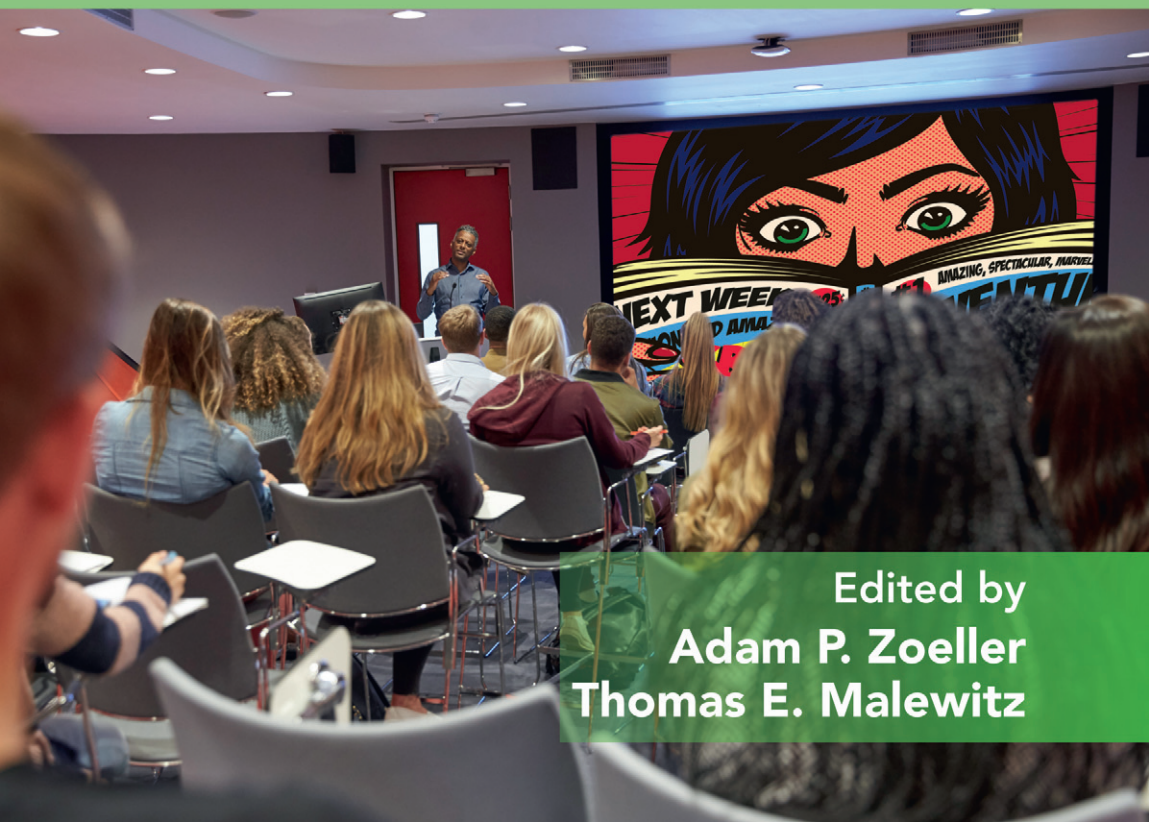


# HOLLYWOOD or History?

An Inquiry Based Approach for Using  
Comic Based Stories to Teach Liberal  
Arts and Social Sciences



Edited by  
**Adam P. Zoeller**  
**Thomas E. Malewitz**

**An Inquiry Based  
Approach for Using  
Comic Based Stories to  
Teach Liberal Arts and  
Social Sciences**

# **Hollywood or History?**

Series editors: Scott L. Roberts and Charles J. Elfer

Teaching and learning through Hollywood, or commercial, film productions is anything but a new approach and has been something of a mainstay in the classroom for nearly a century. Purposeful and effective instruction through film, however, is not problem-free and there are many challenges that accompany classroom applications of Hollywood motion pictures. In response to the problems and possibilities associated with teaching through film, we have developed the Hollywood or History? book series. The series consists of a collection of collaboratively developed practical, and classroom-ready lesson plans that might assist K-12 history/social studies teachers endeavoring to make effective use of film in their classrooms. Using the Hollywood or History? strategy, each lesson plan offers teachers an inquiry-based approach which allows students to analyze motion pictures, television shows, documentaries, and cartoons using multiple sources.

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*Hollywood or History? An Inquiry-Based Strategy for Using Film to Teach World Religions*

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# **An Inquiry Based Approach for Using Comic Based Stories to Teach Liberal Arts and Social Sciences**

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*Edited by*

**Adam P. Zoeller**  
*Sacred Heart Academy, USA*

*And*

**Thomas E. Malewitz**  
*Spalding University, USA*



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## ABOUT THE EDITORS

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**Adam P. Zoeller (volume co-editor)** is a secondary school theology teacher with over 22 years experience in Carmelite, Xaverian, and Ursuline traditions teaching Scripture, Catholic Social Teaching, and World Religions. He earned his MEd in educational leadership from the University of Cincinnati (OH) and two undergraduate degrees in Religious Studies and Psychology from Spalding University in Louisville, KY. Adam served as an educational consultant for the Wilbur Award winning documentary *Revolution of the Heart: The Dorothy Day Story* (Journey Films, 2020) as well as an educational consultant for Ave Maria Press on the development of their *Exploring the Religions of the World*, 3rd ed. teacher's manual. He has been published in *The Journal of Catholic Education*. Adam has led webinars and has presented nationally for the National Catholic Educational Association on the topics of adolescent spirituality, athletics, media literacy, and Catholic identity. He is the co-editor for *Hollywood or History? An Inquiry Based Strategy for Using Film to Teach World Religions* (Information Age, 2023). Adam is a member of the National Catholic Educational Association (NCEA). He is currently the theology department chair at Sacred Heart Academy in Louisville, KY.

