

IT'S A WRAP!

Raeco & Bibliotheca Webinar held 10.30am Tuesday 5 September 2023

Ka-Pow! Unleashing the Superpowers: Engaging Reluctant Readers with Comics & Graphic Novels



Speakers illuminated some of the mystery around the topic of Comics and Graphic Novels... **Professor Stephen Krashen** – Expert in Learning Language and Comic Book research; **Iurgi Urrutia**, Kingston Libraries – Convenor ALIA Graphic Novels & Comics SIG; and **Moni Barrette** – Librarian, Director Library Pass (Comics Plus) and Lecturer in Reading and Comic Books, came together to discuss the inherent superpowers of these forms of reading materials.

Comics and Graphic novels are a proven way to engage with reluctant readers and libraries and librarians are the conduit for linking readers with comics and graphic novels.

Professor Stephen Krashen, a renowned linguist, educational researcher and activist is an advocate for comic books and graphic novels as a means to engage readers. As a young person Prof Krashen was in the low reader group, his father brought home comics and told him he could read as many as he liked. From those early beginnings he became an avid reader...and the rest is history as they say! Krashen has spent his entire distinguished career in the space of encouraging readers and learners of language.

Krashen discussed the history of comic books from the Golden Age of Comics 1937-1955 with titles like Superman and Archie (and others which 90% of kids read) to the decline in the mid-fifties following research undertaken by Fredrick Wertham. In his seminal work "The Seduction of The Innocent", Wertham claimed comic books were the cause of juvenile delinquency and low literacy. His research is now largely discredited, and the reemergence

of Comics alongside Graphic Novels have grown as legitimate reading forms. From 1961 the “Silver Age” emerged and comic books became about Real People with Real Problems hence increasing their relevance and connection to readers and the dilemmas they face – often citing difficult choices, conflicted identities, moral questions and those around diversity and inclusion and the appreciation of the “other”.

Krashen argues that comics are a conduit to reading. They have a high readability level and contain complex language and bring children into the library. Desmond Tutu praises comics as leading to his love of reading *“I got to loving to read, because he [Tutu’s father] allowed me to read comics, which most people said you shouldn’t let your child read because they will spoil him. But that gave me an extraordinary hunger for reading.”*

Krashen believes that one of the biggest barriers to reading is that everything is too expensive which is why Krashen has made his research and papers free to download from <https://sdkrashen.com/> **Bibliotheca** has taken up the flag on this front offering accessible and curated access to comics and Graphic Novels via its platform Comics Plus that libraries **can subscribe to and** make freely available for their members!

Iurgi Urrutia too was a reluctant reader! As a young child he only spoke Catalan at home and when he went to school, he had to learn Spanish. He was introduced to comics, and this became a turning point, he became an above level reader and used comics to learn Spanish as a second language. Urrutia in fact became “addicted to comics” and was soon reading for pleasure. All of this, he believes, turned him into a life-long reader. “Comics are great for struggling readers and advanced readers, they are multimodal texts, with concise and efficient writing and have a higher memory retention” Iurgi says. Graphic novels and comics are engaging for all readers because of the complex language used. This is one of the great opportunities for language learners – as they are exposed to rare and unusual words. Prof Susan Hill’s research identified the complex language of picture books – Comic book and graphic novel language follows suit. In fact, “A University of Oregon study found that comic books average 53.5 rare words per thousand, compared with an average of 30.9 rare words per thousand in children’s books, and also higher than the adult average of 52.7”, as noted by Chrissie Wright in her Blog – *Say yes to Graphic Novels!*
<https://www.chrissiemwright.com/blog/say-yes-to-graphic-novels>

As Urrutia attests, libraries play an important role in providing access for all. Libraries provide safe spaces where everyone is respected, and librarians can make referrals to other reading resources and help to develop readers. As Convenor of the ALIA special interest group for Graphic Novels and Comics, Urrutia is able to promote comics and graphic novels and their role in the library’s collection.

Moni Barrette talked of the benefits of library’s purchasing Comics Plus as an affordable simultaneous access model, providing access to digital comics as a supplement to print collections. Librarians can engage with readers through book clubs, community reads and other promotions. Comics Plus also activity guides, curriculum guides and promotional material.

Questions were asked of the panel about Manga and how this differed from comics and graphic novels – It’s not just the art style but also can have more adult content.

Another discussion was whether to separate the collections or interfile them. Urrutia argued they should be separate but shelved in three categories, junior, teenage and adult collections.

Further questions that were addressed after the webinar are included below:

What is the best way to choose what comics to put in your collection? There are so many different series, all with so many issues - do you have any tips on how to decide which ones to stock?

Have a feedback/suggestion box or form in the graphic novels section, so they know you want their feedback and that they can put suggestions for titles. I also often talk with patrons who are borrowing graphic novels at the library, it's great to hear from them what they're reading and enjoying and, again, I make sure they know they can put requests for titles.

Graphic novels and manga are often left out of literary review magazines (it's getting better though), so make sure you follow some specialised sources. Make sure you assess the titles yourself though. Check they fit your selection criteria and your community. Some comics are popular everywhere, but some do well in some communities and not in others.

