

Details

Classroom Tips for Comic Strips with Danielle Zélin - 292

In this episode, bilingual educator and Edutopia author Danielle Zélin joins for a chat about tips for comic strips as a creative and effective tool for assessment and engagement in the classroom. You'll hear strategies for introducing comic strip creation to students, tips for integrating technology into the process, and how this approach can boost student confidence while checking for understanding across various subjects.

Link to live show notes: <https://classtechtips.com/2024/11/05/tips-for-comic-strips-292/>

**Tips for Comic Strips*

Introduction

Hello there, and welcome to today's episode of the Easy EdTech podcast. My name is Monica Burns, and I am so glad you're here to join me today. If you want to make the most of education technology, AKA EdTech, you are in the right place. My goal has always been to help make EdTech easier and give you ideas to try yourself, share with a colleague, or bookmark for later in the school year.

Every Tuesday on the Easy EdTech podcast, you'll hear stories from my time in the classroom, my work with schools and districts, and my travels to different EdTech events. Get ready for solo episodes where I share some quick tips, stories, and interviews full of practical ideas and stories from new guests each month. If we mention something you'd like to check out, make sure to click the link. You'll find it in the episode description or the summary area where you're listening to this podcast, or you can find every episode and all of the resources we mention by going to classtechtips.com/podcast or by going to classtechtips.com and just clicking on the Easy EdTech Podcast button at the top of the page.

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Today's Intro

This week's episode is titled: "Classroom Tips for Comic Strips with Danielle Zélin - 292." Danielle is a bilingual educator who has worked with students in a variety of roles. I first

came across her work on Edutopia, and I reached out to see if she would join me for today's episode. We talk all about creativity in the classroom and how to bring comic strips into your next lesson.

Episode Transcript

Monica Burns:

Welcome to the podcast. I'm so excited to chat with you today about comic strips in the classroom. But before we dive in, can you share with listeners a bit about your role in education? What does your day-to-day look like?

Danielle Zélin:

Hi, everybody. So I'm Danielle Zélin. I come from Little Paradise Island, Mauritius. And actually my day-to-day life is quite interesting because I used to work in schools and I've more than 25 years of experience. So nowadays I'm running my own little afterschool English club and as a National Geographic educator. So what I do is merging National Geographic resources and English, because I'm an English teacher at Tesla One, particularly because in Mauritius we are bilingual, but English is still a second language for us. So most of the time I wake up actually very early in the morning because I'm a morning person. And morning time it would be either crafting some programs, some youth program, or other activities that I would love to do with my students in the afternoon. And then round so after school, the kids will come, some of them will come individually because I do one-to-one teaching.

Danielle Zélin:

And all the times it'll be groups of children that will come home. So my latest session finishes at seven 30 in the evening, and I don't work on Fridays. And but on Fridays I mainly do also, if I have some meetings like this year I was I started eco educating with with an NGO called We Recycle, it has to do with plastic pollution. And the two first term we did a campaign in different primary school in Mauritius, but now we are third term here. And we do more like interaction with social groups or other NGOs. So this is my day, day-to-day life.

Monica Burns:

Yeah, no. And in your perspective, working with NGOs, working with students in different types of programs and settings, and your work around really leveraging comic strips right. As

a way to check for understanding is one of the reasons I was so excited to have you on the podcast today. And for someone who might not be familiar with a comic strip, right? We, we kind of think of comics as maybe being a few different things, but for someone who's not familiar with a comic strip, what does it include? What are some of the essential components of a comic strip?

Danielle Zélin:

So the idea of comic strips, actually, it was like, I know my, my student and in my, in my session with my student, there's always a creative art, be it a collage, or it could be a painting or drawing, lots of drawing. They love drawing because in at school, actually with the heavy, let's say program that they have all the curriculum, they don't have that time. So I offer them that space, and I, I could see like how each one of them, they take the time to draw, and then I thought like, Hey, yeah, why not? You know? Mm-Hmm. <Affirmative>. And so I've, you can, you can create comic books, actually <laugh> and for the comic strip you can, I, I chose like for the one, I chose it at six box comic strip. Mm-Hmm. <Affirmative>. So different ways that, that, that you can have it.

