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## THE COSTCO CONNECTION

You'll find a selection of comics and graphic novels, including annuals of *The Beano* and *The Dandy*, at your local Costco warehouse.

enhance motivation and engagement and promote reading as a positive and rewarding pastime," Glennie says. She also stresses the importance of parental involvement and suggests adopting a daily 15-minute family reading time to establish the habit.

"The combination of visual context, boxes of brief narrative explanation, onomatopoeic sound effects and, above all, context-based speech bubbles filled with narrative expressed in spoken language patterns seems to me an ideal method of transition between the spoken and written versions of the language," Palmer says.

### Don't sweat the format

Finally, is there any difference between a traditional comic and a digital, tablet-based version? Murray doesn't think so. He feels comics allow for a mode of reading that involves the interaction of words and images in sequence. "That can be replicated digitally, even enhanced," she says.

All that remains is to help your children choose their books—and enjoy them. **C**

*Gordon Craigie is a Dundee-based freelance writer.*

## GET THE READING PARTY STARTED

*The following tips from Anne Glennie, of the educational consultancy firm The Learning Zoo ([thelearningzoo.co.uk](http://thelearningzoo.co.uk)), can help you and your child find reading bliss this summer, and beyond.*

- When selecting a comic, try to avoid the more garish titles—often children make decisions based on the free plastic toy on the front.
- More traditional comics have an easier-to-read layout and an established format, making them a good choice for novices.
- Discuss your children's reading with them—talk about their choices and preferences.
- Keep the bedtime story. Even when children can read independently, they still benefit from a parent reading to them.
- Establish a 15-minute family read after dinner or before bed, where everyone reads quietly, parents included, to help build up a daily reading habit.—GC

# Reading is no joking matter

*Comic books help young readers learn to love reading*

BY GORDON CRAIGIE

EVEN THOUGH it may seem as if summer has only just arrived, parents everywhere are already preparing for when school resumes. For many, this will also involve thinking about how they can best support their child's learning and development, particularly when it comes to reading, as it's such a fundamentally important skill.

Some parents worry about their children reading comics and comic books, concerned that it's not "proper" reading or isn't helping them develop their skills sufficiently. However, current research debunks this theory and even encourages the use of comic books as valid reading material.

"Comic books and graphic novels have an important place in the reading landscape, particularly for children," Anne Glennie, a literacy consultant with The Learning Zoo ([thelearningzoo.co.uk](http://thelearningzoo.co.uk)), an education consultancy firm, tells *The Connection*. The combination of text and pictures offers an appealing reading experience, she explains.

### Images and action

Chris Murray, a lecturer in comics studies at the University of Dundee ([dundee.ac.uk/english/comics](http://dundee.ac.uk/english/comics)), agrees. "Comics are intriguing to children not because they're simple, but because they're dynamic," he says. "Not only do they tell exciting adventure stories, but because the individual panels show only fragments of the action,

readers have to use their imagination to fill in the gaps. This engages children and challenges them."

Comics haven't always been a popular choice for learning purposes. As far back as the 19th century, the UK saw politically driven objections to comics, mainly from social conservatives and religious groups, alleging detrimental educational effects. But Murray says, "Comics don't harm literacy; they promote it." He says they create a complex negotiation of words and images, making logical sense of the narrative and weaving the action together based on the elementary cues in the illustrations.

### Children need choices

Given this research-based support for the genre, should parents be looking for any comics in particular? Everyone has their own preferences, but a wide variety is available in the genre. Sue Palmer, the chair of Upstart Scotland ([upstart.scot](http://upstart.scot)), an organisation that promotes the benefits of play-based learning for children, says, "As a literacy specialist for the last 40 years, and, before that, an earnest consumer of *The Beano*, *The Dandy*, *The Beezer*, DC and Marvel comics, I've always been a great believer in comic book techniques for easing novice readers into the reading habit."

"When it comes to reading for pleasure, it's essential that children have choice and can find materials they identify with which