

A GUIDE FOR LIBRARIES
ON COMICS AND GRAPHIC NOVELS
BY



The *Comics Cultural*
Impact Collective CCIC



WHY ARE COMICS IMPORTANT?





Report finds 'shocking and dispiriting' fall in children reading for pleasure

National Literacy Trust finds only 35% of eight to 18-year-olds enjoy reading in their spare time, a sharp drop on last year to the lowest figure yet recorded



'The futures of a generation are being put at risk.' Photograph: Catherine Falls Commercial/Getty Images

'Urgent action required' as children's enjoyment of reading falls to 20-year low

National Literacy Trust warns figures should act as a wake-up call with disadvantaged children most affected by falling reading levels

Gabriella Swerling
Social and Religious Affairs Editor

Related Topics
Education News, Education News,
Children

04 September 2023 8:00am BST



INDEPENDENT

Children's writing at 'crisis point' as enjoyment among pupils drops – report

The proportion of young people who enjoy writing in their free time declines as they go through the school system, survey finds.

Eleanor Busby • Monday 05 June 2023 15:44 BST



Research from the National Literacy Trust shows there is a

READING FOR PLEASURE CRISIS

in the UK amongst young people aged 8-18
With rates at their lowest since records began.

**National
Literacy
Trust**

Change your story

Reading Crisis? Well, not among comic readers

17 April 2025

By Hannah Berry and Karrie Fransman of [The Comics Cultural Impact Collective](#) with an introduction by Debbie Hicks MBE, The Reading Agency



But National Literacy Trust research also found that there was **NO** Crisis of Reading Enjoyment among comic readers. They say;

“Nearly twice as many children and young people who read comics in their free time told us that they enjoy reading compared with those who didn’t read comics in their free time **(58.6% vs. 33.1%).”**



Change your story

The National Literacy Trust research also found that

'Children and young people who read comics were more engaged with reading, regardless of their age':

'More of those who read comics rated themselves as 'very good' or 'good' readers compared with those who didn't read comics (86.0% vs 76.3%)'.

'More of those who read comics told us that they read something daily in their free time compared with peers who did not read comics (35.7% vs. 22.8%)'.



WHY IS THERE IS NO 'ENJOYMENT OF READING
CRISIS' AMONGST COMIC READERS AGED 8-18?

“Children may be reading less but are they also reading differently? Is it that conventional definitions of reading are misaligned with current practice? As new technologies and digital media reshape how we consume and interact with narrative and information, is the definition of “reading” being redefined for younger generations?”

DEBBIE HICKS MBE, CREATIVE DIRECTOR OF THE READING AGENCY



THINGS YOU MIGHT HEAR AT THE LIBRARY

Comics are all fantasy and superheroes, right?

'Comics' is a medium, not a genre. There are comics on cooking, history, memoirs, politics. Let us know your interests and we'll recommend a book.

I thought 'Graphic' novels were sexual or violent.

Comics are for every age. Sometimes they don't come with an age bracket but if you ask us we can advise.

Aren't they for kids?

31% of adults in the UK do/have read comics and 40.3% of young people aged 8-18.

They'll read THAT in 30 minutes!

Comics readers often repeat read, uncovering hidden depth on subsequent readings. They're also likely to create their own comics.

I can't get my kid to read proper books

Your kid is learning literacy and visual literacy. Let them choose what to read and they will fall in love with reading



WHAT ARE 'COMICS'?

- 'Comics' is a medium that includes as many genres as literature.
- The term 'comics' encompasses graphic novels, manga, manhwa, bande dessinée (BD), comic strips, weekly magazines and digital comics for everyone from children to adults.

COMICS HAVE BEEN DEFINED AS...




Will Eisner (1985)

"SEQUENTIAL ART"


"JUXTAPOSED PICTORIAL AND OTHER IMAGES IN DELIBERATE SEQUENCE, INTENDED TO CONVEY INFORMATION AND/OR TO PRODUCE AN AESTHETIC RESPONSE IN THE VIEWER".



(McCloud, 1993)



SEQUENTIAL ART HAS BEEN AROUND
FOR A LONG TIME.



