

Introduction to Digital Comics

Digital Integration Teaching Initiative (DITI)

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ANTH 3441- Medical Anthropology

Fall 2025, Professor Carie Hersh

Workshop Agenda

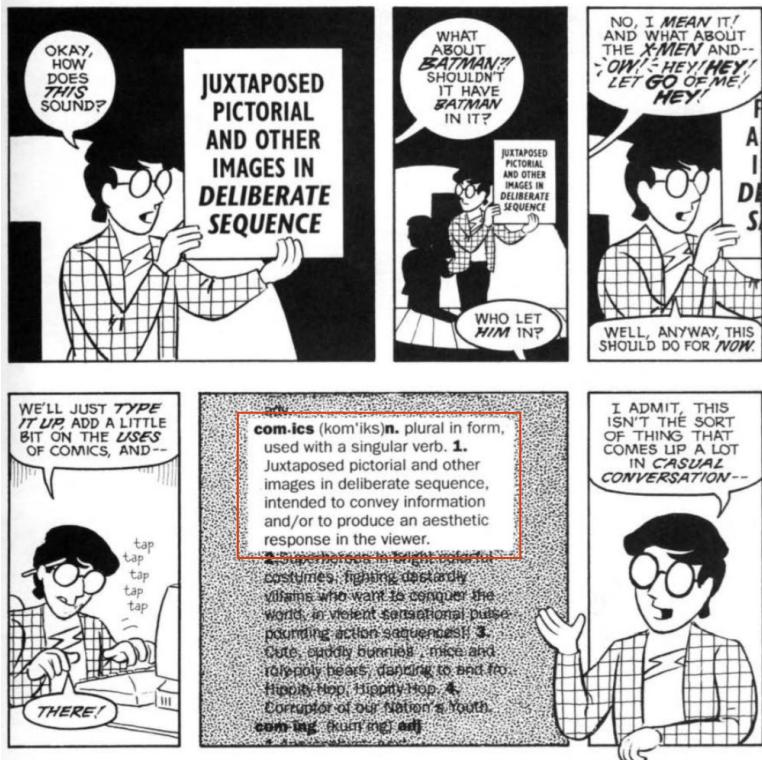
- Understand best practices for digital comic creation.
- Explore three approaches:
 - Hand drawing & scanning with modifications.
 - Drawing on tablets with pens.
 - Pixton for basic comic construction.
- Learn how to choose the best method for your goals.

Handouts and slides are available at:

<http://bit.ly/3VSGPKK>

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.

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

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.



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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.

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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.



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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.

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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.

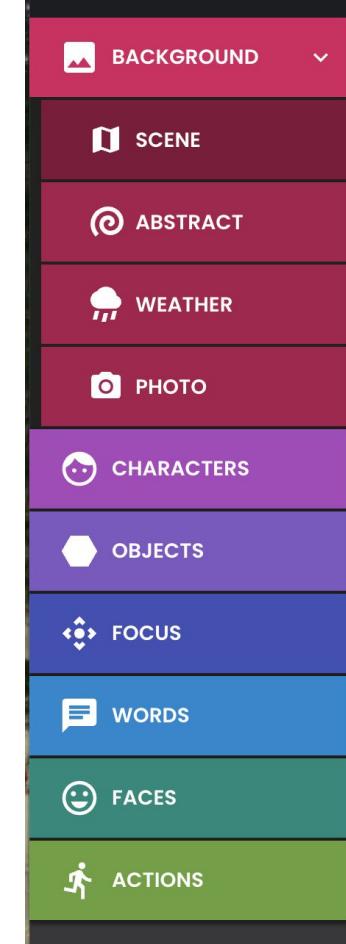
For more information on copyright and reuse, please see:

<https://bit.ly/diti-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.



