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SHAZAM! Exploring Superhero Comics to Study Character Origin and Creative Writing

Introduction

When we look at the word "superhero" our minds go to supernatural powers and larger-than-life characters. We instantly think of Superman, Batman, or Spider-Man, to name a few. These are characters that are universally known by young and old, foreign and domestic. Hollywood has recently had an influx of films based on comic book heroes. These movies are generating millions in revenue both domestically and in the foreign markets. Is it because these heroes are characters we can look up to? Is it because we have a need to see the good guys prevail over evil? Or is it simply that Hollywood has become unimaginative and therefore continues to recycle the same stories that have been told for years? Whatever the reason may be, the comic book superhero is someone that we are all familiar with. It is this notion that I would like to explore in this curriculum unit.

Looking at comic book superheroes is an especially current topic now with so many comics becoming big budget movies. Of course characters such as Batman, Spiderman and Superman have, for years, been an attraction to the movie producers and movie-goers. Recently other comic superheroes have taken to the big screen. Characters such as Iron Man, Wolverine, and Incredible Hulk have gained wide popularity with movie audiences. Why are we so attracted to these comic book superheroes? It is fair to say that most superheroes are continually reinvented for new generations. Most of these characters live a double life by having an average human existence and then a separate life where they fight crime with their superhuman powers. It is always embedded in the plot that the character must remain unknown to the human world. The threat of being revealed to the public is always lingering. Recently, however, a movie called *Hancock* was released and in this story the superhero did not have a double life. Everyone in the city knew who Hancock was because he didn't change clothes to fight battles or wear a disguise to keep himself hidden. The idea of the superhero as being out in the open is something we have not experienced much before, especially if you consider the big three: Batman, Spider-Man and Superman. It leaves the fans to wonder if this might be a new trend in developing superheroes.

This unit is designed for an eighth grade language arts classroom. However, the content and strategies included can certainly be used for a variety of grade levels as the concepts of character development, origin stories and creative writing are prevalent in most language arts classrooms in some form or another. Although

this unit is designed to work within the reading/writing workshop format, it certainly can be tailored for standard instruction classrooms as well.

Movies

The inspiration of this unit comes from the influence that in recent years there has been a flood of Hollywood movies that are based on comic book superheroes. There have been big budget movies dating back to 1978's *Superman- The Movie* starring Christopher Reeve. In the early and mid 90's the *Batman* movies began to emerge, which were also huge hits. There have been gaps between these movies until recently. From 2006 to 2008 there were no fewer than seven big budget movies that were live action accounts of classic comic book superheroes. A brief list of these movies includes: *X-Men 3: The Last Stand* (2006), *Spider-Man 3* (2007), *Fantastic Four: Rise of the Silver Surfer* (2007), *X-Men Origins: Wolverine* (2008), *Incredible Hulk* (2008), *Iron Man* (2008), and *The Dark Knight* (2008). Young kids of today are very versed in the idea and story of these superheroes, thanks to the blockbuster movies. Using these characters and subsequently the comics that originated them should be an easy transition for students. It is always easier to start with something familiar in order to launch into something more complex. In addition, there are many superhero movies slated for production in coming years, so this phenomenon does not seem to be ending any time soon. Upon looking at movies for production for Paramount Pictures the following titles are in the works: *Nick Fury* (2010), *Ant Man* (2010), *Iron Man 2* (2010), *Thor* (2011), *The First Avenger: Captain America* (2011), *Doctor Strange* (2012), and *The Avengers* (2012).

Objectives

Why are superheroes so popular and so widely familiar? Fingeroth states, "A hero embodies what we believe is best in ourselves. A hero is a standard to aspire to as well as an individual to be admired."[1] One thing about superhero characters is that they are well written and have qualities that seem universal. By well written I am referring to the notion that these characters are relatable and likeable and therefore we continue to show interest in their activities. Therefore readers can relate to their characteristics and their thought process. By studying a variety of superhero characters, students can see what qualities a well written character has and therefore be able to identify other well written characters in all types of stories as well as incorporate these traits in their own writing.

Creative writing is an important skill for all students. One way to enhance creative writing is to write from an image. One activity for this unit is for students to use a frame from a comic book, with the dialogue removed and write a brief story of what happened just before, during, and just after the frame. If the students know who the character is, they may incorporate traits that are known, however if the student does not know the character, they can simply create a persona for him or her.

Origin stories are an important part of character development. This is true of superheroes but also true of any character in literature. The beginning of the character is crucial in understanding how he or she thinks and behaves in subsequent situations. A big part of superhero comics is the origin story. Students will study origin

stories of various superheroes and learn how a story is told from the beginning of a character's development. Sometimes the origin story is told after several issues have been released. There is something interesting about learning the background of a character after you have been introduced to them and have begun following their lives.

After students have identified common motifs of superhero origin stories and studied a variety of heroes, they are ready to create their own superhero or supervillain. The value of this activity is to once again use creative writing as a means of storytelling. In addition, it allows students to work collaboratively by teaming an artist with a writer, just the same way that actual comics are written. Students will have free reign in creating a new superhero or supervillain as long as they utilize the knowledge of the common motifs and standards that accompany the common superhero, as studied in this unit.

Strategies

One way to start the unit is to engage in conversations on what defines a superhero. Fingeroth points out that a superhero has strength of character, a system of values, and determination. He also points out that these are characteristics of a supervillain.[2] We will discuss supervillains later in the unit. It is important that students define the word themselves in order to be able to distinguish the meaning. Perhaps each student might come to a conclusion that a superhero is subjective and therefore can take shape in a variety of ways depending on the person making the decision. However, it is important to find the commonalities within the discussion so there is a framework from which students can work.

After a discussion of a framework for a superhero, then students can discuss what they know about superheroes both from comics and from movies. Discuss with students what traits certain superheroes have and how to they use their superhuman powers. Discussion should also lead to supervillains, which are essential to the superhero comic story. Without the supervillain, many of the stories would not exist and interestingly, we wouldn't get to see the superhero exhibit his or her supreme power. From this discussion on superheroes students should understand the vast appeal these characters have for many types of people. Implement to students that these superheroes have well developed characters that are in some regards believable to the common audience and that is why they continue to be popular. A poorly written and developed character will not last and readers will not embrace them.

