



## *Tintin and I*

### **Activity: Using Comics to Teach About Primary and Secondary Sources**

**Purpose:** To explore the advantages and disadvantages of using primary and secondary sources to understand other cultures.

**Activity:**

1. Explain to students that, “The Adventures of Tintin” by Belgian creator Hergé (pronounced “air-SHAY”) are as recognizable in Europe and Canada as Mickey Mouse and Superman are in the United States. Tell the class that the comic book series initially began in 1929 as a strip in a Catholic newspaper with the intent of teaching political lessons. Early Tintin stories reflected stereotypes of the day, but then Hergé experienced a professional turning point.
2. Show students a three-minute [video clip](#) from the film, “Tintin and I” that presents some of the racial and geographic stereotypes that Hergé included in a Tintin story set in colonial Africa, “Tintin in the Congo,” as well as some later illustrations of Chinese culture in the story, “The Blue Lotus.” (The clip begins at 13:50 with “At this stage, the early Tintins...” and ends at 16:50 with “...by the extra trouble he had taken over it.” Note: The voice speaking French in the clip is that of Hergé.)
3. Following the clip, go back and compare specifics of Hergé’s illustrations of colonial Africa and China. Discuss why the depiction of Chinese culture was more genuine.
4. Explain that after Hergé’s experience with “The Blue Lotus,” he began extensively researching material for each new Tintin adventure. In his search for authenticity, Hergé would read considerably and cut out photographs or articles about a particular place from newspapers, magazines, catalogs, and other sources. He would also visit local museums to examine artifacts from different cultures. However, Hergé never traveled to the locations he wrote about.
5. Discuss the difference between primary and secondary sources and how the use of one kind or the other might impact storytelling, such as “The Adventures of Tintin.” How do such sources illustrate social conditions and cultural identity? What are the advantages and disadvantages of using primary versus secondary sources?
6. Have students then research a foreign culture, create their own adventure narratives with simple illustrations that reflect their research findings, and then write an essay that analyzes the impact that primary and/or secondary sources had on their work.

## Extensions:

Have students read the interview with comic artist Jason Lutes, particularly the Q&A about his best-known comic series, *Berlin*. The series is about people living in Germany during the 1920s and early 1930s, the years prior to fascism and World War II. Lutes talks about the research he did for the series and how he focused more on the mundane details (silverware, doorknobs, etc.) to capture life during that era. Download some of the panels available on the P.O.V. website and print them out or borrow a copy of *Berlin* from the library and pass it around the classroom. Ask students to point out aspects of the imagery that tells them it takes place in Germany during this time period.

\* P.O.V. documentaries can be taped off-the-air and used for educational purposes for up to one year from the initial broadcast. In addition, P.O.V. offers a lending library of DVD's and VHS tapes that you can borrow anytime during the school year — FOR FREE!

## Additional Resources:

- **Tintin in America**  
[www.pbs.org/pov/pov2006/tintinandi/special\\_tintinamerica.html](http://www.pbs.org/pov/pov2006/tintinandi/special_tintinamerica.html)  
This essay describes Tintin's popularity outside of the U.S., how the illustrations from Tintin influenced American pop culture, and why Tintin's appeal continues to endure.
- **On Cartooning**  
[www.pbs.org/pov/pov2006/tintinandi/special\\_artists.html](http://www.pbs.org/pov/pov2006/tintinandi/special_artists.html)  
Discover the modern world of comics as six contemporary artists talk about Hergé's influence, visual narratives, and the art of cartooning.

## Related Standards:

- Arts and Communication, Standard 4: Understands ways in which the human experience is transmitted and reflected in the arts and communication.
- Historical Understanding, Standard 2: Understands the historical perspective.
- Language Arts, Standard 1: Uses the general skills and strategies of the writing process.
- Language Arts, Standard 4: Gathers and uses information for research purposes.
- Language Arts, Standard 10: Understands the characteristics and components of the media.
- Visual Arts, Standard 3: Knows a range of subject matter, symbols, and potential ideas in the visual arts.
- Level IV, Benchmark 1: Understands how visual, spatial, temporal, and functional values of artworks are tempered by culture and history.

- Level IV, Benchmark 2: Applies various subjects, symbols, and ideas in one's artworks.
- Visual Arts, Standard 4: Understands the visual arts in relation to history and cultures.

Source: "Content Knowledge" (<http://www.mcrel.org/compendium/browse.asp>) by McRel (Mid-continent Research for Education and Learning)