

Fandoms: Subcultures on the Rise!

If you've gone to a movie theater, turned on the TV, logged onto social media, or walked down the toy aisle at any major department store recently, you've noticed that the days of keeping one's nerdy interests on the DL are gone. Individuals express their allegiance to the pop culture they love on t-shirts, jewelry, backpacks, shoes, nail designs, cellphone backgrounds, and even tattoos. And in case you didn't know there was a name for this, these allegiances are called fandoms.

Everyone is keen on being involved in the fandom craze, and libraries are no exception. Rather than simply an opportunity to cash in on a trend, pop culture and fandom are great resources to use in creating programs that are timely, relevant, and responsive, which in turn keeps things fresh and patrons coming back. More than just a passing fad, interest in a topic so strong that it has a fandom behind it can trigger interest in other library classes and services and is actually a way to build and foster community.

Fans are brought together by their fervent devotion to a fictional book, TV show, movie, game, sport, and more. Often characterized, in part, by the feelings of empathy and camaraderie felt with fellow members over their shared interests, these are groups with strong ties. While the pervasiveness of the Internet and social media brings fans together in ways previously unavailable, and large-scale gatherings like San Diego Comic Con and the Chicago Comics and Entertainment Expo (C2E2) give them opportunities to interact in real life, libraries are in a unique position to be able to offer in-person social interaction and celebration on the local level.

Library staff tend to be both eager and hesitant at the same time to enter this new realm of programming. There are as many fandoms as there are members of the *DC* and *Marvel* universes combined, so where to start? As each library differs widely in terms of service area, patron base, and budget, the key is looking at what you've got to work with, keeping an open mind, and not being afraid to take a few chances. As libraries respond to more fandoms, they will be better equipped to quickly plan for popular interests.

FINDING THE FANS

It is as important to keep up with fandom trends as it is to carry best-selling authors and movies in the library. Learning about which fandoms are popular in your community is often a matter of patron watching, which of course many library staff do already. Patrons will come in dressed for a particular fandom—this was especially evident during the Cubs' 2016 season! Sometimes comic costumes or anime characters are regular sightings around the library, and their distinctive looks are hard to miss. Passionate patrons will be at EVERY program on a particular topic.

Another place to look is at your circulation statistics. Are there certain graphic novels that go out especially often? What about movies, video games, and novels? At the Schaumburg Township District Library (STDL), fandoms that we see as especially popular among our patrons include *Star Wars*, the *Marvel* and *DC* universes, *Stranger Things*, *Harry Potter*, fantasy series such as *Doctor Who*, *Shadowhunters*, and *Game of Thrones*, steampunk, and of course, sports fandoms. Some fandoms do wane, or morph into something else. Twilight fandoms have mostly gone away, as well as most things having to do with vampires. Hunger Games fans have found other survival and adventure movies and series to watch with strong female leads such as *The 100*, *Wonder Woman*, and *Star Wars: Rogue One*.

In addition to checking out your circulation statistics, think about which programs are especially popular at your library. When the *CSI* television franchise began, forensic and mystery programs were especially popular. Drawing programs may be popular with comic fans, as well as anime and manga aficionados who wish to design their own. Offering a trivia or fan fiction contest can also be a good way to gauge interest before planning a series of events. Our library hosts a general fandom event within our Comic Con each year that includes trivia from several popular fandoms, a craft like slime-making or butterbeer, and games with popular

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characters. Teens and adults at the event are polled about which fandoms they belong to. When new *Marvel* or young adult books/movies are released, the library hosts fandom nights or kickoff parties with related activities. Monitoring popular movies, TV shows, and Netflix trends are good ways to gauge fandom interest.

