

# Hero worship

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120

## Background

This extract is taken from a section of the *Funday Times*, a children's newspaper. This article was published in Spring 2002, shortly before *Spider-Man* was released in the UK.

This feature article includes typical elements of newspaper form, including a headline that plays on words, a summary opening paragraph and the use of quotes from an interview.

## Shared reading and discussing the text

- Discuss with the children what they know about Spider-Man and other superheroes. Ask what is so special about a superhero. Allow the children to talk about their answers in pairs or groups first, to encourage less confident children to contribute. Establish that superheroes often have unnatural strength and special powers and that they fight evil wherever they find it. Explain that Spider-Man, unlike most superheroes lives in a real place. Now read the first two paragraphs of the article.
- Tell the children that this text is from a newspaper. Ask them to identify any features characteristic of newspapers, for example a bold headline.
- Point out and mark other features that stand out, such as the pun in *snare the UK in its web*. Ask the children to explain why this is a clever use of language. (It is a metaphor – like a spider catches a fly, the UK is being caught in the enthusiasm for the film.)
- Another feature of newspaper writing is the use of colloquial language or language that is quite close to speech, for example *chats*.
- Discuss whether the opening paragraph makes the children want to read on. As well as having an interesting subject matter, is the opening presented in a way that entices them to read more? Explain that the opening sentences are very important in a newspaper or magazine – they must grab a reader's attention or the article won't be read.
- Read the rest of the text. Point out that it introduces the subject (Stan Lee) and then quotes from an interview with him. Explain that

quotes like this are another characteristic of newspaper or magazine writing. Ask the children what they have found out about him from the article. Did any of the children already know any of the character's origins?

- Go back to the opening two paragraphs. Discuss the difference between fact and opinion. Which words, phrases and sentences do the children know or assume to be true? (The movie arrives on June 14th.) Which are the writer's opinions? (Some people may not agree that a comic-strip character is *humble*.) Now ask them to find other examples of fact and opinion in the text. How could they check whether something was a fact or opinion? (Discuss the use of information books, encyclopedias, the Internet, other newspapers.)

## Activities

- Give the group the whole text and a set of highlighter pens. Remind them of the different features of newspaper reports or articles: headline, lead or summary paragraph, quotes and so on. Ask the children to find these in the text, marking them in different colours. What is left unmarked? Help the children to identify that it is background material about the cartoons and their creator.
- Ask the group to cut out the headline and first few sentences or lead paragraphs from similar types of articles in other papers. Analyse the features of the examples collected.
- Evolve catchy headlines for articles on ordinary subjects, for example 'School band hits the right note!'. Using the text, remind the children of the features of effective article openings and encourage them to experiment with puns, unexpected verbs and an enthusiastic tone, as well as being aware of their audience.

## Extension/further reading

Make a dictionary of colloquial phrases that are used today, such as *cool* as discussed in the text and compared to *groovy*. Ask children to take their dictionary list home and research comparative phrases that their parents used.