

# Digital comics creation guide



Co-funded by the  
Erasmus+ Programme  
of the European Union





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# THE GOOD REASONS TO CREATE COMICS FOR YOUR LESSONS

## 1. Good reasons to create comics

### a. Introduction

*“It never felt like an assignment. It was more like an adventure.*

*Like you are discovering things as they play out”.*

*(Mickey Smith in Blanch and Mulvihill, 2013, p.35)*

As times change and education is required to move hand-in-hand with technology to remain up to date, new innovative teaching methodologies arise. One of them has been the introduction of comics in the classroom, in either digital or non-digital form, with a number of educators and scholars arguing in favour of their educational value.

The benefits of comics as learning tools range from creating motivation (Blanch & Mulvihill, 2013), increasing imagination and advancing a person’s storytelling skills (Haines, n.d.) to sharpening one’s memory (Short et al., 2013) and developing a unique vocabulary, as comic books entail 53 rare words per 1000 in comparison to adult novels, in which rare words appear only 52 times per 1000 words (Hayes & Athens, 1988). Additionally, when digital comics are used for didactic purposes through guided learning, they can help students develop 21st century skills, like multimodal literacy, (i.e. combining at least two modes of semantics, such as written text, images, music, speech etc. to create meaning (Elsner et al. (2013)); digital skills, critical thinking and visual literacy skills among others, i.e. “the ability to recognize and understand ideas conveyed through visible actions or images” (Merriam-Webster, (n.d.).

If you are interested in learning more about the benefits of using comics in the learning environment, have a look at the Pedagogical Guide of this Erasmus+ funded project EdComix.

Overall, EdComix intends to create a methodology to make the most of comics as a pedagogical tool for learning English in an inclusive way, by developing a set of tools that will support teachers in implementing an innovative pedagogy with the use of comic strips and pages.

In the present guide, we will examine ways to create digital comic strips and pages for English language acquisition that are inclusive towards learners with specific learning disorders (SLDs), and respectful of cultural differences. Specifically, in the first part of the guide, we will explore the benefits and potential challenges for teachers when creating their own comics and debate about using existing comics. Moreover, in chapter 2 we will analyse how to plan the comics creation process and how to outline inclusive storytelling, before presenting ways to link comics with learning outcomes and providing examples of storyboards for inspiration in chapter 3. In the final unit of the guide, we will present a variety of online tools for creating digital comics suitable for education.

## **b. The benefits of creating your own comics as a teacher**

Returning back to the current chapter, we will be elaborating on the benefits and plausible pitfalls for teachers when designing their own comics. As an educator, you could ask yourself: “Why do I have to create my own comics, when there is plenty of them already out there?” While this argument is undeniable, it is worth taking into consideration the range of advantages that underscore the effort of creating your own comics. With the help of technology, it is becoming increasingly easier to design your own comics from scratch. So why not give it a try?

## i. Flexibility for adaptation

One of the greatest perks of comics is their capacity to be adaptable to different kinds of subjects, for various age groups and level of learners, as well as for diverse types of students. The teacher can select any theme for the topics of comics, thus making it adjustable for the delivery of any subject, either a theoretical one, such as mathematics and language acquisition, or a more practical one, like culinary arts and sociology of sports. Barbosa da Silva et al. (2017) list a number of examples of subjects and educational settings, where comics are selected as the teaching tool. For instance, Barbosa da Silva et al. (2017) use this methodology themselves to deliver a management course at a university level, while Snyder (1997) conveys his experiences on using comics to teach sociology of sports at a high school in the U.S. On the other hand, Rossetto and Chiera-Macchia (2011) have used comics for the acquisition of the Italian language with secondary school students, whereas Rebolho et al. (2009) with primary school students, so as to verify if they recalled information on good postural habits.

After the selection of the topic, the determination of the educational objectives can facilitate in composing the scenario and writing the script. When the educators know the age, learning capacities and level of knowledge of their students, they are in prime position to customize the learning content and adjust the vocabulary level accordingly. In this way, a storyboard used for English language acquisition level A2 for children, could also be utilized with teenagers and adults with only some adjustments. Alternatively, the above example could also be modified to fit across levels, by writing the dialogues based on a more advanced vocabulary for B1 level or higher.

The format of comics, being one that combines images and texts, is also ideal for appealing to diverse types of learners. Since 1983, when Howard Gardner formulated his **theory of multiple intelligences** and identified eight distinct learning styles, the idea of learning through different modalities (such as movement, music, images, numbers etc.), and using tools that support these different types of learners, has been increasingly widespread.

In her article, Haines (n.d.) supports that comics address all eight categories of learners in the subsequent ways:

- **Verbal and Linguistic learners:** through the written text and language
- **Visual and Spatial learners:** through visual elements and pictures
- **Logical and Mathematical learners:** through numbers and strategy. In the case of comics, the formulation or reading of a panel sequence requires logic and strategy.
- **Bodily and Kinesthetic learners:** through the incorporation of movement, such as the facial expressions and physical positions of the plot characters
- **Interpersonal learners:** by working in groups and analysing emotions, which can be accomplished by assigning group activities based on a comic page/strip; or by witnessing the characters' interactions.
- **Intrapersonal learners:** they learn through self-reflection and application of their own emotions to the occasion, so an educator could provide exercises that encourage this process.
- **Naturalistic learners:** through the association of the comic's environment with the learner's own environment
- **Musical and Rhythmic learners:** by identifying the innate rhythmical patterns that occur through the repetition of panels, of panel elements or texts.

As such, when educators create their own comics, it gives them the opportunity to bolster the competences of a wider range of students, thus leading them to more advanced academic achievements and rendering their learning experience more enjoyable and participatory.



## ii. Cultivation of a useful skill set

Another advantage for teachers when designing comics themselves is the wide range of skills they can develop and practice during the process. Undoubtedly, the ones below are not just skills that will exclusively be used in the course of designing a comic, but they can subsequently be instilled in every part of a teacher's work.

First of all, to create a digital comic, teachers require a basic knowledge of operating a computer and working around the internet. As most digital comics creation tools are rather user friendly and include guided instructions, exploring the functions of a tool can be relatively easy, but also constructive for practicing how to drag and drop, add and remove elements, zoom in and out, for approaching web content with a more critical spirit and in general, for cultivating digital literacy, i.e. "the ability to use information and communication technologies to find, evaluate, create, and communicate information, requiring both cognitive and technical skills" (American Library Association Digital Literacy Task Force, 2020).

Furthermore, comic creation can cultivate a person's storytelling skill and how to organize a narrative in a logical sequence with a beginning, middle and end. This can also become exemplary for students on how to put their own thoughts in order, so as to create a compelling message.

One more skill that is bolstered by the creation of comics is the graphic one. As part of this process, teachers can familiarize themselves with the basic elements of design, refine their sense of aesthetics and creativity, as well as improve paying attention to small details. Additionally, this is a skill that can help teachers in their work overall, with the aspiration of designing more appealing content for students in various settings.

Hand-in-hand with storytelling and designing, goes the development of the teachers' presentation skills, from selecting the content and logical structure of the text to adding interesting graphic elements that will enrich their presentation.

Last but not least, not only do students have the chance to boost their visual and multimodal literacy skills when learning through comics, but also teachers do. To understand and, in turn, to design comics, teachers cannot simply approach them as a textual literary form. Instead, they

also have to delve into the “semiotic, symbolic and iconographic visuals” that are formed through the relationship between the text, the panels and their in-between space (Wallner, 2017, p. 34-35). As such, they can gradually learn how to detect and incorporate subtle visual elements with a deeper sense of meaning and become appreciative of other forms of literacy.

### **iii. Maintenance of students’ attention and motivation**

This medium is also a prominent way to retain on a high level the attention and motivation of students. As it is argued in a blog article by Pixton (2017), “[...] storytelling, sequential art, and embellishment are naturally engaging, particularly to those who are growing up in a fast-paced world of social networks, gadgets, and an inescapable flood of superhero movies”. Based on this, when an educator presents to the class a comic strip of their own, the learners might not only be naturally curious to explore the outcome of her/his mental and creative process, but also interested in engaging with a new learning methodology. While on the one hand, this medium could become a bridge of communication between the educator and the learners, hence establishing a personal understanding and appreciation, on the other hand, it could make the school learning environment feel less formal and strict. To add to this, more quiet and reserved students could welcome the opportunity to interact with a format other than a textbook, as a chance to relate to the story, open up in class and participate more enthusiastically (Halimun, 2017).

### **iv. Sense of empowerment for the educator**

One final argument in favour of teachers creating their own comics is that the creative process is empowering. Despite the fact that it entails technical difficulties, which can be overcome with the help of a digital creation tool, having an outlet for expression and bringing to life a character or an idea that will become role model for the learners, can encourage also the educators in doing their job with unvarying passion and dedication. As Williams brings forth, when working on comics with the students, it is “an opportunity to inspire empathy, curiosity and action” (2008, p. 18) in a supportive manner.

## c. The challenges of creating your own comics as a teacher

One could argue in length about the benefits of self-created comics. Nonetheless, when engaging in the design process, certain surmountable challenges, which the teachers need to be aware of, come hand-in-hand with the advantages. In the following part, we will examine those one by one, as well as ways to avoid them.

### i. Sensitivity towards representations and misrepresentations

To begin with, the first aspect that teachers ought to be mindful of, when creating a comic, is their level of sensitivity towards certain representations and misrepresentations. This could regard issues like gender, gender roles and gender identity, race, cultural, religious and historical contexts, as well as disabilities and disorders (see EdComix Pedagogical Guide, Chapter 3). While on the one side, comics are an optimal tool for introducing challenging, sensitive and controversial themes to the classroom, on the other side, the educator needs to approach this with special care. Let's take, for instance, the case of Marjane Satrapi's (2007) graphic novel "Persepolis", in which she narrates her life's story from her early childhood during the Iranian Revolution in 1979 to her migration to Austria in her teenage years and her reintegration to Iranian society as an adult. In the graphic novel, the writer manages to convey how migration can become a double-edged sword in a manner that encourages compassion and understanding on behalf of the reader, as migrants first experience integration difficulties in the host country, followed by different, reintegration difficulties when returning to their home country. Additionally, she tackles issues like the gradual turn of Iran towards fundamentalism, the altering role of women in the Iranian society over the years and the history of Iran from the 1980s onwards among others, in a skilful and delicate way, which allows the reader to reflect critically.

Nonetheless, as it has been extensively analysed in the EdComix Pedagogical Guide, not all comics are suitable for education and certain parameters like the art quality, level of violence, vocabulary and target group have to be critically examined before a specific comic is included in the learning material. Therefore, this aspect should be monitored when teachers create their

own content and are mindful of the above. It is crucial, that educators are conscious of the manner in which they represent certain topics like ethnic groups, the role of genders in society or the story of a character with a disability or disorder, as subtle stereotypical behaviours can be perceived and repeated by the students, resulting unwarily in the exclusion of a part of the classroom, single story narratives and the development of extreme behaviours. Instead, as Williams pointed above, the goal should be to instil a feeling of empathy, awareness, critical ability and engagement with the world.

## **ii. Openness towards the needs and preferences of students**

A second important facet to consider during the creation of comics is the needs and interests of the target group. It would be advisable to choose an enticing theme that speaks to the students, in order to keep them engaged and motivated. For instance, if the students are teenagers, teachers should try avoiding stories and character representations that are too infantilizing, as this might lead to the opposite result than the one desired. One more thing to keep in mind is that, despite the generic appeal of comics and their proven benefits for learning purposes, there might always be students who are neither enthralled by this medium, nor able to perform academically as well as they did with other learning tools. In such a case, it is up to the teacher to be perceptive of these issues and responsible to present comics in a manner that supports students, rather than hinders them.

## **iii. Time, background knowledge and learning approach**

A third challenge that educators could come across when creating comics is time availability. It is often asserted that creating a comic from scratch can be a lengthy and time-consuming process, as it involves the participation of a series of experts, such as the writer, the penciller and the inker to the colourist, the letterer and the editor. However, current technological advancements and digital, user-friendly tools have rendered this process accessible and tailored to the needs of amateur comics creators. By providing background scenes, a wide selection of characters and items, as well as bubbles being available online for adjustments, creating comics from scratch can now be easier than ever before, as we will see in Chapter 4. Besides, with practice and over time, the design procedure will take less and less time.

Concurrently, the fact that the creation steps of a digital comic can be carried out by only one individual, implies that teachers/designers need to have (at least to some extent) basic storytelling skills and a sense of aesthetics. This might seem challenging and requiring some online research and exploration. However, in the frame of the EdComix project, we provide an e-learning course that teachers and educators can follow and benefit from a 25-hour guidance and material on how to create their own comics for their classroom's specific needs.

One last essential aspect about the way in which this medium is addressed to the class is that it cannot be approached as a common text book or literary text. This is underscored in the online teacher roundtable discussion on Jennifer Gonzalez's blog (2016), where the university professor Michelle Falter explains: "If you just focus on the story, and not on how the story is constructed through frames, colours, angles, word bubbles, etc., you are missing the point." School teacher Beth Gillis (*ibid.*) adds: "The best thing a teacher can do is to educate themselves on the elements and components of comics/graphic novels so that they can use that knowledge for the end goal: teaching students to recognize those elements and make sense of them in a literary context". As such, they both urge teachers to indulge in research and suggest material that can be helpful in the learning process.

