

The History of Anime

A Reading A-Z Level Z1 Leveled Book
Word Count: 1,692

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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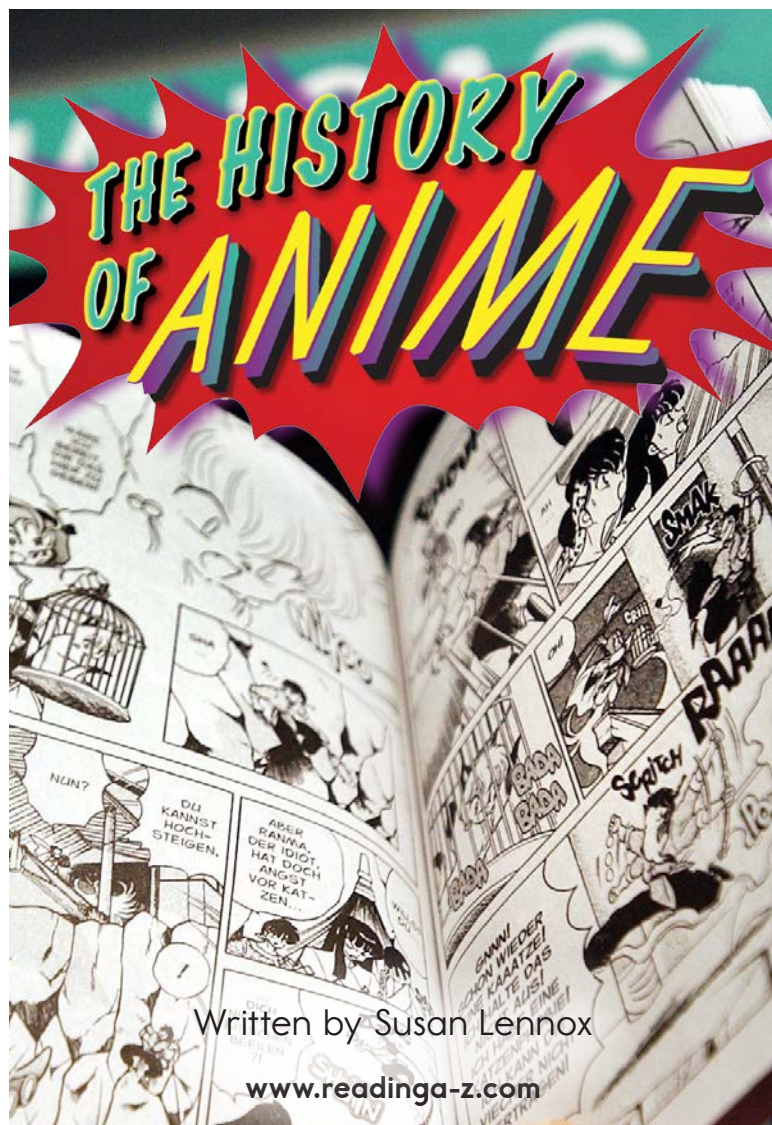
LEVELED BOOK • Z¹

THE HISTORY OF ANIME

**Multi
level
U•X•Z¹**

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Focus Question

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

Words to Know

affluent	insular
affordable	intrigued
animated	manga
anime	plied
censored	synchronize
flocked	traditional

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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Correlation

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

Introduction

Long before written words existed, there were pictures. Many ancient cultures used images to tell stories. From prehistoric paintings on cave walls to delicate figures carved into clay, the art's style reflected how these ancient artists saw themselves and the world in which they lived.

As language developed, written symbols and words soon became a more common way to record and relay ideas. Art, however, continued to be an important element in storytelling.

Today, images are featured not just as paintings and illustrations but also as moving figures in media such as movies, **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 is incredibly popular worldwide.

Art for All

The history of anime stretches back more than two hundred years. Before the nineteenth century, most **traditional** 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 reverse images into a woodblock, cover the images with a heavy coat of ink, and then press the block onto a surface to create prints. The complicated and lengthy processes made artwork quite expensive. Only wealthy people in Japan could afford to own and enjoy scroll art.



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

In 1814, a new art form called **manga** appeared. Manga sketches were drawn freehand on sheets of paper. A famous printmaker named Hokusai used manga sketches to teach his students and encouraged them to draw their own. They began sketching and sharing their work with others,

and the humorous images caught on with the public. The ease and speed with which manga illustrations could be produced made them a much more **affordable** form of art. Unlike traditional scrolls, manga was accessible to all Japanese people, not just **affluent** art patrons.

From Curious Sketches to Comics

Japanese manga came into its own in the late 1800s. Up until the mid-1800s, Japan had been a secluded country that had minimal interaction with other nations. That changed when an 1853 United States naval expedition forced Japan to open its ports to international trade. By 1858, commercial ships **plied** the waters of the Pacific, carrying goods to and from six Japanese ports. The ships also carried British and American merchants to the **insular** island nation and brought along newspapers and magazines from their homelands.

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.

Japanese manga artists were **intrigued** by the style of political cartoons and comics in these publications. They began to apply Western forms, such as the use of sequenced story panels, to their own art. Soon manga characters had some of the expressive features seen in Western illustrations.

