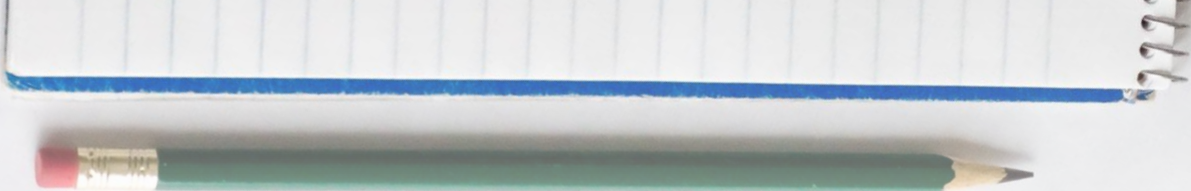




COMICS CREATION WORKSHOPS WITH STUDENTS



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



INDEX

Chapter 1: Comics as a stepping stone: from informal, to non-formal and formal language learning	1
Chapter 2: The theory on how to use the workshops in the classroom.....	1
Chapter 3: What skills do students gain from creating comics?	1
Chapter 4: Level and age specifications	1
Chapter 5: Special Educational Needs: how to make your workshops more inclusive for students with Specific Learning Disorders	1
Chapter 6: Introducing comic-making in the classroom.....	1
Chapter 7: Questions & answers	1
Comics creation Workshops.....	1
Bibliography	1

INTRODUCTION

Dear reader,

If you decided to read this guide, you must be interested in using comics in the classroom. To be more specific, this guide aims at guiding teachers, educators and educational programme managers to understand how creating comics can be beneficial for students in secondary education and for English language learning in particular. It is intended both as a practical tool to implement comics creation workshops with students, and also as a communication and training tool to provide some background and arguments in favour of implementing such workshops.

What you will find in this guide

This guide provides thorough guidance, beginning with a quick exploration of theory, then moving on to practical guidance and tools. It focuses on explaining the method for implementing comic creation workshops, using digital comics creation tools or software in particular. In that sense, it does not consist in delivering a drawing course for students, but rather on the advantages of creating comics to improve the language learning experience.

This guide is divided into 3 parts:

- The first three chapters explore the theoretical aspects of comics creation workshops, by providing a background on mixing informal, non-formal and formal language learning, a general overview of the workshops, a list of skills developed.
- The second part (Chapters 4 and 5) tackles ways to adapt the activities and learning goals according to age, language levels and special needs, especially regarding Specific Learning Disorders (SLDs or dys),
- Last but not least, Chapters 6 and 7 dive into the practicalities of preparing students for the workshops and implementing the workshops thanks to scenarios. We also provide a workshop template to support you in designing your own workshop scenarios.

The aim of the European project 'EdComix'

This guide is part of the 6 tools developed in the Erasmus+ project EdComix, which aims at providing comics creation resources for language teaching and learning in secondary education. The partners decided to develop this project because they find the use of comics in education is not fully developed throughout Europe, with clear differences among countries (i.e. Franco-Belgian comic culture compared to other countries). In addition, we believe that comics can be a great tool for more inclusive teaching, but it needs appropriate methods that go beyond considering that comics make everything easier for students just because they use images – it goes a bit further than this.

You can find all the resources developed in this project for free at www.edcomix.eu:

- A pedagogical guide on the practical uses of comics in education,
- A creation guide of digital comics for teachers,
- An E-Learning module on comics creation for teachers,
- Lesson and comics packages for CEFR levels A2 and B1 (coming spring 2021),
- An implementation guide gathering use cases, best practices and recommendations from partners' experience (coming autumn 2021)
- A workshop guide on creating comics with students, which you are reading.

We are looking forward to receiving news from you about how you design your own English activities based on comics and the impact they have on students.

Warm regards,

The EdComix project partners

This project is carried out by 6 partners: YuzuPulse (France), Areadne (Greece), Babel Idiomas (Spain), Citizens in Power (Cyprus), Colegiul Tehnic 'Mihai Băcescu' from Fălticeni (Romania), and Logopsycom (Belgium).



CHAPTER 1

COMICS AS A STEPPING STONE: FROM INFORMAL, TO NON-FORMAL AND FORMAL LANGUAGE LEARNING

Learning that occurs through reading or creating comics, is considered as an **informal learning** practice as it is not organized and takes place during activities that are undertaken without any learning purpose in mind (Council of Europe). This is according to Council of Europe definition, that informal learning happens involuntarily and is purely incidental, such as the learning that happens everywhere in our daily lives, for instance, while we are reading a comic book.

Informal learning has multiple benefits in language learning. Firstly, it is a very flexible and accessible form of learning, not limited to any specific curricular settings, time or level. As there are no prerequisites for informal learning, it can happen to proficient students, as well as to beginners and students with an intermediate language level. They can all equally benefit from informal language learning. Most importantly, it can prompt intrinsic motivation in the learner, because the learning is not forced, but rather results from a genuine interest. Informal language learning also happens throughout a much longer timespan than formal learning in a typical class.

From all the above, it seems obvious that teachers should encourage their students to indulge in language learning practices while being involved in various informal situations.

As regards non-formal and formal learning, which are more structured and intentional and to be clear on what these terms actually mean, here are short definitions:

Non-formal language learning happens outside of formal learning environments (such as schools), but still in the framework of some organized activity, often in a community setting (Council of Europe). These could be sports classes, amateur choirs or debating clubs. In these settings, the language learning occurs either at the learner's initiative or as a by-product of the involvement of the learner in some other activity (OECD). The learning is intentional and there can be settled clear learning objectives.

Formal language learning is characterized by the fact that it is always structured and has specific objectives. Formal learning is promoted by educational systems and generally happens in the framework of a course, where learning outcomes are measured and assessed, for example through tests (Council of Europe). In the case of formal language learning, the learner has the explicit objective to become proficient in a specific language. The learning is thus more structured and intentional (OECD).

We should point out here that informal learning is often not properly valued like in non-formal and formal educational settings. This is because its learning outcomes, such as motivation and personal engagement, are not easily measurable compared to the learning outcomes of formal and non-formal education (OECD). In addition, the format of comics and the use of visuals does not resemble an academic writing style and, consequently, comics tend to be considered 'simple' and 'easy' reading material that can be used with children of younger ages, but less in upper secondary or higher education. The other perception is that comics are read by teenagers in their free-time or as a hobby, but their role in formal educational settings is considered insignificant.

On the other hand, formal and non-formal learning are both not purely intentional as we always learn something besides our target. For example, one can learn about cultural identity, while creating comics in a foreign language. In particular for language learning, which is a complex process, it is very important to have the three aspects of learning – informal, non-formal and formal – intertwined. By bridging the gap between these, students are able to learn continuously and it can also promote students' autonomy.

This can be done wonderfully through comic creation. Comics enable informal language learning in non-formal and formal language learning environments, which may be the key for student engagement and successful learning. Their informal style results in a very pleasant and effective way of learning and can support learners to develop skills in reading and writing, as well as fostering their creativity and imagination. In addition, comics are a very useful tool in the hands of the teacher as to present the activities differently and get creative with the students.

