

JORDAN SCHNITZER **MUSEUM OF ART**



Teacher Resource Guide

Friday, October 9, 2009



UNIVERSITY
OF OREGON

Agenda

Understanding Superheroes and Heroes Teacher Workshop

Friday, October 9, 2009

9:00 a.m.	Sign in & Coffee, Tea, and Pastries
9:05-9:15 a.m.	JSMA Dragon Puppet Theatre [<i>Hero: Kintaro</i>]
9:20-10:30 a.m.	Introduction to exhibitions: • <i>Faster Than A Speeding Bullet: Art of the Superhero</i> • <i>Superheroes in Japan: 19th Century Ukiyo-e</i> Gallery Exercise
10:30-11:15 a.m.	Introduction to Manga
11:20-12 p.m.	Art Studio Activity: <i>Create your Own Manga Comic</i>
12:00 p.m.	Visit the exhibition on your own with your free pass today or on another return trip



UNIVERSITY OF OREGON

October 9, 2009

Dear Educator,

We are pleased that you are attending one of the Jordan Schnitzer Museum of Art's teacher professional development workshops. The museum was founded by Gertrude Bass Warner on the premise of teaching UO students and Oregonians about Asian cultures. The museum's commitment to cross-cultural understanding is based on her early endeavors and still holds true today.

By examining the two current exhibitions on traditional Superheroes and Heroes in Japanese culture, we hope to draw connections between the art on display and curriculum opportunities for you and your students.

We are grateful to Lori O'Hollaren and the Center for Asian and Pacific Studies for their financial support of this workshop.

Finally, we would like to invite you to bring your students to the museum for a field trip and participate in an interactive tour and studio activity. We recognize the challenges for transportation and budget cuts and are thankful to the many donors who have supported our "Fill Up the Bus" campaign. Scholarship money is available for transportation from schools across Oregon and we hope you will take advantage of this opportunity.

Thank you for making the museum a part of your teaching process.

Sincerely,

Lisa Abia-Smith
Director of Education

Sharon Kaplan
Museum Educator

JORDAN SCHNITZER MUSEUM OF ART

1223 University of Oregon, Eugene OR 97403-1223 T (541) 346-3027 F (541) 346-0976 <http://jsma.uoregon.edu>

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JORDAN SCHNITZER **MUSEUM OF ART**

MISSION STATEMENT

The Jordan Schnitzer Museum of Art enhances the University of Oregon's academic mission and furthers the appreciation and enjoyment of the visual arts for the general public.

JSMA ARTS EDUCATION MISSION

Education is an integral component to the JSMA and is central to its vision. We believe that education should be included in the development and design of each tour, exhibition, and program we create. We value museums as learning environments in which curiosity, discovery, and contemplation are encouraged. Our aim for each visitor, regardless of age, background or ability, is to experience the museum with enthusiasm and success, empowered by new perspectives.

Our programs focus on family-centered learning, interdisciplinary connections, and the individual learning styles of each visitor. We are committed to providing exceptional programs that promote museums as sources for life-long learning.

INTRODUCTION TO THE EXHIBITIONS



September 26, 2009 - January 3, 2010

Mapping the path of the American superhero through a history of comics, ***Faster Than a Speeding Bullet: The Art of the Superhero*** addresses the subject from many perspectives, including aesthetic achievements. The exhibition and accompanying symposium also examine the larger processes of social change through narratives and visual expressions of age, gender, race, religion, culture, and nationalism. Guest-curated by Ben Saunders, a professor in the Department of English, the exhibition features Superman, Wonder Woman, Batman, and others and features original art by the masters of the genre.

Sponsored by the Coeta and Donald Barker Foundation, the William C. Mitchell Estate, and JSMA members.

Media Partners: Eugene Magazine and KLCC 89.7 FM

Community Partners: Imagine Graphics and Image King Signs

Superheroes in Japan: 19th Century Ukiyo-e

Superheroes feature in the myths, histories and literature of cultures throughout the world. This intimate exhibition, drawn from the JSMA's Japanese art collection, complements *Faster Than a Speeding Bullet* with images specific to Japanese prints. The exhibition was selected by Dr. Sandy Kita, an independent Japanese print specialist and senior scholar at Chatham University.



Utagawa Kuniyoshi (1797-1861)
Japanese, Edo period
Saginuma Heikurō Rending a Great Serpent in the Deep Mountains from Japanese and Chinese Correspondences for The Tale of Genji: Chapter 31 (The Handsome Pillar), 1855-56
14-7/8 x 10-1/4 inches
Murray Warner Collection of Oriental Art
MWJ51:K129

Keefer, Bob. (September 24, 2009). "Hero worship: Art museum and an English prof take a serious look at comics. *The Register-Guard*.

<http://www.registerguard.com/>

Comic book superheroes such as Superman and Batman used to be little more than a guilty pleasure in American life, a cheap diversion loved by children and looked down on by their parents.

No longer. For years now, the art world has embraced comic books — especially the original sketches behind those early superhero comics — as a compelling form of visual art.

To see how seriously comics are being taken today, you need only look at exhibits such as "Heroes and Villains: The Battle for Good in India's Comics" now at the Los Angeles County Museum of Art, or the sprawling "Masters of American Comics," which brought 900 pieces of original artwork and printed books to Los Angeles' Museum of Contemporary Art in 2005.

Now Superman and his crime-fighting allies are setting up shop at the Jordan Schnitzer Museum of Art.

"Faster Than a Speeding Bullet: The Art of the Superhero" opens with a reception Friday evening and runs through Jan. 3 at the Schnitzer, on campus at the University of Oregon.

The exhibition features more than 150 pages of superhero comic art from the 1940s to the present, including several complete stories.

The show is curated by UO English professor Ben Saunders. It grew out of an academic conference he is organizing in October to examine the role of superheroes in society.

"It always frustrates me when academics don't give you anything to look at," he said.

Saunders originally had in mind a rather smaller exhibition for the art museum. Then he was introduced to the museum staff.

"To my surprise, they liked the idea and have run with it. It's become a much bigger exhibition than conference."

That's at least in part because Jill Hartz, the museum's new executive director, saw an opportunity to put on an original exhibit that both features work by a UO faculty member and is likely to draw an entirely new crowd through the museum's doors.

“We are looking at this as a three-generational show,” she said. “Superman is 70 years old. We have a big age range here of people interested, from fans of the traditional comics when they first came out to people knowing the characters from the film.”

“Superheroes” will include original art from some of the most influential comics in history: Superman, Batman, Spider-man, Wonder Woman, all the way through today’s Hellboy.

It also will include a rare copy of Action Comics No. 1, the 1938 comic that started it all, which is on loan from a Eugene collector who bought it at auction in 1980. Putting the show together was a labor-intensive endeavor. The Schnitzer staff found itself dealing with numerous private collectors who had varying levels of experience in working with museums.

One of those collectors is Darrell Grimes, who owns two comic book stores in Eugene. More to the point, he also owns a copy of Action Comics No. 1.

Grimes was reluctant, at first, to take the comic book — now conservatively valued at \$525,000 — out of the safety deposit box where he keeps it.

“I am a little bit shy about letting people know what I have,” he said. “The people at the museum worked on me for a couple of months to get me to loan it to them. They are extremely nice. That’s what won me over. They had me walk through the museum. They said, ‘You know, honestly, this is going to be safer than your safe deposit box.’ As we were walking along, they were pointing out paintings worth \$10 million. I’m thinking, ‘Wow. Holy cow!’ ”

He is also lending copies of Superman No. 1, from 1939, and Famous Funnies No. 1, which came out in 1934 and was one of the first successful comics ever printed.

At the other end of the spectrum is collector David Mandel, a former writer for the TV sitcom “Seinfeld” and now executive producer of the HBO series “Curb Your Enthusiasm.”

He is lending the complete interior art from Amazing Spider-Man No. 26, by Steve Ditko; the cover of Giant Size X-Men No. 1 by Gil Kane and Dave Cockrum; the cover of Iron Man No. 1 by Gene Colan; the cover of Fantastic Four No. 59 by Jack Kirby; and Hellboy art by Mike Mignola.

Other artists represented in the exhibit include Neal Adams, C.C. Beck, John Buscema, Gene Colan, Will Eisner, Bill Everett, Lou Fine, Ramona Fradon, Dave Gibbons, Don Heck, Carmine Infantino, J.G. Jones, Gil Kane, Joe Kubert, Mort Meskin, Frank Miller, George Perez, H.G. Peter, Mac Raboy, Alex Ross, Marie Severin, Bill Sienkiewicz and Matt Wagner.

An exhibit catalog will be released this fall with essays by Saunders, Diana Schultz, Michael T. Gilbert, Charles Hatfield and Rebecca Wanzo, as well as biographies of the major artists.

Superhero stories arose in a country wracked by economic disaster and headed into a world war, Saunders says. Superman first appeared in 1938 in that first issue of Action Comics, which was one of a handful of comics then on the market.

Most people think of superheroes like Superman as a kind of modern pantheon, the equivalent of Greek gods. That's too simple, Saunders says.

"That tends to overlook the specific historical circumstances in which superheroes arise," he says. "They arrive on the scene in the late 1930s at a time when the country is going through some very interesting self examination."

Franklin Roosevelt was president and was under attack for his New Deal social programs. And the country was involved in a fierce debate about whether to enter the war in Europe.

"It's at that moment that Superman appears," Saunders says. "Initially he is about the most aggressive version of a New Deal Democrat that you'll ever get. In the first year of Superman, he doesn't have any super villains. He fights the oil companies. He fights corrupt senators in bed with arms dealers. He fights for better housing in the ghettos. He fights against automobile manufacturers for producing unsafe vehicles. He's Ralph Nader on steroids."

American comic books grew out a melding of newspaper comic strips and the pulp fiction of the 1920s. Pulp characters such as Tarzan and Buck Rogers morphed into newspaper comic strips by the late 1920s. By the late 1930s, a couple of companies had begun reprinting newspaper comics without the newspaper attached.

"And then Superman happens," Saunders says. "And within a year and a half there were 27 comic book companies in the country. And they were almost all printing original material, most of that fronted by a superhero. It was a \$20 million-a-year industry."

Almost all of the comic books were produced in New York and New Jersey. The writers and artists were first- and second-generation immigrants, many from Eastern Europe and many of them Jewish, Saunders said.

The secret identity employed by so many superheroes might be a metaphor for cultural assimilation of the immigrant comic book creators, the professor suggests. And their ethnic background might explain the superheroes' immediate opposition to fascism.