Some suggested trusted sources:

- ALIA Graphic Novels and Comics publishes monthly roundups of titles that our team believe are a good fit for libraries. We also publish a year list of Notable Australian Graphic Novels
- No Flying No Tights is an excellent resource
- YALSA's Great Graphic Novels for Teens list
- ALA's Graphic Novels and Comic Roundtable's Best Graphic Novels for Adults and Kids list
- Schol Library Journal
- Booklist
- Publishers Weekly Comics
- The Beat

You can find a comprehensive list of resources we at ALIA Graphic Novels and Comics trust, here: <https://aliagraphic.blogspot.com/p/resources.html>

Finally, long series and ongoing series can be problematic. Urrutia says "We don't usually buy ongoing Marvel and DC series but there are exceptions. We may buy a particular run that has a strong creative team and is of particular interest. For example, Spider-man: Miles Morales written by Brian Bendis due to the popularity of the films". With really long manga series, sometimes buying the first five volumes can be useful to see how popular it is before committing to buying more.

Krashen suggests "The Star Method" - encourage students to draw a star in the inside cover of books they like. Library browsers will be interested in books/comics that have lots of stars. *"Then it occurred to me: Maybe the only authority on 'good books' for kids is a kid. Should we (educators) stand aside and let children recommend books to each other?"* ([Adriance 2010](#)). Adriance, L. (2010). Seeing stars: How I ignored my inner librarian and got kids excited about books again! *School Library Journal*, 56 (7), 26-27.

How do you feel about Manga? In my school library, Manga is more popular than Comics and Graphic Novels. However, I could certainly update my Comic and GN collection more regularly.

Manga is incredibly popular these days, not just here but all over the world, in large part because Anime is also more available than ever. It's a completely different culture and a

fascinating one. While I've watched lots of anime in my life, I haven't read that much manga until about a year ago. Now I read a lot of manga and there are some really amazing series. I recommend you check the Manga in Libraries website. It's an excellent resource.

I also want to say that there's the perception that manga can be problematic in terms of content (violence and sex), while there's some truth to that, there are lots of mangas that are totally appropriate for younger readers too. Sue and Tai Chan, Dragon's Quest: The Adventure of Dai and Witch Hat Atelier are some examples. There are many more.

I would love to know your tried and tested tricks to get kids actually picking up the comics. Displays obviously, but I would love to hear other suggestions.

I treat comics very much like we do readers advisory with fiction. I try to find out what they're interested in. Sometimes kids can tell you what series they like. If they can't, I ask what type of books, what type of stories they like and then match them with comics in that genre.

I also like to look at trends, what's popular, what the most borrowed titles are and what's selling. Unfortunately, in Australian sales data for comics is nearly impossible to get but there are websites from the US that publish handy sales data. Here's an example from ICv2: <https://icv2.com/articles/markets/view/55075/august-2023-circana-bookscan-top-20-kids-graphic-novels>

Learn about Comics Plus

Comics Plus provides libraries with an ever-growing collection of digital comics, graphic novels and manga titles. Simultaneous use, unlimited access – readers never have to wait for a title, no need to reserve titles – explore and read! Thousands of titles from hundreds of library friendly publishers. New content is added into the collection on a weekly basis, and new content providers join the collection throughout the year. Access the Comics Plus collection via a web interface, or app experience – capture your audience with a fun, exciting addition to your eLibrary!

Public Library Packages, School Library Packages and Academic Library Packages are available – take a closer look with trial access – contact Kylie Peckham k.peckham@bibliotheca.com

More information can be found here:

<https://www.bibliotheca.com/solutions/digital-comics/>

<https://comicsplusapp.com/>

On Promoting and displaying...

Firstly, create a special Graphic Novels collection interest area utilising a new shelving system or a revamped area to draw attention to this offering. Something like the example attached could do it! The Designer Series mobile shelving is perfect for this!

<https://www.raeco.com.au/designer-series-library-shelving/> The other option would be the smaller New Book stand <https://online.flippingbook.com/view/86800/20-21/>

Raeco offers a design service that will allow the use of its REX system (which utilises you're existing or proposed floor plan) to place furniture and shelving selections in situ to show both 2D plans and 3D renditions of concepts. You can contact a consultant to help you load your floorplan into the system and either have a designer suggest a new updated floorplan or you can work on it yourself with your team adding in your selected furniture and shelving

suggestions from the Raeco catalogue. It's very clever and a collaborative way to co-design your spaces! <https://www.raeco.com.au/rex-gallery/>

Using bright coloured ottomans to accent the space can also work to encourage a bit of a flick through browsed titles before borrowing.

https://www.raeco.com.au/cpt_products/lounge/

For Comics and Magazines – use magazine shelving or rigid plastic covering too great a more robust product that will take the hammering they will get when being borrowed. Mobile towers are a great option for this type of collection material.

https://www.raeco.com.au/cpt_products/magazine-newspapers/

The final piece of advice from Paula Kelly Paull was about the importance of face out display for physical collections, it has been proven to increase Circulation by seven times!!

For a free trial of Comics Plus see next page >

For a free trial of Comics Plus contact Kylie Peckham at Bibliotheca

k.peckham@bibliotheca.com, and for discussions on display shelving contact the Raeco sales team at <https://www.raeco.com.au/contact-us/> or 1300 727 231

Wrap up! provided with input from Karyn Siegmann (Raeco Ambassador), Professor Stephen Krashen, Iurgi Urrutia, Paula Kelly Paull and the Bibliotheca and Raeco teams.