WILL EISNER WEEK
PLAYBOOK

Celebrate Will Eisner Week • March 1–7
READ
A GRAPHIC NOVEL

Will Eisner Week is an annual celebration honoring the legacy of Will Eisner, champion of the graphic novel. This international event is dedicated to promoting graphic novel literacy, free speech, and the sequential arts.

For information and events in your area, visit willeisner.com

Will Eisner Week 2020 Poster
Prior Will Eisner Week Posters
Dear Comics Enthusiast,

Will Eisner Week is named for the comics and graphic novel pioneer Will Eisner, who was one of the most innovative and revered figures in comics history. Will Eisner Week is an annual celebration of his legacy and the world of comics and graphic novels with events presented in libraries, schools, museums, bookstores, and comic book shops around the world. Were he alive today, Will Eisner would be thrilled about the growth and appreciation of comics and graphic novels. He was a beacon of light, impressing us with his relentless drive and innovation.

This Will Eisner Week Playbook provides information to help you plan your own Will Eisner Week event in March. We hope it inspires you and your organization to join us in this annual celebration of comics and graphic novels. The pages that follow are filled with information that will hopefully persuade and encourage you to join us.

We hope you enjoy reading the playbook and look forward to hearing your plans!

Danny Fingeroth
Chair, Will Eisner Week

Nancy and Carl Gropper
Will and Ann Eisner Family Foundation

Visit www.willeisner.com
Like Will Eisner Official Site on Facebook
Follow @WillEisner on Twitter
1. Will Eisner Week

Will Eisner Week is an annual series of events celebrating comics and sequential art, graphic novel literacy, free speech, and the legacy of comics and graphic novel pioneer, Will Eisner. Will Eisner was one of the most innovative figures in the history of comics and graphic novels.

Will Eisner Week occurs annually in March in conjunction with Will Eisner’s March 6th birthday. Will Eisner Week began in 2009 with two events in New York City and has grown every year since. In 2017, the Centennial of Will Eisner’s birth, there were over 100 events held in cities throughout the United States and Internationally, as well as podcasts and cyberspace events. With your help, we hope to exceed that number and achieve Will Eisner’s dreams for the sequential art medium that he championed.

The Will Eisner Week Playbook is a “living document” and has grown year-by-year with additional contributions and new suggestions. The Playbook provides ideas and tools to help you plan, create, organize, and promote a Will Eisner Week event at your location.

Will Eisner Week is for everyone, whether you’re…
- a librarian
- an educator
- a comics scholar
- a retailer
- or a comics fan

We hope this Playbook inspires you to join us and organize your own event.

For more information visit [www.willeisner.com](http://www.willeisner.com) or email [info@willeisner.com](mailto:info@willeisner.com).
2. About Will Eisner: Creator, Publisher, & Entrepreneur

Will Eisner (March 6, 1917 – Jan. 3, 2005) was a one-of-a-kind genius, that rare figure of whom it can be said, comics and graphic novels, as we know them today, would not exist without him.

He was one of the pioneers in the American Comic Book Industry, proving himself a master of a variety of artistic and literary styles. His landmark comic series *The Spirit* (1940–1952) was noted for its expressive artwork and breathtaking experiments in content and form.

In 1978, Will Eisner popularized the term graphic novel with the publication of his book *A Contract with God and Other Tenement Stories*, which was then followed by three decades of extraordinary work, much of it examining topics in comics form that had never before been dealt with in that medium. Some of it, like the works of Saul Bellow and Philip Roth, dealt with the Jewish-American experience. His work also explored themes of love, death, loyalty, life in the big city, and more – including humor and science fiction.

Will Eisner was one of those rare practitioners who was adept at both the creative and business aspects of the medium. He owned most of the properties that he created and co-founded Eisner-Iger, one of the first comics “shops,” where comics creators worked together. The list of well-known comics creators who passed through his shop en route to becoming comics professionals...
themselves is amazing. They included Jack Kirby, Jules Feiffer, Al Jaffee, Nick Cardy, Mike Ploog, and many others.

Will Eisner pioneered yet another facet of comic art - its use as a highly effective instructional and educational tool. Drafted into the Army during WWII, he combined image and text to teach GI’s about maintaining their equipment. The comic format proved to be more quickly and easily understood by the soldiers than the dry technical language of standard Army manuals alone. He went on to use sequential art for instructional purposes by publishing *PS Magazine* for the Army and producing pamphlets for industry and government. He later championed its use in teaching children who were reluctant learners.

