

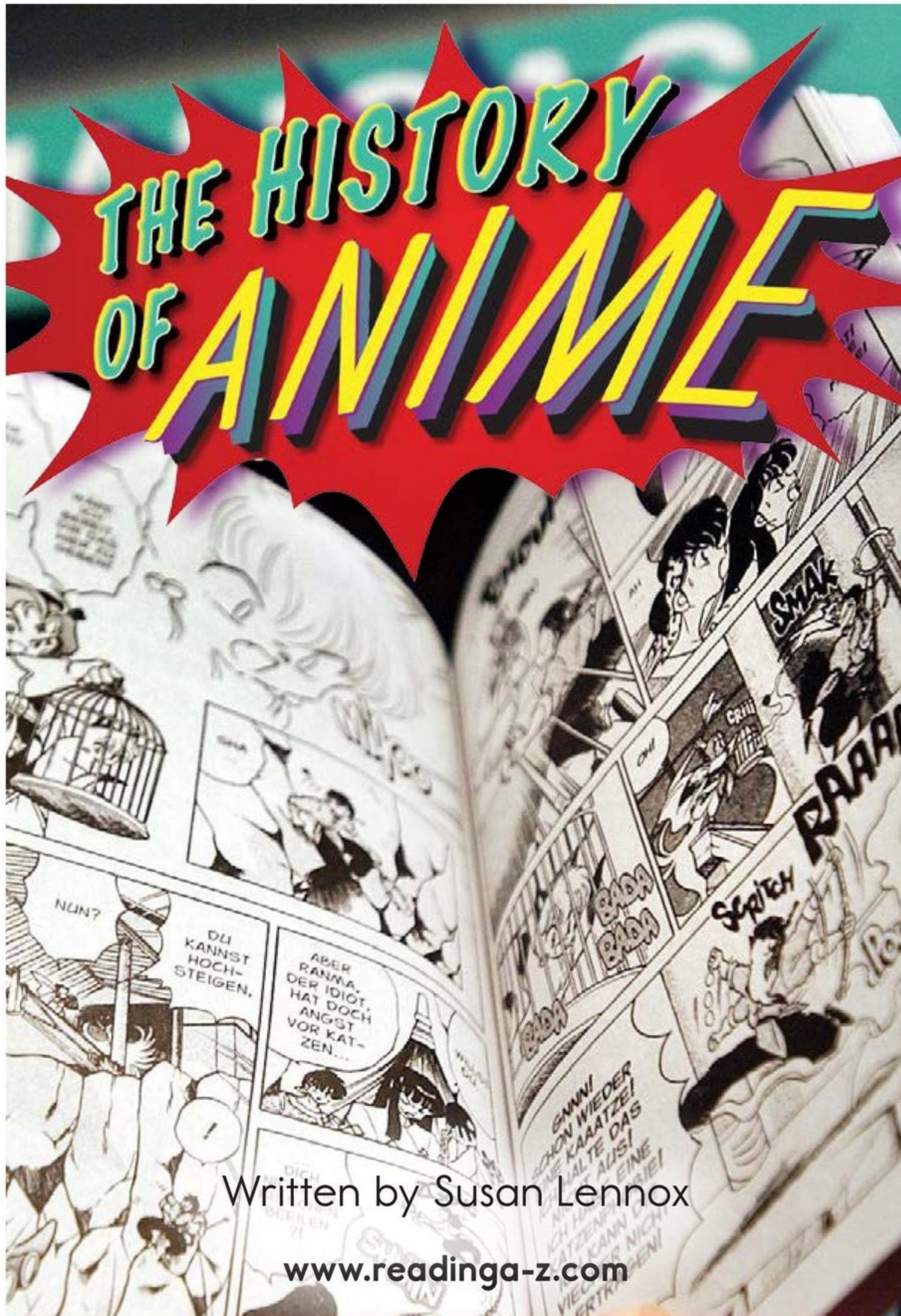
LEVELED Book • X

# THE HISTORY OF ANIME

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Written by Susan Lennox

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## Focus Question

What is anime, and how has it changed over time?

