

History Through Fiction: The Use of Popular Fiction as a Tool to Teach Secondary Social Studies

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Abstract:

When teaching social studies to secondary students, ages eleven to eighteen, it has become increasingly necessary to find engaging educational tools. Students are no longer being trained for factory work, but the curriculum has not changed to reflect that. Additionally, student attention spans have dwindled for anything that is not electronic. Thus, it has become crucial to find alternative methods for effective content instruction.

Recent popular fiction may provide a solution. Authors like Rick Riordan and Michael Scott have created modern adaptations of classical mythology and historical figures. Mythology was a vital component of ancient societies and as such is a rich source for information on the culture and society of the ancient world. The study of prominent artisans, politicians, and the clergy is a cornerstone of historical inquiry. Rick Riordan has placed Egyptian, Greek, Roman, and Norse mythology into an engaging and exciting modern setting; Michael Scott has incorporated real and mythical characters from world history and mythology into a race against and across time. These stories, while entirely fictional, provide secondary age students with an introduction to historical cultures and societies while also presenting an opportunity for them to develop individual inquiry and research skills.

The purpose of using these texts is not to analyze the validity of the story. The purpose is to engage young minds in discovering the history embedded in the story. This paper is a case study in how these sources can be effectively used to teach social studies and world history to secondary students.