

Comic-Con® presents in association with San Diego Public Library



COMIC-CON CONFERENCE FOR EDUCATORS AND LIBRARIANS



WEDNESDAY, JULY 22

3:30–5:30 **Teaching and Learning with Comics**—Looking to bring comics into your classroom? **Peter Carlson** (Green Dot Public Schools) and **Susan Kirtley** (Portland State University) lead an interactive workshop where educators explore how to teach about, with, and through comics. Through hands-on activities, attendees will learn how to engage all students as superhero readers and writers while designing powerful lessons and thematic units rooted in the comic arts. *Shiley Special Events Suite, San Diego Central Library*

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THURSDAY, JULY 23 | LIBRARY DAY

10:00–11:00 **Comics, Spanish, Library Magic!**—Graphic novels aren't just fun; they're secret weapons for learning and community connection. **Robert Lanuza**, **Claudia Apodaca**, and **Lea Hernandez** of the San Diego Public Library discuss how graphic novels can support Spanish-language learning at any age. This lively discussion focuses on how comics, bilingual storytelling, and Spanish conversation programs are helping kids build confidence, improve literacy skills, and fall in love with reading. Moderated by **Rebecca Wright** (St. Paul's Hollywood Library in S.C.). *Shiley Special Events Suite, San Diego Central Library*

11:00–12:00 **The Kids Are Alright: Sketch Night**—What is Sketch Night? It is a San Diego-based virtual drawing program for teens that is informal, inclusive of all skill levels, and draws inspiration from popular culture. Learn how staff from the County of San Diego Parks Department and the San Diego Public Library teamed up to create this free online art workshop. **Juan Carlos Robles** (parks and recreation supervisor) details the organizational and behind-the-scenes work that keeps classes running smoothly. **Claude Castañeda** (library assistant), **Rovai Hernandez** (library assistant), **Thomas Vineberg** (senior library technician), and **Janet Yeager** (librarian) discuss session planning and strategies for leading virtual instruction. The panel also explores how these programs support creativity, artistic growth, and community connection. Moderated by **Kit Jackson** (library assistant). *Shiley Special Events Suite, San Diego Central Library*

12:00–1:00 **Banned in the USA?! Freedom, Comics, and Education**—The First Amendment protects freedom of speech, so why are books being banned? Censorship is more commonplace in the U.S. than you may think. Writer **Regine L. Sawyer** (Women in Comics, Represent!), rapper **Mazzi** (Def Jam Recordings, S.O.U.L. Purpose), writer **Amy Chu** (Carmilla: The First Vampire, DOTA: Dragon's Blood), **Kae Winters** (Tokyopop), and **Rachel Piontak** (The Institute for Citizens and Scholars) discuss fighting censorship and how comics can be an effective tool for education, entertainment, enlightenment, and civil discourse. Moderated by comics editor, writer, and scholar Dr. **Shamika Mitchell** (State University of New York, Rockland Community College/Women in Comics). *Shiley Special Events Suite, San Diego Central Library*

1:00–2:00 **Where All Educators Belong: Popular Arts Educator Learning Communities at Comic-Con Museum**—Are you the nerdiest teacher on your staff? Is your classroom or office decorated with superheroes, sci-fi, fantasy, and anime? Popular arts passion is not just fun; it can also be a powerful catalyst for rigorous, authentic learning. At the Comic-Con Museum Education Center in San Diego, local and national communities of educators are using the popular arts in their teaching through the Education Advisory Committee, Teacher Studio, professional learning workshops, Educator Nights, and more. **Emily Schindler, Karis Jones, Alecia Magnifico, Roxanne Pompilio, Danny Beckwith, Nairin Collardey**, and other educators discuss in-person and hybrid opportunities and why the popular arts can serve as springboards for student learning and adult learning in this interactive session. *Shiley Special Events Suite, San Diego Central Library*

