



COMICS AS A TOOL  
FOR INCLUSIVE YOUTH WORK

# ***METHODOLOGY ON INCLUSIVE YOUTH WORK THROUGH COMICS***



# ***DEAR COMIC ART FANS!***

Welcome to the Methodology on inclusive youth work through comics which was created as a project result within the CO-MIX: COMICS AS A TOOL FOR INCLUSIVE YOUTH WORK. The consortium has put its knowledge and expertise to this manual in order to hopefully encourage youth workers and other educators working with youth to incorporate comics as a tool more often in their daily work with the youth.

The CO-MIX Methodology will provide youth workers a guiding text and materials that are easy and quick to absorb. The document is structured into 6 chapters each crucial for a theoretical and practical understanding and incorporation of comics into youth work. After an important fundamental introduction into comics from a theoretical point of view on what are comics and how they can be a useful tool for youth work you will continue to chapter 2: Guidelines on inclusivity and interesting links with examples of inclusive comics addressing social issues. The third chapter will include concrete guidelines for using comics in youth work as well as not to miss “The Rules”: Do’s and don’ts in comic creation. We also would like to direct your attention to our website <https://comixproject.eu/#/en> where you can up into practice the chapter 4 CO-MIX platform and CO-MIX Creation Tool where you can use the creation tool to create your own comics. Moreover, if as a youth worker you wish to use comics as a tool to address a specific topic some helpful guidelines on how to interpret the comic might be of use, so please for those refer to chapter 5. For the final chapter of this manual you can read about some suggestions on how to initiate discussions in the session after young people have created their comics.

We hope this guide improves your understanding of comics, inspires you to explore the different possibilities of using them in youth work and spurs you to apply it in your activities with young people.

Comic on!

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Publisher: Celjski mladinski center, javni zavod za mladinsko kulturo, izobraževanje, informiranje in šport

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the European Union



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# **TABLE OF CONTENTS**

<b>INTRODUCTION</b>	<b>6</b>
Why Comics	6
Comics in Youth Work	8
About this methodology	9
<b>1. COMICS AS A USEFUL TOOL FOR YOUTH WORK</b>	<b>11</b>
1.1. What are comics	11
1.2. How can they be a useful tool for youth work	12
1.3. How can they help young people talk about their problems, everyday life ...	14
<b>2. GUIDELINES ON INCLUSIVITY</b>	<b>16</b>
2.1. Concrete examples from different settings including gender, people of color, people with mental disabilities, people with mobility disabilities, etc.	16
2.2. How to address different social issues and social categories: ecology, religion, politics, gender & sex, culture, economy ... through the use of comics	20
2.3. Concrete guidelines on how to include young people from different social/cultural/economic backgrounds through the use of comics	22
2.4. Examples of how to organize workshops with comics	24



<b>3. COMICS AS A TOOL FOR INCLUSIVE YOUTH WORK: PRACTICAL GUIDE</b>	<b>27</b>
3.1. Concrete guidelines for using comics in youth work	27
3.2. “The Rules”: Do’s and don’ts	40
<b>4. CO-MIX PLATFORM AND CO-MIX CREATION TOOL (TFN)</b>	<b>42</b>
4.1. Instructions on how to use the CO-MIX platform and Creation Tool	42
4.2. Guidelines for youth workers guiding youth on how to interpret comics	42
<b>5. EXPLAINING AND UNDERSTANDING CREATED COMICS</b>	<b>44</b>
5.1. Design / Visual Aspect	45
5.2. Off-Panel Action / Closure	46
5.3. Time / Space	47
5.4. Plot structure	48
5.5. Characters	49
5.6. Dialogue	50
5.7. Action	51
<b>FOLLOW UP</b>	<b>52</b>
<b>CONCLUSION</b>	<b>55</b>
<b>RESOURCES</b>	<b>57</b>



# ***INTRODUCTION***

## **Why Comics**

The main aim of CO-MIX project is the use of comic creation in youth work in order to support cooperative learning in an inclusive and flexible way. In this digital age, where technology has profoundly changed and affected all aspects of human life, having effective communication tools can significantly contribute to societal transformation.

Given that effective communication has always been at the heart of youth work, having a means of communication that can help us as youth workers understand young people's needs, difficulties, and paths enables us to be there for them as a support structure, guidance, or role model and mentor when it comes to humanity, learning, growing, and becoming our best selves. It is always important to remember that different people require different forms of honest communication, such as speaking and listening, theater, and story creation in all of its forms.

Comics' visual language is widely understood by the majority of people. Nowadays comics are used not only as a means of entertainment but also as a teaching and learning method since they can raise awareness and disseminate information. Previous research indicates that graphic stories, with their illustrated narratives, may have a positive impact on readers' engagement, memory, and conceptual learning, and that these benefits are most noticeable among novice learners (Akcanca 2020).

Likewise, studies have shown that the use of comic creation as a tool can be more efficient than other traditional tools (Akcanca 2020). The comic creation can lead to improved knowledge, behavior and healthier decision-making. At the same time, the small-scale Comics Youth initiative in the UK has shown promising results as comics creation can be proven as supporting for young people to express and discover themselves. It is also important to consider that consuming and creating comics promotes media literacy education, as well as learning and growth overall. Illustrations accompanying text reinforce information in the text, provide coherence, and help establish settings in the narrative (Akcanca 2020).

It is not irrelevant the fact that in 2015, the United Nations launched 17 Sustainable Development Goals to be achieved by 2030 which were transformed into comics in order to make them widely accessible and easy to disseminate throughout the developed and developing world. The comics are already used often as a learning tool in order to raise awareness for these issues, which needs to be further promoted.

Comics can improve multiliteracy, motivation, content learning and language learning. Through the use of comics, students have increased motivation and improved attitudes toward reading; even students who initially claim to dislike comics later recognize their importance as a motivating tool for language learning (ANIELSON BARBOSA DA SILVA, GABRIELA TAVARES DOS SANTOS, ANA CAROLINA KRUTA DE ARAÚJO BISPO, 2017).



## Comics in Youth Work

Youth work is a field which demands constant improvement and innovation, in order to support the dynamic and vibrant needs of target groups - young people. Obviously youth work has evolved over time to play an important role in preventing social exclusion and enhancing social inclusion, while also being a field that requires constant improvement and innovation to stay current and capable of meeting the significant needs of young people. Particularly in these times, where the gaps in connection, empathy and understanding in communities is a typical phenomenon and can lead to both physical and mental health consequences, youth work appeared as a powerful influence sector. Times of uncertainty and crisis show us how important it is to stay connected and how security is frequently dependent on the well-being of the entire community.

Taking into consideration that youth are frequently overlooked in their need for personal support, understanding, and education not only in formal settings, but also in issues of self-awareness, self-knowledge, interpersonal relationships, and boundaries, it is significantly important for youth workers to be prepared, open, and understanding - ready to connect, reach out, and support in the way that is required.

Comics in youth work will be a powerful tool since it will facilitate a better understanding of complex and sensitive issues by serving as a preliminary reading activity and also they can extend the analysis of a classic work of literature, either by providing examples of derivative fiction or by making strong allusions (Akcanca 2020). If used correctly, comic books and graphic novels in general can be an effective weapon as comic books are considered to be uniquely capable in building bridges between cultures, languages and understanding.

## About this methodology

The methodology of comics will be aimed at youth workers and will consist of guiding text and materials that are easy and quick to absorb, as well as being updated for the needs of our dynamically changing world.

Comics as a tool, adapted for youth work, will be extremely useful for the target groups of the project (youth workers and youth organizations, educators) to evolve their approaches, incorporate new visions in them, as well as become more flexible and more open to connecting with their own target groups - young people.

Youth workers and youth organizations constantly evolve and try to find ways on how to engage with the youth that is transforming quite rapidly. There have been many approaches on methods or tools that youth workers can use and adjust in order to cover the needs of their beneficiaries. The creation of comics, guided via an in-depth, detailed and methodical guide, will be one more important asset for youth workers everywhere.

The methodological reason for using comic books is twofold: on the one hand comics strips are adaptable to changing contexts, and on the other hand, they are more flexible than other communication tools.

Considering the suspension of reality, as well as grassroots research and highly culturally sensitive language, traditional modes of communication are sometimes inefficient. Comics are an ideal medium for communicating social messages to a wide audience, and comic strips can also be used effectively for this purpose among teenagers and young adults.



At the same time, the improvement and involvement of youth work will be promoted through the effective incorporation of comics. The methodology for inclusive youth work through comics will cover, incorporate and take into consideration demographic groups in the most diverse manner. Furthermore, the methodology is structured in such a way that the core element (inclusivity) can be applicable to any activity that involves the creation of visual illustrations. Therefore, its application can be diverse, for instance: used by organizations that aid a group of people that have a speech impediment, activities with people that prefer visual illustrations rather than text or audio, as well as youngsters who have any kind of language barrier.

The methodology's element of innovativeness is the creation and application of comics for inclusive youth work. Transforming previous practices and activities in such a way that can apply in almost any setting or environment as well as tend to the diverse elements of the beneficiaries that youth groups have.

**The Methodology includes:**

- Information adapted for youth workers on comics, with the goal of sparking interest and creating an understanding and appreciation for the idea;
- Demonstrations and guidelines on practical application of comics for inclusive youth work;
- Templates and examples of comics that they can use freely and that will be designed in such a way that they can adapt it to any situation;
- Guide on how to use the online platform with the comic book creation tool;
- A guide on inclusivity, focusing on how to include people from almost any demographic group.

Furthermore, as in any form of art - including comics - the final product or creation is interpreted in various ways. The methodology will include a general approach on how to interpret the outcomes of the comic that is created by the beneficiaries and highlight issues that might emerge.

For instance, if there is a recurring topic that a beneficiary is using or the use of improper or not inclusive language. Since art is used as a medium of expressing one's self, the youth worker can benefit a lot from having a guide on how to interpret this form of art.

Lastly, the methodology will introduce and teach both youth workers and young people how to use a form of art that has no limits, is open to interpretation, transcends language barriers and cultural differences. The methodology will empower youth workers and young people to engage in creative activities that will be inclusive to all groups.



**VOL. 1**

# **COMICS AS A USEFUL TOOL FOR YOUTH WORK**

## **1.1. What are comics**

A comic book takes its name from the fact that the first comic books illustrated humorous situations. However, it would be reductive to limit the 9th Art to a specific genre since comics have long offered very dark and serious scenarios („What Is A Comic Book English Literature Essay“ 2015). So if genre doesn't help define the term, what definition could be given to Comics? Central Community College offers a very open-ended general definition that fits rather well with what a comic book consists of: „A comic book is an excerpt from a larger serialized narrative that is told via illustration.“ (Siegel and Shuster 2022)

Contrary to what some may think, comics are not a subculture of geeks locked in their rooms all day. The comic book market is valued at \$7.14 billion („Comic Book Market Size, Share, Growth & Trends Report, 2030“, n.d.) and is the result of a very ancient pictorial and narrative culture that dates back to at least 3200 BC. At that time, the Egyptians communicated and represented ideas using more than a thousand images, called hieroglyphs. European tapestry in the Middle Ages was also a favored medium for depicting different stories.

In the 18th century, the massive production of paper and the improvement of printing allowed the democratization of the printing of illustrations, but it was not until 1830 that the first comic strips, properly speaking, saw the light of day in Geneva under the pencil of Rodolphe Töpffer, although

he never used the word „comic strip“ and instead used the expression „Literature in Print“ which is very reminiscent of the modern term „Graphic Novel“ (Peeters and Misserey 2022).

At the very end of the 19th century that this phenomenon develops in newspapers and the first boxes accompanied by speech bubbles appear („Who invented the comic book? - 1 day, 1 question“ 2018) in the United States, one of the future great countries of the Comic Book („History of Comic Books“ 2017). A land of immigration at the time, comics were a good way for newcomers to immerse themselves in American culture and integrate thanks to the presence of attractive images and colors at the time (McCutcheon, n.d.).

In France, at the beginning of the 20th century, children’s newspapers appeared and allowed comics to become better known among a very young target audience. In France, for this reason, the comic strip will be associated for a long time with early childhood, which will encourage the elitist contempt of cultural circles that will consider that since it is for children, it is not really art and even less literature. However, comics were the gateway to literature for many writers and Nobel Prize winners during their youth, and bridges were regularly established when renowned writers contributed to the scripts of comics (Peeters and Misserey 2022).

