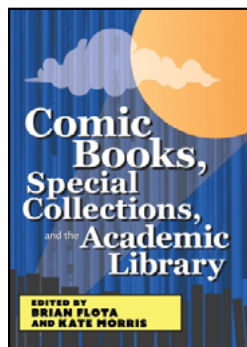


Comic Books, Special Collections, and the Academic Library.

Brian Flota and Kate Morris, eds. Chicago, IL: Association of College and Research Libraries, a division of the American Library Association, 2023. 305p. Softcover, \$82.00 (\$73.80 ALA members) (ISBN: 978-0-8389-3950-5).



As comic books and their associated media continue to dominate popular culture, many libraries are exploring the idea of collecting them or thinking of new ways to use the comic books they have as aids to instruction and research and to draw more students into the library. The editors of this new work have collected essays covering many different aspects of the comics in the library question. In 20 chapters over 4 sections, the reader learns why a library should collect comics material, what to do with it once it arrives, and how to use it in library instruction and as a research tool.

The wide variety of comic publication formats and subjects can be daunting when deciding what to collect. Often, a library's collection begins with a donation from an individual collector. Other criteria, such as local authors and artists or a particular subject or style of publication, can help focus an institution's collecting efforts. In Part 1 of *Comic Books, Special Collections, and the Academic Library* many of these issues are discussed. The special requirements of digital comics are covered in one chapter, and another discusses Native American, First Nations, and Indigenous graphic novels and how they are used by students in various classroom settings. Another chapter examines the conflict between the established Comics Code and the Nixon administration's desire to get its anti-drug message into as many media outlets as possible. The challenges and importance of collecting local comics in Australia is discussed in another chapter.

Part 2 looks at the particular challenges of housing and cataloging comic books in an academic setting. Many were not intended to last and were printed with cheap ink on cheap paper. Different storage solutions such as acid-free slipcovers and storage boxes (similar to what individual comic collectors might use) are discussed. Cataloging presents several challenges. Most comic books were published in serial form, but many different writers and artists might work on specific issues. Titles and even publishers might change over the course of a comic's life. Long established series might have associated one-off issues. Some libraries have adapted MARC records to catalog their collections, while others use finding aids, usually in a spreadsheet format, as a quick and economical way to make a collection accessible to readers and researchers. Of special interest is the Dark Horse collection at Portland State University. The publisher, located in Oregon and founded by alumni of PSU, made the decision to donate copies of everything they publish to PSU. There is a circulating collection as well as archived copies of their output.

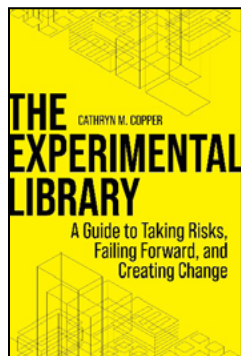
Instruction and outreach are the focus of Part 3. Working with an instructor, special collections librarians can pull materials on a specific topic or from a particular era, allowing the students to see different perspectives and interpretations of events. One chapter discusses an exhibition of editorial cartoons that COVID forced online. Librarians were able to add pop-up explanatory notes to the scanned cartoons that were arranged by topic. In another case, Silver

Age (c1956–1972) superhero comics were compared to other, lesser-known genres from the period, such as war, western, and romance comics. Students could compare artistic styles and editorial decisions in different types of stories, and the worldview on display in the comics could be compared to other media of the era.

In Part 4, chapters discuss specific collections and types of comics. One discusses the challenges particular to crowdfunded comics, especially regarding budgets. Another looks at LGBTQ graphic memoirs in relation to other biographical sources from members of this community. A third examines propaganda comics from Maoist China, establishing a link to earlier forms of information distribution, such as early modern European broadsheets and religious tracts. Students are able to compare tales such as the life of Confucius through the lens of the party line of the Chinese government. Another looks at comics published by the Catholic Church to compete with the popular secular comics of the time.

Comic Books, Special Collections, and the Academic Library will be a valuable resource for any librarian whose institution is beginning to collect comics and to any librarian with an underused collection looking for inspiration. The popularity of comic books and their related movies and television shows provides an excellent avenue for introducing students to larger topics in history, storytelling, and social issues in a number of disciplines. The breadth of topics covered across the chapters of this work means that almost any reader will find some applicable ideas for collecting, organizing, and using comic book collections in an academic setting. —Dan Forrest, Western Kentucky University

Cathryn M. Copper. *The Experimental Library: A Guide to Taking Risks, Failing Forward, and Creating Change*. Chicago, IL: ALA Editions, 2023. 184p. Paper, \$59.99 (ISBN: 978-0-8389-3965-9).



The Experimental Library: A Guide to Taking Risks, Failing Forward, and Creating Change by Cathryn M. Copper is a short, handy guide for anyone looking to bring about a different way to solve problems and implement change in their library. The book is divided into three short sections: “A Culture of Experimentation,” “The IDEAA Anti-Method,” and “Mapping Experimentation to Your Organization.” Summarizing successful corporate businesses that reinvented or transformed themselves provides the foundation that libraries could follow. The meat of the book, however, is in Part 2, where Copper explains the steps in the experimentation “anti-method” and how it is relevant to libraries. Moving libraries away from being risk-

adverse and towards embracing exploration into new operational procedures or innovative programming is a major theme of the whole book. Experiments do not have to take a lot of money or space in order to be implemented—all they need is to be well thought out. This book takes inspiration from the tech sector and startups, highlighting companies like Apple and Google as experimentation models to emulate. Libraries can imitate the environment of a startup organization by encouraging small experiments and reconsidering what it means to fail. This book is ideal for someone in a leadership position who is looking to bring about changes, both large and small, to their organization. At a slim 184 pages, this book is easy to read as part of a professional-development group or for everyone in leadership to consider.

Copper has worked in both public and academic libraries and has provided examples of experimentation from her past experiences as well as samples from other libraries. The provided illustrations are equally split between academic and public library situations. Any