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Drawing Expansive Narrative Boundaries*

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Craig Hill. *Teaching Comics Through Multiple Lenses: Critical Perspectives*. New York: Routledge, 2017.

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**Abstract**

Review of Craig Hill. *Teaching Comics Through Multiple Lenses: Critical Perspectives*. New York: Routledge, 2017.

**Keywords**

Teaching comics, pedagogy studies, pop culture, reading communities

Craig Hill. *Teaching Comics Through Multiple Lenses: Critical Perspectives*. New York: Routledge, 2017. 195 pp.

Upon opening *Teaching Comics Through Multiple Lenses: Critical Perspectives*, readers will find a collection of essays that explore comics from a variety of angles with a particular emphasis on the pedagogical significance of engaging with these texts. This emphasis is especially notable given comics' history of being regarded by some as, at worst, a contributor to problematic and/or harmful behaviors in youth, and, at best, simply not challenging or complex enough to have much use in the classroom. Luckily, in recent years, these perspectives have shifted fairly significantly, perhaps largely due to both increased scholarly interest in the texts as well as the sprawling popular film and television adaptations of comics that likely will continue to be produced for many years to come. It is in this very specific environment that editor Craig Hill brings forth *Teaching Comics* to highlight how comics can be useful in the learning process, to both educators and to students, as well as how comics are uniquely positioned to help us make meaning in ways that other texts may not be able to.

Central to the overarching argument of the collection is the belief that comics, by way of being comprised of images and written text that are inseparably intertwined in the meaning making process, both share characteristics with other media but also stand apart from those media. This particular focus is first highlighted in collection's preface in which editor Craig Hill draws attention to the "unique intelligences of comics" that allow us to "engage with the world" in ways that other media cannot (8). The writers in this collection follow and expand upon this thread in a variety of ways, such as Sean P. Connors' "Designing Meaning: A Multimodal Perspective on Comics Reading," which explores the "series of complex interpretive practices" that readers must utilize when working with comics (27). Meanwhile, in "Multimodal Forms: Examining Text, Image, and Visual Literacy in Daniel Handler's *Why We Broke Up* and Markus Zusak's *The Book Thief*," Amy Bright draws attention to the importance of recognizing a practice students already engage in, "seeing text paired with image," in order to bring them to reading texts and spaces that may be outside their norm (58).

For a relatively compact book, *Teaching Comics* covers substantial ground. Beyond the "Introduction" and "End Points," the text is broken down into four guiding sections which are labeled as follows: "Materiality and the Reading of Comics," "Comics and Bodies," "Comics and the Mind," and "Comics and Contemporary Society." Each section is comprised of two to three essays that are in line with the section title. We see a variety of subjects being taken up in these essays, such as the presence of race and sexuality in comics and how comics can help us to better understand mental illness. Additionally, the various writers utilize multiple methods as they examine comics. Some chapters are almost entirely

focused on close readings of particular comics and/or characters from comics while others might specifically engage with applying theory to comics. And still others focus more heavily on the pedagogical benefits of working with comics.

*Teaching Comics* explicitly notes its desire to be useful to both comics scholars as well as any educators who may be interested in working with comics. Because of the variety of perspectives provided through the text, it could serve as a foundational resource for anyone interested in engaging with these texts academically. Given the resurgence and dominance of superhero media in recent years, educators and students alike may be drawn to the collection's ninth chapter, "Can Superhero Comics Defeat Racism?: Black Superheroes Torn Between Sci-Fi Fantasy and Cultural Reality." The chapter, written by P. L. Thomas, explores the complex relationship between race and comic books, which has been fraught for many years and, given contemporary convergence culture, tends to spill out into other mediums. As the collection's title indicates, the essays it contains could be utilized as a means of developing lessons and activities for the classroom, but they could also be provided to students as a means of showing them how to critically engage with comics. Additionally, *Teaching Comics* usefully illustrates the importance of comics as a medium and area of study on its own, apart from other media. Though this does not come across as a campaign for legitimacy, it is clear that these scholars have a vested interest in growth and development of this area, which is underscored in Craig Hill's concluding section, "End Points," when he asserts that "This book only works if it's a springboard to other books" (179).

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