

AASL Standards-Based Learning

# Manga Goes to School

Cultivating Engagement and  
Inclusion in K–12 Settings

Ashley Hawkins, Emily Ratica, Sara Smith,  
Julie Stivers, and Sybil “Mouna” Touré

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of School Librarians  
TRANSFORMING LEARNING

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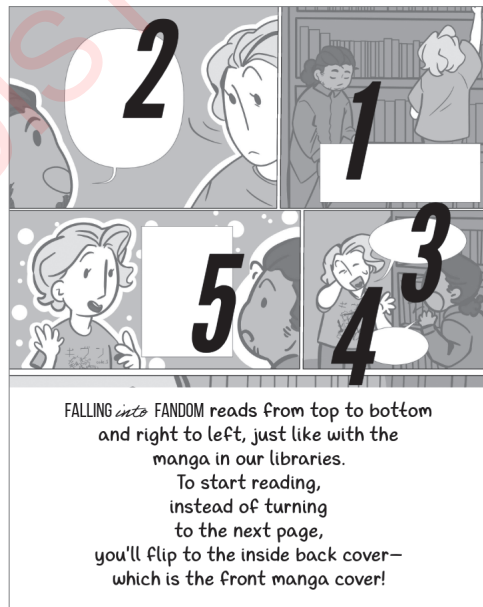
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# USING THIS GUIDE

Julie Stivers

The appeal of manga is undeniable. As a worldwide publishing phenomenon, it has deservedly garnered the attention of scores of our learners. Its overwhelming popularity must be matched with willingness and excitement on our part as school librarians. Many school librarians, however, have expressed uncertainty at elements related to manga collections, readers' advisory, and programming. As school librarians committed to—and experienced with—manga, we wanted to build a resource centered on manga specifically for our colleagues and ways in which it can be made accessible and essential throughout the school day.

This guide is built to be adaptable and meet school librarians where they are. Perhaps you are about to create your first manga order. Great! The chapters in parts I and II—covering topics from manga basics to collection development to organizing in your space—will be particularly helpful. Or you may be a librarian who feels comfortable with collection development and is ready to shore up your readers' advisory skills with chapter 7 while learning about different genres and publishers in chapter 3. We're excited to help! Or you may be an otaku yourself (fabulous!), with a vibrant manga collection, and ready to integrate manga into your lesson planning and looking for anime club content—both found in part IV. Our collection development and lesson plan chapters include dedicated information for elementary, middle, and high school librarians. No matter where you are on your manga journey, we've got you covered.

With five coauthors, we bring you a range of experiences working with learners at a variety of ages and school contexts. We all come to manga using a different lens and are excited to leverage those unique viewpoints for our readers. Though divergent in specific tastes and areas of interest, we are 100 percent united in helping our colleagues collect manga, read manga, use manga, and celebrate manga! Toward that end, we are excited for you to use this guide as both an informational resource—including a helpful glossary—and an ongoing touchstone. Chapters can be read linearly, or you can pop in and out to focus on your current support needs.

Two features of this guide that we are particularly proud of are the inclusion of both learner voice and art and a manga-style chapter on the flip side (or front side in Japan). Chapter 8, “Manga and Marginalized Communities,” and chapter 13, “Anime Clubs as Community Builders,” foreground learner voice, wisdom, and experiences. Our own personal librarian stories are illustrated by high school learners and coauthor Sybil “Mouna” Touré and can be found in the appendixes and also on the flip side of this guide.

Finally, we’re excited to include ways in which your work with manga hits so many of the AASL Standards. Look for information on the *National School Library Standards for Learners, School Librarians, and School Libraries* (AASL 2018; second edition forthcoming) highlighted in each chapter, as well as a summary of how manga collections and programming connect with and through all six of the Shared Foundations in chapter 1. Additionally, the twelve lesson plans include the key AASL Standards that each lesson addresses along with other organizational standards, such as the International Society for Technology in Education (ISTE) standards or content-specific standards.

Threaded through all the sections of this guide is care for our most important stakeholders: our learners. We are passionate about advocating for manga in every school library because our learners need it. With manga, you’ll strengthen not only the circulation statistics in your school library but also engagement *and* inclusion. There is no better investment for our time!





