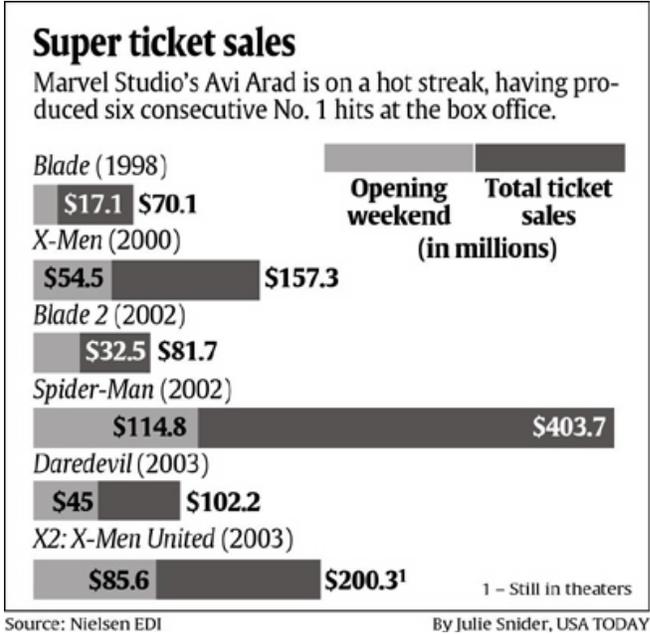


Activity 2: Super ticket sales



Activity Overview:

In this activity, you will create two box-and-whisker plots of the data in the USA TODAY Snapshot, "Super ticket sales." You will calculate mean, median, and mode values for both sets of data. You will then compare the two sets of data by analyzing the differences graphically in the box-and-whisker plots, and numerically as percents of ticket sales.

Focus Questions:

- Q. What are the mean, median, and mode values for the opening weekend?
- Q. Using the box-and-whisker plot that represents the ticket sales for the opening weekends, where is the first quartile?
- Q. Using the box-and-whisker plot that represents the ticket sales for the opening weekends, are there any outliers? Where does the largest spread occur?
- Q. What are the mean, median, and mode values for total ticket sales?
- Q. Using the box-and-whisker plot that represents the total ticket sales, where is the third quartile?
- Q. Using the box-and-whisker plot that represents the total ticket sales, are there any outliers?

See reading comprehension questions on the last page.



For use with the TI-Navigator™ Classroom Learning System



Conquering comic heroes

LIFE SECTION - FRIDAY - APRIL 26, 2002 - PAGE 1D

By Susan Wloszczyna

USA TODAY

Behind nearly every timeless comic-book hero, there's a deceptively unassuming alter ego who secretly possesses superhuman abilities.

And, lately, behind nearly every timeless comic-book movie, there's a seemingly non-mainstream director blessed with a bold populist vision.

Hollywood's hiring policy will be put to the ultimate test when Sony's heavily anticipated *Spider-Man* swoops into theaters next Friday. It will mark not only the blastoff of the summer movie season but also the blockbuster baptism of filmmaker Sam Raimi, he of cultish tastes (*The Evil Dead*) and low-budget morality plays (*A Simple Plan*).

Those in charge of the multiplex blitz based on characters owned by Marvel and DC (the Coke and Pepsi of the comic-book world) are on the lookout for distinctive filmmakers to propel the genre to new heights.

"People are realizing the brilliance that can be found in comics," says Joe Quesada, editor in chief of Marvel, home of the 40-year-old Spider-Man. "We're fighting the stigma that it's a child's medium. This is a more mature industry than is given credit for."

The right directors to conquer misperceptions are those who respect the material's modern-day myths yet carry enough confidence to lend a personal sensibility to high-stakes endeavors. And ones who

probably spent many a childhood afternoon absorbed in superhero exploits.

While growing up in Detroit, Raimi slept under a mural depicting the arachnid avenger. "I love the *Spider-Man* comic books the way an English scholar loves *Macbeth*," he confesses.

