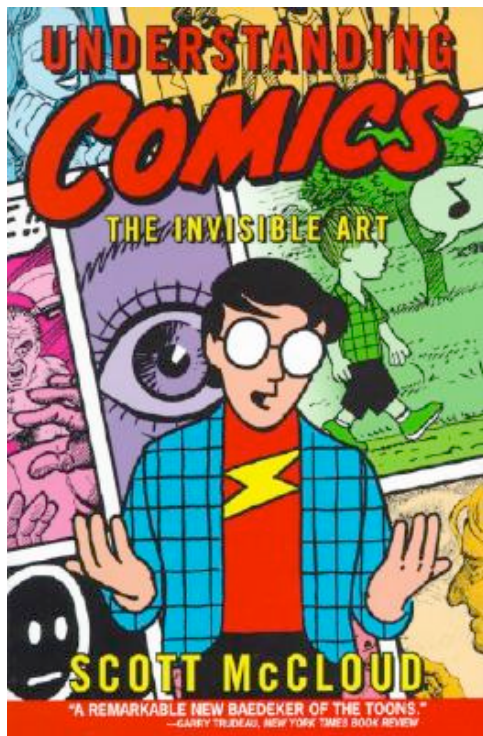


Book Review

By NiluferGuler and Lynn Chih-Ning Chang

Understanding Comics: The Invisible Art

Scott McCloud (1994), New York, NY: HarperPerennial Publishing, 215 pages.



Understanding Comics is a graphic book that consists of ten chapters. In each chapter, McCloud introduces a different aspect of comics in terms of writing it and understanding it. McCloud describes the aim of the book as “... an examination of the **art-form** of comics, what it is capable of, how it works” (stress in the original, p.1). So this book goes beyond giving a definition for comics and explaining the visuals, but it aims to demonstrate the art in comics.

The book starts with refuting a long-lasting misconception about comics: “Comic books were usually crude, poorly drawn, semiliterate, cheap, disposable kiddie fare...” (p.3). McCloud explains “the limitless potentials” (p.3) in comics throughout the book and states that “Comics offers tremendous resources to all writers and artists: faithfulness, control, a chance to be heard far and wide without fear of compromise” (p. 212). To show this limitless potential, McCloud

provides examples from different comics and graphic novels worldwide, from ancient manuscripts, to the movies.

Each chapter introduces an important aspect of comics, how they are used, and why they are used. This book helps to increase the readers' visual literacy awareness, since the chapters not only stress the importance of understanding how to write comics, but also understanding the comics we read and the visuals we are exposed to everyday.

The book is written in the form of comics, which is one of its most important strengths. McCloud describes characteristics of cartoons, explaining each and providing plenty of examples. This helps readers to recognize the effects of certain practices in cartoons. For instance, chapter two of the book explores icons and their levels of abstraction. McCloud does a great job explaining how to decrease and increase the level of abstraction in the cartoons, including an explanation of how the different levels of abstraction affect the reader.



The chapters of the book are arranged as: chapters 1-6 & 8 provide definitions and description of cartoon characteristics; chapter 7 steps to create cartoons; and chapter 9: summary. Chapters define key terms and give several examples of how these characteristics can be used in different ways.

Understanding Comics can be used in all grade levels with the guidance of the teacher and can help the

visual development of the students. The strengths of this book cannot be overstated. It is remarkable to have a good collection of the comic terms and described with great examples. This book can be used as course material, as well as outside reading at different levels of instruction and can be a rich source for understanding the art and science of comics. This book is also very well-written and edited. It is highly recommended for teachers who want to expand their students' learning to include visual media.

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