Comics are indeed a stepping stone to include informal learning aspects in the formal and non-formal settings and this is particularly interesting and helpful for language learning, from lower to upper secondary education. Comics are a resourceful tool in the classroom, and therefore should be promoted as applying the informal practices in formal education environments.

CHAPTER 2

THE THEORY ON HOW TO USE THE WORKSHOPS IN THE CLASSROOM

Using workshops in the classroom will enable you – the educator – to help your students learn English through creating and/or using comics. These workshops are meant to provide students, with the help of their teachers, with certain soft skills (teamwork, expression, presentation, etc.) as well as ICT skills all in the framework of inclusive learning. The project's proposed methodology provides suitable and engaging ways for English language learning, as well as guidance for structuring comics and storytelling.

Recommendations for Successful Workshop Sessions

This chapter introduces important aspects that should be covered throughout workshops, that educators can then use to transfer the potential of comics for the purposes of English language learning to their students. It is important that the process of creation and use of comics is thoroughly explained to learners throughout the workshops so that they can understand the pedagogical and technical aspects of the task. Educators are also encouraged to adapt the learning process depending on their students' needs, interests and capabilities, always guided by the key structure and characteristics of comics (speech bubbles, panels, characters, text, etc.).

Storyboarding and Storytelling Process

Facilitating the storyboarding and storytelling process for students is the first step. You will need to outline the difference between the two in accordance to the "Digital Comics Creation Guide", using the definitions provided and additional examples, before you move on to creating and/or using comics for English language learning. Essentially, storyboarding involves the planning out of the comic panels and the scenes that will be illustrated in each (which can also include the script), and storytelling is the central narrative of the story that the comic will be based on. Make sure you identify the different techniques used within these processes and the technical details associated with them (these can be found in

detail within the "Digital Comics Creation Guide"). Structuring and planning out comic strips is important for both educators and students in the creation as well as in the learning process.

Creating Comics

Creating comics with students can be a fun classroom exercise, but it can also be challenging. If your students do not have a lot of experience with digital tools, they may find it harder to create digital comics using the software mentioned in the comics creation guide, but this is not the case for everyone. Alternatively, they can sketch out and draw their own comics – which may help them practice their artistic skills; but this may also be more time-consuming or difficult for learners who are not particularly skilled at drawing.

Comics creation tutorials should be conducted using the information from the **Pedagogical and Digital Comics Creation Guides** to help students navigate the digital comic-creation websites and test out creating a few draft comics to see how the process and different software work. Some websites offer ready-made comics that can be adapted, while others offer the opportunity to create them from scratch.

The comics creation process should be focused on the English language curriculum (e.g., CEFR levels). It should also highlight the idea that being a professional artist or cartoonist is not essential for the process and that practically anyone can design and create them for language-learning purposes. Consequently, students can create a Spiderman or Batman comic about grammar related to the weather, for instance, without being a MARVEL or DC illustrator!

Additionally, creating comics from scratch will enable students to practice, consolidate, and synthesize their English knowledge into small practical exercises or scenarios that showcase what they have learned or serve as evaluation exercises. This may involve True or False exercises for comprehension, Fill-in-the-blank and short writing tasks, as well as matching pictures to text. Additionally, students may, for instance, use or create comics to reflect about what they have learned through the narration of a story about a given topic. This process is also beneficial as it provides learners with the opportunity to combine

English language learning and their own interests to create comics. Students can use their favorite characters (i.e., the X-Men or Garfield) and storylines (i.e., “rags to riches” story, good vs. evil, high school romance, etc.) to construct a storyboard, and consequently a comic strip, related to English language learning.

Using Comics

The concept of using comics for English-language learning will need to be presented to students in ways that they find appealing. The comics need to, at the very least, be related to their general interests – which will also depend on their age and level. Students will need to be given clear and thorough instructions and theoretical information prior to, and during the process.

Students will need to firstly understand what comics are, if they have not heard of them or encountered them before. When their basic characteristics are outlined, then teachers can introduce comics as language-learning tools.

Educators should always seek their students’ feedback throughout the process so that they can observe if studying about comics is received well by the students and if they are actually learning from them, not just having fun.

Remember that comics can be used not only as self-expression tools but also for knowledge restitution and presentation – this way, comics can be utilized to help students understand and remember difficult concepts better through visual representation. Group cohesion and teamwork are also highly important throughout this process therefore the workshops and comics creation process should facilitate the essential groundwork for carrying out teamwork exercises as well.

Reflection and Evaluation

Importantly, throughout the process, these workshops are meant to help students reflect on the skills they have acquired so far in the lessons. They should be able to check their English and engage in self-evaluation through practical exercises and quizzes. This will

ensure that the process is running smoothly and effectively, and it can become a key aspect of learning using comics, not just for English language learning.

WHAT SKILLS DO STUDENTS GAIN FROM CREATING COMICS?

When creating comics with young students, it is easy to simply be satisfied with pupils developing their motor skills thanks to drawing. However, asking students in secondary education to take time to create comics can seem less clear regarding the relevance of the skills developed, as students are very unlikely to be asked to create comics as part of their national examinations in languages. In the following pages, we aim to show you how the skills developed when creating comics can be relevant not only for school, but also for the development of soft skills.

Self-expression and presentation skills

If you ask students (and many teachers) what can make school uninteresting, the answer is probably going to be that students feel like all they do is write and receive information passively. Creating comics can be a great way to overcome these two shortcomings.

The first aspect in which creating comics can support the development of students' self-expression and presentation skills is by giving them **a sense of ownership** over things related to school. Even when students are not drawing themselves, the choice of characters, colours, and general atmosphere can be used to convey meaning. As they are amateur creators of comics, these choices will be more or less conscious, developed nor mastered by the students. However, they provide a good topic for conversation: they are an opportunity for students to present their creations to others, to explain the idea they wanted to convey, and how they feel about their work. While presenting school topics can be intimidating for students because they feel judged and fear failure, at least in this example they can feel like they master the subject of their presentation.

That being said, keep the exercise pressure-free and do not ask the students to overthink the creation process. Asking students why they chose specific colours or settings might not always produce inspiring answers: it is natural to choose colours just because you like them, for instance. Some students might not even like what they created or might feel

ashamed of the result: with enough support from the teacher, even such doubts can be an interesting basis for conversation. And any opportunity for conversation is an opportunity to make language learning more engaging and efficient.

The second aspect of comics creation that can improve students' relationship to school learning is through offering them a **different opportunity to process, restate and retain information**. Most exercises in foreign languages, especially at the lower language levels, can be very limited: students can only give one answer to a specific question, and they can have a hard time transferring the language skills tested in exercises into more free forms of evaluation, such as essays or free writing.

When students create a comic from scratch, they need to look up words, or they might not know how to write a sentence. Even if a student writes the text in a comic with support from their teacher or peers, it still gives them more agency than just answering an exercise asking the students to write their own story. In other words, creating comics gives students the opportunity to put what they have studied into action, and to make it come alive.