PART I

# Getting Started with Manga

available at [alastore.ala.org](http://alastore.ala.org)



# The Basics of Manga as a Format

Ashley Hawkins with Emily Ratica

## **“How do I know what manga is best to add to my school library?”**

By a massive landslide, this question is the one that I hear the most in my work providing manga collection development guidance. I know it's the question my cowriters also have encountered the most because it is the impetus for this book's existence.

The focus on school libraries is no accident. The five of us are librarians representing various communities across the United States. Still, the people who seek our help the most are our school library colleagues. That's not to say that public librarians don't ask us questions or use title lists, but manga collection development is trickier for school librarians.

Building a school library manga collection means following a collection development policy that not only is often more stringent than a public library policy but also is limited by budget constraints. A manga title that turns out to be a bit too extreme for one population can't just be shifted to another collection as it can in a public library. A poor order choice can be costly and frustrating.

That being said, building an excellent manga collection with culturally responsive titles, excellent ties to curriculum, and strong social-emotional themes is possible.

In my experience working with school librarians, the issue has more to do with a need for increased understanding and knowledge. Manga and anime are formats but also are part of an entire subculture built on Japanese pop culture. There is a lot of vocabulary intrinsic to the culture and a unique visual language specific to anime and manga.

The structure of this book is intended to guide you on your journey, whether you're a seasoned otaku like myself, a trained artist and creative

otaku like Sybil “Mouna” Touré, a consummate comics and manga reader like Sara Smith, a later convert to the culture like Julie Stivers, or someone who simply knows the value of having a collection and program like Emily Ratica. Each of us comes with a slightly different approach to and history with manga and anime, and this variety should show that you don’t need to be a lifelong expert to bring your learners the titles they crave.

But before we get into all of that, let’s start from the beginning.

## MANGA AND ANIME: A CRASH COURSE

For school librarians who may or may not know anything about it, *manga* (漫画 or マンガ), in its simplest definition, is the Japanese word for comicbooks or graphic novels. Within Japan, any comic would be called manga. *Spider-Man*, *Smile* by Raina Telgemeier, *Calvin and Hobbes*? In Japan, they are all manga. But as a loanword, it has come to mean comics from Japan or made in a style influenced by Japanese visual culture. The same is true of *anime* (アニメ). Within Japan, it’s simply the word for animation. But in English, it is the loanword for animated works originating in Japan.

This generality of the terms can be helpful in many ways. Manga is a format, not a genre, and can encompass many genres. Recently, we have been starting to see a wider variety of manga available in the West. Still, the reality is that we see only a small percentage of titles licensed from Japan. The most popular manga for licensing is what is known as shōnen battle manga, primarily from a magazine called *Weekly Shōnen Jump*. These titles are packed with action but also have storylines about honor, friendship, family, and personal growth. This genre is highly formulaic but speaks to a broad audience, particularly adolescents. Shōnen battle manga’s wide appeal makes it ripe for licensing, whereas other genres have often been overlooked because of the perception that they may not sell as well. In recent years, opportunities have widened, and publishers have found avenues to allow them to bring over titles in a wider abundance.

The history of manga in Japan is extensive, going back to the eighteenth century. The most famous use is in the series *Hokusai Manga* (1814–1878),<sup>1</sup> which was a bestseller in its time. A series of drawings done by the artist, the work depicted both real life and the supernatural. Although *Hokusai Manga* is probably the most famous early manga, it is not the first, and Hokusai did not create the term.<sup>2</sup> The reality is that Japanese culture has a long history of serialized images depicting stories,<sup>3</sup> but it is vital to recognize that all cultures have such a history.

