

# Meeting Our Heroes: The Fight for Diversity in Comic Books

by Craig and Marc Kielburger



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When we were kids, we used to buy comics in bulk at a corner store near the local gas station. It was \$3 for a random grab bag. Batman, Spider-Man, Fantastic Four—we never knew what we'd get.

Except in some ways, we knew exactly what we'd get. With few exceptions, we'd get a white male hero.

It's strange that these stories about outsiders and underdogs are so dominated by privilege. The X-Men fight to overcome social prejudice. Spider-Man struggles to balance the conflicting identities of a high-schooler and web-slinger. Superman grapples with blending in as [an alien immigrant](#) in America. But it's rare to see fictional heroes from the communities that deal with these challenges in real life.

This year, with Marvel's release of [Inuk superhero Snowguard](#), and [Black Panther setting box office records](#), the world of comics is a bit more diverse, but there's still a long way to go to change minds about what makes a hero.

"Why would anyone want to hear an Indian speak at Comic Con?"

Cree filmmaker Sonya Ballantyne was asked this by an online troll when [she fundraised \\$3,935](#) to fly to San Diego Comic Con to speak about diversity. Ballantyne believes she was the first Cree woman to speak at the annual pop culture event, which brought together 130,000 fans from around the world on July 19–22, 2018.

She plans to chronicle the journey in *Cree Supergirl*, a forthcoming documentary.

"I didn't have a hero who looked like me growing up," says Ballantyne. "You have to be the person you needed when you were younger."

Ballantyne fell in love with Superman and Wonder Woman at a young age. She saw herself reflected in their fight to fit in, if not their complexions.

In 2014, she released [Crash Site](#), a short film about a young Cree girl who moves to the city after the death of her parents. There, she meets a superhero named Thunderbird, who teaches her to harness her inner powers.

Ballantyne has since become an advocate for more diverse heroes.

But fictional worlds won't change with lone voices. Audiences have to speak up before publishers and movie studios will listen. Producers work for us—for our eyes and our dollars. We all have the power to bring more diverse heroes into the mainstream.

"Vote with your money," Ballantyne says. "I laugh when executives are surprised with the success of movies like *Black Panther*."

Look at your own media diet to see how much variety you're really getting. Look into the backgrounds of the writers and directors who fill your couch time. Is it likely they all share a similar perspective? Reach beyond the \$3 comic grab bag or the "Recommended For You" section on Netflix.

If our heroes can fight for empathy and a more accepting society, so can we. What helps us understand each other is the same thing that drew Ballantyne to Superman in the first place—recognizing our shared struggles and drawing inspiration from them.

Any kid should be able to find that in their heroes, both real and imagined.