

Ms. Marvel: Our Identities, Our Superpowers

AUTHORS:

Lindsay Johnson, Roosevelt Middle School, River Forest, Illinois

Emily Bollinger, Osseo Area Learning Center, Brooklyn Park, Minnesota

Susy Remillard, Cape Cod Lighthouse Public Charter School, Harwich, Massachusetts

SUMMARY OF THE UNIT:

This unit is heavily focused on the idea of identity, particularly how culture influences identity and how our identity shapes individuals' strengths, their "super powers." The lesson revolve around the character Ms. Marvel, a Muslim Pakistani American superheroine. Students will read G. Willow Wilson's *Ms. Marvel: No Normal*, engage in guided reading questions and discussions with their peers, and complete a project in which they depict themselves as superheroes based on aspects of their identity. This unit is designed with an integrated approach to the teaching, although the subject areas may be separated for individual instruction.

SUBJECTS: Art and English/Language Arts (ELA)

GRADE LEVELS: Middle/High School

TIMING:

ART: 5 class periods

Reading artwork

Ms. Marvel introduction

Drawing and exaggerating the human body

ELA: 3 weeks

Background information

Read w/ discussion questions

Superhero project

STANDARDS:

ART

VA:Re.7.2.8a Compare and contrast contexts and media in which viewers encounter images that influence ideas, emotions, and actions.

VA:Re.7.1.8a Explain how a person's aesthetic choices are influenced by culture and environment and impact the visual image that one conveys to others.

ELA

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.CCRA.R.1 Read closely to determine what the text says explicitly and to make logical inferences from it; cite specific textual evidence when writing or speaking to support conclusions drawn from the text.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.CCRA.R.2 Determine central ideas or themes of a text and analyze their development; summarize the key supporting details and ideas.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.CCRA.R.3 Analyze how and why individuals, events, or ideas develop and interact over the course of a text.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.CCRA.R.4 Interpret words and phrases as they are used in a text, including determining technical, connotative, and figurative meanings, and analyze how specific word choices shape meaning or tone.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.CCRA.R.5 Analyze the structure of texts, including how specific sentences, paragraphs, and larger portions of the text (e.g., a section, chapter, scene, or stanza) relate to each other and the whole.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.CCRA.R.6 Assess how point of view or purpose shapes the content and style of a text.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.CCRA.R.7 Integrate and evaluate content presented in diverse media and formats, including visually and quantitatively, as well as in words.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.CCRA.R.10 Read and comprehend complex literary and informational texts independently and proficiently.

ESSENTIAL QUESTION/COMPELLING QUESTION:

Where and how do we encounter images in our world?

How do images influence our views of the world?

What images do we project into the world?

What can we learn about ourselves and others through “windows and mirrors” we read?

How do culture, family, community, and personality shape identity?

How do our identities shape our “super powers”?

LEARNING OBJECTIVES:

ART:

Students will be able to compare and contrast contexts and media in which viewers encounter images that influence ideas, emotions, and actions.

Students will be able to explain how a person’s aesthetic choices are influenced by culture and environment and impact the visual image that one conveys to others.

ELA:

Students will be able to use evidence from the story to support what they think the story clearly says as well as what it infers.

Students will be able to support plausible inferences with reasonable evidence.

Students will be able to draw inferences about the text where it is ambiguous or uncertain.

Students will be able to determine a central idea of the text and say how it is conveyed through particular details.

Students will be able to use text evidence to help explain how culture and religious beliefs shape our lives.

Students will be able to analyze comic book writing, looking for text details related to multicultural perspectives that influence identity.

Students will be able to make text-to-self connections and transfer knowledge of text details into an original project designed around identity.

