

Anime, or Japanese animation, first appeared as a tiny blip on the U.S. pop culture radar in the 1960s with such TV series as *Astro Boy* and *Speed Racer*. But thanks to the explosive popularity of manga, Japanese print comics, increased anime programming on American cable channels, and cross-media marketing, this uniquely Japanese art form, which already has a sustained fan base, is attracting a new audience. The current generation of animation fans are more likely to know by heart all of Hayao Miyazaki's films (the Oscar-winning *Spirited Away*, *Howl's Moving Castle*) than the recent spate of Disney productions. In an interesting aside, the Wachowskis Brothers, who have cited the influence of anime on their *Matrix* movies, are remaking *Speed Racer* as a live-action film, due out in 2008.

## A storytelling medium

Anime titles are varied, innovative, and quite distinct from Western animation traditions, though the cross-cultural exchange is getting more noticeable, as seen in Shinya Ohira's anime sequence in Quentin Tarantino's *Kill Bill Vol. 1* and anime-inspired U.S.-made cartoons like *Samurai Jack*, *Teen Titans Go!*, and *Avatar: The Last Airbender*. Unlike U.S. animation, which is still pigeonholed as a medium for children, animation in Japan is used to tell any and every kind of story, from children's adventure to adult drama. This sometimes results in the misconception that anime is predominantly violent or sexual. And like the manga that is frequently its source material, anime is targeted to specific audiences, though there is significant

*Robin Brenner, a Reference and Teen Librarian in Brookline, MA, is the creator and editor in chief of the graphic novel review web site No Flying No Tights ([www.noflyingnotights.com](http://www.noflyingnotights.com)) and a 2007 LJ Mover & Shaker. Her guide for librarians, Understanding Manga and Anime, is now available from Libraries Unlimited*

crossover—*Naruto*, for example, is aimed at an older teen male audience but also appeals to other viewers.

Anime storytelling shares its traditions with manga (which was originally inspired as much by film as by print cartoons) but, ultimately, is more cinematic than cartoonish. Animation can do what is either impossible or prohibitively expensive in live-action films: exaggerate action, dilate time, pop people into caricature only to return to "normal" character design in the next instant, and telegraph laughter or an emotional state through a standard lexicon of visual symbols and cues. This style can take some getting used to, especially the quicksilver shifts in mood from silly to serious and back again, but the end result often is compelling and evocative.

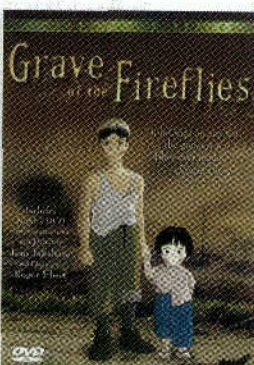
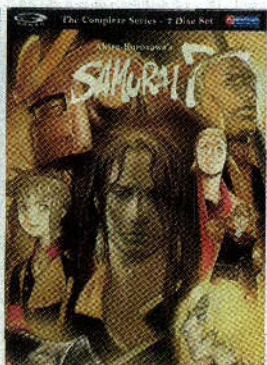
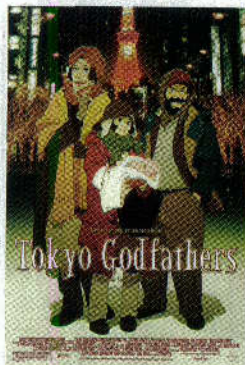
## Anime 101

There are three major anime categories: feature films like *Spirited Away* and *Ghost in the Shell*; animated TV series like *Naruto* and *Cowboy Bebop*; and original video animations (OVAs, also referred to as OAVs), standalone titles like *Samurai X* or *Read or Die* that are released directly to the home video market. Feature films are the most expensive to create and are meant to have broad appeal and showcase superior animation. TV series are also aimed at a wider audience but can also be more varied in target viewers. OVAs are aimed at a specific audience and may tackle subjects that are outside the mainstream and contain more mature content.

