


### Stan Lee's legacy

adapted from an article by Sean O'Neill

- 1 Twelve minutes into the pilot episode of the 1970s TV series *The Amazing Spider Man*, a young Peter Parker, played by Nicholas Hammond, is bitten in a lab by a radioactive spider. Moments later out on the street, his brand-new spidey sense already tingling, he is chased by a car to the end of a blind alley. Without thinking, he launches himself onto the smooth wall and effortlessly climbs several storeys – much to his own surprise.
- 2 I was 6 or 7 years old when I saw this for the first time, and it blew my tiny mind. Those moments drew me into Stan Lee's comic-book world. Lee's decades as Marvel's top writer and editor helped to revolutionise comic-book superheroes and villains. Much of his success came because he focused on depth of character as much as on spectacle.A black and white photograph of Stan Lee. He is wearing dark sunglasses and a dark jacket over a white shirt. He is smiling and looking towards the camera, with his right hand extended forward as if gesturing. The background is a blurred cityscape with the word 'SPIDER-MAN' visible in large letters on a building.
- 3 In the 1960s, Lee was instrumental in increasing diversity in superhero characters, says psychologist and mental health counsellor Parker Shaw, based in Tulsa, Oklahoma, who has researched the psychological effects of reading superhero comics. "Most people had a superhero that looked like them, and struggled with the same challenges," says Shaw. Today, Shaw sometimes uses comic book narratives in therapy. "As a mental health counsellor, I am trying to connect with my patients in a way that both of us can relate to. Superheroes offer a safe, relatable outlet for children, adolescents and adults to openly discuss superheroes' struggles, while 19."
- 4 While DC Comics served up superheroes often destined for greatness (think Superman and Aquaman), Lee took everyday people, and thrust superpowers upon them, often courtesy of, let's face it, some very dubious science. Where would Lee be without radiation? A radioactive spider created Spider Man, exposure to gamma radiation produced the Hulk, while cosmic rays turned four astronauts into the Fantastic Four. As Lee admitted in an interview: "I'm the least scientific person you'll ever know, but I try to seem scientific with our characters. I wouldn't know a gamma ray if I saw it... But if it sounds good, I'll use it."

- 5 But perhaps Lee was being too 21. From artificial silk with curious properties (though unlikely to catch thieves just like flies), to power-lifting exoskeletons (though without Tony Stark's jet boots – yet), the futuristic technology that features in many Marvel creations may be just around the corner.
  
- 6 As well as his extraordinary creativity, Lee's own superpowers included his longevity. "I was first interviewed for Stan Lee's obituary about 20 years ago," writer Neil Gaiman tweeted: "I was happy he defied the reaper and carried on. With Stan now gone, aged 95, an era really does come to an end. He was the happy huckster that comics needed."

*newscientist.com, 2018*