COMICS AND CARTOONS AS CHANNELS TO TRANSFORM CLASSROOM PRACTICES

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Abstract
Introduction: Comics are loved and enjoyed by all the children. Use of comics in the classroom to teach will make the teaching interesting, easy and captivating. Teaching through comics enhances the process of quick learning, recollection and memorizing. Student-participation will be amplified. Scope for pair-work and group-work will be improved. It is like mixing vegetables in a cake batter or decorating a cake with raisins. In a similar way, a teacher can use comics in a class. For higher levels, there are comic books on a specific character. Example: Chatrapati Shivaji. After reading the Amar Chitra Katha comics about Shivaji, the teacher can ask the class to analyse the situations, circumstances and actions etc. It also leads to greater exposure to words and in other sense helps in vocabulary acquisition. It also boosts their speaking competence. As all of us know, student motivation is the requirement for reading comprehension. Motivating students with small texts that interest them leads to improve reading comprehension. After this exercise and analysis, students easily read and able to analyse the text-book related topics.

Many character traits can be discussed whether it is about Sindbad or Tintin. Not only Indian cartoons, they can be introduced to Foreign cartoons slowly. Sequencing, vocabulary development etc. skills can be improved among young learners. Studying comic books will definitely help in connecting students to other works of literature, literary analysis and the skills they require for deeper comprehension. Even teaching grammar through humour is possible and very much interesting.

Key words: comic strips, panels, Gag cartoons, memorabilia, stimulus, Amul-slipstreaming, story sequencing, idiomatic expressions

Introduction:

Comics are loved by young children as they contain their favourite hero’s stories as well as action pictures. A Comic book is a magazine that contains a set of stories told in pictures with a small amount of writing. Comics are used as mediums to express ideas through images, often combined with texts or other visual information. They include textual devices such as speech balloons, captions and onomatopoeia. By the mid-20th century, comics flourished, particularly in the United States, Western Europe and Japan. Newspaper comic strips; magazine-style comic books appeared in the 1930s, in which the superhero genre became prominent after Superman appeared in 1938.

The term comic is used as a singular noun when it refers to the medium but becomes plural when referring to particular instances, such as individual strips or comic books. In the beginning, the word comics referred to humorous illustrations but later it applied to non-humorous illustrations also.

As children, we used to read comic strips in newspapers and magazines. The various types of cartoons are discussed below.
Gag cartoons in which good triumphs over evil and they usually consist of a single panel. We find them in magazines.

Illustrative cartoons are three types. They are Comic strips or panels, single illustrations and comic story books.

Comic Strip Cartoons have more than one panel. These are a series of humourous drawings put together to make a funny story. The last panel usually has the punch line.

Animated Cartoons are a kind of comic strip cartoons because animation is defined as a series of pictures put together to make it seem as if the characters are in motion.

Another type is Political Cartoons. They serve as a visual commentary on current political affairs. These are mostly satirical rather than funny. The common factor in all cartoons is humour.

The Famous comics are The Adventures of Tintin (French: Les Aventures de Tintin [lez‿avɑ̃tyʁdɛtɛ̃]) is a series of 24 comic albums created by Belgian cartoonist Georges Remi, who wrote under the pen name Hergé. The series was one of the most popular European comics of the 20th century.

The main characters are Tintin, Snowy, the adorable dog; Captain Archibald Haddock, Professor Calculus, Thomson and Thomson, the two incompetent detectives who look like identical twins, their only noticeable difference being the shape of their moustaches. The character Tintin represents an unattainable ideal of goodness, simplicity and authenticity. These comics were published between 1929-1976 and were created by Hergé.

The Tintin series was adopted in the form of Television, radio, theatre, documentaries and video games. Many people have done their research about Tintin books and tintinology. Many memorabilia and merchandise came into existence all over the world. Stamps and coins were sold in Belgium. Parodies were produced, exhibitions were held in 1929 and in 2015, Brussels airlines painted an Airbus with the picture of Tintin. The famous phrases from the Tintin series include Blistering Barnacles! Anacoluthons! Dunderheaded coconuts! Ten thousand thundering typhoons! etc. We observe use of these phrases in day to day conversation.

It is a well-proven fact that one could change the zero–intelligent persons as well-natured and intelligent people by way of using comics. The best example is Vishnu Sarma's Panchatantra in Sanskrit. We find these stories in English story books also. For generations, cartoons and comics are used in the classroom for entertaining purpose. Now, these are used to generate a stimulus in the classroom. They are used to teach different subjects in the classroom. Students enjoy reading comics, discussing comics and even creating comics. In this context, we have to understand that cartoons and comics are exchangeable. Cartoons have more impact as visuals are more effective than reading. Teachers use cartoons in two ways one is to analyse a cartoon or to create a new cartoon.

A Brief Introduction to the World of Comics:

Students can put the comic strips in sequential order, through which they can learn story-sequencing. English teachers can use these comics to teach vocabulary and analytical skills. Amul Slipstreaming Cartoons can be used for developing analytical skills.

