

## A Choose to Read Ohio Toolkit

Use this toolkit to plan book discussion groups or library programs.

Meet Ohio author Brad Ricca and learn about Siegel and Shuster, the Cleveland team that created *Superman*.

Select from a range of discussion questions and extension activities to deepen the experience of reading and sharing *Super Boys*.

Discover interviews, informational texts, websites, and documentary videos to explore topics and themes in depth.

# Super Boys:

The Amazing Adventures of Jerry Siegel and Joe Shuster—the Creators of *Superman*

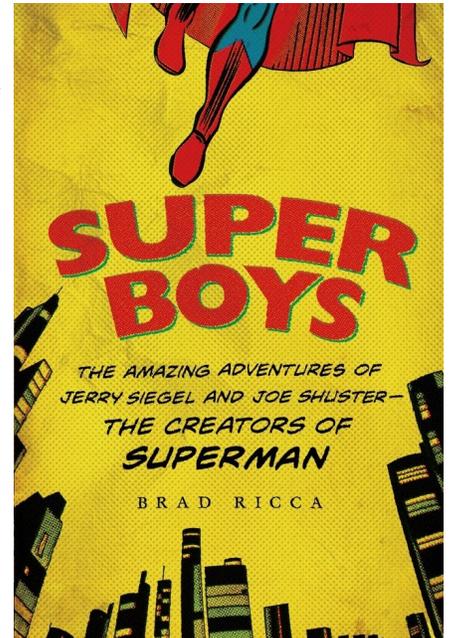
By Brad Ricca



## About the Book

Drawing on ten years of research in the trenches of Cleveland libraries, boarded-up high schools, and secret, private collections, and a love of comic books, Brad Ricca's *Super Boys* is the first ever full biography about Superman's creators. Among scores of new discoveries, the book reveals the first stories and pictures ever published by the two, where the first Superman story really came from, the real inspiration for Lois Lane, the template for Superman's costume, and much, much more. *Super Boys* also tracks the boys' unknown, often mysterious lives after they left Superman, including Siegel's secret work during World War II and never-before-seen work from Shuster.

*Super Boys* explains, finally, what exactly happened with the infamous check for \$130 that pulled Superman away from his creators—and gave control of the character to the publisher. Ricca also uncovers the true nature of Jerry's father's death, a crime that has always remained a mystery. *Super Boys* is the story of a long friendship between boys who grew to be men, and the standard that would be impossible for both of them to live up to.



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## Book Details

***Super Boys: The Amazing Adventures of Jerry Siegel and Joe Shuster—the Creators of Superman*** by Brad Ricca.

St. Martin's Griffin, 2013. ISBN 9781250049681. 423 pages.

[us.macmillan.com/superboys/bradricca](http://us.macmillan.com/superboys/bradricca)

Available as an ebook through the Ohio Digital Library: [ohiodigitallibrary.com](http://ohiodigitallibrary.com)

Available as a downloadable talking book through the State Library of Ohio Talking Book Program: [klas.com/talkingbooks/ohio](http://klas.com/talkingbooks/ohio)



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**“Also bear in mind that we own the feature ‘Superman’ and that we can at any time replace you...**

**...It is entirely up to you and Joe, whether you wish our pleasant relationship to continue and whether you wish the strip ‘Superman’ to be syndicated.”**

## About Brad Ricca

Brad Ricca earned his Ph.D. in English from Case Western Reserve University where he currently teaches. He has spoken on comics at various schools and museums, and he has been interviewed about comics topics by *The New York Daily News*, *The Wall Street Journal*, and *All Things Considered* on NPR.

Ricca's film ***Last Son*** won a 2010 Silver Ace Award at the Las Vegas International Film Festival. His 2011 book of poetry, ***American Mastodon***, won the St. Lawrence Book Award. After the success of ***Super Boys***, he has turned his attention to his forthcoming novel, ***Mrs. Sherlock Holmes*** (2017), the story of Mrs. Grace Humiston, who solved a famous cold case and went on to become the first female U.S. District Attorney. Ricca lives in Cleveland.

