

Comic Life (app)

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It's always a challenge to find new ways to engage students in language learning in the classroom, and integrating technology into instruction is an undeniable method of increasing engagement and motivation. It is important, however, to carefully consider how and why we use technology with our students. One effective support of language and content learning is through the use of digital comic strip creation software. Digital comics simultaneously engage students with two mediums they enjoy and naturally gravitate to—cartoons and computers.

There are many software options available to support language learning and thousands of educational applications in the crowded field of educational technology. A handful of apps, such as Strip Designer, Comic Book, Comic Head, and Comic Life, are dedicated to creating comics. Comic Life distinguishes itself from its competitors by its ease of use, mobile compatibility (iOS and Android devices), and its integration with preexisting applications available on most computers. It is a powerful, photo-comic creation software that uses templates with a computer's built-in camera to create visually attractive stories. The program is simple to use for both novices and the tech savvy and provides an access point for ELLs to write and use pictures as a way to generate stories.

Comic Life features a variety of templates that aid in story creation and have clear benefits in learning English. One great way to support writing is to have students storyboard their ideas first on paper, then use Comic Life. The comics can then serve as a script for readers' theater, which in turn helps students' fluency and presentation skills.

Another excellent way to support learning English is to focus on language objectives, such as the correct use of first or third person and subject-verb agreement. This can be done using speech bubbles and narration templates, which deepen students' understanding of point of view and illustrate who is speaking.

With Comic Life, students can create stories in various genres, such as how-to guides, expository essays, or narrative writing. Students storyboard their writing pieces using images and dialogue, and this is especially useful to teach concepts such as sequencing, character change, conflict, and story elements. Comic Life is also a great way to enhance project-based learning. For example, after a unit of study, students can create a story demonstrating their knowledge of a concept. These comics can then be exported as a PDF to any email or printed for a portfolio. With Comic Life, teachers can manageably differentiate by process, content, and product, creating variations on a singular theme or idea. This allows for multiple access points for students across K-12 environments into any material, no matter how dense.

Although Comic Life costs slightly more than other comic maker apps, it is available in all platforms (PC and Mac as well as for IOS and Android devices)—a rarity in software development. Its cost ranges from \$4.99 for IOS devices (iPod Touch; iPhones and iPads) and \$14.99–\$29.99 for the Mac and Windows software.

Comic Life (version 3.0). Available from <http://plasq.com/>

For technology inquiries, please contact the author at martigliere@schools.nyc.gov

For a gallery of student work, go to <http://plasq.com/products/comiclifegallery>



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