As an indispensable element in studying this unit, students will need to know how to read a comic book. Instructing students on how to read a comic is important because the images play such an important role in the story, a reader cannot look at just the words. The rules are essentially the same as reading a novel whereby the reader goes from left to right and top to bottom. However, there is the issue of different frame sizes and how to follow the story if one frame takes the space of two regular sized frames. Demonstrate with actual comic books how to sequentially read a comic and show some examples where the frame sizes differ on the page. In addition, the discussion of reading the dialogue before or after looking at the picture should be addressed. In essence it is probably an individual preference but it should be pointed out to students that both ways need to be explored. For some students the above information will be common knowledge, but for others this may be new information that they perhaps would have been too shy to inquire about before or simply had not come across previously. After the lesson on sequentially reading the comic book, students should be ready to engage in a sequencing activity. Provide for students comic strips that have been cut into

frames. For an extra challenge for gifted students, remove the dialogue and all words. One page of frames is all that is minimally necessary. Ask students to study each frame and decide what the action and storyline is. Students should then reconstruct the comic in a logical order and explain what is happening. For the gifted students, they should write any words or dialogue that is missing.

One way to enhance creative writing in students is through the image. Through studying comics and images students begin to see that there is a story being told both through the words and also through the images. In the professional world of comics there is one person who creates and writes the comic story. Once that story has been created the writer seeks out an illustrator. That illustrator reads the story and designs pictures based on the essence of the story. The writer and illustrator collaborate together to create the final comic book. (Also, many times there is a colorist and a letterer, but we won't get that detailed here.) The students will do something similar, but in a different order. Students will be provided with frames from comics, preferably one in which there is dialogue and action. The teacher will provide these images with the dialogue removed. Students will write a short story telling the events that happened just before, during, and just after the image. The students should be given free choice to work independently or with a partner. They should also be given more than once choice of image from which to choose. The goal of this activity is to allow students to think creatively in writing a story. Students will need to follow the images as a guide to creating the story. If the students know the characters in the image they can certainly use that information in the story and logically guide the narration with including the superpowers and abilities of the character. However, some students may not know the character in the image, and that is fine as well. They can create the name and powers of the character based on what they see and what they imagine is happening.

Origin stories are fundamental to the character development and progression of a story. It is during this study of origins of superheroes that an understanding of motifs and standards can be had. Refer to the section below titled *Superhero Motifs* for a further explanation. Reading superhero origin stories is almost a right of passage to comic book enthusiasts. It is so crucial to the storyline that skipping it or not knowing it can cause disruption in the enjoyment of the comic. In studying origin stories from various superheroes such as Superman, Batman and Spider-Man, one can begin to realize that not only are there similarities among all of them, but that the characters they embody are ones that we tend to admire and strive to replicate. In looking at other literary stories, we see that the origin of the character has everything to do with the choices he or she makes in subsequent stories. It also gives us a foundation of knowledge about him or her and thus we, as readers, can follow along the journey of the character's life and have a sense of what the outcome should be.

Origin stories are a key factor in studying superheroes; however there are differences that arise when you study the comic book and the theatrical movie. Many of the big screen movies that have been released in the recent years tell the origin story of the character. This is, no doubt, to catch up the audience on who the character is just in case you didn't read the comic books. Because a good portion of the movie is usually dedicated to the origin story, it is not surprising that it tends to be more detailed than most comic books are. With this adjustment, come story changes.

One example in particular is *Superman*. For instance, the comic book origin story of *Superman* as told by Jerry Siegel and Joe Shuster has slight differences from the origin story included in the movie released in 1978 and directed by Richard Donner. The examples are taken from *The Dailies: Volume 1* found on the DC Comics website. The comic, released in 1938, indicates that Jor-El is building a model space flier and is only able to complete that, which holds a single person, before Krypton begins to be destroyed.[3] In *Superman - The Movie,* no mention is given to the building of the ship; we are shown that it is built to fit Kal-L only.[4] The comic strip shows the ship as resembling a rocket[5] ; the movie shows the ship as being made of a special crystal

resembling a multi-pointed star.[6] In the comic strip Kal-L arrives on Earth as an infant.[7] In the movie Kal-L arrives as a toddler, having aged as he passed through the galaxies.[8] These are very specific differences between the two versions and it will be good to show the strip to the students before watching a clip of the movie. Discuss with students the relevance of the changes and whether or not they change the actual storyline. In addition, discuss reasons why the movie producer might decide to incorporate the changes and what benefit he or she might anticipate. Asking students to compare origin stories such as Superman by using different forms of media can incite critical thinking skills but can also lead to a discussion of pros and cons. Is one story better than the other and are certain elements necessary to include, no matter the media form?

Another example is *Iron Man*. Some of the changes in the *Iron Man* story arise from the difference in the time period when the comic was released compared to the movie. In the comic, released in 1963, the war setting is Vietnam while the war setting of the movie, released in 2008, is Afghanistan[9] . Because of the difference in setting, the characters are also changed slightly. In the comic, the main enemy who is forcing Tony to make weapons is Wong Chu who is clearly Vietnamese. In the movie, the two differences are that there are actually two main "bad guys" but their names aren't given clearly in the storyline. In addition, these two men are Middle Eastern, perhaps Afghan. Continuing with these character differences is the man who helps Tony build his iron suit while in the cave. In the comic Yinsen is of Asian decent while in the movie he is of Middle Eastern decent[10] . In the comic, both Yinsen and Stark collaborate to build the transistor plate to keep Tony's heart beating. In the movie, Yinsen does this by himself. Later Tony builds a better one that does not have to be attached to a car battery. Other aspects of the origin story remain similar.

Now that students have studied superheroes and specifically looked into origin stories, it will be time for students to once again use their creative writing skills to create an original superhero or supervillain. Again, students can pair up with a classmate, especially if there are distinct talents within the group. As mentioned earlier, each comic that is published is collaboration between a writer and an illustrator. It is very rare that the two are one in the same. Because of this, students should be able to collaborate in the same style in order to create their superhero or supervillain. The motifs are mentioned below and students should recognize and appreciate that there are some standards when it comes to creating a comic book superhero. Adhering to those standards will really be the only guideline in this creative project. The main focus should be the creation of an origin story for their superhero or supervillain. If desired, the student may wish to create a first issue as well providing a structured storyline beyond the origin story.

Superhero Motifs

According to Reynolds[11] there are several motifs that create the story of Superman. Looking at these attributes we can see that they certainly hold true and could be considered pertinent to the superhero story in general. The first is lost parents or at least a disconnection and strained relationship with parents. This can also go into the notion of the "orphan." Several superheroes are considered orphans when we first meet them and thus their struggle is acted out in the services and choices they make. We see that Superman was found as an orphan baby on the streets after being launched in a rocket from Krypton, his home planet that was being destroyed. Spiderman also was a baby orphan after his parents were killed in an airplane crash, thus leaving him to be raised by his Aunt May and Uncle Ben. As a young child Batman witnessed the murder of his parents which subsequently led him to fight crime in his city. The list of superheroes separated from their

parents continues, giving us reason to believe that this is a storyline requirement for most superheroes.

