

# POP CULTURE CLASSROOM



## 2022 ANNUAL REPORT

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**Pop Culture Classroom**

**[PopCultureClassroom.org](https://PopCultureClassroom.org)**

1420 Ogden St, Suite 1-A, Denver, CO 80218 | Phone: 303.325.1236

# FROM THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR



Friends,

2022 might be remembered as the year the world emerged from the pandemic. We will see.

**I am more confident that this was the year Pop Culture Classroom emerged from a period of metamorphosis.**

For those of you reading this letter, thank you for embracing our efforts to continue serving students, educators, and families with in-person programs, free comics, curriculum, teaching guides, and other resources. And, to everyone who helped us emerge in a new, yet familiar form — congratulations on the good work you've made possible with your support.

As Pop Culture Classroom's new Executive Director, I see a great opportunities to share our exciting educational comics, curricular resources, and hands-on learning experiences with many more students. And, as a career educator, I am honored to lead this organization to create even more transformative learning experiences.

Pop Culture Classroom's opportunity is demonstrated in our growth across programs. We have seen — and are projecting — an increase in the number of:

- Workshops Conducted
- Workshop Participants
- Free Resources Downloaded
- Publishers Submitting Titles for our Excellence in Graphic Literature Awards

We are not just putting on programs, either. We are making a measurable difference in the lives of students through our programs:



## **Results: Students who attended PCC Workshops:**

- **87%** Feel Valued
- **81%** Feel More Creative
- **92%** Feel they have more tools for self-expression

## **Educators say their students:**

- **86%** Had improved creative and critical thinking skills
- **100%** Felt proud of themselves





# FROM THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

Focusing our programs through the lens of comics, games, and other pop culture that kids love, Pop Culture Classroom draws on research-based approaches to learning, recognizing that pop culture:

- Engages students.<sup>i</sup>
- Promotes learning.<sup>ii</sup>
- Encourages imagination and opens doorways to new possibilities for students and the world they live in.<sup>iii</sup>

Pop Culture Classroom's programs open windows to new perspectives, doors to creative self-expression, and opportunities to imagine a brighter future — whether that is with a career in pop culture or the arts, as a visionary scientist, or simply as a responsible and engaged member of the community.

This is vital work, and each member of our small staff is honored to be a part of it.

Pop Culture Classroom is working to diversify the sources of our funding by building foundation support, soliciting individual donations and sponsorships.

We've made significant progress toward building a more effective and sustainable arts and education organization, but [we need your help](#) to keep inspiring and educating kids! As you read this report, please consider supporting our work.

Thank you for being a part of our story.

**Matt Hess**  
Executive Director

## NOTES

<sup>i</sup> J. Chem. Educ. 2021, 98, 3, 896–906, Publication Date: January 26, 2021 <https://doi.org/10.1021/acs.jchemed.0c00233>, Copyright © 2021 American Chemical Society and Division of Chemical Education, Inc.

<sup>ii</sup> Weld, Jamie, "Connecting Literacy and Popular Culture" (2011). Education Masters. Paper 6.

<sup>iii</sup> "We may envision the outcome we want to achieve through the imagination and inspiration of our team members, or we may be inspired by concepts found in the art," said NASA's Barbara Brown, director of exploration research and technology programs. "And then science, engineering and math drive the rest." Adelson, Eric. The Washington Post, Jan. 11, 2023 <https://www.washingtonpost.com/technology/2023/01/11/science-fiction-space-travel/>



# Our Work



## Our Mission

Our mission is to inspire a love of learning, increase literacy, celebrate diversity, and build community through the tools of popular culture and the power of self-expression. Our workshops, events, and resources play an important part in this work.

## The Opportunity

Researchers tell us that interest about pop culture remains high among youth, and studies show that this interest can motivate and sustain long-term language learning. We see this first hand every time we step into a classroom, library, or non-profit, which all lead us to believe that now is the time to expand our creative approaches to better engage students and promote learning.

## Our Vision

Pop Culture Classroom envisions a world where individuals are transformed by the educational power of popular culture and create diverse, inclusive, and engaged communities.