**Thomas E. Malewitz (volume co-editor)** is an Assistant Professor in the College of Education and Director of the EdD: Leadership Program at Spalding University. He holds a BA in Mathematics and Philosophy from Eastern Michigan University, a MTS and Graduate Certificate in Scripture from St. Meinrad School of Theology, and a PhD in Education and Social Change from Bellarmine University. Tom taught for over a decade in Catholic secondary education teaching courses in Philosophy, Statistics, and Theology. He is the author of the Catholic Media Association 2021 first place award-winning book *Authenticity, Passion, and Advocacy: Approaching Adolescent Spirituality From the Life and Wisdom of Thomas Merton* (Wipf & Stock, 2020). He has also authored *Truth and Reconciliation: An Exploration of Leadership and Accountability Within Divided Nations and Cyclic Ideologies* (Pickwick, 2024). He

served as co-editor for *Hollywood or History? An Inquiry-Based Strategy for Using Film to Teach World Religions* (Information Age, 2023). Along with several book chapters, his publications can be found in *The Journal of Catholic Education*, *The Merton Annual*, and *The Merton Seasonal*. Tom is an active member of the American Educational Research Association (AERA), College English Association (CEA), and the International Thomas Merton Society (ITMS).

**Scott L. Roberts (series co-editor)** currently serves as Professor of Social Studies Education at Central Michigan University. He teaches courses in elementary social studies education, current educational issues, and research methods. He has served as a board member of the Michigan Council for Social Studies, on several committees for the National Council for the Social Studies, on the editorial board of *Social Studies* and the *Young Learner*, and was named the Georgia Council for the Social Studies' Gwen Hutchinson Outstanding Social Studies Educator (2012). A former middle school teacher, he received his doctorate from the University of Georgia in social studies education in 2009. He is the author of multiple publications concerning history education and is the co-editor *Hollywood or History: An Inquiry-Based Strategy for Using Film to Teach United States History* (2018), *Hollywood or History: An Inquiry-Based Strategy for Using Film to Teach World History* (2021) and the co-author of *Teaching Middle Level Social Studies: A Practical Guide for 4th-8th Grade* (2022). His research interests include state history, discussion-based strategies, history education, and educational technology.

**Charles J. Elfer (series co-editor)** currently serves as Associate Professor of History Education at Columbus State University (GA), where he teaches courses pertaining to history, social studies education and educational foundations. Charles also serves as Coordinator of History and Social Studies Education for all graduate and undergraduate programs, as a board member for the Georgia Council for the Social Studies, and as the co-editor of *History Matters!* In addition to his ongoing co-editorial contributions to the *Hollywood or History?* strategy and book series, he is closely affiliated with The Ivey Center and the *Cultural Approach to History*. A former high school teacher, Charles received his PhD from the University of Georgia in Social Studies Education in 2011, with an emphasis in curriculum history, place-based education, and history/social studies methods.

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## ABOUT THE CONTRIBUTORS

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**Sarah Beach** is an Assistant Professor of Communication in the School of Liberal Arts at Spalding University. She teaches interpersonal communication, public speaking, business and professional communication, leadership communication, and health communication, among others. She is a rhetorical scholar with an interest in the circulation of rhetoric, especially in digital spaces. In particular, she focuses on ambient rhetoric and internet communication, and how memetic culture online participates in and reinforces offline “worlding” of received knowledge(s) and information(s). Dr. Beach previously taught Communication at Jefferson Community & Technical College in Carrollton, Kentucky and has taught Philosophy at the Kentucky Governor’s Scholar Program. Dr. Beach holds a doctorate in Communication, Rhetoric & Public Culture from Ohio University and a Master’s in Communication, Technology, & Society from Clemson.

**Emily Campbell** is the Director of Accessibility and Academic Success at Spalding University. Her work focuses on student success, primarily through supplemental reading instruction and success coaching for undergraduate and graduate students. She holds an MAT in Elementary Education from Bellarmine University and an MDiv from Louisville Presbyterian Theological Seminary. She received her doctorate in Educational Leadership at Spalding University.

**Joseph Claypoole** currently holds an MA in Instructional Design and Technology from the University of Central Florida. He began his career as a middle school math and science teacher and athletics coach, which has provided him with a unique perspective on the educational landscape. Joseph possesses a deep understanding of how to create effective and engaging learning experiences. His expertise extends to analyzing training requirements, designing, developing, evaluating, and managing training and educational programs using current and emerging technologies, instructional strategies, and theories of human learning. Throughout his career,

Joseph has remained committed to education and the pursuit of innovation in learning and development, making valuable contributions to the field.

**Ariel Cornett** is an Assistant Professor in the Department of Elementary and Special Education at Georgia Southern University. She teaches undergraduate and graduate elementary social studies methods courses. She received her doctorate from the University of Virginia in Curriculum and Instruction with a focus on Social Studies Education in 2020. Prior to pursuing her PhD, she taught elementary school (i.e., kindergarten, first, and third grade) for 3 years in a Virginia public school system. Her research interests focus on the place-based teaching and learning of social studies in elementary classrooms and communities. She also has two peer-reviewed edited book chapters in *Hollywood or History?: An Inquiry-Based Strategy for Using Film to Acknowledge Trauma in Social Studies* (2022) and *Hollywood or History?: An Inquiry-Based Strategy for Using Film to Teach World Religions* (2023).

**Colleen Fitzpatrick** is an Assistant Professor at the Judith C. Herb College of Education at the University of Toledo where she teaches undergraduate and graduate courses in social studies education. She received her doctorate in Curriculum and Instruction, focusing on social studies education from the University of Virginia. Prior to her doctorate, she taught middle and high school social studies in Utah and Virginia. Her research explores the complex and interactional role the context of a classroom, school, district or state plays in how teachers and students experience teaching and learning history.

**Alexander J. Glaser** is a secondary education social studies teacher. He completed his BA in History at Murray State University and his MAT from Spalding University. He received his EdD at the University of Louisville. Alexander has 8 years of Catholic education experience in various secondary schools. He has also taught for the Center for Talented Youth program sponsored by Johns Hopkins University. He has served on various school improvement teams and district advisory boards within the Archdiocese of Louisville as well as participated in review boards for Cognia. He has been published in the academic journal *Perspectives in History*.

**Delandrea Hall** is an Assistant Professor of Social Studies Education at the University of North Texas. She received her doctorate in Curriculum and Instruction with a specialization in Social Studies Education from The University of Texas at Austin, and her K-12 experience includes 11 years as a high school social studies teacher in the Dallas area. Her research interests center around examining the ways racialized and gendered experiences inform the praxis of Black and Latinx teachers, and how these teachers

work to disrupt dominant notions of social studies through critical pedagogical approaches like Hip-Hop Based Education/pedagogy and critical economics.