“Superheroes get involved in the war very early on,” Saunders says. “Though Superman, by and large, kept out of the war until after Pearl Harbor. That was a decision on the part of the owners, not the creators. The owners said there were still too many isolationist parents and you might lose their nickels.”

But a year before Pearl Harbor, the flag-draped Captain America, a creation of Joe Simon and Jack Kirby, was on the cover of a comic book, punching Adolf Hitler in the face.

Kirby was a pen name and later the legal name of Jacob Kurtzberg, a New Yorker who was the son of an Austrian Jewish immigrant. The Hitler-punching issue enraged American Nazi organizations, and it spurred New York to give police protection to its publisher, Timely Comics (which would later become Marvel). The issue sold almost a million copies.

The art in “Superheroes” is almost all owned by private collectors. That means this show is a rare opportunity to see the work.

“This art was not valued even by the publishers until the later 1960s,” Saunders says. “And not even then, in some cases. No one was really preserving it except for private collectors. The challenge was getting private collectors, who spent a lot of time and money acquiring these works, to let us borrow them.”

One of the interesting things about the show is seeing how various individual artists contributed to the development of the characters, the professor says.

“Part of the reason you can convince talented people to work on these figures, even though the work will end up being owned by Marvel or DC, is that it’s like someone gives you the most fantastic toy ever and says you can play with it, so long as you don’t break it. You get to add your own little wrinkle to the mythology. And you become a major figure in the creative process.”



NEWS VIEWS BLOGS LETTERS CALENDAR FILM MUSIC CULTURE CLASSIFIEDS PERSONALS **NEW** ARCHIVE **CURRENT ISSUE**

Affection and Nostalgia

The UO's Jordan Schnitzer Museum gives comic books a hero's welcome

By Aaron Ragan-Fore

"Can I touch this?" I ask, gesturing to the 70-year-old magazine sitting on the glass top counter of Nostalgia Collectibles, a Eugene comic book store. Darrell Grimes, the owner of both the shop and the comic book in question, gives his assent, and I lift the object carefully, reverently, as if I'm handling an illuminated manuscript from the Dark Ages.

Even encased as it is in clear, hard, protective plastic, the illustration on the comic book's cover exudes a kinetic sense of exuberance: a boyishly grinning Superman leaps high above the rooftops, his cape billowing behind him.

This is a copy of *Superman #1*, published in 1939. Fewer than 200 copies are thought to exist. It's worth \$50,000. The very fact this comic book resides in Eugene makes this city noteworthy, in some circles.

And I'm holding it. For me, comic book nerd that I am, that's like touching the Holy Grail.

This comic, and the nearly 200 pieces of original comic book art it will soon be joining on the campus of the UO, matter to the dozens, perhaps hundreds, of hardcore comic book aficionados in the area.

But they're also a point of pride to the citizens of Eugene as a whole, or at least they should be. Because the artwork that has been collected for "Faster Than a Speeding Bullet: The Art of the Superhero," an exhibition opening Friday, Sept. 25, at the UO's Jordan Schnitzer Museum of Art, is one of the most expansive gatherings of superhero comic book art ever assembled. And it's not hanging on a wall in N.Y. or L.A. or London, or even Portland. It's here.

"I do think this is the best museum exhibition of superhero comic art to date," says Ben Saunders, an associate professor of English at the UO, and curator of the exhibition. "'Best' in the sense of broadest, most historically comprehensive," he continues, "and with a large number of key pieces by key artists from the 70 years of the genre."

It may sound as if Saunders is bragging about the show he's assembled. But to be frank, the man has a right to brag: Works are on loan from the Library of Congress as well as from 18 private collectors from around the country.

But this show is about more than just volume. Saunders is an expert on this stuff, and he has taken care to present the original artwork. Originals are created on card stock pieces larger than the comic book pages to which they will eventually be reduced, in a manner that tells a story: not just the thrilling tales of spandexed champions or the story of good winning out over evil, but the story



Green Lantern #70, page 20, 1975, Gil Kane (pencils) and Vince Colletta (inks), On loan from Ethan Roberts, Ph.D, TM & © DC Comics



Fantastic Four #73, page 9, November 1967, Jack Kirby (pencils) and Joseph Sinnott (inks), On loan from Ethan Roberts, Ph.D, TM & © Marvel



of the creation of a wholly new and inherently American way to tell stories in the first place.

"I went in pursuit of key works by key artists," says Saunders, who revels in name-dropping from the collection's impressive catalog: "Not just 'something by Jack Kirby,' but Jack Kirby's cover to [*Fantastic Four*] #74. Not just Bill Sienkiewicz, but one of his large collage poster/covers from the mid '80s. Not just Neal Adams, but Neal Adams on *Batman*." Care has also been taken, Saunders says, to include "once-influential masters of the form" of the 1940s Golden Age of comic books, "who deserve to be better known."

An Artistic Thesis

It's possible I've overstated. Not about the importance of this collection, but rather that "Holy Grail" bit. No, for me, the Holy Grail would probably be a copy of 1938's *Action Comics* #1, the magazine in which Superman first appeared, before he graduated the next year to his own eponymous comic book series. That particular issue can fetch up to \$525,000, and fewer than 200 copies are thought to exist.

Darrell Grimes owns one of those, too, a companion for his *Superman* #1. And he's loaning both to the J-Schnitz, along with a copy of *Famous Funnies* #1, a 1934 publication hailed by comics experts as the first monthly newsstand comic book; and a full page of art from 1965's *Fantastic Four* #40.

Grimes doesn't usually keep such valuable components of his art collection below the shop counter. In fact, they're usually in safe deposit boxes, like all of Grimes' major pieces. But today he's letting me take a peek at these comics on Saunders' say-so.

At first Grimes was reluctant to let his babies go on display. He trusted the JSMA's security, but the clincher was his trust in Saunders. The earnest professor, who teaches an undergraduate class on superhero comics, is so sincere, so enthusiastic in his commitment to helping this artwork take its place in the American canon, it's difficult not to trust that his intentions for the comic medium are genuine, and dare one say ... superheroic?

Saunders has narrowed the focus of the exhibition to the superhero end of the comic book spectrum. He appreciates the intent of other festivals and exhibitions that mix superhero material with work by independent and alternative cartoonists such as Art Spiegelman, Chris Ware and Joe Sacco. "I understand wanting to say there's more to comics than superheroes," Saunders says, but he asserts that exhibiting the two genres side-by-side muddies their respective impacts, like trying to do a festival on 'film' as a topic, mixing the work of John Waters, Woody Allen and Steven Spielberg into an unwieldy whole: "There's no coherence there."

"Faster Than a Speeding Bullet" features 172 pages of original comic art and is arranged chronologically, demonstrating the development of the art form from adventure newspaper strips of the early 20th century to the advent of comic books and superheroes in the 1930s-40s to today's established comic book professionals. "We have work from Joe Shuster" — Superman's co-creator and first artist — "through to Alex Ross," a modern fanboy favorite, Saunders says.

"There is an artistic thesis being developed here about the nature of superhero art," Saunders says. Newspaper adventure strips such as Alex Raymond's *Flash Gordon* and Hal Foster's *Prince Valiant* (examples of each are featured) serve as "a kind of 'origin story' for the superhero genre." The art of these adventure strips showcases a naturalistic style of figure drawing and layout even in the midst of winged aliens and knights on horseback. "Prior to the days of television, you spread these out on the floor and fall into the page," he says.

As superhero comic books evolved in the latter 1930s, Saunders says, more elements of cartooning, such as exaggerated figures and impressionistic layout, began to emerge. "This is the balancing act of all comic book artists," he says.



Photo by Todd Cooper

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Situated along this chronology will be groupings of related works, such as the original art comprising all 18 story pages from 1965's *Amazing Spider-Man* #26, and all seven pages of a 1949 *The Spirit* comic book.

The exhibition also tracks the visual development of Superman from the character's emergence in the late 1930s as a barrel-chested strongman to a more lithe frame Saunders describes as "balletic," as tastes changed over the decades. Saunders sees Superman not only as a useful tool in academic discourse on the place of virtue in an ethical society but also as a pivotal figure in the development of the comic book industry itself. "While there's always been more to the comic book than superheroes," Saunders says, "there would be no comic book industry without Superman."

Saunders, who carries the mannered lilt of his native Wales, is perplexed at Americans' evident lack of pop cultural support for the Man of Steel, evidenced by the poor critical and fan reception of the 2006 film *Superman Returns*. "How can you not care about this?" Saunders asks. "Superman is *yours*. Superman is your gift to the world."

Approaching the Work from the Inside

Accompanying "Faster Than a Speeding Bullet" is an academic conference Saunders has organized, which runs Oct. 23-24. Titled "Understanding Superheroes," the event is free and open to the public, though limited to 300 guests, who must pre-register on the JSMA website. The conference sports panels and lectures with impressively scholarly titles like "My Best Enemy: The Signifying Super-Villain," and "Secret Identity Politics: Religion, Ethnicity and Superheroes."

In addition to a veritable Justice League's worth of brainy academics from various universities (the forerunner of which is no doubt MIT's Henry Jenkins, who is presenting a keynote address on comic book artist and writer David Mack), the conference will also host Oregon-based, A-list comic book writers Kurt Busiek (*Superman*, *Astro City*), Greg Rucka (*Gotham Central*, *Whiteout*) and Gail Simone (*Wonder Woman*, *Birds of Prey*) as discussants on a panel on writing for superhero comics.

Mike Allred, a comic book artist and writer who grew up in Roseburg and now lives near Reedsport, provided a new piece of original art for the exhibition featuring a number of major heroes, including his own creation, Madman. In conjunction with the exhibition and conference, Allred will also deliver a Nov. 18 talk about the life of a comic book creator. "I wanted to give people the perspective of what it's like to go from having this art form in your life casually as a child, to transitioning to being one of the people who creates [superheroes]."

Allred's work frequently incorporates the color palette and stylistic tropes of 1960s comic books and pop art. "It was the sheer joy of them," Allred says of the comics of midcentury America, that brought him into the field.

In planning the conference and its associated events, Saunders engaged in a concerted effort to balance academic guests with journeyman practitioners like Allred. "Critical discussions of superheroes have a tendency to drift into generalities about mythic systems, or abstract discussions about the sociological meanings of power fantasies," he says. "But one can also learn a great deal from a comic creator who approaches the work 'from the inside' as it were."

