



# Zines in Libraries

By Alexis Arcaro and Alison Baitz

Art from *The Riot Grrrl Collections*, edited by Lisa Darms.

**W**hy are zines just the things for libraries to get into? Zines tick all the boxes: they're incredible examples of primary sources, they can be used for instruction, they're fun to make, and they're just plain cool.

Before collaborating here, we both worked together at Northfield Mount Hermon School (MA), an independent secondary boarding school. In partnership with the school's media education coordinator, we brought zines to the school library through a zine-making event, creating a zine to promote the library, developing a research guide, and adding materials to the library's collection. Though our work was done to support high-school students, incorporating zines into library events, collections, and general work is applicable (and fun to do!) no matter what population your institution serves.

## A Brief History

Zines have an association with the 1970s punk and 1990s riot grrrl scenes, but the beginning of zines was much earlier than that. The "little magazines" that popped up during the Harlem Renaissance were zine predecessors, and science fiction fanzines arrived in the 1930s. It can even be argued that many self-published efforts from even earlier history could be a kind of precursor to the zine.

Self-publishing has always been a method for the marginalized to bypass the gatekeepers and censors associated with mainstream publishing in order to disseminate their thoughts, perspectives, and words. Zines, in particular, have historically been inexpensive, sometimes (though not always) anonymous, and easily distributed.

No historical relic, zines are perhaps more popular than ever

these days. Not only are there a huge number of zine and art book fairs that take place yearly across the globe, but there are so many shops across the world that sell zines, in addition to artists' and publishers' individual websites that host them. Not to mention the huge number of libraries and archives that collect zines, both historical and contemporary.

## Learn about Zines by Making One Yourself

Because learning to make zines is experiential and essential to the teaching process, try your hand at creating your own zine, if you have never done so before. Make a zine about your library—you can include information about your library's history, how to search the catalog and check out a book, a list of your library's services; you could even include a map of your

library and where different sections are located. You can also make zines about special topics or materials in your collection that you wish to highlight. Consider making a handful of copies and having your zine(s) available at your circulation desk or other congregating area—patrons can grab a zine or two and start or add to their personal zine collections.

## Using Library Resources to Support a Zine Curriculum

One way to bring zines into your library is to provide your patrons with access to digital resources. This could be as simple as curating a list of links to related websites and resources, or as involved as creating new material. At Northfield Mount Hermon, we created a LibGuide that covered zine history, format ideas for making zines, lists of zine-related materials in the catalog, and lots of lists of links, particularly one about both nearby and far-flung zine libraries that our students might be interested in visiting. (Barnard Zine Library is an excellent and all-around resource for librarians interested in zines, and its

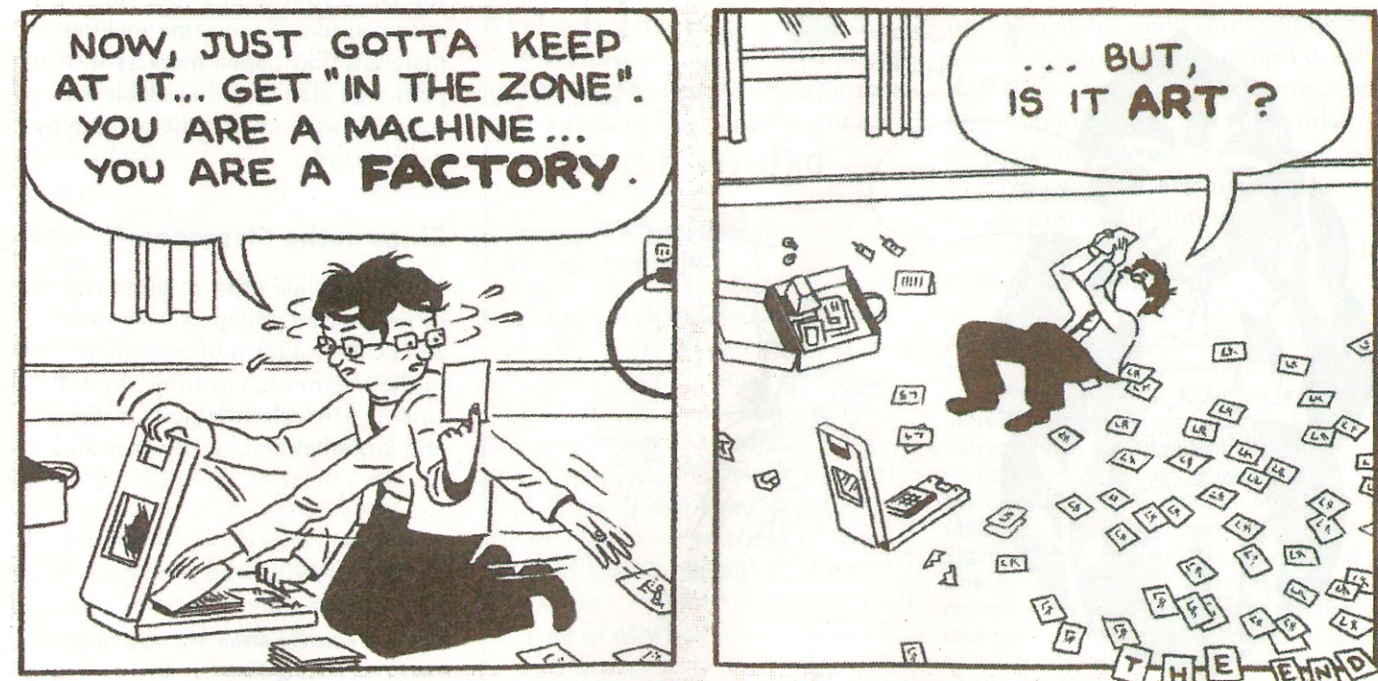
staff maintains a list of zine libraries in the U.S. and across the world.) If your institution maintains LibGuides, consider mimicking our approach. But really, you can use whatever your institution uses to relay information to patrons—be it a blog, a page on your website, or even your social media accounts—to promote and showcase zines.