## d. Conclusion

To summarise, in the present text we have analysed why it is advantageous for the teachers, the students and the learning environment when teachers create their own comics. Furthermore, we have considered the main challenges that educators might face during this process and pointed out some things to keep in mind to surmount them. In light of the above and with the assistance of the digital comics creation tools presented in Chapter 4, we hope to have encouraged any teachers, trainers or educators who may want to introduce comics in class by attempting to create them on their own. In case you are still hesitant, keep reading through the guide, as in the next part we will be debating on whether to use existing comics in class or self-created ones.

## 2. Using existing comics vs creating your own

### a. Introductory notes

Whenever we look at a comic book page entitled for learning, either printed or digitally made, we are amazed at the characters that are cleverly designed and fun to watch, where the brisk and colourful design lures the viewer into a magic world of cartoonish people and events with sparkling dialogues. Using comics to convey concepts from domains such as language learning, literature, science, technology or social issues has proved to be highly beneficial for teachers who can deliver information through this resourceful tool.

We shall see together how teachers may turn into superheroes and avail themselves of comics as teaching material to enhance their students' language acquisition. In agreement to the above comments, let us not forget McCloud's advice, who stated that 'words and pictures can work miracles' (1993, p. 135). The following lines will show what the different perspectives on using either existing or creating comics are, in order to facilitate language learning for students, so as to give language teachers a reliable tool to use in the classroom.

### b. Teachers use the existing comics for various reasons

#### i. Benefits of ready-to-use comics

##### **For teachers**

Perhaps it is better to talk here about comics designed specifically for educational purposes and comics designed to entertain or for commercial interest, but used for learning as well. As Kress and van Leeuwen (2001) suggest, it falls on the teachers' ability to analyse the structural form and content of these multimodal textual-visual tool, so as to offer students the best learning structures and outcomes.

There are important benefits for teachers if they rely on already existing comics, such as time management, a comics base and online library which is available and ready to use anytime. As regular printed or digital issues, comics are primarily produced for native English speakers, not

for students learning English as a foreign or second language, thus being true examples of authentic language which can be exploited in the English class in order to develop the four basic skills: reading, listening, speaking and writing. However, Barthes (1985, pp. 14-15) writes that 'the text burdens the image, loads it with a culture, a morality, an imagination', and consequently, students with a not well-developed reading literacy may fail to comprehend general or specific meaning. Therefore, it would appear that ready-made comics require thorough analysis and guidance from teachers prior to exploiting in the classroom.

### **For students**

Apart from their entertaining purpose, comics are used to reach and motivate students to learn while having fun. As they depict real dialogue and culture, comic books and strips are important for students who study English or any other subject. For learning to be effective, students need to indulge in authentic texts as much as possible, with meaningful material (Drolet, 2010). The intrinsic motivation for reading in language acquisition is particularly important due to the realistic samples of genuine, day-to-day speech used in comics. Teenagers seem to understand at a great extent this visual and linguistic communicative form which appeals to almost any age group or learner level because they depict real dialogue and culture (Davis, 1997). The learners are supposed to deconstruct images and gather meaning from different types of texts, thus developing and making avail of their critical thinking and cognitive competences. Comics offer both verbal and non-verbal communication forms, and students not only indulge in reading texts at their own pace, but also expand visual-spatial intelligence due to the visual and textual interplay inside a comic strip which they compare and contrast.

## **ii. Drawbacks in using pre-existing comics as learning tools**

### **Teachers need to adapt curricular structures to existing comics**

In this section, vocabulary, grammar, syntax, learning techniques and other language structures need to be selected in order to fit the comic strip theme. Comics are innovative tools as they bridge the gap from long narrative text to small language chunks, while keeping the complexity of language. Acquiring and enriching vocabulary, as we have already mentioned in the Pedagogical Guide of the EdComix project, is undeniably realised more efficiently by means of



visual communication. There are many lexical items and neologisms which teachers may explain easier through comics and graphic novels, where long literature pages are reduced to a more condensed literary work. In this respect, Art Spiegelman's Holocaust allegorical story "Maus" and David Small's memoir "Stitch" are genuine examples. Yet, although students benefit directly from comics, it is to be noticed the strenuous effort teachers make in order to cope with the curricular appropriateness when selecting text and images in order to teach grammar and syntactical patterns. All the satellite rules that revolve around grammar need to be made approachable to students by using existing comics as tools, with an already linguistically shaped form. This aspect may hinder the learning process in terms of time management, having teachers shovelling for suitable material pertaining to curricular demands while keeping in mind their students' age, interests and socio-cultural backgrounds.

### **Teachers need to be selective in using comics for their classes**

Irrespective of the students' level, the existing comic strips address all students at the same time. Students of a lower reading level may feel intimidated to read the bullets of a comic book thoroughly and may limit to watching visual cues to help them interpret the text. For advanced readers, some comics are quite a challenge to follow the complex plot lines which sometimes unfold too redundantly, in spite of being supported with pictures for a better understanding. On the other hand, there are amounts of comics in different formats and media which teachers should analyse before using them as teaching aids. Either way, existing comics should be carefully studied before integrating them in learning classes.

#### **DID YOU KNOW**

Amongst the several types of comics, teachers can look for comics that are designed to support all readers, by adapting their content in terms of design, text font, illustration and general layout organization. Find more information about adaptive comic content on Chapter 2 Part 2 of this guide!

Although many non-educational comics are created specifically for different ages, interests or genders, before presenting a comic strip or book to students, there should be a thorough check for inappropriate vocabulary, violence, harmful elements or other unsuitable aspects (Jenkins, 2008). By teaching with comics, teachers prepare students to gather information from multiple sources, paying attention beforehand to fake, unresearched for data or to the delicate shift from child-friendly to adult-friendly comics that could undermine the educational value for the school readership.

## **c. Creating your own comics brings classroom satisfactions**

### **i. Benefits of creating new comics for both teachers and students**

While existing comics need to adjust to a prescribed curricular setting, comics that are created meet the learning purposefully, as 'the importance lies in not only what occurred but when they occurred' (Ramsey, 2013). In other words, language trainers know exactly what to use and when to use a resourceful tool like comics, and in order to save time, energy and money buying comic books or registering different web-comics to be allowed to use their products, teachers feel it is more beneficial to create own tools. Some classes may need remedial learning steps, while others need proficiency activities. Comic strips allow for both classroom pursuits due to their flexible status, as teachers may create them to correspond to his or her class necessity: revising irregular past tenses, drilling on "wh-" questions, teaching reported speech, acquiring new vocabulary, learning idiomatic expressions and cultural issues, just to offer several examples.

Moreover, comics help improve methodological competences as well as digital ones, as teachers may choose characters, props, movements, body postures, backgrounds, scenes in order to create digital storytelling. There are digital pages which offer full liberty in creating comics; others restrain creation to two, three and four strips and provide pictures, others offer free printables and editing, access to ready-to-use images or to online characters libraries. Adding comics to an existing curriculum may also put teachers and students together to cooperate in creating strips and stories, view and then share them with other teachers or students. Creating

comics is technically engaging, and sharing them gives a sense of self-appreciation and connectedness among students, becoming part of this shared experience.

Comics are also an anchorage settlement for children with serious learning issues or disruptive behaviour, as Wisenthal (2017) states on his blog. Through digital comic creation teachers encourage students to tell their stories, socialise and empathise with other teenagers. As an example, "Make Beliefs Comix" and "Storyboard That" are two sites which facilitate interactive learning and are freely accessed by teachers and students alike. Creating comics sessions helps bring a wonderful asset to the class, can fulfil a student's need to be heard and might spot gifted and talented students who may become comics artists one day.

## ii. Creating comics means adapting to curricular structures

The potential applications of comics in the classroom are to engage students gradually, starting with prior knowledge, progressing with productive learning activities and then assessment, according to their proficiency level. Existing comics need to adjust to a prescribed curricular setting, while comics that are created are already tailored to match the class demands. Using sequential images and text in a comic strip or page means connecting with the students' ability to grasp meaning out of visuals, understanding the functional use of language, as well as being able to employ the key vocabulary productively.

At the same time, teachers should focus on the competences that students need to acquire while participating in receptive and productive language skills, such as reading, listening, speaking and writing. The learning activities will be compatible with A2 and B1 levels, working in a differentiated manner and using various techniques and methods with familiar topics, such as: Going Places, Holidays, Personal Profile, Spare Time Activities, People, Books, Pets, Food and Drink, Characters, News Around the World, Myths and Mysteries, Interpersonal Relationships, Daily Life, Shopping, The Natural World, Animals, Celebrations, Social Media, so that all students are involved in the learning process according to their learning environment. To forward an example, **If I were a president** is a perfect lesson example for B1 level to create a comic strip where students present a possible election platform and make use, at the same time, of conditionals. Another example may refer to **What's behind the lost civilisations?** for A2 level, where the teacher creates and tells the story of Machu Picchu (having as further cues The

Forbidden City, The Pyramids, Atlantis etc.) in a few strips, meanwhile revising the order of adjectives.

Moreover, the diversification of the tasks is realised under the following aspects:

- taking into consideration the cognitive profile of the students, for example, they may acknowledge a reading task by explaining, drawing and miming what they understood from that particular task;
- creating strips with motivating topics that encompass the students surrounding world of interests, hobbies, passions and leisure activities;
- developing language and ICT competences while creating comic strips, here both teachers and students may be involved in joint comics creating activities;
- assessing their work using different methods and evaluation procedures, such as digital portfolios with comics, by observing the quality level of their activity as individual, pair or group work.

As regards language functionality inside the comic strips with direct speech acts, teachers may provide bullets with vocabulary patterns or idiomatic expressions which students have to transform into reported speech, at the same time being aware of the use of these informal expressions. Developing writing skills may be achieved by visual clues inside sequential wordless strips and then try story mapping techniques while maintaining the narrative writing conventions. Writing dialogues including vivid and relevant details while creating drama and anticipation highlights the comics' potential inside classrooms and how they motivate and engage students.

To sum up, as comics creators, teachers may open new perspectives and pathways to introduce new practices inside their language classes, rather than using existing comics which "tell" them what to do.

### **iii. c. The communicative approach is an important aspect when creating comics**

**The type of discourse** chosen for comics is a non-fictional text that can be more properly defined through its communicative purposes and linguistic realization as a popular entertainment genre, the term being potentially denoted by means of culture and time

coordinates (Eggins, 1994, pp. 26-36). The linguistic sign to be used in comics provides favourable junctures of real-life communication within a social context and can effectively stand for genuine communicative activities during English teaching classes in which both productive and receptive skills can be applied. Pertaining to an in-depth textual analysis, interpreted in terms of **form** (pronunciation and spelling), **word use** (collocation, idiom and metaphor), **aspects of meaning** (denotation, connotation, appropriateness, register), **relationships among the sense(s)** of one item and the sense(s) of other items (synonymy, antonymy, hyponymy, etc.), **word formation** (prefixes, suffixes) will allow students for further linguistic deciphering and understanding at communicative level.

**Humour** can be another ingredient that should not be omitted, as it is an important component in foreign language acquisition, considering that it can be written, spoken, recorded, or taped. Margie S. Berns (1983), as cited in the Office of Educational Research and Improvement (OERI, June 10, 1987, p. 20), an expert in the field of communicative language teaching, explains that 'language is interaction' and helps develop 'a learner's communicative competence'. In this light, the study of how language functions in its linguistic context and its social and situational background represents an empowering asset to language classes.

The speech acts of each discourse may involve social satire, play on words, witty and at the same time ironic hints, ironic replies to serious statements, cultural jokes, exaggeration. Beyond textual approach, the comic of situation and name is also worth using and studying. For example, the teacher asks students to fill in the bullet of a comic strip related to the topic **Food and Cooking**. One exercise task may be "Batman is coming to dinner. What do you choose for the menu?" where the students acquire specific vocabulary regarding healthy versus unhealthy food and cooking methods as well as they improve their English pronunciation.

**The cultural issue** is a delicate aspect to consider when constructing a comic strip for a specific purpose. The English teacher may exploit both images and text to teach about multiculturalism at the same time with delivering vocabulary, grammar, syntax. Thus, students may benefit from textual and visual immersion in another culture while acquiring language patterns. Accordingly, they develop the ability to grasp culture, norm and value issues through idiolects and the social background the teachers may feel prone to use in their productions.

**Creating comics may promote interaction** between teachers and students. Both students and educators may become creators, producers, writers or actors in their own comic strips. By observing everyday school experiences, in situ practices and behaviour, teachers gain thematic material to which students bring their own contribution. Not only are they supposed to make use of their language knowledge, but also cling to general knowledge and different forms of communication and social interaction, according to Stivers and Sidnell (2005). Moreover, to make tasks clearer, teachers may use conventional iconic signs for reading, speaking, listening, writing, in pairs or group work, role-play activities, and so on. In class interaction practices, students and teachers engage in reading, composing, analysing and teacher-led group discussions about comics where students research for responsive ideas.

# HOW TO PLAN THE CREATION & PRACTICAL ADVICES AND ROADMAPS TO KEEP THE CREATION SIMPLE

After reading about the advantages of creating comics for your students, you might feel inspired to get into creating your very own strips or pages, or if you have already created some, to share them with your students. However, as with any creative endeavour, it might feel intimidating as you might not know how to organise the creation process, you might be afraid to make mistakes, or you might get discouraged because you feel that what you have created is not good enough.