A second motif is upholding justice. Most superheroes are intent on fighting crime and bringing the lawbreaker or sinner to justice. However, many times the superheroes themselves do not carry out the punishment but leave the final decision to the authorities.

Many superheroes are transformed from their human selves to their superhuman selves when danger is imminent. The sense of danger spurs their inner self to emerge. Sometimes they must excuse themselves from the company they are with in order for their identity to remain secret. We see this in Superman while he is with Lois Lane, over and over again. It is this innate desire to fight crime that makes superheroes transform themselves in unexpected situations.

The double identity of superheroes is the most common characteristic. In order to maintain balance there must be a distance between the superhero self and the human self. It is a recurring theme that the superheroes must continually keep their identity hidden. There have been many times when they have been close to having their identity revealed, but of course it continues to remain a secret. One reason to keep the superhero identity hidden is to protect their loved ones. Enemies would love to find out the double life of the superhero so they could use family and friends as bargaining tools and victims of torture. The consideration also has to be made about which of the persona's is the true person. For example, Superman is the real persona while Clark Kent is the fake persona. The opposite is true for Spiderman and Peter Parker. In studying these superheroes it is wise to note who the "real" persona is and how that affects the everyday life of the superhero.

"Superpowers versus politics" is the balance between what is morally right versus what is legally right. Many superheroes will break the law during the course of catching the bad guy if they feel that the bad guy is a greater danger to the public than is the law being broken by the superhero. The reality is that most superheroes are far stronger and greater than the police force or military force that may be present. They are constantly making choices between legal and moral issues.

In the beginning most superheroes' creation had a direct link to science. The superpowers that many embody could be traced back to a scientific explanation. This is true of Spider-Man's spider qualities after being bit by a radioactive spider. The same holds true for Iron Man who invented his iron suit as a way to keep himself from dying from the shrapnel that was near his heart. Superman's ability to leap and carry heavy weight is directly related to the abilities of a grasshopper and ant respectively. As the superhero and subsequently the supervillain evolved, less attention was paid to the thought of relating powers to direct scientific explanations. The characters of X-Men are simply mutants who are born with an extra power that they must learn to harness. No true scientific explanation is given, it is just stated as being fact; they are mutants. In all of the above regards, the science that has given the powers can be used for good or evil, which creates the anti-superhero, the supervillain.

Continuity

An important feature of the superhero comic is continuity. The storyline, action and structure of the series must follow some type of pattern and realistic plotline. According to Reynolds[12] there are three areas for which continuity must remain intact.

The first is serial continuity. As a story progresses from book to book and series to series, there must remain a sense of continuity in storyline to previous issues. In other words, an action that happens in issue 4 must be adhered to and acknowledged in issue 18. You cannot treat the issues as independent stories, but rather a series of continuous action that builds upon itself. Perhaps this is what keeps comic book readers coming back. The idea of something concrete and continuous helps the reader feel as though the story is realistic and follows true-life sequence. The same must be said of movie series. More and more as the movies are coming out with part two and part three, the storyline must build upon itself and not be unrealistic in the series of events that occur from one movie to the next.

Hierarchical continuity is important when comics deal with a large number of characters, both heroes and villains. There is a pecking order of strength and ability within the supers and that order must be adhered to throughout the series, even the cross-over series in which two unlikely heroes or villains meet. It is the basic math problem in which character A defeats character B, character B defeats character C, therefore if character A and C were to meet, logically character A would prevail.

Structural continuity is the concept that the developing story should be realistic within a normal course of events. Family structure, once introduced must not change, just as human family trees and structures do not change. When names and relationships are introduced, they cannot be changed in a subsequent issue for this would not follow the natural order of things. In addition, the concept of aging of characters must be realized and followed, if in fact it is introduced. To follow the structural continuity in *Batman*, once he retired and aged to approximately fifty, the writers must acknowledge this structure, and therefore brought him back as *The Dark Knight* in which much of his storyline revolved around his age and his fatigue for having been out of the picture for so long. Writers then decided they wanted to tell the story of *Batman* between his time of *Batman* and *Dark Knight*. This transition story came to be the animated feature film *Batman Gotham Knight*. If a comic writer decides to kill a super then the only way he or she can come back is to market the story as a flashback or a transition story.

Origins

Superheroes

"The superhero has a mission to preserve society, not to re-invent it."[13] The origin story of each superhero is vital to the overall story. The beginning explains how the superhero came about, how the powers were acquired, who the alter-ego is, and what the purpose or mission of the character may be. Knowing the origin story helps the reader understand the actions that take place and the reason behind certain decisions. Students who are seriously into comic books will likely know most origin stories of their favorite superhero.

However, it is likely that many students may be familiar with a superhero or supervillain character, but not actually know the origin story. In order for students to create their own superhero or supervillain story, they must understand how the concept of the origin story is written. Some of the more well-known origin stories are included below.

In considering origin stories, the detail of costumes should be noted. There is a history with most superhero costumes that relates back to their origins. Superman's costume and cape are woven from the blanket he was swaddled in from his journey from Krypton. Iron Man's chest plate was used for aiding his damaged heart and the rest of his iron suit was an extension of that. Spiderman's costume has a direct resemblance to the spider qualities which he posses. Wonder Woman's costume is decorated with colors and stars representing her Amazon heritage. As students begin to study and understand superhero costumes they will be able to incorporate similar history into the costume of their original superhero or supervillain.

Batman - The world's greatest detective

Batman first appeared in *Detective Comics #27* in 1939. However, his origin story is told much later in *The Origin of Batman,* 1948. Bruce Wayne was a young boy when he witnessed the murder of his parents by a street thug. Although the Wayne family was very rich, money could not replace the loss that Bruce felt from being an orphan. Bruce Wayne vowed to wage a war on crime and clean up Gotham City. He spent most of his time training for combat and developing gadgets that would help him become a great crime fighter. This motivation is also an explanation for his unending anger and his ultimate disguise as Batman, someone who wreaks fear in others. Because of the brutal murder of his parents, Batman considers firearms "the coward's weapon".[14] However, this does not mean he does not favor other weapons and means of attack. He is a genius in creating gadgets for his suit and his car. This is ultimately how he succeeds over his opponents, along with his incredible intelligence and detective skills. A key to *Batman* comics are the enemies. Many speak in riddles which are a way to continue the circus that surrounds Batman's existence. Instead of one enemy he has a line-up of recurring enemies such as The Joker, The Riddler, The Penguin, Two-Face, The Scarecrow, and many more.