In the 1930s, the comic strip enjoyed a worldwide triumph and also turned to adults with the adventures of superheroes in the United States (which were very effective in preparing the American mentality for a war in Europe against the fascist leaders of the time) and Tintin in Belgium. Hergé, the illustrator of Tintin, even invented a graphic process called „clear line“ which underlines the contours of each element by a line in black ink. The Manga, the comic book originating from Japan which is read from right to left, will begin to impose itself in the 80s outside the country of the rising sun („The Manga phenomenon“, n.d.). In 1974, a festival dedicated to the 9th Art (De Blicq 2018), the Comic Strip, was established in Angoulême, France. This festival is now one of the largest comic book festivals in the World (Beccaria and Lagaffe, n.d.).

## **1.2. How can they be a useful tool for youth work**

It might sound foolish for the most veteran of youth workers to go through this process, but sometimes, even the experts need to go back to the basics. As youth work implies strong human interaction between one or multiple youth workers and youngsters, it’s fundamental to understand what exactly a youth worker is.

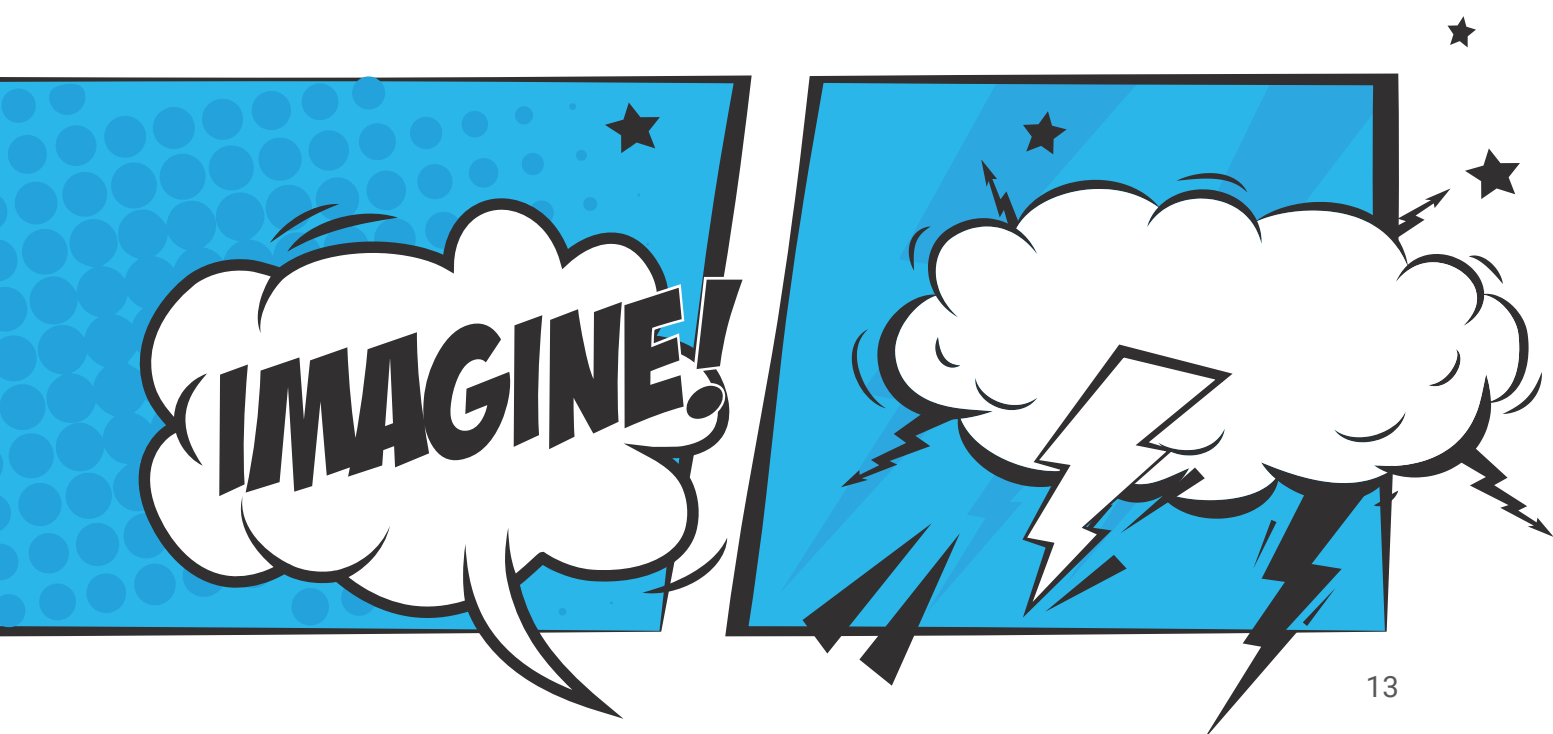
At European level a definition of youth work and, consequently, of youth worker is not clearly delineated. Visiting the YouthWiki portal of the European Commission website it is easy to

realize that every country gives different meanings and a European framework does not exist. The National body for Youth Work in England states “Youth work takes a holistic approach with young people. [...] Many professionals work with young people, but principally, only in youth work is it the choice of the young person to engage with the professional”.

It also defines the profile of youth workers as individuals who “usually work with young people aged between 11 and 25 years. [...] Their work seeks to promote young people’s personal and social development and enable them to have a voice, influence and place in their communities and society as a whole. It builds resilience and character and gives young people the confidence and life skills they need to live, learn, work and achieve. [...] Youth work offers young people safe spaces to explore their identity, experience decision-making, increase their confidence, develop interpersonal skills and think through the consequences of their actions. This leads to better informed choices, changes in activity and improved outcomes for young people.”

Many of the readers of this methodological guide will recognize themselves in this definition and whatever activities, projects and events we put in place and however difficult it may be to evaluate their impact, it is real and invaluable to society as a whole.

Identifying how comics can become part of our Swiss Army knife for youth and what impact they can have on the young people we serve is the first step to understand their potential. Comic books offer a stimulating and creative space in which many young people can let their imaginations run wild without being judged by others. Using the 9th art as a method and tool with young people can give them the opportunity to express themselves about the things that affect them and also help them to (re)find their self-esteem and confidence in the future. In art, there is no right or wrong answer like in school, and for young people who have suffered a lot from a difficult school



career, comics can represent a new horizon where their individuality is not associated with failure. In addition to facilitating the expression of young people's ideas and emotions, comics can help raise awareness of many social issues and provide them with important information on issues that concern them, such as sex education, bullying, addiction, domestic violence, disability and racism. Short, engaging texts and impactful images can help them better understand the important issues surrounding these questions.

Comic books can also contribute to one of the youth worker's main missions, to help young people reach their full potential through the development of their skills. Indeed, as a reader, the youth will see an increase in reading and concentration skills, communication skills („Comics Projects of the International Cultural and Educational ..." 2015), writing skills, and problem solving skills (Widodo, Dahlan, and Saputro 2018) will also be positively impacted by the design of comics works, even at an amateur level! It is also not anecdotal that young people can develop scientific knowledge („The Application of Comics in Science Education," n.d.) through this type of literature, which can stimulate the curiosity of its young readers about many areas rich in learning.

Therapeutically Art has long been an effective way for people to sort out their resentment and emotional problems. That being said, art therapy has only recently become more popular among youth workers. Youth workers often lag behind in the innovations they incorporate into their skill sets and activities.

Since the priorities of a youth worker are to live with the times, to adapt to the context, to be regularly informed of the progress made in the sector and to experiment, we deeply hope that reading this guide will encourage you to start using comics in your activities with young people!

### **1.3. How can they help young people talk about their problems, everyday life ...**

Comics, which contain many characters and situations, are used as a tool to reflect people's feelings, thoughts and problems. People sometimes express their feelings and problems by creating these comics themselves, and sometimes they learn that they are not alone by reading comics in which they see characters who have similar problems to themselves and who look like them, and they accelerate the process of resolving the issues.

Today, young people make up the majority of the population dealing with mental disorders such as depression and anxiety. („Understanding Depression: Age Groups and Risk Factors", n.d.) There are many comics that address these issues and are easily accessible to young

people. („I Draw Comics To Explain What It’s Like Living With Depression And Anxiety (30 New Pics)“, n.d.) By talking about these issues, comics can instill confidence in young people by reminding them that they are not alone. Although these comics are based on fictional characters, they help the reader to develop emotional resilience by showing how characters in similar situations and circumstances deal with the problems they face. In addition, for young people who are dealing with loss and grief, they can find many comics, which can be helpful, about those emotions (Davis 2022).

In addition to such young people, comics can also help children and young people with autism who have learning difficulties to overcome these difficulties and recognize and express their own emotions. It is known that many young people on the autism spectrum want to be accepted by society as much as other people. However, they find it difficult to make friends with other young people in everyday life. In this case, comics help these highly creative children, who are great at drawing, to express these feelings through comic books. („The comic book art giving children a voice“, n.d.). Also for dyslectic children, the help of comics is undeniable. These children find traditional books frustrating, whereas comics are much easier to read, so when they manage to read at least one page of a comic book completely, it will give them a sense of accomplishment and self-confidence.

In summary, by reading comics and creating their own comics, young people can get to know their feelings and emotions more closely and share them with other people. In this way, they can sometimes become the person they want to be in the world they create, and sometimes they can help both themselves and others who are dealing with the same difficulties by directly narrating and sharing the difficulties they experience in their own lives.





**VOL. 2**

## ***GUIDELINES ON INCLUSIVITY***

### **2.1. Concrete examples from different settings including gender, people of color, people with mental disabilities, people with mobility disabilities, etc.**

Creating a comprehensive and supportive strategy plan to ensure effective and fruitful collaboration, with the goal of integrating young people from different settings and incorporating innovative practices/ methodologies in digital youth work, it appears vital to specify these different settings:

- **cultural differences** - young immigrants or refugees or descendants from immigrant or refugee families; young people belonging to a national or ethnic minority;
- **economic obstacles** - young people with a low standard of living, low income, dependence on social welfare system; NEETS (young people Not in Education, Employment or Training); youth in long-term unemployment or poverty;
- **geographical obstacles** - young people from remote or rural areas; young people from less serviced areas (e.g. limited public transport, poor facilities, abandoned villages);
- **social obstacles** - young people facing discrimination because of gender, ethnicity, religion, sexual orientation, disability, etc.; young people with limited social skills or in a precarious situation.

Below you can find some interesting links with examples of inclusive comics addressing social issues:

### COMICS ADDRESSING GENDER INEQUALITIES:



<https://www.gaylaxymag.com/articles/women/7-powerful-cartoons-that-depict-gender-inequality-in-the-world/>

### COMICS ADDRESSING HUMAN RIGHTS:



<https://cblbf.org/2016/06/celebrate-pride-all-year-with-these-lgbtq-comics-creators-2/>

**COMICS ADDRESSING COLOR DISCRIMINATION:**

OSAJEFO • SMITH 3

# BLACK

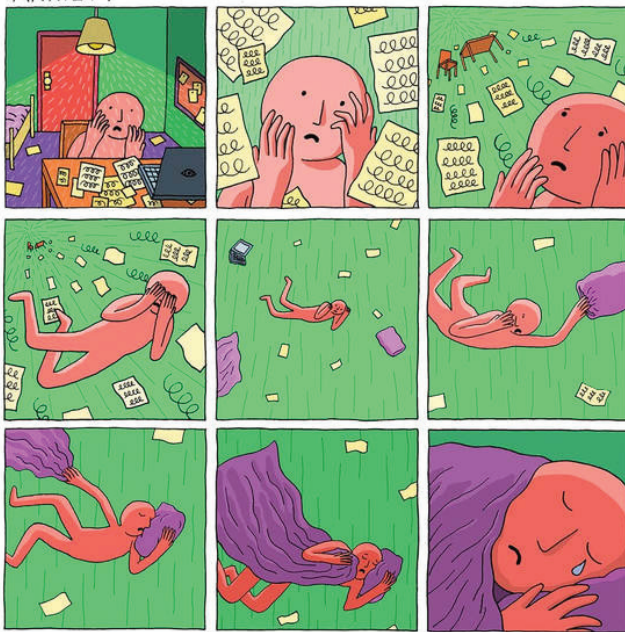
IGLE RANDOLPH LITT RIGGS DAGUISAN SHARPE



