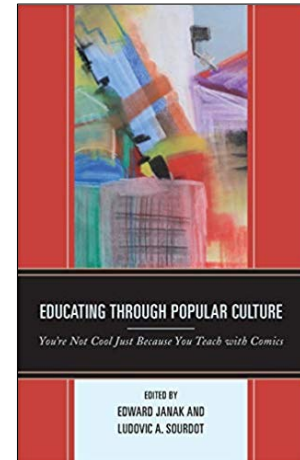


Edward Janak and Ludovic A. Sourdout (Eds.), **Educating Through Popular Culture: You're Not Cool Just Because You Teach with Comics**, Lexington Books, 2017, 341 pp., \$120 (hardcover).

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Since the late '90s, perhaps beginning with Buckingham's (1997) *Teaching Popular Culture*, there has been an attraction to linking learning material to popular culture to combine the interests of students with applicable classroom lessons. As part of these efforts, the editors of ***Educating Through Popular Culture: You're Not Cool Just Because You Teach with Comics*** provide educators an opportunity to share how they've used popular culture in their practice. Contributors to the volume highlight the significance of understanding the various forms of popular media in context with the topic of instruction. Altogether, the book is comprised of 14 chapters divided into five sections.



The first section assembles case studies that highlight the use of popular culture to teach history to pre-K–12 students. The examples, however, focus on 8th-grade and high school instruction. The second and third chapters provide frameworks for workable lesson plans, along with the specific Common Core Standards that the lesson plans address. Both of these chapters serve to inform and inspire instructors to consider similar lesson plans or adapt these as outlined. The first chapter provides less of a workable approach and instead focuses on explaining details about specific comics authored by Asian Americans. Through the use of negative stereotypes, the comic book authors hope to reclaim Asian American identity. There is a danger in this approach, however, and while this danger is noted, no advice is offered on how to steer clear of the potential pitfalls. A framework for introducing identity and author's intent would have been a compliment to the piece.

The second section offers additional case studies particular to community college and university classroom examples. The first chapter in this section outlines a four-year curriculum on instruction in sequential art within an English department. Unless readers can create or work from a similar scaffolding of courses, this approach would be difficult to emulate. Wenburg's chapter on teaching writing as a meditation process (or, reflective writing) includes example lectures, materials, and assignments. The author provides sufficient rationalization and guidance for an instructor to incorporate parts or all of the recommended practice as outlined. The final chapter, another strong chapter in the series, provides active learning strategies for teaching undergrads about migration through popular media via a critical approach. While the focus here is on teaching students about migration, the authors emphasize an opportunity for students to, "expand their cultural awareness and critically examine the news media and messages inherent in popular culture" (p. 122) more broadly.

Two instructors share their practice from a global perspective in the third section. The first in this section is both a reflective piece about using U.S.-based popular culture examples while teaching in Saudi

Arabia as well as an outline for creating a constructivist classroom environment. Instructors can take away methods for placing students as active creators of knowledge through interactive engagement. Al-Saati provides various examples for relating to millennials through the use of sci-fi and "dated" pop-cultural materials and references. The second chapter in this section discusses using pop culture television shows featuring characters with autism spectrum disorder (ASD) to "initiate conversations about the traits and learning needs of students on the spectrum" (p. 145). The author reasons that advocates for ASD students recommend using television programs to teach students "normal" social interactions; therefore, ASD-type characters on television may assist instructors to better understand this population's classroom behavior. Reference is made to "little professors" in the title and early in the text, but whom this is referring to, whether it's students on the spectrum or their future instructors, remains unclear. The piece focuses largely on characters from *The Big Bang Theory* television show, particularly on how these characters may be interpreted, rather than on how best to incorporate elements of the show and characters into the curriculum.

The fourth section suggests additional tips and lessons for using pop culture in teaching-preparation programs. The first offering in this section looks at using humor as a method of interpretation, specifically linking humor and critical pedagogy. The authors also forward the need to prepare preservice teachers to attend to the prevailing power structures and their roles within. More importantly, the authors provide various tips and recommendations for incorporating humor in various forms and formats. The next chapter in this section seeks to draw lessons from the television series *Orange Is the New Black (OITNB)*. The authors use the various characters to highlight "struggle in the domains of social, emotional and self-awareness and the consequences that then arise" (p. 190). At the end of each character reflection, the authors provide additional topic-specific resources. This chapter highlights the need for instructors to think outside of their own experiences so that they may better advocate for their students and their diverse needs. The final chapter in this section tackles introducing future teachers to the benefits of reflective practice through the use of popular culture examples. Timm begins by acknowledging that students often struggle to separate opinions and experience from philosophical thought and uses popular culture to help them differentiate the concepts. Through various activities, Timm encourages reflective practice for future educators who likely begin their roles with very little practical teaching experience to draw from.

The fifth and final section begins with a chapter on the use of comic books as historical documents to teach gender history. The author reflects on the need for multimodal literacy instruction to help students adapt to the changing concept of text and meaning-making. The rationale is provided for understanding the culture in which the text was created rather than just meaning-making. Although the author focuses on using comic books to teach Postwar gender history, the case is made for using multimodal primary texts for enhanced historical instruction. The second piece in the series compares themes in the movie *Daddy Day Care* to the experiences of men working in the teaching and care of young children. Each theme includes participant/observer personal ethnography reports from the field to highlight themes explored. The final chapter in this series highlights conservative student responses to jazz in the 1920s. Reasons for student opposition to jazz varied, and although the community of opposition was small and contained, the author argues that their voices should be included in the historical recounting of jazz's impact on society.

The book ends with concluding remarks from an instructor who is hesitant to include graphic novels in her curriculum and another who is frustrated with how comics are being integrated into the various

curriculums by instructors who don't understand the genre. This chapter taps into a larger conversation, or debate, about whether or not including popular culture into the curriculum truly engage students more. The authors provide a list of graphic novels interested instructors should consider.

Overall, the chapters combine in a way that reflects a diverse approach to incorporating pop culture into the existing curriculum. More specifically, the authors offer a framework centered on the educator. This book would be a helpful addition to an education course that explores pedagogical approaches. It is relevant to those seeking inspiration as well as practical examples for including popular culture in their classrooms. Although the authors did note that they wanted to provide a space for popular culture studies research, the fifth section seems rather out of place from the preceding chapters. Instead, a further examination of how well (or not) these curricular integrations have worked would have rounded out the book. Similarly, a broader conversation about the merits for including pop culture, as the conclusion chapter suggested, would have provided much-needed context about who shapes the curriculum and how. Nevertheless, the breadth of specific examples this volume offers are significant to those interested in exploring the implementation of popular culture in their classes.

Reference

Buckingham, D. (1997). *Teaching popular culture: Beyond radical pedagogy*. London, UK: Routledge.