Saunders says he is lucky to work at the UO, an institution at which he feels "very supported at every level, both departmentally and administratively," in pursuing academic work with comic books, and in another research area, popular American music. Beyond pop cultural topics, Saunders' primary research and teaching focus centers on the poetry and drama of the English Renaissance. He sees a great deal of promise in the study of comics, likening a study of the themes of family relations in *Hamlet*, for example, to questions of virtue and morality in *Superman*.

"Comics studies is an emergent field, not an established one," Saunders says. "The tiny handful of tenured academics currently working in that field were all hired to do something else." And as much as he loves superheroes, Saunders doesn't want perceptions of his career trajectory colored by a mistaken view that the UO supports a tenured faculty member solely so that he can sit in his office and drool over Gil Kane's line work on *Green Lantern*.

"The work I have done organizing this exhibition and conference has been undertaken in addition to my regular duties but not at the expense of those duties," Saunders says. "Eight out of every 10 classes that I

teach are in the traditional field of Renaissance literature.”

Saunders notes that, like himself, many of the most ballyhooed comics creators of recent decades have been residents of, or expatriates from, Western Europe. U.K.-born creators such as *Watchmen*’s Alan Moore, *The Sandman*’s Neil Gaiman and *All-Star Superman*’s Grant Morrison have injected complex writing and more adult-level themes into comics work, a shift that comics critics and fans liken to their industry’s own “British invasion.”

Saunders cites the “magical aura of foreignness” that comic books exude overseas, an inescapable siren song which has for seven decades packaged American culture and values as a mass-mediated commodity, every bit as marketable to kids in Manchester, Mumbai and Mexico City as are flight, super-speed or a magic lasso. “One of the reasons I probably live in this country is the comics I read when I was five,” he explains. “They transcend American-ness.”

“When I was a kid, every kid wanted to be the president of the United States,” says Darrell Grimes. He explains the lasting appeal of the superhero by noting that since his childhood, increasing public scandals have revealed that sports figures, movie icons and politicians all possess feet of clay. “They fall short in the eyes of humans,” he says. To find real heroes, today’s youth (and maybe even a few adults) look to fiction. “It’s all we have left,” Grimes says. “We don’t have any real heroes anymore.”

Mike Allred also looks to his boyhood to keep himself inspired in his work. “I just kind of regressed into my childhood” in creating the *Madman* alternative superhero comic, he says. But even his work for industry heavyweights Marvel Comics and DC Comics fires his imagination. “It’s always been out of affection and nostalgia,” he says.

Now Ben Saunders and the Schnitzer Museum are counting on that same pair of superpowers, affection and nostalgia, to make twin successes of the exhibition and conference. And if Saunders’ own passion for the world of comic books is any indication, museum patrons will soon be flying as high as the man in the cape.

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THE COMIC ARTIST

With this workshop, you will become knowledgeable about the world of comic books and manga, and be asked to create your own comic art. To give you some background, you may wish to consult these how-to books for making comics. These texts introduce readers to all aspects of writing comics from the tools needed, the different jobs people have in the production of a comic book, developing characters and scripts, provide an introduction to comic book history, and even include information about selling your work.

Fingeroth, Danny, & Manley, Mike. (2006). *How to create comics: From script to print*. Raleigh, NC: TwoMorrows Publishing.

Eugene Public Library: J 741.5 FINGEROTH 2006

Lee, Stan, & Buscema, John. (1978). *How to draw comics the Marvel way*. New York: Simon and Schuster.

Eugene Public Library: J 741.5 LEE 1978

Sturm, James; Arnold, Andrew; and Frederick-Frost, Alexis. (2009). *Adventures in cartooning: How to turn your doodles into comics!* New York: First Second Books.

A how-to book on comic writing written in the form of a comic.

Eugene Public Library: J-COM STURM JAM ADVENTUR

Biographies of some famous comic artists:

Miller, Raymond H. (2006). *Stan Lee: Creator of Spider-man*. San Diego, CA: KidHaven Press

Eugene Public Library: J 921 LEE STAN 2006

Nobleman, Marc Tyler, and MacDonald, Ross (illus.). (2008). *Boys of steel: The creators of Superman*. New York: Alfred A. Knopf.

Tells the story of Jerry Siegel and Joe Shuster and how they conceived of Superman, who debuted in their Action Comics #1 in 1938 and instantly became a star.

Eugene Public Library: J 741.5092 NOBLEMAN 2008

Exhibition catalogue:

Saunders, Ben. (Ed.). (2009). *Faster than a speeding bullet: The art of the superhero*.

Eugene, OR: Jordan Schnitzer Museum of Art, University of Oregon Press.

UNIT 1: HEROES AND SUPERHEROES

Connect to the visual arts, social studies, and language arts curriculum

Books to use with this section:

Feiffer, Jules. (1997). *Meanwhile...* New York: HarperCollins.

As any child familiar with comics knows, a simple “meanwhile...” inserted into a text box can carry the action from wherever it was to someplace completely different. The boy in this story conjures up a series of fantastic comic book adventures (in which he stars), always “meanwhiling” himself out when the situation gets sticky.
Eugene Public Library: J-PIC FEIFFER JUL MEANWHIL

Grey, Mini. (2005). *Traction Man is here!* New York: Alfred A. Knopf.

This delightful book draws on a child’s creative play with his “Traction Man” action figure and recounts Traction Man’s otherworldly adventures, even in the most familiar settings.
Eugene Public Library: J-PIC GREY MIN TRACTION

Moutoussamy-Ashe, Jeanne. (1993). *Daddy and me: A photo story of Arthur Ashe and his daughter Camera*. New York: Arthur A. Knopf.

Arthur Ashe, the former tennis champion and a victim of AIDS, and his daughter Camera, who learns what the disease means through her father’s struggle, demonstrate a quiet heroism in the face of the illness in this poignant book.

Weigel, Jeff. (2004). *Atomic Ace (He's just my dad)*. Morton Grove, IL: Albert Whitman & Co.

What would it be like to have a superhero as a dad? The main character of this book thinks the world of his dad – who fights bad guys and restores good to the world in classic superhero ways – but, to him, his dad is not much different than other dads. His dad plays catch with him, makes him dinner (albeit instantly heated with fire torch), etc.
Eugene Public Library: J-PIC WEIGEL JEFF ATOMIC A

Activity: I’m A Superhero!

One of the traits of a superhero is to have a secret identity. (A superhero also wears a costume/mask, has an origin story, possesses superpowers/weakness, and is countered by a worthy nemesis or Super Villain.) Imagine that you have the ability to change into a

Superhero. What qualities would you possess? How would your physical attributes change from who you are now?

Using the questions provided on Superhero Planning Sheet, imagine that you a Superhero. After you complete your planning sheet, create an illustration of your hero. Be sure to include visual clues to reveal your power and inform people about why your character is superhuman!

Taking inspiration from Jeff Weigel's book *Atomic Ace*, write a story that tells what a typical day is like as this superhero. Be sure to include what your friends, pets, or family think of your superpowers.

Activity: Celebrate the Heroes in My Life

It is easy for us to think about the iconic Superheroes such as Wonder Woman and Batman. However, the true heroes are those people who have influenced and served as role models. Think about who has been an extraordinary hero to you. Was it the firefighter who pulled the elderly man out of the Twin Towers in New York on 9/11? Is it your 1st grade teacher who taught you to read and works diligently to help each child reach his/her potential? Consider the traits and qualities of this person and then create a picture illustrating him or her.

Either of these activities (or others you create) may be used to produce artwork to submit to the JSMA's *NewArt Northwest Kids: Heroes and Heroines* exhibition.

Name _____ Date _____

I'm a Superhero Planning Sheet

by Karen Antikajian

1. My superhero name: _____

2. Why you have that name: _____

3. Superpowers or abilities: _____

4. How you help with your superpowers: _____

5. What you have to do to be able to use them: _____

6. Problems you have: _____

7. The purpose of your outfit: _____

8. Do others know you are a superhero? Is there a special way you put on your suit?

(If you need more room, write the rest on the back of this sheet and put the correct number)

Make a sketch below or on the back showing what you can do and/or what your super outfit or suit looks like or the emblem on the front.

MY FAVORITE SUPERHEROES

Directions: List each of your favorite superheroes, where you found him or her, and what kind of traits he or she has.

Name of superhero	Where did you find this superhero? (For example, a video game, movie, comic book)	Character traits (For example, brave, strong, fast, witty)

UNIT 2: EXPLORING MANGA

Connect to the social studies, visual arts, and language arts curriculum.

This unit looks at the graphic and literary conventions of Japanese manga and how it relates to western comics.

Historical Origins of Manga

- The tradition of telling stories with text and art sharing the same space started in Japan, as early as the 12th Century. Stories were told sequentially, illustrated from right to left on a scroll called an emakimono. The reader unrolled the scroll in segments, scanning both the images and reading the accompanying text. In this way, the story developed from scene to scene, which can be seen as an early form of transition and visual storytelling we see in modern manga. The integration of text and image from these picture scrolls influenced woodblock print artists during the Edo Period (1603-1867). Artists used the woodblock print technique to illustrate books – an increasingly popular media – and also created stand-alone single sheet prints that usually depicted a famous scene (or persona) from a well-known play, folktale, or novel. The rectangular boxed image of the woodblock is speculated as the origin of panel layout in Japan. Rolling the scroll so that only one image was shown at a time gave this narrative art its “motion.” This art form influenced modern Japanese comics, or *Manga*.



Kuniyoshi (1797-1861), Japanese Edo Period
Taihaki Eiyūden, c. 19th century, Color woodblock print,
Gift of Henry T. Bailey Collection, 1967:9

- In the 19th Century, Japanese artist Katsushika Hokusai (1760-1849), most famous now for his series of print images entitled “36 Views of Mount Fuji” for his iconic woodblock print images of “36 Views of Mount Fuji,” coined the term *manga* to refer to his sketches (*Hokusai Manga*). His work often featured humorous images, using the same figure in different forms. He used several traditional elements of fantasy and stylized them to make them more popular. Although Hokusai invented “manga,” his manga looks nothing like what we expect from manga today. Hokusai drew his figures in order to teach his students aesthetic techniques such as perspective and figure drawing. So while his figures were humorous and often sequential, he did not use his drawings to tell a story. However, his use of linework to draw motion and such ethereal elements like sunlight, smoke, and rain may be the origin of such modern conventions as speed and emotion lines.



