

THE EFFECT OF COMIC BOOKS ON HISTORICAL EMPATHY IN HIGH SCHOOL
STUDENTS

by

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Abstract

In this study, a group of 10th-grade civics and economics students from eastern North Carolina participated in two weeks of comic book centered instruction to increase their levels of historical empathy. Historical empathy is defined as the ability to understand the actions of past peoples through their mindset as opposed to modern values. Research by Nancy Dullberg states that historical empathy can be measured in three levels (2002). At the first level, students are severely restricted and require a concrete connection to their personal lives to understand history. At the second level, students are less restricted but still require a personal connection. At the third level, students still require a personal connection but can understand more abstract historical concepts. During this study, students received comic books as part of their regular instruction in order to try and boost their levels of historical empathy. The design focused on students being taught a lesson using comic books every other day for a total of five times over two weeks. These comic books centered around the topics of criminal justice, civil law, types of economic systems, entrepreneurship, and supply and demand. During this instruction, students participated in a mixture of document analysis strategies as well as Socratic seminars. Additionally, students were interviewed between lesson days to determine if there was any change in their level of historical empathy.

Keywords: comic books, historical empathy, social studies, literacy, historical literacy

Introduction

When teaching students history, it is important that they understand the mindset and actions of people from the past. History cannot be judged through the lens of present understandings of morality. Simultaneously, it is also unfair to assume that past peoples all believed the same thing. For instance, the issue of slavery is a concept that is often pointed to as an institution that was simply accepted. This understanding of the past, however, ignores those who opposed slavery from the start. To properly understand the past, students must learn that past peoples had depth to them. They had goals, ambitions, fears, and desires just like modern people. The only difference was the historical context that people faced. Therefore, it is important that students develop a sense of historical empathy. Research suggests that historical empathy is important to students learning and understanding history (Dulberg, 2002). Because they incorporate themes of Remembrance, Justice, and Heroism, comic books could potentially be used to foster historical empathy. Yet, comic books are not often used in contemporary classrooms. The problem of the present study is to determine the role if any, that comic books play in developing historical empathy. The purpose of the present study is to measure the effect of comic books on students' historical empathy as measured by Dulberg's three stages of historical empathy (2002). The guiding hypothesis is that because comic books contain historical themes and political messages, they can be used to promote historical empathy amongst students if they are used in classrooms.

Research Question

What is the effect of using comic books on student's historical empathy as measured by Dulberg's three stages of historical empathy?

Literature Review

Historical Representation in Art

A common form of historical representation is art and its various forms. Historical representation is present in art of all forms. An example of this is in the form of photographic images (LaMaiheu, 2011). As LaMaiheu wrote, photographic images, particularly digital ones, will allow historians to “walk through corridors of vanished buildings and encounter fully embodied representations of long-dead figures” (p. 82). The idea behind this is that photographs preserve historical memory. They preserve the past in a way that allows it to continue to be studied. Another example of how art serves as a historical representation is shown in the 2009 film *The Only Good Indian* (Stoddard, Markus, and Hicks, 2014). This film is set in the past and looks at historical issues that faced Native Americans such as assimilation and the ways native peoples have been used throughout United States history. Art and artistic representation have always been a form of historic representation. Therefore, comic books and graphic novels being an artistic and visual medium would also be historical representations.

Comic Books as Art

In recent years there has been a shift that has started to analyze comic books as art (Sherwood, 2015). This is because comic books are now considered the “Artist’s book” (p. 16). This is true to the extent that several prominent comic book artists have had their work featured in museums (Roeder, 2008). Comic art is seen as “complex aesthetic and intellectual ideas, holding its own in the company of more respected forms of art” (p. 2). Despite criticisms that comic books are childish, comic books are a form of art that has radically changed the concept and interpretation of the discipline.

