

“Pop Culture and Zines” an excerpt from the book *The Big Book of Pop Culture: A How-To Guide for Young Artists* by Hal Niedzviecki. Published by Annick Press. Reprinted here with permission.

WHO CARES?

Ever feel like you just don't care? I mean, you're watching TV or flipping through a magazine and you realize that you really don't care: about what celebrities are wearing, or how many cylinders this year's sports car has, or what grisly crime is going to be solved by a bunch of hunky detectives in designer outfits.

Sometimes it seems as if there's this whole world of pop culture that tells you what to care about but has nothing whatsoever to do with your life.

At the same time, we are constantly told that we should be original and creative and fantastic. But how did being original and fantastic come to mean talking about stuff that we don't care about and pretending to solve outlandish crimes while keeping our hair perfectly gelled? What's so great about that?

Pop culture bombards us with stories, songs, shows, movies, and products that tell us to be ourselves and tap into our creativity and talent. But when we *are* creative and original, we find out that no one is interested unless we're doing the same stuff as everyone else.

Unless you're trying out for the latest reality TV singing show, no one wants you on TV. Unless you're some wild and wacky character with an amazing gimmick, you don't get any attention. But what if you don't want to be totally brand new and ultracool and original? What if you just want to be you?

Creativity is often confused with originality. But when you create, the challenge isn't to think of something no one has ever done before; it's to figure out what you want to say and why you want to say it. Creativity is about discovering who you are, including how much *like* other people you are.

This is a book about creating a space where you get to say what you care about. This is a book about using pop culture to communicate how you see the world and how you want the world to see you. You'll learn how to use pop culture to create your own TV shows, magazines, websites, songs—whatever you want.

A lot of people seem to think that just being who they are isn't interesting enough. But you have the right to be normal, you have the right to make mistakes, and you have the right to not want to be a superstar. And most important of all, you have the right to create your own pop culture your way, for yourself.

Even if no one ever hears our songs, reads our zines, or watches our movies, expressing ourselves just because we feel like it is something we all have the right to do.

So what are you going to do?

I started my own magazine in 1995. I called it *Broken Pencil* and it's still publishing today. The magazine is all about how much I love independent pop culture—zines, blogs, movies, music, websites, and more.

When I started the magazine, I had only the slightest idea about how many people were doing creative things and wanted to share them. Now, people I've worked on the magazine with are some of my best friends. And I've met creators from all over the world who produce amazing comics, video games, music and zines—stuff I'd never have known about if I hadn't decided to just go ahead and do something.

What I did wasn't all that amazing, or even original. But it was what I wanted to do. Because it meant a lot to me, I worked hard at it and kept it going, and eventually it started to mean something to other people too. Not because I'm such an original genius, but because we need, in our world, more places where people can be creative —where we can express ourselves—without feeling all kinds of pressure.

So this book is part of what I started years ago, when I wasn't that much older than you are now. And even after all those years, I still need to be reminded that pop culture isn't just a way to talk about the rich and famous. There's another kind of pop culture out there—the kind I started my magazine to celebrate. It's a pop culture that lets you share your stories and ideas with people all over the world.

Not that anyone cares.

But then again, you never know.





What's a Zine?

A **ZINE** is an easy format to self-publish in. It is basically a mini magazine. Drop the “maga” from magazine and you’ve got zine. Zines are usually published cheaply in photocopied editions of a couple of hundred, and they are generally the personal project of one or two people. They aren’t made for profit, but as a way to get ideas and stories out into the world. As I mentioned in the last chapter, zines developed in the 1930s as a way for science fiction fans to share their enthusiasm about sci-fi books. Originally, these mini-magazines were called fanzines, because they were self-produced by fans of sci-fi. But since then, zines have shrugged off the “fan” label and developed a reputation as a no-holds-barred format for publishing. These days, some people publish zines online in website or “webzine” format. Much of what is discussed here is applicable to webzines, blogs, ediaries, and other forms of online publishing (see chapter 7).

WHY START A ZINE?

Practically ever since the written word was invented, people have been using it to get out their feelings, ideas, and points of view. From the 16th Century on, politicians, economists, poets, comic artists, journalists, activists, and philosophers have self-published everything from big statements on the rights of humanity to fad diets guaranteed to promote eternal life to guidebooks on the best way to use your car's engine for cooking your dinner.

These days, with all those TV shows and movies and video games out there, printing your own self-published zines and even books might not seem like the coolest method of starting your D.I.Y. Pop Culture career. But rest assured, you are taking your place in a time-honored tradition of freethinkers, rabble-rousers, and dreamers.

