# Comics and the Curriculum

# Why Comics? What you need to know.

## ****Teacher’s Kryptonite or New Found Super Power?****

“What are you reading?” Mrs. Grant said storming over towards me as I quickly hid my latest superman comic between my back and the seat (I thought I was an evil genius back in third grade). Towering over me, she focused her eyes and used her X-ray vision to spot the vile text that had invaded her fortress built on good literature and high moral fiber. Confiscating yet another of my comics, she shook her head and said “you won’t gain anything by reading this filth. Comic books do not belong in the classroom!”.

Maybe that was true in 1987, but what about now? Comic books should be accepted and used as supplemental material in the classroom because of their effect on core curriculum content.

Comics also correspond well with the different levels of cognitive understanding as presented by Kieran Egan in his book The Educated Mind: How Cognitive Tools Shape Our Understanding. Egan looks at the various levels of understanding that we go through, as we grow older. It is important to look at each level as a tool in a toolbox that we can later use, instead of one level of understanding replacing another. With that said the three levels that we would see most children go through in their traditional schooling would be:

* Mythic (ages 3-8)
* Romantic (ages 5-10)
* Philosophic (ages 12-15)

Each of these levels holds a key component to the whole level of understanding that we enjoy as adults. Mythic gives us the sense of wonder and magic relying on the simple truths. It is built on a binary structure of interpreting information while exploring the realms of fantasy and the abstract. Romantic understanding takes us one step further. The extreme fantasy is still appreciated but more so in the terms of reality. Students begin to rely more on fact while search for the extreme limits that reality has to offer. A good example of this is the Guinness book of world records. Relating this to comics, one can find the extreme in the old Ripley’s Believe it or Not cartoons. If romantic understanding begins to draw on real facts, then the philosophic understanding takes those facts and begins to question them. This level of understanding is all about understanding systems of information, structures, and organizations. This is when many kids feel the urge to beat the system, according to Egan.

So how do comics fit in? It is has been my own observations (through interviewing fans of comics both young and old) that certain comics feed into this same idea of understanding. The example I have for mythic understanding is Superman. Looking at Superman he is a very simple character. Everything is good or bad, black or white. He has the mythos of a god with little questioning. Children just seem to accept him at face value.

The flip side of Superman is Batman. Most of the people I talked to began to enjoy Batman during their romantic period of understanding. My reasoning for this shift is that Batman unlike Superman is just a man. He is a man that has taken his body and human abilities to the extreme, but he is still just a man. He also tends to operate in more of a gray area of what is morally accepted. In some of the early Batman stories he killed the bad guys instead of arresting them.

The final shift in understanding (philosophic) can be best represented by comics like the X-Men or Spiderman. These are characters that are all humanly flawed and are out casts from the very system they try to protect. This idea of operating outside of a system fits nicely with the level of understanding that most readers (the ones I talked to) were experiencing at the age of fifteen or sixteen. They felt like outsiders from schools and even families, much like the characters in the comics.

It is my opinion that comics can help us as teachers tap into these levels of understanding that our children experience. Although comics cannot replace core curriculum in our schools, they can be used as an extra tool to help make the content more accessible to those future heroes sitting in the back of our classrooms dreaming of what things may come.

by Kieran Egan in his book The Educated Mind: How Cognitive Tools Shape Our Understanding.

## ****Comic Book Lessons****

These lesson are based on specific comic books and series to teach the material. The lessons are designed as exercises in writing, critical thinking, presentation skills, and understanding the writing process.

Spiderman: A Marvel ongoing series  
The lessons within are based on the comics produced by Marvel Comics, more specifically it’s ongoing series of The Amazing Spiderman.

Hellboy: A Dark Horse ongoing series  
Hellboy is an ongoing series created by Mike Mignola for Dark Horse Entertainment. The lessons are based around world cultures, an exploration into folklore, and the writing and research of history.

Superman/Batman Alternate Histories  
Superman/Batman Alternate Histories  
Publisher: DC Elseworlds This is a collection of stories that feature various forms of Batman and Superman in different periods of time. The look at how things might have been different by addressing cause and effect.

## ****Non Specific Comic Book Lessons****

These lessons that do not require a specific comic book needed to teach the material. The lessons are designed as exercises in critical thinking, impromptu writing, and are meant to aid students in understanding (through practice) writing as a process. **Skills:** Writing, Reading for a purpose, and Critical Thinking.

## ****Creating your own comic book:****

In my spare time (of which their is increasingly little), I am a writer for a self-published independent comic book. What I have included here are the steps that we take in creating our comic. **Content Areas:** Writing, Drawing, Computer Skills, Research, Marketing, and Web page design.

## ****Resources & Additional Information****

<https://www.makingcomics.com/2014/05/07/panel-layout-golden-ratio/>

<http://comicbookpaper.com/> for printable panels

<https://www.scholastic.com/teachers/lesson-plans/teaching-content/comic-strip-creations/> for elementary school

<https://www.cartoonstudies.org/teachingcomics/> for middle school and high school

<https://www.makebeliefscomix.com/lesson-plans/> for various aages