Japan has more than 430 anime production companies; in 2003, over 80 anime TV shows were on the air, and anime accounted for almost 70 percent of DVD sales. Here in the United States, more anime is making its way onto TV via programming blocks like Cartoon Network's Adult Swim and Toonami and also on G4, Showtime, and the Sci-Fi Channel. The medium now has its own cable channel, ADV Film's An-

# ANIME'S BRAVE NEW WORLD

By Robin Brenner





ime Network (theanimenetwork.com), and multiple offerings are available through on-demand services.

## Counsel & caveats

In collecting anime, your budget will affect what you can acquire. Standalone films don't need a large influx of cash, but a complete TV series requires greater financial investment. Many production companies and distributors, such as ADV Films (www.advf.com), Geneon (www.geneonanimation.com), and VIZ Media (www.viz.com), now offer boxed sets of series, though some (ADV, Bandai [www.bandai-ent.com], and VIZ) are cheaper than others (Geneon). If you don't have immediate demand for a particular series, wait for a cheaper forthcoming collection. If you're starting a new collection, purchase a number of popular new series as they are released to spread out the expense over time. Standing orders for series, available from vendors like Baker & Taylor and BWI, help keep you up-to-date.

Keep in mind that much anime is unrated; most programs are not reviewed by the Motion Picture Association of America (MPAA) unless they have a theatrical U.S. release. Anime distributors do their best to rate, but there is no industrywide standard. Check each individual distributor's rating scheme and reviews from outside sources—web sites like the Anime News Network and Parent's Guide to Anime (both in the bibliography) offer their own judgment on the appeal and appropriate audience for each title reviewed. Libraries should be aware that shelving each title in its appropriate collection—children's, teen, or adult—is important in educating patrons that titles exist for each age range.

Most anime DVDs offer the original Japanese language audio track and the dubbed English track; fans prefer both options. Dubbing quality has long been debated among anime

fans, so editions with at least the Japanese-language track, with English subtitles, are preferred over an English-only dub.

As with any popular medium, libraries should try to balance their anime collection between what's popular right now and what will become classics. Although few Miyazaki titles are highlighted in this list, libraries should collect the entire opus of one of Japan's greatest animators. Many viewers new to anime find Miyazaki's films the most engaging, perhaps because they are what U.S. audiences expect from our own best animated films.

A year ago, *Fullmetal Alchemist* was the buzz-worthy title; now the frenzy for all things *Naruto* has ratcheted up. Both series titles will maintain interest after the furor has died down, but it can be a gamble when trying to pick the winners from the new releases. Pay attention to patron requests and solicit local anime fans' opinions on what's upcoming. You can also keep current with manga and anime blogs, especially with prompt previews or reviews of new series.

Many anime fans also keep tabs on what's about to break out here by watching content available online. Companies from ADV to VIZ to Central Park Media (www.centralparkmedia.com) have made extended trailers, interviews, and even full episodes of new series available for download. And reports on programs not yet available in the United States by web sites like AnimeonDVD.com can help librarians determine what titles, once they are released, will be quality additions for their collections.

While this article will focus on a core DVD collection of landmark anime films and essential series, don't forget books that cover the history and art of anime. Stone Bridge Press (www.stonebridge.com), which specializes in books about Japan, is a solid resource for anime titles. Starred [★] titles below are especially popular and good for anime club discussions. [ISBNs are not as ingrained in the video industry as in book publishing; we have provided ISBN information where available.—Ed.]

## LANDMARK ANIME

These titles represent recent classics in anime and act as touchstones for viewers in establishing excellence in style, technique, and story.

**Akira: Special Edition.** color. 124 min. Pioneer: Geneon. 2001. DVD \$24.98.

Set in a ravaged future Tokyo, this complex sf action tale highlights the dangerous consequences of using science to play God. Engaging the viewer on a mature and intelligent level, *Akira* triggered the realization in the United States that animation could be for adults.

