

# Introduction to Digital Comics

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Digital Integration Teaching Initiative (DITI)

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ANTH 4100 - Making Anthropology Public

Spring 2026, Professor Carie Hersh

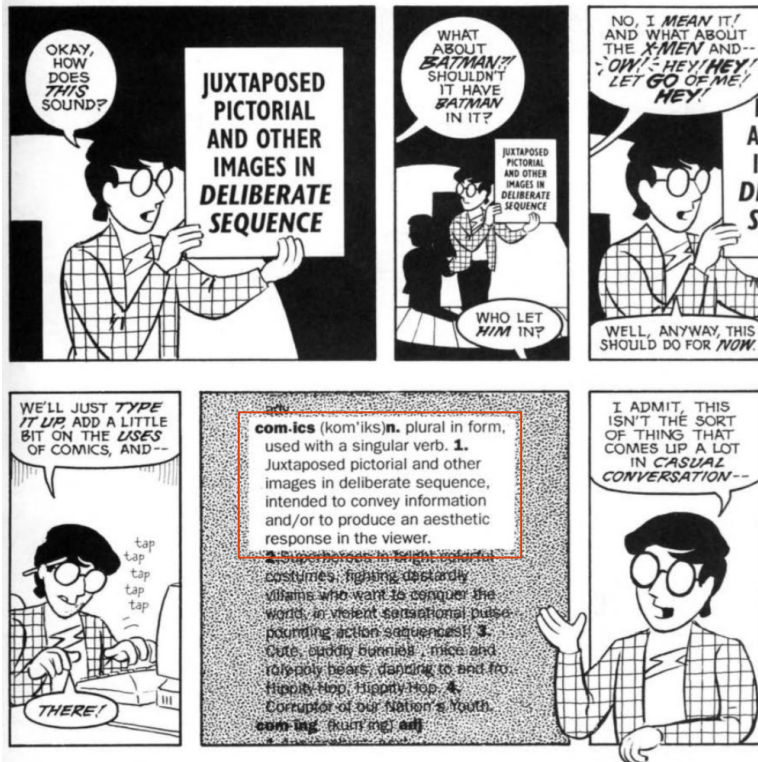
# Workshop Agenda

- ❑ Understand best practices for digital comic creation.
- ❑ Explore three approaches:
  - Hand drawing & scanning with modifications.
  - Drawing on tablets with pens.
  - Pixton for basic comic construction.
- ❑ Learn how to choose the best method for your goals.

Handouts and slides are available at: [bit.ly/sp26-hersh-anth410](https://bit.ly/sp26-hersh-anth410)  
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# Thinking Critically about Comic Creation

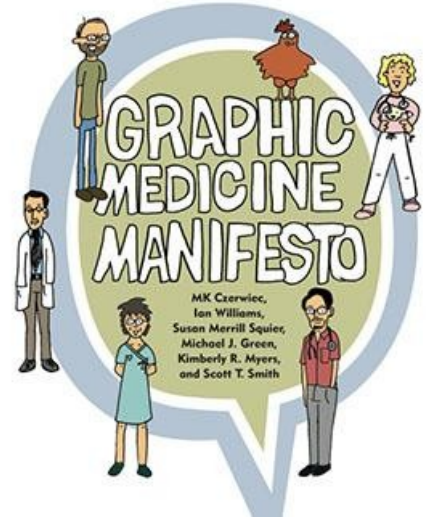
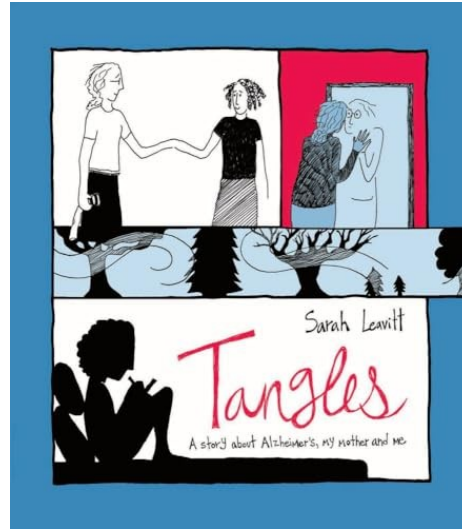
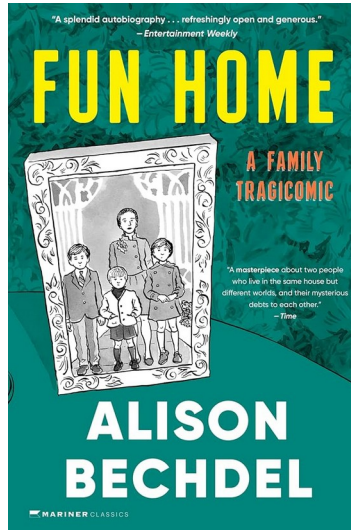
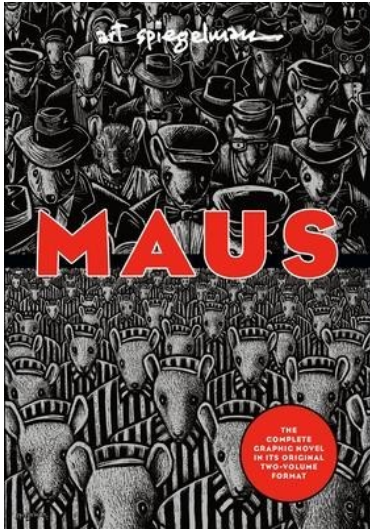
# What are comics?



