

# Comics Studies: A Resource Guide

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## Topic 1: Introduction to Comics Studies

**Many different narrative genres can be found in comic books.** The Alexander Street *Underground and Independent Comics* database, for instance, contains many comic books that are the familiar genre of action/adventure and superhero stories, but the collection also includes autobiographical, historical, science fiction, religious, and political comic books. There are also different types of comic books. Comics studies scholars study and research:

- Mainstream comic books
- Independent comic books
- Graphic novels
- Manga
- And comic book movie adaptations

Comics studies is also sometimes referred to as sequential art studies or graphic narrative studies. Comics Studies is unique because it brings together so many different types of research: literary studies, cultural studies, and image and visual studies— just to name a few. Comics are a multimodal literary and art form that requires analyzing the complex relationship between text and image. Unlike most traditional literary forms, comics also rely on visual rhetorics and storytelling.

Comics studies also draws from cultural studies—a field that investigates the ways in which cultural practices function within systems of power. Popular media such as comic books and graphic narratives are just as important to modern storytelling as more traditional art and literary forms. Cultural studies examines how social phenomena and popular media operate in relation to ideology, class structures, race and ethnicity, sexual and gender orientation, and national formations. As cultural productions that require multimodal analytic methods, comics are deeply rich objects of study to understand larger social and political structures.

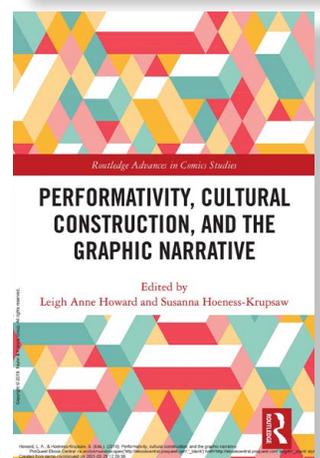
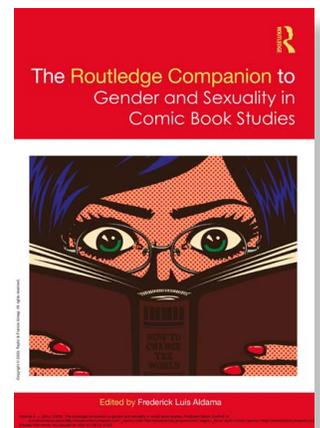
### The following readings demonstrate some of the different genres of comic books:

Ahrens, Lois. *The Real Cost of Prisons Comix*. Oakland, CA: PM Press, 2008. [https://search.alexanderstreet.com/view/work/bibliographic\\_entity%7Cbibliographic\\_details%7C4092783](https://search.alexanderstreet.com/view/work/bibliographic_entity%7Cbibliographic_details%7C4092783)

Fujimura, Takayuki. *Sorako*. New York, NY: Gen Manga Entertainment, 2013. [https://search.alexanderstreet.com/view/work/bibliographic\\_entity%7Cinstallment%7C2786300](https://search.alexanderstreet.com/view/work/bibliographic_entity%7Cinstallment%7C2786300)

Locke and Key Vol. 1: *Welcome to Lovecraft*. San Diego, CA: IDW Publishing, 2008. [https://search.alexanderstreet.com/view/work/bibliographic\\_entity%7Ccomic\\_book%7C3323142](https://search.alexanderstreet.com/view/work/bibliographic_entity%7Ccomic_book%7C3323142)

Rodriguez, Manuel. *Che: A Graphic Biography*. New York: Verso, 2008. [https://search.alexanderstreet.com/view/work/bibliographic\\_entity%7Cinstallment%7C1520415](https://search.alexanderstreet.com/view/work/bibliographic_entity%7Cinstallment%7C1520415)



## Readings:

*Comics and Power: Representing and Questioning Culture, Subjects and Communities.* Eds. Anne Magnussen, Erin La Cour, and Rikke Platz Cortsen. Cambridge Scholars Publisher, 2015. <https://www.proquest.com/legacydocview/EBC/2076612>

*Critical Directions in Comic Studies.* Ed. Thomas Giddens. University Press of Mississippi, 2020. <https://www.proquest.com/legacydocview/EBC/6284571>

Nyberg, Amy Kiste. *Seal of Approval: The History of the Comics Code.* Jackson, MS: University Press of Mississippi, 1998. [https://search.alexanderstreet.com/view/work/bibliographic\\_entity%7Cinstallment%7C2128130](https://search.alexanderstreet.com/view/work/bibliographic_entity%7Cinstallment%7C2128130)

