



The Effect of Comic Books on Historical Empathy in High School Social Studies Students

Abstract

Historical Empathy is a person's ability to understand historical events through the perspectives of the time they occurred. Research suggests that individuals will display Historical Empathy at one of three levels. (Dulberg, 2002) The present study seeks to discover a way to raise the levels of Historical Empathy in high school students by using Comic Books in the classroom. Studies have shown that art can be a valuable window into the past as well as the experiences of past peoples. (LaMaiheu, 2011) Studies have shown that in recent years comic books have begun to be analyzed alongside more contemporary forms of art. (Sherwood, 2015) Comic book creators have a long history of addressing the issues of their day such as Stan Lee, Jack Kirby, Joe Simon, Joel Schuster, and Jerome Siegal. (Royal, 2011) The study sought to do this through the lens of the moral response stance to history. (Barton and Levstik, 2004) The moral response stance relies on students making moral connections to the content they are learning. Therefore, the present study chose comic books because of the present themes of justice and morality within them. The present study consists of three steps. Firstly, is a literature review that focuses on the usefulness of comic books to understanding history and the importance of historical empathy. The important hypothesis I wish to share is the possibility that using comic books in high school history classrooms may increase levels of historical empathy in students. Secondly, the study uses collected data from eight students at a semi-urban early college high school. Lastly, the present study seeks to better inform the discipline as well as to discover better teaching practices.