See Scott McCloud's [\*Understanding Comics\*](#) to explore how the comic medium defines itself, challenges our assumptions about art and storytelling, and reveals how panels, words, and images create meaning.

# Comics' Unique Form

Because of comics' unique affordances as a visual and verbal medium, and their ability to highlight point of view, they have often been used in trauma storytelling, life writing, and the medical humanities.



# Why are you making a comic?

- ❓ Before you start drawing panels, ask yourself the following questions:
  - **What** story or idea am I trying to communicate?
  - **Who** am I speaking to, and what will keep them engaged?
  - **How** do I want the reader to move through the page, and where should their eye land first?
- ❓ Comics are a mix of visuals and text, but too many characters, backgrounds, or dialogue can easily overwhelm the audience.
  - Focus on **clarity**! Each panel should help the story move forward.
  - Think of your comic as a **guided path**; you need to guide your reader through the story from panel to panel.

# Key Considerations:

- ❑ What's the central message or theme?
- ❑ Who will read this comic?
- ❑ How will your panels be arranged?
- ❑ How will words and visuals work together?
- ❑ Will you use hand-drawn sketches, digital art, or a comic-building tool?
- ❑ Is the text large and legible?
- ❑ How much time do you have? What tools are available? What is realistic for your timeline?

# Three Approaches to Digital Comics



# Hand Drawing + Scanning + Modifications (1/2)

- ❑ Creating panels on paper using traditional drawing materials allows you to create comics using your personal style.
- ❑ Scanners (or smartphone scanning apps like CamScanner) convert your drawing into digital files (PDF, PNG, or JPEG)
- ❑ Image-editing software (such as Photoshop or Canva) allows you to enhance your drawings and add graphics or text to your comic.



# Hand Drawing + Scanning + Modifications (2/2)

## Strengths

- ❑ The process is easy for those already comfortable with sketching.
- ❑ Can be combined with digital elements such as photos, graphics, or text.
- ❑ No need for advanced digital drawing skills to get started.

## Limitations

- ❑ Time-intensive (drawing + scanning + editing).
- ❑ Less flexibility for quick edits once scanning is completed.
- ❑ Free versions of Canva, Photoshop, and CamScanner have limits.

*Feel free to ask questions at any point during the presentation!*

# Tablet and Stylus Tools (1/2)

- ❑ Drawing tablets (such as iPads with Apple Pencil, Wacom) let you sketch directly into a digital format.
- ❑ Digital art apps (Procreate, IbisPaint, Illustrator, Krita) provide brushes, layers, and effects for flexible design.
- ❑ Export options (PNG, PDF, PSD) make it easy to share, revise, or integrate drawings into larger projects.



# Tablet and Stylus Tools (2/2)

## Strengths

- ❑ No scanning required; exports as PNG, PDF, PSD.
- ❑ Apps like Procreate offer advanced tools for a polished touch.
- ❑ Layers allow for easy editing and rearranging.

## Limitations

- ❑ Tablets, pens, and paid apps can be expensive if not already owned.
- ❑ Steep learning curve for students unfamiliar with digital art software.
- ❑ Files can be large and harder to share.

*Feel free to ask questions at any point during the presentation!*

# Pixton (Comic Building Software) (1/2)

- ❑ Pixton is a web-based tool that allows users to build comics using drag-and-drop panels, characters, and backgrounds.
- ❑ It provides built-in templates for characters, expressions, poses, and dialogue balloons, with customization options for style and layout.
- ❑ Finished comics can be exported or shared digitally.



# Pixton (Comic Building Software) (2/2)

## Strengths

- ❑ No drawing skills are required, making it very beginner-friendly.
- ❑ Customization options let students adjust characters, poses, and expressions.
- ❑ Works in-browser, so no special equipment or downloads are needed.

## Limitations

- ❑ Free version restricts features and export options.
- ❑ Dialogue-heavy panels can feel cluttered in templates.
- ❑ Limited flexibility for complex or detailed artwork; not ideal for students seeking full artistic control.

*Feel free to ask questions at any point during the presentation!*

# AI Considerations with Pixton

- ❓ Pixton is a comic creation platform that uses AI to generate comics, which sometimes draw on the likeness of real-life people or copyrighted characters.
- ❓ This raises concerns about intellectual property, originality, and ethical responsibility.
- ❓ Ensure proper credit and attribution are given to all media.