Eisner was also an early contributor to formal comics studies with his textbooks *Comics and Sequential Art* (1985), *Graphic Storytelling and Visual Narrative* (1995) and *Expressive Anatomy* (2005). He taught at New York’s School of Visual Arts for twenty years, alongside other famous comic creators such as Harvey Kurtzman and Art Spiegelman. Eisner was an evangelist and goodwill ambassador for comics, burning with a passion to show and tell people that comics stood on an equal footing with other storytelling media. As part of this, he lent his name to the prestigious Will Eisner Awards, the Oscars of the Comics Industry, presented each year at the world's foremost comics convention, San Diego’s Comic-Con International.

Will Eisner passed away in 2005 at age 87, having just completed *The Plot*, a work of non-fiction, which was another significant graphic novel achievement. 2017 marked the centennial of Will Eisner’s birth and included the publication of the centennial edition of *A Contract with God*, and two original art exhibitions traveling to museums and festivals in the US and Europe, along with a companion hardcover catalogue, *Will Eisner: The Centennial Celebration, 1917-2017*. 

Praise for Will Eisner

“Eisner was not only ahead of his times; the present times are still catching up to him.” —JOHN UPDIKE (Pulitzer Prize, *Rabbit Run*)

"An American storyteller, like Ray Bradbury, like O.Henry." —NEIL GAIMAN (*Sandman, Coraline*)

“Eisner is the single person most responsible for giving comics its brains.” —ALAN MOORE (*Watchmen, From Hell*)

“Will Eisner created the world of comics as I knew it.” —MICHAEL CHABON (Pulitzer Prize)

“He was a cartoonist other cartoonists swiped from...Will Eisner is a national treasure.” —JULES FEIFFER (Pulitzer Prize)

“Will Eisner is the heart and mind of American comics.” —SCOTT MCCLOUD (*Understanding Comics*)

“[Will Eisner is] an inspiration to several generations of cartoonists.” —ART SPIEGELMAN (Pulitzer Prize, *Maus*)
3. Will Eisner Week Ideas

So where do you start? All successful programs have very simple beginnings, and whether you work in a comic book shop, a library, an independent bookstore or simply know somewhere to hold an event, we created this playbook to give you some great ideas to launch your own annual Will Eisner Week program. Please read on!

**Where Can You Host Your Event?**

The venues for Will Eisner Week events have included:

- Libraries
- Schools of Art and Design
- Museums
- Colleges and Universities
- Retailers, Bookstores, and Comic Book Shops
- Pubs and Restaurants

Of course, events don’t have to be limited to the above venues. Other ideas are always welcome…

**Partnerships Bring Great Opportunities**

Will Eisner Week provides an excellent opportunity for librarians, educators and retailers to connect and create a mutually beneficial network and support system. A retailer’s goals for a Will Eisner Week event will be different from those of a library, college, art school, or a tavern’s. By the same token, the various venues can complement each other. A coffee shop or tavern may have a reading of Eisner’s work, but could also partner with a local retailer for book sales at the event, and may also lean on the expertise of a local educator or librarian, and so on.

**Will Eisner Week Programming for Librarians and Educators**

Start a graphic novel book club. Attract new members with the superheroes they know and then introduce them to the work of popular creators such as Raina Telgemeier and Gene Luen Yang. Create a display of Graphic Novels and challenge readers to read them all. Reach out to the local experts within your community. As the graphic novel market continues to grow, so will the pool of incredibly talented experts. Many local creators will be thrilled to participate. Chances are that you already have contacts with the nearest university, or there’s a comics-savvy teacher or two within your local school district who will be happy to lend their voices. It could also be of great benefit to create partnerships with other librarians, comic shop and independent bookstore owners for their support and participation. The following pages have additional ideas for Will Eisner Week events.

**Will Eisner Week Programming for Retailers**

Use the Will Eisner Week theme, “READ A GRAPHIC NOVEL!,” as the focus of a Will Eisner Week presentation, panel, or workshop. Reach out to local writers, teachers, librarians, reading specialists or other experts within your community to participate. Chances are that you already have contacts with the nearest university, or there are comics-friendly teachers or librarians in your local area who will want to partner with you and your store. Schedule a book sale in conjunction with your Will Eisner Week event. The following pages have additional ideas for hosting your in-store event.
People Love to Celebrate Anniversaries and Their Favorite Pop Culture Figures
2020 marks the 80th anniversary of the debut of the iconic comics-originated characters Captain America, Captain Marvel, Catwoman, the Joker, Robin, and Will Eisner’s The Spirit! Use the popularity of those characters as a “hook” to get people and local media interested in your organization and events.

