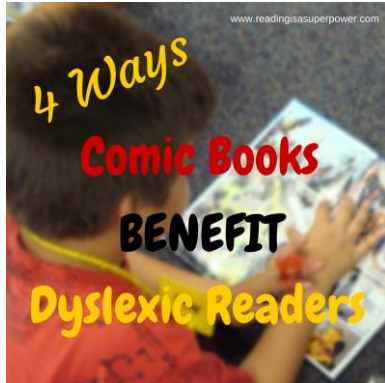


4 Ways Comic Books Benefit Dyslexic Readers



One of my sons is dyslexic, so learning to read was difficult for him. Although we worked on phonics, breaking words down to their sounds and syllables, he just couldn't handle a whole page of words all at once. He would not voluntarily pick up a book to read.

I thought...until one day I found him reading a comic book. I discovered that the pictures attracted him and then he tried to figure out the words so he could understand the story. I was thrilled! He was reading independently – what a breakthrough. I went and bought graphic novel versions of everything, even Bible stories. He read them all. For two to three years, that's all he read – comic books.

After building his confidence and an amazingly large vocabulary, he moved on to read other books. Eventually he took a Latin class, memorized Shakespeare, wrote his own poetry, read stories in Middle English...things I would never have guessed that he would do. Things that he probably never would have done if he had not spent time reading graphic novels.

At the time, I did not know that I was doing the right thing by supporting and encouraging his pursuit of comic books. I was just following his lead, his interest and hoping it was going to help.

Since then, I have become very involved with graphic novels and have learned the reasons that comic books can benefit dyslexic readers and allow them to enjoy reading.

1. Bite-size Text Decreases Overwhelm

One challenge for dyslexic readers is the overwhelm they feel when faced with a lot of words in one place. In comic books, the text is in small amounts spaced throughout the graphics. This allows the reader to decode a few words at a time with a break between as they look at the pictures. This process lowers the stress level of the reader, allowing him/her to actually enjoy reading.

2. Graphics Support Comprehension

Another challenge faced by dyslexic readers is comprehension. Because their reading tends to be slow and laborious, it is difficult for them to understand what they are reading. The graphics in comic books help the reader to understand. The reader can look at the pictures to get clues as to the meaning of the words. The reader does not have to rely solely on his ability to decode words in order to understand. This allows the reader to feel supported while reading so the process can be more enjoyable.

3. Font Can Reduce Confusion

A common challenge for dyslexic readers is the confusion of letters. The b/d, p/q, m/w are difficult for them to distinguish from one another. However, the uppercase versions of these letters are not so similar, not so easily confused. Interestingly, many comic books use only the uppercase fonts. Reading in uppercase reduces the confusion and allows the reader to more easily decode the words. Less confusion means less stress and more enjoyment.

4. Panel Sequence Supports Left to Right Tracking

Many dyslexic readers find it challenging to know their right from their left. Often they try to write, read, and even turn book pages "backwards" starting on their right instead of their left. Like most other books, comic books are written to be read from left to right and from top to bottom. The picture panels as well as the words are only understood if read in the correct order – from left to right and from top to

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bottom. Although this may not contribute to the immediate joy of reading, it does help with the future pleasure of reading as it reinforces the left to right tracking that is required in other formats.

What a surprise when years later ABDO hired me to write curriculum to go with MARVEL and STAR WARS comic books! Nearly 100 step-by-step lessons covering all different subjects – reading, writing, STEM, character education, visual & performing arts, and physical activities – are now available for free to those that purchase the books.