*Performativity, Cultural Construction, and the Graphic Narrative.* Eds. Leigh Anne Howard and Susanne Hoeness-Krupsaw. Taylor & Francis Group, 2019. <https://www.proquest.com/legacydocview/EBC/5894568>

*Rise of the American Comics Artist: Creators and Contexts.* Eds. Paul Williams and James Lyons. University Press of Mississippi, 2010. <https://www.proquest.com/legacydocview/EBC/619202>

*The Routledge Companion to Comics.* Eds. Frank Bramlett, Roy Cook, and Aaron Meskin. Taylor and Francis Group, 2016. <https://www.proquest.com/legacydocview/EBC/4626182>

Van Lente, Fred; Waltz, Tom; Dunlavey, Ryan. *Comic Book History of Comics.* San Diego, CA: IDW Publishing, 2012. [https://search.alexanderstreet.com/view/work/bibliographic\\_entity%7Ccomic\\_book%7C3789780](https://search.alexanderstreet.com/view/work/bibliographic_entity%7Ccomic_book%7C3789780)

## Topic 2: Narrative Form

What can the comic book medium do that forms, such as the novel, cannot? Fred Van Lente's *Comic Book History* depicts how page layout can be used as a narrative tool as well. Many scholars have looked at the way graphic narratives utilize the form to move back and forth between the present and the past and to depict the personal experience of a major historical event. Because of this, comic books have the potential to represent the material effects of large events on individual lives. This is particularly important when portraying history from the perspective of communities that have been marginalized. Comics and graphic narratives are accessible forms of history and storytelling, and it is this accessibility that gives them such revolutionary potential.

## Comics:

Zograf, Aleksandar. *Life Under Sanctions.* (Seattle, WA: Fantagraphic Books, 1994). [https://search.alexanderstreet.com/view/work/bibliographic\\_entity%7Ccomic\\_book%7C788385](https://search.alexanderstreet.com/view/work/bibliographic_entity%7Ccomic_book%7C788385)

Andreas, Joel. *Addicted to War: Why the U.S. Can't Kick Militarism.* (Oakland, CA: AK Press, 2003). [https://search.alexanderstreet.com/view/work/bibliographic\\_entity%7Ccomic\\_book%7C804375](https://search.alexanderstreet.com/view/work/bibliographic_entity%7Ccomic_book%7C804375)

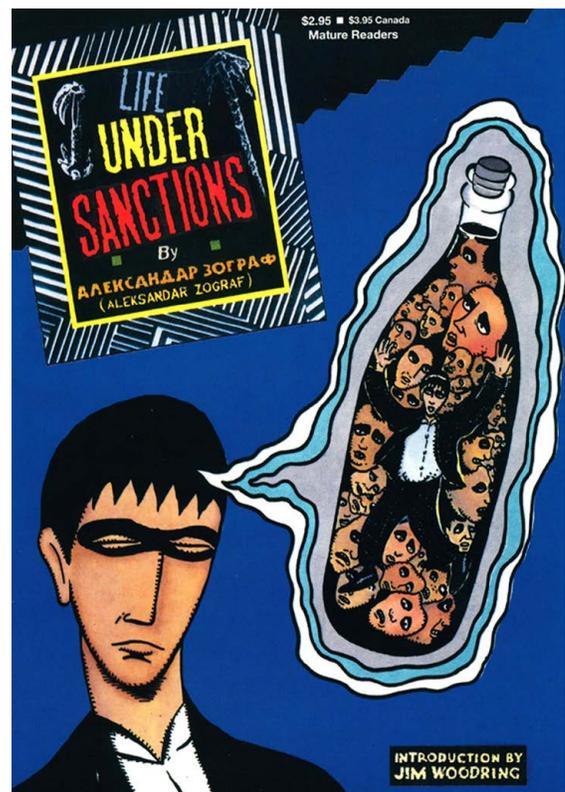
Jaxon. *Secret of San Saba.* (Milwaukee, WI: Kitchen Sink Enterprises, 1989). [https://search.alexanderstreet.com/view/work/bibliographic\\_entity%7Ccomic\\_book%7C1518215](https://search.alexanderstreet.com/view/work/bibliographic_entity%7Ccomic_book%7C1518215)

