

YOUTH CAN**Superman is 'everyman'**

AS THE WORLD CELEBRATES 80 YEARS SINCE THE BIRTH OF SUPERMAN, WE EXAMINE WHY THIS FICTIONAL HERO CONTINUES TO BE LAUDED AND MUCH-LOVED



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Emily Thomas

When societies or communities face difficulties, they try to find creative solutions or just share their common suffering with one another. Some write or sing about it; others start movements for change. Joseph Shuster and Jerry Siegel created a comic strip character clad in a blazing blue skin-tight suit and bright red underwear.

Not that fictional heroes hadn't previously attempted to save dudes and damsels in distress, but never quite like Superman did. Shuster and Siegel had no idea how successful they would be when they chose to release the first Superman comic in June 1938 — this hero of heroes turned out to be exactly

what the masses wanted — what they had been waiting for all along, but hadn't realised so far.

The historical context

What began with a humble 13-page spread soon found rapid success with over 900,000 copies sold regularly. The public was paying attention to a fantasy involving a sturdy bloke with X-ray vision and a dimpled chin during a time of widespread recession and immigrant struggles. Superman became a respite from the political, economic, and social situation of America in the 1930s. He was the epitome of all that society longed for but could not reach.

At its core, the idea of Superman was not new, though — Superman followed in the tradi-

tion of several classical heroes and was similar to other pulp fiction champions. Subtle differences, however, set Superman apart from his peers. These differences, combined with the era into which the Man of Steel was born turned into the lucky combination that revolutionised the concept of a fictional hero. The cultural insecurities, and struggles of the 1930s subsequently gave significance to every aspect of Superman.

The identity and legacy

Superman — the immigrant, the orphan, and the alien — resonated with the public in a way that no other character had been able to before. He embodied the immigrant people's separation from their homelands. As Clark Kent, he was the awkward, un-

sure foreigner, trying hard to assimilate into a new culture. But, as Superman, he was the real deal — he instilled hope within individuals to have faith in their own identity and believe in their self-worth. He used his supernatural powers to care for society and strived to work towards the common good. And, for all these reasons, he continues to have an enduring relevance. Because, ultimately, Superman is the representation of humanity's best wishes for itself and the world.

Also, it is admittedly hard to ignore a man zooming around in a gaudy pair of tights and under-'outer'-wear.

(With inputs from Sean Sanoop and the Budding Editors Club, ASPAM Indian International School, Sharjah)

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"I watch the Superman series when the episodes run on the television. I love that nothing bad ever happens when Superman is around. He always comes to the rescue and protects people from harm."

Angelina Sanoop George, The Millennium School, Dubai



"Superman is one superhero we all, even adults, know and like. Most young adults would have grown up with this character. But, what is it that makes this superhero so appealing to all of us? I feel that Superman is a very generous person as he is always there to help people in distress and uses his powers to make this possible. I also asked a few of my friends about this. All of them agreed that Superman inspired them to do good deeds. I even asked my father about his thoughts on Superman — for him, Superman was a personification of everything man wanted to be. Man wanted to fly and be invincible, so Jerry Siegel gave Superman those powers. But, above all, man wanted to ideally be good — that's why Superman is a superhero, not a supervillain. I really hope that humans also develop the ability to be generous and do good deeds like this beloved hero."

Ashaank Kaimal-Nair, ASPAM Indian International School, Sharjah



What led me to create Superman in the early thirties? Hearing and reading about the oppression and slaughter (of a helpless population during World War II)... seeing movies depicting the horrors of privation suffered by the downtrodden ... I had the great urge to help... help the downtrodden masses, somehow. How could I help them when I could barely help myself? Superman was the answer.

Jerry Siegel, Superman co-creator (Source: Den of Geek, 2013)



It's very hard for me to be silly about Superman because I've seen first-hand how he actually transforms people's lives. I have seen children dying of brain tumors who wanted as their last request to talk to me, and have gone to their graves with peace brought on by knowing that their belief in this kind of character is intact. I've seen that Superman really matters. It's not Superman, they're connecting with something very basic: the ability to overcome obstacles, the ability to persevere, the ability to understand difficulty, and turn your back on it.

Christopher Reeve, Superman actor, as told to Otto Friedrich in a 2001 interview



Superman stands alone. Superman did not become Superman; Superman was born Superman. When Superman wakes up in the morning, he is Superman. His alter ego Clark Kent is how Superman views us. And, what are the characteristics of Clark Kent? He's weak. He's unsure of himself. He's a coward. Clark Kent is Superman's critique on the whole human race.

Quentin Tarantino, writer & director, as said by 'Bill' in Kill Bill: Volume 2

