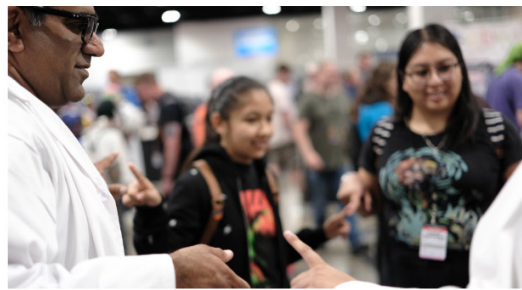
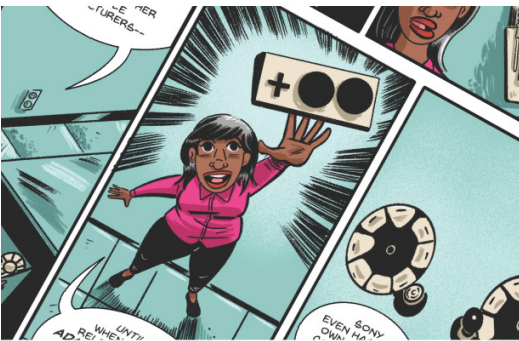


# POP CULTURE CLASSROOM



## 2023 ANNUAL REPORT

# 2023 ANNUAL REPORT

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# FROM THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR



Dear Friend,

2023 was an ambitious — and impactful — year for Pop Culture Classroom. It was a year of incredible memories and a renewed focus on helping hard-working educators with our educational resources, in-person workshops, and community events.

These last few years have been tough on educators. Their students have faced an epidemic of social isolation,<sup>1</sup> school absenteeism,<sup>2</sup> student disengagement,<sup>3</sup> and declining national testing scores.<sup>4</sup>

Yet, throughout 2023, we were reminded again and again that improved literacy, a love of learning, community connection, and an appreciation and respect for diversity — the core elements of our mission — offer exciting opportunities for educators to promote student engagement and success.

This is why we offer free classroom-ready, standards-aligned history comics, curricula, and graphic novel reading recommendations and teaching guides. Helping educators and parents serve their students is also why we create innovative in-person workshops for classrooms, libraries, and other places where kids and teens learn. And it's also why we create family-friendly community events and host professional development sessions for educators at FAN EXPO Denver, New York Comic Con, and other events.

In the report that follows, I hope you can see the positive difference our arts and education programs made in 2023 and will consider supporting our work in whatever way you can.

With deepest gratitude,

Matt Hess  
Executive Director  
Pop Culture Classroom



Notes

<sup>1</sup> U.S. Surgeon General. "Our Epidemic of Loneliness and Isolation." May 2023. U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. Retrieved online February 26, 2024, from <https://www.hhs.gov/sites/default/files/surgeon-general-social-connection-advisory.pdf>

<sup>2</sup> Meltzer, Erica. ChalkBeat. October 4, 2023. "Absenteeism remains high, with 31% of Colorado students missing too much school last year." Retrieved online February 26, 2024, from <https://www.chalkbeat.org/colorado/2023/10/4/23904009/colorado-chronic-absenteeism-increase-2022-2023-attendance>

<sup>3</sup> "2023: Student Engagement." Gradient Learning Poll. Retrieved online February 26, 2024, from [https://gradientlearning.go-vip.net/gradientlearningwebsite/wp-content/uploads/sites/2/2023/01/GradientLearningPoll\\_StudentEngagement.pdf](https://gradientlearning.go-vip.net/gradientlearningwebsite/wp-content/uploads/sites/2/2023/01/GradientLearningPoll_StudentEngagement.pdf)

<sup>4</sup> U.S. Department of Education. Institute of Education Sciences, National Center for Education Statistics, National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), 2022 Reading Assessment. Retrieved online February 26, 2024, from <https://www.nationsreportcard.gov/>





# Our Work

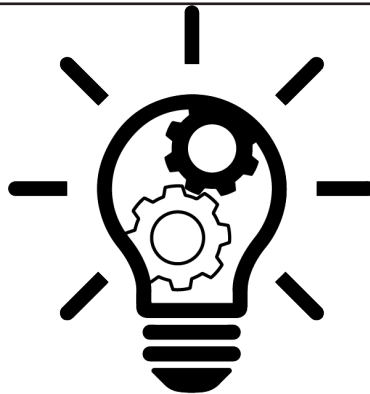
**Pop Culture Classroom works directly with students and offers tools to help teachers, librarians, and other educators incorporate pop culture in their classrooms.** We also host community events with one-of-a-kind opportunities for kids, teens, fans, and families to learn, create, and connect.

