

# **COMIC BOOK LEGAL DEFENSE FUND**

Comic Book Legal Defense Fund is a non-profit organization protecting the freedom to read comics! Our work protects readers, creators, librarians, retailers, publishers, and educators who face the threat of censorship. We monitor legislation and challenge laws that would limit the First Amendment. We create resources that promote understanding of comics and the rights our community is guaranteed. Every day, we publish news and information about censorship events as they happen. We are partners in the Kids' Right to Read Project and Banned Books Week. Our expert legal team is available at a moment's notice to respond to First Amendment emergencies. CBLDF is a lean organization that works hard to protect the rights that our community depends on. For more information, visit www.cbldf.org



CBLDF's important work is made possible by our members!

Join the fight today!

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# Introduction

All you need to do is visit a movie theater or turn on your television to recognize that comic book properties have become a dominant form of popular entertainment. This holds true for the books themselves, too. Comics and graphic novels have seen increasing popularity, especially in libraries and educational institutions. Graphic novels are now topping *The New York Times* bestseller list and winning recognitions normally reserved for traditional books, such as the Pulitzer Prize, the Newbery and Caldecott honors, the National Book Award, and the MacArthur "genius grant."

The diversity of comics and graphic novels is simply astounding, and there's a graphic novel for any age group in any genre. Given their current popularity and diversity, comics make an ideal focus for book clubs. We've assembled this guide to help librarians, educators, and retailers — really, anyone who has an interest in this dynamic format — start a book club for comics and graphic novels in their community!

# What do graphic novels offer?

Is it really too much to say that graphic novels offer readers the world? Not in our opinion! From Marjane Satrapi's autobiographical account of growing up during the Iranian Revolution in *Persepolis* to the visual and historical allegory of Art Spiegelman's *Maus* to the deep-space adventures of Brian K. Vaughan and Fiona Staples' *Saga*, graphic novels can expose readers to new cultures, different historical perspectives, fantastic adventure, and much, much more.

What are some types of book clubs?

Book clubs can be held in a variety of places and run by a variety of individuals. The tips and guidelines offered in this handbook are most applicable to graphic novel book clubs held in the following locations:

➤ Libraries (curated by library staff or by an outside individual)

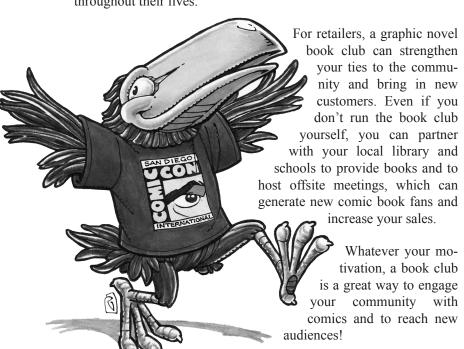


- ➤ Schools (independent, non-compulsory programs curated by teachers, students, or parents)
- ➤ Retail comic and book stores (curated by store employees or members of the community)

# Why start a graphic novel book club?

The reasons to start a graphic novel book club go beyond simply sharing the format we love with the people around us. For librarians, a graphic novel book club is another avenue to reach the wider community, an opportunity to engage longtime and new patrons alike. You'll see increased circulation of graphic novels and other books, as well as more community engagement as you tap into an audience that isn't always served by libraries.

For educators, graphic novels are an amazing tool for making lifelong readers, engaging reluctant readers, and assisting struggling students. For new and reluctant readers, graphic novels are less daunting than prose and more likely to be read. For advanced readers, they offer a novel and expansive reading experience. In the context of a book club, graphic novels help students build reading, discussion, critical thinking, and interpersonal skills that will benefit them throughout their lives.



# Getting Started

Once you've decided to curate a graphic novel book club, there are a few questions you should settle before you announce your book club and begin inviting participants:

#### 1. Who is your audience?

The audience for a graphic novel book club is as variable as graphic novels themselves. Consider whether you want to run a book club for a specific age group or all ages; there are advantages to focusing on either. An all ages group may attract a larger or more diverse audience, but you may have more difficulty agreeing on the comics the group wants to read. A book club for younger readers may need to address concerns over age-appropriate materials, community standards, and educational needs

#### 2. Where will your book club meet?

The location where you hold your meetings can affect who is able to attend. Are you going to hold your book club meetings in the local branch of your public library, at a school, or in a comic book shop? Is the location near public transportation? After your book club is assembled, the group may decide to meet elsewhere, but you still need a space to get started!

