

## MAKEBELIEFSCOMIX LESSON PLANS

### SECTION 2: TESOL LESSON PLANS

#### FOR TEACHERS OF ENGLISH TO SPEAKERS OF OTHER LANGUAGES (TESOL)

#### BECOME A COMIX STRIP WRITER WITH EASE!

**Tamara Kirson**, named The New York Times 2009 ESOL Teacher of the Year and ESOL instructor at the New School in New York, shares how she uses MakeBeliefsComix.com in her essay, "MakeBeliefsComix: An Article About Using Comics to Teach English - Become A Comic Strip Writer with Ease!" Her article was originally published in the Fall 2009 issue of ProLiteracy's Notebook.

#### PURPOSES

To help students, especially ESOL students, to develop writing fluency through an entertaining, engaging and nonthreatening format; to encourage students to convey feelings and ideas creatively.

The activities below are based on MakeBeliefsComix.com. When students use this site, they seem to forget they are writing in another language and, instead, focus on the joy of creating a "comix" strip!

Before using the web site with students, explore the Teacher Resources section. Take a look at the YouTube video on that page. The web site is suited to any level of language learner. Students may write as little as one word to a more extensive dialogue. They may choose one character or multiple characters. Students can work on their own or in pairs. The comix are easily printed out for classroom sharing and for display.

#### ACTIVITY 1

Ask students to bring in an example of a favorite comic strip, whether in English or their home language. There are often well-known comics that they love from their home countries.

Conduct a discussion about the purpose and value of comic strips. (To begin, model a discussion by presenting a favorite comic strip of your own. This discussion will help students develop an understanding of what makes a good comic strip and the value of comic strips for language learning.) Ask students:

- **Why do people read comic strips?**
- **What kinds of episodes are describe in comic strips?**
- **How are feelings conveyed in comic strips?**
- **How can reading and writing comic strips help with language learning?**

#### ACTIVITY 2

Present the opportunity for students to become comic strip writers themselves! Explain that they will begin by exploring MakeBeliefsComix.com on their own. Introduce the web site and briefly describe each of the tools: the writing window, the characters, the emotions, the panel choices, balloons, colors, and prompts. Let students "play" for about 15 minutes.

Once students have become familiar with the features, ask them to write their first comic strip about comic strips! Their strips will address the questions that were discussed in Activity 1 (above). For example, two characters might be talking about comic strips—what they are, and how people react to them. A group of characters might be discussing how they feel when they read comic strips, or how they learn language by writing comic strips. The possibilities are limited only by the imaginations of the students.

Review the discussion about comic strips, asking students to state the main points that came out of the discussion. To focus their writing, have each student choose one of the discussion questions as a prompt for his or her comic strip.

Print out and share the first set of comic strips. At this point, comfort with the web site elements and the story content are more critical than mechanics.

### ACTIVITY 3

One of the strengths of the web site is its applicability to classroom studies. The pleasure of creating a comic strip is enhanced by relating the content to classroom instruction. In this way, the joy of writing is integrated with the rigor of academic study. For this activity, the students will work with vocabulary they have studied based on their classroom reading and writing. If you haven't yet developed a vocabulary list, this is the time to do so!

Now review the vocabulary your class has been learning to ensure that students understand the meanings of the words, what part of speech each word is, and how each word can be used. Students will select five new vocabulary words to incorporate into their comic strips. Ask students to choose the theme or topic of the comic strip. They must include the five pre-selected new vocabulary words and use the correct word form of each.

Expansion Activity: After they have completed their comic strips, have the students read their strips aloud, leaving out the vocabulary words. Other students in the classroom must "fill in the blanks" with the correct word in the correct form. Depending on the students' reading level, you may have them refer to a list of the vocabulary words on a board or chart or to lists in their own notebooks. Or you can ask students to activate their memories only!

### ACTIVITY 4

To reinforce and further promote a deeper understanding of concepts the class has been working on, have students create a comic strip that addresses the main ideas of a particular topic. (This year, my students have been studying ethics and the environment. The guiding study question has been about how we protect our flora and fauna, whether in zoos or the rainforests.)