Comic Books as Historical Representations

Comic books throughout history have served as forms of historical interpretation through the historical themes and ideas within them. This can be seen in the wide array of cultural and historical concepts that can be found within the pages of comic books. An example of this is how comic books have largely been defined by Jewish “ethnic themes” (Royal, 2011, p. 3). Many of the early comic artists such as Bill Finger, Jack Kirby, Joe Simon, Jerome Siegal, Joe Schuster, and Stan Lee were all men of Jewish heritage (2011). Therefore, the ideologies and culture of these creators shaped their comics. This suggests that the ideals and values of people both past and present can be found in comic books. Another example of this is seen in Art Spiegelman’s *Maus: A Survivor’s Tale*. While the comic was not written during the Holocaust it does contain Spiegelman’s perspective on the world. Spiegelman, however, based the novel off of his father’s story of surviving the holocaust (Chute, 2011). Throughout the comic, Spiegelman then uses his art and paneling to convey the horror of the period (2011). As evidenced in these works, comics display the attitudes and actions of people in the same ways that traditional art does. Therefore, it can be reasonably argued that comic books are a form of historical representation.

Comic Books and The Moral Response Stance

With comic books taking a role as a form of historical representation, then a classroom use can be assigned to them. One might argue that Comic books can be subsumed under Barton and Levstik’s moral response stance to effectively teach history (Barton and Levstik, 2004). The moral response stance focuses on three different forms in history and relies on the moral responses students have when learning content. The first of these forms is remembrance. Remembrance involves the events that students consider important enough to remember (2004).

In many cases, students attribute death to events that are important to remembrance. The second form that the moral response stance takes the form of Fairness and Justice (2004). Students have different perceptions of fairness and justice that are largely based on their world view. Certain students are more likely to point to examples of injustice in history than others. The final form of the moral response stance revolves around Heroes and Heroism (2004). This element dealt with the fact that Heroes are troublesome in history. This is because many heroes made non-heroic decisions and, therefore, it is important to focus more on acts of heroism than actual heroes (2004). Comic books fit under the Moral Response Stance because all three of these themes are present within the stories they tell. Themes of Remembrance, Justice, and Heroic acts can each be found within the pages of comic books making them a strong candidate for Analysis under this system.

Comic Books and Historical Empathy

Since comic books contain these moral response themes of remembrance, justice, and heroism they are a useful medium for teaching historical empathy. In comic books, there are themes of remembrance. In some cases, this can be by having characters who experienced real-world traumas or it can be through the event itself. An example of this is 1972's Amazing Spider-Man #108. This comic features a Vietnam veteran who is struggling with some of the things he saw while at war (Lee, 1972). This shows a form of remembrance that is different than the one Barton and Levstik mentioned. This issue remembers the problems faced by veterans who lived. This is another important aspect of remembering. Simultaneously, Comic Books also deal with themes of justice and fairness. Traditionally, superhero comics feature a narrative that involves themes of justice. They center around a hero who deals with crimes within the area they protect. These comics, though, show the opinions of what is just during the period it was written.

Lastly, comic books display themes of heroes and heroism. Like many characters, those represented in comic books typically are not completely pure. Their acts of heroism, however, are identifiable in comics. These examples of heroism display thoughts and ideas from the time of their creation. This makes comics an important tool for developing historical empathy.

Historical empathy is important to develop amongst students so that they can understand the actions of past people. Students are unable to properly learn history from events where they do not have a connection (Rantala, Manninen, and Van Den Berg, 2015, p.324). Students need to be able to understand the actions of past people as not unlike their own. This gives students a connection to the material that helps them further understand the past. The concept was originally designed to put “people, not battles and dates, at the heart of the subject” (Lee and Shemilt, 201, p. 40). An example of this is teaching students to understand the “kingly touch”. People did not believe in this because they were easily duped because sometimes it worked (2011, p.45). This is a fundamental difference to establish about the past and past peoples. These people were not ignorant, they simply saw things through a different context.

