Title of Session: Arts and Literacy - The Comic Book Project
Moderator: BJ Berquist
Guest Speaker: Michael Bitz
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Room: After School Online Room

BjB: |** ANNOUNCEMENT: The Comic Book Project with special guest Michael Bitz is starting shortly in the After School Online Room. To participate click on the Online tab to the left of the chat window, single click on MichaelBit and then click on the door icon at the bottom of the frame **|
JeffC joined the room.
KevanN: What grade level(s) is this being implemented in?
MichaelBit: The target is 4-8
BJ: I suspect that people will be straggling in, but I'm so excited to get started
KevanN: thanks
MichaelBit: But we've been working with several high schools
BJ: let's start with introductions so Michael knows who his audience is
KevanN: well, I represent h.s.
ElizabeGst18: could it be used for high school students too
BJ: I'm an art teacher in Pennsylvania
AmyLV: can any of it be modified perhaps for college age students in performance studies? Maybe you can share some ideas at the end
KevanN: I am a high school art instructor in MN and the ArtsConnectEd workshop facilitator on Tappedin
ElizabeGst18: I am a secondary education major in college
BJ: Amy, Stephanie, Elizabeth, can you please introduce yourselves
BJ: Allison, you're just in time for introductions
MariahK joined the room.
StephaniNe: My name is Stephanie and I am a 4th grade math and science teacher in Ohio
AllisonRu: I am an arts administrator and work with children ages k-12.
BJ: Hi, Mariah. Welcome. Please introduce yourself to the group.
AmyLV: My name is Amy, I'm a Speech Comm. instructor at McNeese State in Louisiana. I'm here as part of a class project actually, but wanted to pick something interesting
BJ hands the virtual floor over to Michael
MichaelBit: Thanks for being here everyone!
KevanN: Thanks for hosting!
MichaelBit: Let me start with a brief intro about the project
StephaniNe: ok
MichaelBit: It's an art and literacy initiative hosted by Teachers College in NYC
MichaelBit: The goal is for kids to write and design original comic books
MichaelBit: The project started with 1 after-school program in NYC
MichaelBit: Now it's in 10 cities with about 30,000 kids

MichaelBit: The theme this year is leadership

KevanN: impressive

MichaelBit: The idea is to help kids forge an alternative pathway to literacy through art

MichaelBit: So...

AllisonRu: I read a wonderful write up in the Washington Post. Is the program running in different states?

KevanN: great connection, Michael

MichaelBit: Yup, it's in NYC, Philly, Baltimore...

BJ: if you've just entered the room, a reminder to please go to the actions menu in the top right of your chat window and click on DETACH

JeffC wonders if there is a URL for the project.

MichaelBit: Cleveland, St. Louis, DC...

MichaelBit: Hartford, Bridgeport...

MichaelBit: www.comicbookproject.org

WyleenB: Lake Charles, LA

MichaelBit: So have folks had experiences using comic books in their classrooms?

BJ: click on the blue hyperlink ...you may need to hold your CTRL key down

KevanN: I have

BJ: I think comic books can be used in any classroom, Michael!

BJ . o O (for any discipline)

WyleenB: Well, I've used comic strips with sentence identification

KevanN: I have one student working on a comic book character / plot line in an AP Studio Art Class

MichaelBit: No doubt, many social studies teachers use them to help teach history

BrooksT: cool

MichaelBit: Now with the whole Japanese anime revolution many kids are into the genre

WyleenB: All my students were really excited

AmyLV: thanks for the url

WyleenB: The lesson went fairly well

MichaelBit: How did you work it Wyleen

WyleenB: I love Japanese anime

KevanN: It's big here as well - the Mpls. College of Art and Design runs a comic book art course

WyleenB: Well, I introduce the lesson

WyleenB: Then I pull out the photo copied comic strip

WyleenB: All my students' faces begin to lighten up

MichaelBit: Sounds cool!

JeffC: anime is banned in my school district

AllisonRu: Michael, do all the students follow the same theme in each program?

KevanN: I am thinking that one could also create the comic book using Powerpoint so that it was sharable electronically...

