



## **Art and Writing: Comics and Beyond**

*September 15, 2006–January 28, 2007*

**Grades 5–12**

**Pre- and Post-Visit Materials for Educators**

### **Program Overview**

Many artists incorporate text into their work. This tour will explore the connection between art and writing with a particular emphasis on the art featured in *Master of American Comics* and *Superheroes: Good and Evil in American Comics*. The former is a landmark, two-part exhibition on view simultaneously at The Jewish Museum and The Newark Museum. The first major museum examination of one of America's great popular art forms, this exhibition features fourteen of the most innovative and influential comic artists. In Newark, the focus is on comic strips created in the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. In New York, comic artists working from the 1950s to the present day are presented. *Superheroes*, at The Jewish Museum, features classic images of comic book heroes, such as Superman and Batman, created between 1938 and 1950. Students will discover how comics integrate art and text to express powerful ideas and construct engaging narratives. Writing and drawing activities will be an integral part of this tour.

### **Background Information**

*Masters of American Comics* (September 15, 2006–January 28, 2007)

During this program, school groups will focus on two of the artists presented in *Masters of American Comics*: Will Eisner and Jack Kirby. Eisner's work was an important bridge between comic strips and comic books—readers found his comic feature *The Spirit* in the weekly paper, just like comic strips, but the stories were more extensive and were told over multiple pages. Jack Kirby is best known as the creator of many well-known superheroes from the 1940s to 1970s. *Captain America* was Kirby's first success, followed by *The Hulk*, *The Avengers*, *The X-Men*, *The Fantastic Four*, and *the Silver Surfer*, which were developed through a partnership with writer Stan Lee (b. 1922). Kirby was a talented draftsman and his work set a precedent for epic adventure comics popular at the time. Both artists—Eisner and Kirby—were working during the Golden Age of Comics (1938–1950), when comic books were at the height of popularity and some of the most famous superheroes were created.

*Please note: Many of the works featured in this exhibition contain graphic images that are geared toward an adult audience. This program focuses only on those appropriate for students in grades 5–12.*

*Superheroes: Good and Evil in American Comics* (September 15, 2006–January 28, 2007)

In addition to exhibiting *Masters of American Comics*, The Jewish Museum has also organized a small exhibition about the superheroes that emerged in comic books in the late 1930s and the 1940s. *Superheroes: Good and Evil in American Comics* explores the connection between

superheroes and super-villains and the historical and political context in which they were conceived; many of these characters were drawn from the experiences of the young Jewish immigrants who created them during the time of World War II. These characters include Superman, Batman, and Captain America, to name a few. Comic artists featured in the exhibition are: Jerry Siegel and Joe Shuster (creators of Superman), Jerry Robinson, Bill Finger, Bob Kane, Joe Simon, Jack Kirby, Mort Meskin, Irwin Hasen, Fred Ray, Joe Kubert, Lou Fine, Mac Raboy, Will Eisner, and Alex Schomburg.

### Goals

- Explore works of art from *Masters of American Comics* and *Superheroes: Good and Evil in American Comics* considering the following elements: draftsmanship, layout, character development, narrative, and the relationship between text and image.
- Consider the stylistic development of comics throughout its history.
- Examine the political and historical context of the comics featured in *Masters of American Comics* and *Superheroes: Good and Evil in American Comics*.
- Compare original works of art with mass produced images.
- Understand the process of making comic books, from preliminary ideas and sketches to final published versions.
- Establish connections between original comic book characters and contemporary adaptations.

### Vocabulary

<b>Alter-ego</b>	Another side to someone's personality; Clark Kent is Superman's alter-ego.
<b>Comic Strip</b>	A series of images with text that tell a story; <i>Peanuts</i> , by Charles Schultz, is an example of a comic strip.
<b>Draftsmanship</b>	Skill in drawing or drafting.
<b>Genre</b>	Category of works of art; comics are one example of an artistic genre.
<b>Graphic Novel</b>	A form of comic book, usually with lengthy or complex storylines.
<b>Formal Qualities</b>	Purely visual elements of a work of art, including line, color, light, composition, structure, and space.
<b>Layout</b>	Way things are arranged; comic artists experimented with the layout of comic book pages with designs ranging from grids to diagonal boxes to full-page spreads.
<b>Splash Page</b>	A full page drawing in a comic book; a splash page or splash is usually the first page after the cover. This important page establishes the setting of the story and usually presents an enticing picture of the main character in action.

<b>Superhero</b>	A fictional character, often featured in comic books, that usually has superhuman powers and uses them to fight evil.
<b>Super-villain</b>	An evil fictional character often featured in comic books, that is the enemy of the superhero.

