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Review

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REVIEW

Teaching Comics/Teaching with Comics: A Review of *With Great Power Comes Great Pedagogy: Teaching, Learning, and Comic Books*

With Great Power Comes Great Pedagogy: Teaching, Learning, and Comic Books, edited by Susan E. Kirtley, Antero Garcia, and Peter E. Carlson, University Press of Mississippi, 243 pages, 2020, ISBN 9781496826046

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This article reviews *With Great Power Comes Great Pedagogy: Teaching, Learning, and Comic Books*, edited by Susan E. Kirtley, Antero Garcia, and Peter E. Carlson (University Press of Mississippi, 2020). The book covers a wide range of approaches, pedagogical techniques, and uses of comics and graphic novels, as well as making comics, in the university classroom. A balance of theory, practice, and interviews, the book appeals to anyone interested in incorporating comics in their teaching.

Keywords: Graphic Novels; Learning; Making Comics; Pedagogy; Teaching

Comics in the classroom, for me growing up, was never an issue. Or rather, the presence of *les bandes dessinées* (BD), as I grew up in Montreal going to a French immersion school. These colorful and compelling large-sized hard-cover collections filled the shelves at the back of our classroom, in an attempt to entice us to read in our second language. They were never a part of the curriculum, but they were a welcome sight when we were “forced” to read on our owns.

The only other time anything resembling a comic ever made an appearance again in one of my classes was in college, a class studying the Holocaust, and we were assigned the graphic novel *Maus* (1986). But as I observed in my review of Abate

and Tarbox's 2017 edited collection *Graphic Novels for Children and Young Adults* (Besette 2018), children are reading graphic novels and comic books throughout K-12, and these students are showing up in our college classrooms.

With Great Powers Comes Great Pedagogy (2020; **Figure 1**), a collection edited by Susan E. Kirtley, Antero Garcia, and Peter E. Carlson, seeks to fill a gap in the literature addressing how to teach with comics, how to teach comics, and how to

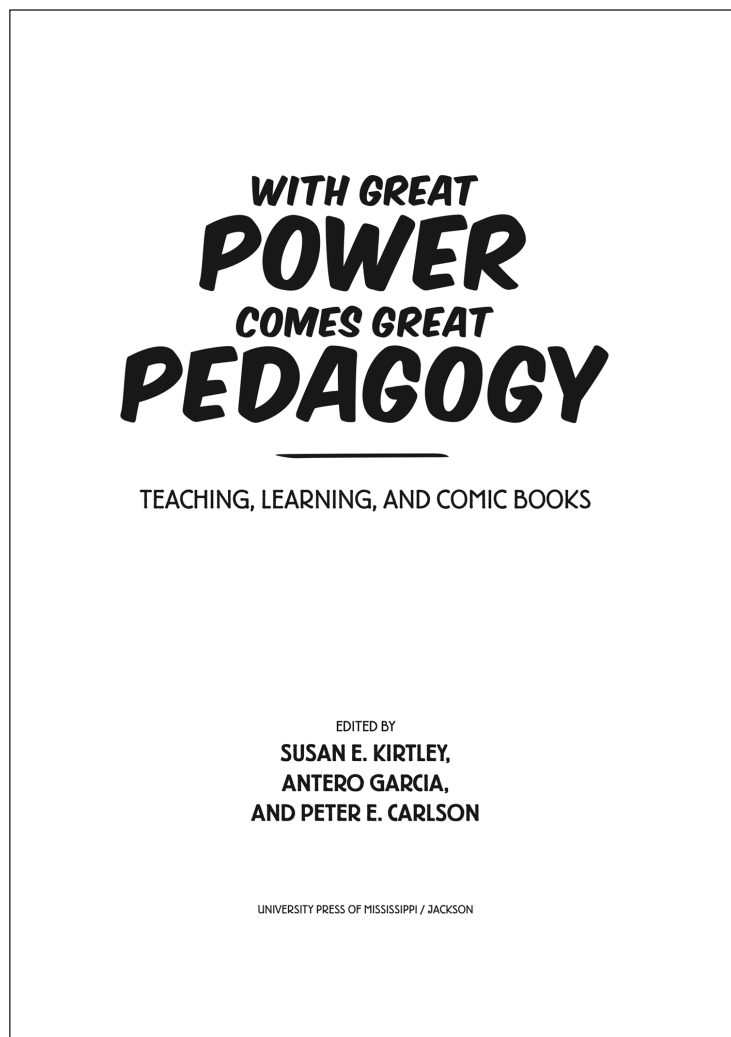


Figure 1: Inside cover of the advance review copy of *With Great Power Comes Great Pedagogy: Teaching, Learning, and Comic Books*, edited by Susan E. Kirtley, Antero Garcia, and Peter E. Carlson. Copyright © 2020 by University Press of Mississippi.

teach through comics. Divided into three sections, Foundations of Comics Pedagogy, Comics Pedagogy in Practice, and Future Directions in Comics Pedagogy, each contribution contains essays addressing all types of comics, from pulp to graphic novels to online comics, and a multitude of approaches, from historic to technological to practical.

Each section also concludes with an interview with a comics artist, addressing the questions posed in the collection around comics pedagogy. A highlight is the interview with Lynda Barry, author of (among other books) *Syllabus* (2014). She discusses her pedagogy, her teaching career, and the power of comics as a pedagogical tool. Her essay concludes the second part of the book, by far the most interesting grouping of essays, including one that is a comic itself, "On Copying" by Ebony Flowers Kalir. Nick Sousanis makes two appearances in the collection, highlighting the multiple ways he has used and incorporated comics and making in his teaching and pedagogy. If you are a skeptic, this middle section shows how you can use comics to teach digital literacy, classic literature, and interdisciplinary thinking.

As a non-specialist, I appreciated the historical and theoretical overview of comics pedagogy provided by the editors in their introduction. "Misunderstanding Comics" by Jonathan Flowers, located in the final section of the collection, usefully interrogates the whiteness of foundational teaching texts in the field and how that has then been used to shape the field and how it is taught. The editors, in their conclusion, propose why comics pedagogy matters within this particular historical moment, and great power alluded to in the title.

I, for one, required no convincing. In one of my writing classes, where I allowed students to read a collection of thematically organized of "classic" essays of their choosing and then teach it to the class in a way they saw fit, a group was struggling with how they were going to teach the teachings of a collection of writers writing about human nature. While they sat at the end of another class of discussing the content of the essays but no closer to settling on their project, they were messing around on a group member's iPad when they stumbled on his Marvel app. And then it hit them: they were going to make a comic book.

They final project blended a variety of comics styles, but styles that nonetheless reflected the writing, teaching, and cultures of the various essayists and philosophers they had read. They appropriated and remixed existing styles and genres, as well as using an app to put themselves into the narrative. Their classmates were impressed with the final project, and I was impressed with the visual and stylistic cues that reinforced the various views on human nature.

As we work to continue to find ways to engage our students, this book provides a great introduction, guide, and inspiration for using comics as a pedagogical tool. Specialists and non-specialists alike will benefit from reading this collection.

Competing Interests

The author has no competing interests to declare.

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