WyleenB: It was amazing how they really tuned in to the black an white copy

MichaelBit: Yes, the project is theme based--this year's theme is leadership.

ElizabeGst18: Leadership and Comic books?

ElizabeGst18 left the room (signed off).

MichaelBit: The idea is for kids to first write a comic book manuscript on that theme, then design the comic book
MichaelBit: Jeff, anime banned?! What's the story?
WyleenB: like a story board
MichaelBit: Very much like a storyboard, Wyleen
AmyLV: what kind of guidance does the teacher provide based on the theme
MichaelBit: The teachers facilitate discussions about leadership
MichaelBit: Who is a leader?
MichaelBit: What is a leader?
MichaelBit: Have you ever been a leader?
MichaelBit: Then kids synthesize that into a comic book story
WyleenB: I do believe
MichaelBit: Some are making comic books about the election, others about their communities
WyleenB: As a child I found myself through my drawing
AmyLV: how extensive are the comic strips?
KevanN: I am curious about what exemplars you use regarding the art portion of this project? Are there other readily available visuals besides anime?
MichaelBit: Very extensive: check out some of the work on the website
BJ: I have a question related to what Amy asked....how much actual writing is involved?
ElizabeGst18: It must be interesting, their view on leadership.
MichaelBit: We don't really emphasize genres like anime, etc.
MichaelBit: It's more focused on the kids' creativity
WyleenB: Yes, I agree
MichaelBit: Lots of writing, BJ. We want kids to do as much writing as possible
AllisonRu: Is there a specific structure to the story line?
WyleenB: I believe young children find it easier to relate to their world through art
MichaelBit: Well, just as in a story, we want to focus on a beginning, middle, end
KevanN: alright, perhaps not specific comic character styles but how about things like page layout?
WyleenB: A they mature the drawing begin to speak =, and therefore lead themselves to written text
MichaelBit: Wyleen: Absolutely
AmyLV: do they work as individuals or groups on this project?
MichaelBit: Especially for kids who have been struggling with English
BJ: If you've recently joined us, Michael is discussing www.comicbookproject.org
AmyLV: if it is groups, how many would make up a nice size group to get work down
AmyLV: done
MichaelBit: Individuals and groups, depending on the goals of the teacher
AllisonRu: Have any of the students touched on personal challenges in their lives?
MichaelBit: Groups generally 2-4 kids
ElizabeGst18: how structured must they be, as this is an after school initiative
MichaelBit: The kids have incorporated all kinds of personal challenges: conflict resolution, the environment...
MichaelBit: The after-school clubs generally meet once a week for the entire school year
MichaelBit: It's not just after-school though...

TraceyC: This strategy does seem like it would work well with ESL students

MichaelBit: In Cleveland it's a school-based project where art teachers work with English teachers

TraceyC: I agree with Michael

MichaelBit: Tracey: Many ESL kids have had enormous success because they rely on the visual component

MichaelBit: It can be a real pathway to literacy

AmyLV: how much time is spent on it in the classroom

MichaelBit: It depends, Amy

MichaelBit: Some work on it for many, many hours

TraceyC: Do you think it would work well with 2nd graders

MichaelBit: Others just a few hours

MichaelBit: 2nd grade is probably a bit young

MichaelBit: Only because of the amount of writing--and the amount of time it takes

TraceyC: o i c

BJ: I think lessons could be adapted to the lower grades

AllisonRu: What grades have engaged in the comic book project?

MichaelBit: Yes, you're right. They could be adapted.

TraceyC: How could I BJ

MichaelBit: When we started, it was 4-8

AmyLV: what about adapted for college speech students that are terrified of performance?

MichaelBit: Now we've been working with several high schools across the country

TraceyC: o i c

MichaelBit: I think it could really work with college students

MichaelBit: basically, anyone can make a comic book...

MichaelBit: it's just a matter of getting creative and telling a great story

AmyLV: I am just wondering if we only have an hour and a half how long it would take for older students to generate this comic

MichaelBit: you don't have to be a skilled artist

MichaelBit: an hour is really not enough...