Consequently, it may be argued that comic books can and should be used to teach historical empathy. Art is regarded as a form of historical representation that can widely teach about past peoples. Comic books are a form of art that has undeniably left its mark on the discipline. Because of this, comic books can be considered a form of historical representation. When subsumed under the moral response stance it becomes clear that comic books can be useful for teaching historical empathy. This is because comic books contain themes of remembrance, justice, and heroism from the time of their creation. Historical empathy is important for students to develop because it creates a personal connection to content and allows

students to analyze past peoples in terms of their actions and motives. Therefore, comic books should be used in history classrooms to help students develop historical empathy.

Definitions

- Historical Empathy- The Ability to understand the motivations, actions, and desires of past peoples in a way that lines up with the perceptions and beliefs of the time as opposed to modern times.
- Dulberg’s Three Stages of Historical Empathy- Three stages developed by Nancy Dulberg following a 2002 study. Her study found that there are three stages to a student’s ability to apply historical empathy. These stages range from students having very little understanding of historical empathy to a fair amount of it (Dulberg, 2002).
 - First Stage of Historical Empathy- The first level has students showing “very restricted” levels of historical empathy (Dulberg, 2002, p. 13). These students need a lot of help with employing the skill (Dulberg, 2002, p. 13).
 - Second Level of Historical Empathy- The second level of students are “restricted” (Dulberg, 2002, p. 13). These students can show a base level of historical empathy, but not fully able to comprehend the concept (Dulberg, 2002, p.14).
 - Third Level of Historical Empathy- At this level students are the “least restricted” (Dulberg, 2002, p. 12). These students are capable of fully employing historical empathy, however, their answers still fluctuate sometimes (Dulberg, 2002, p.14).

Conceptual Framework

The guiding conceptual framework behind this study is Barton and Levstik's moral response stance. This stance splits student's responses to historical events into three categories which each focus on a different emotional response to history. These stances are based on Remembrance and Forgetting, Fairness and Justice, and Heroes and Heroism (Barton and Levstik, 2011). This conceptual framework provides a basis for analyzing the effect that comic books have on historical empathy. In traditional comic books, the expressed themes of remembrance, fairness, and heroism can be found widely. Therefore, the moral response stance explains why students would react to comic books. If these themes touch students on an emotional level, then this same element can be applied to comic books. Students will respond to varying instances in comic books based around the concepts of remembrance, justice, and heroism expressed within them.

Methodology

Overview of Methodology

The central research question that guided the present study was, what effect does the use of comic books/ graphic novels have on historical empathy in high school history students? The study was quasi-experimental using a survey, observations, and interviews. The goal behind using this method was to get the students' opinions toward the use of comic books from them directly.

The population of the present study was high school sophomores. The sample of the study was 18 sophomore civics and economics students in a semi-urban Early College High

School. This was a small sample of the entire student body, and only 5 students completed the study in its entirety, which may have negatively influenced the accuracy of the results.

Students learned using comic books as part of their regular instruction. The comic books related to varying topics in Civics and Economics depending on what was being covered during that unit of instruction. Students analyzed comics using document analysis strategies and Socratic Seminars. This was implemented five times over two weeks. On the first day a baseline survey was taken. On days between comic book lessons, students were interviewed to determine their level of historical empathy. Following this, the goal was to analyze changes in the research to see if historical empathy stayed consistent with their initial level or if there were any significant changes over two weeks. Changes in historical empathy were measured daily by either using a teacher observation or student interviews. Behavior was measured at this interval because it allowed a significant amount of time to see if comic books raised students' levels of historical empathy. Once the period of the study was complete the data was analyzed to determine if any significant changes in levels of historical empathy occurred. Then, significant trends or disparities were analyzed to determine the results. This was done to demonstrate whether using comic books influenced historical empathy.

