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Comic Books as Education

Stan Lee teams up with Team Prime Time for the kids.

May 5, 2011

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by **Joey Esposito**

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On Tuesday, I attended an event at Dodger Stadium in Los Angeles with the producer of the Batman films, **Michael E. Uslan**, CEO of Platinum Studios Scott Mitchell Rosenberg, and comics legend **Stan Lee**. The event was a joint effort of **Team Prime Time**, a foundation established to help kids from low-income areas of LA become exposed to the arts to help build their futures, and the **Stan Lee Foundation**, the comics legend's organization to help fight illiteracy. It Books, an imprint of HarperCollins Publishers, donated copies of the Cowboys & Aliens graphic novel (the movie version of which is produced by Platinum Studios) to the kids that attended the event.

Uslan kicked off the discussion with a touching introduction to Lee, saying, "The reason I am doing what I do today, being that overgrown kid who is still taking my favorite comic books and making movies out of them, reporting to a sandbox every day to play with my favorite toys, is due to primarily an inspiration in my life who has been my mentor, my inspiration; a genius who has created and co-created the pantheon of Marvel superheros, a guy I am now privileged to call my friend, Stan Lee."

Uslan continued, "I don't have to tell anybody that these are tough times we're living in. It's tough in particular for kids because it's tough for education. Anytime people are willing to stop and not only simply write a check, but to provide their time to make it worthwhile is an incredible thing."

Lee was asked if he ever thought that his comic books would be used as a form of education to help get kids to read."I did realize it, but not right away," Lee answered. "After we had been doing Marvel Comics for the first five or so years, in the late 60s, I started getting mail from school teachers saying 'we

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were very surprised, we always thought comics were no good for kids, but we find that the kids who read your comics seem to be doing better in English and composition and grammar than the other kids.'"

Lee went on to describe that he would get similar letters from parents as well. "Comics really are a good aid to getting kids to read more literature, increasing their vocabulary, and making them *want* to read. Comics are the one type of reading you don't have to be forced into," he said. "If you're a kid, you want to read them and you enjoy them. You begin to equate enjoyment with reading. Once you become a reader, you don't stay with comics, you then go onto other things too."
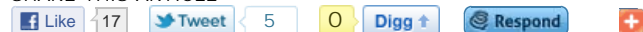
Rosenberg and Uslan went on to discuss their various experiences using comics in the classroom, including Uslan's creation of the very first accredited comics class in U.S. colleges at Indiana University in the 1970s. Uslan explained that he used an example of comparing the story of Moses to the story of Superman to help convince the university that there was merit in his idea that comics are contemporary American folklore.

I personally took two comics courses my senior year of college, and they were by far the most worthwhile courses in my entire four years of school. Do you have a similar experience? **Tweet me** or sound off below!

For more information on comics as education, visit **Team Prime Time**, the **Stan Lee Foundation**, or another great non-profit organization, **Reading With Pictures**.

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TexMex07

The chair of my undergrad college English department has been teaching comics in the university since the 80s. I took his course as an elective towards my Creative Writing BA, but that class shaped who am as an academic more than any other. After that, I wrote my Master's Thesis on superheroes and now I teach university English myself, incorporating comics into all of my classes. I even offer a Freshman Writing course entirely on comics. My students think I'm a huge nerd, but I usually convert one or two students a semester to full-fledged comic lovers.

11 hours ago   Joey-IGN and 2 more liked this   Like   Reply

Joey-IGN in reply to TexMex07

That's freaking awesome!

8 hours ago   TexMex07 liked this   Like

Manly669

I am actually a teacher for middle school students and I have found that many students don't want to read regular school books, they want to read comic books instead. I was quite happy to let the students do work/assignments based on comics because I am a fan of them myself and I know their merits.

In my time in university, I took a few comic courses (and I was amazed at how much information is hidden within comics) and even wrote a few essays about them. For instance: I was learning all about social justice so I wrote an essay comparing Prof. X to Dr. King and Magneto to Malcolm X. The professor loved my essay. In addition, I took a psych course all about death and dying (depressing yes, but I learned a lot) and it was right around the time that Captain America died, so I wrote an essay detailed about the 5 stages of grief and the marvel superheroes that went through them.

I continue to support the comic book industry and I love it when students are able to find connections and use comic books as a bridging tool to other pieces of literature.

Keep up the good work Stan and thanks Joey for letting all the IGN readers about the benefits about them :)

14 hours ago   metlica44 and 2 more liked this   Like   Reply

**Joey-IGN in reply to Manly669**

You, sir, are awesome.

14 hours ago   Manly669 liked this   Like

metlica44

I'm a relatively new reader of comics, and I have to say that comics have opened up doors for me. A lot of kids, back when I went to school, used to call comic's nerd's stuff and what not, I used to agree with them.

Now, I'm a devoted Batman reader who's been enjoying it ever since. I really enjoy the idea of implementing comics into grade schools, seeing as it would help everyone. Thank you Stan Lee, for giving this chance to the younger readers out there.

15 hours ago Joey-IGN and 2 more liked this Like Reply

goshuntokuX in reply to metlica44

Ya I wish I had known people growing up who were into all of these "geek" things that I love now, but I really didn't know that many (or at least they didn't admit to it). I didn't start reading comic books until late high school, but without any guidance (until checking out IGN comics) it wasn't until a couple years later that I really got into them.

14 hours ago Like

Joey-IGN in reply to metlica44

Thanks for sharing :)

15 hours ago Like

sEsposito7

I've taken the opportunity, wherever its presented itself, to study comics at university. I've taken a "Writing for Graphic Novels" elective and when I took philosophy of literature I wrote a term paper on the effects of contemporary philosophical traditions in The Watchmen. It was probably one of the more fun papers I've written.

All in all, I've never had a bad experience with comics at university -- although most students only take the electives because they believe them to be easy.

2 hours ago Like Reply

Dkrocks12

We have a graphic novels class in my high school in NY. We read: A Contract With God, Maus, Persepolis, V for Vendetta, Watchmen, and Dark Knight Returns.

12 hours ago Like Reply

Joey-IGN in reply to Dkrocks12

A Contract with God is like an education unto itself. That's awesome!

8 hours ago TexMex07 liked this Like

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