

School Spotlight

Salem Church Middle School: Building Community Through a Schoolwide Graphic Novel Read

At Salem Church Middle School in Virginia, Head Librarian Danielle Schafer saw an opportunity to use graphic novels to strengthen visual literacy, inspire creativity, and engage students across the school. First, she needed to show teachers and administrators that a graphic novel could support curriculum goals while creating measurable results.

Using Comics Plus® and a carefully planned schoolwide read of [Awkward](#) by Svetlana Chmakova, Danielle brought students and educators together around one relevant, accessible story. What began as a reading initiative soon inspired hundreds of essays, new student clubs, and stronger connections across the school community.



Garden Club



Dungeons & Dragons Club

“ We were able to show our principal and teachers that graphic novels are valuable and can connect to their content.”

Danielle Schafer

Head Librarian, Salem Church Middle School

Results at a Glance

920+ Essays

Students used evidence and reasoning to propose new school clubs.

16 New Clubs

Forty student applications led to the creation of 16 clubs.

450+ Participants

More than 450 students participated in the clubs the following year.

Building the Case for a Schoolwide Read

Danielle began by defining eight goals for the program, including fostering community, supporting curriculum priorities, inspiring creativity, and creating an experience that would be equitable and accessible to every student.

She also brought compelling reader data to the conversation. Although graphic novels represented a relatively small portion of the school's physical collection, they accounted for 40–45% of library checkouts. That demand helped demonstrate that graphic novels and manga were already powerful engagement tools for Salem Church students.

Bringing Awkward to Life

Danielle selected *Awkward*, a story about middle school friendships, clubs, and finding your place, because it reflected experiences her students understood.

Students read for 20–30 minutes during morning enrichment periods. To make implementation simple for educators, Danielle created:

- A schoolwide reading calendar
- Recorded readings and discussion questions
- Resources to build background knowledge
- Clear curriculum and writing connections

Students were then asked to imagine a new club for their own school and make a case for why it should be created. The activity connected the story to [Claim, Evidence, and Reasoning](#) writing while giving students an opportunity to share their interests and ideas.



STEAM Club



Car Club

Making Schoolwide Access Possible

Comics Plus provides unlimited, simultaneous access to thousands of digital comics, manga, graphic novels, and picture books. With no holds or waitlists, every student could access the featured title when it was time to read.

That equitable access enabled Salem Church to create a shared reading experience without relying on hundreds of physical copies or limiting participation due to availability.

From One Story to a Stronger Community

Salem Church Middle School's schoolwide read reached far beyond the pages of one graphic novel. By combining a relevant title, thoughtful instruction, and equitable digital access, Danielle created an experience that strengthened writing, encouraged creativity, and helped students connect around shared interests.