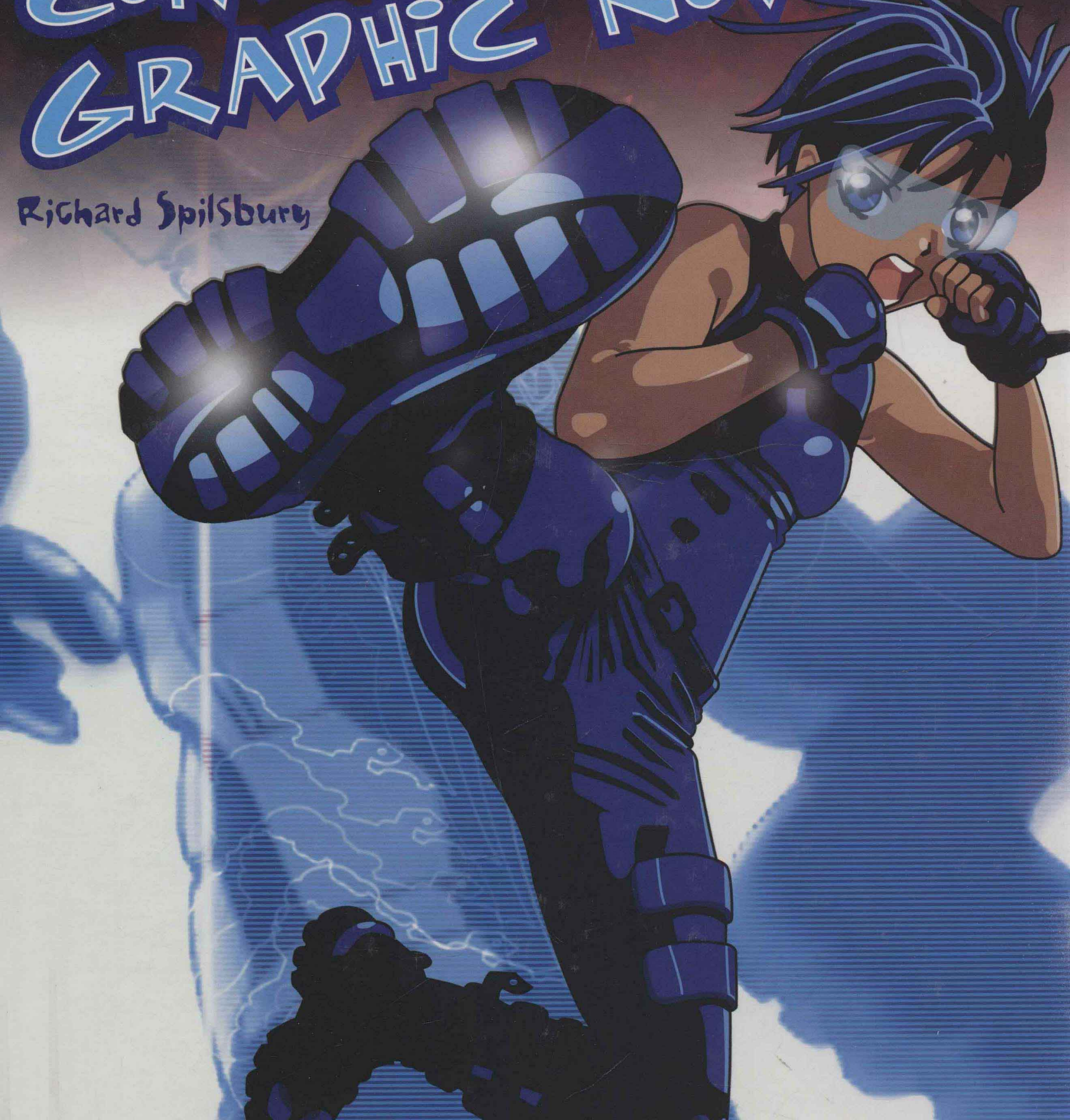


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