

# WORKING WITH LIBRARIES!

A Handbook  
for Comics  
Creators

Introduction by  
Jeff Smith



# Comic Book Legal Defense Fund

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Comic Book Legal Defense Fund is a non-profit organization dedicated to the protection of the First Amendment rights of the comics art form and its community of retailers, creators, publishers, librarians, and readers. CBLDF provides legal referrals, representation, advice, assistance, and education in furtherance of these goals. [www.cbldf.org](http://www.cbldf.org)

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James Wood Bailey, Grant Geissman, Philip Harvey, Joseph H. King, Midwest Comic Book Association, Small Press Expo, and the Will & Ann Eisner Family Foundation.

**CBLDF's education program made possible by the Gaiman Foundation and supporters like You. Thank you!**

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# Joining Forces For Our Communities!

When I started publishing *Bone*, the idea of comics finding a home in libraries was a far-off dream. So much has changed since then! Today, comics creators and librarians are natural allies. I think that's because we share the goal of doing our best work to serve our community of readers.

Unfortunately, there are still challenges to overcome. The fact that *Bone* was one of the most banned books of 2013 is evidence enough of that! But even beyond people challenging the comics and other books on library shelves, there are more fundamental obstacles to conquer in the relationship between comics creators and libraries. For comics to truly take a central place in libraries, the community of comics creators and publishers needs to do a better job understanding what makes libraries tick. That's where this handbook comes in!

*Working With Libraries! A Handbook for Comics Creators* gives creators like us an inside view of the library world and the systems librarians have to navigate to bring comics to their patrons. Written by leading librarians who are passionate about comics, this brief but informative guide will help you learn about some of the kinds of libraries that are out there, how they function, and what librarians are looking for when they build their comics collections. The handbook also provides info about the events, publications, and authorities that librarians use to guide their decisions. *Working With Libraries!* also shines a light on the kinds of programs librarians are looking for and how you can pitch yourself and your work to be a part of these activities.



Libraries have come a long way from the days when comics were looked down upon. Modern librarians have done a lot of amazing work to make sure that comics have a place in their collections. Now it's our turn to learn what we can do to help make libraries an even better place for the readers we both serve. When we understand each other's needs, we can do amazing things. So here's to an even brighter future for comics and libraries!

— Jeff Smith

# Library 101

So, you want to get your book into the library. Like the world of comics (and books), there's a lot to know that isn't apparent to people who work outside the business and knowing where the "missing stairs" are is important to success. Our goal as librarians is to help you, the comic creator, find a place in public and school libraries.

This pamphlet is designed to help you understand how libraries function, particularly in selecting materials for the library collection and in setting up events with creators in libraries and schools. Libraries vary widely in size and scope. Most are part of a larger system. Please keep in mind that the advice in this document may not be accurate for all libraries.

## Types of Libraries

Trying to define "library" is like trying to define "comics." But here goes: Libraries exist to preserve, transmit, and promote culture to the communities they serve. Just as there are many genres of comics, there are many kinds of libraries. For our purposes, we'll focus on three main kinds of libraries: public, academic, and school.

The **public library** is funded primarily through local taxes and some grants and is open to the general public. This kind of library will have the broadest collection because it has to serve the community at large: all ages, all ethnicities and cultures, and all education levels. The public library will also have the most and greatest variety of programming. It's also the institution most likely to have a (comic) book festival or fair. This handbook will focus mostly on working with public libraries.

An **academic library** serves a college or university and is funded through tuition and fees, grants, endowments, or state money. Academic libraries buy items that support the research, curriculum, and goals of the institution. Programming at this kind of library reflects the academic and cultural interests of the institution as a whole, as well as those of specific disciplines. There are two main demographic groups in most academic libraries:

- highly-educated (and often highly specialized) professors and graduate students
- high school-educated (or equivalent) undergraduates.

A **school library** is funded through the local school district, tuition (if it's a private school), and the occasional endowment or grant, and it serves the needs of K–12 students and their teachers. Ethnicity and culture will vary depending on where the school or district is located, but the primary audience is minors. Programming at this kind of library supports the grade level and curriculum. An important secondary audience for programming (if the school district is large enough) consists of the individual school librarians. We'll focus more specifically on school libraries later in this handbook.