2:00–3:00 **Teaching Afghan Girls Through Comics!**—Afghan girls are reclaiming their past through a comic about famous Afghan women. **Selai Balkhi** (Afghan-Swiss emigre) and 18-year-old Afghan illustrator "**SN**" introduce Detective Sanazu and the Magic Vest and its lead character, Sanazu, a young Afghan American who discovers a magic vest that transports her into the past to meet some of the most important women in Afghan history. Also featured are student teachers from Flowers for the Future (a peer-to-peer global school for underserved girls), who present their program to teach Afghan girls so they can graduate from high school online. *Shiley Special Events Suite, San Diego Central Library*

3:00–4:00 **Teaching on Genocide and Totalitarianism Using Comics**—**Krystal Williamson** (San Diego Public Library, library assistant III) presents on the United Nations' legal qualifications of genocide, how to identify a genocidal government, and how graphic novels can be used to increase students' empathetic engagement with historical lessons on genocide. This lecture includes instruction on teaching genocide studies through a comparative framework and a suggested reading list by grade level for teachers in K–12 and undergraduate studies. *Shiley Special Events Suite, San Diego Central Library*

4:00–5:00 **Teaching With Comics in Latin America: A Silly Idea or a Brilliant One?**—Dr. **Arturo Ferrer** (biotechnology researcher and educator with experience using comics to teach), **Fers** (creator of the YouTube channel Echando Trazos and creator of Soulkeepers, the best-selling comic in Mexico), and **Jose Juan Macias** (entrepreneur and collector), moderated by **Robert Cuadra** (owner of a comic book and toy store in Mexico), discuss the potential and challenges of using comics to educate on various topics. For some, comics are a powerful tool; for others, they are inefficient. It is time to find out the truth. *Shiley Special Events Suite, San Diego Central Library*

5:00–6:00 **A Comics Reading Club . . . for Faculty!**—What happens when faculty swap journal articles for comic books? This panel explores the creation and impact of a faculty comic book reading club as a space for intellectual play, community building, and interdisciplinary dialogue. Drawing on examples from shared readings across comics genres, the panel shows how a low-stakes, high-engagement reading club can strengthen collegial connections, model lifelong learning, and legitimize comics as serious scholarly and teaching tools while still being fun. San Diego State University's **Pamela Jackson** (comic arts librarian; co-director, Center for Comics Studies), **Beth Pollard** (chair of history; co-director, Center for Comics Studies), **Conor McLaughlin** (staff development manager, Center for Inclusive Excellence), and **Van Tarpley** (lecturer in history) discuss the program. *Shiley Special Events Suite, San Diego Central Library*



10:00–11:00 **Leap into Action-Filled Graphic Novels**—Adventure awaits. **Danielle McKechnie** (Otto Normal's Monsterton) and fellow authors **Simon Estrada** (Otto Normal's Monsterton), **Arianna Irwin** (Penelope's Escape from the Platypusary and 101 Dalmatians: Penny's Big Splash), **Mike Maihack** (Spider-Man: Mighty Mayhem! [A Mighty Marvel Team-Up]), **Samuel Sattin** (Unico Awakening), and **Katie Longua** (Agent Cupcake) discuss how action-packed stories spring off the page and engage middle-grade readers and teens alike. *Shiley Special Events Suite, San Diego Central Library*

11:00–12:00 **Building Connections with Middle-Grade Graphic Novels**—From shared communities to bonds with family and friends, connections help young readers understand themselves in the world. **Daniel Sulzberg** (Unicons), **James Burks** (Box Tales: Grow, Strawberries, Grow!), **Gale Galligan** (The Baby-Sitters Club), Rob Thompson (Feo the Chupacabra), and **Sequoia Blankenship** (Feo the Chupacabra) share stories centered on empathy, trust, and belonging. *Shiley Special Events Suite, San Diego Central Library*

12:00–1:00 **Drawing Courage: YA Graphic Novels That Speak Up**—These stories can't keep quiet any longer. **Julie Fiveash** (The Froggy Library), **Jarrett Dapier** (Wake Now in the Fire), **Tilly Bridges** (Just Another Summer), **Susan Bridges** (Just Another Summer), **R. Sikoryak** (Declaration/Emancipation Illustrated), and **Rob Reger** (Emily the Strange (25th Anniversary Edition)) discuss how graphic novels shape moments of standing up and speaking out to initiate change. *Shiley Special Events Suite, San Diego Central Library*