## Words to Know

animated	isolated
anime	manga
exaggerated	panels
expedition	prehistoric
forbidden	scrolls
illustrations	sequenced

Front cover: Manga artists use fine-point pens to create detail in their work.

Back cover: An Astro Boy exhibit at a Shanghai art museum opened in 2015.

Title page: Manga paperbacks in Europe are read from back to front.

Page 3: Visitors to an art exhibit in Germany can sit in front of a huge wall of anime characters.

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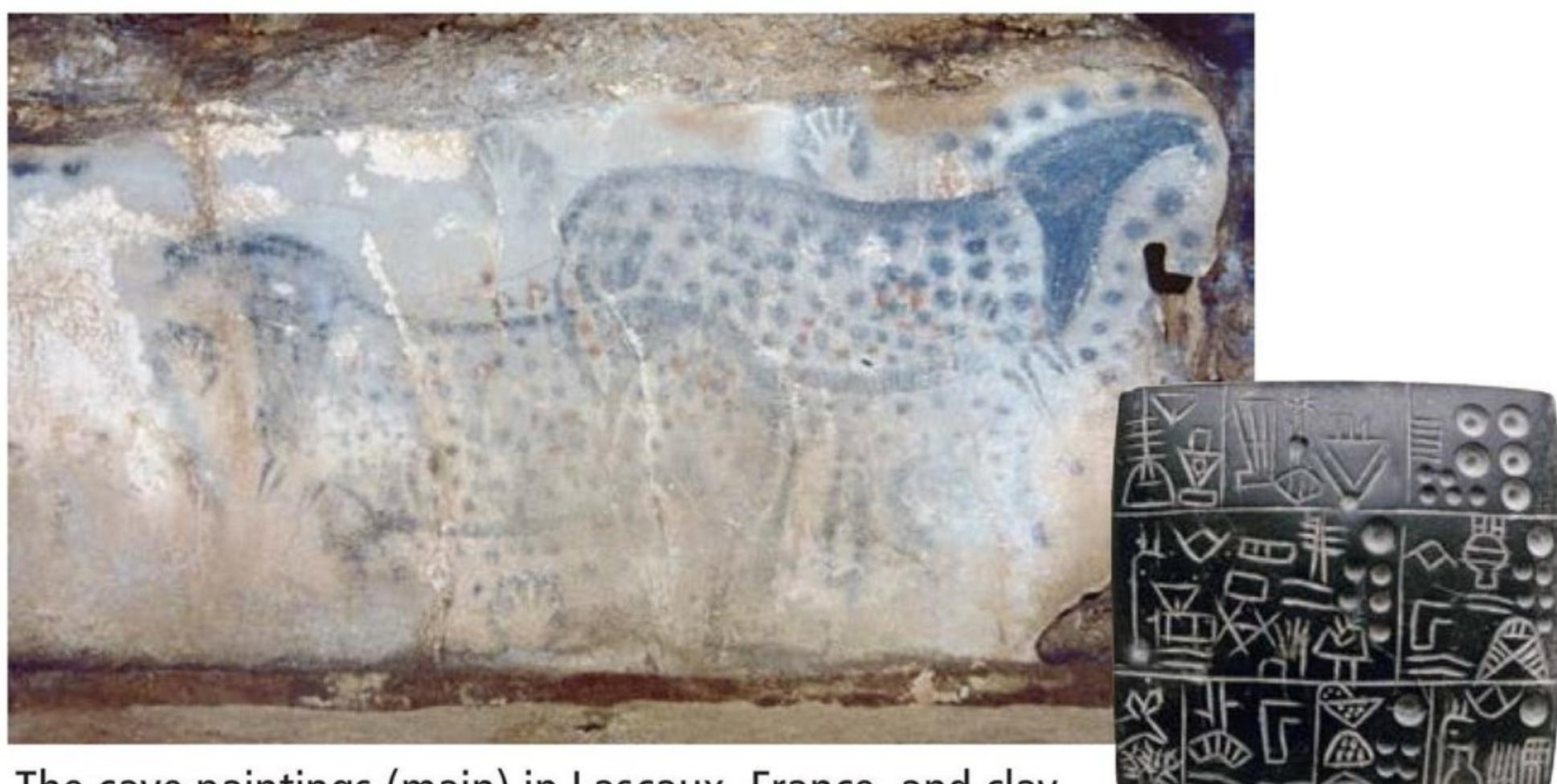
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## Introduction