Hokusai Self-portrait at the Age of Eighty-three
Painting (ink on paper)
Rijksmuseum voor Volkenkunde, Leiden

Western Comics Influences on Manga/Manga Influences on Western Comics

Western Influence on Manga

- The Meiji Restoration – a revolution brought about by simmering internal conflict and international pressure from the United States – brought an end to the Shogun feudal system, restored power to the Emperor, and spurred an intense program of growth, modernization, and nation state construction in Japan. Along with the shogunate, the new government disposed of Japan's so-called Closed Door Policy and encouraged trade and intellectual exchange with foreign countries openly for the first time in 300-years. Foreigners settled in Japan's port town of Yokohama as part of the new program of international participation. British Army officer Charles Wirgman, a resident of Yokohama, began drawing and publishing humorous comics of his experience as a foreigner living in Japan in 1862. His art and jokes were in the style of the British magazine "Punch" and Wirgman named his publication, appropriately, "Japan Punch." As Japan Punch began to circulate among a Japanese readership, Wirgman's style and humor became extremely popular and soon many Japanese artists began to mimic his style in their own publications. Significantly, Japanese artists used the new form to depict and criticize what they saw as a corrupt government- a public political expression that had been outright censored during the previous shogunate.
- These early comics took on a new look, mimicking early American, German, and French "funny pages." Significantly, reoccurring characters developed, and their exploits were included as inserts in newspapers and magazines. These comics were cartoonish and fairly straightforward in their layout and narrative.
- Osamu Tezuka – the "father/god of manga" and author of such famous manga as Atom Boy, Phoenix, and BlackJack among countless others – grew up during this influence of the funny pages. Heavily influenced by early Disney cartoons, he

developed many of the techniques we now commonly see in contemporary manga: large, expressive eyes, panel and frame play, serious subject matters for both children and adults, and manipulation of the body. Since the import of comics from the US was banned during the war years, Japanese comic development became somewhat self-contained since they were removed from influence. While American comics developed a sense of realism in story, figure drawing, and linework, Japanese comics maintained their earlier style and Tezuka's playful manipulation of art and form took manga in a different direction than its Western counterparts.

Japanese Influence on Western Comics

- Manga has had a tremendous influence on contemporary comic, animation and art styles all over the world, but only recently. Anime was far more successful at gathering international attention, and the popularity of anime really only boomed to mainstream in the mid to late 1990s. Hayao Miyazaki's anime and manga, however, have had a tremendous impact on American style since the 90s and we see the influence of Japanese style in the recent generation of comicbook creators.
- Some of the famous Western comic heroes, such as those from X-Men or Spiderman have been revised in a Manga style, called "Marvel's Manga Heroes."
- Today many Japanese *mangakas*, or comic artists, work on Western comics and anime. Many works are a collaborative effort between Asian and US artists.

Compare Layout, Indication of Motion, Use of Text, etc.

- Manga often
 - uses motion
 - does not always show descriptive captions, but lets the images and sequence illuminate the story, rather than relying on text
 - Play with form and style; are for all ages and are about almost anything; about 40% of all publications in Japan are manga; are an integral part of contemporary Japanese culture.

This quote from the late Osamu Tezuka (1928-1989), often referred to as the God of Manga, explains how modern Manga differs from the earlier Japanese comics:

"Until that time, most manga [...] were drawn from a two-dimensional perspective, and in the style of a stage play. The interactions of actors appearing from stage left and stage right were composed as if from the viewpoint of someone seated in the audience. I

came to the realization that there was no way to produce power or psychological description using this approach, so I began to introduce cinematic techniques into my composition. The models for this were the German and French movies I saw in my days as a student. I manipulated close-ups and angles, of course, and tried using many panel or even many pages in order to capture faithfully movements and facial expressions that previously would have been taken care of with a single panel. So I would end up with long works five- or six-hundred to more than a thousand pages in length in no time at all [...] Also, I thought the potential of manga was more than getting a laugh; using themes of tears and sorrow, anger and hatred, I made stories that didn't always have happy endings."

- Western comics often:
 - use text to narrate the story
 - use uniform page layouts of images and text

Culturally-based definitions of heroism

- In Japan, We see a lack of the superhero, but instead see a great many stories involving boys and girls imbued with magical or spiritual powers.
- When western superheroes show weakness it is attributed to individual character (flaws in human nature). In Japan, it is about the larger forces of nature and philosophy
- The genre of Japanese school comics often talk about bullying, showing what school life is like for Japanese children. Unlike in the West, Manga is part of everyday culture for children and adults in Japan.

Historical Art Forms to Contemporary Manga

- Scroll paintings created the first "animated" art form. The drawings show movement lines, similar to what you see in modern Manga.
- Ukiyo-e or "floating world" paintings, were first created in the late 16th Century as a popular form of woodblock prints. These flat images with distinct lines mirror modern day Manga.
- These first "manga" or scroll paintings were created for the elite. It wasn't until Hokusai created playful caricatures with dramatic themes using woodblock prints that the genre was popularized.



Manga vs Comic The War is Cooming..

Historical Art Forms to Contemporary Manga

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Activity: Storytelling Through Manga

Manga and comics are really just a form of visual storytelling. Think about a recent event in your life that had a conflict or unexpected outcome. Dramatize or exaggerate the event with humor or horror.

Using the Concept Sketch Page, jot down your idea in the bottom left hand corner. Make notes about the event, including the time of day, the weather, the characters involved, and the outcome. Sketch your idea on the draft.

Next, using the Manga Sheet provided, begin to layout a page telling your story. It can be an exaggeration of your story or an entirely fictitious version.

Elements to include in your comic:

Word balloons: Use the variety of balloons to illustrate what your characters are thinking, yelling, or whispering. Try to use at least 3 forms of the bubbles.

Dark Spots: Areas of shadow or black will grab the eye and lead readers through your story.

Faces: We are naturally attracted to people’s faces, especially the eyes. Manga artists draw eyes so they are 1/3 the size of a person’s face. Try to use this style.

In Manga, the mouths are very small

Contrasting areas: Simple areas contrasted with complex areas catch the viewer’s eye.

Examples of Unique Features Found in Manga Comics:

Food: Food is often used as a peace offering or a gift to break the ice. Many times the villain tries to attack the hero while she or he is eating a bowl of noodles or other meal.

Childishness: Manga characters often display a goofy immaturity. This may be to reinforce their innocence and to lighten a serious scene.

Falling Cherry Blossoms: The *sakura*, or cherry blossom, is a national symbol of Japan. It is often used in a patriotic fashion as a sign of confidence or victory.

Speed Lines: Speed lines are not exclusive to manga, but are used in it very often. Speed lines draw your attention to the action of the characters and make it look dynamic.

Supplies

- Clean, flat, well-lit drawing surface
- Paper or board to draw on. Professional comic and manga artists use 2- or 4-ply Bristol board sheets cut to 11"x17".
- Pencils (HB and B)
- Color markers such as Copic and ink pens.

Vocabulary

Anime: French term for "animation" adopted from the Japanese to describe all Japanese animation.

Bishoujo: Beautiful girl

Bishounen: Beautiful boy

Chibi: "Small" refers to a child-proportioned version of a manga character, often used for comic relief.

Manga: Whimsical or careless drawings, meaning Japanese comic books.

Shouju: Young girl.

Shouunen: Young male

Activity: Examining Story Elements Using Comic Strips (A Book Report Alternative)

Lesson adapted from readwritethink.org and the National Council of Teachers of English

Overview

Using the elements of creating a comic, students summarize key points of a story through illustration and phrases. This lesson modifies the traditional book report from synopsis and narrative summary to creative and visual and symbolic display. Students are asked to demonstrate comprehension of their story and convey elements of characters, setting, problems, events, and solutions in visual way. By doing so, they become more involved in the story and take a greater interest in details.

The story strips that result provide an effective method to evaluate student's understanding of important events and elements in a novel. The students will enjoy the artistic aspect as well.

From Theory to Practice

Story mapping activities, also called story grammars, are a technique for using graphic representations to explore elements of a reading working toward increased comprehension. As Margaret Foley explains in her "The (Un)Making of a Reader," story

mapping asks readers to focus on the distinctive features of a text (feature analysis), separate the facts or significant information from the other details (signal detection), provide abstract structures that represent the text structure of a reading (schema theory), and explore the process of reading by breaking that process into component parts and making the reader aware of the way that these parts combine (metacognition).

In this activity, students use story mapping as a step toward personal response to the text. The creation of the comic strips is part of a reading process that also includes reflection and personal rethinking of the text elements. In this way, students can explore the benefits of story mapping.

Student Objectives

Students will:

- read and analyze a novel independently.
- identify story elements directly from a text.
- create a six-frame story comic strip illustrating five story elements.
- respond individually to the text through reflection and rethinking of the text.

Resources

- Comic Strip Planning Sheet
- Rubric for Comic Strips

Other Questions for Students to Consider

- 1) What stood out the most for you in the story and why?
- 2) Have you ever had a problem like the one in the story? What did you do?
- 3) Did the solution in the story seem realistic and appropriate? Would you have changed it if you had written the story?
- 4) What event in the story interested you the most—not which one was most important, but which one did you want to know more about and why?

Elements of A Comic Strip

Scenes and Actions

Characters

Landscapes and Props

Captions

Character's Speech/Dialogue

Character's Thoughts

Web Resources

100 Picture Books Everyone Should Know

<http://www2.nypl.org/home/branch/kids/reading/recommended2.cfm?ListID=61>

The New York Public Library provides this list of 100 books that every child should know. These picture books can be used to teach many literary elements.

Integrative Art: American Comic Strips

http://www.psu.edu/dept/inart10_110/cmbk1main.html

<http://scottmccloud.com>

Further Reading

Foley, Margaret M. (2000) "The (Un)Making of a Reader." *Language Arts*, 77.6 (July): 506-511.

McCloud, Scott (1993) *Understanding Comics: The Invisible Art*: Harper Collins

Student Assessment/Reflections

Planning sheet and comic strips should be collected as evidence of student's understanding of story elements. Also note student participation in guided discussions, student response and reflection to the texts, as well as whether students answer questions and providing information about story elements.

The following questions can work well to guide these conversations.

- * What is the setting of your story?
- * Who are the characters of your story?
- * What is the problem/solution in your story?
- * What are the events of your story?