Finally, asking students to create comics provides an interesting opportunity for the **inclusion** of all students in class activities. Several Specific Learning Disorders (SLDs) can make writing more challenging and require extra effort from students. Creating comics comes with its own challenges, but at least it offers other opportunities for students with learning difficulties to complete homework and express themselves in different ways, rather than sticking to energy-consuming exercises based on writing to a great extent. You will find more details about the benefits and recommendations for creating comics with students with Specific Learning Disorders in Chapter 5.

Communication and collaborative skills

Creating comics is a good basis for students to develop their communication and collaborative skills, whether it is an individual or group assignment. As most of the benefits of individual exercises stem from the points made above, we will focus on group work in this paragraph.

Group work allows **for work division and co-creation of comics**. Creating comics involves different jobs, as listed by Larson (2014) and quoted in our Pedagogical Guide on Using Comics in Education:

- **Penciller**: illustrates the comic (by hand or digitally);
- **Inker**: can also be the penciller, adds with texture and more detail to the pencilled artwork;
- **Colourist**: is responsible for providing the colour to a comic;
- **Letterer**: provides words, balloon shapes, titles, sound effects;
- **Editor**: person responsible for the creative direction, gives final artwork check.

Another beneficial aspect of creating comics as a group is that members of a group have to **communicate** about what they would like to create, what they understand about others' ideas, and, last but not least, how to give and receive feedback. In a informal activity integrated in formal education settings, there are more opportunity for creativity and discussions that generate constructive feedback. It is important to teach students how to give feedback to others. One good way to do so is to remind students that they evaluate the comic, not the creator, and that they should take time to highlight positive aspects of the comic created as well.

Digital skills and the use of digital tools

Creating comics thanks to digital comics creation software can improve students' digital skills as **it teaches them about other programs** than the ones commonly taught at school, and **it allows them to discover image processing**.

The programs that students use at school are generally directly related to their courses: they will learn about the most common uses of text editors, spreadsheet and presentation software. They might also use programs related to mathematics industry-specific programs or be introduced to coding. One of the advantages of comics creation programs is that as they do not pertain to the school environment, they might appeal differently to students, who might feel encouraged to try and understand how they work on their own. In addition, their interface is generally lighter and easier to navigate than that of even common office

suite software, and in that sense, they could encourage students who are less eager to work on computers to try it out.

One common assumption is that because youngsters were born at a time when internet and smartphones were already widely available, they know all about using digital tools. While they might know how to navigate social media, they do not necessarily know how to create clear visual communication supports nor how to process images: creating comics 100% digitally or learning how to clean up their own drawings could be a good introduction into this topic.

CHAPTER 4

LEVEL AND AGE SPECIFICATIONS

Level and age specifications are important aspects to consider throughout the workshops to facilitate the learning process. Language level specifications, like the ones outlined in the Comics Creation Guide (A1, A2, B1, B2...) are defining in relation to the content that students will be exposed to. Additionally, younger or older learners will have differences regarding their interests and abilities as well. These are factors in need of consideration in the process of designing and implementing comics for English language learning.

Age Specifications

Secondary school learners, the target group of this project concerns young people aged between 11-13 years old (12 being the most common age for lower secondary school) and 15-18 years old (upper secondary school).

Not all comics can be used for learners of any age. Different age groups will be able to use different comics for language learning. For example, while superheroes are universally known as interesting characters in comic books, younger students may feel uncomfortable being exposed to images with violence and blood, for example, compared to someone who is older and less frightened. Therefore, careful consideration should be taken about character choices as well as different or complex story lines and language-learning activities amongst different age groups. You can use [GoComics](#) for inspiration about characters and contexts for different age groups, and GoodReads.com to some extent. For older students, you can use characters or figures that they admire or are interested in, or appear in current events (presidents, local or international celebrities, action figures, etc.).

Additionally, the younger the students are, the more probable it is that they are less experienced in technology and online tools for comics creation – therefore creating comics for younger ages should be done in very simple forms, using the easiest tools available and

giving very detailed, step-by-step instructions about using the different tools to achieve the goal.

Usually, the older the students are, the higher their CEFR level will be, although that is not always the case. You should aim to create or use comics that correspond to both. A1/A2 learners usually start in lower secondary school and B1/B2 in upper secondary. A2 is rarely found in upper secondary schools (English Level Age, 2020).

CEFR Level Specifications

CEFR levels influence an educator's use of comics during the workshops. Naturally, the content of each lesson will differ if the student is at level A2, B1 or B2. A2 learners, for instance, are basic English users, therefore they will only be able to practice with more basic sentences and immediately relevant concepts than those in B1 level, who are intermediate users and are able to use more complex vocabulary and grammar. A2 learners are not yet independent English users, therefore it may take longer for them to understand storyboards and comic strip scenarios. They will have more simplified comics with basic knowledge exercises and introductory-level conversations and grammar. B1 learners, on the other hand, will be able to construct more complicated storylines or storyboards and will understand the technicalities of comics a bit better.

SLDs

Students with SLDs will have a different interaction with comics, sometimes no matter their age or CEFR level. Students with SLDs may find it easier to draw their own comics rather than use digital tools – this needs to be considered depending on your students' abilities and structure the workshop accordingly. Conversely, educators may find that ready-made comics are easier to use for Dys-students (depending on age and CEFR level).

- Level and age are important, yet underrated, specifications that educators need to consider in their classrooms. In the case of using comics for English language learning, it is important to keep in mind the differences between age groups and CEFR levels when creating comic strips in your workshops.

CHAPTER 5

SPECIAL EDUCATIONAL NEEDS: HOW TO MAKE YOUR WORKSHOPS MORE INCLUSIVE FOR STUDENTS WITH SPECIFIC LEARNING DISORDERS

A very important aspect that teachers should consider while designing any kind of workshops, is to ensure inclusion and accessibility for all learners. This is a challenging task as groups of students are heterogeneous and while each learner has different needs and learning styles, accessibility should be granted also for those that are diagnosed with learning difficulties such as Specific Learning Disorders (SLDs) and Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD), as well as for children with special educational needs (SEN).

Approximately 10% of the population are affected by learning disorders such as dyslexia, dyscalculia and autism, which means that about three students in your classroom will most probably have learning difficulties (University College London, 2013) that are not linked to low levels of intelligence or individual effort. These learners, as well as children with special needs, have different requirements, especially when it comes to classroom learning and participation.

As a workshop facilitator and teacher, the first step to an inclusive workshop is to **know your participants**. If you have been teaching the class for some time already, this probably won't be a problem for you. If you do not know the participants of the workshop you are organising, it is always a good idea to try to find out who they are and what abilities they have beforehand. This includes their age, background and mother tongue, previous knowledge and general preferences as well as their skills (ACPA, 2013). It is important to mention here that special needs and specific learning disorders, are highly individual and have very different consequences for every student. To give an example from SLDs, dyslexic students might have problems with reading and thus prefer spoken instructions, whereas dysphasic students might have problems with understanding spoken instructions and therefore prefer the written ones. Thus, teachers should adapt their curriculum,

methodology, material and instructions, and provide different options for different learning styles, abilities, and needs. Also, teachers should adopt more than one teaching strategy and use various tools to actively engage learners and ensure an inclusive workshop.