These are the reasons why this chapter tackles the different steps of the creation process, including a few tips about how to keep things simple for you, followed by a part on keeping in mind broad principles of inclusiveness to make sure you do not alienate part of your readership, or in other words, your students.

## 1. Creation

If you start to research on how to create comics on the internet, you are likely to find a myriad of resources that will either:

- tell you about creating a full-blown story or a complete graphic novel that spans over several pages;
- give you advice on creating simple webcomics that aim at capturing a wide audience and become viral on social media;
- tutor you into using one specific comics creation tool as a teacher.

While there are a lot of interesting things to learn from such resources, their variety can make them look intimidating to a newcomer, and overwhelming for a teacher who is looking for a time-efficient solution.

Therefore, this part will cover the main principles and steps involved for teachers to create their own comic strips or page for their classroom. In other words, this chapter aims at introducing you to the proper mindset and organisation to get started and create without any long training. To know more about the tools and the detailed process of creating your own comics, we invite you to take a look at our e-learning module, which will adopt a more step-by-step approach to comics creation for teachers in English. The e-learning module of EdComix is planned to be launched in during the autumn of 2020.

The main steps involved in the creation of comics are: first, to get inspired, then to plan the conception or creation of your work, and finally to know about what can be done during the post-conception phase. As it is easy to get lost when creating anything from scratch, we will finish this part with a few tips on how to keep the creation process simple.

### **a. Pre-conception and getting inspiration**

The main purpose that comics allow you to aim for as a creator is to tell a story. A story can include explanations about a topic, such as a notion in a lesson, but the explanation linked to the lesson or the application of what has been, is or will be studied in a lesson can be contextualised as part of a story when it is presented in a comic. Therefore, the first step to create a comic is to think about the story you want to tell. This story will tell about a topic, character, or event, and it will involve characters in an initial situation that will end the story in a changed situation.

If you are not used to writing or creating stories, you might feel stuck at this stage. Chances are that you know the topic you want to talk about, or that you know one or a few elements of the story you want to tell, but you are not sure as to how to piece them together.

Here are a few suggestions to prompt you to make a full story out of the pieces of ideas that you might have.



## **i. Gather comics you like as models**

One of the first things you should do is to gather a set of comics you like or would like to write in the spirit of. This will allow you to create your own set of references and to understand what kind of structure or style you would like to create comics in.

When creating comics for your lessons, we would advise you to gather strips and short stories, or short extracts of longer works, as it is unlikely that you would have the time or stamina necessary to create lengthy albums.

Also, there is no need for you to gather pages and pages for inspiration, especially as you might end up getting lost in the process or in the sheer volume. Therefore, do not hesitate to challenge yourself to find a reasonable number of comics — 10 works would already give you a good basis to work on —, or even to set a timer to limit the time and energy you spend on researching ideas. Limiting the time you allocate for research is especially interesting when you deal with comics, as you might be drawn to read them if you enjoy them and end up losing track of your goal.

## **ii. Understanding the structure of a story**

After gathering these resources, it is time to think critically about them, or about why you think they could be good models for you. Are there situations that you find particularly useful? How do the stories move from an initial situation to a resolution of the story? Are there any major differences between the works that you selected? Do some of these examples seem easier to draw inspiration from than others?

Here, the point is not to evaluate the pedagogical value of different forms of comics or to try and define the perfect form of comics for you, but to build your own storytelling toolbox.

If you are a language teacher, you have probably studied some form of literature analysis during your training. Try to apply the principles of literature analysis to comics to understand a bit more how they work, as well as what you think could speak the most to your students.

If you take some of the elements of the story you initially thought about and add the elements you found from already existing comics, you might end up being able to create one or several

full stories. Your stories do not need to be long, but they should tell about how situation A turned into situation B.

### iii. Using writing prompts to kickstart your creativity

Creative writing prompts come in all shapes and genres. They consist of story pitches that aim at getting you kickstarted in writing your own story. They either provide you with an incipit to start from or an ending to reach through your story, or they can provide just small elements of storytelling for you to image what the story is about. A good thing to do to get you going is to combine one idea from a writing prompt to the structure or elements from a comic you like and try to create a story around them.

As there are countless resources for creative writing prompts, it would be difficult to name them all, but in our annexes we listed an article from the New York Times entitled “Over 1.000 Writing Prompts For Students” (2018) that can be a good first entry point for you to explore. In addition, you can browse the English Profile platform ([www.englishprofile.org](http://www.englishprofile.org)) to find vocabulary and topics adapted to different English levels.

As creative writing prompts exist about all possible topics, do not hesitate to research prompts about specific topics (such as “nature”, “travel”, “work”, etc.).

## **b. Description of the creation process (conception)**

Once you have written your story, here are the different steps that you will have to go through to create a comic strip or page.

### **i. Decide about the tools you want to use**

Try to check what tools are available to you, and whether you wish to go for a comic you draw by hand, create digitally or if you wish to mix both methods. Even when you create a comic digitally, you might need to use several tools, so make sure that you start by listing what you want to use in what order. Take this opportunity to design a creation plan for yourself if you feel it helps you keep track of your work.

### **ii. Choose your graphic style**

If you do not draw, choose the set of graphic resources that you want to use. As we will see in chapter 4, some digital comics creation tools offer you to choose from different styles or allow you to import pictures from other sources into your comic. Therefore, choose whether you wish to create a comic that looks has a style that is more cartoony, classical European, artsy, intricate, simplified, etc.

If you choose to draw by yourself and draw regularly, you are likely to already be settled on a graphical style and might skip this step. However, if you usually draw detailed illustrations, you might want to draw something in a more accessible style that will be less time consuming. To do so, consider browsing the corpus of comics you gathered for inspiration during the pre-conception phase!

### **iii. Create or choose your characters and setting**

Once you have decided what story to tell, with what tools and in which style, you can start gathering resources to represent your characters and the setting — that is if the setting needs to be explicit for your story, as there is nothing that prevents you from leaving an empty background.

#### **iv. Write your scenario and/or a storyboard**

While in the pre-conception we discussed how to prompt yourself to create your own story, the scenario is the detailed action of how your story develops. Depending on how you create it, you could either draft everything in the text and then transfer your ideas to a storyboard, or first create a storyboard and then add the text you need directly into the strip. While this could be risky for longer forms of comics, it should not be too much of a problem to directly start with a storyboard for a short strip.

In short, you can think of a storyboard as a draft of the panels, in which you could put the silhouette of the characters and place the speech bubbles and any other graphic elements.

Storyboard templates will be explored in chapter 3.

#### **v. Creating your comic**

With all the elements you now have at hand, you should be able to launch into creating your comic! If you create it digitally, your first shot at creating might be close to the final result you want to achieve. One good way to go is to first put all the elements in the panels, and when everything has been put at their place, you can make final modifications (for example adjust the size of the bubbles, the size of characters, some colours, etc.). On the other hand, if you create your comic by hand, you might realise that the things you imagined in your storyboard do not fit or work as you intended: you might spend a bit more time to put everything together and to clean your work. When you are done with your paper version, you can scan it and adjust the contrast to clean your drawing. Lesson 17 of our elearning module will provide you more detailed guidance as to how to do this.

#### **c. Post-conception**

Now your comic is created, clean and finalised, you might think that you have reached the end of the creation process. However, we have some additional advice to make sure you are happy with your creations.

## **i. Have other people review your comics**

You have thought about a story, turned it into a comic, and its relationship to course material is crystal clear to you. However, it is possible that other people, be it your colleagues, students or friends, do not see your point or do not understand your story. If this happens, it is perfectly normal: when authors create a story, they spend a lot of time thinking about how to translate their ideas into ways that other people will understand what they mean, and yet, sometimes their readership misses their point. Therefore, it is always interesting to have others quickly read your work to make sure that they understand your point. As long as a majority of people understand what you mean without too much effort, it means that you can use it with your students. In addition, if you ask your students to evaluate your creation, you can even turn this into an exercise by asking them to answer a series of questions or to write a short report about whether they find your comic clear or interesting.

## **ii. Be ready to receive feedback**

Whether you ask for others' opinion or not, you will hear about what others think about what you created in one way or another. Therefore, you should be ready to receive feedback, either positive or negative. Whether the people who give feedback or express their opinion know you created the comic they see or not, you should not take whatever they tell you personally. It can be difficult to take negative criticism over something you worked on, just as it can feel strange to have others congratulate you about something over which you do not feel you made such an effort. Do not let your first batch of feedback demotivate you from making comics because your public did not react to it as you thought they would: for example, if they do not find what you created funny. And do not let your will to improve turn all the advice for improvement you receive into a huge to-do list for your next creations. Take what you feel is within your reach and desire to work about if you wish to improve your comics. And remind yourself that in the end, you are not aiming at creating works of art, but new supporting material for your lessons.

This is even truer if you self drew or if you made an effort to be creative with digital comics creation tools: others might give you their opinion about other graphical choices you could have made, or other stories to write. If you feel like they are right, do not be ashamed: you had to start somewhere. If you do not see how their suggestions would make your comic better at serving its purpose to support your students in studying, feel free to ignore their suggestions this time.

You are only starting your journey in creating comics, so it is normal that you do not create perfect works of art right away! When you look at several artists, their early works can look a bit messy and imprecise compared to their later works: everybody needs time and practice to improve their skills.

### iii. How to keep motivated over time

In general, one's motivation is high when starting to learn and doing something new, but as soon as it gets more complicated or as the excitement of a new activity wears off, it is easy to give up. Therefore, if you enjoy creating comics for your students, see the benefits for them and if you want to turn it into a habit, here are a few tips to support you in keeping motivated over time and in keeping your efforts up:

- Note down your ideas somewhere: it can be in a notebook, in a note-taking app in your smartphone or in a text file on your computer. When you feel like you are out of inspiration, this will be a precious resource.
- In the same place, do not hesitate to journal your own feedback to yourself when you create. It will motivate you to create on the days you feel demotivated.
- Do not set unattainable targets of comics to create for your students: as it takes a bit of time and energy to create comics, and considering all the other tasks you are in charge of as a teacher, it is unlikely that you could draw more than one to two comic strips or pages per month. Set yourself a reasonable target, and do not be afraid to adjust it, to make sure that you do not pressure yourself too much.
- If you love using comics with your students, use existing comics along with the ones you created. You could even list the topics for which you find it hard to find existing comics and focus on creating material for these topics.

- If your colleagues like what you create, do not hesitate to share your works with them! This will allow you to get more qualitative feedback if they actually use them with their students rather than just take a quick look at your comics.
- Always keep your goal in mind: you might feel disappointed if you do not create works of arts, if your students are not interested in your comics or if your colleagues think that you are losing your time. To prevent such negative feelings from demotivating you, state your goal of creating comics clearly to yourself and refer to it anytime you are doubtful. It should motivate you again!
- Enjoy creating comics: the point of creating new material is not for you to become a perfect Instagram-worthy teacher, but to vary what you create and make your lessons more enjoyable. Therefore, do not force yourself to create comics if you feel pressured or annoyed to do so. While some aspects of comics creation might feel less enjoyable, overall, you should focus on what you like.

## d. Some advice to keep things simple

One of the main reasons that can make one shy away from getting on a creative journey is that it can feel difficult. Any creative process can be taxing: one can be shy to present something they feel is not good enough, or it can be discouraging not to be able to create all the comics you would like to when you have many ideas but little time to make them come to life. As we mentioned above how to receive feedback and not thinking too harshly about one's works, in this part we wish to introduce some forms of comics that do not look too complicated to try and create as a teacher. We just wish to start with a short disclaimer about the way we present this topic: we do not mean that the comics we present here have low artistic value, we only wish to show that they might feel like more accessible models for teachers to start creating, by showing them that complicated layouts or drawings are not necessary to create a comic.

Here are a few examples:



- “La Bande Pas Dessinée” (Navo), which could be translated as **“The Un-illustrated Comics”**, is a series of comic strips that only show text and bubbles, without any drawings of any characters or backgrounds. While we have only found them in French, they are a good example of using comics to focus on dialogues and situations, rather than spending too much time on designing a character or a place with their clothes, accessories, and other elements related to their appearance.

**Example of Navo’s “La Bande Pas Dessinée”:**



**Translation:**

Title: The concept

**1st panel:**

1st bubble: At the beginning, people didn't really get the concept of comics without pictures...

2nd bubble: Oh yeah?

3rd bubble: Yeah...

**2nd panel:**

1st bubble: And now?

2nd bubble: What do they think?

**3rd panel:**

1st bubble: Well... It has just begun.

2nd bubble: Oh, right...

- Empty spaces can have a great narrative power in other contexts as well: they can be empty panels or even full pages filled in one colour (including white), or almost empty pages that can highlight overwhelming feelings or give the reader time to let ideas sink in. Zeina Abirached is a Lebanese comics creator and trained graphic designer who alternates between black and white pages with a lot of details to almost empty ones to change the rhythm of narration. You can look at her graphic novel “I remember Beyrouth” (2008), for example.

