

Full transcript of comic book writer Stan Lee's TEDx Talk: **What makes a superhero?** at TEDxGateway 2013 conference.

Stan Lee - Comic book writer and publisher

First of all, I really want to thank you for letting me speak to TEDxGateway in India about superheroes.

I wish I could be there in person, but this is the next best thing. I would really love to share some of the things I've learned over the years and share them with any artists and writers in India who might be wanting to create new superheroes and new superhero adventures.

India has been on my mind a lot lately, because I've been working with my good friend Sharad Devarajan and with Graphic India to create a new Indian superhero named **Chakra: The Invincible**, who lives in Mumbai.

My goal with Chakra was really simple: I wanted to bring an Eastern concept, like the chakras, to the Western world of superheroes.

And for me, superheroes will always spark the imagination of people around the world regardless of their background, because I think that people are always looking for something that represents the ideal person or the ideal situation.

Almost all of us have loved fairy tales when we were young. Just remember stories of giants and witches and wizards and monsters and things that were so colorful and bigger than life.

But then, you get a little older and you're too old to read fairy tales. But you never outgrow your love of that type of story.

And if you think about it, superheroes stories today are really like fairy tales for grown-ups. The characters are bigger than life, just like in fairy tales. They have the same type of superpowers: some can fly, some are extra-strong, some can be invisible.

It gives the viewer and the reader a chance to relive the excitement he or she had when they were young. They're really reading fairy tales for grown-ups when they read or when they see superhero stories today, and that's why I love them so.

To me, the human aspect of superheroes has always been, perhaps, the most important part. By that, I mean: Okay, we assume your superhero might be extra-strong, or might be able to fly or run as fast as a comet. But unless you care about the superhero's personal life, you're just reading a shallow story.

ALSO READ: [Carrie Roy: When Art Collides With Data at TEDxMileHighWomen \(Transcript\)](#)

Just because a person has a superpower doesn't mean he might not have the same personal problems that you or I might have. Maybe he doesn't have enough money, maybe he has a family problem, maybe the girl he loves doesn't love him. Or maybe the girl he loves doesn't want to be involved with a superhero.

There are so many things you can think of that round out the character and the personality, so the superhero isn't just one or two dimensional.

You want a three-dimensional superhero who lives and breathes and worries and experiences things just the way you and I do, except for the fact that she or he has a superpower.

One thing I might mention, most writers — and I think it's an unfortunate

thing — they try to write something that they think a certain audience might enjoy. I've never been able to do that, because I can't put myself in the mind of other people.

I only know what I enjoy. So every time I've written a story, I've always tried to write the sort of story that I, myself would enjoy reading, a story that would interest me while I'm writing it as I'm waiting to find out what happens next.

And I can't know what other people think, but I can know what I think, and I feel. I'm not that unusual. If there's a type of story I like, there must be lots of people who like the same type of stories.

Therefore, I have always written to please myself, not to please a certain type of audience, because you can't know the audience as well as you know yourself.

And if I write a story that I'm enjoying while I'm writing it and I can't wait to see what happens next, then I'm hoping that a large proportion of the public will feel the same way, and they'll enjoy it too.

So to sum it up, I have always tried to please myself, not other people. And somehow, it seems to have worked because I guess I'm not that different than other people.

ALSO READ: [Dave Morris: The Way of Improvisation at TEDxVictoria \(Full Transcript\)](#)

So, to wrap it up. What I suggest is, use your imagination, don't be afraid to come up with the wildest thought in the world if what you create is truly different and colorful, and if it's written well, people will enjoy it.

Now when I say "*written well*," what I mean is you might have the most fantastic notion in the world, suddenly you have a man who can fly faster

than the speed of light. That could be interesting, but you have to make him believable, you have to give the reader or the audience some reason to think he really has the ability to do that.

How did he get that power? Origins of superpowers are always very interesting. If you get the right origin, like, for example, Spider-man being bitten by a radioactive spider, at least, then the viewer has something to hold on to and to say, "Well, it might have happened, now I'll enjoy it."

So even though you're writing what amounts to a fairy tale for grown-ups, try to keep enough facts and try to give enough detail that the reader or the audience will say, "Well, it could have happened," and then your public goes along with the fun.

But if you make it too wild, and you don't give any reason why it is as wild as it is, then sometimes it can be overkill.

So what I'm trying to say is, let your imagination flow freely, but always base what happens on some sort of provable fact so that the reader or the viewer will go along with it and enjoy it as much as you enjoy writing it.

So good luck to you! Thanks for listening and I really enjoyed talking to you.

Excelsior!

Sharing is caring! [Share on Facebook](#)[Share on Twitter](#)[Share on LinkedIn](#)[Share on Pinterest](#)
[Multi-Page](#)