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DIGITAL COMICS AND THEIR EXPLOITATION IN THE EFL CLASSROOM OF PRIMARY EDUCATION

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this Master's Dissertation is to develop a methodology that exploits digital comics in the English classroom of Primary Education. To this end, an exhaustive study about comics, digital comics and their benefits in learning a foreign language is conducted in the first part of this document. Special attention is paid to the effects of comics on reading comprehension and second language acquisition. Then, a methodology that integrates freeze-frame drama, Task-Based Language Teaching and Cooperative Learning is suggested and exemplified with a didactic unit for a class of third year of Primary Education in an English bilingual state school. A digital comic is provided so that students can monitor their learning process that ends with the creation of a digital comic, in which they introduce themselves as superheroes / superheroines and show their superpowers to society.

KEY WORDS

Second language acquisition, English as a Foreign Language, reading comprehension, written production, Primary Education, multimodality, comic, digital comic

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1. INTRODUCTION

In the last decade, there has been a spate of interest in promoting extensive reading in the English as a Foreign Language (henceforth referred to as EFL) classroom of Spanish Primary Education schools. Evidence of this can be found in the Order of 27 August 2014, of the Department of Education, University, Culture and Sport, which introduced a reading plan to boost reading and communication skills of students in state and private non-university educational centers of Aragon. To this end, literary texts are encouraged in all the areas of the curriculum, including EFL, to acquire and convey coherent meaning from varied contexts.

The function of literature in the EFL classroom has changed completely in the last century. The Grammar Translation Method, which was the dominant method to learn a foreign language (henceforth referred to as FL) until the middle of the 20th century, employed literary texts exclusively as instances of good writing and correct grammar rules (Duff & Maley, 1990, p. 3). Thus, little importance was given to meaning and literary devices.

With the emergence of the Audiolingual Method in the 1960s, literature adopted a similar function in FL teaching. Students read literary texts to reinforce their oral language instruction, focusing on grammatical rules, vocabulary and pronunciation (Yoon, 2013, p. 18). Again, reading literature was considered as a passive process aimed at acquiring language proficiency, rather than experiencing the beauty and pleasure of acquiring meaning.

Against this backdrop, the King's College conference on education that took place in Cambridge in 1963 highlighted the relevance of literary texts as an effective tool in teaching/learning a language and questioned the traditional approach due to its inability to improve language and communicative skills (Bobkina & Dominguez, 2014, p. 249). Later, the psycholinguistic model of reading by Goodman (1967, p. 126) rejected reading as a primary process of picking up information letter-by-letter or word-by-word. Instead, for Goodman reading involves a selective process in which readers take tentative decisions to refine the information of perceptual input on the basis of their expectations. What is more, pragmatics and discourse analysis, which emerged in 1970s, consider that reading should not focus only on the sum of lexical-grammatical meanings but also on interpretation (Sinclair, 1994, p. 100) and semantic content (Wu, 2017, p. 514) to comprehend the information.

Despite these efforts to redefine the concept of reading, the inclusion of literary texts was ignored in the language classroom for many years (Bobkina & Dominguez, 2014, p. 249). Structural approaches to language teaching held that literature was an outdated tool while

functional-notional methods disregarded literature due to its lack of communicative functions (Llach, 2007, as cited in Bobkina & Dominguez, 2014, p. 249). It was not until the mid-1980s when a deficiency of elemental content knowledge and skills among learners of languages was detected and, therefore, it was necessary to reintegrate literature into language programs so that learners could acquire the knowledge, strategies and study habits necessary to meet the high demands of more advanced levels of education (Gilroy-Scott, 1983, p. 1).

In addition, in the late 1980s there appeared a new paradigm that integrated language within culture and considered literature a part of culture. This conceptual framework has entailed in the last twenty-five years the inclusion of literary texts in the FL curriculum, showing a great potential to promote students' FL vocabulary knowledge, knowledge of formulaic expressions, grammatical knowledge, language awareness, and sociolinguistic and pragmatic competences (Bobkina & Dominguez, 2014, p. 248).

Although much research has confirmed the benefits of literary texts when teaching FL skills, many English teachers in Spain are reluctant to include them in their classes because they face serious problems, such as absence of background and training in literature, lack of preparation to teach literature, absence of clear objectives that define the function of literature in teaching FL and deficiency of appropriate literary materials in the classroom context (Sarto Martes, Bobkina, & Fernández de Caleyá Dalmau, 2012, p. 219).

The laborious choice of literary texts should fulfil three important goals in the EFL curriculum of Primary Education: enhance motivation towards extensive reading, develop autonomy and promote second language (henceforth referred to as L2) acquisition. What is more, literary texts should respond to the demands of our global, digital and complex society, leading “twenty-first-century teachers to adopt new didactic multimodal approaches to engage learners, and provide them with linguistic and visual skills to organize information and with the literacy necessary to make sense of it” (Reyes-Torres & Portalés Raga, 2020, p. 96).

These new didactic multimodal approaches are based on multimodal texts, which “use more than one mode to articulate, render, represent and communicate an array of narratives, concepts or information in both print and digital environments” (Serafini, 2014, pp. 12-13). In this definition, a mode is understood as a “socially shaped and culturally given semiotic resource for making meaning” (Kress, 2010, p. 79) such as, for example, painting, photography, music, sound effects or oral and written language.

The growing presence of multimodal texts in children's literature has become the focus of

current research, which tries to understand the distinctions, similarities and pedagogical potentials of multimodal texts and their impact on children's literature (Serafini, Kachorsky, & Reid, 2018, p. 312). In Spain, it is observed that picture books are the most used multimodal texts by English teachers of Primary Education. It goes without saying that comics are also multimodal texts with interesting repercussions on education, as I will discuss in the next section. Although both picture books and comics integrate visual images in the written text, comics provide a more visual continuity from image to image (Cohn, 2020, p. 271).

The scarce use of comics in education is largely due to the fact that some literary theorists do not consider them as part of literature (Meskin, 2009, p. 223). The concept of literature is complex and has changed throughout history. According to Almazán, González, Nieto and Orrequia (2020, para. 7-8), what distinguishes literary texts from non-literary texts is literariness, which is characterized by two main contrasting views. The first one is immanentism, which holds that literature has something special that cannot be touched or modified in any way. The second perspective is more social, which sees literature as a special kind of discourse in which readers establish a form of communication with the writer and also with the text, which differs from other forms of communication. Almazán et al. (2020, para. 9-13) describe this literary discourse as artistic discourse with three distinctive elements that differentiate it from other forms of art: a production, behind which there is an author who finds an original idea or concept and then revises it during a period of time until being fully satisfied with the final result; an instrument or product, which has been carefully conceived, planned, written and revised, and which is outstanding in its linguistic form; and finally a reception that characterizes literary discourse for its iterability, which means that many forms of literary communication have the capacity to be reproduced over the years.

Taking this concept of literature as reference, comics should be considered as literary texts since they have remained intact over many years and contain a peculiar literary discourse that makes them unique with respect to other types of literature. As I will detail in the next section, this literary discourse is defined by distinctive elements that comic writers must follow in the process of combining written text and visual information. If they show us an 80-year-old Batman comic and a recently written Ms. Marvel comic, we can quickly identify that both have an original format and literary devices that differentiate them from other literary genres.

Despite this argument, today there are many illustrious figures who deny that comics are literature. For example, Douglas Wolk (2007, p. 14), an important critic of comics, points out that "comics use words, they are printed in books, they have narrative content - but they are no

more a literary form than movies or opera are literary forms”. And Alan Moore (2007, p. 3), a prominent contemporary comics writer, argues that “if you try to describe the *Dazzler* graphic novel in the same terms as you describe *Moby Dick* then you’re simply asking for trouble”.

Opinions are divided on the inclusion of comics as literature, which directly affect their use in schools. Moreover, comics have continuously had a bad reputation in education since the anti-comics movement of the 1950s and ‘60s, led by the psychologist Fredric Wertham, who assured that comics caused delinquency and psychological harm to children and adolescents (Serafini et al., 2018, p. 316).

Despite this generalized discredit of comics, today there are some educators who are struggling to give comics prestige and introduce them to schools because of their educational benefits, especially to learn a FL. There are many varieties of comics, even some without written text, and which are not intended for a single audience. Although most people associate comics with superhero/superheroine comics, recently there has been a blossoming of alternative comics produced for children. These texts, like those produced by the prestigious comic authors Raina Telgemeier, Gene Luen Yang, and Kazu Kibuishi, have enjoyed widespread popularity among young readers and their teachers (Riesman, 2017, blog post).

Because multimodal literature in Spanish education currently focuses mainly on illustrated and picture books, the present Master’s Dissertation seeks to give comics the attention they deserve as multimodal texts. Thus, it is deemed convenient to answer the following research questions:

- What are the fundamentals of comics as multimodal texts?
- What are the effects of comics on L2 reading comprehension?
- What are the benefits of comics in L2 acquisition?
- How can digital comics be exploited in an EFL classroom of a Spanish Primary Education school?

To answer these questions, this document is structured in three clear parts. First, a literature review will address the presence of multimodality in children's literature, the effects of visuals on cognition and reading comprehension, the digitalization of multimodal texts, and the convenience of using digital comics in the EFL classroom. Second, a methodology will be established to work on the five skills to learn a FL - listening, speaking, reading, writing and intercultural awareness - with digital comics. Finally, a didactic unit for a class of third year of Primary Education in an English bilingual state school will be exemplified to put into practice the entire theoretical framework.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1. Multimodality and children's literature

One of the most significant changes that children's literature has experienced in recent years is the presence of multimodal texts. This is mainly due to the strongly multimodal character of children when they interact with their environment, experience new feelings and learn from the "new" (Siegel, 2006, p. 65). In addition, children exploit their cultural and social multimodal resources for making meaning, such as for example drama, talk, drawing, gesture or linguistic signs (Hassett & Curwood, 2009, p. 271).

In many books written for children, meaning no longer lies in the text itself because there are many other culturally shaped resources, i.e. semiotic modes, for making meaning (Hassett & Curwood, 2009, p. 271). Consequently, simple design elements such as typesetting, font, color, lines, shape or texture can be viewed as semiotic modes, which can affect the meaning or the interpretation of the written text. For example, in the picture book *Snow Lion*, by Jim Helmore and Richard Jones (2017), images and characters present specific colors to evoke emotions and feelings in the reader (Reyes-Torres & Portalés Raga, 2020, p. 110). In this story, Caro, a little girl, moves to a house where the dominant color inside is white, representing loneliness and separation from the outside world, which is colorful. An imaginary white lion will lead her to build up her confidence to go outside and meet other friends, so that the story shows a progressive inclusion of color in the pages.

Knowing to read and write texts is not sufficient to acquire literacy competence in today's society (Källvant, 2015, p. 2). According to Elsner, Helff and Viebrock (2013, p. 28), it is also necessary to develop multimodal literacy, which is the "ability to obtain, systematize, expand and link information from different symbolic systems (language, graphic illustrations, numeric representations)" (p. 28) and visual literacy, which is the "ability to decode, use and create visual forms of expression" (p. 28) because communication today uses visuals in some way.

In this context, multimodal children's literature becomes essential to cultivate both multimodal and visual literacy in the EFL classroom. Following Serafini et al. (2018, p. 311), picture books, multimodal novels and comics are the most relevant types of multimodal literature, and they all have in common the primary defining characteristic of the inclusion of images along with the written language to render the narrative. However, there are clear distinctions among them, in relation to structures, compositions, designs and formats, which makes it necessary to study and interpret them in different ways.

2.2. Comics as multimodal texts

Comics are considered multimodal texts since they contain at least two semiotic modes, written text and images, to communicate information. Although it may seem clear what comics are, experts do not agree on the use of terms and definitions. Two of the most accepted definitions are provided by Eisner and McCloud. Eisner (1985, p. 7) simply defines comics as sequential art in which words and images form the narrative. On the other hand, for McCloud (1993) comics are “juxtaposed pictorial and other images in deliberate sequence, intended to convey information and/or to produce an aesthetic response in the reader” (p. 9).

From the definitions of Eisner and McCloud, comics may also include ancient hieroglyphs from Egypt or some tapestries. This broad definition of comics has led some authors to define new terms and definitions. For example, Wolk (2007) considers that “comics or comic books are the bad or cheap way of referring to comics, while graphic novels or sequential art would be the most sophisticated way” (p. 60). Moreover, Wolk makes a distinction between two different types of graphic novels or sequential art: mainstream and art comics. For him, “mainstream comics are several individual comic books, usually telling parts of the same story, put together into a volume or collection” (p. 60), while “art comics are generally published as unique graphic novels, in which style and content might vary a lot since the most important issue for readers is the artist and her or his ideas presented in the comics” (p. 60).

For the sake of clarity, this Master’s Dissertation will take the perspective of Cary (2004), who considers comics as an “umbrella term for several different types of sequential art, including cartoons, comic books, comic strips, and graphic novels” (p. 10). This definition also extends to digital comics, which will be detailed in subsection 2.6. and will be part of the methodology for teaching EFL in section 3.

Unlike other multimodal texts, “sequential art” is the definitive characteristic of comics’ medium, which consists of pictures arranged in sequence (McCloud, 1993, Eisner, 1985, Tatalovic, 2009, as cited in Yunus, Salehi, & Amin Embi, 2012, p. 3463). Furthermore, Saraceni (2003, p. 5) identifies four distinctive elements in comics that make them unique compared to other multimodal texts:

- Panel: each of the frames that compose each page, generally with a rectangular shape.
- Gutter: the blank space that separates each panel from the others.
- Balloon or bubble: a shape inserted into the panel, containing written text that corresponds to a character’s direct speech or thought.

- Caption: a box inserted at the top or bottom of the panel, containing written text that represents the narrator's voice.

From these characteristics, comics can be described as sequences of panels separated by gutters, each of them containing three elements in strong connection: a picture, a caption that gives voice to the narrator and one or more balloons that give voice to the characters. It is important to note that panels without captions or balloons can also be found in comics.

As with other types of multimodal text, students develop multimodal and visual literacy through comics as “they learn to decode and interpret the individual panels, the words and images that they contain, and how panels relate to each other” (Salazar, 2019, p. 46). What is more, Elsner et al. (2013) assert that comics show detailed situational contexts that help young readers develop functional literacy, which is the “ability to learn languages and use them adequately in different contexts” (p. 28). For these authors, “the quality and lexical density of the vocabulary in comics are higher than in other books at the same level, and the combination of images and text is especially helpful for weak readers” (p. 64).

2.3. Effects of comics on L2 reading comprehension

2.3.1. Functions of visuals on reading

The presence of contextual visuals in comics have significant benefits on L2 readers, especially in the area of memory recall and schemata formation (Jones, 2010, p. 229). In general, “a schema can be defined as an abstraction of a concept that is induced from past experiences and guides the organization and appraisal of incoming information” (Al-Diban, 2012, p. 2088). For example, if someone says that there is a plague of “ants” in the garden, the listener’s environment schemata are activated to understand that the word spoken is most likely “ants” and not “aunts”. Closely related to schema is the concept of mental model, which is “an internal representation in the human mind of various aspects of an individual’s lifetime experience” (Al-Diban, 2012, p. 2200). In contrast to schemata, mental models are not permanent, involve cognitive restructuring, and are useful for solving tasks or understanding novel situations when schemata are absent, insufficient or inadequate (Al-Diban, 2012, p. 2201).

Many studies compare the degree to which readers comprehend and remember a text with and without visuals, and they conclude that visuals in texts mostly facilitate reading comprehension and memory (Liu, 2004, p. 226). Some researchers (Levie & Lentz, 1982, Levin, Anglin & Carney, 1987, as cited in Liu, 2004, p. 226) outline five major functions of visuals on reading:

- Representation: Visuals repeat the text’s content or substantially overlap with the text.