**Cover of Abirached’s “I Remember Beyrouth”:**



- Comparing the earlier and current works of webcomics authors such as Chris Grady (Lunar Baboon) and Sarah Andersen (Sarah's Scribbles) show how one's style can evolve over time, even in the case of drawing styles that are meant to look simple and quick to draw. Do not hesitate to look at their blogs which are listed in the bibliography and compare the style of their earlier works to their latest publications. It can show you how one's style can mature and evolve over time and encourage you to start creating even if you feel unsure about your skills.

### Example of Sarah Andersen's first and latest comic on her blog

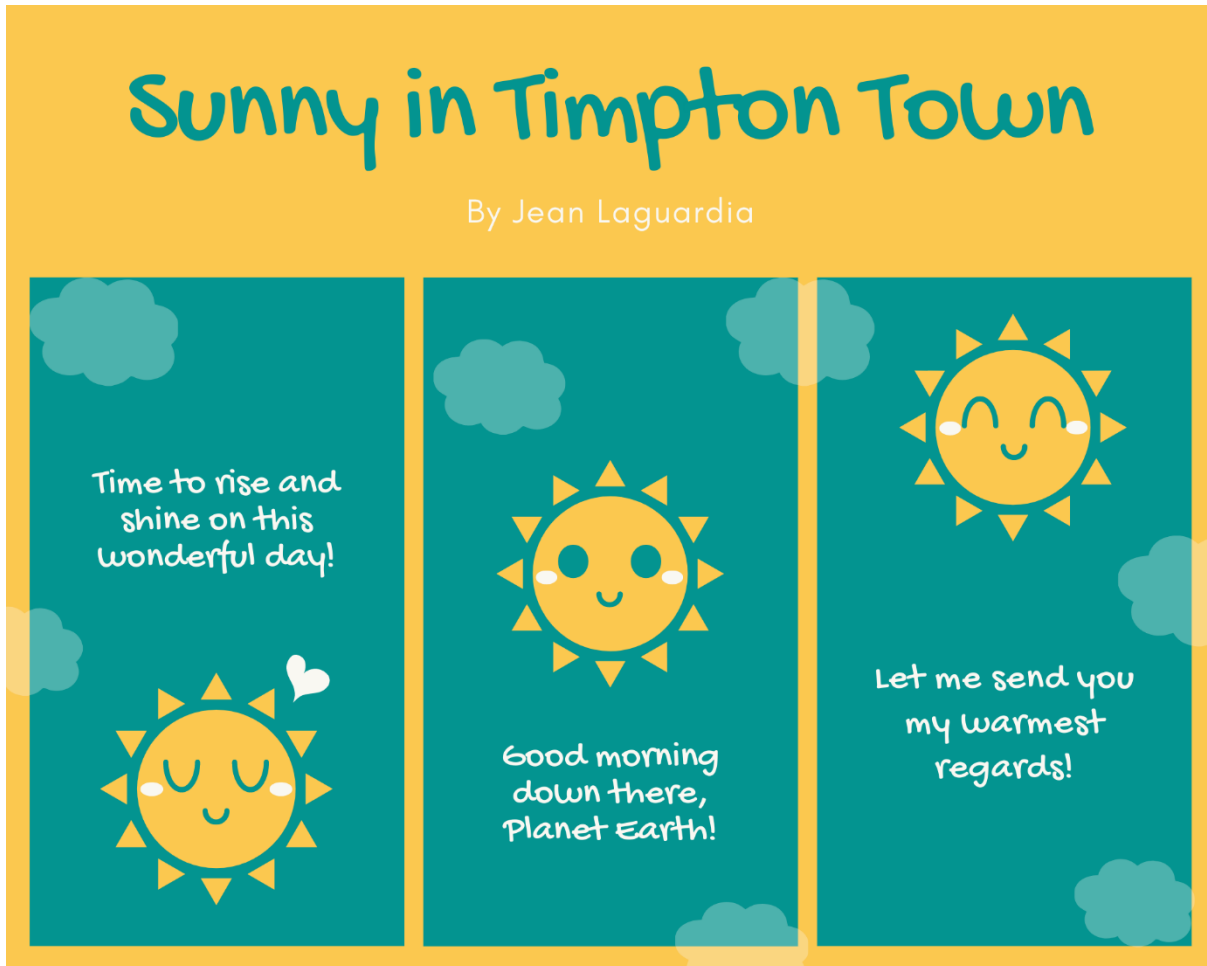


This is the first comic one can find in Sarah Andersen's archives, which dates from December 2011 (Andersen, 2011). She started sharing her experience as an arts student.



In her latest strip (as of October, 7th 2020), we can see the style of the author has matured, as her style is less changing in her latest works than in her first works.

- Finally, keep in mind that the characters you create for comics strips do not have to be complicated. They can even be in geometric shapes, things, vegetables or fruit, to name a few, and you can still create a story about them. Several of the templates offered on Canva provide such examples of simple comics.



## 2. Storytelling

Storytelling is a way of communicating and learning by using stories to engage the learners, pass the information easier, and/or often to clarify something. 'Storying' is the process of constructing stories in the mind of the learner, which is one of the most fundamental way of making meaning (Hamilton & Weiss, 2005).

Regardless of the age, people are learning and remembering information much easier when it is given as part of a story. This is because stories are enjoyable and encourage the learner's attention and instinctive curiosity to unfold the story and learn how a problem is solved, or about the steps taken to complete a task successfully. Storytelling **creates interest, anticipation and expectation** that triggers engagement and participation in the learning process. This can lead to meaningful learning, helps in retention, and immediate recall of information.

Storytelling can be both oral and visual. At the same time, it can make use of voice, images and pictures, which really helps learners to grasp the information and details of the story. In comics, we are interested in **visual storytelling**, and in the frame of the EdComix project, we would like to present how storytelling through comics can be **inclusive** and empower students to enjoy learning and store the information easier.

But first, what do we mean by inclusive storytelling and why is it important?

For a successful inclusive education, teachers should aim at accepting, understanding, and attending to student differences and diversity, which can include physical, cognitive, academic, social and emotional differences. Inclusivity invites all the different users to participate in the conversation, and for that to happen, it requires making accommodations. Accordingly, inclusive storytelling refers to the adaptations that are taking place in order to engage and integrate all the students with the above differences, into the learning process.

Because of its great impact and engagement, storytelling is often one of the main techniques used for inclusion in the classroom. Hearing, reading telling, or telling a story is a cognitive process that creates images in the mind of the learner, and this fosters imagination and

creativity. It also stimulates the learners' emotions and helps in their self-reflection and expression.

Learners can benefit from a variety of storytelling formats, mostly from those which include visual and audio content. Comics are visual storytelling mediums that pass the information and the details of the story through the power of image. This gives many opportunities for integration of all learners in discussions and in the learning process. Visual stimulation also helps learners to keep their focus and increase their attention spans. It also helps adding clarity, especially to a rather difficult subject.

For these reasons, in this part of the guide we aim to provide suggestions and tools to create adaptive content for inclusive storytelling using comics. But before doing so, right below we will describe the two main categories for which there is a demand for adaptive comic content regarding inclusive storytelling.

## a. Respect for the cultural diversity and disadvantaged backgrounds

To start with, stories are related to a cultural context that has a specific setting, time, with preconceived ideas or references that the audience must be equipped with to understand. Hence, they cannot be neutral. Considering this aspect, storytelling can offer challenges and opportunities in terms of inclusion. Thus, educators need to be alert regarding cultural diversity and inclusion and avoid reproducing clichés and biased opinions.

Especially in visual storytelling, **representation matters** as words and images used can include or exclude audiences, sometimes even unintentionally. The same goes with comics that, as a work or product of culture or media, they convey ideas about what or who can be represented, and how. Being inclusive refers to acknowledging representations related to gender, race, disabilities, cultures, religions, other identities or groups of people, in general (e.g. smart people, strong people, etc). Consequently, it is essential for teachers to bear these factors and complexities in mind when using comics with their students, in order to avoid spreading biased representations and misconceptions about culture and diversity.

Cultural differences in comics could be easily detected from the type of comics or genre which has specific codes and structures, as well as cultural references, such as jokes or the rhythm of narration. An example is the different codes of European comics versus Japanese comics (manga). Regarding this aspect, we advise teachers to use different genres, e.g. American comics alongside European classics and manga, as well as online comic strips and allow learners to observe and explore the differences and the commonalities.

Moreover, inclusive comic storytelling is not limited to the type of comics teachers present to their students. It is essential also to have a diversity in the characters at cultural, social, gender and ability (mental and physical) level. For instance, a girl with hearing problems or a boy in a wheelchair could be good examples of diverse and inclusive characters as the heroes of a story.

Furthermore, to deal with misrepresentations or misperceptions of **racial and cultural stereotypes and prejudices** that can be conveyed through comics, teachers should be encouraged to validate the cultural context of the comics used in the classroom, just like with any other school subject . It would be very beneficial for all sides (teachers and students) to conduct research on the background and cultural meanings of a story in order to understand, clarify and provide justified explanations about the context and make sure it will be understood in an appropriate way by the reader. Especially regarding **gender** issues, we would greatly advise teachers to make sure that they include several roles and types of women and men in their comics.

## b. Adaptation of the comic material for the inclusion of Dys-readers

Another fundamental aspect of inclusive storytelling is dealing with the adaptations of comics for learners with Specific Learning Disorders – also referred to as SLDs – that make use of the affix 'dys' to signify the partially lacking ability, such as dyslexia, dyspraxia and dyscalculia, for instance<sup>1</sup>. Teachers should adapt the teaching and learning material, as well as the classroom organisation, in order to include these students in the learning activities.

Inclusive storytelling in comics uses accommodations that rely on students' visual ability for processing information. In this context, adaptation to comic materials to support learners with SLDs, can be made in the section below:

Regarding the **panels**, they should be large enough and with clear outline, to help the 'dys' reader distinguish between the different actions and scenes. Also, be aware of the order of the panels which should follow a left to right order (for western countries), aligned and not in a random order and in not too many different shapes and sizes across the pages. This will help pupils with SLDs to navigate easily through the different panels and be able to follow the storyline.

The **comic bubble or balloons** can vary in shapes and styles, as long as they stay consistent throughout the comic strip; but it is important to have enough space inside the bubbles for the text to fit, avoiding the use of the hyphen to break the words. Also, the balloons should not overlap with each other or with the frame of the panel.

The text inside a balloon reads also from left to right and top to bottom in the western countries, and in relation to the position of the speaker, which for students with SLDs it is

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<sup>1</sup> For detailed description and information about SLDs, readers can see our EdComix Pegagogical Guide: Using Comics for Inclusive English Education.



important to use **balloons tails** to indicate which character is speaking by pointing to the character's mouth.

Furthermore, the **text** in digital comics should be in Sans Serif fonts such as Arial and Comic Sans. Other font options could be Verdana, Tahoma, Open Sans, Century Gothic and Trebuchet. Also, teachers as designers should always avoid writing in Italics and/or Bold Italics. For emphasis, the word could be highlighted or turned into different colours. Moreover, it is advised to use capital letters (ALL CAPS) which allows to fit more dialogues into less space and keep it clear. Most importantly, the point is **to be consistent** in the writing style. If for example the text in a bubble is written in both uppercase and lowercase font, it might add in difficulty for the 'dys' reader. Besides, numbers generally should always be spelled out, unless they are a date, designation, part of a name or a larger number. Regarding the narrative text in the caption boxes used to indicate location and time, internal monologue, or 'off-camera' voices, should have the same font as the dialogue, or a bit larger.

Adaptations for learners with SLDs referring also to the **graphic design and illustrations**: it is preferred to use colour contrast (black and white) and other contrasting or non-complementary colours, rather than close shades of grey and vague outlines. Also, a critical aspect is how the image is displayed, where teachers should take care of using a **good quality of the image**, in digital or in printing paper version.

Regarding the storytelling **process** with comics, teachers should encourage learners to read the story (comic strip) several times, first for pleasure and then concentrating on acquiring the information. It is also advised to keep the story brief and simple.

All the above adaptations to the comic material are not only made to meet the requirements of inclusive storytelling for students with SLDs, but they can also be beneficial to regular education students as well.

## c. Tools and tips to go further with inclusive storytelling

Keeping in mind all of the above, we would like to close this part of the guide regarding the creation of comic strips by highlighting some key-points and suggestions for successful and inclusive storytelling:

- **Planning:** Taking time to plan before going into production will help in creating a cohesive story that integrates all the elements that will make/render the content appropriate and inclusive. Meanwhile, educators should **determine the reading/language level** of the students. Then it is essential to think about the knowledge and competences they want their students to acquire and establish the **learning objectives**.
- **Research:** As mentioned earlier, it is essential to pay attention to the context of a story in order to avoid cultural bias and stereotypes. Teachers, for instance, should take care of the diversity of the characters and not always propose male figures seeking adventure, for example. For these reasons, it is essential to research and find different modules, and also to be able to provide explanations about the cultural notions of the story and the background. Also, knowing the context will help the learner stay focused and gather the information and knowledge required to accomplish the learning objective.
- **Create the story:** Each story needs to have a **plot** which serves as the guiding force and ensures there is a beginning, middle, and end. This will make learners/readers of the story feel comfortable and focus on the information. **Keep it brief and simple** — especially for younger children or for learners with SLDs. Also, the story should be **interesting and relevant** to learners' life and experiences. For example, it can be about recent events that are happening around them (e.g. the importance of the environment protection) to spark engagement and discussions.