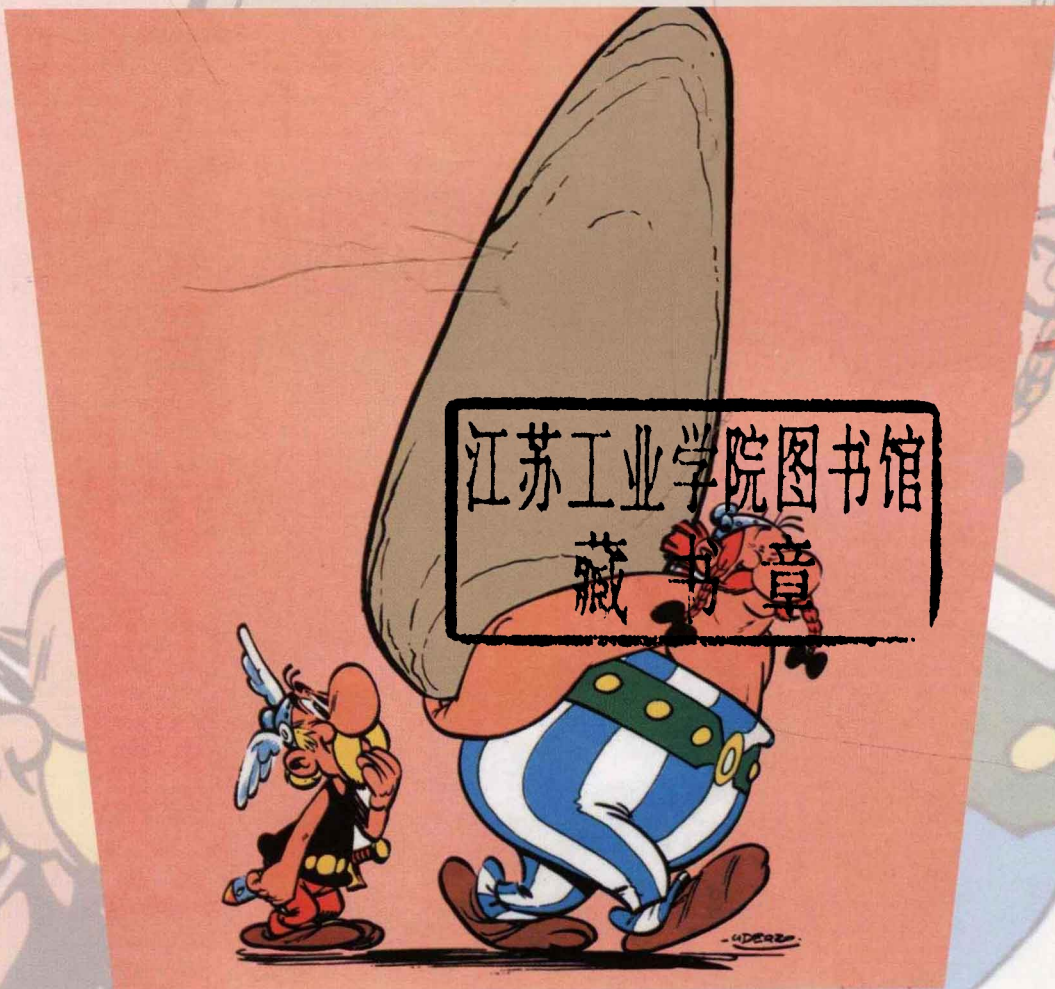
COMICS & GRAPHIC NOVELS

