Ms. Marvel: Our Identities, Our Superpowers

TITLE: Ms. Marvel: Our Identities, Our Superpowers

AUTHOR(S):
- Lindsay Johnson, Roosevelt Middle School, River Forest, Illinois
- Emily Bollinger, Osseo Area Learning Center, Brooklyn Park, Minnesota
- Susy Remillard, Cape Cod Lighthouse Public Charter School, Harwich, Massachusetts

SUMMARY OF THE LESSON/UNIT:
This unit is heavily focused on the idea of identity, particularly how culture influences identity and how our identity shapes individuals’ strengths, their “super powers.” Students will read G. Willow Wilson’s Ms. Marvel: No Normal, engage in guided reading questions and discussions with their peers, and complete a project in which they depict themselves as superheroes based on aspects of their identity.

SUBJECTS: Art & English/Language Arts (ELA)

GRADE LEVEL(S): Middle/High School

TIMING:
- Art: 5 class periods
  - Reading artwork
  - Ms. Marvel introduction
  - Drawing and exaggerating the human body

- ELA: 3 weeks
  - Background information
  - Read w/ discussion questions
  - Superhero project

STANDARDS:
- Art:
  - VA:Re.7.2.8a Compare and contrast contexts and media in which viewers encounter images that influence ideas, emotions, and actions.
  - VA:Re.7.1.8a Explain how a person’s aesthetic choices are influenced by culture and environment and impact the visual image that one conveys to others.

- ELA:
○ **CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.CCRA.R.1** Read closely to determine what the text says explicitly and to make logical inferences from it; cite specific textual evidence when writing or speaking to support conclusions drawn from the text.

○ **CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.CCRA.R.2** Determine central ideas or themes of a text and analyze their development; summarize the key supporting details and ideas.

○ **CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.CCRA.R.3** Analyze how and why individuals, events, or ideas develop and interact over the course of a text.

○ **CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.CCRA.R.4** Interpret words and phrases as they are used in a text, including determining technical, connotative, and figurative meanings, and analyze how specific word choices shape meaning or tone.

○ **CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.CCRA.R.5** Analyze the structure of texts, including how specific sentences, paragraphs, and larger portions of the text (e.g., a section, chapter, scene, or stanza) relate to each other and the whole.

○ **CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.CCRA.R.6** Assess how point of view or purpose shapes the content and style of a text.

○ **CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.CCRA.R.7** Integrate and evaluate content presented in diverse media and formats, including visually and quantitatively, as well as in words.

○ **CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.CCRA.R.10** Read and comprehend complex literary and informational texts independently and proficiently.

**ESSENTIAL QUESTION/COMPELLING QUESTION:**

- Where and how do we encounter images in our world?
- How do images influence our views of the world?
- What images do we project into the world?
- What can we learn about ourselves and others through the “windows and mirrors” we read?
- How do culture, family, community, and personality shape identity?
- How do our identities shape our “super powers”?

**LEARNING OBJECTIVES:**

- **Art:**
  - Compare and contrast contexts and media in which viewers encounter images that influence ideas, emotions, and actions.
  - Explain how a person’s aesthetic choices are influenced by culture and environment and impact the visual image that one conveys to others.

- **ELA:**
  - Students can use evidence from the story to support what they think the story clearly says as well as what it hints at.
  - Students can support plausible inferences with reasonable evidence.
- Students can draw inferences about the text where it is ambiguous or uncertain.
- Students can determine a central idea of the text and say how it is conveyed through particular details.
- Students will analyze comic book writing, looking for text details related to multicultural perspectives.
- Students will make text-to-self connections and transfer knowledge of text details into an original project designed around identity.

LISTS OF MATERIALS/RESOURCES NEEDED:

- General:
  - Ms. Marvel: No Normal (free on Kindle as of 2/20)
  - Islam: A Brief Introduction
  - Ms. Marvel: An Introduction

- Art:
  - Ms. Marvel Art Slides
  - Selection of graphic novels from school library for reference
  - Student devices (Chromebooks, iPads) for collaborative work
  - Paper
  - Colored pencils/markers/crayons
  - Or digital drawing program: Procreate, Notability, etc.