Danielle Zélin:

So you have some website where you can download free templates or you can go on Canva, and then you create your own one, or sometimes they already have template already in place, so they, you, you just use it. But I love, I love having them printing out because we use the colors, the <inaudible>, the colored pencil, and the first time I tried comic strip, it was just storytelling, you know? Mm-Hmm. <affirmative>. And the one thing I, we did like, okay you like that part of the story, if I did a storytelling, like reading a story to them, so I tell them like, okay, you've heard a story, and now we are going to use those six boxes to maybe do the flow of the story itself. Mm-Hmm. <Affirmative>. So each box will have a part of the story, and then they can do the background, understand them.

Danielle Zélin:

Like, okay, yes, you have the characters, but also we need to know where it happens. And if there are some details that you, you remember, just put it like from imagination. I think it's, it's helping the creative mind and it may not look the same, like maybe if there's a comic or there's a story with, with a picture, but they will create their own Mm-Hmm. <Affirmative>. And I think it's a very potent skill to develop because this help them to, you know, connect the neurons inside and they say like, oh yeah, I like this one. And I that part of the story. This is what I want in the comic strip.

Monica Burns:

I love that idea of keeping it simple, right? The six boxes. Yeah. Really anchoring that as your way of having a focus for students, right? 'cause We know that a comic strip right, could get overwhelming or it could turn into something much bigger, which is great. But if your primary goal is around checking for understanding, having kids think critically and choose their moment strategically, right? Keeping it simple is huge. So from a formative assessment standpoint, how do comic strips help kids demonstrate their understanding of a topic or concept? What kind of things are you asking for or looking for when they're doing this?

Danielle Zélin:

So I, I think like first thing, first, I mean, like through the article, you will, I, i, i, we have gone a little bit, bit, little bit more in details about that. So I will take the straight example of what I did with the free oil plastic. So before that, we did different activities because it was about recycling. It was about the free oceans. We, because the three words, so reduce, reuse and recycle plastic. Mm-Hmm. <Affirmative>, we've been watching some videos and also tell a story about cleaning our beaches here in Mauritius, where little islands, so the ocean and the beach are, they are very important. And we have also been visiting a recycling center, you know, and so to come up to the comic strip and, and as a foremost of assessment is they, they had to tell it a little story of a six box and make sure that they have those three words included.

Danielle Zélin:

Mm-Hmm. <Affirmative> in the comic strips. So reduce, reuse, recycle. And since my students, some of them are seven, others, they are like 15, you know? Mm-Hmm. <Affirmative>. And it'll depend, it'll depend. Some, I the most important, although those three words, they should be in those three words. Now, connecting with the, with the drawing. Now I know lots of them, sometime they, they are just shy or they have, I, I would not say the perfectionist <laugh> thing, that they want things to be right. You know? And I think it has to do also how we have been trained or educated, like if this is not good. So I give them that space to draw as they wish. So but to make sure also some instruction, like I I, we, I want to see what are the actions you are doing to reduce, reuse and recycle.

Danielle Zélin:

So it could be as simple as possible or as complex as they want. So some of them have really given me some very complex drawing. And in that drawing itself, like in one box you would say, oh my God, that this is amazing. You know, and seeing the details, because the, the, the activity was the free ocean superhero. So as an ocean superhero, what do you do to reduce? So you will see some of them flying in the ocean. You like, you know, like a superhero, having that power. Now I'm going to pick all the plastic bottles from the sea that the turtle doesn't die, you know, <laugh>. And, and I think like it's, it's really engaging actually, because I didn't expect that. And when, when I saw the drawing, this is where I understood like, yes, this is a very, very I potent assessment. So I know now that they, they were sort of embodying a superhero and to really integrate the free rs in their, through their drawing and the sentences also, they, they, they will, they will just write, yeah, I reduce plastic by instead of using a shower, gel plastic, I will use a soap. So they will write it. And at the same time, for me as a, as an ESL teacher, so connecting with the vocabulary, the flow of the sentence, punctuation, and yeah. Yeah. So that, that was like, that experience.