1:00–2:00 **Visual Literacy for Early Readers**—Creators **Julio Anta** (Speak Up, Santiago!; Sol Goes for the Goal), **Stephen Shaskan** (author/illustrator, Pizza and Taco), **Trisha Speed Shaskan** (author, Itty Bitty Witch), and **Dora Wang** (author/illustrator, Pocket Peaches) and creator-educators **Chris Pearce** (cartoonist, Big Fat Notebook study guides) and **Jana Tropper** (Animal Rescue Friends; speech-language pathologist) discuss how they scaffold early visual literacy skills. From overall story construction to artistic choices within a single panel, understanding visual images—including identifying literal and nonliteral meanings, making predictions, and connecting images with background knowledge and other media—is a critical skill for young readers. Creators share examples from their work, educators discuss classroom use, and time is reserved for Q&A. *Shiley Special Events Suite, San Diego Central Library*

2:00–3:00 **Super Teachers Unite! Engaging Students with Comics in the Classroom**—Educators discuss how incorporating comics into the curriculum can increase engagement and access for students while building literacy skills. Panelists **Erica Aguirre Tan** (history/ethnic studies teacher, ABC Unified), **Jaime Diego Chavez** (school counselor, San Diego USD), **Scott Nielsen** (mild/moderate special education teacher, Grossmont UHSD), **Ella "Dizzy" Rogosin** (history teacher, Sweetwater UHSD), **Lorran Garrison** (school psychologist, Little Brainstorm), **Sue Bourrillion** (para educator, San Diego USD), and **Mike Cruz** (elementary teacher, Temecula Valley USD) share classroom strategies, resources, and tools, along with how the Comic-Con Educator Book Club connects teachers across the region. Moderated by **Jewyl Alderson** (San Diego County Office of Education). *Shiley Special Events Suite, San Diego Central Library*

3:00–4:00 **What Now?! Comics Censorship in Schools and Libraries**—Comic books are under attack in schools and libraries across the country. This panel covers the latest threats, what is being done, what to know, and ways to help protect the freedom to read comics. Featuring **Jeff Trexler** (interim director, CBLDF), **Gamal Hennessy** (comic book attorney), **Moni Barrette** (comics librarian), and **Mary Ellen Stout** (lecturer, SDSU), with a surprise guest creator. *Shiley Special Events Suite, San Diego Central Library*

4:00–5:00 **Comics in the Classroom: The Benefits of a Comics-Based Curriculum**—**Bryant Dillon** (president, Fanbase Press) leads comics creators, librarians, and educators, including **John Jennings** (professor, UC Riverside), **Ryan Claytor** (Elephant Eater Comics; self-publisher, artist, and professor), **Dr. Katlin Marisol Sweeney-Romero Pack** (assistant professor, UC Davis), **Jack Phoenix** (comics librarian), and **Shane Portman** (writer, Shrub), in a discussion of why comics serve as valuable classroom resources and approaches for selecting and integrating comics into curriculum. *Shiley Special Events Suite, San Diego Central Library*

5:00–6:00 **Pow! Bang! Teach! Comic-Con in the Classroom!**—**Patrick Meehan** (ELA teacher, SDUSD), **Nancy Burks** (social studies teacher, SDUSD), and **Maya Bellistri** (librarian, SDUSD) discuss how the myriad aspects of Comic-Con can transform the ordinary classroom into a creative, collaborative, and engaging learning environment that complements the needs of today's students and educators. The panel includes handouts and resources for educators, as well as freebies for kids. *Shiley Special Events Suite, San Diego Central Library*

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SATURDAY, JULY 25 | EDUCATOR DAY

10:00–11:00 **Student Activism vs. Student Participation**—In an ever-changing future that uses pop culture, comics, gaming, and more as essential learning tools, what is the best way for students to be involved? Does traditional education still work? How important is hands-on learning? There's a difference between having a seat and having a voice. Showing up is necessary, but is it sufficient? Educators who use comics, pop culture, and gaming in classrooms—including Dr. **Chris Wildrick** (Syracuse University), Dr. **Christina Knopf** (SUNY Cortland), Dr. **Billy Obenauer** (University of Maine), **Krista Rozanski** (Syracuse Libraries), **Darlynne Overbaugh** (First Congregational Church), and **Bailey Day** (Ithaca College)—discuss the challenges of teaching for an ever-changing future. Moderated by **Ed Catto** (Ithaca College). *Shiley Special Events Suite, San Diego Central Library*

