INTRODUCTION...

Comics have long been a superpower of the entertainment industry; they’ve amused us in the Sunday paper, thrilled us with superheroes and villains, and block-busted our theaters with their theatrical adaptations, but comics are an unsung hero when it comes to their power of teaching – comics can teach you just as effectively as they can entertain you.

OUR SUPERHERO, THE COMIC, HAS THE POWER TO...

USE IMAGINATION

Comics allow the author to control the amount of detail a reader sees – abstracting certain details encourages the reader to fill in the blanks with their own imagination. When the reader is allowed to exercise their own imagination, they relate more personally with the material presented and will understand and recall information more effectively.

ASSIST USERS

The importance of comics as a form of visual communication and user assistance cannot be overstated. When introducing a product, comics offer a simple yet meaningful way to explain seemingly complicated concepts. Scott McCloud, who helped users understand the new Google Chrome browser with a now-famous comic, said the key was “amplification by simplification”.

REACH OUT

Comics reach out to low-literacy segments of the population. A British Columbian agency, responsible for providing legal aid to its marginalized residents, created a comic for its Native American women – a documented low-literacy group. The comic focused on domestic violence and explained women’s legal rights. The comic was so successful, a second print-run was required and similar comics followed suit.

ENGAGE STUDENTS

In the class room, comics are a framework for education, supporting text with visual clues and providing a context for the student to better understand material. By using a more manageable amount of text, comics can motivate even the most reluctant of readers, encouraging them to participate and express themselves in ways that text alone might not.

WAIT A SEC! DON’T ALL SUPERHEROES HAVE A WEAKNESS?

I’m afraid it’s true, comics can’t be used for everything. There are certain situations where it might not be efficient to use a comic. While the military has found use for comics in many subject areas, such as operating a rifle, other areas of expertise are not as suitable. For example, a comic would not be as useful in a time-sensitive situation, such as disarming a bomb – in this case, a quick reference technical manual would be preferable.

MEANWHILE, IN AN ENGLISH CLASS AT VIRGINIA TECH...

A comic is born as part a Writing and Digital Media class project...

This isn’t really the actual comic, but we’ll give you some insight into how it worked.

REACH OUT

1st DEGREE

All the characters we met were so interesting!

SIX DEGREES OF SEPARATION

That’s right! Comics help make sense of things and Mr. Loose took one for the team!

My hero, Kevin Bacon, is the person I wanted to be introduced to.

YOU WERE A LITTLE TOO INTERESTING FOR ME, BUT IT WAS ALL IN GOOD FUN. YOU MADE THE DEGREES MEMORABLE!

You are a lawyer, and we served as introductions, or “degrees” in this case.

1st Degree

Everybody can relate to wanting to meet their hero and we served as the perfect example to engage them!

2nd Degree

I knew this concept sounded familiar, it all makes so much sense!

3rd Degree

This comic should’ve been called “Six Degrees of Kevin Bacon!”

4th Degree

That’s right! Comics help make sense of things and Mr. Loose took one for the team!

5th Degree

I knew this concept sounded interesting, it all makes so much sense!

6th Degree

He used real pepper spray...

WORKS CONSULTED

“See What I mean” by Kevin Chung
“Stand Up For Comics” by Ulltán O’Brien
“Comics for Consumer Communication” by Rahel Anne Bailie
“Comic Life in Education” by Glen Bledsoe
“The Comic as a Technical Communication Tool” by Eagranie Yuh
“Structured Authoring Meets Technical Comics in TechCommix” By Carlos Evia, Michael Stewart, Tim Lockridge, Siroberto Scerbo, and Manuel Perez-Quinones

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“Creative Tools for Teaching COMIC COMM”