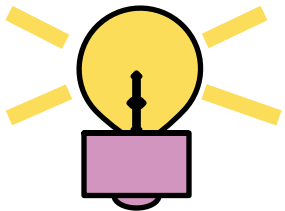


COMICS ARE A MARVEL(LOUS) TOOL FOR YOUR ENGLISH CLASSES

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Are you looking for innovative resources to motivate your students and help them develop English competences?

Use comics!

They are great learning tools for your English classes and you don't need pencils and paper, unless you want to!



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1 What is a comic?

From prehistoric times, people have used written symbols and representational signs as means of communication in the form of:

- ❑ pictorial drawings
- ❑ cuneiforms
- ❑ hieroglyphs

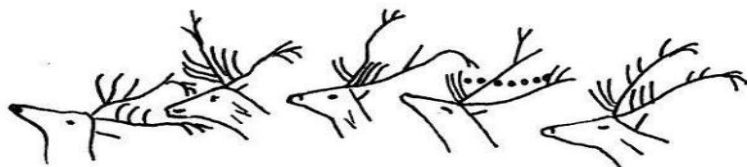
1 What is a comic?

Enigmatic cave and rock paintings are considered an effective liaison between the ancient ways of human expression in vernacular circumstances and the visual manifestations in modern, day-to-day life.

As societies developed, pictograms have evolved along time not only in terms of what they represent, but also in terms of emotional impact upon the viewer.

1 What is a comic?

Examples: cave painting of a single stag represented in different stages of motion in Lascaux, France, the marble carvings of the Greek Parthenon, Trajan's military campaign against the Dacians on his famous Column, or the almost intact Bayeux Tapestry depicting the Norman conquest of England in 1066.



1 What is a comic?

Bayeux Tapestry

This 70-metre medieval embroidery is considered by specialists to be the forerunner of comics, often cited as an example of narrative needle work.



The Battle of Hastings
(detail)

1 What is a comic?

It is the 19th century that indicates the beginning of comics. The Swiss school teacher and cartoonist Rodolphe Töpffer used to entertain his students and acquaintances with his own caricatures and illustrated books.

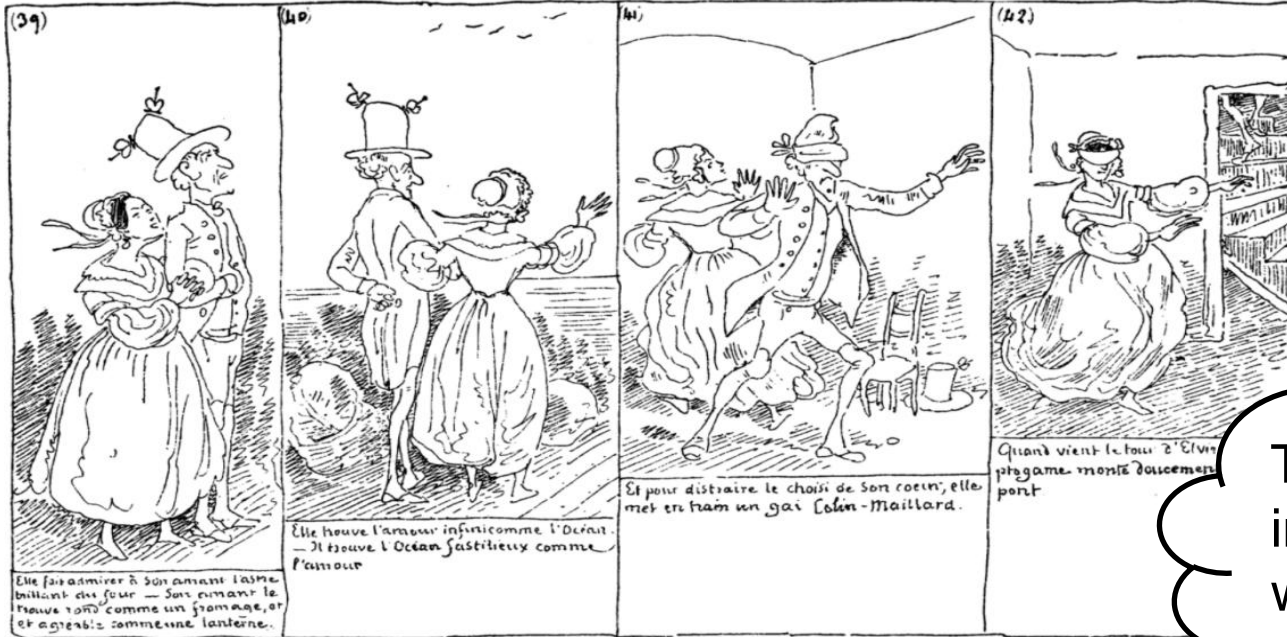
Goethe himself persuaded Rodolphe Töpffer in 1831 to publish his stories.



