

The Effects of Violence in Popular Culture Cartoons

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“The average child who watches 2 hours of cartoons a day may see nearly 10,000 violent incidents each year, of which the researchers estimate that at least 500 pose a high risk for learning and imitating aggression and becoming desensitized to violence” (The Henry J. Kaiser Family Foundation, 2003). Children and imitating television aggression is an on going debate since the 1930’s, though the recent technical advancements pose a greater reason to address the effects that violence in cartoons have on today’s youth. This curriculum addresses the effects of cartoon violence while allowing middle school students to deconstruct popular culture cartoon programs. Students will be able to create an alternative sequence that will be presented in a logical progression that correlates stop motion animations, storyboarding, comic strips and animation stills with positive violence-free cartoons.

The correlation between violence in cartoons and youth responses has always been a hot debate topic since the 1960’s, and is still a leading topic, which now can be tied to the more recent anti-bullying campaign. A Kaiser Family Foundation (2003) study showed direct association between bullying and a child’s exposure to media. This study, and many more like it, help to aid children’s television program networks, such as Cartoon Network, create an anti-bullying campaign called Stop Bullying: Speak Up. This might ideally sound like a wonderful positive promotion to end bullying but juxtaposed with the violence filled cartoon programs results in an oxymoron against the productivity of their underlying goal.

In order to further develop the main issues that violence in cartoons produce one must first observe cartoons with a critical eye and must be able to understand how children view and related to the programming. Studies show that children process media and cartoons differently than adults, and that immediate exposure to high levels of violence can be linked to the development of attention and self-control disorders (Blumberg, Bierwirth, & Schwartz, 2008). Children, unlike adults, view cartoons as a fantasy reality, though most still maintain the moral understanding that violence is not good. On the other hand, violence in cartoons are consistently overlooked due to the unrealistic nature of character responses. According to Potter (2003) the more the violence deviates from reality (as in the case in cartoons, science fiction, and fantasy), the less likely it is that the act of violence will be taken seriously by the viewer (Kirsh, 2006).

If children can distinguish the difference between good and bad behavior then there is no real concern right? No. As Kirsh (2006) had addressed, children do not relate violence in cartoons at the same level as violence in real life. Since most cartoons feature comedic elements along side the violence, that comedy aspects actually negate the negative moral notions as opposed to children watching non-comedy programming. "When comical events are paired with acts of violence, as is the case in comedic cartoons, priming not only occurs in aggression-related thoughts, concepts, and feelings, but in humor-related thoughts, concepts and feelings, as well. As a result of this dual priming, the perceived level of violence may be lessened" (Kirsh, 2006). Ultimately, by pairing cartoon violence with humor children end up not recognizing the moral dilemma whereas all children respond

when paired violence with news clippings.

On the other hand, not all cartoons are comedies. Even though the dual priming is not featured in a non-comedic cartoon, violence is perceived as less threatening than real life situations. This is the primary reason to pair a lesson about cartoon violence with real life examples and could be taught parallel with graphic novels. Graphic novels produce a different direct relationship to everyday aggression by showing real life situations and dialogues. Youth also relate reality through the use of blood and gore, which is not usually presented in cartoons. Not only can youth respond and process the moral dilemmas in graphic novels, but also they can connect through the imagery.

In addition to television programs, we cannot forget to include animated movies such, Disney or Pixlar animated films. Even as innocent as they might appear, given that most are a G or PG rating, they still feature at least one violent act, which does not include racial or gender biases. According to a study by Yokota and Thompson in 2000, "Violence was frequently initiated by the bad characters (74%) and the rest by good characters; however, the acts committed by good characters were often justified" (Coyne & Whitehead, 2008). This connects to the same characteristics as shown in television cartoon programs.

Ultimately students will be able to recognize and understand that violence is prominent in cartoons, relates to the same moral degree as in real life, and that the lack of seriousness shown in cartoons about aggressive behaviors might lead younger audience to mimic the behavior through bullying. Students will deconstruct

and lead conversations about the violence and aggression, which most will be surprised to see, even though they are familiar with the episodes. Students will address questions based on the idea of discovering the truth behind cartoons and violence. Students will be able to critically observe and address issues relating to cartoons such as gender and race biases on top of the overarching theme of violence.

