

# Superheroes



*Written by Morea Banićević*

## **A** Read the text

*"Kick him!"*

*The cheering crowd is gathered around a scrawny teenager crouching on the concrete. His school books are scattered around him, and he is painfully embracing his knees with both arms.*

*"Well, aren't you a little wimp?" A bully with a spiky hair and chains around his waist approaches the downed boy and takes out some kind of a weapon from his pocket. He appears to be the leader of the gang.*

*The crowd laughs. "Ooooh, you're so dead now!"*

*The boy says nothing, but releases a silent whimper.*

*"Aren't you a little mama's boy? Huh? Are you trying to yell? Is this the best you can do? Let's hear you scream!"*

*The boy closes his eyes and his body continues to shake. Voices around him make him even more disoriented. He is prepared for the worst.*

*Suddenly, the shouting around him intensifies. He hears a loud body thump and the clatter of steel on the concrete. His eyes are still closed, though.*

*He remains like that for some time before finally deciding to open his eyes. The first thing he sees is a hand reaching towards him. He looks up and sees the rest of a dark figure.*

*The boy guesses the masked man means no harm and lets the hand help him get up from the concrete. He looks around. The bullies are lying in a circle. The guy with spiky hair lies on the ground muttering something incoherently. The rest of the cheering crowd is no longer there.*

*"Who... who are you?" utters the boy silently, staring directly at the dark figure.*

*"I am Batman," says the mysterious man.*

*"You are... what... who?"*

*There is no answer. The man in the black suit smiles and points to the leader of the gang. The boy approaches the bully and stares at him in surprise. He doesn't look so tough anymore. Then he turns around to say something to the mysterious man, but he is no longer there. The alley remains silent. The boy swiftly picks up his backpack and books. Scared and hurt, but also euphoric, he hurries home. The boy was saved by a superhero.*



Since the dawn of humanity, people have tried to comprehend the battle between good and evil. Both come in many different forms. Planet Earth has always been threatened by natural disasters, wars, climate change, deadly diseases and crime, and so people have always been searching for ways to defy the odds and survive the most difficult situations. With the rise of human imagination, evil started to take different and new forms, and it needed to be defeated. There was something challenging, even glorious in a battle against a mighty adversary, whether natural disaster or immoral human activity.

Over time, people ascribed natural phenomena to characters who were specifically designed to embody the type of enemy who might threaten humanity, but who could also be beaten by another, more moral character. It all started with myths, legends and fairy tales, but later evolved even further and as such, gained widespread popularity. Humanity needed and wanted to be saved. The birth of the modern superhero occurred in America in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, more specifically in 1930s. These superheroes were the answer to every kind of evil, especially embodied in villains whose main mission was to destroy, enslave or exploit humanity.

Superheroes made their grand entrance in comic books. They caught on quite fast. Their abilities varied from flying, being super strong, invisible or completely indestructible. For every hero, of course, there was an equally powerful villain, but superheroes' wit and imagination always led to victory. The popularity of comic books has thus spawned many heroes, anti-heroes and ordinary people with exceptional skills.

In the late 1930s comic books with superheroes were so popular that it marked the following decades as the Golden Age of comic books, which introduced popular characters such as Superman, Batman, Wonder Woman, Captain America, Flash and many more. Readers were amazed by their extraordinary powers, charm and intelligence. Of course, one might protest about Batman being regarded as an actual superhero, for he doesn't have superpowers, but his strength, gadgets and sense of justice make him almost entirely equal to superhumans born with abilities that normal people lack.

Kids looked up to superheroes, secretly wished to be them, which was of course, impossible. They fed



their young minds on comic book after comic book and enjoyed new and exciting adventures. Adults weren't immune either. Some of them became great collectors, wouldn't trade their treasure for anything in the world, and were ready to pay large amounts of cash to obtain the rarest and oldest comic book editions.

It is worth mentioning two prominent comic book publishers: Marvel and DC (Detective Comics). Not only did they introduce the most famous superhero characters but their famous rivalry and hyper production of popular comics had a huge impact on media in general, especially in recent years. During the Golden Age of comic books the production of various characters was incredible. In this period authors included new characters with supportive functions and called them *sidekicks*. They were less than dominant superheroes, but they also devoted their lives fighting crime and injustice. Villains evolved too. They became smarter, more resourceful and their intentions were clear – they wanted to hurt humans in any possible way even if it meant the complete destruction of our entire planet.

Amongst that multitude of characters, however, people needed a break, so the Golden Age ended around the 1950s. Comic books tackled more realistic themes such as crime, war, love and stories from history.

Marvel and DC continued to compete, and in the mid-1950s they introduced new characters that once more completely absorbed readers' attention. This is called the Silver Age of comic books. It relied heavily on superhero characters, just as the preceding era. Spiderman, Thor, and the Hulk originate from this period. The superheroes from the Golden Age were also revived.

What is interesting about the Silver Age is that it relied heavily on science, or, to be fair, pseudo-science. The majority of characters were exposed to chemicals, animals and explosions so their genes were forced to mutate and give them their well-known abilities. All in all, the plots were imaginative, light hearted and sometimes even silly.