Monica Burns:

No, and just what you were mentioning about the vocabulary expectations, like, I'm looking for these things, right? Here's a structure or an avenue, right? You're a super hero, right. Talking about this, right? You're reviewing the sentences that go along with each box or cell of a comic strip. I just love that it gives kids structure and flexibility, and they know what you're looking for, right. And you're able to figure out where they might need, you know, some extra support. So, you know, for some students, like you mentioned, the ones who you might have seen, right. Doodling or drawing at different parts of the day, they might love, right? This jump right into a more creative endeavor. But I also imagine there are some kids who are a little hesitant, right? To, to draw and to share. So how do you introduce the concept of creating comic strips to kids who might not have any other prior experience or maybe a little low confidence when it comes to creating something like this?

Danielle Zélin:

So I think I've encountered, even with my, my elder one, they were, I think with the elder one, they were, they are more conscious of the drawing. Mm-Hmm. <Affirmative>, you know, and they, they want to say like, yeah, I want this to be perfect. The little ones, they, they just draw like, you know, okay, here it is. And I, I, I'm open to, to, to accept this is their expression, you know, this is the experience they have, this is the knowledge they have. And I think as an educator, it's very important to not judge connected to that. And this is where you open the doors to them. So as soon as I don't judge them, oh, this is, this should be square, this should be run, you know? And for those who are not so confident, so one I, I would say like, okay, you

can write a sentence, but maybe it could feel more like infographic, but you will see them, you will see, like even if you have to write signs and symbols and just the drawing, not necessarily the character.

Danielle Zélin:

And some of them will just draw they, they will draw the, the recycle symbol and the write. She, she, she wrote a sentence, and the sentence is very potent, you know? And then I think it had to do with how the brain is processing the information. So one, one on one box in one box, I saw like one of them drawing the process of recycling. And it was amazing. There were no characters on. But should we see like the, the lorry will come and pick the, the, the plastic bottle and then bring it to the factory. Mm-Hmm. <Affirmative> and, you know, and weave arrows. So for me, it's, it's, I I will accept, I accepted it because it was so clear. Yeah. And concise. And the sentence were there, the word was there, <laugh>. So for me it is, it was just great. And I had, I had one or two, they were not so confident in drawing.

Danielle Zélin:

And so I, I said, okay, let's try it out as a digital one. Mm-Hmm. <affirmative>, you know, and we, we went on Canva and we started to build up the comic strip. The template was already there. And then they chose from from the different characters and little icons or clipboard they want to add. And then they just wrote the sentence. And I think you could see the satisfaction after that because they said, they said to themselves, I mean, anyway yes, I did it <laugh> Yeah. They'll not say it directly to me, but I, I, I could see it through the eyes. I did it. And it was also always, I mean, as an educator, always encouragement because, you know, they are so overwhelmed sometimes with everything happening around them, having that little boost up different from what the school is giving Mm-Hmm. <Affirmative>

Danielle Zélin:

And telling them, okay, you can't draw. It's all right, let's digitalize it. Okay. See, you can do it. <Laugh>. So I mean, this is, this is that part, it's, it's, it's also like twofold or even three or fourfold. It's also emotional, emotional reassurance for them. Yeah. Because they could feel themselves like, oh I don't know how to draw. You know, they have that question, they have that doubt. And then being able to observe and see like, okay, it, I will not ask that student to go for the drawing. Let's try the digital one. And then the, the, the atmosphere change, the emotion change, and then they get excited and they say, yeah, yeah, I want to put this, yeah. Can I put this and this and this? And this also is a very particular skill because being able to, to put all the colors together and so that it looks good. <Laugh>, I mean like the visual

Monica Burns:

And that piece as you're, as you're describing that there is massive, because, you know, it's so important what you said about how some of your older students in particular were self-conscious, right. Of their drawing when some of the younger students just jumped right in. Right. And, and we probably feel that way ourselves. Like if someone asked us to do something creative, we might have a little more pause or hesitation than the five-year-old version of our ourselves, right? Mm-Hmm. <Affirmative> with doing that task. Yes. So what you mentioned really gets to my next question, you know, to unpack together, which is the technology of it all. And you mentioned that, you know, using a tool that has, you know, characters you can drag over things, you can move into one place or another has templates, right? Is really great for boosting student confidence and giving them some tools to create something that they're proud to share. So do you have any other tips for teachers on how to integrate technology into the process of creating and sharing comic strips?