Modern manga, truthfully, is a combination of these traditional Japanese serials and modern Western comics. In the early twentieth century, comics

such as *Popeye* by Elzie Crisler Segar and *Felix the Cat* created by Pat Sullivan and Otto Messmer were imported and had a definitive role in transforming traditional serialized images into what we recognize as today's manga.<sup>4</sup>

The grandfather of modern manga, Osamu Tezuka, was heavily influenced by Western media, particularly early Disney cartoons.<sup>5</sup> Through Tezuka's work, we can also trace the close relationship between manga and anime. Tezuka adapted his popular manga works, such as *Astro Boy*, into anime and launched the careers of some of the most influential animators in Japan. There is a long history of manga being adapted into anime, and even a bit of vice versa, which is crucial to manga's popularity as a format.

Manga evolved over the twentieth century and into the twenty-first from a niche format exported from Japan into a cultural zeitgeist that has transformed the Japanese pop culture and tourism industries. The successes of critically acclaimed anime from directors such as Hayao Miyazaki (*Spirited Away*), Satoshi Kon (*Perfect Blue*), Makoto Shinkai (*your name.*), and Katsuhiko Otomo (*Akira*) have boosted the general image of anime and manga as a whole. The current manga boom has allowed for stories that previously would have been seen by English publishers as less marketable. Although it may seem that all this has just been thrust upon you within the past few years, it's actually the result of a slow burn and a lot of work.<sup>6</sup>

A successful manga nowadays can turn into a media juggernaut. For instance, *One Piece*, Eiichiro Oda's incredibly long-running manga about a pirate named Monkey D. Luffy who is looking for a life-changing treasure while having a rather unique ability to become very rubbery, has inspired anime, video games, cookbooks, films, light novels, a trading card game, a Kabuki play, theme park attractions, restaurants, life-size recreations of pirate ships, and a Netflix TV show.

Manga in Japan is traditionally published first in magazines, although, with the rise of digital applications, those lines are steadily blurring. It is important to note that most Japanese readers do not read manga physically nowadays, and the general preference leans toward digital formats, which account for most manga purchases.<sup>7</sup> Manga magazines, however, are still how manga is serialized, and these magazines are broken into demographics: *shōjo* (少女), or adolescent girls; *shōnen* (少年), or adolescent boys; *josei* (女性), or adult women; *seinen* (青年), or adult men; and *kodomo* (子供) or *kodomomuke* (子供向け), or children. We will cover Japanese demographics in more detail in chapter 3, "Foundational Information about Manga," and chapter 4, "Collection Development."

This summary is obviously very simple, but the purview of this book is not to provide an in-depth history and analysis of manga and anime. If you would like to learn more and read deeply, here are some of my favorite books on the history of manga:

- *Manga: A Critical Guide* by Shige (CJ) Suzuki and Ronald Stewart
- *Manga! Manga! The World of Japanese Comics* by Frederik L. Schodt
- *Manga: The Citi Exhibition* edited by Nicole Rousmaniere and Matsuba Ryoko

## MANGA? MANGAS? AND WHY IS IT PRINTED LIKE THAT?

The word *manga* is both singular and plural. You will hear learners say,

- “I love to read manga!”
- “This is my favorite manga.”
- “I don’t like manga with too much filler.”
- “I’ve read thirty manga this year!”

The correct way to pronounce the word is “mahn-gah.” Manga is a loanword, so it follows pronunciation rules that are different from those for English. If you’ve always pronounced it similar to “mango,” it’s because you’re leaning on English pronunciation. It’s nothing to be embarrassed about, but you might want to shift to the correct pronunciation. It will show learners that you’re “in the know”!

Non-manga readers often find the print order baffling. Because Japanese is read from right to left, the pages are printed in this direction. When manga was first brought to the West, publishers flipped the pages so books could be printed left to right. The practice of printing the pages unflipped was started by the publisher TOKYOPOP in 2002. The idea was to provide a completely authentic manga experience because flipping the pages often distorted the artwork and was labor intensive. TOKYOPOP also kept the original sound effects in Japanese. These combined practices allowed manga to be localized much faster and have become industry standard, with some variations. As part of their contract, some artists request that their work be flipped when localized, but this practice is rare.

