

Manga and Anime FAQ

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[Louisville Free Public Library](#)

What is anime?

[Anime](#) is animation, for TV or the movies, made in Japan, and for the Japanese market. Unlike series in the US, they may only run for one season, so a gripping storyline is the best option for keeping the audience engaged.

What is manga?

[Manga](#) refers to graphic novels from Japan. The word's meaning, literally, is "illustrated thing," and the medium has historical roots in the woodblock printing industry and urban culture, starting in the 1600s. With a complicated writing system, woodblock printing produced art prints and broadsheets for the highly literate townsfolk. Since everything would be carved into blocks anyway, it was as easy to illustrate something as it was to write text for it. Like many other Japanese words, manga can be either singular or plural. As with other Japanese books, and to preserve the flow of the artwork, a manga is read from right to left and from top to bottom. When you look at the front cover, the spine is on the right.

Why are anime and manga so popular?

Market forces in Japan ensure heated competition between production groups, which might split up at any time. This fosters involved, exciting, and varied storylines that follow narrative arcs, rather than the serial formats of "Saturday Morning Cartoons" we're used to. The output is huge, and the series that get imported are usually the ones with the most buzz about them, or what the distributors guess will become the most popular. Also, due to historical and cultural factors, anime and manga have genres for all ages and tastes, not just for children. Besides, for teens and kids in the US, they're exotic.

What makes manga different from other graphic novels?

Rather than our glossy and colorful magazine format, manga are generally in black and white, and in a thicker, trade-paperback-like size. The books we get are usually several collected chapters that originally ran separately in popular Japanese magazines like [Shonen Jump](#).

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Aside from this, there's a greater range of themes for the mainstream market. Manga can be about anything from fantasy cloak-and-dagger politics, to high school comedies. Aside from the genres available, manga tend to be produced in a serial format, rather than as stand-alone art house types of graphic novels, or endless-run comic books. Some *mangaka* (manga authors) get famous enough to call the shots, even to the point of publishing at their own pace.

What cultural differences should I know about?

Although some themes are universal, there are a few differences that might impact where manga and anime go on library shelves. Naked bonding time, like at a public bath, is considered an important part of socialization and friendship, and isn't necessarily sexualized. (Although trying to peek at the other sex bathing at the same spa is often played for laughs because it's very immature.) On a similar note, kissing is considered much more sexual than it is here, and who a girl's first kiss is with is a frequent plot point. Overtly sexual themes, however, are less stigmatized, and considered appropriate for much younger ages than in this country. In addition, very heavy themes, such as war crimes, are fair game.

How do these works get published here?

In the case of manga, they go through a distributor, who buys the rights to popular series, translates, and publishes them. In the case of anime, the distributors have the choice of either dubbing the voices over the original animation (in which case they have to match the mouth movements in addition to translation issues, and maybe it will be hard to get good voice actors) or simply adding subtitles (harder to watch while reading). Since our fandom can only see it through the filter of distributors, [simulcasts](#), [fansubs](#), and [scanlations](#) are common, and watched closely by the distributors, in case a series they didn't expect gets a rabid following.

Anime and Manga Demographics (as they stand in Japan):

- **Kodomo** (for little kids, under age 9) - cute animals and pro-social lessons.
- **Shonen** (for boys, 9-13) - action/adventure, optimistic. Kid hero.
- **Shojo** (for girls, 9-13) - romance and drama, lots of cute boys.

The above two, especially shonen series, make up the vast majority of titles imported to the US, and are often marketed to an older age.

- **Seinen** (for men, 13+) - a lot more cynical, slower pace, more nuance, and probably more sexual or violent content.

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- **Josei** (for women, 13+) - same as seinen in terms of tone, but with the shojo focus on relationships.

This is why we don't see these in our library system: along with the soap-opera vibe, there's a lot of sexual content in josei.

The important thing to know is that the **content** of series for younger or older demographics may be **basically the same**, but the deciding factor is on **exactly what** is explicitly shown on page or screen, rather than implied, or kept "offstage."

Where can I learn more about this?

Demographics, in more depth: http://nionkokesu.hubpages.com/hub/animanga_genres

One of the leading distributors, **Funimation**: <http://www.funimation.com/>

Also: <http://www.animenewsnetwork.com/> ...and that's just the tip of the iceberg.

While there are plenty of websites, books, and other ways of learning about anime and manga, the best way is to watch or read it yourself!

A Quick Note on Language:

There are five vowels in Japanese, as written in English letters:

A as in "Aah," E as in "Bread," I as in "Machine," O as in "Oats," and U as in "Tuna."

If you see doubled consonants, hold the sound for an extra beat: "come to the Outpost tonight." (Over-pronouncing final "U" sounds is considered girly-cute.)

In Japanese, as with most East Asian traditions, the family name comes first, and the personal second: **Akechi**(family) **Mitsuhide**(personal).

Anime and Manga Supplement – Katherine's Picks

[Last Exile](#) – fantasy/sci-fi shonen anime series about grand strategy, geopolitics, and the regulation of a war between two civilizations by the vastly technologically superior Guild. What are their motives for toying with the fates of nations?

[Mushi-Shi](#) – a seinen series, but for the pacing, not content. This manga and anime is what you would get if you turned a post-graduate course in parasitology into a fantasy fiction series. Deeply weird, but good.

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[*Black Butler*](#) – yes, this is actually shonen, but trying really hard for shojo cross-over appeal. Imagine Faust, as written by P.G. Wodehouse and starring a *very troubled* (but cute) twelve-year-old boy, and a demon-Jeeves.

[*Vagabond*](#) – this award-winning seinen manga historical fiction series follows the development of Shinmen Takezo from a rage-fuelled brute into the highly cultured *kensei* (sword-saint) Miyamoto Musashi.

[*Bride of the Water God*](#) – manhwa, or a graphic novel from Korea, but in a comparable demographic to josei, and about a girl sacrificed to the river and trying to navigate interpersonal intrigue in the Dragon-God's court. Read left to right.

[*Ouran High School Host Club*](#) – this shojo series is a loving parody of the conventions of the whole genre, and ultimately about the real personalities hidden behind the masks of stereotype and gender performance. (No, I'm not kidding.)

[*Hetalia Axis Powers*](#) – this shonen comedy series is about Italy, mostly focused on WWII. Every character is a personification of a country, and their friendships, messy breakups, and other hijinks are an allegory for history. Each episode is only five minutes long, and also available as a manga collection.