## RESOURCES



Free comics and other educational resources for students and educators

## EDUCATIONAL OUTREACH

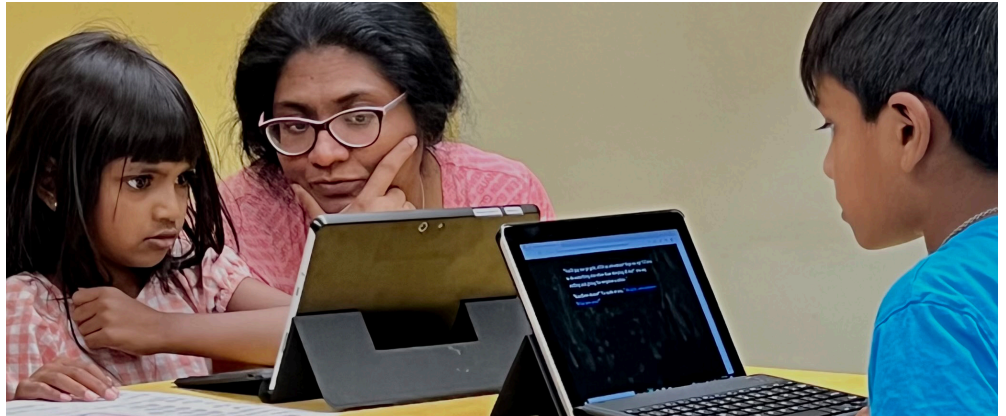
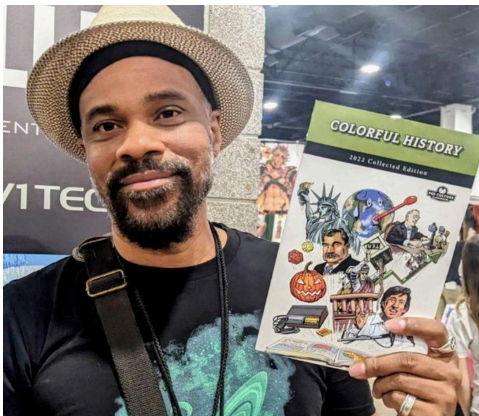


In-person workshops for students and professional development for educators

## COMMUNITY EVENTS



Unique events and in-person experiences that combine learning, creativity, and social connection using pop culture

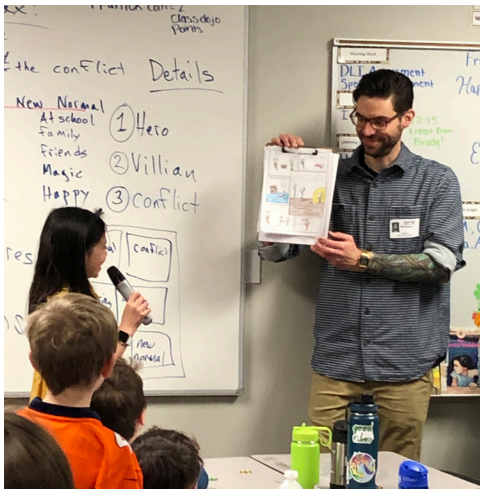




# Our Team



**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.



## BOARD OF DIRECTORS

Tone Ellis de Jesus, President  
Kyle (Ky) Burnett, Vice President  
Esteban Morin  
Todd Fukai  
Jess Castellano  
Ashley Wilfred

## STAFF

Executive Director - Matt Hess  
Director of Education – Matt Slayter  
Outreach Program Manager – Rachel Brazell  
Director of Operations – Angie Morency  
Director of Events and Partnerships - Emilee Klein  
Director of Development and Communications – Chris Burley