**Jeffrey M. Hawkins** directs the social studies teacher education program and urban education doctoral program at the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee. Dr. Hawkins has experience teaching at K-20 levels in New York, San Francisco, Memphis, Tulsa, Milwaukee and has field supervised pre-service candidates in Belize, Costa Rica, and the United States. Current scholarly interests include critical pedagogy, intersectional and justice perspective using content analysis methodology within urban contexts. Dr. Hawkins earned his BA in History from the Massachusetts College of Liberal Arts, MA in Social Studies Education from New York University, and EdD in International and Multicultural Education from the University of San Francisco.

**Mark A. Lewis** is Professor of literacy education at James Madison University. He previously taught middle school English language arts and English to speakers of other languages in Arizona and worked with Indigenous high school students in Colorado. His research interests include examining and critiquing representations of youth in young adult and adult literature, defining the multifaceted literary competence of secondary students, and identifying effective ways to support linguistically diverse learners. In addition to multiple book chapters, his scholarship can be found in *English Education*, *Reading Research Quarterly*, *Middle Grades Research Journal*, *Study & Scrutiny*, *Research on Diversity on Youth Literature*, and *Journal of Literacy Research*. He is also a co-author of *Rethinking the "Adolescent" in Adolescent Literacy* (NCTE, 2017).

**Alexandra Lindner** is an instruction librarian who provides information literacy and research support to university students. As a librarian and a former writing tutor, she has worked with a variety of students of all ages on communication, research, and writing skills. Alley has designed online and in-person library learning modules for Spalding University in Louisville, KY, and the Universities at Shady Grove in Rockville, MD, specializing in scaffolded information literacy for first year students and research support for online graduate students. She has a background in English and the Humanities, with a focus on postcolonial literature, writing pedagogy, and the digital humanities.

**Daniel E. Martin** is a secondary school theology teacher with over 20 years of teaching experience. He earned his PhD in Theology from the University of Dayton. His dissertation focused on the influence of Roman Catholicism

on Sargent Shriver's contributions to public policy and international development. His areas of expertise include Catholic Social Teaching, Social Ethics, Religion and Film, Religion and Politics, and Religion and Science. He has contributed to theological texts from Continuum and Lit Verlag. Dr. Martin has articles published by *The Maronite Voice*, *The Covington Messenger*, and Louisville's *Eccentric Observer*. He has presented at academic conferences sponsored by the College Theology Society, the Upper Midwest Chapter of the American Academy of Religion, the Sisters of Notre Dame USA, the Archdiocese of Louisville, the University of Dayton, and Dominican University of Illinois. Dan is currently involved in Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion work at both a local and regional level.

**Liz Shanks** is a graduate student at James Madison University, where she was also an undergraduate student majoring in English, with minors in secondary education, teaching English to speakers of other languages, and Africana studies. She was an assistant art teacher at a small studio in Woodbridge, Virginia, and has had practicum placements in Harrisonburg City and Augusta County public schools. She studied abroad in Costa Rica during summer 2023, which included teaching 5th, 8th, and 10th grade students at a small private school. Her research interests include studying linguistic features and associations of marginalized groups, implementing critical analyses and research into English language arts classrooms, and exploring effective strategies regarding the success of culturally and linguistically diverse learners. Her scholarship can be found in James Madison University's *Undergraduate Research Journal* and *Sigma Tau Delta Review*, and her creative work has been published in the literary arts magazine, *Iris*.

**Eric C. Street** is an Assistant Professor of Management in the School of Business at Spalding University. He received his Master's degree from the University of Kentucky and his doctorate degree in Sports Management from the United States Sports Academy. He is currently enrolled in the World War II Studies Program at Arizona State University. Dr. Street has extensive research experience with World War II veterans. His grandfather was a NAZI POW for 11 months, captured a few weeks after D-Day, which is the main motivation for his interest in World War II and the Holocaust.

**Arthur L. Turner** has served the Archdiocese of Louisville as the Director for the Office of Faith Formation for over 10 years. He earned his BA in History from St. Meinrad College Seminary and pursued his graduate studies in Systematic Theology at the Catholic University of America in Washington, D.C. He also holds a graduate certificate in Reflective Practice from St. Meinrad Seminary and School of Theology. Arthur has worked as a professional catechist for the Catholic Church for over three decades. After 6 years

of seminary formation, Arthur worked in Catholic secondary education for seven years. Later he served as a parish Director for Lifelong Formation and Education, and a parish Pastoral Associate responsible for all levels of parish faith formation.

**Christopher Willman** is a licensed clinical laboratory scientist, microbiologist, and has been a master's level educator for well over two decades. He began his career as a clinical scientist, which inspired him to transition into secondary science education for both exceptional and special needs students. He has also served as a science and math department chair and has led several curricular and technological professional development seminars and training. Current academic interests include multiple-intelligence differentiation, social justice based cross-curricular models, and technology-assisted inquiry in the science classroom. He has taught courses in Biology, Environmental Science, Anatomy/Physiology, Integrated Science, and Fundamental Mathematics. Mr. Willman possesses a BS and MAT from the University of Louisville as well as MT (ASCP) and CLS certificates.

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# INTRODUCTION TO HOLLYWOOD OR HISTORY?

## Comic Based Stories Edition

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In response to the limitation associated with teaching through film, we sought to develop practical lesson ideas that might bridge gaps between theory and practice and assist teachers endeavoring to make effective use of film in the classrooms. We believe that film can serve as a powerful tool in the social studies classroom and if appropriately utilized can foster critical thinking and civic mindedness. The College, Career, and Civic Life (C3) framework, adopted by the National Council for the Social Studies in 2013, represents a renewed and formalized emphasis on the perennial social studies goals of deep thinking, reading, and writing. The C3 is comprehensive and ambitious. Moreover, we believe that as teachers endeavor to digest and implement the platform in schools and classrooms across the country, the desire for access to structured strategies that lead to more active and rigorous investigation in the social studies classroom will grow increasingly acute. Our hope is that the present text might play a small role in the larger project of supporting practitioners, specifically teachers of history and world religions, by offering a collection of classroom-ready tools designed to foster historical inquiry through the careful use of theologically-themed motion pictures and documentaries (Roberts & Elfer, 2021, p. xiii).

The *Hollywood or History?* method is a unique educational strategy and to adhere to its expectations the following method section is included to offer a consistent and clear series introduction for reader ease and clear implementation throughout each of the volume editions within the *Hollywood or History?* series. The following *Hollywood or History?* method section below, acknowledges and adapts the outline for the step-by-step method that was established for this educational strategy (see Roberts & Elfer, 2021, pp. xiii–xx).