## Our Values

- Quality service to kids and communities
- Respect, inclusiveness, and diversity.
- Equality of opportunity. Alternative approaches to education.
- Recognizing each person's intrinsic dignity and importance.
- Open communication, responsibility, and honesty



## How We Work

### In-School Services and Professional Development:

Educational and engaging pop culture-themed workshops and professional development throughout the Denver metro area!

### Free Resources for Educators, Students and Families:

Pop Culture Classroom proudly offers a wide variety of free educational resources for students, educators, and families, including comics creation and board game design curriculum, graphic novel teaching guides, and our popular *Colorful History* line of comics.

### The Excellence in Graphic Literature Awards:

Founded in 2017, the EGL Awards are uniquely focused on the educational value of graphic novels, comic collections, and manga to guide teachers, librarians, parents, and readers to the best resources for learning and literacy.



# Our Work

**“My class was really engaged and enjoyed drawing their own Manga! It was very meaningful and allowed for students to relate to the world and to one another. Thank you!”**

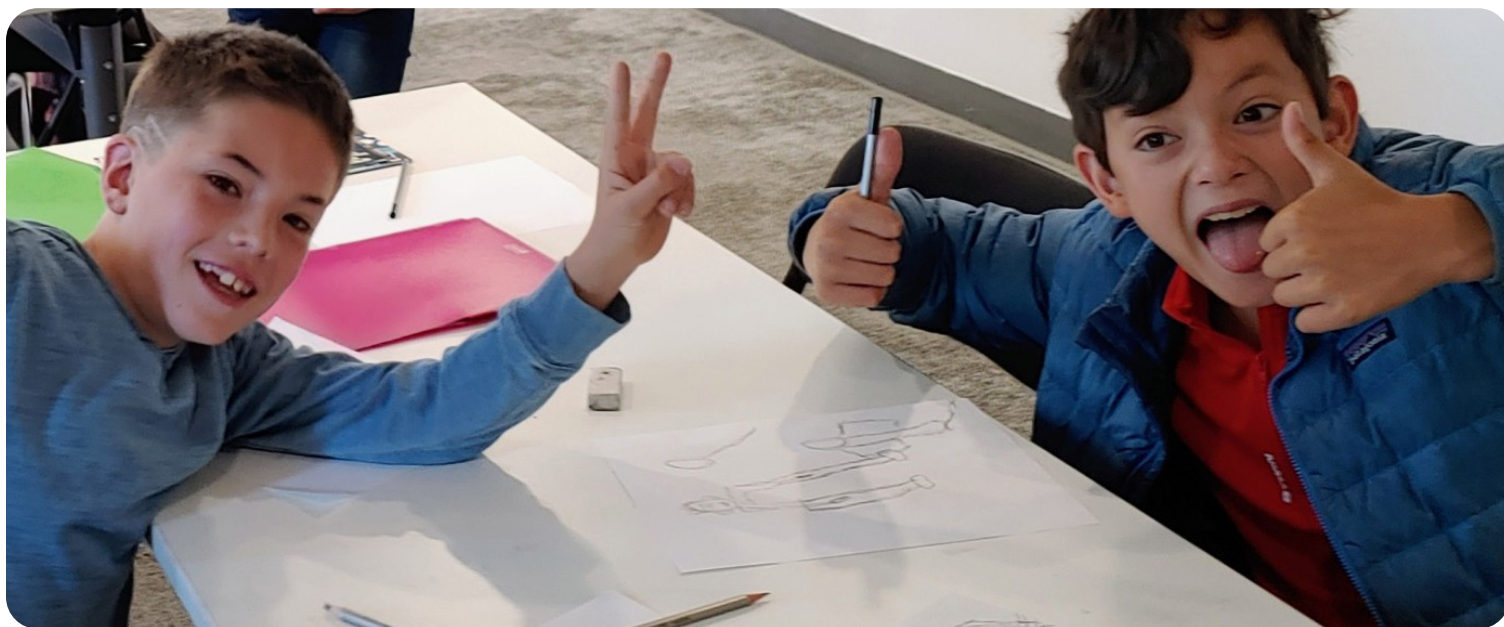
— Instructor,  
Independence Middle School  
(Aurora, CO)

## Community Events:

Pop Culture Classroom is the featured nonprofit of [FAN EXPO Denver](#), where we offer arts and education activities through our [Educators' Day](#) and the [Experience the Comics](#) program, which brings student groups to the event for free, and a full weekend of educational and entertaining programming. In 2022, we also held our [PopUP Denver event](#) — a full day of family fun and learning — and participated in other community events.