American Cartoonist Bill Watterson’s Calvin and Hobbes, James Davis’s Garfield, Archie comics, Peanuts, Dilbert, Betty Boop, Heathcliff, Mafalda, Hagar, the horrible, Dennis the menace and Gaturro are some of the famous non-Indian comics.
Coming to the Indian scenario, Pinki, Nagaraj and Saktiman and ChotaBhim are some of our children’s favourite heroes in Indian Comics. Batman and Superman are already read by the children.

Coming to stories in the form of comic strips, Panchatantra stories are the oldest tales in Indian history.

The witty stories of Akbar and Birbal and Tenali Rama encourage children to find simple solutions to the various problems. Tenali Rama inspired several TV shows and movies. Vikram and Betaal series is based on the writings of Somdev Bhatt nearly 2500 years ago. The stories revolve around the advice given by a ghost called Betaal to the wise King Vikramaditya. Amar Chitra Katha is India’s largest selling comic book series with more than 90 million copies sold in 20 Indian languages. These series teach Indian children of their cultural heritage and cover various topics including mythology, ancient history and traditions of India.

Next one is Chacha Chaudhary. Who doesn’t know Chacha Chaudhary? This short man assisted by Sabu from Jupiter would make even the strongest of men run for their lives. These books teach a lesson too- a lesson of intelligence and how a strong mind is more powerful than a strong body.

Next one is Champak. It is the largest read children’s magazine in the country, which is a compilation of short stories, comic strips, puzzles, brain teasers and jokes.

Next one is Tinkle. The tagline is where learning meets fun. It enjoys great popularity being the magazine of both children and adults. It contains stories, comics, puzzles, quizzes and contests.

Next one is Shakti. This is our only Indian female superhero, the incarnation of Goddess Kali. Whenever there is a cry for help from women in any corner of the world, Shakti comes to their rescue.

The next one is Bankelal. He is called the King of comedy, as he would arouse laughter among the readers through his mischievous deeds.

Chandamama: It is a monthly magazine for children famous for its mythological or magical stories along with good illustrations. It is adored by children and elders as well.

Teachers can use these Indian comics at the primary level for two reasons. As responsible persons, it is the teacher’s responsibility to inculcate morals and values through these stories at a very young age. The second reason is our cultural values will pass to younger generations.

**Why Use Comics to Teach English?**
The truth is that comics are actually a very effective tool in the English teacher’s classroom. Teachers can use them for…

- Building vocabulary
- Teaching various idiomatic expressions
- Providing a visual component to reading exercises that text-books don’t have.
- Entertaining the students with funny, culturally-relevant material
- Encourages Constructive motivation
• Scope for Creativity

• Students really seem to enjoy comics—either because they love to read comics or because they appreciate learning with visuals.

• Target – Language Culture

• Leads to deeper comprehension of Literary works

• Resources for an action-packed ESL Class

Activities that can be planned in a class:

• Sequencing
• Match the speech bubble with a picture
• Guess the meaning of new words
• Add speech bubbles and thought clouds
• Fill in words, expressions or whole sentences that have been erased.
• Role Play of their favourite character
• Add-a-panel
• Scripting or narrating a comic strip into a story
• Story-boarding – Book summaries, processes, social action
• Create own comic strip or cartoon from scratch
• Erase the speech bubbles of one character and ask the students to fill in the blanks based on the responses of the other characters.
• Teachers can encourage students to do more creative writing by having them write their own version of their favorite comic book or panels.
• Ask the students to bring in examples of their favourite comic strips in their native language and ask them to translate a brief section into English. This could be done in pairs or small groups and the translations by different groups could then be compared.

• Remove the final speech bubble in a comic strip story so that the students have to invent and write a suitable ending. Depending on the desires, needs and capabilities of the class, the teacher could also ask them to draw the final line of the story as well as providing the dialogue.
• [https://americanenglish.state.gov/resources/why-english-comics-classroom](https://americanenglish.state.gov/resources/why-english-comics-classroom)

This resource can be used by teachers as well as learners. It includes notes for teachers and activities to use in the classroom at the end of each story. The story is available to read and audio is also available to listen. The material is created by the United States Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs and is designed specifically to teach American English to ESL students using fun stories and a number of challenging exercises. There are a total of 21 short comic book stories for beginners and lower-intermediate students, and each one comes with the following material available for download:

• A PDF of the comic
• An MP3 file for listening practice
A teacher’s activity guide with discussion topics, vocabulary, pronunciation and role-play activities
A create-your-own-comic component

The goal of this resource is to use storytelling and sequential art as a way to teach lower-level students the basics of English. Overall, it’s a great program because it helps to challenge the students’ listening, reading and writing skills with fun and interactive comics.