LASCAUX CAVE PAINTINGS, 17,000 - 22,000 YEARS OLD



THE BAYEUX TAPESTRY (11TH CENTURY)



CANTERBURY CATHEDRAL TRINITY CHAPEL (12TH CENTURY)



MARRIAGE A-LA-MODE BY WILLIAM HOGARTH (1743 AND 1745)





WINSOR MCCAY, 1905-1911



SUPERMAN BY JERRY SIEGEL AND JOE SHUSTER, 1938



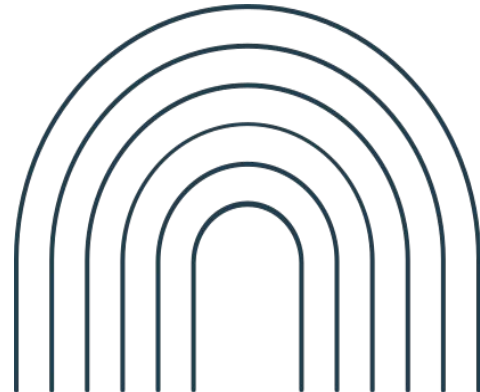
OSAMU TEZUKA, 1928-1929



DIGITAL/VR/AR COMICS

THE VALUE OF COMICS

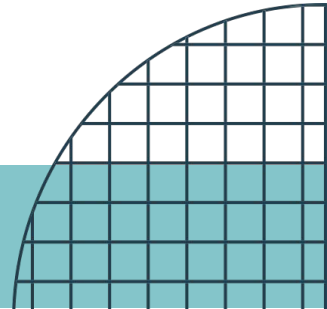
- **Comics can have a positive impact on enjoyment of reading at home and on motivation to read recreationally** ([Miles, 2023](#)).
- **Webcomics can improve comprehension in learners** ([Hartati et al 2022](#)) ([Syarah et al, 2019](#))
- **Comic help people retain information in a way written text can't** ([Aleixo & Sumner, 2017](#))
- **Comics can also provide a gateway to more complex texts.** ([Uijie & Krashen, 1996](#))



- **Comics are popular! 115 comic conventions that take place in the UK each year.**

https://docs.google.com/spreadsheets/d/1gEd7J-eIT60vzb_UrTgFGf9pPHpzSpMikqTDoQc81Z8/edit?usp=sharing

- Comics are **accessible with a low barrier to entry**. Anyone can create comics with little more than paper and a pen. Anyone can understand comics on some level, regardless of age, education level or nationality (Karrie Fransman, TEDX Talk, 2016).
- Comics **require less translation** and are a window directly into another storyteller's world.



Key findings from The National Literacy Trust research into comics



- Despite wider declining trends, **comics and graphic novels have remained unusually buoyant in popularity** with print reading of comics dipping only slightly since 2017 (32.2% vs 29.2% in 2025); the shallowest decline of any reading material monitored.
- While most other forms of reading on screen have stagnated or fallen, **comics have bucked the trend with digital reading rates increasing over the last seven years** (13.8% in 2017/18 to 14.3% in 2025).
- **Libraries report that graphic novels, manga and comics are among their most borrowed items.**
- Studies demonstrated how **comics can be used by educators as an effective tool for engagement, enhancing retention of information and developing critical thinking skills and comprehension** across a range of subjects (Faria et al. 2024; Aleixo and Sumner 2017; Krusemark, 2016; Jones 2020).
- Lack of **educators' knowledge and confidence around the form, and a persistent stigma around its legitimacy as both a reading material and a creative output, still limits its use in the sector**, despite growing evidence of its impact on attainment, attitudes towards reading and wellbeing (Comic Art Europe 2025; Clark et al 2024)

Key findings from The National Literacy Trust research into comics



- Another part of the challenge around the use of comics in the curriculum is the way **they cross the distinct boundaries of the art and English curricula**, but herein also lies huge potential for the form.
- As well as reflecting modern modes of communication, **developing opportunities for children to create comics and other multimodal texts provides vital insight into their world view** (Jones, 2020; Kendrick and McKay 2009)... It provides a **platform for the often marginalised voices of children and young people, enabling families, educators and policymakers a direct window into their motivations, interests, experiences and concerns.**
- Despite their popularity and proven impact, comics and other visual texts remain underutilised in formal education. Yet, **the evidence is clear: comics support literacy development, foster critical thinking and enhance engagement across a range of subjects.**
- **Comics are not a diversion from literacy; they are a dynamic and vital part of it.**