Richard Spilsbury



Art off the wall

COMICS AND GRAPHIC NOVELS



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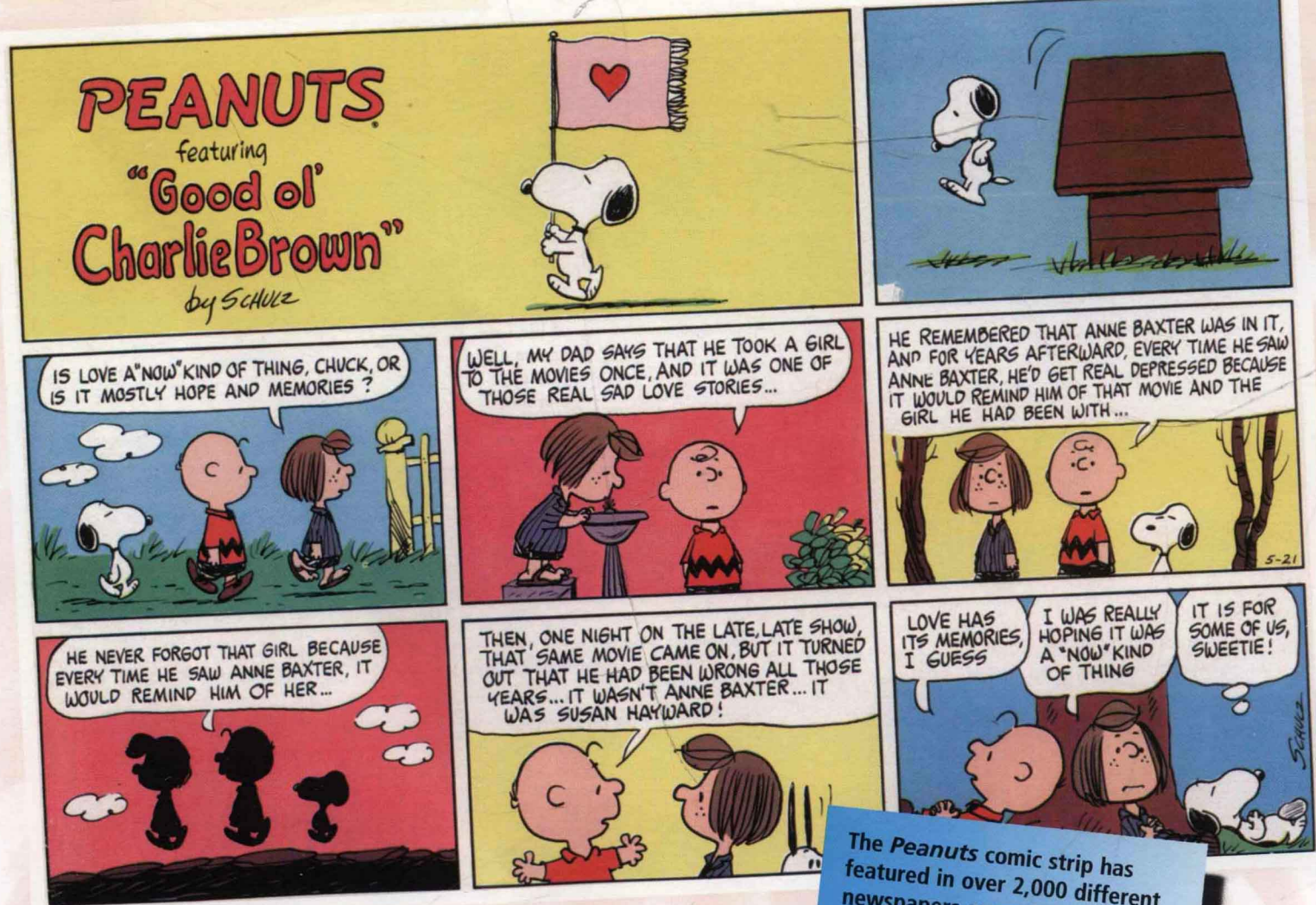
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What are comics and graphic novels?

Most people have an idea what a comic is – for example, the short row of drawings called a **comic strip** at the bottom of a newspaper page, or a magazine or **comic book** filled with the colourful adventures of different characters. Whatever the type, comics are all made up of pictures arranged in a definite order. Comics are sometimes defined as “**sequential art**”.

The separate pictures in a comic always have things in common, such as the same characters or settings. However, a few things change from one picture to the next, such as the position of a character. The arrangement or **layout** of the pictures is planned to make readers follow what is changing between one picture and the next. The pictures usually also have words within or right next to them to help explain the action.



The Peanuts comic strip has featured in over 2,000 different newspapers around the world.

Graphic novels

Graphic novels are simply comics planned as longer books. They often have a more in-depth story that moves between different settings. Usually, graphic novels feature a much wider range of characters than shorter comics. Some of the pictures may be very detailed and may take up whole pages. Some graphic novels are actually collections of stories created and originally published at different times, rather like comic books, but always featuring the adventures of the same characters.