Long before written words existed, there were pictures. Early people used images to tell stories. From **prehistoric** paintings on cave walls to delicate figures carved into clay, the images reflected how the artists saw themselves and the world in which they lived.

As language developed, written symbols and words became a more common way to share ideas. Art, however, continued to be an important part of storytelling. Today, images are seen not just in paintings and **illustrations** but also as moving figures in **animated** cartoons and video games.

One of the more common styles of moving art comes from the Asian island nation of Japan. Known as **anime**, it has become popular around the world.



The cave paintings (main) in Lascaux, France, and clay tablets (inset) from Mesopotamia tell ancient stories.

## Art for All

The history of anime began more than two hundred years ago. Before the nineteenth century, most Japanese artwork was done on large **scrolls**. The techniques used to make scroll art were precise and time-consuming. One method involved painting each image with a single long brushstroke. Another method required artists to carve images into a woodblock, coat the block with ink, and then press the block onto a surface to create prints. These forms of art were very expensive to create. Only wealthy people in Japan could afford to own scrolls.



Colored woodblock prints required a different block for each color. Some prints had twenty different blocks for one complete image.



One of the most famous pieces of manga art is Hokusai's illustration of the well-known fable "The Blind Men and the Elephant."

In 1814, a new art form called **manga** appeared. Manga sketches were drawn freely on sheets of paper. A printmaker named Hokusai used manga sketches to teach his students and had them make their own. The students shared their work, and the humorous images caught on with the public. Manga could be made more quickly and cheaply than scroll art. Its low cost made it available to everyone.

## Word Wise

The term *manga* is a combination of two Japanese words—*man*, meaning “curious,” and *ga*, meaning “sketches”—that together are the equivalent of the English word *cartoon*. It was first used by the artist Katsushika Hokusai to describe his own comical sketchbook drawings.

## From Curious Sketches to Comics

Japanese manga came into its own in the late 1800s. Up until the mid-1800s, Japan had been an **isolated** country. That changed in 1853 when a United States naval **expedition** forced Japan to open its ports to international trade. British and American merchants arrived soon after, bringing newspapers from home.

Japanese manga artists were influenced by the style of political cartoons and comics in Western papers. They began using similar forms, such as **sequenced story panels**, in their own art. Manga characters also adopted the more expressive features seen in Western illustrations.

By the turn of the twentieth century, manga appeared in many Japanese newspapers. Political cartoons done in manga made fun of current events. Manga comic strips entertained children and adults with simple, funny stories. More and more people enjoyed lively manga art.

Manga newspaper comic strips look like their Western counterparts.



## Cartoons Spring to Life

The new century brought with it a different type of media—motion pictures. Film studios in the United States and other Western nations began producing movies. People packed theaters to see this new form of entertainment. Motion pictures soon spread to theaters in other countries, including Japan.

The first movies were short black-and-white silent films. There was no recorded speech. Theater musicians played while the film rolled. Words appeared on the screen to explain what was happening and what the characters were saying. Since voices couldn't be recorded, actors had to find other ways to show emotion. Their performances, although silent, were quite dramatic, with **exaggerated** expressions and gestures.



Actresses in the 1917 film *Patria* use overly dramatic gestures to convey their characters' emotions.