## **The *Hollywood or History?* Method**

Through our collaborative work with both new and experienced teachers, we have developed and refined a classroom strategy that provides a structured and inquiry-based approach for viewing Hollywood feature films in the social studies classroom. This strategy, which we refer to as *Hollywood or History?*, bridges components of the C3 framework, especially, deep reading, deep writing, and deep thinking, through a guided analysis of historical materials and historically-themed films. The strategy challenges teachers and students to evaluate competing claims, detect bias, and measure evidence from multiple sources with the goal of developing reasoned perspectives regarding the relative accuracy of commercially-produced motion pictures. By the end of the *Hollywood or History?* exercise, students are positioned to express those self-generated assessments, orally and in writing, by making claims about whether a film selection is 100% History (all fact), 100% Hollywood (all fiction) or somewhere in between. The *Hollywood or History?* approach is fundamentally a platform for historical inquiry and analytical-skill building (Roberts & Elfer, 2021, pp. xiii–xiv).

As a practicing middle grades teacher of state history, Scott Roberts originally developed this strategy through his efforts to implement historical thinking in his classroom in a way that was approachable and engaging. Informed by well-known inquiry focused work of Sam Wineburg as well as his appreciation for the television series *Hollywood or History*, Roberts was able to make effective use of both topically relevant historical films and historical material (primary and secondary sources) in a way that was developmentally appropriate for eight grade students of state history. In designing and implementing several *Hollywood or History?* lessons in his own teaching space, he saw first-hand how well the strategy was received with his middle grades students and was encouraged by the motivation that went on to share the strategy at regional and state conferences and in staff development sessions. As he moved into teacher education and the role of social studies methods instructor, Roberts introduced the approach to his preservice education students as a means of modeling effective approaches for using traditional pedagogical tools (e.g., textbooks, films, worksheets, lecture, etc.) in the social studies classroom. In an effort to show how these traditional tools can assist in teaching through C3, Roberts asked his students to participate in a hands-on *Hollywood or History?* lesson based on a clip from the movie *Gone with the Wind* (1939) (Roberts, 2014; Roberts & Elfer, 2021, p. xiv; Roberts & Wellereiter, 2015).

Encouraged by his early successes as a K-12 practitioner and teacher education, Roberts later shared his experiences with long-time colleague, Charles Elfer, who was also interested in best practices for using film in the social studies classroom. Since that time, their collaborative work on the subject has grown tremendously. Together, Roberts and Elfer have worked

to share the *Hollywood or History?* framework throughout the United States at professional venues. Additionally, Roberts and Elfer have elaborated on illustrations of the approach and its effectiveness in a variety of professional journals, books, and as published lesson plans (Elfer et al., 2017; Roberts, 2014; Roberts & Elfer, 2021). The feedback received has been generous and overwhelmingly positive and provides the impetus for the *Hollywood or History?* manuscript series (Roberts & Elfer, 2021, pp. xiv–xv).

The *Hollywood or History?* approach represents a structured plan for the evaluation of film which incorporates the use of primary and secondary historical materials. Lesson materials themselves will necessarily vary from one lesson to the next as a function of topical differences and student readiness; however, the procedures are largely consistent across applications. A detailed outline of those procedures is offered below in a step-by-step format for clarity. The procedures outlined here are incorporated throughout the text in each of the exercises included (Roberts & Elfer, 2021, p. xv).

**Step 1: Film selection.** The list of potential useful films for the world history or world religion classroom is expansive and forever growing. To provide an exhaustive accounting is beyond the scope of the present text. The included plans offer a variety of themes and potential topics that are addressed throughout the secondary curriculum, as indicated at the beginning of each lesson plan (Roberts & Elfer, 2021, p. xv).

The first step in *Hollywood or History?* lesson plan development is generally to make the film selection. In the present text, we have drawn on the experiences of educators from a wide variety of contexts. Within those examples, readers will find that contributors have paid attention to ratings, availability, and practicality of the lesson topic. Ratings are especially important, and while they will vary from one school context to another, we offer our sincere caution to practitioners to ensure that the films incorporated into the classroom contain content that is consistent with the norms and expectations of the wider community served (Roberts & Elfer, 2021, p. xv).

The lesson plans offered throughout this volume offer a unique combination of social studies and global awareness, through a focus on topics directly connected to world religions. Although the desire in the *Hollywood or History?* method is to rely primarily on film clips and not use films in their entirety (Roberts & Elfer, 2021, p. xvi), due to the nature of a particular religious theme, or in the need to complete a story arc, some of the lesson plans included in this volume have allowed the option of utilizing film clips or the entire film as an option for lesson plan as the need of the teacher warrants. Please be aware of the context of the topic and read the lesson plan thoroughly to have a complete context of the expectations of the activities and assessments.

**Step 2: Develop the inquiry.** Once the film selection has been made, the second step in a *Hollywood or History?* exercise is to develop an interesting question or set of questions. As the showcased lessons demonstrate, a

narrative describing the scene, the film and/or context of world religion under review often guides the students into inquiry. In a *Hollywood or History?* lesson, the fundamental question that students must answer is: Is the material depicted in the film 100% Hollywood (fiction), 100% History (fact), or somewhere in between? In several instances, that essential question will suffice as an overarching task for the inquiry. In other cases, teachers may develop additional questions to guide the exercise. Additional questions may be especially useful for beginners who may not have a great deal of experience with analytical exercises like these and/or where the level of rigor is so high as to require additional scaffolds for students (Roberts & Elfer, 2021, pp. xvi–xvii).

**Step 3: Selection of sources.** As the series title suggests, the crux of the *Hollywood or History?* strategy begins with film. Equally important is the careful selection of accompanying documents that serve to compliment, verify, and/or challenge the film under review. As the lessons presented below will demonstrate, we often suggest bookending the film selection with primary and secondary sources. In our experience in working with students and preservice teachers in a variety of classroom contexts, we find that this approach (1) provides for an inquiry exercise that is suitable to a single classroom session, (2) reinforces primary and secondary materials as the core of historical work, and (3) is developmentally appropriate for a wide range of student audiences. As is true of many of the recommendations for practice provided in the present text, we invite teachers to scale-up their *Hollywood or History?* lessons in a way that is suitable to their student populations (Roberts & Elfer, 2021, p. xvii).

