

TEEN READ MONTH

LESSON #1

ONLINE LESSON EXTENSION

ACTIVITY: AMERICAN COMIC STRIPS

Ask your parents, grandparents or other older relatives about comic strips they used to read in the newspaper. What did they like about the comic strips? What do they remember about the characters? Do some online research on the comic strips and report back to your relative with the information you find for further discussion. Toonopedia at www.toonopedia.com is a good place to start your research.

If your relatives can't think of a comic strip, ask them if they remember reading any of the following:

- * *Apartment 3G*
- * *Dondi*
- * *Li'l Abner*
- * *Little Orphan Annie*
- * *Mary Worth*
- * *Peanuts*
- * *Pogo*
- * *Popeye*
- * *Snuffy Smith*

ACTIVITY: OKLAHOMA CARTOONISTS

Did you know that an Oklahoman created one of the most famous 20th century comic strips? Chester Gould of Pawnee, Oklahoma, was the man behind the popular *Dick Tracy* strip. Research another Sooner State cartoonist by making a virtual visit to the Oklahoma Cartoonist Collection at Oklahoma's own Toy and Action Figure Museum, www.actionfiguremuseum.com. Select one of the artists, gather the information from the OK Cartoonist Collection, then do additional research to find out more about the artist and his comic creations.

ACTIVITY: A COMICS SCAVENGER HUNT

Research online to find the answers to these questions:

- * Who was Dale Messick, and why is this name famous in the annals of comic strip history?
- * DC comics is one of the most famous and successful comic book publishers. What does the "DC" stand for?
- * Who was Jack Kirby?
- * Romance comic books were popular in America from the late 1940s into the early 1970s. Name three comic book titles of this once popular genre. (Note: Romance is not gone from the comic book world. If you want to find a Romance, check out the Manga section at your library or comic book store.)
- * The 1950s through the 1970s also saw a host of Horror comic book titles. Name three titles from this era. (Give yourself an extra point if you can name the title that was turned into an American cable television show from 1989 to 1996.) (Note: Just as with Romance, Horror remains a popular genre in Japanese Manga.)

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SURPRISE! YOU ALREADY KNOW COMIC GRAMMAR!

Most comic grammar practices have been established by DC and Marvel Comics companies over the years. Visit www.blambot.com/grammar.shtml to see how comic book artists uniquely express grammar, emotion, tone of voice, etc. through their use of the cartoon balloon and other artistic elements.

QUESTION: How many of these examples did you already know just from reading comics and graphic novels?

THE FACE OF MANGA AND ANIME

The Japanese love their comics, known as Manga. Anime is the animated version of Manga. Graphic clues to the mood and emotions of characters in Manga are sometimes different than those in American comics. The Anime Blog tells you what it means when a Manga or Anime character “spontaneously sprouts a giant sweat drop or gets dripping blue and black lines down his face.”

Visit www.theanimeblog.com/japanese-culture-links/but-what-does-it-all-mean so you can understand the language of Manga.

THE VOCABULARY OF COMICS

All professions have their own jargon that practitioners use to communicate with each other. Some words in the comics jargon are common and you will recognize them. Others may be new to you.

Visit the websites below to find out more about the vocabulary of the Comics industry:

- * Comics vocabulary: en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Comics_vocabulary
- * The Vocabulary of Comics: www.tomhart.net/teaching/mccloudChap2/index.html

READ MORE ABOUT IT:

- * *Understanding Comics: The Invisible Art* by Scott McCloud
- * *The Comics: An Illustrated History of Comic Strip Art* by Jerry Robinson
- * *Comics, Comix and Graphic Novels: A History of Comic Art* by Roger Sabin
- * *Men of Tomorrow: Geeks, Gangsters and the Birth of the Comic Book* by Gerard Jones

ANSWERS TO COMICS SCAVENGER HUNT:

- * Dale Messick was the pseudonym for Dalia Messick, the female cartoonist who created the *Brenda Starr, Reporter* comic strip. She wrote and drew the strip for 43 years.
- * DC Comics was named after what would become one of the publisher’s most famous comic book titles. It was incorporated in 1937 as Detective Comics, Inc.
- * Jack Kirby is recognized as one of America’s most influential comic book artists. His co-creations include *Captain America*, the *Fantastic Four*, *X-Men*, and *The Hulk*.
- * There are a few lists of American Romance comic book titles out on the web. Here’s one from Comicology: www.matt-thorn.com/comicology/romance/stevenson.html
- * A great list of American Horror comics from the era can be found at: en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Horror_comics (Tales from the Crypt was a Home Box Office television anthology from 1989 to 1996.)