Tricks of the trade

You can easily get caught up in a good comic just as you can in any good book. Some of the characters and the fascinating places in their world might appeal to you. Maybe the story is so gripping you cannot bear to put the comic down.

Comic book characters often have features that make them stand out from the crowd. The easily recognizable Simpsons family feature in a monthly comic book series based on the popular animated TV show, *The Simpsons*.

Throughout this book there will be lots of examples of the techniques different comic artists and writers use to convert their ideas into finished comics. When they have been successful, you should care what happens to their characters and believe in the drawn worlds they have invented.



Try it yourself

This book provides lots of activities you can try yourself. Most are simple exercises to do with particular stages in the creation of comics – for example, how to draw eye shapes for different moods and how to change a story into pictures.

The aim is for you to build up enough skills to start making your own comics. You can use the completed exercises as part of a comic **portfolio**. This is a collection of your best and most recent work that you keep. It is a record of your development as a comic creator.

Picture this!

You stumble down to breakfast and spot a comic on the cereal packet. Waiting for the school bus, you spot another one on an advertising poster. At school you open your French workbook and there is another. Sequences of pictures are all around us today. However, they are not a new way of telling stories and spreading information.

The Bayeux Tapestry is a 70-metre (230-feet) long picture story embroidered nearly 1,000 years ago in thread on woollen cloth.

Early picture stories

The first picture stories we know of date back tens of thousands of years. Cave paintings show hunters, the wild animals they hunted, and dramatic moments when they fought their prey. These paintings were probably intended to record events and teach other people about hunting.

Other early picture stories are records of war and conquest. The famous Bayeux Tapestry, commissioned by a French bishop, tells the story of the Battle of Hastings, England, in 1066. The French army led by William killed the English king, Harold, and defeated his forces. France ruled England for the next 88 years.



EAGLE-BRITAIN'S NATIONAL STRIP CARTOON WEEKLY



DAN DARE

THE RED MOON MYSTERY



The Eagle comic was very popular in the 1950s and 1960s. The major character, Dan Dare, was a fearless pilot of the future who had adventures on strange planets.

Glass comics!

Inside most cathedrals or churches, coloured light floods into the dark interior through stained-glass windows. Many of these windows are divided up into separate pictures, telling different stories about Jesus or the lives of saints. Many early church-goers could not read – they learnt about Biblical stories by looking at stained-glass windows.

The funnies

Strips of drawings first appeared in print in the early 19th century. They were often called “funnies” because they featured funny-looking people in humorous situations. Some characters were made-up, but others were recognizable **caricatures** of politicians and noblemen. By around 1900 they became known as “comics” rather than funnies.

Comic strips in print

In the early 20th century, comic strips featuring different adventures of the same characters were a feature in many newspapers. By the 1930s so many people were reading newspapers that some comic characters, such as Popeye, were becoming popular. Readers wanted to see more of their favourite characters' adventures so different comic strips were published together in comic books such as the *Eagle*.

Unlucky in love

The first printed graphic novel appeared in 1837 in Europe. It was called *The Adventures of Obadiah Oldbuck* and it was created by Rodolphe Töpffer, a Swiss artist. In it, Oldbuck makes a complete fool of himself in his attempts to charm a woman who isn't interested in him!

Birth of superheroes

Life in the United States during the 1930s was hard. There was mass unemployment and lots of poverty. This was the time when comics featuring **superhero** characters started to become very popular. Superheroes have special abilities to do improbable things. They were just the right characters to help people at that time to escape from reality.

The first popular superhero, Superman, was created by Jerry Siegel and Joe Shuster in 1938. Superman had astonishing strength and speed, the power to fly, fantastic vision, and other unusual abilities. He wore a tight, blue costume with a large "S" for Superman on the front, and bright red pants over the top. Superman fought crime whenever he was needed, but spent the rest of his life as Clark Kent, a clumsy, quiet reporter. The success of Superman encouraged lots of comic publishers to create their own superheroes, such as Batman, the Atom, and Wonderwoman.

