

Sister Cities Use Comics to Build Understanding

One year ago, in the Autumn of 2008, the Henniker-San Ramón Sister Community Project began to use a new tool to build cultural bridges of friendship and understanding between the children of New Hampshire and Nicaragua: comic books. The Henniker-San Ramón Comics Exchange now facilitates



Marek Bennett's story of the comics exchange.

comics-based cultural exchange between students and families in the sister communities of Henniker, New Hampshire, and San Ramón, Nicaragua. Participants work together to produce original comic books about their communities, self-publish and translate the comics, and share them with each other, with their community members, and with their peers in their sister community. The program also encourages and supports educational delegations, and provides professional networking opportunities between educators, librarians, and artists working in the communities.

The process begins with a workshop for participants in the sister communities. Individual students then begin their drawing and writing projects in collaboration with teachers. The comics are economically reproduced and copied and then read at family/community events. The students work on translating their work so that the comics are bilingual and they are then exchanged between participating schools in Henniker and San Ramón. The program aims to train teachers in using comics techniques in their classrooms, and conducting independent exchanges between schools. The home-made comics portray similarities and differences between participating communities and cultures, leading participants to a better understanding of both local and

global solidarity and community.

Henniker native Marek Bennett started the workshops through his school-based Comics Workshop programs. Each student's comic tells a unique story about the community of Henniker or of San Ramón. "Anybody can do comics," says Bennett. "You don't need lots of money or a studio. You don't even need any experience!" "The stories these kids can tell will reach across cultures and languages to make real, human contact," Bennett predicts. Bennett has been a member of two separate Henniker-San Ramón delegations in the past. He currently teaches comics all over New England, plus music and Spanish at the Hopkinton Independent School, and draws the award-winning comic strip, "Mimi's Doughnuts" for New England newspapers.



Henniker students present their work to the community.

The Henniker-San Ramón Sister Community Project has facilitated social justice and humanitarian aid projects between Henniker and San Ramón since 1993. Past projects include drinking water projects, hurricane relief construction brigades, funding for elementary schools and childcare centers, and training

HENNIKER - SAN RAMÓN Comics Exchange

MY HOME TOWN
HAS THIS **SISTER
COMMUNITY**
PROJECT WITH
A TOWN IN
CENTRAL AMERICA



HENNIKER,
NH * U.S.A.
A LITTLE TOWN IN
THE HILLS... COLLEGE,
SKI AREA, B.C. ...
ALL THE FIXINS!

SAN RAMÓN,
Matagalpa * Nicaragua
A CENTRAL VILLAGE
B OUTLYING "COMARCAS"
IN THE COFFEE-GROWING
MOUNTAINS OF
NORTHERN NICARAGUA!

ABOUT A YEAR AGO,
WE WROTE SOME GRANTS
FOR AN INTERNATIONAL
COMICS EXCHANGE

AND THEY
CAME
THROUGH!
WOO-HOO!