Use the Enormous Popularity of Marvel and DC Movies and TV Series
Draw patrons to learn about the medium in which those pop culture phenomena originated. From there, at least some of your audience will be interested in finding out more about the beginnings of the characters and about the comics medium—and about where Will Eisner and his work fits in with that of his contemporaries, such as the creators of Superman, Batman, Spider-Man and The Avengers.

Invite local writers, artists, creators, and educators who will be happy to host a workshop or join a panel discussion of comics and graphic novels. Partner with a local retailer, schedule a book sale benefit, or a book signing.

Will Eisner Week Means Something for Everyone
Who do you create your program for? Everyone! As a librarian or retailer, you can create a wide range of programs that can bring new patrons to your library or store. Programs can range from age-specific activities, such as cape-making or a draw-your-own comic book workshop for kids, to a sketching workshop with local models for teens and adults. Invite a local artist or comics creator to lead a workshop and you will have a great program for your library or store. Older or more serious-minded attendees will be interested in a program about Eisner’s portrayals of historical events.

As a retailer, a partnership with your local library is a great idea. If you have very little space to host a medium or large event, your library may turn out to be an excellent venue. The partnership you create can become a long-term relationship that helps you both grow your audiences.

The Suggestions Below Are Great Starting Points For Your Program

Readings From Will Eisner’s and Other Creators’ Work
Celebrate the works of Will Eisner with a group reading of The Spirit, The Plot, or any of Eisner’s other great titles. Explore the cultural influences at work, Eisner’s artistic style, his use of light and shadow, the illusion of motion and sound, and evolving storytelling techniques through the comics medium.

How-to-Draw Workshops and Comics Craft Events
As a writer, an artist, and a publisher, Will Eisner was also a great teacher of sequential art. As part of Will Eisner Week event, local creators can be excellent ambassadors for introducing patrons to the craft of comics. Materials are simple: magic markers, pens, pencils, paper, and lots of imagination.

Celebrate the Comics Medium: An Appreciation of Comics as Literature
Not only was Will Eisner one of the first true comics publishing professionals, he worked hard to show the public that comics can be a form of literature. During Will Eisner Week, titles such as Persepolis,
Smile, Blankets, Maus, or many of Eisner’s own works such as Last Day in Vietnam, A Contract with God, or The Plot can be used to demonstrate the wisdom of Eisner’s convictions. Possible options include inviting local academics, educators, journalists, or creators as speakers.

**Host a Panel Program or Lecture**
Hosting panel discussions on the comics medium encourages a vast array of ideas. With a well-planned approach, you will find there are many experts within your region who are willing to set aside an evening to speak about their passion, ideas and proposals for the world of comics, creators, and fans. Here are a few suggestions for great panel sessions:

- Comics as a platform for political and societal commentary
- The Art of Comics
- The Influence of Comics on Other Media Such as Movies
- The History of Comics in North America and Around the World
- Comics in English as a Second Language (ESL) classes.
- Comics Journalism
- Comics for Students with Spectrum Disorders
- Comics as Literature
- Comics and the Gifted Reader
- A lecture by a local comics expert on an aspect of Will Eisner’s career

**Host a Film or Documentary Screening**
Hosting a showing of the Cooke award-winning feature-length documentary Will Eisner: Portrait of a Sequential Artist, Marisa Furtado’s Will Eisner: Profession Cartoonist, or another film about comics creators is a great way to share an evening with fans of the comics medium. Or host a screening of a superhero film. Screenings can be followed-up with a discussion panel to explore new ideas.

**Curate a Graphic Novel or Art Exhibition**
Set up an exhibit of graphic novels or art by Will Eisner and other creators. Email info@willeisner.com for information about framed fine art lithographs. Showcase graphic novels to put comics and sequential art in a wider context. Examples would be the immigrant experience or the history of New York.

**Host Cosplay, Costume Contests, and Fashion Shows**
Host a cosplay event, where participants dress-up as their favorite comics characters and superheroes. Use a graphic novel story or write an original play that can be acted-out.