Cartoonists around the world were fascinated with this new medium. In the United States, illustrators like Walt Disney and Max Fleischer figured out how to turn drawings into moving images. Soon, popular comic characters sprang to life on the big screen. The animated movies, like live-action movies, had no sound. Music played and cartoon characters used movement, gestures, and expressions to tell the story, just as real film actors did. These animated movies were called *shorts* because they ran less than ten minutes. Children and adults delighted in the animated shorts, which were shown before full-length feature films at movie theaters.

## Do You Know?

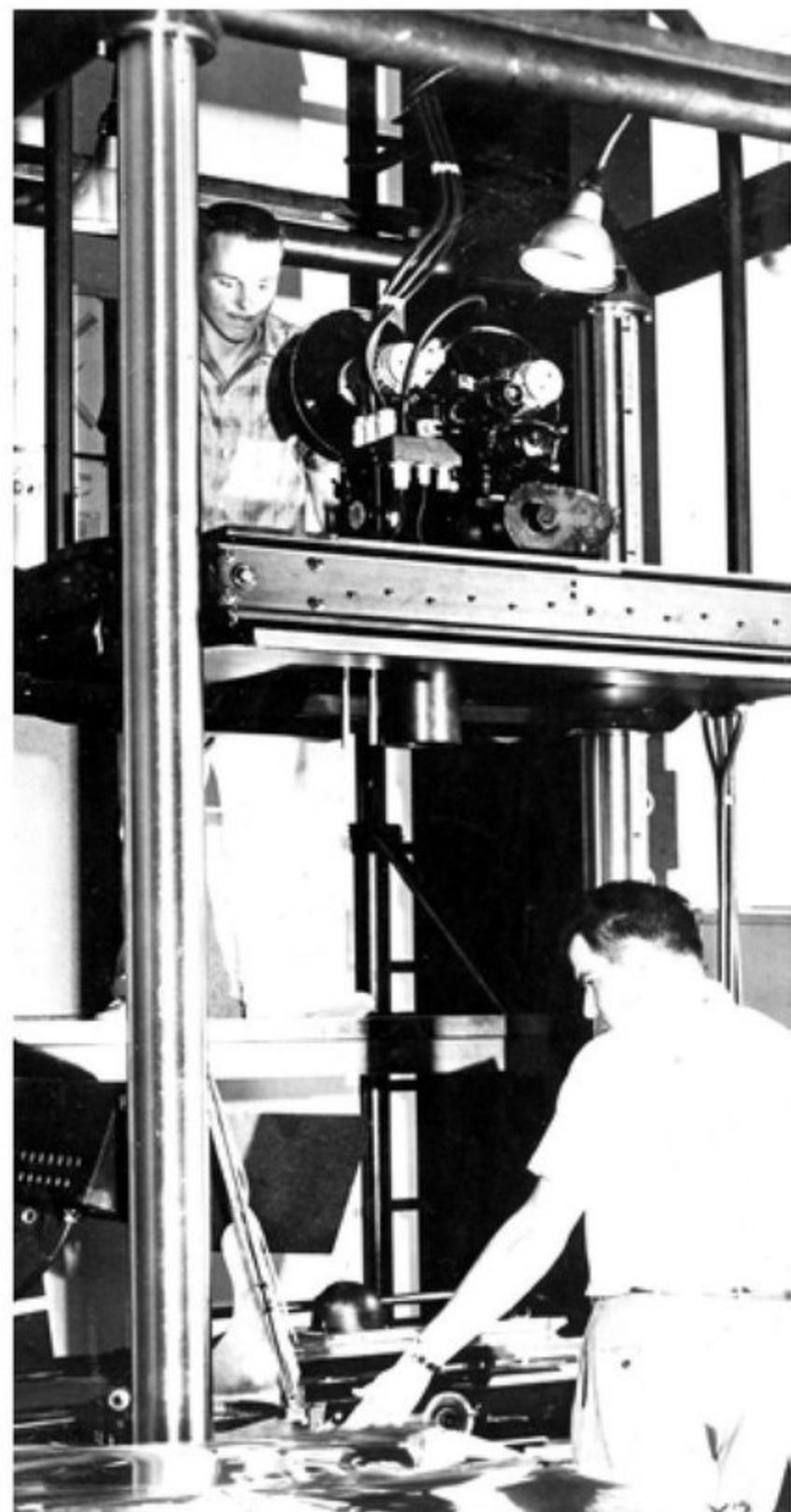
Before films and cartoons had sound tracks or recorded dialogue, music in theaters was live. Sometimes a single person played the piano along with the action on the screen. Sometimes a full orchestra played. The music served two functions. The first was to drown out the loud projector noises. The second was to keep the audience excited about what it was watching.