Danielle Zélin:

I, I think like on the forefront, I will definitely go for Canva. <Laugh>. Mm-Hmm. <Affirmative>. I've not tried the others. There are some other we have been trying but it's much more like we created an e ebook, so using generative AI. So we tried it out. Yeah. So they were excited. Yeah, they were excited. Someone that's like, oh my God, that this is so cool. Mm-Hmm, <affirmative>. But I think the gen, even the generative AI, there are some pictures. They are still trying to to, to perfect it or to polish it. So sometimes it gives like cool pictures, sometime not. But we've I think it's an easy, easy way kind for me. I've discovered it like some years ago, and I've been doing u using it for many, many things. And now I believe that if it's possible, if they have the access of course to, to, to personal laptops or computers and just log in.

Danielle Zélin:

And I, I think first thing first is to play with it. Yeah. And let them try. Don't do like any specific activities and just say, okay, because on Canva, when you go on it there are already templates on, and sometimes like the, the, the stories can be generated from inspired from the template already there. So they would say, oh, oh yeah, this is cool. The template is already there, but I will change the word and I put some colors here. And then when it's presented to them that when it's finished and then they say, Hey, this is a cool like comic strip. And then like, you know, it, it like really get them like into the excitement of I want to do more. I want to do more. And I think being able to do that, teachers would would love that. Okay. And then you can get them like a huge activity, 30, 45 minutes, they can be together. And I think this is important

also that the teachers are knowledgeable about it so that they can, they can guide and facilitate the session with the, the students. Otherwise you may feel hesitant and they will feel it anyway if you don't know the technology. But there's so many things that we can do with technology. So many things.

Monica Burns:

And yes, I love what you mentioned about tools that are open-ended, that have templates, right? Adobe Express Book Creator Storyboard, that there's a bunch of them out there. Even Google Slides, I've got it exactly to for comic strips that I love sharing with teachers. There's so many ways to go about it, but jumping into a space with that lower level, right, not the full activity just yet is such a great recommendation for listeners. So Danielle, this was so helpful for letting people hear your experience, your tips, what your students are making and creating. I'm gonna link out to your LinkedIn, I'll link out to that Edutopia article I mentioned, but if someone wants to connect with you, what is the best way to get in touch?

Danielle Zélin:

So the best way would be LinkedIn. So you will just type Danielle Zélin. And most probably like during, in the podcast, you can just link my, type me on my name and it's most active and you can see all the different other activities I'm doing. Also not on economics trip, but as an environmental educator also. I do, I do plenty. And I'm a youth mentor also. I create, and I'm actually preparing my next article for Ethiopia, which is the Blue Heart generation, which is like something different from maybe AI or technology. And I've been working with that with my students. So anyway, yeah, you can, you can connect with me on LinkedIn. So this would be my most active, professional platform.

Monica Burns:

Perfect. Well, thank you again so much for your time today.

Danielle Zélin:

Thank you. Thank you a lot.

Monica Burns:

It was lots of fun chatting with Danielle for this episode and if you have visited the blog in the past you know how much I love comic strips using comic books for inspiration so I will make

sure to link out to some extra blog posts and templates that I've got on my website so that you can put her great ideas into action right away.

So let's make this EdTech easy with some key points from the episode...

Comic strips provide a creative outlet for students.

The use of a six-box comic strip format helps students focus.

For students who may lack confidence in drawing, try digital tools.

Remember, you can find the shownotes and the full list of resources from this episode including all of the ways to connect with with Danielle Zélin on classtechtips.com/podcast and finding today's episode #292!

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Outro

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Episode Resources

- Connect with Danielle Zélin on [LinkedIn](#)
- Danielle Zélin's [Edutopia profile](#) & article [Using Comic Strips as an Assessment Tool](#)
- [National Geographic Education Resources](#)

- [Canva for Education](#) (Graphic design platform)
- [15 Comic Strip Templates](#) (Free download)
- [Reasons to Try a Comic Strips Activity](#) (Blog Post)
- [Liven Up Your Lesson with a Comic Strip Twist](#) (Podcast Episode)
- [How to Use Comic Strips in a Science Classroom](#) (Blog Post)
- [Comics in the Classroom and an AI Connection with Nicholas Provenzano](#) (Podcast Episode)
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