For more information on copyright and reuse, please see:

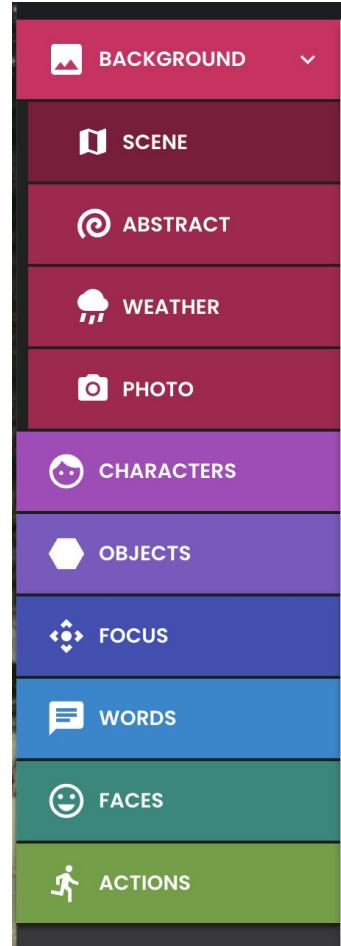
[DITI Handout on Copyright & Fair Use](#)

# Building your comic in Pixton



# Pixton vocabulary

- ❓ **Panels:** the frames that structure your comic.
- ❓ **Characters:** customizable people/figures with adjustable poses and expressions.
- ❓ **Backgrounds:** preset locations or scenes you can drop behind panels.
- ❓ **Speech/Thought Bubbles:** text containers to show dialogue or inner voice.
- ❓ **Props:** extra objects you can insert to add context.



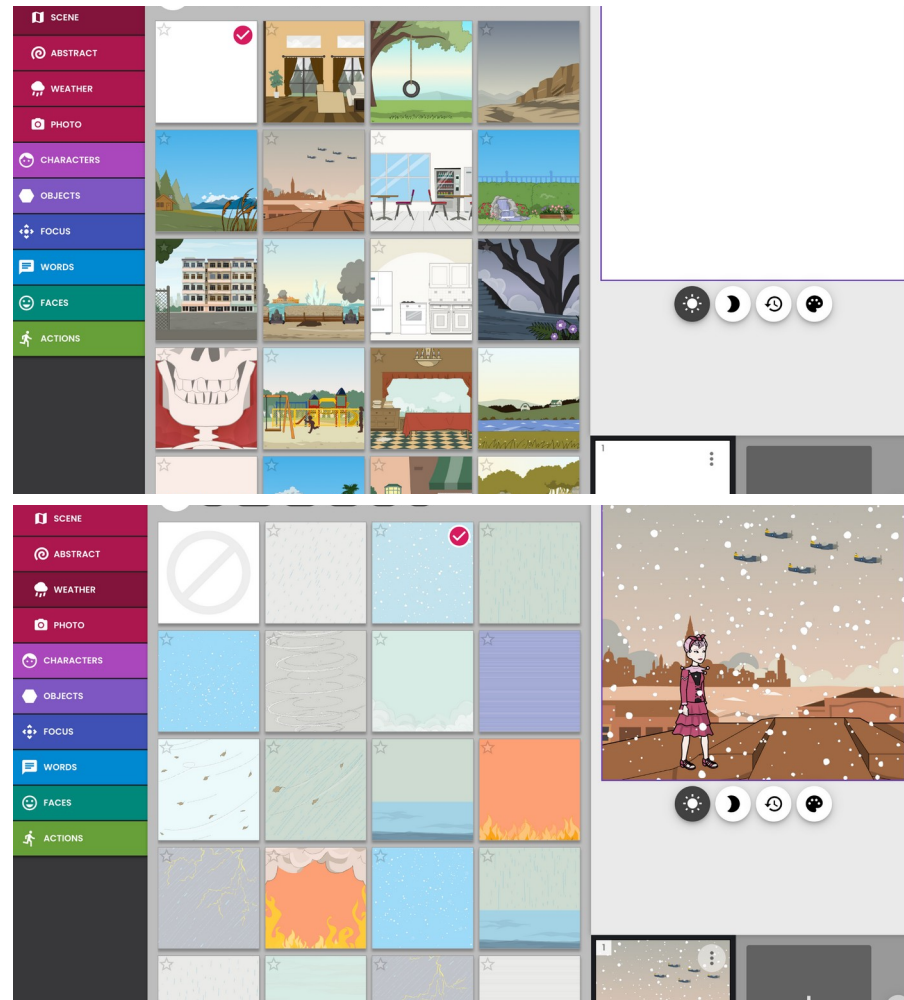
# Getting started

- ? Go to **pixton.com**.
- ? Create an account (Google sign-in works).
- ? Select **+New Comic** to start a project.