- Organization: Visuals enhance the text’s coherence.
- Interpretation: Visuals provide the reader with more concrete information.
- Transformation: Visuals target critical information in the text and recode it in a more memorable form.
- Decoration: Visuals are used for their aesthetic properties or to spark readers’ interest in the text.

In a meta-analysis of the effects of these visual functions on reading, Levin et al. (1987, as cited in Liu, 2004, p. 226) found that, whilst decoration does not help memory formation, the rest of functions facilitate memory and schema formation in this order of importance: transformation, interpretation, organization and representation.

Several theoretical cognitive frameworks try to explain the effects of visuals on L2 reading comprehension. According to Liu (2004, p. 226), the three that best describe them are the Dual Coding Theory (DCT), the mental model theory and the repetition hypothesis, which are detailed in the next subsections.

2.3.2. Dual Coding Theory (DCT)

The Dual Coding Theory (DCT), hypothesized by Paivio (1986, pp. 64-67), posits that the reading process involves two interconnected but independent systems: the verbal system and the nonverbal or imagery system. According to Paivio, when both systems are activated, visual strategies are enabled to create alternative analogous contexts for generating inferences and integrating text, which means a better understanding of the text.

Research within the DCT framework has proved that L1 and L2 reading comprehension is improved when verbal and nonverbal coding systems work together, but it is not when either one of them works alone (Liu, 2004, p. 230). A study conducted by Liu (2004, pp. 230-236) showed that low intermediate-level proficiency adult students of English as a L2 receiving comic strips with high-level texts obtained significant better results on L2 reading comprehension than their counterparts receiving high-level texts only. Liu (2004) explains that, when reading comics, “pictures are stored only in the nonverbal system while language is stored only in the verbal system, but referential connections are created between them” (p. 237), so that two sources of information contribute to make the same mental model.

Nonetheless, Liu also found that comic strips with high-level texts do not enhance high intermediate-level proficiency adult students’ L2 reading comprehension, thus questioning the DCT. Hence the need to resort to two more theoretical frameworks, the mental model theory

and the repetition hypothesis, to explain these findings.

2.3.3. Mental model theory

The mental model theory, proposed by Marcus, Cooper and Sweller (1996, p. 61), affirms that written information that is broken into simple components, as in the case of diagrams, presented serially, such as the panels in a comic, or accompanied by graphics or illustrations, facilitates mental model building. According to Glenberg, Kruley and Langston (1994), “the entities in the encoded picture would serve as referent for the words in the text, and the encoded picture would become a mental model” (p. 616).

When images in comic strips do not reflect the high-level text’s complexities, they tend to negatively interfere with constructing an accurate mental model as complex as the text (Liu, 2004, p. 237). Turning to Lui’s study, when low-level students have difficulties with high-level texts, they focus their attention on the pictures of the comic strips to understand the linguistic input. By contrast, when high-level students read comic strips with high-level texts, they do not benefit from the pictures because these visuals might be simplified input that do not reflect the complex information embedded in the text, and can even be a distraction (Liu, 2004, p. 238).

2.3.4. Repetition hypothesis

The repetition hypothesis, proposed by Gyselinck and Tardieu (1999, p. 211), asserts that when written text and visual elements are well integrated, they act as if the information was presented twice, thus improving the reading process. This hypothesis implies that pictures in comic strips should repeat the information presented in the text to facilitate reading comprehension. This in line with Liu’s (2004, p. 235) findings, which show that low-level students benefit from comic strips with low-level text since pictures repeat the information presented in the text. However, when it comes to comic strips with high-level texts, pictures are unlikely to duplicate the complex information provided by the text so that neither low-level nor high-level students should improve their L2 reading comprehension.

2.4. Benefits of comics in L2 acquisition

2.4.1. Comprehensible input

The Input Hypothesis, formulated by Krashen (1982), claims that “L1 or L2 acquisition occurs when learners understand input a bit beyond their current level of linguistic competence, where “understand” means that the learner is focused on the meaning and not on the form of the message” (p. 21). Following Krashen, to understand structures that have not yet been acquired,

learners use more than their linguistic competence, such as the context, the knowledge of the world or extralinguistic information. Children learn their L1 by receiving caretaker speech, a simplified input adapted to their L1 linguistic competence, and the “here and now principle”, which consists of talking about what children can perceive around them (Krashen, 1982, pp. 22-23). On the other hand, foreigners and teachers adapt their talk to L2 learners by taking advantage of the learner’s knowledge of the world, and pedagogical aids, such as pictures and realia (Krashen, 1982, p. 24).

The Input Hypothesis supports the benefit of comics for learning a L2. The abundant contextual visual clues in comic strips make text comprehensible and consequently boost L2 acquisition (Salazar, 2019, p. 48). But, for comic strips to be effective in the L2 classroom, it is fundamental to consider the mental model theory (subsection 2.3.2.) and the repetition hypothesis (subsection 2.3.3.): first, there must be a strong correspondence between pictures and the text of panels so that students can relate their meanings and understand the unknown structures; and second, the text of comic strips must be a little more complex than the linguistic competence of students, so that they can benefit from the pictures that make the text comprehensible.

2.4.2. Affective variables

The Affective Filter Hypothesis, proposed by Krashen (1982, pp. 30-32), states that there is a number of affective variables that affect L2 acquisition, most of them placed into three categories: motivation, self-confidence and anxiety. Although comprehensible input is the primary causative variable, as enunciated in the Input Hypothesis (subsection 2.4.1.), affective variables act to impede or facilitate the transmission of this comprehensible input. In particular, they are optimal to acquire a L2 when learners have a low affective filter, which occurs when they are highly motivated, self-confident and with low anxiety.

There is “almost a consensus amongst researchers that comics have an innate power to motivate learners to read, learn and engage with these texts” (Källvant, 2015, p. 9) and “many researchers argue that they are especially helpful for reluctant readers or struggling readers” (Källvant, 2015, p. 9). Comics motivate reading because “they are first and foremost an entertainment medium which seeks to get readers engaged on reading” (Salazar, 2019, p. 47). Yang (2003, as cited in Yunus et al., 2012, p. 3463) states that the ability of comics to capture and maintain students’ interests is due to the natural tendency of human beings towards pictures. Especially, children have a strong attraction to images, which makes comics an extraordinary motivating tool in the EFL classroom (Haugaard, 1973, p. 54).

Another important fact is that children have a sense of ownership or feeling of control when reading comics (Norton, 2003, p. 146). As stated in subsection 2.4.1., the great quantity of visual clues in comic strips help increase the amount of comprehensible input and improve reading comprehension. Moreover, Themelis and Sime (2020, p. 4) observe that children with reading or learning difficulties, such as for example dyslexia, are less stressful when reading comics: first, having fewer words to read per page enables them to finish much faster; and second, the ease of keeping track of the plot or the characters helps those students who struggle to remember the details of stories due to short term memory problems. As a result, children feel more confident and less anxious when their reading comprehension and speed are increased, keeping the affective filter low and thus promoting L2 acquisition.

2.4.3. Visual permanence

Unlike film and animation, where the medium dictates the pace of the viewing process, comics provide a permanent medium of pictures and text (Williams, 1995, Yang, 2003, as cited in Yunus et al., 2012, p. 3463). Versaci (2008, p. 101) argues that readers can spend the time necessary to analyze each panel of the comic but, unlike with photographs, they must constantly supply the missing parts of the static images in order to relate the meaning of them.

The visual permanence of comics has great benefits in the EFL classroom. Students can read at their own pace and, when they lose track of the story, they can go back to reread that passage again, with the advantage of having pictures really well integrated with the text, which makes reading comprehension easier. It is like giving them a remote control to accelerate or slow down the speed of information at their own whim and stop the story when necessary.

2.4.4. Authentic language

One of the objectives of the EFL subject is to expose students to the authentic language that English speakers would use in varied sociocultural contexts. In this sense, comics are ideal educational material since they provide authentic language-learning opportunities for all students, regardless of their L2 proficiency level (Cary, 2004, p. 15). Comics with low readability level and support of graphics help students access the authentic language with less trouble than with other authentic materials (Fay, 2007, p. 3).

Krashen (1993, as cited in Roozafzai, 2012, p. 10) suggests that comic reading serves as an important bridge between every day conversational language and academic language. Comics are “rich in ellipses, blends, non-words (uh-huh, humph, sheesh!), and other common aspects of spoken language” (Cary, 2004, p. 33). The inclusion of an informal register in learners’

linguistic repertoire is a crucial element to confront English native speakers or when they watch a film in English (Fay, 2007, p. 3).

Moreover, many comics provide a modern look at the foreign culture and society, containing a broadly accessible source of prominent topics, concerns and fashions that may appeal to almost any age level, and, what is more, interactions between characters from different backgrounds allow students to notice differences and similarities between the foreign culture and the learners' native culture (Fay, 2007, p. 3). Therefore, comics are an important source of activities to develop the intercultural awareness skill in the EFL classroom.

2.4.5. Comic production

Comics are also beneficial when it comes to written production. In a study conducted by Bledsoe (2010, as cited in Yunus et al., 2012, p. 3464), students complained that they had ideas to write but lacked language skills to accurately reflect them in their production; and they frequently asked if they could draw pictures to support their language ideas. In this sense, comics provide a scaffold to accompany written text with images, which is quite effective for learners with low English level.

In addition, the comic medium does not require long sentences or paragraphs to tell a story since characters normally need only a few words to express a plot (Chen, Fan, Chang, Chang, & Chen, 2018, p. 956). With the help of pictures, students can contextualize the sociocultural situations in which these characters find themselves, practice functional language in context, and therefore, develop communicative competence. Furthermore, images can help learners express the emotions and feeling of characters, which in other types of media would be more difficult for low English levels.

Comic production provides a wide array of didactic proposals in the EFL classroom. Following Fay (2007, p. 4), students can use comics to revisit or summarize stories that they have read in books or watched in animations either in class or at home, thus serving as a comprehension check or assessment tool; or they can design comics with their own autobiographies or biographies of family members, descriptions of hobbies or cultural celebrations, instructions for doing an activity or even grammar explanations.

2.5. From print to digital children's literature

In today's world, digital media is transforming the traditional means of communication such as newspapers, magazines, books, radio or television. Digital media enables easy access, reception and exchange of multiple modes of representing information (Hassett & Curwood, 2009, p.

272; Reyes-Torres & Portalés Raga, 2020, p. 96). Digitalization is also hitting children's literature and particularly multimodal literary texts, including picture books and comics. The great potential of technologies allows "creators to produce new artistic forms and children to have new literary experiences" (Yokota & Teale, 2014, p. 577). In this way, image and written text can be accompanied by music, sound effects or even interactive features that make digital children's literature a unique and exciting encounter.

The process of converting multimodal texts into digital multimodal texts through the features of computer technologies can occur in four ways (Yokota & Teale, 2014, pp. 578-580):

- 1) Scanning entire print books. Nothing is added and nothing is taken away, keeping the original design. The goal is simply to have a scanned version of the print book to make it available online or through electronic devices.
- 2) Transforming books into film-like creations. In the film version of the book, readers usually listen to the story while the camera zooms, pans, cuts between or moves about the illustrations, complemented by sounds related to the book's setting. Normally, there is an option to show the written text as it is read aloud.
- 3) Transforming books with features unique to the digital world. These include altering font, text placement, adding sound effects and music, or adding hot spots so that some elements in the illustrations respond to a mouse click or touch on the screen with sound, animation, or both.
- 4) Adding interactive features, including games, that extend beyond the story. There are many apps and e-books that provide didactic resources to learn with the story such as puzzles, matching games, and coloring or drawing opportunities.

2.6. Digital comics as multimodal texts

As with other types of digital books, digital comics are designed to be read on a digital medium such as a computer or a tablet. One of the most significant characteristics of digital comics is the "guided view—a feature that allows a digital comic to be viewed panel-by-panel rather than page-by-page or spread-by-spread" (Serafini et al., 2018, p. 317). In this way, panels are moved forward with a mouse click or a tap on the screen, so that readers focus their attention on each panel in isolation rather than having an overview of the entire page. This feature may be a problem because readers may have to jump to the previous panel/s when they lose track of the story. Nevertheless, comic designers have made up for this disadvantage with the options that technology offers. Digital comics "often feature animated transitions between panels, such as

fading or zooming in, shifting position, elongating or expanding, and flying into view” (Serafini et al., 2018, p. 317). Trying to imitate the film editing techniques, the animated transitions of digital comics set the pace of the narrative.

It is also important to note that digital comics may present more semiotic modes than written text and images. Probably the most defining mode is the sound, which includes aural diegetic elements, such as for example footsteps or someone knocking on the door, and aural non-diegetic elements such as a music soundtrack that can change the mood of the story, making the reading experience more complete (Serafini et al., 2018, p. 317).

Nor should it be forgotten that images in digital comics, as with other digital books, may contain interactive elements such as changing the panoramic view or inserting a short narrative animation in a panel. As technology evolves, the possibilities offered by digital comics will increase and, most importantly, teachers will be able to access new programs that will allow them to easily include these innovative features in any digital book.

2.7. The exploitation of digital comics in the EFL classroom

Digital comics provide many benefits in the EFL classroom. First and most importantly, they promote multiple intelligences. The Multiple Intelligences theory, proposed by Gardner (1983, p. 98), claims that there is not a single intelligence but eight separate intelligences that develop differently in each person. Students have an enriching reading experience with digital comics, whose semiotic modes stimulate their linguistic, visual or even musical and logical intelligences. Thanks to apps such as *ComicLife*, for instance, learners design their own digital comics by creating logical sequences of events or frames, composing and taking photographs, drawing illustrations, or adding music or recordings (Yunus et al., 2012, p. 3465).

In the second place, students are highly motivated to design comics with the support of technology, which breaks with the usual routine of the class, making learning English more interesting and enjoyable. In a study conducted by Goldberg, Russell and Cook (2003, pp. 12-17), learners who used computers when learning to write were not only more engaged and motivated, but also their written productions were longer and of higher quality. Likewise, Yunus et al. (2012, p. 3467) found that teacher trainees agreed that digital comics could attract and encourage low-achieving language students to write in English. What is more, the use of technology gives learners the confidence they need to continue working on tasks and completing them (Deligianni-Georgaka & Pouroutidi, 2016, p. 235).

It is important to emphasize that the digital revolution that we are experiencing makes it

necessary to teach children to use technology from an early age in school. Actually, one of the key competences proposed by the Royal Decree of 28 February 2014, by which the Spanish Curriculum of Primary Education is established, is Digital Competence, which requires students to develop the essential knowledge, skills and attitudes related to the use of Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) in everyday contexts. To achieve this competence in the language area, Elsner, Helff and Viebrock (2013) coined the term “digital literacy”, which “describes the ability to employ digital media not only for communicative processes but also for one’s own learning process” (p. 28). In this sense, current software to design digital comics involve decisions that go far beyond writing the text. Among others, students can acquire computer skills to upload and insert photos, pictures or audios in the comic strip, print the final version in a standard format, post it on a website or blog, or sent it to their parents.

It is also worth noting that digital comics are economical, since they can be easily produced, duplicated, modified or shared for different teaching purposes in comparison to paper-based comics that require more money (I Ketut Trika Adi, 2015, p. 78). Moreover, because Spanish schools normally neither have English paper-based comics in their libraries nor enough budget to purchase them, it is a great advantage to have many free digital comics available online for different English levels and educational purposes.

Nevertheless, not all are advantages when using technology to create comics. It is time-consuming, not only in the tutorials that students need to use the comic software, but also in the process of creation, which may include editing images, taking photographs, finding existing photographs or creating original drawings (Yunus et al., 2012, p. 3466). To overcome this problem, it is highly recommendable to plan a full annual syllabus around digital comics, so that the time spent at the beginning of the school year teaching students to use the target software is compensated for during the remainder of the school year.

