Summer is here, and Marvel superheroes are...getting a makeover? In a single week, Marvel comics fans have been rocked by the news that Thor can no longer take up the hammer, and must yield it to a woman. And Steve Rogers, a.k.a. Captain America, has shed the cape and bestowed the mantle of Captain America on Sam Wilson, the African-American superhero formerly known as the Falcon. Usually, audiences view superheroes as standard-bearers for a generic "American Way" that they might not be able to articulate even if they were asked to do so. Makeovers like these, however, stimulate the moral and sociological imagination of audiences by reminding them that superheroes can and do represent specific values, lifestyles and points of view. In this MediaLit Moment, your late elementary and middle school students will get the chance to revise their favorite fantasy characters to embody--and even deliver--the message of their choice.

Ask students to "revise" a fantasy character they already like

AHA!: By changing this character, I can say things that are important to me!

Grade Level: 4-7

Key Question #4 for Producers: Have I clearly and consistently framed values, lifestyles and points of view in my content?
Key Question #4: What values, lifestyles and points of view are represented in, or omitted from, this message?

Core Concept #4: Media have embedded values and points of view

Materials: Paper, pencil, imagination

Activity: Deliver the news to students about the recent changes to Marvel characters if they haven't heard it already, and ask for their reactions (If you wish, display or play relevant media to help engage them in the activity). If they read comic books often, have they seen similar changes before?

Familiarize students with KQ and CC #4. One way of introducing students to the concept is to ask, what might these new versions of classic superheroes have to say about themselves, and why? Since these changes have to do with race and gender, you may want to ask questions to heighten students’ awareness of larger social issues.

Next, ask students to pick a fantasy character they like, and change that character to reflect their own outlook on the world. Producing a sketch should help students imagine and present the changes to their character. Has that character changed radically (like Thor or Captain America)? Have they simply picked up a new hobby? Next, ask students to explain the significance of the changes they've made. Is there something new this character has to say? What would the world be like if this character indeed had the power to change the world? As discussion continues, help students recognize that they're exchanging different points of view about what an ideal world should be like.
The Five Core Concepts and Five Key Questions of media literacy were developed as part of the Center for Media Literacy’s MediaLit Kit™ and Questions/TIPS (Q/TIPS)™ framework. Used with permission, ©2002-2014, Center for Media Literacy, http://www.medialit.com