This study used triangulated approach, using information from surveys, participant observation, and conducting interviews with students. This method was informed by prior research studies into the areas of historical empathy and student engagement. Change in behavior was measured by first establishing a baseline of student performance before comic books were introduced. This was done by using a survey to measure student engagement in history classes. The use of surveys to measure student engagement is based on the research of several members of the field who studied various methods of increasing engagement.

Treatment

For the present study, comic books were implemented into lessons every other day of instruction for a period of two weeks. Between lesson days, students were interviewed to assess any changes in their level of historical empathy. The comic books used were related to the unit that students were studying and followed the North Carolina essential standards for Social Studies. The first activity in the research was a baseline survey that recorded students' perceptions of the discipline as well as their current levels of student engagement in history classes. The design was to gather baseline data on students. During this study, comic books were implemented in ways that attempted to analyze them as sources. Ranatla, Mannien, and Van Den Berg recognized that historical empathy "requires an ability to both interpret historical sources and use this knowledge to explain the choices and actions of people in the past" (2015, 325). For this reason, the decision was made to foster historical empathy through the means of document analysis. These comics were chosen based on the subject areas that were covered over the two weeks. These were *Batman* #45 (Criminal Justice), *She-Hulk* #1 (Civil Law), *Superman Red Son* #1 (Types of Economies), *Tales of Suspense* #39 (Entrepreneurship), and *Batman/Catwoman Trial of the Gun Part 1* (Supply and Demand).

For the initial three comic books, students utilized a document analysis tool called SCUBA (Appendix A). The tool required students to look for the type of source, the context of the source, an understanding of the source, the bias in a source, and the application of a source. This was a simple and intuitive tool that helped students analyze sources. A simple strategy was chosen for students because of the unique nature of the documents being analyzed. On these days students were presented with a copy of the comic for analysis and had 30 minutes to read and annotate them. The time of 30 minutes was chosen based on another study by De Leur, Van

Boxtel, and Wilschut (2017). In their study they gave students 30 minutes to analyze documents before giving students writing assignments. The same concept was applied here to try and give students ample time to read the documents. When they finished the activity, the class reconvened and discussed the SCUBA strategy. The other strategy that was utilized for the remaining two comics was to have students read the source overnight for homework. They had to annotate the source and take notes on important elements of it. Then the next day it was discussed in a Socratic Seminar. This way the activities kept the original intent of analyzing the historical significance of Comic Books without overexposing students to this form of instruction. According to De Leur, Van Boxtel, and Wilschut, “Students can show historical empathy in almost every type of task” (2017, p.335). This is because “When writing an essay, or discussing a question on an historical event, they can take thoughts and feelings of historical actors into consideration” (p.335). Therefore, the decision was made to have these documents become a part of full class discussions. Even when they were being analyzed as sources the discussion element was present.

Data Collection

Baseline data was established using an initial survey that students answered on the first day. The change, or lack thereof, of historical empathy in students was measured over time through a series of interviews (appendix B) conducted using Nancy Dulberg’s three stages of historical empathy (Dulberg, 2002). This was done because the stages show clear differences and observable differences in the level of empathy possessed by students. Changes in historical empathy were measured every other day between comic book lessons. This was done to provide a real-time account of student responses while the activities were still fresh in their minds. This way data was more likely to be accurate. End data was collected by triangulating the three

components of data collection. This was the interviews, the survey of engagement, and personal observation. The conclusion was drawn based on whether or not students showed an increase in historical empathy from their initial interview. Data was first collected by giving students a baseline survey. These were given at the beginning of the study to determine their typical level of engagement in a history class. Then students had the comic book-based lessons incorporated during class time. This was done every other day. During these days, data was collected by observing the actions and comments students made during the activities. On the days between these lectures, students were interviewed to further gather their thoughts on the assignments given and to further measure historical empathy.