Others are equally eager to plumb the emotional depth found in comics. In the Marvel universe:

- **Bryan Singer**, best known for the twisty ensemble noir *The Usual Suspects*, successfully tackled the mighty mutants of *X-Men* in 2000 and is doing the sequel.
- **Ang Lee** of *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon* is applying his emotional lyricism to the Jekyll-Hyde duality in *The Hulk*.
- **Guillermo del Toro's** operatic approach elevated the vampire blood bath *Blade II*.

Says del Toro, who next does the film of comic *Hellboy*: "If a director looks down on the genre, fans can smell it a mile away. You shouldn't take a comic-book movie any lighter than you would Shakespeare."

DC, a division of the AOL Time Warner empire, is famously tightlipped about upcoming projects, all under the Warner Bros. banner, of course. But at least two are likely to get off the ground soon:

- **Darren Aronofsky** (*Requiem for a Dream*) is busy conjuring the fifth Batman episode.
- **Pitof**, a French visual effects whiz, is trying to get a leash on *Catwoman* with Ashley Judd.

Comics are serious business nowadays, especially at the movies. The campy archness engendered by the '60s Batman TV series doesn't fly with generations weaned on cowl and capes.

Says Michael Uslan, executive producer of the *Batman* franchise: "Our parents didn't read comics, or they burned them and threw them out. Baby-boomer parents have a respect for them and don't want to see them treated in a way that violates their integrity."

Precious merchandise

Recruiting directors who will do justice to a treasured hero's transition to the big screen is like "interviewing a babysitter to take care of your child," says Avi Arad, *Spider-Man's* executive producer and the head of Marvel Studios, which has dozens of film spinoffs in development. "To me, all our babies are important and fragile."

Forget formulaic hacks. Considering that the first *X-Men* extracted \$157 million at the box office and *Blade II* cut deep with a \$32.5 million opening, it can pay to go beyond the typical candidates.

And woe to those who manhandle not only a potential cash machine but also a superbeing dear to many. Says 20th Century Fox chairman Tom Rothman, whose studio has *X-Men*, *Daredevil* and *The Fantastic Four*. "In this arena, you can get hurt by playing it safe just as easily as taking a risk. Heaven help you if you do a bad version. Not only will it fail and lose money, it will engender enmity."

For *Blade II*, the best choice was "someone off-center who didn't come out of the studio system and could bring a fresh sense to the sequel," says writer/producer David S. Goyer about selecting del Toro (*Mimic*, *The Devil's Backbone*). "The last thing we needed was a journeyman who has done 30 movies and would phone it in."

Even more care was used when matchmaking Raimi with *Spider-Man*, based on Marvel's premier do-gooder.

It certainly was important to pick the perfect actor (doleful Tobey Maguire of *The Cider House Rules*) to personify Peter Parker, a high-school misfit who must balance amazing physical feats, painful sacrifices and homework after being bit by a genetically enhanced spider. Otherwise, the movie's core audience would be immediately alienated if the star didn't match their Everyteen ideal.

Even more key, however, was a simpatico maestro who could orchestrate the crime-fighter's back-story drama but wouldn't be intimidated by digital derring-do.

While there were many capable storytellers who could handle *Spider-Man's* technical requirements, Raimi impressed because he respected the character's origins as a Queens-bred nerd who's shunned by fellow classmates until science gone wrong intervenes.

"Trust was an important component," Arad says, "and there was a little extra soul to him, an extra dimension that made you feel sure you could share joint custody over this baby."

Adds *Spider-Man* producer Laura Ziskin, "My theory is that directors put themselves onscreen. Sam's sly sense of humor and his humanity are very much in this movie. He is a kind of perpetual boy and relates to that kid."

Out of the Bat cave

The original superhero blockbuster, 1978's *Superman*, went up, up and away with Richard Donner at the controls -- a reliably middlebrow director if there ever was one. Younger filmmakers, including Singer and Raimi, are admirers.

"The first half of *Superman*, with its vision of the planet Krypton and the town of Smallville, was a seminal, modern-day approach to comic-book movies," says *Batman's* Uslan. "It was grounded in a sense of reality, touching and human."

Others, though, find it dated.

"I know this sounds strange," *Blade II's* Goyer says, "but *Superman* doesn't have a comic-book mentality. It doesn't revel in it. None of the

films are imbued with that crazy sensibility."

