

READERS ADVISORY FOR COMICS



At the end of the class, students will hopefully:

- ▶ Understand comics' appeal to readers, even in genres outside our own interest
- ▶ Learn about print and electronic resources for comics
- ▶ Learn to be able to suggest titles in the top comics genres and by top creators

This isn't a session on how to get comics into your collection

WHAT WE'LL COVER

Session Overview: This Comics Readers' Advisory session will cover how to think about comics using the appeal factors model of reader's advisory. We will also share some print and electronic resources to use on your own or with patrons. Finally, we'll talk about some of the top titles being published today and together come up with readalikes. We hope this session will inspire you to learn more about the world of comics and graphic novels to help readers find their next great comics read.

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Who is a comics reader?

Let's talk a little bit of jargon....

Graphic novel, comics, comic book, sequential art, floppies or single issues, trade paperbacks, etc.



INTRODUCTION

Why comics? Comics are a growing slice of the book market. We need to know about comics--specifically graphic novels and trade paperback compilations. We don't need to focus on the floppy single issues of comics that readers subscribe to at their local comic shop. Let's take a look at the bookscan handout. The top circulating graphic novels tell us that the graphic novels our patrons are looking for may be new to comics, aren't necessarily into superheroes, and are probably not collectors.

Many library systems all over the US have added comics to their collections. Our community of patrons wants us to have this format in our collection and therefore they need us to be comfortable helping them with readers advisory in this format. If not they will go to Powells or Amazon or the local comic shop like Pegasus Books of Bend. They need us because many communities don't have a bookstore or comic shop. They need us because we give unbiased and accurate information.

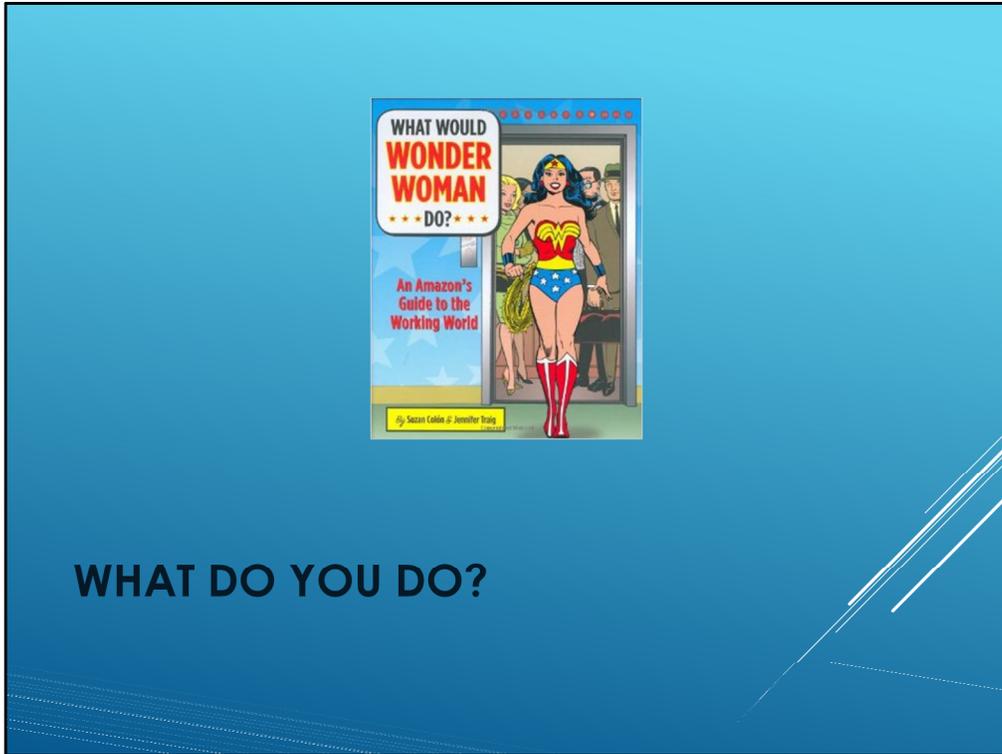
It's a format, not a genre

It's very important to remember that comics is not a genre. It's a format or medium that is used to tell a variety of stories in a variety of ways. If you think comics are only about 'superheroes' it would be like saying **all fiction is romance fiction. It's the biggest and most popular genre, but conflating fiction as romance ignores the huge variety of genres and the scope of the creative output of novelists. This is the same with comics.**

ask audience:

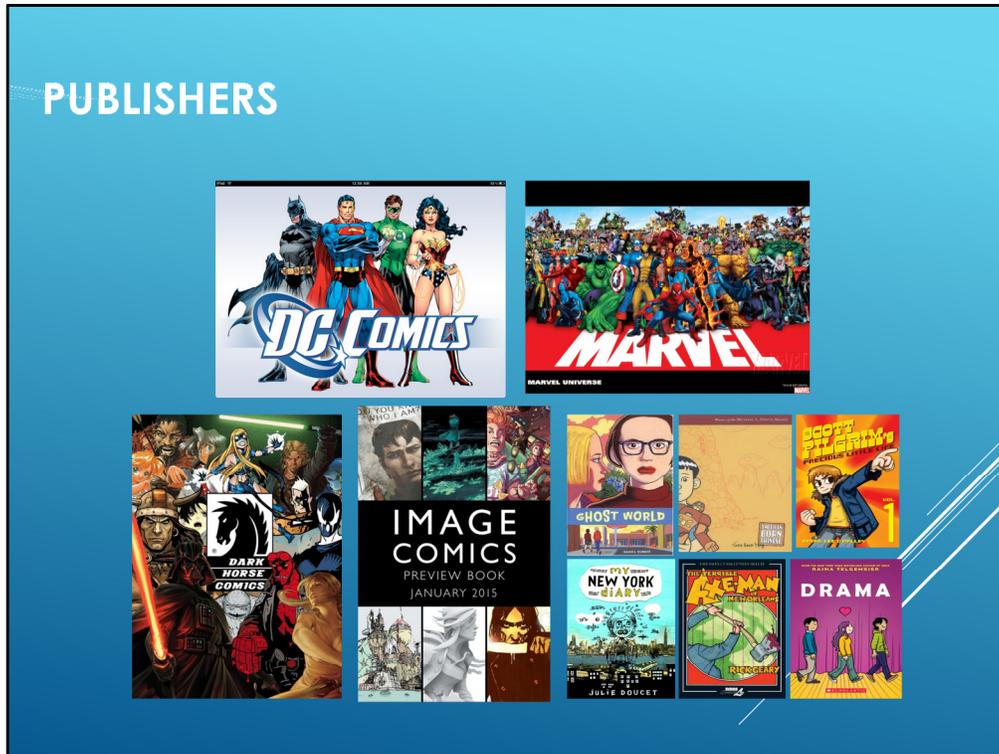
So if you need to learn about a format or even a genre what do you do? tell us

Comics don't live in obscurity they are reviewed, there's conferences, classes, webinars, there's resources for us to learn about the format.



WHAT DO YOU DO?

When learning about a format or genre? Incumbent on you to learn and then coach your coworkers



Thinking about the publishers

I love to learn about publishers when I am learning about a genre and format. Here’s a little bit about comics publishers.

Comics Publishers

Top three comics publishers--Marvel, DC, and Dark Horse.

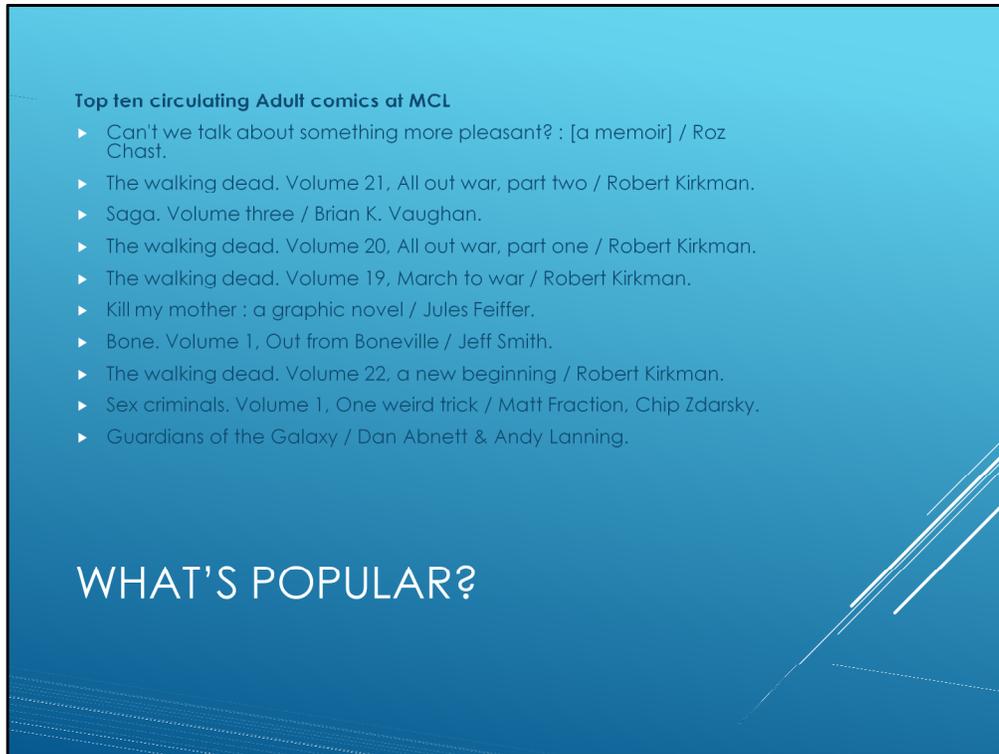
Marvel is best known for the X-Men and Avengers, as well as Spider-Man. Guardians of the Galaxy-Movies?