3. METHODOLOGY

3.1. *Book creator* as a tool to create and share digital comics

In this methodology, students will receive and produce English through *Book Creator*, a software that allows making digital comics and that can be used on chrome books, windows, mac or android. Teachers can create a free account that includes a private library and a library that can be shared with learners and that can store up to 40 digital comics. Some of them will be designed by the teacher to guide students in their learning process and others will be edited

by students to fulfill their final tasks.

Book Creator offers many features to exploit multimodality in digital comics, namely handwriting, drawing, typing, voice or video recording, taking photos, embedding websites or videos from the Internet, or importing files such as photos, pictures or videos. Thus, the linguistic, musical and visual multiple intelligences can be stimulated in a unique medium.

Another interesting function of *Book Creator* is the possibility of creating collaborative digital comics so that groups of students can edit in real time the same file from different devices and can send comments to each other. The teacher can also monitor their progress and provide instant feedback. This function is really useful in case students have to work at home.

3.2. Digital comic performance-based language learning

The chosen methodology integrates digital comics with drama, which immerses students in authentic situations so that they can use the language in real contexts and express their emotions and feelings. Specifically, learners will put into practice freeze-frame drama, a type of performance through which they tell a situation or story with static body poses (Chen et al., 2018, p. 956). This is quite effective at lower levels of English in which students are not yet ready to improvise a dialogue. In this way, they can practice scriptwriting, a process in which they have time to combine their language knowledge and creativity to create dialogues.

Therefore, each digital comic strip will be composed of panels that show freeze-frames of students and their dialogues in comic format to represent each real-life situation. In addition, learners will complete each panel with other semiotic modes such as voice recordings, music, videos or pictures, following their preferred multiple intelligences. To this end, students will have tablets with cameras and the *Book Creator* application installed.

3.3. Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT)

This methodology follows the Communicative Approach, which, according to Richards and Rodgers (1986, p. 72), has three learning principles:

- Communication principle: activities that involve real communication promote learning.
- Task principle: activities in which language is used for carrying out purposeful tasks promote learning.
- Meaningful principle: language that is meaningful to the learner supports the learning process.

Specifically, under the umbrella of the Communicative Approach, this methodology is based

on the Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT) method, which is oriented around tasks, which can be of two types (Nunan, 2004, p. 3):

- Learning supporting tasks, which explore how the English system works and prepare learners for communicative tasks. These tasks can also generate genuine communication such as, for example, discussing grammar using the English language.
- Communicative tasks, in which there is sharing of meaning, through oral or written communication, and there is purposeful use of the FL.

3.4. Cooperative Learning

In group activities, students will follow Kagan Structures, which implement the four basic principles of Cooperative Learning (Kagan & Kagan, 2017, p. 4.2):

- Positive Interdependence: a gain for one means a gain for another.
- Individual Accountability: each member is accountable for her or his own contributions.
- Equal Participation: all students have the same opportunities to interact and participate.
- Simultaneous Interaction: there is more than one active participant at a time in the classroom.

Kagan Structures are management tools, which help students know what to do at each step of the activity so that they can always be on task, fully engaged (Kagan & Kagan, 2017, p. 8.2). This is the big difference in comparison to group work, which is unstructured interaction and often results in more management problems. For example, in the RoundRobin Structure, students in groups of four take turns answering orally to a question or contributing to a task.

3.5. Organization of the didactic unit

Following the TBLT method, a didactic unit is organised into five clear stages:

- 1) Activation stage: the aims are to activate the previous knowledge about the topic of the didactic unit and to complete a success criteria checklist for doing the final task, which is a digital comic strip.
- 2) Exploring stage: the aims are to learn the contents of the didactic unit through learning supporting tasks, to gain autonomy in the learning centers and to learn how to organize ideas and contents.
- 3) Deepening stage: the aims are to memorize the contents presented in the exploring stage through communicative tasks and to gain oral and written accuracy and fluency.
- 4) Planning & Creation stage: the aims are to plan the digital comic strip in teams of four

students, using all the contents learnt in the previous stages, to share ideas and opinions with other teams and to edit the digital comic strip using *Book Creator* for tablets.

- 5) Sharing & Assessment stage: the aims are to share the final version of the digital comic strip with other students and to self-assess all the learning-teaching process.

In order to guide students through these stages, there is a multimodal digital comic guide for the didactic unit (Appendix I), so that students can monitor their learning process in an attractive and motivating way. For this purpose, this step-by-step guide lists all the activities and resources of each stage, and connects them to reach the final task, which is a digital comic chapter.

3.6. The roles of the teacher

Although the information to complete the didactic unit is detailed multimodally in the digital comic, the teacher must provide support and help in the activities of the different stages. In the first place, special attention must be paid to learning centers in the Exploring stage, where learners must work autonomously to interiorize English contents. The teacher will take the opportunity to track the performance of teams of students and answer questions.

In the Deepening stage, the teacher will follow the Vigil and Oiler's model (Brown, 2001, p. 267) in oral communicative tasks. This model recommends a balance between negative and positive feedback, in such a way that the performance of the task should only be interrupted to point out those errors that affect the meaning of the message. The aim is to avoid discouraging learners from attempting to speak after many interruptions.

In the Planning & Creation stage, the teacher will help students apply the contents previously learnt in the didactic unit to write the script of the digital comic. The display of situational pictures on the screen will help learners imagine the scene and produce the language. In addition, the teacher will help students stimulate their creativity not only in writing the script, but also in editing each panel with drawings, images, music, videos or voice recording.

Finally, in the Sharing & Assessment stage, the teacher will moderate the presentation of the digital comics created by students. It is important to note that, following the Task-Based Language Teaching method, the digital comics must also be assessed in terms of their non-linguistic features. This means that there is not only interest in the accuracy of the language showed in the comics, but also in whether the actual communicative purpose of the challenge presented at the beginning of the didactic unit has been met.

4. DIDACTIC UNIT

4.1. Title, theme and justification

The title of the didactic unit is “*Do you want to be superchildren?*”. It is planned to be the first didactic unit of the academic year and is based on the world of comics and superheroes/ superheroines. To choose this theme, I took into account the information provided by the initial evaluation, performed in the first English sessions of the new school year. The results showed that my students are really interested in the world of fantasy and magical elements. Consequently, I have oriented the theme of this didactic unit around comics, superheroes and superpowers, a center of interest that can really motivate students to learn English. This didactic unit is designed to be the first one in an annual syllabus geared towards this theme.

4.2. Official regulations

This didactic unit obeys the following laws:

- Spanish Constitution of 1978: Article 27.
- Organic Law 2/2006 of 3 May, of Education, modified by the Organic Law 8/2013, of 9 December, for the Improvement of the Educational Quality (LOE-LOMCE).
- Royal Decree 126/2014, of 28 February, which establishes the Spanish Curriculum of Primary Education.
- Order of 16 June 2014, issued by the Department of Education, University, Culture and Sport, which approves the Curriculum of Primary Education and authorizes its application in the Aragonese schools, modified by the Order of 21 December 2015 and the Order of 29 July 2016.
- Order of 26 June 2014, issued by the Department of Education, University, Culture and Sport, which regulates the organization and functioning of Aragonese state schools of Infant, Primary and Special Education.
- Order of 21 December 2015, which regulates the evaluation of Primary Education in Aragonese schools, and modifies the Order of 16 June 2014 and the Order of 26 June 2014.
- Decree 188/2017, of 28 November, issued by the Aragonese Government, which regulates the inclusive educational response and coexistence in the Aragonese educational communities.
- Order ECD/823/2018, of 18 May, which regulates the BRIT-Aragón model for the development of the linguistic competence of foreign languages in the state non-

university educational centers of Aragón.

4.3. Context

4.3.1. My school

We are in an English bilingual state school located in Miralbueno, one of the newest neighborhoods of Zaragoza (Spain). It is an urban area that was started in 2006 and is still growing. In general, we can find young working couples with a medium economic level, and many of them with children. There are also some foreign families but they are very integrated in the neighborhood, interacting with the Spanish families.

It is important to note that we are in an English bilingual school that has a BRIT-Aragón model since the 2018/2019 school year. The subjects taught in English are English as a Foreign Language (225 minutes/ week), Natural Sciences (90), Social Science (90) and Arts & Crafts (90). Consequently, there is a higher level of English, especially oral, in comparison with other state schools that do not have a bilingual model.

Since the 2014/2015 school year, the Coexistence Plan includes Cooperative Learning as a specific measure to prevent conflicts and improve social relationships between children. To this end, the Teaching Staff receives frequent training on the Kagan method, which is implemented from the first year of Primary Education. Therefore, my students should already be familiar with it, which is part of my methodology.

4.3.2. My classroom

My classroom is optimized for a group of 24 students of third year of Primary Education of which I am going to be their tutor. Besides EFL, I will teach them Spanish, Math, Natural Sciences, Social Sciences, Arts & Crafts, and the corresponding tutoring session. It is important to emphasize that the classroom is common to all these subjects. Thus, my students get used to it soon, time is not wasted between sessions and I can make changes when appropriate.

The desks of this classroom are arranged in groups of four since I can choose between three options when my students work in cooperation: they can work in teams of 4, in pairs with their shoulder partner or in pairs with their face partner. Moreover, the groups of desks are distributed in the classroom following a big circle. By more often being in the interior space, I can have easy access to all teams quickly and I can have more control over the whole class. What is more, when all the students have to do an activity together, we will only have to radially push the groups of tables outward to leave a large space in the middle of the classroom.

It is worth noting that the classroom decoration is inspired by the world of superheroes, so that there is a consistency with the theme of the didactic unit. We can find five centers:

- Superhero Powers Centre, where classroom rules are found in an attractive way. For example, superheroes always work in teams, respect others, try their best or celebrate other's success.
- Superhero Strategies Centre, where I will write the two superhero strategies that my students have to use in the didactic unit, the corresponding roles, who are assigned in each team for a week and gambits associated with those roles. For example, a superhero strategy is equal participation, the role is the gatekeeper and a possible gambit could be: *Thank you David. What's your answer Sheila?*
- Superhero Achievements Centre, on which the pegs with the names of my students can be placed on different levels of success in target behaviors.
- Superhero Voice Centre, on which a peg can be placed on one of the 3 noise levels.
- Daily Planet, a wall space where students can post publications of any subject.

On the other hand, there are three classroom corners:

- S.H.I.E.L.D. Centre, the space of the class dedicated to reading. There, we can find leather poufs on a carpet and a bookcase with books.
- Lonely Superhero Corner, where there are two isolated desks for those students who do not know how to work in teams or prefer to work individually, and need some time to think about the disadvantages of being lonely superheroes.
- Superhero Challenge Corner, a space reserved for those fast finishers who prefer to be challenged instead of reading books on their own. In this space we can find a circular table, two mini laptops and superhero challenge cards, which include computer games, cooperative games, riddles and jigsaw puzzles. All of them can be performed autonomously without having to ask the teacher.

4.3.3. My students

The chosen group of students belongs to third year of Primary Education and is made up of 24 students, 14 girls and 10 boys. Among them, we can find a Romanian boy and a Venezuelan girl, who live in Spain from the age of 4 and 5 years, respectively. So far, neither of them has difficulties in the EFL area.

According to the initial evaluation, students have an average level of English, considering the results of the school in recent years. In addition, it is observed that the oral competence of this

class is superior to the written one. This is also in line with the expected results of the school because oral skills are a priority in this bilingual school, following the BRIT-Aragón model over the past two years and, previously, the CILE-2 model.

The initial evaluation also shows that most students have a great willingness to work both individually and in groups. They are quite familiar with Kagan Cooperative Learning, which will help me save a lot of time when implementing it in this didactic unit.

It is also important to note that in this class there are two students with Specific Need of Educational Support (ACNEAEs): Juan with Oppositional Defiant Disorder (ODD) and Aitana with Attention Deficit Disorder (ADD). Information on how to handle these students in this didactic unit will be detailed in subsection 4.8.

4.4. Objectives

According to Article 2 of the Spanish Curriculum, the objectives are the referents of the achievements that students must reach at the end of the educational process, as a result of the intentionally planned teaching-learning experiences. This didactic unit pursues all the general objectives of Primary Education detailed in Article 8 of the Aragonese Curriculum. Specially, great importance is attached to the following:

- b) To develop habits of individual and team work, effort and responsibility in the study, as well as attitudes of self-confidence, critical sense, personal initiative, curiosity, interest, creativity and entrepreneurial spirit.
- d) To know, understand and respect different cultures and differences between people, equal rights and opportunities for men and women and non-discrimination of people with disabilities.
- f) To acquire, in at least one FL, basic communicative competence that allows students to understand and express simple messages and to cope with daily situations.

More specifically, this didactic unit responds to the following specific objectives of the English area, detailed in Annex II, English Area, of the Aragonese Curriculum:

- ObjIN.1. To understand expressions and frequent vocabulary related to familiar situations that concern themselves, the family, their usual environment, etc.
- ObjIN.2. To read short and simple texts with correct pronunciation, intonation and appropriate rhythm to be understood.
- ObjIN.6. To ask for and give simple information about familiar issues and activities.

- ObjIN.10. To write simple and short notes and messages: email, postcard, invitation, congratulation, etc.
- ObjIN.13. To use simple syntactic structures correctly in short expressions, in order to communicate information related to familiar situations in the daily lives of students.

4.5. Key Competences

This Syllabus considers the key competences, which were defined for the first time in the Official Journal of the European Union of 30 December 2006, as a “combination of knowledge, skills and attitudes that all individuals need for personal fulfilment and development, active citizenship, social inclusion and employment”. They were taken by the LOMCE in 2013, replacing the basic competences of the LOE. This didactic unit considers the following:

- Linguistic Communication Competence (LCC). In stage 2 (Exploring) there is special attention to receptive skills, listening and reading, while in stages 3 (Deepening) and 4 (Creation) students are focused mainly on productive skills, speaking and writing.
- Digital Competence (DC). Students will learn to use Book Creator for both reading and creating digital comics.
- Learning to Learn (L2L). Students will gain autonomy in the learning centers, and in the planning and creation of a digital comic chapter, and will acquire metacognitive strategies by coloring each step of the mission and self-evaluating their learning process at the end of the didactic unit.
- Social and Civic Competences (SCC). Students will learn to work effectively in cooperative teams through the use of Kagan Structures and two social strategies: equalizing participation and praising others for their contributions in the group.
- Sense of Initiative and Entrepreneurship (SIE). Students will use their English knowledge and creativity to plan and create a digital comic chapter, which is the final task of the didactic unit.

4.6. Contents

Taking as reference the contents of the English area corresponding to third year of Primary Education, reflected in Annex II of the Aragonese Curriculum, the contents that will be worked on in this didactic unit are the following:

- Vocabulary: appearance and personality adjectives.
- Grammar: question formulation.
- Pronunciation: intonation patterns.

- Communicative functions: expressing ability and liking, opening a conversation, and praising and making compliments.
- Strategies: note-taking, organizational planning and organization of ideas.
- Sociocultural/ sociolinguistic contents: social conventions when making personal presentations.

4.7. Cross-curricular elements

This didactic unit considers the following cross-curricular elements, taken from Article 8 of the Aragonese Curriculum:

- Inclusive approach. The implementation of Kagan Cooperative Learning ensures equal participation and equal opportunities among students.
- Universal accessibility to learning. The multimodal digital comic guide of the didactic unit (Appendix I), designed to orientate students through the five steps of the mission, provides different semiotic modes to access learning: written text, voice recording, photographs, images, pictograms and videos. In addition, students will be able to use these semiotic modes through Book Creator to design their digital comic chapter, satisfying different multiple intelligences and learning styles.
- Prevention and peaceful resolution of conflicts. Students will learn openings and greetings to promote politeness and avoid social conflicts.
- Situations of risk derived from the use of Information and Communications Technologies (ICTs). Students will learn to use Book Creator responsibly, specially when taking photos, recording videos and selecting images from the Internet.
- Cooperative Learning and sociability. Students will use Kagan Structures to work in cooperative teams and will learn two social strategies to promote sociability: equalizing participation and showing appreciation.