*The
Adventures
of Mr.
Obadiah
Oldbuck*

- translated
into English
and
published in
the USA in
1849

1 What is a comic?



Histoire de Monsieur Cryptogame (1830)
- text and drawings by Rodolphe Töpffer

Text and images in a sequential way...

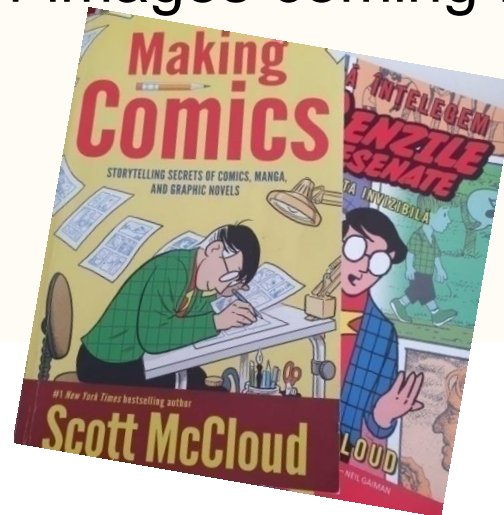
Scott McCloud (born 1960), an American cartoonist and comics theorist, considers Töpffer 'the father of modern comics'.

1 What is a comic?

The history of comics abounds in pioneers and stages of evolution which point the uniqueness of comics as a cultural phenomenon.

Although it is rather difficult to shape a **definition** for this display of images accompanied by text, we could accept McCloud's words, saying that comics are 'sequential art', rendered as a juxtaposed set of images coming in deliberate order.

(Understanding comics - 1993)



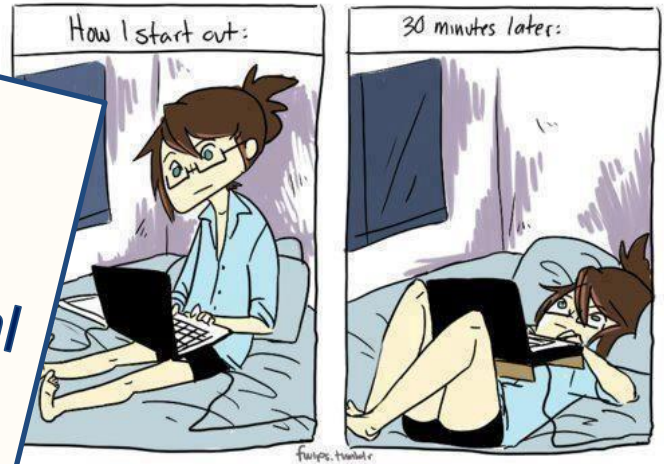
1 What is a comic?

Comics come in different **formats**

- ✓ comic strips
- ✓ comic books
- ✓ manga
- ✓ graphic novels
- ✓ webcomics

and **genres:**

- ✓ adventure
- ✓ autobiographical
- ✓ fantasy
- ✓ horror
- ✓ humorous
- ✓ romance
- ✓ science fiction
- ✓ superhero