## Pre-Visit Activity

### 1. *Analyzing a Work of Art*

Look at the image enclosed in these pre-visit materials with your students:

- This is a photocopy of an original comic book cover by Jack Kirby for the *Fantastic Four* from May 1966. What are your initial observations of this piece? What catches your eye?
- How would you describe the manner in which the artist illustrates the scene? Consider color, composition, and perspective.
- Describe the cover design. What information is provided for the reader? How is it organized?
- What does the cover reveal about the story inside? What do you think the story is going to be about?
- What can you infer about the attributes of the Silver Surfer based on his depiction in this cover illustration? Do you think he is a hero or a villain? Do you think he has any super powers? If so, what do you think they are?
- What devices does the artist use to entice the reader? Consider both the pictures and the text.
- Have you seen contemporary depictions of the *Fantastic Four* characters? What do you already know about the *Fantastic Four* characters in regards to their alter-egos, super powers, and relationships to one another?
- How do the original renderings of the *Fantastic Four*, as seen in this image, compare to more recent ones?

### Background Information:

Jack Kirby's *Fantastic Four*, issue 50, which was published in May 1966, was the third issue in a trilogy called "The Startling Saga of the Silver Surfer." In this trilogy, the character the Silver Surfer is introduced for the first time. Originally the herald of the super-villain Galactus, the Silver Surfer eventually betrays Galactus when he is sent down to earth (after surfing the cosmos) and meets the *Fantastic Four*. After his introduction in issues 48, 49, and 50 (for which this is the cover illustration), artist Jack Kirby and writer Stan Lee develop the Silver Surfer into its own comic book feature.

## **2. Comic Book Comparison**

Bring in comics books from home. Working in pairs or small groups, have students choose one comic book to discuss. At the end, groups present their discussions to the entire class.

Questions to consider:

- Who illustrated the comic book?
- How would you characterize the style of the illustrations? Describe the artist's rendering of form, color, and compositional elements.
- Who wrote the comic? When was it written?
- Who are the characters in the comic and how would you describe them?
- How do the words and images work together to tell the story? How would your understanding of the story change if there were no pictures? What if there was no text?
- Identify sections in the comic book that feature a dynamic moment in the story. For example, this may be the climax of the story when a superhero defeats a villain, or it could be a time a character experiences something exciting. After finding dynamic moments, consider the following questions:
  - How does the artist choose to lay out the illustrations on the page? How is the layout similar or different than other pages in the comic book?
  - How are emotions revealed through the pictures? Consider the pose and expressions of the characters.
  - How do the words express the mood of the scene? For example, does the writer use exclamations such as "wow!" or "yeah"? Are words emphasized through the use of capital letters?
- Consider some of the reasons that you think this comic may be appealing to a broad audience.

### **Post-Visit Activity**

#### ***Create your own comic book splash page***

Consider some of the works that you saw during your visit to *Masters of American Comics* and *Superheroes: Good and Evil in American Comics*. Using the exhibitions at The Jewish Museum as inspiration, develop an original idea for a comic book considering the plot, characters and setting. Illustrate the splash page of your comic book. Remember: The splash page establishes the setting of the story and usually displays an enticing picture of the main character in action.

***Teachers please note:*** Students will have an opportunity to sketch ideas for an original comic book character during their visit to The Jewish Museum. Upon returning to school, students may include their original character in the splash page they illustrate for this activity.

### **Additional Activity**

Design and assemble a costume for your comic book character. Afterwards, dramatize your comic book page for the rest of the class.

### **Resources**

#### Books

Carlin, John, and Paul Karasik and Brian Walker (Eds.) *Masters of American Comics*. Hammer Museum and The Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles. In association with Yale University Press, New Haven and London, 2006.

McCloud, Scott. *Understanding Comics: The Invisible Art*. Harper Paperbacks, 1994.

Taylor, Joshua. *Learning to Look: A Handbook for the Visual Arts*. (2<sup>nd</sup> ed.) Chicago: University Of Chicago Press, 1981.

*Zap! Pow! Bam! The Superhero: The Golden Age of Comic Books 1938–1950*. The William Breman Jewish Museum, Atlanta, 2004.

#### Website

**[www.thejewishmuseum.org](http://www.thejewishmuseum.org)**

The Jewish Museum's website contains information about *Masters of American Comics* and *Superheroes*; includes an online gallery of images and a detailed description of the exhibitions.

*The Jewish Museum is under the auspices of The Jewish Theological Seminary of America.*



From the *Masters of American Comics* exhibition: Jack Kirby, cover of *Fantastic Four* #50 (published May 1966), comic book. Collection of Michigan State University. FANTASTIC FOUR™ and © 2006 Marvel Characters, Inc. Used with permission.