<https://comicsverse.com/addressing-racial-trauma-black/>

**COMICS TACKLING MENTAL HEALTH:**

**ANXIETY**

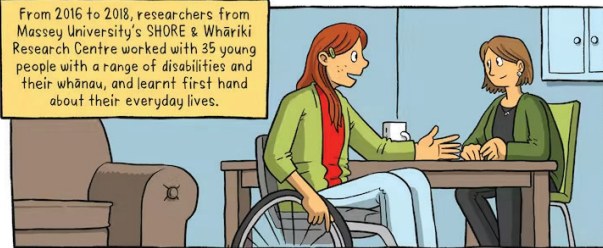


<https://inneryoucounselingri.com/blog/comics-can-help-you-understand-mental-health/>

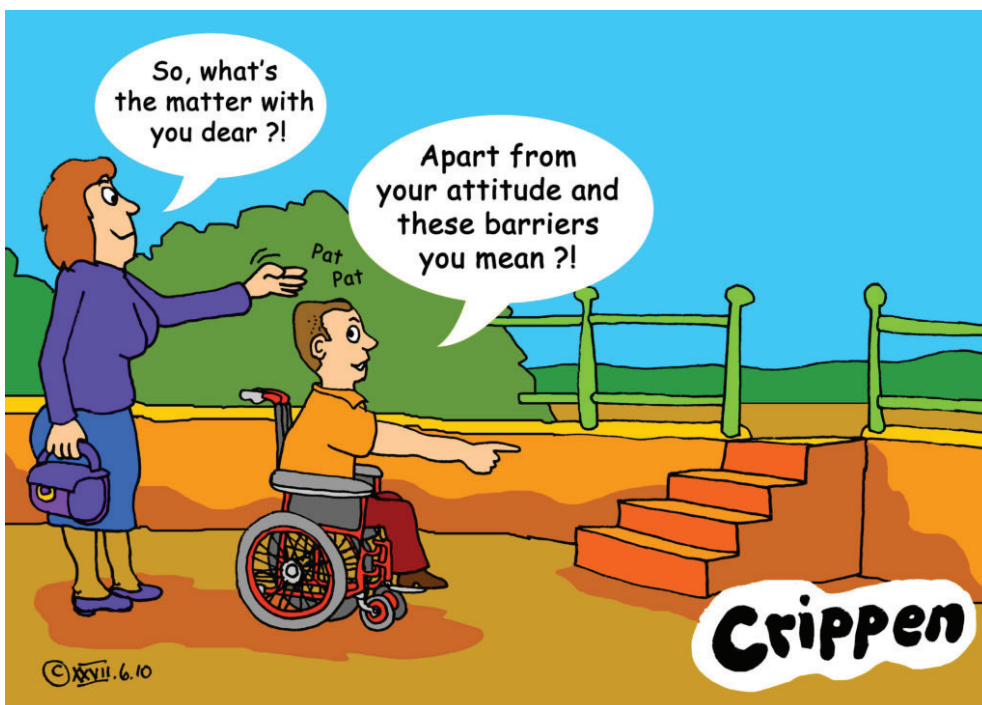


## COMICS ADDRESSING MOBILITY DISABILITIES:

### ENABLING PARTICIPATION RESEARCH WITH YOUNG PEOPLE ON ABLEISM



<https://theconversation.com/comic-explainer-young-disabled-new-zealanders-on-the-barriers-to-a-better-life-122226>



<https://disabilityarts.online/magazine/opinion/the-social-model-understanding-the-language-of-disability-from-a-cartoonists-point-of-view/>

## 2.2. How to address different social issues and social categories: ecology, religion, politics, gender & sex, culture, economy ... through the use of comics

Comic books are no longer simply for superhero fans and Sunday morning chuckles. Young activists are getting involved in the fight against discrimination, the violation of human rights, climate change, social injustice etc, and comic books are becoming a powerful tool in the battle.

From 1930 to the present, the age of comic readers has grown more mature, and comic books can easily address a variety of social issues. At that point, comics had progressed from a purely fantasy medium to one capable of conveying messages on a wide range of topics, including social issues, death and even day-to-day issues. On top of that, comics was once thought to be a white male-dominated field. Even this aspect has evolved over time.



Since to date more diverse writers and artists have entered the field which can even more enhance the diversity and the influence of comics as the representation is a changing matter. Comics began to mature alongside their readers, as did the subject matter.

Comic books can reach far more diverse age groups than a newspaper or magazine that must cater to a single specialty. Comics have the freedom to address anything while still maintaining an interesting story (Jason Juniewicz).

It would be helpful for more comics related to social issues to be created in order for comics to become not only an amusing means but also a means of information about social issues such as poverty, crisis, covid-19, human rights, art and ecosystem. In other words, comics can be related and illustrate everyday issues that concern and should concern all people. Because the combination of text and images in graphic novels can communicate issues and emotions that words alone often cannot. The heroes may be placed in situations in which they do not always know how to, or if they should, deal with. When confronted with these issues, the heroes always try to adhere to the norms that govern what society considers moral (Jason Juniewicz).

Whether it's Iron Man's alcoholism, Spider-drug Man's friend's addiction, or Green Arrow's ward becoming addicted to drugs, or other issues like poverty, crime, and war, almost all heroes are affected by social problems in some way. Batman, The Punisher, Spider-Man, and a slew of other heroes have all had violent pasts that drove them to embark on their crusade.

Another example of how social issues can be reflected in comics is Captain America. The concept of what he stood for has always remained consistent, but his ideology has evolved over time to reflect what was considered the „good fight.“ When he was fighting tyranny against the Nazis in the 1940s, he stood for freedom from oppression. However, when the character was revived in the 1960s, he was anti-war due to the death of his young partner during World War II. While some issues are addressed directly by placing the characters in actual situations, others are less direct in their statements. Comics such as X-Men address issues such as racism and bigotry without focusing on race. The characters in the books are mutants, whom society regards as freaks and people to be despised.

Moreover, it is important that more superhero comics include different cultures and civilizations, presenting their concerns and the problems they are facing. It is crucial for people being able to see their culture in heroic positions without being preoccupied and biased for other cultures.

## 2.3. Concrete guidelines on how to include young people from different social/cultural/economic backgrounds through the use of comics

According to the Erasmus+ Inclusion and Diversity Strategy in the field of Youth, the different social, cultural and economic backgrounds are referred to:

- Cultural differences include immigrants, refugees, or descendants of immigrants or refugees, young people from a national or ethnic minority, young people struggling with linguistic adaptation and cultural inclusion, and so on.
- Economic barriers include young people with a low standard of living, low income, reliance on the social welfare system, young people in long-term unemployment or poverty, young people who are homeless, in debt, or experiencing financial difficulties, and so on.
- Social obstacles include young people facing discrimination because of their gender, age, ethnicity, religion, sexual orientation, disability, and so on; young people with limited social skills or anti-social or high-risk behaviors; young people in precarious situations; (ex-)offenders, (ex-)drug or alcohol abusers; young and/or single parents; orphans, and so on.

In this digital age, where technology has profoundly changed and affected all aspects of human life, having effective communication tools can significantly contribute to societal transformation. Given that effective communication has always been at the heart of youth work, having a means of communication that can help us as youth workers understand young people's needs, difficulties, and paths enables people to be there for them as a support structure, guidance, or role model and mentor when it comes to humanity, learning, growing, and becoming our best selves. It is always important to remember that different people require different forms of honest communication, such as speaking and listening in all of their forms.



Including young people from different social/cultural/economic backgrounds even in comics can improve even more this means of communication and can pass on social messages.

But how can we include young people from these different social/cultural/economic backgrounds (Youth Mentoring Network):

- **RESPECT ALL DIFFERENT BACKGROUNDS**

Be respectful of the young person's cultural, social and economic background, beliefs and values: Creating a common ground, aiming at building trust and transparency.

- **CULTURAL AWARENESS**

Given the fact that culture is a significant part of our identity, the inclusion of different cultural backgrounds can be associated with informing people about the different cultures represented through the use of comics. It's critical to recognize how culture influences your perceptions. To promote a harmonious cross-cultural exchange, be aware of your beliefs, biases, and worldview, and be open and non-judgmental. In this way, people from different social, cultural and economic backgrounds will have the opportunity to feel more comfortable and respected among their peers.

- **LINGUISTIC DIVERSE**

Comics can make science relevant to the majority of people due to their simplified language and structure. Recognize young people's home language as an important part of their identity. Be open to using other home languages when it serves a purpose, such as making a child feel safe or learning from each other. Also, explain that the majority language is the language of all of us. Offering the opportunity of several and different languages, can make comics books a useful tool which will be addressing young people from different backgrounds.

- **BE AWARE OF THE DIFFICULTIES YOUNG PEOPLE FACE**

Work, family/ friends relationships and responsibilities put a lot of strain on young people. These pressures are often exacerbated for young people from refugee or migrant backgrounds by the additional complications of navigating a new culture, language, and systems. Delving and recognizing these problems can be a relief for people that face difficulties and are coming from different backgrounds.

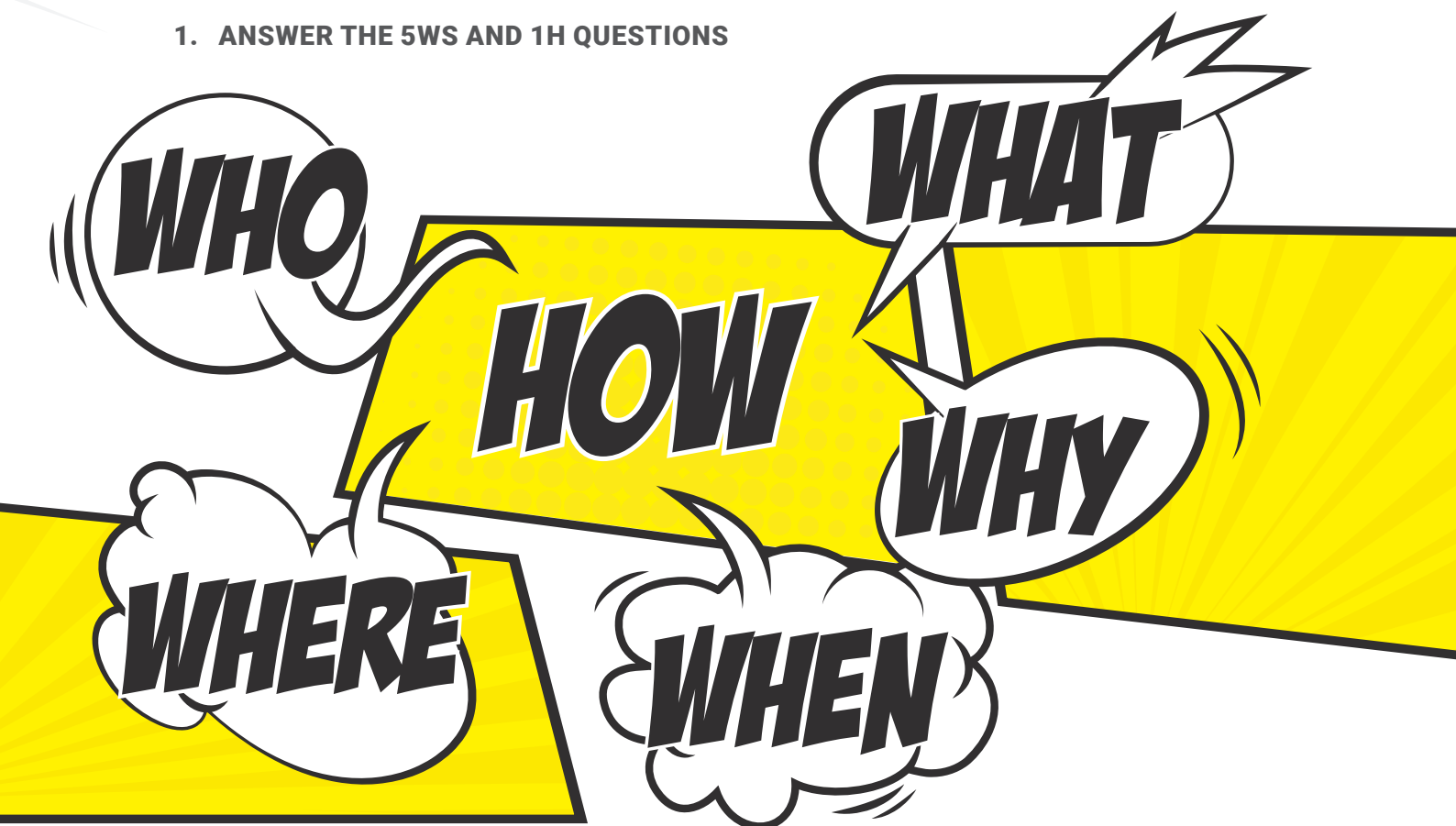
- **AVOID STEREOTYPING**

Trying to be more open and tolerant about any type of diversity, developing empathy and being educated about different groups of people. Continuing to do self-assessments about our stereotypes and how they are potentially interfering with our interactions. Do so with an open and gender-neutral mindset (avoid stereotyping based on gender or cultural background).

