



Melanie Kimball

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Youth services in public libraries; literature for youth;
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Melanie Kimball: What Constitutes Reading?

Melanie Kimball owns original copies of a few of her favorite books from childhood, some of which were more than a generation old when she read them as a girl in Alma, Michigan. “A lot of books I liked had worn covers, which meant they were really good because they’d been read a lot,” she says.

It’s easy (perhaps too easy) to suggest that kids today read less than their elders because of the candy-like substance of much that’s on the Web and television. But times have changed. Kimball, whose field is youth library services, is seeing more and more kids who do most of their reading online. She is loathe to make any judgments, however. “How much kids read is one of the big questions I have,” she says. “But what constitutes reading? If you read online, is it still reading?” Kimball recently consulted on a project exposing adolescents to a different type of book — the now hugely popular graphic novel — to entice reluctant readers. The project brought together public libraries, art galleries, media outlets, publishers, and others in Buffalo, New York. In the end, teenagers wrote their own stories in graphic novel format, some of which were published in a collection.

Kimball, who loves movies (“I see as many as I can cram into my life”), knows that images can be a vital part of reading. She’s kept those books from her childhood for more than just their words. “They had fabulous pictures,” she says.