#### 3. How big will your book club be?

A number of factors come into play when determining the size of your graphic novel book club: the location of your meetings, your comfort level as a curator, the concerns of the venue, and so forth. A group that is too large can be unwieldy and difficult to moderate. In smaller groups, conversation can be difficult to maintain if members are absent. Many sources recommend a minimum of 8 members and a maximum of 15 members, but take into account your audience and your comfort level as a curator when making your size determination.

# Announcing Your Graphic Novel Book Club

Many book clubs start by word of mouth, but you can also advertise your book club in the following places:

- > community announcement boards at your local library, school, or book store
- online using social media such as Facebook and Twitter or

websites such as Craigslist (<u>craigslist.org</u>) and Meetup (<u>www.meetup.com</u>)

➤ email newsletters and mailing lists

# Holding Your First Meeting

Before you actually read any books, use the first meeting to establish some ground rules for your graphic novel book club. Your group should answer the following questions during the first meeting:

### 1. What kind of graphic novels do you want to read?

Some graphic novel book clubs establish a theme for what they want to read. For example, your club could focus on superhero comics, independent comics, comics by women, and so forth. If you decide that you are going to read a comic book series, your group should also discuss whether you want to read multiple volumes of the series at a time or over the course of several meetings.

### 2. What is your schedule?

During your first meeting, establish a schedule and time for your ongoing meetings. Most book clubs meet monthly, but you may want to meet every six weeks depending on participants' schedules.

## 3. Where do you want to meet?

As a group, discuss whether you want to continue meeting in the established location or whether you want to change things up with offsite events or meetings in members' personal homes.

# 4. What is the format of your meetings?

Determine the format of your meetings: Do you take turns moderating or hosting? Do you have food and snacks at the meetings, and who provides them? Do you want to follow a prescribed format?

## 5. How do you want to keep in touch with each other?

Determine how you want to communicate with each other. Social media can be an invaluable tool for communication. You can use Facebook or Google+ groups to communicate and make decisions. You may also want to designate a communications lead to send reminder emails and announcements.

# Selecting Books

After you establish the ground rules for your graphic novel book club, it's time to select some reading material! There are a few ways to select books:

- **Vote:** Each member of the club suggests a book, and everyone votes on which book to read. The suggestions and voting can be done either in person or using social media.
- **Take turns:** Each member of the group takes turns selecting a book.
- **Combine the methods:** The members of the group each take turns suggesting books, giving everyone three options to consider. The option with the most votes is the book that will be read

## Tips

- Consider limiting book selections to paperbacks. They're less expensive.
- Some libraries carry book club sets, but they rarely do so for graphic novels. Because it's unlikely your local library will have enough copies of a graphic novel available for everyone in your group, develop a partnership with a local comics retailer to ensure that you can get enough copies for everyone. Some retailers may offer a discount for members of your group.
- Discuss with your club whether you want to limit the length of the graphic novels you read. Shorter books are easier on busy schedules.
- For longer books, you may want to consider breaking the discussion over multiple book club meetings.
- Make sure the books you choose are still in print.
- > Choose no more than three books at a time. Choosing multiple books lets people read at their own pace, but you don't want to lock yourselves into a rigid schedule by selecting too many books at once.
- > Emphasize variety! Even if you choose a theme for your book club, don't get stuck in a rut. Vary genres, lengths, styles, difficulty, and so forth to maintain interest and participation in the club.

# Reading Critically

Whether you're moderating a graphic novel book club meeting or not, the ability to critically evaluate the graphic novel you're reading is essential to your experience of the work and the discussion of it. As you read, do the following:

#### 1. Take notes.

Notes help not only with discussion of the material, but also with retention of what you read — if you take notes, you're more likely to remember what happened in the book. You can take notes on a separate piece of paper, in the margins of the book, or on self-adhesive note paper. Taking notes may increase the amount of time you need to finish reading a book, but it will enhance your ability to think critically about the book.