PROGRAM PARAMETERS

Usually at least a few staff members are watching the popular series, or attend cosplay (costume + play) events in the most popular fandoms. Often they will suggest things to other library staff members. But if a suggestion is made from a group of teens on a fandom that staff are not familiar with, there are some ways to quickly immerse into a new world. For example, staff may not be familiar with all the incarnations of *Doctor Who*. First, research the series, and try to watch at least one episode with each of the main actors. Second, look at Tumblr and Pinterest—many fandoms live there, as well as fan art. The most popular characters, ships, crafts, and activities will pop up on those sites even under simple searches like “*Doctor Who* crafts.” Search also for library programs on *Doctor Who* as well as high school or

community college clubs on that theme. If staff are still not comfortable enough to host simple crafts, treats, or trivia contests, they may build a 2-D or 3-D Tardis and see how many people want their picture taken with it. Having a key symbol for a fandom and seeing how it is received may help determine parameters for a fandom, such as most popular age of fans, what they wear, which library materials they like. It is definitely possible to dip a toe into most big fandoms, even without an in-depth knowledge.

Some basic activities work with almost any fandoms. As mentioned above, trivia can be adapted to many fandoms. Green-screen photography or simple interactive prop displays are popular. Used figurines could be incorporated into a stop-motion animation program to make short movies with an app, iPad, and a tripod. Charms can also be purchased for patrons to make simple necklaces or key chains. Small, used figurines can be made into key chains or necklaces as well, or glued onto lamp bases for craft programs. Simple costume design can include mask decorating for superheroes, gear charm key chains or necklaces for steampunk fans, printable iron-on transfers or 3-D printed figures for gamers to wear on shirts, bags, or as key chains.

Craft or food programs can be linked to many fandoms. There are cookbooks and recipes online with simple, child-friendly recipes for many big fandoms including *Star Wars*. The author's or characters' favorite treats could be served or made, for example, cheesecakes for a Stephen King program (a favorite of his). Cookies can be decorated for fandoms with *Shadowhunter* runes or *Harry Potter* horcruxes, or with popular team colors and logos.

SHARING INFORMATION

Promote patron creativity through their interests. Involve teens and adults in fan art contests or fan fiction contests to celebrate an upcoming movie sequel or book release. Offer a costume design contest for steampunk accessories or characters. Invite patrons to come in costume or cosplay, then have them discuss how they made or put together their costumes so everyone leaves with ideas. Having a daily display with quotes for patrons to identify can help promote a fandom or an upcoming fandom event, an activity that can also work on Twitter or a Facebook page.

For fan events that pop up quickly, like *Stranger Things* or *Pokémon Go*, libraries polled each other to see which programs worked. Several libraries posted Christmas light displays for *Stranger Things* or created spur-of-the-moment library *Pokémon* hunting events by dropping lures within a couple weeks of those popular trends. Again, Tumblr and Pinterest can be great resources as people will quickly post what they are doing to celebrate trends.

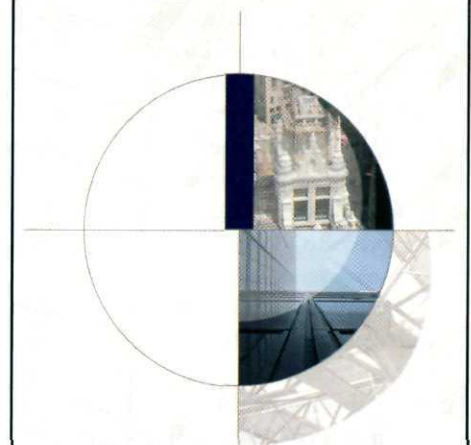
Fandom programming is a chance for staff to get creative and receive input from others not always involved in programming. It's a great way to discover hidden talents and interests in your staff and encourage them to take an interest in programming, thus promoting your programs from within. Offering the freedom to incorporate staff's own fan interests into programming and outreach encourages staff buy-in and makes for happier staff. It is an opportunity for staff members to show their passion to the community and geek out with like-minded patrons.

And you never know, staff may find a new fandom for themselves after researching and planning! **ILA**



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