## COLORFUL HISTORY COMICS

R. Alan Brooks, Colorful History Art Manager

## OUTREACH INSTRUCTORS

Sol Aldinger Jason  
Abrams Jorge Arroyo  
Erik Jacobson Terra  
Necessary Faith  
Ojebuoboh Tera  
Midori Proper Joe  
Rubald Katherine  
Scott Emily Townsend  
Will Whitaker



# 2023 Accomplishments



## FREE RESOURCES



- **7**  
New **Colorful History** Comics
- **3**  
Teaching Guides
- **6,399**  
Downloads

## EDUCATIONAL OUTREACH

- **719**  
Students Served at  
Workshops
- **309**  
Programming  
Hours at Workshops



## COMMUNITY EVENTS



- **12**  
Public Events
- **Nearly 7,000**  
Kids and Families  
Served at Events

## FEEDBACK

In our surveys of our workshop participants:

- **87% of Students**  
said that Pop Culture Classroom valued their talents, interest, and opinions.
- **100% of Teachers**  
said that their students improved creative and critical thinking skills after attending a Pop Culture Classroom workshop.



# Educational Outreach



## Workshops and Camps

As a core part of our mission, PCC designs highly customizable workshops which bring pop culture topics to educational spaces using top quality pedagogical practices for youth development and the years of art education expertise of our teaching instructors.

In 2023, we served more than 700 Denver-area kids and teens, offering unique in-person learning experiences in classrooms, libraries, and community centers in the Denver, Colorado, metro area.

### Current Workshops

- 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
- Social-Emotional Learning through Dungeons & Dragons

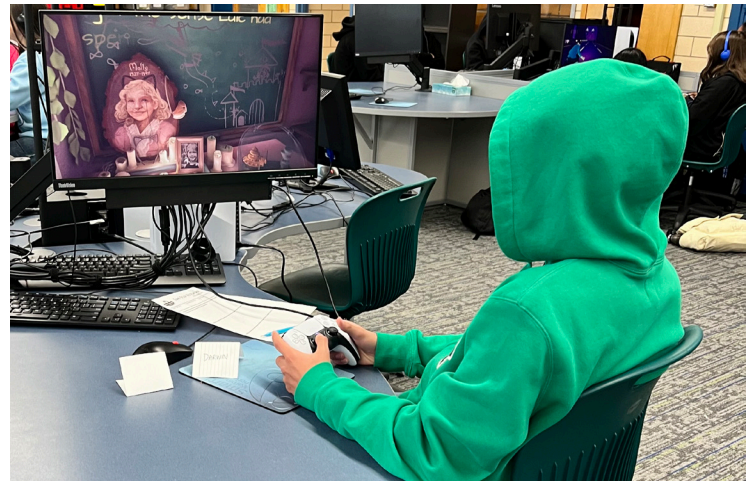
## Innovation Programs

Pop Culture Classroom continued to break ground in 2023, continuing to develop exciting new programs to engage kids and teens in active, transformational learning.

### Literacy Education in Adolescent Detention (LEAD) Program

Pop Culture Classroom's teaching artists worked with students at the Gilliam Youth Services Center this fall on a graphic novel book study and comic-

creation course. Youth participants created concept art work that reflected their own backgrounds, stories, and journeys of personal transformation before collaborating with the professional artists on our teaching staff who finished the visual representations. The artwork will be released in spring of 2024.



## Video Game Design

Director of Education Matt Slayter, our teaching artists, and Denver Public Schools teachers Olivia Conner and Kendall Graham, developed a special video game design program at the Denver Center of International Studies.

In the program, students in the STEAM Engineering elective work toward creating their own narrative-based video games with a pro-social message using Dreams — a game creation suite on PlayStation consoles. The program launched in early 2024 with high student interest and engagement.

The new student-created games will be showcased at a special exhibit in Denver in the spring. This program



# Educational Outreach

was made possible with funding from the Redline Arts in Society Grant.

## Educators' Day at FAN EXPO Denver

This year, Pop Culture Classroom welcomed 142 teachers, librarians, and other educators from Colorado and beyond to our annual special day of professional development at FAN EXPO DENVER.

Educators learned about using pop culture and creative self-expression to promote student engagement and success at sessions such as "D&D + TTRPGs for the Secondary Education English Classroom," "Discovering the Metallurgical Secrets of Beskar," and "Making Narrative-Adventure Games with Deck Nine."