The blueprint in place for the 21st century is the one established by an even more successful franchise bow: 1989's *Batman*, a grim urban fairy tale infused with Tim Burton's peculiar brand of battiness.

Alas, its declining-in-quality sequels sucked a good idea dry. As filmmaker Kevin Smith (*Jay and Silent Bob Strike Back*), who runs a comic-book emporium in Red Bank, N.J., says, "*Batman & Robin*, the fourth film, was the death of the comic-book movie. It was too hokey. But *X-Men* suddenly opened the floodgates again."

Singer brought about a Marvel-led genre revival with *X-Men* by remembering why the original *Batman* worked so well: Focus on the human, not the hero. Recalls Uslan, "Tim said on the first *Batman* that it wasn't about a guy with a square jaw and rippling muscles. It's about Bruce Wayne, the man inside the suit, not Batman."

Similarly, the *Spider-Man* moments that Raimi is most proud of aren't the flashy web-flings over noisy Manhattan traffic but quiet times "when Tobey is thinking and he's understanding the mistakes made in the past. I let him do his thing and trusted the story."

Raimi, with a \$100 million-plus budget at his disposal, doesn't consider his foray into the summer blockbuster circus to be a sellout.

"If a studio asked me to do it in a way that was not true to the character, it would be," says the director, who already has



committed to a Spidey sequel. "But they have been so supportive. They took a potentially valuable property and went outside the box."

But, as Uncle Bill warns Peter in *Spider-Man*, with great power comes great responsibility, and Raimi felt the pressure. "The expectations of fans were overwhelming, as was the import of the movie for the studio."

But the fascinating characters offer creative compensation.

An artist like Ang saw "the emotional, positive side of the Hulk," observes the film's writer-producer, James Schamus. "He understands he isn't simply a monster that is there to scare us, but that everyone has a bit of the Hulk in them and there is something very enjoyable, very empowering in experiencing 'Hulkiness'."

Singer never read comics as a kid, but doing *X-Men* still fulfilled a long-held desire. "I was always interested in doing something in the science-fiction/fantasy realm." A colleague suggested *X-Men*.

The initial movie had the daunting task of introducing a slew of characters, such as Hugh Jackman's Wolverine, who lacked the established cultural identity of a Batman.

But that didn't scare Singer. "Unlike a lot of comics, it's about a diverse group of reluctant superheroes forced by circumstances and beliefs to defend a world who hates and fears them. I found the dichotomy interesting. It's a great allegory of aloneness, particularly through adolescence."

Mark Steven Johnson, the writer responsible for the crowd-pleasing *Grumpy Old Men* comedies, may seem the odd man out as he oversees *Daredevil*, starring Ben Affleck as a blind lawyer whose other senses are heightened. But his directing debut, 1998's *Simon Birch*, was about a handicapped underdog much like Daredevil.

Besides, the comic-book freak vows to uphold Daredevil's honor. "I hate when superhero movies wink at the audience. The best thing is to take it seriously. But that doesn't mean you can't have fun."

With sequels a given and a launch of many new Marvel productions possible now that the company's legal and financial troubles of the past decade are subsiding, the most dangerous foe facing big-screen superheroes is a possible comic-book cinema glut.

"If you do them wrong and make a couple movies that seem redundant, it will hurt," says Marvel's Arad. "You have to remember that it has to play on a human level before you add the schmaltz, the computer graphics and the hero."

He suggests it's best to think of the Hulk and Spider-Man as stars, like Tom Cruise or Tom Hanks. "Do you ever get sick of seeing them? No, not with the right stories."

Besides, as any parent knows, all of Arad's "babies" are unique: "There's a teaser for *The Hulk* on the *Spider-Man* movie and, son of a gun, they are so different."



Reading Comprehension:

Q. What types of directors are being put in charge of making the movies based on Marvel and DC Comics?

A. _____

Q. What numbers appeared in the article as well as in the USA TODAY Snapshot, "Super ticket sales?"

A. _____

Q. What was the original superhero blockbuster and in what year was it released?

A. _____

Q. Bryan Singer brought about a Marvel-led genre revival by remembering that the movies based on comics needed to be about what?

A. _____