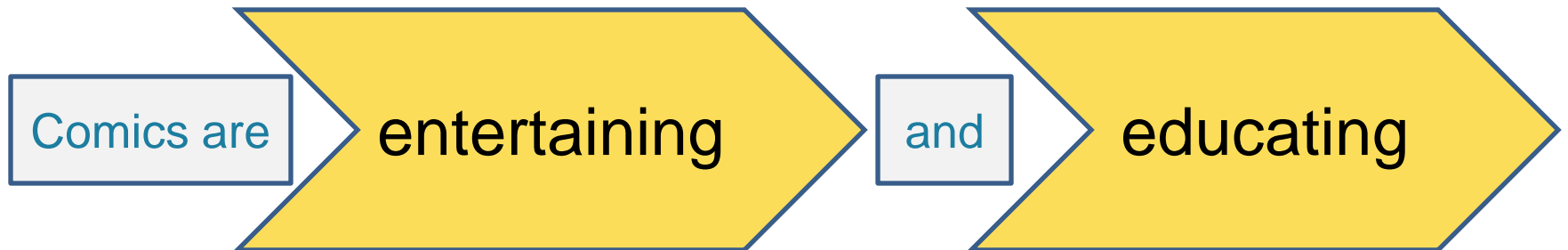
www.LeFunny.net



2 Comics as an educational tool

Comics are undoubtedly regarded as **entertainment** media due to commercial purposes.

However, researchers have concluded that comics may become effective **educational** tools.



2.1 Decoding visual and linguistic signs

First of all, teachers need to focus on the educational goal(s) in choosing and planning learning situations.

An **oldie but goldie** pedagogical work is actually Bloom's comprehensive taxonomy of educational objectives, based on the following domains:

cognitive

affective

sensory

Relying on knowledge, emotional and behavioural experiences, teachers need to find the best learning strategy to cope with the current learning demands.

2.1 Decoding visual and linguistic signs

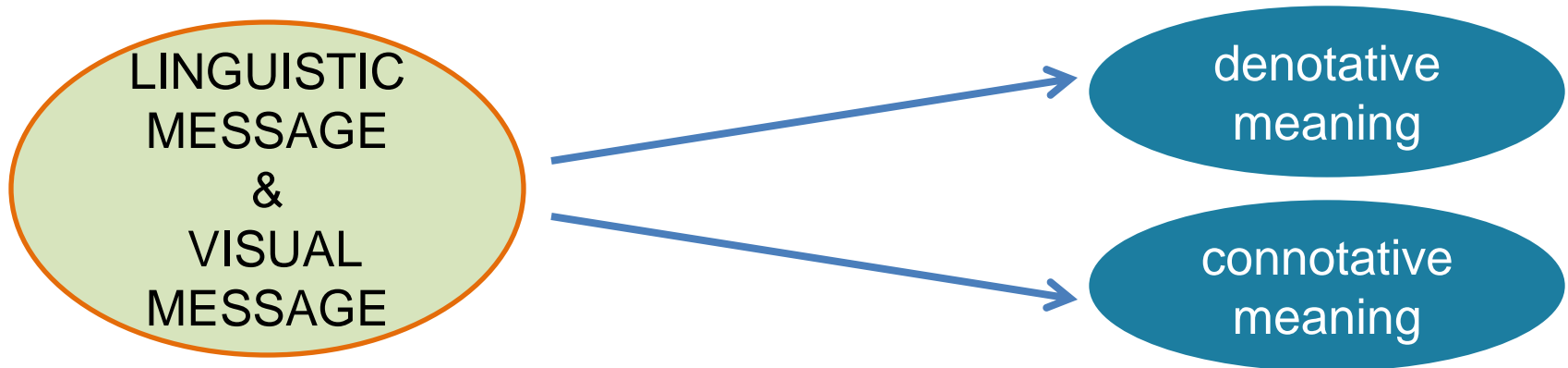
Let us keep in mind the 3 domains stated above...

Research conducted and case studies agree on the fact that associating pictures with text in comic books may develop various strategies for communication conveyed through different 'modes' or sign systems: pictures, sound, music, gesture, space, etc.

In other words, comics may develop various types of communication, also called **multimodal literacy**.

2.1 Decoding visual and linguistic signs

Another direction given by image and associated discourse is provided by **R. Barthes** (1915-1960), who analysed a variety of sign systems (semiotics).



According to Barthes, we decode messages using socio-cultural codes.

Conclusion: comics represent a relevant example of functional discourse in combination with graphic carrying socio-cultural marks.

2.2 Comics may support language learning

Using comics, **teachers** can design class activities for students in order to meet specific learning needs.

Using comics, **students** can acquire or develop competences in English through different activities.

What are the **learning benefits** of using COMICS in the classroom?