The screenshot shows the Pixton website homepage with a blue background. At the top, there are links for 'FRANÇAIS' and 'ESPAÑOL', and a 'LOG IN' button. The main heading reads 'Bring out the storyteller in everyone'. Below this, a text block says 'Show what you know and express how you feel through comic creation with authentic avatars. Try it free!'. There are two red-outlined buttons: 'EDUCATOR SIGNUP' and 'STUDENT SIGNUP'. A yellow box with a comic strip image and speech bubbles says 'Click around this comic to randomly explore'. Below this, there's a section for 'Proven to work' featuring an 'ESSA Level 2 Evidence' badge and a 'RESEARCH-BASED DESIGN' badge. At the bottom, there are several award logos including 'AASL BEST Level 2 Evidence' and 'Pixton named Best Digital Tool for Teaching & Learning by the AASL'. A small yellow question mark icon is in the bottom right corner.

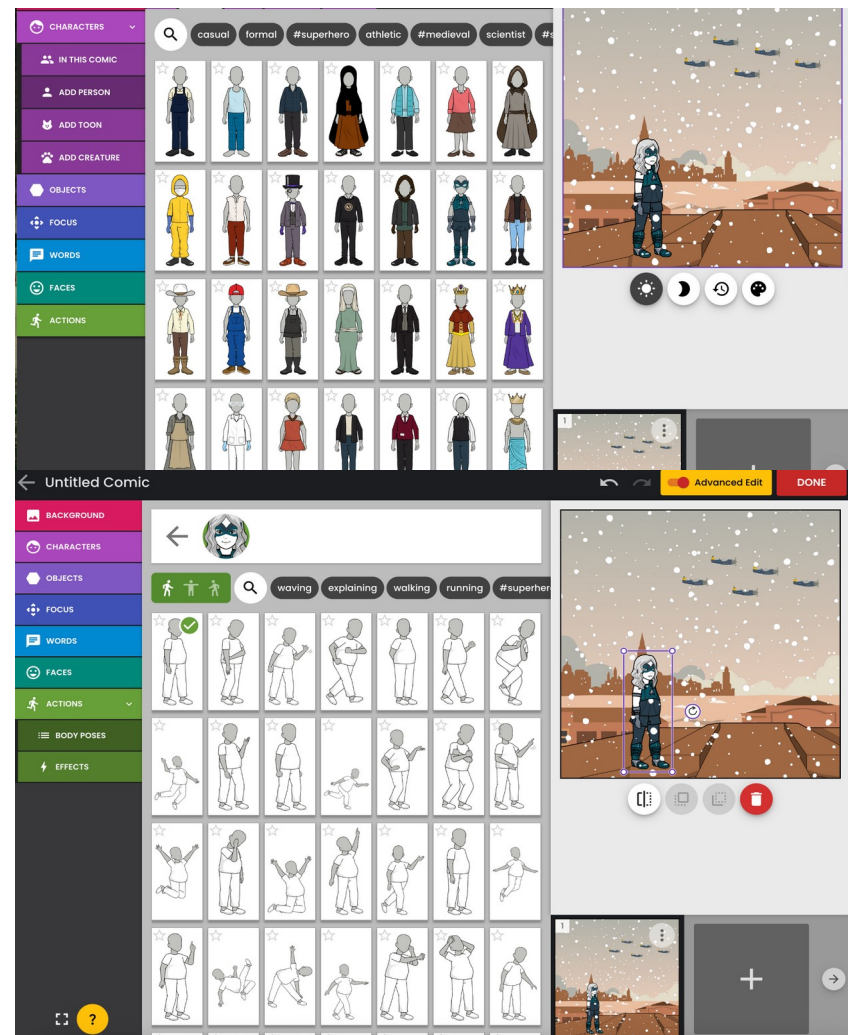
# Choosing Background

- ❓ Select **Background** from the left menu.
- ❓ Browse by category (#nature, #school, #scifi, etc.).
- ❓ Click on “Weather” to add weather elements like snow and wind.
- ❓ Click to apply.
- ❓ **Tip:** Keep backgrounds simple so they don’t distract from characters/text.