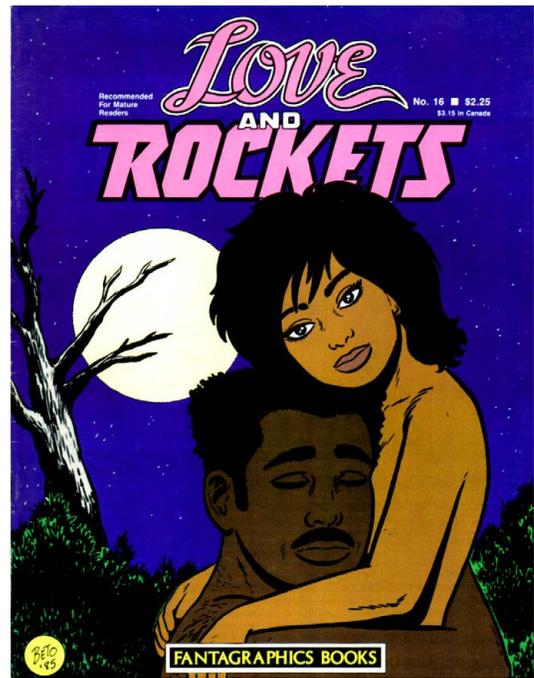
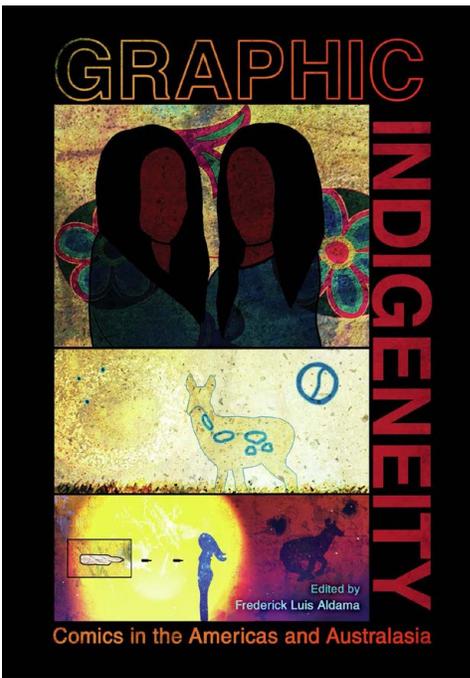
## Readings:

Beaty, Bart. *Comics Versus Art: Comics in the Art World.* Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2012. [https://search.alexanderstreet.com/view/work/bibliographic\\_entity%7Cinstallment%7C2386854](https://search.alexanderstreet.com/view/work/bibliographic_entity%7Cinstallment%7C2386854)

*Comics as History, Comics as Literature: Roles of the Comic Book in Scholarship, Society, and Entertainment.* Ed. Annessa Ann Babic. Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 2013. <https://www.proquest.com/legacydocview/EBC/1583588>

Cutter, Martha J. *The Illustrated Slave: Empathy, Graphic Narrative, and the Visual Culture of the Transatlantic Abolition Movement, 1800-1852.* University of Georgia Press, 2017. <https://www.proquest.com/legacydocview/EBC/4946505>





*Graphic Indigeneity: Comics in the Americas and Australasia.* Ed. Frederick Luis Aldama. University Press of Mississippi, 2020. <https://www.proquest.com/legacydocview/EBC/6199360>

Green, Richard; Yoe, Craig; Lait, Jackie. "Destroying Idols: The Role of Satire and the Free Press in Comics." *The Comics Journal*. Ed. Gary Groth. Seattle, WA: Fantagraphics Books, 1987. 76-94. [https://search.alexanderstreet.com/view/work/bibliographic\\_entity%7Cinstallment%7C1461463](https://search.alexanderstreet.com/view/work/bibliographic_entity%7Cinstallment%7C1461463)

McCloud, Scott. *Understanding Comics: The Invisible Art*. Harper Collins, 1994. <https://www.proquest.com/books/understanding-comics-invisible-art/docview/1367869064/se-2>

Oh, Stella. "Movement and Mobility: Representing Trauma through Graphic Narratives." *Asian American Literature Discourses & Pedagogies* Vol. 7 (2016): 54-69. <https://www.proquest.com/scholarly-journals/movement-mobility-representing-trauma-through/docview/2095545829/se-2>

### Topic 3: Comic Books and Race

What is the impact of the way comics and graphic narratives represent people of color? Examining artistic, literary, and filmic representations of race allows scholars of American culture, history, and African-American studies to analyze the way in which race is understood and reproduced through cultural production. Because comics rely on visually codified representations, a character's appearance must communicate a lot of information—which can run the risk of harmful stereotyping. As Marc Singer explains, "This system of visual typology combines with the superhero's genre's long history of excluding,

trivializing, or 'tokenizing' minorities to create numerous minority superheroes who are marked purely for their race: 'Black Lightning,' 'Black Panther,' and so forth" (Singer 107). Although comics rely on visually codified representations, the various methods and forms available to graphic narrative also invite nuance. For instance, in his article, Singer also looks at the way comics like *Black Lightning* and *Xero* portray double consciousness.

