Comic Books and Social Justice Teaching and Learning Guide

Resources produced by Curtis Peters

Graduate Student in SOC 610 Seminar: Teaching Sociology

Title of Video: Comic Books and Social Justice (What’s so funny about truth, justice, and the American way?)

Name(s) and Titles of Speaker(s): David Gallaher, Writer and Editor

Date of Talk: October 22, 2015

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| **Which disciplines would find this most useful?** | Sociology, Art, Mass Media, Special Education |
| **Learning Goal(s)** | Identify methods that comic books use to triumph social justice.  Develop methods to enhance understanding of social issues. |
| **Social Justice Learning Goal** | If you’re a hero, you can do great things. If you’re a superhero, you can do greater things. |
| **Relevant Topics, Concepts, and Key Terms** | Rescue Fiction – art based on the protagonist providing relief to a situation (my definition)  Comics as a tool to communicate  Otherness – the quality or fact of being different |
| **Companion Readings** | Bondy, A. S., & Frost, L. A. (1994). The picture exchange communication system. *Focus on autistic behavior*, *9*(3), 1-19.  Nyberg, A. K. (1998). *Seal of approval: The history of the comics code*. Jackson [Miss.]: University Press of Mississippi.  Wertham, F. (1954). *Seduction of the Innocent* (p. 125). New York: Rinehart. |
| **Discussion Questions** | What effect have comic books and superheroes had on social justice issues? |
| **Activities/Project Ideas** | Identify a social justice cause that you believe in, and create a comic strip featuring a superhero fighting for the cause.  Analyze a comic to identify the issue at hand, and the views of the protagonist and antagonist. |
| **Viewing Guide** | Fast forward to 20:40 for start of the introduction.  At 32:20, an audible emergency alert interrupts the speaker. There are further alerts.  Q&A begins 48:13.  **What was the overall effect of the Comics Code Authority on comic books?** Self-imposed censorship and decency. An aura of respect and dignity for government officials. Banned violent content, sexual themes, foul language, supernatural forces, demanded that evil always needed to be punished  **What major comic stable or universe started introducing more human traits and anti-establishment heroes?** Marvel |
| **Instructor Guide** | David Gallaher presents on superheroes and comics in the realm of social justice.  He identifies Superman as a social justice warrior, fighting for the general good, advocating for taxes and social welfare programs, fighting against domestic violence and corrupt city officials, for the unemployed, and the oppressed. In the Clan of the Fiery Cross episodes, Superman battles against the Ku Klux Klan, based on real information obtained by Stetson Kennedy’s infiltration of the group.  Gallaher discusses the effect that Fredric Wertham’s book, Seduction of the Innocent (1954) had on the world of comics. Wertham identified comics as a negative form of popular literature that lead to juvenile delinquency. Themes in comics include homosexuality among Wonder Woman and Batman and Robin, and anti-American and fascist traits of Superman.  Wertham’s book lead to the creation of the Comics Code Authority, a comic industry self-censorship organization. The Comics Code banned violent content, sexual themes, foul language, and supernatural forces; it demanded that evil always needed to be punished; police, judges, and government officials are always good guys, with an aura of respect and dignity. In effect, it took nuanced, diverse characters, and made them photocopies of cops. The Comics Code led to the campy graphics such as pow, zap, kapow, and zoom, among others, during its enforcement.  Marvel artist Stan Lee and others worked to re-introduce human traits and anti-establishment heroes to reflect comic book readers in their pages. Through direct marketing to comic book specialty stores, the authors were able to surpass the restrictions of the Comics Code Authority, and promote otherness in their pages.  David then discussed his background, including being born with a collapsed skull, being an outcast, and victim of bullying in school. He used comic books to provide solace, showing that he wasn’t alone. They (comic books) gave him strength, courage, and bravery to persevere.  Went into teaching, driven to be a better teacher than those that taught him. He studied under Andy Bondy, the creator of the Picture Exchange Communication System, which uses a series of pictures to create complete thoughts for those that are unable to communicate normally. This brought the realization that comics can do the same thing, constructing stories, while improving vocabulary and reading comprehension. Additionally, they serve as a bridge between picture books and full chapter books.  During the Q&A, Gallaher identifies comics that teach social justice, including Y: The Last Man, Fun Home: A Family Tragicomic, A Contract with God and Other Tenement Stories, V for Vendetta, Bitch Planet, Secret Six, Sex Criminals, New Warriors, Teen Titans, X-Men, Diary of a Wimpy Kid, and his comics, High Moon, Box 13, and The Only Living Boy |