

This toolkit was created as part of the *Superman's Cleveland: Lineage and Legacy* celebration.

Superman's Cleveland honored the 85th anniversary of the creation of Superman by Jerry Siegel and Joe Shuster in 1938 in their hometown.

The program was organized by the Rust Belt Humanities Lab at Ursuline College and the Ohio Center for the Book at Cleveland Public Library with support from Ohio Humanities.

Get Graphic! Toolkit

Superman: *The Harvests Of Youth*

By Sina Grace

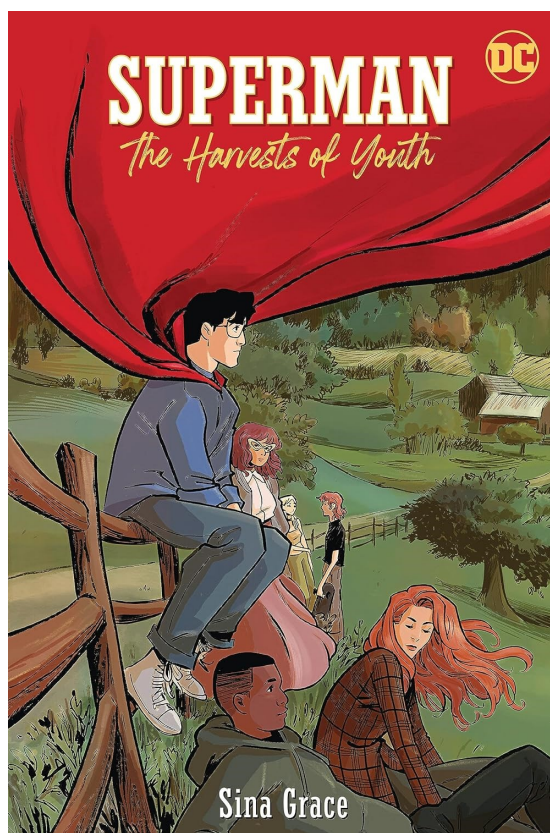
About the comic

Superman: The Harvests of Youth is a graphic novel by Sina Grace which retells the story of Clark Kent's youth in Smallville for the twenty-first century. Clark Kent's relatively normal life drastically changes when a classmate of his dies at school.

As Clark, his friends, and the Smallville community grieve, they begin to uncover a mystery connected to their friend's death linked to an online platform. At the same time that the citizens of Smallville are grieving this loss, the Luthor family moves in to make some big changes to this small town. The Luthors' impact on the landscape of Smallville is quickly felt as they build out their empire. In the midst of all of this upheaval, Clark Kent is also facing one of the most difficult of adolescent experiences: dating!

These new experiences force Clark to learn to deal with problems that he cannot always punch his way through. Rather, he must rely upon other skills and the support of his friends.

As Clark navigates the loss of his classmate, this new mysterious arrival, dating, and a villain that cannot be fought with physical strength, the comic brings into focus important discussions of adolescent mental health and social media, all while imagining a new future for the superhero who began the genre.



Who is Sina Grace?

Sina Grace is a GLAAD media award-nominated writer known for his bestselling *Iceman* series at Marvel Comics. Grace has written and/or drawn many other notable characters, including Shazam, Green Lantern, and Wonder Woman for DC as well as the series *Go Go Power Rangers* (Boom! Studios), *Jughead's Time Police* (Archie), *Read Only Memories* (IDW), and the fan-favorite *Rockstar and Softboy* (Image Comics). He has contributed to the Eisner award-winning anthology *Love is Love* and Ringo Award-winning anthology *Mine! A Comics Collection to Benefit Planned Parenthood*. Grace also contributed illustrations and comic pages to the National Book Award-nominated *I Hotel* by Karen Tei Yamashita. Another project is a trilogy of young adult graphic novels for Random House Graphic entitled *The Big Deal*.

As an illustrator, Grace has also worked with many musicians, including Jenny Lewis, Childish Gambino, Tegan & Sara, and Metric. He has provided illustrations for director Cameron Crowe and his label Vinyl Films Records.

Themes

There are several themes throughout the book that can help frame your discussion.

- **The immigrant experience** — Superman is the last son of Krypton. He is an immigrant from another planet who comes to our world, and we are made better for it. The metaphor is pervasive amongst the Superman mythos and remains relevant today and can frame this discussion as well.
- **Social media** — The conflict of the story emerges from experiences on the internet and social media. This graphic novel asks us to reflect on our relationship to social media and how it is affecting friends and family members today.
- **Mental health** — As noted in his dedication, Sina sees this comic as an ode to the friends he lost. The story can prompt discussions about mental health today, a new arena for Clark Kent who typically fights villains who are physically powerful.
- **Adolescence** — This is a story of personal development — growing into our strengths and understanding our limitations. The work invites our thinking about our own sense of self, our strengths, and our limitations.