In the traditional storytelling method, the stories begin with an exposition that sets the stage and introduces the characters and a conflict (problem), followed by a series of events leading to the resolution (solution), and finally the outcome.

To enhance the understanding of the story and make it more memorable, teachers can provide the outline of the story in few bullet points at the end of the reading activity, so it would be easier to follow for the students who are struggling with this skill.

- **Shape the characters:** As it has been mentioned further above, the characters of the story are essential for storytelling in general, and for inclusive readers in particular, as they come with many representation meanings. Teachers should pay attention to issues related to gender, nationality or religion and avoid using stereotypes. Thus, they can integrate characters with disabilities or other difficulties and barriers that students can relate to (for example, to have divorced parents or dealing with depression). Of course, the topics and the material should depend on the age of the student-learner as well. In addition, the characters do not need to be likeable or perfect as the learners would not be able to identify with a perfect character. Instead, characters could be flawed and showing their weak points because this is what makes them more realistic. It can be interesting to see how a character evolves and goes through an array of emotions.
- **Be mindful of your language:** As young people can absorb our prejudices and stereotypes, even unconsciously, teachers should be mindful of the language they use, especially when dealing with students with learning difficulties, physical disabilities and challenges or underprivileged backgrounds. For instance, it is better to create short phrases with simple vocabulary and avoid using words with ambiguous concepts and slang language that not all might understand.
- **Use appropriate visuals:** Comics are visual mediums where the imagery plays an important role in inclusive storytelling. Educators should keep in mind the adaptations for learners with SLDs that have been described above, in terms of adaptive font, illustration and design of a comic strip. Also, we suggest focusing **on one key element per panel and/or one key panel per page**. This will help learners to grasp the information and

follow the story more easily. In addition, teachers can facilitate what readers should be focused on in a panel or on a page, by controlling the amounts of visual activity that the picture requires. For example, you can put an emphasis on some elements to create 'visual bullseyes' or landmarks that the reader's eye will focus on. To do so, you can use contrasting colours, add lighting, or direct your characters' gaze towards a spot in the panel.

Creating comic strips that encourage inclusive storytelling can be a great way to get students excited about learning. The content knowledge that they can demonstrate, especially through digital comic storytelling is nearly unlimited. The driving principle is to make them all feel welcomed, integrated, appropriately challenged, and supported in their efforts.

# DIFFERENT STORYBOARDS AND SCENARII INSPIRATION FOR COMICS IN ENGLISH EDUCATION

## 1. Learning outcomes

Learning outcomes are an important part of the teaching and learning process due to the fact that they influence the quality of education or training and its relevance (CEDEFOP, 2017).

Teachers and trainers use defined learning outcomes as part of their lesson plans to express what a learner is expected to demonstrate in terms of knowledge, skills, and values by the end of a learning process.

Learning outcomes such as 'being able to comprehend short narratives' or 'being able to describe a past event while using a variety of past tenses correctly' can be obtained through the use of comics in the classroom. In many cases, students do not keen on reading in a second language or studying grammar, but comics provide the opportunity for active engagement. 'The readers involve their minds with both the visual and narrative content, hopefully resulting in greater comprehension and interest' (Winer and Sima, 2013, p. 5).

Learning outcomes (LO) can vary depending on the level of the class. Teachers can choose more than one LO for their class based on the needs of their students. These can include one of the four basic skills: reading, writing, listening or speaking, and a grammar or vocabulary point.

Here are some examples of possible LO for A2 ESL or EFL students which were created while keeping in mind the CEFR can-do statements of the aforementioned level:

1. Being able to write simple sentences while using appropriate word order.
2. Being able to understand and apply the general rules of spelling and punctuation in the target language
3. Being able to correctly use the different past and present verb tenses of basic verbs such as: be, have, there is, and there are.
4. Being able to identify the difference between simple and progressive aspects of present and past tenses.
5. Being able to identify and correctly use a series of common nouns, adjectives, and adverbs.
6. Being able to identify and use basic language functions such as formal and informal greetings, expressing appreciation, and offering apologies.

When the level of the class changes, for example from A2 to B1, most of the LO continue to be valid with slight changes. For instance, students are still expected to correctly use the past and present verb tenses of basic verbs such as 'be', 'have', and so on, but, on top of that, they are expected to add a series of new verbs and new lexical items more appropriate for their new level.

Here is a list of some possible learning outcomes for B1 students of a second foreign language:

1. Being able to speak the target language more fluently while expressing ideas accurately and appropriately.
2. Being able to understand and respond appropriately to spoken English.
3. Being able to write well organized, well developed, and logically sound sentences and paragraphs.
4. Being able to make and respond to offers and promises, ask for clarification and permission, and answer questions about daily activities, events, plans, and goals.
5. Being able to understand and appropriately use common modal auxiliaries.
6. Being able to understand and use comparative and superlative adjective forms.

Teachers can set long-term LO which are more generic and reflect what the students are expected to know by the end of the course or they can set short-term LO which are more practical, specific and focus on what students should be able to achieve by the end of the lesson. In the following part we will look at more specific LO which are based on developing the basic skills of reading, writing, listening and speaking; as well as grammar and vocabulary.

## a. Reading and Writing

Thomas Farrell (2009), a professor in Applied Linguistics, says "reading helps us in many ways: it entertains, educates, communicates and informs us about the past, the present and even the future". Learning how to read in a second language can be confusing, difficult or even boring for some students. They tend to start reading a text with confidence, but as soon as they encounter a word, phrase or sentence they do not fully understand they feel discouraged. If this happens on numerous occasions, the students' motivation for reading declines gradually until they stop it completely. How can we prevent this from happening?

Comic strips were proven effective in teaching students how to read and even motivating them to read more. Roozafzai (2012) states that comics stir students' imagination and draw their attention substantially which makes reading more enjoyable and interesting. The researcher Csabay (2006) compares using comics in the classroom to using video games and affirms that they are "usually funny" and "it brings a good atmosphere into the class". Csabay suggests using a series of activities to engage the students in reading:

1. The teacher cuts apart the panels of a comic strip and divides them into separate envelopes, then the students are asked to open each envelope and arrange the pieces into a comprehensible story. Students should analyse the verb tenses used to understand the correct order of the events.
2. The teacher removes the speech bubbles and asks the students to figure out the correct order. They should pay close attention to the vocabulary used to indicate the connections between different speech bubbles (pronouns, connectors, etc).
3. Students complete some missing information in a story based on a comic strip later given to them.

In a similar manner, comics help improve students' writing skills as argued by Rengur and Sugirin (2019) who mentioned in their paper that "there is significant difference between students who were taught reading comprehension and writing skills using comic strips in the newspaper and the students who were not taught with it." Furthermore, comics can be used to help students deal with difficult or complex structures (Cary, 2004) as it is a challenging area in learning a second language.

Students face numerous problems during their learning process and writing could be one of them. Writing is defined as "a cognitive process that tests memory, thinking ability and verbal command to successfully express the ideas; because proficient composition of a text indicates successful learning of a second language", as Fareed, Ashraf and Bilal (2016) mention. Additionally, they argue that some of the factors that affect students' writing skills are associated with the motivation of the students "who are generally unclear about the purpose and significance of their text in their L2 learning" ( ibid.).

ESL/EFL writers are expected to reach a level in their second/foreign language where they are able to write cohesive and coherent texts using a wide range of vocabulary and grammatical structures. A comic strip is an open-ended dramatic narrative which includes a set of characters presented in various situations in a series of drawings. The most common way of using comics in improving writing is by creating a comic strip from scratch. For this activity, students work individually or in small groups to create a narrative storyline, while using appropriate vocabulary and grammar, and later they can illustrate it with relevant graphics. The teacher can provide a template to help guide the students and a topic that the student is familiar with such as: describing a childhood memory what they did over the summer break.

Another interesting writing activity could be providing students with blanked out comic strips which they have to complete basing their story on the given illustrated characters. To make this activity more approachable, teachers write down a list of possible words for the blank speech bubbles. If this is the first time your students are using a comic, you could start by showing them an existing comic strip and asking them to finish it. This encourages students to write and to use their imagination. A different approach to this activity is giving students a sequential comic strip with a panel missing from the middle and then asking them to provide text for it in groups or individually.



## b. Listening and Speaking

By developing students' ability to listen effectively and to speak correctly, they become independent learners by being exposed to correct pronunciation and understanding the message, the students are prone to reproduce it correctly as they learn grammatical rules and useful vocabulary.

Speaking comes naturally to students of a second language (L2) when they are exposed to a variety of situations which push them to use both formal and informal language in context. Formal language is more commonly found in written form, which might be used by students with less frequency than the informal language which can be found in comics. This aspect prevents students from sounding "bookish" (Csabay, 2006) and prepares them to deal with spoken language more naturally. Comics promote negotiation and communication in the L2, creativity and colourful vocabulary, critical thinking and diversity of opinion while giving the opportunity to bring authentic language and personal experiences into the classroom.

Creative materials such as comics bring students closer to real conversational contexts, either by listening to a story being read out loud or by acting it out among themselves, they live through the fictional characters and their experiences. Students learn how to start or finish a conversation in a more natural way, how to use humour and sarcasm, how to take turns and how to make use of appropriate style. Also, skills such as negotiation, describing, reasoning, asking and giving information, can be taught and enhanced through the use of comics.

The LO previously mentioned: being able to talk about everyday topics such as friends, family, or hobbies by asking and answering questions could be achieved through the following activity. Teachers choose the theme for the comic strip that they are going to create, in this case "hobbies", and brainstorm useful vocabulary with the class. First, the students are divided into groups and are asked to act out possible situations where they would discuss the chosen topic. The teacher writes the questions used by the students on the whiteboard while they are speaking and gives alternative answers. By doing so, the teacher is creating a safe space for the students where they feel comfortable with the vocabulary they are going to use.

During the process of producing the comic, students need to agree and disagree on the storyline they are creating, so they are already encouraged to use specific vocabulary and expressions in the target language which the teacher can help with. At the same time, they will be making suggestions/infering and making decisions regarding their characters and the design. They should be using questions such as “Where does the story take place? Who is the main character? Who is the villain? How does it end?” and answer them accordingly. The teacher should make sure that the students are using the target language/English during the entire process, while they provide constant support. When the comics are ready, the teacher should give students the opportunity to present them in front of the class and even act them out. By doing so, they will be practicing intonation, rhythm and pronunciation.

A different approach: if the students have not presented their creations to their classmates, these could be used as a material for a different activity where teachers record an audio of their students’ comics and use them as a listening exercise. By using the same comic strip that the students have previously created, the teachers are presenting a familiar context where students feel more confident as well as appreciated. The teacher can easily record the audio through a mobile device and prepare a set of questions to check their understanding of the story. It is important to have three or more comic strips generated by different groups in order to create the element of surprise among students which makes the listening exercise relevant.

### **c. Grammar and Vocabulary**

Through comics, teachers can highlight specific grammatical and vocabulary items in context, making use of formal or informal language, vocabulary based on a specific topic and a variety of pre-taught grammatical structures. It is suggested that both grammar and vocabulary items should be taught previously so that the students will have a basic understanding of what to use in the activity.

Teachers can give existing or pre-created (by the teacher) comics to students and ask them to identify grammatical structures such as compound sentences, figurative language or verb patterns. For example, one of the learning outcomes of the lesson is: “students will be able to identify and use compound sentences correctly”.

As part of the lesson, the teacher will explain the meaning of “compound sentences” and how to use them and give examples to help students such as: “Anna likes to dance, and she is taking dance classes every Monday”, “Anna likes to dance” is an independent clause where “Anna” is the subject, “likes” is the action, and a complete thought is expressed. Next, the teacher gives the students a list of independent clauses and coordinating conjunctions to match. After practicing and analysing the examples given, students can move on to making their own story. They can work in small groups or individually and write down the storyline that they will be using in their comic. The teacher should ensure that everyone is using grammar correctly and as soon as everyone has finished, they can continue with working on the design and characters of their new comic.

When teaching vocabulary, there are many different ways to use comics as they offer short texts which usually are easy to understand. Teachers should choose a well-known comic, one that maybe their students are familiar with or have heard of previously, because this motivates the students. If the vocabulary studied is adjectives to describe feelings and emotions, the teacher can remove the adjectives from some or all the panels and the students have to fill in the gaps with the appropriate words. In this case, the teacher should choose a comic strip that gives students a clear understanding of the characters’ feelings; they should be very expressive and easy to guess by the student. For less advanced levels, teachers could provide a choice of potential adjectives in a word bank. This cloze activity can be adapted to the vocabulary point that the teacher decides to use in their lesson and it can also be used with comics created by students provided the teacher constantly helps and guides them.

#### **d. Other possible LO: social, cultural, emotional (culture, humour, emotions, sarcasm, greetings, politeness)**

Comics are often culturally contextualised and offer opportunities to raise awareness of topics such as racism or bullying, or just help students have a better understanding of other cultural aspects such as humour, sarcasm, greeting or politeness.

