

The Importance of Alternative Literacy  
What is It and Why is it Important to Implement in  
our Libraries, Classrooms and Lives

Sarah Vail of Garfield County

# About Me

I am a library specialist in Glenwood Springs who specializes in teen programming, teen collections, and other programming. I have been working with the library for just over 2 years, but I have several years of experience in programming with seniors, adults, and teens. I grew up in the Arvada area of Denver, but moved to Garfield County in 2020. I am also an artist, getting a degree in Illustrative Design, and this has intrinsic ties to my passion for Alternative Literacy.

# What is Alternative Literacy? And Why are we Talking About it?

Alternative Literacy: The process of encouraging literacy skills through non-traditional means.

Literacy scores have been progressively dropping, particularly since the Covid-19 Pandemic:

- "On average, nationwide, 66% of 4th grade children in the U.S. could not read proficiently in 2013." (Craft, S.)
- "...reading and math scores have declined and especially the math scores here - widespread declines, showing students are really scoring very similar to what we picked up in the 1970s." (Elliott, D)
- "So what we're picking up now is that there are a lot of other factors that are impacting the well-being of students - mental health. We are seeing chronic absenteeism. We're seeing a bullying increase. And then, of course, we all know about crime and safety in schools. So the big picture is that we need to think about the whole child, not just the academics, which are important, but we really need to focus on all the well-being - factors affecting the well-being of the student." (Elliott, D)

# Graphic Novels: What are They?

Graphic Novels, according to the Encyclopedia Britannica: “Graphic novel, in American and British usage, a type of text combining words and images—essentially a comic, although the term most commonly refers to a complete story presented as a book rather than a periodical.” (Murray, C)

# Graphic Novels: Alternate Names

- Comics: “Comic strip, series of adjacent drawn images, usually arranged horizontally, that are designed to be read as a narrative or a chronological sequence. The story is usually original in this form. Words may be introduced within or near each image, or they may be dispensed with altogether. If words functionally dominate the image, it then becomes merely illustration to a text. The comic strip is essentially a mass medium, printed in a magazine, a newspaper, or a book.” (Kunzle, D. M.)
- Manga: “Manga is an umbrella term for a wide variety of comic books and graphic novels originally produced and published in Japan. Unlike American comic books, which are usually printed in full color, Japanese manga are almost always published in black and white. Full-color prints are often only used for special releases.” (Pagan, A.)
- Sequential Art: “Sequential art refers to the use of visuals – such as drawings, images and/or photos – that are used in a sequence in order to tell or illustrate a story. In some cases, it includes a combination of visuals and text though text is not necessary for it to be considered sequential art.” (Gaule, B.)

# Graphic Novels: Why They are Important

- Provides Multiple Lenses to Gain Information
- Accessible
- Popular
- Provides a Gateway to Appreciate Art and Literature
- Increases Emotional and Empathetic Pathways
- An Outlet for Marginalized Voices

# Graphic Novels: Example Pictures 1

SEQUENTIALIST BB

<https://www.myfonts.com/products/sequentialist-bb-package-146887>

OpenDyslexic-Regular.otf

Open-Dyslexic

<https://www.fonts4free.net/open-dyslexic-font.html>



<https://www.mangaclassics.com/the-count-of-monte-cristo>

# Graphic Novels: Example Pictures 2



<https://www.amazon.com/Lore-Olympus-Two-Rachel-Smythe/dp/059335608X>

[https://www.amazon.com/Lore-Olympus-Four-Rachel-Smythe/dp/0593599055/ref=pd\\_bxgy\\_d\\_scl\\_2/138-7534828-5985351?pd\\_rd\\_w=FtEMb&content-id=amzn1.sym.615d9037-0d71-4715-8421-5695fbf26656&pf\\_rd\\_p=615d9037-0d71-4715-8421-5695fbf26656&pf\\_rd\\_r=SPJS66WD0V7B5ZTZ0PAB&pd\\_rd\\_wg=kkmJP&pd\\_rd\\_r=a1412126-6b28-4a52-a100-9f8b32d6fc52&pd\\_rd\\_j=0593599055&psc=1](https://www.amazon.com/Lore-Olympus-Four-Rachel-Smythe/dp/0593599055/ref=pd_bxgy_d_scl_2/138-7534828-5985351?pd_rd_w=FtEMb&content-id=amzn1.sym.615d9037-0d71-4715-8421-5695fbf26656&pf_rd_p=615d9037-0d71-4715-8421-5695fbf26656&pf_rd_r=SPJS66WD0V7B5ZTZ0PAB&pd_rd_wg=kkmJP&pd_rd_r=a1412126-6b28-4a52-a100-9f8b32d6fc52&pd_rd_j=0593599055&psc=1)