In short, manga is not printed “backward.” It is printed as the mangaka, or creator, intended it to be when they were in the process of illustrating. The characters move precisely as they should, with deliberate direction and angles. Japanese publishers generally do not flip Western comic books and graphic novels but preserve the artists’ intent by keeping the original layout of the page. Thus, the original intentionality of the creator is preserved for the reader to experience. To say manga is “backward” implies that it is wrong or not the norm and that there is only one “right way” to read, which excludes our learners, colleagues, and community members whose home languages are read from right to left. Although it may take some practice,

part of the appeal of manga is the different format. Experiencing manga as it was created provides a view into another culture, reminding us that our way is not the only way and that there is no “right” or “wrong” way to read.

Another thing to consider about the format is that manga can have a wide range in series length, and reading a complete series matters. Manga (in most cases) needs to be read in continuity. A complete manga can be anywhere from a single volume to hundreds of volumes. The longest-running manga series in Japan is *Golgo 13* by Takao Saito, which has been running since 1968 and is well over two hundred volumes, but there are many incredible single-volume manga as well. The number of volumes varies widely depending on various factors determined by the editorial team of the magazine in which a series runs or how long it takes for a mangaka to feel they’ve reached completion. Some series lengths are predetermined before the series even comes out. It’s entirely dependent on the publisher and editorial department!

Consider the series I mentioned earlier, *One Piece*, which is currently the longest-running series available in English. If a learner has read all of *Shōnen Jump*’s print editions of *One Piece* by the time we are writing this book, they have read 103 volumes. With an average page count of 180, that is approximately 18,540 pages read. Although *One Piece* is an extreme case, learners who read manga read deeply, at high volume, and tend to reread favorite volumes and scenes.

## HOW AN EFFECTIVE MANGA PROGRAM HITS THE AASL STANDARDS

The reality is that incorporating manga into your school library has the potential to hit every AASL Standard. Learners are the center of what we do, and this work is about tapping into their passions to grow our learners as whole people and scholars.



**Inquire:** Manga readers are naturally drawn to inquire deeply about their favorite manga. Because so many manga are rooted in historical periods, traditional folklore, and cultural Japanese practices, there are often many opportunities for inquiry. Aside from cultural connections, many manga incorporate learning about a particular topic, skill, or trade.



**Include:** Particularly with the rise in the publication of manga memoirs, there are titles that encompass authentic experiences of people from many different communities. On a deeper level, though, manga and anime programming is a community-building opportunity for

all ages and has particular benefits for neurodivergent, LGBTQ+, and BIPOC (Black, Indigenous, People of Color) learners to feel seen and welcomed in the school community.



**Collaborate:** For the same reasons that manga programs can be particularly effective at encompassing the ability to Include, they also offer great opportunities for collaboration among learners. Whether within a club, planning to host a library manga and anime convention, working together to learn how to develop a cosplay, or simply collaborating within the classroom as part of an academic lesson, manga programs encourage learners to work together.



**Curate:** The multimodal nature of manga and the fact that it is a format means that it allows learners to gather information on a wide variety of topics, connecting to the work done in Inquire.



**Explore:** Manga programs lend themselves to a wide variety of STEAM (science, technology, engineering, art, mathematics) activities! The artistic nature of the format only scratches the surface. Learners might explore creating their own manga, but they can use their interest in the format to explore coding, 3D printing, amigurumi (crocheted stuffed animals or plushies), origami, calligraphy, and so many activities that stretch learners beyond basic academics.



**Engage:** Because the wider manga and anime community is primarily in the digital space, we can teach our manga enthusiasts digital citizenship through a lens of personal connection. Conversations about safely engaging online when so much fan activity occurs there are especially vital for young people.

### **I WISH I COULD TELL YOU EVERYTHING, BUT . . .**

When I first set out to write this chapter, I'll confess that I was overwhelmed. How would I tell school librarians, who already have so much information to fit in their impressive brains, *everything* about anime and manga culture? But then I remembered. *You don't need to know everything.* If you want to know more, there are some incredible books to read. A school librarian simply needs basic knowledge to make intelligent decisions.



