

The Art of Comic Books

Are you a fan of comic books? Do you eagerly wait for a new issue to arrive so you can find out what happens next? Comic books have been thrilling fans since the mid-1930s. This week, The Mini Page talked with the curator at the Cartoon Art Museum in San Francisco about comic books.

A successful start

Before the 1930s, comic books were mostly reprinted comics from newspaper pages. Newspaper comics were very popular, but publishers soon realized they were running out of material.

In 1938, one publishing company produced Action Comics, which included Superman. It was an immediate hit with readers. Other companies began printing superhero stories, and kids were huge fans.

Soon publishers realized that adults were reading comic books, too. Some started releasing comic books more suited to adults, with crime or horror stories. During World War II, soldiers were an important audience for these more adult-themed comic books.

Later, other types of stories appeared, including wacky comedy, teenage high jinks (such as the Archie comics) and romance.



Artist Fred Ray created this Superman cover in 1942.

Disney comic characters, especially Donald Duck and Uncle Scrooge in the 1950s, were some of the most successful subjects of comic books.

Comic book art

Most early comic book artists were hopeful newspaper comic strip artists. Writing and drawing a comic strip for a newspaper was a dream job, but with the popularity of comic books came new opportunities.

In the 1940s, artists such as Jack Kirby, who co-created characters including Captain America, the Fantastic Four, X-Men and the Hulk, and Will Eisner, who created The Spirit, started thinking about comic strip art as a separate form of expression. They began to use the whole page for their art and to pace the story differently. As each new generation of artists comes along, styles and techniques change the look of comic books.

Comic books today

With the recent release of the film “Star Wars: The Force Awakens,” Star Wars comic books are wildly popular now. Other favorites include the Avengers and Spider-Man, Batman and Justice League.

Starting in the 1980s, more strong female characters appeared in comic books, and today the bigger publishers actively seek not only female characters, but also female writers and artists.

Mini Fact:

In 2014, readers bought more than 82 million comic books.



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Reading and collecting

Most comic books are printed on a monthly basis, but some are also released online. Fans may choose to read this way because the books pile up and take up space, or because they want to conserve paper and trees.

Comic book collectors may keep a first edition of a comic that they believe will one day be a big hit. But an expert says: “Buy something you’ll like to read. It’s hard to guess in advance what will be valuable. Collect comic books because you like them.”

A future in comic art?

As printing technology has improved, artists have gained even more control over how comic books look. The ability to color images using a computer has made characters and backgrounds more lifelike and interesting.

“If you want to pursue comic book art, make your own comic books. The more you work, the better you’ll get,” says an expert.

“But don’t be discouraged if your first efforts aren’t as polished as what you see in comic books. The artists and writers work very hard” to produce the final products.

Resources

On the Web:

- dccomics.com/characters
- marvelkids.com/characters
- archiecomics.com/characters

At the library:

- “Making Comic Books” by Michael Teitelbaum



Try 'n' Find

Words that remind us of comic books are hidden in this puzzle. Some words are hidden backward or diagonally, and some letters are used twice. See if you can find:

ACTION, ARTIST, BOOK, CHARACTER, COLLECTOR, COLORING, COMIC, COMPUTER, FANS, ISSUE, KIDS, NEWSPAPER, PUBLISHER, READ, STORY, STRIP, SUPERHERO, TECHNOLOGY, WRITER.

R S R E H S I L B U P G B C R
C E T E W E U S S I V J N O O
O S P O T A L P I R T S O M T
L C D A R C R E X M N I P C E
O Q O I P Y A T E R J A T U E
R C Z M K S H R I A H F C T L
I R E T I R W N A S D E A E L
N K O O B C Y E K H T U R R O
G U V Y G O L O N H C E T O C



Cook's Corner

Good Luck Black-Eyed Pea Salsa

You'll need:

- 1 (15.5-ounce) can black-eyed peas
- 1 (15.5-ounce) can pinto beans
- 1 (15.5-ounce) can black beans
- 1 (11-ounce) can white corn
- 1 (2.25-ounce) can sliced black olives
- 1 cup mild chunky salsa
- 1 medium green pepper, chopped
- 1 packet powdered Italian dressing
- 1/2 teaspoon garlic salt

What to do:

1. Drain and rinse cans of peas, beans, corn and olives. Place in large bowl.
2. Add remaining ingredients. Mix well.
3. Serve with multigrain chips.



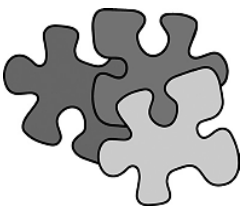
* You'll need an adult's help with this recipe.

Puzzling

Unscramble the words below that remind us of comic book characters.

efamle _____
pwreusoepsr _____
eymne _____
kacyw _____

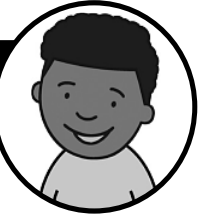
Answers: female, superpowers, enemy, wacky.



Mini Jokes

Paige: What would you get if you stacked up thousands of pizzas?

Peter: A leaning tower of pizza!



Eco Note

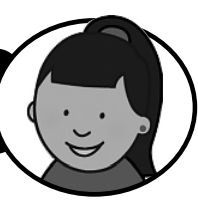
Americans use 90 million tons of paper every year, about 600 pounds for each person. To make all that paper, we use more than a billion trees! Recycle all kinds of paper — cereal boxes, note paper, bags, newspapers, etc. — and comic books!

adapted with permission from "The New 50 Simple Things Kids Can Do to Save the Earth" by The Earthworks Group, Andrews McMeel Publishing (andrewsmcmeel.com)



Thank You

The Mini Page thanks Andrew Farago, curator of the Cartoon Art Museum in San Francisco, for help with this issue.



Teachers:

For standards-based activities to accompany this feature, visit: bbs.amuniversal.com/teaching_guides.html

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