Students should consider not only the observation of physical but also verbal and indirect aggression. Verbal aggression is almost always negated in cartoons due to their comedic approach, such as through the use of sarcasm or lack emotional response in the victim's expression. Indirect aggression is a "manipulative form of aggression that is often initiated under the cloak of anonymity. This means that the costs of harming others in this way are minimized for the perpetrators, who if questioned, may apply deflective strategies such as denial" (Coyne & Whitehead, 2008). Coyne and White (2008) categorized indirect aggression into 4 areas, which include: social exclusion, malicious humor, guilt induction, and indirect physical aggression.

In conclusion, youth today are getting more than what they bargained by watching popular culture cartoons. Cartoons today are saturated with violence that most children pass off as insignificant even though the consequences might have both long and short-term effects on their overall well-being.

There are a number of key factors that children and youth tend to use unconsciously when viewing cartoons and determining if they are non-threatening. First, if the cartoon is comedic. When a cartoon has comedic elements then our duo

primers began to function simultaneously resulting in a cancellation of any situation or understanding that the cartoon is morally unacceptable. Second, if the cartoon features any form of violence other than physical. This is primarily do to the fantasy reality that youth places cartoons, but also because of the fantasy element it creates a lesser degree of seriousness. Third, the violence does not feature blood, gore, or over-exaggerate responses. When this occurs the cartoon is not viewed as being realistic and youth cannot relate it to real life situations.

This curriculum is to help students recognize that violence can be seen in most televised cartoons and that they should actively seek out the underlying message in these cartoons. In the end, students will be able to deconstruct and reconstruct positive cartoons through the use of stop motion animation, cartoon stills, and comic strips. Hopefully, by gently reminding students that we are products of our environment but it does not mean we have to accept it as it is given to us, then they can alter their understanding and help to positively change their social environment.

References

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Curriculum Unit Theme: The Effects of Violence in Popular Culture Cartoons

Teacher: Leanne Thomas

Grade Level: 6-8th

State Visual Art Goals: VA6-3.3, VA6-5.1, VA6-6.2, VA7-1.3, and VA7-4.3

State Media Arts Goals (if any): MA6-1.2, MA6-1.3, MA6-1.5, MA6-3.4, and MA8-4.1

State Language Arts Goals (if any):

General goals for the curriculum (describe in 2-5 sentences):

This lesson will allow students to deconstruct popular cartoon shows that emphasize and highlight negative features such as violence and bullying. These cartoons will be from a selection of popular shows whose primary audience is middle school students. Students will create a modified cartoon segment that originally featured violence/bullying to reflect a more positive approach to the scene. In this process, the students will work in small teams, choose their segment to modify, create a storyboard, cartoon strip based on storyboard and finally a stop motion clip. This curriculum will include individual mini lessons for each section in the progress on creating the final animated artwork.

Lesson Title (name each lesson to reflect a general unit theme)	Visual Exemplars (list specific images and artists, TV shows, and/or books that you plan to use for each lesson)	Motivation / Dialogue (list basic issues and questions to be explored during classroom dialogue and any other motivational strategies that you plan to use for each lesson)	Media / Process (list artistic processes that your students will engage in during each lesson)	Concepts and/or Design Principles to be learned during each lesson	Closure/Assessment (list an assessment strategy used for each lesson)
Lesson 1 Introduction to Violence in Cartoons (One day)	<i>A. Adventure Time</i> <i>B. The Amazing World of Gumball</i> <i>C. Johnny Test</i> <i>D. The Powerpuff Girls</i> <i>E. Cartoon Network Stop Bullying: Speak Up</i>	A. Issues <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - General review of episodes - History of cartoons - Intended audience - Violence change with society changes B. Discussion Questions <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Why do you think these cartoons are so successful? Would they be successful without the violence? Why? - Why are these cartoons promoting violence along side the networks Stop Bullying Campaign? Is there any correlation between cartoon violence and bullying? - If you could create a cartoon without violence what would you include? Why? 	-Observing and critiquing cartoon animations. -Students will fill out a reflection sheet about violence in cartoons as well as discuss ways that violence can be taken out of cartoons and still remain entertaining.	-Students will deconstruct popular cartoon shows and how they project violence towards youth audiences.	-Students will complete a reflection sheet.