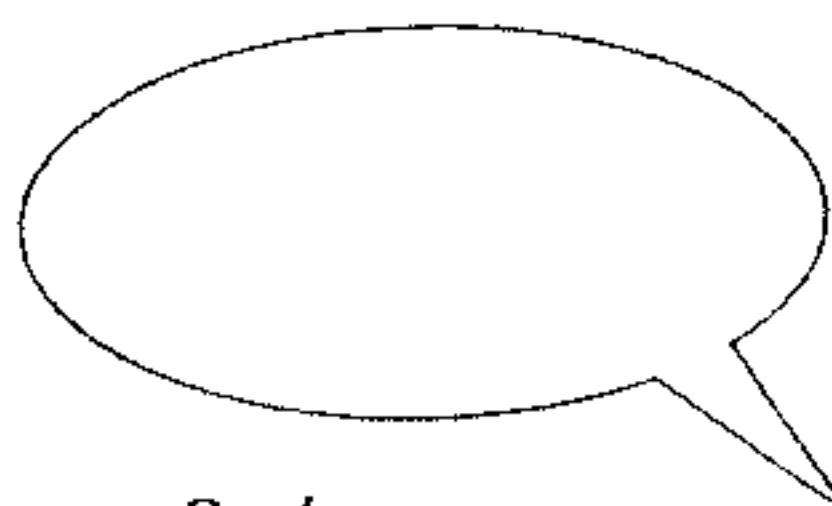
word balloons and Lettering

There is an infinite variety of ways to put words in your characters' mouths. Word balloons come in all shapes and sizes. The shape and style of the balloon tell the readers how the words are spoken.

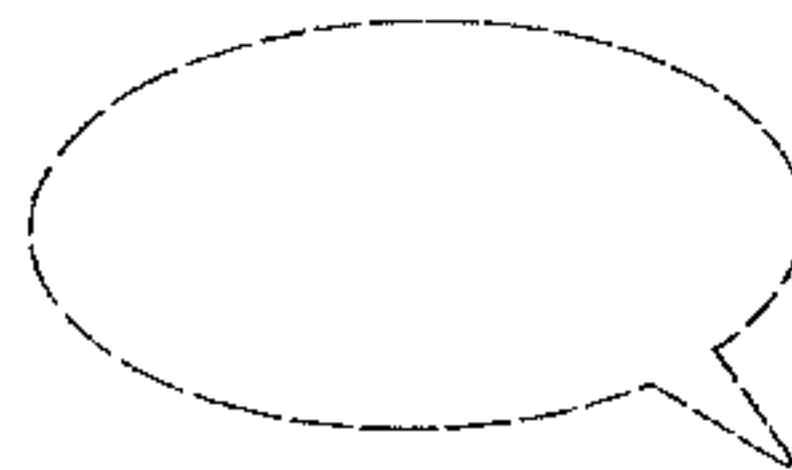
If you are not using a computer to do the lettering, then you must make sure that your lettering is done clearly and carefully. Spelling mistakes will reflect poorly on your abilities even if the art is beautiful.

Try making an alphabet style of your own based upon what you are comfortable with. You'll discover personal touches that will add some character to your lettering. You can also be much more expressive with hand lettering. Emphasizing or bolding certain words helps add emotion and tone to the dialogue.

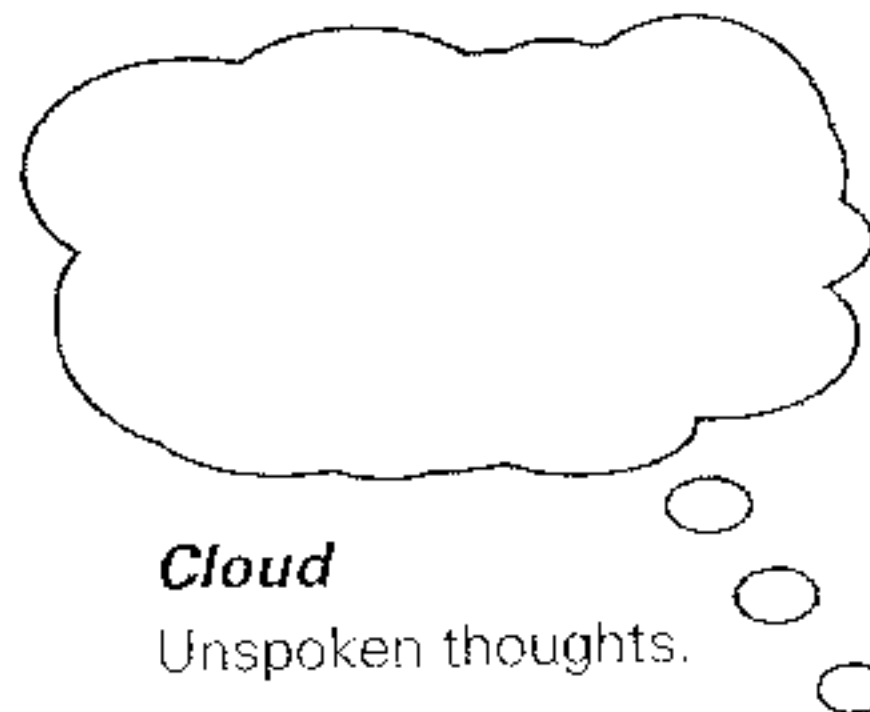
If you really want to get complicated, you could give certain characters unique lettering styles. This lets the reader know who is talking and says something about the personality of the character. Sometimes special effects can be used to express emotion. For example, a "thank you" written with icicles hanging from the letters cleverly indicates that the speaker is giving the cold shoulder or is insincere.



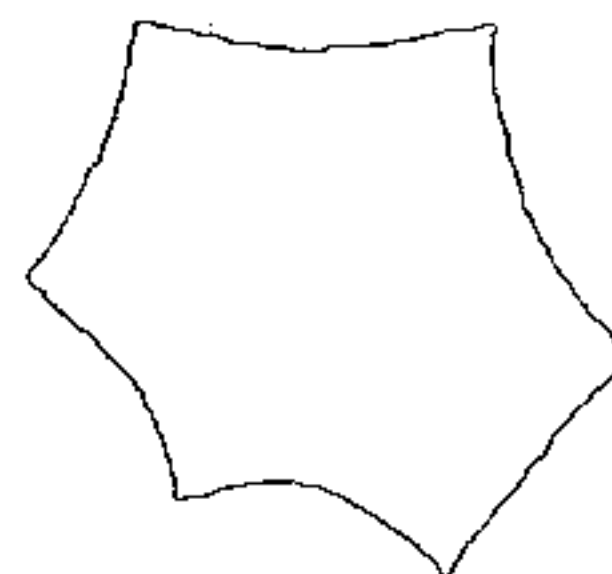
Oval
Normal speech.



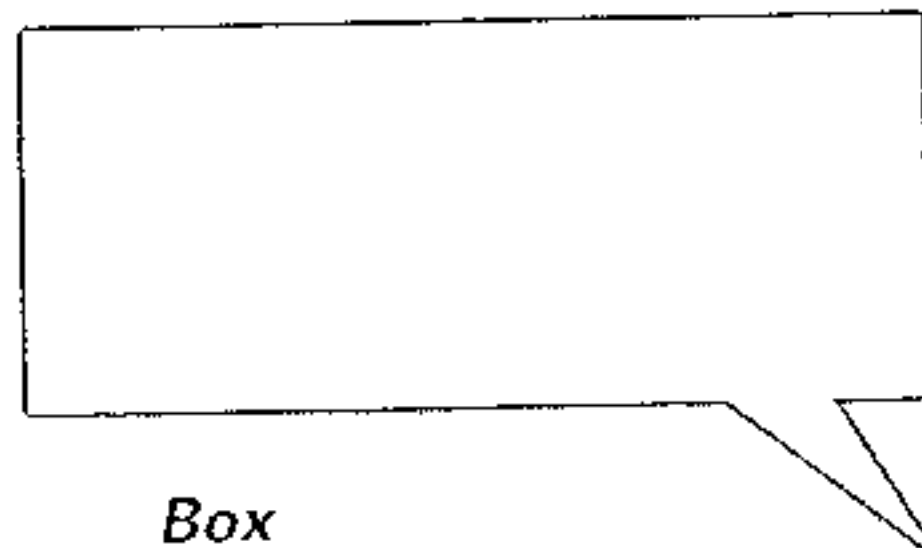
Dotted-line Oval
Whispering.



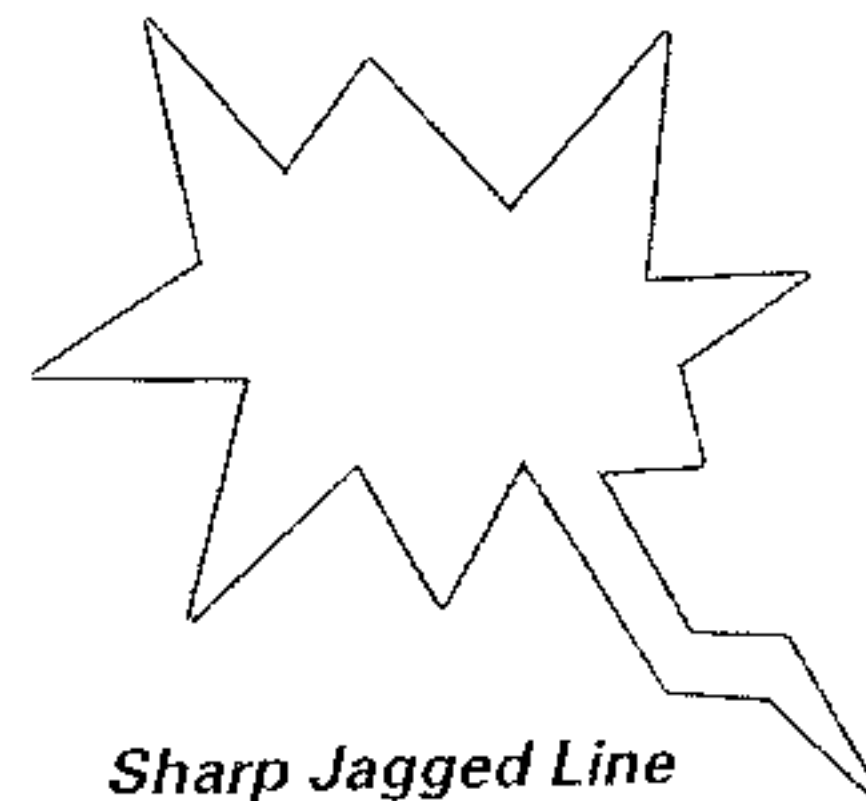
Cloud
Unspoken thoughts.