# FAN EXPO

## DENVER





# Our Team



**Pop Culture Classroom's team** is comprised of professional educators, creative professionals, and advocates for pop culture education. We are supported by an incredible community of donors, volunteers, and community partners.



**Matt Hess,**  
Executive Director



**Angie Morency**  
Director of Operations



**Christopher Burley**  
Director of Development  
and Communications



**Emilee Klein**  
Director of Partnerships  
and Events

## Education Team



**Matt Slayter**  
Director of Education



**Rachel Brazell**  
Classroom Programming  
Coordinator



**R. Alan Brooks**  
Colorful History  
Art Manager

## 2022 Board of Directors

- **Tone Ellis de Jesus**, President, communications specialist
- **JP Prentiss**, family law attorney
- **Esteban Morin**, privacy and civil rights attorney
- **Kyle (Ky) Burnett**, Vice President, author, coach, and culture creator
- **Todd Fukai**, educator and administrator
- **Jessica Castellano** non-profit professional





# Our Team

## Outreach Instructors

Pop Culture Classroom Workshops are taught by artists, writers, and other pop culture experts and professionals. Highly customizable, these workshops are available as one-off workshops or multi-class courses for children 8+, teens, adults, and as intergenerational experience.



**Jorge Arroyo**



**Andrew Gomez**



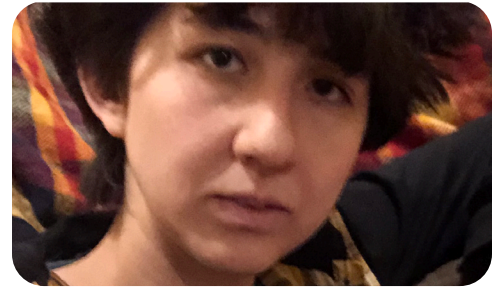
**Erik Jacobson**



**Faith Ojebuoboh**



**Terra Necessary**



**Tera Midori Proper**



**Joe Rubald**



**Katherine Scott**



**Will Whitaker**

2022

# Accomplishments

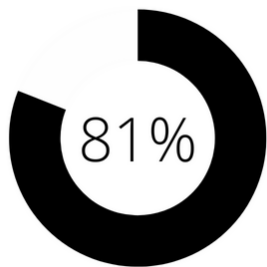
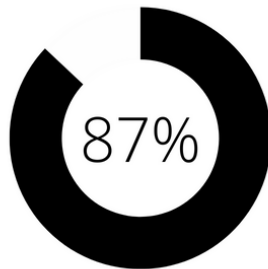


## Students who attended 2022 PCC Workshops Felt ...

406 students were surveyed after attending a Pop Culture Classroom Educational Workshop.

### Valued

Students agreed or strongly agreed that they felt their opinions, interests, and talents were valued by PCC instructors.

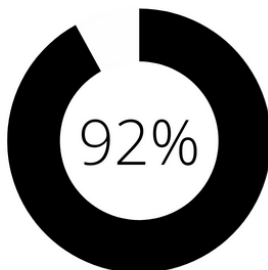


### More Creative

Students agreed or strongly agreed that they felt they had more creative skills.

### Better Equipped for Self- Expression

Students agreed or strongly agreed that they had more tools for self-expression.