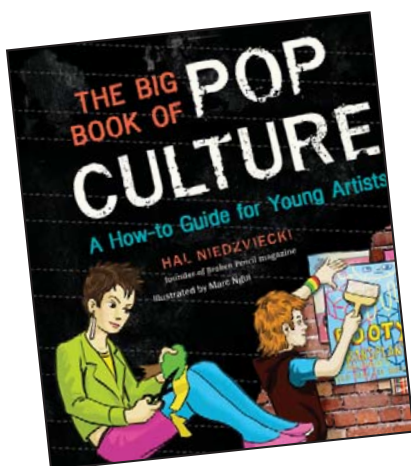
There are all kinds of ways to self-publish. Zines—which are generally photocopied—are the easiest to start with. But you can also self-publish newspapers, comics, webzines, even books. It depends on what you want to achieve and what your budget is, of course.

One day you might graduate to starting your own full-color, glossy magazine. Or you might want to publish a monthly community newspaper. You might even decide to collect all the comic strips you've published in your various zines over the years and publish them in a book.

All those things are possible, but they are hard work. So why self-publish?

I've got one word for you: freedom. More than any other independent pop culture medium, self-publishing lets you create quickly, easily, and without a lot of complicated technology. If you want to, you can make a zine entirely from stuff you already have in your house. And to get started you don't need computers or any kind of electronic devices at all.

In short, putting out your own magazines, comics, pamphlets, or wild and crazy thoughts on everything from garden gnomes to girl-guy relations is relatively easy, a lot of fun, and a great way to show off how fascinating you are.



An excerpt from the book

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by Hal Niedzviecki

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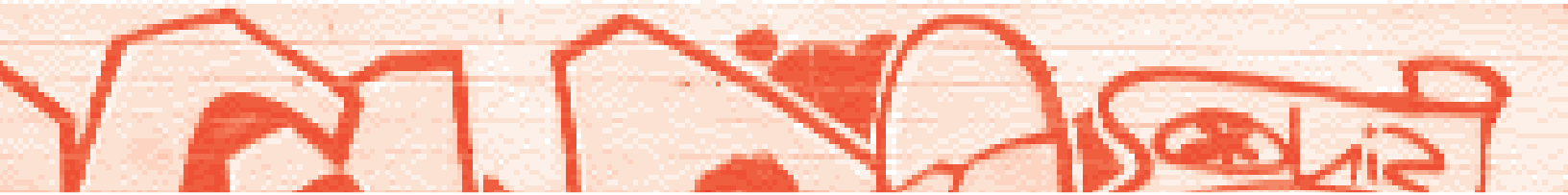


ASSIGNMENT

CLASSROOM F.P.O.

“F.P.O.” stand for “Free Press Organization,” a way of making zines that became popular in the politically-charged 1960s. Here’s how it works:

- Your classroom is going to publish a group zine.
- Everybody gets two standard-size pages they can use any way they want—or two sides of one page.
- You can tell a story, write a poem, draw a picture, make a collage, mash things together, make a puzzle, draw cool-looking fractals, anything.
- You can cut up old magazines, or print stuff you find on the Internet, or use color and texture and debris. Just remember, your final pages will be photocopied, so much of the color and all of the texture will be lost—unless you put the color or texture on *after* each copy gets printed.
- On Friday (or whatever day your teacher specifies) everyone hands in their two pages. You might want to put your name on each page —it gets a little crazy after this.
- Next, one person or a team is designated to make enough copies of every page for every person. If you have 25 people in your classroom, you need to make 25 copies of each page. Now you know why so many zinesters get started using the copy machine where they work or where their parents work!
- Next, a person or team needs to *collate* the photocopied pages. That is, you put the pages in order to make complete zines. Collating parties can be noisy, raucous affairs with everyone passing sheets of paper in a circle. Sometimes you don’t want every thing in perfect order, so you might turn a page upside down or “shuffle the deck” and assemble the pages out of order.
- Next, a person or team needs to *bind* the pages into a zine. You can do this with a stapler, a paper clip, tape along the binding, comb-binding, 3-hole punch and put in a binder, tuck in the pocket of a portfolio folder, twine, sew the binding, use ribbon—whatever seems right.



- Next comes *distribution*, the bane of so many small publishers, but in your case it's easy. One person or a team is selected to hand out one copy of the finished zine to every contributor. You can make extra copies if you want—for teachers, parents, the library, or for sale. But a true F.P.O. is sent only to those people who participate.
- Now you can have a publication party. Everyone gets a chance to admire everyone else's work in the finished zine. You can pass around copies for each other to sign.

Many F.P.O.s are published this way every month. Everyone who subscribes by sending in money for copying and mailing costs gets 2 or more pages each month. You have to have your pages in by, say, the 20th, and then copies are made, collated, bound, and mailed by the end of the month.

Some F.P.O.s get a little out of control, with people trading their unused pages to other subscribers. Sometimes people amass a huge number of pages to publish a single, long piece of work. Some people subscribe to get the zine, but never contribute pages. When people stop sending stuff in—or the editor gets tired of all the copying and mailing—the zine is over. Some F.P.O.s have lasted for decades as a way to share members' works with each other.