**Ghost in the Shell.** color. 125 min. Manga Entertainment. 1996. DVD \$19.98.

Like *Akira*, this film astonished U.S. audiences with its smart take on international surveillance in a world where cyborgs are the norm and the difference between man and machine is dwindling. Less successful are the sequels, but the TV series, starting with *Ghost in the Shell: Stand Alone Complex*, is much closer to the multilayered source manga, allowing in-depth character devel-

opment and extended story arcs. Incorporating frequent, nonsexual nudity, the theatrical release is recommended for mature older teens and adults, although the TV series is fine for adolescents and adults.

**Grave of the Fireflies: Special Collector's Edition.** 2 vols. color. 159 min. Central Park Media. 2002. DVD ISBN 978-1-58664-202-0. \$29.98.

By turns touching and heartbreaking, this 1988 anime classic follows two orphaned children struggling to survive in the aftermath of the World War II firebombing of Kobe. Concentrating on the effect of war on civilians, this is one of the few anime films set during the conflict. Despite its young protagonists, it is most suited to teen and adult audiences.

**Metropolis.** color. 108 min. Sony Pictures. 2002. DVD ISBN 978-0-7678-8180-7. \$24.95.

A utopian city is brought down by one displaced robot girl searching for her true place. Inspired by "the god of manga" Osamu Tezuka's work and Fritz Lang's famous 1929

film, legendary director Rintaro's gorgeous work uses the themes of class prejudice and humanity's responsibility to its own creations to highlight a common theme in anime. A harsh fable despite the cute character design, this title is great for teens and up.

**My Neighbor Totoro.** color. 86 min. Walt Disney Home Entertainment. 2006. DVD ISBN 978-0-7888-3403-5. \$29.98.

Two rambunctious girls move with their father to the country to be near their mother as she recuperates from a long illness. They meet various benevolent natural spirits, including Totoro, the keeper of the forest. This magical film from Hayao Miyazaki remains a favorite for children and adults.

**Samurai X: The Complete Collection.** 5 vols. color. 510 min. ADV Films. 2006. DVD ISBN 978-1-4139-1320-0. \$99.98.

Amidst civil war and increasingly fractious politics in Meiji-period Japan, assassin Rurouni Kenshin begins to regret his role and tries to find a way toward peace. A prequel to the favorite *Rurouni Kenshin* TV series, these OVAs are markedly more serious,



# Collection Development | Anime

with elegant, lethal fighting and relationships portrayed more through glances than words. This complete set is well worth the price, but the bloody and brutal violence makes this appropriate only for older teens and adults.

★ **Spirited Away.** color. 125 min. Buena Vista. 2001. DVD ISBN 978-0-7888-4461-4. \$29.99.

Another by Miyazaki, this 2003 Oscar winner for Best Animated Film and anime top seller is a favorite among fans. The story intertwines international myths and folklore with a coming-of-age tale.

★ **Tokyo Godfathers.** color. 92 min. Sony Pictures. 2003. DVD ISBN 978-1-4049-4691-0. \$26.96.

Three homeless misfits—a runaway 'tween girl, a drunken middle-aged failure, and a former drag queen—discover an abandoned baby in Tokyo one Christmas Eve and try to reunite her with her parents. This sweet, character-driven film is a marked departure for director Satoshi Kon (*Perfect Blue*, *Paprika*), best known for psychological thrillers. Although this anime is suitable for a wide range of ages, younger audiences may not quite understand the characters' hardships or drag queen Hana's gender identity.

## THE SERIES

**Azumanga Daioh: Class Album.** color. 6 vols. 650 min. ADV Films. 2005. DVD \$69.98.

A young teacher attempts to instruct a child prodigy, a new girl, a wallflower, a loudmouth, a wild card, and a jock in this series that takes the roller-coaster emotions and insecurities that plague high school students and cranks the wackiness into high gear. A hilarious example of the sillier side of anime and a hit with teens.

