

## Starting up

- Name some famous cartoon characters from your country, or a country you know well.
- Read through the whole article. Then do the exercises below.

## Reading 1

Read the article again to find:

- Uderzo's collaborator
- the main character of their books
- the country he was from
- the number of published titles with this character
- the number of copies sold around the world
- the number of languages that the books were translated into
- two American cartoons that provided inspiration
- the year when Uderzo's collaborator died
- Uderzo's daughter
- the current publisher of the series

## Vocabulary 1 — identifying meanings

Use appropriate forms of words and expressions from the article to complete these statements.

(The number of letters is shown in brackets.)

### Paragraph 1

- If you don't understand something, you are \_\_\_\_\_. (7)
- Something great or impressive is \_\_\_\_\_. (10)
- If you hit someone, you \_\_\_\_\_ them. (4)
- Someone unbeatable is \_\_\_\_\_. (11)

### Paragraph 2

- If something has a powerful influence it has or holds \_\_\_\_\_ over other things. (4)
- If you like something, you're \_\_\_\_\_ it. (9, 2)
- A prefix meaning 'for' is \_\_\_\_\_ and one meaning 'against' is \_\_\_\_\_. (3 and 4)
- If you put your foot down onto the ground with a lot of force, you \_\_\_\_\_ it. (5)

### Paragraph 3

- If you don't accept something, you are \_\_\_\_\_ it. (9, 2)
- Someone extremely intelligent is a \_\_\_\_\_. (6)

## Albert Uderzo, cartoonist and co-creator of Asterix, 1927-2020

A gracious and modest man, Albert Uderzo always seemed a little puzzled by the phenomenal appeal of Asterix, the quirky moustachioed cartoon character he created along with his great friend René Goscinny. Perhaps the books were so popular because rebellious readers dreamt of drinking a little magic potion and biffing their bosses in the same way as Asterix scattered Roman legionaries. Perhaps it was because they identified with the spirit of the indomitable Gauls who bravely resisted the might of Julius Caesar's armies. But what has never been in doubt is the global success of the 38 Asterix comic books. They sold 380m copies and were translated into 110 languages, including Welsh, Hebrew, Afrikaans and Occitan. "In every country it is the same thing," Uderzo said.

The more we are under the sway of globalisation, the more people feel the need to rediscover their roots." In a small way, Uderzo, who died this week aged 92, helped define the very identity of postwar France. As one political commentator wrote: "Asterix is the citizen who is enamoured of liberty but thirsty for equality, the taxpayer who is pro-public service but anti-tax, the voter who would like to change everything but stamps his feet at the mention of reform. Asterix is neither from the right nor from the left but he is quite simply French."

Uderzo was the son of Italian immigrants, and grew up in the Parisian suburb of Clichy-sous-Bois devouring Walt Disney cartoons, such as Mickey Mouse and Donald Duck. In spite of being colour blind, Uderzo took up sketching, in black and white. He later said that the Americans had taught him how to draw, even though the US proved to be more resistant to Asterix's charms than most of the world. He began working in the 1950s on various children's comics with René Goscinny, a writer he described as a "genius of humour". In 1959 they helped launch Pilote magazine, introducing readers to Asterix and his plucky band of warriors.

In his memoirs, Uderzo recalled how they invented the characters of the fictional Breton village so beloved by millions. Stimulated by pastis and cigarettes and a fast-approaching deadline, they started riffing on the first history lesson taught to every French schoolchild. They decided that all of their characters' names ought to end with the suffix "-ix" in memory of the legendary chief of the Gauls, Vercingetorix, who vainly led the resistance to Caesar.

They started with Asterix, an adaptation of asterisk, because the name began with the first letter in the alphabet (useful for comics listings). The first Asterix album, Asterix the Gaul, published in 1961, was followed by a stream of other adventures. Even after Goscinny's death in 1977, Uderzo continued to publish new Asterix albums, both written and illustrated by himself. But, with great sadness, he acknowledged that these later albums lacked Goscinny's wit and sparkle. Uderzo fell out with his one daughter, Sylvie, who managed his estate. He sold the rights to Asterix to the publishing firm Hachette, which has continued to publish albums since 2011 using a different writer and illustrator.