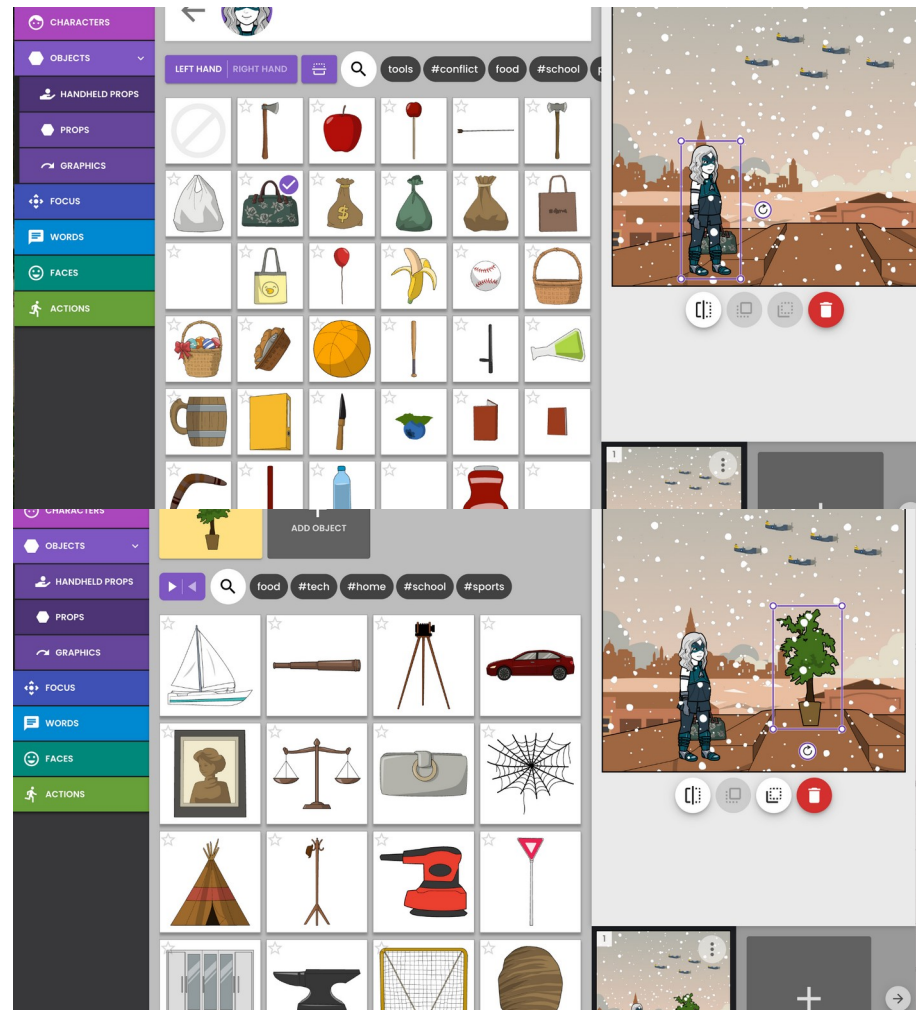
# Choosing Characters

- ❓ Choose **Characters** from the left menu.
- ❓ Customize hair, skin, clothing, and more.
- ❓ Drag into your panel and adjust position.
- ❓ Click on the character to adjust their body position.
- ❓ Click on **In this Comic** and **Edit Character** to customize their appearance (clothing, skin tone, hair style, hair color).
- ❓ **Tip:** Start with one or two characters per panel to keep it readable.



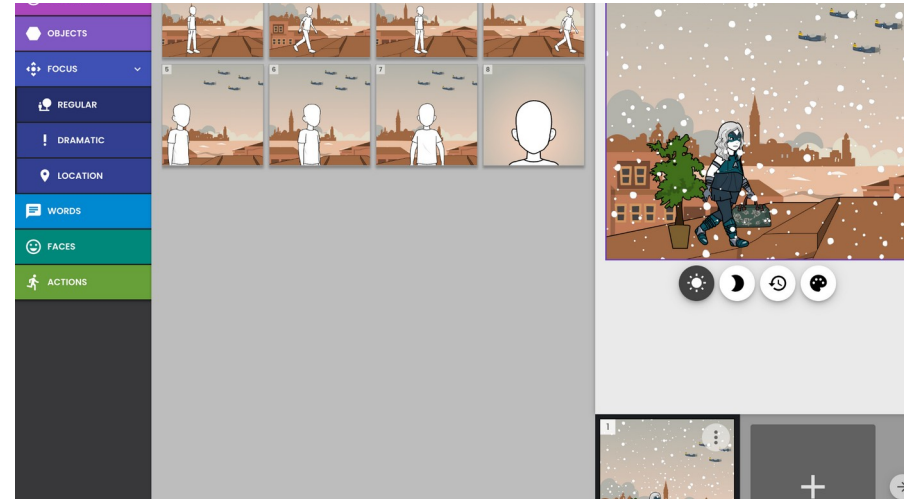
# Adding Objects

- ❓ The **Objects** menu allows you to add objects into your panel.
- ❓ Categories include **Props, Handheld Props, and Graphics** (e.g., boats, cameras, clothing, tools).
- ❓ Search bar and hashtags (#food, #tech, #home, #school, #sports) help filter objects quickly.
- ❓ Click any object to drop it into your panel; resize and reposition as needed.