## Library Personnel

In terms of staffing, most library branches are operated by at least one professional librarian (someone who has a master's degree in library and information sciences). Many branches include librarians who specialize in certain collection areas, such as children, teens, and adult reference. Additionally, libraries have a number of other staff members who are not professional librarians but who are essential to the day-to-day running of the library: shelving books, circulating items, and answering informational questions.

Most librarians have a variety of job expectations, including selecting items for the collection and organizing programs for patrons. Additionally, they often write professional reviews of works and participate in regional organizations that share information about collections and programs. Finding one librarian to champion your creation will likely tap you into a network of other like-minded librarians who will appreciate your work. They communicate through social networks as well as directly with other librarians in their own library systems and regional organizations.

Many librarians are enthusiastic about comics. One way to find a librarian advocate is to visit local comic shops and talk to somebody who has worked there awhile — they can tell you who the “good” local librarians, professors, or teachers are.



These people will become your allies and are a gold mine of information about how things work in libraries and schools.

## **Collection Development and Programming**

No matter the kind of library, they all have a collection development policy and somebody in charge of programming. Much of this information may be found on the library website or by visiting the library. Examine the collection development policy (don't be afraid to ask for help finding it!), see what kinds of comics the library has (or doesn't have) on the shelves, and consider where you, your comics, and comics in general fit in. Get a schedule of events and programming and brainstorm how you can contribute to and help strengthen the existing schedule.

## **Library Budgets**

Another thing all libraries have in common is budgets, and there are a few crucial things to understand about them.

Whether publicly or privately funded, most of the purses of money at a library have strings — make that chains — attached to them. Every fiscal year, a set amount is allotted to collection development, programming, staff payroll, staff training, facilities upkeep, outreach, and so forth. The ability to move money from one purse to another is limited by contracts, bylaws, regulations, and in some cases, state and federal law. For the most part, once the money in a purse is spent, there is no asking for more. These budget rules shape what a library buys, how it buys it, and from whom it purchases materials. They also shape the events and programming offered.

Library budgets operate on a fiscal year, which is not the same as the calendar year. In most public and academic libraries, the fiscal year begins July 1 and ends June 30. In many school libraries, the fiscal year begins September 1 and ends August 31. The first quarter of the fiscal year is a great time to work with libraries. The last month of a fiscal year in any library is complete insanity: Purchasing is frozen; statistics are compiled in an effort to plan the next year; and accountants and auditors descend on everything. The end of the fiscal year is a bad time to approach a library about carrying your book or programming (unless, of course, you want to make a comic about end-of-fiscal-year insanity).

## Professional Conferences

National and regional professional associations hold annual library conferences around the country. The biggest of these conferences is the **American Library Association Annual conference**, which will be held in late June in San Francisco in 2015, Orlando in 2016, and Chicago in 2017. Think of it as Comic-Con for libraries, with publishers announcing their big upcoming books, authors making the rounds, and program sessions on a variety of topics. ALA Annual also features a robust Artists Alley and Graphic Novel Pavilion, complete with a programming stage and a number of familiar entities from the comic book world, including Comic Book Legal Defense Fund, several comics publishers, and a number of independent creators.

Attending or tabling at ALA can be an excellent opportunity to meet hundreds of librarians from across the country with buying power in their systems, and you can sell your own merchandise while you are at it. Visit [ala.org/conferencesevents/home](http://ala.org/conferencesevents/home) for more information.

Your own state library association may also have an annual conference, where you can interact with librarians by tabling, presenting, or sponsoring the event. To find a state conference, use the internet to search for “[Your state] library association conference.”

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The rest of this guide will go into greater detail about the specifics of what you need to know so you can make good, strategic plans. But as you read and learn, keep this in mind above all: Libraries want comics, libraries are great places for outreach, and libraries are key to growing the next generation of comics readers and creators. Once you understand how to work with them, libraries offer a great opportunity to connect with comics fans (including librarians themselves) and to grow interest in your work.



# Collection Development

Libraries are often publicly funded and, as such, have a fiscal responsibility to spend their money wisely. As a result, most libraries establish collection development policies to serve as guidelines in the selection and maintenance of their materials. Policies vary from institution to institution, but a collection development policy enables a library to curate a collection that supports the library's mission.