**1,000+**

### Students

Served at Colorado  
Schools, Libraries, and  
Community Centers

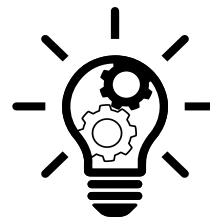


**3,500**

Kids and Parents/  
Guardians Attended  
the Pop Culture  
Classroom Kids' Lab  
at FAN EXPO Denver  
2022 and  
Other Community  
Events

**5,000+**

Comic, Curriculum,  
and Teaching Guide  
Downloads



**200+ Hours**

Of Student  
Engagement in  
Workshops

**9**

New Colorful History  
Comics

**3**

New Graphic Novel  
Teaching Guides







# Education Programs



**At Pop Culture Classroom, we believe learning is more effective and accessible when we tap into students' existing interests, especially pop culture media.**

That's why we offer arts and education workshops for students (often at reduced cost to partner organizations), summer camps, and professional development experiences to help educators use pop culture to advance learning, creativity, and connection.

**"What a gift it was to have you visit our classroom! I would 100% use this program again. You brought new life into the students' writing and artwork. The best workshop we've had this year!"**

— Metro Arts Academy Teacher  
(Denver, CO)

## 2022 Offerings

In 2022, Pop Culture Classroom served more than 1,000 students with a range of workshops and summer camps, including:

- Storytelling Through Comics
- Game On! Board Game Design
- Intro to Cosplay
- Pop Culture Careers in Art
- Interactive Branching Narratives with Twine
- World Building for Sci-Fi and Fantasy
- Tabletop Role-Playing Games for Social Emotional Learning

## Workshops and Summer Camps

With Pop Culture Classroom's [workshops](#), [summer camps](#), and [in-school programs](#), students can:

- **Think Critically** – Look beneath the surface of the stories and media you love.
- **Create Like the Pros** – Engage in the creative process by learning to make comics, board games, or cosplay.
- **Become a Master of Fiction** – Learn to create fictional worlds and write stories about them.
- **Play the Part** – Play new games and learn how video, board, and role-playing games get made.
- **Choose A Career Path** – Discover what it takes to be a professional artist and how to get a career in pop culture.



# Education Programs



## Professional Development

Our unique [professional development sessions](#) provide the opportunity to share ideas, build partnerships, and learn from leaders in the field of pop culture education.

In 2022, Pop Culture Classroom provided professional development sessions for roughly 250 different educators at the Colorado Association of Arts Educators conference and our Educators' Day at FAN EXPO Denver 2022, which we kicked off with a special appreciation event for Colorado educators the night before.

Pop Culture Classroom's professional development programs for educators offer:

- **Hands-On Participation:** Educators can participate in both theoretical and/or methods-based panels during FAN EXPO Denver weekend.
- **Learning:** Educators learn how to leverage this ubiquitous form of cultural expression to further their craft as educators.

- **Discussion:** Educators discuss how popular culture resources, events, and expressions can be successfully integrated into lesson plans for their particular classroom.
- **Lesson Development:** Educators can develop the ability to integrate pop culture into regular education, allowing them to combine relationship development with content education.

Pop Culture Classroom's experts offer a range of training subject matter. Past sessions have included incorporating the following disciplines into academic learning:

- Storytelling Through Comics
- Cosplay and Costuming
- Role-playing Games
- Social and Emotional Development
- Board Game Design
- Interactive Storytelling

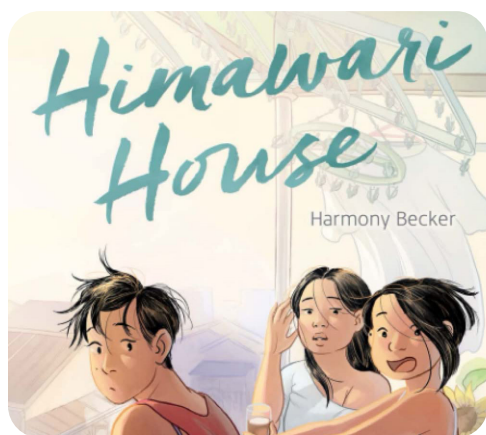


# Excellence in Graphic Literature Awards

In 2022, Pop Culture Classroom held our 5th annual [Excellence in Graphic Literature Awards](#) to help:

- **Educators and librarians:** Identify high-quality graphic literature to use in diverse educational settings.
- **Publishers:** Highlight works that make a significant contribution to graphic literature and promote substantive pop culture education.
- **Parents, Pop Culture Fans, and Other Discerning Readers:** Find compelling, expertly crafted graphic literature to read and enjoy.