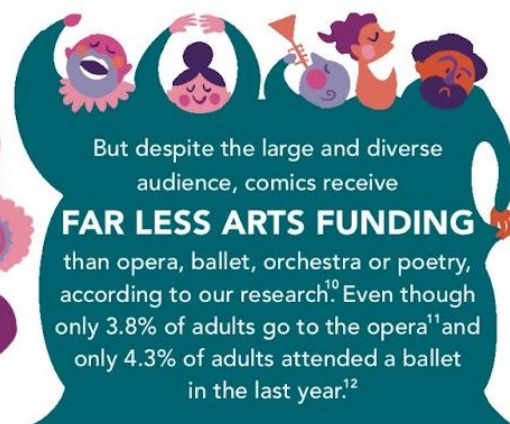
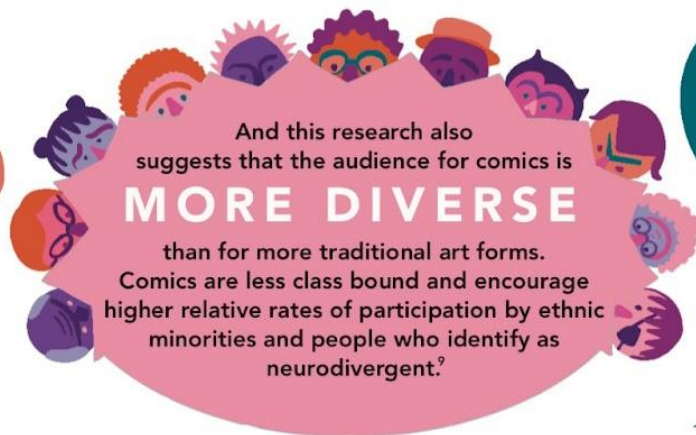
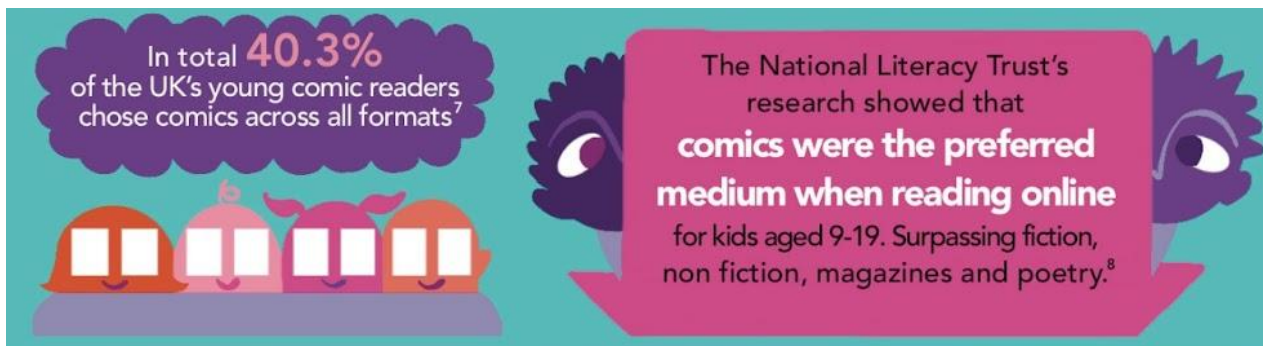
STATS AS 2025:

This is the biggest year for comics since accurate records began (£78.7m across adult and kids' via BookScan).

- Graphic Novels (adult): £52.8m in 2025 vs £48.7m in '24 (+8.4%); 2nd biggest year behind 2022's £53.3m.
- Children's Comic Strip Fiction & Graphic Novels: £25.9m in 2025 vs £20.3m in '24 (+28.7%); biggest year ever – and '24 was the previous biggest year.
- Total: £78.7m vs £69.1m (+13.9%), GREATEST OF ALL TIME
- This is sales through Nielsen BookScan's Total Consumer Market. So that doesn't include floppy comics, just books with an ISBN. About half (49.1%) of that adult side is from Manga. As a point of comparison, this is £46m more than what the comics sector earned in 2019.