#### Comics:

Hernandez, Gilbert; Hernandez, Jamie. *Love and Rockets*, no. 16. Ed. Gary Groth. Seattle, WA: Fantagraphics Books, 1986. [https://search.alexanderstreet.com/view/work/bibliographic\\_entity%7Ccomic\\_book%7C785535](https://search.alexanderstreet.com/view/work/bibliographic_entity%7Ccomic_book%7C785535)

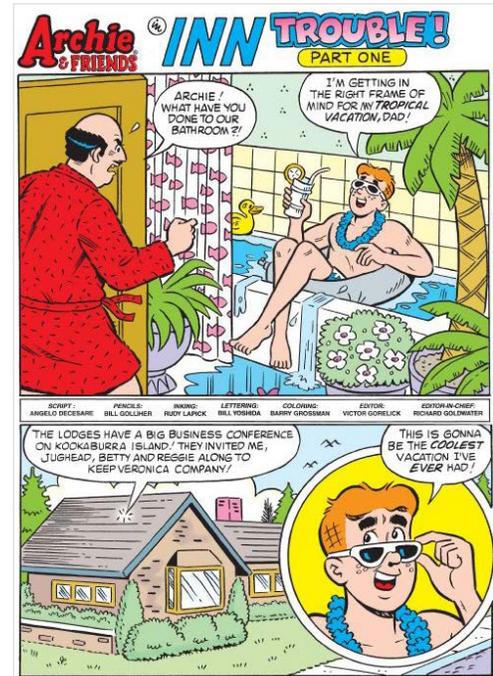
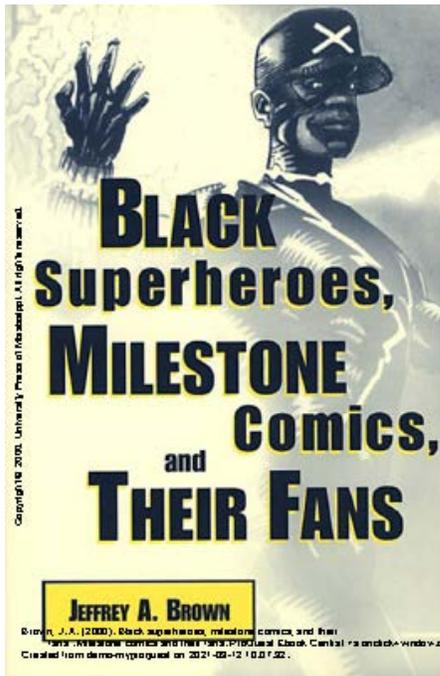
Onli, Turtel. *Malcolm-10: The Cleansing of New Afrika*. Chicago, IL: Onli Studios, 1992. [https://search.alexanderstreet.com/view/work/bibliographic\\_entity%7Ccomic\\_book%7C1750408](https://search.alexanderstreet.com/view/work/bibliographic_entity%7Ccomic_book%7C1750408)

Onli, Turtel. *Sustah-Girl, Queen of the Black Age*. (Chicago, IL: Onli Studios, 1993). [https://search.alexanderstreet.com/view/work/bibliographic\\_entity%7Ccomic\\_book%7C1777083](https://search.alexanderstreet.com/view/work/bibliographic_entity%7Ccomic_book%7C1777083)

#### Readings:

*Black Comics: Politics of Race and Representation*. Eds. Sheena C. Howard and Ronald L. Jackson II. Bloomsbury Publishing Plc, 2013. <https://www.proquest.com/legacydocview/EBC/1142027>

*The Blacker the Ink: Constructions of Black Identity in Comics and Sequential Art*. Eds. Frances Gateward and John Jennings. Rutgers University Press, 2015. <https://www.proquest.com/legacydocview/EBC/3565202>



Brown, Jeffrey A.. *Black Superheroes, Milestone Comics, and Their Fans*. University Press of Mississippi, 2000. ProQuest Ebook Central, <https://search.proquest.com/legacydocview/EBC/619210>

