



The Phoenix ? a gateway to reading

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The Phoenix Comic introduced by **David Fickling**

David Fickling explains why he loves comics so much, he started his own.

When I was a child there was no other experience like holding in my own hand the latest and unread issue of my favourite comic. It was called **Boys World**, and that feeling of excitement every Friday when it dropped through the letterbox was pure delight. For me and thousands of children all over the country that feeling bordered on the euphoric. What brilliance! A profusion of stories, funny and serious, heroes and villains and adventures. And it was ALL mine to devour. Now that really is reading for pleasure! I didn't even think of it as reading.

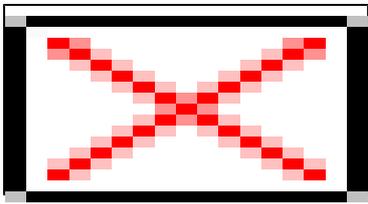
Everyone had their favourite comic, there were so many, over thirty weekly titles for girls and boys. The loss of these wonderful publications was and remains a terrible tragedy for the country and its children. The real pity is that we didn't realise the massive cultural platform comics provided. They were, and are, one of the foundations of much of our modern literary culture. I am a book editor and I would say at least half my story sense, if I have any, came from comics. That's why so many top authors now pay tribute to them.

?It was as much through **The Eagle** and **Classics Illustrated**, those wonderfully evocative comic books of the classics, that I first came to a love of stories. I loved the speed of the stories, the breathless excitement I felt as I turned the page. I am now a story maker myself, so I owe a lot to my ?comic beginnings!? What matters hugely is that children should be excited by stories, in whatever form, whether in books, CDs, comics, movies - it doesn't matter. For many children comics are a way in, a way to become a reader. That's what they were for me.? Michael Morpurgo

?Comics formed a vital and vigorous part of my childhood reading. **The Eagle** was the main British comic, of course ? to anyone born just after the war, as I was, it came as a great burst of life and fun and colour in a rather drab world. I still feel the thrill that made me tremble with excitement when the weekly comic arrived with the papers. I'd seize it with avidity and retreat to some corner of the garden and fling myself down and devour it like a hyena. There was something so clean and powerful about the storytelling in a comic ? so direct, so swift and easy, as if the delight and excitement of the story passed immediately into my blood.? Philip Pullman

And it's not just those two literary heavy weights. Lots of our most beloved writers are huge comic fans. From George R. R. Martin to Dame Jacqueline Wilson, from Malorie Blackman to Derek Landy. They can all see the tremendous value and excitement embedded in great comics.

And that's exactly why we started **The Phoenix**! Because when we lost those comics of decades past, I don't think we fully appreciated their almost unparalleled ability to nurture new readers. And comics are great for growing new readers, and writers, thinkers and creators. Unlike so many reading experiences that children encounter, comics are first and foremost about fun and entertainment. They are relaxed reading. Pure enjoyment. And it's only through enjoyment and the urge to read ourselves that we get a real love of words and stories.



But there's one other top secret quality of comics that very few of us remember but is also part and parcel of why they are such incredible reader-makers for all our children: and that is the sense of ownership they engender. My comic was mine! As far as I was concerned it, and everything in it, didn't belong to anyone else but me, every story, strip and joke seemed to have been made for me alone. And what joy, it came every single week without fail and a bumper version at Christmas.

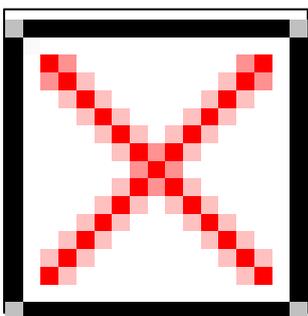
That's why **The Phoenix** comes out every week. There's no point in a monthly comic. A week is the longest any child should be expected to wait! The feeling that the reading belongs to me and to no one else is the secret heart of reading for pleasure. How can we be the only literate culture on the planet that no longer has story comics for children? How did we mislay them? No wonder we are slipping down the international reading charts and that fifty percent of readers who can read don't. Everybody waffles on about literacy but how do you take action? The best way to solve that problem is to provide reading material that children flock to like the promised land. For reading, comics are that heaven.

We want **The Phoenix** to bring all that back for today's children. It is not a piece of nostalgia, it is the restoration of a natural right of childhood but fresh and modern and packed with brilliance. Because the best way to get children hooked on reading is to give them access to awesome, thrilling and hilarious stories that make them laugh and hold their breath with excitement. Stories that delight and even ones that are a little scary. Maybe even especially those!

If we get **The Phoenix** right UK comics will rise from the ashes and soar again. We can bring back comic brilliance to our children. More than that, I have never known a publication that has prompted so many children to get their own crayons and pencils out to make their own strips. Any child seems to think they can naturally make a comic themselves. Because they can! If you don't believe me then come to Oxford or go online to gaze at the legendary Phoenix Wall of Awesomeness. It's uh?awesome!

And who knows, we might even inspire the creative powerhouses of tomorrow! And we have some fantastic artists and writers to achieve that with. From swashbuckling pirates and dinosaurs in Neill Cameron and Daniel Hartwell's **Pirates of Pangaea** to the galactic adventures of James Turner's **Star Cat**, from digging up the past with Adam Murphy's **Corpse Talk** to digging up the garden with Gary Northfield in **Gary's Garden**, **The Phoenix** has brilliant stories to satisfy every appetite. But don't take my word for it!

There's a little teaser of **The Phoenix** to wet your appetite in the digital edition of Books for Keeps ([Download extract as a PDF](#) [3]). And if you like it you can get a great four issue free trial too! Visit www.thephoenixcomic.co.uk [4]



David Fickling is a children's book editor and publisher. In July 2013 launched his new independent publishing venture, David Fickling Books www.davidficklingbooks.com [5] He won the 2013 Branford Boase Award, given annually to the author and editor of the most outstanding debut novel for children for **A Boy and a Bear in a Boat** by another star of **The Phoenix**, Dave Shelton.

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