DC is best known for Superman, Batman, and Wonder Woman, and is the home of the imprint Vertigo. Movies?

Dark Horse is the home of Hellboy, Buffy the Vampire Slayer, several manga series, and until recently, the Star Wars comics. They started the idea of creator owned comics.

Image is the biggest publisher where most of the books are creator-owned/author owned meaning the writers and illustrators retain the rights to their creation.

Other independent publishers include Oni Press, First Second, Drawn and Quarterly, Fantagraphics, iDW, Top Shelf etc. Locals: Dark Horse, Oni Press, Top Shelf in Oregon and Fantagraphics out of Seattle Washington.



It all boils down to:

You don't have to worry about the entire comics market. Pay attention to what is circulating in your library and think about what are the comics that are read alike for those books. And you should pay attention to the bestseller lists because you want to know what's popular that you may not have in your library. I wish I had some market research about this, but I have a hunch that library patrons in general have more in common with bookstore patrons than with comic book shop customers.

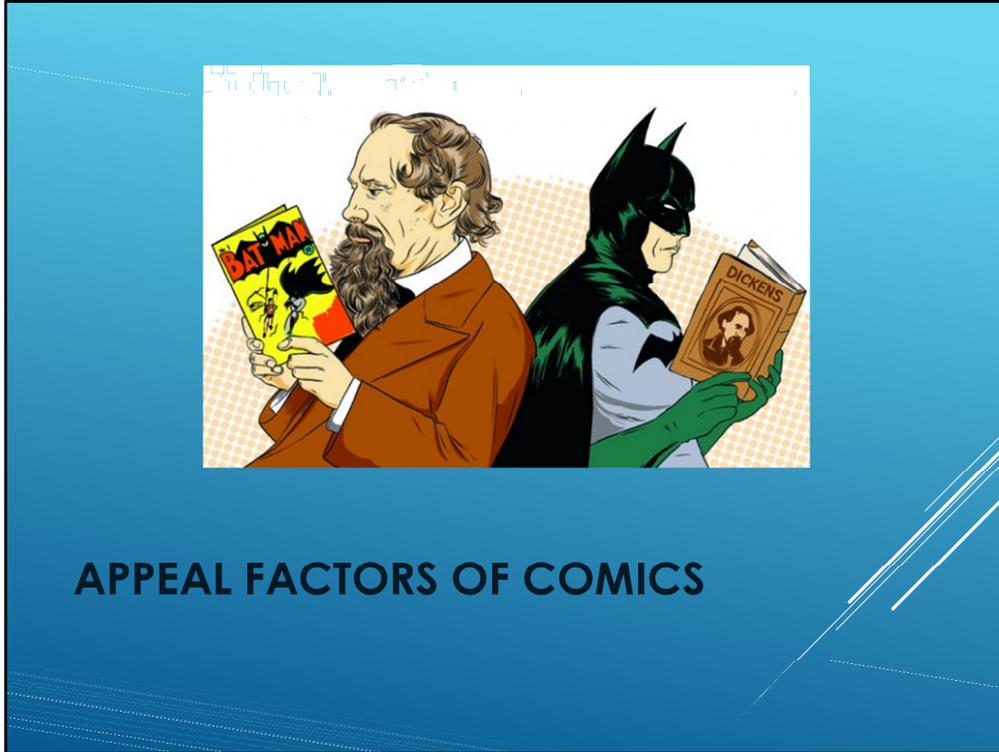
- What's circulating at MCL for Adults, Teens, and Kids.
- What's selling in the bookstore market.
- What's selling in the comic book shops.

If you want to look at single issue releases because you love comics and you're interested in the industry, by all means, please do. But they're not in your library and they won't be for a long time. And the graphic novels that are selling in comic book shops only partially overlap with what's circulating and what's selling in the bookstore market.