More realistic superheroes

In the late 1940s, when readers were ready for a bit more realism, a new kind of superhero became popular. One of these was "the Spirit", created by Will Eisner. The Spirit was a crime-fighter, the half-living spirit of a detective, dressed as an ordinary man wearing a mask. Rather than having super powers, the Spirit had ordinary human failings and fears.

After the Spirit, comic creators developed more and more characters that readers could identify with. The new superheroes had bad tempers, tried to impress their girlfriends, and worried about paying their bills, just like many normal people.

Creator focus: creating a new type of superhero!

Some modern comic creators have invented silly superheroes with unusual powers. Dav Pilkey has created a series of comic books in which Captain Underpants flies around fighting injustice but also recommending comfortable undergarments! Here's how Pilkey got his idea:

"My teacher used the word 'underpants' in class one day and everyone started laughing ... our teacher had never made everybody laugh so hard before. I realized then that the word 'underpants' was a very funny word. On the school bus home that day, I was making up a story about underwear and some younger kids in the seat behind me were laughing so hard, they almost fell on the floor. The next day, I invented a superhero named Captain Underpants."

CAPTAIN UNDERPANTS

AND THE BIG, BAD BATTLE OF THE
BIONIC BOODGER BOY
PART 1: THE NIGHT OF THE
NASTY NOSTRIL NUGGETS



Captain Underpants' costume is a cape and an enormous pair of white briefs!

SQUISHY ACTION!

SMOOSHY HORROR!

GOOEY LAFFS!


THE SIXTH EPIC NOVEL
BY DAY PILKEY

SCHOLASTIC

Virtues of visuals

As young children, many of us learn to read using picture books. The pictures help us understand what words look like and what they mean. For example, a picture of a cat next to the word "cat" reinforces the definition of the word.

Sequences of images continue to be useful throughout our lives for showing us things simply so we remember them. For example, if you have been on an aeroplane you will probably have seen instructions about how to put on a lifejacket in an emergency. The added advantage of not using words is that there is no need to translate the safety instructions into lots of languages for different passengers from around the world.

A hand is holding an airplane safety card. The card is filled with numerous small, colorful illustrations showing passengers performing various safety procedures, such as putting on life jackets, using oxygen masks, and stowing luggage. The illustrations are arranged in a grid-like pattern. Some illustrations include red prohibition signs (a circle with a diagonal line) to indicate actions that are not allowed. The card is being held in front of an airplane seat, with the seat's control panel and a "FASTEN SEAT BELT WHILE SEATED" sign visible in the background.

Sequences of images can be a useful way of giving instructions, as in this aeroplane safety guide.

Comics and school

Many adults read comics and graphic novels, but there is no doubt that they appeal most of all to younger people. That is why they can be a really useful educational tool. The impact of pictures used with just a few words makes complicated information more memorable and easier to understand. For example, plays by William Shakespeare can be tricky to read as they are long and full of complicated language. Comic versions of the plays are much shorter.

They reduce the plots to their simplest forms and make relationships between characters clearer. Some people think that studying a comic version makes reading the original easier.

Comics can help us understand non-fiction such as science, too. For example, *Sandwalk Adventures* by Jay Hosler is a comic book about the complex theory of evolution starring Charles Darwin and a talking parasite!