<p>Lesson 2</p> <p>Storyboarding: getting from point A to point B</p> <p>(3-5 days)</p>	<p>A. Short video clips about storyboarding an animated movie (behind the scenes).</p>	<p>A. Issues</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Cartoons as a promotion of violence. - Violence aimed at one audience type. - Effects on younger audiences. <p>B. Discussion Questions</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Is the intended audience only boys/girls? Why? - Can a scene be changed to become more positive? Why? Which one? 	<p>-Students will create a rough draft of their storyboards based on their group discussion.</p> <p>-Students will create their own storyboard.</p> <p>-Students will then reflect on each other's storyboard and combine elements from each into their group project, to be used later.</p>	<p>-Elements of a storyboard and how beneficial they are artwork creations.</p> <p>-Direct relation to ELA outlines and research webs.</p> <p>-Students will view a short clip on how storyboards are created and how the effect the end product.</p>	<p>-Students will create a K.N.I. formative chart about what they have learned about storyboarding.</p> <p>-Students will submit their completed storyboard, which will be returned to be included in their portfolio.</p>
<p>Lesson 3</p> <p>Design Elements of cartoon stills, comic strips, and animation</p> <p>(1-2 days)</p>	<p>A. Brick Flicks & Comics Academy, <i>Adding Comic Book Elements to Images</i></p> <p>B. Darrin Bell, <i>Candorville</i></p> <p>C. Mike Peters, <i>Mother Goose and Grimm</i></p> <p>D. Floyd Gottfredson, <i>Mickey Mouse</i></p>	<p>A. Issues</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - How do you design a cartoon still? - What is the difference between a cartoon still and a comic strip? - How do you create an animation? - How are these interrelated? <p>B. Discussion Questions</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - How is the effect of violence different between the media? - Is one layout easier to produce? Why? Is the message still the same? - Is the influence on younger audiences different? Why? 	<p>-Students will create four thumbnail sketches of a cartoon still based on their storyboard.</p> <p>-Students will create a final cartoon still.</p>	<p>-Students will begin to research for comics to use as a guide reference.</p> <p>-Each student will cut out a comic strip and use that as a guide to their storyboard.</p> <p>-Students will use the comic strip as a guide in creating their comic strip.</p>	<p>-Students will complete a cartoon still, which will be returned to be included in their portfolio.</p> <p>-Students will complete four thumbnail sketches and attach to cartoon still.</p> <p>-Students will complete an analytic rubric.</p>

<p>Lesson 4</p> <p>The Good ol' Fashion Comic Strip</p> <p>(3-5 days)</p>	<p>A. Ernie Bushmiller, <i>Nancy</i></p> <p>B. Ray Billingsley, <i>Curtis</i></p> <p>C. Bill Watterson, <i>Calvin and Hobbes</i></p>	<p>A. Issues</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Do comic strips feature violence? - Comic strips aimed at different audiences. - Effects on younger audiences - Are they outdated? <p>B. Discussion Questions</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Review. How is the effect of violence different between the media, cartoon verses comic? - Is there more or less violence? Why? - Is the influence on younger audiences different? Why? - Is it harder to portray violence in comic strips? 	<p>-Students will create three thumbnail sketches prior to creating a final artwork.</p> <p>-Students will create a final cartoon strips based on their group's storyboard.</p>	<p>-Students will begin to research newspaper comic for ideas.</p> <p>-Students will use the comic strip as a guide in creating their comic strip.</p>	<p>-Student will cut out a comic strip for reference and adhere it to the thumbnail sketches.</p> <p>-Students will create three thumbnail sketches.</p> <p>-Students will create a final comic strip.</p> <p>-Students will complete an analytical rubric</p>
<p>Lesson 5</p> <p>Putting it All Together: Elements of a Stop Motion</p> <p>(One day)</p>	<p>A. Klutz, <i>Animation Videos</i></p> <p>B. Smashing Magazine, <i>50 Incredible Stop Motion Videos</i></p> <p>C. Nick Park, <i>Wallace and Gromit</i></p> <p>D. Lego Short Videos</p>	<p>A. Issues</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - How to use a storyboard, comic still and strip to create a stop motion. - Ways to create animations. - Use of technology or lack of technology. <p>B. Discussion Questions</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - How are storyboards, comic stills, and comic strips interrelated? - How would you create a stop motion animation if you do not have a still camera? Could you use a cell phone? Images found online? 	<p>-Observing and critiquing stop motion animations.</p> <p>-Students will fill out a reflection sheet about stop motion animations.</p> <p>-Discussion of project over view and elements required making animations.</p>	<p>-Discuss the animation set, which includes: the photography area, background/drop, and lighting.</p> <p>-Use of materials such as Legos, clay, drawings, and figures.</p> <p>-Project expectations, deadlines and project rubric.</p>	<p>-Students fill out a reflection sheet about stop motion.</p>