## The Importance of Reviews

Professional journals are incredibly important in the library world. In addition to being a place to share news and ideas, they are the primary source for reviews of new materials. Some libraries require that books in the collection have one or more positive reviews in approved professional journals such as:

- *Booklist Magazine*
- *Horn Book Magazine*
- *Kirkus Reviews*
- *Library Journal*
- *School Library Journal*
- *VOYA: Voice of Youth Advocates*

This can be a considerable challenge for a librarian eager to expand a graphic novel collection, as many graphic novels are not reviewed by traditional library media. If possible, you will want to work with your publisher to provide review copies to professional journals.

The website No Flying No Tights ([noflyingnotights.com](http://noflyingnotights.com)) is comprised entirely of librarian reviews of graphic novels and manga. This is frequently more accessible to smaller publishers, and in some cases can serve as a substitute for a print journal review.

Some libraries aren't confined by a collection development policy that requires reviews, although reviews can be a primary source of book discovery. Many librarians who are actively looking to build and expand their comics collection work closely with their local comic shop and attend conventions such as Comic-Con International.



## **Format Matters**

Most libraries do not collect or circulate single issue comics (floppies); instead, traditional trade paperbacks are strongly preferred. Books need to be professionally bound, strong, and able to withstand being read over and over again. One reason the binding of a book is so important is because of how libraries prepare books and make them available for circulation. Practices vary by institution, but almost all libraries stamp or label their books as well as apply a sticker with a call number that indicates the location of the book in the library. Floppies and spiral- or ring-bound comics are difficult to label in these ways, so they are rarely carried in libraries.

## **Purchasing Books**

Libraries may have restrictions on what distributors and vendors they can use. Two major distributors of library books are Baker & Taylor and Brodart. Think of them as the equivalent of Diamond Comic Distributors. Vendor restrictions may be imposed by the library or academic system, or more likely, by existing city or county government rules. Sometime, libraries can add a new vendor, but it can be a slow bureaucratic process that requires a great deal of patience.

New advances in technology and the growing popularity and awareness of self-published books is slowly creating more flexibility in collection development via purchasing self-published materials at shows and creator websites. Often, when a librarian is purchasing a title at a show or via website, they are spending their personal money and submitting supporting paperwork for reimbursement. In those cases, receipts are crucial. Please be prepared with a receipt book for these librarians.

## **First Line of Defense**

Collection development policies also provide guidelines for handling attempts to ban a book. The policy establishes how and why librarians select materials for a collection. A good collection development policy makes it clear a book will be evaluated as a whole, not based on an isolated portion. This is particularly important for comics, as their visual nature can make them an easy target for challenges.

# School Libraries

Schools present a different set of challenges — and rewards — than you will encounter in public libraries. Like public libraries, school libraries welcome a wide variety of books, and with the adoption of the Common Core curriculum by almost all states in the United States, there is more opportunity for comics in the school setting. The Common Core State Standards require that students and teachers use a wide variety of formats and text types, including graphic novels. That means schools are currently expanding their library and classroom collections to embrace comics, making this an excellent time to bring high-quality graphic novels into schools.

Schools have many points of entry: librarians, art teachers, English teachers, counselors, or the PTA. As teachers embrace visual literacy among the many literacies they teach, they will be seeking engaging materials to share with their students.

## Getting Your Foot in the Door

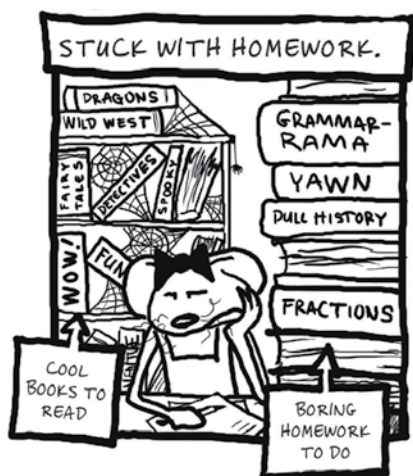
As with public libraries, it helps to have your titles reviewed in library or education journals and distributed by major vendors. Follett, Scholastic, and Baker & Taylor are the largest distributors for books to school libraries and classrooms. The purchase cycle is shorter for schools than in public libraries, with most orders placed between September and late March. Almost all purchases are made with purchase orders through the school district and require several layers of approval. For that reason, you may not be able to sell your books to schools without an intermediary. School districts probably will not reimburse a librarian or teacher for books purchased independently. Regardless, many teachers will shoulder the expense to build classroom libraries for their students.