For instance, humour is not always easily understood in a second language (L2), but comics provide the necessary visual aspects that makes it easier for them to grasp. Newspaper strips could be a good source of familiar comedy or slapstick humour and they tend to use a set of semi-fixed characters in a sequence of three or four panels. For longer narrations, teachers could use some popular comics such as Asterix and Obelix, or depending on the age of the students, any stories from Disney, Marvel or DC Comics.

Teaching greetings and politeness can be difficult at a young age and in a different language, but by using comics students will learn through images and actions. The teacher can work on one skill at a time and help students understand the different manners that each culture and country follows. Students can create their own avatar that will be used in various situations that clearly show what is considered polite and what not. The comics can include a series of common greetings depending on the country they are analysing. Next, students can use the same avatars that they have previously created to explore the world of emotions and feelings.

## e. Examples of scenarii

### i. Scenario 1

**Learning Objectives:** Students will be able to identify adjectives and to understand the correct word order of the adjectives in a sentence.

**Learning Outcomes:** reading, writing, vocabulary - adjectives describing feelings.

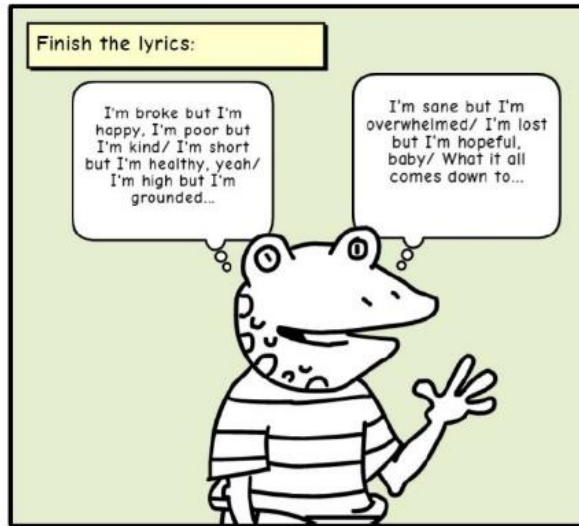
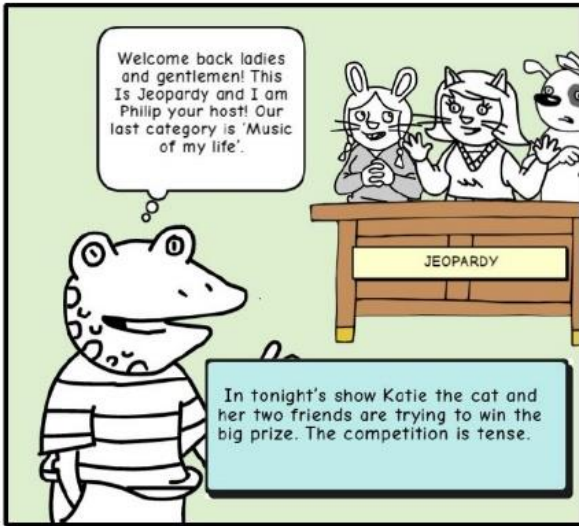
**Instructions:** Students read the comic strip, underline the adjectives and finish the comic by using adjectives to describe how Katie the cat is feeling.

#### **JEOPARDY featuring Philip the frog and Katie the cat**

Philip the frog is the presenter of the classic game show 'Jeopardy'. In tonight's show Katie the cat and her two friends are trying to win the big prize. The competition is tense. The contestants have reached the final round and the category is: music. If their answer is correct Katie the cat may win the game.

Philip the frog says: 'Welcome back ladies and gentlemen! This Is Jeopardy and I am Philip your host! Our last category is Music of my life'. Finish the lyrics: I'm broke but I'm happy, I'm poor but I'm kind/ I'm short but I'm healthy, yeah/ I'm high but I'm grounded, I'm sane but I'm overwhelmed/ I'm lost but I'm hopeful, baby/ What it all comes down to...

Katie the cat is the first to ring the bell and gets a chance to answer: 'Is that everything's gonna be fine, fine, fine?' Philip the frog: 'That's right!! Congratulations! Philip the frog: How are you feeling, Katie?'



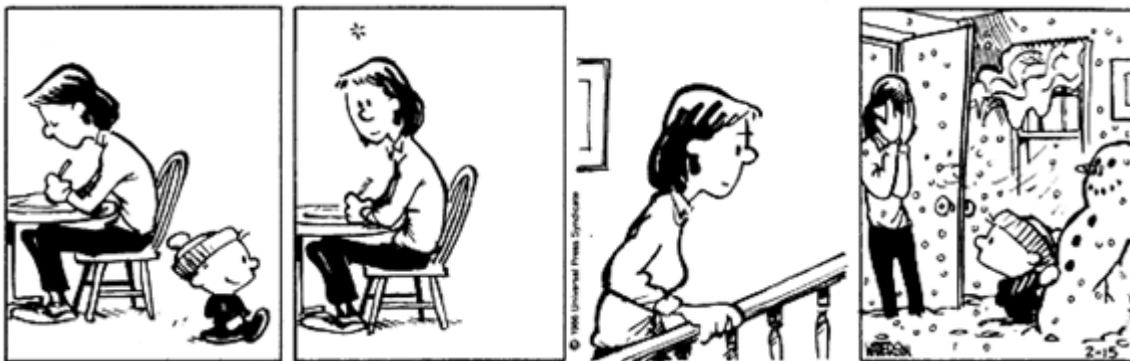
## ii. Scenario 2

**Learning Objectives:** Students are able to identify and correctly use the narrative tenses: past simple, past perfect. Students will be able to use connectors and time expressions in a narrative story: while, when, yet, but, already, etc.

**Learning Outcome:** Practicing speaking and writing, using narrative tenses, connectors and time expressions

**Instructions:** The teacher reviews the narrative tenses and introduces connectors and time expressions usually used in a narrative story. Teachers write six sentences on the whiteboard and the students are asked to connect them by using the appropriate connectors. Next, they are told that they will be designing their own comic. The teacher gives them various panels which show events of a story. The students have to put the story in order and add connectors and time expressions then write the narrative part. Then they use the story to write the text they will use in the speech bubbles.

**Possible answer:** Annie was at her desk writing her new novel when Bobbie entered the room. He looked suspicious so Annie was intrigued. Then, she got up and followed him up the stairs. When she opened the door, she was surprised to see that Bobbie had made a snowman in his room. Image from Islcollective.com (2015).



### iii. Scenario 3

**Learning Objective:** Students will be able to identify and use reported speech appropriately.

**Learning Outcome:** practicing speaking and writing, correctly using the reported speech

The teacher divides the class into groups of 3 or 4 students. Each group writes a story that starts with the sentence: "When I looked down the street, I couldn't believe what I saw." Then they transform the story into a comic strip. When they finish, they exchange the comics created in such a way that each group receives a new comic strip. Students have to read the new comics and present them in front of the classroom using the reported speech.

#### **For example:**

Group 1: When I looked down the street, I couldn't believe what I saw. It was a dinosaur but not any dinosaur... a big one, a T-Rex!

Alex: "OMG! How is this possible?"

Javi: "What is wrong, Alex?"

Alex: "I think that is a T-Rex! Look! It's over there in that building!"

Javi: "Really? Let's go and look closer!"

The boys ran to see the incredible dinosaur, but they were very disappointed when they got there. Alex: "It's not real! Oh, it's just a dinosaur in a museum. But it looks so real!"

Now Group 2 would have to retell the story by using reported speech correctly.



#### iv. Scenario 4

**Learning Objective:** Students will be able to use the first conditional

**Learning Outcome:** practicing speaking, reading and writing, correctly using the first conditional

After reading the first comic strip, students analyse the structure of the first conditional and they underline the verbs in the main clause and in the conditional clause. Then, individually or in groups, they think of different ways to finish the sentence by completing the second comic strip. For example, "Ellen, if you hang up on me, I'll never stop crying/you'll make me sad/I'll adopt a dog". Then, the students are given the third comic strip and they have to imagine what happened next in the story. They have to complete the speech bubbles and use the first conditional.



(Bart, 2013)



## 2. Storyboard templates and flow of narration, based on examples

### a. Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is to introduce you to the storyboarding. To do that, we will start from defining what a storyboard is and how it can be used in the classroom. Then, we will continue with analyzing its parts and how it is built.

### b. What is a storyboard?

A storyboard for a visual artist or worker, is what an essay plan is to an essayist and a business plan to a business person, i.e. a plan of what is expected to take place. Whereas essay writers organize their thoughts by drafting an outline of key ideas on a piece of paper, visual artists often choose to organize their work by drawing a sequence of images showing the main events of the story and their narration's sequence.

Although storyboards are believed to have been extensively used even in silent films, Walt Disney is considered to have championed their use, by even employing specialized storyboard artists whose job was to create the flow of the narration in their animated movies (Finch, 1995). To offer an example, 'Gone with the Wind' is reportedly one of the first films to be completely storyboarded.

### c. Why use a storyboard to create your comics?

Storyboards are nowadays used by a variety of professionals. Next to the traditional fields of film, theatre, animation and comics, storyboards are also extensively put into practice in business, architecture, novel-writing, e-learning, education and in many other fields.

Specifically, storyboards can be used to:

- **organize one's thoughts:** just as making notes can help somebody draft a story they want to write, so can sketching – by hand or with software – a few pictures can help somebody visualize and organize the story they want to show.

- **plan the order of a story:** having the parts of a story in front of them may help people put the events in the optimal order, as well as experiment with sequence changes, try different beginnings and endings, etc.
- **communicate their plans to other people:** trying to render a visual story in words is a completely different thing than trying to communicate with images. Communicating a visual story in words helps other people understand its aesthetics, its style, etc. much better, as well as enable them to offer more accurate feedback.

Furthermore, many professionals – including teachers – often choose to communicate visually instead of in writing in order to keep their audience’s attention or simply to make their presentations easier to understand.

- **save time:** spending time planning means that you will probably end up changing less things during production stage, thus saving precious time.

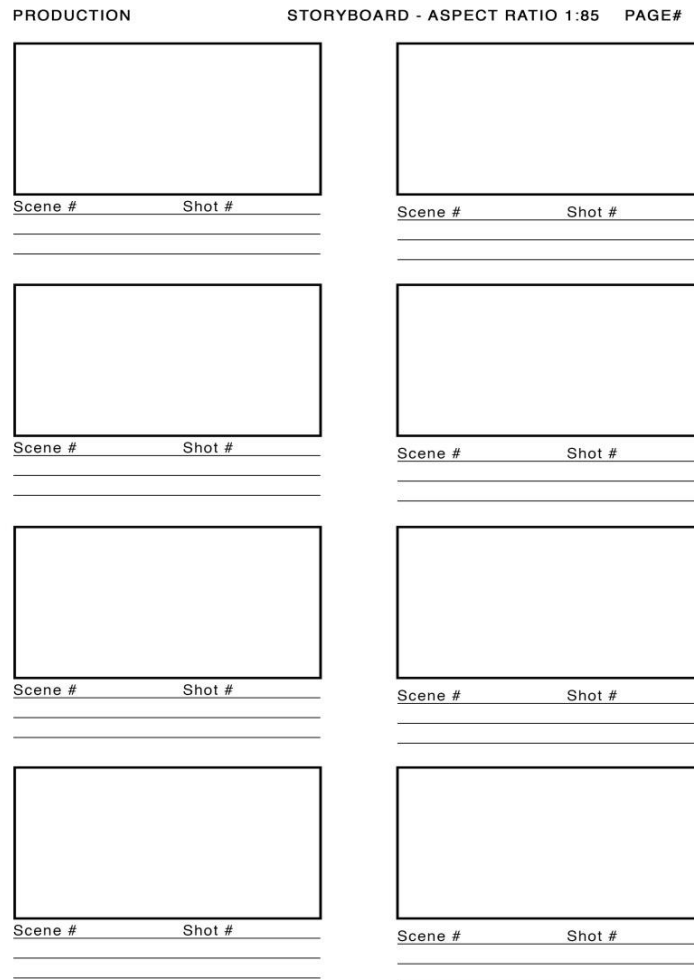
## d. Storyboards in education

Traditionally, storyboards have been used in education mainly as an exercise for students. For example, the teacher may hand-out an empty storyboard template to their students and ask them to draw the story that the teacher reads out to them by pointing out some referential elements or which they read to themselves. Then, the students exchange storyboards and discuss the differences.

Teachers can also use storyboards to make difficult processes easier by visualizing them, while some more visually-prone students also use them instead of writing to make notes.