Workshops for all students, but especially for SEN learners or learners with SLDs, should be **carefully planned, well-structured** and appealing. In addition, to engage learners, workshops should not miss being interactive and having **hands-on activities**.

When it comes to planning the workshop's different tasks, it is best to reduce the amount of writing tasks and avoid difficult manipulations. It is recommended to break the session down into manageable steps and make room for breaks in between. Moreover, you should provide **explicit guidelines** and enough time for each task. This is very important as designing a workshop that is **carefully paced**, allows students to have time to absorb and enjoy the experience, without becoming distracted and losing interest. To manage the time and the task, you could, for instance, prepare a list of the tasks to accomplish and then tick off each one as the students complete the tasks during the workshop. This can also help to promote student engagement (Sobel & Knott, 2014).

In terms of materials you can use during the workshop, you might consider using a **multisensory method** in order to engage the audience. This means providing different kinds of support that engage with different kinds of senses. You could for example, stimulate visual reasoning and learning by using text and pictures on paper, posters, projection screens and models, combined with verbal instructions or use of highlighters to underline important information. You could also prepare some material that students can actually touch like textured objects, puzzles or flashcards. Also, you could use auditory techniques such as recordings or peer assisted reading, paired reading and computerized text readers, video, music and even language games.

It would be very useful considering making **adaptations in the written material** that can benefit learners greatly. These adaptations could be the following:

- ✓ Use text font types such as Arial, Century Gothic or OpenDys. Other options could be Verdana, Tahoma, Open Sans, Century Gothic or Trebuchet.
- ✓ Opt for adapted spacing of 1,5 in between the lines, in a font size that should range between 12 and 14.
- ✓ Align the text to the left, do not justify it.
- ✓ Print on one side as it helps students to avoid the manipulation of having to turn pages.
- ✓ Use colors to separate information and be consistent in the color codes.
- ✓ Use off-white or pastel colored paper whenever possible.

Another crucial aspect for making a creative workshop, is the **environment** in which the workshop will take place. To help learners, you should make sure to provide a quiet environment, so students are not distracted and thus are more easily able to focus on the tasks. Starting the workshop with explicit guidelines and explanation of the activity – supported by visual elements if possible – is a good idea in any case. You should always make sure that everyone has understood everything before proceeding and try to anticipate problems. Mistakes should be seen as part of the learning process to build a supportive workshop environment.

Last but not least, **fostering collaboration** between your students will also create a safe and inclusive workshop for learners. Working in groups will combine the strengths of all participants and encourage learners to be active during the learning process. Furthermore, it is advisable to promote collaboration instead of competition and keep the groups small, so everyone has the chance to participate in the activities.

All of the above should be taken into account when planning and implementing a workshop for a heterogeneous group of learners with mild or more severe learning disorders and different needs, so that they can all participate and be actively engaged in the learning process.

CHAPTER 6

INTRODUCING COMIC-MAKING IN THE CLASSROOM

Using comics as a reading aid to help students learn is only one aspect of using comics in the classroom. Another one is to enable them to create their own comics in order to organize, present and solidify their newly-acquired knowledge, something that could also affect positively their overall ability to organize and present information and data.

To achieve this, however, you would have to introduce comic-creation tools in the classroom in such a way that will motivate your students to use them for the purposes intended, as well as help keep class dynamics balanced – introducing something new in the classroom will almost certainly affect the roles, relations and overall dynamics the class is used to. So, make sure that characteristics such as your class's relations (and expectations) to experimentation, change, novelty etc. is reflected on what you expect of them.

The purpose of this chapter is to sketch a quick map of how to do just that by using online comic creation tools rather than more traditional techniques.

To begin with, before your students are asked to use comics in the classroom for learning purposes, the fact that they do not need to have any highly complex artistic skills or talent has to be made clear.

To achieve that, you can show them a simple, not perfect looking, but effective comic that you have created, or create a very simple comic in front of the class using one of the tools you will ask them to use.

Then, you might need to explain to them that a basic familiarization with basic comics and comic-creation tools terminology and concepts is needed.

To help them understand what these terms and concepts are, you may use ideas from the EdComix Workshop I to familiarize your students with elements such as speech bubble,

balloon, panel, gutter, tier and sound effects, or simply show them a strip from a well-known and popular comic and ask them to name its elements.

Some students might already be familiar with comics and knowing who these students are might be important for you (you can use them as helpers or make sure that each working group has one of them), for the other students (they might prefer to be helped by a peer rather than you), as well as for them, since showing interest for and valuing their expertise might motivate them to try harder.

Once students are familiar with the main blocks of a comic, the main characteristics of storytelling that comics use have to be explained. Again, ideas on how to do that can be found in our EdComix Workshop I, or you can use a problem or project-based activity. For example, you could show them clear examples of different storytelling techniques and ask them to identify in groups and present them to class.

Once the comic basics are reasonably clear, the tools themselves have to be presented.

The best way to do that might be through a simple exercise to get familiar with the comics creation process. For example, you can ask them to think of a time they were frustrated, and then share their frustration story with a peer. Then, ask everyone to retell the story of their peer using a comic making tool. The “re-telling” should be highly structured. For example, you could also have your computer screen projected onto the wall, break the comic-making process into small steps (e.g. open your computer, go to the tool webpage, click on “Make a new comic”, etc.), and ask all students to follow each step while giving them enough time to work their story at each step. Make sure you are available for guidance and that students understand they can help each other.

If you are using one of the tools presented in EdComix “Digital Comics Creation Guide”, the breakdown of using the tool has already been made for you.

Once students are reasonably familiar with the comic making tools, activities with specific content learning goals can be introduced.

To ensure that student motivation stays high, and that class dynamics are boosted, a few things have to be kept in mind. First of all, comic-production learning activities have to be fit-for-purpose. Not all learning is necessarily best served by comic making and badly planned activities will not help student motivation.

Secondly, it would be best for class dynamics if comics creation is done in small groups, so as students identify their strengths and weaknesses, work from their strengths, improve their weaknesses by observing others, and help others overcome their problems, thus exercising the key element of class dynamics: empathy.

The purpose of the 'Question and Answer' (Q&A) area is to gain a more in-depth perspective as well as solutions to common issues that teachers may encounter when wishing to organise workshops inside the classroom in order to help students create comics for English language learning. It is also designed to offer optimisation, support and visibility whenever teachers are confronted with either friendly or less amiable situations when asking students to create their own comics. The Q&A part is divided into three main sections which pertain to the global understanding and accuracy of this part.

1. Why have comics' creation workshops with your students?

Question: In which way does the organisation of comics' creation workshops involve informal, non-formal and formal activities?

