Writing a comic strip

For students, it is essential to know the different genres of writing that exist: description, narrative, argumentation, dialogue... Nevertheless, sometimes the teachers forget a genre that a lot of people and most of our students like reading: the comic strip.

We can find comic strips in newspapers and magazines, but also small books of comic strips, some well-known, as the Tintin comic strips in France or the Mortadelo y Filemón in Spain.

We propose here an activity in which we can introduce our students to a well-known American comic, that is, the Calvin and Hobbes comic strips and, at the same time, let the students learn the characteristics of a new literary genre in a motivating way.

It would be an activity designed for the first stages of Non-Compulsory Secondary Education, that is, for first or second ESO. As for the duration, it is expected to last one session of 60 minutes.

The main objective of the activity is to develop the creative competence of the pupils, as they will have to write their own comic related to different drawings.

Other aims of the activity include to enhance their writing skills, using the appropriate connectors to create a coherent and a cohesive text as well as to know the characteristics of this genre of writing.

This is why we, as teachers, will have to introduce the structure of the comic, before starting the activity itself.

Alternatively, it is a good activity for the students to work in groups cooperatively and to respect their peers’ ideas. The teenagers will have to listen to their partners as well as practice speaking while they give their ideas to write the comic.

An ultimate objective of the activity is to familiarize students with the comic Calvin and Hobbes related to the American culture, as it is a well-known comic for American children.

Regarding the curricular competences, according to the Spanish legislation, this activity would contribute to develop students’ communicative competence, of course, as well as the autonomy competence.

How do we develop the activity?

First of all, we will give them a model of a comic strip of Calvin and Hobbes and we will do a warm-up activity to set students into the mood. We can ask them questions, such as: ‘Do you know this comic strip?’ or ‘Do you know other comic strips?’ ‘Do you like reading them?’
After five minutes of warm-up speaking and brainstorming about comic strips, the focus can be put on the linguistic characteristics of this genre of writing, paying special attention to the onomatopoeias. The comic strip chosen should include some examples of onomatopoeias, let us take the following one as an example:

Students observe the onomatopoeias in the example and try to give an explanation of what they mean. In the comic strip above, we find the onomatopoeia *Ah Choo!!*, for instance. Students must be explained that this kind of language is necessary and very characteristic of comic strips, and it is only used in this genre of texts. Students, then, can give other examples of onomatopoeias they know (even in their mother tongue) and in groups of four people do a brainstorming of other onomatopoeias they know and their meaning. In the meanwhile, the teacher will give the appropriate feedback, translating the onomatopoeias to the English language, when necessary.

Apart from the onomatopoeias, students will also be advised of the different forms of bubbles: speech and thinking bubbles, and, the most important thing, they will be explained that the comic strips must be, as the word says, comic, so students will have to use their imagination and wit to write a funny text.

After these warm-up activities are finished, and the students are now familiarized with the language and the structure in the comic strips, we can continue with the next step.

Students will be organized in groups of four and each group will be given a different comic strip of Calvin and Hobbes, but without text. They will be asked to fill in the speech bubbles with their own imagination and with the help of the drawings. This activity should be done in about 20 minutes and teachers here must help the students with vocabulary or grammatical doubts.

After having finished all this, we can finish the activity in two different ways; students can exchange their comic strips with the other groups, so that everybody reads and enjoys all the comic strips or we can collect them and hang them on the wall. The ultimate objective is that all the comic strips be available for everybody in the class and that students vote for the best and funniest comic strip.

Regarding the evaluation of the activity, the teacher will supervise in every moment the development of the task and if the students are working cooperatively within their groups. Pupils will be given a self-evaluation form, in which they can assess themselves and also they will be provided with a co-evaluation form, in order to evaluate their partners in the group. By doing this, we help them to be responsible for their own learning and conscious of the knowledge acquired by doing the task.

Apart from that, the teacher will read the comics and will evaluate them, giving them a mark, which will be added to the mark given in the development of the task and their group work.

Summing up, creating a comic strip can be a funny and motivating activity that will help our students to know this genre of writing and to enhance their creativity.