**Cowboy Bebop Remix.** 6 vols. Vol. 1: ISBN 978-1-59409-481-1; Vol. 2: ISBN 978-1-59409-482-8; Vol. 3: ISBN 978-1-59409-483-5; Vol. 4: ISBN 978-1-59409-484-2; Vol. 5: ISBN 978-1-59409-485-9; Vol. 6: ISBN 978-1-59409-486-6. ea. vol: color. 125 min. Bandai. 2005-06. DVD \$29.98.

Bounty hunters Spike Siegel and Jet Black work the space around Mars from their ship, the *Bebop*. Living from prize to prize, they pick up the shady Faye Valentine and 'tween hacker tomboy Ed along the way, creating a kind of dysfunctional family. The resulting adventures are a mix of traditional noir and Old West showdowns sprinkled with bursts of snide humor, all set to a hot jazz score.

★ **Fruits Basket: Series Box Set.** 4 vols. color. 532 min. FUNimation. 2004. DVD \$99.98.

Cute, earnest, and sweet, Tohru discovers the Sohma family curse—when hugged by someone of the opposite sex, each member turns into an animal from the Chinese zodiac—and decides it's up to her to break it. This charming and gentle fantasy is a favorite among younger teens.

★ **Fullmetal Alchemist.** 13 vols. Vol. 1: ISBN 978-1-4210-0649-9; Vol. 2: ISBN 978-1-4210-0650-5; Vol. 3: ISBN 978-1-4210-0651-2; Vol. 4: ISBN NA; Vol. 5: ISBN 978-1-4210-0653-6; Vol. 6: ISBN 978-1-4210-0654-3; Vol. 7: ISBN 978-1-4210-0656-7; Vol. 8: ISBN 978-1-4210-0657-4; Vol. 9: ISBN 978-1-4210-0658-1; Vol. 10: ISBN 978-1-4210-0660-4; Vol. 11: ISBN 978-1-4210-0661-1; Vol. 12: ISBN 978-1-4210-0662-8; Vol. 13: ISBN 978-1-4210-0663-5. ea. vol: color. 105 min. FUNimation. 2005-07. DVD \$29.98.

Alchemy has one rule: to create something, you must sacrifice something of equal value. Edward and Alphonse Elric, brothers and alchemists, try the unthinkable—to bring their mother back from the dead. But no one has ever figured out what balances a lost soul, and the consequences of breaking the rules are considerable. With plenty of humor, adventure, and action, this first-rate fantasy portrays a fascinating alternate world teeming with magic, conspiracies, and fearsome villains. This series continues to be popular with teens. The theatrical film sequel is equally worthy of collecting, though it doesn't stand completely on its own.

**Inuyasha: Season 1.** 2004. ISBN 978-1-59116-683-2.

**Inuyasha: Season 2.** 2005. ISBN 978-1-4215-0035-5.

**Inuyasha: Season 3.** 2006. ISBN 978-1-4215-0785-9. ea. vol: 5 vols. 675 min. VIZ Media. DVD \$99.98.

Kagome falls down a well at her family's shrine and lands in a magical, alternate feudal-era Japan where she's a prophesied heroine. Then there's Inuyasha, her reluctant half-human, half-dog-demon companion, bickering with her at every turn but nonetheless remaining a strong ally. Bouncing back and forth between modern Japan and the Warring States period, this long-running anime follows Kagome's complicated

adventures. The combination of fantasy adventure and humor keeps it one of the most popular with teens and up.

**Naruto: Uncut Box Set. Vol. 1.** 2006. ISBN 978-1-4215-0797-2.

**Naruto: Uncut Box Set. Vol. 2.** 2006. ISBN 978-1-4215-0798-9.

**Naruto: Uncut Box Set. Vol. 3.** 2007. ISBN 978-1-4215-1434-5.

ea. vol: 3 vols. color. 325 min. VIZ Media. DVD \$49.98.

Full of action, humor, suspense, and a good dose of heart, *Naruto* focuses on the coming of age of a trio of ninjas in training. The slapstick adds laughs, and the action is as cool as any ninja combat should be, but the real strengths of the series are its sustained character development and the sense of honor and duty that drives the ninja in their work. While the episodes shown on TV are edited for younger viewers, the collected DVD sets are unedited and are most appropriate for teens and up.