## 2.4. Examples of how to organize workshops with comics

Creating a fun experience for the learner is key to getting the content across. This is where suspending disbelief comes into play. If you have uninspiring performances from actors, or subpar photos, the learner may be immediately pulled out of the learning; and worse yet, distracted. This is where instructional comics have a bit of an edge over videos or photos. Comics and the characters in them have a simplified, universally relatable look. Visuals are still necessary to tell the story, but the timeless style of comics allows the learner to suspend that pesky disbelief and immerse themselves within the content.

### 1. ANSWER THE 5WS AND 1H QUESTIONS



- **WHO** is organizing, hosting and attending the workshop?
- **WHAT** type of workshop is it?
- **WHEN** do you plan to host the workshop?
- **WHERE** will the workshop take place?
- **WHY** do you want to host this workshop?
- **HOW** will you execute this workshop based on what you know right now?

## **2. DEFINE THE TOPIC OF THE WORKSHOP**

For hosting and organizing a workshop with the use of comics, someone needs to do research and define some topics that need further enlightenment and will provide a fresh point of view to a field. Define your target group and find the comics that are suitable for your topic and your target group. You may also ask for advice and arrange a meeting with experienced people in the field.

## **3. ATTENDANCE LIST**

On some occasions defining the attendance list from the beginning may be helpful. Yet changes in the attendance list depending on the type of the conference are required. If you are running an event without a guaranteed audience, associated statistics and average attendance ratings related to your type of workshop can be helpful.

## **4. DEFINE YOUR TEAM**

Like with any large project, a team helps lighten the lift. Even if your workshop is just for your colleagues, you may be able to find volunteers among your coworkers, friends, or speakers. Start by asking stakeholders what they would be willing to contribute. Establish a weekly meeting and estimate the time commitment you'll need from each participant. It is really important to be people that you can collaborate effectively with and you need to divide each other's tasks regarding the time you can devote.

## **5. DEFINE YOUR EXPERTISE**

Decide who is going to present the workshop, your speaker and your expertise that will staff your workshop. You can reach out to people that you may admire, who may be inspiring and can pass on people's knowledge and experience.

## **6. GATHER YOUR TOOLS**

Throughout the workshop you need to choose what communication tools you will need to use such as email, group chats, zooms, skype etc. You will need to gather and provide to the participants the paper material that they may need throughout the project. You may also need electronic equipment such as a projector or speakers etc. Plan this out ahead of time just in case something is missing or you want to test out some software. An interesting idea would be to create the workshops program in comic book form.

## **7. DEFINE YOUR TARGETING AUDIENCE**

Look for what type of content (video, audio, memes, etc.) appeals most to them. Consider what their goals for the workshop are and begin brainstorming ideas for activities based on that. If you have direct communication with your target audience now, put out a poll or survey that allows them to share suggestions.

## 8. PLAN YOUR ACTIVITIES

The best workshop activities begin with an icebreaker related to the workshop theme followed by your main event and a decompression period. Take your favorite ideas from related events and put your own spin on them. Define in your team your responsibilities and who is going to implement each session. The more interactive, the better.

## 9. SPREAD YOUR WORKSHOP ON MEDIA

You can spread your workshop on Instagram, Facebook or LinkedIn in order for more people to be informed about it. You can also create a comic post that will contain the topic, the location and the details about the workshop but in an alternative and contemporary means of communication that will reach more people.





**VOL. 3**

# ***COMICS AS A TOOL FOR INCLUSIVE YOUTH WORK: PRACTICAL GUIDE***

## **3.1. Concrete guidelines for using comics in youth work**

### **HOW TO INCLUDE COMICS IN YOUTH WORK AND USE THEM FOR INCLUSIVE YOUTH WORK**

Now that we know what comics are and how to organize workshops with them, comes the question of how to approach comic-making ourselves.

While it may seem like a question of artistic intent or even intuition, there is a lot of theory that you can put into your comic work, to make it significantly better. Understanding story structure, character arcs, genres and approaches to comic-making will empower you to create and to support young people in creating meaningful and impactful comics.

In the next pages we will go through some of those important comic-building fundamentals, we will provide you with potential extra material, with which you can expand your knowledge, and we will give you some actionable knowledge with which you can create great comics!

Before that, let's start with some **basic terms**, when it comes to comic creation:

- **PANELS:** One still image in a sequence; used to frame the action. Panels could be any shape, though they are usually square or rectangular. Panel layout is important, as it creates opportunities for communicating rhythm, action, speed of the story – sometimes even points of view.

When thinking of panels, imagine how your comic page will be divided into pieces, which the reader will see:

- If the whole page is one panel, that might be an introductory page, or a way to put a big emphasis on a scene or moment. This is usually called a splash or a full-page splash.
  - If you use large panels, it feels like less time is passing or time is slowing down; and the opposite is true – smaller panels, close to each other, signal fast speed and pace to a reader;
  - You can experiment when drawing out the panels by making them stacked (small panel in a large panel) to show more detail or more information – also known as an insert; making them slanted to one side to create a sense of unease or dynamics; removing the borders of some panels and not others to differentiate points of view, place emphasis, etc. – also known as a bleed panel.
- **GUTTERS** – the spaces between the panels. These spaces can be left white or used in color to differentiate a page – though that is more rarely used. Readers of comics usually perceive this space as the passage of time. The gutters can also be used for readers to imagine something in-between and this is called closure. While some actions are easy for readers to imagine going from one panel to another (walking leading to a new location for example), be careful of “hiding” too many things in the gutters and aim for smooth transitions instead.
  - **LETTERING** – any text on a comic page. Size and style of the lettering indicates emotion – in the scene or in the characters. Bigger, bolder letters usually get read as yelling, something crucial and obvious, etc. while italicized, smaller letters could be perceived as whispering, small background dialogue, etc. There are different ways to insert lettering into your comic:
  - **WORD BALLOON** – the shape containing dialogue. It is often balloon-shaped (rounded) but it can also be changed, based on different characters of different atmospheres. Whichever the shape, though, they usually have a tail, pointing towards the person speaking. Tailless balloons are usually perceived as internal monologue. Depending on your style, though, as long as you are consistent with how you put your speech bubbles, even tailless could be seen to be dialogue.



- **THOUGHT BALLOON** – Like a word balloon without a tail, but usually with cloud-like form, thought balloons depict the internal monologue or thoughts of a character.
- **CAPTION** – Usually the way that narration is presented – in square or rectangle balloons, usually on the top or in some way in a corner of a panel.
- **ONOMATOPOEIA OR SOUND EFFECTS (SFX)** are those (usually very visible) sound-imitating words like POW, BANG, etc, which you find accompanying any action. Don't just think of them as needed in an action-hero type of comic – they can also be used when objects are falling, when someone trips, etc. Armed with this knowledge, let's dive into the thought you can put into creating a comic.

## STORYBOARD

Storyboarding, the process of sketching out some important scenes from the story you want to tell, is usually popular when it comes to moviemaking. However, this activity could be a great first step into making your comic well-thought-of, not forgetting any major scenes you want to include, and finding the tone and general feel of your story. Like any other undertaking, you don't want to skip the planning stage. And a storyboard is meant to be a transitory step, a planning activity, in your comic-creating process.

To make a storyboard, you can either use a storyboarding software (like MakeStoryboard or Storyboarder) or sit down with a few papers in the old-fashioned but still very practical way. Imagine a scene that would be very important for the story you want to tell – a pivotal moment, an action-packed sequence, a personal realization, a scene that shows an important interper-

sonal relationship or milestone – and sketch it out. When you imagine it, see if it will fit within a panel, a few panels, a page – but don't go too much into planning out a multi-page moment from the story. Instead, imagine it as a highlight, key to the plot. You can add dialogue, narration, background or side characters; think of the positioning, expressions, feelings of the characters. You don't need to spend much time or energy into perfecting the drawings – this is just the planning phase; but include all essentials, so that you remember to include them in the final product as well.

Imagine several of these – depending on how long your story is and how many of these key scenes you can imagine in the beginning.

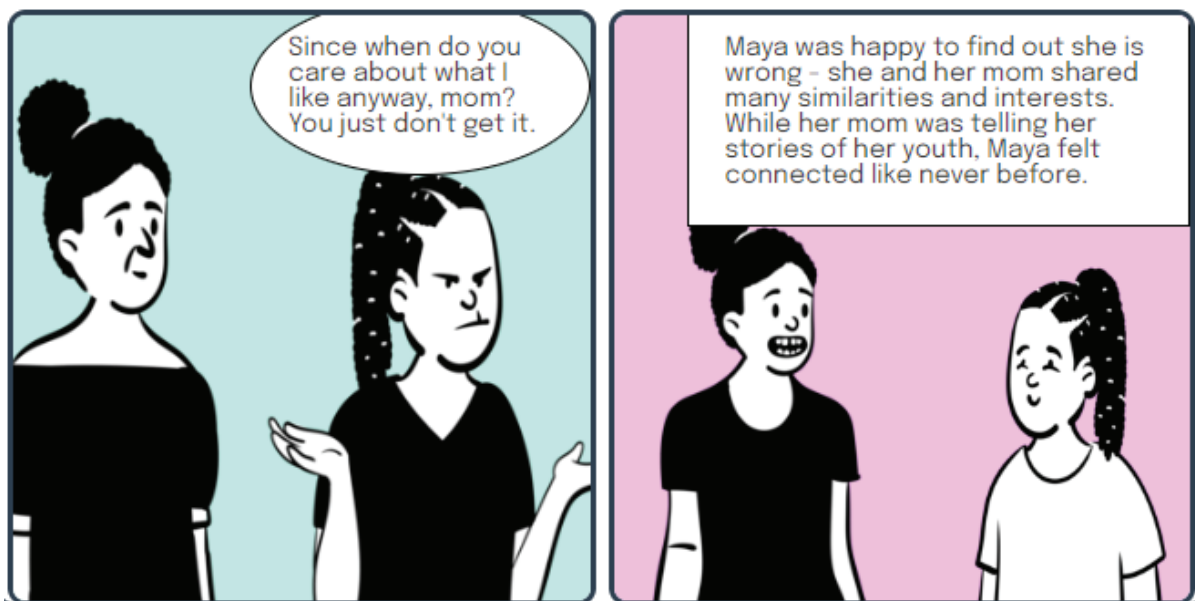


Illustration 2: Example of a rough sketch of a pivotal scene

Now, you can spend some time deciding how those boards fit into the whole story – what is the sequence in which they happen but also what is the sequence in which you want to tell them. Would all of it be linearly told? Would some of it be told in flashbacks, in dialogue, in other forms?

Physically or in your software, make a timeline of events as you want them to be told in the story, label the scenes and if you want, add some extra boards in-between explaining what happens before and after these pivotal scenes.

What could also help you is creating a short profile of each character – their name, a rough sketch, their age, motivation, and anything else you want to note as important for them. This will help in keeping continuity and in creating meaningful character arcs, which we will be looking at soon.