# Graphic Novels: Recommendations Pt 1

- *Persepolis* by Marjane Satrapi
  - YA Nonfiction
- *March* by John Lewis
  - YA Nonfiction
- *They Called us Enemy* by George Takei
  - YA Nonfiction
- *Genderqueer* by Maia Kobabe
  - YA Nonfiction
- *Manga Classics Series* by Various Authors
  - YA Fiction
- *Sailor Moon* by Naoko Takeuchi
  - YA Fiction

# Graphic Novels: Recommendations Pt 2

- *Heartstopper* by Alice Oseman
  - YA LGBT Fiction
- *Spider Man: Miles Morales* by Various Authors
  - YA Superhero Comics
- *Ms Marvel: Kamala Khan* by Various Authors
  - YA Superhero Comics
- *Saga* by Brian Vaughan
  - Adult Fiction
- *Lore Olympus* by Rachel Smythe
  - Adult Fiction
- *Monstress* by Marjorie Liu
  - Adult Fiction
- *Sandman* by Neil Gaiman
  - Adult Fiction

# Poll: What Graphic Novels would you recommend? Are there any that impacted you personally?

<https://www.polleverywhere.com/discourses/jyF0hyaFMJMp1DAMAECIK>



# TTRPGS and Other Games: What are They?

TTRPG: "A tabletop role-playing game is "a fun and structured cooperative activity with predictable rules and unpredictable outcomes that takes place directly with other people around a table, where players are playing as characters they create in an open, interactive, responsive world facilitated by a game master." (What Exactly is a Tabletop Role-Playing Game Anyway?)

# TTRPGS and Other Games: Why They are Important

- Provides Multiple Lenses to Gain Information
- Encourages Reading/Writing
- Popular
- Increases Emotional and Empathetic Pathways

# TTRPGS and Other Games: Example Pictures



<https://idiottantrum.com/aih/2018/7/17/gaming-table>

STRENGTH	INSPIRATION
DEXTERITY	PROFICIENCY BONUS
CONSTITUTION	<input type="checkbox"/> Strength
INTELLIGENCE	<input type="checkbox"/> Dexterity
WISDOM	<input type="checkbox"/> Constitution
CHARISMA	<input type="checkbox"/> Intelligence
	<input type="checkbox"/> Wisdom
	<input type="checkbox"/> Charisma
	SAVING THROWS
	<input type="checkbox"/> Acrobatics (Dex)
	<input type="checkbox"/> Animal Handling (Wis)
	<input type="checkbox"/> Arcana (Int)
	<input type="checkbox"/> Athletics (Str)
	<input type="checkbox"/> Deception (Cha)
	<input type="checkbox"/> History (Int)
	<input type="checkbox"/> Insight (Wis)
	<input type="checkbox"/> Intimidation (Cha)
	<input type="checkbox"/> Investigation (Int)
	<input type="checkbox"/> Medicine (Wis)
	<input type="checkbox"/> Nature (Int)
	<input type="checkbox"/> Perception (Wis)
	<input type="checkbox"/> Performance (Cha)
	<input type="checkbox"/> Persuasion (Cha)
	<input type="checkbox"/> Religion (Int)
	<input type="checkbox"/> Sleight of Hand (Dex)
	<input type="checkbox"/> Stealth (Dex)
	<input type="checkbox"/> Survival (Wis)
	SKILLS

# TTRPGS and Other Games: Recommendations

- *Dungeons and Dragons 5e* by Wizards of the Coast
  - 12+ (with some variation)
  - *Candlekeep Mysteries* by Christopher Perkins
  - *Explorer's Guide to Wildemount* by Matthew Mercer of Critical Role
  - *Journeys Through the Radiant Citadel* by Ajit A. George and F. Wesley Schneider
  - *Keys from the Golden Vault* by Amanda Hamon and Christopher Perkins
- *Pathfinder 2e* or *Starfinder* by Paizo Publishing
  - 12+ (with some variation)
- Other TTRPG games
  - *Andor, Dungeon!, Kids on Bikes, Magical Kitties Save the Day* (Maxwell, L.)