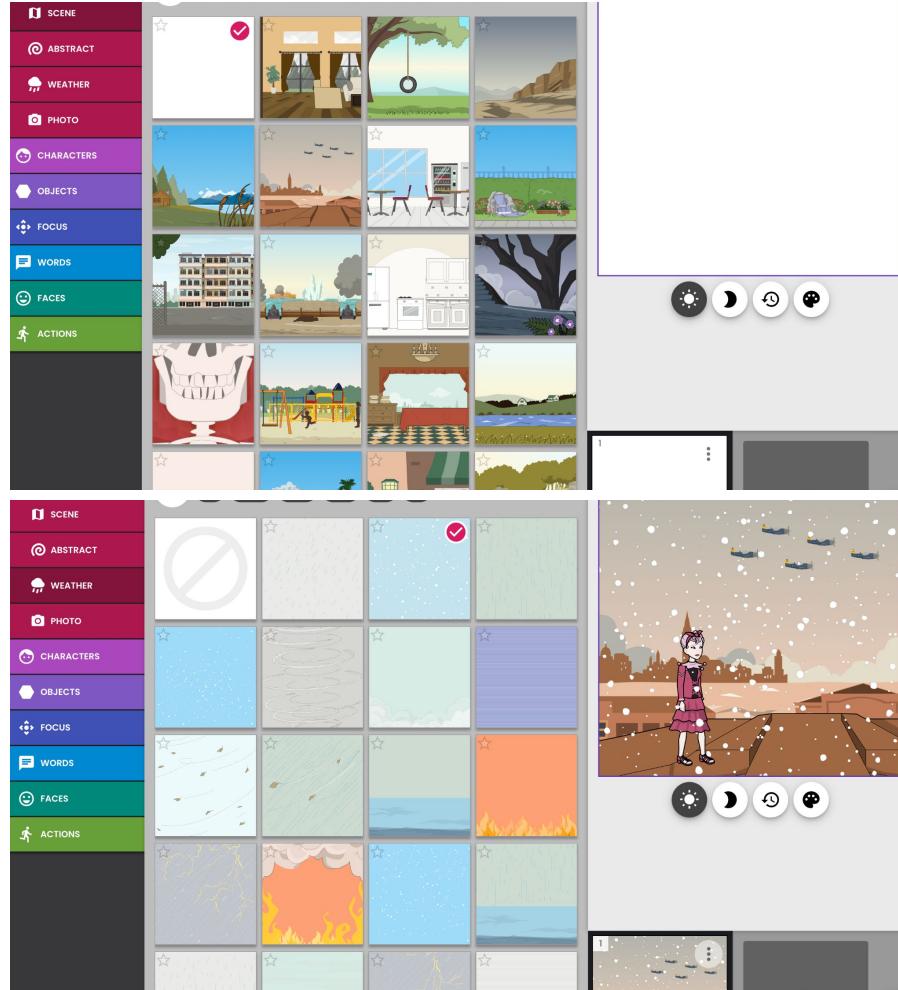
Getting started

- 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 header featuring the Pixton logo and navigation links for FRANÇAIS, ESPAÑOL, and LOG IN. The main content area features a comic strip with two characters in Egyptian-themed avatars. A yellow call-to-action button says "Click around this comic to randomly explore". To the right, a large headline reads "Bring out the storyteller in everyone". Below it, a sub-headline says "Show what you know and express how you feel through comic creation with authentic avatars. Try it free!". There are two red-bordered buttons: "EDUCATOR SIGNUP" and "STUDENT SIGNUP". A small icon of a white horse is followed by the text "Aligned with United States curriculum standards, and reading programs". At the bottom, there's a section titled "Proven to work" with icons for ESSA Level 2 Evidence and Research-Based Design, along with other achievement badges like "Common Sense Selection", "Community Impact", "Reading Award WINNER", and "TECH LEARNING BEST OF 2022 WINNER". A "SEE THE RESEARCH" button is at the bottom right, and a question mark icon is in the bottom right corner of the page.