> One of the true icons of comic book culture is Batman, a superhero without super powers. The scourge of the underworld, Batman is a spectacular crime fighter with a dazzling array of weapons and gadgets. Unlike most comic book heroes who are gifted with extraordinary powers, Batman is an ordinary man who develops his skills through training and hard work. A master detective, Batman is one of the few superheroes who outthinks as well as outfights his opponents.[15]

Iron Man - I am Iron Man

Iron man was first released in 1963 in an issue titled *Tales of Suspense #39*. Tony Stark is a millionaire physicist who created micro-transistors during the time of the Vietnam War. While on a journey to check on one of his plants in Vietnam he is assaulted with shrapnel that enters close to his heart. He is captured by Wong Chu and forced to make weapons. However, Tony has a different plan. Along with the help of fellow captured scientist, Professor Yinsen, the two create a transistor plate to cover his heart and keep it beating. Together, the two scientist work tirelessly to create such a device that will keep Tony alive. In addition to creating the heart device, they also create an entire iron suit which contains some helpful features such as suction cups, magnetic turbo insulator, and buzz saw, to name a few. They succeed in the nick of time and Tony is able to escape the prison created by Wong Chu. Iron Man's story begins and thus he continues to

strive to undo the damage that was caused by his inventions when they are placed in the wrong hands. Although Iron Man does not have actual powers, he does have gadgets. His suit is equipped with various weapons in order to fight off the bad guys. It is Tony's intelligence that has created this suit and these weapons, and therefore *intelligence* is Iron Man's superpower.

Spider-Man - With great power comes great responsibility

Peter Parker is a highly intelligent, if awkwardly social, high school student. Spider-Man's powers came about because of an accident. Although Spider-Man has numerous powers and can think quickly when danger ensues, Peter Parker would be considered the opposite personality.

> Attending a public science exhibit when Peter was 15-years old, he was bitten on the hand by a radioactive spider accidentally irradiated by a particle beam, empowering Peter with the arachnid's proportional strength and agility, and the ability to cling to almost any surface. Most incredibly, he had gained a sixth sense that provided him with early warning of impending danger.[16]

Superman - It's a bird, it's a plane...

The planet Krypton is being destroyed by volcanic eruptions. Jor-El has tried to warn the council but they do not believe him because of lack of proof. Jor-El decides to make a space flier to save himself and his family. Unfortunately the eruption arrives sooner than expected and Jor-El has only made a small version of the space flier, one that ultimately will only hold one person. Jor-El and his wife, Lora, decide they will place their infant son Kal-L into the flier and send him to Earth. Kal-L arrives on Earth and is found by a stranger who takes him to an orphanage. It is here that the workers realize what great strength, agility and speed the young infant has. Clark Kent, as he was to be called, grew into maturity and became keenly aware of his abilities and decided "he must turn his titanic strength into channels that would benefit mankind."[17] Superman's powers include the ability to fly, laser beam eyes, superhuman strength, and an uncanny ability to leap over buildings.

Wonder Woman

On the remote island of Themyscira, peace and serenity is practiced and the teachings of Gaea are upheld. Queen Hippolyta desires to have a daughter and that desire is granted by the Grecian Gods. They instruct her to mold the child from clay. The child is granted life and the powers and abilities known to the Gods. Her name was Princess Diana. As she matured and grew, her powers were realized. These included strength, speed, and human prowess. She was appointed to spread the message of Gaea to the outside world. With this, she donned a uniform "decorated with symbols representing a legendary Amazon heroine,"[18] complete with a lasso that forces people to tell the truth, a boomerang tiara that can cut through diamonds, and wrist bands that can deflect bullets.

X-Men

X-men, first released in 1963, was the first of its kind. Stan Lee had begun to realize that all of his previous superheroes had come from an incident where a human was exposed to some form of radiation: gamma-rays (Hulk), bitten by a radioactive spider (Spider-Man), or exposure to cosmic rays (Fantastic Four). He decided he wanted to create a new type of superhero that was completely different than anything previously released. Thus came the X-Men. They are simply explained as mutants who each have a special power. They are born to normal parents and live a normal childhood. Once the child reaches puberty the mutant powers begin to

manifest themselves. Professor Xavier sees the potential in all these mutants and wants to train them to be powerful fighters who defend the planet from evil mutants. He carefully selects students to attend his school where he trains them to harness their power and control it in very specific ways, especially ways in battle. The audience accepts the X-Men because they are half mutant, half human. Therefore, much like the superheroes mentioned above, we have a relatable element with them. And of course, their goal is to save the Earth from the control of the evil mutants, and we continually cheer for them to be successful. Plus, it is fun to watch them work together, each using his or her own special skill in combination with the others. What else is interesting about the X-Men is the seemingly endless line-up of characters. There certainly is no shortage of *X-Men* characters and this certainly has an advantage in keeping the readers entertained with continuous new story lines. Although today's roster of *X-Men* is quite baffling, there were originally five members of this team. In the original issue, Professor Xavier had recruited five teenagers into his school for the gifted. These original X-Men were Cyclops (Scott Summers) who's eyes have the power to project a radiant beam that is destructive, Iceman (Bobby Drake) who can use the moisture in the air to instantly form ice, Angel (Warren Worthington, III) who has fully feathered wings that allow him to fly and reach great speeds, Beast (Hank McCoy) who has superhuman strength and agility, and Marvel Girl (Jean Grey) who has telepathic powers that can read minds and telekinesis powers that allow her to move objects. One final note, in the movie *X-Men* (released in 2000) there is a segment that thoroughly explains all the powers of each mutant beyond the original five. It could be a beneficial clip for your classroom to engage the students not only in superheroes, but also in the origin and explanation. This is time clip 7:40 - 11:40.

Supervillains

"The common outcome, as far as the structure of the plot is concerned, is that villains are concerned with change and the heroes with the maintenance of the status quo."[19] Supervillains are just as important to the comic book story as our beloved heroes. What would Superman be without Lex Luthor, Spider-Man without Green Goblin or Batman without The Joker? The supervillain, like him or not, helps us see our superhero in a different perspective. If the superhero never battled the bad guy how would we know the powers he or she had and how would we be sure that he or she was actually fighting for good? The supervillain's role is to provide the reader or the audience with someone to hate and gives us all the more reason to cheer on our hero. However, it could be said that there are fans out there that like and even prefer the supervillain. Perhaps this character does things that we would only think of but not actually act on. It forces us to admit that deep down there is probably a part of all of us that is sinister, though we would never admit it openly. So the supervillain allows us to secretly live vicariously through the bad guy, all the while rooting for the good guy. It's a very delicate balance and without these supervillains our comic world would be unstable and admittedly boring. This brings to mind the notion of tall tale heroes such as Paul Bunyan and Pecos Bill. These larger-than-life characters are just as superhuman as the heroes discussed above. Why, then, are there not comic books, big budget movies, and marketing ploys in support of these heroes? I'm sure many answers could be had for this question, but I think the one answer that is most relevant is that Paul Bunyan and Pecos Bill had no enemies. There were no super forces of evil to stand in their way and cause trouble. There is no action without the villain and where there's no action, there's no continuing story. A final note about supervillains - it is not uncommon for the supervillain to have once been associated and even friends with the superhero. A couple of examples are Lex Luthor and Clark Kent, Harry Osborn and Peter Parker, even Magneto and Professor Xavier were once associates. It leads us to wonder how two people who seemingly have a common interest can part ways and eventually become enemies. I guess all is fair is friendship and comics.