Soon manga artists such as Seitaro Kitayama were making Japanese animated shorts. The bold features of manga characters lent themselves to the dramatic action and expressions needed to tell stories in silent films. Japanese cartoons were called *animēshon*, based on the English word *animation*. In time, this was shortened to *anime*.

As technology improved, color and recorded speech were added to Western cartoons. During the 1930s, American cartoonists tried to make their human characters look more lifelike. This style was seen in Disney's first full-length animated movie, *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs*. This film also featured technology called *multiplane animation*. Its purpose was to make the background and action look realistic as well. Glass panels were painted with different background images and stacked on top of each other. The layered panels were moved back and forth during filming to improve depth of field and motion.

Multiplane cameras helped create the appearance of depth in animated films.



Japanese anime filmmakers added sound but did not adopt the realistic look seen in Western cartoons. Instead, they used a technique from full-length Japanese movies—long, still camera shots that suddenly shifted to close-ups for dramatic effect. Anime cartoonists also continued to draw in the black-and-white anime style that defined their work as truly Japanese.

## The Anime Look

Anime has a distinct appearance. Backgrounds are very detailed, and characters are often high energy, with exaggerated expressions and gestures. Many anime cartoons show action as viewed from different and extreme angles not used in Western cartoons.

Anime characters have prominent eyes and brightly colored hair. The eyes are especially telling in anime. Characters with large eyes are childlike and trustworthy, while smaller eyes, narrowed into a squint, indicate sneakiness. Tiny eyes reveal evil. A character's eyes don't always remain the same shape and size.

When a character is embarrassed, red lines appear across the character's nose. Scratching the back of the head makes the character seem more embarrassed. Blue lines across the face, narrowed eyes, bulging veins, or drops of sweat show anger.

Hair in anime has a unique look as well. It is often oddly styled and changes shape to convey movement and emotion.



happy sad



angry embarrassed

## The Sorrows and Lessons of War

One reason anime did not change was cost. Although background is an important part of anime, techniques such as multiplane animation were expensive. Another reason had to do with the start of World War II in 1939. When the war began, Japanese leaders sought the support of citizens. They tried to develop national pride by banning movies and cartoons made in other countries. Anything that looked foreign was **forbidden**; artists could only make art that celebrated Japanese values. Some animators refused to follow these rules and fled Japan. Others continued to create and release their art secretly. If caught, they faced punishment.

World War II ended terribly for Japan in 1945. The cities of Hiroshima and Nagasaki were destroyed by two atomic bombs. Hundreds of thousands of lives were lost. The war had a strong effect on the Japanese people and their art. The lighthearted fun of anime was replaced by more serious themes. Now free from government rules, manga and anime artists used their work to promote messages of peace, justice, and freedom.



Posters convinced the Japanese people to support their government against Japan's enemies.

Often, these messages were delivered using a new 1950s technology—television. Through television, anime found a wider audience because cartoons could now be watched at home. One of the most popular anime shows was based on a manga comic book called *Mighty Atom* drawn by Osamu Tezuka. The main character, Mighty Atom, was a robot boy with rockets for feet. In the show, he traveled the world, saving it from danger.