Answer: Whenever the students read comics involuntarily and unofficially, in a relaxed and **informal** atmosphere, they have fun and are entertained. They may indulge in creating comic strips in order to reveal their native drawing talent or enhance digital comics' creation skills. Another format refers to comics as **non-formal** learning in community settings (COE), such as reading groups, language centres, clubs, etc. For example, these settings organise learning activities for migrant learners who wish to take up English courses or acquire a certain skill. The learners may also start creating comics as a training course supervised by trainers with professional expertise in hand drawn or digital comics. Regarding **formal** classroom activities, teachers use learning objectives according to national curricula and syllabi for teaching and assessing students. Teachers may design and implement language activities using comics while respecting the educational guidelines.

Question: Why engage in comics' creation workshops with your students?

Answer: Organising class workshops is beneficial for either reluctant readers or writers, especially when it comes to foreign language acquisition. Comics contain images and text combined in a **multimodal form of communication**, thus enabling students to use a multitude of techniques (image, text, motion, audio) when learning with comics. At the same time, the teachers use different tasks and methods to teach, having the students practise and evaluate their activity based on comics. We have dealt with many types of linguistic activities inside the pages of the EdComix 'Digital Comics Creation Guide'.

Question: Do I have the necessary expertise to implement a digital comics' creation activity for my students?

Answer: Yes, if you successfully went through the E-Learning Module carried out by the EdComix project team which offers learners both theoretical and practical training to create comic strips. The aimed for CEFR levels in this module are A2 and B1.

Question: What is the proper age to be involved in workshops based on comics?

Answer: Good question! We hope you will agree with the answer that comics are for everybody, irrespective of language level or age. Remember the first question about the three environments of learning with comics! Well, learners read and use comics in different situations, be they informal, non-formal or formal. Pre-school children can have their first English lessons by drawing three picnic blankets and sketching there their family members and friends. Practically, these are the first comic panels and the first characters of a storyboard. Later on, at upper secondary level, the students will be able to create more elaborate comic strips with sequential panels and a story plot.

Question: Is it possible to use comics workshops in a cross-curricular manner?

Answer: Yes, many teachers use comics to teach English through other subjects. For example, Social Sciences students have been learning about cultural and social values and historical backgrounds with the Asterix series or Hergé's Tintin, or younger students can

explore and storytell in English 'The Dacians' Legends', a contemporary comic book based on the valiant ancestors of the Romanian people.

There can be organised STEM workshops in English based on comics for both younger and older students, provided that the topic vocabulary is previously taught. In this respect, Macmillan's 'Science Comics' may arouse your students' curiosity with vivid frames about different scientific domains which are ready to use or can be digitally adapted for class workshops. The same goes for Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL), where students learn a subject using comics and practise English at the same time.

2. How can you help your students create and use comics to enhance language learning?

Question: What types of comics can I use for my workshops?

Answer: You can use either print or digital comics, but you ought to know the differences between them.

Using **print comics** for your English class could be a strenuous endeavour, taking precious time sorting out the existing collections to find the proper comic strip and adapt its content to curricular demands and learning needs. On the other hand, financial obstacles are another issue worth mentioning, but it is your decision to use a tangible type of comic if you wish so. Ask your students to bring their Marvel or DC Comics into the classroom and you will have enough material for your English class workshop. Or, at least an excellent idea for translation activities! You can make photocopies of comic books or interesting magazines pages and then tell your younger students to cut out images of people or scenes and then glue them on print out storyboards. Older learners can add speech bubbles and create a story line. The talented students can draw the characters or can realise the entire comic strip by hand.

As regards **digital comics**, they allow everyone to produce, publish and access them. On the one hand, web comics or online comics belong to the general category mentioned above and are accessed via mobile phones, tablets or desktop screens. Here the teacher's job is even more difficult, having to sort out the wide range of material before bringing

them into the classroom, considering that web comics are not always subject to editing or censorship. On the other hand, to digitally create comic strips will require digital tools which generally can be freely accessed when subscribing. The students will have the possibility to choose the characters, the background scenes, the speech balloons, the text size and font in multiple joined frames.

Question: Can you recommend some good digital comics tools to use with my students?

Answer: We have indicated several online digital tools for education: BDNF, Canva, Make Beliefs Comix, Pixton and Storyboard That. You can see the detailed analyses of these tools in the project's part called 'Digital comics creation guide'.

Question: Why are topics important when creating comics with my students?

Answer: Firstly, topics pertain to age or linguistic levels. Secondly, topics tackle important issues, such as (cyber) bullying, racism, gender inequality or citizenship. For example, your A2 level students who are 12 years old might not have the socio-cultural knowledge to deal with plastic surgery or pandemic issues, although they are linguistically equipped in English. Consequently, it is important to take time to choose comics that your students will be able to understand.

Question: Could you help me with some guiding steps to organise workshops about comics' creation in the classroom?

Answer: The guidelines below may help you organise a successful workshop activity:

- 1) Establish a clear and precise learning purpose or objective for creating a comic strip: vocabulary, grammar, syntax, language functions, etc.;
- 2) Indicate the digital tools, tutorials and supportive materials for the know-how, including for learners with SLDs;
- 3) Choose an interesting topic in accordance with the learning level, age, interests and needs;
- 4) Distribute tasks and divide the students in work groups according to their roles;

- 5) Prepare for the task doing research work if needed;
- 6) Allow your students to accomplish their task while constantly offering feedback in a constructive manner;
- 7) Share work presentations and obtain peer feedback;
- 8) Assign follow-up tasks to transfer knowledge acquisitions.

Question: How can I save my students' work?

Answer: Most comic strip software devices allow you to save the creations in PNG, JPG or BMP formats. For example, after finishing your work, the tools Pixton and Make Beliefs Comix give you the possibility to either print or download your strip (as PNG image) or send it to your email.

3. What skills can students acquire when indulging in comics' creation workshops?

Question: What language learning skills can students gain?

Answer: Throughout our project's pages we have already mapped how comics become a powerful and resourceful tool to enhance learning skills. Through attractive **reading** material the students' attitude towards reading and writing can change and help them discover the pleasure of making meaning. They can read their peers' comic strips and give feed-back. Younger students may indulge in **speaking** activities when describing scenes, characters, or when role-playing the story line of the comic strip they created. For (self) assessment, they can be recorded. After **listening** to or watching an audio-video material, the students can create a comic strip using storytelling and storyboarding techniques to convert the plot into a comic strip. To enhance **writing** skills, the students at lower levels may start first with print out storyboards then use the digital tool. Higher level students can realise the speech balloons directly inside the panels.

Question: What other skills and abilities can they acquire?

Answer: Mainly digital skills, teamwork, social, imagination, creativity, collaborative and adaptive behaviour for SLDs, communication, higher-order thinking, multimodality

COMICS CREATION WORKSHOPS

This series of workshop scenarios aims at providing English teachers with the tools to introduce to introduce comics creation to secondary school students, as well as to integrate comics creation into studying specific lesson topics, such as grammar or vocabulary, or a topic studied in another class but to study it in English as part of an interdisciplinary approach.

These workshop scenarios will provide general guidelines to help English teachers structure their workshop with examples of specific topics. These three workshops are designed to last about an hour and a half. Study them and make the necessary adjustments for your class needs.