If you believe that your work would be interesting for children or teens, share your books with people who work with youth. Professional reviewers almost always include recommended age groups. Compare your work with books that have been given age recommendations to see what age is the most likely target audience.

There are few hard and fast rules for what is considered appropriate for a school library or classroom. Schools reflect the standards of their community and are more risk averse than public libraries.

People often assume that schools will not carry anything controversial, but this is not true. Most schools and educators hope to provide a broad range of ideas and content for their students.

Local comic book shop employees can probably direct you to teachers and school librarians who are enthusiastic about comics. Your own school may be an excellent place to start. School libraries often strive to collect any work published by their alumni. The librarian of your former school could also consult with you about your target audience and put you in touch with other librarians and teachers who may be interested in your work.



## In the Classroom

Schools welcome community members and seek outsiders to share their experiences with students. Most schools would love to host creator visits. You could visit a school as part of a larger event, such as a career day, a family reading or arts celebration, and Banned Books Week (last week of September), or in conjunction with Free Comic Book Day (first Saturday in May).

Art teachers enjoy having professional artists demonstrate technique, lead workshops with students, and talk about their life as an artist. English teachers would be happy to showcase your work as a sample of storytelling technique. Some schools may be able to offer an honorarium through the PTA, particularly if you are a visiting artist offering workshops. Local rules often limit sales to students. You could try to schedule school visits in conjunction with a bookstore signing, inviting students to purchase your book that evening. In fact, many bookstores and comic shops will be happy to connect you with a local school when you come to their store for a signing.

Children can be challenging audience members. The younger your audience is, the more interactive your presentation should be. Consider having students draw while you draw or have student volunteers act out scenes from your comic. Whatever you plan to do, communicate your material needs to your school hosts well in advance of the event.

# The Library Life Cycle

The events listed here are generally recognized and celebrated at public and school libraries across the country. It is not exhaustive, and probably not every library is going to do something for every single one of these events. However, it is likely that your local library will recognize at least some of these events, and they're good starting places to talk about teaming up for events.

You should approach a librarian with an event idea in mind, but be flexible. Most library programs have to be free and open to the public, so you could end up with very young children in a program intended for middle schoolers, or adults may want to attend your "Drawing Comic Faces 101" workshop. A willingness to collaborate is recommended; the librarian may also have ideas to springboard off of yours.

Remember: Libraries like to plan ahead. It's a good idea to give your library at least two months lead time if you want to be featured. If you hope to get paid for your visit or program, you will need even more lead time. This will help the library effectively plan and market your visit and to make sure it's a rewarding experience for everyone.

## Good Times to Offer Your Program

### January

**January through March and October** are good months to approach schools about planning creator visits to classrooms. During these months you're less likely to run into conflicts surrounding holidays, first / last day of school crunches, or testing periods.

### February

African-American History Month  
([www.africanamericanhistorymonth.gov](http://www.africanamericanhistorymonth.gov))

### March

Women's History Month (<http://womenshistorymonth.gov>)

**Read Across America:** An annual reading motivation and awareness program that calls for every child in every community to cel-

celebrate reading on March 2, the birthday of beloved children's author Dr. Seuss. ([nea.org](http://nea.org))

**Teen Tech Week:** An initiative sponsored by Young Adult Library Services Association (YALSA), Teen Tech Week is designed to teach ethical and responsible use of digital media and to showcase all of the great nonprint resources and services that are available to teens and their families at libraries. (<http://teentechweek.ning.com>).

## April

**D.E.A.R (Drop Everything and Read):** A national month-long celebration of reading designed to remind folks of all ages to make reading a priority activity in their lives, nationwide D.E.A.R. events are held on April 12 in recognition of Beverly Cleary's birthday. ([www.dropeverythingandread.com](http://www.dropeverythingandread.com))

**National Library Week:** Generally held the second full week in April, National Library Week celebrates the contributions of our nation's libraries and librarians and promotes library use and support. All types of libraries — school, public, academic, and otherwise — participate. ([www.ala.org/conferencesevents/celebrationweeks/natl-libraryweek](http://www.ala.org/conferencesevents/celebrationweeks/natl-libraryweek))

## May

**Asian-Pacific American Heritage Month**  
(<http://asianpacificheritage.gov>)

**Free Comic Book Day:** Held annually the first Saturday in May, participating comic book specialty shops across North America and around the world give away comic books absolutely free to anyone who comes into their shops. Many libraries now participate and host events on this day. ([freecomicbookday.com](http://freecomicbookday.com))

**Children's Book Week:** The longest running literacy initiative in the country, Children's Book Week is held the first full week of May and is celebrated in all 50 states. ([www.bookweekonline.com](http://www.bookweekonline.com))

**Teacher Appreciation Week:** The first week of May was designated Teacher Appreciation Week by the National PTA in recognition of the contributions of teachers and administrators.