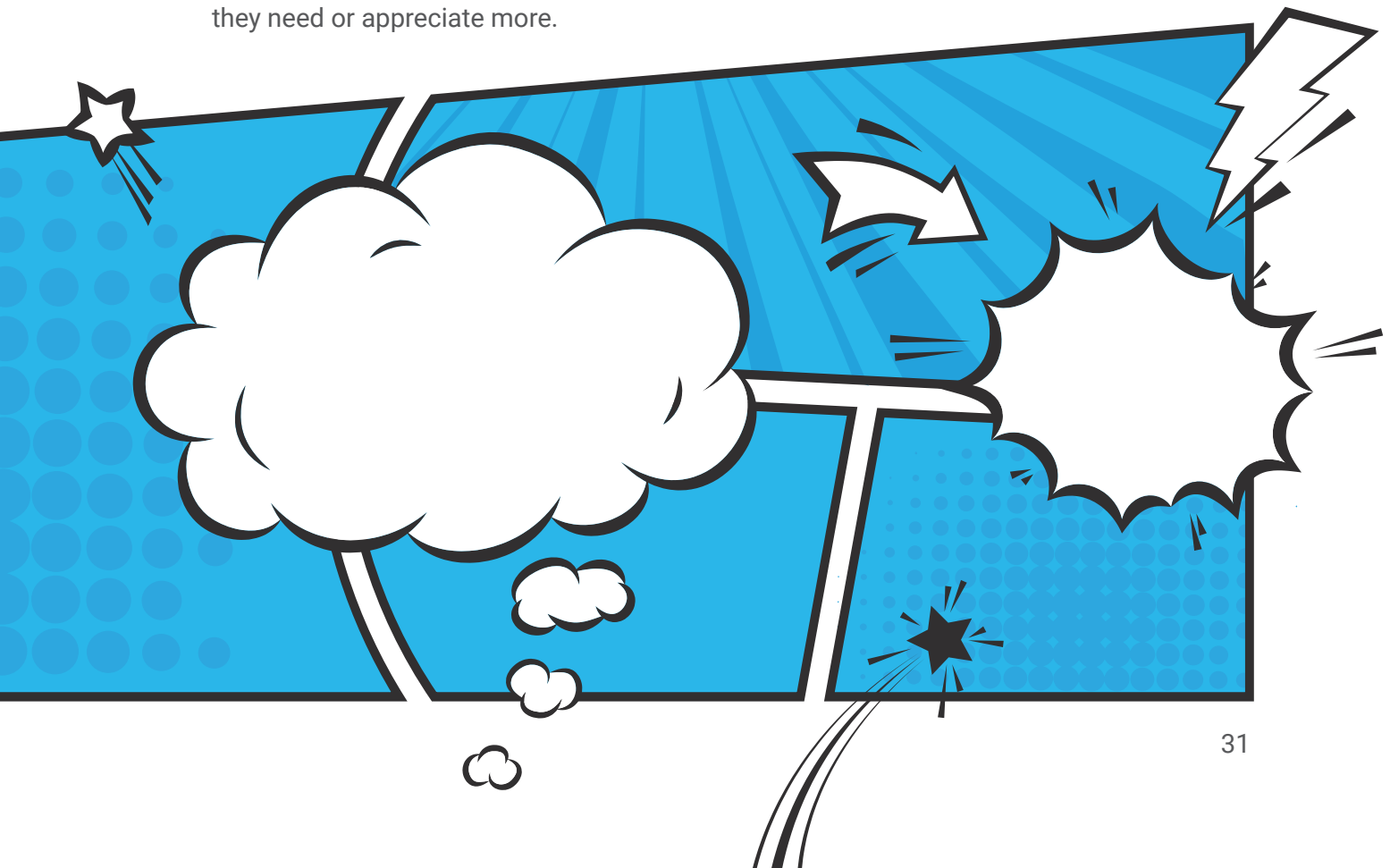
## STORY STRUCTURE

Story structure (or narrative structure) is the flow of the story – the sequence in which events form a beginning, a middle and an end of a story. In comics the story structure may be very similar to story structure in other means of storytelling – novels, books, TV shows or movies. There is significant variety, as you can imagine, and that variety is what creates opportunities for creation of interesting and thoughtful stories, presented in new ways.

As an important step to creating your comic, especially now that you have some sketches in the storyboard, imagine the flow of the story –below you will find a few examples of how.

There are some basic elements, which are shared among a majority of stories:

- Status quo – the main character is living their “normal” situation, to which we are introduced; the character usually has bigger aspirations and seeks a change;
- Inciting incident – the occurrence that pushes events into motion in one way or another;
- Rising action – character follows some trajectory related to aspirations; in the meantime, challenges occur;
- All-is-lost – the character is led to understand that their efforts didn't lead to a satisfying conclusion and they have failed;
- Resolve – the end of the story either shows a success (character achieving their goal), a failure (character failing to achieve their goal) or a failure that shows that the character's initial goal was wrong to begin with – there was something more precious that they realize they need or appreciate more.



You can imagine these as elements in any kind of comic book genre (which can vary the same way that other pieces of storytelling could be seen in) – action, adventure, romance, mystery, thriller, fantasy, science fiction, horror, humor, slice of life, even poetry, if you can imagine it.

One way to see the story flow, is in a three-act narrative structure, which is also how we often imagine movies and other forms of storytelling:

**Act 1:** Introduction to main characters, mood, setting, status quo, main conflict

**Act 2:** Character development, various story arcs, challenges and issues along the way; lessons learned; climax

**Act 3:** Transformation of the characters based on the events in Act 2, which shows the meaning of the undertaking



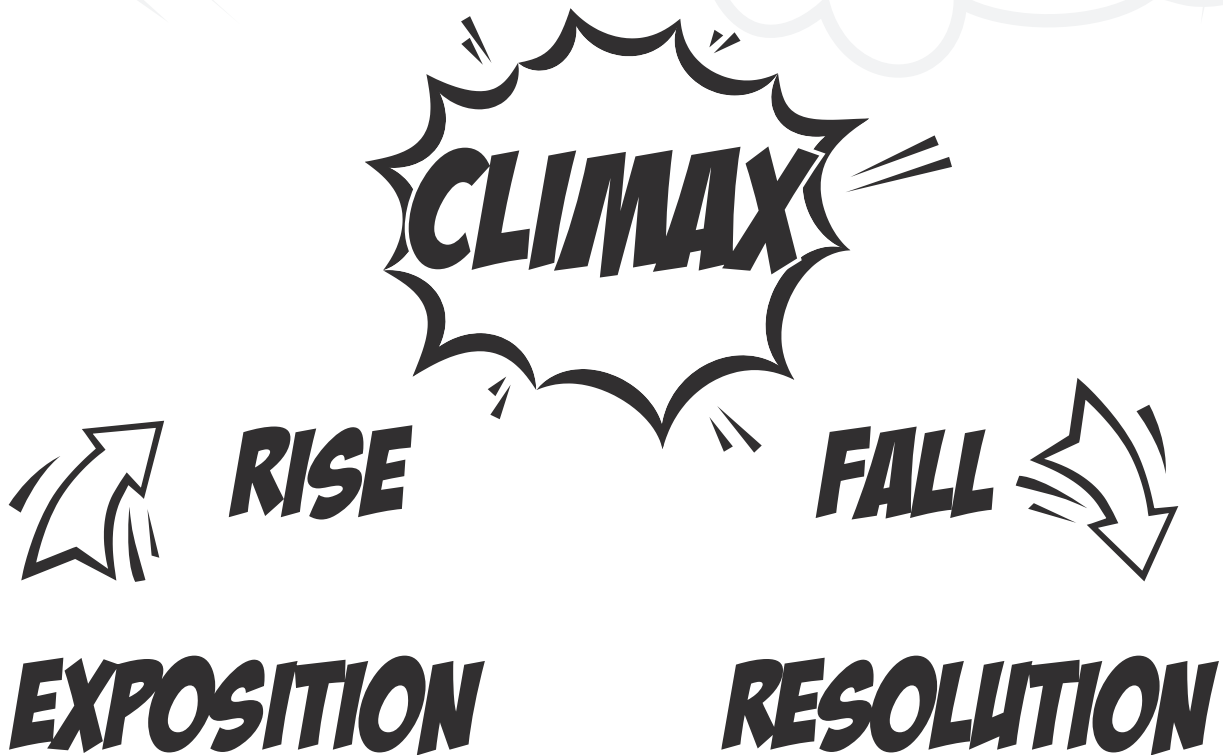
Illustration 3: Simple three-act structure illustrated

Armed with this knowledge of story structure, there are several established and known ways to structure a story you will find below. You can use them as a guideline or as inspiration from which to formulate how your story flows.

## 1. FREYTAG'S PYRAMID

Gustav Freytag, a novelist from the 19th century, outlined this pyramid to showcase a very popular flow of storytelling. Maybe you recognize that it includes all the basic elements introduced before, and is an expansion of the three act structure. This, of course, is because it describes the most popular narrative structure, used by storytellers throughout history.

According to him, you start with the exposition, which depends in length and detail on your artistic choice, but its main goal is to draw readers in and make them feel like they are in a world as real as ours. The exposition ends with an inciting incident, after which you move to the Rising action. There, you explore the story's twists and conflicts all the way to the climax. Rising action usually is the biggest part of any story, and includes a big part of the plot, the character development, their motives, the themes of the story.



The climax is the part of the story in which everything, the main conflict, comes to a turning point, and there is no coming back. No matter if the climax is one page or several in your comic, what is important is that you find a way to create an emotional takeaway, to address the themes and concepts in your story.

In the aftermath, the fall, the story's elements have time to find their ties and seek their new normal. The fall is still an opportunity to expand on some themes, including new twists or new reveals, all while stirring the story towards a resolution.

And as difficult as it might be, every story has an ending, which we find in the Resolution. Happy or sad, thoughtful, open-ended, exciting, cathartic – a story can end in many ways, which answer to the call sent out by the exposition – the end of character development, answer to long-awaited questions, satisfaction or disappointment, these are all options.

## 2. THE HERO'S JOURNEY

This is arguably the most popular structure used today, seen in movies like Star Wars, Matrix, and streamlined by Disney executive Christopher Vogler.

As could be expected, there are some similarities to the pyramid of Freytag, but with some additions and twists!

The three bigger steps: Departure, Initiation and Return, have a few sub-steps each.



### DEPARTURE

- The Ordinary World – meet our hero, their normal life, the status quo
- The Call to Adventure – a disruption to the normal life, a challenge the hero cannot ignore, understanding the stakes
- Refusing the Call to Adventure – when understanding the high stakes, the hero refuses the call to adventure (because of fear, other obligations, feeling of inadequacy, etc.)
- Meeting the Mentor – a mentor figure supports and encourages the hero, prepares them for what is needed to embark on the adventure
- Crossing the Threshold – together with the mentor or after their interactions, the hero is ready to begin the adventure, and take the chance anew

## INITIATION

- Test, Allies, and Enemies – learning the new world, experimentation, growth; definition of the hero's relationships with new characters
- Approach to the Inmost Cave – approaching, but not yet exploring the most dangerous place in the hero's journey; stakes are rising
- The Ordeal – the hero's greatest test so far; the main event of the second act; the hero faces their greatest fear – actually, the hero just now becomes the hero truly
- The Reward – whatever that may entail – something physical, a piece of knowledge or a skill, the hero receives as a reward for their efforts; from now on, the hero is a changed person, ready for the final conflict

## RETURN

- The Road Back – the story isn't finished yet! The hero is faced with the consequences of the success they reaped in the previous act – maybe the defeated are out for revenge, maybe more enemies appear – but there is one more obstacle before the hero's journey can be complete
- Resurrection – the hero's final test, the big battle, the true climax of the story; near death is common, even death and resurrection; the stakes are the highest they could be, but success is within reach
- Return With the Elixir – the hero is transformed, the enemy has been defeated; the elixir from the title is what the hero will share as a win with the rest of the ordinary world – the true reward for the hero's journey, be that something physical, a skill or a piece of knowledge.

There are more story structures that you can explore if you have the interest. You can read more for example about The Seven-Point Story Structure, The Three-act structure, or Save the cat – a model, which includes 15 “beats”, created by Blake Snyder – a screenwriter.

As we pointed out before, the story structure as theory is there to help you flesh out your story and shape it to best connect and impact readers. You don't need to follow any specific story structure in your work, but you can follow one of them whenever you need some help in this.



## COMIC CHARACTERS

One of the questions you might face once you start creating your comic – or hopefully, while you're planning it – is the question of characters.

It is usually easy to imagine the one or two main characters in your story, the ones that it feels like the story and the world revolves around. For some types of storytelling, they might even be completely enough and this way of storytelling might be beneficial to showcase the struggle, the connection or the relationship between the main characters.