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## Author Resources

Visit Brad Ricca's official website  
[brad-ricca.com](http://brad-ricca.com)

Follow Brad on Twitter  
@BradJRicca

Brad Ricca on Macmillan Speakers Bureau website  
[macmillanspeakers.com/bradricca](http://macmillanspeakers.com/bradricca)

**Book trailer for *Super Boys*** (video, hosted on Brad's Youtube channel. The channel also contains archival footage related to ***Super Boys***)  
[youtu.be/bqdBdcRaemg](http://youtu.be/bqdBdcRaemg)

***The Athenian*, CWRU's Torch-like student newspaper, interviews Brad**  
[cwruathenian.com/professor-bradley-ricca-announced-man-of-the-year](http://cwruathenian.com/professor-bradley-ricca-announced-man-of-the-year)

**Columbus Calling's Ohio-centric Brad Ricca interview**  
[columbuscalling.com/superman-and-the-buckeye-state](http://columbuscalling.com/superman-and-the-buckeye-state)

**For speaking engagement inquiries:**  
Contact Talia Sherer at MacMillan, [talia.sherer@macmillan.com](mailto:talia.sherer@macmillan.com)

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## Talk About It

Topics to share when discussing ***Super Boys***.

- Young Jerry Siegel often wrote in to “pulp” like *Amazing Stories* and *Science Wonder Stories*, finding a place in the letter-writing world of early science fiction enthusiasts. Have you ever written in to a magazine?
- Could conversations carried out in the letter columns of pulp magazines be considered forerunners of internet forums and online message boards?
- Years before Superman, Joe Shuster won an art contest through the *Cleveland Plain Dealer* and received citywide recognition for his portrayal of a football player in an athletic pose. What do you imagine Joe thought of his own potential when he found out he had won? Do you think he expected to create artwork as enduring as the perennial image of Superman?
- As Superman reaches commercial success, Joe is able to hire other artists to help him with the workload. Do you think he ever had hesitations about letting others help him draw Superman? Why or why not?

## Talk About It (continued)

- Do you think of Jerry and Joe's "Reign of the Super-man" as an early version of Superman, or as a separate creation altogether? How many differences does it take to make one character or story distinct enough from another to be considered separate? Although in this case it was the same creators in both instances, copyright law deals with questions of this nature frequently. What is the line between being inspired and simply copying?
- *Radio Squad* focuses on the automotive reality of the day, and the dangers inherent to automobiles (we learn on p.108 that Jerry himself was once sideswiped by a car as a child). Superman, too, takes an interest in promoting safe driving. How have vehicles become more safe? What dangers still exist, for motorists and pedestrians?
- On March 1st, 1938, Joe Shuster and Jerry Siegel, as creators of the character, signed all the rights attached to Superman away in perpetuity. Eventually, they were able to leverage public opinion to grant themselves a small share of the success of Superman and recognition as the creators. Imagine a hero who has public opinion's power to influence events. Do you believe that this "Public Opinion Man" (or "Public Opinion Woman"?) is generally a hero, or a villain? What is he or she like?
- Jerry's wartime gig with *Stars and Stripes* involved writing and a lot of comic relief, and yet he never spoke publicly about his service. Do you think he was scarred by the war, despite his relatively peaceful post? What would it have been like to be stationed in Hawaii during World War II? Would the war have felt distant, or close by?
- Ricca argues that Joe Shuster worked for the seedy *Nights of Horror* serial. Ultimately tied to grotesque real-world murders, *Nights of Horror* was likely a low point for Joe, but Ricca theorizes that he took the work in order to help support his struggling sister. What would you do to support your loved ones?
- Jerry and Joe had complicated personal lives. Were their various collaborative projects a means of escape from these complexities, or a way of reflecting on and processing through them? Are escape and reflection mutually exclusive?
- Ricca's research shows that "Bernard J. Kenton", one of Jerry's favorite pen names, was the name of a real-life individual who may have collaborated with Jerry on material for Superman, but never received direct credit. If this is accurate, it is deeply ironic considering Jerry's long struggle over the rights to Superman and his fight for recognition as the creator of the character. What do you think is the reality of the Bernard J. Kenton story? If Jerry never credited Kenton's work, how do you think he compared it to his own fight for recognition? What makes a person deserving of formal credit in work created through a process involving many individuals?
- Jerry almost certainly felt frustrated by the untimely death of his father. Superman himself loses his parents in his origin story. Yet Jerry was estranged from his own son from the time his first marriage fell apart, and never reconciled. Do you think Jerry was at peace with the estrangement? If not, do you agree with Ricca's theory that Jerry's regret about this bled through into the world of Superman?
- At the time of their deaths, Jerry and Joe had full credit for their status as the creators of Superman. Today, their old neighborhood is full of tributes to the Man of Steel. And yet for most of their lives they had to fight to get anything out of their very lucrative creation, and they often had little or no money. Do you think they were reasonably happy with the outcome of the Superman phenomenon, or do you think they would have preferred to create a character that had less of a cultural impact while they perhaps received more money for their work?
- Legal battles can be famously lengthy. Fights over the rights to Superman were continuing 75 years after the creation of the Man of Steel, and we probably haven't heard the last of it. Is there a better way to handle these situations? What can be done?