# Adding Focus (1/2)

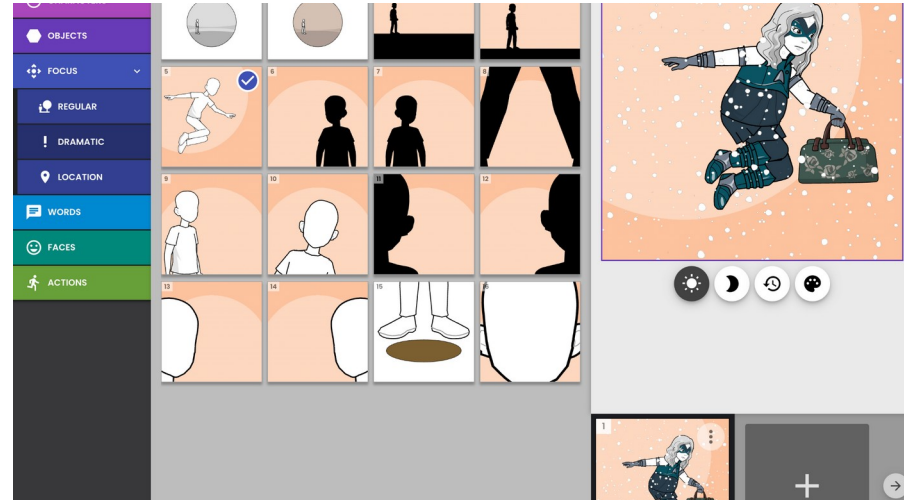
- ❓ The **Focus** adjusts how the reader's eye is drawn in a panel.
- ❓ Options include:
  - **Regular:** standard zoom or framing.
  - **Dramatic:** close-ups or angles that emphasize tension.
  - **Location:** wide shots that highlight the setting.





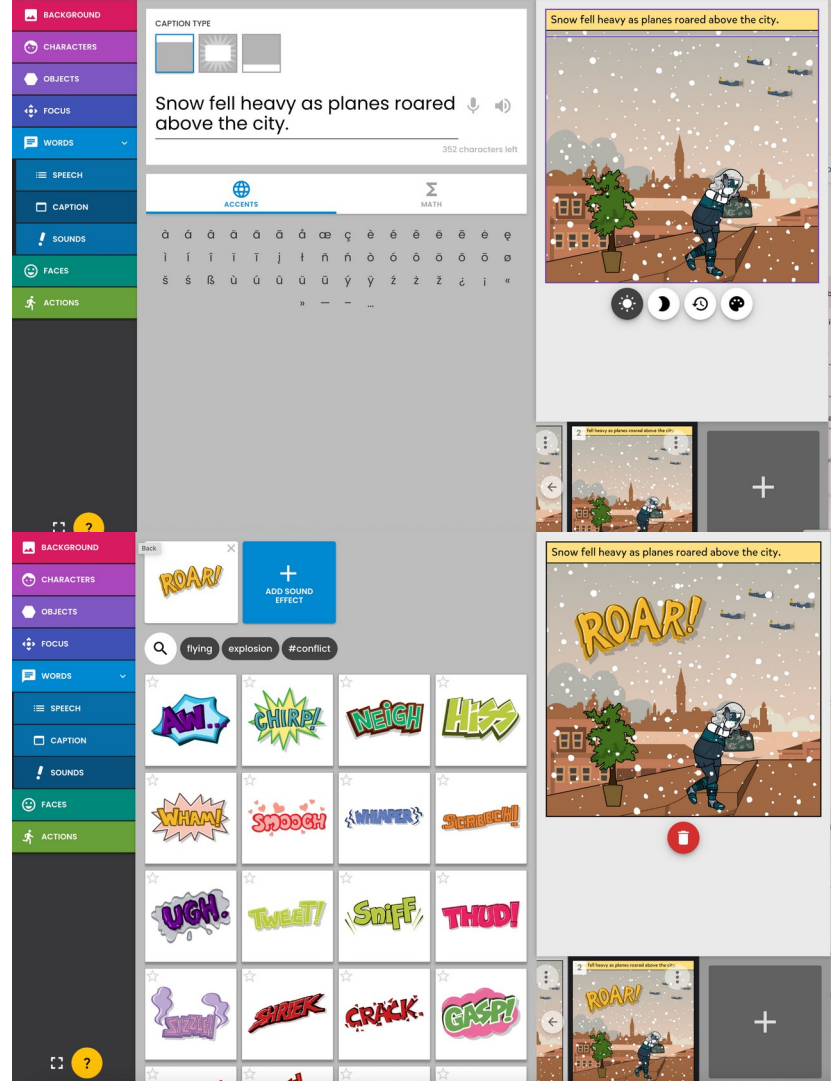
# Adding Focus (2/2)

- ❓ Each option changes panel composition.
- ❓ Focus can shift mood: zooming in adds intensity, while wide shots slow the pacing.
- ❓ **Tip:** Use close-ups for emotions or important details and wide shots for establishing the scene.