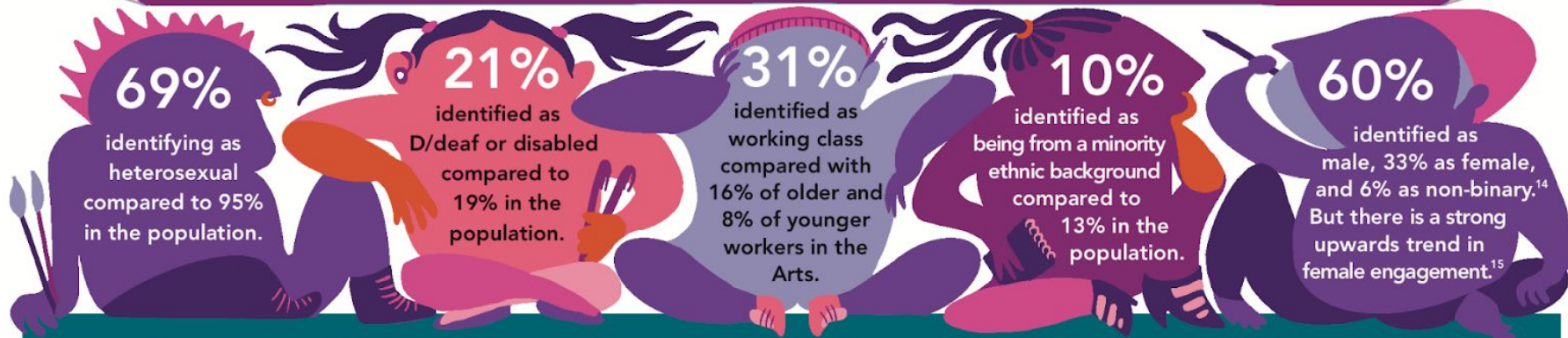


COMICS AUDIENCES





Anyone can read or draw a comic, regardless of age, education level or nationality.¹³
The accessibility of the medium results in the diversity of not just the readers but also the creators...



Article by CCIC. Art by Karrie Fransman. First published in *The Bookseller* 15/9/23

There is a wealth of amazing comics organisations in the UK who are already engaging with these audiences.

POSITIVENEGATIVES.ORG

uses comics and animation to amplify research, working for 11 years across 46 countries, engaging audiences of over 100 million.

GRAPHIC MEDICINE

explores the interaction between the medium of comics and the discourse of healthcare. They are a growing academic and artistic community who share ideas in an annual, international conference.

LDCOMICS

is the largest women-led comics forum in the UK and open to all. They organise and host comic-related events in the UK and globally.

There are an astonishing **115 UK-BASED COMIC CONVENTIONS AND FESTIVALS** that take place each year.¹⁴ From big cities to tiny villages. The bigger cons include...

THE LAKES INTERNATIONAL COMIC ART FESTIVAL (LICAF)

is an annual comic festival with a host of international guests. It is the sole comics organisation in the UK with Arts Council England NPO status.

MCM COMIC CON

is a biannual London and Birmingham based comic con that includes a "comics village" where 200 comic creators sell their work. The con is also for cosplayers and game, sci-fi and film creators and fans.

THOUGHT BUBBLE

is one of the biggest UK comic festivals, based in Harrogate. It has run for 17 years with a footfall of 12,000 over the weekend, 50 guests and 450+ comic-creating exhibitors.

Not to mention all the comics publishers, museums, shops and organisations... too many to mention here but we'll add a list to our website.

Article by CCIC. Art by Karrie Fransman. First published in *The Bookseller* 15/9/23

**National
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CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE'S ENGAGEMENT WITH COMICS IN 2023

Christina Clark, Lucy Starbuck Braidley, Aimee Cole
and Elena Chamberlain
(March 2024)

This report draws on data collected in early 2023 from 64,066 children and young people aged 8 to 18 from across the UK to explore the attitudes and beliefs of comic readers.

WHO READS COMICS?

- 2 in 5 (40.3%) children and young people aged 8 to 18 told us they read comics or graphic novels on paper, on screen or both at least once a month.
- The percentage of children and young people who read comics in their free time remained fairly consistent between 2010 and 2023.
- More boys than girls read comics in their free time at least once a month (44.6% vs 34.8%).
- The percentage of those who read comics decreased with age: 49.7% of those aged 8 to 11, 40.5% of those aged 11 to 14, 31.4% of those aged 14 to 16, and 32.1% of those aged 16 to 18 read comics at least once a month.

COMICS AND READING ENGAGEMENT

- Children and young people who read comics were more engaged with reading, regardless of their age:
- Nearly twice as many children and young people who read comics in their free time told us that they enjoyed reading compared with those who didn't read comics in their free time (58.6% vs. 33.1%).
- More of those who read comics rated themselves as 'very good' or 'good' readers compared with those who didn't read comics (86.0% vs 76.3%).
- More of those who read comics told us that they read something daily in their free time compared with their peers who did not read comics (35.7% vs. 22.8%).

WHY DO YOUNG PEOPLE READ COMICS?

- Children and young people told us that they read comics because they were accessible, engaging, supported their wellbeing, and provided opportunities to learn about different cultures.
- Although we did not ask children and young people whether they created their own comics, a small group told us in their comments that they had done so. Indeed, some told us about how reading comics led to them writing their own:

“I will write a comic at lunchtime, or I will read one.” (Boy, Y8)

“I read most of the time because I play video games and read comic books. I also like to write comics myself, so I do quite a lot of writing too.” (Boy, Y6)

“I don’t like writing, only if I’m making a comic.” (Girl, Y7)

THE STATE OF THE NATION'S ADULT READING (2024): INITIAL INSIGHTS ON GRAPHIC NOVEL AND COMICS READERS

New research from The Reading Agency reveals that **half of all adults in the UK don't read regularly for pleasure, with 35% of adults having dropped their regular reading habit**. Sadly, lack of engagement with reading limits life chances and choices. The Reading Agency's work with adults aims to create a world of opportunity where everyone can access the benefits of reading. The research was conducted by Censuswide with 2,003 UK nationally representative consumers aged 16 years and over.