ElizabeGst18: Would teams be more appropriate for students whose art skills may be lacking?

MichaelBit: in three hours, say, you could probably pull it off

AmyLV: do you make the students "present" their idea to the class?

MichaelBit: Teams are great--you can pair an artist with a writer--form actual production teams!

MichaelBit: Yes, presentation is a big part of it because we want kids to communicate about their work

ElizabeGst18: Have any of these been published

BJ: an alternative to the short class time would be to collaborate with a writing or art teacher

MichaelBit: Yes, at the end of the process we publish the kids work

TraceyC: I agree

MichaelBit: Our publisher is Dark Horse Comics

WyleenB: That is a amazing.

AllisonRu: Doesn't Dark Horse publish Shrek?

MichaelBit: We also have exhibits in each of the cities

WyleenB: That a lot of extrinsic motivation.

MichaelBit: Yes, Shrek!

MichaelBit: You're right Wyleen: extrinsic motivation can be really valuable

ElizabeGst18: Are any of the exhibits in Ohio?

AllisonRu: Who attends the exhibits at the end of the year?

MichaelBit: If it's done the right way, that is

MichaelBit: Ohio: Last year we exhibited at the Cleveland Public Library, hopefully again this year

MichaelBit: Exhibits: students, parents, teachers, community members...

MichaelBit: We want kids to feel really good about what they accomplished and get rewarded for it

MichaelBit: Also, every child who finishes a comic book is on the website: www.comicbookproject.org

ElizabeGst18: This must increase student efficacy

AmyLV: if its group work, do you make everyone that participated take part in a presentation

MichaelBit: Kids do really get motivated

MichaelBit: It depends on the teacher, Amy.

WyleenB: How would/can a teacher from down south get involved?

ElizabeGst18: What have been some themes used in the past?

MichaelBit: It would be good for as many as the kids as possible to present

AllisonRu: Is work displayed on the web site's gallery regularly, does it get updated often?

MichaelBit: Send me an email Wyleen: meb53@columbia.edu

MichaelBit: Other themes: last year in Cleveland was conflict resolution

MichaelBit: in NYC it was the environment

AmyLV: how often do the themes change?

MichaelBit: Allison: yes, the work is often updated

MichaelBit: The themes change every year. This year the theme is leadership

MichaelBit: We'll have a national publication representing all the cities involved

MichaelBit: A touring exhibit

MichaelBit: and the web galleries

ElizabeGst18: Do some the children come up with ideas that appear beyond their years?

WyleenB: That is quite unique

MichaelBit: Interesting question, Elizabeth...

MichaelBit: Yes, many of the kids come up with things you would have never thought they were capable of

MichaelBit: And that's because they WANT to do it. It doesn't feel like schoolwork.

AmyLV: is the publication done annually as well?

MichaelBit: Some of the kids who were throwing chairs against the wall before the project, now became engaged in the learning process

ElizabeGst18: That's Incredible

MichaelBit: Yes, annual publications, as a culmination of the year's work

WyleenB: That's empowering

MichaelBit: Interestingly, some of the most "talented" artists have had trouble making comic books...

AllisonRu: Can simply one school get involved? How?

MichaelBit: They are so used to drawing Dragonball Z or Spongebob...

MichaelBit: It's hard for them to be creative.

BJ . o O (and think)

MichaelBit: So we're trying to reinforce creativity in the learning process

MichaelBit: Teachers that want to be involved can download the project info and forms from the website: www.comicbookproject.org

ElizabeGst18: Do the comic books ever interfere with their other school work

MichaelBit: Many of the after-school programs focus on homework help...

ElizabeGst18: technically I know it's not supposed to but.....

TraceyC: thanks

MichaelBit: So at the beginning they think it will interfere

MichaelBit: But once they get into the process...

MichaelBit: they really see the advantages

MichaelBit: After all we want kids to be engaged, and this is one way to get that happening

WyleenB: I believe that it's the teacher's responsibility to develop an effective lesson plan that can integrate such an activity

ElizabeGst18: This works well for ESL students. What about gifted students?

AllisonRu: Do their English skills seem to improve... spelling, grammar?