# Video Games: What are They?

Video Game: “a game played by electronically manipulating images produced by a computer program on a television screen or other display screen.” (Oxford Languages)



# Video Games: Why They are Important

- Provides Multiple Lenses to Gain Information
- Audio, Visual, Ludo, Narrative
- Popular
- Provides a Gateway to Appreciate Art and Literature

# Video Games: Example Pictures



<https://www.theguardian.com/technology/2017/apr/26/what-remains-of-edith-finch-review-giant-sparrow>



<https://www.wired.com/2016/06/video-game-explores-familys-battle-sons-cancer/>

# Video Games: Recommendations Pt 1

- *Super Mario Smash Brothers*
  - Tournament Programs
- *Mario Kart*
  - Tournament Programs
- *Minecraft*
  - Personal Favorite/Group Gaming
- *Animal Crossing*
  - Personal Favorite/Group Gaming
- *Headbangers: Rhythm Royale*
  - Group Gaming/Music Instruction
- *Super Mario Bros Wonder*
  - "Book" Club/Group Gaming/Music Instruction
- *SnipperClips*
  - Small Group Gaming/"Book" Club
- *Portal 2*
  - Small Group Gaming/"Book" Club

# Video Games: Recommendations Pt 2

- *That Dragon Cancer*
  - “Book” Club
- *What Remains of Edith Finch*
  - “Book” Club
- *Night in the Woods*
  - “Book” Club
- *Hitchhiker*
  - “Book” Club
- *Legend of Zelda: Wind Waker*
  - Personal Favorite/“Book” Club
- *Wytchwood*
  - Personal Favorite/“Book” Club
- *The Talos Principle*
  - Personal Favorite/“Book” Club

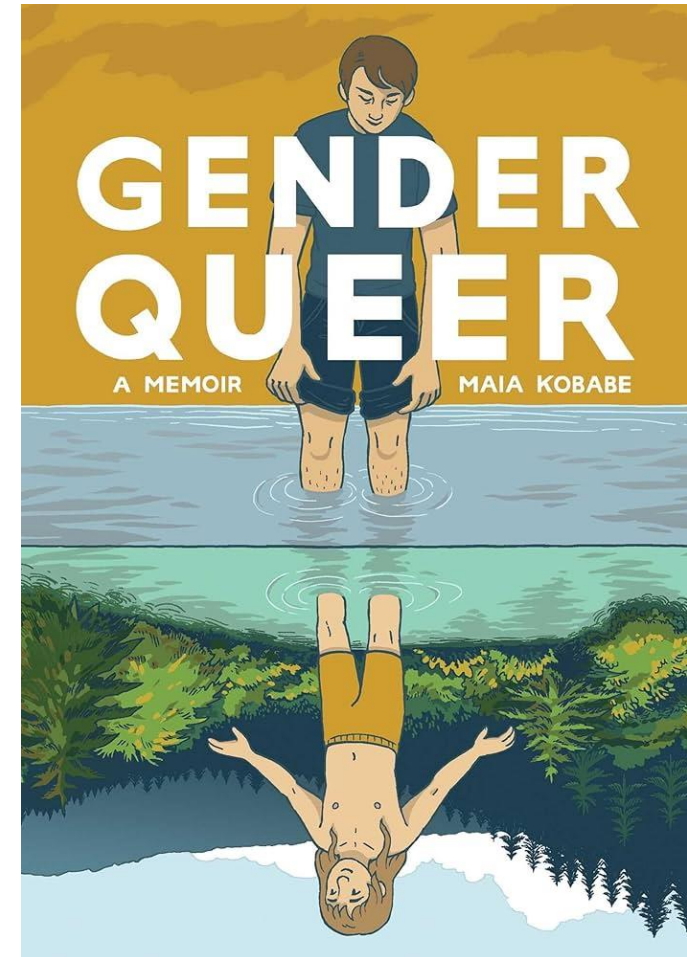
Poll: Have you been impacted by storytelling in any video game? If so, which one?

