

LESSON #2

PICTURE IT! A CELEBRATION OF COMICS, COMIC BOOKS, AND GRAPHIC NOVELS

TEEN READ MONTH

COMICS AND CULTURE

Comics were once considered the lowest form of literature, even though they provided a reflection of American culture for many readers. From World War II through the conflict in Vietnam, comic books entertained readers with tales from the battlefield and the home front. When the 1960s counterculture emerged, there was a surge of underground comics that reflected the new youth culture. Comics even influenced modern artists in the 1960s. Today, comics command the respect of history professors and art critics alike.

EDITORIAL AND POLITICAL CARTOONS:

Since the 19th century, editorial cartoons have offered political and social commentary on the issues of the day. They often use symbols, exaggeration, caricature, stereotypes and irony to make a point. They are often funny, but they can also be somber in tone.

VISIT [NIE.NEWSOK.COM](http://nie.newsok.com) FOR MORE INFORMATION ON THE ELEMENTS OF EDITORIAL CARTOONS AND LINKS TO EDITORIAL CARTOON GALLERIES.

ACTIVITY: In a small group, brainstorm an idea for an editorial cartoon. Select a current issue and discuss the controversy surrounding it. What are the messages from both sides of the issue? What point of view or commentary does the group want to convey with the cartoon?

COMICS BECOME ART:

Artist Roy Lichtenstein's painting *Drowning Girl* is a parody of Romance comics from the 1960s. Visit the Museum of Modern Art at www.moma.org and search for *Drowning Girl* to read or hear what the museum says about this famous piece of Pop Art.

ACTIVITY: Research "Pop Art." What is the importance of the Pop Art movement? How did Lichtenstein use comic books for his art and why was it controversial? What other artists were inspired by comics in this art movement? What kind of pop art would you create today?

SUPERHEROES!

America's comic book market is dominated by Superheroes. The genre was born with *Action Comics #1* in 1938 when the story of Superman debuted. Today, classic and modern superheroes star in Hollywood movies, on television, in video games, and in novels. Fans celebrate their heroes at comic conventions, in online forums, and through fan fiction.

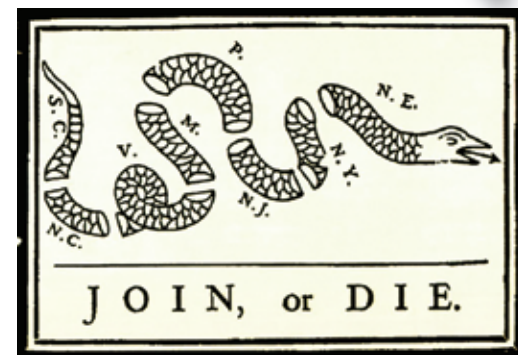
ACTIVITY: Research the origin story of a favorite superhero. Comic Vine (www.comicvine.com) is a good place to start. What character did you choose, and why? Has the character changed much over the years? Has this character influenced other aspects of popular culture? What does this superhero's story mean to you?

FROM GRAPHIC NOVEL TO FILM

Did you know that last summer's hit movie *Cowboys and Aliens* was based on a graphic novel? Hollywood has been adapting popular comic books and graphic novels into screenplays for decades.

ACTIVITY: Identify a movie that has been based on a graphic novel. Once you have found your novel/movie pair, read the graphic novel and watch the movie so you can compare and contrast. What were the differences between book and film? Do you prefer the book or the movie? Why?

VISIT [NIE.NEWSOK.COM](http://nie.newsok.com) TO READ ABOUT SUPERMAN'S STRANGE ORIGIN, AND TO FIND ADDITIONAL LINKS AND ACTIVITIES.



* This 1754 drawing by Benjamin Franklin has been called the first editorial cartoon. The commentary on colonial unity during the French and Indian War would later be adopted to advance the cause of the colonies against the British.



* You can read the very first Superman story online, courtesy of the University of Virginia's American Studies program. Visit nie.newsok.com for the link!