### 2. Ask questions.

If you're moderating the meeting about the book, include potential discussion questions among your notes. Don't be afraid to ask hard questions, and identify questions that you think will promote meaningful discussion of the material. Even if you aren't moderating, asking yourself questions can help you identify with the work.

### 3. Pay attention to both the art and the text.

Graphic novels embrace both textual and visual cues to tell a story. Sometimes, it's easy to focus on one over the other. As you read, make an effort to examine both and how the interplay between the two is greater than the parts. It may help to read the book multiple times, focusing first on one aspect, then the other, and then finally on both together.

## 4. Identify themes and symbolism.

Analyze the deeper meaning behind the work: What are the ideas that the creators are exploring in the book? How do they use text and images as metaphors or similes, as symbols of something else?

#### 5. Examine the structure of the book.

As you read, pay attention to how the creators use color (or the lack of color) to convey ideas, themes, temporal changes, and so forth. The creators may also use panel size, frequency, and structure to convey emotions and events or to develop a sense of urgency about the plot or characters.

#### 6. Evaluate the motivators behind the book.

Is the book plot- or character-driven? If it is plot driven, it will move from event to event quickly, with little time spent on character development. Character-driven books tend to have a slower pace, focusing less on events and more on individual reactions, emotions, and thoughts.

### 7. Compare the book to other stories.

As you read, compare the book to other stories, whether they are prose or graphic novels. Consider the other work of the writer and artist: Are their previous books similar in art style and subject matter? Are there common themes? Identify prose books or other graphic novels that have similar themes or employ similar structure or visual style.



# Discussing Books

Discussion is a must in any successful book club. The members of your group don't need to agree on everything — in fact, some disagreement is healthy and fosters conversations. However, it's important to respect the other members of the group and to steer the discussion in constructive directions.

# Participating in a Discussion

Whether you're leading the discussion or participating, there are several things you can do to facilitate discourse:

### 1. Pay attention to your language.

Try to avoid value judgements and weighted terms, such as "hate" or even "dislike." Describe how the book made you feel as you read it.

2. Don't dismiss or interrupt other members of the group.

Respect the statements made by other members of your group, even if you disagree with them, and let everyone finish their

of view before responding, and respect the fact that you can have differing opinions about the material.

## 3. Speak up.

The more you participate in a discussion, the more you get out of it. Don't be afraid to share your thoughts and ideas, but be brief so everyone in the group has a chance to participate.

4. Support your statements.

Support your opinions by citing specific passages or images in the graphic novel.

## 5. Ask questions.

The discussion moderator will have plenty of questions ready to lead the

conversation, but don't be afraid to ask your own questions; you may have an idea that didn't occur to the moderator, or you may have noticed something that everyone else missed.

## 6. Respect the privacy of other members of the group.

When describing what happens in your graphic novel book club on social media or with outside parties, respect the other members of the group by not sharing their personal opinions or your opinion of the individuals in the group with outsiders.

# Preparing in Advance

Leading a healthy discussion requires some advance preparation. As you read, take notes to inform your conversation and use your notes to build discussion questions. Compile a discussion guide handout that you can provide to the group as a conversation aid. To best facilitate the conversation, include discussion questions, a plot summary, and character list in your guide.

# Leading a Discussion

Moderating a discussion carries some responsibility. As a moderator, you should:

- prepare 10-15 open-ended questions for discussion. Avoid yes / no questions, and ask them in turn. Don't be afraid to deviate from the prepared questions if the conversation is flowing naturally in another direction.
- > consider using a physical object, video clip, or song related to the book or subject matter of the book as a discussion prompt.
- pick out specific passages or images from the book, and ask > members of the group to comment on the material.
- choose a specific character, and ask members of the group to examine how that character develops over the course of the story. Ask the group to describe how the character is developed both visually and textually.
- > encourage members of the group to give specific reasons for why they did or did not like a book. Don't let them stop with "I just didn't like it."
- avoid dominating the discussion. Share your thoughts and ideas briefly and then ask each member of the group to weigh in on a particular plot point, character, or discussion question.