Data Analysis

Data was analyzed based on an increase in the students' level of historical empathy. Responses were measured during the first interview to establish a student's initial level of historical empathy. This was measured according to Dullberg's criteria to determine if the students' historical empathy increased (Dullberg, 2002). The student surveys were used to determine if student engagement had any impact on the results. Student Engagement is important to understand with any classroom activity because if students do not feel engaged then it could explain shifts in data that impact the research. Lastly, the data from the teacher observation was used to notice student behavior that shows signs that their historical empathy or potential issues with instruction. If students showed an increase in their level of student engagement, then it could indicate that there is a positive correlation between using comic books and promoting historical empathy.

The primary form of data utilized was the interviews. These were measured alongside observations made and the rubric for Dullberg's stages of historical empathy (Appendix C).

Interviews were used when Dullberg created the stages and therefore were used here to measure historical empathy (2002). If a student's interviews and observable characteristics were higher up on Dullberg's stages than they were previously then they were moved up in level. If by the end of the activity Student's level of historical empathy had increased by one or more levels, then the treatment was considered successful. During the analysis, Barton and Levstik were considered in terms of how students picked up on themes of Heroism, Justice, and Remembrance. This was to see if students called upon these themes when giving their answers.

Results

To answer the central research question, data was collected from the students who agreed to participate in this study. Of the 18 potential participants, only 8 agreed to participate in the research and only 5 were present for all the days required to collect a full data sample. Data was organized based on a student's answers to interview questions and observations made about them during class. This was measured using the attached criteria based on Dullberg's work (Table 1; Appendix C). The idea was that significant increases in historical empathy could be measured by changes in the stages of historical empathy at which students met.

Table 1

Student Levels of Historical Empathy over Time

| 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 |

An example of how data was analyzed is the student who scored a level 3 on the criteria. As indicated in Appendix C, these students can draw abstract connections and are the least restricted in their historical understanding. They first showed signs of being level 3 from their first interview. This is particularly evident when they were asked about a figure from social studies that they believe they could empathize with. They stated that they could empathize with President Andrew Jackson. When asked why they replied that “People always thought of him in general as not a great president, but he had great intentions.” To explain this the student stated that “obviously he killed a lot of people as President, but there’s always a reason for people doing something and through his perspective maybe his reasons weren’t always bad.” This reaches a level 3 because the student was able to make connections to the material with little personal connection and was able to understand that Jackson may have had good intentions when he made these decisions. The student denotes that from a modern perspective Jackson’s actions

have framed his legacy; however, the student also recognizes that looking at things through Jackson's perspective would explain why he took the actions that he did.

The student also echoed themes of fairness from Barton and Levstik during this exercise. This was true when they were asked about a character from the comic, they felt they could empathize with. To answer this question the student chose to focus on the police officer featured and the fairness related to his portrayal in the comic. The student responded that while it was wrong that the officer had shot the teenager, he felt that the officer deserved fairness. They tried to be fair to the character saying "he's a police officer he's going through stuff...[the officer] was jumpy and he wouldn't do what [the officer] told him to do so [the officer shot]." Throughout the comic which focuses on a police officer shooting a black teenager, the officer is very much portrayed as a troubled person. Here the student was able to pick up on it and try to empathize with their perspective as well as applying justice. Simultaneously, they also expressed the idea that fairness could be applied to the teenager. They remarked that he was forced to take the actions he had in the comic and that he was not treated fairly, either. Overall, this student showed a strong example of historical empathy during their first interview.

The student kept this consistent throughout the study. A prime example of this was during the 3rd interview. The student discussed the fears about communism expressed through *Superman Red Son*. They stated that the comic which focused on a world where Superman landed in the Soviet Union instead of the United States was relatable in terms of the modern world. In the comic, there is a strong theme of the United States trying to catch up to the Soviets and their Superman in terms of development. To this, the student said "if I was in the position of the U.S., I would want the same. I would want to have all the things the Soviets had to avoid getting overpowered." Here the student received a level 3 because they were able to draw

abstract connections to something that goes beyond their personal experiences. They did not live through the cold war but were still able to empathize with the mindset of those who lived through it. They connected with the idea that the United States had to be better than the Soviets. This was regardless of the period that was focused on in the comic.