Colorado Governor Jared Polis offered closing remarks, and screen legend Christopher Lloyd (*Back to the Future*, *the Addams Family*)



making a special appearance, it was a day to remember!

## Other Outreach to Colorado Educators

Pop Culture Classroom increased our efforts to connect with key educational stakeholders in 2023, appearing at The Rocky Mountain College of Art's Educators' Day in August and the Colorado Association for Gifted and Talented fall conference.

At each, we met passionate educators who wanted to deepen their use of pop culture in their classroom and were excited to learn about the free resources PCC has to offer. At PCC we believe no educator should have to pay for classroom curriculum!

## Professionals Day at New York Comic Con

Pop Culture Classroom returned to New York Comic Con, participating in the LitX session "Titles You Should be Teaching and Reading" and offering our own well-received presentations on "Teaching Kids to Make (Good) Comics" and "Parenting and Teaching Tips from The Legend of Zelda: Tears of the Kingdom."





# Resources: Colorful History



Pop Culture Classroom released seven new issues of our popular Colorful History comic series about significant people, places, events, and ideas in U.S. history, each with substantive teaching guides to enhance classroom learning and engagement.

## 2023's Free Downloadable Colorful History Comics



### Anime in America

Story and Art by Terra Necessary, Lettering by R. Alan Brooks

### The Harlem Renaissance

Story and Lettering by R. Alan Brooks, Art by Marcus Kwame Anderson

### Ruth Bader Ginsberg and the U.S. Supreme Court

Art and Story by Ally Shwed, Lettering by R. Alan Brooks

**Scan the QR code above to download these comics and many more!**



### History of the U.S. Railroad

Story and Art by Will Whitaker, Lettering by R. Alan Brooks

### A Two-Spirit (Indigenous Queer) Perspective

Story by Cristoso Apache, Art by Moe Butterfly, Lettering by R. Alan Brooks

### Accessibility in Video Games

Story by Matt Slayter, Art by Zak Kinsella, Lettering by R. Alan Brooks

### The Wright Brothers: First to Fly

Story by Phil Steffes, Wings Over the Rockies Air and Space Museum, Art by Ally Shwed, Lettering by R. Alan Brooks



# Excellence in Graphic Literature Awards

Celebrating the best in graphic literature, the Excellence in Graphic Literature (EGL) Awards promote and honor the graphic novel titles that are most compelling and useful in educational settings. The EGL Awards 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.



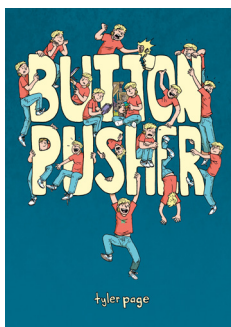
## Book of the Year

The highest-scored graphic literature, selected from the year's category winners.

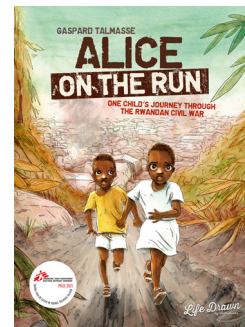
## Mosaic Award

Celebrating stories about and from diverse communities, ethnicities, nationalities, faiths, and identities.

