CBLDF Presents: She Changed Comics: The Untold Story of the Women Who Changed Free Expression in Comics

Middle School Teaching Guide

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Contents

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I. Introduction

Covering female comics creators from the turn of the 20th century to present day, *CBLDF Presents She Changed Comics: The Untold Story of the Women Who Changed Free Expression in Comics* profiles more than 60 women who transformed the landscape of free expression and expanded the comics artform. It also examines the plights of women who have been persecuted for expressing themselves through cartoons and features interviews with some of the most influential women working in comics today.

She Changed Comics was designed with educators and students in mind. The short profiles facilitate customization for classrooms: instructors can readily select material in *She Changed Comics* for supplemental and independent reading as suits their goals and pedagogical needs. For educators who use large portions of the volume, the material is readily parceled into more manageable portions. In turn, for those who choose to assign the entire book, it is organized to allow an understanding of how women have navigated and contributed to the medium over time.

Common Core State Standard correlations, background information, discussion questions, and activity suggestions follow. If you have further suggestions, concerns, or want to tell us about your classroom experience with She Changed Comics, please send a note to Betsy.Gomez@cbldf.org.

II. Common Core State Standards

She Changed Comics (and comics in general) can be used to address the competencies outlined in the Common Core State Standards. In particular, *She Changed Comics* addresses:

Reading: Informational Text

Grade 6

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RI.6.1
Cite textual evidence to support analysis of what the text says explicitly as well as inferences drawn from the text.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RI.6.2
Determine a central idea of a text and how it is conveyed through particular details; provide a summary of the text distinct from personal opinions or judgments.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RI.6.3
Analyze in detail how a key individual, event, or idea is introduced, illustrated, and elaborated in a text (e.g., through examples or anecdotes).

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RI.6.7
Integrate information presented in different media or formats (e.g., visually, quantitatively) as well as in words to develop a coherent understanding of a topic or issue.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RI.6.10
By the end of the year, read and comprehend literary nonfiction in the grades 6-8 text complexity band proficiently, with scaffolding as needed at the high end of the range.

Grade 7

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RI.7.1
Cite several pieces of textual evidence to support analysis of what the text says explicitly as well as inferences drawn from the text.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RI.7.2
Determine two or more central ideas in a text and analyze their development over the course of the text; provide an objective summary of the text.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RI.7.3
Analyze the interactions between individuals, events, and ideas in a text (e.g., how ideas influence individuals or events, or how individuals influence ideas or events).

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RI.7.5
Analyze the structure an author uses to organize a text, including how the major sections contribute to the whole and to the development of the ideas.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RI.7.10
By the end of the year, read and comprehend literary nonfiction in the grades 6-8 text complexity band proficiently, with scaffolding as needed at the high end of the range.

Grade 8

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RI.8.1
Cite the textual evidence that most strongly supports an analysis of what the text says explicitly as well as inferences drawn from the text.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RI.8.2
Determine a central idea of a text and analyze its development over the course of the text, including its relationship to supporting ideas; provide an objective summary of the text.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RI.8.3
Analyze how a text makes connections among and distinctions between individuals, ideas, or events (e.g., through comparisons, analogies, or categories).

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RI.8.10
By the end of the year, read and comprehend literary nonfiction at the high end of the grades 6-8 text complexity band independently and proficiently.

Literacy in History / Social Studies

Grades 6-8

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.6-8.1
Cite specific textual evidence to support analysis of primary and secondary sources.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.6-8.2
Determine the central ideas or information of a primary or secondary source; provide an accurate sum-

mary of the source distinct from prior knowledge or opinions.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.6-8.7
Integrate visual information (e.g., in charts, graphs, photographs, videos, or maps) with other information in print and digital texts.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.6-8.9
Analyze the relationship between a primary and secondary source on the same topic.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.6-8.10
By the end of grade 8, read and comprehend history/social studies texts in the grades 6-8 text complexity band independently and proficiently.

III. Background

Terminology

Alternative comics: comics that are not from "mainstream" comics from publishers like DC and Marvel. Sometimes called independent or indie comics, alternative comics became popular in the wake of the underground comix movement.

Balloon: a section of speech that is usually framed with its own border and that has a tail indicating which character is speaking. Balloons may contain speech, thoughts (the tail has progressively smaller circles), and other narrative information. Also called speech balloon or speech bubble.

Caption: similar to a balloon, a caption often has its own frame, but often contains narrative speech that doesn't have a designated speaker. Sometimes called narrative blocks, boxes, or staging balloons, captions can provide information like a change of location or time.