27% say they read graphic novels, comics or comic books once a month or more:

- 31.4% men
- 22.3% women
- 53.8% non-binary
- 49% 16-24 years old
- 45.6% 25-34 years old

THE
READING
AGENCY

UK adults who said they read graphic novels/comics/comic books at least once a week are more likely to...

- Be regular readers (55% vs 50% UK average)
- Like talking to people about books and reading (62% vs 41% UK average)
- Say that reading is an important part of their life (73%, rising to 83% of daily graphic novel or comics readers vs 60% UK average)
- Have read together with a member of their family when they were a child (64% vs 58% UK average)
- Say there are lots of things they want to read (72% vs 59% UK average)
- Say reading makes them feel better (71% vs 61% UK average)
- Say they want to read more books featuring characters with experiences similar to their own (59% vs 35% UK average)

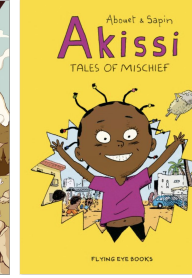
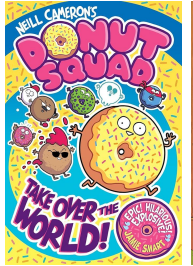
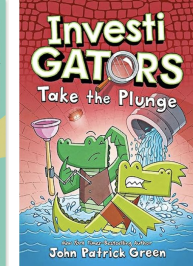
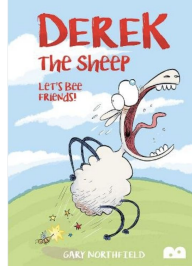
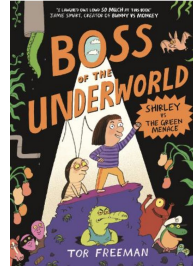
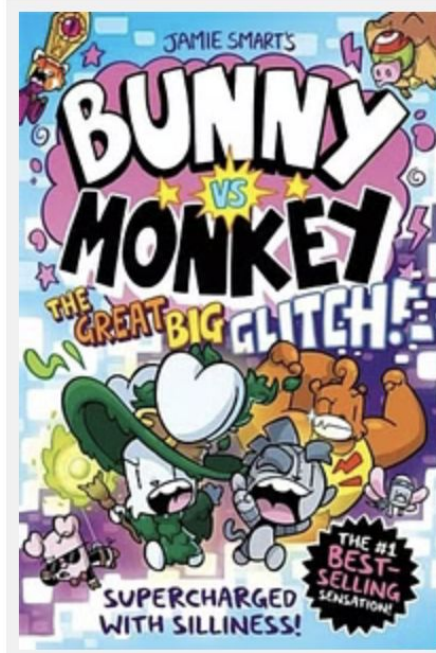
However, they are also more likely to say they...

- Struggle to focus on reading for more than a few minutes (40% vs 28% UK average)
- Find it hard to finish what they're reading (41% vs 30% UK average)
- Find reading 'always' difficult (19% vs 9% UK average)
- Experience difficulty finding books featuring characters with experiences similar to their own (47% vs 25% UK average)