<p>Lesson 6</p> <p>The Creation Story: In the Begin there was light, a set and characters!</p> <p>(5 days)</p>	<p>A. Klutz, <i>Animation Videos</i></p> <p>B. Smashing Magazine, <i>50 Incredible Stop Motion Videos</i></p>	<p>A. Issues (Review)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - How to use a storyboard, comic still and strip to create a stop motion. - Ways to create animations. - Use of technology. <p>B. Discussion Questions</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Are you experiencing any issues in your creation? - What is the significance of keeping a still camera shot in the same location each time? - Why is lighting important? If your lighting changes what can occur? 	<p>-In their small groups, students will create your set, backdrop and set up lighting based on their collaborated storyboard.</p> <p>-Students will begin to capture their movement sequence.</p> <p>-Students will maintain a log of each scene and the number of images produced in that frame.</p>	<p>-Students will capture their movement sequence through the use of photographic still shots.</p>	<p>-Students will be assessed while in class through individual discussions.</p>
<p>Lesson 7</p> <p>The Creation Story: Then there was the World</p> <p>(5 Days)</p>	<p>A. Klutz, <i>Animation Videos</i></p> <p>B. Smashing Magazine, <i>50 Incredible Stop Motion Videos</i></p>	<p>A. Issues</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - How to use a storyboard, comic still and strip to create a stop motion. - Ways to create animations. - Use of technology or lack of technology. <p>B. Discussion Questions</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - How are storyboards, comic stills, and comic strips interrelated? - How would you create a stop motion animation if you do not have a still camera? Could you use a cell phone? Images found online? 	<p>-Students will create a folder on server and will label it according to class.</p> <p>-Students will upload captured images onto the computers.</p> <p>-Students will use images to create a short animation.</p>	<p>-Students will use Photoshop and iMovie to create the animation.</p> <p>-Students will upload final video onto server.</p>	<p>-Students will produce a portfolio that will include all thumbnail sketches, final artworks as well as post the final video onto the server and onto Vimeo or YouTube.</p>

<p>Lesson 8</p> <p>Movie Shorts Premier</p> <p>(One day)</p>	<p>A. Students work</p> <p>B. Teachers work</p>	<p>A. Issues (review original)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Cartoons as a promotion of violence. - Violence aimed at one audience type. - Effects on younger audiences. <p>B. Discussion Questions (Review original)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Why do you think these cartoons are so successful? Would they be successful without the violence? - Why are these cartoons promoting violence along side the networks Stop Bullying Campaign? Is there any correlation between cartoon violence and bullying? 	<p>-Observing and critiquing cartoon animations.</p> <p>-Students will fill out a reflection sheet about violence in cartoons as well as discuss ways that violence can be taken out of cartoons and still remain entertaining.</p>	<p>-Students will positively critique each work, by providing insight to how these stop motion shorts are a positive alternative to the violent original clip.</p>	<p>-Student fill out a reflection sheet about</p>
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Lesson #4