**Step 4: Develop student supports.** Some of the *Hollywood or History?* exercises provided within provide a graphic organizer which follows a template developed by Roberts (2014). Our intention is to provide classroom-ready materials that are accessible for both teachers and students. With that in mind, and in anticipation of the fact that many teachers may want to make the *Hollywood or History?* strategy a regular part of their practice, we endeavored to standardize the student supports to some degree. The supports have been field-tested and enjoy a demonstrated level of effectiveness. Our objective is not to provide a rigid set of prescriptions and tools, and readers should note that the accompanying worksheets and graphic organizers are highly flexible. Once students learn the strategy it can be applied to multiple topics with ease. As with other suggested practices, the exact format of the student support is completely flexible (Roberts & Elfer, 2021, p. xviii).

**Step 5: Show the film and review the resources.** With documents and film clips carefully selected, the next step in the *Hollywood or History?* approach is to carefully have students review the collection of materials. In most cases, we recommend showing the film clip first. Much of the gravity, or hook, in the strategy centers on the medium of film, which has the unique capacity to capture student attention and generate interest. In our

ongoing collaboration with a community of practitioners, it is worth noting that a number of educators have suggested a flipped protocol, whereby the sources are examined first and then the film clips are reviewed by the students. Traditionally, we have organized our classes into small groups, but this exercise could also be treated as an individual activity. Similarly, readers may find benefit in a whole class arrangement as a way of modeling the expected behavior and process (Roberts & Elfer, 2021, p. xix).

**Step 6: *Hollywood or History?*** Once students have had an opportunity to view the film and document collection, they should be invited to deliberate and prepare their evaluations regarding the relative accuracy of the clip. This portion of the exercise is straightforward, but students should be instructed to support their conclusions with evidence from the texts and film. There is no right or wrong, per se, as the primary goal is to mobilize the evidence in support of conclusions. We encourage the reader to use the included worksheets and/or graphic organizers to assist with the students forming and supporting their conclusions (Roberts & Elfer, 2021, p. xix).

**Step 7: Debriefing activity and extensions.** After students have had the opportunity to draft their evidence-based determinations regarding the historical accuracy of the film clip, we suggest that teachers unpack the conclusions as a whole class. Throughout this manuscript contributing authors have offered a wide variety of methods to assist in debriefing the student conclusions. Readers may find that in some instances, authors have suggested an individual writing assignment, whereby students are asked to write an essay for homework, or authors have suggested group research projects to further investigate the historical contexts presented in the film and sources. We also invite teachers to introduce additional documents that further challenge or confirm the film and resources encountered. Students can work to make sense of these new documents in class if time permits, or as part of a homework assignment (Roberts & Elfer, 2021, p. xx).

## Layout of the Book

The *Hollywood or History?* Series incorporates the skills of media literacy as a means to comprehend, analyze, and evaluate contemporary films to content from the standards set forth in a social studies curriculum. The application of the skills of media literacy to liberal arts and social sciences are expanded in this volume to include comic book based stories in light of history, psychology, religion, and science. The justification of using comic based storytelling is based on its continued growth in popularity in our contemporary culture. Forty percent of the top 10 all time grossing films are from the comic book genre with the second highest film all time, *Avengers: Endgame*, grossing over 2.79 billion dollars (Childress, 2023). There is also a growing field of literature and scholarship on the importance and role of

comic books and graphic novels in offering advocacy and voice to cultural and historical events as well as in the educational process (Duncan & Smith, 2009; Hoberek, 2017; Whitted, 2019). As Attwood and Gerber (2020) attest.

Through comic books and other graphic literature, students have the opportunity to use readily accessible media formats to learn about history, other non fiction, and fictional stories for developing critical understandings of the past and necessary skills for successfully operating in a complicated multicultural society (p. 181).

The pedagogical strategy of meeting students where they are is essential to engage the students' interests in current culture as a springboard in the comprehension of a particular topic. The National Association of Media Literacy Education (NAMLE) also reinforces the importance of the overarching theme of the *Hollywood or History?* Series. NAMLE seeks to recognize the role of media literacy in critical thinking in a technological driven environment. This sense of the call of meaningful literacy is not a new approach to education, but lies at the intersection of engaging pedagogical strategies and 21st century skills (Eisner, 2004).

## **Chapter 1**

The focus of the first chapter in the comic-based film volume explores direct historical parallels between the topics within the comic and events in human history. Many of the original comic book heroes evolved as a response to historical events, threats, or violence. On March 1, 1941, the premier issue of the Marvel superhero Captain America had a drawing of the hero punching Adolf Hitler (Kirby & Simon, 1941). The volume was so popular that the second issue of Captain America had a picture of the hero hitting Adolf Hitler but from the opposite perspective. A more thorough investigation into the historical parallels between comics and significant historical events, places, and people can be found in the History Channel documentary *Superheroes Decoded* (Burns et al., 2017). The title for Chapter 1 is aptly named Historical Parallels to lay a direct foundation for the connection of comic book characters and stories with history. Alexander Glaser begins this section with a lesson on understanding total warfare and the role of propaganda in World War II using the film *Captain America: The First Avenger* (Johnston, 2011). This lesson explores the context and circumstances of World War II, focusing on the power of propaganda and media messaging in the war effort. Similarly, the second lesson also focuses on World War II, but from the eyes of Jewish Holocaust survivors. Using Marvel's X-men anti-hero Erik Lensherr, aka Magneto, Eric Street explores testimony surrounding the context evolution of the culture in Nazi Germany to the Holocaust, from the Treaty of Versailles to the Nuremberg

Trials. Street's use of weaving scenes from *X-men: First Class* (Vaughn, 2011) with stills from Magneto's origin story comic, *X-Men Magneto Testament* (Pak, 2009), and stories gathered and preserved at the [Blavatnik Archive](#) (2024) and the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum (n.d. -a) offers a somber and terrifying experience of history through the eyes of a Holocaust survivor.

In lesson three, Emily Campbell brings life to a contemporary historical event for the students through revolution and protest. Using clips from *V is for Vendetta* (McTeigue, 2005) as well as global events like the Arab Spring, Campbell ties the story from the graphic novel (Moore et al., 1990) to the pages of the news, making a captivating and tangible lesson for students. Closing out the first section, Thomas Malewitz offers a heartbreaking introduction to the cultural genocide of the Canadian Residential Schools. Through the use of the graphic novel and musical event *Secret Path* (CBC Arts, 2016; Downie & Lemire, 2016), the lesson briefly explores the experience of First Nations children in the Residential schools as well as exploring the power of storytelling in the truth-telling process of national reconciliation. Several additional resources are included in the lesson for those unfamiliar with the topic.