Programme:

1. Discovering the structure of a comic strip and creating a short strip

- Comics types and specific vocabulary.
- Storytelling and structuring a comic strip.
- Creating your first digital comic strip.
- Preparation for the next workshop.

2. Creating a comic strip to illustrate grammar and vocabulary

- Start with a reminder/roundup of things learnt during the previous workshop.
- Exploring techniques to create an easy-to-read comic
- Use a reminder of the grammar and vocabulary points you wish to present in the comic strip, including difficulties and nuances.
- Brainstorm story ideas with your students.

- Create a comic strip based on these grammar and vocabulary topics.
- Organise group presentations, feedback and debriefing.

3. Creating a comic page and giving feedback

- Start with a reminder/roundup of things learnt during the previous workshop.
- Review the comics creation process and principles and going further
- Comics creation in groups
- Organise group presentations, feedback and debriefing.

WORKSHOP 1

a. Checklist

Workshop title: Discovering the structure of a comic strip and creating a short strip

Learning Objectives: By the end of this workshop, students should understand basic comics related vocabulary and understand the structure of a story based on short comic strips.

Material needed: Classroom resources (pen, paper, blackboard or whiteboard, projector, etc.) and computers (1 per 1 or 2 students)

Timing: 1h30

Outline of the workshop

b. Discovering the structure of a comic strip and creating a short strip

- Comics types and specific vocabulary
- Storytelling and structuring a comic strip
- Creating your first digital comic strip
- Preparation for the next workshop

c. Activity

Introduction: Start by introducing the outline of the workshop to your students.

1) Comics types and vocabulary

The different types of comics

Present different types of comics and their names to your students, in particular European comics, American comics, manga, and webcomics. During your presentation, do not hesitate to ask your students about the comics they have read in each category!

Resources:

For an in-depth presentation on the different types of comics, you can visit:

<http://edcomix.eu/elearning-part1/>, click tab 'What are comics' and scroll down to view and download the homonymous PowerPoint file.

The different types of comics are also presented in depth, with several examples, in our 'Pedagogical Guide on the Practical Uses of Comics in Education' that you can download at:

<http://edcomix.eu/resources/>

This guide is available in English, French, Greek, Spanish and Romanian.

Some vocabulary to talk about comics

Introduce to your students this basic vocabulary to help them talk about the comics they will create.

- **Forms of comics:** The most common forms of comics are comics books (made of several pages) or comic strips (made of at least 2 panels).
- **Panels** are the frames or boxes in which the story is represented.
- **Balloons or bubbles** represent the text holders in a panel. Round balloons represent spoken text. Cloud shaped balloons represent thoughts. Balloons drawn with a dotted line represent whispers or text spoken in a low voice.
- **Captions or narrative blocks** are boxes containing narration or dialogue and communicate directly with the reader, without taking part in the action.
- The **gutter** is the blank space between the panels.
- **A tier** is a row of panels in a comic page, or a 'line' of panels.
- **Onomatopoeia, or sound effects**, is text that represents sounds in the panel.

Then, present this strip and ask your students to identify the different elements used. This can be done in pair work, group work or by asking the students to identify the parts that the teacher point out on a screen.

Garfield Classics by Jim Davis for January 19, 2017



Source: https://garfield-comic-strips.fandom.com/wiki/January_18

2) Storytelling and structuring a comic strip

A bit of theory

For this first workshop, present this basic storytelling principle to your students: a story is created when something happens to a character or to a group of characters and ends when the event is solved.

As comic strips are short, the story is reduced to its minimal size. A good way to start creating comics is to work on a three-act story structure to create a short comic strip made of 3 to 4 panels in one tier.

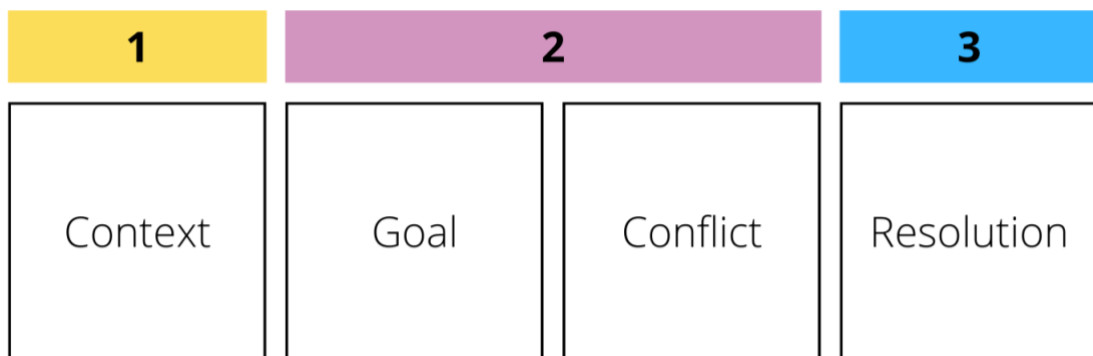
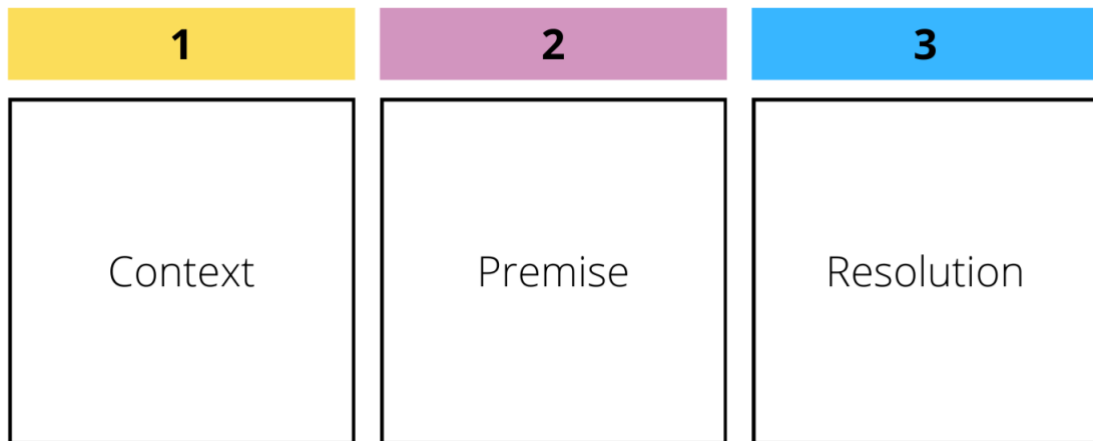
The three-act story structure is composed of the following steps:

1. **The context:** the first panel provides some elements of context, or some elements to answer the 5 wh- questions:
 - Where does the story take place?
 - When does the story take place?
 - Who are the characters?
 - What are they doing?
 - Why are they doing it?

The first panel answers to some of these questions, but they might not all matter.

2. **The premise:** the premise is the main part of the story, which depicts how the character's goals come into conflict with an event. The premise is depicted in the middle panels (panel 2 for 3 panel strips or panels 2 and 3 for 4 panels strips).

3. **The resolution:** this is the end of the story, at the end of which the reader knows more about the character.