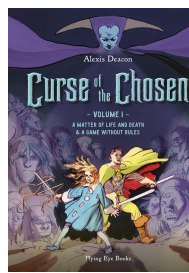
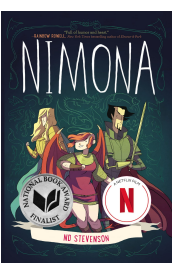
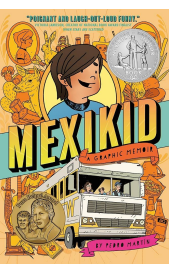
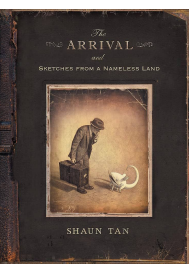
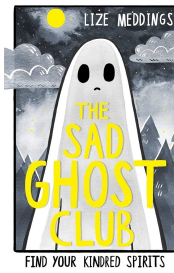
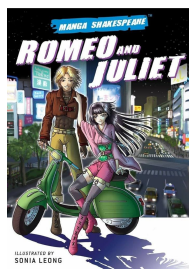
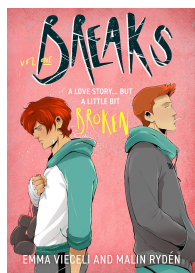
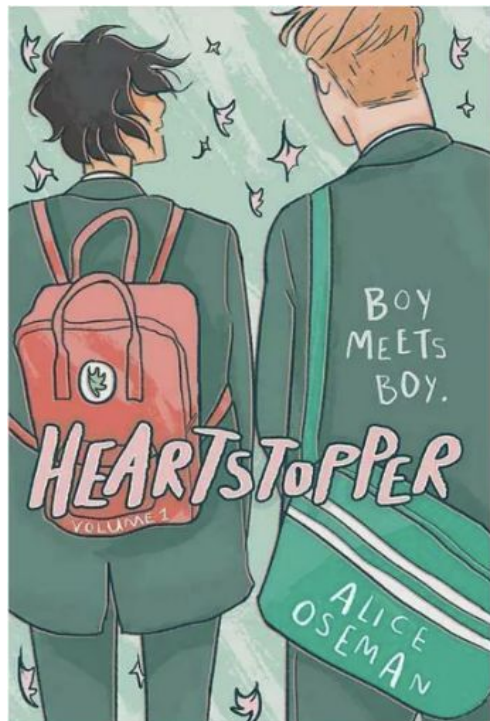


COMICS RECOMMENDATIONS

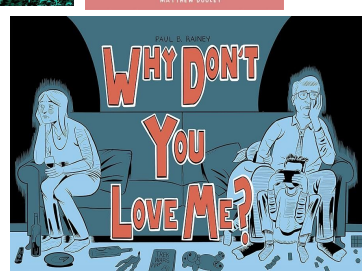
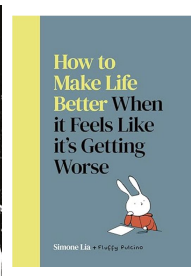
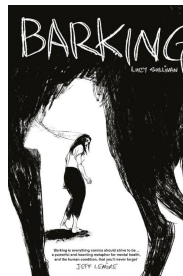
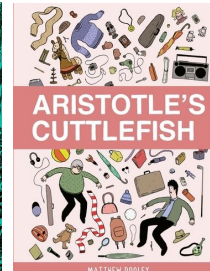
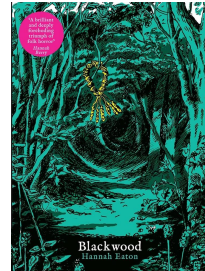
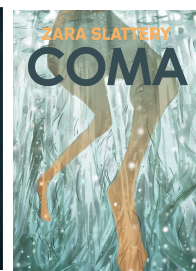
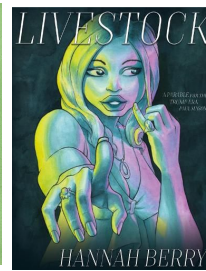
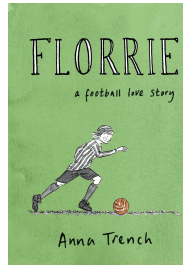
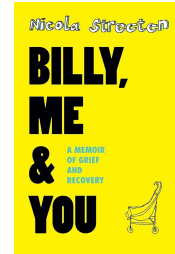
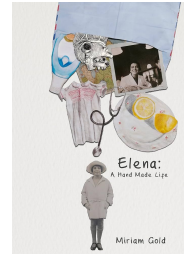
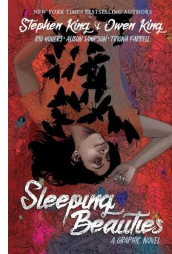
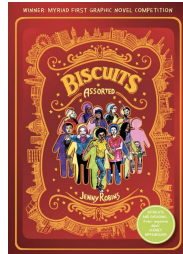
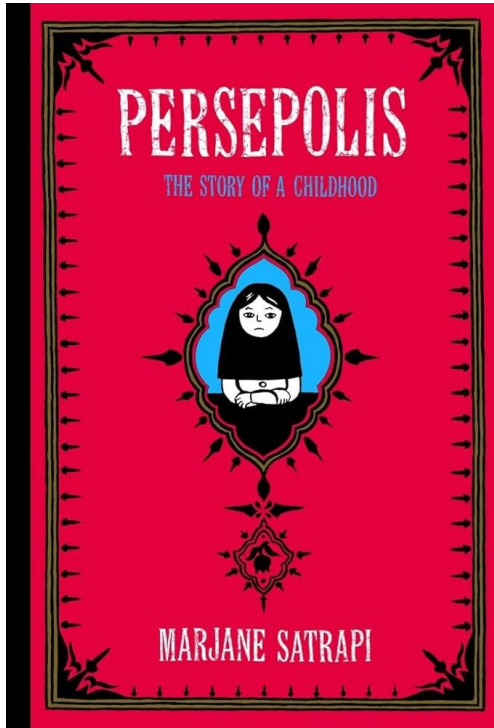
LIKE BUNNY VS MONKEY? THEN READ...