## **Chapter 2**

The focus of the second chapter offers insight into the role comic books and graphic novels have played in providing an empowering voice for those who have often been historically left to the margins of textbooks. Comic book stories have traditionally offered a venue to challenge cultural beliefs, myths, and stereotypes (Whitted, 2019). The following lessons highlight some comic book characters and stories that can provide an empowering voice to an often bland historical narrative. Adam Zoeller leads off the chapter by examining Afrofuturism and colonization as presented in the film *Black Panther: Wakanda Forever* (Coogler, 2022). By examining traditional communal rituals within the context of the race for technological power, Zoeller explores a new way of guiding students to understanding through tangible examples of historical realities and experiences through a modern lens. Jeffrey Hawkins's lesson follows with the focus on an authentic re-enactment of the Tulsa Race Massacre (1921) through the lens of HBO's *Watchmen* series (Kassel, 2019). The episode follows, from start to finish, the emotions and experiences of one of the worst race riots in American history from a counterview of traditional history accounts. This lesson and its storytelling offer a tangible reminder that it is essential to understand another perspective of historical accounts.

The remaining three lessons in this chapter offer narratives from the perspective of another voice often neglected in historical texts, a feminist lens.

Ariel Cornett, Delandrea Hall, and Colleen Fitzpatrick offer a lesson that explores the origins of a young Pakistani-American teenager who unexpectedly becomes a great superhero through the series *Ms. Marvel* (Spendloff, 2022). Cornett, Hall, and Fitzpatrick weave powerful topics into this lesson on adolescent identity, family identity, and religious identity to challenge historical and cultural stereotypes from the experience of a female Muslim hero. The next lesson, by Alexandra Lindner, explores nostalgia and anti-nostalgia through the science fiction genre. In *Paper Girls* (Folsom, 2022), a group of female paper deliverers becomes caught in a time-traveling adventure. By comparing this story with the wildly popular series *Stranger Things*, Lindner masterfully re-examines the 1980s through a new perspective for students. To conclude this section on empowering voices, Liz Shanks and Mark A. Lewis offer an engaging lesson on a feminist view of death and dying. Using the fantasy genre, Shanks and Lewis also challenge dominant historical and cultural stereotypes through the use of film clips from *I Kill Giants* (Walter, 2017). Through magic and mythology, the story follows the challenges of a young feminist shaping and understanding her identity through re-imagining a world full of grief.

### Chapter 3

The third chapter focuses on religious and theological implications in comic book characters and stories. Throughout the rise and fall of superhero character story arcs, there are countless examples of altruism, ethics, miracles, morals, redemption, and sacrifice. These themes have been incorporated prominently in the following lessons to help students engage more tangibly with such concepts. The first lesson, by Adam Zoeller, explores one of the most famous DC Comic superheroes, Superman. By fusing Christian and Jewish concepts and imagery into this lesson, Zoeller illustrates the power and ultimate sacrifice of the *Man of Steel* (Snyder, 2013). Arthur Turner explores the concepts of fall and redemption in the Marvel hero and Norse god Thor Odinson. By comparing and contrasting the fall narrative with the consequences of the protagonist character in *Thor* (Branagh, 2011), Turner offers a clear case for the need for self-reflection regarding ethical decision-making and the consequences our actions have on others.

Similarly, Daniel Martin uses the fall and redemption narrative to explore the character of the Silver Surfer. Instead of relying on the Genesis text of the fall, Martin compares and contrasts comics of the Silver Surfer and clips from the film *Fantastic Four: Rise of the Silver Surfer* (Story, 2007) to John Milton's *Paradise Lost*. The final lesson in this chapter focuses on the ethical issues surrounding the development of medical sciences. Thomas Malewitz explores the harm of medical science research without proper ethical considerations in the graphic novel and television series *Sweet Tooth*

(Lemire, 2021; Netflix, 2021). Juxtaposing the graphic story with historical examples of unethical research, like the Tuskegee Experiment, and contemporary calls for continual ethical consideration for the dignity of life in the development of scientific inquiry in *Laudato Sí* (Francis, 2015) students are challenged to see the allegory in the graphic novel and real-life abuses of human commodities.

## **Chapter 4**

The fourth chapter focuses on psychological concerns and issues that are more palatable through comic book characters and stories that can offer a springboard for normally more challenging conversations and topics in the classroom. In the first lesson in the section, Adam Zoeller explores personal grief and coping mechanisms through the trauma of Wanda Maximoff in the series *WandaVision* (Shakman, 2020). Using clips from previous Marvel films to set the scene of Wanda's grief, Zoeller unabashedly confronts the challenges of finding solace after losing a close loved one. Thomas Malewitz follows up this lesson with a focus on the danger of internalizing bullying. Through the psychological thriller and origin story of the infamous DC villain *Joker* (Phillips, 2019), Malewitz explores the importance of learning healthy coping mechanisms to relieve stress and find peace instead of resorting to violence. Examples of meditation exercises and additional resources to respond to bullying are included in the lesson.

The third lesson in this section explores the psychological condition of multiple personalities. Through the use of clips from the series *Moon Knight* (Diab, 2022), Adam Zoeller offers a brief introduction of the complex symptoms of Dissociative Identity Disorder and how such a condition affects one's personal life and relationships. This section closes with a lesson on envy and gratitude. By weaving the stories of Wonder Woman's nemesis Cheetah, Barbara Minerva in the film *Wonder Woman 1984* (Jenkins, 2020) and/or Priscilla Rich in the original Wonder Woman comic, and the envy and hatred the character has for Diana Prince with the classic short story *The Monkey's Paw* (Jacobs, 1902) this lesson explores the importance of finding satisfaction in one's self, skills, and possessions and the dangers of thinking that life would be better to wish for something else.

## **Chapter 5**

The final chapter of this volume approaches contemporary challenges, concerns, and issues with science, pseudo-science, and technology through the perspective of comic-based stories. The first lesson of the chapter explores the mindful use of technology. Sarah Beach examines the importance of respecting and remaining aware of the uses of technology in our lives.