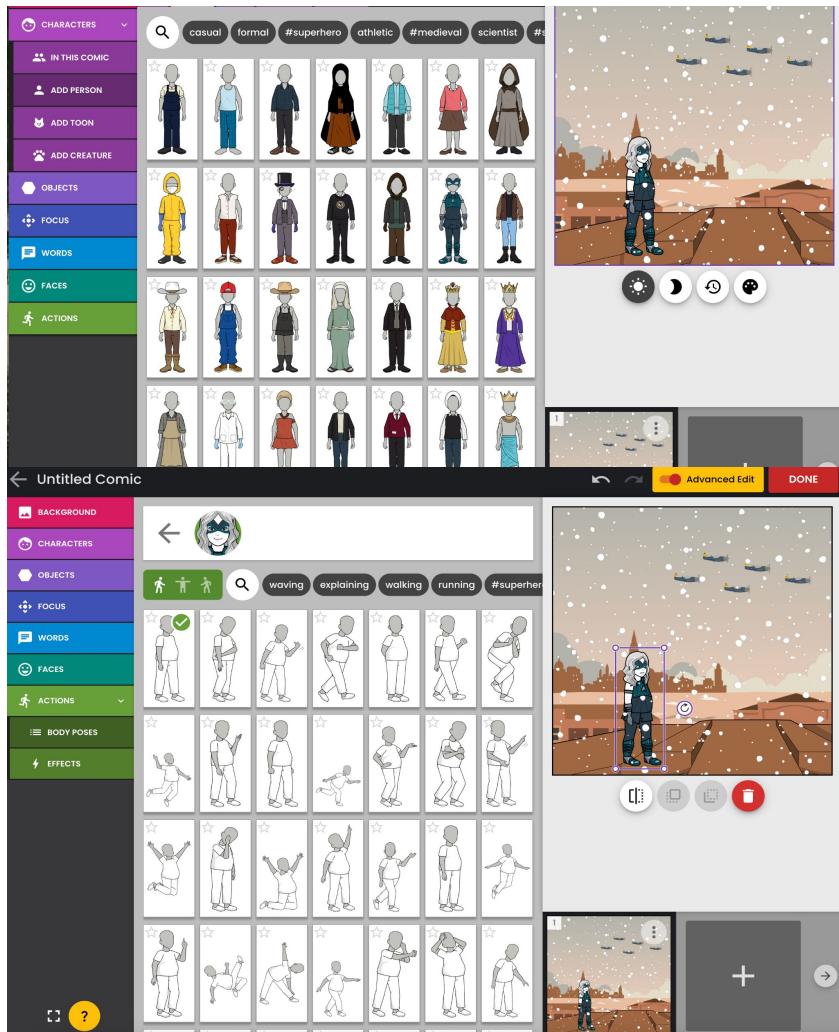
Choosing Background

- 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.