4.8. Attention to diversity

4.8.1. General actions

In the first place, the multimodal digital comic guide of the didactic unit (Appendix I) includes images and pictograms in strong connection with the written text and the voice recording of the dialogues to facilitate the understanding of instructions and tasks. When it comes to designing the digital comic chapter, students will take advantage of the background image, the freeze frame photos of them dramatizing the scene, and the inclusion of images and drawings to compensate for the lack of English. It is important to note that students are expected to use the

written language corresponding to their linguistic level and the new structures studied in the didactic unit. Therefore, the visual elements and the voice recording of the dialogues cannot replace written English but complement it.

It is also important to have “sponge” activities for those students that finish their tasks earlier than others (fast finishers). These “sponge” activities include:

- Reading English books in the S.H.I.E.L.D. Centre. This option is recommended for those students who want to read for pleasure, without any task. To this end, we have in the bookcase a varied collection of English books for different levels, taken from the library of the school.
- Autonomous work in the Superhero Challenge Corner, which includes computer games, cooperative games, riddles and jigsaw puzzles about the contents of the didactic unit.

4.8.2. Specific actions

As described in section 4.3.3. (My students), in this class we can find two students with Specific Need of Educational Support (ACNEAEs): Juan with Oppositional Defiant Disorder (ODD) and Aitana with Attention Deficit Disorder (ADD).

Regarding Juan, I will sit him in a table near the Interactive Whiteboard (IWB) so I can have more control over him. When making cooperative teams, I will place in his team one of the most social and supportive students of the class, who will facilitate his integration.

If he throws a tantrum, I will send him 5 minutes to the S.H.I.E.L.D. Centre to do some relaxing exercises, release tension and rethink the situation. If he does not want to work with his teammates, he will work alone in the Lonely Superhero Corner until he changes his mind. On the other hand, if he commits a serious misconduct, I will send him to the S.H.I.E.L.D. Centre until I have a free moment to talk with him about what happened.

I will also use the time of some difficult activities to negotiate other alternatives with him. If he behaves well and do properly the previous activities, I will allow him to carry out activities related to his interests or greatest abilities.

Concerning Aitana, I will sit her in a table away from distractions such as the door, windows, the pencil sharpener or the heater, among others. When making cooperative teams, I will pair with her a “study buddy”, a kind and mature peer who can give her reminders or refocus her when she gets off-task.

I will also take advantage of multimodality, which is quite effective in children with ADD. In

addition to the voice recording of the written text and accompanying images, I have also included in the digital comic guide of the didactic unit (Appendix I) pictograms that will help her follow the instructions and focus on the different tasks.

4.9. Sessions and activities

This didactic unit, which is the first one of the school year, is composed of 20 sessions of 45 minutes each. The main objective is to introduce students to Book Creator and teach them how to create the first chapter of a digital comic that will be developed during the rest of didactic units of the school year. In this first chapter, students will have the challenging mission of presenting themselves as superheroes/ superheroines and showing their superpowers.

During the didactic unit, we will follow a multimodal digital comic (Appendix I) to guide the learning process or “mission”. In this digital comic guide, there is a detailed multimodal description of the different activities that students must perform to accomplish the mission. An outline of the sessions, activities and materials is found in Table 1.

STAGE	SESSION NUMBER AND ACTIVITIES	RESOURCES
1. ACTIVATION	1) Introductory video, elaboration of word clouds and elaboration of Success Criteria Checklist.	IWB, tablet/ student
2. EXPLORING	2) Pronunciation: intonation of questions and answers.	IWB, video
	3) Reading comprehension: <i>Superheroes and comic books</i> .	Photocopies
	4) Storytelling: <i>10 rules of being a superhero</i> . Pre-listening: questions related to the cover. While-listening activity: Superhero matching Grid.	IWB, photocopies
	5) Storytelling. Post-listening: elaboration of posters for the 10 rules of being a superhero.	Cardboards
	6) Learning center 1: Question formation.	Tablet / team
	7) Learning center 2: Expressing ability and liking.	
	8) Learning center 3: Description of appearance and personality.	
	9) Learning center 4: Elements of a comic.	

3. DEEPENING	10) Social superpowers: equalize participation and praising. Practice with Kagan Structures: RoundRobin and Inside-Outside Circle.	Kagan posters
	11) Openings in a conversation. Practice with Kagan Structures: Turn-Toss and AllRecord RoundRobin.	
	12) Elaboration of questions to use in a presentation and Kagan Structure: Three-step Interview.	
4. CREATION	13) Book creator: inserting text, drawings, voice recording, photos and videos.	IWB, tablet/ student
	14) Book creator: inserting pictures, videos and links from internet.	
	15) Book creator: creating a comic panel based on freeze-frame drama.	
	16) Elaboration of the Comic Strip Planning (Appendix II)	Planning worksheet, tablet/ team
	17) Peer-feedback on the Comic Strip Planning of other teams.	
	18) Creation of the first chapter of the digital comic.	
5. SHARING	19) Sharing of digital comics and self-evaluation.	IWB
	20) Sharing of digital comics and self-evaluation.	

Table 1. Outline of sessions, activities and materials.

4.10. Assessment

In this didactic unit there are three moments of evaluation. First, there is an initial evaluation in the first stage, Activation, to know the previous knowledge of students about greetings and personal presentations. Second, there is a process evaluation during the Exploring, Deepening and Creation stages in which special attention is given to the receptive skills, listening and reading. Finally, there is a final evaluation in the final stage, Sharing, when students present their digital comic chapters to the rest of the class.

A relationship between What I evaluate, learning outcomes, tools for evaluation and marking criteria is detailed in table 2.

WHAT I EVALUATE		LEARNING OUTCOMES	TOOL FOR EVALUATION	%
LISTENING	Superhero matching grid	Students identify simple words about rules to sequence the images of a story in a contextualized listening.	Test	20
SPEAKING	Digital comic	Students use basic discourse structures to open a conversation and introduce themselves as superchildren.	Checklist (Appendix III)	25
READING	Questionnaire	Students identify the global meaning of a text about superheroes and comics to answer 7 questions.	Test	20
WRITING	Digital comic	Students write simple texts on a digital comic to talk about themselves as superchildren.	Rubric (Appendix IV)	25
ATTITUDE & WORK GROUP	Motivation Interest Successful in steps Group working		Observation register Self-assessment checklist (Appendix V)	10

Table 2. Relationship between What I evaluate, learning outcomes, tools for evaluation and marking criteria.

5. CONCLUSIONS

The present Master's Dissertation has reviewed the pedagogical possibilities of comics and specifically digital comics at the Primary Education level. Unlike picture books, which are the most widely used multimodal texts in education, comics provide a strong integration between images and written text so that every written text must be accompanied by an image. This fact has relevant repercussions in learning a FL.

On the one hand, students can benefit from images to understand written text that is above their

linguistic level. This is extremely useful for children of Primary Education, who are beginning to learn a FL and need more language support.

On the other hand, when it comes to written production, students can employ images and drawings to compensate for the lack of language. This does not mean that visual elements must replace written text. Quite the opposite, learners are expected to use their communicative competence, which is one of the general objectives of Primary Education, to write simple messages and cope with daily situations. Since written language does not allow students to use gestures, facial expressions or body language, they can take advantage of visual elements, which are also extralinguistic elements, to give additional meaning to their written messages and reach communicative competence.

It is also important to note that comics, unlike picture books, provide situational contexts in which characters communicate in the first person and use every day conversational language that actually occurs outside of the classroom. Therefore, students can more easily access this authentic language and gain confidence in themselves to face future oral interactions.

This document has also presented digital comics as a step beyond physical comics. Besides written text and images, digital comics may provide other semiotic modes, such as voice recording, music, sound effects or visual interactivities, making reading a more complete process that not only facilitates the understanding of written text but also satisfies the receptive multimodal preferences of all children.

Finally, this Master's Dissertation makes a didactic proposal to exploit digital comics in an EFL classroom of a Spanish Primary Education school. The chosen medium is *Book Creator*, an application that allows to create and share digital comics, and the chosen methodology integrates digital comics with freeze-frame drama. As part of Task-based Language Teaching, students are asked to act out a communicative situation by taking photos of themselves, dramatizing them, uploading them to Book Creator, and adding written dialogue.

As exemplified in the didactic unit, a group of third-year students from an English bilingual state school are given a multimodal digital comic guide (Appendix I) to orientate their mission, which consists of acquiring the necessary English content to present themselves as superheroes/superheroines in a digital comic strip and publish it on the network. The multimodality presented in the digital comic guide considers possible necessities in the classroom. In my context, I have included two students with problems to follow an English class and who can benefit from the appealing story presented in the digital comic guide, and the images and

pictograms that accompany the instructions for the different activities.

Like all didactic proposals, this one is not free of weaknesses. There is a great dependency on the digital medium to follow the didactic unit in a multisensory way. That is why it should be advisable to use the digital comic guide (Appendix I) only at the beginning of the session so that students can position themselves within the mission. On the other hand, we can find students who are more comfortable creating the comic chapter in a physical medium. In this case, we should not be strict and allow them to do it in that way. Then, we can ask them to take photos of each panel of their comic and upload them to Book Creator, so that we have a digital version for all the class. Therefore, it is essential to adapt the tasks as new needs appear during the didactic unit and try to satisfy our students' preferences to the extent possible.

Finally, it should be noted that the digital medium cannot replace the physical medium. It is paramount to provide children of Primary Education with written texts in paper form and teach them how to find their favorite books adapted to their linguistic level in the library. This Master's Dissertation only tries to make the most of digital comics in the EFL classroom and show benefits that other multimodal texts or comics in paper form cannot offer. It should be clear that technology is only an educational tool that should complement our teaching practice in the classroom and in no case should it occupy all the time. It can be helpful when providing authentic oral language to our students or, as detailed in this document, making the reading or writing process more complete with varied semiotic modes. In conclusion, technology can be extremely useful if we know how to handle it and, most importantly, teach our students how to make a responsible use of it. In words of a child: *Teach me how to use technology in my writing process and I will be able to give color to my written words.*

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7. APPENDIX I (DIGITAL COMIC)