Through the use of film clips from *Avengers: Age of Ultron* (Whedon, 2015) and multiple engaging activity options, this lesson will challenge students to examine the extent to which they use technology and why. The second lesson, by Christopher Willman, explores the ethics of nuclear power and radioactive decay through the film *The Incredible Hulk* (Lewis, 2008). This lesson offers clear and tangible clips to directly compare and contrast real science from pseudo-science, assisting students to further develop critical thinking skills in scientific inquiry and understanding. The final lesson in the volume explores the theoretical scientific concept of the multi-worlds theory. Joseph Claypoole uses clips from three different Spider-man films (Raimi, 2002; Watts, 2021; Webb, 2014) to present an example of the many-worlds theory through the Marvel Cinematic Universe. It offers an emotional and powerful lesson for students to engage and discuss beyond the classroom.

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## Additional Reading

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# SECTION 1

## HISTORICAL PARALLELS

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In 2017, the History Channel compiled a documentary on the history of comic books called *Superheroes Decoded* (Burns et al., 2017). This two part series analyzed how the comic book genre reflected American culture historically, through the interviews and narration of the premier comic book authors, illustrators, and actors. While episode one featured legendary heroes of Marvel and DC such as Superman and Captain America, episode two focused on heroes that challenged authority and the status quo. The comic book form of storytelling challenges the reader to explore the implicit allegorical implications and the explicit lessons through each plot line as the character development unfolds of heroes and villains (Duncan & Smith, 2009; Whitted, 2019). This section in *Hollywood or History: An Inquiry Based Approach for Using Comic Based Stories to Teach Liberal Arts and Social Sciences* will examine the historical parallels of comic book stories in light of North American history.

In addition to super strength and a vibranium shield, arguably, the true superpower of Steve Rogers is his integrity and courage. This patriotic hero created by Joe Simon and Jack Kirby, known as Captain America, infused into pop culture during World War II; with a version of his origin story recently brought to the big screen in the 2011 film, *Captain America: The First Avenger* (Johnston, 2011). Although the enemies of the United States of America have changed historically due to a variety of reasons, Steve Rogers remains the ultimate hero that represents the courage of thousands and thousands of enlisted soldiers over the last century.

Similar to Marvel's Captain America comics, Stan Lee's X-Men also represent a part of American history. These extraordinary mutants led by the protagonist, Professor Charles Xavier are discriminated against unjustly by the non-mutant community. One of the main antagonists in the story is a

## 2 An Inquiry Based Approach for Using Comic Based Stories

mutant named Erik Lehnsherr, a holocaust survivor who has experienced firsthand the cruelty of humanity based on ethnocentric monoculturalism. Erik, whose mutant identity is Magneto, views the mutant world as superior to non-mutants and vows to defend his fellow mutants at any cost. Using *X-Men: First Class* (Vaughn, 2011) as a representation of discrimination in our nation's history, the motivation and trauma of Erik Lehnsherr will be analyzed.

While communal conflict and hopeful resolution are at the heart of the X-Men stories, the film *V is for Vendetta* (McTeigue, 2005) additionally uses themes of protest as a means of creating change and revolution in society. Alan Moore and David Lloyd's graphic novel draws on historical imagery of Guy Fawkes, anarchy, and social revolution (Moore et al., 1990). Lastly, *Secret Path* (CBC Arts, 2016) is a live-motion graphic novel and musical experience that explores one re-imagining of the history of Canadian residential schools. This graphic novel (Downie & Lemire, 2016) offers an emotional and heart wrenching look into a historical genocide from an element of poetry and truth telling, from the perspective a child. All of these stories presented in section one reflect a historical narrative that challenges the audience to use media in order to accurately evaluate the obstacles and hope of our collective past.

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# UNDERSTANDING TOTAL WARFARE AND THE ROLE OF PROPAGANDA IN WORLD WAR II

**FILM: *Captain America: The First Avenger* (2011)**

**Alexander J. Glaser  
St. Xavier High School, USA**

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## ABSTRACT

Using characters from the *Captain America* comics as a guide, this chapter explores topics on World War II warfare and propaganda. It engages students with definitions, key concepts, and terms surrounding images and language of the war. Activities include examination of comic book cover art, characters, and maps as a comparison and contrast between the comic-based characters and the historical people, messaging, and events of World War II. Video clips from *Captain America: The First Avenger* (2011) and *Captain America: The Winter Soldier* (2014) are also used to demonstrate the role of propaganda and purposeful messaging surrounding the message of war shared with civilians.

#### 4 Alexander J. Glaser

Lesson Name
World War II and Today: Propaganda of American Enemies

Grade	Subject	Topic
10–11	US History	World War II

Theme Under Study	Estimated Time Needed for Lesson
Total Warfare—the method of propaganda	60–90 minutes

National Association for Media Literacy Education	
Standard Number	<i>Detailed Description of Each Standard You Are Discussing</i>
<p><b>Core Principles of Media Literacy Education in the United States</b></p>	<p>1. Expands the concept of literacy to include all forms of media and integrates multiple literacies in developing mindful media consumers and creators.</p> <p><b>IMPLICATIONS FOR PRACTICE</b></p> <p>1.3 MLE guides learners to participate in a broad range of media experiences—both in person and online—and across print, visual, audio, and digital media.</p> <p>1.4 MLE values inquiry of contemporary media experiences that are culturally relevant in both the learning environment and the everyday lives of learners.</p> <p>2. Envisions all individuals as capable learners who use their background, knowledge, skills, and beliefs to create meaning from media experiences.</p> <p><b>IMPLICATIONS FOR PRACTICE</b></p> <p>2.3 MLE helps learners identify biases within their own and others’ media experiences.</p> <p>7. Recognizes that media institutions are cultural and commercial entities that function as agents of socialization, commerce, and change.</p> <p><b>IMPLICATIONS FOR PRACTICE</b></p> <p>7.1 MLE acknowledges that all media experiences have a particular perspective, context, and purpose and helps learners to ask questions about the substance, source, form, and significance of these aspects.</p> <p>7.2 MLE acknowledges that all media messages contain values and points of view.</p>