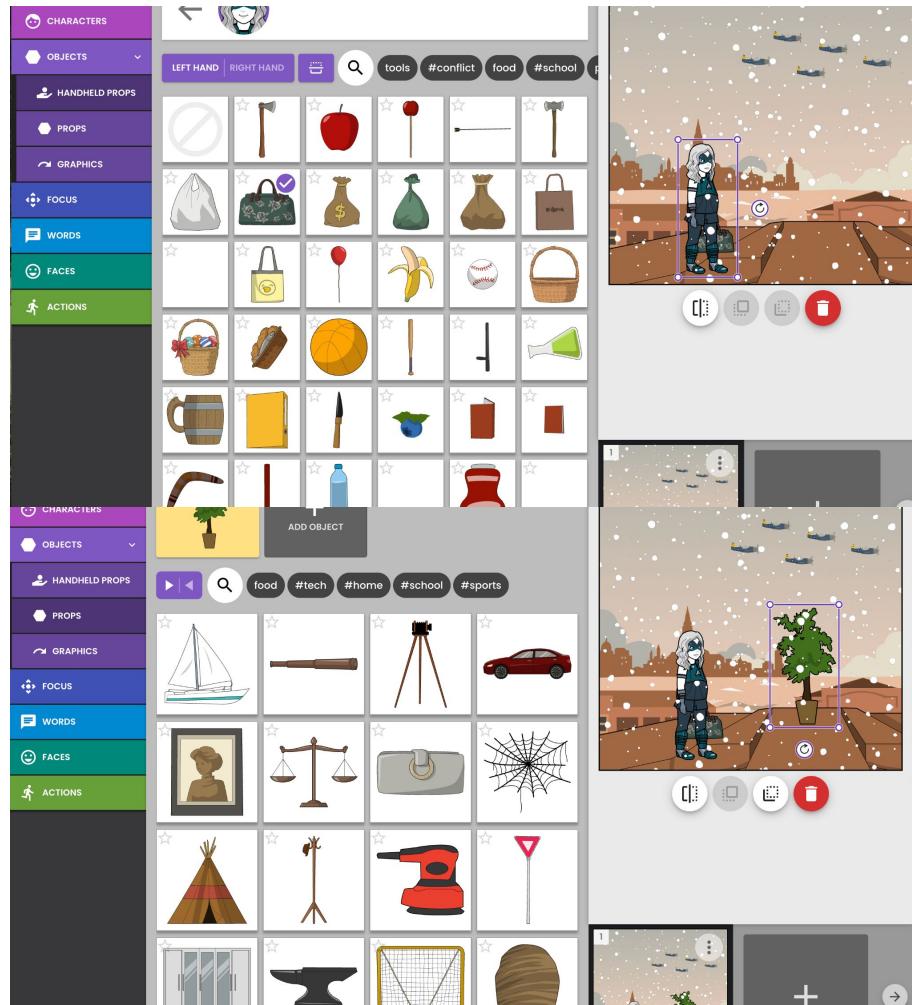
Choosing Characters

- 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.



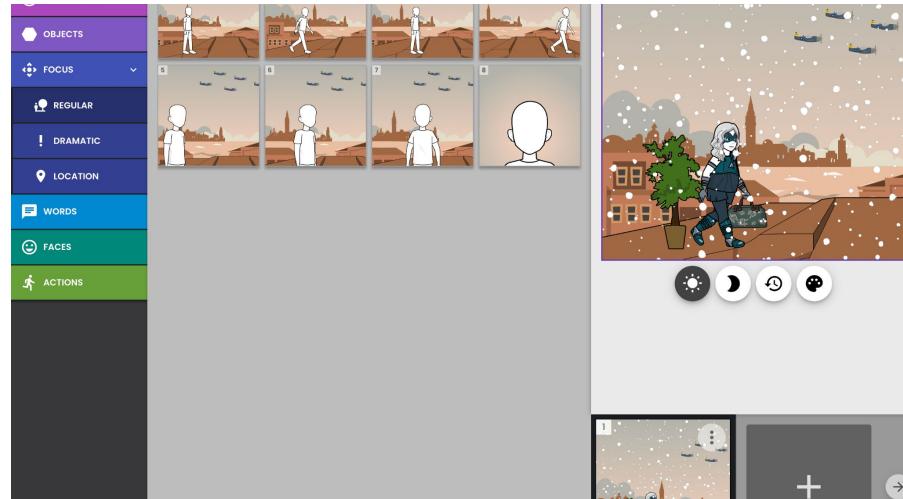
Adding Objects

- 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.



