Imagine walking into a Reading Workshop class first thing on a Monday morning.  As you walk up and down the aisles, you observe students who are engrossed in dense novels.  Sasha is reading the Harry Potter series. Peter is turning pages furiously in *Enders Game*.  Shelly is diving into the latest John Green novel.  And Ralph is reading a Spiderman comic. Wait, what? A comic book in Reading Workshop?  How can that possibly compare with the dense novels other students in the class are working with?  Surely something is out of place here.

Currently, there is a debate over what should and should not be permitted as reading material in Reading Workshop.  Specifically, many are arguing about whether comic books should be accepted.  Some argue that comics are a waste of time, while others believe they are a valuable reading genre for kids.  Careful research into comic books makes it clear that they do not provide the volume of printed text that kids need, they do not deal with complex issues, and they take time away from kids reading longer novels.  Therefore, comic books should not be permitted in Reading Workshop.

Comic books do not provide the volume of printed text that kids need.  A recent study of comic books by the literacy department of Columbia University found that “on average, comic books are 30-35 pages in length” (Smith, 2015).  The same study also noted that in addition to having fewer pages than novels, there are also far fewer words per page. The most significant growth in comprehension, vocabulary, and stamina takes place when students consume large numbers of words and do so frequently.  In other words, the more text students soak in, the more they grow.  Even though kids might spend more time on each individual page of a comic, the majority of that time is spent looking at illustrations.  The shortage of words in a comic book actually makes it harmful to the goals of the Reading Workshop.

Some proponents of comics in the Reading Workshop argue that comics should be accepted as reading material because kids deserve a break now and then, an opportunity to read something just for the fun of it.  This is, indeed, a valid point. Kids *should* be able to read just for the fun of it once in a while.  But is that time during Reading Workshop? The goal of Reading Workshop is to continually challenge oneself with texts of increasing complexity, and comics simply do not meet the course’s needs.  Perhaps a better time would be over the weekend or during the summer. If the aim is to strengthen comprehension and reading stamina, then kids need to be reading novels.