Many of the students interviewed performed lower on the scale of historical empathy mostly scoring at level 2 (Table 1). One student also scored a level 1. These students struggled with the interview question of if there was any figure from history that they felt they could take their point of view. Often these students had prolonged silences or outright say that they did not know. These students continued to show signs of this level consistently throughout the study. When presented with comic books that were of more modern events dealing with issues such as race and sex, these students responded well. All the female students interviewed stated that the comic they connected with the most was *She-Hulk*. When asked one of the female students said: “I think that I connect best with *She-Hulk* because I am a female and she represents the idea of strong, powerful women”. These students were consistent with this answer for the duration of the study

In contrast, the comics that dealt with issues farther from their frame of reference were the ones that, on average, students showed the least levels of connection with. According to all, but one student *Superman Red Son* was the one that they connected the least with. The primary reason given for the disconnect with this comic was that students seemingly did not feel they could empathize with the mindset of the time which was dominated by fears of Communism. One student stated, “the cold war was something that happened long before I was born, so I guess I can’t truly understand what it’s like to fear something like that.” The same could be said for the use of the Iron Man comic. Here students continued to state that they did not feel that

great of a connection with the material because they had no connection to the Vietnam War and the sentiments surrounding the war. Therefore, based on Dullberg's standards these students were unable to draw connections based on artificial constructs beyond what they understood in their everyday lives. This led to them remaining at the first level for the duration of the study.

Alternatively, the student at level 3 always answered questions by stating the idea that they wanted to see things from the perspective of others, including those he felt differently on issues than. When asked who he would like to be able to see the world through their perspective, this student chose to say, "Donald Trump." He explained that while he did not agree with President Trump personally that he wanted to "understand why he believes the things that he does". This student also stated that the one he was able to connect with the most was Iron Man. This student said that while he had no memory of Vietnam, he could understand the position of someone during this time period being concerned about the world around them.

Discussion

Based on the data collected, the data suggests that there is not a correlation between increases in historical empathy and the use of comic books in the classroom. Research by Rantala, Mannien, and Van Den Berg suggests that the issue may have been the result of unfamiliarity with this method of learning history (2015). In their study about using a simulation approach to fostering historical empathy, they wrote: "a simulation exercise was not a typical way of learning history, nor were they attuned to using texts of a different kind in their studies, and this might explain the poor results" (2015, 241). The part that is relevant here is the use of different kinds of texts. Earlier in this paragraph, they refer to a focus on historical content where the primary reading material is textbooks and how this is the dominant theme in history classes

(2015). They suggest that using varied texts particularly fictional ones can increase historical empathy, but students must have more exposure to varied texts for it to work (2015). This connects to the comics because it suggests that making comic books and other fictional texts a part of regular instruction may help foster historical empathy. During the trial period, no data was collected from students that indicated a change in the thought process of students based on Nancy Dullberg's stages of historical empathy. Many students exhibited signs that they were levels 1 or 2 from the beginning and based on the answers they provided their level never changed. They continued to look at the world through the character they had the most in common with. In this case, that comic was *She-Hulk*. Many of the female students were drawn to this comic citing the presence of a strong female character as a primary factor for why they preferred it compared to the other comics that we read. Their answers also remained consistent that this was the comic they most connected with. This aligns with Dullberg's stages because it shows that the literal concrete connection was necessary to connect with the comics. This evidences the lack of an increase in historical empathy. This is also shown in the least popular comic of the allotment. This comic was *Superman Red Son*. All, but one of the students nominated this comic as the one they felt the least connected with. When asked why they felt the least connection to this book the answers were all similar. They stated that they had trouble connecting with the common fears of communism from the Cold War that inspired the writer. They said therefore, they had a much harder time connecting with the story.

