

Editor's Note

The Struggle of RA Is Real

By Sharon Verbeten

As a librarian, I love doing readers' advisory (RA). But there are two things about it I struggle with.

The first is that the parent rarely (or never) brings the child along. When asking for books for their child, they often don't know what the child is currently reading, what they like, or what they might like. They might incorrectly judge their reading level. Or, they often say, "They don't like to read."

I always help them, of course, with a probing reference interview designed to better understand the child's reading level and what they might enjoy. Often, I recommend nonfiction for reluctant readers. I feel it's a section parents often overlook because they're just looking for chapter books—or what I have determined they consider "real" books.

That leads me to my second pet peeve: When I recommend graphic novels, 90 percent of the time the parent responds, "They read those all the time. I want them to start reading 'real' books."

That's a tough one to absorb. And it's a fine line to engage with a parent to let them know that graphic novels and comic books ARE, in fact, real books. The engaging format is what is drawing their child in and keeping them reading—and possibly then moving on to more challenging reading once they've gained some confidence and interest.

This is not a surprise to most of you out there, and I know many librarians and children's authors are working to alleviate the stigma (only among parents and, sometimes, teachers) of reading graphic novels.

We probably all love seeing a child walk out with a stack of Wimpy Kid books—when the parent secretly wants them all to be replaced with books they read as a child. But I continue to lavishly praise the child for picking out books they like—and hopefully get the parent on board with a new perspective on kids' favorites.

When the child isn't there it's decidedly harder, but we librarians, as we know, are superheroes, putting the right book in the hands of the right child at the right time.

Now, if we could just get the teachers and parents on board! &



Longtime *CAL* contributor, and author of our Couples Who Collaborate column, Mary-Kate Sableski, right, visited *CAL* editor Sharon Verbeten on a recent trip to Wisconsin. They are pictured at the Manitowoc (WI) Public Library.

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