## Go Further

*Ideas for extending the experience of reading **Super Boys**.*

- To learn more about the Cleveland of Jerry and Joe's youth, visit Explora and other subscription research resources freely available to all Ohio residents through the Ohio Web Library ([ohioweblibrary.org](http://ohioweblibrary.org)).
- On p.16, we see the first fateful mention of a connection between Jerry Siegel and Joe Shuster. Imagine Jerry and Joe had never met, and Superman was never created. What might the first super hero look like if it wasn't the Man of Steel? What abilities would they have? See if you can draw your creation, or try writing out a script of one of their adventures. Or, would there even be such a thing as a superhero without Superman leading the way?

## Explore More

*Additional ideas and resources to use with **Super Boys**.*

### Superman

[dccomics.com/characters/superman](http://dccomics.com/characters/superman)

It's a bird! It's a plane! It's... a figure that was almost certainly familiar long before you had heard of **Super Boys**: Superman. Superman's come a long way since *Action Comics* #1, and so has the DC universe. **Super Boys** focused on Superman as created by Jerry and Joe, but the iterations of the Man of Steel that can be found in comic shops today echo not only across a multiverse of parallel versions of Superman, but even a multi-multiverse. Great Caesar's ghost!

### World Intellectual Property Organization

[wipo.int/portal/en/](http://wipo.int/portal/en/)

If your favorite part of **Super Boys** was the ongoing intellectual property (IP) legal drama, then the website of the World Intellectual Property Organization (WIPO) is for you. You may be especially interested in their collection of international case studies on IP topics, available here: [wipo.int/ipadvantage/en/](http://wipo.int/ipadvantage/en/).

### How to Draw

[makeuseof.com/tag/top-youtube-channels-learning-draw-comics/](http://makeuseof.com/tag/top-youtube-channels-learning-draw-comics/)

Makeuseof.com editor Yaara Lancel has collected a handy roundup of YouTube videos that help aspiring audiences hear and observe techniques for drawing comic characters. Joe Shuster's legacy lives on in more ways than one.

### Physical Culture

[libx.bsu.edu/cdm/search/collection/PhyCu/](http://libx.bsu.edu/cdm/search/collection/PhyCu/)

Ball State University's Digital Media Repository contains a substantial archive of high-quality scans of Bernarr Macfadden's *Physical Culture* magazine, which **Super Boys** cites as a potential source of inspiration for Joe Shuster's vision of Superman.

### Pulp Magazines

[archive.org/details/pulpmagazinearchive&tab=about](http://archive.org/details/pulpmagazinearchive&tab=about)

Young Jerry Siegel was very interested in "the pulps," ragged-edged magazines cheaply produced on pulp paper, designed to get stories to the public at a very low cost. With titles like *Amazing Stories*, *Astounding Stories*, and *True Detective Mysteries*, the pulps dominated the US affordable literature market in the early 20th century. Archive.org offers free access to full scans of thousands of pulp magazine issues.

Choose to Read Ohio, a project of the State Library of Ohio, the Ohioana Library Association, and the Ohio Center for the Book, encourages public libraries, schools, families, and others to build a community of readers and an appreciation of Ohio authors, illustrators, and literature. CTRO is adaptable for use in classrooms, libraries, bookstores, by book discussion groups, families, and other community groups.

Explore Choose to Read Ohio resources & toolkits:  
[library.ohio.gov/ctro](http://library.ohio.gov/ctro)

This toolkit revised  
December 2016.