**Neon Genesis Evangelion: Platinum Collection.** 6 vols. 650 min. ADV Films. 2005. DVD ISBN 978-1-4139-1283-8. \$89.98.

*Eva*, as it is known by fans, is the mecha (or mechanical-oriented) series that twisted the "boy and his robot" tropes into a mystical, grim examination of humanity and psychology. Teen pilots are recruited to guide humanity's last hope against alien invasion, the giant robot Evas. A very personal creation for writer/director Hideaki Anno, the series is notable for its inventive design and its protagonists, who are a far cry from the usual brave, unflinching anime heroes. The title influenced a wide range of subsequent series, yet fans still debate the controversial ending. Given the violence and sensuality, especially at the end, this title is most appropriate for older teens and adults.

★ **Samurai 7: Complete Series.** 7 vols. 600 min. FUNimation. 2007. DVD \$99.98.

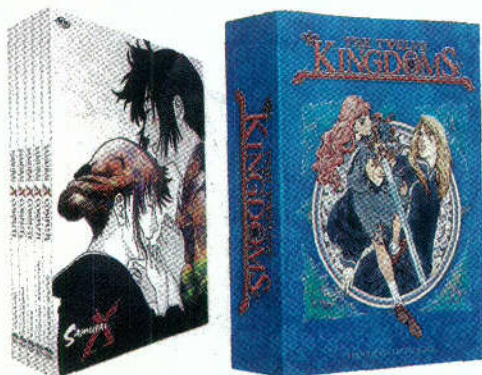
An sf reinterpretation of Akira Kurosawa's *The Seven Samurai* is an ambitious project, but this series succeeds as both homage to the original film and a way to draw young viewers into a now classic story. The village of Kanna needs to fight off a group of bandits bent on stealing its precious rice crop, so villagers go in search of samurai willing to aid their cause. Featuring thrilling action and a meticulously imagined steampunk environment, this series appeals to teens and adults alike.

**Samurai Champloo: Complete Box Set.** 7 vols. 650 min. Geneon. 2006. DVD \$199.98.

In Tokugawa-era Japan, Jin is an unflappable, ruthless, and honor-bound samurai, while

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Mugen is untrained, reckless, and deadly. When they meet, they can't wait to fight to the death, but loudmouth waitress Fuu tricks both into agreeing to help her search for the "samurai who smells of sunflowers." This show is most famous for its combination of anachronistic elements (a hip-hop soundtrack, fashion) with a classic samurai tale. The action is exhilarating, the humor sassy, and the trio's uneasy bonds lend just enough emotion to keep it all together. Some occasional cursing and sensual encounters make this title best for older teens and adults, though most is innuendo rather than anything explicit.

**Twelve Kingdoms: Premium Box Set 1.** 550 min.

**Twelve Kingdoms: Premium Box Set 2.** 575 min.

ea. vol: 5 vols. Anime Works. 2005. DVD \$99.95

Based on a series of novels, this epic is everything a fantasy fan could want. Youko desperately wants to fit in, but when she and two classmates are whisked away to another world and then abandoned, she's barely equipped to deal with surviving a strange new environment. Youko is, of course, destined to be a queen, and her journey from timid coward to fierce ruler is what makes the series shine. The drawback is that the series halted in the middle, leaving a number of arcs unresolved. Manga publisher Tokyopop is beginning to release the source novels, so at least there's hope of getting the end of the story. Entirely appropriate for young teens up to adults, though teens who love fantasy epics will embrace it most readily.

## PRINT RESOURCES

**The Anime Encyclopedia: A Guide to Japanese Animation Since 1917.** rev. ed. Stone Bridge, dist. by Consortium. 2006. 850p. ed. by Jonathan Clements & Helen McCarthy. illus. ISBN 978-1-933330-10-5. pap. \$29.95.