Doctor Doom - Fantastic Four

Victor Von Doom was raised by a father who was a Gypsy healer. When his father, Werner Von Doom, was taken to the Baron's wife to heal her, he is given an ultimatum that he must heal her or die. He tries his best, but she is past the point of any healing he may be able to do. As a result he must flee the village with his young son, Victor. Father and son are soon rescued by their good friend Boris. Unfortunately Werner has suffered great fatigue and bitter cold trying to keep his son alive. As a result, he dies. This was the beginning of Victor's plot of revenge on society. Having a Gypsy father and learning of his sorceress mother's abilities, Victor begins to travel the countryside tricking people into buying items from him that have magical wares, that soon fade away, leaving the customers angry. Soon Victor is pursued by law enforcement but manages to use magic to escape. Victor continues to hone his skills as a scientist. He is recruited to University where be becomes even more of a "mad scientist." This is where he first meets Reed Richards (later to become Mister Fantastic). Victor secludes himself in a private room where he continues to mix potions and conduct experiments. One of his experiments goes awry and blows up his dorm room; he is grossly disfigured and expelled from school. Victor finds solace in the remote vastness of Tibet. There he finds an order of monks who take him in. It is there that he learns the monks' ancient secrets and soon begins constructing his suit of armor. Once the suit is complete and is fitted to him, he declares himself Doctor Doom. His powers include the ability to change minds with others as well as mystical abilities. Mostly he is a genius in many scientific fields.

Green Goblin - Spider-Man

> Gobby is truly the only supervillain who is also a good guy when he's not breaking up Spidey's act. He's also the only supervillain who sometimes doesn't even know who he is in his other identity. And he is for sure the only supervillain who also happens to be the doting father of our hero's best friend. If that doesn't qualify him for a permanent place in The Bad Guys' Hall of Fame, then try this on for size: he's certainly the only comicbook menace to finally reach that old rascals' resting place in the sky and then be replaced by his closest living relative back here on earth![20]

Norman Osborn is the father of Harry Osborn, Peter Parker's best friend. Osborn was a ruthless business man who stole his partner's formulas. When he attempted to mix them, an explosion happened. This explosion caused him to have an altered brain, a brain that was more brilliant than anyone could imagine. With this brilliancy came greed. He set out to become "the greatest costumed criminal of all time."[21] He designed the costume out of his favorite color. Once the costume was complete he had a sole focus to make his first mission to kill Spider-Man. Because of the formula, Norman attained the ability of super-human strength, incredible speed, and ability to heal.

The Joker - Batman

> The Joker has no special powers, but his unique psychoses make him the most dangerous killer in the world. His chief weapon is Joker Venom, a fatal toxin that kills its victims on contact - but not before sending them into fits of sick laughter and locking their faces into a smiling death rictus.[22]

The Joker's appearance is a result of falling into a vat of chemical waste. This chemical caused his hair to turn green, his face to turn white and his lips to turn red, thus giving him the appearance of a clown. In addition, he now has a permanent smile across his cheeks. It is unclear exactly what caused him to fall into this vat, as there are conflicting stories. However it is assumed that he fell while being chased by Batman. Therefore The Joker now has his eyes set on destroying the peace of Gotham City that Batman loves so much.

Lex Luthor - Superman

Lex Luthor is best known for his intelligence and businesslike sense. Luthor grew up in Smallville, Kansas along with Clark Kent. He was somewhat of a loner and did not socialize much with his classmates. "Luthor is indeed the villain of all comic book supervillains; he is the ultimate mad scientist."[23] In *Adventure Comics #271* Luthor's story is told. Once day after saving Superboy from a kryptonite meteor that crashed, Luthor takes Superboy to his barn and shows him all the collectibles he has saved in his shrine to Superboy. Once Superboy sees Luthor's scientific laboratory he decides to thank him for saving his life by building him an even greater laboratory out of junk. Luthor begins using his laboratory to create an antidote for kryptonite. As fate would have it, Luthor spills the formula and causes a huge eruption. As Superboy comes to expel the flames he realizes that Lex Luthor's appearance has drastically changed. The once curly haired red-head is now bald and insane, though he has kept his scientific genius. At this point Luthor decides to kill Superboy, albeit a failed attempt. And thus begins the peril of the endless battle of Superman and Lex Luthor. Although Luthor does not have superpowers he does have incredible intelligence that allows him to build and create many chemicals that can potentially harm Superman.

Magneto - X-Men

We are introduced to Magneto in the very first issue of *X-Men #1* which appeared in 1963. Magneto, like the other mutants, was born with his powers. He has the ability to control metal with his supernatural force of magnetism. He was once associated with Professor Xavier but parted ways when the two realized they had different agendas for use of their mutant powers. Magneto thinks that mutants are superior to humans and therefore they should rule the world with unstoppable force.

> Magneto has mastered many technological fields, and is an expert on genetic manipulation and engineering, with knowledge far beyond that of contemporary science. He is considered to be a genius in these fields. He can mutate humans in order to give them superhuman powers, or create adult clones of human beings and then manipulate the genetic structures of these clones during their development.[24]

Conclusion

Comic books are a part of pop culture. Superhero comic books are simply a part of culture. Our culture is intrigued by superheroes and it is almost as if we are born knowing who they are and what they do. This knowledge and familiarity is something that can be brought into the classroom. Using superheroes to learn character traits, origin stories and creative writing is a natural fit. I do hope you find this unit as exciting and interesting to teach as I found researching it. In reflecting on the title, I felt this would be an opportune time to explain the acronym for SHAZAM. When Billy Batson changes into Captain Marvel he yells SHAZAM! The origin of this word can be found in Greek and Roman mythology and the gods that inspired the writers of Captain Marvel. The acronym is based on the letters of Solomon (for wisdom), Hercules (for strength), Atlas (for stamina), Zeus (for power), Achilles (for courage) and Mercury (for quickness)[25] There are many secrets among the world of superheroes, what discovery will you find upon reading the comics of your students?