Soft Jagged Line
A loud voice.



Box
A mechanical or technological voice.



Sharp Jagged Line
Yelling.

ABCDEFGHIJK

LMNOPQRST

UVWXYZ

! ? 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 0 . , ; " ()

Computer Fonts

Handwritten lettering is generally used for manga, but computer-generated fonts such as Comix (shown) are used by most professionals. If you are going to letter your comic by hand, you should make a sample alphabet so that your letters remain consistent.



Lettering Tips

If you're not using a computer to letter your comic, you'll want to letter the pages after penciling and before inking. A few tips:

- Carefully print out each word in uppercase letters.
- Try to keep the style and size of the letters consistent. Imitate an existing font or make one of your own. Use a ruler to make the letters the same size every time.
- Start with the letters first, then draw the word balloons. If you draw the balloon first, you may run out of room for the words.
- Create stencils to help you draw consistent balloons, or try using a curved ruler.

Pacing and panel flow

Manga and other comics are really just a form of visual storytelling.

The panels set the pace of the story, much like a drummer sets the tempo for a song. Mix up the size of your panels based on what is important to the story. A succession of small panels, like many quick shots in a film, will speed up the pace. Larger panels demand attention and will hold the eye longer if they have more detail and a fully realized space.

If you are building the drama and suspense of the moment, draw a series of small, narrow panels. If you are reflecting on a long, lingering shot, make the panel larger and wider. Establishing shots that set up the location of the story are usually large and wide. Keep readers engaged in a scene that continues for a few pages by changing the point of view or angle with each new panel.

Too many complicated panels on a page can ruin good storytelling. The reader might zip right through your story without catching key information. A grid approach—six to nine equally sized panels spaced evenly across a page—can build a steady pace but can become tiresome and restricting at times. Do what will advance the story at the right pace. You can tell only so much story on one page.

Watch how the following manga pages lead the viewer's eye around the page, pacing the story as it is revealed.

The page has five panels: an establishing shot, an action/reaction shot, a detail shot, a further reaction shot and a final panel that moves the story along.

The amount of detail in the first panel holds the reader's attention.



The borderless panel really stands out. The reaction of wonder and awe is the focus of this page.

Manga readers will often read in the direction characters in the panel are looking. They will be directed by the gaze and want to see what the character is looking at.

Contrasting areas of light and dark attract the eye of the reader. This glowing orb becomes the focus against the dark background.

COMIC STRIP RUBRIC

Student's Name: _____

	4	3	2	1
Action	Action makes sense from one panel to another	Most of the action makes sense from one panel to another	Some of the action makes sense from one panel to another	Action does not make sense from one panel to another
Characters	Characters are believable in all panels	Characters are believable in most panels	Characters are adequate in some panels	Characters are not believable
Landscape and props	Landscape and props relate to the action and characters in all panels	Landscape and props relate to the action and characters in most panels	Landscape and props relate to the action and characters in one panel	Landscape and props are not chosen or do not make sense
Captions	Captions are well written and edited for punctuation, grammar, and usage	Captions make sense and are edited for punctuation, grammar, and usage	Captions may or may not always make sense; some are not edited for punctuation, grammar, and usage	Captions don't make sense and are not edited for punctuation, grammar, and usage
Onomatopoeia	Onomatopoetic words are used correctly in five or six panels	Onomatopoetic words are used in two or three panels	One onomatopoetic word is used	No use of onomatopoeia in the comic

Comments:

UNIT 3: TAKING ON THE REAL WORLD THROUGH COMICS

Connect to the social studies and language arts curriculum for high school students

“...the Superhero – more than any even the ordinary fictional hero – has to represent the values of the society that produces him. That means that what, say, Superman symbolizes changes over time. In the 1950s, he may have been hunting commies. In the 1970s, he may have been clearing a framed peace activist against a corrupt judicial system. Either way – the hero does the right thing. Perhaps more importantly, *he knows what the right thing is.*”

-- Danny Fingeroth, *Superman on the Couch*, 2004, p. 17

Coming out of the Depression years, many superhero comic creators were working class Jewish immigrants. Superheroes offered their creators (and the readers of comic books) some escape into alter egos in which they were suave, popular, powerful, and could make a difference in the world. Superheroes, like Superman, whose motto was to fight for Truth, Justice, and the American Way, fought for the good of the people, helped out the powerless, and brought criminals to justice.



Alex Ross, *Superman and the Heroes of September 11, 2001*, cover (2002)
Watercolor over graphite on Strathmore board
underdrawing, 25 1/8 x 16 3/4
On loan from the Library of Congress
Published in: *9-11 the world's finest comic book writers and artists tell stories to remember* / edited by Paul Levitz. New York: DC Comics, copyright 2002, v. 2, cover.

Incidentally, it was through leaking inside information about the Ku Klux Klan to the Superman radio show in the 1940s that Stetson Kennedy, a Southerner, attempted to bring down the organization. Listen to a podcast of this story (aired March 25, 2005) on Chicago Public Radio's *This American Life* at http://www.thislife.org/Radio_Episode.aspx?sched=1073

Following the terrorist attacks on September 11, comic artists responded with *9-11: The World's Finest Comic Book Writers and Artists Tell Stories to Remember*. In the cover illustration, "Superman and the Heroes of September 11, 2001," Superman and Superdog, their backs to us, stand in deference before the larger-than-life (larger than even Superman himself) firemen, police, medical professionals, and others who performed acts of heroism on that day.

LESSON 1: GRAPHIC NOVELS

Readers who enjoy comic books may also be attracted to other books told in visual form. Numerous contemporary artists have used the format of the graphic novel to tell powerful personal stories or to recount significant historical events.

Some graphic novels include:

Colon, Ernie, & Jacobson, Sid. (2006). *The 9/11 report: A graphic adaptation*. New York: Hill and Wang.

A graphic version of the 9/11 commission's government report. Hear an interview with Colon and Jacobson on NPR's *Talk of the Nation* (August 8, 2006) archived online at <http://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=5690970>
Eugene Public Library: YA-GN JACOBSON SID 911 REPO

Guibert, Emmanuel. (2008). *Alan's war: Memories of G.I. Alan Pope*. New York: First Second.

A memoir of a World War II veteran told in the format of a graphic novel.
Eugene Public Library: YA-GN GUIBERT EMM ALANS WA

Geary, Rick. (2008). *Lindbergh child*. New York: ComicsLit.

In an infamous 1932 crime, aviator Charles Lindbergh's infant son was kidnapped and murdered. Using well-researched text and appealing art, Geary expertly recounts the crime's setting, the colorful characters involved (on both sides of the law), the communication between the kidnapper and Lindbergh, and the evidence both for and against Richard Hauptmann, the murder suspect.
Eugene Public Library: YA-GN GEARY RIC LINDBERG

Satrapı, Marjane. (2003). *Persepolis: The story of a childhood*. New York: Pantheon Books.

Satrapı's autobiography tells of her life as young girl in Iran during the Islamic Revolution.
Eugene Public Library: YA-GN SATRAPI MAR PERSEPOL

Spiegelman, Art. (1997). *Maus: A survivor's tale*. New York: Pantheon Books.

A classic which tells a story of survival during the Holocaust.
Eugene Public Library: YA-GN SPIEGELMAN ART MAUS

Sturm, James, & Tommaso, Rich. (2007). *Satchel Paige: Striking out Jim Crow*. White River Junction: VT: The Center for Cartoon Studies.

A graphic novel telling the story of an African-American baseball legend who started his career in the Negro Leagues in Alabama in the 1920s.
Eugene Public Library: J-COM STURM JAM SATCHEL

Select a graphic novel to read with your students. As you read, have students pay particular attention to how the format and presentation of the material visually adds to the experience with the text.

Use the following questions to guide your discussion:

- How do the graphic elements and illustrations contribute to the experience of the text? Describe the font treatment, quality of line, and how the action is divided into frames. What mood do these elements create?
- How are the characters depicted? Has the author chosen a realistic approach or used metaphor or satire?
- Who is the narrator? Describe the voice and perspective.
- Where does the story take place? How does the author help you see the setting?
- Why do you think the author chose this format to tell this story?
- Who do you think the intended audience is for this work?

Find another book on this same theme (targeted at a similar reading level) written in a more conventional prose format. Compare the styles of the two works and the resulting effect and impact of each.

- Are there some things that are better expressed through a graphic form?
- Are some things better left to prose and the reader's imagination?
- What are the weaknesses and strengths of each?
- Did you come away from both work having a similar understanding of the subject and emotional connection to the material? If not, how was the experience different?
- Was there any discovery in this process that surprised you?

Activity: Writing and illustration

After becoming familiar with how graphic novels and superhero comics express real world issues, now it's your turn to make your own illustration relating to an issue of importance to you.

Select a current issue that is of concern to you. What is the problem? Who does it affect? Imagine that you have the power to make a difference. Create a comic to tell about it in visual form.

Tie in to a history class by illustrating an important historical event through an original one-page illustration or comic. What is the conflict? Who are the characters? Where there any heroes or superheroes involved? How was the story resolved (or does it remain an unfinished tale)?

LESSON 2: SUPERHEROES AND GENDER STEREOTYPES

“Comics Makeovers: Examining Race, Class, Ethnicity, and Gender in the Media”

Link to this lesson plan online:

http://www.readwritethink.org/lessons/lesson_view.asp?id=207



Darwyn Cooke
Catwoman, cover (2003)
Pencil and ink on Bristol
board, 11 x 17
On loan from David Mandel



Kurt Schaffenberger
Lois Lane #42, cover
(1963)
Pencil and ink on Bristol
board, 18 ¼ x 12 ¼
On loan from Diana
Schutz

EXPLORING SUPERHEROES CHART

Directions: Choose two superheroes from popular culture texts and two superheroes from books. Use the *GUIDING QUESTIONS FOR EXPLORING SUPERHEROES* to decide what perspectives you would like to explore before filling out this chart.