*Mighty Atom* became one of the most popular television shows in Japan. In the early 1960s, it became a hit series in the United States as well under a new title, *Astro Boy*.

The success of *Astro Boy* paved the way for other anime cartoon shows. Called *mecha*, the cartoons featured teens and giant robots working to save the world from monsters. *Mazinger Z* was a popular mecha in Japan during the 1970s. Its main character was a super robot made from a special metal discovered on Japan's Mount Fuji.



*Astro Boy* premiered on New Year's Day in 1963.

## Anime Today

Modern anime, like manga, has become more specialized, with characters and story lines geared toward specific audiences. *Shonen*—manga made for boys—stars male characters and has story lines that highlight action and comedy. The



*Dragon Ball Z* ran from 1989 to 2003.

popular shonen *Dragon Ball Z* first ran in Japan in 1989 and continues to be shown on television stations throughout the world.

*Shojo*—manga made for girls, at first starred female characters with story lines that focused on emotions and relationships. It eventually evolved to include more active heroines involved in romance and adventure.

The 1990s anime series *Sailor Moon* by artist Naoko Takeuchi is a classic example of shojo. It tells the story of a middle-school girl who receives special powers and becomes a guardian of Earth, protecting it from evil forces.



The Sailor Moon character is used in at least three films and thirty-nine video games.

In the 1980s and 1990s, Japanese studios began to make anime films that were hits around the world. In 1984, Hayao Miyazaki released *Nausicaä of the Valley of the Wind*, which saw great success. It told the story of a young princess who must save her planet. In 2001, the Japanese anime *Spirited Away* brought the tale of a young girl who enters the spirit world to the big screen. The director, Hayao Miyazaki, received much praise for the film, which eventually won the Academy Award for Best Animated Feature.



*Spirited Away* has earned more than \$289 million since its release in 2001.

Anime is featured in the latest twenty-first-century media, too. Favorite characters such as Astro Boy, Digimon, and Dragon Ball Z fighters spring to life in video games. Gamers control their heroes and heroines, directing them to fulfill missions at the push of a button. Just like figures from long ago, the images on the screen enact tales of adventure and daring. The dynamic characters in anime, though, take modern storytelling art to a whole new level.

## Glossary

<b>animated</b> ( <i>adj.</i> )	made from a series of drawings that are put together to give the appearance of motion (p. 4)
<b>anime</b> ( <i>n.</i> )	a Japanese animation style used in film and television (p. 4)
<b>exaggerated</b> ( <i>adj.</i> )	represented as bigger, better, or more extreme than the way something really is (p. 8)
<b>expedition</b> ( <i>n.</i> )	a journey or voyage taken for a specific purpose; a group of people who go on a journey or voyage (p. 7)
<b>forbidden</b> ( <i>adj.</i> )	not allowed (p. 12)
<b>illustrations</b> ( <i>n.</i> )	pictures or drawings used to explain or decorate books or other written material (p. 4)
<b>isolated</b> ( <i>adj.</i> )	far away from other people or things (p. 7)
<b>manga</b> ( <i>n.</i> )	Japanese comic books and illustrated novels (p. 6)
<b>panels</b> ( <i>n.</i> )	individual boxes or frames in a comic strip or comic book (p. 7)
<b>prehistoric</b> ( <i>adj.</i> )	of or relating to the time before recorded or written history (p. 4)
<b>scrolls</b> ( <i>n.</i> )	long rolls of paper or parchment that are used for writing or drawing (p. 5)
<b>sequenced</b> ( <i>adj.</i> )	having been put in a certain order (p. 7)

# The History of Anime

A Reading A-Z Level X Leveled Book  
Word Count: 1,447

## Connections

### Writing and Art

Create your own manga comic strip. Include at least five pictures in your comic strip.

### Social Studies

Make a timeline of at least five events that impacted the development of anime. Briefly describe the significance of each event.

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