## June

LGBT Pride Month

**June through August (dates vary by library system):** Summer months are when public libraries do the most outreach to children and teens. They often host special events and give-aways for youth. Check with your local library to find out about reading programs, events, and more.

## September

Hispanic Heritage Month: September 15 – October 15  
(<http://hispanicheritagemonth.gov>)

**Banned Books Week:** An annual celebration of the freedom to read since 1982, Banned Books Week is observed the last week of September. Each year, librarians, booksellers, teachers and countless others take this opportunity to highlight the importance of intellectual freedom and remind us not to take this precious democratic freedom for granted. The focus of Banned Books Week 2014 is graphic novels, and CBLDF will have numerous resources for librarians, educators, retailers, and creators. ([www.bannedbooksweek.org](http://www.bannedbooksweek.org), [www.cbldf.org](http://www.cbldf.org))

## October

**Star Wars Reads Day:** An international event that celebrates reading and Star Wars. It was launched in 2012 by Lucasfilm and its publishing partners: Abrams, Chronicle Books, Dark Horse, Del Rey, DK Publishing, Klutz, Random House Audio, Scholastic, and Workman Publishing. ([www.starwars.com](http://www.starwars.com))

**Teen Read Week:** Held annually during the third week of October, Teen Read Week is sponsored by YALSA and is intended to encourage teens to be regular readers and library users. (<http://teenreadweek.ning.com>)



**DEFEND FREE SPEECH  
LIKE BABYMOUSE!**

**Halloween (October 31):** Spooky storytellings are often hosted on this day, making it a great opportunity for horror comic creators to host an event.

## November

Native American Heritage Month  
(<http://nativeamericanheritagemonth.gov>)

## Challenging Times to Offer Your Program

**March through April:** During these months, schools often have standardized testing scheduled for various grade levels, and many teachers won't book events during these weeks. Check local school calendars to see when these tests are scheduled.

**Early June:** For many schools, early June is when classes wrap for the summer. Libraries are ramping up for summer programs, and may have limited programming time available in their calendars. Ask to be included in Summer Reading kickoff events, but don't be disappointed if you're asked to reschedule for later in the summer. Many libraries have themes for their summer reading programs, so find out the theme for your local library and see what you can do to fit your program within the theme.

**Late August to early September:** Back to school can be a tricky time for school and youth librarians: They may be very busy doing outreach to schools, making contact with teachers, and preparing for classroom support. They also might be planning special events to welcome students into the library near the start of the academic year. If you have an interesting idea for an activity to reach out to kids, now might not be a bad time to try it out but don't be surprised if the library is booked up.

**November / December:** It can be really tough to schedule events around school and religious holidays. But some public libraries may be on the lookout for winter themed ideas or a hands-on program for tweens or teens that will help carry them through the winter holidays.



# Programming with Libraries

Modern libraries are much more than just collections of books. Increasingly, public libraries aim to position themselves as community, cultural, and educational hubs. To cultivate a spirit of innovation, librarians are constantly looking for new participatory ways to engage with their communities, help their users develop new skills, and spotlight the local art scene. This spotlights the library as a perfect venue for comic book publishers and creators to reach new audiences and establish themselves as important parts of their local creative culture. Through these partnerships you will reach scores of new readers who will be excited to learn about the art happening in their town.

If you want to offer a standalone event or an ongoing program to your local library, head to the reference desk and introduce yourself. Tell the librarian on duty who you are and what you do, ask if there is a particular librarian on staff who would be interested in developing events around comic books, and request an introduction. Odds are there will be at least one graphic novel fan on staff, and he or she will be excited to hear from you. If the two of you can get together, there is little doubt that you will discover a variety of ways to bring your work to the community. Many (but not all) libraries will be able to pay you a small honorarium for your work, so be upfront about whether and how much you are expecting to be paid.

Usually, libraries can team up with bookstores to facilitate the sale of your books at an event. If this is something that is important to you, let the librarian know early so he or she can make the necessary arrangements with the store and staff. Additionally, this is a great reminder to develop a solid relationship with your local comic book shop — most libraries can't sell books and having a partnership with a local retailer will make that step much easier.