The lack of an increase in historical empathy may also be contributed to other factors that occurred during the study period. One significant example is the absence of many students from the sample. During data collection, there were instances of students showing a connection with this activity. This was especially true for the first comic book studied which was 2015's *Batman*

#45. During this lesson, many students were actively engaged and had astute observations about the comic and its content. The story of the comic book revolved around Batman trying to solve the murder of a black teenager. The story delves into issues of police brutality and failures of the criminal justice system to aid those in African American communities. Many of the students of the class are from minority backgrounds. This may have been a reason that students were interested in the topic. One of Barton and Levstik's themes is justice and fairness. The problem is that many of the students presented signs of being interested and engaged with the activity, but they did not turn in the consent form and therefore their work could not be included in the overall sample for the study. The ability to interview these students may have impacted the results found by the present study.

Another factor that may have contributed to the results was an error in content delivery to students. One issue that potentially limited the success of the study was a failure to properly explain comic books as history. Rantala, Mannien, and Vandenberg state that "historical empathy is not possible without a sufficient amount of context knowledge" (2015 p.325). Because of this, teachers need to "offer students enough background information so that an empathetic analysis is possible" (p.325). When the idea was first introduced to students there was visible confusion and it was obvious that some students did not fully understand why comic books were being chosen. Because of this Students were given the materials despite not knowing the proper context as to why they were studying comic books. This may have trivialized the assignments and created a flaw in the effectiveness of content delivery.

The issue of content delivery can also be extended to the time and frequency of the activities. One thing that became evident after the third session is that students were quickly becoming burned out with the style of lessons. The excitement and optimism from the first day

of delivering content had faded. Students completed the same activity three classes that week and they were tired of it. For this reason, the change to Socratic Seminars was important. The original idea was inventive, but after repeating it three times in short proximity with little variation it became stale. This could also be attributed to the time students were given to read the documents. It seems that the additional amount of time given for reading the documents before seminar days improved the willingness of students to participate in the discussion. In order to analyze the sources students, needed more time to properly understand what they are analyzing.

Conclusion

Historical empathy is an important tool for teaching history because it creates the understanding that past peoples had different perspectives than their modern-day counterparts. Due to the importance of promoting historical empathy in students, this study sought to determine if comic books could be used to promote historical empathy in high school students. This was supported by research concerning artistic interpretations of history, comic books as art, comic books as history, and comic books under the moral response stance. The study was implemented using a method that had comic books analyzed and discussed as primary sources in a high school social studies class. When analyzed, the results suggest that there is not a link between the use of comic books and an increase in historical empathy.

Through this study, the importance of keeping lessons innovative and fresh must be stressed. The lessons that were done with comic books were innovative on the first day of instruction, but by Lesson 3 they had already become tired. Students were no longer quick to answer questions and instead seemed visibly bored. Therefore, it is important to remember that instruction must stay innovative. Changes must be made to keep activities from becoming stale.

Another important lesson learned was about providing context. During the study students never received a proper context on the activity and were therefore placed at a disadvantage. Students needed to understand the proper context behind why comics were being used. They never received this explanation, so they never fully understood why they were doing the assignments. These were important lessons learned during the study.

One change that would benefit future attempts to study using comic books to promote historical empathy would be the course in which it was embedded. This study was designed for an American history course but was conducted in a Civics and Economics course. Therefore, the comics used had to be adapted to fit the content instead of choosing comics that fit with a period. Under this the comics were more abstract in their connection to content. Another change would be making diverse types of texts a regular part of instruction. It seems that to properly foster historical empathy, students need to have prior exposure to many types of sources. Therefore, this would need to be a facet of a class before the study was conducted. This study did not find a significant connection between using comic books and increasing historical empathy. This is evidenced by a lack of significant change in the levels of student's historical empathy throughout the study. This result may be attributed to a limited sample size or improper teaching practices. In conclusion, the research suggests that the answer to the central research question is that comic books do not help increase levels of historical empathy in students.