2.2 Comics may support language learning

- **Comics can shape human characters and behavioral interaction.**

Children and teenagers are great consumers of comics who tend to empathise with the characters in terms of behaviour, speech, appearance.

For example, Marvel's young superheroes of **Power Pack** are four siblings who are fighting aliens and super-villains who embody current social issues such as bullying, pollution and homelessness.



2.2 Comics may support language learning

- Comics offer a set of algorithms that help students with visual thinking.

- the frames or panels promote a certain rigor in the overall aspect of a comic

AND TOGETHER WITH

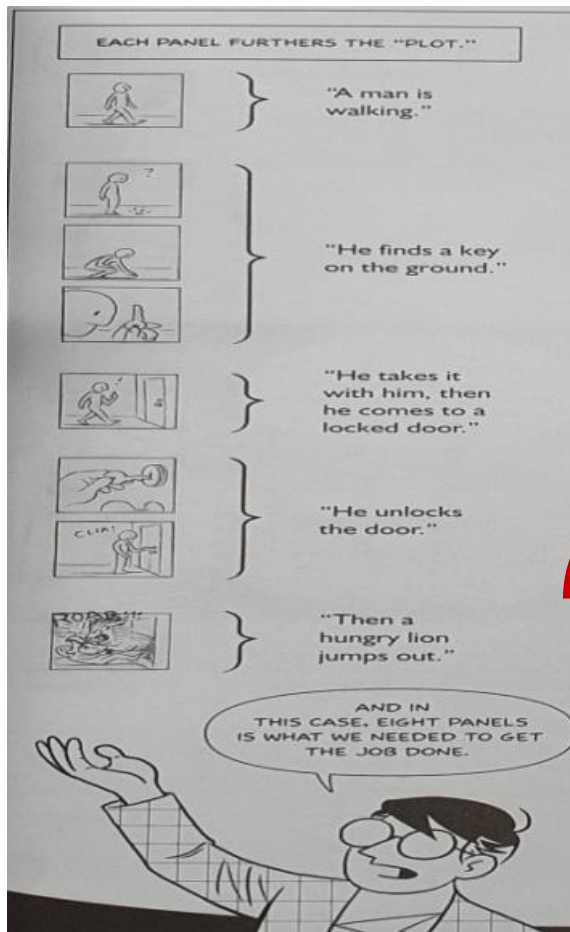
- the general elements inside a panel: drawings, speech and thought balloons, text boxes, font type, camera angles, colours, etc.

will form a SPATIAL VIEW which develops

HIGHER ORDER THINKING SKILLS (HOTS)

2.2 Comics may support language learning

- Storytelling and storyboarding enhance writing in an engaging way.



STORYBOARDING

= images encapsulated in panels and displayed in a sequenced order

STORYTELLING

= unfolding a story using narrative techniques in a sequenced order

From *Making comics* – S. McCloud

An example of storyboarding and storytelling to use with students in order to enhance their **writing skills**.

2.2 Comics may support language learning

- Comics develop receptive and productive skills, having students involved in creative tasks.

To improve their reading skill, students can interact with Shakespeare's plays in comic book style with illustrations and abridged/original text. They can work collaboratively for storyboarding and storytelling the plot., Then, they can role-play the dialogues.

www.shakespearecomics.com



2.2 Comics may support language learning

- **Overall, the English teachers can use comics with different activities.**

Students may be asked to:

- ✓ fill in the dialogue balloons with lexical items or grammar categories;
- ✓ complete or finish the story by providing the missing panel in order to have a narrative flow of the story;
- ✓ arrange panels correctly for jigsaw comics;
- ✓ describe the characters orally or in written;
- ✓ summarise the story using storyboards (Post-its);
- ✓ turn the dialogues into reported speech;
- ✓ write opinion essays starting from a given panel or comic strip;
- ✓ role-play the dialogues.

You can **assess** students through comics, as well.

2.2 Comics may support language learning

- **Comics help children with learning difficulties develop self-esteem.**

It is generally accepted that drawings and art *per se* are a form of therapy and a method to communicate with non cooperating children or students with disabilities.

According to researchers, **when they learn with comics** the students with special needs open up and communicate their ideas and feelings better.



For example, the entire mutant community of X-Men are fighting for their social status and acceptance. Students with physical disabilities could gain a sense of inclusion as they read comics about Professor X (Charles Xavier) who is in a wheelchair.