<https://www.polleverywhere.com/discourses/hCCclaUrfzmBxMwPoQVwl>



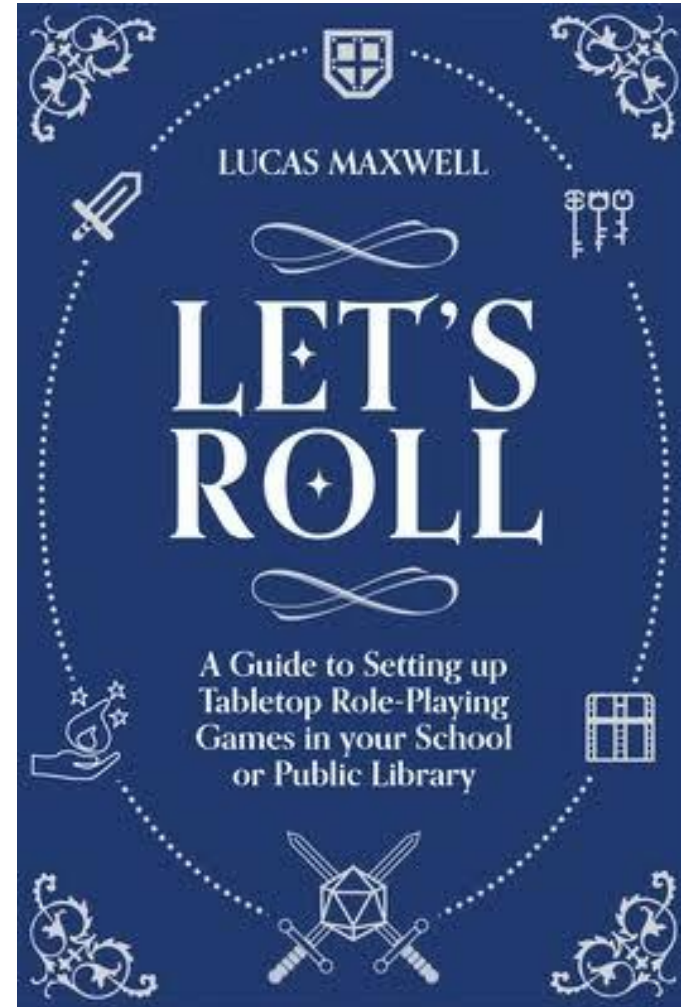
# How to Implement: Graphic Novels

- Collection
  - Age Appropriateness
  - Get a sampler of different kinds, and see what sticks with your community
- Programming
  - Comics Creation
  - “Banned Books” Club



# How to Implement: TTRPGS and Other Games

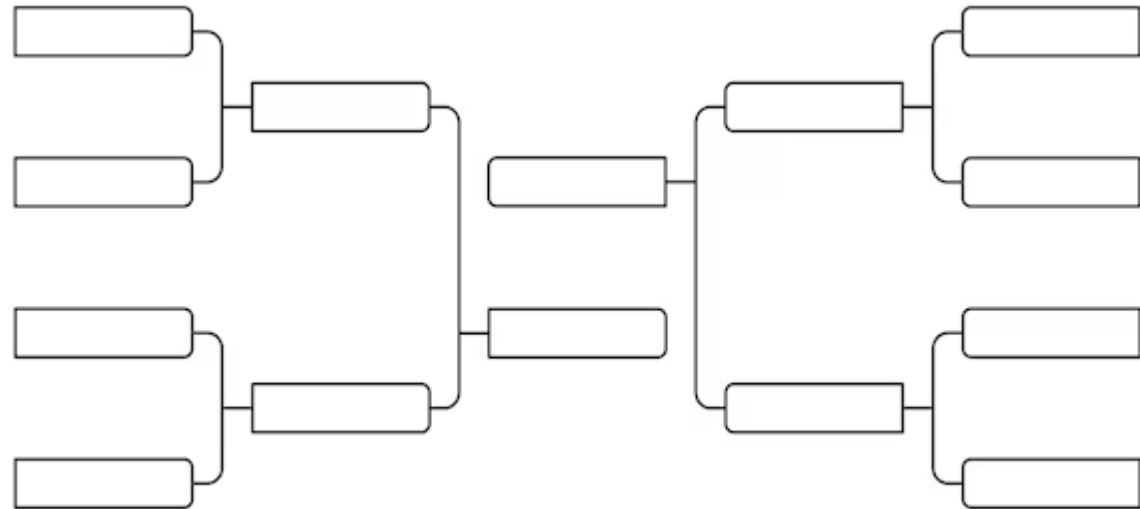
- Collection
  - Source Books
  - Game pieces (if you want to play it risky)
- Programming
  - Dnd Club
  - *Lets Roll: Setting up Roleplaying Games in your Library* by Lucas Maxwell
  - ILA Videos (International Literacy Association)
    - Storytelling
    - Modified



<https://alastore.ala.org/letsroll>

# How to Implement: Video Games

- Collection
  - Cost and Fragility
  - Console vs PC
- Programming
  - Tournaments
  - Co-op Play
  - “Book” Club



[https://www.freepik.com/premium-vector/8-team-tournament-bracket-championship-template-flat-style-design-vector-illustration\\_20454703.htm](https://www.freepik.com/premium-vector/8-team-tournament-bracket-championship-template-flat-style-design-vector-illustration_20454703.htm)



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