

Exploring the World of Comic Book Heroes

Overview: Comic books are an essential part of popular culture. They are fun, interesting, and engaging. In this lesson students will explore comic book superheroes and make connections between their adventures and everyday life experiences. They will work in collaborative groups to conduct research, design cover art, and create an interactive Venn diagram comparing real life heroes and comic book superheroes.

Grade Level: 6-8

Subjects:

Language Arts, Visual Arts

Learning Objectives:

Students will do the following:

- Engage in small-group and whole-class discussions
- Compare and contrast information
- Create original art
- Summarize, interpret and synthesize information from a variety of resources

- Conduct Internet research
- Create a class presentation

Learning Activities

Building Background

Activity One: Comic Book Heroes

The purpose of this activity is to introduce students to comic book heroes.

1. As a class, explore the following websites that feature comic book heroes:

- Marvel
<http://www.marvel.com/>
- Detective Comics
<http://www.dccomics.com/features/bmtch/>
- Archie Comics
http://www.archiecomics.com/arcade/sunday_stumper/forparents.html

Ask the students to brainstorm ideas about why people may like to read about comic book heroes. Record their thoughts and opinions, and continue to update this list as you continue the lesson activities.

2. Read the [Teacher's Count Spider-Man and the Fantastic Four in Brain Drain](#) comic aloud to your class.

Teacher Note: In order to recognize teachers for their heroic efforts, OfficeMax, Marvel Entertainment, and TeachersCount teamed together to present the first ever OfficeMax Super Hero Teacher of the Year contest. This one-of-a-kind competition recognized outstanding middle school teachers and the students who nominated them by turning them into real comic book characters. You can pick up this free Super Hero comic book in OfficeMax stores. You may also use another comic book of your choice for this activity.

3. As you read the comic book, discuss the characters and their motivations, and summarize the storyline plot. Ask students to predict and confirm their predictions as they read.

Steps for Learning

Activity One: Fact & Fiction

The purpose of this activity is to help students explore the differences and similarities between real world heroes and comic book superheroes.

1. Tell your students that they are going to work in groups of three students to compare a real world hero and a comic book superhero.

2. Have each group choose one global hero and one comic book superhero.

3. Tell the students that they are going to use an Interactive Venn Diagram to represent the differences and similarities between their real world hero and their comic book superhero. Have the students visit the Read.Write.Think. website at <http://www.readwritethink.org/materials/venn/index.html> to use this interactive tool.

4. Have the students print out their Venn diagrams to share with their classmates. Lead a class discussion based on students' ideas. Use the following questions as a guide:

- What are the differences between real world and comic book heroes?
- What are the similarities between real world and comic book heroes?
- What kinds of obstacles do real world heroes have to overcome?
- What kinds of obstacles do comic book heroes have to overcome?
- What can we learn from comic book superheroes and their adventures?
- What can we learn from real world heroes?

- What are the differences and similarities between your life adventures and those of comic book superheroes and real world heroes?

Activity Two: Cover Art

The purpose of this activity is to have students research comic book cover art and generate an original piece of art.

1. Have your students research comic book cover art by browsing the following websites:

- http://www.spiderfan.org/comics/title/amazing_fantasy.html
- http://www.spiderfan.org/comics/title/marvel_k_nights_spiderman.html

2. Ask the students to create a comic book cover that features their likeness and an illustration of a superhero. Allow the students to work individually, in pairs, or in small groups.

3. Post the students' artwork for others in the school and community to share.

Activity Three: Why Read Comics?

1. Tell your students that they are going to create a mock school committee meeting to debate whether or not kids should read comic books in school.

2. Provide the following articles to the students to use to learn about this issue:

- <http://www.tascorp.org/programs/special/Literacy>
(Scroll to the Comic Book Project)
- <http://www.csmonitor.com/2004/1012/p11s01-legn.html?s=hns>

3. Divide the class into small groups and assign each group one of the following characters:

- A teacher who thinks comic books help students read better
- A parent who thinks comic books have no place in schools and children should only read books
- A librarian who can see both sides of the issue
- A student who says comic books helped him become a better reader
- The mayor of the town who hasn't decided what she thinks yet
- A local newspaper reporter

Have the students discuss the articles, and what they imagine their assigned characters might think about this issue. Tell each group to create a one-

paragraph description of its assigned character and his or her thoughts about comic books.

4. Ask each group to choose a student to play the part of its assigned character. Have the remainder of the class should act as the audience for the mock committee meeting.

5. After staging the mock committee meeting, ask the class to vote on whether or not they think comic books should be read at school.

Extension Activity

1. Ask your students to create a public service announcement encouraging kids to read comic books. If possible, videotape students' work or create a podcast.

National Education Standards

www.mcrel.org

Writing

Standard 1.

Uses the general skills and strategies of the writing process

<http://www.mcrel.org/compendium/standardDetails.asp?subjectID=7&standardID=1>

Level III (Grades 6-8)

5. Uses content, style, and structure (e.g., formal or

informal language, genre, organization) appropriate for specific audiences (e.g., public, private) and purposes (e.g., to entertain, to influence, to inform)

Reading

Standard 7.

Uses reading skills and strategies to understand and interpret a variety of informational texts

<http://www.mcrel.org/compendium/standardDetails.asp?subjectID=7&standardID=7>

Level III (Grades 6-8)

1. Uses reading skills and strategies to understand a variety of informational texts (e.g., electronic texts; textbooks; biographical sketches; directions; essays; primary source historical documents, including letters and diaries; print media, including editorials, news stories, periodicals, and magazines; consumer, workplace, and public documents, including catalogs, technical directions, procedures, and bus routes)

3. Summarizes and paraphrases information in texts (e.g., arranges information in chronological, logical, or sequential order; conveys main ideas, critical details, and underlying meaning; uses own words or quoted materials; preserves author's perspective and voice)

4. Uses new information to adjust and extend personal knowledge base

Standard 4.

Gathers and uses information for research purposes
<http://www.mcrel.org/compendium/standardDetails.asp?subjectID=7&standardID=4>

Level III (Grades 6-8)

3. Uses a variety of resource materials to gather information for research topics (e.g., magazines, newspapers, dictionaries, schedules, journals, phone directories, globes, atlases, almanacs, technological sources)

Listening & Speaking

Standard 8.

Uses listening and speaking strategies for different purposes
<http://www.mcrel.org/compendium/standardDetails.asp?subjectID=7&standardID=8>

Level III (Grades 6-8)

6. Makes oral presentations to the class (e.g., uses notes and outlines; uses organizational pattern that includes preview, introduction, body, transitions, conclusion; uses a clear point of view; uses evidence and arguments to support opinions; uses visual media)

Working With Others

Standard 1.

Contributes to the overall effort of a group

<http://www.mcrel.org/compendium/standardDetails.asp?subjectID=22&standardID=1>

Visual Arts: Artistic Expression & Communication

Standard 2.

Knows how to use structures (e.g., sensory qualities, organizational principles, expressive features) and functions of art

<http://www.mcrel.org/compendium/standardDetails.asp?subjectID=13&standardID=2>

Level III (Grades 5-8)

3. Knows how the qualities of structures and functions of art are used to improve communication of one's ideas