# Adding Words

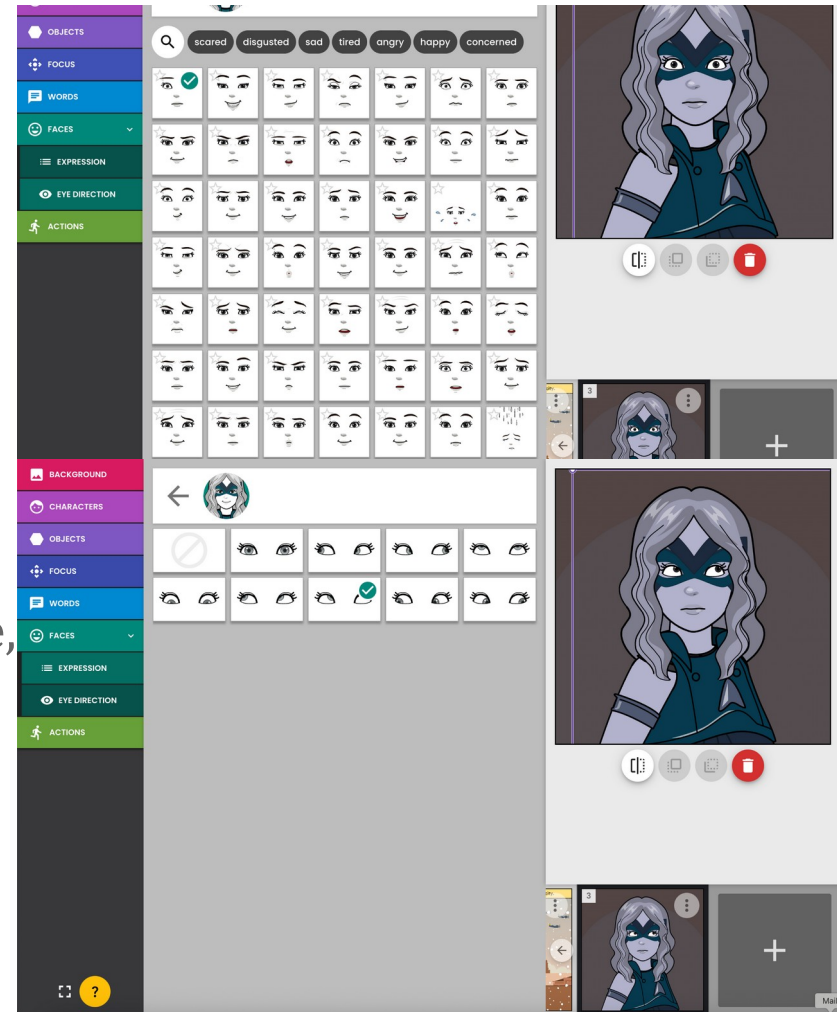
- ❑ The **Words** section allows you to add text to your comics.
- ❑ Options include:
  - **Speech:** dialogue between characters (speech bubbles).
  - **Caption:** narration, scene-setting, or time markers.
  - **Sounds:** onomatopoeia like *BANG!* or *WHOOSH!* to show action.
- ❑ Text box appears at the top; type your dialogue or narration.





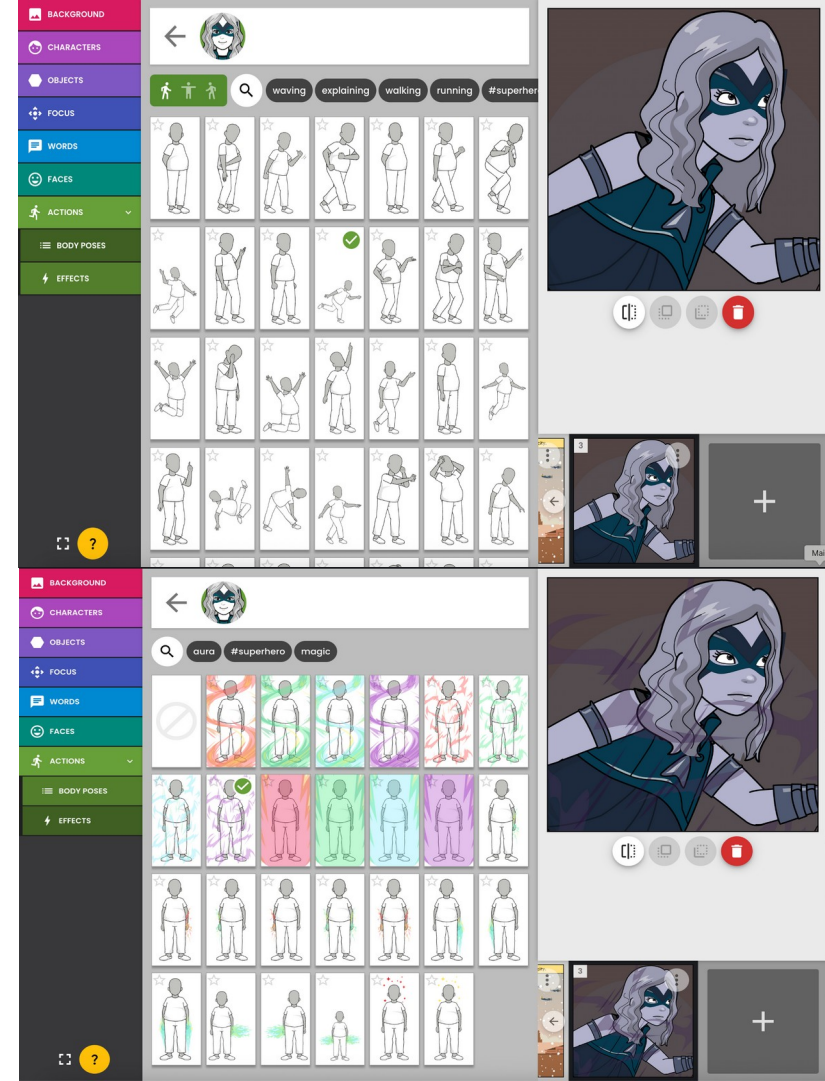
# Modifying Expressions

- ❑ The **Faces** menu lets you change your character's emotion.
- ❑ Options include happiness, sadness, anger, fear, surprise, confusion, and more.
- ❑ Facial expressions work together with body poses to show mood and tone.
- ❑ Subtle changes (eyebrows, mouth shape, eyes) can completely shift how a scene feels.
- ❑ Expressions reduce the need for extra



