

What do you need to know about superheroes?

Superheroes have been firm favourites in children's books, films, comics and toys for decades. Ever since the debut of the *Superman* comic in 1938, there has been an increasing range of characters, often with special powers, who are dedicated to fighting crime, protecting others, and battling villains.

There are numerous superhero movies coming out this year that are predicted to be big hits. *Avengers: Infinity War* is hitting the big screen at the start of May and *The Incredibles 2* will be released in June. In *Little Monsters*, out now, a family is cursed by a witch and feels the effects of superpowers being used against them!

How can superheroes be used to teach literacy?

Utilising popular trends is a great way to engage children with literacy and learning. Our research shows that children who enjoy writing are seven times more likely to write above the level expected for their age compared with children who do not enjoy writing.

Our **Craze of the Month** taps into current trends to make literacy in the classroom engaging and relevant. The activities featured here relate to the English Programmes of Study from the National Curriculum in England¹.

Using Craze of the Month in the classroom

This resource can be used on a cross-curricular basis; as starter and plenary tasks, for homework and extensions, or in form time sessions.

The activities are designed to be adaptable for Key Stages 1, 2 and 3. You can print off the activities page and put it on your staff room notice board to share these ideas with colleagues.

¹ DfE (2013). The National Curriculum in England. Key Stage 1 and 2 framework document

Grab 'n' Go

Activity one: choosing your own superpower

Ask students to decide which superpower they would choose if they could have just one. Start with a class discussion about famous superheroes and what powers they have. Students should then come up with their own choice of superpower and the reasons for their choice. Examples:

- *If I could have one superpower, I would choose invisibility. This would let me listen in on other people's conversations and to be able to sneak into different places without people seeing me.*
- *Other superpowers could include: flying, time travel, the ability to heal, superhuman speed, telepathy, the ability to walk through walls, superhuman strength, shapeshifting, the ability to predict the future.*

Optional extras: Turn this into a competition and a persuasive writing task by asking students to create an extended piece of writing justifying why their superpower is the best. They can then vote for the most persuasive speech as a class.

Activity two: what makes a superhero a superhero?

Challenge students to think about what a superhero really means and to widen their thinking and descriptive skills. Ask students to make a list of the qualities they would look for in a superhero. Do they have to have superpowers?! Examples:

- *Superheroes should be brave*
- *Superheroes should be open-minded and kind to others*
- *Superheroes can come in any size or shape*

Optional extras: students could create their own superhero characters, including drawing and describing how their characters use their superpowers for good. This could then lead to a wall display or class presentations.

Activity three: the sounds of superheroes

Use the theme of superheroes to get students thinking about how to include sounds and onomatopoeia in their writing. Give students a list of pictures or scenarios and ask them to write down the sounds being made in each one. Examples:

- *A superhero flying at superhuman speed through the air; the sounds of a superhero eliminating his enemies*
- *Sounds could include: zap; pow; whoosh; crash; bang; bam; zoom.*

Optional extras: ask students to create a poem in which a superhero of their choice overcomes a challenge and saves the day. The focus of the writing is to include as many sounds as possible. You could choose a particular style of poem, such as an acrostic poem or a shape poem.

Recommended reading inspired by superheroes

These books all contain chocolate in one way or another and this can be used to promote reading for enjoyment. There are examples of fiction and non-fiction with options for different ages and abilities:

Young adult fiction:

- *We Can Be Heroes* by Catherine Bruton 14+
- *Fuzzy Mud* by Louis Sachar 11+
- *How to be Invisible* by Tim Lott 12+

Fiction for younger readers:

- *Other Girl* by Nicole Burstein 11+
- *Kid Normal* by Greg James and Chris Smith 7+
- *Hero.Com series* by Andy Briggs 9+
- *Superhero Mum* by Timothy Knapman 3+
- *Kenny Wright: Superhero* by James Patterson and Chris Tebbetts

Non-fiction:

- *Marvel: Absolutely Everything You Need to Know* by Adam Bray, John Sazaklis, Lorraine Cink
- *The Ultimate Guide to being a Superhero* by Barbara Beery
- *The Physics of Superheroes* by James Kakalios

Further resources

This theme provides a good opportunity to teach children about values and what makes a 'real life' superhero. The Teaching English section on the British Council website has further resources and ideas: <https://www.teachingenglish.org.uk/article/superhero-high>

For parents who are interested in using their children's favourite TV shows, hobbies and games as learning opportunities, have a look at the National Literacy Trust's Words for Life resources, which provide further ideas to help encourage children to read and write for pleasure: <http://www.wordsforlife.org.uk/7-11>

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