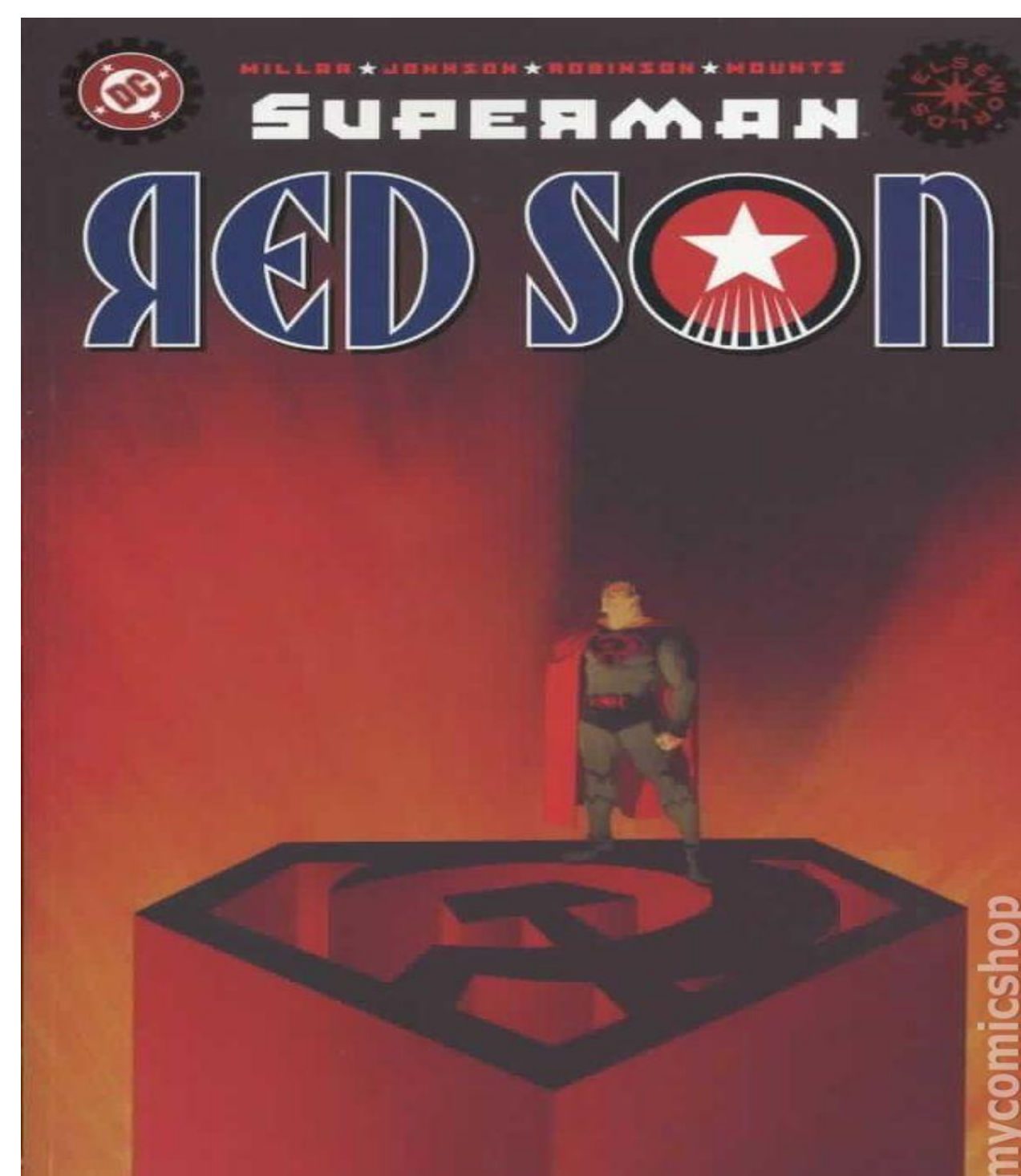
Introduction

This study was inspired by my shared love of both History and Comic Books. I realized that I had a deep knowledge about Comic Books and their historical context and I wanted to incorporate this into my teaching.

- Central Problem: Students need to have historical empathy in order to learn history.
- Purpose of the Study: To better inform the discipline and improve the quality of instruction by finding new ways to raise historical empathy.
- Central Research Question: What is the effect of using Comic Books on the levels of Historical Empathy on High School Social Studies Students?



She-Hulk #1 2014 from Marvel Comics by Charles Soule and Javier Pulido courtesy of Crushingkrisis.com



Superman Red Son #1 2003 from DC Comics by Mark Millar and Dave Johnson courtesy of mycomicshop.com

Literature Review

- There are studies showing that art can be a useful tool for visualizing the past (LaMaiheu, 2011).
- Comic Books have been written to explore themes that were important to the author in the period they were written. (Royal, 2011)
- Because of themes of remembrance, Justice, and Heroism Comics can be viewed through the moral response stance to find these themes (Barton and Levstik, 2004)
- Studies show that Historical Empathy is important to teaching students about the different perspectives of past peoples. (Rantala, Manninen, and Van Den Berg, 2015)
- According to Nancy Dulberg, Historical Empathy can be measured in 3 levels (Dulberg, 2002)
- The Level is based on a student's ability to make connections separate from their personal experiences. (Dulberg, 2002)

Methodology and Sample

- Sample size: 8 students agreed to participate out of 18 in a 10th grade Civics and Economics class in a Semi-Rural Early College High School.
 - Only 5 students were present every day of the study to be interviewed.
- Students were introduced to Comic Books as part of instruction through source Analysis.
- The Comic Books used were Batman #44 (2015), She-Hulk #1 (2014), Superman Red Son #1 (2003), Tales of Suspense #39 (1963), and Batman Trial of the Gun #1 (2004)
- Comics were used in instruction every other day over the span of two weeks.
- Comics were analyzed using the document analysis strategy SCUBA (Source, Context, Understanding, Bias, Analysis) the first three days. Students had 30 minutes to read the comic before analysis
- For the fourth and fifth lesson, Students were taught using Socratic Seminars. Students could take home the documents to read the night before. The change was made to prevent burnout in students.



Tales of Suspense #39 from Marvel Comics by Stan Lee and Don Heck. Courtesy of Comixology.com

Data Collection/Analysis

- Data was collected from Students throughout the course of the study in 3 ways.
- Firstly, students completed a survey at the beginning of the study to determine their overall level of engagement as well as baseline data.
- Students were observed during class based on their responses and reactions to the work being assigned.
- Students were interviewed the day after a comic book activity to note if their answers had changed.
- Once collected Students responses and observations collected were organized to determine their levels of historical empathy at each interval of the study.
- The Treatment was deemed successful if by the end of the study students showed a substantial increase in their Historical Empathy.

Student	Interview #1	Interview #2	Interview #3	Interview #4	Interview #5
Student #1	3	3	3	3	3
Student #2	2	2	2	2	2
Student #3	2	2	2	2	2
Student #4	2	2	2	2	2
Student #5	1	1	1	1	1

Results/ Discussion

- The Results of the present study suggest that there is no correlation between using comic books in social studies classes and increases in historical empathy.
- The student at level 3 reached this level because of answers beyond just their personal experience. They said that the comic they connected with the best was Tales of Suspense #39 which deals with factors from an era before he was born.
- The students at level 2 were able to make connections to other perspectives but only through a character they felt represented them. All these students said they connected best with She-Hulk #1
- The student at level 1 had issues with taking on other perspectives. They were unable to answer a question about a historical figure whose perspective they wanted to understand. They also look unengaged throughout the process
- Potential Problems and future Changes
 - The small sample size and issues with absences made a sample hard to collect.
 - There were students in class who seemed engaged in the activity who did not agree to participate in the study
 - This study was changed to fit a Civics and Economics class as opposed to an American History Class.
 - Students burned out with the document analysis quick as energy was down on the third day. Potentially due to the reading time.
 - Students needed a proper explanation of Comic Books throughout History.
 - Changing selection as students agreed to not liking Superman Red Son.