## Book of the Year



## Mosaic Award



## Readers' Choice



## Best in Children's



Fiction



Non-Fiction

## Best in Middle Grade

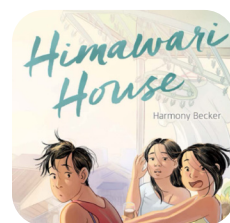


Fiction



Non-Fiction

## Best in Young Adult



Fiction



Non-Fiction

## Best in Adult



Fiction



Non-Fiction



# Colorful History Comics



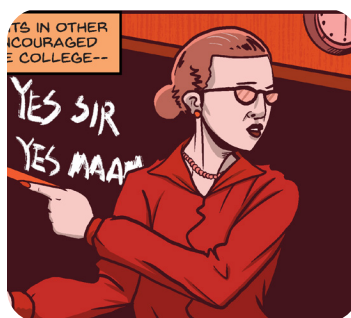
**Colorful History** is Pop Culture Classroom's FREE downloadable comic series about people, places, and events in US history. We released nine new issues in 2022, with more than 3,000 Colorful History downloads last year alone. Each issue includes a teaching guide with Common-Core-aligned discussion questions, project ideas, and more.



#73: How Inflation Works



#72: The History of Halloween



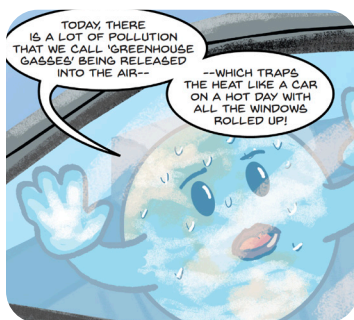
#71: Sal Castro & The East L.A. Walkouts



#70: Immigration & Citizenship



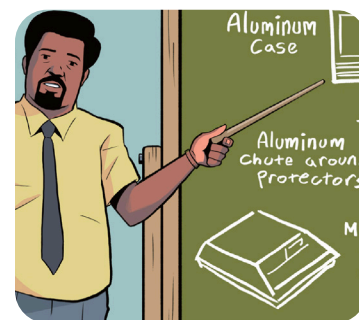
#69: The Great Depression



#68: What is Climate Change?



#67: Cesar Chavez, the Farmworker's Champion



#66: Jerry Lawson and Channel F



#65: A Tale of Dungeons & Dragons

## Download FREE Comics

Download any of our 75+ Colorful History Comics at [PopCultureClassroom.org/comics](https://PopCultureClassroom.org/comics) or by scanning the QR code to the right with your mobile device.







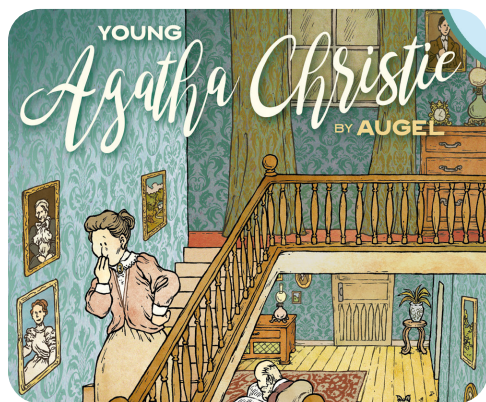
# Graphic Novel Teaching Guides

Pop Culture Classroom's graphic novel and manga teaching guides help teachers use quality graphic literature to promote student learning and success.

In 2022, we worked with Humanoids to create teaching guides for three of comic publisher's graphic novels: **Young Agatha Christie** by William Augel, **Ghosts of Science Past** by Joseph Sieracki and Jesse Lonergan, and **The History of Science Fiction: A Graphic Novel Adventure** by Xavier Dollo & Djibril Morissette-Phan.

## Download Our 2022 Teaching Guides

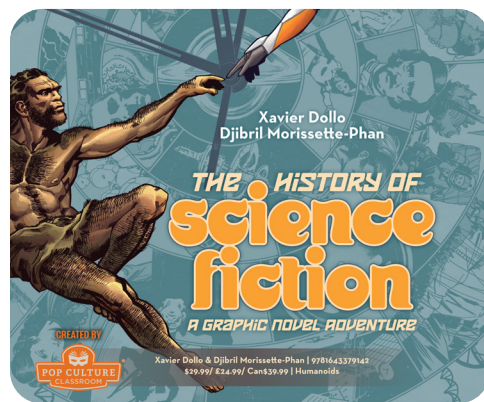
Scan the title's QR code with your mobile device to download the reading guide.