## Sample Discussion Questions

- > What was your experience as you read the book?
- Who is the intended audience for this book?
- What makes this graphic novel distinctive from other books?
- Who is the narrator in this book, and how does the narrator's perspective inform the story?
- > In what era is the book set, and how does it impact the story?
- ➤ What is the overall tone of the story? How does the art suit the tone?
- What motivated various characters in this book?
- With which character do you identify the most? Why?
- ➤ Was anything left unfinished? In what ways did the creators resolve the plot?
- Based on this book, extrapolate what you think the author's worldview might be.
- How does the panel structure convey meaning in the story?
- What are some visual or textual metaphors in the story?
- How did the artist use color, patterns, or textures to convey meaning in the story?
- ➤ What other pieces of art paintings, prose, music, and so on — do you think influenced this graphic novel?
- Would this graphic novel make a good movie? Why or why not? Who would you cast in the movie, and who would you hire to direct it?
- What would you change about this graphic novel? >
- How believable was the story?
- Would you recommend this book to another person? Why or why not?

# Managing Conversations

Graphic novel book clubs tend to be livelier and more dedicated than other book clubs. As a moderator or participant, you may have to contend with strong opinions about the content of a story. Occasionally, you may need to employ conflict management skills to steer the discussion away from negative or destructive avenues.

#### 1. Try not to get angry.

When a book instills strong emotions in book club participants, it's important to remain as neutral as possible as a moderator. Remember that when emotions are running high, people may say something they don't mean or that is easily misinterpreted. It may be difficult, but try not to take anything that is said personally.

### 2. Keep the conversation constructive.

If members of the group start using negative language, try to steer the conversation toward positive aspects of the material. Instead of talking about things people didn't like, encourage people to discuss what they did like about the book, however small it may be.

#### 3. Take a break.

If a discussion becomes too heated to control, take a break. Stop for a restroom break, have a snack break, ask everyone to go get a breath of fresh air, or otherwise interrupt the meeting in an effort to break participants out of an uncomfortable rut or argument.

## Ask for help.

If you're running a book club at a library or school as a volunteer, ask the employees at the institution for advice on how they handle difficult conversations and confrontation. If the tone of the book club has become excessively negative, consider bringing in a moderator to address members' concerns.

Occasionally, you may need to consider asking someone to leave the group because their participation is more detrimental than beneficial. As with book selection policies in libraries, it's a good idea to have a policy in place before you begin the book club or establish some guidelines with the group during the first meeting to guide discussions and to use as a more objective determinant for when someone needs to be asked to leave the book club

# Staying Connected

Communication is a pretty essential part of any organization, whether it's a library, school, or your friendly neighborhood graphic novel book club. Stay connected between meetings using these outlets:

**Social media:** Use Facebook groups or Google+ Hangouts to check in with the other members of your book club between meetings. You can send notifications, plan logistics, or contend with sudden scheduling conflicts on these platforms. You can also use these platforms for scheduling and to discuss your next book club pick!

**Blogs:** Use Tumblr or similar blogging sites as a historical document, recording photos and minutes from each meeting to share with each other and with your community.

**Email lists:** Use email lists to send reminders about upcoming meetings and community outreach events.

**Meetup.com:** Web-based platforms such as Meetup are great tools for getting the word out about new book clubs or the latest meeting. Meetup is also a useful tool to identify people who have similar interests in graphic novels.



# Expanding Beyond the Book Club

A graphic novel book club doesn't have to be all about the books. There are a number of things you can do to make meetings and book club events more exciting:

- > Snacks: Food and drink are a great way to help people relax during a book club meeting. Get creative and make snacks inspired by the books you read!
- Movie / TV night: Watch the movie or television adaptation of the graphic novel you just read or a movie or show that has a similar plot or theme.
- ➤ Paired reading: Pair a prose novel with a graphic novel and compare how the two differ and how they are the same. Paired reading is also a great way to introduce graphic novels to a traditional book club — after reading a prose novel, encourage members to read a related graphic novel or comic book adaptation of the prose novel!
- Field trips: Visit a local museum or arts center to explore the work of an artist who inspired the graphic novel or the creators who wrote it
- Parties: It's OK to meet with nothing more on the agenda than to have fun! Once or twice a year, plan a party to help the members of the group bond over something other than the latest graphic novel.