## e. What does a storyboard look like?

A storyboard looks like a comic strip. Some people like drawing it by hand, some use ready-made templates, and some prefer using a specialized software. For example, this is what a blank eight-panel storyboard template may look like:



Source: <https://gr.pinterest.com/pin/41658365286615829/>

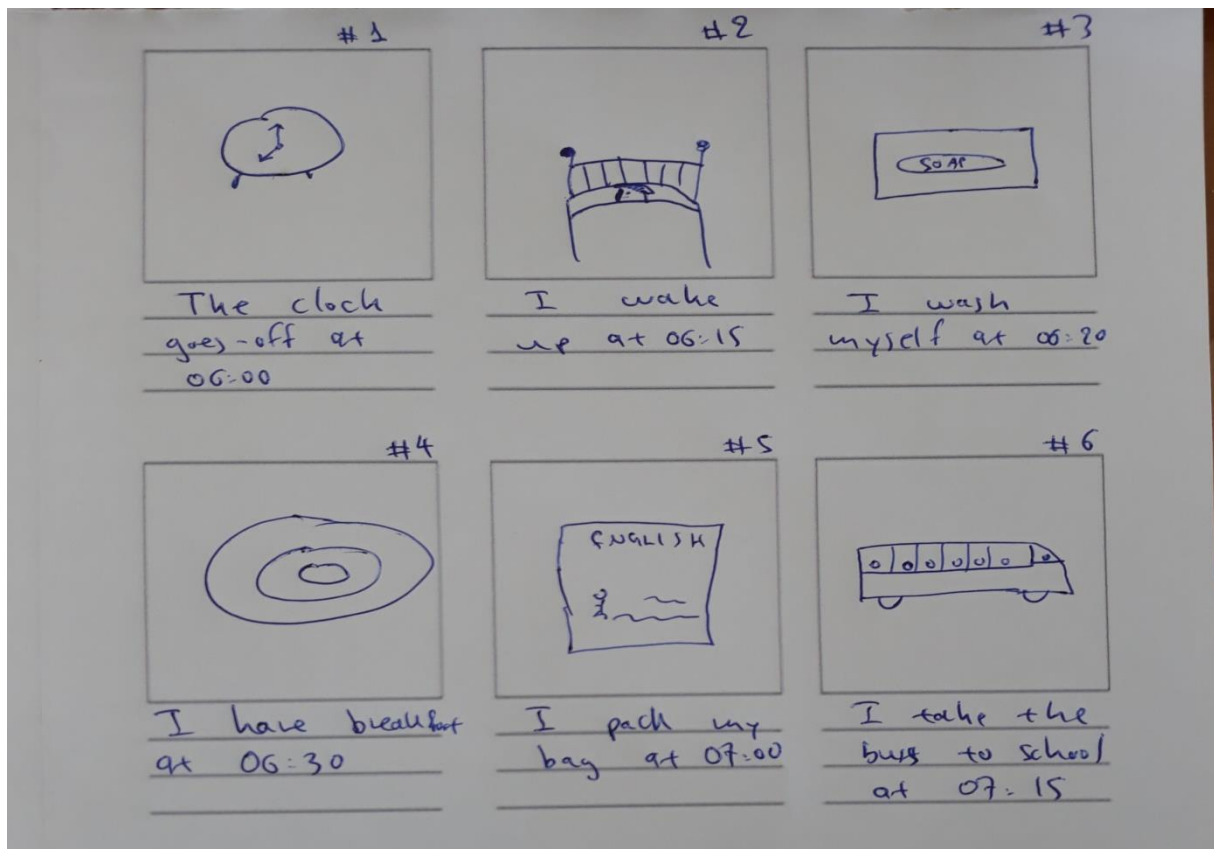
A simple internet search of “blank storyboard templates” will enable you to find hundreds of different, free and ready to use storyboard templates.

Some comics-making software have their own built-in storyboard-making function or offer a variety of templates, while there are also specialized storyboard-making software. These are among the most popular ones:

- Storyboard Lite <http://storyboard-lite.software.informer.com>
- Frameforge 3D Studio [www.frameforge3d.com/Products](http://www.frameforge3d.com/Products)

- Storyboard Artist [www.powerproduction.com/storyboard-artist.html](http://www.powerproduction.com/storyboard-artist.html)
- Storyboard Quick [www.powerproduction.com/storyboard-quick-software.html](http://www.powerproduction.com/storyboard-quick-software.html)
- Toonboom [www.toonboom.com](http://www.toonboom.com)
- Comic Life <http://plasq.com/products/comiclife2/win>
- Media Stage [www.immersiveeducation.eu/index.php/mediastagepg](http://www.immersiveeducation.eu/index.php/mediastagepg)




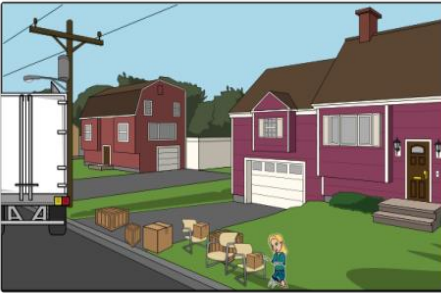
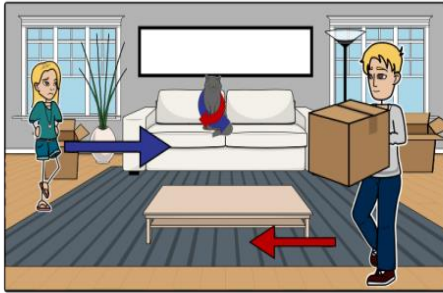
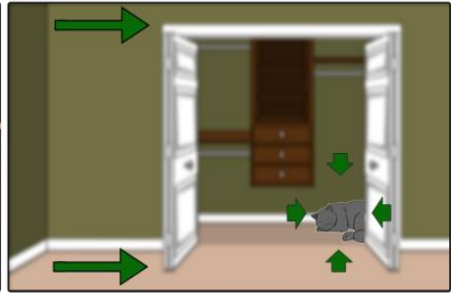
A finished storyboard drawn by hand may look like this:



### DID YOU KNOW

Handwritten material can also be adapted for learners with learning difficulties and SLDs! Try to keep a clear structure and use off-white or pastel colored paper whenever possible. Also, use a thick paper quality to ensure visibility and opacity.

Or like this, by using "Storyboard That":

<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Scene 1, Shot 1</b></p>  <p style="text-align: center;">A cat lies on a bed in the corner of a near-empty bedroom. NARRATOR One may think the life of a cat is boring.</p>	<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Scene 1, Shot 2</b></p>  <p style="text-align: center;">The same cat is eating food from a bowl in a kitchen. NARRATOR A life of easy living, populated with naps, food, and an occasional trip to the litter box.</p>	<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Scene 1, Shot 3</b></p>  <p style="text-align: center;">Cat face shot against country background. Slow zoom on cat's face to focus on eyes, then fade to black. NARRATOR But the story of Fletcher, a country cat gone city, is different from the usual tale.</p>
<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Scene 2, Shot 1</b></p>  <p style="text-align: center;">City street with car "moving" supplies. NARRATOR Fletcher was a two year old cat when his family decided to move to the big city.</p>	<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Scene 2, Shot 2</b></p>  <p style="text-align: center;">Family runs around during the move, cat turns to watch the humans walk by. NARRATOR Fletcher was confused by the boxes and his humans' frantic moving about.</p>	<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Scene 2, Shot 3</b></p>  <p style="text-align: center;">The cat is curled up in an empty closet. NARRATOR Seeking refuge from the hectic atmosphere in the household, Fletcher finds himself a nice spot in the upstairs closet.</p>

Create your own at Storyboard That

## DID YOU KNOW

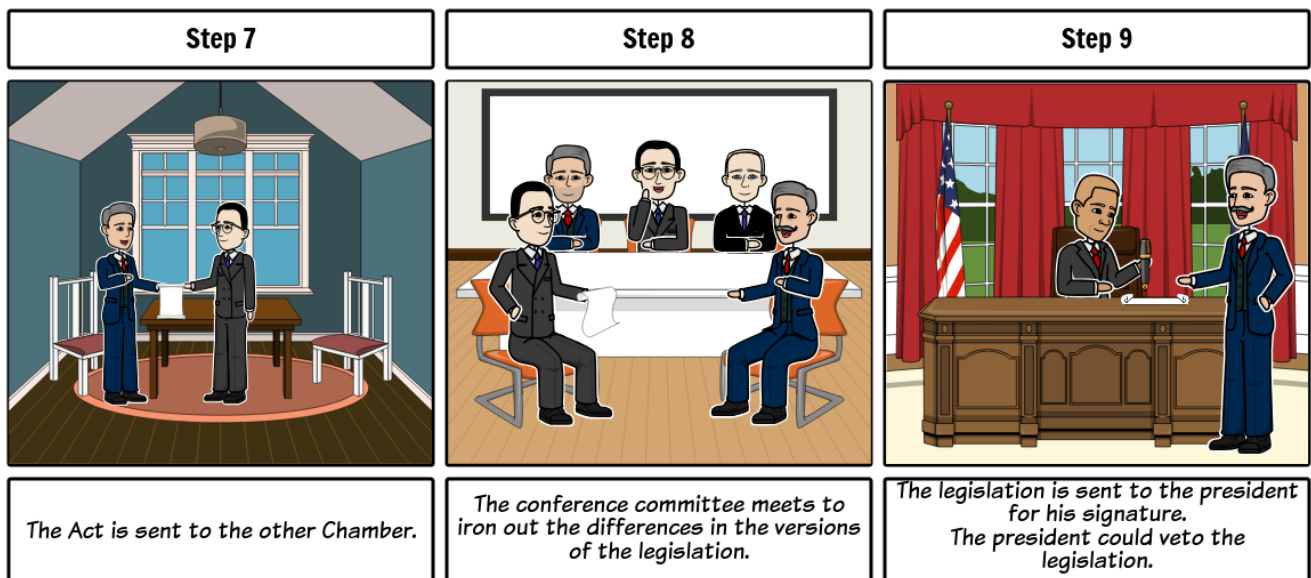
The panels of a comic strip do not necessarily have to be square. Using panels that are triangular or with a wavy effect for instance, can give a different feeling to the reader. Yet, creators should keep in mind to produce comics that visually help all learners, including those with learning difficulties and/or SLDs. Remember what you have seen in Chapter 2 for adaptive content!

## f. What are the parts of a storyboard?

As you can see in the examples above, a storyboard is made up of boxes containing words and pictures or drawings. Although different people working on different subjects for different purposes may use different storyboard templates, the basic parts of a storyboard are the following:

- **Title.** However trivial it might sound, including a title in your storyboard may be very important to help other people understand what you are trying to make. For example, check the two storyboard examples above. What is the storyboard about? Imagine now that there was a title, e.g. "Going to school" or "Saturday morning" for the first storyboard and "Moving to a new house" or "Leaving my old house" for the second. Doesn't it help you focus on the sequence of events better? Of course, for some, it is easier to decide on a title after developing their story more clearly.
- **Panels.** Panels are the main – and usually the biggest - boxes within which you draw.
- **Steps.** A step is a picture in a panel accompanied by a short description.
- **Step titles.** Quite often it is only a number showing step sequence.
- **Description or summary lines.** A summary line accompanies a step and gives the basic background information for the viewer to understand / remember what what-is-shown is meant to mean.
- **Detailed descriptions or notes.** Any other information you think might be relevant.

Example:



Create your own at [Storyboard That](https://www.storyboardthat.com)

## g. Building the story board

To create a storyboard, this is an approach you could follow:

1. **Think of your teaching / learning goals.** Do you want to teach the present simple? Would you rather focus on practicing a skill like writing or summarizing?
2. **Set your goal.** Choose a clear goal and the learning objectives you would like your students to achieve.
3. **Think of a story to achieve your goal.** A person sorting-out their weekly schedule or a geography teacher discussing landmarks in different countries may be a suitable story for teaching present simple, while a sci-fi story may be more suitable for teaching future tense or hi-tech vocabulary.
4. **Decide your story's parameters.** Where will the story be taking place? When? Do your characters need any specific clothing? For example, if you place your story in the future, how long in the future you will go? How will people dress then?

### REMEMBER

Enhance inclusive storytelling strategy to help even more your students to understand and appreciate diversity, by incorporating diverse characters coming from different backgrounds, and telling stories from diverse points of view.

5. **Decide which the main events are.** Your story will probably consist of a lot of information, but not all is necessary. You need to include only the main events, especially those that enable someone to re-construct the story without missing any vital information. Make sure you include the turning points — where things change — if your story has any.
6. **Key thing to remember: a storyboard does not show a story frame-by-frame, but scene-by scene. So, think of an event as the main event in a scene.**
7. **Put the main events in order.** What should happen first? What next? How does the story end?



8. **Decide how detailed you will get.** The purpose of the storyboard is not to create a visual novel masterpiece, but an effective activity for your students. Try not to tire them out or confuse them. Stay focused on your learning goal.
9. **Write panel summary descriptions.** Here, you should not focus on what is shown, e.g. "a cat", but what you expect the reader to understand. For example, "Jim's favorite pet-cat is getting hungry and sad".
10. **Decide which design medium you will be using.** Will you be drawing by hand? Will you be using software?
11. **Create the corresponding template.** Do you need 6 panels or 30 panels? Try to keep the panels to the minimum needed.
12. **Design.**

### REMEMBER

There are several advices and tips for easy adaptation in design to support even more learners and include learners with SLDs! For instance, about the order of panels, the text and speech framing. Most importantly, try to have a clear outline and keep the consistency in your comic strip!

13. **Add any extra information you think is important.**
14. If you have the luxury of time, **let the story sit** for a couple of days. Then, revisit it. Is it clear? Do you still think it is effective? Would you change anything?
15. **Finalize the storyboard**, by incorporating the changes – if any - described above.
16. If you have even more time, **seek for feedback**. Do other people get it as you do?
17. If not, make some more changes, and then **it is ready** to be produced.

## h. Summary

Storyboards are a planning tool for visual products. They can be completely hand-drawn, completely software-drawn, and anything in-between.

What they show is the key scenes of a story. Each scene is normally called a step. Each step consists of a panel with a picture or drawing and a short description of what the step is meant to show.