State Standard	Description
<i>Standard Number</i>	<i>Detailed Description of Each Standard You Are Discussing</i>
<b>California</b>	
Department of Education	HSS-11.7 Examine the origins of American involvement in the war, with an emphasis on the events that precipitated the attack on Pearl Harbor
<b>Kentucky</b>	
Department of Education	HS.UH.CO.3 Analyze the role of the United States in global compromises and conflicts between 1890 and 1945 in the Spanish American War, World War I, the Interwar years and World War II
<b>Missouri</b>	
Social Studies Standards Grade 6–12	History Continuity and Change Theme 4 E. Evaluate the impact of US participation in WWII and the resulting new role in post-war world home and abroad
<b>Oklahoma</b>	
Academic Standards for Social Studies	WH.4 The student will evaluate the global transformation created by the World Wars (1900–1945 CE)

NCSS C3 Framework	Description
<i>Dimension</i>	<i>Detailed Description of Each NCSS Dimension You Are Incorporating</i>
<b>D1.2.9-12.</b>	Explain points of agreement and disagreement experts have about interpretations and applications of disciplinary concepts and ideas associated with a compelling question
<b>D2.His.1.9-12.</b>	Evaluate how historical events and developments were shaped by unique circumstances of time and place as well as broader historical contexts
<b>D2.His.4.9-12.</b>	Analyze complex and interacting factors that influenced the perspectives of people during different historical eras
<b>D2.His.7.9-12.</b>	Explain how the perspectives of people in the present shape interpretations of the past

NCSS C3 Framework	Description
<i>Dimension</i>	<i>Detailed Description of Each NCSS Dimension You Are Incorporating</i>
<b>D2.His.9.9-12.</b>	Analyze the relationship between historical sources and the secondary interpretations made from them
<b>D2.His.12.9-12.</b>	Use questions generated about multiple historical sources to pursue further inquiry and investigate additional sources
<b>D2.His.17.9-12.</b>	Critique the central arguments in secondary works of history on related topics in multiple media in terms of their historical accuracy
<b>D3.3.9-12.</b>	Identify evidence that draws information directly and substantively from multiple sources to detect inconsistencies in evidence in order to revise or strengthen claims
<b>D4.1.9-12.</b>	Construct arguments using precise and knowledgeable claims, with evidence from multiple sources, while acknowledging counterclaims and evidentiary weaknesses

NCSS Core Themes	Description
<i>Theme Number</i>	<i>Detailed Description of Each NCSS Theme You Are Incorporating</i>
<b>I Change, Continuity, and Context</b>	<i>Understanding the interrelation of patterns of change requires evaluating the context within which events unfolded in order not to view events in isolation, and to be able to assess the significance of specific individuals, groups, and developments.</i>
<b>II Perspectives</b>	<i>History is interpretive. Even if they are eyewitnesses, people construct different accounts of the same event, which are shaped by their perspectives—their ideas, attitudes, and beliefs.</i>
<b>III Historical Sources and Evidence</b>	<i>Historical inquiry is based on materials left from the past that can be studied and analyzed.</i>
<b>IV Causation and Argument</b>	<i>Historical thinking involves using evidence and reasoning to draw conclusions about probable causes and effects, recognizing that these are multiple and complex.</i>

## Handouts/Materials/Web Links

### Handout/Materials

- Handout #1: Hollywood or History? Graphic Organizer
- Handout #2: Transcript From Captain America Comic

### Web Links

- Link to Film Clips:
 

Filmey Box. (2023, July 7). *Steve Rogers meets Alexander Pierce scene | Captain America the winter soldier 2014 movie clip HD 4K* [Video]. YouTube. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VMTfYyFPSk&t=155s> (2 minutes)

Marvel Entertainment. (2011, March 21). *Captain America: The first avenger—trailer* [Video]. YouTube. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JerVrbLldXw> (3 minutes)

Rodriguez, A. (2015, July 29). *Captain America: The winter soldier clip 'Sitwell's confession'*. [Video]. YouTube. <https://youtu.be/qGpz8Q4Jq6A?si=PVQuW8j-IjNqghkm> (4 minutes)

Scott, M. (2021, April 7). *Hydra is inspected—Captain America: The first avenger* [Video]. YouTube. [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Z5N\\_0tmiljY](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Z5N_0tmiljY) (3 minutes)
- Primary Source(s):
 

Kirby, J., & Simon, J. (1941a). Captain America. *Captain America Comics* (issue #1). Marvel Comics. [https://www.marvel.com/comics/issue/7849/captain\\_america\\_comics\\_1941\\_1](https://www.marvel.com/comics/issue/7849/captain_america_comics_1941_1)

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- Secondary Source(s):
 

The American Experience. (n.d.). *The man behind Hitler: Joseph Goebbels (1897-1945)*. WGBH Educational Foundation. <https://www.pbs.org/wgbh/americanexperience/features/goebbels-biography/>

The Holocaust Explained. (n.d.). *Nazi propaganda*. The Wiener Holocaust Library. <https://www.theholocaustexplained.org/educational-resource-nazi-propaganda/>

The National Archives. (1995). *The Power of Persuasion: Poster art from World War II*. National Archives and Records Administration. [https://www.archives.gov/exhibits/powers\\_of\\_persuasion/warning/warning.html](https://www.archives.gov/exhibits/powers_of_persuasion/warning/warning.html)

Parrott, J. (2021). *Captain America: Changing conscience of a nation*. Ohio State University Origins. [https://origins.osu.edu/milestones/captain-america-changing-conscience-nation?language\\_content\\_entity=en](https://origins.osu.edu/milestones/captain-america-changing-conscience-nation?language_content_entity=en)

## Guiding Questions

*What should students know or understand at the completion of the unit or lesson?*

## Primary Questions

- *Compare the strategies and goals of propaganda between the United States and Nazi Germany.*
- *Who were the enemies of the United States in the original Captain America comic books? Why were they the “bad guys”?*
- *Who are the enemies of the United States in the Marvel Cinematic Captain America? What differences do you notice?*
- *How historically accurate are modern depictions of Captain America? What principles of World War II propaganda do you notice in modern depictions?*

## Important Vocabulary

*List all of the important indicators of achievement (important people, places, and events) and vocabulary that students will need to know at the conclusion of the lesson.*

- **Anti-Semitic**—To be hostile or prejudiced against Jewish people.
- **Fascism**—A political philosophy that dominated many parts of central, southern, and eastern Europe between 1919 and 1945 that exalts nation and often race above the individual and that stands for a centralized autocratic government headed by a dictatorial leader.
- **Holocaust**—State-sponsored persecution and mass murder of millions of European Jews, Romani people, the intellectually disabled,