Brains! - A Neuroscience Cartoon for Kids

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By: Anya Kim

Quick Overview:

Brains! is a comic book and coloring book created to give elementary school students the chance to learn a little bit about neuroscience, while also showing them that science can be fun and relatable. If you're interested in reading the entire comic, check out this PDF: Brains Comic Book_Latham.pdf

If you're interested in downloading a printer friendly version of this comic, please email me at anya-kim@uiowa.edu!

Why make a comic book?

At the end of last semester when we were asked to choose our individual Latham projects, there was a comic book floating around the laboratory I work in. My research mentor, Professor Michael Dailey, had actually grabbed this cartoon at the annual Society for Neuroscience conference, and as soon as I saw it I knew I was hooked. When I was growing up whenever I wanted something quick and fun to read, I always reached for a comic book. I was in love with the amount of personality and excitement these short little stories were able to convey through bubbles of text and simple yet vivid cartoons. As I have grown up, I haven't had as much of a
chance to continue reading comics, but when I saw this comic I started to reminisce about my childhood, and how big of an impact comics had on it. Although the comic Professor Dailey brought back was relatively simple, with little in the way of dialog or characters, I still thought it seemed like a fantastic idea for showing children a glimpse of STEM.

**Goals for the Project:**

- Create a comic that portrayed science as fun and relatable.
- Be able to explain neuroscience in an accurate but accessible way for an audience of elementary school students.
- Show that there are a lot of opportunities in neuroscience and STEM as a whole.
- Show scientists of different genders and ethnicities to promote diversity.
- Reach a broad audience of elementary school students, both locally and through the internet.
Timeline of Project Thus Far:

1. Looked at current science comics, like the Journal of Cartoon Neuroscience, to find inspiration.
2. Brainstormed potential characters and plots.
3. Double checked to make sure the science behind the comic was sound.
4. Drew out the complete comic, and went through about three revisions.
5. With some much needed guidance from Kevin Ripka, I began digitizing the comic.
6. Ran the printed comic by my research mentor Professor Dailey to check for accuracy, and Professor Renita Schmidt for
her advice on elementary school literature and how to best reach my audience.
7. Made one final revision, and printed off the official comics.
8. Read the comic to a local book club for elementary school girls, **Strong Girls Read Strong Books**, and talked with them about my own experience as a woman in STEM.

Currently, I’m planning the next installment of Brains! and working on distributing copies of the comic to local libraries.

**Lessons Learned:**

- Drawing and editing comics is much more time consuming than I initially expected.
- Creating a story about your field of study can help you describe your research to all members of the general public, not just elementary school students.
- **Creating a comic book is a lot of work, but it is incredibly rewarding.**

**Thank you so much to everyone that helped with this project!**

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  - Brinda Shetty
  - Renita Schmidt
  - Michael Dailey
  - Kevin Ripka