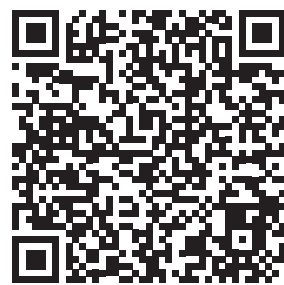
Common Core-aligned for Grades 3-4, with classroom project ideas, discussion questions, and more.



Common Core-aligned for Grades 6-8, with classroom project ideas, discussion questions, and more.



Common Core-aligned for Grades 11-12, packed with exciting projects, discussion topics, and more.



# Events



## FAN EXPO Denver

2022 saw the first full edition of FAN EXPO Denver, where Pop Culture Classroom provided three full days of family-friendly educational program as the event's featured charity.

88 students took part in our Experience the Comics program at FAN EXPO Denver 2022, where they heard from a variety of industry professionals about careers in Pop Culture. Students were also treated to an exclusive panel with *Red Dead Redemption* actors Roger Clark and Rob Wiethoff about voice acting, motion capture, and other aspects of careers in video game production.

Sixteen arts, educational, and cultural organizations from the community appeared in the Pop



Culture Classroom Kids' Lab, offering families interactive learning experiences from groups like History Colorado, the Denver Center for the Performing Arts, the young creators at Tomorrow Makers Studios, and more.

In addition to multiple interactive sessions from our community partners, celebrities like Anthony Daniels (*C3PO*, *Star Wars*), Troy Baker (*The Last of Us*) and Patricia Summersett (*The Legend of Zelda: Breath of the Wild*) appeared on our All-Ages Stage, discussing their careers in pop culture.

Dozens of educators attended Pop Culture Classroom's free Educators' Day at FAN EXPO Denver. Teachers, librarians, and other educators heard from DC comics author and former teacher Kami Garcia about ways pop culture can be used to enhance learning. Pop Culture Classroom welcomed attendees with a special Educators' Appreciation Night in Denver the evening before Educators' Day.

All told, more than 3,500 attendees visited our 9,000 square foot Kids' Lab and All Ages Stage, with an average of 38 people attending adult-focused educational panels at FAN EXPO Denver 2022.







# Events

## PopUP Denver

In October, the organization hosted PopUP Denver 2022 at the McNichols Civic Center Building. The event — a full day of family fun and learning — featured author readings, cosplay and make-up tutorials, presentations from History Colorado, Colorado School of Mines and other community groups, and more pop culture activities. Members of the award-winning video game studio Deck Nine Games (Life is Strange: True Colors, The Expanse: A Telltale Series) also offered advice on careers in video games.



## Cherry Creek STEAM-a-Palooza

During this special day celebrating science, technology, engineering, arts, and math, we served between 300 - 350 students and parents from Cherry Creek School District — who made more than 200 containers of slime in the Pop Culture Classroom Alien Slime Lab!

## Colorado Arts Educators Conference

Pop Culture Classroom brought our professional development sessions to November's Colorado Arts Educators Association Conference in Breckenridge, offering the presentations "Video Game Designers in the Art Classroom" and "Tips for Teaching Comics". The event signifies Pop Culture Classroom's return to conferences and events where we can directly engage with those most interested in our work.

## Quiz for a Cause

Working with Geeks Who Drink's Quiz for a Cause program, Pop Culture Classroom hosted a night of trivia, fun, and fundraising at the Alamo Draft House and



Cinema in September. Several hundred dollars were raised in support of our work.

## Educators' Appreciation Night

The night before FAN EXPO and Educators' Day, we gathered at Bierstadt Lagerhaus to celebrate local educators and thank them for their work. We gave away \$1,700 worth of in-kind donations as trivia prizes to the educators who attended.

