



SO WHAT'S A ZINE?

A cheaply reproduced, self-published magazine, often photocopied, with specialized subject matter and a limited print run. Traditionally, zines are serialized, but they can also be produced as one-offs. Their subject matter ranges from historical to informational to personal—in fact, some zines, known as *perzines*, consist of published diary entries. Zines are sometimes modeled after mass-circulation magazines, featuring a mix of reviews, interviews, editorials, and even advice columns—all written, edited, and published by one person or a small number of people. Profit is not an incentive: many zines are simply made to be handed out to friends.

Below are some resources to help you share examples of zines with your students, as well as guide them in making their own.

A BRIEF HISTORY

While *zine* is a twentieth-century term, the concept didn't come out of nowhere. Martin Luther's Reformation broadsheets ranting against the Catholic Church shared a similar ethos and means of expression, as did the American colonists who cranked out publications criticizing the British government. Zines are very democratic: they were born of necessity, as a pre-Internet means for people, often with limited resources, to spread information, and to make that information available as widely as possible.

The word *zine* comes from *fanzine*. In the early twentieth century, there were a number of magazines for fans of science fiction, many with lenient editorial standards which allowed amateur writers to publish. These writers would also list their addresses, creating a kind of postal forum for people to hash out their shared obsessions. Obsession is key here: even as the meaning of the word *zine* has morphed over the years, there's an urgency behind the medium that's foundational, a strong desire to express your love—or hatred—of a particular subject.

When zines became associated with punk in the 1970s and '80s, the fandom at their core shifted to music. Zine makers would review and interview bands, always with relish, whether that relish was devotion or revulsion. Similar to sci-fi fans, punks relied on zines (and by extension, the post office) for connection. There were different punk scenes in different towns and cities around the country, and zines—along with band tours—became a way to network these different regions.

Many zines produced in the mid-twentieth century used the *mimeograph* machine, a widely available and cheap stencil duplicating process. The mimeograph was gradually replaced by the *photocopy* machine, and by the 1980s and '90s, the subject matter of zines had really started to expand. Zine makers explored topics beyond music: celebrities or their favorite bus lines or their most loathed franchise of Denny's. Some zines also came to have more of a political bent, taking cues from the underground and radical publishing movements of the 1960s. In the 1990s, the rise of the Riot Grrrl movement—a form of third-wave feminism rooted in punk—generated a whole new subgenre of zines. Community often became a more explicit objective during this time, whereas before it had simply been implicit in the form. And the zine's potential as a platform for the disenfranchised grew to encompass larger numbers of LGBTQ people, people with disabilities, people of color, and other traditionally marginalized voices.

In the early 2000s, the Internet supplanted the primary functions of zines. Fans—of anything, really, you name it—could easily find each other and communicate online. And anyone wanting to spread information could do so much more efficiently and cheaply in the digital realm. Because of this, zines in the past twenty years have become more concerned with their object-ness, exploring different structures and bindings, and incorporating fine-arts-associated printing techniques such as silkscreen and letterpress. Today, though, with the rise in popularity of activism-inspired art and the troubling trend toward online corporate censorship, the zine has again become an essential tool for political dissent and increasing awareness around social justice.

GETTING YOUR STUDENTS' HANDS ON SOME ZINES

If you don't have your own teaching collection of zines to share with students, check to see if a local institutional or public library collects them. While they may not allow you to check them out, they might be able to schedule a visit with your students. You can have your students each pick a zine that catches their eye, and then guide the group through the following formal analysis exercise:

Spend some time carefully observing a zine of your choice. Begin by taking in the zine as a whole and making a note of any emotions or sensations that arise. Even before you begin reading, does the zine make you feel excited, frightened, bored, melancholy, self-righteous, joyful? How do these emotions shift once you begin to read?

Break the zine into its component parts. Spend some time considering the choices that were made in terms of **material, composition, size/scale, and context**. How were its images created and how was the zine reproduced? What's holding it together—staples, thread, a rubber band? Was it made by one person or was it the product of a collaboration? Remember that zine makers are often working under economic constraints, causing them to take advantage of whatever materials are at hand. Try to picture what kinds of happy accidents might have happened during the zine's creation and reproduction. Could this object be categorized as something other than a zine? Why or why not?

What themes and/or topics does the zine's text cover, and what genres does it engage with: interviews, reviews, rants, diaristic writing, recipes, how-to manuals, political tracts? Why do you think the zine's maker wanted to create this object and get it out into the world? Were they trying to effect some sort of change, were their intentions more aesthetic, or did they just need to get something off their chest? In what ways does the zine's **form** (how it looks and feels) complement and/or contrast with its **message** (what it's trying to say)?

A FEW LOW-TECH PRINTING PROCESSES

It's time to get your students making their own zines! Below are some hand editing techniques that go beyond the photocopier and are great for in-class zine making. Also be sure to utilize CBAA's single-sheet template at collegebookart.org/resources/Documents/Rising%20Together/ZineDigitalArchive_ParticipationInstructions.pdf.

Blender pen transfer

An alternative photographic process where a photocopy is transferred to another piece of paper using a blender pen.

What you need: Chartpak blender pen, photocopies, paper, bone folder

Find instructions and more info here: art-e-zine.co.uk/imageblend.html

And a video here: youtube.com/watch?v=othh78K46io

Hectograph, aka gelatin duplicator or jellygraph

A smooth piece of gelatin is used to make multiple prints off a single master sheet.

What you need: 1 oz unflavored gelatin, 6 oz liquid glycerin, a pan slightly larger than 8.5" x 11", non-thermal transfer sheets (can be obtained from a tattoo supplier online, also referred to as Spirit transfer sheets), paper

Find instructions and more info here: blog.lib.uiowa.edu/speccoll/2013/07/16/what-the-hectograph/

Pochoir, aka stenciling

A sheet of plastic or coated paper, with letters or a design cut from it, is used to produce the letters or design on an underlying surface by applying gouache through the cut-out holes in the material.

What you need: stencil material such as Mylar or Yupo, an X-Acto blade, gouache, water, stencil brush

Find a video here: youtube.com/watch?v=bkXu2I_fSGU

Printing linocuts with a baren

A way of printing a linocut image without a press, by applying pressure using a disc-like device called a baren.

What you need: a few pieces of lino, lino cutting tools, paper, Van Son rubber-based ink, a large piece of Plexiglass, a palette knife, a brayer, a baren (or anything smooth you can use to apply pressure, such as a wooden spoon or another, clean brayer)

Find a video here: youtube.com/watch?v=i5gq-pnlLOk

A FEW PLACES WHERE YOU CAN ORDER ZINES

Atomic Books (Baltimore): atomicbooks.com/search?q=zines

Pioneers Press (Lansing, KS): pioneerspress.com/collections/zines

Quimby's (Chicago): quimbys.com

Sweet Candy Distro & Press (Olympia, WA): sweetcandydistro.com

A FEW USEFUL BOOKS

Duncombe, Stephen. *Notes From Underground: Zines and the Politics of Alternative Culture*. Verso, 1997.

Spencer, Amy. *DIY: The Rise of Lo-Fi Culture*. Marion Boyars, 2005.

Watson, Esther and Mark Todd. *Whatcha Mean, What's a Zine?* HMH Books for Young Readers, 2006.

Wreck, Alex. *Stolen Sharpie Revolution*. AK Press, 2003.