It's not necessary to completely revamp your library's physical collection in order to support zine-making or zine scholarship. You may already have materials that cover publishing, self-publishing, and art/graphic design in some way relevant to zines. Inspiration can come from anywhere, too, so think creatively about what kind of materials you have that can serve as inspiration for zine-making. This can even be a great opportunity to highlight materials that may not be the most popular among your patrons but nevertheless have value.

If you're finding your pickings slim, consider adding a few items to the collection. There are books that can support potential zine-makers of all ages and abilities, from elementary-school students to adults,

and at many different price points, to support all budgets. When developing our zine-related collections, we sought out zine-specific works, books that covered related things like graphic design, and some comics-making instruction. Here are just a few of our suggestions—pick what sounds cool and relevant for your collection, or get some ideas for other stuff to add:

- **Cartooning:** Philosophy and Practice. By Ivan Brunetti. 2011. Yale, \$16 (9780300170993).
- **Graphic Design Play Book.** By Sophie Cure and Barbara Seggio. 2019. Laurence King, \$19.99 (9781786273963).
- **How to Make Books: Fold, Cut and Stitch Your Way to a One-Of-a-Kind Book.** By Esther K. Smith. 2007. Potter Craft, \$25 (9780307353368).
- **Let's Make Comics!** By Jess Smart Smiley. 2018. Watson-Guptill, \$12.99 (9780399580727).
- **Making Books with Kids.** By Esther K. Smith. Illus. by Jane Sanders. 2016. Quarry, \$24.99 (9781631590818).



Art from *Whatcha Mean, What's a Zine? The Art of Making Zines and Mini-Comics*, by Esther Watson and Mark Todd.



- **Moxie.** By Jennifer Mathieu. 2017. 336p. Roaring Brook, \$17.99 (9781626726352).
- **Observe, Collect, Draw! A Visual Journal.** By Giorgia Lupi and Stefani Posavec. 2018. Princeton Architectural, \$19.95 (9781616897147).
- **Shotgun Seamstress Anthology: The Complete Zine Collection.** By Osa Atoe, 2022. Soft Skull, \$40 (9781593767396).
- **Stolen Sharpie Revolution: A DIY Zine Resource.** By Alex Wrekk. 2020. Silver Sprocket, \$10 (9781945509452).
- **The Riot Grrrl Collection.** Edited by Lisa Darms. 2013. Feminist, \$39.95 (9781558618220).
- **Whatcha Mean, What's a Zine? The Art of Making Zines and Mini-Comics.** By Esther Watson and Mark Todd. 2006. Clarion, \$14.99 (9780618563159).

You can also collect zines. There are so many artists and publishers making zines right now that you would be hard-pressed not to find something relevant to the population you serve. Zine collecting is starkly different from collecting other materials, and

there are many specific considerations when it comes to zine acquisitions. It's critical to do additional research if you'd like to add zines—whether patron-made or purchased from artists and zine publishers—to your collection. In 2021, ALA Editions published *Zines in Libraries: Selecting, Purchasing, and Processing*, edited by Lauren DeVoe and Sara Duff; reading it would be a great way to learn about the ins and outs of collecting zines for your library. An ultimate goal of your zine work at your institution may be to begin collecting patron zines. All the ideas for policy and collection development around zines apply in this scenario, too.