TEEN READ MONTH

LESSON #2

ONLINE LESSON EXTENSION

LINKS TO STUDY EDITORIAL CARTOONS

Discover the Elements of Editorial and Political Cartoons through this Power Point presentation:
socialstudies-yhs.wikispaces.com/file/view/Cartoons.ppt

Visit these online galleries of Editorial Cartoons to discover the creativity, diversity and power of this form of political and social commentary:

- * Association of American Editorial Cartoonists: editorialcartoonists.com
- * Daryl Cagle's Political Cartoons Store: www.politicalcartoons.com

THE STRANGE CASE OF SUPERMAN

You know these basic tenets of the Man of Steel story: he grows up in rural America, has extraordinary strength and abilities that he must hide from a mistrustful society, and dedicates himself to fighting for truth and justice. But we're not just talking about Clark Kent/ Superman here; we're also talking about Hugo Danning, the hero of author Phillip Wylie's 1930 novel *Gladiator*.

When Superman debuted several years later in 1938's *Action Comics #1*, the superhero genre was officially born. Co-created by Jerry Siegel and Joe Shuster, Superman remains an iconic figure in American culture.

While many know the story of Siegel's litigation with Time Warner to reclaim copyrights to the comic character, few know about the controversy surrounding Superman's birth.

There has been persistent speculation that Siegel's Superman was inspired by Wylie's novel. Sam Moskowitz's 1963 book *Explorers of the Infinite: Shapers of Science Fiction* states that Siegel "borrowed" Wylie's idea to create Superman. According to the book *Men of Tomorrow* by Gerard Jones, Siegel reviewed *Gladiator* in a 1932 science fiction fanzine. Siegel would maintain that Superman was not based on Hugo Danning, but Wylie even considered suing Siegel in 1940.

The current publisher of *Gladiator* gets in on the act through their promotional copy: "An enduring classic in speculative fiction and the reported inspiration for the original comic hero, Superman, *Gladiator* is a melancholic tale of a boy set apart because of his unique gift and his lifelong struggle to come to terms with it."

Even Superman's name is borrowed. The Online Etymology Dictionary says the word was first used by British playwright George Bernard Shaw for his 1903 play *Man and Superman*. The word was Shaw's translation of the German *Übermensch*, a "highly evolved human being that transcends good and evil," coined by philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche for his work *Thus Spake Zarathustra* (1883–91). Prior to Shaw, *Übermensch* had been translated as "overman" or "beyond-man."

ACTIVITY:

The first 13 pages of *Action Comics #1* features Superman's introduction to the world. Read it online at:
xroads.virginia.edu/~ug02/yeung/actioncomics/cover.html

LESSON #2: ONLINE LESSON EXTENSION

ALTERNATE HISTORIES

If Siegel did, indeed, get the idea for Superman from Wylie's novel *Gladiator*, he made a fundamental change. Where Hugo Danning was a human being who developed his strength because of scientific experimentation, Superman is an extraterrestrial who receives his strength from the Earth's yellow sun.

Comic book writers often rethink treasured superheroes to update them for a new generation, or to tell different types of stories. There are a number of alternate versions of Batman and Spiderman, for example. DC Comic's *Red Son* mini series changes the story of Superman by having Kal-El land in Soviet Russia instead of America. Our hero no longer fights for the American Way. Instead, he fights for communism and the collective, and the altered history is startling.

DC Comics did a complete reboot of all of their characters and comic book titles just last month. Talk about rethinking superheroes!

ACTIVITY:

Brainstorm with a small group to create an alternative history for a favorite Superhero. Change the time period (what if World War II soldier Peter Parker was bitten by a radioactive spider?), the sex of the character (The Flash is the fastest woman alive!), or the background or motivation of the character. What types of stories could be told with this alternate version of the hero?

Or...

Brainstorm and create a whole new American hero for today. Create a backstory for the character; detail the origin of the character's superpowers and identify those powers; and place the character in a particular setting. Why did you create this kind of superhero? What types of stories could be told with this character? What does the character say about life in America today?

NEED SOME INSPIRATION?

Marvel Comics offers a Create Your Own Superhero web game at: marvel.com/games/cyos

TEEN READ MONTH

LESSON #3

ONLINE LESSON EXTENSION

READ MORE ABOUT IT

- * Hamilton, John. *You Write It: Graphic Novel*. Edina, MN: ABDO Publishing. 2009. Print.
- * Gertler, Nat and Steve Lieber. *The Complete Idiot's Guide to Creating a Graphic Novel*. NY: Alpha Books. 2009. Print
- * Abel, Jessica and Matt Madden. *Drawing Words & Writing Graphic Novels*. NY: First Second Books. 2008. Print.
- * The New York Times Funny Pages: www.nytimes.com/ref/magazine/funnypages.html?_r=1
- * Free Online Graphic Novels: free-online-novels.com/graphic.html
- * Graphic Novel Reporter Best of 2010: graphicnovelreporter.com/content/best-2010-other
- * School Library Journal Graphic Novels: www.schoollibraryjournal.com/csp/cms/sites/SLJ/Reviews/GraphicNovels/index.csp
- * Young Adult Library Services Association 2011 Great Graphic Novels for Teens: www.ala.org/yalsa/ggnt