Comics: a medium that uses images in sequence, often (but not always) with text, to tell a story.

Emanata: visual elements that communicate information about a character without words (for example, sweat beads when a character is nervous; lines projecting from the character's head to denote shock).

Graphic novel: a standalone (non-serialized) comics story that is longer in length.

Gutter: the space between panels

Issue: in serialized comics, a single unit usually consisting of 24 - 36 pages. In many cases, issues of a series come out monthly. Also colloquially called a "floppy."

Mainstream comics: comics from DC and Marvel; frequently refers to comics in the superhero genre.

Manga: comics from Japan.

Panel: a single unit in a comic story sequence, usually (but not always) bounded by a border line or box.

Sound effect: word that communicates or mimics sound (onomatopoeia). Examples include "BOOM" and "CRASH"

Splash page: a page of a comic that consists of one panel

Spread: a panel that covers (in whole or in part) two facing pages in a comic.

Trade: a collection of issues (usually 4-6) from a comic series that is bound together in one book

Underground comix: small press or self-published comics that frequently use satire and parody to address social or political issues. Popular with the counterculture scene, underground comix arose in the late 1960s in direct opposition to the Comics Code, which forbade the depiction of sexuality, drug use, and certain types of violence.

Webcomic: comics made for and published on the internet.

Making Comics

Comics are created by one person or a group of individuals. If more than one person makes a comic, they could fulfill any of the following roles:

>   » a penciler, or the individual who actually draws the comic from the script

>   » an inker, who inks over the drawing, or "pencils," from the penciler

>   » a colorist, who adds colors to the inked pencils

>   » a letterer, who places the text in balloons and captions

Most comics publishers also have an editor or editors to guide the process of making comics. An individual creator takes on any or all of these roles.

Comics may be created using traditional art materials and techniques . Increasingly, some or all aspects of comics creation is done digitally.

Moral Panic and the Comics Code Authority

Fredric Wertham was a child psychologist who did groundbreaking work with underprivileged youth (he was instrumental in *Brown v. Board of Education*), but Wertham sullied his legacy in a quest for fame that manifested in the 1954 anti-comics screed *Seduction of the Innocent*.

Despite his commendable work on behalf of the poor and disenfranchised, Wertham began to make questionable—and even fabricated—connections between juvenile delinquency and the popularity of comics. Wertham asserted that comics were a corrupting influence on youth and a leading cause of juvenile delinquency. Wertham's "science" was based around the habits of at-risk youth, lacked a control group, and did not account for the habits of adult comic readers. Chock full of specious claims and unscientific conclusions, *Seduction* remains infamous for the assertions that Batman and Robin were involved romantically, Superman was an anti-American fascist, and most egregiously, the conclusion that crime comics were teaching children how to commit violent and evil acts.

Because of Wertham's assertions and the resulting moral panic, the Senate Judiciary Committee's Subcommittee to Investigate Juvenile Delinquency put comics on trial during hearings on April 21-22, 1954. The hearings were led by Senator Estes Kefauver and featured Wertham as the star witness.

Comics didn't lack a defense during the hearings: Bill Gaines, publisher for EC Comics spoke on behalf of the four-color, saddle stitch newspaper pamphlet that dominated the proceedings. However, at 32 years old and filled with righteous indignation (while also experiencing amphetamine withdrawal), Gaines was not the best spokesman. The young publisher unwisely chose to testify of his own volition and had the poor fortune to approach the stand with flagging energy due to multiple postponements of his testimony. He faced the hostile interrogation of senators, who had just respectfully heard Wertham's indictment of comics and who were rankled by Gaines's "Red Dupe" cartoon, which mocked those who would speak out against "naughty comic books."

Gaines's testimony ultimately added fuel to the anti-comics movement. After two days of Senate hearings and a deluge of bad press, compounded by an angry public and the threat of regulation by the government, the comics industry was backed into a corner. They responded by establishing the Comic Magazine Association of America, which instituted the Comics Code Authority, a censorship code that thoroughly sanitized the content of comics for years to come. Almost overnight, comics were diminished, suitable only for the youngest or dimmest of readers. Horror, crime, science fiction, romance, and other comics genres that appealed to older and more sophisticated readers were essentially wiped out for a generation.

According to David Hajdu in *The 10-Cent Plague*, the work for cartoonists dried up, with the number of titles published dropping from 650 titles in 1954 to 250 in 1956. The consequence was that more than 800 working creators lost their jobs.