**Button Pusher**  
by Tyler Page  
(First Second Books)



**Button Pusher**  
by Tyler Page  
(First Second Books)



## 2023 Category Winners

### Children's

Fiction



### Middle Grade

Fiction



Nonfiction



### Young Adult

Fiction



Nonfiction

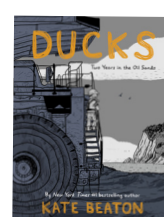


### Adult

Fiction



Nonfiction





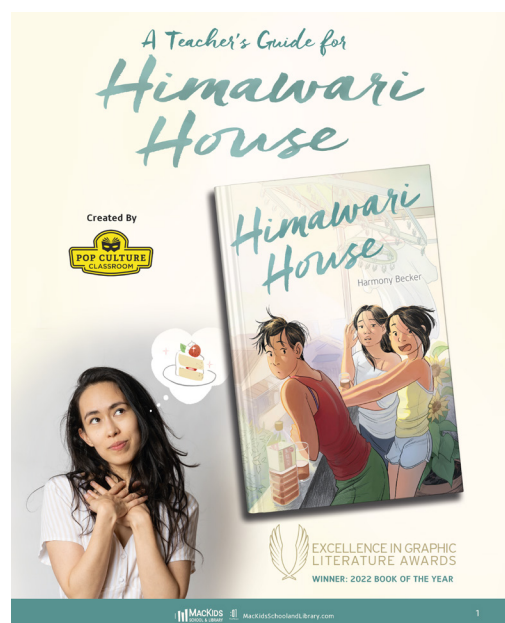
# Graphic Novel Teaching Guides



Graphic novel teaching guides are an important way Pop Culture Classroom helps educators engage students. These free resources are produced in collaboration with top publishers. Each includes discussion questions, project ideas, and Common Core Standards-aligned tools and supports for educators to use in their classrooms the moment they download the guide.

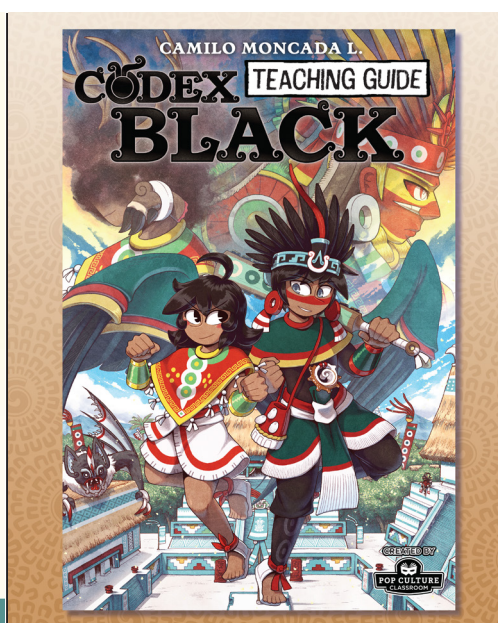
In 2023, we produced three new guides:

## Himawari House



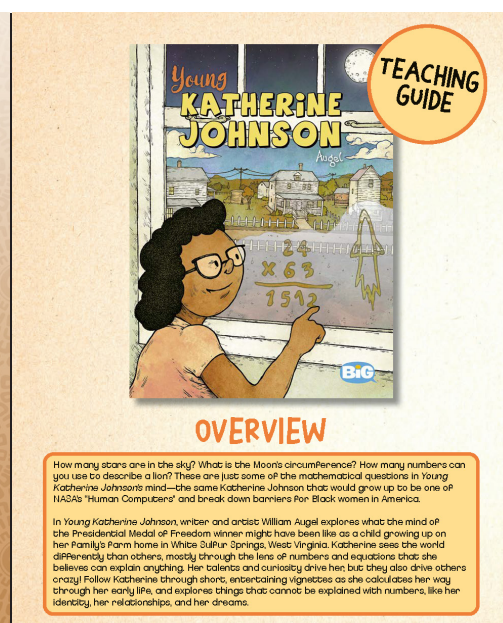
With the teaching guide for **Himawari House** — winner of Pop Culture Classroom's 2022 Excellence in Graphic Literature Awards' Book of the Year — students can learn about finding your identity, East Asian cultures, family & friendship, and living outside your comfort zone.

## Codex Black



Using Pop Culture Classroom's teaching guide for IDW Publishing's graphic novel, **Codex Black: A Fire Among Clouds**, educators can help students explore Mesoamerican history, myth, and legend through historical fiction.

## Young Katherine Johnson



Pop Culture Classroom's free, downloadable graphic novel teaching guide for **Young Katherine Johnson** by William August (Humanoids), helps 3rd and 4th grade readers learn about the power of history, math, and imagination!



# Community Events

Throughout 2023, Pop Culture Classroom created unique opportunities for educators, students, families, and fans to learn, create, and connect — reaching thousands at community events in Colorado and beyond.

## FAN EXPO Denver

With three days of programming, FAN EXPO Denver is our biggest event of the year, and 2023 was no exception.