In our school library, we dedicated a small area near the graphic novels and the non-circulating periodicals for our small zine library, which consists solely of uncataloged, non-circulating zines made by students and teachers that are available for in-library perusal. We also have copies of zines that patrons can keep, such as zine templates as well as a zine about our library. There is also a small sign next to our display with a QR code that takes patrons to our zine LibGuide. You can do something similar in your library, and you can even consider having zine-making materials (like paper, markers and pens, and glue sticks) available for spur-of-the-moment zine-making by your patrons.

### Zines in the Classroom

Much like slide presentations, traditional research papers, or posters, zines can be a form of assessment in the classroom. Creating physical zines is particularly suited for visual and kinesthetic-tactile learners and

requires skills in delivering information sequentially and the use of text with images. As we are learning more about how different forms of media can support learning in the secondary classroom, zines are a great hands-on activity that students can participate in to show their knowledge in almost every subject, from English literature to science.

Teachers can also use zines in the classroom for teaching about primary sources. And, since zines cover a variety of topics, specific zines can be used to teach about various concepts, political movements, and even the craft of writing or art. Instruction librarians can incorporate zines into their own classrooms or teaching sessions, while librarians who work with teachers can explain the benefits of zines in the classroom and encourage the teachers to incorporate zines into their lesson plans.

Kelly Wooten, a librarian at Duke University, developed a lesson plan for zine instruction using a “think, pair, share,” model, which is described in the chapter “Zines as Primary Sources” in *Critical Library Pedagogy Handbook, v.2*. Although the lesson is geared toward college students, it can be modified for the secondary classroom. Wooten highlights the importance of selecting examples of zines for instruction that include marginalized voices, especially zines created by people of color.

### Formats

Zines are often associated with cheap-to-make, cut-and-paste small paper objects. While this is a valid and very fun format to use in the library, you can also let your resource availability lead the way. Say you have some spare printer paper and some pens. Zines can be made with just these things. There are many tutorials online that will teach you to fold a small, eight-page zine using just one piece of printer paper. One sheet of paper and

just two folds yields a four-page zine in which the interior is the opportunity to make a poster.

If you can spare some simple art supplies, all the better for creating colorful zines with your patrons. And if you have any library materials headed for the recycling bin, set them aside instead—the perfect collage fodder! Make some glue sticks and scissors available if you're going this route. If you have more than a little bit of paper to spare, you can let patrons make longer zines. Zine-making as a library activity is truly adaptable to whatever materials you have on hand. Large budgets not necessary!

Physical zines made with paper may be the tradition, but they're not the only option. If you're interested in increasing digital skills and literacy with your patrons, head to the computer. Adobe InDesign is a wonderful software program that can result in fine-looking zines that can be distributed in PDF format or printed. It may be an important program for your population to learn. That said, free or cheaper programs, like Canva, can also be used to create striking digital and print zines.

Zines are powerful because they are distributed. After creating zines with your patrons, consider allowing them to either print multiple copies or to make a copy of their original, for distribution.

### Hosting a Workshop/ Zine Instruction

Workshops and zine-focused events are a great way to ensure targeted interaction with zines—and are a good complement to some of the more passive forms of zine programming described above. Workshops can cover whatever you want them to, including zine history, a tour of relevant materials in the library, and zine-making instruction.

Those of us who have hosted

workshops in the past know that the key to creating a successful workshop lies in participation; not only in the number of people attending the workshop but also their engagement in the material. If teens are interested in zines, learning about zine history and how to create them might be enough of a draw. We have found, however, that busy teens need incentives in order to carve out time to attend a workshop. These can be in the form of refreshments and take-home zine-making kits in the public library setting.

In the high-school library, the best way to guarantee numbers and engagement lies in the partnership between librarians and teachers. Teachers can assign attendance to the workshop as homework or make it count as a participation grade. We have also had teachers offer students participation in a workshop as extra credit. And zine workshops don't have to be held outside of class! Instruction librarians can visit classes or have classes visit the library to teach zine-making skills (and promote library resources) during class time.

However you choose to include zines into your library, whether by connecting with teachers and informing them about using zine creation as a form of assessment; making a display of zine anthologies, histories, and how-to books; hosting a zine workshop; or encouraging zine-makers to leave a copy of their zines in the library to start building a zine collection, these DIY publications will find an enthusiastic audience.

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