

mentor's introduction

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For over ten years I co-directed the Indiana University Summer Arts Institute, a residential summer program for junior high and high school students who demonstrate art talent. One of the students' favorite elective classes at this Institute was a drawing class titled Visual Narratives. In this class, students studied essentials of drawing as applied to narrative art. They began by studying the history of narrative art, learned to tell stories through drawing techniques, and finally created a story of their own in words and pictures. The artist-educator who taught this class emphasized that in the twentieth century some of the best examples of visual story telling are found in comic books and cartoons.

Indeed, comic books can be a valuable source for teaching youngsters drawing techniques through the art of storytelling. Many talented art students are interested in reading comics, learning to draw from comics, and creating their own comics. Cartoon and comics also have great potential as tools for teaching students about the society in which they live and how that society is viewed from numerous perspectives. Often I have asked pre-service teachers to explain "what's so funny" about a comic strip or cartoon. One cartoon often is worth at least a half an hour of good discussion about how art, the art world, and art study are depicted by contemporary artists who tell stories in the tradition of the visual narrative. In fact, giving students comics or cartoons and asking them to explain "what's so funny" is a powerful means of teaching aesthetics from authentic, local materials.

Sheri Klein is interested in using comics and cartoons to teach students about how stereotypic views of women have been perpetuated through a popular visual medium. Within the past decade, many illustrators and writers of cartoons and comics have challenged these stereotypic views of women and replaced them with new images of women in contemporary society. Although the content of some contemporary comics may be deemed offensive by some community members, there is enough "good stuff" that can be used in most contexts for teaching about women, art, and education. Klein provides explanations and examples for teaching students how not only to create their own personal and political views of the world through integrating drawing, writing, design, and humor, but also how to use comics to study the inequitable treatment of women in our society.

Presently, Klein has a summer grant to study humor and conflict resolution in children's drawings. She was given this McArthur grant from an Indiana University center in which peaceful resolutions of world-wide conflicts are studied. By using humor, as depicted in a popular art form, to study important concepts about contemporary society, Sheri Klein is making a most worthwhile contribution to the field of art education.