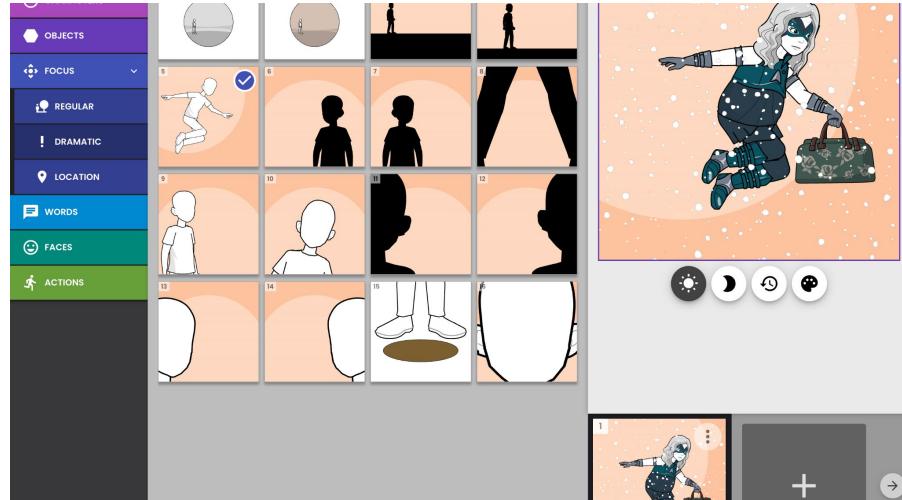
Adding Focus (1/2)

- 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.



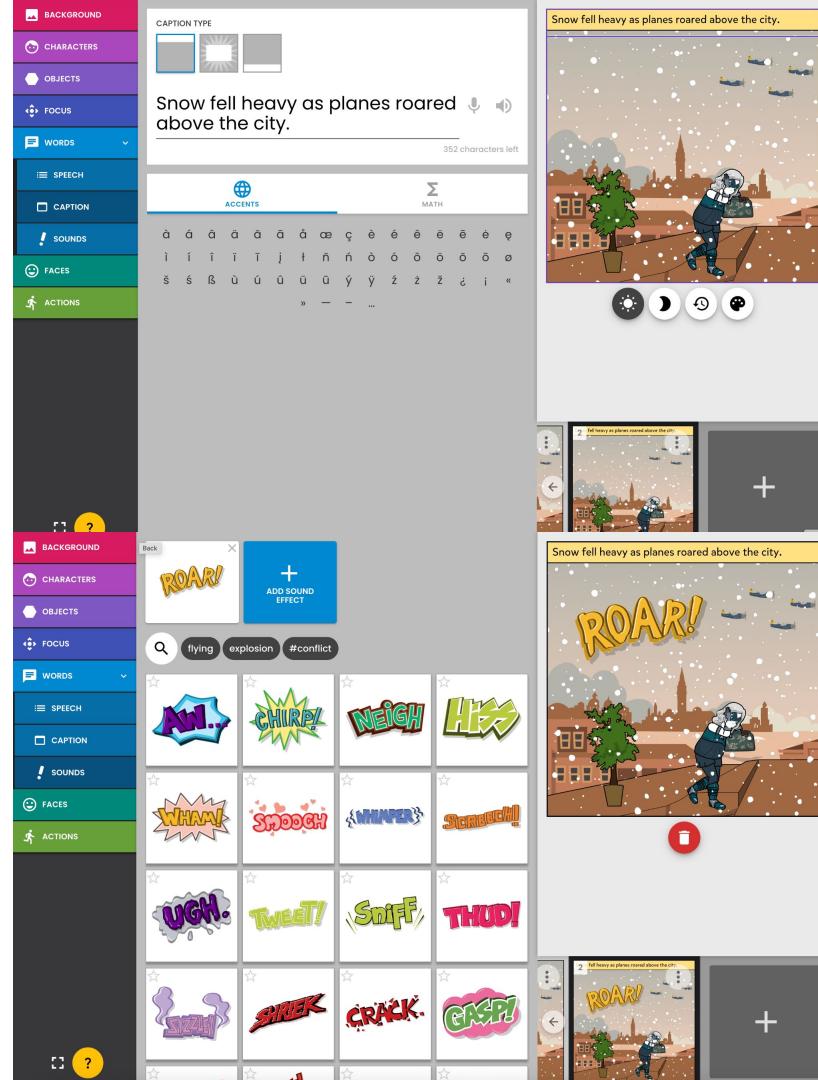
Adding Focus (2/2)

- 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.