- ELA:
  - Guided Reading Questions
  - Superhero Project

BACKGROUND/CONTEXT/RATIONALE:

The comic Ms. Marvel: No Normal features a Muslim Pakistani American superheroine struggling with identity issues as she comes to realize her superpowers in the opening volumes of this series. Kamala Khan’s polymorph superpowers — the ability to change her shape, size and form — reflect her inner struggles in a metaphorical sense. Living her teenage life in Jersey City, she stretches, bends, and pulls away from the pressures all around her. Kamala not only struggles with her identity, but also with the different practices and expectations of her religion, with the pressures put on her by strict but loving parents, and with her newly found power as well. Throughout all these conflicts, Kamala must sort out how to not be all things to all people, given that her super identity is as a polymorph. In the end, this might be the most dangerous part of her transformation.

Like most teens, Kamala is just trying to fit in. Her diverse cultural background makes this challenging but also interesting for the reader. The text provides insights into Kamala’s
interpretations of her identity while never dwelling on these aspects of her character. She is a fully drawn superhero in that her personality, her culture, and her beliefs come through the story and affect the plot in interesting ways. The art is engaging and draws the reader in. The artist’s style balances Kamala’s most pressing conflicts with the author’s humor, bringing the reader into all elements of the story.

This is an excellent text that offers scholars **windows** into someone else’s lived experiences as well as **mirrors** into their own, similarities they might share with Kamala Khan. Representation matters, and this text -- and the accompanying materials -- exemplify just that.

**PROCEDURES/PROCESS/TASKS:**

- **Art:**
  - 1 class period to visually study graphic novels
  - 1 class period to be introduced to Ms. Marvel and reflect on their own culture and super power
  - 1 class period to practice their body proportions and sketches
  - 1 class period to work on final
  - 1 class period to present to peers

- **ELA:**
  - Introduce Ms. Marvel with the **introductory presentation** to spark interest.
  - Introduce the **summative superhero project** so that students can think about themselves as heroes as they read the graphic novel.
  - Review the **Introduction to Islam presentation** so that students have a cursory understanding of some elements in the story.
  - Use the **guided reading questions** as an anchor while reading the graphic novel (either as a worksheet, as discussion prompts, or as a combination of the two).
  - Allow students time to create their **superhero project**.

**ASSESSMENTS:**

- **Art:**
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- **ELA:**
  - Guided Reading Questions
  - Ms. Marvel Superhero Project

**EXTENSIONS:**
• Art:
  ○ There are five coloring pages at the end of Ms. Marvel available for download

• ELA:
  ○ There are additional volumes of Ms. Marvel for students to read:
    ■ Ms. Marvel: Generation Why
    ■ Ms. Marvel: Crushed
    ■ Ms. Marvel: Last Days
    ■ Ms. Marvel: Super Famous
    ■ Ms. Marvel: Civil War II
    ■ Ms. Marvel: Damage Per Second
    ■ Ms. Marvel: Mecca
    ■ Ms. Marvel: Teenage Wasteland
    ■ Ms. Marvel: Time and Again
    ■ Ms. Marvel Meets the Marvel Universe

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES:
• Information about Islam (and stereotypes/issues that pop up in the text)
  ○ I Am a Hijabi Feminist
  ○ Here’s What Hijabis Want You to Know about Their Choice to Cover
  ○ The Hijab has Liberated Me from Society’s Expectations of Women
  ○ The Horror of ‘Honor Killings,’ Even in the US
  ○ Everything You Should Know about Honor Killings

• Using Graphic Novels in Education: Ms. Marvel: a fabulous resource that identifies various themes as well as ideas to track throughout the text

• Comics & Graphic Novels: a resource from Harvard’s Center for Middle Eastern Studies that focuses on visual and pop culture. There are lectures from an April 2011 panel that included Hussein Rashid (Comics & Muslim Identity), A. David Lewis (Muslim Identity and Superhero Comics), and Jeffrey Melnick (Comics and Post 9/11 Culture).

• TEDx: A Superhero for Generation Why/G. Willow Wilson: G. Willow Wilson discusses her writing and the themes that motivate her work.