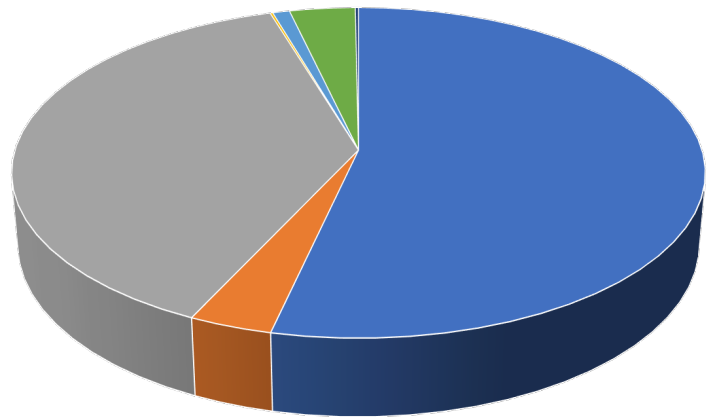


# Financials

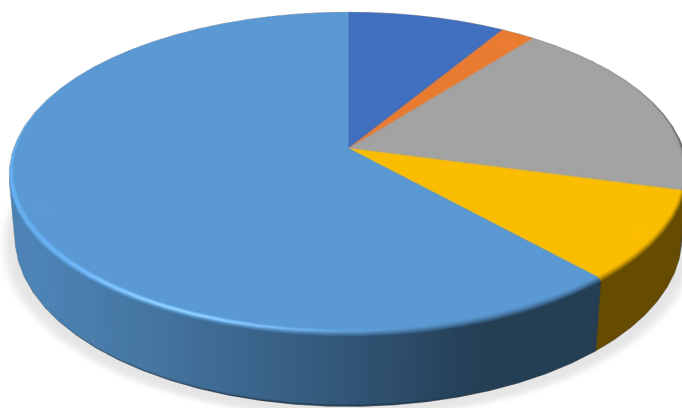


## 2022 INCOME: \$730,565

- Government Grants
- Foundation Grants
- Businesses
- Events
- Individual Donations
- Fees
- Other



## 2022 EXPENSES: \$656,763



- Programs
- Events
- Admin
- Marketing
- Staff



# Our 2022 Supporters

Our work is made possible by the generous support of...

## Foundation and Public Support



Colorado  
Creative  
Industries



Klein Family Trust

## In-Kind Sponsors

McNichols Civic Center  
Denver Center for the Performing Arts  
Colorado Opera  
Colorado Music Festival  
Colorado Mountain Club  
Arvada Center  
Denver After School Alliance

## Individual Donors

Suzie Ahlers  
Heather Baker  
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Matthew Cole  
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Joel Fischer  
Sam Fuqua  
Casey Gale  
Claudia Garcia  
David Gehlert  
Sean George  
Stephen Godbout  
Adrienne Gower  
Matt Hess

Travis Hill  
Christina Imholt  
Tom and Mel Jensen  
Kate Johnson  
Karin Kirchoff  
Paul Le  
Kevin Light  
Peter Lindstrom  
Mary Loftis  
Cassidy Lovenstein  
Lisa Lujan  
Megan Malave  
Chelsea Marx  
Suveen Mathaudhu  
Marissa Mink  
Esteban Morin  
Michael Morrow  
Sarah Mosher  
Brody Mulligan  
Lisbet Myrvold  
James Pancoast  
Kristen Perkins  
Rachel Sellers  
Bill Shrum  
Ann Wilson  
Ken Zinn

## Corporate Support



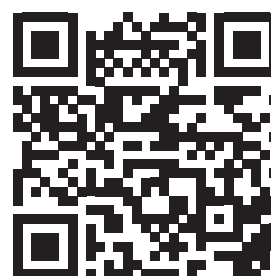


# Get Involved



## Subscribe

Sign up for emails about Pop Culture Classroom's free comics, curriculum, teaching guides, event updates, in-school programs, and more!