Figure 1. From *Superman Harvests of Youth*, p.46 by Sina Grace. © DC Comics

Questions for Discussion

1. Grace expands the cast of characters typically depicted in Superman comics (Fig. 1). While Lana Lang appears along with other familiar faces, Lois Lane, Jimmy Olsen and other regular cast members are noticeably absent. Instead Clark has new friends and even a new love interest. In what ways do these new characters allow us to see new sides of Clark or understand him in new ways outside of the dynamics we typically see?
2. The subtitle *Harvests of Youth* implies that this is an ending to a period of life. After finishing the book, how do you understand the title and what connections come to mind?
3. Outside of the title, Clark Kent is never referred to as Superman in the graphic novel. How do you understand this choice? What does it mean for how we should read this story?
4. The main conflict in the story revolves around an issue that Clark Kent cannot defeat with physical strength. (Fig. 2) How does this conflict differ from other superhero stories you might have read and in what ways does this work expand the stories told in the superhero genre?
5. The main villain, Mr. Mxyzptlk, is a deceptively silly villain in appearance but is actually quite sinister. What can we understand about this villain who is visually ridiculous but actually quite evil in the context of this story? How can we connect this to social media and radicalization that is a major part of this story?
6. *Harvests of Youth* explores the way that social media has changed how we think about adolescence as well as how it is experienced. How does the comic help us think about growing up today as it is filtered through the internet and social media?
7. When Superman was created in 1938, he embodied a power fantasy. Do the problems of the twenty-first century call for a different type of superhero? In what ways does this version of Superman call back to the character of 1938, and does he offer us a new vision of superheroics?
8. Grace has spoken to the ways that previous Superman comics as well as tv shows such as *Smallville* influenced his comic. How do you understand this work in conversation with *Smallville* or other Superman stories you might have read?
9. In what ways does Lex Luthor's story, that of being a stranger in a strange land (Smallville), parallel Clark's story? In what ways do they differ? What can we learn about how the two of them think about and relate to Smallville?
10. This is a story about a small town and a big corporation coming in and changing everything. In what ways can this graphic novel help us think about the cultural landscape of America today and the complexities of it?
11. This story features adolescent mental health as a genuine concern for a superhero who we typically see fighting giant battles. What does this focus do for Superman stories and for our understanding of current mental health issues among adolescents?
12. The ending of the book reminds us that Superman's story is one of hope. In what ways does the story inspire you?



Figure 2. From *Superman Harvests of Youth*, p.140 by Sina Grace. © DC Comics

Further Supplemental Materials

Additional resources to supplement this toolkit:

- *Word Balloon*. “Sina Grace Talks Superman, Marvel, and More.” (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GWindqhQMVA>)
- *Den of Geek*. “Sina Grace Gives Us A Teen Clark Kent in *Superman: The Harvests of Youth*.” (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZOfm11VOavU>)
- *Enter the Popverse*. “Behind the scenes: *Superman: The Harvests of Youth* with Sina Grace” (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sS2wj3BPzaA>)
- Dominic Loise, *F(r)iction*. “An Interview with Sina Grace,” (<https://frictionlit.org/an-interview-with-sina-grace/>)
- Vera J. Camden and Valentino L. Zullo, *Journal of Graphic Novels and Comics*. “‘I was always staring at Superman’: An Interview with Sina Grace.”

Further Reading

If you are interested in other interpretations of Superman’s origin story:

- *Superman: Birthright* by Mark Waid and Leinil Francis Yu (DC Comics)
- *Superman: Secret Origin* by Geoff Johns and Gary Frank (DC Comics)
- *Superman: Earth One* by J. Michael Straczynski, Shane Davis and Ardian Syaf (DC Comics)

If you are interested in other comics by Sina Grace:

- *Iceman* by Sina Grace, Alessandro Vitti, Nathan Stockman, and various artists (Marvel Comics)
- *Ghosted in LA* by Sina Grace, Siobhan Keenan, and Cathy Le (Image Comics)
- *Read Only Memories* by Sina Grace and Stefano Simeone (IDW)

If you are interested in other YA superhero stories:

- *Supergirl: Being Super* by Mariko Tamaki and Joelle Jones (DC Comics)
- *Girl Taking Over: A Lois Lane Story* by Sarah Kuhn and Arielle Jovellanos (DC Comics)
- *You Brought Me the Ocean* by Alex Sanchez and Julie Maroh (DC Comics)