

オタク

Allentown Public Library's Otaku Club



APL'S OTAKU CLUB

The Otaku Club was started at the Allentown Public Library (APL) for fans of manga, anime, and Japanese pop culture. It was also started to let young patrons know about the new manga additions to our collection. Manga has enjoyed a boom in popularity in the past several years and has found a niche in American book publishing, for they are not released in the original Japanese comic book format but as paperback graphic novels.

The first incarnation of the Otaku Club was opened to fifth and sixth graders with APL cards in April of 2003. It was a six week program that culminated in a Yu-Gi-Oh! card tournament. Unfortunately, however, the majority of the members were more interested in participating in the card tournament than actually reading manga.

Because of this, the second incarnation of the club was then opened to 12 to 16 year old patrons with APL cards, but the six week sessions remained the same. Now in it's ninth incarnation, club members enjoy reading manga, watching anime, producing anime cels, and playing "Dance! Dance! Revolution!".

APL's Otaku Club meets twice during the school year, in September and February on Fridays from 4 pm to 5 pm.

What's an otaku?

"Otaku" is a Japanese word signifying a person who is a fan, a person who is obsessed with his or her hobby, be it computers, movies, sports, etc. However, in Japan the word is used in a negative context. To say someone is an otaku is to suggest that he or she has no life outside of their hobby. Their hobby dominates all of a person's free time as well as his or her state of mind.

However, here in America "otaku" is used to describe anyone who is a fan of manga and anime.

American manga and anime fans have taken something negative and turn it into something positive.

Why have a club?

Otaku clubs provide a forum for teens who are interested in anime and manga as well as Japanese pop culture, history and language. Unfortunately, since young people tend to stop going to libraries when they hit their teens, otaku clubs are a great way to reintroduce them to our institutions. They are also a great way to receive feedback

in terms of collection development. Otaku clubs let us librarians know what teens are reading.



About the Club Advisor:

Ximena Miranda received her Master of Library and Information Sciences from the University of Pittsburgh in 2002. She also earned her Bachelor of Fine Arts in Painting from the Maryland Institute College of Art in 1993.

Miranda became interested in Japanese culture at the age of eight while watching the television series *James Clavel's Shogun* and has been hooked ever since. She enjoys watching *Ranma 1/2* and collecting Hello Kitty paraphernalia. She works as a children's services librarian at the Allentown Public Library in Allentown, PA. She may be reached at mirandax@allentownpl.org.