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**NOTES**

1. Shige (C) Suzuki and Ronald Stewart, *Manga: A Critical Guide*, edited by Chris Gavaler (N.p.: Bloomsbury Academic, 2022).
2. Suzuki and Stewart, *Manga*, 17.
3. Adam L. Kern, *Manga from the Floating World: Comicbook Culture and the Kibyōshi of Edo Japan* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2007).
4. Eike Exner, *Comics and the Origins of Manga: A Revisionist History* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2021).
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6. Casey Brienza, *Manga in America: Transnational Book Publishing and the Domestication of Japanese Comics* (London; New York: Bloomsbury Academic, 2016).
7. Rafael A. Pineda and Crystalyn Hodgkins, “Manga Market Reaches Record 677 Billion Yen in Japan in 2022,” Anime News Network, February 28, 2023, <https://www.animenewsnetwork.com/news/2023-02-28/manga-market-reaches-record-677-billion-yen-in-japan-in-2022/.195361>.



# You Don't Have to Be an Expert

## Manga Advocacy for Everyone

Emily Ratica

**You don't have to be a fan of manga and anime to be a well-versed manga librarian.** Growing up, I didn't watch anime or read manga. I watched my first anime in my twenties (*Naruto*—thanks, first college boyfriend). I read my first manga in my thirties (*Dragon Ball* so that I could talk to my son about it). And now, here I am in my forties, writing a book about the importance of manga in school libraries like I'm some kind of expert. (*Hint*: I'm still not!) My expertise in all things manga was gradual and came from the impact I saw on learners.

In 2015 I left the classroom and became the sole librarian in an urban high school with almost three thousand students in Southern California. The school library had been without a certificated school librarian for some time and was a bit of a mess: no new books had been acquired for years, the circulation numbers were almost nonexistent, and the school library was mostly ignored and unused. During my initial review of materials, I found one copy of *Dragon Ball* by Akira Toriyama, volume 4—the sole manga in the school library. It had over sixty checkouts and was severely damaged; it should have been weeded about twenty checkouts previously. I was about to discard it when a helper begged me to let him check it out. I was astounded that he was so excited to read volume 4, with no other volumes available. He brought it back within a day, as well as a friend who wanted to check it out, who then brought a friend, and so on. Seeing their excitement about this sole volume, I put the purchase of more manga high on my to-do list.

I began my manga adventure by asking my sister-in-law, who I knew was a huge manga reader, to provide a few titles to get me started. She responded enthusiastically, providing a detailed list of about fifty titles that she termed “must read.” Knowing next to nothing, I started by purchasing the first

several volumes in a few more popular and widely available titles, including *Death Note* by Tsugumi Ohba and illustrated by Takeshi Obata, *Sailor Moon* by Naoko Takeuchi, *Naruto* by Masashi Kishimoto, *Fruits Basket* by Natsuki Takaya, and Hiromu Arakawa's *Fullmetal Alchemist*. Fortunately, there was no room to fit them in with the recommended Dewey at 741.5, which never really made a whole lot of sense to me anyway. Instead, I decided to repurpose some glass-doored display shelves that were going unused. I took the doors off, rearranged the shelves to fit the smaller manga sizes, and the graphics collection was born!

The response from readers was immediate. I didn't even have to advertise these new purchases because readers spread the word so quickly among themselves. Manga was flying off the shelves—readers would check out books in the morning before school and return during lunch and after school for more. Readers would come in packs and boisterously argue with friends about their favorite characters, battles, or love stories. Individuals would linger, reading and rereading. I was inundated with requests for more. I left a clipboard out by the collection for readers to list titles and soon had pages and pages of requests for new titles, more volumes, and beloved authors.

The collection quickly grew, and over the course of five years, it now boasts more than six hundred volumes that are being checked out more often than any other items in the entire library. It had outgrown the display case, and, with administrative permission, I made an entire Comic Lounge area to house it, as well as the highly popular comic and graphic novel collections. I did this by weeding the outdated reference collection and then integrating what little was left with nonfiction, leaving two full shelving units open. This rearranging moved the graphics collection to the very front of the library, making the manga shelves the first thing readers saw when they walked into the school library space. Many learners who only visited the library for a textbook, a class, or an assignment were shocked and awed by the collection, and I often heard excited exclamations of “No way! They have [fill in the title] here?!?!”