Analysing comic strips with the class

Take time to analyse and decompose the steps of short comic strips with your students. Interesting examples from 'Calvin and Hobbes' are analysed on Tim Stout's blog (2011), or you can browse Sarah Andersen's blog for interesting examples (such as <https://sarahcandersen.com/page/9>) for instance.

During the conversation, ask your students what they think about the comic, and if they feel anything when the resolution happens. They might not be fans of the strips you present, but if they look bored it might be because they did not understand the comics.

3) Creating your first digital comic strip

Introducing comics creation tools

Choose 1 to 2 comics creation tools that you would like to use with your students. The most relevant tools for comics creation in secondary education are presented in:

EdComix 'Digital Comics Creation Guide' in chapter 'Online tools to create digital comics for education', which you can download at: <http://edcomix.eu/resources/>

EdComix E-learning module in <http://edcomix.eu/elearning-part3/> tab 'Use creation tools', and in <http://edcomix.eu/elearning-part4/> tabs 'Digital comics creation tools 1/2 and 2/2'.

Explore it yourself before the workshop and present the basic uses to your students. As there was a good volume of theoretical content provided in the previous steps, feel free to go quickly over this first guidance to let your students discover the tools on their own.

Let your students create their first comic strip

Ask your students to create their first digital comic strip, composed of 3 to 4 panels, to allow them to experience and remember the concepts explored so far. If you wish, you can provide them with 5 to 10 prompts related to a topic (grammar, vocabulary, drama, novel, history, etc.) you have been studying in class to inspire them.

4) Preparation for the next workshop

After the workshop, ask your students to select one comic strip they could share with the class. You will start the next workshop by analysing some of these strips to make sure that students understood and remember the notions explored during the first workshop.

If you have time, depending on how fast you went through the content of the workshop, do not hesitate to ask students how they felt about creating their first comic strip or about the tools used.

WORKSHOP 2

a. Checklist

Workshop title: Creating a comic strip to illustrate grammar and vocabulary

Learning Objectives: At the end of this workshop, students will create a comic to illustrate a grammar notion studied in class. To do so, they will put into practice the knowledge about storytelling acquired during the first workshop, and they will learn a few tips and tricks to improve their comics.

Material needed: Classroom resources (pen, paper, blackboard or whiteboard, projector, etc.) and computers (1 per 1 or 2 students)

Timing: 1h30

b. Outline of the workshop

Creating a comic strip to illustrate grammar and vocabulary

- Start with a reminder/roundup of things learnt during the previous workshop.
- Exploring techniques to create an easy-to-read comic
- Use a reminder of the grammar and vocabulary points you wish to present in the comic strip, including difficulties and nuances.
- Brainstorm story ideas with your students.
- Create a comic strip based on these grammar and vocabulary topics.
- Organise group presentations, feedback and debriefing.

c. Activity

1) Start with a reminder/roundup of things learnt during the previous workshop

The introduction of the second workshop will be realised in three steps:

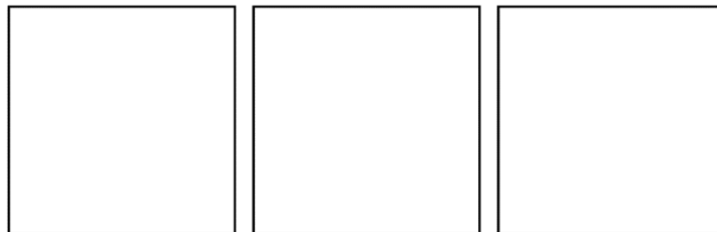
- Start by introducing the outline of the workshop to your students.
- Then, ask the students for their feedback on creating their first comic strip.
- Ask 5 students to share the comic strip they were asked to bring to analyse with the classroom. You can select them randomly, for instance by asking the first 5 people who roll the number 6 on a dice to share their comic with the class.

2) Exploring techniques to create an easy-to-read comic

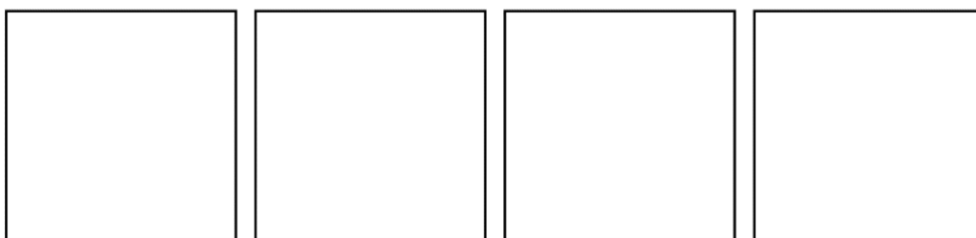
Introduce several page layouts to your students

Introduce these easy-to-use short comic strip templates.

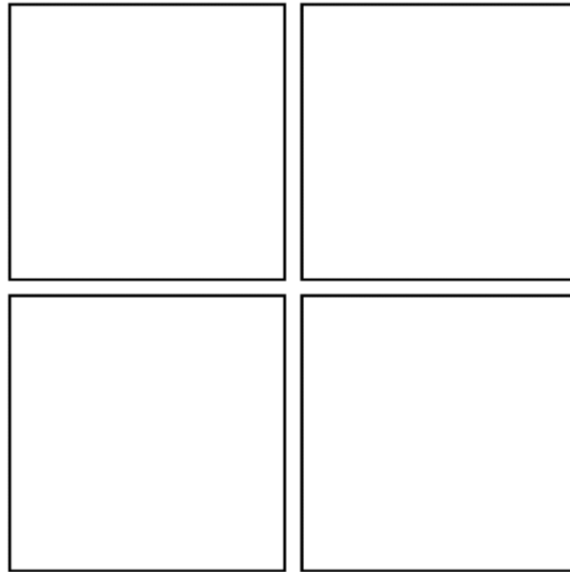
- 3 panels on 1 tier



- 4 panels on 1 tier



- 4 panels on 2 tiers, or 'square'



- 4 rectangle panels of the same size arranged vertically, also known as 'yon-koma' (from their Japanese definition)



Made with [BDF](#) application, developed by the IBnF

Present basic comics creation principles

Here is a list of recommendations to share with your students. Do not hesitate to offer your them use this as a checklist as they are creating their comic strip.

- When you design your storyboard, first plan the for text and bubbles to make sure that you have enough space for it even before adding the illustrations.
- The tail of the bubbles should point to the character's mouth.
- The tails of the bubbles should not cross one another.
- Readers spend more time on bigger panels: make sure bigger panels display important or lengthy action.
- Number your bubbles and trace a line between them to see if the order of reading is logical.

Resources:

For a more exhaustive list and for more graphic resources on these points, visit <http://edcomix.eu/elearning-part3/>, and click tabs 'Steps of comic creation' and 'Comic creation troubleshooting'. These two lessons also have short videos to explain the points above to your students more visually (especially the video named '[How to place bubbles](#)')!

