

25 WAYS TO USE [MAKEBELIEFS.COM](http://www.makebeliefscomix.com) IN THE CLASSROOM

By Bill Zimmerman, Creator, [MakeBeliefsComix.com](http://www.MakeBeliefsComix.com)

1. CREATE AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL COMIX

At the beginning of each new school year have students create an autobiographical comic strip talking about themselves and their families or summarizing the most important things about their lives. Let each student select a cartoon character as a surrogate to represent her or him. After students complete their strips, encourage them to exchange their comics with classmates to learn more about each other. Students can also create strips that summarize what their individual interests are to help a teacher to learn more about them. These autobiographical comic strips can become the opening pages of a daily comix diary that students can be encouraged to keep throughout the school year. For more information about the concept of a daily comix diary, go to: [MakeBeliefsComix.com Daily Comix Diary](http://www.MakeBeliefsComix.com/DailyComixDiary).

2. PRACTICE NEW VOCABULARY WORDS

Have students create a comic strip story using new vocabulary words that are being taught. Having students fill in talk or thought balloons for different cartoon characters also helps students practice conversation and language structure in a meaningful context. And what a fun way for students to improve their writing, reading and storytelling skills!

3. PROMOTE TEAM COLLABORATION

Have students break up into pairs or group teams to create their comic strips together. This approach encourages teamwork and cooperation, with students complementing the skills of their colleagues. The site also provides a structure for students to work individually as they create their own cartoon worlds using their imaginations. Look upon the site as a resource for literacy development and to reach out to engage reluctant writers and readers.

4. PRACTICE CONVERSATION SKILLS FOR ESOL STUDENTS

Having students in [English for Speakers of Other Languages](http://www.MakeBeliefsComix.com/ESOL) (ESOL) classes fill in talk or thought balloons for different cartoon characters helps them practice conversation and offers a way to experiment with language, sentence structure and vocabulary in a meaningful context. Try our new [ESOL/LITERACY](http://www.MakeBeliefsComix.com/ESOL/LITERACY) section for a variety of class activities and ideas which you can use with English language learners.

5. SOCIAL SKILLS TRAINING

Create comic scenarios, scripts, or stories for children with autism as a way to teach them different kinds of social behavior and to read emotions by observing the faces of the different characters selected for the cartoons. Says one teacher who works with high-functioning students with autism, "I used the comic strips to create social stories focusing on behaviors we want to modify." Creating cartoons in which the characters speak for the creator also provides a way to help autistic and deaf students to communicate. For more information on how to use MakeBeliefsComix for children with autism as well as with those with other disabilities, see our Special Needs section at <http://www.makebeliefscomix.com/Special-Needs/>. MakeBeliefsComix has also added a new [Autism/Spectrum category](#) in our printables section. Its intent is to help children with autism identify different emotions as well as draw them on faces.

6. FOREIGN LANGUAGE PRACTICE

Have students who are learning new foreign languages write their text in languages they are studying. In addition to English, the site accepts characters and accent marks from languages such as Spanish, French, Latin, German, Italian and Portuguese. Additional languages will be added to the site in the future.

7. PRINT, DOWNLOAD OR EMAIL: VALIDATE STUDENT EFFORTS

Have students print, email or download to the desktop their completed comics. Doing so validates the efforts they put into creating the strips and gives them a sense of ownership. The printed cartoons represent their hard-earned efforts and they can add the completed work to their school portfolios or share with friends and family. Think of the student sharing her cartoon with someone important to her and the smile this brings to the face of the recipient. Wouldn't such an experience reinforce learning?

8. INTRODUCTION TO CREATIVE WRITING

Use the cartoon strips to introduce students to the world of creative writing and the pleasure of using their imaginations more fully. When students create a comic strip, they are also honing their reading and writing skills in addition to tapping into their creativity. The act of creating cartoons allows students to learn in a pleasurable way.

9. CREATE DAILY COMIX DIARIES

Consider having students create daily comix diaries. These provide a way for students to digest and integrate what they are taught each day as well as to reflect on their lives and experiences. Encourage students to use the comic characters as surrogates for them to talk about and examine their lives, their problems, their challenges and their anxieties. In effect, students can see themselves in the comics they create. The comic strips also allow the students to express their feelings and thoughts about the learning that occurs in the classroom. The goal here can be to encourage students to compile over the school year a portfolio highlighting their educational

and personal development. For more guidance on creating daily comix diaries, go to:

<http://www.makebeliefscomix.com/Daily-Comix-Diary/>

10. CREATE SERIALIZED COMIC STRIPS

Create comic books based on the strips that the students complete. Let the students serialize their comics by creating a new strip each day as part of a continuing story. They can print and color them, too.

11. LIFE SKILLS PRACTICE

Create comic strips in which students can practice real-life, practical scenarios, such as looking for a job, or learning how to deal with a school bully, or interacting with a difficult boss or fellow worker or classmate. As an example, create a comic in which a student applies for a job. What kinds of questions is the interviewer likely to ask her and what kinds of responses might be appropriate? An individual going to visit a doctor or emergency room can practice vocabulary that will be needed for such an encounter -- this can be particularly helpful to those students who are learning English as a second language.

12. LOCAL OR NATIONAL NEWS IMMERSION

Have students use the characters to create comic strips that comment on local or national politics. Perhaps these cartoons can be published in the school newspaper or newsletter.