2.3 What comics to use for my English classes?

The question above is arguable, taking into consideration that students have different language levels, age, preoccupations, interests, socio-cultural backgrounds and learning needs.

However, we can 'tame' comics so as they may serve our teaching purposes.

There are broadly known 2 formats of comics:



print

digital

2.3.1 Print comics

Print comics (comic books, graphic novels, comic strips)

- need to be adapted to curricular demands;
- can develop literacy in reading and writing;
- paper comics come in a palette of brands, styles, drawings;
- teachers need to analyse them carefully before bringing them into the classroom;
- can be handy resources when technology fails;
- they are more expensive due to production costs.

Hint:

The books with Peanuts and the creepy graphic novel '*Anya's Ghost*' by Vera Brosgol are to be found in Romanian libraries and can be used for your English class. They can work miracles!

2.3.2 Digital comics

Digital comics (web comics and dynamic digital comics)

- free of charge digital comics providers:



StoryboardThat www.storyboardthat.com



Pixton www.pixton.com



MakeBeliefsComics www.makebeliefscomix.com

- can be realised to meet curricular demands
- create them to teach vocabulary, grammar, syntax
- easy to use with basic digital skills

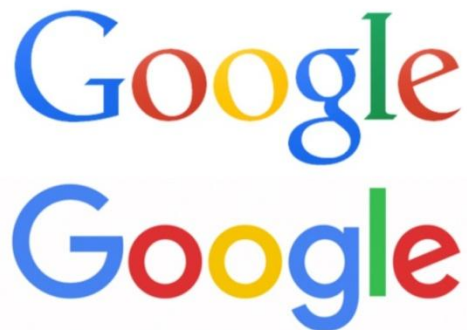
2.3.2 Digital comics

For students with learning difficulties: dyslexia, dysgraphia, dyspraxia, dyscalculia

If you design comics for 'dys' learners, pay attention to:

- the type and size of font (use Sans Serif)
- the colours used (not very bright)
- the overall display of the panels in order to facilitate visually and cognitively your students' comprehension.

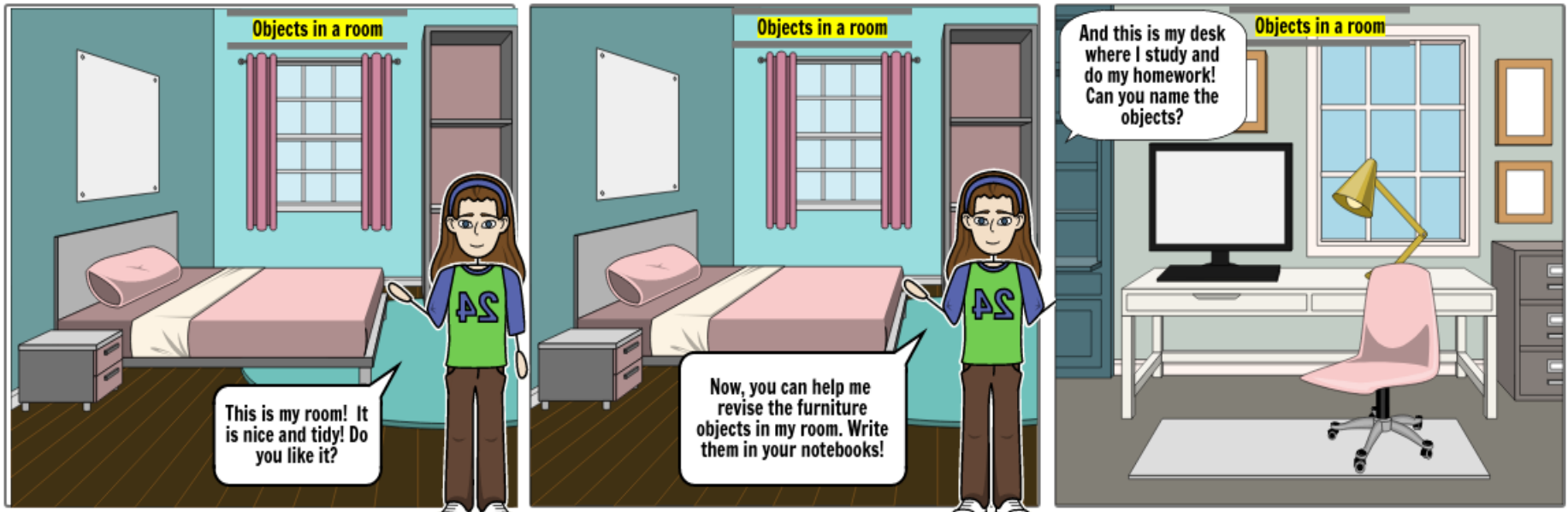
Visit www.edcomix.eu for more information on comics used inclusively!



