

FEATURE

Toolkit for The Social Justice League

Graphic novels and comics are a great way for students to express themselves and their social views. Help your students plan and create their own social justice comics!

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As the article “The Social Justice League” shows, graphic novels and comic strips can be important tools for justice and diversity. Their popularity among students of all ages goes without saying. This toolkit guides you through a process of helping your students create their own justice-oriented comic strips, which you will compile into a class comic book for social justice.

Essential Questions

1. How are graphic novels and comics created?
2. How can graphic novels and comics promote social justice?
3. What social justice issues would you like to convey in a comic strip?

Procedure

1. Ask your students to talk about whether they generally enjoy reading graphic novels and comic strips—and to explain why or why not. Engage students with the idea that some people see graphic novels and comics as an effective way to defend what is fair or right in the world, to speak out against stereotypes or to teach important historical lessons. Ask students for their ideas on how visual images and texts can work together to communicate messages about social justice and history. What do graphic novels or comic strips have to offer that other mediums may not—or at least, not to a similar extent?

2. Tell students that they will be creating their own comic strips. (Note: Having student create graphic novels is another option, but would be a more time-consuming endeavor.) Then, ask them to respond to the three questions listed below in a writer’s notebook.

- What social justice issue—dealing with (in)justice or (in)equality—would I like to address in my comic?
- What plotline and kinds of characters will I feature in my comic?
- What personal experiences could I draw from to create my comic?

Give students a chance to share these ideas with a classmate, and receive suggestions and input before they get started.

3. Ask students to create an outline or sketch of what their comic will look like.

Remind students about the variety found within this genre. For example, they may choose to create a traditional linear storyboard or one large panel. Some examples can be found at printablepaper.net/category/comics. The student's objective is to effectively communicate a story on his or her chosen social justice issue or about a personal experience that touches on (in)justice or (in)equality.

4. Once students have created their outlines, provide them with paper to create drafts of their pictures and text. Encourage them to work in pencil so that they can erase or edit any sections. Tell students they can go over their work with more permanent ink at a later stage—when their work nears completion. If you have the appropriate software, students can also work digitally. However, this work is equally valuable when done by hand.

5. Have students revise, edit and then publish their work. Some may choose to add color, while others may opt to stick with black and white. After publication, instruct students to describe the social issue they address in their comic. Specifically, have them respond to the following questions:

- What social justice issue do you hope people will think about after reading your comic? or
- What do you hope people will gain from reading your personal story about (in)justice or (in)equality?
- How might readers react to your comic? Why?
- Do you think your comic will inspire activism and action?

6. Compile students' work into a class comic book for social justice, and send copies of the book home with each student. Be sure to give students a chance to read and comment on each other's work. Ask them to respond to these questions:

- What personal experiences or social justice issues did your classmates' comics help you think about that you had not thought about before?
- Now that you have read your classmates' comics, what action-based steps might you take in your community to tackle these issues?
- How do comics make you think about (in)justice or (in)equality differently than when you read about them in a textbook, novel or newspaper?