### Kids' Lab + All Ages Stage

More than 3,700 kids, parents, and fans visited our Kids' Lab and All Ages Stage during FAN EXPO Denver 2023, which featured interactive learning experiences from Pop Culture Classroom and 15 community partners.

Our team helped attendees create hundreds of original keepsake fantasy maps, work to solve the puzzles in our Epic Portal Pursuit interactive adventure, learn to draw cartoon animals with our instructors, and much more.

Attendees learned writing insights from the Rocky Mountain Fiction Writers. The Colorado School of Mines shared fun facts from science fiction. Families explored local botany and climate with the Denver Botanic Gardens and



history with History Colorado. The Colorado Ballet held an Addams Family Dance party, and kids and teens explored their musical interest with the Boulder School of Rock.

And, since FAN EXPO Denver wouldn't be complete without some celebrity appearances,



Sarah Natochenny (the voice of Pokemon's Ash Ketchum) and Marty Grabstein (Courage the Cowardly Dog) shared stories from the All-Ages stage, and Christopher Lloyd (*Back to the Future*, *Addams Family*) joined Governor Jared Polis after the governor's remarks at Educators' Day.

### Experience the Comics

More than 250 kids and teens participated in our Experience the Comics program at FAN EXPO Denver. The program provides special programming and FAN EXPO Denver access for students who may not otherwise be able to attend the event.



# Community Events



## Cherry Creek STEAM-a-Palooza

At October's Cherry Creek STEAM-a-Palooza, we served more than 300 students with a brand-new Foley Lab activity. Students learned about making practical sound effects and recreated sounds from cartoons, video games, and movies.

## Aurora Mini-Con

In October, Pop Culture Classroom joined Aurora Public Library's annual mini-con event, where we worked with kids and teens to create their own fantasy maps and play through a Text-Based Pirate Adventure.

## Lafayette Mini Con

Working with Lafayette, Colorado Public Library and The Friends of the Lafayette Library Foundation, Pop Culture Classroom produced our first-ever Lafayette Mini Con. The event, attended by 676 kids and parents, featured attractions like:

- Live Action Role-Playing Duels
- Science Exploration
- Choose-Your-Own Adventure Pirate Adventure
- Video Game Library and Gaming Area
- Cryptid Arts and Crafts
- Panels and Workshops
- Prop and Costume Design
- Drag Queen Storytime with Shirly Delta Blow



## Celebrating Local Supporters

Recognizing the important role local pop culture fans play in supporting our work, we also held two special social events. Geeks Who Drink's Quiz for a Cause hosted a special trivia fundraising event in support of our work in the lead-up to FAN EXPO Denver 2023. In November, we ended the year with a night of holiday celebrations and making pop culture ornaments.

## New York Comic Con

New York Comic Con is one of the very largest gatherings of comics creators, publishers, and fans in the United States—and we were delighted to return to the event in 2023.