LISTS OF MATERIALS/RESOURCES NEEDED:**General:**

Text Source: [Ms. Marvel: No Normal](#) (free on Kindle as of 2/20)

Google Slides Background on Islam: [Islam: A Brief Introduction](#)

Google Slides Background on Ms. Marvel: [Ms. Marvel: An Introduction](#)

ART:

Google Slides Introduction to Art Project: [Ms. Marvel Art Slides](#)

Selection of graphic novels from school library for reference

Student devices (Chromebooks, iPads) for collaborative work

Paper

Colored pencils/markers/crayons

Or digital drawing program: Procreate, Notability, etc

ELA:

Text Support: [Guided Reading Questions](#)

Final Summative Project: [Superhero Project](#)

BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT:

The comic *Ms. Marvel: No Normal* features a Muslim Pakistani American superheroine struggling with her identity as she comes to realize her superpowers in the first volumes of this series. Kamala Khan's polymorph superpowers — the ability to change her shape, size and form — reflect her inner struggles in a metaphorical sense. Living her teenage life in Jersey City, she stretches, bends, and pulls away from the pressures all around her. Kamala not only struggles with her identity, but also with the different practices and expectations of her religion, with the pressures put on her by strict but loving parents, and with her newly discovered power as well. Throughout all these conflicts, Kamala must sort out how to not be all things to all people, given that her super identity is as a polymorph. In the end, this might be the most dangerous part of her transformation.

Like most teens, Kamala is just trying to fit in. Her diverse cultural background makes this challenging but also interesting for the reader. The comic provides inner thinking into Kamala's interpretations of her identity while never dwelling on these parts of her character. She is a fully drawn superhero in that her personality, her culture, and her beliefs come through the story and affect the plot in interesting ways. The art is engaging and draws the reader in. The artist's style balances Kamala's most challenging conflicts with the author's humor, bringing the reader into all elements of the story.

This is an excellent text that offers scholars windows into someone else's lived experiences as well as mirrors into their own, similarities they might share with Kamala Khan. Representation matters, and this text -- and the accompanying materials -- exemplify just that.

LEARNING PLAN:

ART:

1 class period to [visually study graphic novels](#)

1 class period intro to Ms. Marvel and reflection on own culture and super power

1 class period to practice their body proportions and sketches

1 class period to work on final

1 class period to present to peers

ELA:

1 class period to begin *Ms. Marvel* with [introductory presentation](#) to spark interest.

1 class period to introduce the [summative superhero project](#) so that students can think about themselves as heroes as they read the graphic novel and begin reading.

1 class period to review the [Introduction to Islam presentation](#) so that students have background information to understand elements in the story.

3-5 class periods to use the [guided reading questions](#) as an anchor while reading the graphic novel (either as a worksheet, as discussion prompts, or as a combination of the two).

1-3 class periods to allow time to create their [superhero project](#).

ASSESSMENTS:

ART:

Representation of super hero self through art

Gallery Walk

Formative assessment of observation during introductory slideshow

ELA:

[Guided Reading Questions](#)

[Ms. Marvel Superhero Project](#)

EXTENSIONS:

ART:

There are five coloring pages at the end of Ms. Marvel available for download.

ELA:

There are additional volumes of *Ms. Marvel* for interested students.

[*Ms. Marvel: Generation Why*](#)

[*Ms. Marvel: Crushed*](#)

[*Ms. Marvel: Last Days*](#)

[*Ms. Marvel: Super Famous*](#)

[*Ms. Marvel: Civil War II*](#)

[*Ms. Marvel: Damage Per Second*](#)

[*Ms. Marvel: Mecca*](#)

[*Ms. Marvel: Teenage Wasteland*](#)

[*Ms. Marvel: Time and Again*](#)

[*Ms. Marvel Meets the Marvel Universe*](#)

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES:

Information about teaching about Islam and about Ms. Marvel in the classroom

[I am a Hijabi Feminist](#)

[Here's What Hijabis Want You to Know about Their Choice to Cover](#)

[The Hijab has Liberated Me from Society's Expectations of Women](#)

[The Horror of 'Honor Killings,' Even in the US](#)

[Everything You Should Know about Honor Killings](#)

[Using Graphic Novels in Education: *Ms. Marvel*](#): a fabulous resource that identifies various themes as well as ideas to track throughout the text

[Comics & Graphic Novels](#): a resource from Harvard's Center for Middle Eastern Studies that focuses on visual and pop culture. There are lectures from an April 2011 panel that included Hussein Rashid (*Comics & Muslim Identity*), A. David Lewis (*Muslim Identity and Superhero Comics*), and Jeffrey Melnick (*Comics and Post 9/11 Culture*).

[TEDx: A Superhero for Generation Why/G. Willow Wilson](#): G. Willow Wilson discusses her writing and the themes that motivate her work.