By the turn of the twentieth century, manga appeared regularly in Japanese newspapers. Political cartoons done in manga poked fun at current events.

Manga comic strips entertained children and adults with simple, humorous stories. More and more people enjoyed these lively and entertaining manga images.



Manga newspaper comic strips look like their Western counterparts.

Cartoons Spring to Life

The new century brought with it a new form of entertainment: motion pictures. Film studios in the United States and other Western nations began producing movies. People **flocked** to theaters. This popular medium spread to other countries, including Japan.

The first movies were short black-and-white silent films. There was no recorded dialogue because the available technology could not accurately **synchronize** audio tracks with what was happening on film. Instead, 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 facial expressions and gestures.



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

Cartoonists around the world were fascinated by this new medium. In the United States, illustrators like Walt Disney and Max Fleischer figured out a way to turn still sketches into moving images. Popular comic characters sprang to life on the big screen. The cartoons, like live-action movies, had no sound. Music played and

cartoon characters used movement, gestures, and expressions to tell the story. The animated cartoons 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.

In Japan, manga artists such as Seitaro Kitayama began creating their own 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 dialogue were added to Western cartoons. During the 1930s, American cartoonists were encouraged to make their characters look and move more realistically. Animators used a process called *rotoscoping*, in which a movie projector cast an image of a real-life actor on a transparent drawing board, allowing the artist to trace the figure's outline onto a plastic panel called a *cell*. A simple movement such as sitting down required many cells to be drawn, but the result was impressive. This style was seen in Disney's first full-length animated movie, *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs*.

This film also featured new 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 increase depth of field and motion.

Japanese anime eventually included sound but did not apply Western techniques to create the realistic look and motions used in Western cartoons. Instead, animators continued to treat their work as true art. Animation was filmed using a technique common to Japanese full-length movies—long, still camera shots that suddenly shifted to close-ups for dramatic effect. Characters' body movements were not casual, but instead were very deliberate and carefully planned, with each small motion significant to the plot. Anime cartoonists also continued to draw in the black-and-white anime style that defined their work as truly Japanese.



Rotoscoping was used by Walter Lantz Productions to create more natural movement in animated characters. It involves tracing animated characters over live-action film.

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 essential component of anime, using techniques such as multiplane animation with layered shifting backgrounds was expensive. Another reason had to do with the start of World War II in 1939. When the war began, Japanese leaders wanted the support of citizens. They tried to foster national pride by banning movies and cartoons made in other countries. They also demanded that artists make art that only celebrated Japanese values and criticized Japan's enemies. Some animators refused to be **censored** and fled Japan. Others continued to create and release their art secretly. If caught, they faced punishment.



Posters such as this one convinced the Japanese people to support their government against Japan's enemies.

World War II ended tragically for Japan in 1945. The cities of Hiroshima and Nagasaki were destroyed by two atomic bombs. Hundreds of thousands of lives were lost. The devastation had a profound effect on the Japanese people and their art. The lighthearted fun of anime was replaced by more serious themes. Both manga and anime artists began to use their work to promote messages of peace, justice, and freedom.

Often, these messages were delivered via 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 and superhuman endurance. 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 original *Astro Boy* anime ran for two years, with reruns of those shows broadcast into the early 1970s.

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 that aired 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, with plots that highlight action and comedy. *Dragon Ball Z* is an example of shonen anime that first aired in Japan in 1989 and continues to be shown on television stations throughout the world.



Dragon Ball Z ran from 1989 to 2003.

Shojo—manga made for girls—at first starred female characters with story lines that focused on emotions and relationships, but eventually evolved to include more dynamic heroines who are actively involved in romance and adventure. The 1990s anime series *Sailor Moon* by artist Naoko Takeuchi is a classic example of shojo



anime. It tells the story of a middle-school girl who is empowered by a magical brooch to become a guardian of Earth and protect 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 produced anime films that went on to be international hits. 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's artistry, and it 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. Today there are dozens of video games based on manga comics or anime shows and movies. The interactive nature of the games is a thrill for anime fans. Characters from favorite shows, such as *Astro Boy*, *Naruto*, *Digimon*, *Pokémon*, and *Dragon Ball Z*, spring to life in video games, fulfilling their 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

affluent (<i>adj.</i>)	having a lot of money and possessions; wealthy (p. 6)
affordable (<i>adj.</i>)	of a reasonable price; not too expensive (p. 6)
animated (<i>adj.</i>)	made from a series of drawings that are put together to give the appearance of motion (p. 4)
anime (<i>n.</i>)	a Japanese animation style used in film and television (p. 4)
censored (<i>v.</i>)	examined in order to remove content viewed as threatening or offensive (p. 12)
flocked (<i>v.</i>)	gathered or moved in a large group (p. 7)
insular (<i>adj.</i>)	isolated from other people or cultures; having or reflecting a sheltered point of view (p. 6)
intrigued (<i>adj.</i>)	very curious or interested (p. 7)
manga (<i>n.</i>)	Japanese comic books and illustrated novels (p. 5)
plied (<i>v.</i>)	traveled over the same route regularly (p. 6)
synchronize (<i>v.</i>)	to set things to match in time or arrange things to happen at the same time (p. 8)
traditional (<i>adj.</i>)	of or relating to a long-established custom (p. 5)