### **Standards Connection: Facilities Reflect Needs**

Modern school library facilities should “enhance the use of and ensure equitable access to information resources and services for all learners.”<sup>71</sup> Wanting to update my school library to make the most popular collection more easily accessible, I knew I was going to have to radically change its physical setup, which took a long time and a lot of planning and work. I first consulted with my administration, proposing the idea to remove the reference collection and replace it with a Comic Lounge. They trusted my judgment and gave me a green light. The next steps were to confirm that no classroom educators were actually using the reference materials and then weed that section down to the bare bones, which also took some time. Wanting to create a browsing space and seating area, I had to submit a facilities request to have some shelves removed, others moved, and carpet fixed and replaced. Once the physical space was there, I applied for special funding from my district and received enough to buy new lounge chairs, a chess table, and a rug (to cover up the patched carpet). I then had to arrange shelves, rearrange the collection, and create signage. All in all, the entire process took about three years to complete. All the time and work were 100 percent worth it to see how the learners responded. The Comic Lounge is by far the most popular place in the school library.

I became an expert out of necessity. I have not read every volume of Eiichiro Oda’s *One Piece*, but I know Luffy and the Straw Hat Pirates because I love to listen to readers talk about what they love. I have not watched every episode of *Sailor Moon*, but I have had many conversations about sewing techniques and even conducted a few sewing demonstrations with readers about how to make cosplays of the Sailor Guardians. I will never read my way through every volume of *Dragon Ball*, but that won’t stop me from proudly wearing my Goku T-shirt and asking every learner I see with a *Dragon Ball* lanyard, notebook, sweater, hat, sticker, backpack, or pair of flip-flops if they’ve read the manga. Ultimately, readers don’t care if I know everything about their favorite manga; they love to tell me all about it anyway. By taking an interest in what they care about, I show that I care about them and that what they think matters and what they care about is valid and important.

So, how can you become a semi-expert manga librarian, too?

As school librarians, we are often required to become overnight experts in a wide variety of subjects. We conduct research to find out what we need,

seeking out the best sources and expert ideas for how to be the best for our learners. We attend professional development opportunities and conferences; watch webinars and videos; follow colleagues, authors, and creators on social media; and subscribe to industry, publisher, and association newsletters so that we can stay up to date on the myriad of things that are happening around us. Becoming an expert manga librarian is an extension of this effort: not that difficult to do and, for me at least, a lot of fun.

Some ideas for becoming an “expert”:

- *Student advisory group*: Talk to your learners. Learners are often your best source to get started. Your school may already have an anime or manga club. If not, a comic or gaming club may also be a good place to start. Trust me—you have anime watchers and manga readers around you. Keep an eye out for any evidence of fandom. Fans often show their love by expressing it however they can, and there is plenty of merch available for them to display. Ask them! I can almost guarantee that they will happily talk about their interest. If you want to make things more official or get more learners involved, create an advisory board of student experts whereby titles can be vetted and justified as needed. Or, if you prefer things to be more passive, leave out a clipboard like I did, asking for suggestions. Create an online survey, accessible through a QR code or link on your website, where learners can suggest specific manga titles. Always check age ratings for learner suggestions! What a learner will say is appropriate for your school may not always be the case!
- *Comic conventions*: Some of the *best* professional development I’ve attended is at comic conventions. Most large conventions will have an education component built in, during which educators, librarians, creators, publishers, and others involved with the industry will have panel discussions, presentations, and opportunities to share ideas. I am fortunate to be close to some of the big comic conventions, but even small ones, hosted at local libraries or comic shops, can be a great resource. Anywhere people who love comics, manga, and graphic novels gather is a place where you can gain information, talk to experts, and develop your own understanding. Make sure to reach out to convention organizers, especially those for small ones, because they will often have discounts or free passes for educators. Plus, conventions are *so much fun*!
- *Manga publishers*: Publishers of every kind are generally a fantastic source of information. Most manga publishers regularly create guides that list their series, age ratings, and new titles, which they send out through e-mail newsletters or hand out at conventions. Sign up for those newsletters, download publisher guides to help in your collection development, and talk to the people who work the booths at conferences and conventions.