11:00–12:00 **Teaching with Comics to Celebrate Immigrant Stories**—**Anna Osborn** (Jefferson Middle School), **Philip Belcastro** (Hill Freedman World Academy), and **Peter Carlson** (Green Dot Public Schools), members of the National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE) Teaching Comics Initiative, showcase classroom-ready strategies built around the Carnegie Corporation of New York's Great Immigrants, Great Americans comic series. Moderated by **Sarah Miller** (NCTE). *Shiley Special Events Suite, San Diego Central Library*

12:00–1:00 **From Playlists to Panels: Pop Culture in the ELA Classroom**—**Austin Bruns** (Ánimo Leadership Charter High School) shares how he transforms students' existing engagement with pop culture into rigorous, purposeful learning. From song lyrics to graphic novels, he leverages cultural relevance and student interest as a gateway to critical thinking, close reading, meaningful analysis, and creative production. *Shiley Special Events Suite, San Diego Central Library*

1:00–2:00 **Wired to Read: Comics and the Science of Literacy**—**Leondria Brown** (Green Dot Public Schools) examines how the features of comics align with the science of how all learners acquire language and literacy. Comics are not a supplement to rigorous instruction but a vehicle for it, lowering affective barriers and creating equitable entry points for diverse learners. Moderated by **Peter Carlson** (Green Dot Public Schools). *Shiley Special Events Suite, San Diego Central Library*

2:00–3:00 **Science in Middle-Grade Sci-Fi**—Panelists discuss the role of science in middle-grade science fiction, including how scientific accuracy can support (or complicate) storytelling and how well-portrayed science can inspire young readers to pursue science fiction and STEM pathways. Authors **Greg Van Eekhout** (*Voyage of the Dogs*) and **Becca Lee Gardner** (*Bleep Blurp Murder*) appear with scientists **Lisa Will** (resident astronomer, Fleet Science Center) and **Ronald Coleman** (Ph.D. in regenerative medicine). Moderated by **Jonathan Bacon-Liu** (host, *All the Time We Have* Podcast). *Shiley Special Events Suite, San Diego Central Library*

3:00–4:00 **Start a D&D Club**—Teachers **Lisa Harrison**, **Nichole Santangelo**, and **Heather Thompson**, along with students **Henry Masi** and **Charlie Masi**, break down how to launch a Dungeons & Dragons club from the ground up—no gold, no experience, no problem. Panelists share materials needed to get started, how to create player characters, and where to find free adventures . . . everything needed to turn a group of curious beginners into a thriving party of adventurers. From first quest to long-running campaign, this session highlights practical strategies for building an engaging, inclusive club that keeps players coming back for the next roll of the dice. *Shiley Special Events Suite, San Diego Central Library*

4:00–5:00 **The Future of Libraries 2036**—Libraries have always been more than buildings full of books. They are civic infrastructure, trusted knowledge systems, community memory, digital access points, and refuges for curiosity. But what will they become by 2036? **Daniel W. Rasmus** (*Listening to the Future*, University of Washington) will lead an engaging look at the forces reshaping libraries, from A.I. and misinformation to public space, intellectual freedom, community resilience, and the future of work and learning. Through the lens of scenario planning, attendees will explore how libraries can prepare for multiple futures rather than betting on a single forecast. The library is imagined not as a place trying to survive disruption, but as one of the institutions best positioned to help communities make sense of it. *Shiley Special Events Suite, San Diego Central Library*