Comic Ages

Comics historians and collectors divide comics into specific eras:

1. **Golden Age** (**1930s-1950s**): Comics historians don't always agree on the specific date denoting the start of the Golden Age, but many tie it to the publication of *Action Comics* #1—the first appearance of Superman—in 1938. The Golden Age was marked by an immensely popular and thriving comics industry that was born out of the popularity of newspaper cartoons and had something available for readers of all ages and interests. During the Golden Age, comics embraced not just superheroes, but all genres, including Western, science fiction, romance, crime, horror, action adventure, and even nonfiction. At the time, there was near parity in readership based on gender, with some historians such as Trina Robbins finding that female readership was somewhat larger (1999). Comics were popular with both younger readers and adults. In *She Changed Comics*, the following women created comics and cartoons before and during the Golden Age:

    › Nell Brinkley (1)
    › Marjorie Henderson Buell (3)
    › Grace Drayton and Margaret G. Hays (5)
    › Edwina Dumm (7)
    › Ethel Hays (9)
    › Helen Hokinson (11)

> › Dale Messick (13)
> › Tarpé Mills (15)
> › Rose O'Neill (17)
> › Jackie Ormes (19)
> › Lou Rogers (21)
> › Barbara Shermund (23)

2. **Silver Age** (**mid 1950s-early 1970s**)**:** A boom period for superhero comics in particular, mainstream comics from the Silver Age were largely shaped by the self-regulatory Comics Code, which led to the consolidation of both comics publishers and the genres that comics embraced. During this era, the female audience became smaller and few women worked in mainstream comics, but many expressed themselves via underground comix and alternative comics. Women profiled in *She Changed Comics* who worked during the Silver Age include:

   › Ramona Fradon (25)
   › Marie Severin (27)
   › Hilda Terry (29)
   › Claire Bretécher (59) *also falls under Alternative Comics
   › Underground Comix (1960s-): These self-published or small press comics often addressed topics forbidden in mainstream comics by the Comics Code Authority. Underground comix made it possible for women creators to address their specific interests and concerns. Underground creators included:
     › Lyn Chevli (31)
     › Joyce Farmer (33)
     › Shary Flenniken (35)
     › Roberta Gregory (37) *also falls under Alternative Comics
     › Aline Kominsky- Crumb (39)
     › Lee Marrs (41)
     › Diane Noomin (43)
     › Trina Robbins (45)
     › Dori Seda (47)
     › Melinda Gebbie (69) *also falls under Alternative Comics
     › Dorothy Woolfolk (113)

3. **Bronze Age** (**early 1970s-mid 1980s**)**:** Superhero comics remained a mainstay during the Bronze Age, but mainstream publishers trimmed their lines significantly and the stories started to incorporate more sophisticated and socially relevant themes inspired by real-world concerns, such as drug abuse and environmental issues. While the Comics Code was still in effect, it had been revised in 1971 to relax restrictions on crime comics and to lift the ban on horror comics. During this era, publishers experimented with other genres, including Western, horror, action, and romance comics, and specialty comic shops and distributors were increasingly prevalent. *She Changed Comics* includes the following creators who began working during the Bronze Age:

   › Lynda Barry (51) *also falls under Modern Age
   › Roz Chast (61) *also falls under Modern Age

> › Louise Simonson (87) *also falls under Modern Age*
> › Jenette Kahn (107) *also falls under Modern Age*

4. **The Modern Age** (**mid 1980s-present**)**:** The present period of comics is marked by much more emotionally complex and psychologically sophisticated work than was produced in previous ages. The Comics Code was revised again in 1989, loosening restrictions further. Over the intervening years, fewer and fewer publishers adhered to the Code, which was dissolved altogether in 2011. The Modern Age has seen a proliferation in alternative and independent comics, which has provided a space for women in particular to express themselves. The genres and audiences for comics have also diversified, with more titles being made specifically for younger audiences, created by diverse creators, and imported from other countries (for example, manga from Japan). The format has also been increasingly embraced by librarians and educators. *She Changed Comics* includes the following Modern Age creators:

> › Alison Bechdel (55)
> › Barbara Brandon-Croft (57)
> › Kelly Sue DeConnick (85)
> › Gail Simone (89)
> › Fiona Staples (91)
> › Jill Thompson (93)
> › Karen Berger (105)
> › Diana Schutz (111)
> › Cece Bell (121)
> › Sophie Campbell (125)
> › Kate Leth (127)
> › Noelle Stevenson (142)
> › Raina Telgemeier (148)
> › G. Willow Wilson (154)
> › Alternative Comics:
>   > › Jessica Abel (49)
>   > › Kate Beaton (53)
>   > › Sue Coe (63)
>   > › Colleen Doran (65)
>   > › Julie Doucet (67)
>   > › Phoebe Gloeckner (71) *also falls under Underground Comix*
>   > › Carol Lay (73) *also falls under Underground Comix*
>   > › Wendy Pini (75)
>   > › Marjane Satrapi (77)
>   > › Ariel Schrag (79)
>   > › Posy Simmonds (81)
>   > › Jillian and Mariko Tamaki (83)
>   > › Françoise Mouly (109)
>   > › Atena Farghadani (115)

> › Doaa Eladl (117)
> › Lena Merhej (130)
> › Kanika Mishra (133)
> › Spike Trotman (151)

Manga

The roots of manga lie within a thousand years of Japanese art and printmaking culture. Some of the earliest examples of Japanese sequential storytelling date back to religious scrolls from the 11th and 12th centuries. The term manga was coined in the early 19th century by Katsushika Hokusai, who used the word to describe the "whimsical pictures" in his long-running instructional series. The term wasn't applied to Japanese comics as we know them until the early 20th century.

In the late 1940s and 1950s, manga were as popular among Japanese youth as comics were among Western youth. With the commercial success of Osamu Tezuka's *New Treasure Island* (which sold nearly 400,000 copies in 1947), publishers raced to capitalize on the interest in manga. In the late 1950s, weekly magazines became increasingly important vehicles for manga, eventually jettisoning all other content in favor of comics. In the 1960s, publishers introduced a new format, a paperback-style perfect bound novel. Both the magazines and the longer books were sold at low cost primarily through train station kiosks and newsstands, making manga a favorite reading material for commuters of all ages. Even today, manga dominates Japanese publishing, making up a quarter of all book sales in the country.

Manga began making their way stateside in the 1970s, and in recent years, the format has seen exponential growth in terms of sales and popularity. Fueled by the increasing presence and popularity of anime (Japanese cartoons) on American television, interest in manga grew, and by 2006, manga had become one of the fastest-growing sectors of the American publishing industry. A simple visit to the graphic novel section of your local bookstore or library reveals that a lot of shelf space is allotted to manga. The format is particularly popular with preteen and teen readers.

In Japan, books are read right to left rather than left to right, and what Western audiences normally consider the back of the book is instead the front. This is also true for manga. Sometimes, English translations of manga are "flipped" so the book can be read left to right, but most manga in the United States is now released in the original Japanese format.

IV. Additional Reading

For more on the history of comics and the evolution of the format, check out the following titles:

Abel, Jessica, and Matt Madden. 2008. *Drawing words, writing pictures: making comics from manga to graphic novels and beyond.* New York: First Second.

Abel, Jessica, and Matt Madden. 2012. *Mastering comics: drawing words and writing pictures continued: a definitive course in comics narrative.* New York: First Second.

Chute, Hillary L. 2010. *Graphic women: life narrative and contemporary comics.* New York: Columbia University Press.

Eisner, Will. 2008. *Comics and sequential art: principles and practices from the legendary cartoonist.* New York: W.W. Norton.

Eisner, Will. 2008. *Graphic storytelling and visual narrative: principles and practices from the legendary cartoonist.* New York: W.W. Norton.

Goldstein, Nancy. 2008. *Jackie Ormes: the first African American woman cartoonist.* Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press.

Gravett, Paul. 2010. *Manga: sixty years of Japanese comics.* New York: Collins Design.

Hajdu, David. 2008. *The ten-cent plague: the great comic-book scare and how it changed America.* New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux.

Hatfield, Charles. 2006. *Alternative comics: an emerging literature.* Jackson, Miss: University Press of Mississippi.

Koyama-Richard, Brigitte. 2014. *One thousand years of manga.* Paris: Flammarion.

Lepore, Jill. 2015. *The secret history of Wonder Woman.* New York: Vintage.

Lunning, Frenchy, ed. *Mechademia* (multiple volumes). 2006-. Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press.

McCloud, Scott, and Mark Martin. 2014. *Understanding comics: the invisible art.* New York, NY: William Morrow.

Napier, Susan Jolliffe. 2005. *Anime from Akira to Howl's moving castle: experiencing contemporary Japanese animation.* New York: Palgrave Macmillan.