With entries identifying over 2000 feature films and TV series, this encyclopedia covers a century of anime history and is a great resource for basic information on a variety

of works. Trends and themes are highlighted as well as titles. (*LJ* 3/1/07)

**Drazen, Patrick. Anime Explosion! The What? Where? and Wow! of Japanese Animation.** Stone Bridge, dist. by Consortium. 2002. 382p. illus. bibliog. index. ISBN 978-1-880656-72-3. \$18.95.

In the first half of this title, pop culture academic Drazen explores the characters, themes, and styles that recur in anime. He devotes the book's second half to examining classic examples from films and TV series and provides illuminating insight into each. Great for fans who are in between novice and expert. (*LJ* 1/03)

**Napier, Susan J. Anime from Akira to Howl's Moving Castle: Experiencing Contemporary Japanese Animation.** rev. ed. Palgrave Macmillan. 2005. 384p. ISBN 978-1-4039-7052-7. pap. \$17.95.

This classic, revised in 2005, is an excellent introduction to the history, style, and breadth of Japanese anime. Each academic essay focuses on different themes, from gender to magical girls to anime's take on history, and Napier reports on it all with clear and intuitive prose.

**Patten, Fred. Watching Anime, Reading Manga: 25 Years of Essays and Reviews.** Stone Bridge, dist. by Consortium. 2004. 376p. illus. ISBN 978-1-880656-92-1. pap. \$18.95.

Patten, a longtime anime and manga fan, gathers 25 years' of his essays and reviews. His collection follows the growth of the industry and its fandom, including the quirks, and provides an update on the field.

**Poitras, Gilles. The Anime Companion: What's Japanese in Japanese Animation.** 1998. 176p. ISBN 978-1-880656-32-7. pap. \$16.95.

**Poitras, Gilles. The Anime Companion 2: More...What's Japanese in Japanese Animation.** 2005. 160p. ISBN 978-1-880656-96-9. pap. \$18.95. (*LJ* 11/15/05)

**Poitras, Gilles. Anime Essentials: Every Thing a Fan Needs To Know.** 2000. 128p. ISBN 978-1-880656-53-2. pap. \$14.95. ea. vol: Stone Bridge, dist. by Consortium.

From foods characters eat and common sounds to the finer points of anime fan culture, these relatively slim and easy-to-read paperbacks by a San Francisco librarian pack a lot of detail, making them especially appealing to general readers looking for more basic info and less academic discussion.

## PERIODICALS

**Video Librarian.** bi-m. \$64. Randy Pitman. 8705 Honeycomb Ct. NW, Seabeck, WA

98380; 800-692-2270; [www.videolibrarian.com](http://www.videolibrarian.com). ISSN 0887-6851.

This is the one professional review journal that includes Japanese anime in every issue, highlighted in its own section.

## ONLINE RESOURCES

**Anime Café: A Parent's Guide to Anime** [www.abcb.com/parents](http://www.abcb.com/parents)

For parents and librarians looking for anime in particular age ranges, this excellent site provides in-depth reviews and rates anime using the familiar MPAA system.

**The Anime News Network** [www.animenewsnetwork.com](http://www.animenewsnetwork.com)

One-stop shopping for any anime series. The main site provides daily news and commentary on the anime industry, both in Japan and in the United States, as well as timely, substantial reviews. The online encyclopedia has detailed information about each series, including original release dates, genres, audience recommendations, and production notes. Links relate manga and anime series and provide context for each title.

**ICv2.com** [www.icv2.com](http://www.icv2.com)

Aimed at retailers and librarians and including everything from statistics to feature articles, this site is unbeatable for keeping up with the market. It also produces *ICv2 Guide*, an excellent print resource for both market information and librarian-authored reviews on manga and anime.

**The Librarian's Guide to Anime** [www.koyagi.com/Libguide.html](http://www.koyagi.com/Libguide.html)

Gilles Poitras is well known for his print guides (see above), and this web site complements his books by providing comprehensive advice on collecting anime, including cataloging tips, preferred terms and vocabulary, and recommended further reading. ■

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