5:00–6:00 **What Comics Teach Us: How Professional Educators Are Using Comics in Schools**—Award-winning educators Drs. **Michael Dando** (*So You Think You Know Blue Beetle*, St. Cloud State University), **Karis Jones** (*Fandoms in the Classroom: A Social Justice Approach to Transforming Literacy Learning*, Baylor), and **David Low** (*Transgressive Humor in Classrooms*, California State University, Fresno) discuss the ways popular culture has influenced their approaches to teaching, learning, and education research and provide practical insights for the K–12 classroom. Presentations are followed by an informal Q&A moderated by **Lauren L. Kelly** (*Teaching with Hip Hop in the 7–12 Grade Classroom: A Guide to Supporting Students' Critical Development Through Popular Texts*, Rutgers). *Shiley Special Events Suite, San Diego Central Library*

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SUNDAY, JULY 26 | GEEK-ED

10:00–11:00 **GeekEd: Is the Juice Worth the Squeeze? When Pop Culture Becomes Pedagogy for First-Gen Students**—What does it mean for educators and student-support professionals to write about the work that shaped them? Moderator **La'Tonya "LT" Rease Miles** (My Tribe Media and Santa Clara University) is joined by panelists **Martha Enciso** (My Tribe Media and University of Redlands), **Ariela Canizal** (University of San Diego), **Brenda Bran** (California State University, Dominguez Hills), and **Jennifer Henriquez** (California State University, Dominguez Hills) for a conversation about identity, scholarship, and the power of bringing your full self into professional spaces. Inspired by *First Gen & Juice: Exploring First Generation College Student Narratives in Pop Culture and Mass Media* (2026), this panel explores how contributors, many of whom are first-generation college graduate culture, fandom, and lived experience to reflect on their careers, affirm their identities, and reimagine what counts as meaningful professional knowledge. Attendees are also invited to share the stories that shaped their own educational journeys. *Shiley Special Events Suite, San Diego Central Library*

11:00–12:00 **GeekEd: Behind Batman's Mask: Rigid and Flexible Masculinity in Pop Culture and on College Campuses**—When are we wearing masculinity, and when is it wearing us? The tropes we see in stories like *Batman*, *Star Wars*, *Steven Universe*, and *He-Man* present examples of both rigid and flexible versions of the many forms masculinity can take. Panelists explore what masculinity can look like through the lens of popular culture, examples we can draw from iconic characters, and the ways these representations can contribute to the socialization and performance of gender for college students. Featuring **Emilie Iannarelli** (UC Berkeley), **Dylan Pugh**, MPH (UC Berkeley), **Dr. Billy San Juan** (Pop Culture Psychology), **Dr. Alfred Day** (UC Berkeley), and **Sabrina Van Zuiden**, LCSW (Sweet Mango Therapy). *Shiley Special Events Suite, San Diego Central Library*

12:00–1:00 **GeekEd: You Belong Here: Using Unbridled Enthusiasm to Challenge Traditional Hierarchies**—What can higher education learn from Comic-Con about belonging, fandom, and identity? This interactive panel explores how visible "geek" culture—defined not by gatekeeping, but by unbridled enthusiasm—can dismantle traditional hierarchies in academia and foster deeper student belonging. Drawing parallels between fan communities and academic spaces, panelists examine who is seen as "allowed" to participate, whose identities are validated, and how diverse representation can transform access. Featuring **Jeremy Parker** (UC Santa Cruz), **Jayde Spiegel** (UC Santa Cruz), **Isabel Wong** (PlayStation), and **Asya Cook** (Occidental College). *Shiley Special Events Suite, San Diego Central Library*

1:00–2:00 **GeekEd: Surviving the Upside Down: Higher Education in the Days of Future Past**—What kind of future are we building in higher education right now? Using the Upside Down from *Stranger Things* and the timeline-shifting stakes of *X-Men*, this panel examines what it means to learn, work, and belong on college campuses during an era of profound sociopolitical upheaval. *Shiley Special Events Suite, San Diego Central Library*

2:00–3:00 **Comics for Education**—Host **Dimithri Perera** (The Keeg Podcasts) discusses the educational importance of comic books in the classroom with three comics-loving educators: **Sara Zitney** (cosplayer/educator), **Ambrosha Koepp** (content creator/educator), and **Drew Maxey** (comic writer/educator). *Shiley Special Events Suite, San Diego Central Library*