*The Comics Journal: Special Issue Black Comic Artists* no. 160. Fantagraphics Books, 1993. [https://search.alexanderstreet.com/view/work/bibliographic\\_entity%7Cinstallment%7C1633020](https://search.alexanderstreet.com/view/work/bibliographic_entity%7Cinstallment%7C1633020)

Royal, Derek Parker. "Introduction: Coloring America: Multi-Ethnic Engagements with Graphic Narrative." *MELUS* Vol. 32 Iss. 3 (2007): 7-22, 322-323. <https://www.proquest.com/scholarly-journals/introduction-coloring-america-multi-ethnic/docview/203692637/se-2>

Singer, Marc. "'Black Skins' and White Masks: Comic Books and the Secret of Race." *African American Review* 36.1 (Spring 2002): 107-119. <https://www.proquest.com/scholarly-journals/black-skins-white-masks-comic-books-secret-race/docview/209802756/se-2>

## Topic 4: **Archie Comics and Literacy**

Scholars like Bart Beaty have focused primarily on textual analysis in his monograph *Twelve-Cent Archive*. Peggy Dickinson Cuevas, Robin L. Danzak, and Brian Patrick Burke have done research on the use of comics— and *Archie* comics in particular— as an instructional tool for literacy development for teens and young adults. Bonny Norton has done extensive research on this topic as well, including research on comic book culture for second language learners. The accessibility of comic books, with the aid of additional visual cues such as page layout and images, functions to help reader comprehension and engagement.

### Comics:

*Archie* no. 106. (Pelham, NY: Archie Comic Publications, 1959). [https://search.alexanderstreet.com/view/work/bibliographic\\_entity%7Cinstallment%7C5081589](https://search.alexanderstreet.com/view/work/bibliographic_entity%7Cinstallment%7C5081589)

Hughes, Adam; Reit, Sy; Morelli, Jack; Pellerito, Mike. *Betty and Veronica* (2016-) no. 1. (Pelham, NY: Archie Comic Publications, Inc., 2016). [https://search.alexanderstreet.com/view/work/bibliographic\\_entity%7Cinstallment%7C5088275](https://search.alexanderstreet.com/view/work/bibliographic_entity%7Cinstallment%7C5088275)

Goldwater, Richard and Gorelick, Victor. *Archie* no. 379. (Pelham, NY: Archie Comic Publications, Inc., 1990). [https://search.alexanderstreet.com/view/work/bibliographic\\_entity%7Cinstallment%7C5083397](https://search.alexanderstreet.com/view/work/bibliographic_entity%7Cinstallment%7C5083397)

Thompson, Kelly; Fish, Veronica; Fish, Andy; Morelli, Jack. *Sabrina the Teenage Witch* (2019-) no.1 (Pelham, NY: Archie Comic Publications, Inc., 2019). [https://search.alexanderstreet.com/view/work/bibliographic\\_entity%7Cinstallment%7C5090189](https://search.alexanderstreet.com/view/work/bibliographic_entity%7Cinstallment%7C5090189)

### Readings:

Beaty, Bart. *Twelve-Cent Archie*. New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2015. <https://www.proquest.com/scholarly-journals/twelve-cent-archie/docview/1752112314/se-2>

Burke, Brian Patrick. *Using Comic Books and Graphic Novels to Improve and Facilitate Community College Students' Literacy Development*. Indiana University of Pennsylvania, 2012. Dissertation. <https://www.proquest.com/dissertations-theses/using-comic-books-graphic-novels-improve/docview/1267740425/se-2>

## Critical Questioning in and beyond the Margins: Teacher Preparation Students' Multimodal Inquiries into Literacy Assessment

Katrina Bartow Jacobs and David E. Low

This article explores the potential of using multimodal texts—particularly comics—as a way of engaging teacher education students in critical inquiry around literacy and ELA assessments. We describe a qualitative study into the use of a multimodal comics form article within an ELA/literacy assessment course in an MEd program. Our findings suggest that teacher preparation students were able to effectively remix and play with both comics tropes and more traditional “academic” writerly discourses. The use of multimodal texts in teacher preparation helped students engage in dialogic and critical forms of inquiry around issues related to classroom practices and policies. We end by suggesting ways that English teacher educators can include similar texts and activities in their courses and teacher preparation programs.

