



**Grades 7 to 9 | Social Studies and Arts Education**

# **Activity Plan: Exploring Superheroes and Diversity**

**SOUTH ASIAN CANADIAN  
LEGACY PROJECT**



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[www.saffronthreads.ca](http://www.saffronthreads.ca)

## Overview

### Big question

Why is diversity important for representation and storytelling?

### Activity description

Students will explore the changing impacts that superheroes have had in society. Students will also explore the backstory and narratives of South Asian superheroes and critically analyze the role they play.

### Big ideas

|                | Social Studies   | Arts Education  |
|----------------|--|---|
| <b>Grade 7</b> | Religious and cultural practices that emerged during this period have endured and continue to influence people.                                | Engaging in the arts develops people's ability to understand and express complex ideas. |
| <b>Grade 8</b> | Changing ideas about the world created tension between people wanting to adopt new ideas and those wanting to preserve established traditions. | Engaging in the arts develops people's ability to understand and express complex ideas. |
| <b>Grade 9</b> | Emerging ideas and ideologies profoundly influence societies and events.   | Artists often challenge the status quo and open us to new perspectives and experiences. |

### Curricular competencies

|                | Social Studies   | Arts Education  |
|----------------|--|---|
| <b>Grade 7</b> | Explain different perspectives on past or present people, places, issues, or events, and compare the values, worldviews, and beliefs of human cultures and societies in different times and places | Explore relationships between identity, place, culture, society, and belonging through the arts   |
|                | Assess the significance of people, places, events, or developments at particular times and places  | Demonstrate an understanding and appreciation of personal, social, cultural, historical, and environmental contexts in relation to the arts |
| <b>Grade 8</b> | Make ethical judgments about past events, decisions, or actions, and assess the limitations of drawing direct lessons from the past  | Demonstrate an understanding and appreciation of personal, social, cultural, historical, and environmental contexts in relation to the arts |

## Activity Plan: Exploring Superheroes and Diversity

Grades 4 to 6 | Social Studies and Arts Education

|                |   |   |
|----------------|---|---|
|                | Assess the significance of people, places, events, or developments at particular times and places   | Explore relationships between identity, place, culture, society, and belonging through the arts   |
| <b>Grade 9</b> | Assess the significance of people, places, events, or developments, and compare varying perspectives on their historical significance at particular times and places, and from group to group | Explore relationships between identity, place, culture, society, and belonging through artistic experiences                                 |
|                | Make reasoned ethical judgments about actions in the past and present, and determine appropriate ways to remember and respond   | Demonstrate an understanding and appreciation of personal, social, cultural, historical, and environmental contexts in relation to the arts |

## Materials/Resources

- Chart paper and pens
- [Superheroes 5 W's Mind Map](#)

## Kick Off and Connect

### Step 1

Have students take turns sharing about their favourite superhero (or their favourite superpower). Keep a tally (e.g., on a whiteboard or chart paper) of which superheroes are mentioned multiple times. Save this list for reference throughout the next steps of the activity.

Optional: Share some superhero fun facts to engage students into the topic.

### Step 2

Have students complete the Superheroes 5 W's Mind Map using the template provided, chart paper, or another medium in the classroom (e.g., whiteboard). They can do this individually, in small groups, in a carousel (rotating through each station) or as a class. Have them discuss and share after each question, adding anything that is missing.

The five questions for the mind map are:

- What characteristics make a hero “super”?
- Who is a superhero?
- When do we need superheroes?
- Why are superheroes important?
- Where do you find a superhero?

## Explore and Engage

### Step 1

Form students into groups of three to four students. Provide each group with a time frame to research:

- 1930-1960
- 1960-1980
- 1980-1995
- 1995-2010
- 2010-present

### Step 2

Have students research their time frame and the superheroes from it. Each group should find images of and information about at least five superheroes from their assigned time frame. You may choose to have students create their superhero summary using a specific software or medium.

### Step 3

After students have created their superhero summary, have groups share short summary presentations of their time frames, going in order from earliest to the present.

### Step 4

Start a discussion with the class about how superheroes have changed throughout history, using the presentations to help guide the conversation.

Questions to ask the class:

- What did you notice?
- What are you interested in knowing?
- What assumptions are you making?
- How has the role of the superhero changed from the first time frame to now?
- How has the superhero role changed based on what we discussed at the beginning of the activity?

### Step 5

Introduce the concept of diversity: Explain that diversity refers to differences in race, gender, culture, abilities and more. It will be important to define these key words:

- Stereotypes
- Perceptions

## Activity Plan: Exploring Superheroes and Diversity

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- Bias

Students should recognize that the characters in earlier pictures were not as diverse as more recent pictures. Consider the following:

- Simu Liu is one of the first Asian superheroes in the Marvel Cinematic Universe. The Shang-Chi and the Legend of the Ten Rings was the movie he starred in.
- Chadwick Boseman achieved international fame for playing the Marvel Comics superhero Black Panther in the Marvel Cinematic Universe.

### Step 6

Have students reform their groups (or form new groups of three to four students). Give each group the name of one superhero: Kamala Kahn, Karima Shapandar, Kingo Sunen, Ironheart, Chakra the Invincible, or Thunderbird.

Then have students research their character and create a graphical presentation (e.g., poster, ID card) for the character. The presentation should (at a minimum) answer the following questions:

- Who is this superhero?
- What is their backstory?
- What is their superpower?
- Where is the superhero from?
- When (in what year) were they first introduced in comics and in movies?
- Why are they significant?

In addition to the questions above, students should find one or two key historical events from the year the superhero was introduced.

## Wrap-Up and Assess

For the final assessment, you may choose to focus on Social Studies, Art Education, or both.

**Social Studies:** For the final assessment, students will prepare a final project on the role diversity has played in superheroes and mainstream culture. The project should include references to superheroes but may branch out to other areas of media students feel are underrepresented. It should also include references to sources that highlight the shifts caused by historical events, and how more diverse superheroes have impacted communities.

**Art Education:** For the final assessment, students will create themselves as a superhero, drawing on things they love (superpowers) and identifying something they hate (their kryptonite). Students should complete multiple iterations of their artwork and story, weaving in elements of their personal identity and culture. Once students have completed this work, have them do a gallery walk, providing feedback in the form of “two stars and one wish” for their peers.

## Extend and Transform

Explore the reactions that followed the release of *Ms. Marvel*. First, watch the [trailer](#) for the series, and then have students read the following articles:

- [At 19, Canadian actor Iman Vellani will be Marvel's 1st Muslim superhero](#) (CBC)
- ['Ms. Marvel' praised by fans but flooded with bad reviews. Critics think they know why](#) (NBC)

As a group discussion or assignment, explore the following questions:

- What traditional barriers is Ms. Marvel breaking?
- Why are they breaking these barriers?
- Why might some people not feel favourable to the character?
- Why is change difficult?

Ask students to share their opinions on how diverse superheroes impact society and representation.

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

## Superheroes 5 W's Mind Map