Usually, though, we need to add more characters if we want to make the world we are building and the story we are telling feel authentic. So let's help you with some ideas that you can get from character archetypes:

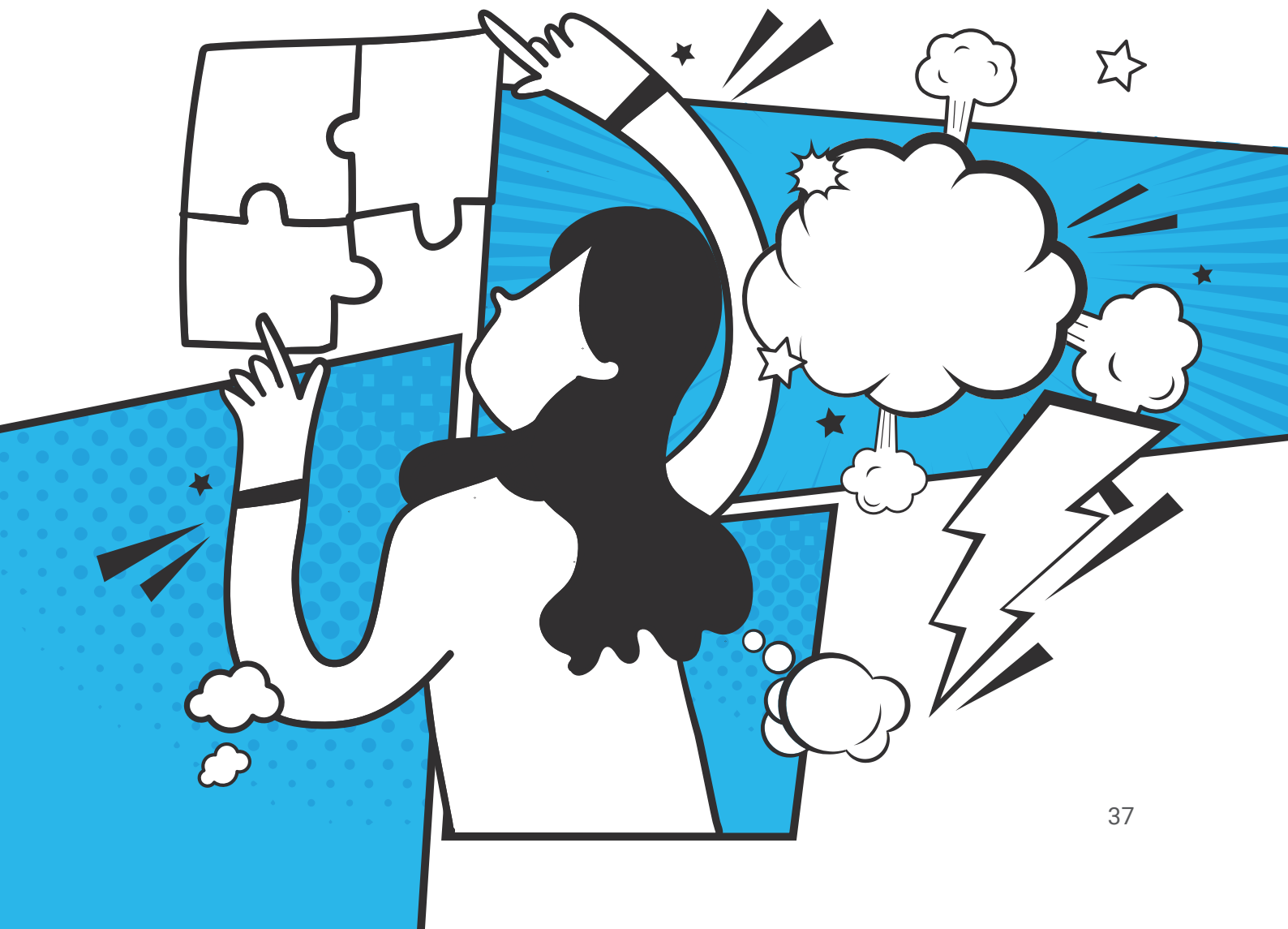
- **Hero/Heroine** - the main character. Traditionally, the main character goes one of two ways - they are either virtuous (brave, selfless, ready for adventure), for the audience to aspire to; or they are a self-insert for the audience - few of their characteristics are strictly defined, but enough so that they are fleshed out, while giving the audience the opportunity to imagine themselves as this character. More and more in recent times, the main character is also questioned, their flaws shown more clearly - also called the antihero. Ask yourself which way you want to go, especially based on what kind of story you want to tell.
- **Comic relief** - a humorous character could add levity or depth to your story. They could provide some lighter motifs, and could make witty and poignant jokes as well.
- **Logician** - driven only by rationale and reason; may struggle with emotions, self-expression, communication overall, etc.
- **Outcast** - the ones who don't fit it with the rest of the group or the characters in your story. They may be a great way for you to showcase the "opposition" to the hero, without needing to vilify one or the other - the outcast is different but that doesn't need to make them or the main character evil.
- **Villain** - they may be an outcast but evil - a clear opposition to the hero in all regards; but the villain can also share many characteristics with the hero; their motivation might be something that sounds almost reasonable to the audience, and like this, they challenge the hero very efficiently.
- **Love interest** - they may be out of reach and slowly become closer to the hero; or even the opposite - they might be a close friend, unsuspecting of the hero's passions; they might end up in a relationship with the main character or not, but the hero harbors feelings for this character for a long part of the story you are telling.

- **Sibling** - sometimes the archetypes are there just to remind us of the obvious - even if the story we are telling is not directly involved with the family of the main character, they still have some of that - whether that be a young or old sibling, a parental figure, etc. When we are creating the concepts of characters, we can also imagine their family situation, in order to humanize them better.
- **Side-kick** - every Batman needs a Robin! The best friend, the companion, is sometimes there to reveal the most honest interactions of the main character, to demonstrate what kind of person the main character is, but also to actively participate in the plot!

Of course, you don't need to have all of these in your story, but if you are struggling for ideas, they are a great source of inspiration! Go out of the box if you want, and combine aspects of different archetypes to create complex and interesting, multi-layered characters.

## PHILOSOPHY OF COMIC CREATION

Lastly, we want to provide you with some overall guidance from the best in comic making on how they approach comic creation, as well as some extra advice that is still important but may not fit into the other three categories.



## CONSIDER THE COMIC BOOK PAGE

*"Each page of a comic should help tell the story while keeping things visually interesting for the reader."*

Consider the comic book page as one whole out of the whole – the page itself should have a more or less consistent mood, colors, a sense of continuation. Of course, you can play with that idea by introducing contrasts – when you want to emphasize a character, contrast a situation, a feeling, a behavior with another. However, contrast in these cases is best used in moderation, so as to keep the otherwise consistent flow of the story.

Consider also the text you insert in various ways – you don't want to overuse text, since comics are supposed to be a more visual form of storytelling. Try to limit the excessive use of thought balloons, over-exposition and lengthy dialogues.

## CONSIDER THE PROCESS OF COMIC-MAKING

Neil Gaiman, famous for creating some incredibly influential and meaningful graphic novels and comics, points out that the process of comic-making is one of innovation and collaboration. On the one hand, every page of the comic allows and invites for experimentation and artistic expression.



On the other, it's very difficult to create a comic on your own entirely – Gaiman lists as people needed for a comic to be professionally finished 5 positions:

- A writer, who creates the story as a roadmap for the rest (characters, plot, conflict, dialogue);
- An editor, who offers constructive criticism;
- An artist, who translates and enhances the roadmap into panels;
- A letterer, who incorporates the correct fonts, sizes and calligraphy into the panels; they also usually ink pencil lines;
- Finally, a colorist put color into the black and white pictures.

Of course, one person can be the writer, the artist, the letterer and even colorist all together. A colorist might not be needed at all, if you choose to leave your work black and white. We do recommend though, as part of working with young people, to consider the roles as opportunities:

- An opportunity for teamwork would be a pair to work together on a comic, one being the writer, one being the artist;
- An opportunity for group work could be assigning for a group each to have one of the different roles listed;
- An opportunity for understanding the young people would be for you to be their editor, or to invite them to be an editor for a comic you are creating;
- An opportunity for connection would be for you as a youth worker to be a part of a pair or a team in the creation process as well.

We encourage you to find freedom and opportunities in comics, take on the theory provided as a jump-off point and find how comics could fit best into your work and for your needs.

## **CONSIDER YOUR CHARACTERS**

*"Everybody is special. Everybody. Everybody is a hero, a lover, a fool, a villain. Everybody. Everybody has their story to tell."*

Ask yourself questions about the characters you are creating. Why are they the way they are? What kind of childhood did they have? What reaction would they have in different situations? We want to create realistic characters not for the sake of mastery of storytelling but in order to involve the audience as much as possible. People respond to real characters - flawed like humans are, interesting, diverse in their background and minds. This is the way to create a relationship between the reader and the story - create this connection with the characters, this awareness, so that readers feel like they know the characters.

## 3.2. "The Rules": Do's and don'ts



**DO'S**

When drawing Comics always start with a plan.

**Balloons and text are a part of compositions.**

Letter first, balloon around.

**There's only so much space in the speech bubbles so make sure you make each word count.**

Composition trump's perspective, Gesture trumps anatomy.

**The narration must harmonize with the drawings.**

Your characters must feel as if they have a life and personality of their own.

**Motion in a panel that goes from left to right represents action heading toward the future.**

Vertical panels excite the reader.

**Horizontal panels calm the reader.**

Make sure the story clearly points to the next panel.

**Try new angles and views to make your scenes more dynamic.**

Draw with and without borders for a cool look.

**Generate emotions for the readers.**

Change colors according to the progress of the story.

You need colors to direct the reader's attention.

**You can use onomatopoeias to express sound effects.**

Be expressive. Use anything to get the energy and emotion of a page like gesture, posture, shapes, distortion.

**Use the proper type of bubble for: narration, speaking, thinking, onomatopoeias, etc.**

Before publishing, show comics experts your work and collect feedback. If you don't know a comic expert you can always ask your friends!

**Save your comics creation as often as possible.**

Let your panels breathe.



# **DON'TS**

**Don't be a perfectionist.**

**Don't have characters just standing there.**

**Don't write about a topic you don't know.**

**Don't focus too much on quality drawing.**

**Don't overcomplicate the klayout and the storyline, keep it simple.**

**Don't use hate speech.**

**Don't use swear-words, instead use cute swear-word alternatives like: Balderdash!, William Shatner!, Corn Nuts!, Dagnabbit!, Son of a monkey!, Barnacles!.**

**Don't add unnecessary steps to your process.**

**Don't keep refining the layout.**

**Don't use a straight ruler to have straight lines drawn by hand.**

**Don't lean too much into an intricate art-style**

**Don't overdo the small talk. Unless you're trying to develop a character, small talk just adds more unneeded pages.**

**Don't isolate yourself. Comics are, in most cases, collaborative.**

**Don't go overboard with the amount of pages. Keep it short.**

**Don't concentrate too many colors in one panel. You can utilize color and make pages much more dynamic, if done correctly.**

**When you think you are done with the comic, don't rewrite it, know when to stop.**



**VOL. 4**

## ***CO-MIX PLATFORM AND CO-MIX CREATION TOOL (TFN)***

### **4.1. Instructions on how to use the CO-MIX platform and Creation Tool**

Please see Annex 1, to find details and instructions on how to use the CO-MIX platform and Creation Tool.

### **4.2. Guidelines for youth workers guiding youth on how to interpret comics**

- Guidelines for youth workers guiding youth on how to interpret comics
- When considering a graphic novel in an educational setting, it's important to encourage readers to look at all of the elements that make up a graphic novel.
- Description and word balloons: Think about how the dialogue appears. Are the words in different colors? How are they written? How does the story unfold? What gestures do you see? How do motion lines indicate how characters or objects are moving? How are each of the sounds written?

## DISCUSSION AND QUESTIONS

There is no right way to read a graphic novel, and many readers go through them differently. Compare with the participants how you read the assigned graphic novel and see if you read it differently or the same.

Pick a page or a sequence from a graphic novel and think through what you learn from just the words and then think about what you learn just from the images. Are they telling you the same information? How do they work together?





**VOL. 5**

## ***EXPLAINING AND UNDERSTANDING CREATED COMICS***

This chapter discusses different ways that youth workers can interpret comics created by young people. It offers some concrete guidelines on how to explain and understand created comics, by analyzing different elements of comics that youth workers have to pay attention to in order to understand their message. It starts by focusing on the basic elements of comics and posing some key questions for analysis and understanding. At the end of the chapter, you can find guidelines for understanding comics, with a special emphasis on using comics as a tool in youth work.

Comics are a form of sequential art (McCloud, 1994), a series of images that tell a story. To explain and understand them, we first have to know the general rules of the comics' universe; that is the basic structure, elements and principles that the creators of comics have to follow in order to create them. All comics contain some key elements – design, the characters, the narrative, the setting – time and space, sequencing, plot structure, dialogue, action, use of emotions, etc.