It is a Monday evening and classrooms throughout our school of education are filled with group discussions, lectures, notetaking, and presentations. In one room, 25 graduate students and their instructor sit silently around a conference table, part of a master’s-level course on reading and writing assessment. The students are not reading a traditional academic article or taking a midterm; they are reading and responding to a piece of comics scholarship—that is, scholarship composed in the medium of comics. They do so with their own speech and thought balloons, visual icons, words, and tentative illustrations. After students spend half an hour on their multimodal responses, Katrina, the course instructor, asks every student to choose one page of text, complete with visual and textual embellishments, to share with their classmates. The class does a museum walk of these artifacts, slowly and silently circling the table, and taking in each other’s perspectives and reactions to the piece. Forty-five minutes into the two-hour seminar, the conversation begins in earnest.

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English Education, April 2017

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Cuevas, Peggy Dickinson. *Voices from the Middle: At-risk Readers in Urban Middle Schools*. University of Miami, 2003. Dissertation. <https://www.proquest.com/dissertations-theses/voices-middle-at-risk-readers-urban-schools/docview/288247107/se-2>

Jacobs, Katrina Bartow; Low, David E. “Critical Questioning in and beyond the Margins: Teacher Preparation Students’ Multimodal Inquiries into Literacy Assessment.” *English Education*. Vol. 49. Iss. 3 (2017): 226-264. <https://www.proquest.com/scholarly-journals/critical-questioning-beyond-margins-teacher/docview/1884771737/se-2>

Norton, Bonny. “The Motivating Power of Comic Books: Insights from Archie Comic Readers.” *The Reading Teacher* 57.2 (Oct 2003): 140-7. <https://www.proquest.com/scholarly-journals/motivating-power-comic-books-insights-archie/docview/203277011/se-2>

Norton, B., & Vanderheyden, K. “Comic book culture and second language learners.” *Critical Pedagogies and Language Learning*. eds. B. Norton & K. Toohy. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2004. 201–221. <https://www.proquest.com/scholarly-journals/critical-pedagogies-language-learning/docview/85423883/se-2>

*With Great Power Comes Great Pedagogy: Teaching, Learning, and Comics*. Eds. Susan E. Kirtley, Antero Garcia, and Peter E. Carlson. University of Mississippi Press, 2020. <https://www.proquest.com/legacydocview/EBC/6032941>

Jacobs and Low • Critical Questioning in and beyond the Margins



Figure 3.



Figure 4.

These examples demonstrate how teacher learners made use of the wide range of verbal-visual tools that were in the text to annotate it. What is interesting is both the participants’ facility with using these multimodal tools and the ways that they specifically used these tools to highlight the polyvocal and, at times, conflicting perspectives found within Jones and Woglom’s (2014) text itself. Students literally filled in the margins by ventriloquizing the voices, thoughts, questions, and concerns of the students, teachers, and researchers depicted, but often left silent, in Jones and Woglom’s article (see Figures 2 and 5). In situating these responses within the larger corpus of work across the class, this active taking up of multiple perspectives was unique. Particularly in comparison to students’ responses to other assigned

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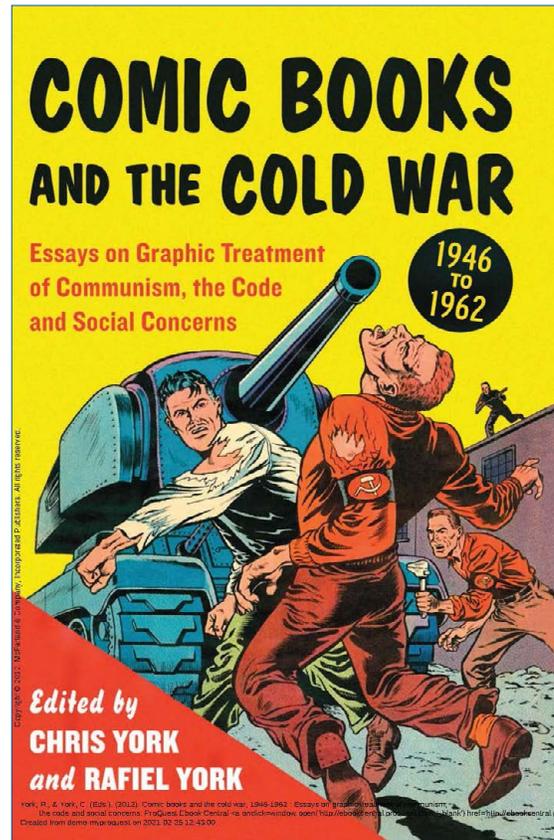
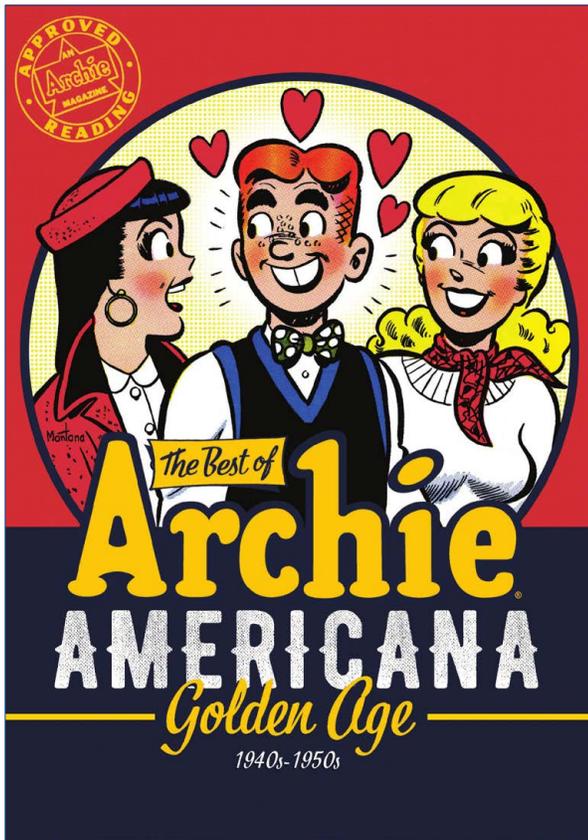
## Topic 5: Archie, History, and American Culture