13. JUST FOR FUN

Create comic strips in the classroom just for the sheer fun of it, and as a way to help students deal with the stress of school and the everyday world. This provides a perfect activity for the end of the school day or week. Encourage students to create daily comix diaries about their lives; go to: <http://www.makebeliefscomix.com/Daily-Comix-Diary/>.

14. PUBLIC SPEAKING PRACTICE

After a student completes creation of a comic strip ask him to read aloud or act out the dialogue written for his characters. Doing so gives a student an opportunity and structure to practice public speaking and share thoughts with others.

15. STRENGTHEN CONFLICT RESOLUTION SKILLS

Have student create a comic in which the characters reflect on a particular experience the student has had, such as dealing with a school bully or with a problem at home or with a friend. The process of creating the strip provides a way for a student to think through and resolve these problems. Such comic strips about how students deal with their problems can be part of their daily comix diaries. See <http://www.makebeliefscomix.com/Daily-Comix-Diary/>.

16. DAILY CLASSROOM THEME TIE-IN

Choose a theme for the day, such as My Top 3 Wishes or Ways to Improve the Environment, or focus on a theme for a unit that is being taught that day, and have each class member do a comic strip on that subject. By creating a comic strip on a particular topic that the lesson has focused on -- whether in history, social studies, science, math or the arts -- students gain a deeper understanding of concepts covered in class.

17. FAMILY BONDING AND COMMUNICATION

Hold a Family Literacy Night or Day in which parents and students work side by side in your computer lab to create their own comic strips. The students will most likely begin helping their parents with the mechanics of working on the web site, while the parents will be helping the students in vocabulary and spelling. This creates an intergenerational bonding experience and provides a way to parents to share an activity with their children, and for parents and children to communicate more effectively with each other to create something new and imaginative.

18. JUMPSTART CREATIVITY WITH STORY BOARDS

Use the strips to create story boards for an original story or to illustrate a book or play being read in class. Or, encourage students to create comic strips that change or go beyond the ending of the book they have just read. If students are creating short stories or novels, for example, they will find that comic strips provide them with a way to experiment with dialog that can be incorporated into their writing of text. The story comic strips can provide the first step in the creation of a much longer written piece of work or project. Or, have students use the comic strip as a book report summarizing or commenting on what they have been reading. You also can use the comic strips to assess students' knowledge of facts they are learning in the units you may be teaching.

19. UNDERSTANDING LITERARY CHARACTER PERSPECTIVES

In reading a book or story have students in their comic strips assume the roles of two of the characters with each one's personality and voice and have them interact with one another. This helps students better understand the perspective of the characters in the book they are reading.

20. MENU OF WRITING PROMPTS / TOOLS

Use the Menu of Writing Prompts / Tools feature found at the bottom navigation strip on this site for writing prompts and ideas for writing assignments in the classroom. Among the resources offered is our writing blog SomethingToWriteAbout.com. Another site resource chock full of comic strip writing ideas is our [Story Ideas](http://www.makebeliefscomix.com/Story-Ideas) page at www.makebeliefscomix.com/Story-Ideas.

21. DON'T FORGET - WE HAVE PRINTABLES TOO!

If you don't have regular access to a computer lab for your class, you can use our new feature – [MakeBeliefsComix Printables](#) - where you can print out hundred of comix templates from this site and pages from my Make Beliefs books and use at home, school and in the office to write on and color - another way to have fun and express all the creativity within you. Just click [Printables](#).

22. DOWNLOAD OUR FREE E-BOOKS TO ENCOURAGE WRITING

To encourage writing, use our free e-books which offer interactive comic strips with imaginative writing prompts. Readers can respond to the prompts by typing directly onto the pages shown on their computer screens or by printing the pages. Two examples are: [MakeBeliefsComix FILL-ins](#) and [Make Beliefs to Spark Your Writing](#).

23. AND TRY OUR NEW LESSON PLANS SECTION

This section offers ideas of how other educators are using MakeBeliefsComix.com in the classroom. Lessons are included for language comprehension, for Teachers of English to Speakers of Other Languages, for foreign language instruction, and using comics to help children with autism. We welcome your own lesson plans, too, to enrich the section. Send them via our contact page -- or to billz@makebeliefscomix.com. *(Please include your full name, grade, school and town.)* For each lesson posted, we will send you a copy of Bill Zimmerman's book, **MakeBeliefs: A Gift for Your Imagination**.

24. USE OUR SPECIAL NEEDS SECTION FOR STUDENTS WITH DIFFERENT ABILITIES

This section offers suggestions from educators, educational therapists and parents on how they use MakeBeliefsComix with children who have a variety of disabilities. Please [take a look](#) for valuable ideas.

25. DOWNLOAD THE MAKEBELIEFSCOMIX IPAD APPS FROM iTUNES

Because so many schools and individuals are now using iPads we have released two versions of MakeBeliefsComix for iPads, a [FREE](#) (Family-friendly ad supported) as well as an [AD-FREE](#) (\$1.99) iPad app from iTunes.

ABOVE ALL, HAVE FUN!

If you have a suggestion on how to use MakeBeliefsComix in the classroom, please write to billz@makebeliefscomix.com and we'll add them to the list with your permission.

NOTE: Some schools have Internet technology rules that block Flash or interactive web sites for the safety of students. In some cases a school will allow you to request an exception so that MakeBeliefsComix.com can be used in class. If your school has blocking rules in place you could ask your administration or technology group to allow our site to be used as an educational tool. The site does not share any user information from creating comix, so it's a safe resource for students and teachers.