**Don’t forget to promote:** Get the word out to the community via your library, school, comic book shop, book store, social media, and the press. Use your website, Facebook page, Twitter feed, and email.
4. Will Eisner Week Past Events

Past Will Eisner Week Events Provide Good Examples:

- **PASADENA, CA**: The Pasadena Library showcased a display of Eisner graphic novels and those of authors inspired by him.

- **JACKSONVILLE, FL**: The University of North Florida hosted a “Women and Graphic Novels” panel.

- **BOSTON, MA**: The Cambridge Public Library hosted a children’s cartooning workshop with local cartoonists working with kids to make comics.

- **NEW YORK, NY**: The Columbus Branch of the New York Public Library celebrated graphics novels as literature with a presentation and a panel of local experts.

- **PENN YAN, NY**: The Penn Yan Public Library hosted a screening of the documentary, *Will Eisner: Portrait of a Sequential Artist*, followed by a discussion of the film.

- **BOWLING GREEN, OH**: Bowling Green University hosted a talk on “Will Eisner and Those He Inspired.”

- **ARKADELPHIA, AR**: Henderson State University presented a talk by Professor Randy Duncan: “Graphic Novels for Grown-ups: A Will Eisner Week Celebration of the art form.”

- **MINNEAPOLIS, MN**: A “Graphic Novel Read-In” was held by MCAD and UW in which students shared their favorite graphic novels and their own work. They also participated in creating a Communal Comic Jam Novella!

- **PANAMA CITY, FL**: Bay County Public Library held a "Comics Are For EVERYONE!" afterschool program for youth and teens.

- **NORTHRIDGE, CA**: Professor Charles Hatfield presented a talk on “Comics and Visual Culture: A Will Eisner Week Event.”
• **SEATTLE, WA**: The Emerald City Comic Con presented a panel on “Will Eisner’s The Spirit at 75.”

• **PITTSBURGH, PA**: The Toonseum hosted a presentation of Will Eisner’s work on P*S Magazine with the U.S. Army-and screened Will Eisner: Portrait of a Sequential Artist documentary.

• **SAN FRANCISCO, CA**: The Cartoon Art Museum hosted “Will Eisner Presents,” a panel of Eisner’s life, artwork and influence with comic creators Steve Englehart, Al Gordon, and John Heebink.

• **DALLAS, TX**: Titan Comics Store presented a panel discussion about Eisner, as well as Eisner artwork on display.

• **GLASGOW, SCOTLAND**: Dundee University hosted a workshop: “Illustrate a Script in the Eisner Style.”

• **LONDON, ENGLAND**: The British Library hosted a talk by Scott McCloud about his graphic novel, *The Sculptor*.

• **SAVANNAH, GA**: The Savannah College of Art and Design, SCAD, hosted events run by Professor David Duncan featuring artist Kevin Cannon.

• **SAN FRANCISCO, CA**: The Cartoon Art Museum gave a presentation about James Bond as seen in comics including a little-known Spirit/James Bond crossover.

• **GLASGOW, SCOTLAND**: *Will Eisner: Portrait of a Sequential Artist*, was screened at the Glasgow International Film Festival, followed by a reading of an Eisner graphic novel at the Glasgow School of Art.


• **SACRAMENTO, CA**: Wizard World Sacramento ComicCon “Why Eisner Matters,” a panel with Danny Fingeroth, Trina Robbins, & Professors Tom Andrae and Mel Gordon.

• ARKADELPHIA, AR: The Comics Club of Henderson State University, under the direction of Professor Randy Duncan, studied Eisner’s work in conjunction with the school’s Immigrant Experience Focus Week.
• NEW YORK CITY, NY: The Society of Illustrators hosted a Sketch Night including models dressed as characters from Will Eisner’s The Spirit.
• BOSTON, MA: Tufts University hosted a screening of Will Eisner: Portrait of a Sequential Artist, followed by a panel discussion including A. David Lewis, Chuck Henebry, and Stephen Weiner.