LIKE HEARTSTOPPER? THEN READ...



LIKE PERSEPOLIS? THEN READ...



THE BOOKSELLER

heart of the book trade since 1858

COMICS AND GRAPHIC NOVEL ISSUE...



THE POWER OF COMICS

BY THE COMICS CULTURAL IMPACT COLLECTIVE (CCIC). COMIC BY KARRIE FRANSMAN.

In the UK, Alice Oseman's *Heartstopper* series made £10.1m through Nielsen BookScan and Jamie Smart's comics made £5.4m while Netflix, Disney and Amazon are heading with films and series based on comics. But how can the UK book industry better capture this sizeable audience?

The teen comics market includes graphic novels, manga, superheroes, indie, children's comics and more. Comics may feel like the teenage sibling of literature, but in fact they have been around a lot longer. They have been defined as "sequential art" and can be traced back 17,000 years to prehistoric cave paintings, providing written text.

And only the medium's most ardent fans are really embracing the move from print to digital and enjoying its strengths: already broader audience online.

But the UK has been slower to embrace comics, or marketing them for reluctant readers and children.

Comic shops are important history and social hubs, but are an important medium in their own right.

They provide a nuanced perspective into complex subjects.

And more tailored groups can be formed and can be more targeted.

We only need to look internationally to see that the potential for growth in the UK is HUGE.



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2-page article on 'the Power of Comics' published in The Bookseller (2023) and available to read in full at: thecomicsculturalimpactcollective.org/bookseller.png

Cover: Nominated for Best Cover at the PPA Awards (2024).

THE POWER OF COMICS

BY THE COMICS CULTURAL IMPACT COLLECTIVE (CCIC), COMIC BY KARRIE FRANSMAN.

In the UK Alex Oseman's *Heartstopper* series made £10.1m through Nielsen BookScan and Jamie Smart's comics made £5.4m while Netflix, Disney+ and Amazon are heaving with films and series based on comics. But how can the UK book industry better capture this sizeable audience?

The term 'comics' includes graphic novels, manga, superhero, indie, children's comics and more. Comics may feel like the teenage sibling of literature, but in fact they have been around a lot longer. They have been defined as "sequential art" and can be traced back 17,000 years to prehistoric cave paintings, predating written text.

And today the medium remains just as relevant, easily traversing the move from print to digital and engaging an increasingly visually literate audience online.

But the UK has been slower to embrace comics,

confining them to dark corners of bookshops next to the YA and kids' sections

or earmarking them for "reluctant readers" and children.

FROM HEAVEN

Yes, comics do improve literacy and mental health, but are an important medium in their own right.

providing a nuanced perspective into complex subjects?

and even helping people retain information in a way written text can't?

We only need to look internationally to see that the potential for growth in the UK is HUGE.

Belgium has **three museums** dedicated to comics... with a fourth, "Foundation Boon", for graphic narratives on the way for 2025.

France's Angoulême comics festival attracts over **200,000 visitors** in addition to the creators and publishers attending and brings in **€2.45m**

While Japan's manga industry had a global market value of **\$12.13bn** in 2022.

We know comics are a powerful medium with the ability to engage mass audiences.

28.7% of young people aged 8-18 read comics in print (outside of school)

16.9% read comics online

In total **40.3%** of the UK's young comic readers chose comics across all formats

The National Literacy Trust's research showed that **comics were the preferred medium when reading online** for kids aged 9-16. Surpassing fiction, non-fiction, magazines and poetry!

1. How Far Does Engagement With Comics Positively Affect Children's Enjoyment Of Reading And Walking? UK interim Report on the Comic Art Europe, Comics and Literacy Project 2023. <https://www.ukccic.org/>
 2. <https://doi.org/10.1017/9781017131113>
 3. <https://www.artsandculture.gov/feature/stories/angouleme>
 4. <https://doi.org/10.1017/9781017131113>
 5. <https://doi.org/10.1017/9781017131113>
 6. <https://doi.org/10.1017/9781017131113>
 7. The National Literacy Trust's report on 'Children and young people's reading in 2023'.
 8. National Literacy Trust (2019). <https://doi.org/10.1017/9781017131113>
 9. Further details of this study will be made available at www.enjoyourparticipation.org.
 10. <https://doi.org/10.1017/9781017131113>

Adults also love comics. A forthcoming study carried out by Professor Andrew Miles at the University of Manchester finds that

31% of the adult UK population read or have read comics.