Explain to students that they will be writing a comic strip based on a specific topic they have been working on in class. Have students share their ideas. Next, pose a question to students that will generate global thinking about the issues under study in the classroom. Have students answer that question by creating a scenario in their own comic strip.

Concluding Activity: You may wish to have a "Comix Celebration" and post all of the strips that the students have written to celebrate their writing progress. Students can walk about and read all of their classmates' comic strips. This is an ideal time to invite other classes in for a community reading!

Expansion Activity: Students may use the site to send birthday greetings, invitations, and tales of their successes. Adult students may engage with their children by writing comix with them.

### LEARNING TO USE MAKEBELIEFSCOMIX.COM

Paula Michelin is ESOL Instructor at the Center for Immigrant Education and Training, La Guardia Community College, Long Island City, N.Y. Here she shows how she uses MakeBeliefsComix.com with her intermediate adult English as a Second Language Students.

The goal of this activity is to familiarize intermediate adult English as a Second Language (ESL) students with the MakeBeliefsComix website and its many possibilities for creating comic strips and helping students improve their creativity, problem solving and writing skills.

#### STEPS:

Students can work individually or in pairs based upon their computer skills level and computer availability. Tell students they will create their own comic strips using this web site.

1. Students go to [www.makebeliefscomix.com](http://www.makebeliefscomix.com) home page and click on the tab "ENTER HERE!"
2. Tell students that the first thing they will do is to explore each character. Ask students to click on a character to make it appear in the Selection Window at the lower left of the page. Make sure students understand that by clicking on the red arrows under the window, they can check out four different versions and emotions within the same character. Once they have found the one they like, they can add that character to the panel by clicking on it.
3. Tell students to click on different scenes and objects on the far right to become familiar with all the options they have when creating the comic strips. Ask them to practice moving the objects to the front or to the back, making them smaller or bigger and adding different colors to the background.
4. Finally, have students check the different sizes and shapes for the speech bubbles.

Once students are familiar with all the possibilities and tools in creating comic strips, give them the tasks below and have them come up with their own comic strips:

### **TASK 1**

**CHARACTERS:** A vampire talking to an angry baseball player.

**PLOT:** Think of a situation or a problem using the characters above. Remember that comic strip dialogues are short and funny!

**TOOLS:** Use the tools listed below to create your own comic strip and have fun!

- Choose blue background by clicking on Background Colors boxes at lower right.
- Choose two panels to make the comic by clicking on Panel Choices boxes at lower right.

### **TASK 2**

**CHARACTERS:** Clown holding a pie and a girl on a wheel chair.

**PLOT:** Think of a story, a situation or a problem using these characters. Remember that comic strip dialogues are short and funny!

**TOOLS:** Use the tools listed below to create your own comic strip and have fun

- Select locker room background.
- Choose three panels.

### **TASK 3**

**CHARACTERS:** Choose your own characters.

**SITUATION:** One character is the supervisor and the other one is the employee. The supervisor asks the employee to work overtime, but the supervisor refuses to pay overtime. What is going to happen when the employee tells the supervisor that he/she is entitled overtime pay?

**TOOLS:** Choose your own background and objects.

When students are finished with these tasks, ask them to post their stories on the classroom walls. Students walk around the room and view their classmates' comic strip. Click on the link below and check out one comic strip created by a student.

[https://www.makebeliefscomix.com/Comix/?comix\\_id=28220474C774486](https://www.makebeliefscomix.com/Comix/?comix_id=28220474C774486)

### **FOLLOW UP:**

As a follow up activity, students can choose some of the characters from the MakeBeliefsComix website and write a comic strip based on a situation, or problem related to a book or newspaper article they are reading or have read. This will allow students to become a "character" in the story and freely voice their opinion and point of view on how a certain situation should be dealt with. The creation of the comic strip gives students a chance to analyze the situation and think carefully about how to respond to it. In addition, students who are not artistically inclined are still able to create something artistic.