



POW! ZANG! BLAM! ‘Get Pop-Cultured’ Events on Campus Pack a Powerful Punch

AUGUST 28, 2015

With off-the-chart box office sales, it’s a safe bet to say most everyone is familiar with superheroes like Batman, Spiderman and Captain America. Batman has evolved over time from its original comic book beginnings, to a campy 1960s television show, into a series of blockbuster movies. And like many things in our culture, the comic book and graphic novel have come full circle and are now more popular than ever. With a new generation of readers, this segment of pop culture is enjoying a surge of female readership — and according to a survey by Eventbrite, the fandom is now evenly split between women and men.

DID YOU GET POP-CULTURED?

To coordinate with San Diego’s four-day convention celebrating pop-culture, known as Comic-Con, [Barnes and Noble College](#) bookstores hosted events of their own during the month of July. “Not everyone can go to Comic-Con, so we thought it would be a great idea to have a smaller version in our stores, so fans could feel like they were part of the experience,” explained Stephen Larrison, Trade Books project manager for Barnes & Noble College.

College bookstores, like the [Barnes & Noble at Tidewater Community College](#), began actively participating in Get Pop-Cultured this year. One of the planned events was Manga Madness. In addition to a Manga sampler giveaway, local artist and Trade Book Supervisor Lanier Williams volunteered to teach children and adults how to draw Japanese comic characters. “He is very talented,” said Ashley Hicks, Tidewater’s bookstore community relations manager. “The audience seemed to really embrace what he was teaching them, and at one point somebody asked if he gave private lessons.”

Williams, whose audience ranged in age from 6 to the mid-20s, spoke about the popular comic series, the special sale and promoted the Manga section in the bookstore. “We have a strong local graphic novel/comic book following, and Manga Madness did very well,” explained Hicks. “We have a good relationship with some of the local artists and we recently invited some of them in to promote their products, and I think that helps us, too.”

The bookstore staff also participated in a bit of ‘cosplay’ for the DC Comic Days, dressing up in their favorite costumes, t-shirts – anything that had a DC Comic character on it. “Any day our staff can dress up is a good day for them. They seem to really enjoy it,” Hicks said.

GEEK GIRLS RULE

Planning for the Get Pop-Cultured events began in October at New York’s Comic-Con. Meeting with the retail graphic novel buyer and discussing the pop-culture events, Larrison felt that this year it was important to highlight the role of women in comics and to recognize an ever growing female audience. “Publishers are starting to publish books that have strong women protagonists, which hasn’t always been the case. We discussed doing in-store ‘Fangirl’ displays that featured titles that were female friendly and promoted strong female characters,” he said. “We wanted to highlight the diversity and progressiveness of what’s going on in the 17-33 age range – which is the college market. We thought this was an important cultural change in the industry and wanted to highlight that in this year’s Pop-Culture events.”

GIRL POWER

Included in the ‘Fangirl’ display was Sam Maggs’ *The Fangirl’s Guide to the Galaxy*. The best-selling author recently spoke with *The College Juice*, Barnes & Noble College’s student [blog](#), describing herself as a “geek and a feminist.” She says she wrote the book she wished she had when she was 15 years old. “It’s equal parts fun and inspiration, encouraging young people — especially young women — to pursue their interests with abandon and to live as their most authentic selves.”

Knowing he wanted to do something fun and different to highlight the diversification of characters in comics and in recognition of the female fan, Larrison reminds us that college students of today grew up with X-Men, Harry Potter and Hermione. “For customers in our stores, we try to cater to their interest in the strong female characters they grew up with,” he said. “Once you grow out of teen books, there’s a whole lot more out there — and we wanted to embrace what is going on in the industry — and with our customers.”