Top Ten books sold in 2014 from Bookscan

- ▶ SISTERS
- ▶ TALES FROM A NOT SO FABULOUS LIFE [Dork Diaries]
- ▶ SMILE
- ▶ HYPERBOLE AND A HALF
- ▶ DRAMA
- ▶ BIG NATE GREAT MINDS THINK ALIKE
- ▶ STAR WARS JEDI ACADEMY
- ▶ STAR WARS JEDI ACADEMY RETURN
- ▶ DORK DIARIES OMG ALL ABOUT ME
- ▶ CAN'T WE TALK ABOUT SOMETHING MORE PLEASANT

WHAT'S POPULAR?



APPEAL FACTORS OF COMICS

Module one: Understanding the appeal factors of comics

Appeal factors for comics:

If you're not a comics reader already, you do have to learn how to read comics. You had to learn how to read print, so it makes sense that you would have to learn the unique visual language of comics. When you are new to comics and learning to read them, choose books that have appeal to you, based on the artwork, story, characters and other factors that appeal to you in other books. If you usually read literary fiction, don't try to pick up the latest X-Men series.

What you're looking for as a literary staff person when evaluating comics are the same appeal factors you are looking for in any other book: Story, Setting, Character, and Language, along with the illustrations. You can use these appeal factors to suggest comics for patrons.

Language, including the visual language of comics:

The unique appeal of comics is its visual medium and the visual format is an essential part of their overall appeal. Think of the illustration style and content as the visual language of comics, which is one of the factors that readers use to select comics. Some readers, on the other hand, are interested in many different illustration styles and appreciate experimentation and non-traditional styles.

Superhero and traditional comics: Frank Miller, Alex Ross, John Casaday, Fiona Staples
Alternative styles: Rick Geary, Chris Ware, Craig Thompson, Lisa Hanawalt

Although the visual language of comics is the first thing a reader experiences, the written language and how it weaves with the illustrations is also important to comics readers.

Does the book have careful dialogue or narrative storytelling woven into the pages? Examples: Fun Home by Alison Bechdel, From Hell by Alan Moore, Sandman by Neil Gaiman.

Does it have violence, explosions, and gitty one-liners? Examples: Sin City by Frank Miller, Hellboy by Mike Mignola, Ultimate Spider-Man by Brian Michael Bendis.

Also, the visual language of a comic may appear simple and child-like, but the content of the comic could be very adult. Examples: Barefoot Gen by Keiji Nakazawa, Persepolis by Marjane Satrapi, The Frank Book by Jim Woodring.

Setting:

Setting can play as big a role in comics as in other books, and the setting can be depicted visually. Setting can appeal for different reasons and could be in a fictional world, in a high school, in a city like Gotham.

Examples: Hicksville by Dylan Horrocks, From Hell by Alan Moore, Flood by Eric Drooker

Story:

There are lots of ways stories appeal to comics readers, and it's not just traditional hero stories.

This is where elements of genre can come into play, i.e. Horror, Sci-Fi, Crime, Realistic, coming of age.

Examples: Walking Dead, Watchmen, Stitches

Character:

This is a major strength of traditional comics, even though it may not seem that way to non-comics readers at first. So many characters in comics are larger than life and have literal superpowers. But these powers often mask a tragic past or a fatal flaw that makes the characters so compelling. Think about Superman—he's been around as essentially the same character since the 1930s!

Non-traditional comics can also have great characters, but usually come from a different angle. Examples: memoir, Jimmy Corrigan, Glen Gengs.