Name of Superhero	Character Traits as Portrayed in a Media Text or in a Children's Book	Character Traits Explored from Perspective 1	Character Traits Explored from Perspective 2

Comic Makeovers: Examining Race, Class, Ethnicity, and Gender in the Media

Author

[Traci Gardner](#)

Blacksburg, Virginia

Grade Band

9-12

Estimated Lesson Time

Five 50-minute sessions

Overview

Stereotyped images create false ideals that real people can't hope to live up to, foster low self-esteem for those who don't fit in, and restrict people's ideas of what they're capable of. In this lesson, students explore representations of race, class, ethnicity, and gender by analyzing comics over a two-week period and then re-envisioning them with a "comic character makeover." This activity leads to greater awareness of stereotypes in the media and urges students to form more realistic visions of these images as they perform their makeovers.



From Theory to Practice

Our students are surrounded by texts, print and nonprint, that take advantage of the increasing options for combining words, images, sounds, and other media to create a publication. As these options increase, the capabilities that students must develop to be knowledgeable members of their literacy communities also increase. As the 1975 NCTE Resolution on Promoting Media Literacy states, "new critical abilities 'in reading, listening, viewing, and thinking' . . . enable students to deal constructively with complex new modes of delivering information, new multisensory tactics for persuasion, and new technology-based art forms."

Perhaps one of the simpler forms of media to explore in the classroom is the cartoon or comic strip. As Rocco Versaci explains, however, cartoons can be quite valuable in the classroom, for "placing a comic book—the basic form of which [students] no doubt recognize—into the context of the classroom . . . can catch students off guard in a positive way, and this disorientation . . . [can lead] students to become more engaged by a given work" (62).

Read More

[NCTE Resolution on Promoting Media Literacy.](#)

Versaci, Rocco. 2001. "[How Comic Books Can Change the Way Our Students See Literature: One Teacher's Perspective.](#)" [English Journal 91.2](#) (November): 61-67.

McCloud, Scott. 1993. *Understanding Comics: The Invisible Art*. New York: HarperCollins.

Student Objectives

Students will

- discuss characteristics of various stereotypes in our society.
- develop an understanding of the impact of stereotypes in television and print media, in particular cartoons and comic strips.
- develop the insights necessary to evaluate critically the messages disseminated by the mass media.
- practice applying a formal strategy for analyzing, critiquing, and rethinking print media that combines visual and text elements (in particular cartoons and comics).

Resources

- [Comic Strip Planning Sheet](#)
- ["Cartoons Still Stereotype Gender Roles" Press Release](#)
- [Comic Character Makeover Rubric](#)
- [Comic Makeover Project Assignment](#)
- [Comic Creator Student Interactive](#)
- [Cartoon Analysis Worksheet](#)

Instructional Plan

Resources

- Daily copies of newspaper comics for a two-week period, or access to comics online (see [Web Resources](#) for options)
- Copies of the [Comic Strip Planning Sheet](#) and [Comic Makeover Project Assignment](#)
- Copies or online access to the ["Cartoons Still Stereotype Gender Roles" Press Release](#)
- [Comic Creator Student Interactive](#)
- (Optional) [Cartoon Analysis Worksheet](#)

Preparation

- If you have not discussed the use of gender-fair language with your students, it's useful to do so before they begin analyzing the cartoons and comic strips so that they are tuned in to the ways that language use can communicate bias and stereotypes. The Purdue OWL's [handout on Non-Sexist Language](#) is a good place to start. The ReadWriteThink lesson [Avoiding Sexist Language by Using Gender-Fair Pronouns](#) is another useful resource.
- Preview available comics and choose a selection that is appropriate for your classroom. When you explain the comic makeover project to your class, you will need to explain how students will access the comics—will they go to online comics sites? will you provide them printouts? will they check the daily newspaper?
- (Optional) If you're using online comics, you may want to print the comics that your students are examining so that you can cut away and discard bordering material on the pages (such as advertisements, some of which may be inappropriate for your class). Prior to the first class meeting, you may want to have students brainstorm a list of comics that they are interested in so that you can print selections that they will enjoy working with for this project.
- Make copies of the [Comic Strip Planning Sheet](#), [Comic Makeover Project Assignment](#), and, if desired, the [Cartoon Analysis Worksheet](#)
- Test the [Comic Creator Student Interactive](#) on your computers to familiarize yourself with the tool and ensure that you have the Flash plug-in installed. You can download the plug-in from the [technical support page](#).

Instruction and Activities

Session One

1. Share the "[Cartoons Still Stereotype Gender Roles](#)" Press Release with your class. Since it's a short piece, you can read it to the class, but they will benefit from a copy of the article or having the article's URL so that they can refer to it over the course of this project as needed.
2. Once you've read the press release completely, ask students to point out details from the piece that help prove the researchers' point that cartoons stereotype gender roles (e.g., male characters outnumber female characters; and female characters are flatter than male characters). Make a list of these characteristics on the board or on chart paper. Note that you will return to this list in later sessions, so chart paper would be preferred if your board is likely to be erased between sessions.
3. Turn students' attention to other kinds of stereotyping—unfair or unrealistic representation of race, ethnicity, religion, and class. Ensure that students understand each of the terms. Customize the list to fit your class and other projects you're working on. For instance you might want to add ageism to the list of stereotypes to consider.
4. Divide students into small groups, and have each group choose a television cartoon to explore in class. Students will need to be familiar enough with the cartoon to discuss its representation of characters; thus, it's probably best to let students select the cartoons themselves than to assign cartoons. However, you should probably remind students to choose a cartoon that is acceptable for class discussion (e.g., *Powerpuff Girls*, *The Fairly OddParents*, and *SpongeBob SquarePants*). If necessary, you might also point out cartoons that you deem unacceptable, telling students why so that they understand the limitations.
5. Have students explore the cartoon that they've chosen for the stereotypes that have been identified in the discussion. Ask them to work with two large goals in mind:
 - a. Look at the portrayal of gender in the cartoons, considering the list of characteristics gathered from the APA press release. Has the portrayal of gender changed since 1997, and if so, how?
 - b. Look at other features of the characters in the cartoon—race, ethnicity, religion, class, and so forth. Create a list of the characteristics that demonstrate that the cartoon your group is examining is or isn't stereotyped.
6. Allow students the rest of the session to work on their analysis. Explain that they will present and discuss their findings with the rest of the class during the next session. Each group will have up to five minutes to share their findings.
7. Circulate among students as they work on this project. The purpose of this activity is for students to practice the skills that they'll use in the focused, individual examination of the comic strip; therefore, provide positive feedback on the analytical skills that they'll need to use in later sessions. Likewise, make suggestions for issues that students may be missing in their observations of the cartoons (e.g., what do the different species of sea life represent in *SpongeBob SquarePants*?).
8. For homework, students may want to watch the cartoon that their group is analyzing. (That's one homework assignment that they're sure to enjoy!)

Session Two

1. Remind students of the goals of their group analysis of a television cartoon. Answer any questions students have.
2. Give students five to ten minutes to make last-minute preparations and to practice their presentation.
3. Have groups present their findings, sticking closely to the five-minutes-per-group guideline that you've established. As students work, ask them to connect to the list of characteristics created during the previous session.
4. Ask students to listen for details from the presentations that help prove whether the cartoons stereotype gender roles, race, ethnicity, religion, class and so forth.
5. Once all presentations are complete, ask students to point out details from the piece that help

prove the groups' points that cartoons stereotype (or don't). Make a list of these characteristics on the board or on chart paper. Again, you will return to this list in later sessions, so chart paper would be preferred if your board is likely to be erased between sessions.

6. By the end of class, arrange the lists into a series of checklist questions that students can use to analyze comics.
7. (Optional) This can be a good opportunity for a mini-lesson on parallelism. Note how to make sentence structure and verb tense match as you revise the brainstormed list into the checklist. Talk aloud as you write the sentences so that students understand the composing choices that you are making. Provide positive feedback when students create parallel items for the checklist themselves.

Session Three

1. Review the checklist of questions that students composed during the previous class session. Answer any questions, and make any corrections or additions.
2. Share the Comic Makeover Project Assignment with students. As you discuss the assignment, explain how the checklist that you've compiled can be used to analyze the comic strips for the project.
3. Add details on the comic strips that students will use and how they will access them (online, printed handouts from you, daily newspaper, and so forth).
4. (Optional) If you have not pre-selected the comics, remind students of any content guidelines for the comics that they choose. Let them know if any comics are completely off-limits as well.
5. Explain the timeline you've chosen for the analysis. Students can gather and analyze the comics over the next two weeks, or students can gather the comics for two weeks from online comic archives, saved newspapers, or printouts that you provide so that they can begin the analysis immediately.
6. Demonstrate the process of summarizing and evaluating with a sample comic strip.
7. Divide students into small groups and allow them to begin their work on the project in class. The groups should support each other and share ideas. Circulate among students as they work.

Session Four

[Note: These next two sessions take place after two-week analysis of the comic strips is completed. Depending upon the timeline you've chosen for the project, you may allow additional time for students to work in class prior to this session, where they use the Comic Creator to rewrite their comic strips.]

1. Distribute the [Comic Strip Planning Sheet](#).
2. Demonstrate the basic steps for rewriting the comic strips using the [Comic Creator](#).
3. Allow students the remainder of the class period to plan their makeover using the [Comic Strip Planning Sheet](#). Alternately, you can share the planning sheet and demonstrate the [Comic Creator](#) and then have students use the [Comic Strip Planning Sheet](#) to plan their makeovers for homework.

Session Five

1. Review the use of the [Comic Strip Planning Sheet](#) and the [Comic Creator](#).
2. Students will use the [Comic Creator](#) during this class period to create their revised and rewritten comic strip. Keep the focus of this session on revising the character's behavior and language as well as the plot, rather than worrying about the visual representation of the comic strip character. It's unlikely that the characters in the Comic Creator will be an ideal match for the characters in the comic strips that your students are making over. Let this part of the project focus on the way that words and situations can create biased or unrealistic representations. Alternately, you can print blank comic strip panes and have students draw their revised comics.
3. While students work, again encourage them to interact with one another, to share and receive feedback on their plans for comic strips.
4. After the comic strips are printed out, students can decorate them with markers or other classroom supplies.
5. Depending upon the pace of the project, you may need to give students additional time in-class or at home to complete the other parts of the project. Ask students to turn in two copies of the comic

strip, along with one copy of the supporting materials for their project (one copy of the strip is for you to evaluate, and the other copy can be posted and shared in the classroom).

Web Resources

[Cartoons Still Stereotype Gender Roles](http://www.readwritethink.org/lesson_images/lesson207/cartoon-stereotypes.html)

http://www.readwritethink.org/lesson_images/lesson207/cartoon-stereotypes.html

This 1997 American Psychological Association (APA) press release outlines a study by two Allegheny College researchers who found stereotyped roles dominated Saturday morning television cartoons. This article defines the basic issue of stereotyping in media and states some of the basic characteristics for students to look for as they analyze the comics they've chosen (e.g., role of character in the comic, character traits, and occupational role).