Title: The Good Ol' Fashion Comic Strip

Grade: 6-8

Teacher: Leanne Thomas

Length: 3-5 days

State visual art goals: VA6-3.3, VA6-5.1, VA6-6.2, VA7-1.3, and VA7-4.3

State media arts goals (if any): MA6-1.2, MA6-1.3, MA6-1.5, MA6-3.4, and MA8-4.1

State language arts goals (if any):

Objectives: This lesson will explore the artwork of newspaper comic strips. This is a foundation lesson on how to create comic strips and how they are related to stop motion animation. Students will research newspapers and remove/cut out a comic strip to use as a reference in the development of their own comic strip based on their group storyboard. Students will create three thumbnail sketches, each with slight variations. Students will create a comic strip that features at least 10 frames. Each comic strip will feature at least one form of dialog or narrative.

Concepts and vocabulary: Students will demonstrate through the creation of a comic strip that each sequence in an action requires a frame. Each frame will consist of an action, dialog, or narrative that will move their comic strip reader along their story. Students will create a storyline that illustrates a proper five stages to story structure, which will include an exposition, rising action, climax, falling action and resolution. These comic strips will also exhibit the direct relationship to storyboarding and stop motion animation, but as an alternative art form.

Vocabulary will include a review on terminology from the previous lesson, which includes comic strip, dailies, gag/editorial cartoons, comic books and graphic novels. The layout vocabulary will consist of panel, gutter, tier, splash, and spread. Element vocabulary will include speech balloon, caption, and Concepts will include closure and encapsulation. Professions that will be discussed will include cartoonist, artist, penciller, inker, colourist, writer, and letterer. English story elements will also be reviewed.

Teacher materials: Newspapers, examples of different comic styles, paper, pencils, color pencils, Sharpie, teacher's example, and a Prezi to introduce the topic to the class. For review: visual display that features comic strip elements.

Student materials: Newspapers, paper, pencils, color pencils, Sharpies

Procedures (detailed step-by-step description including dialogue):

1. Introduction (15 minute Prezi +discussion)
 - a. Discussion of lesson of key issues:
 - Do comic strips feature violence?
 - Comic strips aimed at different audiences.
 - Effects on younger audiences
 - Are they outdated?
 - b. Review engaging questions:
 - How is the effect of violence different between the media, cartoon verses comic?
 - Is there more or less violence? Why?
 - Is the influence on younger audiences different? Why?
 - Is it harder to portray violence in comic strips?
2. Students will be introduced to physical examples of the different types of comics.
 - a. Comic Strip
 - b. Comic Book
 - c. Graphic Novel
3. Students will be introduced to exemplar artists that focus on the comic strip style that will be used for this lesson.
 - a. Ernie Bushmiller, *Nancy*
 - b. Ray Billingsley, *Curtis*
 - c. Bill Watterson, *Calvin and Hobbes*
4. Students will assist on reviewing design elements that was discussed in the previous lesson through the use of a visual display.
 - a. Layout vocabulary will consist of panel, gutter, tier, splash, and spread. Element vocabulary will include speech balloon, caption, and Concepts will include closure and encapsulation.
 - b. Story vocabulary elements will consist of exposition, rising action, climax, falling action and resolution.
5. Review of the project expectations and any questions
6. Students will begin by researching newspapers, in print or online.
 - a. Students will look for comics that feature all the required elements for this project.
 - b. Students may also research online and print out the comic strip to use.
 - c. This comic strip will be cut out and attached to the thumbnail sketches and will be used as a physical reference to their final comic strip.

The rest of the lesson will be completed over 2-4 days

7. Students will then create three thumbnail sketches that include a minimal of 5 frames each, in pencils and color pencils.

8. Once the three thumbnail sketches have been completed students can begin to work on their final comic strip.
 - a. Pencil in the comic strip.
 - b. Ink the comic strip.
 - c. Add color to comic strip.
 - d. Sign comic strip.
9. Students will then fill out a self-analytical rubric.
10. Submit the entire project for review and grade.

Assessment/Closure: Students will submit all work to include: their cut out comic strip used for reference and adhered to the thumbnail sketches; three thumbnail sketches of comic strip attached to their comic strip; a final comic strip. All will returned to be included in their final student project portfolio. Students will complete a self-analytic rubric.

Learning center/ back up activity (if any):