3) Use a reminder of the grammar and vocabulary points you wish to present in the comic strip, including difficulties and nuances

Now that your students are more acquainted with creating comics, you can prepare them to create comics related to their English lessons. We advise you to focus on illustrating grammar as it allows for more creativity and variety than vocabulary. For such an activity, vocabulary should be a secondary aspect: you can ask students to look for the vocabulary they need in a dictionary, or you can give them a list of 5 words to use, pertaining to the topic chosen for the English lesson.

Spend time reminding the topic of the lesson

Spend some time reminding your students about the topic of the lesson, and do not hesitate to focus on the more complicated aspects: students might feel empowered to explore their difficulties when creating comics!

4) Brainstorm story ideas with your students.

Take 10-15 minutes to brainstorm story ideas, contexts or situations with your students related to the grammar topic. This will allow to foster their creativity and make them less shy to share their ideas and creation later.

If they are not very inspired, do not hesitate to give them a prompt, such as 'What would Batman do if...?', 'How could you use this grammar to say something about Asterix?', etc.

5) Creating a comic strip based on this grammar topic

Give at least 30-45 minutes for your students to create a comic strip related to the grammar point studied. Be available to provide support with language or technical difficulties.

For students who finish earlier, offer them to help other students to complete their comic strip.

Ask students to send you the file they created by email or on a joint server to be able to present them to the class.

6) Group presentation, feedback and debriefing

Group presentation and feedback

At the end of the comic creation activity, ask at least 5 students to present their work. This time, you can ask the first 5 who roll a 1 on a dice to come and present their work.

Before they present, remind your students the principles of constructive feedback. One good way to do so is to tell them that they should evaluate the comic, not the creator, and that they should take time to highlight positive aspects of the comic created as well.

Encourage conversation by asking the creator how they feel about what they did, if they would have liked to do anything different, as the rest of the class might actually be supportive and encourage them.

Do not hesitate to come back to the three-act story structure and to analyse students' creations regarding this aspect.

Feedback and debriefing

When all students have presented their work, ask them if they feel more confident about the grammar notion explored.

Then, ask them how they felt about creating comics, about presenting their work, and about giving feedback to those who presented.

Keep at least 20 minutes for this step as students might have a lot to express after a creative activity!

In preparation for the next workshop, you can offer your students to try to draw stick figures if they wish to start drawing themselves. This 4-minute video by illustrator Deb Aoki provides a nice introduction to this topic:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DkM6FgbQIGs>

a. Checklist

Workshop title: Creating a comic page and giving feedback

Learning Objectives: By the end of this workshop, students will understand more comics creation techniques, improve their presentation and communication skills, and learn how to plan their work.

Material needed: Classroom resources (pen, paper, blackboard or whiteboard, projector, etc.) and computers (1 per 3 to 4 students), A3 paper

b. Outline of the workshop

Creating a comic page and giving feedback

- Start with a reminder/roundup of things learnt during the previous workshop.
- Review the comics creation process and principles and going further.
- Comics creation in groups.
- Organise group presentations, feedback and debriefing.

c. Activity

1) Start with a reminder/roundup of things learnt during the previous workshop

As you did in the previous workshops, start by presenting the outline of this workshop to the students.

Start with a reminder of what was learnt during the previous workshop. It could take the form of:

- The 3 things students did best in their creation;
- The 3 things students could do better in their next comic;
- What was better understood in grammar.

Take the opportunity to congratulate your students on the work done so far, and congratulate them on their involvement and efforts, and encourage them for this last but more challenging workshop!

2) Review the comics creation process and principles and going further

Review the comics layout principles

Review the page layout principles studied in the second workshop. If you feel that your students remember most of them, you can go very quickly over this step.

Going further in storytelling: avoiding negative stereotypes

This step is especially interesting if some of your students created comics that made fun of certain categories of people, because of their race, gender, origin, culture, body shape, disability, etc. They might not even realise that their work might have hurt others.

Therefore, explain what stereotypes are and provide this simple technique to avoid most of them.

One good way to avoid stereotypes is to think about them and to try not to fit into them. For instance, a female character can enjoy cooking, but if all the activities she enjoys are only domestic work, it can lead to a diminishing representation of women. She could, for instance, enjoy cooking and football or rugby, which are generally considered as 'male' activities.

Encourage students to insert diverse characters whose singularities do not become their only purpose in the story. For instance, if a female character wears a hijab, the story does not have to revolve around her culture or religion. Similarly, a random character could be a wheelchair user, and no one would ever need to mention it because it does not bring to the story anything else than diversity and representation.

Creation steps and storyboarding

As the goal of this workshop is to create a longer comic, it is interesting to give a step-by-step guide to your students and to ask them to create a draft storyboard. If they do not have time to complete their comic, it could still allow them to show something to the others.

Here are the steps to give to your students:

- Create your characters;
- Write the plot;
- Add the dialogue;
- Transform it into a script;
- Organise all the elements of your page into a draft storyboard;
- Then start using the comic creation tool.

3) Comics creation in groups

Now, divide your class into groups of 3 to 4 and let them create a longer comic on the grammar topic previously explored! Give them at least 45 minutes to create a comic together.

As always, be available for language and technical support.

4) Presentation, feedback and debrief

This time, ask all groups to present what they created. As it is likely that some groups will not be finished by this time, take a picture of their storyboard for all the class to see.

Do reassure them that it is ok if what they created looks like a draft, and encourage them to present why they thought about creating this comic. For each group, and after other students have given their feedback, point to the one thing you like the most in this group's creation.

Finally, take 5-10 minutes to ask students what they thought about the activity, and whether they would like to try it again. And do not forget to congratulate them for their participation!

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Council of Europe. Formal, non-formal and informal learning. Available at <https://www.coe.int/en/web/lang-migrants/formal-non-formal-and-informal-learning?desktop=true>
- Juntunen, Linda. (2017). 5 Reasons Why You Need Informal Learning. Available at <https://epale.ec.europa.eu/en/blog/5-reasons-why-you-need-informal-training>
- OECD. Recognition of Non-formal and Informal Learning – Home. Available at <http://www.oecd.org/education/skills-beyond-school/recognitionofnon-formalandinformallearning-home.htm>
- Larson, D. (2014, January 16). Overview of the comic creation process [Making Comix.com]. Available at <https://www.makingcomics.com/2014/01/16/overview-comic-creation-process/>
- Council of Europe (COE). Formal, non-formal and informal learning. Available at <https://www.coe.int/en/web/lang-migrants/formal-non-formal-and-informal-learning?desktop=true>
- Stout, Tim (2011, March 3rd) 'How to Use 3-Act Story Structure in Comic Strips'. Available at <https://timstout.wordpress.com/2011/09/03/how-to-use-3-act-story-structure-in-comic-strips/> [Accessed 24/05/2021]

Picture credits:

- Photo by Abin Varghese on Unsplash
- Photo by Leone Venter on Unsplash
- Photo by Tamanna Rumeel on Unsplash



Erasmus+

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

This work is licensed under the Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-ShareAlike 4.0 International License (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-sa/4.0/>).

Learn more about EdComix at:



<http://edcomix.eu/>



<https://www.facebook.com/EdComix>

