Good afternoon, everyone! My name is Leah High, and I am public services and programming librarian for Museum Libraries at The Metropolitan Museum of Art. Today I am going to talk briefly about my experiences using comics and graphic novels for programming and outreach in one of our museum libraries.

To lay out the landscape – the museum has a large central research library -Thomas J. Watson Library, more than 25 departmental libraries, and Nolen Library. Nolen Library is unique within the Museum in that it is open to all museum visitors not just to staff or researchers college-age and above. Its primary mission is to support learning about the Museum’s collections and the broader history of art for Museum staff, educators, and visitors of all ages. We have a collection of about 9,000 volumes including non-fiction titles for adults and juveniles, video materials, electronic resources, picture books and most recently graphic novels.

Since 2011, Nolen has collected nearly 150 graphic novel and manga titles based on relevance to the Museum’s collections, art history, and significance to the canon of sequential art. We developed this collection not only as an opportunity to attract new audiences and diversify our readership, but also as an exciting and fresh avenue for launching programs that connect the collections in the library and the works of art in the galleries in new and meaningful ways.

Certainly comics and graphic novels can attract readers of all ages. But we envisioned our new collection as a particular draw for teens since Nolen’s resources have generally appealed to either elementary age or adults with not so much offered to the in between. What better way to highlight and promote these new titles than to make an event of it?

Since educational teen programs have been offered at the Met for many years through the Museum’s Education Department, it made sense to reach out to our colleagues there for guidance and collaboration. We were fortunate they were onboard to jointly pursue these new initiatives and their partnership has proved very beneficial to the success of the programs. They have contributed logistical knowledge of event execution within the Museum, a cultivated teen audience upon which to draw and further expand, and a deep understanding and dedication to museum learning.
Together we brainstormed ideas, investigated possible guest speakers, and explored connections to the galleries. We are also lucky New York City has a great pool of local talent and the artists we have invited were thrilled to participate.

Some details about a few of the programs:

We dubbed the first program “Art of the Graphic Novel” and illustrator Gareth Hinds came to share about his experiences as an author and illustrator, how he chooses and uses mythological themes, and his book *The Odyssey*. He discussed his early work, various projects, and coming to the Museum to sketch from objects in the Met’s Greek and Roman Collection as inspiration. He demonstrated some live drawing for the teens and then signed copies of his book which were made available for purchase in the Met’s store. Afterwards teens enjoyed refreshments and were encouraged to check out the graphic novels in Nolen Library and explore the Museum.

Our second program continued the exploration of “Art of the Graphic Novel” this time with a focus on the Japanese comic form, manga. The event was planned to coincide with the Met’s exhibition *Storytelling in Japanese Art* which presented a perfect opportunity to connect the libraries and the galleries as well as art forms, past and present.

The program began with a museum educator presenting one of the legends represented in the exhibition and highlighting that it was from these historical traditions which manga has emerged today. Next manga author and illustrator Misako Rocks! gave a lively presentation about her childhood in Japan, how she became an illustrator, the influence of traditional Japanese art on her graphic style, and the personal origins of some of her works. Then the teens had a chance to create their own illustrations! Drawing materials were provided and Misako led a workshop guiding the teens through the techniques she uses for various characters and expressions. Then she signed autographs and spoke with her eager fans. Refreshments were offered along with suggestions of manga to read in Nolen Library. Following the event, parents were welcomed to join their teens for a free screening of *Howl’s Moving Castle*, an anime film directed by Hayao Miyazaki.

So these are just two examples of how Nolen Library has utilized graphic novels to attract new teen audiences, but programs relating to graphic novels as well as picture books have also been offered to librarians and educators, families, and the general public.

Here are some practical questions you might consider if you are thinking about programmatic outreach in your museum library.
Who is your target audience?
If you are trying to stimulate growth in a specific audience, customizing your programs accordingly can improve outcomes and inform your marketing strategies.

What resources do you have?
For example, we have budgeted for things such as an honorarium for guest speakers, staffing costs, promotional materials, art supplies, and refreshments, but often these can be donated.

What types of programs could you offer?
We have combined elements like artist lectures, book signings, hands on art making, and gallery visits as events for larger audiences. You might consider recurring programs for smaller audiences such as book clubs or summer classes.

Does the event have to be in the library?
With the exception of daily Storytime sessions, thus far Nolen Library’s programs have been held outside the physical library space in one of the Met’s classrooms or lecture halls. We have chosen to do this in order to accommodate larger audiences while always emphasizing that participants are encouraged to explore the library after the program.

How will admissions be handled?
All Nolen programs have been “free with museum admission” with some requiring pre-registration. When registration has been required, we’ve seen about a 50% turn out rate which may be helpful to note when considering event capacity.

What are your marketing strategies?
We have utilized as many marketing outlets as we can come up with! Email blasts to teens who have attended past Teen Programs held by the Education Department at the Met. The Met’s website and online calendar, print publications, and social media. Event flyers are distributed in the library and sent to targeted groups like the Department of Education, professional organizations, and local event listing publications. Collecting contact information thru pre-registration has been helpful for marketing future events, too.

It is possible to collaborate?
Sharing resources and expertise across departments or even within your broader community can positively impact your program and outreach goals.
In conclusion, our aims in developing these library programs are to create exciting, educational experiences that attract new audiences and reenergizing traditional ones for both Nolen Library and the Museum as a whole. We see this outreach as a positive strategy for raising awareness of the libraries’ resources and services and sustaining relevancy in a changing landscape. Finding creative ways of connecting collections is how Nolen Library will “craft its future.”