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## Vocabulary 2 – related forms

Complete the table with words from the last two paragraphs, or related forms.

verb	noun or <i>-ing</i> form
recall	
invent	
	stimulation
	lead
adapt	
publish	(2 possibilities)
	illustration
acknowledge	
	falling out
lack	

## Grammar – adverbials of frequency

Place the adverb in brackets in its most 'natural' position(s) in each sentence.

- Uderzo seemed a little puzzled by the phenomenal appeal of Asterix. (always)  
*Uderzo always seemed a little puzzled by the phenomenal appeal of Asterix.*
- Uderzo and Goscinny drank pastis when they worked together. (*often*)
- Uderzo did the drawings and Goscinny developed the story-line. (*normally* – 2 possibilities)
- They wrote books that were not best-sellers. (*seldom*)
- For some reason, the books were popular in the US. (*almost never*)
- The albums were translated into other languages. (*frequently* – 2 possibilities)
- Non-French people find it difficult to understand the humour. (*occasionally* – 2 possibilities)
- Uderzo and Goscinny fell out. (*from time to time* – 2 possibilities)
- The books are used to teach French. (*sometimes* – 3 possibilities)
- For a long time, Sylvie spoke to her father. (*never*)

## Reading 2

Which are the correct 'takeaways' from the article?

- a) The books were very French but had global appeal.
- b) The books were best-sellers in the US.
- c) The character of Asterix somehow embodies the French spirit.
- d) The series was not as good as it had been after Goscinny's death.
- e) The series has always had the same publisher.

## Further discussion / Group work

- 1 What is the status of comic books in your country or one you know well? How are they considered?
- 2 Who from your country's history would make a good comic book hero with international appeal?  
Give reasons.

**Level: B2****ANSWER KEY****Reading 1**

- |                  |                              |
|------------------|------------------------------|
| a) René Goscinny | f) 110                       |
| b) Asterix       | g) Mickey Mouse, Donald Duck |
| c) France        | h) 1977                      |
| d) 38            | i) Sylvie                    |
| e) 380 million   | j) Hachette                  |

**Vocabulary 1**

- |               |                |
|---------------|----------------|
| 1 puzzled     | 6 enamoured of |
| 2 phenomenal  | 7 pro-, anti-  |
| 3 biff        | 8 stamp        |
| 4 indomitable | 9 resistant to |
| 5 sway        | 10 genius      |

**Vocabulary 2**

- | verb        | noun or -ing form       |
|-------------|-------------------------|
| recall      | recall                  |
| invent      | invention               |
| stimulate   | stimulation             |
| lead        | lead                    |
| adapt       | adaptation              |
| publish     | publication, publishing |
| illustrate  | illustration            |
| acknowledge | acknowledgement         |
| fall out    | falling out             |
| lack        | lack                    |

**Grammar**

- 2 Uderzo and Goscinny often drank pastis when they worked together.
- 3 Normally, Uderzo did the drawings and Goscinny developed the story-line.  
Uderzo normally did the drawings and Goscinny developed the story-line.
- 4 They seldom wrote books that were not best-sellers.
- 5 For some reason, the books were almost never popular in the US.
- 6 Frequently, the albums were translated into other languages.  
The albums were frequently translated into other languages.
- 7 Occasionally, non-French people find it difficult to understand the humour.  
Non-French people occasionally find it difficult to understand the humour.
- 8 From time to time, Uderzo and Goscinny fell out.  
Uderzo and Goscinny fell out from time to time.
- 9 Sometimes, the books are used to teach French.  
The books are sometimes used to teach French.  
The books are used to teach French sometimes.
- 10 For a long time, Sylvie never spoke to her father.

**Reading 2**

- a), c) and d)

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