Classroom Activities

Note: The following lessons are planned on a schedule of meeting students every other day for 90 minutes. 45 minutes is dedicated to each subject of reading and writing. An approximate breakdown of the 45 minutes would be: 15 minute mini-lesson, 25 minute independent work time with conferences, and 5 minutes of closure and sharing. Independent work time should be filled with the activity and any remaining time should be used by students for silent reading or journal writing. Students should have two notebooks. The literacy notebook is where students will take lesson notes, keep dialectic notes from the novels they read and maintain the reading journal. The writer's notebook is used for creative writing, free writing ideas and journals.

Lesson 1: Introduction to superheroes and comic books

Objective: Students will define the meaning of "superhero" through class discussion and independent reflection.

Estimated Time: 1 lesson

Materials: literacy notebook

Activity: Teacher will engage the students in discussion on the meaning of the word superhero. This word will be discussed in all forms, and points will be made on what traits or characteristics many superheroes have. During independent work, students will write a definition of what they think superhero means after reflecting on the discussion.

Assessment/Closure: Students may share their definition of superhero with a partner.

Lesson 2: Superhero and supervillain as sustainable characters; Superhero motifs

Objective: Students will learn to recognize motifs that are common to superhero characters and will understand the progression of character development.

Estimated Time: 2 lessons

Materials: notes with superhero motifs discussed earlier, literacy notebook

Activity: Students will engage in a class discussion regarding motifs that make a common superhero. Notes will be provided for students to copy or paste in the notebook.

Assessment/Closure: Provide opportunity for students to ask questions.

Lesson 3: Reading a comic book; Sequencing frames

Objective: Students will understand the strategies used to read a comic book and will sequence frames from a story that has been rearranged.

Estimated Time: 1 lesson

Materials: literacy notebook, pages from various comic book stories that have been cut out and rearranged

Activity: Teacher will show students a comic book page and ask them study it. A discussion will be had of how to read the page pointing to the strategies of reading left to right, top to bottom. A point will be made to show students what to do when the frames are different sizes and therefore aren't exactly in a row. After students have studied the frames and the strategy for reading a comic book page, students will be given their own page from a comic. These frames should be cut out so students will have the opportunity to arrange the frames in a sequence that makes sense to a story. Also, an option for advanced students is to remove all text from the frames to make it more challenging and ask students to arrange the frames and then write text that should go in the blank spaces.

Assessment/Closure: Students can share with partners what they created in their frames and explain why they chose that sequence. This will help students verbally explain their thinking for the sequence. Some students may have the option to share with the class.

Lesson 4: Creative writing from the image

Objective: Students will use a comic image to create a story. This creative writing element allows students to think into words an image that they see.

Estimated Time: 1 lesson

Materials: writer's notebook, various image frames from comic books

Activity: Students will work in pairs or individually. Many copies of several different images of one scene from a comic should be provided for students. Once a student has chosen an image they will write a short story explaining what happened just before, during, and just after this image. Students can use the real names and powers of the superheroes and supervillains in the comic as part of the story if they know them. Otherwise, students can create the name and powers associated with the image and incorporate it into the story.

Assessment/Closure: Students may share with fellow students the story they created. Allow some students to post the picture and story in the classroom for all to read. If space allows, some may wish to post in the hallway or common area of the school.

Lesson 5: Introduction to origin stories

Objective: Students will understand how origin stories are created and the impact it has on the character for subsequent story issues.

Estimated Time: 1 lesson

Materials: literacy notebook, if available - copies of original comic origin stories, otherwise - summaries of the character stories

Activity: In order for students to know how to write an original origin story, they should see how professionals tell origin stories. If available, provide students with original comic origin stories. Some can be found on the comic book websites, others can be found in origin collection books. I have provided references below of both of these. If origin stories are unavailable, use the summary stories provided earlier in this unit. The importance is that students understand how an origin story is created and the details that need to be included. Students should use independent work time to read a few of these stories.

Assessment/Closure: Allow for any questions the students may have about the stories.

Lesson 6: Comparing origin stories: comic books versus movies

Objective: Students should recognize that variations occur in stories from print to film and vice versa. These subtle differences may or may not change the story and the student should understand how to recognize the impact. It's an exercise in recognizing detail.

Estimated Time: 2 lessons

Materials: movies or clips from superhero films along with the original comic story that corresponds, writer's notebook

Activity: As mentioned previous in this unit, there are subtle changes in the storyline of superheroes from comic books to film. A detailed breakdown of *Superman* was given above. Provide for students the origin story comic of *Superman* before showing the film or the clips of the film. Discussion can be had about the difference in details between the two. For advanced students, less discussion should be given and more emphasis should be placed on the student discovering and making notes of the differences. A detailed explanation of *Superman* is given above for teaching purposes. Any film and comic may be used for this activity. Also, an option for students to read comics and watch films independently can be given for homework. (Wouldn't they love that homework assignment? "Mom I have to watch this movie for homework, honestly.") Whichever scenario fits best with your students, the result is they should have notes on the differences in the two media and the impact it has on both stories.

Assessment/Closure: The teacher will read the notes and explanations given in each student notebook. A grade for completion and attention to detail can be given.

Lesson 7: Creative Writing: the new superhero or supervillain origin story

Objective: Students will use their knowledge gained thus far to create, write and illustrate an original superhero or supervillain origin story.

Estimated Time: 4 lessons

Materials: writer's notebook, various comic book stories and illustrations for reference and ideas

Activity: Now that students have learned all components of superhero and supervillain origin stories and comic books, they should be ready to create one of their own. As mentioned earlier, in the professional world there is a writer and an illustrator for every comic issue. Students can follow this same pattern of pairing up to write and illustrate the original comic they create. Allow the best scenario to work with the students you have, whether it's collaboration on both or separate work on each. Students should remember the motifs learned and incorporate various aspects of what makes a superhero or supervillain story. The length will be up to teacher discretion based on the abilities of the students. During this lesson, the process of editing and revising should be incorporated. Students should go from creating ideas all the way through publishing an original story with everything included that involves writing and publishing.

Assessment/Closure: The comic book will be assessed on detail, creativity, attention to the lessons learned, and effort. Again, teacher discretion is needed to accurately and fairly assess the students involved. The final product should be shared and posted for others in the class and the school to see and enjoy.

Resources

Resources for Teachers

Books

Coogan, Peter. *Superhero: The Secret Origin of a Genre*. Austin: MonkeyBrain Books, 2006. This book gives a detailed background into the origin of superhero comics as a genre.

Fingeroth, Danny. *Superman on the Couch: What Superheroes Really Tell Us About Ourselves and Our Society*. New York: Continuum International Publishing Group, 2004. This was such a helpful book in researching for this unit. It really gives a great insight into the superhero genre and what we as society have taken from this phenomenon.