Link to the digital comic: <https://bit.ly/3784hfb>



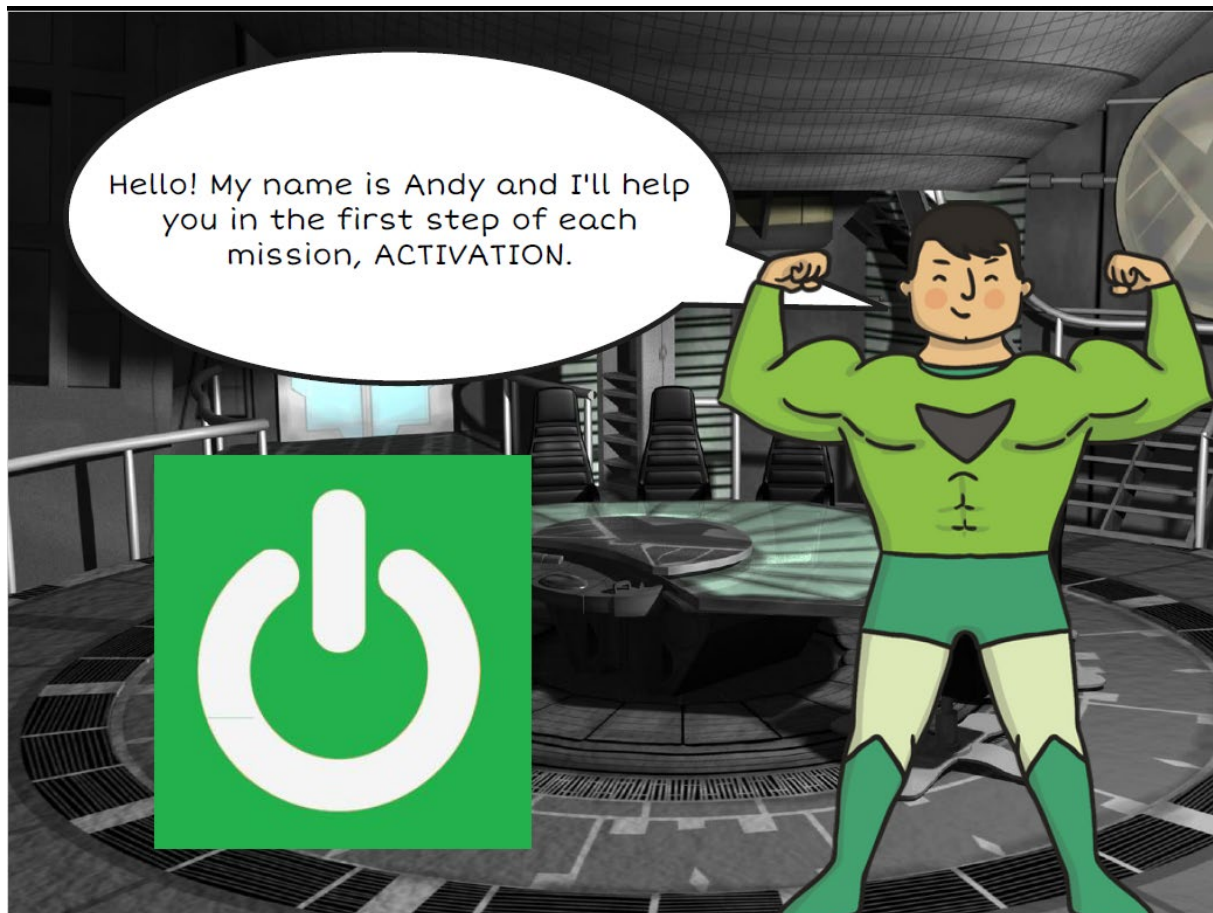


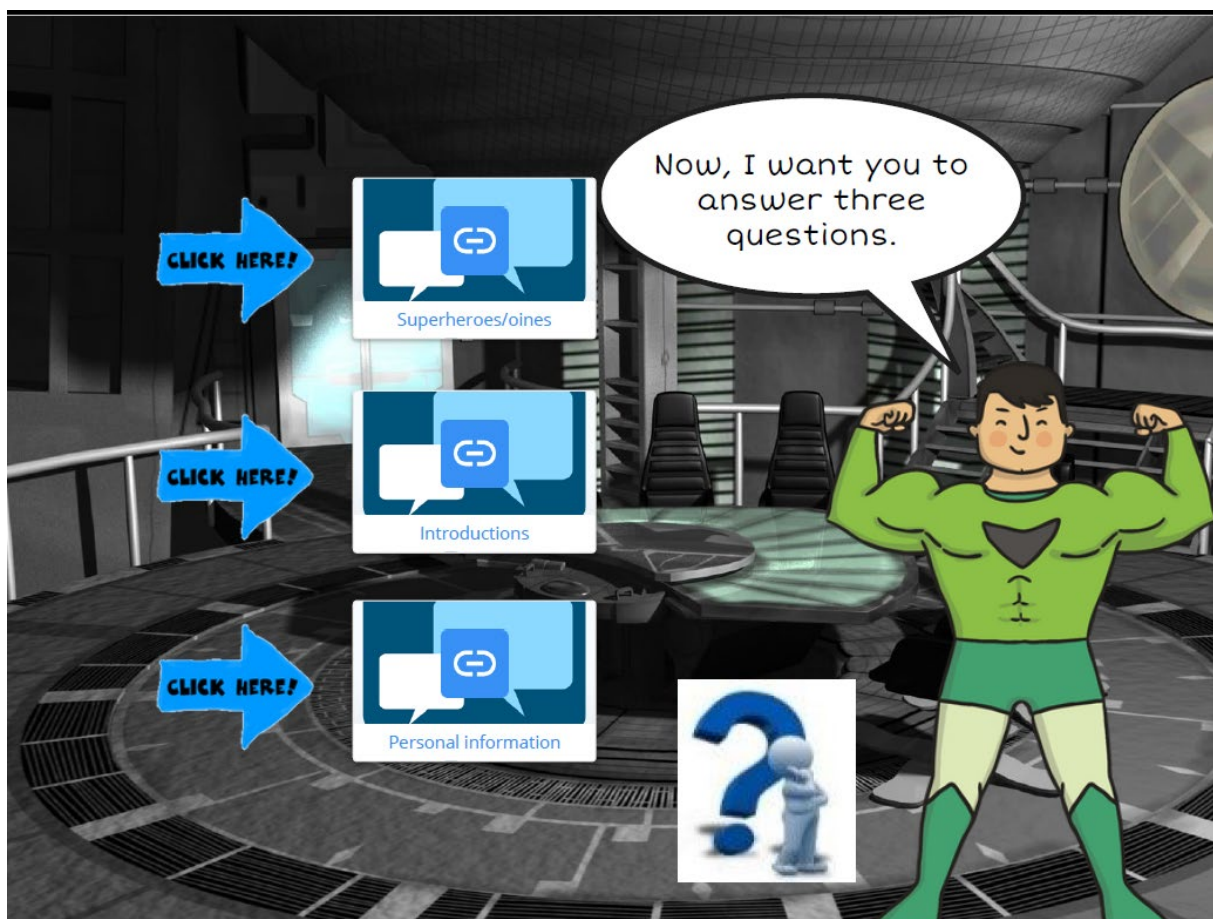


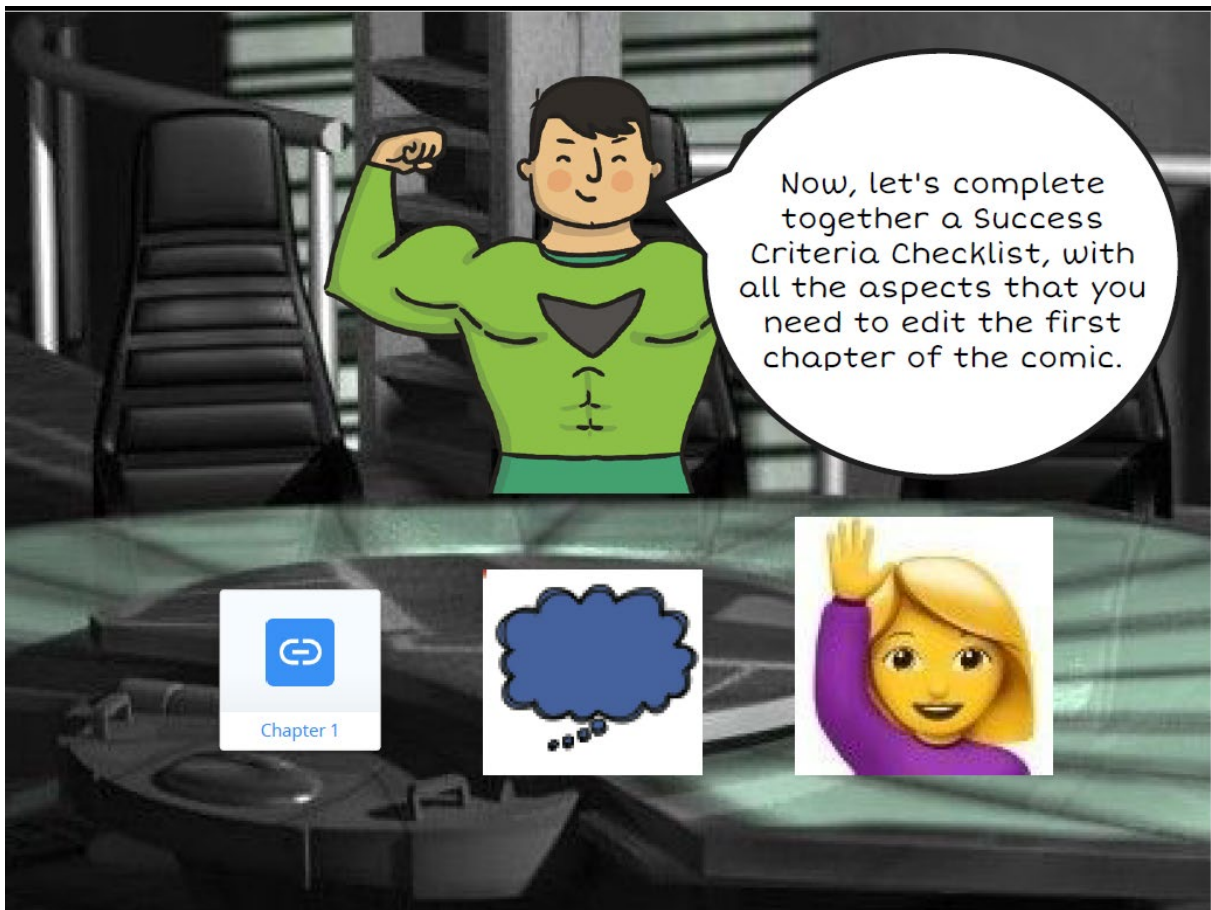


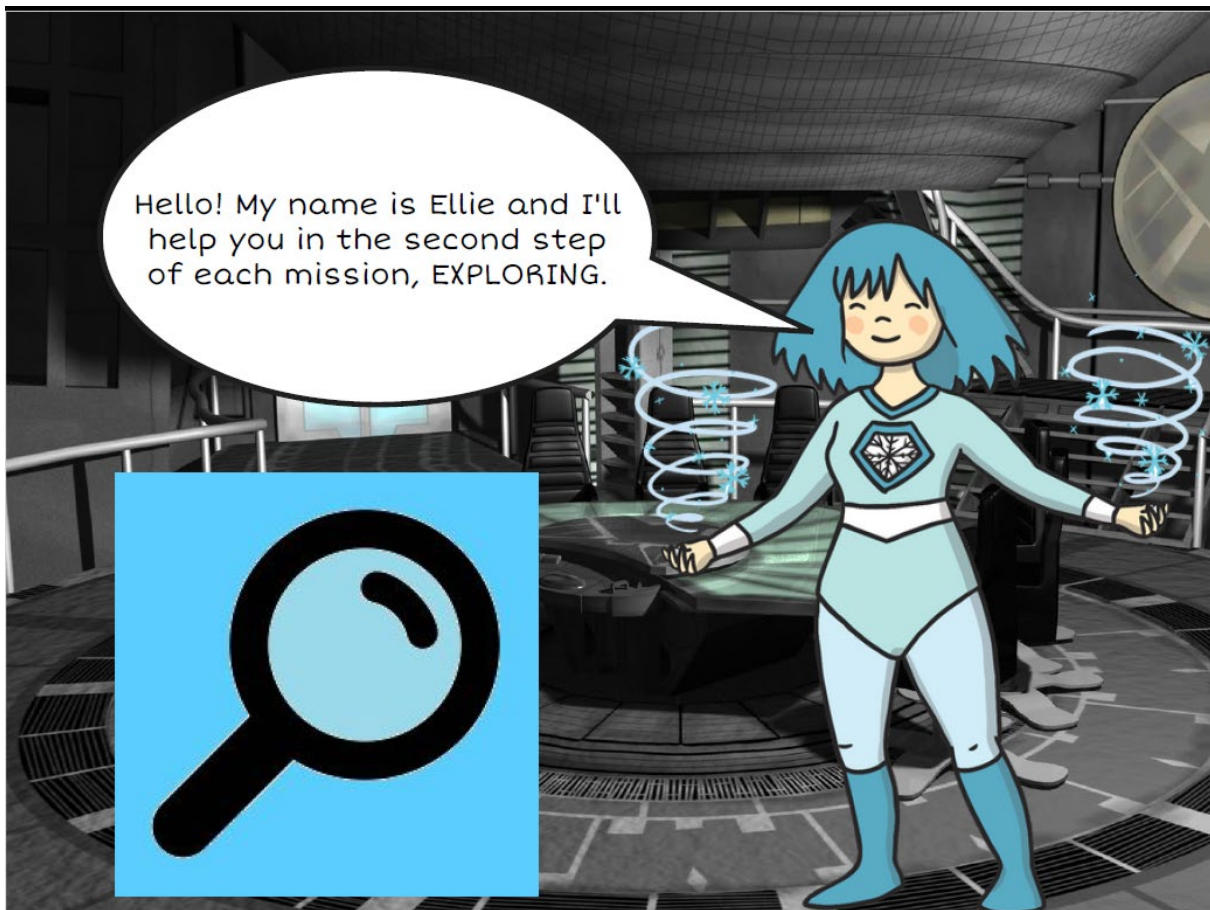


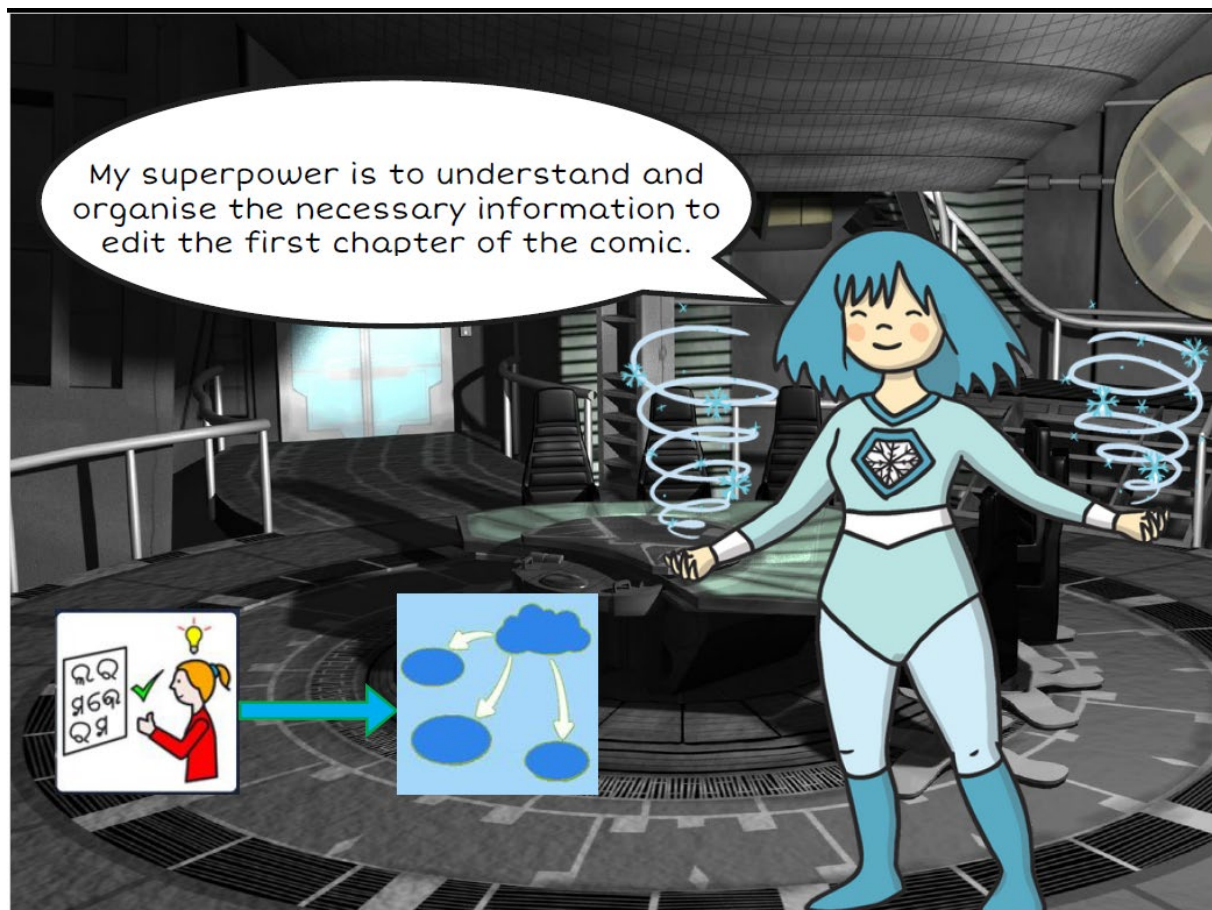


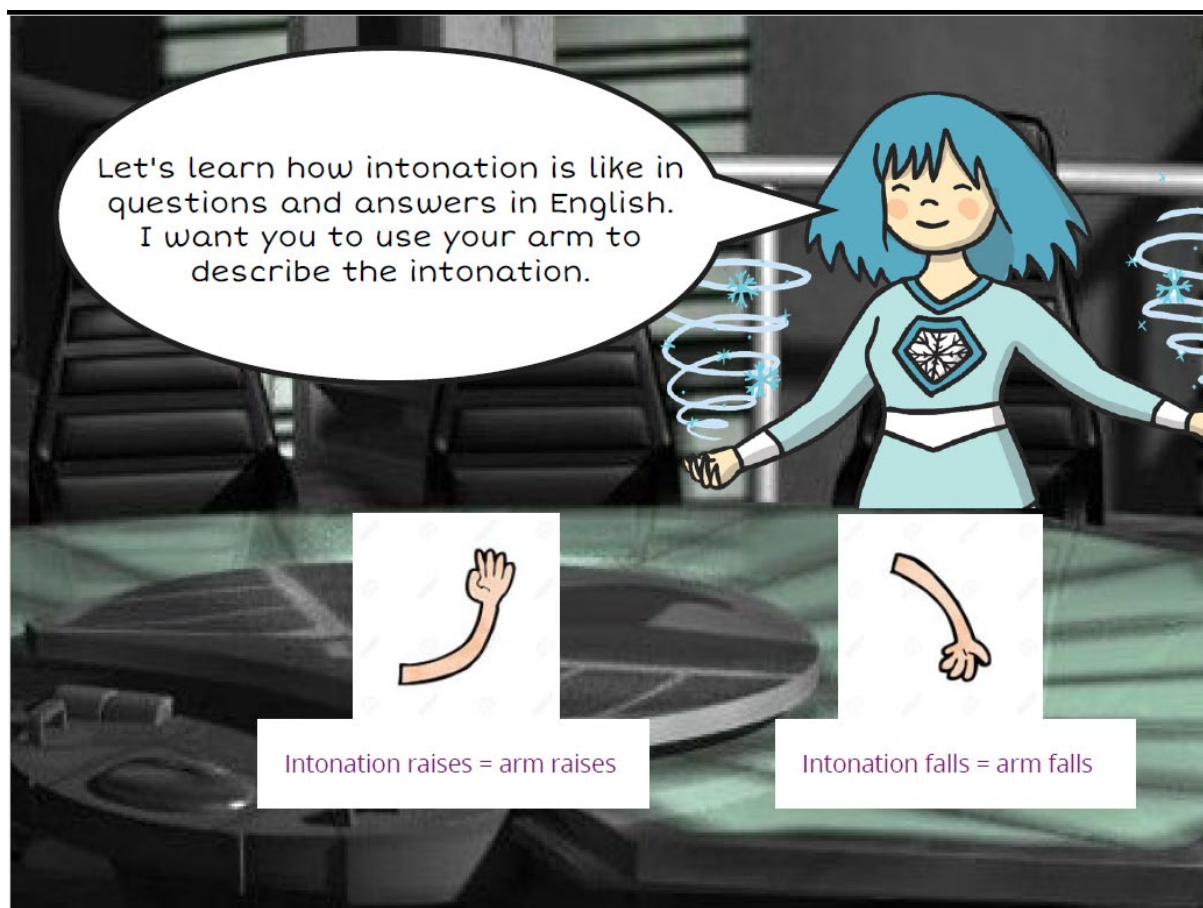


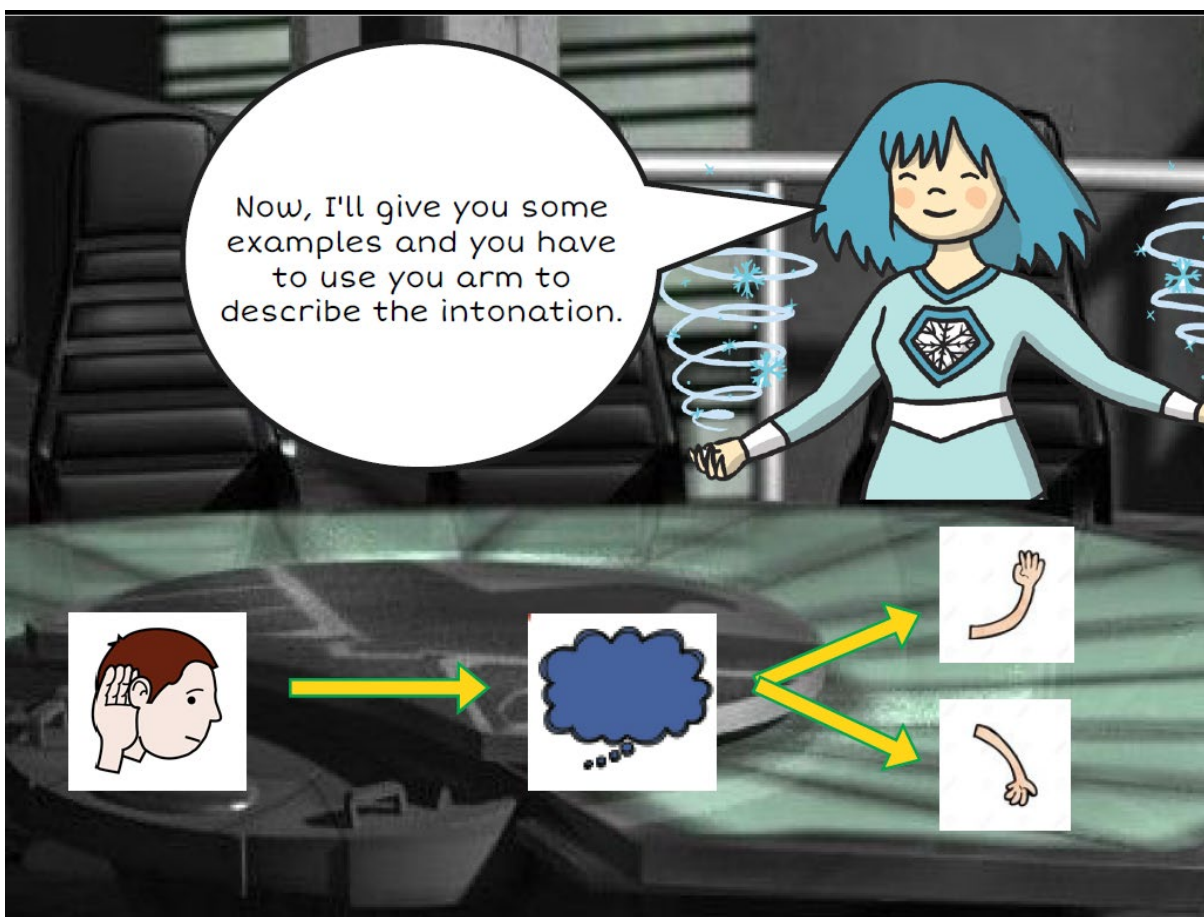


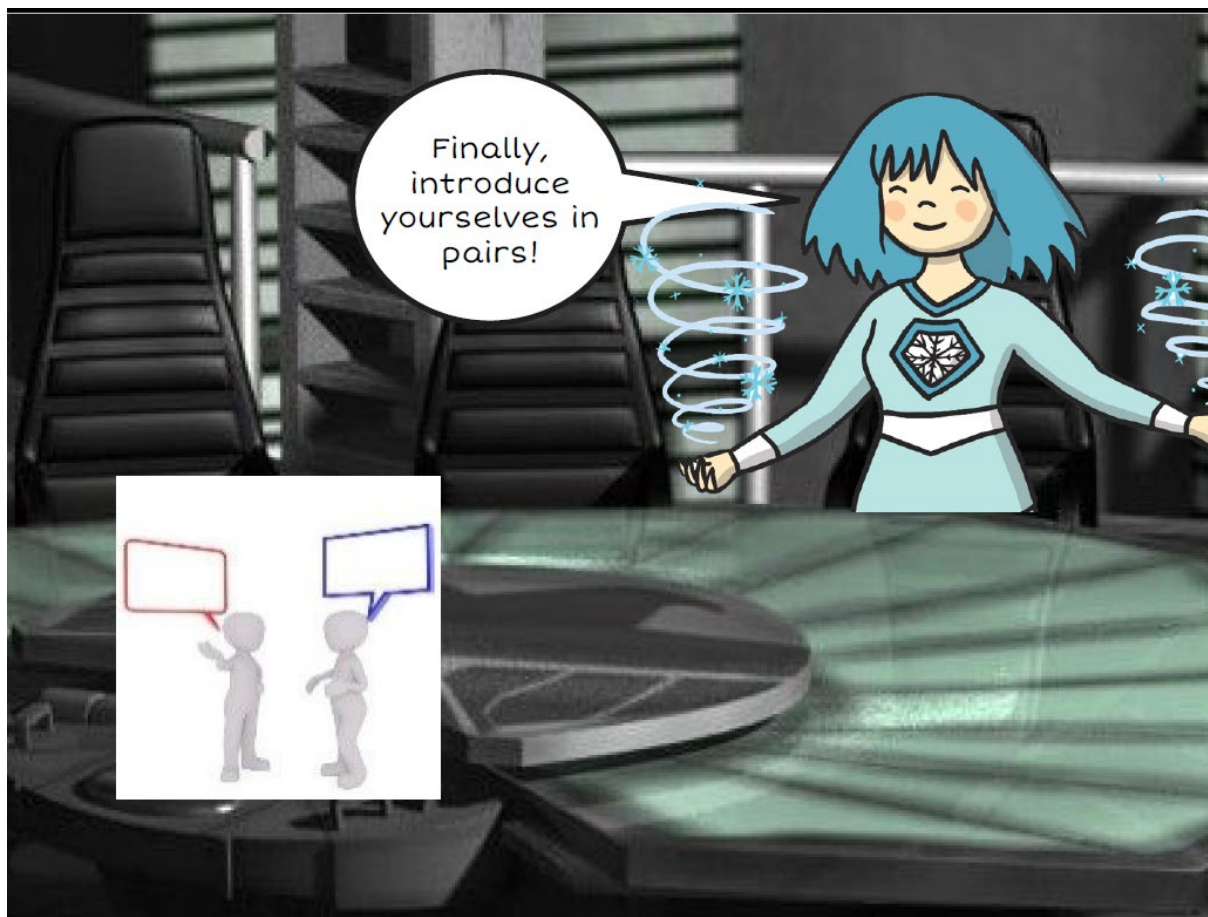








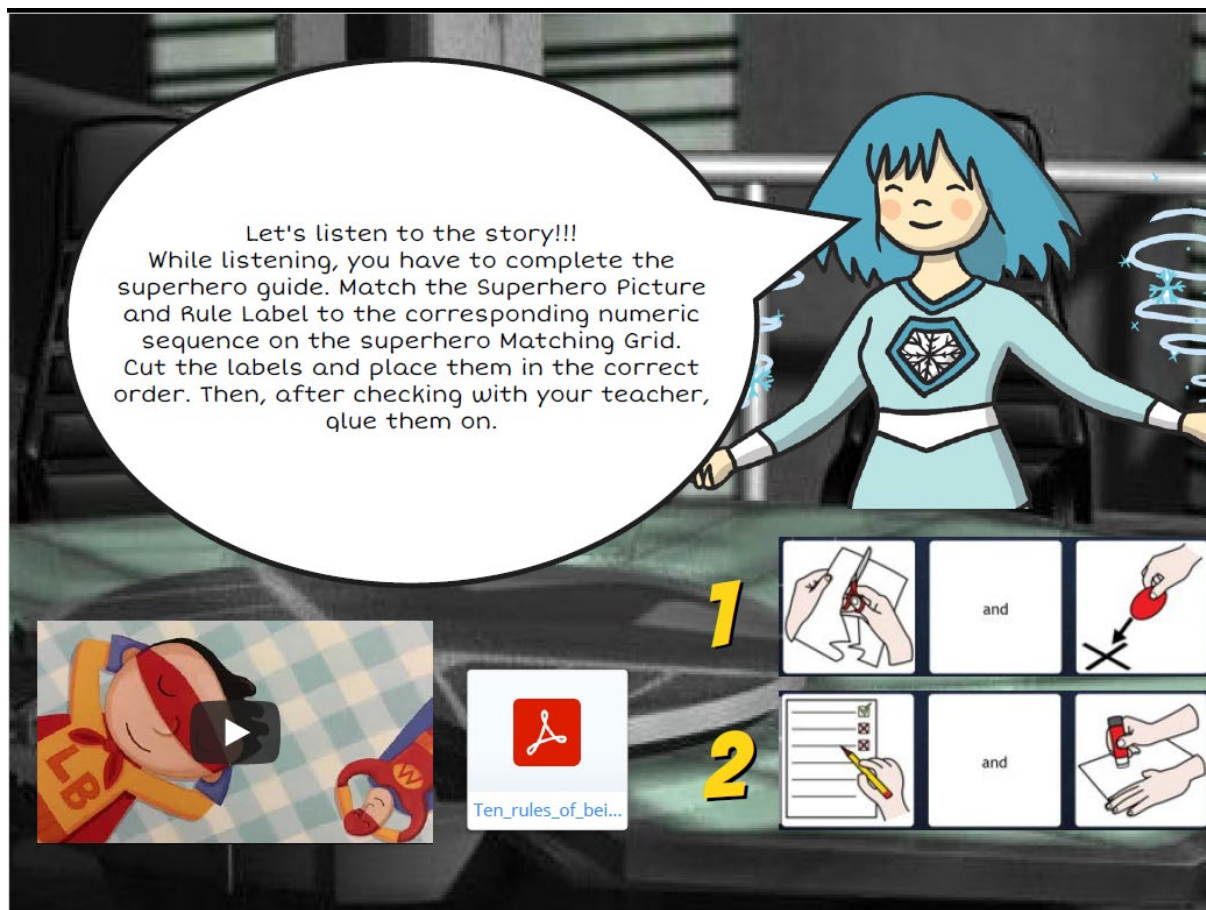






Let's listen to the story!!!

While listening, you have to complete the superhero guide. Match the Superhero Picture and Rule Label to the corresponding numeric sequence on the superhero Matching Grid. Cut the labels and place them in the correct order. Then, after checking with your teacher, glue them on.



1

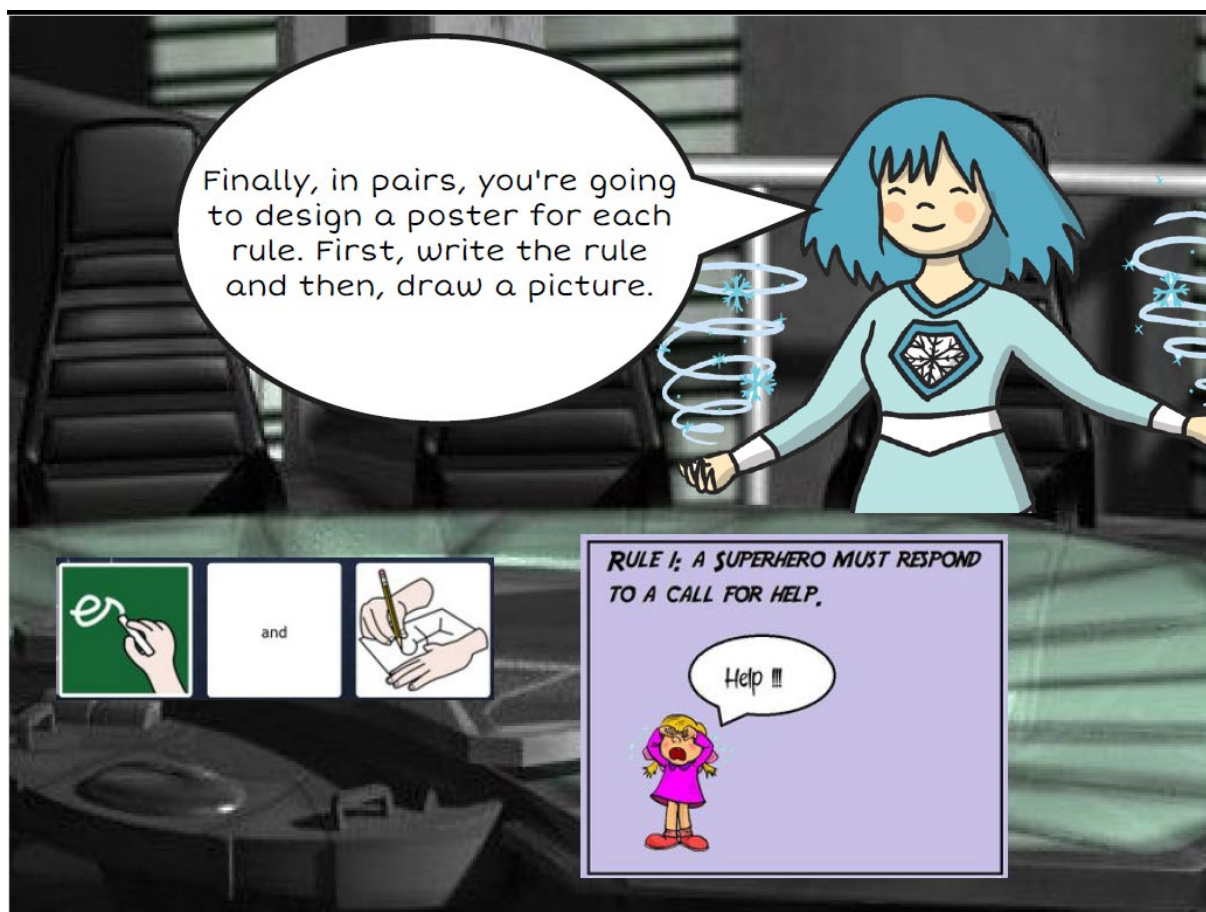
2

and

and

Ten_rules_of_bei...

Finally, in pairs, you're going to design a poster for each rule. First, write the rule and then, draw a picture.



and

RULE 1: A SUPERHERO MUST RESPOND TO A CALL FOR HELP.

Help !!!

Now, you're going to work in cooperative teams. I'll give you the task card with the instructions to work in the learning centres.

INSTRUCTIONS TO WORK IN THE LEARNING CENTRES

- 1** Put your pencils  in a pencil cup  in the centre of the table. 
- 2** One of you reads  the first question or task. 
This is a rotating role. 
- 3** Discuss  your answers and/or turn to resources to find  the best answer.
- 4** When there is a consensus  on the best answer, take your pencils  and write the answer on your worksheet  in your own words. Go to point 1 another time.



LEARNING CENTRE 1

ELEMENTS OF A COMIC

- 1** Watch  the YouTube video  :

- 2** With the information  of the YouTube video, complete the graphic organizer. 
- 3** Compare your graphic organizer  with the cheat sheet . Add or correct information. 