QUIZ

NOTE: Quiz answers are available at the end of this document.

1) Multiple Choice

What does the term “collate” mean?

- A. To put into order.
- B. You and a friend came in late together.
- C. To rub charcoal on a drawing.

2) Matching

Match the letter/term with the number of the best definition for that term.

- | | |
|-------------|--|
| A. magazine | 1. an early form of zine put together by sci-fi buffs |
| B. fanzine | 2. an online publishing platform often used as a diary |
| C. webzine | 3. a self-published micro publication, often handmade |
| D. zine | 4. a glossy, full-color publication sold on newsstands |
| E. blog | 5. an online publication, sometimes called an “ezine” |

3) Multiple Choice

Which of the following is NOT a popular method self-publishers use to distribute their zines?

- A. Hand-delivered.
- B. Delivered by mail.
- C. Put on the counter or rack at a store.
- D. FedEx next morning overnight delivery

4) True or False

You must have permission from the copyright holder to use artwork from magazines in your own zine?

5) Multiple Choice

What does F.P.O. stand for?

- A. Freedom to Publish Often
- B. First Push “On”
- C. Free Press Organization
- D. Freeland Polytechnic Oddatorium



DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- Can you name some famous documents that were self-published? *The Communist Manifesto* was self-published and changed the world. Thomas Paine's *Common Sense* was self-published; many people credit it with sparking the American Revolution. Ask your librarian for help finding famous works that were self-published and learn enough about one of them to share with the class.
- When is it okay to use artwork or text you find on the Internet in your own projects? When is it not okay?
- Tell the class about a zine you found. That's right—not a zine you made or bought but one you found. The library is probably the easiest place to find a zine. Grocery stores often have free literature racks near the entrance with health & fitness zines or used-car zines or buy/sell/trade zines. Bookstores have lots of zines—but you can't *buy* your zine—you have to find it. So look for the free "litmags" at the entrance to the bookstore. Another great way to find zines is to stroll the neighborhood on recycling day. Talk about the unusual places and strange zines people discover on their free zine hunt.
- What is the difference between "creativity" and "originality"? Can you give examples of each? What's so great about being creative? What's so great about being original?
- Do you think anyone will ever notice or care about what you write online or see the images you post on the Internet? Would you feel uncomfortable if you knew people were looking at your blog, but you didn't know who they were? Do you think it's okay for advertisers to watch what you post on the Internet and use that information to target you with ads?



QUIZ ANSWERS

NOTE: Quiz answers are available to teachers upon request from LIVEbrary@annickpress.com. Quiz answers will be revealed during the live Skype Chats and made a part of the Skype Chat Transcripts.

1) Multiple Choice

What does the term “collate” mean?

- A. To put into order.
- B. You and a friend came in late together.
- C. To rub charcoal on a drawing.

Answer:

A. To put into order. Collating a zine means to assemble the final pages in order. It can be a lot of fun to do with friends.

2) Matching

Match the letter/term with the number of the best definition for that term.

- | | |
|-------------|--|
| A. magazine | 1. an early form of zine put together by sci-fi buffs |
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| E. blog | 5. an online publication, sometimes called an “ezine” |

Answer:

- | | |
|--------------------|---|
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3) Multiple Choice

Which of the following is NOT a popular method self-publishers use to distribute their zines?

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- B. Delivered by mail.
- C. Put on the counter or rack at a store.
- D. FedEx next morning overnight delivery

Answer:

D. FedEx next morning overnight delivery. Do you know how much that would cost! Some people will actually overnight their contributions to an F.P.O. in order to make the deadline, but I've never heard of a zine mailed to subscribers by FedEx overnight!

4) True or False

You must have permission from the copyright holder to use artwork from magazines in your own zine?

Answer:

False. Companies try to scare you about using text or images without permission, but international copyright law says you have the right to cut up, use, mash up, and mess with any magazines, newspapers, books, videos, DVDs, CDs, photographs, MP3s, you own—for your personal pleasure, or to share in a noncommercial among your friends, or for educational purposes. That means you can use copyrighted material for your classroom F.P.O. project. Just remember it's wrong—even if it's not illegal—to take credit for someone else's work. And it *is* illegal to use someone else's creations in a commercial way without their permission. If you sell your zine—or even accept paid advertising—you legally must have permission to use everything in it.

5) Multiple Choice

What does F.P.O. stand for?

- A. Freedom to Publish Often
- B. First Push "On"
- C. Free Press Organization
- D. Freeland Polytechnic Oddatorium

Answer:C. Free Press Organization. Subscribers to a zine each get the right to publish pages in the zine. And that's all that's in the zine: copies of the pages sent in by subscribers.