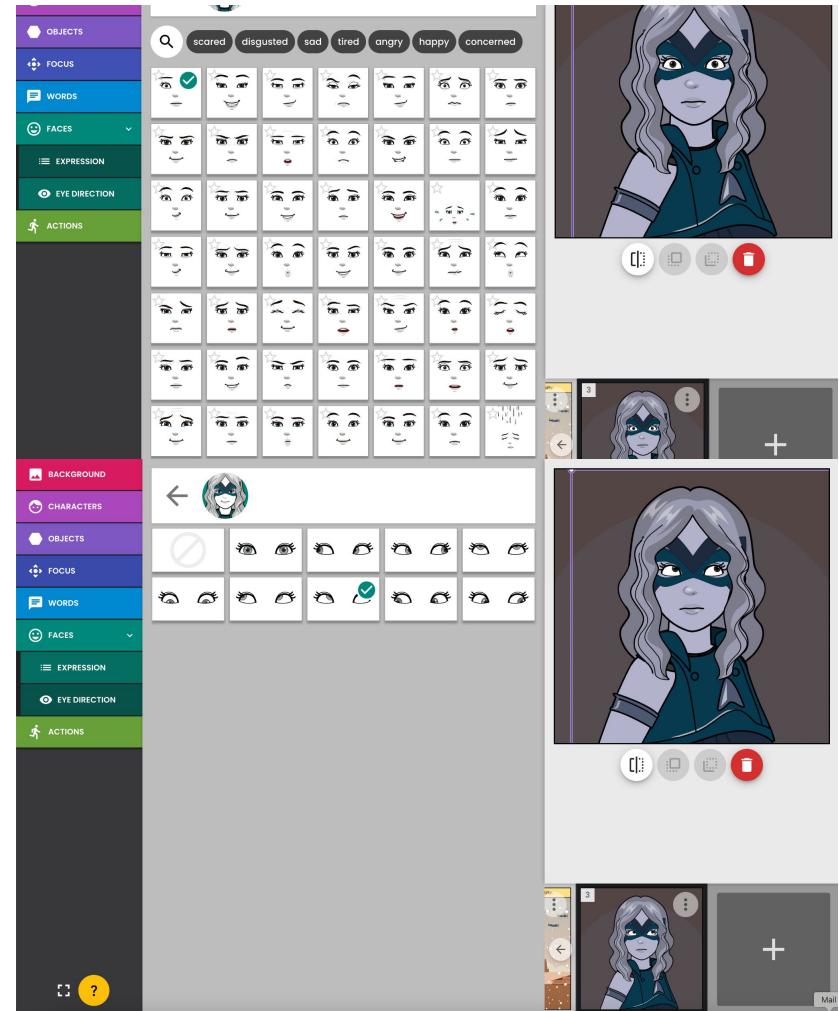
Adding Words

- 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.