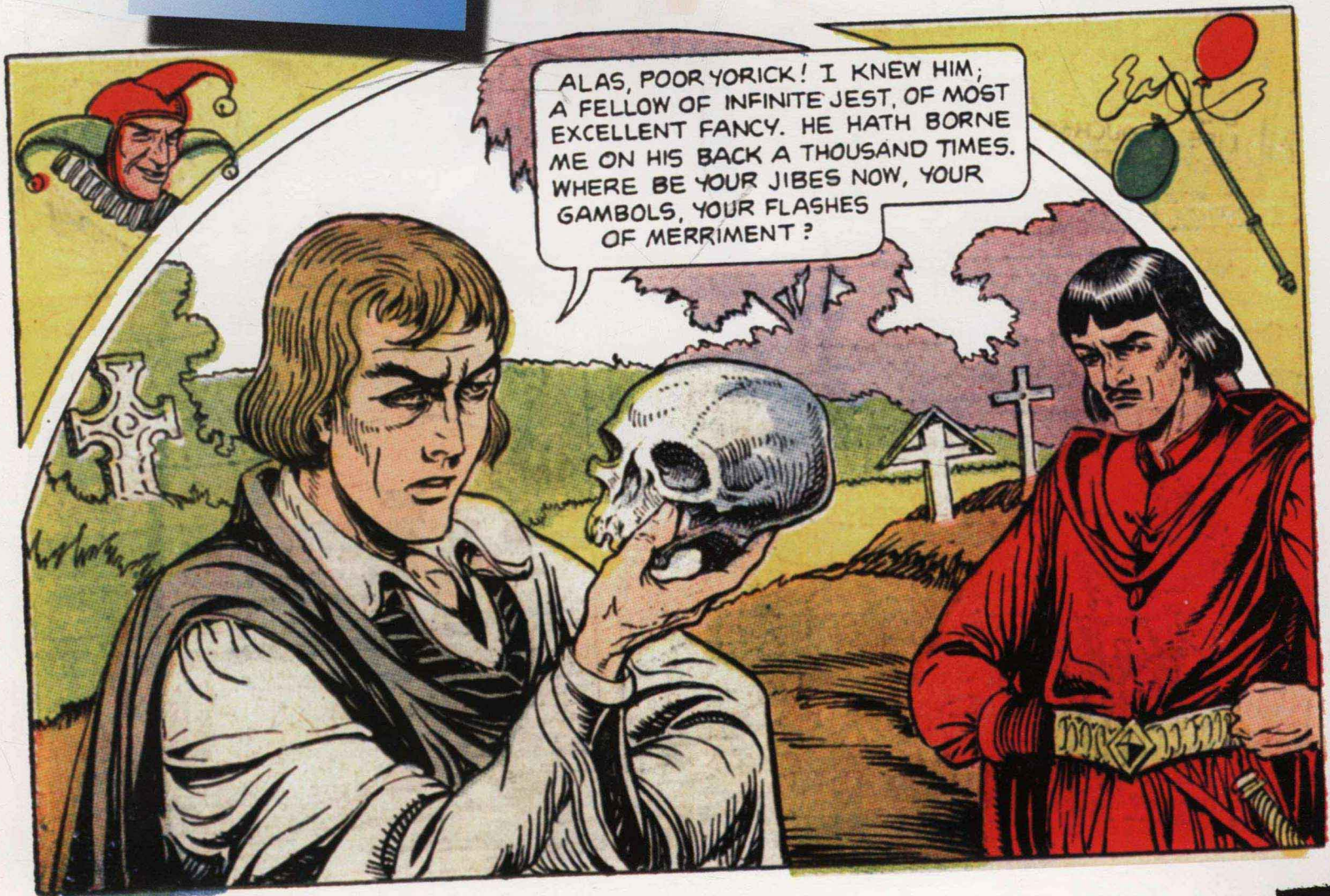
Serious messages

Some people think of comics and graphic novels largely as entertainment, because they are often full of talking animals and dramatic battles. However, many also contain a serious message. For example, Raymond Briggs' *When the Wind Blows* is about the horrors of nuclear bombs and *The Lorax* by Dr Seuss is all about habitat destruction.

Shakespeare's *Hamlet* is easier to read as a comic than lines of script.

Superman teaches vocabulary!

The use of comics in education began in the 1940s when comic magazines were read by 95 per cent of all 8–14-year-olds. When educators developed a Superman language workbook in 1944, which used comic strips to teach new words, teachers reported “unusual interest” in literacy among their students!





Manga are very widely read in Japan and other parts of the world.

Visual novels

For some people, the term graphic or visual novel should only be used for certain long comic books. These contain images whose quality and style demonstrate excellent artistic ability. They should also be written for adult readers with more complicated stories spread over tens of pages. In other words, some people believe graphic novels are the visual equivalent of proper literature, which can reveal different things each time you read them, whereas most comic books are only read once.