Pizzino, Christopher. 2016. *Arresting development: Comics at the boundaries of literature.* Austin: University of Texas Press.

Robbins, Trina. 2013. *Pretty in ink: North American women cartoonists, 1896-2013.* Seattle: Fantagraphics.

Wolk, Douglas. 2008. *Reading comics: how graphic novels work and what they mean.* New York: Da Capo.

CBLDF Resources

She Changed Comics: http://cbldf.org/she-changed-comics/

Using Graphic Novels in Education: http://cbldf.org/using-graphic-novels/

Adding Graphic Novels to Your Library or Classroom Collection: http://cbldf.org/adding-graphic-novels/

Banned & Challenged Comics: http://cbldf.org/banned-challenged-comics/

Librarian and Educator Tools: http://cbldf.org/librarian-tools/

History of Comics Censorship: http://cbldf.org/resources/history-of-comics-censorship/

V. Discussion Questions

General Questions for Individual Profiles

1. What do you think of the creator's artwork? What do you like? What don't you like?

2. What did the creator talk about in her work?

3. What kinds of challenges did the creator face when she was making comics? How did she overcome these challenges?

4. How do you think the time during which the creator made her work influenced it? What events might have had an impact on her work?

5. How did the creator change comics?

Questions for Multiple Profiles / Entire Book

6. Which creator did you like the most? Why?

7. What were some of the topics that women covered in comics in the early 20th century? What topics do they cover today?

8. Several of the women featured in She Changed Comics were censored. What were some of the reasons their work was challenged or banned?

9. Why do you think there are fewer women making superhero comics than making alternative comics? Justify your answer.

10. How do you think women will change comics in the future?

Making Inferences

Have students work in small groups. Give each group a set of 3 to 5 images from *She Changed Comics*. If possible, separate the images from the text, or find additional images from the artist in the library or online and obscure the artist's name. Have students work together to answer the following questions about each image:

1. What do you think the story is about? Why?
2. Who is the main character, and what can you tell about the character based on the image?
3. Who is the intended audience for the comic? Explain your reasoning.
4. Would you read the comic that was the source of the image? Why or why not?

After students finish answering the questions, have then read an excerpt of the work or use the library or internet to research the artist and her work. (Note: Much of the work by the earliest artists profiled in *She Changed Comics* is out of print, so it may be more expedient to focus on contemporary creators for this activity.)

Censorship

Ask students to compile a list of the women in *She Changed Comics* whose work was censored. Have them make a table that identifies the creator, the material that was censored, and why it was challenged or banned.

Comics Exhibition

Assign a small group of students one of the creators featured in *She Changed Comics*. Ask students to look for more examples of the creator's work in the library or online. Have students take the images that they find and make a gallery display of the pieces for the classroom. Have them include informative labels about each image, describing when and where it was published and other interesting details.

Drama Comics

Have students act out a comic strip or portion of a graphic novel by one of the creators in *She Changed Comics*. Suggested comics include *Tippie* by Edwina Dumm, *Teena* by Hilda Terry, *Drama* by Raina Telgemeier, *Ms. Marvel* by G. Willow Wilson, or *Nimona* by Noelle Stevenson. After students act out the comic, ask them to discuss how the comics format helps aid storytelling.

Connection to History: Suffrage

Several women cartoonists from the early 20th century campaigned for suffrage. Ask students identify cartoonists in *She Changed Comics* who campaigned for suffrage. Have them use the library or internet to find other examples of their work. Then, have students make a pamphlet collecting these cartoons.

About the Comic Book Legal Defense Fund

Comic Book Legal Defense Fund is a non-profit organization protecting the freedom to read comics! Our work protects readers, creators, librarians, retailers, publishers, and educators who face the threat of censorship. We monitor legislation and challenge laws that would limit the First Amendment. We create resources that promote understanding of comics and the rights our community is guaranteed. Every day we publish news and information about censorship events as they happen. We are partners in the Kids' Right to Read Project and Banned Books Week. Our expert legal team is available at a moment's notice to respond to First Amendment emergencies. CBLDF is a lean organization that works hard to protect the rights on which our community depends. For the latest news and to access our full archive of resources, please visit **www.cbldf.org**

CBLDF does this work thanks to the support of our members. We have membership plans for donors in every budget, and all of them are tax-deductible!

Please support our important work by joining CBLDF today!
http://cbldf.myshopify.com/collections/memberships

At the first sign of a First Amendment emergency,
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