1-Comics.pdf



1-Comics+.pdf

LEARNING CENTRE 2

EXPRESSING ABILITY AND LIKING

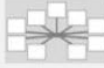


1

Watch  the YouTube videos  :



2

With the information  of the YouTube video, complete the graphic organizer. 

3

Compare your graphic organizer  with the cheat Sheet . Add or correct information. 

LEARNING CENTRE 3

HOW TO FORM QUESTIONS?



1

Watch  the YouTube videos  :



2

With the information  of the YouTube video, complete the graphic organizer. 

3

Compare your graphic organizer  with the cheat Sheet . Add or correct information. 



3-Questions.pdf

LEARNING CENTRE 4

DESCRIBING PEOPLE



1

Watch 🤖 the YouTube video  :



2

With the information  of the YouTube video, complete the graphic organizer. 

3

Compare your graphic organizer  with the cheat sheet . Add or correct information. 

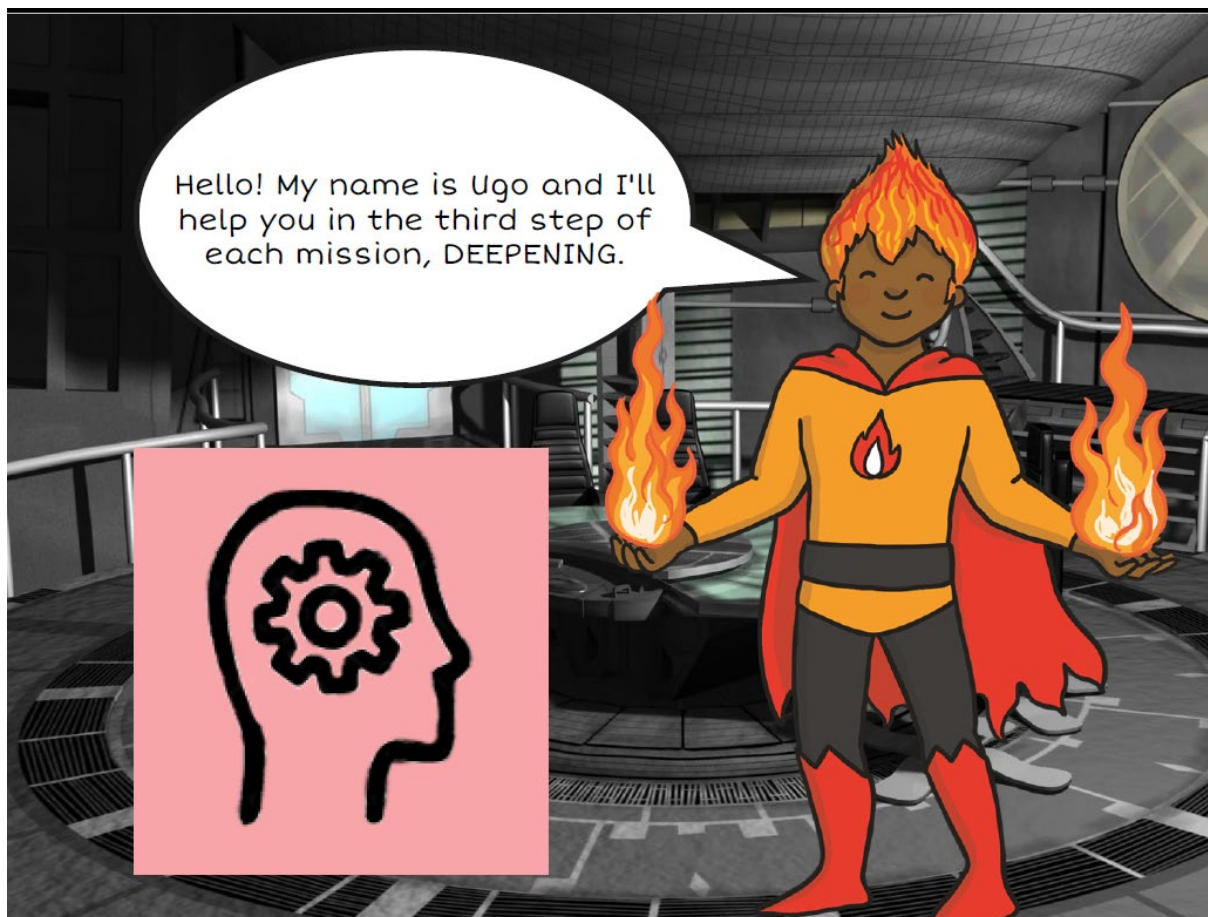
Congratulations!!!
You've completed the second step of this mission.
Colour this step in the first page of this comic.
Use blue, my favourite colour!!!



MISSION 1
Colour after finishing each step of the mission

	1. Activation	☐
	2. Exploring	☐
	3. Deepening	☐
	4. Creation	☐
	5. Sharing	☐





In the first place, I want you to learn 2 important social superpowers when you work in groups of 4 in this mission. One member will be the gatekeeper, who equalizes participation, and another member will be the praiser, who praises others. These roles will rotate each week.



Gatekeeper

Make sure everyone is participating about equally.



Praiser

Show appreciation for teammates' ideas and contributions.

Now, we're going to write gambits that you can say for each role in the Superchildren Strategies Centre.



SUPERCHILDREN STRATEGIES CENTRE

ROLE: GATEKEEPER

ROLE: PRAISER

SUPERPOWER: EQUAL PARTICIPATION

SUPERPOWER: SHOW APPRECIATION

SAY:

- Thank you Senia. What's your answer David?

SAY:

- Great idea!

To practice these superpowers, you'll use two Kagan Structures: RoundRobin and Inside-Outside Circle.

ROUND ROBIN

1. Teacher poses the question.
2. Think time.
3. Your team takes turns verbally giving responses.



Now, we'll practice how to open a conversation. First, we're going to watch some models and take ideas.



It's your turn!!!
You'll use two Kagan Structures:
RallyRobin and Turn-Toss.

RALLY ROBIN

1. Teacher poses the question.
2. Think time.
3. Partners take turns verbally listing responses.

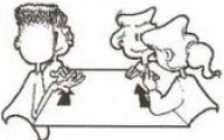



To finish this step, you're going to write questions for an interview and then put them into practice in the Three-Step Interview Structure.

Step 1: One Way Interview



Step 2: The Reverse

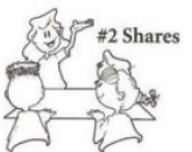


Step 3: RoundRobin

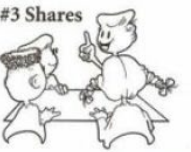
#1 Shares



#2 Shares



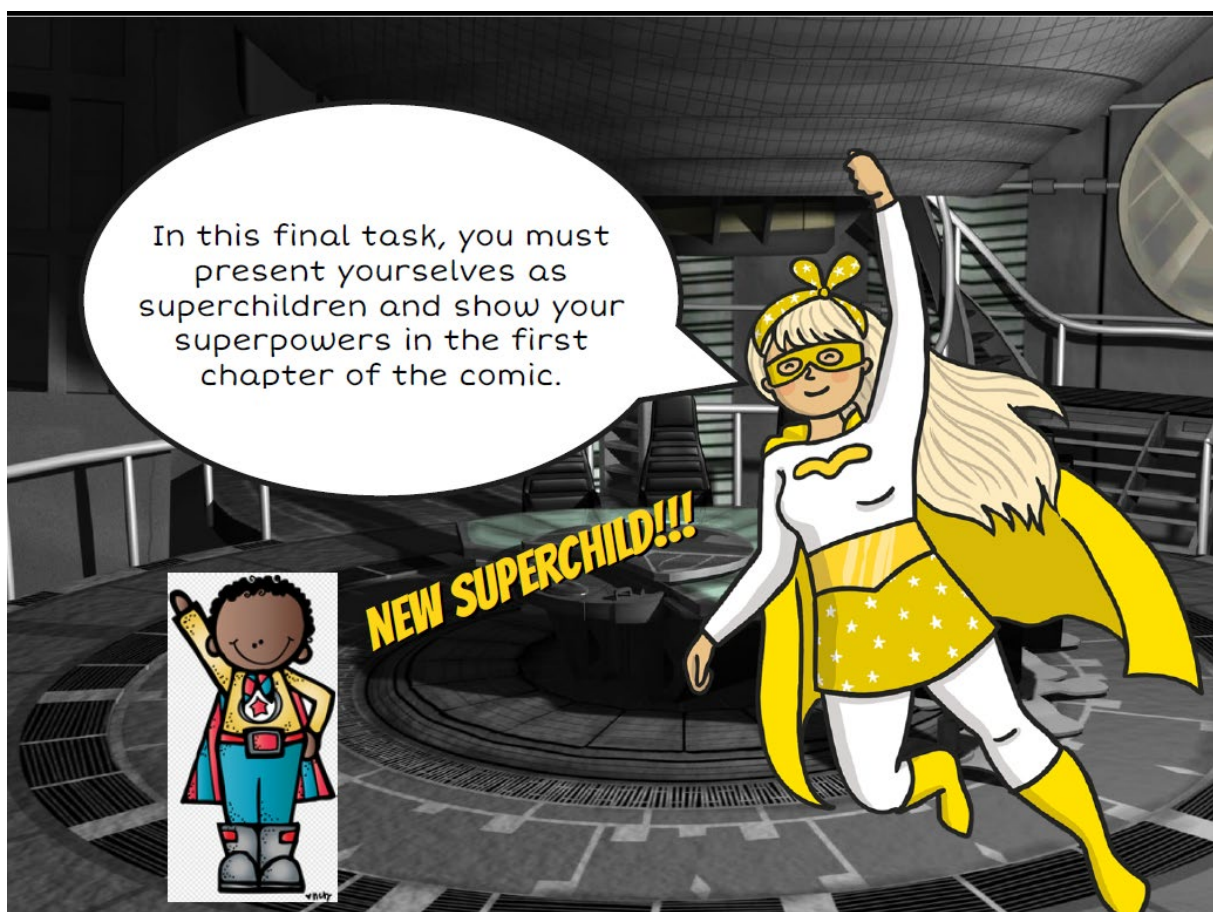
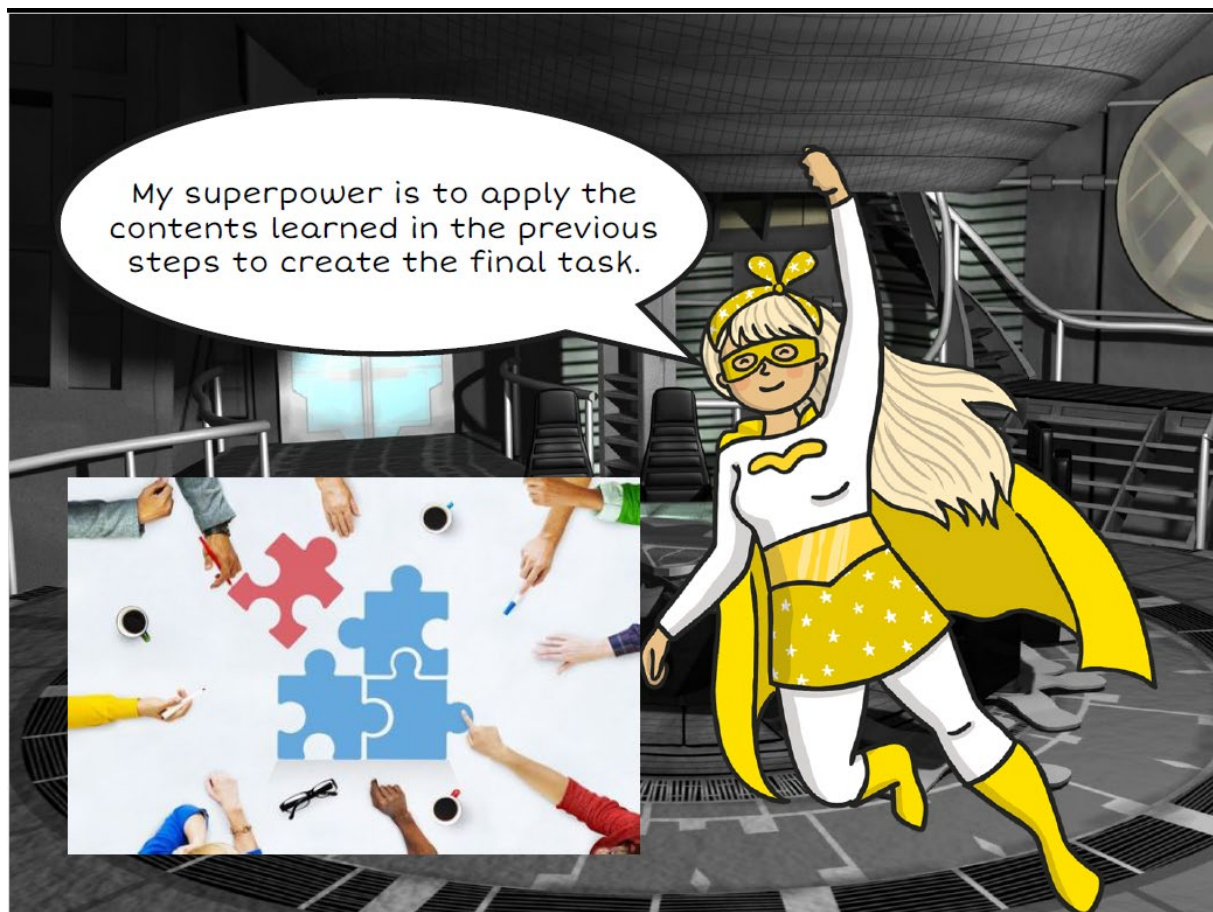
#3 Shares



#4 Shares









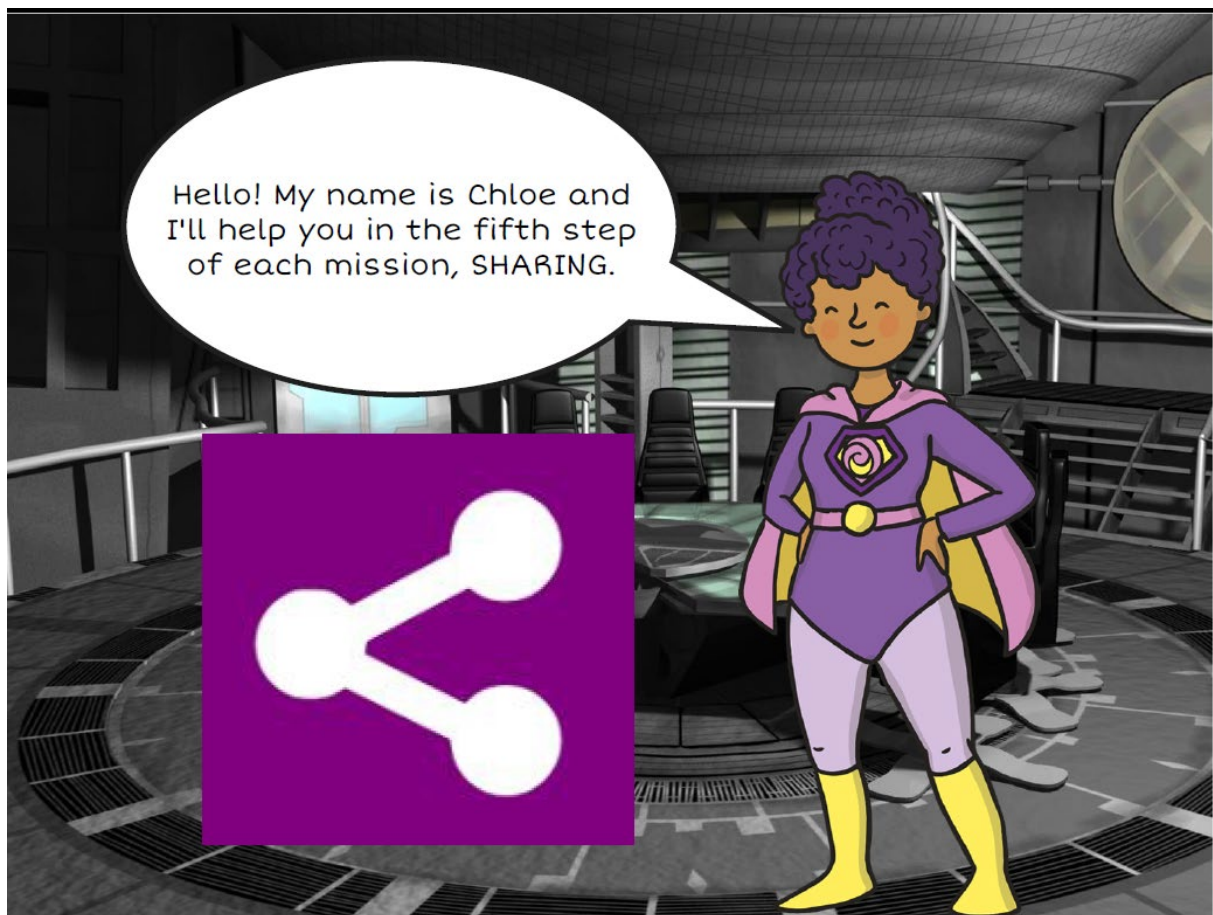
Now, use the Carousel Feedback Structure to leave feedback on other Comic Strip Plannings. Try to also include positive comments.