And this research also suggests that the audience for comics is **MORE DIVERSE** than for more traditional art forms. Comics are less class based and encourage higher relative rates of participation by ethnic minorities and people who identify as neurodivergent.¹

But despite the large and diverse audience, comics receive **FAR LESS ARTS FUNDING** than opera, ballet, orchestra or poetry, according to our research.² Even though only 3.8% of adults go to the opera³ and only 4.3% of adults attended a ballet in the last year.⁴

Anyone can read or draw a comic, regardless of age, education level or nationality.⁵ The accessibility of the medium results in the diversity of not just the readers but also the creators...

69% identifying as heterosexual compared to 95% in the population.

21% identified as Deaf or disabled compared to 19% in the population.

31% identified as working class compared with 16% of older and 8% of younger workers in the Arts.

10% identified as being from a minority ethnic background compared to 13% in the population.

60% identified as male, 33% as female, and 6% as non-binary.⁶ But there is a strong upwards trend in female engagement!⁷

There is a wealth of amazing comics organisations in the UK who are already engaging with these audiences.

POSITIVENEGATIVES.ORG uses comics and animation to amplify research, working for 11 years across 46 countries, engaging audiences of over 100 million.

GRAPHIC MEDICINE explores the intersection between the medium of comics and the discourse of healthcare. They are a growing academic and artistic community who share ideas in an annual international conference.

LDCOMICS is the largest women-led comics forum in the UK and open to all. They organise and host comic-related events in the UK and globally.

There are an astonishing **115 UK-BASED COMIC CONVENTIONS AND FESTIVALS** that take place each year. From big cities to tiny villages. The bigger ones include...

THE LAKES INTERNATIONAL COMIC ART FESTIVAL (LICAF) is an annual comic festival with a host of international guests. It is the sole comics organisation in the UK with Arts Council England NPO status.

MCM COMIC CON is a biannual London and Birmingham based comic con that includes a "comics village" where 200 comic creators sell their work. The con is also for cosplayers and game, sci-fi and film creators and fans.

THOUGHT BUBBLE is one of the biggest UK comic festivals, based in Harrogate. It has run for 17 years with a foothold of 12,000 over the weekend, 50 guests and 450+ comic-creating exhibitors.

Not to mention all the comics publishers, museums, shops and organisations... too many to mention here but we'll add a list to our website.

We are **The Comics Cultural Impact Collective (CCIC)**, an independent group of professionals within the UK comics community who aim to raise awareness of the cultural, financial, social and psychological value of comics in the UK.

We are working with data specialists to examine the research you see above.

Scrutinising and improving the percentage of funding comics receive in comparison to other art forms.

And creating an infrastructure organisation to support the comics creators and community.

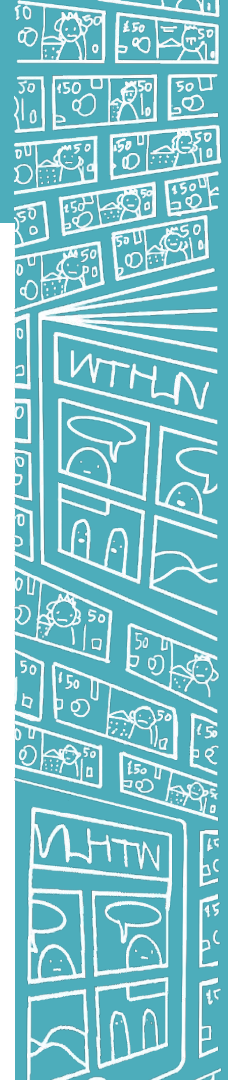
To find out more or to begin engaging comic creators and/or audiences email us HELLOCCIC@GMAIL.COM or visit

Article by CCIC. Art by Karrie Fransman. First published in *The Bookseller* 15/9/23

OUR AIMS

The Comics Cultural Impact Collective are a Community Interest Company run by an independent group of professionals within the UK comics community, working together with the aim of raising awareness of the cultural, financial, social and psychological value of comics.

- We are gathering data and research.
- Building upon this evidence, we are making an irrefutable case for the equitable funding of the comics medium in the UK.
- We are working to raise the profile of the medium with publishers, booksellers, libraries, distributors, galleries and museums, cultural organisations, educators, the media and the general public; working together to understand how we can better reach new audiences.
- To join our campaign or for further information contact us at thecomicsculturalimpactcollective.org





JOIN THE COMICS CULTURAL IMPACT COLLECTIVE:

thecomicsculturalimpactcollective.org/Join-Us



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