Gresh, Lois H., and Robert Weinberg. *The Science of Superheroes*. New York: Wiley, 2003. This book analyzes the reality of certain superhero powers and the scenes that occur in various comic issues. The analysis decides if the situation is scientifically plausible in the real world.

Gresh, Lois H., and Robert Weinberg. *The Science of Supervillains*. New York: Wiley, 2004. This book analyzes the reality of certain supervillain powers and the scenes that occur in various comic issues. The analysis decides if the situation is scientifically plausible in the real world.

Klock, Geoff. *How to Read Superhero Comics and Why*. New York: Continuum International Publishing Group, 2002. An in-depth analysis of superhero comics giving theory for plot lines. In addition, the last chapter analyzes the movie *Unbreakable* as a plausible nod to superheroes and the genre.

Ndalianis, Angela, ed. *Contemporary Comic Book Superheroes (Routledge Research in Cultural and Media Studies)*. New York: Routledge, 2008. A research based analysis of comic book superheroes.

Reynolds, Richard. *Superheroes: A Modern Mythology.* London: B.T. Batsford, 1992. This was an invaluable resource for writing this unit. It clearly goes through every aspect of comic books superheroes, breaking down the information into useful and manageable parts. The chapters include: masked heroes, costumed continuity, deciphering the myths, and three key texts. A great book for those in the know on comic books and those who are interested in expanding their knowledge.

Resources for the Classroom

Books

Lee, Stan. *Bring On The Bad Guys: Origins of the Marvel Comics Villains.* New York: Simon and Schuster, 1976. This book details the origin stories of some of Marvel Comics supervillains. Some of the villains profiled are: Doctor Doom, Green Goblin, Loki, and Red Skull. This is a helpful guide when studying origin stories as the original comic is included as well as a prologue explanation by Stan Lee for each comic.

Lee, Stan. *Son of Origins of Marvel Comics.* New York: Simon and Schuster, 1975. This is a great book that compiles several origin stories into one resource. Stan Lee introduces and discusses the evolution of the character and then the original origin comic is included.

Siegel, Jerry and Joe Shuster. *Superman: Sunday Classics.* New York: Sterling Publishing Co, 1999. This is a collection of the first 183 strips of the Superman comic to appear in the Sunday paper. There is a nice introduction by Roger Stern explaining the origin of

ideas by Jerry Siegel and Joe Shuster that created Superman. The strips are nicely colored and appear in sequential order as they would have in the Sunday comics beginning in 1939 and ending in 1943.

Teitelbaum, Michael. *DK Readers: The Story of Spider-Man*. New York: DK CHILDREN, 2001. This is an easy to read story explaining how Spider-Man originated and also extra facts about the comic. This book has lots of pictures and the language is for elementary students.

Teitelbaum, Michael. *DK Readers: The Story of the X-Men, How It All Began*. New York: DK CHILDREN, 2000. This is an easy to read story explaining how X-Men originated and also extra facts about the comic. This book has lots of pictures and the language is for elementary students.

Thomas, Roy and Stan Lee. *Amazing Marvel Universe*. New York: Sterling, 2006. A great interactive book explaining the Marvel characters. Includes interactive audio commentary by Stan Lee.

Waid, Mark. *Secret Origins of the World's Greatest Super-Heroes*. New York: DC Comics, 1991. This comic book style magazine gives an insight into the secret lives and stories for Batman, Superman, Green Lantern, Flash, and others.

Movies

The Dark Knight. DVD. Directed by Christopher Nolan. 2008; Burbank: Warner Home Video. Batman (Christian Bale) teams with Lt. James Gordon (Gary Oldman) and District Attorney Harvey Dent (Aaron Eckhart) to continue dismantling Gotham City's criminal organizations in this sequel to Batman Begins. But a psychotic new villain known as the Joker (Heath Ledger) threatens to undo all their good work. (PG-13)

Fantastic Four - Rise of the Silver Surfer. DVD. Directed by Tim Story. 2007; Tucson: 20th Century Fox. This sequel to the 2005 blockbuster follows Fantastic Four superheroes Reed (Ioan Gruffudd), Sue (Jessica Alba), Johnny (Chris Evans) and Ben (Michael Chiklis) as they battle the enigmatic Silver Surfer (Doug Jones), who travels the earth preparing it for total destruction. Director Tim Story's comic book adventure introduces viewers to the space-faring explorer Silver Surfer, created in 1966 by legendary Marvel writers Stan Lee and Jack Kirby. (PG)

Hancock. DVD. Directed by Peter Berg. 2008; Culver City, CA: Sony Pictures. Will Smith stars as a down-and-out superhero who must employ a public relations person (Jason Bateman) to help boost his image. The publicist tries to show Hancock how to interact politely with the public and gain respect. During the course of events Hancock finds out about his past and his origins which he previously was unaware. (PG-13)

The Incredible Hulk. DVD. Directed by Louis Leterrier. 2008; Washington DC: Universal Studios. Edward Norton stars as Bruce Banner in this version of the classic comic book tale about a doctor who searches for a cure for his exotic condition, which causes him to transform into a huge green monster when under duress. Drawing closer to finding a remedy, Dr. Banner becomes sidetracked as he's pursued first by the military and then by a rival monster known as the Abomination. (PG-13)

Iron Man. DVD. Directed by Jon Favreau. 2008; Los Angeles: Paramount Pictures. After ultra-rich inventor and weapons maker Tony Stark (Robert Downey Jr.) escapes from kidnappers using makeshift power armor, he turns his invention to good by using it to fight crime. But when he must face the evil Iron Monger, his skills are stretched to the limit. (PG-13)

Spider-Man 3. DVD. Directed by Sam Raimi. 2007; Culver City, CA: Sony Pictures. The seemingly invincible Spider-Man (Tobey Maguire) goes up against an all-new crop of villains including the shape-shifting Sandman in the third installment of this blockbusting comic book adventure series directed by Sam Raimi. While Spidey's superpowers are altered by an alien organism, his alter ego, Peter Parker, deals with nemesis Eddie Brock (Topher Grace) and gets caught up in a love triangle. (PG-13)3)

Superman - The Movie. DVD. Directed by Richard Donner. 1978; Burbank: Warner Home Video. Superman is introduced to the Hollywood audience through this exciting film which included special effects that were seamless for its time. It was the beginning of an era where Christopher Reeve became the face of Superman to the entire world. (PG)

X-Men. DVD. Directed by Bryan Singer. 2000; Tucson: 20th Century Fox. They are genetically gifted mutants the world's newest, most persecuted minority group. Amidst increasing fear and bigotry, Professor Charles Xavier provides a safe haven for powerful outcasts like Wolverine, Rogue and Storm. But can the X-Men triumph over Magneto and his band of evil mutants? (PG-13))