If you prefer to begin this activity by focusing on a stereotype other than gender, these articles that consider other stereotypes can provide a starting place:

- [Speedy Gonzales Caged by Cartoon Network](#)
- [WB Cartoons racist](#)
- [Depicting Mohammed](#)

[Cartoon Analysis Worksheet from the US National Archives and Records Administration](http://www.archives.gov/education/lessons/worksheets/cartoon.html)

<http://www.archives.gov/education/lessons/worksheets/cartoon.html>

Designed for a [lesson plan on political cartoons](#) in the NARA's Digital Classroom collection, this worksheet can provide a nice starting point for your students.

[King Syndicate Comics](http://www.kingfeatures.com/features/comics/comics.htm)

<http://www.kingfeatures.com/features/comics/comics.htm>

King Syndicate is the home of such cartoons as *Curtis*, *Dennis the Menace*, and *Spiderman*. The site also includes editorial cartoons. Each comic includes a "The Characters" link at the bottom of the page, where short biographies are available. Links above each cartoon allow you to navigate to four weeks of cartoons. Unlike others listed below, the King Syndicate site is relatively clean: the only references to advertising are for options to purchase an online subscription to the cartoons themselves.

[Comics.Com List of Features](http://www.comics.com/categories/index.html)

<http://www.comics.com/categories/index.html>

Comics.Com is United Media's homepage for all its comic publications. The collection includes *Peanuts*, *Dilbert*, and *Tarzan* as well as editorial cartoons. For some cartoons, there is accompanying material that would be pertinent to the assignment. For instance, the *Peanuts* page includes a link to information on all of the characters in the cartoon.

Note that Comics.Com pages do include pop-under advertisements as well as advertisements on the pages with the comics. The advertisements seem to be tied to the content and audience of the comics themselves. For instance, the ads on the page with the *Peanuts* comics were all for *Peanuts* merchandise (watches, books, and so forth). The more adult adventures of *Tarzan*, however, were accompanied by an advertisement for an online dating service. Check the cartoons that you plan to use carefully, and be aware that the ads can change without any notice. Perhaps the safest option would be to print the comics and cut away offending material. You'll gain the added benefit of focusing students' attention on the comic, rather than the surrounding material.

[UComics.com](http://www.ucomics.com/)

<http://www.ucomics.com/>

UComics.Com is the Universal Syndicate's collection of comic publications, which includes comics such as *Dick Tracy*, *Doonesbury*, *Garfield*, *Ziggy*, and *Too Much Coffee Man*. Editorial cartoons are also included.

Like the Comics.Com site, UComics.Com includes advertisements which may be problematic on all pages (e.g., VISA applications). Additionally, a membership and login is required to access some archives. For this site, too, you are perhaps best advised to print the comics and cut away offending material.

[Integrative Art: American Comic Strips](#)

http://www.psu.edu/dept/inart10_110/inart10/cmbk1main.html

This site provides a history of American comic strips, including information on graphic novels that can serve as background on the genre.

[Scott McCloud](#)

<http://www.scottmccloud.com>

Visit the Web site of Scott McCloud, author of *Understanding Comics* and *Reinventing Comics*, for background on the genre, inspirations, and sample comics.

[The Museum of Black Superheroes](#)

<http://www.blacksuperhero.com/index.html>

For explorations of additional comic makeovers, explore the characters profiled on the Museum of Black Superheroes.

Student Assessment/Reflections

For formal assessment, use the [Comic Character Makeover Rubric](#) which is tied to both the analysis of the existing comics and the revision of that comic strip.

Additionally, you can ask students to freewrite on the following reflective question: As you examined and revised your comic strip, what did you realize that you didn't notice before about your particular comic strips or comics and cartoons in general?

Informal feedback from students who read the revised comics and discussion of various stereotypes are also valid outcomes. Provide support for the recognitions about misrepresentation in the media that students make during this project.

NCTE/IRA Standards

1 - Students read a wide range of print and nonprint texts to build an understanding of texts, of themselves, and of the cultures of the United States and the world; to acquire new information; to respond to the needs and demands of society and the workplace; and for personal fulfillment. Among these texts are fiction and nonfiction, classic and contemporary works.

4 - Students adjust their use of spoken, written, and visual language (e.g., conventions, style, vocabulary) to communicate effectively with a variety of audiences and for different purposes.

6 - Students apply knowledge of language structure, language conventions (e.g., spelling and punctuation), media techniques, figurative language, and genre to create, critique, and discuss print and nonprint texts.

12 - Students use spoken, written, and visual language to accomplish their own purposes (e.g., for learning, enjoyment, persuasion, and the exchange of information).



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UNIT 4: SCIENCE AND THE SCIENCE FANTASY OF SUPERHEROES

Connect to the science, language arts, social studies, and visual arts curriculum.

“The realm of superheroes is occupied by individuals with fantastic powers (whether magic or “science” based), as well as people who fight their battles with advanced technology (often differentiated from magic only because the author says so)...”

-- Danny Fingeroth, *Superman on the Couch* (2004), p. 16.



Jack Kirby (pencils); Syd Shores (inks)
Captain America #109, |four pages (1969)
Pencil and ink on Bristol board, 18 x 13 each
On loan from Marc Kardell

The Incredible Hulk, a monstrous creature of supreme strength and uncontrollable rage, was the alter ego of scientist Dr. Bruce Banner. In the early 1960s when the Hulk was introduced, the United States and the Soviet Union were engaged in the Cold War and the threat of nuclear weapons were a constant anxiety. In fact, the story maintained that Dr. Banner had been exposed to gamma radiation in an explosion of this new kind of bomb.

The X-Men were teenage mutants with incredible abilities. Professor Charles Xavier (or Professor X) can read people's minds, erase certain memories, or cause total amnesia. Bobby Drake (the Iceman) can create ice, lower his own body temperature, and the body temperatures of those around him. Warren Worthington III (Angel) has wings like a bird but with superhuman strength. He can fly as high as an airplane while his lungs pull oxygen from the air even at extreme altitudes.

Science is the favorite subject of the teenage Peter Parker. One evening, while watching a demonstration about radioactivity, Parker is bitten by a spider that has accidentally absorbed the radioactive waves. The result: **Spider-Man**. Like a spider, Spider-Man can balance on thin wire, walk upside down, and lift many times his own body weight.

Suggested reading:

Hibbert, Clare. (2005). *JLA: The Flash's book of speed*. New York: DK Publishing, Inc.

The Flash, a superhero capable of superhuman speed, introduces readers to the fastest things on Earth (natural forces, animals, athletes, technology, and more) and to his superhero friends and enemies who embody these scientific principles.

Eugene Public Library: J 531 HIBBERT 2005

Kakalios, James. (2005). *The physics of superheroes*. New York: Gotham Books.

Kakalios, a professor of physics and an avid superhero comic fan, found that his students expressed more interest in the subject when he used superhero comics as examples to illustrate real physics concepts.

Eugene Public Library: 530.071 KAKALIOS 2005

Rodari, Gianni. (1996). *The grammar of fantasy: An introduction to the art of inventing stories*. New York: Teachers & Writers Collaborative.

Eugene Public Library: 372.642 RODARI 1996

Three excellent books that tell the back stories of these superheroes while providing insight into the scientific principles which are employed in the stories and historical context out of which these characters developed:

Teitelbaum, Michael. (2000). *The story of the X-Men: How it all began*. New York: DK Publishing, Inc.

Eugene Public Library: J 741.5973 TEITELBAUM 2000

Teitelbaum, Michael. (2001). *The amazing Spider-Man*. New York: DK Publishing, Inc.

Eugene Public Library: J 741.5973 TEITELBAUM 2001

Teitelbaum, Michael. (2003). *The story of the Incredible Hulk*. New York: DK Publishing, Inc.

Eugene Public Library: J 741.5973 TEITELBAUM 2003

Activity idea: Reporting science through a visual means

The following headlines appeared in a recent online version of the *New York Times*:

Self-Destructive Behavior in Cells May Hold Key to a Longer Life

<http://www.nytimes.com/2009/10/06/science/06cell.html?ref=science>

Swine Flu Vaccine Reaches an Anxious Nation

<http://www.nytimes.com/2009/10/06/health/06glob.html?ref=science>

E. Coli Path Shows Flaws in Beef Inspection

<http://www.nytimes.com/2009/10/04/health/04meat.html?em>

Read a newspaper story about a current issue in science. Your task is to make the story accessible to a wider audience by telling it in both words and pictures. Create a comic strip or storyboard that expresses the main ideas of the article.

Activity idea: Creative play with science

While a large portion of the science in superhero comics is based on actual science, fantasy also plays a significant role in these stories. This activity inspires creative writing and playful approaches to scientific principles.

Gianni Rodari was the author of countless silly stories to delight children. He conceived of a country where men were made of butter (and lived in refrigerators instead of houses), of a merry-go-round on which its riders fly all over the world atop their horses with each rotation of the ride, of a fantastic day when a downpour of candy showers down upon the residents of the city, and a land where the prefix “un-” is in front of all the words so that everything is opposite of what we expect.

One of Rodari's story-inventing games outlined in his text *The Grammar of Fantasy* is the **arbitrary prefix**. Take any word and place a prefix in front – and the resulting concept conjures up a multitude of new possibilities. Consider the potential of a micro-hippopotamus, a sub-dog, an un-cloud. A superhero who unleashes the power of language (in the form of a simple prefix) can change the world.

Another game suggested by Rodari is the **fantastic binomial**. In this activity, two dissimilar words are joined together to create a new fantastic possibility. Many superheroes embrace the idea of hybrids or mutants between two objects (a cross between a man and a machine, a cross between man and a force of nature, a cross between a man and an alien being). Consider the possibilities of the following words combinations: wind-man, telephone-bug, hand-telescope, gravity-thermometer, electric-mouse, percussive-cat. Have students write an adventure story based on their own fantastic binomials.

Another fantastic writing prompt that Rodari offers is that of the hypothesis: **What would happen if...?** What if you had the power to command and alter nature (wind, rain, lightning, sun, seasons, how plants grow, creating new hybrid or cloned animals, etc.)? What would you do? How might the world be different? What adventure might you come upon as a result of your superpower?