Activities Using Comics for Teaching English:
1. Sequential art of storytelling using comic strips.
   Students will be exposed to comic strips. They have to tell the story by arranging the pictures in sequential order.
2. The Comic book project:
   It engages children in a creative process, leading to literacy fortification, social awareness and character development. It also publishes and distributes their work for other children to use as learning and motivational tools. http://comicbookproject.org/about/
3. Where can one find comics online?
   www.comics.org
   www.comicbookdb.com
   www.comicspage.com
   www.comicsbeat.com
   www.onlinecomics.net
   www.comicbookresources.com
   www.comixology.com

Intermediate Level:
Using comic strips remove the action words and ask students to provide suitable action words.
In the same way, adjectives also can be done.
Fill in the blanks exercises with content words based on the story can be practiced.
Vocabulary, Pronunciation, Spelling practice also can be practiced using comic strips.

Higher Level:
Along with the storytelling, role plays using different comic characters can be experimented.
Writing or creating suitable comic strips by the class can be given as a (5 member) group project work. (Speaking and writing skills)
Grammar and vocabulary in context can be practiced using suitable comic strips. Scope for language practice through group work is possible. It also promotes the use of higher level thinking skills.
Analytical skills by comparing two panels and synthesis by creating new comic strips are possible. (Bloom’s Taxonomy)
The practice of Idiomatic speech and colloquial use of language by speech are possible. Students will know about reduced speech and slang also.
The excellent way to practice specific grammar items is feasible.
Grammar and vocabulary learning is practiced by CLOZE activities.
The cloze procedure is a reading comprehension activity in which words are omitted from a passage and students are required to fill in the blanks. This procedure is incredibly useful in reading instruction because it can be easily done by any teacher and provides valuable reading comprehension information.
The teacher can hide words in a sentence/paragraph and ask the students to provide the missing words. The teacher can provide a list of mixed words which can fit the blanks along with some extra words.

Advanced Level; No such list is provided. The students are capable of themselves to provide suitable words.

**Exercise 1:**

**Grammar in Context: Fill in the missing vocabulary.**

![Image of a comic strip with a dialogue](image)

**Grammar in context: Vocabulary Cloze**

![Image of a comic strip with a dialogue](image)

**Exercise 2:** Jigsaw Puzzle

Cut comic strips apart.
- Ask students to arrange them in the correct order.
- Students have to justify their assembling.
- Bloom's Taxonomy: Analysis, Evaluation and Synthesis.
  This exercise promotes reading and vocabulary improvement.
  Sequencing can be practiced.
  Use of target language, if done as a group activity is possible.

**Exercise 3:**

Each student gets one part of a comic and describes it to their group mates but does not show it
- After members describe their unit, the group, still without looking, agrees on the sequence
- Promotes directed target-language usage
- Student-directed speech with a visual guide
- Can be done with comics that have only images, or with words and images.
Exercise 4:
Remove one character’s dialogue from a panel
--Students fill in the bubble
--Can be done individually, in pairs, or as a group
--Can promote pragmatic intelligence
--Appropriate response
--Practice of target language, if done in a group is possible.

Exercise 5:
Give students a sequential comic strip with a panel missing.
Ask them to write the missing panel.
Can be done in a group to promote the use of target language
Sequencing and prediction skills will be developed.

Exercise 6:
Students draw and write their own comics
-- A childhood memory, for example, Small group or pairs write and draw together
-- Retell a story, visually, that they have read
-- Students work in illustrator-writer pairs

Exercise 7:
Students act out the comic
-- Retelling a comic – with and without the visual aid of the strip
-- Compare the retelling with the actual comic

Exercise 8: SITE OF A CAR CRASH

PANEL 1 -- Beside a traffic accident, a police officer speaks to a young woman, who sits on the pavement, visibly upset.
YOUNG WOMAN: What happened?
POLICE OFFICER: Are you alright, ma’am?

PANEL 2 -- The young woman panics.
YOUNG WOMAN: What’s going to happen now? Was this all my fault?

PANEL 3 -- The police officer speaks calmly but firmly to the young woman.
POLICE OFFICER: Focus on your breathing. We’ll get you out of here.

PANEL 4 -- The police officer reassures the young woman.
POLICE OFFICER: Everything’s going to be okay.
Analysis of each frame in the panel will give way to group discussion, analysis and creative skills.

Advantages of using cartoons/comics are many. They improve L2 negotiation and communication.
– All four skills
– Creativity
– Freedom of thought
– Diversity of opinion
– Higher-level thinking skills
-- Fun, interesting and motivating for students
-- Opportunities to incorporate target-language culture and pragmatic intelligence
-- Student-directed and student-centered
-- Real world and authentic language
-- Analytical Skills

**Conclusion:**
Thus comics can be used to improve reading habits among children, sequencing, story-telling, writing skills and to encourage higher-level thinking. As humour is an added advantage, they will be in a receptive mood. They show interest to work in groups and comprehension will be easy as visuals are part of comics. A solid comic can provide unique visuals, ideas, characters, points of view, and more scope for discussion. Combining and processing the key elements of a comic, script and image, helps develop a sharp memory for learning. The qualities of participation, working in pairs or groups and sharing will develop among students. Teachers can also teach grammar through humour which is displayed in the Power point presentation.

I strongly urge to consider the idea that comics can be a wonderful assistance to the classroom courses. Check out the links given and dig deeper into this opportunity; explore the reader-friendly medium of comics and get creative with your students!
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