Rafiel York and Quincey Marlin Young have both published research on representations of the Cold War in graphic narrative and in *Archie* comics in particular. Although comics often take a more lighthearted narrative tone that, on the surface, may seem incompatible with serious study— it is precisely *Archie*’s casualness that make it a rich resource for understanding how issues like the Cold War penetrate so many areas of everyday life.

For instance, Jeanne Gardner looks at the rise of Romance comics and storylines such as are frequently seen in comics like *Archie*. Gardner writes, “In romance comic stories of the early 1950s, the negotiation of a girl’s independence and maturity frequently took place in a sexual context, and nearly as frequently involved a question of class status” (Gardner 94). The characters of *Archie* navigate this process of independence and maturity via the romantic encounters of “going steady” against the backdrop of the Cold War.

### Comics:

*The Best of Archie Comics: The Best of Archie Americana Vol. 1*. Pelham, NY: Archie Comic Publications, Inc., 2017. [https://search.alexanderstreet.com/view/work/bibliographic\\_entity%7Ccomic\\_book%7C5093022](https://search.alexanderstreet.com/view/work/bibliographic_entity%7Ccomic_book%7C5093022)



*The Best of Archie Comics: The Best of Archie Americana Vol. 2.* Pelham, NY: Archie Comic Publications, Inc., 2018. [https://search.alexanderstreet.com/view/work/bibliographic\\_entity%7Ccomic\\_book%7C5093100](https://search.alexanderstreet.com/view/work/bibliographic_entity%7Ccomic_book%7C5093100)

### Readings:

Hague, Ian. "From Comic Strips to Graphic Novels: Contributions to the Theory and History of Graphic Narrative." *European Comic Art* Vol. 7 Iss. 1 (2014): 113-116. <https://www.proquest.com/scholarly-journals/comic-strips-graphic-novels-contributions-theory/docview/1691609821/se-2>

Royal, Derek Parker. "Projections: Comics and the History of Twenty-First-Century Storytelling" *College Literature Special Issue: Edward Said: Beginning Again*. Vol. 40 Iss. 4 (Fall 2013): 155-158. <https://www.proquest.com/scholarly-journals/projections-comics-history-twenty-first-century/docview/1458283355/se-2>

York, Rafiel. "Rebellion in Riverdale." *Comic Books and the Cold War: Essays on Graphic Treatment of Communism, the Code and Social Concerns*. Eds. Chris York and Rafiel York. Jefferson, North Carolina: McFarland & Company, Inc., Publishers, 2012. 103-114. <https://www.proquest.com/legacydocview/EBC/867075>