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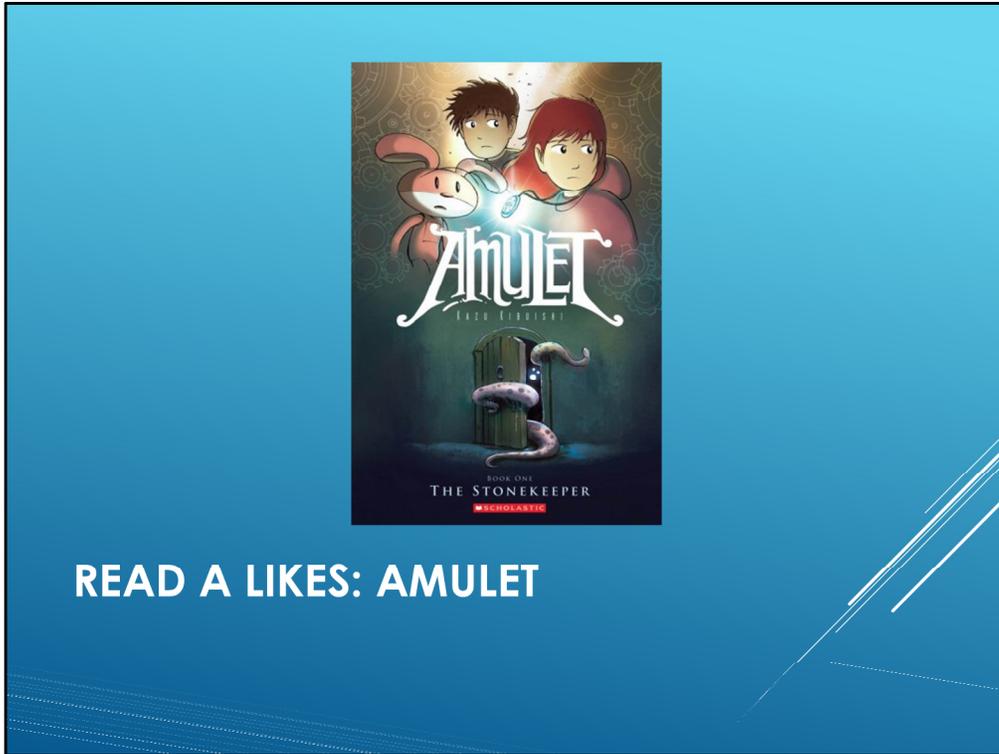
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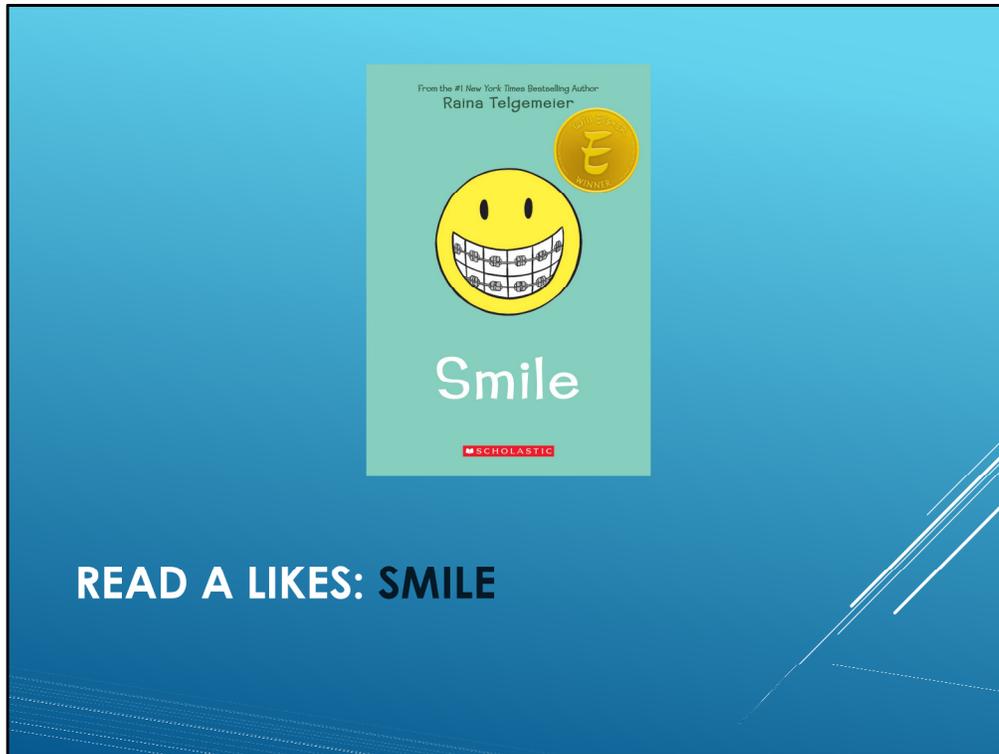
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READ A LIKES: WALKING DEAD

Preacher; Y the Last Man; Chew; The Zombie Survival Guide: Recorded Attacks; Sin City (Ref interview); Sweet Tooth; The Last Zombie



READ A LIKES: SAGA

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READ A LIKE: CAN'T WE TALK ABOUT SOMETHING MORE PLEASANT?

Novelist says: How about Never is Never Good for you by Robert Mankoff; Ethel and Ernest by Raymond Briggs; Special Exits by Joyce Farmer; Displacement by Lucy Knisley and Fun Home by Alison Bechdel.

- ▶ My MCL- Laural's Lists
- ▶ Novelist
- ▶ Wikipedia
- ▶ Publishers Weekly e-newsletter
- ▶ Comics Alliance
- ▶ ICv2
- ▶ No Flying No Tights
- ▶ Good Reads

RESOURCES



QUESTIONS