Your skills, talents, experiences, and interests are valuable. You have interesting things to share with your community. Get creative with what you'd like to do!

## Event Ideas

Here are some basic ideas for events that your local public library would be excited to host:

**A presentation about an upcoming release:** Libraries host authors talking about their books all the time, so why not comics? You could supplement a talk with images from the book and by showing some of your visual influences.

**A lecture about your process or a live drawing demonstration:** Audiences who do not have much experience with comic books are always fascinated to see how comics get made. Talk about the collaboration between artists and writers, how your work goes from page to print, the materials that you use, and what makes creating comics a unique experience.

**“How to Read Comics” lecture:** Think like Scott McCloud and consider how you would teach an audience to read your work. This would be useful for kids, for parents, and even for older readers who might be curious about comics but don’t know where to start.

**Dramatic readings of your work:** Put together a slideshow of panels from your books and draft members of the audience to read different roles and let the comic come to life! This type of event is very good with children, obviously, but it can also help older readers make sense of comics as a literary form.

**How to pitch your ideas / breaking into comics workshops:** Many people would love a chance to make comics professionally. Offer up some advice about assembling a pitch and making contact with publishers or share your own breaking in story. You could couple this with a portfolio review session for folks who are really serious about kicking off their comics career.

**Workshops:** You could cover everything from specific drawing techniques to visual storytelling to formatting and publishing your own zines.

**Sketching:** You could offer to do sketches in conjunction with an existing library event, as part of a movie or book release party, or just for fun. Maybe you could get a few artists together and have a live sketch duel!

**Art installation:** Your library likely has a variety of display spaces, from simple bulletin boards to gallery spaces to giant white-board walls. Volunteer your talents to help fill that space up!

**Curated recommendations:** Maybe you've worked a lot with a particular comics character and know a ton about their history. You could help your local library put together a list or display of the best comics about that character and help reveal the character's rich history. Maybe you could write guest blog posts with your favorite recommendations. Or your library could wrap your selections in plain brown paper and write "A local comic artist thinks you should read this if you like \_\_\_\_\_," giving users a book blind date!

## **Banned Books Week**

This year's Banned Books Week takes place September 21 – 27, and it will shine a light on this still misunderstood form of storytelling. Libraries will be organizing programs specific to Banned Books Week. Here are a few ideas for how you can get involved:

**Volunteer to have your book "banned":** Help librarians teach a valuable lesson about censorship by volunteering to have your book "banned" for a week. Announce the ban, and at the end of the week, host a discussion about the ban and the impact such bans have on the community.

**Host a banned comics read out:** Help librarians hold a readers theater and have performers read aloud from banned and challenged graphic novels. Or organize a 12- or 24-hour read-a-thon, during which patrons, students, and fellow creators take turns reading banned books.

**Join the virtual read-out:** Each year, BannedBooksWeek.org celebrates with a virtual read-out in which anyone can submit a video of themselves reading from a banned book and discussing what it means to them. To learn more, visit [www.bannedbooksweek.org](http://www.bannedbooksweek.org).

**Stage a debate:** For a lively and illuminating conversation about intellectual freedom, bring together members of your community or students in a classroom to debate book censorship!

**Help organize a mini comics convention:** Work with your local librarian or teacher to scale down what is usually found at a comics convention until it's the perfect size for a library, a classroom, or a store. Artist alley, cosplay, demos and workshops, speaker panels, and even an art auction are just the tip of the iceberg when it comes to the programs you can help organize. Keep the programming focused on banned comics and the history of comics censorship.

# Join the Fight!

## Support Comic Book Legal Defense Fund Today!

CBLDF's important work defending the freedom to read is only possible because of the support of individuals like you. Show your support for our work protecting the freedom to read by making a tax-deductible membership contribution today!

### Membership Level

- ☐ **\$30 Junior Member** *(includes member card)*
- ☐ **\$50 Supporter** *(includes member card, sticker set, and button set)*
- ☐ **\$100 Member** *(all of the above, plus an exclusive member-only t-shirt)*
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- ☐ **\$1,000 Champion** *(all of the above, plus recognition in the CBLDF Liberty Annual and the CBLDF publication package)*
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Exp.

CVV

Type of Card

Signature

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