• WHITE RIVER JUNCTION, VT: The Center for Cartoon Studies presented a lecture on Will Eisner by Professor and Cartoonist Stephen Bissette.
• BURBANK, CA: The Comic Art Professional Society, CAPS, Special Meeting to celebrate Eisner’s work.
• PORTLAND, OR: The Art Institute of Portland: Lecture on Eisner by Dark Horse Comics Editor Diana Schutz.
• NEW YORK CITY, NY: The NY Society of Illustrators hosted a Will Eisner Sketch Night including models dressed as characters from Will Eisner’s The Spirit.
• SAN FRANCISCO, CA: The Cartoon Art Museum hosted An Evening with Mario Hernandez, including a discussion of Eisner’s influence on him.
• RIO DE JANEIRO, BRAZIL: The Rio Planetarium held a panel discussion on graphic novels and screened Marisa Furtado de Oliveira’s documentary on Will Eisner.
5. Plan Your Will Eisner Week Event

Will Eisner Week Resources

- Use this Playbook for ideas.
- Request your event be added to the Will Eisner Week website.
- Request your event be linked to the Will Eisner Week Facebook page.
- Request annual Will Eisner Week posters.
- Request Will Eisner Week flyers and add your own event to the legal-size flyer.
- Request a DVD for screening the *Will Eisner: Portrait of a Sequential Artist* or *Will Eisner: Profession, Cartoonist* documentaries.
- Ask for assistance to contact local comics experts and creators.
- Have your event added to Will Eisner Week press releases, e-mails, & twitter feeds.
- Selected bibliography of Will Eisner titles is in Section 7 of the Playbook.
- Special order graphic novel titles from distributors and publishers.
- Educational resources on the internet.

Need More Help?

Write to [info@willeisner.com](mailto:info@willeisner.com) to contact a prior-year event organizer.

Or Email one of the members of the Will Eisner Week Organizing Committee:

Danny Fingeroth (Chair), Author & Comics Historian, New York, NY
- N.C. Christopher Couch, UMass, Amherst, MA
- Jeremy Dauber, Columbia University, New York, NY
- Randy Duncan, Henderson State University, Arkadelphia, AR
- Charles Hatfield, California State University, Northridge, CA
- Benjamin Herzberg, World Bank, Washington, DC
- Martha Kennedy, Library of Congress, Washington, DC
- Katie Monnin, PhD., Pop Culture Classroom, Denver, CO
- Michelle Ollie, Center for Cartoon Studies, White River Junction, VT
- Barbara Schulz, MCAD, Minneapolis, MN
- Stephen Weiner, Author & Library Director, Maynard, MA

Or to one of the Will Eisner Week Advisory Board members:

- Charles Brownstein, Comic Book Legal Defense Fund, Portland, OR
- Tina Coleman, American Library Association, Chicago, IL
- Gerry Gladstone, Midtown Comics, New York, NY
- Judy Hansen, Literary Agent, Bronxville, NY
- Denis Kitchen, Author & Cartoonist, Amherst, MA
- Paul Levitz, Author & Comics Historian, New York, NY
- John Shableski, Consultant, Williamsport, PA

Email [info@willeisner.com](mailto:info@willeisner.com) for contact information for any of the above.
6. Propose Your Will Eisner Week Event

In order to publicize events, provide support, and maintain quality, we need to keep track of Will Eisner Week events. As noted, Will Eisner Week events can celebrate comics and sequential art, graphic novel literacy, free speech and thereby honor the legacy of Will Eisner. It’s easy; just tell us what you’d like to do.

Get your Will Eisner Week event rolling by sending as much information as you have:

Email:
1) Your contact information: (Name, Organization, Address, Phone, Email, etc.)

2) Your proposed event: As much as you’ve decided (description, location, date(s) and time)

3) Let us know if you’d like to include a screening of either documentary - Will Eisner: Portrait of a Sequential Artist, which premiered at the Tribeca Film Festival, or Marisa Furtado’s documentary, Will Eisner: Profession – Cartoonist.

4) Let us know about your website, Facebook page, Twitter feed, etc. Feel free to send questions and suggestions.

We can send you the year’s Will Eisner Week posters (see the playbook cover), and the two types of Will Eisner Week flyers – the legal-size one has room to add information about your event for publicity. It can also be downloaded.

Ask to have your event listed on our websites, Facebook pages, Twitter feed, and Press Releases.

Please e-mail the above information and any questions to info@willeisner.com
or fax to 201-670-0724
or mail to Will Eisner Week
50 East Ridgewood Ave. #367
Ridgewood, NJ 07450
or call 201-389-3330.

Do it as soon as possible in order to receive the best possible support.

Email info@willeisner.com with questions or for assistance.

Many Thanks!
# 7. Will Eisner Selected Bibliography

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