

Retailer Interview

Jason Mojica // Hey Kids Comics



What goes into curating an inviting and successful Kids & YA section in your store?

For starters, because our store specializes in Kids & YA graphic novels, we don't have to lump them all together as though they belong to the same category simply because of the age of their target audience. We're able to organize them by genre, much as a traditional bookstore organizes books: humor, fantasy, sci-fi, non-fiction, horror, etc. When our young customers (and their parents) spot a familiar favorite on the shelf, they'll find next to it something less familiar but in the same universe that we think they might enjoy.

When it comes to graphic novels, it's actually totally fair to judge a book by its cover, so nearly all of our books are displayed face-out. If you think about your own bookstore shopping experiences, what percentage of spine-out books do you ever reach up and pull off the shelf? One percent? Two? Since at least half of what makes us want to take a comic home is a visceral connection with the art, we think it's pretty critical to show the art!



Lastly, since our store is so small, we have to be pretty picky about what we carry, so we put in the effort to read as many ARCs as we can get our hands on, and choose books based on quality art & storytelling rather than on the issues they tackle. There's definitely a gap between the types of books that parents pull off the shelves and hand to their kids and the books that kids choose for themselves—we're biased towards the latter.

How do you bring new readers to your store? Was there already a demand for Kids & YA books from your customers, or did you take steps to bring those new readers in?

We started out selling books on the sidewalk (which is legal in NYC), and we later launched a subscription box, so by the time we opened a brick and mortar store, we knew there was a demand for this material. But the demand wasn't just for a place to access to these books—access to virtually any book you can think of is a click away—but for some guidance on which ones were actually any good. Our approach is to be the opposite of Amazon: we don't have it all—we only carry between 300-500 individual titles at any given time, but they're all good.

What are some challenges you face in selling Kids & YA titles, and how do you meet those challenges?

I'd say the biggest challenge when it comes to younger readers is that their means of discovering new books is limited. With rare exception, kids have no idea when the latest installment of their favorite series is coming out, and they certainly aren't reading reviews of forthcoming stand-alone graphic novels, so you have to put work into creating a culture around your store as a place of discovery—a place where there will always be some surprises to keep you coming back again and again.

Any advice for retailers looking to start/expand their Kids & YA section in their store?

It sounds like a no-brainer, but you've really just got to actually start reading this stuff. Surely you have an opinion on what makes a comic good and what makes a comic bad. All of that applies here. Don't settle for lazy art and cloying stories. Consider that you're hand-selling to parents who are also going to wind up reading these books, so stock books that you think are clever and avoid those which are clearly annoying. Some of the most exciting and innovative work is being done in the kids & YA space, so you're sure to find books that will excite you.