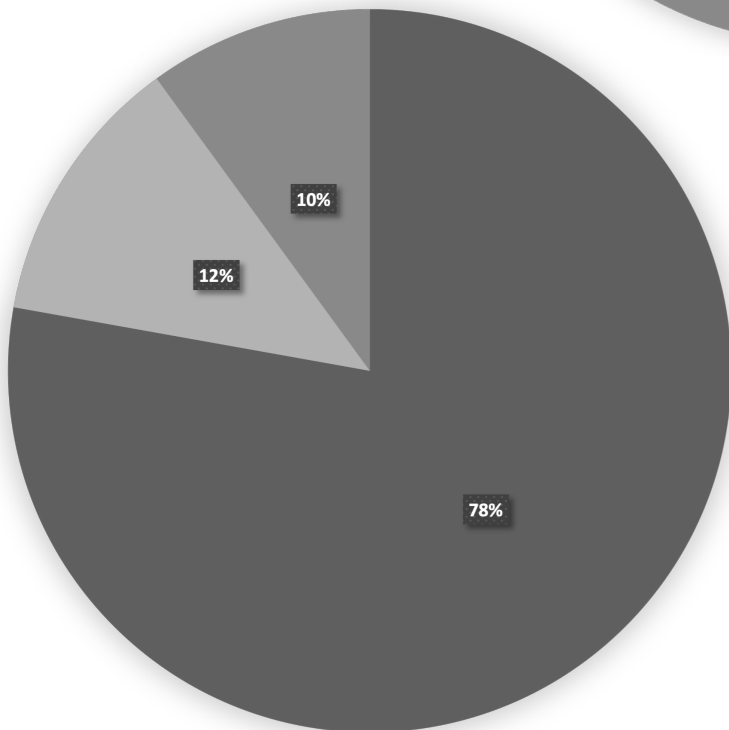
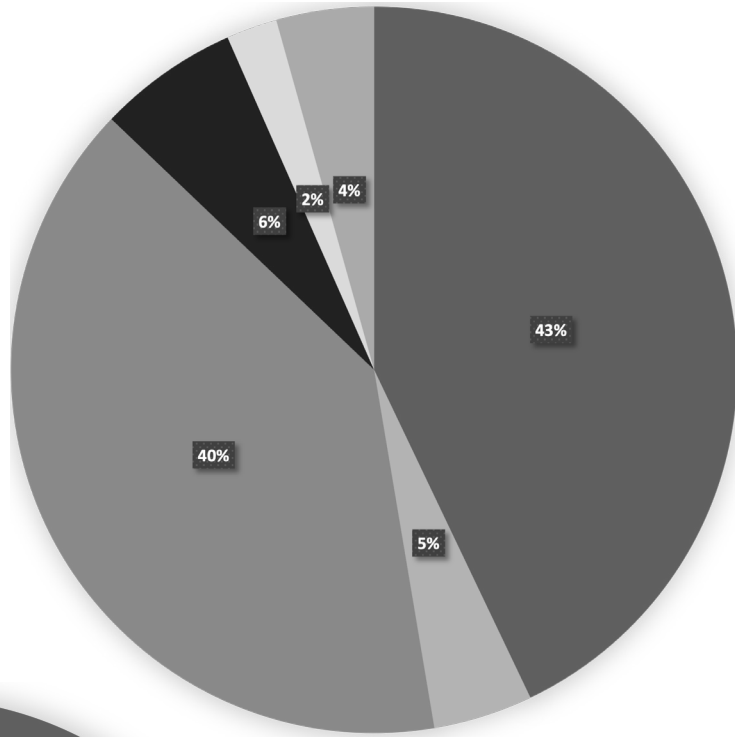
In addition to our panels and presentations for educators, librarians, and pop culture professionals at New York Comic Con, our tiny team of staff and volunteers hosted two at-capacity activities in the event's Family Zone: craft wand crafting and fantasy map-making.



# Our 2023 Financials

**2023 Revenue:  
\$643,984**

- Corporate
- Foundation
- SCFD
- Government (non-SCFD)
- Individuals
- Earned revenue



**2023 Expenses:  
\$663,996**

- Program
- Admin
- Fundraising



# Our 2023 Supporters



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

## Foundation and Public Support



## Corporate Support Support



## Individual Donors

Cristina Alba  
Sol & Lorien Arie  
Jessica Austin  
Mack Bailey  
Nenita Berig  
Bryan Bird  
Alyson Blakely  
Booksweet  
Erik Burgeson  
Christopher Burley  
Rebecca Cales  
Jennie Cartwright  
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Charles Cooper  
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Cheryl Klein  
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Margaret Kono  
Adam Kullberg  
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Talat Mir  
Esteban Morin  
Patricia Morland  
Mike Morrow  
Margaret Morse  
Sarah Mosher  
Brody Mulligan  
Christopher Newby



# Our 2023 Supporters

## Individual Donors (Cont'd.)

Andrew Newman-Dilfer  
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Nancy Nyhus  
Clinton O'Brien  
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Margaret Ocken  
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Ashley Wilfred  
Isaac Wilfred  
Mary Wollard  
Katherine Ziegler  
Ken Zinn





# Get Involved!



**Find out how YOU can help educators  
inspire, educate, and connect kids and teens  
using the tools of creative self-expression and  
comics, gaming, and other popular culture.**

Visit [PopCultureClassroom.org/welcome](https://PopCultureClassroom.org/welcome) or scan the QR code below





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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Denver, CO 80218

[PopCultureClassroom.org](http://PopCultureClassroom.org) | Phone: 303.325.1236