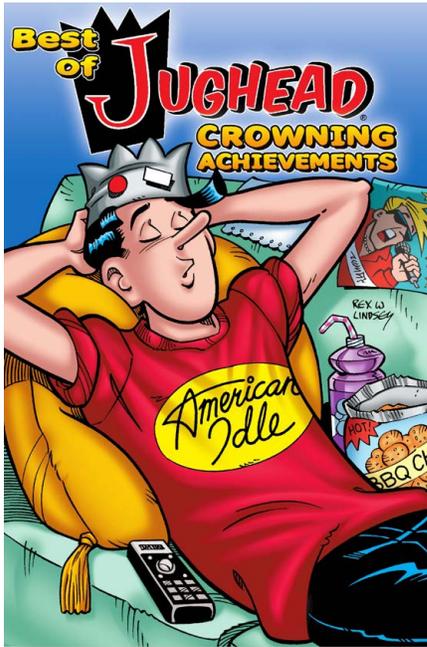
Young, Quincy Marlin. *Cold War Consumers: A History of 1950s Popular Culture*. University of Nebraska at Omaha, 2017. Dissertation. <https://www.proquest.com/dissertations-theses/cold-war-consumers-history-1950s-popular-culture/docview/1952049136/se-2>

## Topic 6: **Archie, Gender, and Sexuality**

*Archie* comics have also been an important site of research for gender and LGBT studies. In particular, the character Jughead is one of the few asexual, or ace, characters in mainstream media. *Archie Comics'* confirmation of Jughead as ace in 2016 is a progressive move and an important step for media representation of ace characters. So, why is it important to have representation of ace characters in comics? Nat Wrhel argues that representation of ace characters is important, especially for younger audiences. He writes, "People who do not fall within heteronormative standards often have a difficult time figuring out their identity when they are young, and a major factor in this difficulty is lack of representation; if people are aware that there are others like them, even if these others are in the form of fictional characters, they are less likely to feel like they are alone or broken in some way. Therefore, acknowledgement that Jughead is ace is important not only to discourse about asexuality, but also to increasing the general public's understanding of asexuality and helping those who are ace in their effort to figure out their identity" (37).

### Comics:

*Best of Jughead: Crowning Achievements*. Pelham, NY: Archie Comic Publications, Inc., 2011. [https://search.alexanderstreet.com/view/work/bibliographic\\_entity%7Ccomic\\_book%7C5096258](https://search.alexanderstreet.com/view/work/bibliographic_entity%7Ccomic_book%7C5096258)



Gladir, George; Gollhofer, Bill; Parent, Dan. *Archie: Love Showdown*. Pelham, NY: Archie Comic Publications, Inc., 2012. [https://search.alexanderstreet.com/view/work/bibliographic\\_entity%7Cinstallment%7C5095298](https://search.alexanderstreet.com/view/work/bibliographic_entity%7Cinstallment%7C5095298)

Gregory, Roberta. *Bitchy Butch: World's Angriest Dyke*. (Seattle, WA: Fantagraphics Books, 1999). [https://search.alexanderstreet.com/view/work/bibliographic\\_entity%7Ccomic\\_book%7C1518153](https://search.alexanderstreet.com/view/work/bibliographic_entity%7Ccomic_book%7C1518153)

### Readings:

Allison, Marjorie C. "(Not) Lost in the Margins: Gender and Identity in Graphic Texts." *Mosaic: A Journal for the Interdisciplinary Study of Literature*. Vol. 47 Iss. 4 (2014): 73-97. <https://www.proquest.com/scholarly-journals/not-lost-margins-gender-identity-graphic-texts/docview/1634215083/se-2>

Danzinger-Russell, Jacqueline. *Girls and Their Comics: Finding a Female Voice in Comic Book Narrative*. Scarecrow Press, 2012. <https://www.proquest.com/legacydocview/EBC/1076207>

Lipton, Mark. "Queer Readings of Popular Culture: Searching [to] Out the Subject." *Queer Youth Cultures*. Ed. Susan Driver. State University of New York Press, 2008. 163-180. <https://www.proquest.com/legacydocview/EBC/4514004>

*The Routledge Companion to Gender and Sexuality in Comic Book Studies*. Ed. Frederick Luis Aldama. Routledge, 2020. <https://www.proquest.com/legacydocview/EBC/6264863>

Wrhel, Nat. "Jughead: Revealing the Closeted Ace." *The Acestor of Aces: Representations of Asexuality in Fiction*. Truman State University. 2017. Dissertation. <https://www.proquest.com/dissertations-theses/acest-aces-representations-asexuality-fiction/docview/1972634150/se-2>



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Libraries have the expertise and a unique platform to support university wide diversity, equity and inclusion initiatives. ProQuest has shared this value for supporting every voice for decades and understands that budget and resource limitations are making it difficult to grow collections and services. ProQuest is your partner in meeting the needs of your institution in ensuring representation of diverse users and reflecting every voice, regardless of race, gender, sexual orientation, physical ability, age or belief.

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<https://alexanderstreet.com/discipline/comics>



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