World of comics

There are comics and graphic novels published in different countries all around the world. You will probably be familiar with many comics.

For example, you have probably seen the US comics featuring Batman and the Simpsons, and British comic magazines such as *The Beano*. You may also have seen the Belgian graphic novels featuring Tintin and the French comic books featuring Asterix. But how about comics from other places?

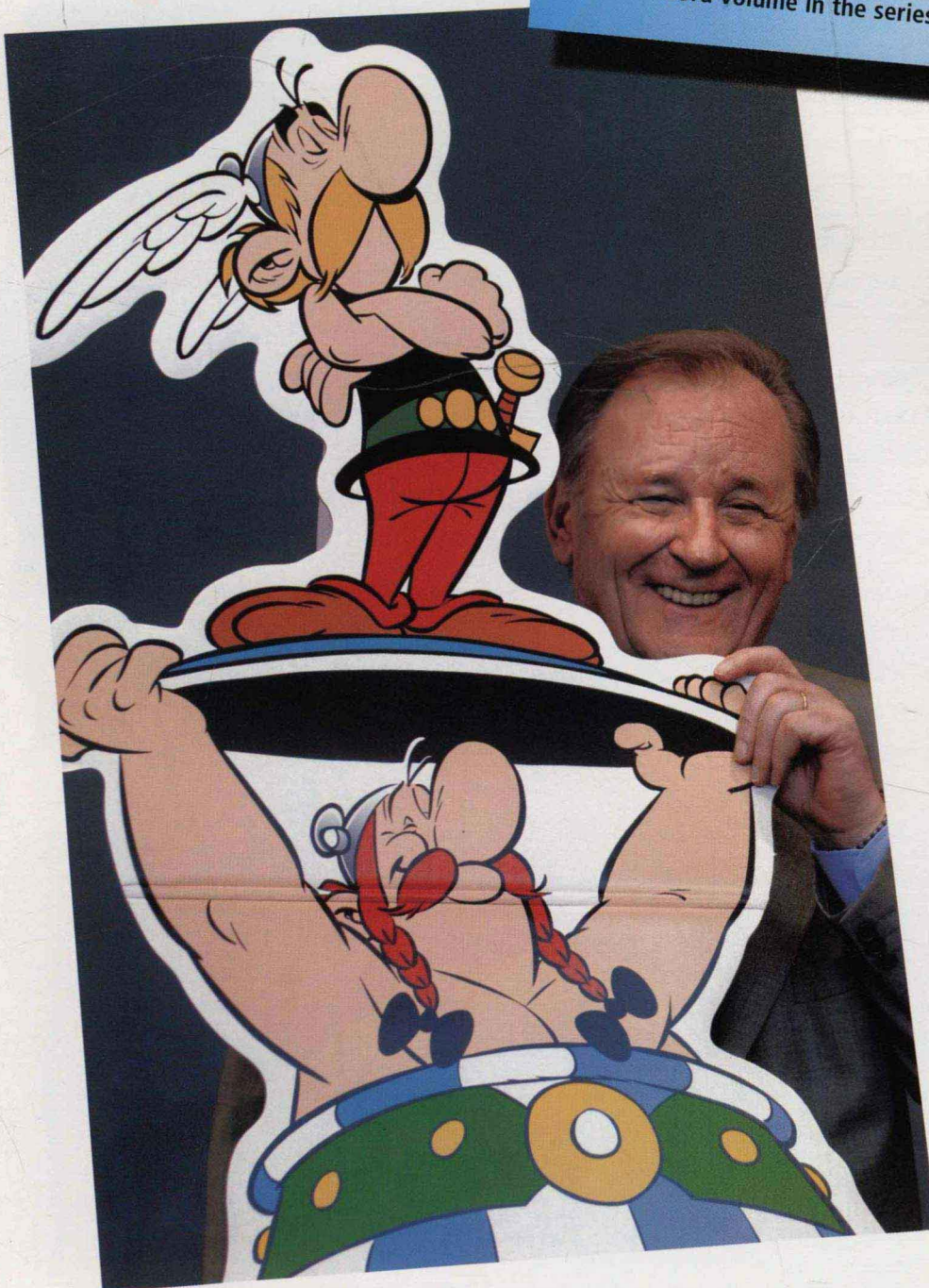
Comics from Japan are called **manga**. There are different styles of manga suitable for different audiences. For example, the style of manga for young teenage boys is called **Shonen**. Other styles of Asian comics are created in China, Korea, and India. Indian comics range from depictions of religious stories to *Spiderman India*, in which the hero takes on demons from Hindu myths!