X-Men 3 - The Last Stand. DVD. Directed by Brett Ratner. 2006; Tucson: 20th Century Fox. When scientists develop a miracle drug to treat unwanted mutations, Professor Charles Xavier (Patrick Stewart) and his heroic band of X-Men must battle a group of mutants known as the Brotherhood, led by Xavier's former ally (Ian McKellen). (PG-13)

X-Men Origins: Wolverine. DVD. Directed by Gavin Hood. 2008; Tucson: 20th Century Fox. This action-packed prequel to the popular X-Men films explores Marvel Comics character Wolverine's (Hugh Jackman) past and the events that influenced the mutant before the Weapon X program bonded his skeleton with the powerfully strong metal alloy adamantium. After the death of his girlfriend, Wolverine seeks vengeance against supervillain Victor Creed (Liev Schreiber). (PG-13)

Websites

"DCU | Heroes and Villains." DC Comics. http://www.dccomics.com/dcu/heroes_and_villains/ (accessed July 12, 2009). This is the DC Comics website which contains origin stories for superheroes and supervillains.

Marvel Universe: The definitive online source for Marvel superhero bios." Marvel: The Official Site | Marvel.com. http://marvel.com/universe/Main_Page (accessed July 10, 2009). Marvel is the creator of many superheroes used in this unit. This website is the official comic book website and offers a wealth of information on each character Marvel owns.

"Paramount Pictures [us]." The Internet Movie Database (IMDb). http://www.imdb.com/company/co0023400/ (accessed July 14, 2009). Internet Movie Database has endless pages of information about movies, actors and directors. The website was used specifically for this unit for the upcoming productions for Paramount Pictures.

Siegel, Jerry, and Joe Shuster. "DCU | Heroes and Villains." DC Comics. http://www.dccomics.com/dcu/heroes_and_villains/?hv=superman_dailies_vol_1&p=13 (accessed July 12, 2009). This is the DC Comics website which contains the beginning strips of Superman.

"Spider-Man (Peter Parker) - Marvel Universe: The definitive online source for Marvel superhero bios." Marvel: The Official Site | Marvel.com. http://marvel.com/universe/Spider-Man_(Peter_Parker) (accessed July 12, 2009). Marvel is the creator of many superheroes used in this unit. This website is the official comic book website and offers a wealth of information on each character Marvel owns.

Appendix A - Implementing District Standards

Writing

ELA.8.14B - develop drafts by choosing an appropriate organizational strategy (e.g., sequence of events, cause-effect, compare-contrast) and building on ideas to create a focused, organized, and coherent piece of writing.

ELA.8.14D - edit drafts for grammar, mechanics, and spelling.

ELA.8.14E - revise final draft in response to feedback from peers and teacher and publish written work for appropriate audiences.

ELA.8.15A.iv - write an imaginative (fictional) story that develops interesting characters and dialogue that develops the story.

ELA.8.17D - produce a multimedia presentation involving text, graphics, images, and sound using available technology.

ELA.8.18F - refine and publish selected work in accepted formats for general and student audiences using traditional and technological methods.

Reading

ELA.RC.8B - ask literal, interpretive, evaluative, and universal questions of text.

ELA.RC.8F - make intertextual links among and across texts, including other media (e.g., film, play, music, print media), and provide textual evidence.

ELA.8.3C - explain how the values and beliefs of particular characters are affected by the historical and cultural setting of the literary work.

ELA.8.9 - analyze works written on the same topic and compare how the authors achieved similar or different purposes, and support using textual evidence.

ELA.8.10B - establish and adjust purposes for reading.

ELA.8.10D - synthesize and make logical connections between ideas within a text and across two or three texts representing similar or different genres and support those findings with textual evidence.

ELA.8.10I - find similarities and differences across texts such as in treatment (the author's approach), scope (depth of information about the topic), and/or organization.

ELA.8.12F - identify, describe, and analyze important characters, including their traits, points of view, causes of feelings and motivations, relationships, conflicts and their solutions, and the changes they undergo.

Listening/Speaking

ELA.8.28 - participate productively in discussions, plan agendas with clear goals and deadlines, set time limits for speakers, take notes, and vote on key issues.

Notes

1. Fingeroth, *Superman on the Couch: What Superheroes Really Tell Us About Ourselves and Our Society*, 14.

2. Ibid, 17.

3. Siegel, Jerry, and Joe Shuster. *Destruction!* "Superman: The Dailies Vol. 1." DC Comics. http://www.dccomics.com/dcu/heroes_and_villains/?hv=superman_dailies_vol_1&p=10

4. *Superman - The Movie*. Time clip 15:52 - 17:40

5. Siegel, Jerry, and Joe Shuster. *Speeding Towards Earth* "Superman: The Dailies Vol. 1." DC Comics. http://www.dccomics.com/dcu/heroes_and_villains/?hv=superman_dailies_vol_1&p=11

6. *Superman - The Movie*. Time clip 21:30 - 23:00.

7. Siegel, Jerry, and Joe Shuster. *A Perilous Arrival* "Superman: The Dailies Vol. 1." DC Comics. http://www.dccomics.com/dcu/heroes_and_villains/?hv=superman_dailies_vol_1&p=12

8. *Superman - The Movie*. Time clip 24:08 - 24:36.

9. *Iron Man*. Time clip 0:36 - 0:54.

10. Ibid, 24:45 - 24:53.

11. Reynolds, *Superheroes: A Modern Mythology*, 12-16.

12. Ibid, 38-43.

13. Ibid, 77.

14. Ibid, 66.

15. Gresh, *The Science of Superheroes*, 33.

16. "The Boy, the Bite, the Burglar". *Marvel Universe - Spider-Man.* http://marvel.com/universe/Spider-Man_(Peter_Parker)

17. Siegel, Jerry, and Joe Shuster. "DCU | Heroes and Villains." DC Comics. http://www.dccomics.com/dcu/heroes_and_villains/?hv=superman_dailies_vol_1&p=13

18. Waid, Mark. *The Origin of Wonder Woman.* http://www.dccomics.com/dcu/heroes_and_villains/?hv=origin_stories/wonder_woman&p=2

19. Reynolds, *Superheroes: A Modern Mythology,* 51.

20. Lee, *Bring on the Bad Guys*, 157.

21. Ibid, 165.

22. Waid, Mark. *The Origin of The Joker.* http://www.dccomics.com/dcu/heroes_and_villains/?hv=origin_stories/joker&p=2

23. Gresh, *The Science of Supervillains*, 8.

24. "Abilities" *Marvel Universe -Magneto* http://marvel.com/universe/Magneto

25. Reynolds, *Superheroes: A Modern Mythology,* 53.