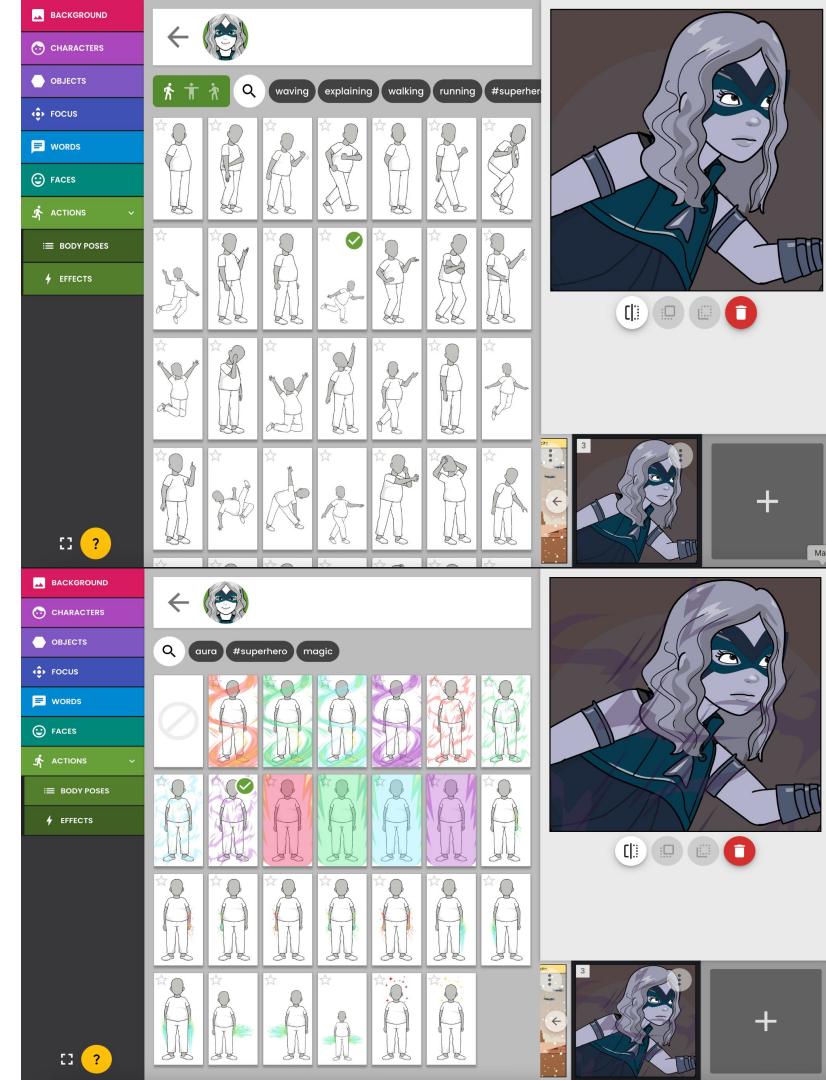
Modifying Expressions

- 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 text.



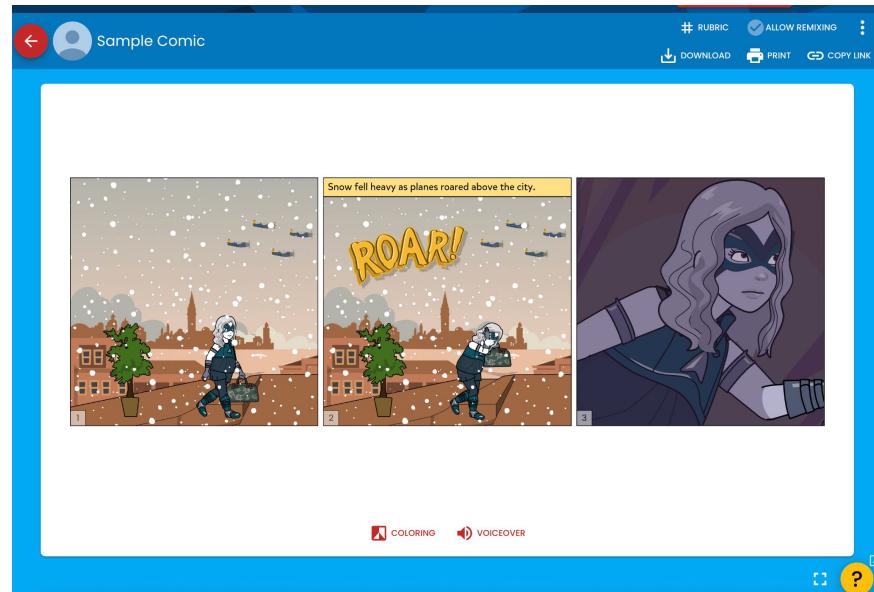
Modifying Actions

- 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 Zhen Guo and Mel Williams

— Developed by

- 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
- We'd love your feedback! Please fill out a short survey here:
<https://bit.ly/diti-feedback>