MichaelBit: It can be worked into so many things: history, science, English, health, etc

AmyLV: what about for special ed, have you ever tried it with any students that need special attention?

MichaelBit: Gifted: You see so many kids sitting in the corner doodling...

AmyLV: I have a son (7) with cerebral palsy that has difficulty with drawing period

BJ . o O (same with sped)

MichaelBit: The project gets them engaged by letting them spread their creative wings

MichaelBit: Special ed: similar in that it can really engage kids no matter what their needs...

BJ: Amy, your son could use his writing skills to work with another student who draws

MichaelBit: It's just a matter of getting them to tell a story...THEIR story

MichaelBit: Allison: lots of improvement in spelling and grammar

MichaelBit: Especially for the kids who are new to the English language

MichaelBit: Agree with BJ, grouping kids can be really powerful

AllisonRu: Could this project be done in a foreign language club?

MichaelBit: I suppose it could!

MichaelBit: I'll say this...

MichaelBit: we've had comic books in Spanish, Korean, Chinese...

MichaelBit: and some languages I've never even heard of!

MichaelBit: As teachers do you have time to collaborate with others?

BJ: collaboration is a learned behavior, Michael

AmyLV: only those in my department, but we have done a lot of work with ESL judging them on their proficiency with English as a sort of "final". They typically read Dr. Seuss

MichaelBit: Because just as grouping kids can be group, when teachers work together it can be really wonderful

AllisonRu: My program has creative writing teacher who could work with the art teachers.

ElizabeGst18: We need to make the time, but is encouraged to be done. Cross over collaboration (history & language arts)

MichaelBit: In Cleveland the art teachers have been collaborating with English teachers for probably the first time...

MichaelBit: They've really learned a lot from each other

MichaelBit: Allison: That could work out great

MichaelBit: Another thing about the project...

AllisonRu: I will suggest the program to them.

MichaelBit: We want kids to work in their own media: something that they would pursue outside of school...

MichaelBit: Kids get bombarded with media messages all day long...

MichaelBit: When they can create their own media, in their own words, for their own communities…

MichaelBit: It's something that can really help them learn.

MichaelBit: Comic books are one example of a youth media that kids are attracted to

MichaelBit: So we want to capitalize on that

MichaelBit: And you wouldn't think that kids in the city are attracted to Japanese animation...

MichaelBit: but they are, in a big way!

AllisonRu: It seems that comic books are cool again! Do you find that the kids think so?

TraceyC: Wow

WyleenB: Wow, they also can begin to build a sense of self-worth, that they may not have ever known

MichaelBit: Allison: Big time...

MichaelBit: Just think of all the movies that are based on comic books these days

BJ: may I paste a comment on superheroes that I recently read in a child research network newsletter?

MichaelBit: Wyleen: Lots of self-worth...

MichaelBit: That's really what this is all about

MichaelBit: I mean, that's the power of art when it comes right down to it

BJ . o O (CRN is out of Japan)

BJ: "Like children, I also love supermen and/or superhero figures with masks. But I always wonder why their clothes get neither torn nor dirty even after a big fight/battle. As a result, it is not very clear for whom or for what the hero was fighting. I believe that genuine justice is not something so cool or glamorous in appearance. To the contrary, doing justice should be necessarily accompanied by sacrificing oneself and getting oneself hurt."

AmyLV: I could certainly see students being more comfortable talking about their own work rather than someone else's that they are asked to analyze. I have seen it work in my classes

MichaelBit: I like that a lot, BJ!