While creating a storyboard the key things to remember are the learning or teaching goals in question, and that every step should be clear and specific.

# ONLINE TOOLS TO CREATE DIGITAL COMICS FOR EDUCATION

In the preparatory research phase of this guide, the partners of the project tried some comics creation tools. Among the wide range of comics creation tools, they selected the 5 that offered the most possibilities and were the most recent.

They analysed these tools along the following criteria:

## General information:

- When was the tool created?
- Is there an active community using this tool?
- What is the pricing?
- How does their privacy policy comply to the European data protection policy (GDPR)?

## User friendliness and experience

- How do you judge the design of the tool website of the tool?
- How is the personalization of the character and/or backgrounds?
- Was it easy to create a 4 cases strip?
- Were you able to download your strip?

## Personal conclusion about the appreciation of the tool

The section below provides a summary of these analyses, highlighting the advantages and disadvantages of using each tool as a teacher.

# BDNF

<https://bdnf.bnf.fr/EN/index.html>

Created in January 2020

**Pricing:** The app is available free of charge on computer, tablet and mobile phone, in French and in English.

**GDPR:** Both the website and the app have a page for privacy policy that includes a GDPR announcement.

## Advantages

- The best feature of this app is the educational resources it provides ([https://bdnf.bnf.fr/EN/educational\\_resources.html](https://bdnf.bnf.fr/EN/educational_resources.html)), which refer to Teacher's guides to assist users to the creation of the comic strips in this platform by providing ideas for organizing a unit plan about comics for their class.
- You can constitute your own selection of graphical elements from the BDNF app for which several comics characters and elements have been created.
- In addition, you can access elements from the French national archives (Gallica database) as the app was created by BNF (National Library of France).
- It has the basic functionalities and a user-friendly format to edit and create comic strips, but also guides (blog, FAQ, Youtube videos) for teachers who wish to introduce comic strips in their classrooms. It is very helpful that it provides options for the different types of comic strips and styles, so even a beginner can try and create something. More advanced users can enrich their strips but in general the app should not be considered as a tool for professional work on comic creation.
- Editing and formatting the text is easy and the app includes several dys-friendly fonts.
- You can upload your own pictures and graphic elements.
- You can also draw directly in the app.
- You can use the app as a computer program or as a mobile device app on tablet.

## Disadvantages

- There is a degree of flexibility, but from our experience, there are still some functions that are not clear and easily adjustable (e.g. edit the size of the images proportionally or mix the color of the background). It can require some time and practicing to be able to fine tune one's work.
- To date there is no copy paste function of elements from one panel to another.

## Canva

<https://www.canva.com/>

Created in 2012

**Pricing:** There is a free plan that allows to navigate and use a lot of the templates and graphic elements for small groups and quick projects. Other plans are more designed for companies to create their design and promotional material.

**GDPR:** There is a page for privacy policy which includes specific GDPR information

### Advantages

- You can upload your own pictures.
- There are 11 basic comic strips templates that are easy to change.
- It is a powerful design tool with a myriad resources.
- You can organise your creations into folders and share folders with members of one's team.

### Disadvantages

- It's very important to bear in mind that this tool is not a comic creation tool but a design tool which you can use for creating comics. That fact has both advantages and disadvantages for teachers who want to create comics online as the amount of resources can make navigation more difficult.
- As it is not primarily a comics creation tool, there is a limited amount of character templates and they cannot be changed (facial expression, movement, etc.).

It might not be the best tool to create longer or more complicated comics.

# Makebeliefscomix

<https://www.makebeliefscomix.com/>

Created in 2006

**Pricing:** The use from the website is free but the mobile app has to be paid for. The website allows to create and save maximum 18 panels.

**GDPR:** There is a privacy policy but it does not mention GDPR specific measures.

## Advantages

- Makebeliefscomix is offered in 13 languages (Arabic, Chinese, Croatian, Dutch, English, Finnish, French, German, Hebrew, Italian, Portuguese, Russian, Spanish).
- The website also provides a lot of content for specific target groups that are basic users, such as teachers, parents and people with special needs.
- Overall, the tool is easy to read and navigate.

## Disadvantages

- The user can only add features on one panel at a time and they cannot move or copy and paste items from one panel to the next, so if they make a mistake, they need to delete the items from the first panel and re-add them on the second.
- It is only possible to work on one comic at a time.
- You cannot change the facial expressions of a character.
- You cannot upload your own drawings or pictures nor draw directly.
- The interface looks a bit outdated.

# Pixton

<https://edu.pixton.com/educators>

Created in 2008

**Pricing:** There is a free trial, but no free plan. There are several offers with different uses in terms of access to resources. There is an educators' plan.

**GDPR:** The website shows a privacy policy for teachers. However, the company is based in the US and does not mention GDPR specific measures.

## Advantages

- You do not have to think about the characters. You just pick and use.
- You need no design nor technical skills or artistic thinking whatsoever.
- You can use the same characters over and over again, thus creating consistency.
- You can turn your students and yourself into comic characters – to a reasonable extent – personalizing, hence, your teaching.
- Your students can also use it.
- It is easy and fast to use.
- You can immediately print your comic.
- It comes with 3 language packs: English, French and Spanish.
- As a teacher you can create assignments and send them to groups of students. You must however choose one of the pricing plans stated above in order to have access to more or all content packs.

## Disadvantages

- The software does not provide any drawing functionality, so you can not bring a more personal note to your work.
- You cannot upload your own graphic elements either.
- The free trial only offers a glimpse of the possibilities offered by the tools.

# StoryboardThat

<https://www.inc.com/profile/Storyboard-That>

Created in 2012

**Pricing:** There is a limited free plan which allows to download 2 strips of 3 to 6 panels per week with a watermark. Dedicated pricing exist for teachers, educational institutions and other profiles or users.

**GDPR:** The website mentions several privacy policies, of which only the teachers' plan and use by students seem to be GDPR compliant.

## Advantages

- Easy and fast to learn and use.
- The app offers a wide range of personalisation of characters (face and movement) and overall appearance, historical costumes included.
- It is not possible to upload one's own pictures.
- Active social media profiles on which the company shares tips on how to use the app in school, as well as a support chatbot.

## Disadvantages

- The comics produced look somewhat outdated, unless you want to focus on historical settings, since it comes with character dress packs from the past.
- The tool is more focused on creating storyboards to present texts than to create comics.
- All comics created with the free plan come with a watermark.
- There are less guidelines than other comics creation tools.



# ANNEXES

## 1. Additional resources

In the following section, the partners gathered a list of useful resources for teachers who wish to create comics for their classroom.

### a. ARTICLES

**Creating comics for languages and literacy:** [In this article](#), Jabari Sellars, who is a current master’s student in the Language and Literacy Program at HGSE discusses the benefits of using comics in the classroom and building reading comprehension and literary analysis — with help from the X-Men.

**Creating a storyboard using Adobe Photoshop:** [a step-by-step guide](#) on how to create storyboards using photoshop. Some of this advice can be used in the more general contexts of developing storyboards using IT.

**Design for instructional purposes:** [This article](#) contains both theory and practical tips on a variety of topics ranging from defining concepts and theories to contemporary bibliography.

**“Graphic Novels in the Classroom: A Teacher Roundtable”:** [in this article](#), Jennifer Gonzalez gathers four teachers in an online roundtable discussion, where they exchange opinions on questions, such as the importance of comics as a learning tool, common misconceptions about graphic novels, their favorite examples of comics and how a teacher can deliver this medium successfully in class.

**“Over 1.000 Writing Prompts for Students” compiled by Michael Gonchar, The New York Times.** [This list](#) of creative writing prompts from The Learning Network is aimed to prompt students to write, but the myriad of topics they offer can be useful for teachers to start writing comics scenarios as well. They are classified in several topics such as technology, arts and

entertainment, school and career, identity and family, social life and leisure, science and health, civics and history.

**Sketching a storyboard:** [This resource](#) will help you focus your hand-drawing practice offering a number of useful tips for those interested to try out hand-drawn storyboards.

**Storyboard templates:** [This link](#) will give you access to sets of templates for storyboarding, writing, visual storytelling and more.

**Study on the possible effects of using authentic comics with EFL learners.** It examined the strategies applied by novice readers in reading comics with the special focus on lexical guessing using context ([link](#)).

**Teaching strategies when using graphic novels:** [article](#) by Jonathan Hunt.

**Tutorial on creating storyboards for children:** [This resource](#) will enable you to create storyboards for children, showing you how your approach might have to be different.

**Using comics to build empathy, self-awareness and to promote creativity:** [article](#) by Ryan Chapman.

## b. VIDEOS

**“4 Time-Saving Tips (from a guy who spent 13 YEARS drawing a comic)”:** Lars Martinson describes himself as a cartoonist. [In this video](#), he shares his experience of creating his graphic novel “Tonoharu” for over 13 years, explaining why he fell into creative traps, and giving advice for other creators on how to avoid them.

**“BaM animation” Youtube channel by Brent Noll and Maximus Pauson:** [This channel](#) provides guidance, drawing drills and advice for illustrators. While it might not be useful for all teachers, those who already draw might find useful advice on how to improve, or at least not feel bad about producing imperfect drawings.

**Brian Boyd’s webinar on using comics to teach grammar:** [this webinar](#) includes practical tips, potential pitfalls (and how to avoid them) and makes suggestions for exploiting the process for the maximum educational value.

## **Advice on how to use graphic novels and comic books to help you improve your English:**

[video](#) from Engvid.com.

**“How To Write Short Comics”:** [in this video](#), American comics author Jake Parker shares advice on creating short stories: while this is meant for short stories that span over several pages, this video can be interesting to see as the author tackles the myriad of questions and traps that any creator can fall in and how to overcome them.

**‘The importance of diversity in the comic book universe’:** [in this video](#), Marvel Comics’ Director of Character and Content Development explains the creation of superhero Ms Marvel (Kamala Khan) that differs greatly from the stereotypic straight white men superheroes. In her talk, amongst others, she highlights how our origin and cultural identity creates assumptions and expectations that they can build a standard of self that is lacking confidence and a true, free identity and expression.

**“Lunarbaboon – How I Make My Comics!”:** In [this 3-minute video](#), webcomics artist Chris Grady films himself creating one of his comic strips from start to finish. It is interesting to see the whole cycle of creating a strip from paper draft to digitally coloured version.

**Pencils & Stories** is [a channel on YouTube](#) aimed at helping people to create their own comics from scratch. Henrike Dijkstra, the owner of the channel, makes comics herself and also teaches others. In her weekly videos, she untangles the comic creation process starting from the basics in an approachable and understandable way.

## **c. WEBSITES AND TOOLS**

**Elementari** is [an online platform](#) which users may access to read, write, code, share and remix interactive stories using professional illustrations and sounds. Teachers can browse through the wide stories library as well as use the lessons plans and guidance in the “curriculums” section.

**The Graphic Classroom** is [a resource](#) for teachers and librarians to help them stock high quality, educational-worthy, graphic novels and comics in their classroom or school library and how to use them.

**MakingComics.com** is [a project](#) aiming to advance comic arts and graphic storytelling to a wider audience by offering relevant educational material on how to create comics from scratch. The site includes workshops and resources for educators and a podcast, among others.

**Reading with Pictures** is a non-profit organization that supports the use of comics in education and other settings with the aim of encouraging literacy and improving the academic performance of students. [Their page](#) contains a large database with educational material for students from 6 to 18+ years old, as well as comic book reviews.

**Scratch** (<https://scratch.mit.edu/>) is a project of the Lifelong Kindergarten Group at the MIT Media Lab, provided free of charge in over 60 languages. It is designed especially for ages 8 to 16. It provides the user with a library of code, costumes and sounds which help create complex and well-structured animated stories, backed up by reliable tutorials.

**Storybird** (<https://storybird.com/>) is a tool to create and share online stories. It offers a wide variety of images classified by categories and the possibility of collaboratively building stories. It is a very suitable tool for working on writing, reading and also boost the creativity of the youngest students.

**Toontastic 3D:** [A free tool from Google](#) which provides structures of different levels of complexity for the story, characters, settings, the possibility of recording dialogues and background musical effects. The characters include gender, race and abilities that allow these aspects to be worked on when creating the stories.

**Turning Comic strips into Books:** another option to enhance digital storytelling is having your students trying to create a book out of a comic strip. [StoryJumper](#) allows converting stories to a digital flash type format. It allows teachers to create collaborative projects for their classrooms as well.

**WeVideo** (<https://www.wevideo.com/>): for digital creation of comics, teachers may want to go a step further in storytelling and experiment with turning a comic strip into a movie, as an extension of the comic strip creation project.

**Writecomics** (<http://writecomics.com/>) is a bilingual Spanish/English website which offers the possibility to create comics. Their article "10 Tips for Writing a Good Comic" offers guidance on

creating characters, theme, tone of narrative, scenery, organising ideas, constructing a general plan, defining dialogues and conducting the storyboard.

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**Cover pictures:** photos by [Jess Bailey](#) and [Leone Venter](#) on [Unsplash](#).



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This project has been funded with support from the European Commission. This publication reflects the views only of the author, and the Commission cannot be held responsible for any use which may be made of the information contained therein.

Project code: 2019-1-FR01-KA201-062855

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