



Christian Parents Guide to Anime and Manga

You've seen it in your children's backpacks and on their computers. Your kids stay up late watching it. They may even dress up and attend conventions celebrating it. *Anime* and *manga* have become prime forms of entertainment for kids all over the country.

You may be concerned about what your child is consuming. What exactly is this form? Is it anti-Christian? While some may want to exclude any media that includes elements that don't reflect Biblical values, this guide takes the position that even media not specifically intended for Christian audiences can be viewed and may be valuable, though parents will set their limits on what is appropriate.

What is anime?

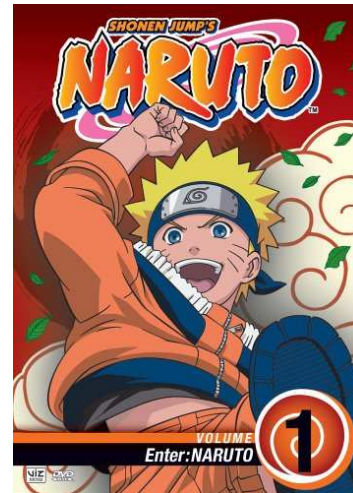
Anime, very simply put, is Japanese animation. Its literary counterpart is *manga*, the comic form from which anime is often adopted. Historically, anime has been just a small portion of the animation viewed in the U.S., though some series and movies like *Speed Racer*, *Pokemon*, and the Oscar-winning *Spirited Away* have received attention on these shores. But with the advent of the Internet age, anime has become far more commonplace throughout the country.

Since it simply refers to a country's animation, the form covers a broad range of genres (ex. science-fiction, romance, comedy) and audiences, including those aimed at very young children and some meant for adults only. The Japanese view anime as a serious art form, and as such it often doesn't carry the kiddy connotation that American animation does.

What's the Big Deal?

Why are so many young people attracted to this foreign form of animation? Well, it's certainly a form of escapism, as is other entertainment. It involves concepts that are foreign to American teens, but often shown in

a captivating way. Anime also primarily gives main roles to teenagers. And finally, the sheer output of series (some three to four dozen are released each season, with four seasons running per year) almost guarantees that one can find a series of interest. And much of it is just *really* good. Anime isn't simply "just cartoons" – this creative form often results in excellent works. For instance, a whole generation of Disney and Pixar animators have been influenced as much by Hayao Miyazaki (*Spirited Away*, *My Neighbor Totoro*) as any American animator.



Naruto is a popular anime and manga with themes of redemption and sacrifice. It also contains violence, fan service, mystical powers, and coarse language.

Concerns About Anime

- *Isn't anime basically animated pornography?*

No, it is not, although there *is* pornographic anime, known as *hentai*. These series and movies are a rough equivalent of pornographic films in the U.S. However, a common concept in most anime series is *fan service*. This sexualizing of characters can be as mild as tight-fitting clothing to as extreme as nudity.

- *Is the violence in anime excessive?*

It depends on the series. Some anime contain graphic violence; others only contain slapstick violence. Some series are referred to as "slice

of life,” and as such may not contain any violence at all.

- *Is anime anti-Christian?*

Though some extreme examples may be viewed as anti-Christian, most anime series are simply not concerned with Christianity at all. Japan is approximately 1% Christian, and as such, the faith doesn't play a prominent role in the medium, and when it does, it's usually in the form of nuns teaching at a Catholic school or religious symbolism with little meaning.

- *Does anime reflect Japanese religion?*

Since most Japanese practice some level of Shinto or Buddhist belief (or both), those systems are often evident in anime. However, they tend to be seen in the background rather than becoming a focus of a series. The Japanese are generally not religious and no proselytizing occurs in anime. However, be prepared to see prayers at dinner tables, images of Buddha, and celebrations at shrines.

What Can I Do?

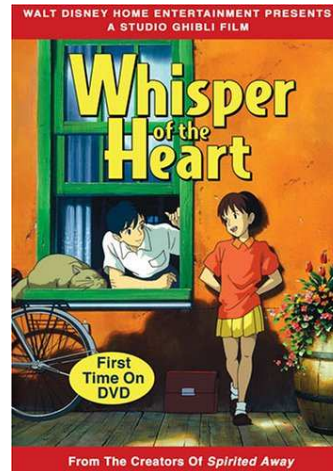
Anime is similar to other television programs in that a parent should decide at what level it should be monitored. A household ban on anime may be excessive, as many series focus on wonderful themes like friendship, teamwork, and courage; certainly, most are less offensive than a typical MTV program.

During adolescence, many boys and girls find it difficult to connect with parents. Anime can become a bridge, since many want to share their fascination for this medium with those they care about. Watching anime with your child could open conversation and even opportunities to discuss themes of the series that may relate to Christianity. For instance, self-sacrifice in *Naruto* could easily segue into a discussion about Jesus and the cross.

Anime and Christianity

As I mentioned before, very few anime focus on Christianity. However, there are a select

few that do, including some you may remember from your youth, like *The Flying House* and *Superbook*, both associated with the Christian Broadcasting Network. Another noted series is the critically-acclaimed *Haibane Renmei*, which while not specifically Christian, contains themes and symbols that any Christian or Catholic will immediately recognize. A [book/study guide](#) has even been written to outline these connections.



Disney has released many of Studio Ghibli's anime films in the U.S. They are wonderful movies that are aimed for children, but may be enjoyed more by adults.

Suggestions and Resources

Beneath the Tangles offers suggestions of [series for Christians to watch](#). They contain varying levels of violence, language, and religious implications. The range is exemplified by shows like *Haibane Renmei*, which contains little to be offended by, to *Samurai Champloo*, a very violent show, but one that nonetheless includes significant Christian characters.

While it's difficult to find Christian-centered reviews on most anime series, established Christ-centered review sites include [The Anime Review](#) and [Christian Anime Alliance](#), which also provides other resources for parents.

Conclusion

Anime is a strange art form for many, from its sometimes controversial themes to the very appearance of its characters. However, it is becoming increasingly popular. As such, I encourage you to be informed of the media and involved in your child's viewing of it. After all, it's likely here to stay.