

the reading agency

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Guide to Manga

It's Japanese comics isn't it?

Manga can be translated as 'comic books' that's certainly what they look like at first glance. Unfortunately the term "comic books" is often based on what is commonly available in the UK either American style superhero comics or humorous strip cartoons. Manga is a format and just about every subject imaginable appears in this format: from "serious literature" to science fiction, romance, mysteries, crime, political thrillers, and humour. Just to complicate things many 'manga' now are Korean in origin (manhwa) – see below. The subject and themes remain broadly the same and the origin of the material whether Korean or Japanese is generally given in the author notes in each volume.

The front is the back?

Probably the first thing you notice about manga books in the UK is that you start at the "back" of the book and turn the pages from left to right. The Panels start at the top right and are usually read from the top right across and down to the bottom left. Many of the books include this information for western readers. This way is the closest to how Japanese readers read manga. Some companies do "flip" the artwork to suit western readers right to left habit but most don't. Not all manga artists like this done to their artwork and obviously it is more expensive to do this. Interestingly, reading left to right doesn't seem to put off western readers, if anything it adds to the fun and makes the experience more memorable.

The artwork looks quite simple compared with superhero comics

Compared with the illustrative-based work of the west the artwork in manga can look quite basic at first glance. There are several reasons for this:

- Manga are generally published in very cheap magazine editions.
- Popular stories are only later collected in book format.
- As these original stories are produced in serial fashion they need to be produced quickly.
- A second look at manga artwork will reveal an astonishing skill with monochrome.
- There is less detail in manga panels because they need to carry a story very quickly.

However manga stories can often go on for hundred and hundreds of pages so the stories can be built up much more slowly than in the 32 page format of American comics. This careful delivery of story combines with a cinematic style gives a rich reading experience. Readers can find themselves invited to focus on a single action, whether watching a plane move across the sky or leaves falling from a tree or steam rising from a cup of coffee. Manga are very fast moving stories but they're not all action - many of the stories are punctuated by moments of stillness and contemplation. All this combined with the fact that Japanese artists are less restricted in how they depict their characters in eccentric ways - incorporating both realistic and "cartoony" styles in the same story.

Is it linked to anime?

Anime are the animated films created in Japan that often also exist as manga stories and characters. Popular manga are often turned into anime. For librarians this means it's a good idea to co-ordinate purchase of manga books and anime videos/DVDs.

Who reads manga in the UK?

In Japan it seems everybody reads manga. Sales are big and have been from the beginning. Osamu Tezuka's *New Treasure Island* (1947) sold 400,000 and the top manga series of today, Eiichiro Oda's *One Piece*, has worldwide sales of over 100 million. In the UK it is more difficult to discern trends in reading manga. Specialist comic shops have been selling manga for years and continually increase their range; high street bookshops stock key manga titles so there is a genuine interest beyond its traditional comic book audience. Part of manga's success lies in that there are as many titles available for female readers as male. Many of the best selling manga are created by an all-female team called CLAMP.

And do we know why some readers chose this format?

It's attractively packaged, and separate from mainstream reading, it's fast but most of all it is based on stories. American librarians have reported that readers like the way the stories are difficult to predict. It is not unusual for a major character in a story to die, or to lose the one they love to another, or fail at what they are trying to do. Manga stories are less predictable (for western readers especially) and so reading is intense and enjoyable.

Is manhwa the same as manga?

Manhwa is the term used for Korean comics. They are similar in style to Japanese manga, and in fact many books that look like manga are in fact manhwa. Confused? Don't worry the differences are not sufficient to worry the casual reader. As with manga what we see of Manhwa depends on translation and distribution – at present many of the manhwa material is fantasy related. Hard core manga readers are presently attracted to some manhwa titles and the fact it is slightly different and less mainstream.

'You're into manga? No, dude, that's so last year. I read manhwa.'

Recently Korean publishers have joined together as ICE KUNION to promote and distribute their best selling titles outside of Korea. They hope to be able to reduce the time lag before titles

popular in Korea are available in English language versions. Manhwa is also usually read left to right so there is no need to flip as there is with Japanese manga.

Examples of manhwa series are: Blazin' Barrels, Chrono Code, Demon Diary, Fantasy Land, and 11th Cat

Glossary:

Anime: Anime is the Japanese derivation of the English word 'animation'. It is used to describe what is commonly called a cartoon. However, anime is used solely to refer to animated created and produced in Japan. The key difference is its appeal to a broader audience than just children.

Manga: manga is the Japanese word for comic book. Manga is most often drawn in black and white format but occasionally will have colour pages inserted in special editions.

Manhwa: Korean comics similar to Japanese manga with a notable difference in art style. Usually produced in their original left-to-right format.

Shojo: manga with character-driven stories created primarily for girls

Shonen: manga with strong action-themed stories primarily written for boys.

Shonen-ai: Love stories involving affection between boy characters, appealing primarily to a female audience. Also known as 'boys love'

Getting active with Manga:

- Get onto www.grouphing.org and start up your own manga group/s – there'll be lots of manga tips and features on the site and young people will be able to connect with other young people and share their passion for manga
- Rate and review manga and anime on www.grouphing.org - young people can also upload their own manga artwork
- Use manga with your teen reading groups ask the questions: are they hooked? Looking for a one off manga book or want the whole series? Girls vs boys – what are you reading?
- Set up a dedicated manga club
- You may want to look at contacting a local anime club which runs regular film showings
- Run cartooning workshops – create your own manga characters and storyboards, invite a cartoonist in to run a workshop
- Check out the Letraset website - www.letraset.com/manga – to find manga drawing materials and pens. Letraset produce a 'Manga Pack' for budding manga artists.
- Get someone in from your local comic shop to talk about manga
- Go manga book buying - involve your students in selecting books for your collection
- Develop a dedicated manga display board in the school library, make a show of what's the most popular manga
- Explore the web – there are a lot of fan sites out there for favourite manga series
- Manga has its own artistic conventions, for eg: a white cross-like bandage symbol denotes pain; a large sweat-drop on the side of the face denotes embarrassment; a scribble on the cheek shows injury and a red cheek denotes embarrassment. At www.howtodrawmanga.com/howtodraw/tutorials.html you can get tutorials on: anime style hair; clothing and folds, general anime faces and female figure drawing.

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