BJ: http://www.childresearch.net/cgi-bin/topics/column.pl?no=00225&page=1

MichaelBit: Yes, children want to talk about what they've accomplished...
BJ: certainly opens up the table for discussion, doesn't it!
MichaelBit: Even if it doesn't seem so advanced to adults...
MichaelBit: True about heroes, BJ...
TraceyC: yeah
MichaelBit: Most of the comic books from kids in the city are not about superheroes...
MichaelBit: They're about real-life situations
AllisonRu: Do the kids open up about their own experiences?
MichaelBit: They use the medium as a means of expression
AmyLV: that was going to be my question
AllisonRu: Does it ever get personal?
ElizabeGst18: I would think the comics would be about people they think are heroes
MichaelBit: The comics get very personal...
WyleenB: Yes, I do believe that in a weird sense that we all internally longing to be alive outside ourselves
BJ agrees with Elizabeth. We need to define what a hero is to each of us
MichaelBit: for example, children will put themselves in the comic books and take on very real issues
TraceyC: I'm sure it does
WyleenB: So, yes I agree they can be very personal
MichaelBit: And that's good...
MichaelBit: we want kids to get personal...
MichaelBit: that means their thinking on a very high level...
MichaelBit: and getting engaged in the learning process
ElizabeGst18: Unfortunately I must leave. Thank You Michael.
AllisonRu: Usually the students keep quiet in regular class, but it seems that this will draw them out a bit!
MichaelBit: Bye, Elizabeth
WyleenB: Yes, to be an artist you must have the end in mind first
ElizabeGst18 left the room (signed off).
MichaelBit: The shyest students have found a voice thru the project, Allison
MichaelBit: And also for writers, Wyleen
MichaelBit: This project is a combo--art and writing. We want kids to do a lot of writing.
AmyLV: seems like something for me to investigate for my classes, thanks
AmyLV smiles
MichaelBit: Many kids will do more writing in making a comic book than they will in class during an entire school year
MichaelBit: Anyone who wants more info is welcome to contact me: meb53@columbia.edu
WyleenB: Yes, I'll be sure to email you
BJ: this has been wonderful, Michael!
MichaelBit: Thanks for having me!
AllisonRu: Could you repeat the web address?
BJ: Amy, a suggestion for how to do this with the younger kids
MichaelBit: www.comicbookproject.org
WyleenB: No, thank you for the inspiration

BJ: fold an 18x24 sheet of construction paper into 8 or 16 panels
BJ: And have the kids write stories in each panel...use invented spelling if they need to
TraceyC: I was thinking along the same lines BJ
MichaelBit: great idea, BJ
AmyLV: that's a neat idea, thanks...also construction paper may make it more fun
MichaelBit: I agree, give kids a structure to work with
AmyLV: perhaps with the college kids too
BJ: there are some cool construction paper crayons now too
AmyLV: LOL
AmyLV: sometimes we need to revert back to crayons to make lessons interesting
MichaelBit: nothing wrong with that, Amy
MichaelBit: creativity is the key
AmyLV: I do a similar project now with a communication situation, but its only one frame, but they get excited to color
TraceyC: I agree
AmyLV: it only takes one class period
AmyLV: this may be a way to expand on it
MichaelBit: You're right, you can expand it now to make a sequence
MichaelBit: That's part of the process, to get kids to tell a story in sequence...
MichaelBit: Just as if they were writing it in paragraph form
MichaelBit: Which, of course, we want them to be able to do
AmyLV: it might be a neat project to start in the spring. it would also help my students tell a story in a sequence since they have to give speeches describing a sequence of events
MichaelBit: Absolutely
AllisonRu: Thank you for the info on the Comic Book Project. I will be in touch soon.
AmyLV: thanks for all the hints, I'm always looking for new activities for my classes. It's hard when you teach "speech"
MichaelBit: Thank you, Allison
AmyLV: number one fear up there next to death
AmyLV smiles
MichaelBit: That is interesting, Amy. Let me know what you come up with
BrooksT: there were some good ideas...thxs
JudithS: It was all very interesting. I've heard some really interesting ideas to take with me when I make the big switch from pre-service teacher to just plain ole teacher.
TraceyC: Thanks for such a great idea
MichaelBit: Good. Thanks, everyone.
AmyLV: thanks from me too, I will be in touch
WyleenB: Thank you
BJ: Any comments on the session, Michael?
BJ: did you like the format?
MichaelBit: It's great that so many different people can sign on and share experiences
MichaelBit: We all learn a lot from each other, don't we?
MichaelBit: Love the format
BJ smiles happily. Thanks, Michael.
MichaelBit: Ok, thanks. Talk soon...