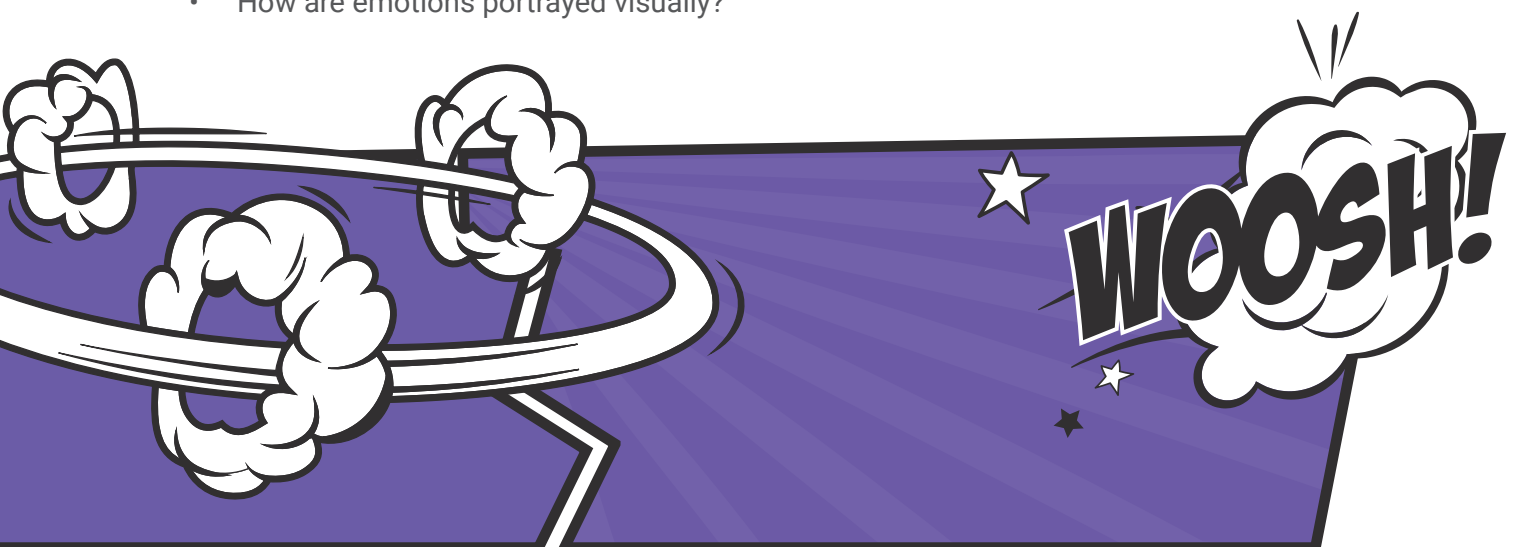
## 5.1. Design / Visual Aspect

Unlike films, comics are a purely visual medium. Thus, the narrative must be planned accordingly even before any word is written. For this reason, artists need to consider the story in terms of color, character design, art style, world-building, etc. (Mercury XY, 2019). One of the key works on understanding the comics was written by McCloud (1994), who, in terms of graphic design, suggests that the more cartoonish an icon is, the more universal it is. The simpler a comic's drawings, the more readers can place themselves in the story (Understanding Comics Summary and Study Guide, n. d.). Therefore, the comics do not have to be super realistic for the audience to identify themselves with it. To understand the comics that you are looking at, you have to think about the target audience, that is – for who the comic was intended.

There are a few elements or methods that are used in comics to represent specific things. For example, if an author wishes to suggest the movement, they will use something called »motion lines«. The use of motion lines is an artistic method, grounded in an overall consensus about what it specifically represents – in this case, a motion or a movement (McCloud, 1994).

### Key questions for analysis and understanding:

- Who did the author have in mind when creating the comic?
- Are the characters designed in a very cartoonish, basic fashion, or are they more intricate and realistic?
- Can analyzing the design of the characters tell you anything about the target audience? Is it meant for a very broad or a more specific target group?
- Can you spot any visual elements or methods that are used to represent specific things?
- How are emotions portrayed visually?



## 5.2. Off-Panel Action / Closure

An integral part of comics is not only what you can see in front of you as you hold one in your hands, it is also what you don't see – i. e. »off-panel action«. What the reader imagines outside the panel can be multiple times more impactful than what is explicitly shown. The goal of off-panel action is to create suspense and expectation. Good comics have a proper balance between what the readers see and what they imagine (Mercury XY, 2019). McCloud calls this natural process in which a reader's mind fills in the unknown of any given media, a »closure«. An example of this would be if a reader sees a panel with a shipwreck followed by a panel of a man on a deserted island, the mind automatically assumes the man swam to the safety of the island. Comics rely on the use of »gutters«, the white spaces between panels, to achieve closure and move a narrative forward. In this way, the reader becomes an active participant in the story, filling in missing details (Understanding Comics Summary and Study Guide, n. d.).

### Key questions for analysis and understanding:

- What information is left out and presumed to be implicitly understood by a reader?
- What is the goal of leaving that information out? Is it to create a better story structure, to create suspense, to give commentary/imply something?
- Is the missing information key to understanding the story or is it used as a tool to move the story forward?



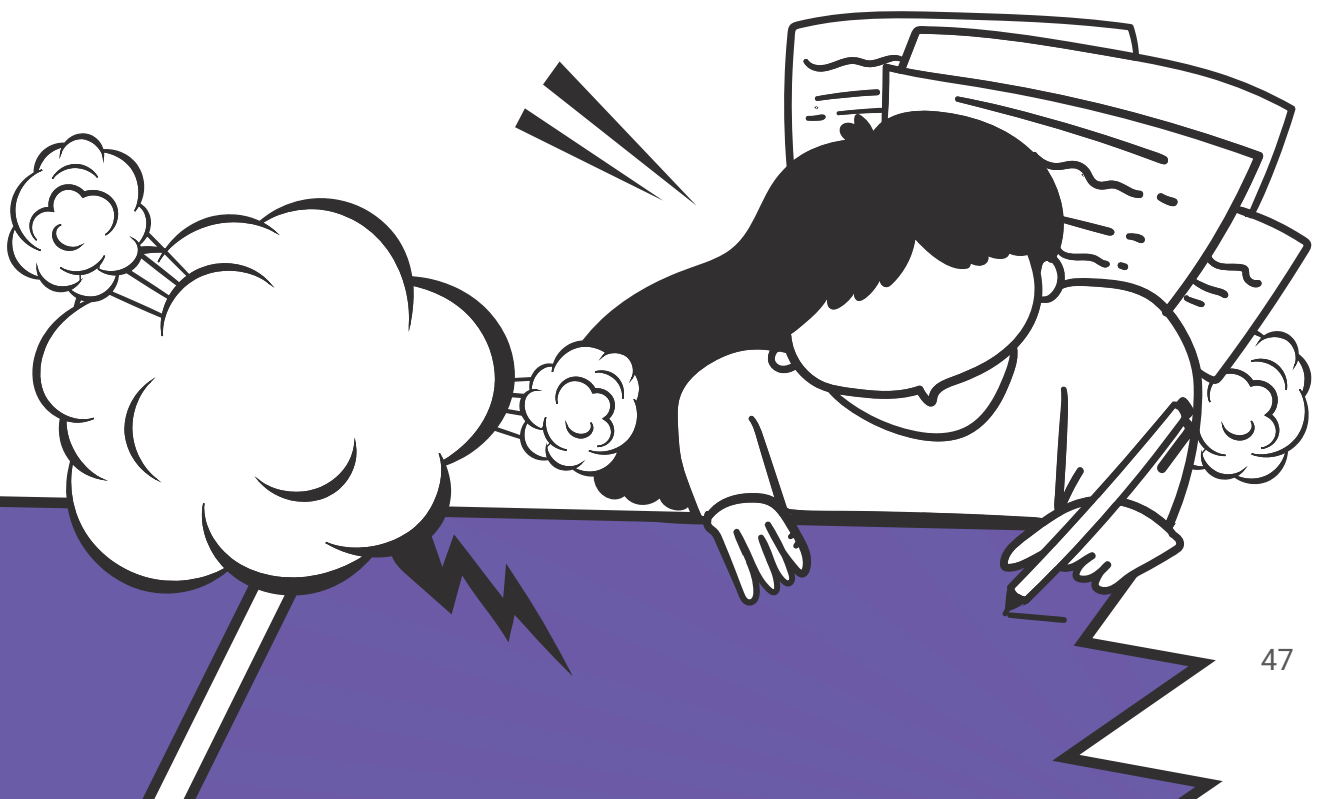
## 5.3. Time / Space

Comics can manipulate a reader's sense of time. By altering or removing panels, storytellers can create any desired impression of the passage of time (i.e., the panel being read is sensed as being in the present; the panel to the left is in the past; the panel to the right is in the future) (Understanding Comics Summary and Study Guide, n. d.). Sequencing of comics, or dissecting time into panels, is equivalent to film editing. Comics' creators can break down a single second into a hundred different panels or can decide to fast-forward several millennia in a single page. The result may feel exciting or confusing, depending on how it fits into the general concept of the story (ibid.).

Sequencing also indicates the spatial flow and layout of the panels on the page. Take, for example, how we read left to right and top to bottom in the Western culture, though comics do not necessarily have to follow that rule very strictly. In this way, the sequencing of the story also dictates the visual style and the overall experience of the reader (ibid.).

### Key questions for analysis and understanding:

- What is the rhythm, pacing and flow of the story?
- How does the setting (time and space of the action) contribute to the overall story?
- How does sequencing of comics relate to the story – is it used as a tool to progress the story, to make it more exciting/unpredictable, is it used in a sensible or in a (deliberately) nonsensical way?
- Why did the author decide for such a use of time and space? Why did the author sequence the comics in such a way and not the other?



## 5.4. Plot structure

Comics are a medium that allows quite a lot of narrative freedom without such things as (budget) constraints (e.g. not being able to set a scene in space or introduce as many new characters as an author can handle). That does not mean that there are no constraints, however. They are limited to plot structure. A comic can offer the most captivating characters and the most exciting setting, but if there is no attention to the story, the end result fails to produce the intended effect completely (Mercury XY, 2019).

But what is the central factor in the dramatic structure of comics? Some would argue that it is long-form storytelling, which does not necessarily entail a decades-long series or a big event. It is a method that consists of layered bits of dialogue and sneaky setups that are used in such a way that every issue paves the way to something bigger. The road to a payoff is just as important as the payoff itself. Making it as exciting and unpredictable as possible, is also a good tool for making the story more captivating and gripping (ibid.).

To create a complex narrative it is essential to plan the distribution of plots, subplots, setups, and payoffs across the journey, while not being afraid to shake things up a bit. There are, of course, some popular types of structures that are commonly used in films, novels, TV shows, myths and comics (ibid.).

### **Key questions for analysis and understanding:**

- How does the story work as a unit? Is it intricate, confusing, smooth?
- What major themes is the narrative tied to?
- Can the story be understood as a commentary on our society? In what way?
- How does the author use emotion to support the story?
- What are some other methods and tools of the author's storytelling? Why do you think they decide to use those methods specifically?
- What is the story trying to convey?

## 5.5. Characters

Thorough construction of characters is essential in all kinds of media. Each character in a story is a vessel for a different point of view for the reader. Popular characters are instantly recognizable but narratively and thematically complex. When crafting the comic's universe, authors have to consider and outline all the possible story arcs that may follow the plot when it develops and progresses. The most attention usually goes to the main character(s), however, many authors also devise several antagonists and supporting characters who live their lives outside the main story, imagining which other heroes are fighting their own battles in the same universe and which potential love interests are longing for a soulmate just like the protagonist (Mercury XY, 2019).

But why is it even necessary to develop the world outside of the main story? It's simple - all this untold information can make the story richer and more layered. It is only the imagination of the writer that shapes the characters and their fate (ibid.).

### Key questions for analysis and understanding:

- What is it about the characters in the comic that shows the potential to resonate in the reader?
- What is the identity of the characters? What is their appearance, their main traits, what emotions do they convey, etc.?
- How does the story support / highlight the characters and their identity?
- Are the characters used in a way to represent something? Do they stand for certain beliefs, values?
- Are the characters diverse? Are they representatives of certain social groups?
- What are their problems / obstacles they are facing – are they universal – i.e. can be tied to real-life problems (economic, social, cultural, etc. obstacles) or are they completely abstract (i.e. »normal« superhero worries, tied to the relationship with the antagonist)?



## 5.6. Dialogue

Comics are also heavily dependent on dialogue. Dialogue is the worldview of the characters put into words. Main features of good dialogue are:

- it is thrilling;
- it draws you into the story;
- it conveys clear information about the characters and plot;
- it doesn't rely on visual / graphic aid (Mercury XY, 2019).

