



In the Classroom

Launching a Comic Book Club

MICHAEL BITZ

THIS brief guide to launching a comic book club—in-school or after school—is based on experiences with The Comic Book Project. However, there is no right or wrong way to go about it. Most importantly, foster creativity, and be sure to find a role for every child, not just those who have an interest in comics or penchant for drawing and art.

Before You Begin

Recruiting

A key to success is recruiting students and assigning tasks through which every child can thrive and learn. Be strategic in how you group students. Rather than saying, “Find some friends and form a team,” determine the teams beforehand based on demonstrated skills and personalities. If you are unsure as to which skills students bring to the table, get a sense through some opening exercises and activities that involve writing, art, and creative thinking.

Professional Comics

Using published comic books as examples can be both a blessing and a curse. On the positive side, professionally designed comics are excellent models for elements of the medium—panels, perspective, character design, font options, and everything else that comprises a comic book. On the other hand, many children will see a comic book and say, “I’ll never be able do that.” I recommend the student publications from The Comic Book Project, which are free PDF downloads from the “publications” page at www.ComicBookProject.org. Created by other students, these comics provide non-intimidating models that establish a connection between your students and others who have created comics.

Tools and Resources

Blank paper, lead pencils, and colored pencils will take you a long way. If you want to get more technical, you can use a lightbox and tracing paper for the final versions of the comics. You can also use a computer to write captions and dialogue as well as a scanner and software, such as Adobe Photoshop, to draw or colorize the comics digitally.

Recommended Process

Step 1: What is a Comic Book?

Explore the elements of a comic book: art, writing, characters, storylines, color, design, etc. Explain the process of how students will create a comic book, and consider choosing a theme (i.e., the environment, conflict resolution, community action). Form teams based on student skills and personalities, and begin brainstorming ideas.

Step 2: Characters

What makes a good character? Have students design a superhero—remember that a superhero does not necessarily have to wear a cape and fly around the world. Each team should draw the superhero, formulate five adjectives to describe the superhero, and write three sentences about the character. Then do the same thing for a villain and perhaps a sidekick.

Step 3: Planning the Manuscript

Each team should develop a plot for the story—at least three sentences describing the beginning, middle, and end. The plot should have a conflict and resolution. Then the students should plan their comic books page-by-page, panel-by-panel with a written and sketched manuscript for what will happen throughout the entire comic.

Step 4: Creating the Comic Book

Using the manuscript, students can now design the comic book, first in pencil. Consider having them do the foregrounds for the entire comic book first: the writing and the main characters or action. Then go back and create the backgrounds. Once the entire comic book is drafted in pencil, use thin black markers to “ink” the comic book. While this step is not absolutely necessary, it makes the comics more legible and visually interesting. Finally, color the comics. We recommend colored pencils because markers bleed and crayons are difficult to control.

When the Comics Are Finished

Publishing

Create a simple classroom publication by color-copying examples from student work and then folding books for each student to keep. Or create a more professional publication by partnering with a print shop—you can include advertising space for local businesses in order to fundraise. Children can even create custom ads! Also, consider web publishing, which does not cost anything.

Exhibiting

Have an exhibit and celebration of the comic books in the library, community center, or other venue. Invite parents, friends, and peers. The students can have a panel discussion about their comics and demonstrate their process. They can design invitations to the event as well. 