# Community Outreach

A graphic novel book club taps into an often underserved audience, and the enthusiasm for graphic novels can be contagious. As a moderator or member of a graphic novel book club, you can reach the community in the following ways:

- > Banned Books Week: Volunteer at your local library or school to facilitate the celebration of graphic novels during Banned Books Week, which takes place the last week of September.
- ➤ Creator visits: After reading and discussing a graphic novel, invite the creators of the book to talk with your group and the wider community. CBLDF's Comics Connector is a directory resource that connects educators and librarians with creators and other comics professionals who are able to visit classrooms or libraries: http://cbldf.org/resources/comics-connector/

# Books to Get You Started

With more than 75 years worth of comics to choose from, there are so many graphic novels that we couldn't possibly list them all here. This list is by no means complete, but it's a great place to start for book club selections. If you need more recommendations, visit your local comic book shop or library and talk to the staff to find more! You can also visit <a href="http://cbldf.org/">http://cbldf.org/</a> to find recommendations in our Banned & Challenged Comics Case Files, CBLDF Discussion Guides, and Using Graphic Novels in Education column!

TITLE	CREATOR(S)	Publisher	GENRE	DESCRIPTION
Bone (multiple volumes)*+	Jeff Smith	Scholastic	Fantasy	Smith's all-ages fantasy follows Fone Bone and his cousins on an epic Lord of the Rings-like quest.
Coraline: The Graphic Novel*YA	Neil Gaiman & P. Craig Russell	Harper Collins	Fantasy	Coraline unlocks a door to discover another home and another set of parents, whom she must escape to return to the real world.
The League of Extraordinary Gentlemen (multiple volumes)	Alan Moore & Kevin O'Neill	DC Comics / Top Shelf Productions	Fantasy	Famous literary characters band together to fight villains throughout time, starting in Victorian England.
The Sandman (multiple volumes)'*	Neil Gaiman, various artists	DC Comics	Fantasy	Gaiman's epic tale of Dream and his siblings as Dream embarks on a quest to retrieve his objects of power.
Locke & Key (multiple volumes)*	Joe Hill & Gabriel Rodriguez	IDW	Horror	Come inside the Keyhouse, where every door you opens transforms you. But beware the beast who lives there!
The Walking Dead (mul- tiple volumes)	Robert Kirkman, Tony Moore, & Charlie Adlard	Image Comics	Horror	Much of the world's population has been turned into zombies, and the unafflicted struggle to survive.
American Born Chinese*YA	Gene Luen Yang	First Second	Reality- Based	Jin Wang just wants to be an all-American boy, but a visit from his Chinese cousin causes him to transfer to another school to start over.
American Splendor and More Ameri- can Splendor	Harvey Pekar, various artists	Ballantine Books	Reality- Based	No one captures real life like Harvey Pekar. His classic stories — illustrated by some of the top artists in comics — are collected in this anthology.
Drama <sup>*YA</sup>	Raina Telge- meier	Scholastic	Reality- Based	Callie deals with the on stage and off-stage drama of her middle school play.