Every single word has to serve a purpose, be it emotional stimulation, a payoff to a former setup, or exposition. Dialogue is all about evolution. It is a tool for building relationships and advancing the plot (ibid.).

Dialogue does not remain isolated from the rest of the graphic elements. It is in constant interaction with the captions, the sound effects, the borders, and the speech balloons. It has to be adapted to space given, so it is usually short and to the point. This is why when creating comics, authors have to use the dialogue cleverly and pair it smartly with a wide variety of graphic resources to produce dynamic results that capture the attention of the reader, while at the same time communicate the story as convincingly as possible. Lastly and most importantly, dialogue must be dramatically meaningful. What comics cannot convey through images, they convey through dialogue (ibid.).

### **In summary, dialogue should ideally be:**

- Concise enough to drive the point across.
- Realistic enough to maintain the suspension of disbelief.
- As dramatically powerful as the moment demands (ibid.).

### **Key questions for analysis and understanding:**

- Does the comic employ different resources, such as irony, comedy, lies, call-backs, suspense, etc., to enrich the dialogue? Is this their only function or does the use also tell us something about the characters, story, themes, perhaps even the overall takeaway message of the comic?
- How is the dialogue used – to convey the message, to further the story along, to develop characters, to make social/critical commentary?

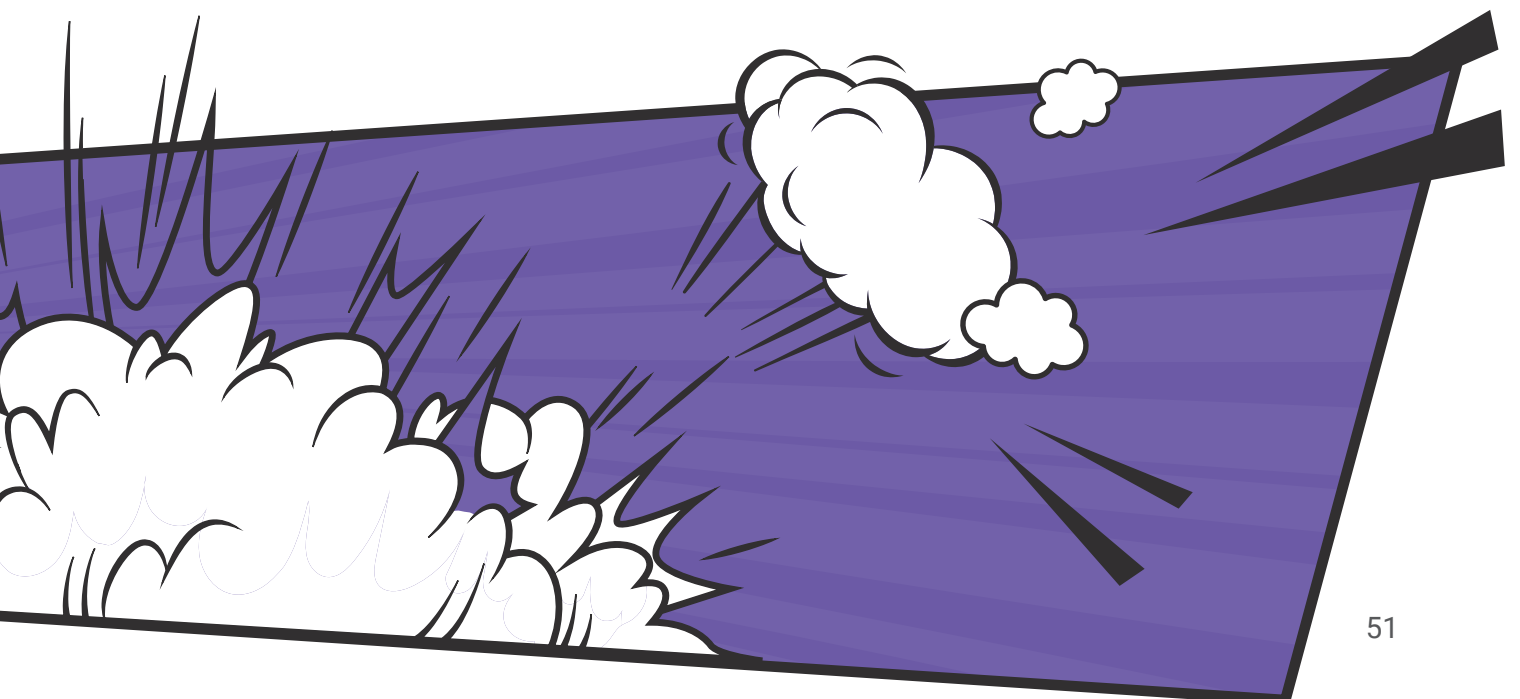
## 5.7. Action

Comics are usually packed full of action. That does not necessarily mean “superhero-y” action in the form of punches, kicks and wild chases. A simple walk down the street can give the reader chills if done right. Action is defined by movement, energy, conflict and resolution. It is also very important that the action stands on its own visually (it is better to show than to tell). The essence of action lies in the weight and intensity of each activity. If weight can be described as a content of the action, then intensity is a shape of the action:

- **WEIGHT:** The relevance of a character’s actions in the context of the moment, their behavior and their relationship with other characters. For example, seeing a character who swore to never do something, doing it for the first time. Here we wonder: what brought them to do it? Pain, joy? Who is with them? Is this the climactic moment in their entire story arc or is it the first step towards a big change?
- **INTENSITY:** The form in which an incident or a character’s activity manifests. The intensity of an action depends mainly on its level of detail and the choice of words used to narrate it. The same example of the character doing something they swore not to do can be either heightened or passed over (Mercury XY, 2019).

### Key questions for analysis and understanding:

- What is the key action of the comic?
- What weight does the key action bear? What about the intensity of the key action?
- Why do you think the author decided to use this action?
- What is conveyed through the action(s) in the comic?  
Emotions, themes, (social) commentary?





## ***FOLLOW UP***

At the end of the session it is important that the participants share their work with their fellow friends/students/participants/writers... Create a safe space for them to share what they have created. The comic panels can be displayed for the entire group in a gallery-style or you can put them in pairs so they can share.

Participants should leave the session with a deeper understanding of the content they have explored and how it can best be communicated to an audience.

The sessions should be followed by a reflection – via discussion or journal entry or in pairs, of how creating in a multimodal format helped them understand the content, or perhaps how having to explain content to others clarified previous misunderstandings.

In addition to a significant improvement of their skills, participants will also have a comic or mini-graphic novel, as a finished piece of artwork that expresses their learning in a distinct and distilled form.

Below are some suggestions based on the article by David Jensen (2001) for how to initiate discussions in the session after young people have created their comics.

- **Keep it short and simple.** Time is limited and your goal is to begin the discussion, not to substitute for it.
- **Provide an „outside perspective“** Instead of recapitulating the participants words and structure of the comics, provide an alternative way of looking at it. This will help others to look at the comic in a different way and start a discussion.
- **Compare and contrast with other comics** Use the context provided by other comics discussed. Consider how the work and the topic in the current is similar or different, better or worse.
- **Make notes.** Make some notes about what you want to say in the session and important points on the comics of the participants. Don't write out all of what you want to say, but do note the important points and your questions so you won't forget them.

Young people use comics to visually retell a story they have read or they tell a completely new story and introduce a specific topic like raising awareness to topics such as racism, bullying, digital citizenship etc. So it is important that during the session you and participants talk about the structure, wording, panels, art, plot, characters, topic ...

Below are some examples of concrete questions, based on research from Mui. S (2017), that you can ask the participants/creators of the comics, that would help you open up a discussion and just reflect on the work that was done.



1. Can you look at the art without the dialogue and still have a good sense of what's happening?
2. Can you clearly tell what happens in between panels?
3. How is negative space used? When is it used for focus or to convey something in the story?
4. Are the captions and speech balloons placed well? Do they detract/distract from the art or do they harmonize well with the composition?
5. Do scenes in the panels have focal points or are they confusing? Are confusing panels done on purpose to support the action and writing?
6. Do the colors used express moods consistent with the context? Are they used effectively and are portraying emotions, tones, moods?
7. Which emotions does the comic evoke? What kind of atmosphere is created?
8. Are panels sized evenly in a grid or are they varying in size?
9. Is there a recurring theme within the work?
10. Are there recurring metaphors, ideas, or language? What symbols or images do they emphasize?
11. Does the plot have a sense of movement? Does it maintain the reader's interest?
12. Are there any obvious plot holes?
13. Was the story paced well or did it feel rushed?
14. Which characters are likable and which are dislikeable? Why?
15. Are character actions consistent with their established personality? If something is out of character, is an explanation given?
16. Are characters written more cartoonishly or do they have more realistic, subtle personalities and motivations?
17. Can you identify the protagonist(s)? The antagonists?
18. What kind of relationships do the characters have with each other? How do they interact with one another? How do those interactions/relationships impact the story?
19. What challenges does the protagonist face and how are they overcome? Are they overcome in a plausible manner? Are they overcome in a clever, character-consistent manner or is some external factor utilized?
20. Many comics portray characters with special abilities or traits – are these abilities connected to each character in some way or do they seem randomly assigned?
21. Does your comic define any stereotypes?
22. Is there appropriate language and terminology used around inclusive topics?
23. Is the comic reflective of today's society?

Your first and most important task as a facilitator is ensuring that conversations around diversity remain civil. Encourage the participants to really dive into their comics and topics and support their thinking and ideas.



## ***CONCLUSION***

Comics as a tool, adapted for youth work, can be extremely useful for youth workers and youth organizations, educators, etc. to evolve their approaches, incorporate new visions in them, as well as become more flexible and more open to connecting with their own target groups - young people. Youth workers and youth organizations constantly evolve and try to find ways on how to engage with the youth that is transforming quite rapidly. There have been many approaches, methods or tools that youth workers can use and adjust in order to cover the needs of their beneficiaries. The creation of comics, guided via an in-depth, detailed and methodical guide, will be one more important asset for youth workers everywhere.

The desire of the Manual was to provide youth workers or educators in general who are working with youth, a new possibility and giving you access to new working tools. Using comics when working with youth has multiple positive benefits from enhancing their creative levels to encouraging their creative writing and storytelling abilities to the social aspects of creating comics by simply being a tools for expression of emotions, thought and desires. Studies have shown that the use of comic creation as a tool can be more efficient than other traditional tools. The comic creation can lead to improved knowledge, behavior and healthier decision-making.

Nowadays comics are used not only as a means of entertainment but also as a teaching and learning method since they can raise awareness and disseminate information. And as youth work is changing and adapting quickly to the needs of young people and trends so is the use of tools, methods and approaches we use in our work. Identifying how comics can become part of our Swiss Army knife for youth and what impact they can have on the young people we serve is the first step to understand their potential. Comic books offer a stimulating and creative space in which many young people can let their imaginations run wild without being judged by others. Using the 9th art as a method and tool with young people can give them the opportunity to express themselves about the things that affect them and also help them to (re) find their self-esteem and confidence in the future. In art, there is no right or wrong answer like in school, and for young people who have suffered a lot from a difficult school career, comics can represent a new horizon where their individuality is not associated with failure.

In addition to facilitating the expression of young people's ideas and emotions, comics can help raise awareness of many social issues and provide them with important information on issues that concern them, such as sex education, bullying, addiction, domestic violence, disability and racism. Short, engaging texts and impactful images can help them better understand the important issues surrounding these questions.

Moving on from the theoretical background of the first chapters of the Manual to the most innovative element, the comics creation tool that has hopefully inspired you to visit the CO-MIX platform. The aim was to provide a long term useful tool in the comic creation process and support youth workers and young people in creating inclusive, engaging stories through this medium. However, having the theoretical knowledge and the skills for comic creation and the tool itself does not mean that it is over in the youth work sphere. How to interpret comics together with young people and make meaningful and in depth follow up discussion on its topics as well as the visual elements and storyline is also important aspect as this way the youth workers can engage in a reflection and evaluation of the impact the tool of comicshad towards the addressed issue and the goal that was intended to reach. At the end of the session it is important that the participants share their work with their fellow friends/students/participants/writers... Create a safe space for them to share what they have created.

As the youth work is ever changing and adapting based on the needs of the young people we (youth workers) have to adapt and grow with our knowledge and skills we have just the same. Therefore, youth workers have to constantly learn new methods, tools, approaches and be open to include diverse methods when working with young people. Having just another tool under the youth workers belt is yet another step into being a quality youth worker and providing quality youth work as well in order to help guide and support young people in their own development.



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