# Modifying Actions

- ❓ The **Actions** menu controls body poses and movement.
- ❓ Options include sitting, standing, pointing, running, waving, fighting, and more.
- ❓ Combine actions with facial expressions for clear storytelling.
- ❓ Actions can show what's happening without extra words.
- ❓ Helps vary panels so characters don't look static or stiff.



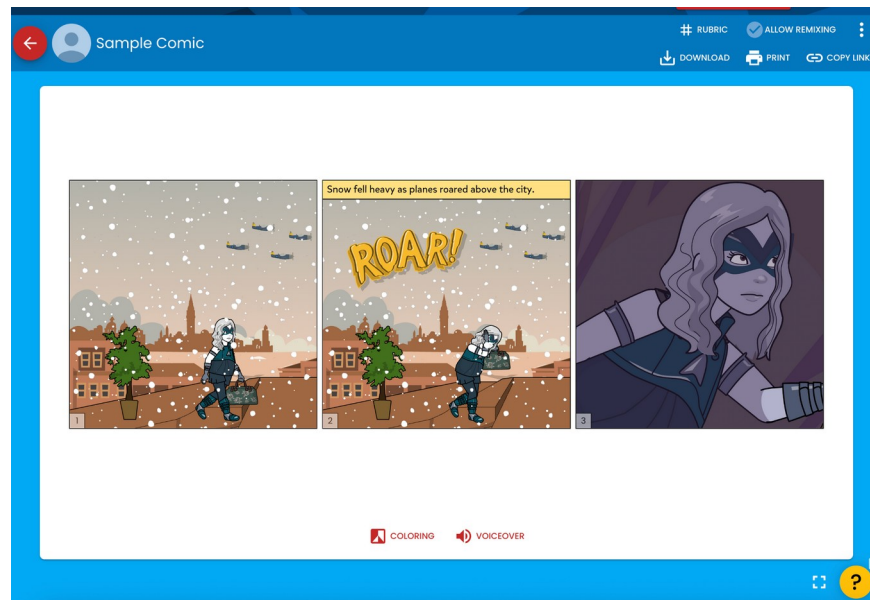
# Exporting & Sharing Your Comic

## ? Download Options:

- Export as PNG image (default format).
- **Choose layout:** vertical strip, horizontal strip, full-page, or ZIP of individual panels.

? **Print:** comics can be printed directly from Pixton.

? **Copy Link:** share a live Pixton link with classmates or teachers.



# Best Practices for Digital Comic Creation

# Presentation and Design

- ❑ **Always remember your audience** and think about how you want your story to connect with them.
- ❑ Use the “Preview” option to **check how your comic flows** from panel to panel.
- ❑ More isn’t necessarily better. You want your comic to be **easy to read, engaging, and visually clear**.
- ❑ Pick a panel layout and style that **fits the story** you’re telling.
- ❑ Design choices should be guided by the narrative, not just decoration.
- ❑ This is particularly important for accessibility.

# Accessibility Considerations

- ❑ For maximum readability, **keep dialogue short and use high-contrast text** and backgrounds.
- ❑ Use **clear, sans-serif fonts** (like Arial and Verdana) and avoid overly stylized or compressed lettering.
- ❑ Ensure **text is large enough**, with sufficient line spacing and letter spacing.
- ❑ Consider using **arrows, numbering, or bolded words** to help guide attention.
- ❑ Be mindful of how groups are depicted visually and in dialogue.

# Discussion Questions

- ❑ How might digital platforms change the way comics are circulated, owned, or remixed?
- ❑ What should creators keep in mind when representing cultures or identities different from their own?
- ❑ What can we do to reduce barriers so that diverse audiences can enjoy and understand our work?

# For further exploration

[Handout: Accessibility in Digital Content](#)

[Handout: Copyright and Fair Use](#)

[Handout: Data Privacy](#)



# Thank you!

— Taught by DITI Fellows Shannon Peifer & Mel Williams

—Developed by Mel Williams, Zhen Guo, Emily Sullivan, Shannon Peifer, & Dipa Desai

- ❑ For more information on the DITI, please see: <https://bit.ly/diti-about>
- ❑ Schedule an appointment with us! <https://bit.ly/diti-meeting>
- ❑ If you have any questions, contact us at: [nulab.info@gmail.com](mailto:nulab.info@gmail.com)
- ❑ We'd love your feedback! Please fill out a short survey here: <https://bit.ly/diti-feedback>