

How can comics be used to support young people's meaning-making with museum collections?

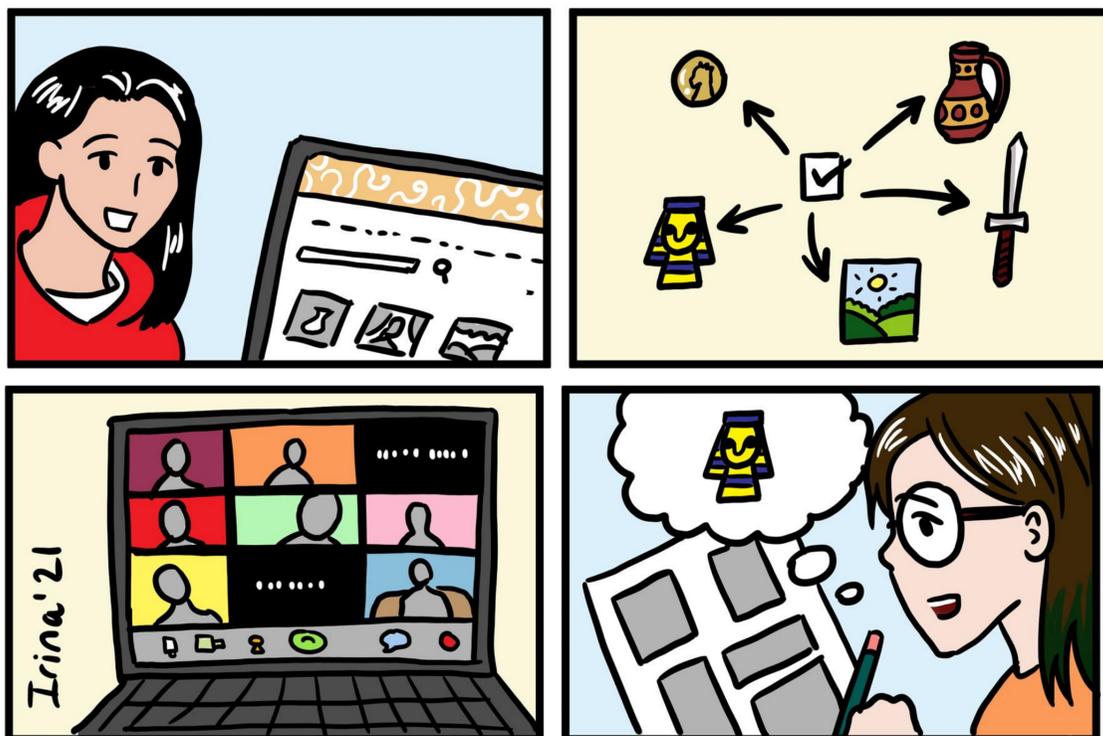
Rationale and aims

- The project aims to investigate how creating comics may support young people's meaning-making with museum collections.
- Existing museum activities rarely involve participatory comics creation, despite the increasing use of comics in museums and heritage sectors to "communicate research about the past" (Swogger, 2019, p. 137).
- Museums often overlook the 10-19 age range in favour of younger children and families, resulting in the lack of stimulating activities for this group.



Context

- A cohort of eight participants aged between 10 and 19 with an interest in art was recruited through two arts organisations in Cambridgeshire.
- Due to the pandemic-related constraints, the project took place online.
- Rather than engage with objects in a physical museum, the project made use of the online collections of The Fitzwilliam Museum (an art and antiquities museum in Cambridge).



Description of research project

- The project started in February 2021. Participants were asked to explore The Fitzwilliam Museum's online collections and choose an item that they found particularly inspiring.
- Two online workshops on comics creation followed. Participants proceeded to create comics as their personal interpretations of their chosen items. Participants were unrestricted in their choice of storylines, art styles, or media.

Research methods

- Participants' comics were used as the main data collection method, with questionnaires providing additional data.

Benefits and limitations of comics as a research method



Discussion

- Participants have demonstrated independence in their creative decisions and their choice of objects. They have valued an opportunity to engage in artistic activity that promoted their independence and emerging voices (Jensen, 1999, p. 113).
- I am currently in the process of coding participants' data. I am approaching this process from the "rhetorical triangle" viewpoint, which suggests that meanings are created by the comic's author, the comic itself, and its reader (McNicol, 2018, p. 9).

Conclusion

- Despite being a work-in-progress, the study has demonstrated ways in which young people may "make personal sense of public meaning" (Payne, 2018, p. 562).
- The project has provided an insight into the creative use of online museum collections, which may be particularly relevant for museums during prolonged periods of closure.

References

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- Payne, R (2018) '11.30am on a Sunday Morning: Making Meanings with Mary', *The International Journal of Art and Design Education*, 37 (4), pp. 560-573.
- Swogger, J. (2019) 'Making Earthworks Visible: The Example of the Oswestry Heritage Comics Project'. *Offa's Dyke Journal*, 1 (2019), pp. 137-156.

List of figures

- Figure 1: Representation of meaning-making in museums.
- Figure 2: Stages of research project.
- Figure 3: Representation of the benefits and limitations of using comics.
- Disclaimer: All images are by Irina Richards. No true likeness of participants is depicted. Participants' responses have been rephrased whilst preserving the meaning of the original quotes.**