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Appendix A (SCUBA Document Analysis Tool)

| | |
|--|--|
| <h1>Source</h1> <p>What is this source?</p> | |
| <h1>Context</h1> <p>What was happening at the time that this source was written?</p> | |
| <h1>Understanding</h1> <p>What is the main idea of this source? What is it about?</p> | |
| <h1>Bias</h1> <p>Does the Author show any bias in this source? What factors may have influenced their bias?</p> | |
| <h1>Application to Present Day</h1> <p>How does this document apply to things that are happening in the world right now?</p> | |

Appendix B (student survey)

1. What are some ways that teachers have engaged you in history courses? If you have not felt engaged in history courses why do you feel this way? Are there any ways that you feel that you could be better engaged?
2. Do you think that it is important to know and understand history? Why or why not?
3. What is history to you?
4. Do you believe that media is influenced by the time in which it is created? Why?
5. Do you believe that popular culture has political messages hidden within it?
6. Have you ever read or have any interest in consuming media such as comic books or graphic novels?
7. Do you consume any media related to comic books or graphic novels such as movies or video games?

Appendix C (Rubric for Student Observation)

| Stage of Historical Empathy | Criteria | Example |
|-----------------------------|--|---|
| Level 1 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Uses their family, culture, or life experiences to understand history. • Very Restricted in their Historical understanding. • These students need a physical connection to historical content. | When given a diorama of an old kitchen to view a student looked at this and said that it reminded them of an old doll house they had at home. |
| Level 2 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Uses their family, culture, or life experiences to understand history. • Restricted in their historical understanding. • Need a more personal connection to the material. | When given a diorama of an old kitchen to view a Level 2 student looked at this and said that it reminded them of the rugged living style, they experienced on a camping trip. |
| Level 3 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • They need a strong response to begin their understanding of historical events. • Answers begin as an effect of the material, but go beyond this into more abstract thoughts. • Once students are primed, they are effective at taking on other perspectives. • The least restricted in their historical understanding. • They still need a personal connection to the material, but they are able to bring in more abstract and hypothetical concepts. | When given a diorama of an old kitchen to view a Level 3 student related the information to accounts of historical fiction and information, they had learned to imagine what it would have been like to live there. |

Appendix D (Interview Questions)

1. Do you think it's possible to put yourself in someone else's position?
2. Do you think it's a good thing to be able to put yourself in someone else's position?
3. What do you think take someone else's point of view means?
4. How would you explain what taking someone else's perspective means to you?
5. Is there anyone in Social Studies, whose perspective you feel that you could take?
6. Is there anyone in the comic books we've been reading whose perspective you feel that you could take?
7. Is there anyone in Social Studies who you would like to have been? (rewording of question 4)
8. Is there anyone in the comic books we have been reading who you would like to have been? (rewording of Question 5)

These are the main scripted questions, but improvised questions may be used to prompt further responses from students. These questions are all from or based on those originally used by Nancy Dullberg in her 2002 study.

Appendix E (Timeline of the study)

| Day | Activity |
|--------|--|
| Day 1 | Students will be given a survey to begin class to discuss their overall level of engagement. They will then have their first lesson using comic books. |
| Day 2 | Students will be interviewed for the first time. |
| Day 3 | Students will be exposed to their second lesson using comic books |
| Day 4 | Students will be interviewed for the second time. |
| Day 5 | Students will receive their third lesson involving comic books. |
| Day 6 | Students will be interviewed for the third time. |
| Day 7 | Students will have their fourth lesson involving comic books |
| Day 8 | Students will be interviewed for the fourth time |
| Day 9 | Students will be taught their fifth and final lesson using comic books. |
| Day 10 | Students will be interviewed for the final time. |