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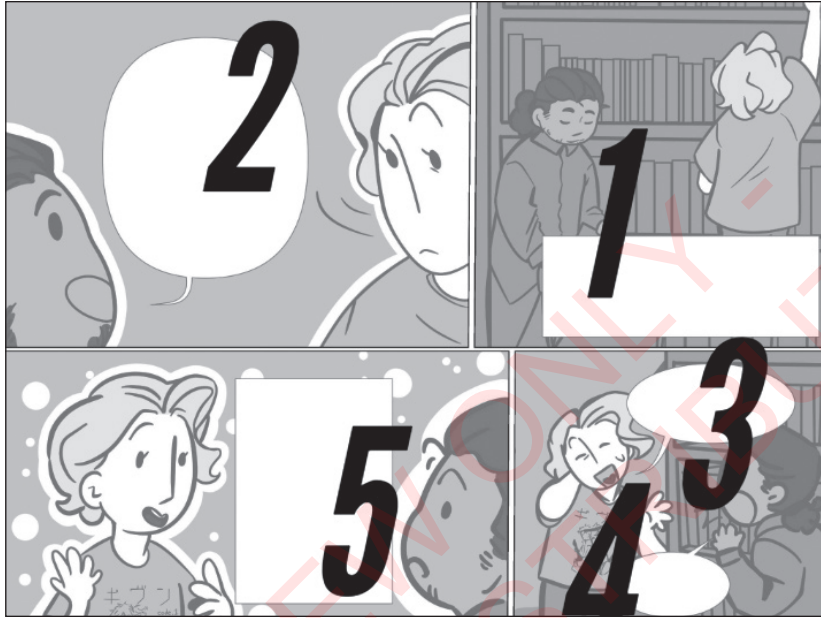
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## Instructions for Reading the Special Feature

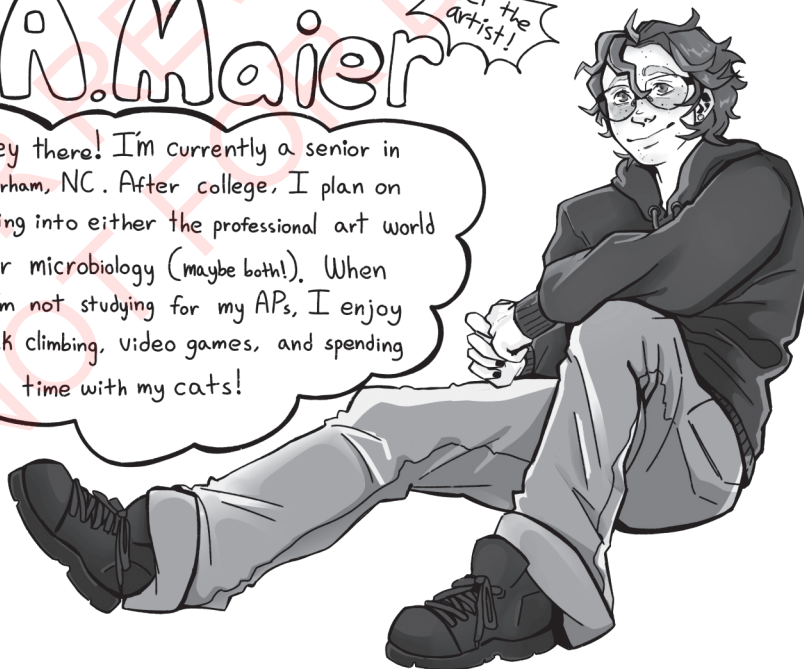
*Falling into Fandom* reads from top to bottom and right to left, just like with the manga in our libraries. To start reading, instead of turning to the next page, you'll flip to the inside back cover—which is the front manga cover.



# A. Maier

Meet the artist!

Hey there! I'm currently a senior in Durham, NC. After college, I plan on going into either the professional art world or microbiology (maybe both!). When I'm not studying for my APs, I enjoy rock climbing, video games, and spending time with my cats!



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