QUIZ: What font type is appropriate for 'dys' learners?

2.3.2 Digital comics

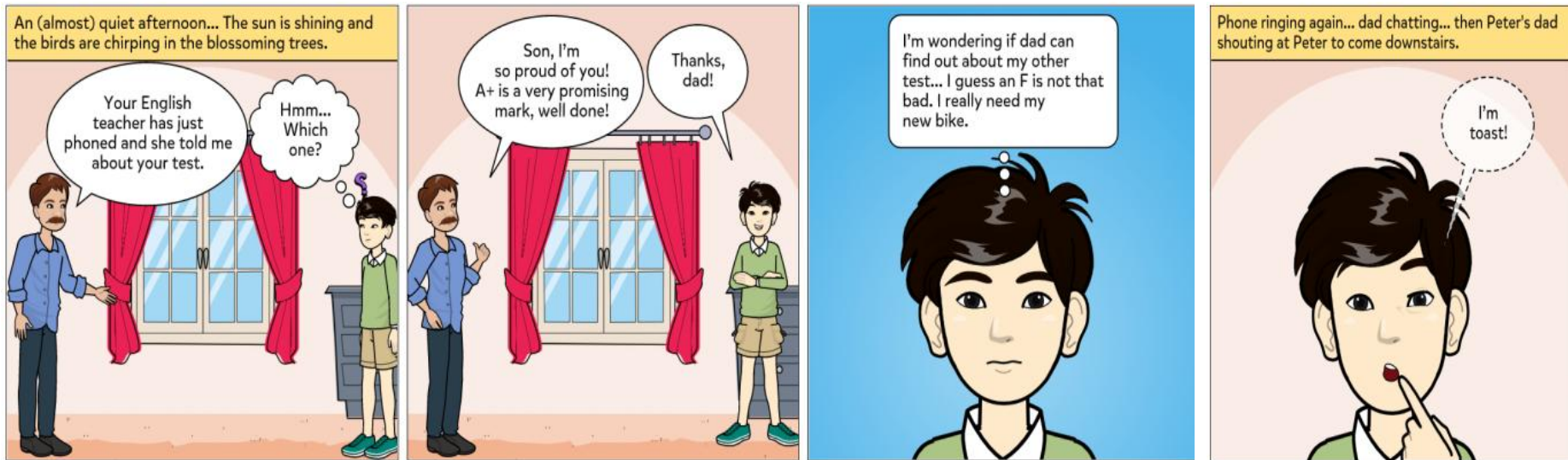
Example of comic strip designed at **StoryboardThat** for A2 English level:



Students can write down the objects they see in order to revise vocabulary and then engage in oral activities to describe their own bedroom and house rooms. They can also try their hand at inserting other characters and scenes or create their own comic strips.

2.3.2 Digital comics

Example of comic strip designed at **Pixton** for B1 English level:



Students may identify with a typical teenager who did not inform his parents about his bad mark at the test. The teacher asks the students to turn the speech inside the bullets into reported speech. They might continue the story reviewing If-clauses by making assumptions regarding Peter's chances to get a new bike.

3 Drawing conclusions

- ❑ students come across visual and verbal elements in a multimodal approach;
- ❑ they acquire visual-spatial intelligence by comparing the visual and textual interplay of elements in a strip;
- ❑ a great tool for collaborative work during online learning;
- ❑ comics use a format which is widely accepted and understood by different cultures;
- ❑ comics are adaptable to age, gender, religion, nationality, socio-cultural backgrounds, knowledge, educational needs.

Thank you for your attention and start designing your class comics today!

The language activities based on comics will certainly give your students the chance to 'shine'.