## Volunteer

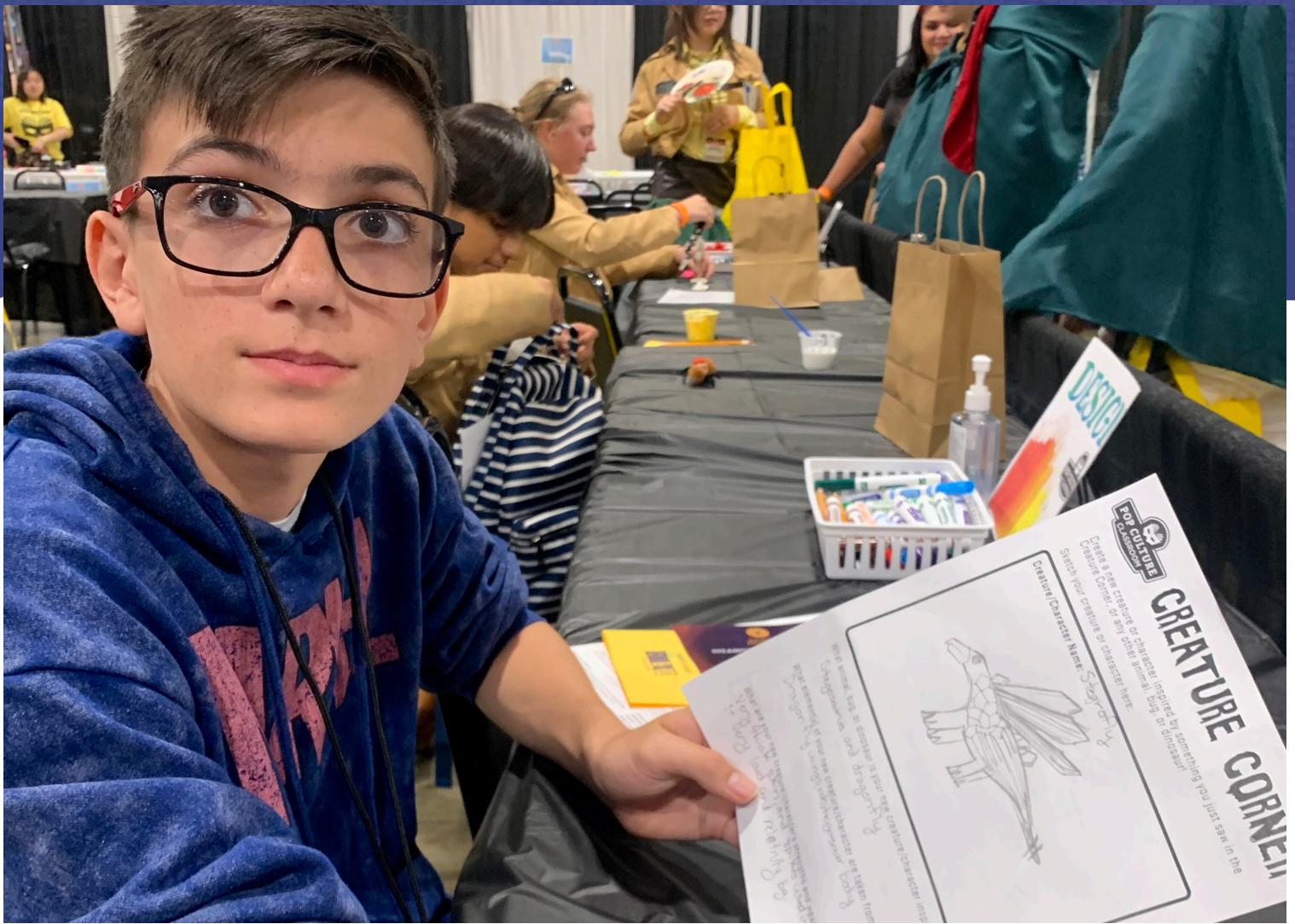
Pop Culture Classroom is looking for skilled, excited volunteers to help us in our mission to support education, imagination, and inclusion through the power of pop culture.



## Support Our Work

We envision individuals transformed by the educational power of popular culture who create diverse, inclusive, and engaged communities. Ready to team up?





**Pop Culture Classroom works to inspire a love of learning, increase literacy, celebrate diversity, and build community through the tools of popular culture and the power of self-expression.**



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