TITLE	CREATOR(S)	Publisher	GENRE	DESCRIPTION
Fun Home: A Family Tragicomic*+	Alison Bechdel	Mariner Books	Reality- Based	Alison Bechdel's autobiographical tale of growing up with her father, owner of the town's funeral home.
Maus <sup>*YA</sup>	Art Spiegelman	Pantheon	Reality- Based	Art Spiegelman's devastating account of his parents' lives in concentration camps during WWII.
Persepolis <sup>*YA</sup>	Marjane Satrapi	Pantheon	Reality- Based	Marjane Satrapi's coming of age story, set during the Iranian Revolution.
Stuck Rubber Baby <sup>'YA</sup>	Howard Cruse	DC Comics	Reality- Based	Howard Cruse's semi-autobio- graphical story explores coming of age in the 1960s South and the search for identity.
The Dreamer	Will Eisner	WW Norton & Company	Reality- Based	Will Eisner's autobiographical look at his beginnings in comics is also a history of the early years of the industry.
This One Summer <sup>'YA</sup>	Jillian Tamaki & Mariko Tamaki	First Second	Reality- Based	The first graphic novel to win the Caldecott honor, this coming-of-age story examines a summer of secrets, sorrow, and growing up.
Chew (multiple volumes)	John Layman & Rob Guillory	Image Comics	Science Fiction	Tony Chu is a detective who gets psychic impressions from what he eats, including the corpses of murder victims.
Saga (multiple volumes)*+	Brian K. Vaughan & Fiona Staples	Image Comics	Science Fiction	A sweeping science fiction epic that unites two soldiers from op- posing sides who fall in love and have a child.
Y: The Last Man (multiple volumes)	Brian K. Vaughan & Pia Guerra	DC Comics	Science Fiction	What happens when every male on Earth — except one human and his pet monkey — dies?
All-Star Superman*YA	Grant Morrison & Frank Quitely	DC Comics	Superhero	Superman returns to the basics in this award-winning series that re- captures the charm and excitement of Superman's best tales.
Captain Marvel (multiple volumes) <sup>YA</sup>	Kelly Sue DeConnick, Dexter Soy, & Emma Rios	Marvel Comics	Superhero	Carol Danvers, the superhero formerly known as Ms. Marvel, takes on a new mission as Captain Marvel.
Hawkeye (multiple volumes) <sup>YA</sup>	Matt Fraction & David Aja	Marvel Comics	Superhero	What does Hawkeye do when he's not being an Avenger? Get into a lot of trouble!
Invincible (multiple volumes) <sup>YA</sup>	Robert Kirkman & Cory Walker	Image Comics	Superhero	Mark Grayson's dad is the most powerful superhero on the planet, and Mark is following in his footsteps.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>†</sup>Challenged or banned comic <sup>†</sup>Eisner Award winner <sup>YA</sup> Suitable for young adult audiences. (Note: Even though these books may be appropriate for younger readers, that doesn't mean they don't offer something for adult audiences.)

# Resources

### Online

- "Book Club," compiling posts about San Diego-area graphic novel book club meetings from Comic-Con International's Toucan Blog: http://www.comic-con.org/toucan/categories/book-club
- "Starting a Book Club," from www.ilovelibraries.org, an initiative > of the American Library Association: http://www.ilovelibraries.org /booklovers/bookclub
- "Book Discussion Groups," from the American Library Associa-> tion: <a href="http://www.ala.org/tools/atoz/book-discussion-grps">http://www.ala.org/tools/atoz/book-discussion-grps</a>
- > "How to Start a Book Club," from LitLovers: http://www.litlovers .com/start-a-book-club
- "How to Start a Book Club for Kids," from PBS Parents: http:// > www.pbs.org/parents/education/reading-language/reading-tips /how-to-start-a-book-club-for-kids/
- > "Book Groups," from Great Books, a literacy advocacy program for preK-12: http://www.greatbooks.org/book-groups-more /book-groups/
- "The Center for the Book in the Library of Congress," a general resource from the Library of Congress that provides information about books for various age groups: <a href="http://www.read.gov/cfb/">http://www.read.gov/cfb/</a>

## CBLDF Resources

- CBLDF Banned Books Week Handbook 2015: Everything you need to celebrate Banned Books Week! Boasting a cover by Raina Telgemeier, America's most popular kids comics creator — and one of the most frequently banned! This resource reveals what comics are banned, how to report and fight censorship, and how to make a celebration of Banned Books Week in your community! On shelves September 2, 2015!
- Raising a Reader! How Comics & Graphic Novels Can Help Your Kids Love To Read! is CBLDF's signature resource for parents and educators! It's an indispensable tool for showcasing the value of graphic novels and chock full of reading suggestions to get young readers engaged with this exciting medium (starts at a \$5 donation for a bundle of ten, <a href="http://tinyurl.com/o9zrtsn">http://tinyurl.com/o9zrtsn</a>)!
- "Banned and Challenged Comics," <a href="http://cbldf.org/banned-comic/">http://cbldf.org/banned-comic/</a> <u>banned-challenged-comics/</u>: CBLDF's online resource compiling case studies about specific banned and challenged comics, this is a great place to start when you're looking for book club ideas!
- Visit http://cbldf.org/ regularly for news and features, including CBLDF's ongoing column Using Graphic Novels in Education, discussion guides, and more!



# www.comic-con.org

# THE COMIC-CON GRAPHIC NOVEL BOOK CLUBS

Downtown San Diego Central Library

Mission Valley Public Library

La Jolla Public Library

North Park Public Library

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