Translations and syndication

Comics have so few words that they are fairly easily translated into other languages. For example, *Asterix* books have been translated into 110 languages. Many US comics have been **syndicated** around the world.

This means other newspapers and magazines pay for the right to use them. The most syndicated comic strip is *Garfield*, created by Jim Davis in 1978. It has appeared in 2,570 different publications worldwide.

French comic book creator Albert Uderzo stands next to a board featuring Asterix and Obelix, after publishing *Gaul in Danger* worldwide in 2005, the 33rd volume in the series.



Try it yourself

Garfield is a comic strip about a grumpy cat. Why don't you do your own version? Draw a row of three or four boxes and think up an idea for your cat. For example, the cat is outside and sees its food inside. It runs at the cat flap but it is locked. Draw simple pictures with a black pen to show your story without using any words.

Parts of a comic

Different types of comic can look very different but they usually contain the same elements:

- **panels:** the square or rectangular boxes where the action takes place. Panels are a bit like the view through a camera, through a window, or on to a film screen. What you see is a **background** against which characters talk and create the action. Most panels in comics are arranged in lines across the page, so we can read them as we would lines of words in a book. However, some comic creators devise unusual page layouts with, for example, panels within panels to tell their stories.
- **gutters:** the narrow spaces or lines between the panels are called gutters. Gutters separate panels and can indicate a shift in time and place.
- **word bubbles:** the rounded or rectangular white spaces that display what the characters say to each other (the **dialogue**), what they think, and sometimes what they are feeling.
- **captions:** boxes above or below panels containing text about them. They are often headings or titles, but sometimes explain what has happened in the past before the action begins. This is called the **backstory**.

Closure

In one panel, a strong-looking baseball pitcher pulls back her pitching arm holding the ball. In the next panel, the batter looks in shock at his splintered bat. You automatically fill in the missing bit of action – the pitch was so fast it broke the bat. Even though the comic does not show this bit of the action, you know what happened. The way we fill in the gaps between one image and the next is called **closure**.

The gutters between panels have a very important job in any comic. They are the bits that make the reader produce closure. Depending on what is drawn in the panels, a gutter can mean a shift in time or place. The baseball example given above shows a shift in time. Comic creators can use gutters to help them cut down on how much action they actually have to draw.

Try it yourself

When we read a comic strip our imaginations fill in the gaps in the action between the panels, producing closure. But how much closure can comic creators expect of their readers? Why not try this exercise with your friends?

Find a comic strip in an old newspaper or photocopy one from a comic book. Cut the strip into separate panels. Remove some of the panels from the middle of the strip and tape the remaining panels together again. Show the new strip to your friends. Can they make sense of the shortened story?



Some comic books, such as Raymond Briggs' *The Snowman*, have almost no words. The action is shown just through the pictures. The gutters between the panels show shifts in time and place and the reader's imagination fills in the gaps in the action.

Tools of the trade

Before you get drawing you will need the right tools to do it neatly. In the past, comic and graphic novel artists always used traditional art equipment. They drew panels on good quality card called Bristol board, which had no loose fibres that could make the ink lines smudge. They used pens or fine brushes dipped in black India ink to draw accurate lines. Any mistakes were covered using white ink. They carefully added coloured paint where necessary. Many artists used plastic or metal **templates** to add lettering to word bubbles and rulers to draw straight lines. Some people still draw comics this way today.

The US comic artist Charles Schultz, creator of the Peanuts comic strip, inks over the pencilled-in characters. Peanuts, featuring the characters Charlie Brown and his dog Snoopy, first appeared in 1950 and became one of the most popular comic strips of all time.