The 1970s started with a darker tone of comic books. The themes were more mature, resulting in a better immersion with reality. Superheroes became vulnerable in the way that they could lose their families, friends and lovers. Female protagonists got more significant roles, as well as heroes of different races and nationalities. It slowly shaped the present era of comic books, called the Modern Age, which has lasted from the mid-1980s up to the present. Superheroes took the lead, as always, but the popularity of comic books spawned other kinds of exceptional characters not only in America, but all around the globe. In Italy, for example, Sergio



Bonelli's publishing house created legendary personas, none of them superheroes, such as Dylan Dog and his sidekick Groucho, Martin Mystere, Tex, Zagor, Dampyr and others. They marked the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> and the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century and are still being read by enthusiasts.

The *formula* for creating superheroes is quite uniform: the seemingly ordinary person, possibly with a rough childhood, is given super powers or ultra-cool gadgets. He or she is then thrown into the most impossible situations, in which innocent people are under huge threat. There is usually another person involved, an unsuspecting lover of the superhero, who has to be saved from an incredibly evil villain. Naturally, the whole world is in great danger. The superhero ultimately wins and delivers a cool one-liner, which reminds us that he is not only powerful, but also intelligent and sarcastic. However, the formula for creating superheroes itself has mutated into something new, which gave superheroes new artistic value and the new prefix: anti-heroes. Such are the Watchmen, written by Alan Moore, and designed in a way which opposes traditional superhero values and gives them more realistic human traits. Then there is Deadpool, a rude and humorous character who hates the idea of being a hero at all, and who destroys villains in the most creative ways, with the help of his often unwilling side-kicks.

In this lasting process of shaping and reshaping characters, superheroes influenced both readers and viewers through numerous films, TV series, appearances in commercials, and of course the toy industry. People dress up as superheroes at Comic Cons, they create their own superhero-based fan art and fan fiction. Some of the enthusiasts are referred to as *geeks*, although superheroes have had immense influence on a mainstream audience as well.

## GLOSSARY\*:

<b>scrawny</b>	unattractively thin and bony
<b>to embrace</b>	to hold closely in one's arms
<b>wimp</b>	a weak and cowardly person
<b>to whimper</b>	to say something in a low voice that expresses fear, pain, or unhappiness
<b>to clatter</b>	a continuous rattling sound as of hard objects falling
<b>to clench</b>	close into a tight ball, especially as a manifestation of extreme anger
<b>to depict</b>	to portray in words; describe
<b>to defy odds</b>	to resist chances
<b>adversary</b>	an opponent, enemy
<b>to ascribe</b>	to regard a quality as belonging to
<b>wit</b>	keen intelligence
<b>to spawn</b>	to produce or generate a large number of
<b>prominent</b>	important; famous
<b>rivalry</b>	a competition for the same objective or for superiority in the same field
<b>resourceful</b>	having the ability to find quick and clever ways to overcome difficulties
<b>multitude</b>	a large number of people or things
<b>preceding</b>	coming before something in order, position, or time
<b>vulnerable</b>	in need of care, support, or protection
<b>one-liner</b>	a short joke or witty remark
<b>prefix</b>	a word placed before another
<b>to oppose</b>	to disagree with
<b>immense</b>	extremely large or great
<b>mainstream</b>	the ideas, attitudes, or activities that are shared by most people and regarded as normal or conventional

\*Words and expressions have been looked up in the Oxford online dictionary. Some of them have been partially modified (<https://en.oxforddictionaries.com>).

**B** How would you deal with bullies? Discuss with your classmates!

**C** Do some research!  
Sort out the superheroes according to their publishers

The Hulk, Spiderman, Superman, Captain America, Batman, Deadpool, Thor, Green Lantern, Aquaman, Wolverine

MARVEL	DC

**D** Connect the authors with their work:

- |                                   |                     |
|-----------------------------------|---------------------|
| 1. Stan Lee and Stephen Ditko     | ___ Deadpool        |
| 2. Jack Kirby and John Simon      | ___ Superman        |
| 3. Bob Kane and Bill Finger       | ___ Watchmen        |
| 4. Jerry Siegel and Joe Shuster   | ___ Captain America |
| 5. Fabian Nicieza and Rob Liefeld | ___ Spiderman       |
| 6. Alan Moore and Dave Gibbons    | ___ Batman          |



## WRITING

There is a new villain in town. His name is Magget. He is rotten to the core. Magget's mission is to invade the town with a deadly virus that turns humans into huge, flesh-eating worms. He is trying to infiltrate the government in order to administer the virus to every possible institution, by pretending it is a harmless anti-flu vaccine.

Your task is to design a superhero/superheroine specifically for this story. Give him or her whichever powers you want. Devise a plan to rescue innocent citizens and destroy Magget.

## Key to Task C:

Stan Lee and Stephen Ditko – Spiderman  
Jack Kirby and John Simon – Captain America  
Bob Kane and Bill Finger – Batman  
Jerry Siegel and Joe Shuster – Superman  
Fabian Nicieza and Rob Liefeld – Deadpool  
Alan Moore and Dave Gibbons – Watchmen