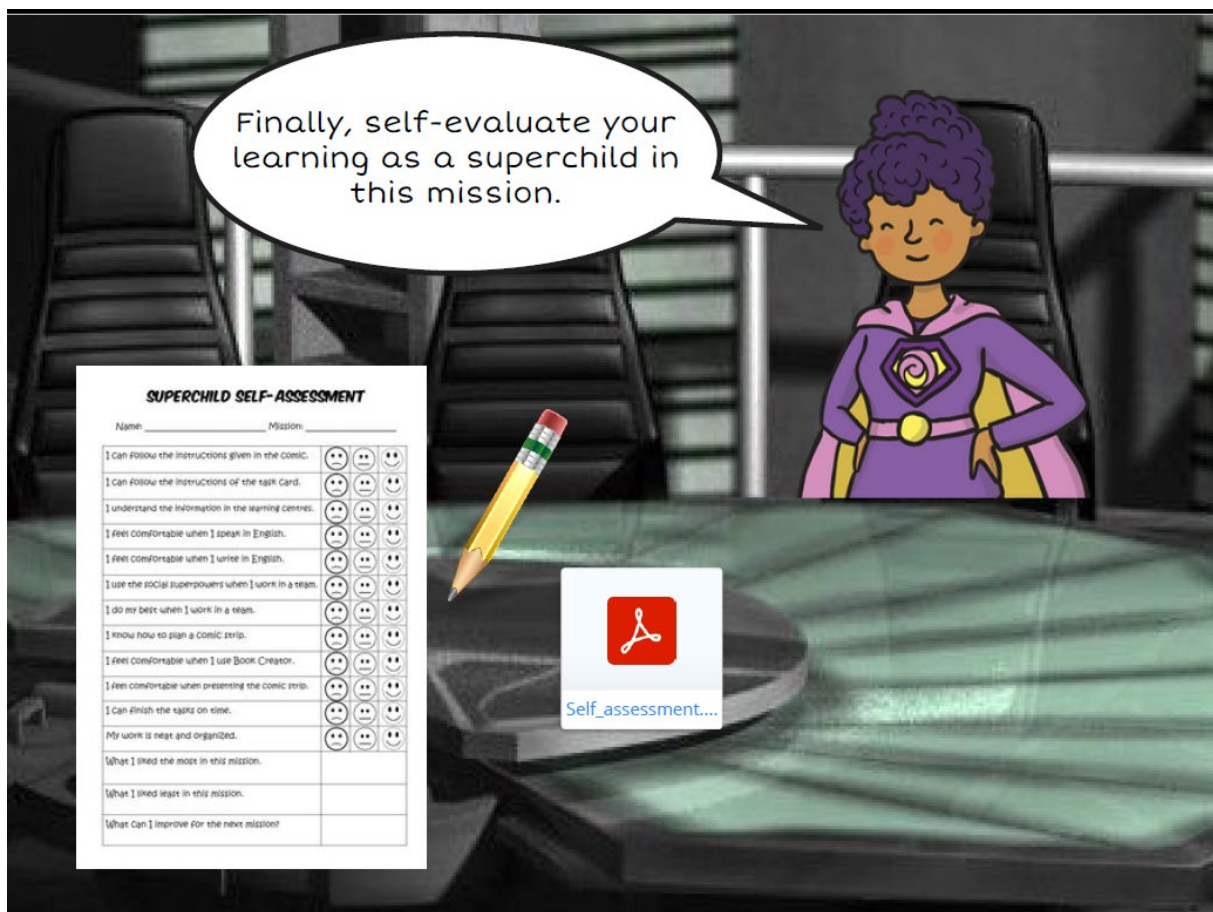


- 1 Teams Stand By Projects
- 2 Teams Rotate and Observe
- 3 Teams Share and Discuss
- 4 Team Rep Writes Feedback
- 5 Teacher Calls Time
- 6 Teams Rotate
- 7 Continue Rotating with New Team Rep Each Time
- 8 Teams Review Feedback They Received

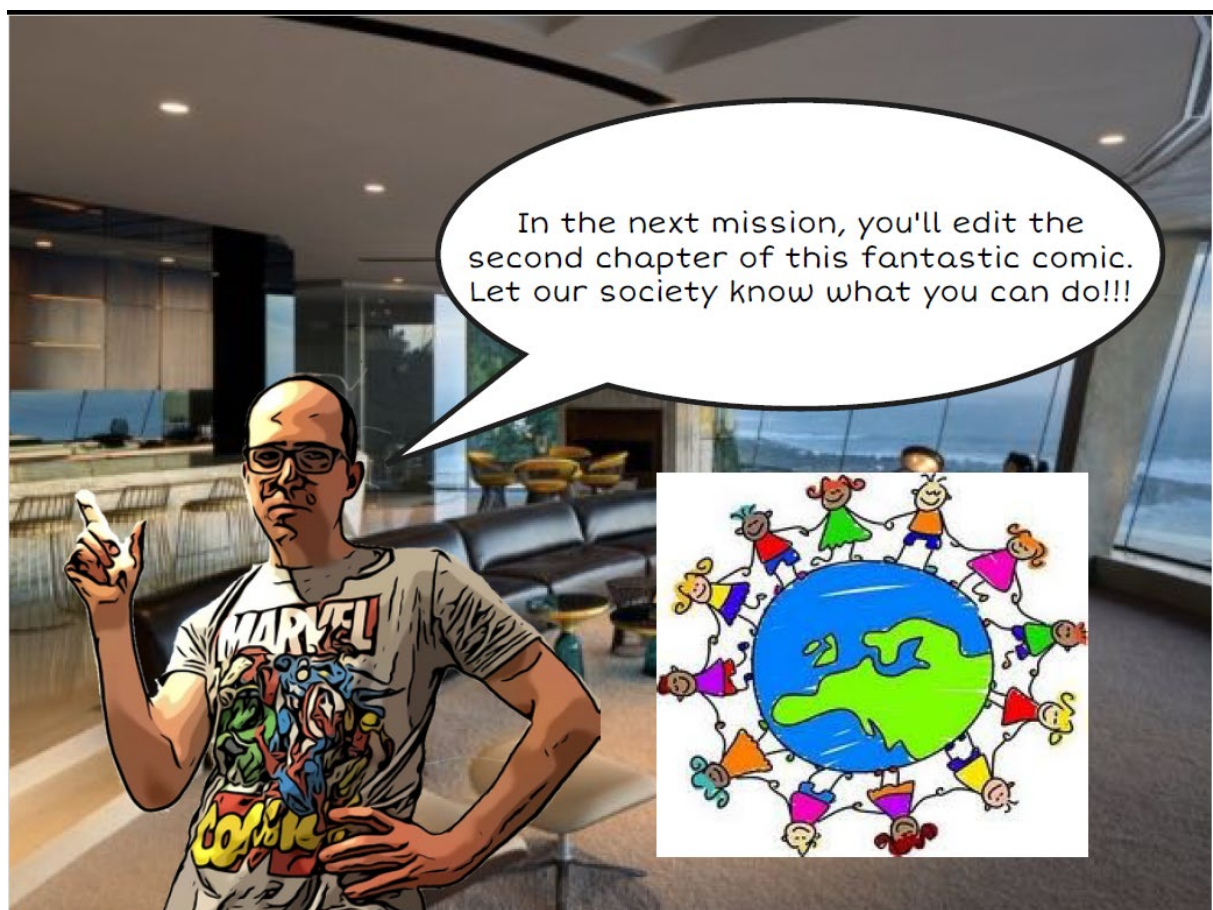
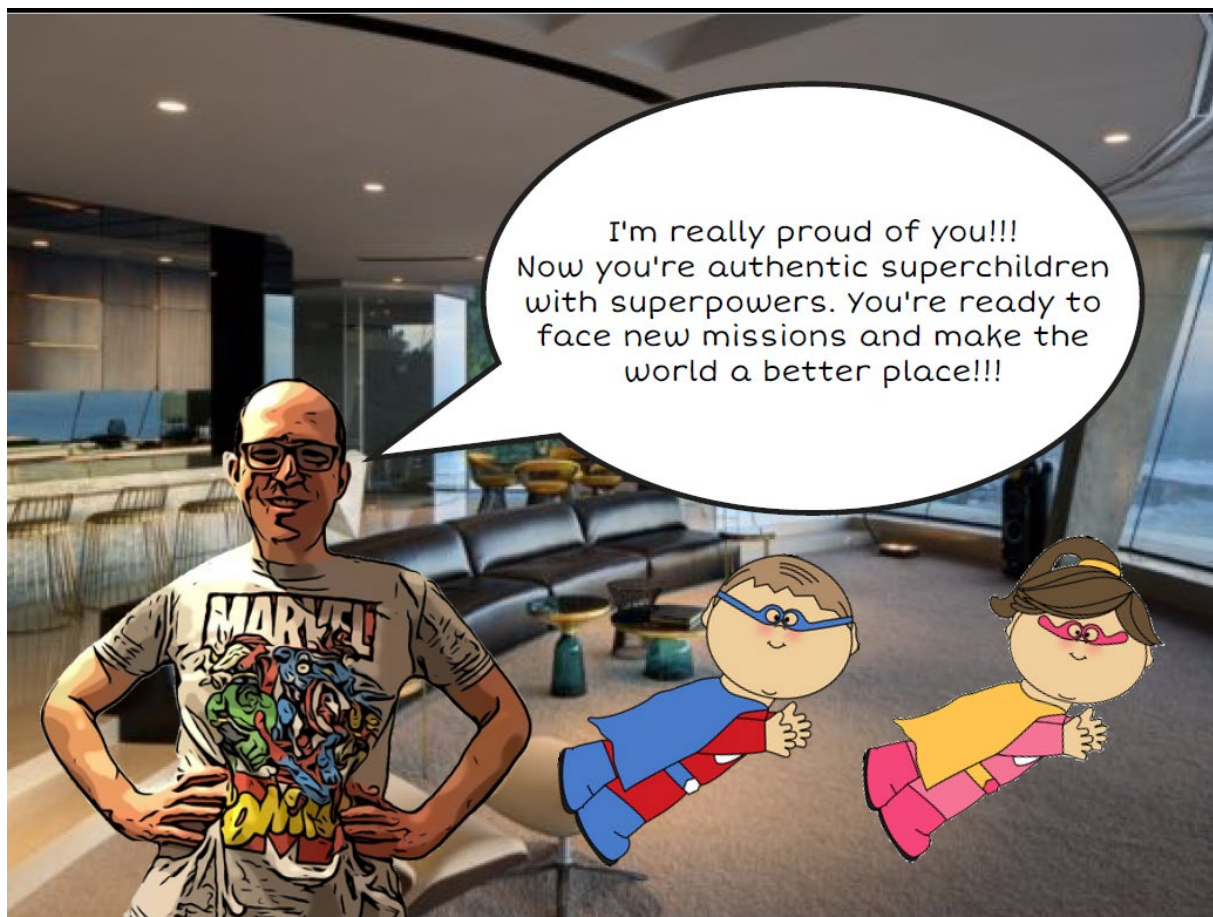
With the feedback provided by other teams, improve your Comic Strip Plannings!













8. APPENDIX II (COMIC STRIP PLANNING)

COMIC STRIP PLANNING

Chapter:	Members: - - - -
Name:	
PANEL 1	PANEL 2
Participants:	Participants:
Dialogue:	Dialogue:
Picture:	Picture:
PANEL 3	PANEL 4
Participants:	Participants:
Dialogue:	Dialogue:
Picture:	Picture:

9. APPENDIX III (SPEAKING CHECKLIST)

SPEAKING CHECKLIST	DIDACTIC UNIT 1	
NAME:	DATE:	
The student uses basic syntactic structures (“ <i>Hi!</i> ”, “ <i>Excuse me</i> ”, saying her/his friend’s name, asking a question...) to open a conversation.		
The student uses the basic syntactic structure “ <i>My name is...</i> ”.		
The student uses the basic syntactic structure “ <i>I am...</i> ” to talk about personal information.		
The student uses the basic syntactic structure “ <i>I (don’t) like...</i> ” to talk about personal information.		
The student uses the basic syntactic structure “ <i>I can/can’t...</i> ” to talk about personal information.		
FINAL MARK: ____ / 5		

10. APPENDIX IV (WRITING RUBRIC)

WRITING RUBRIC FOR THE DIGITAL COMIC			DIDACTIC UNIT 1: DO YOU WANT TO BE SUPERCHILDREN?			
NAME:			DATE:			
	FAIL (4)	GOOD (6)	VERY GOOD (8)	EXCELLENT (10)	%	MARK
PUNCTUATION MARKS	The student misuses almost all the punctuation marks.	The student correctly writes some punctuation marks.	The student correctly writes almost all the punctuation marks.	The student correctly writes all the punctuation marks.	25	
SPELLING CONVENTIONS	The student misspells almost all the basic words to present themselves.	The student spells some basic words to present themselves.	The student spells almost all the basic words to present themselves.	The student spells all the basic words to present themselves.	25	
	The student misspells almost all the basic words to express ability.	The student spells some basic words to express ability.	The student spells almost all the basic words to express ability.	The student spells all the basic words to express ability.	25	
	The student misspells almost all the basic words to express liking.	The student spells some basic words to express liking.	The student spells almost all the basic words to express liking.	The student spells all the basic words to express liking.	25	
FINAL MARK						

11. APPENDIX V (SUPERCHILD SELF-ASSESSMENT)

SUPERCHILD SELF-ASSESSMENT

Name: _____ Mission: _____

I Can follow the instructions given in the comic.			
I Can follow the instructions of the task card.			
I understand the information in the learning centres.			
I feel comfortable when I speak in English.			
I feel comfortable when I write in English.			
I use the social superpowers when I work in a team.			
I do my best when I work in a team.			
I know how to plan a comic strip.			
I feel comfortable when I use Book Creator.			
I feel comfortable when presenting the comic strip.			
I Can finish the tasks on time.			
My work is neat and organized.			
What I liked the most in this mission.			
What I liked least in this mission.			
What Can I improve for the next mission?			