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Monsters: A Bedford Spotlight Reader



Book Information

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Customer Reviews

Andrew J. Hoffman is a Professor of English at San Diego Mesa College, where he teaches courses in grammar, composition, and British Literature. He received his B.A. in English from the University of California at Irvine and his M.A. from Syracuse University. He is the author of *Monsters*, part of the Bedford Spotlight series, and has contributed to *The Arlington Reader*, Fourth Edition. In addition, he has authored, edited, or otherwise contributed to numerous other textbooks of grammar, composition, and rhetoric, in both traditional and online formats. "

I bought two of this book, but only one book arrives home.

4 stars. I like this collection of essays a lot but I don't love it. I like what this little book tries to do. It attempts to engage college students who are required to complete transfer-level composition and/or literature with a cultural studies/pop culture approach on a single subject. I like that it's a viable alternative to the creative nonfiction canon--the nonfiction essays that we usually find in most comp readers (e.g., the Norton Reader, *Writer's Presence*, *50 Essays*). After awhile even the classic essays become blah. That or I get bored easily (like most students). As amazing as they are, how many consecutive occasions can a person assign "Once More to the Lake" and "Death of the Moth"? (OK, don't answer that). This book is a courageous "out of the textbook canon box" alternative. Who is this book appropriate for? It's at a ninth grade reading level. In my estimation, it's appropriate for first term first-year college students. This is the kind of text that helps students

immerse themselves slowly into the tidal waters of academic conversations on pop culture / low art (let's admit it) subjects. I'm unsure I'd use this with more advanced lower division or upper division undergrad classes. It seems more appropriate for introductory level lower division courses in reading and writing. It is superior to other books in the spotlight reader series. No offense to foodies, but I don't think I can teach "food matters" for a 16-weeks academic term. I'd bore myself silly. You may have a similar worry about this book. That is, can you really cover monsters for 12-13-14-15-16 weeks? After all, the price of the text (\$30ish before bookstore markup) requires sustained time and effort to yield value. Also, students may not find it to be super valuable. In the end, I envision a lot of instructors making copies of certain articles from this collection for individual units but not really adopting it for the entire term. Why? The book is compact and thin. It feels slight. At \$30 it's a bit too thin. You can almost walk around with it in your back pocket. That has pros and cons. Yes, it's a convenient size that's not textbook clunky and overwhelming. But if it's something you can stuff into a back pocket, then perhaps it'll end up staying there for many students. The size is perfect for those who are transitioning from high school to college, perhaps best for pre-baccalaureate composition students (one level under transfer-level comp--but not appropriate for lower levels). The readings are brief--about 3-4 pages in length. The readings scaffold from less complicated to more sophisticated at the end. Students love to read writers they're familiar with, such as Stephen King, Chuck Klosterman (Spin magazine), and Guillermo del Toro (Hellboy, Pan's Labyrinth). They love the King essay about horror movies (needs a longer excerpt). I'd recommend more Stephen King material in the book--maybe one of his short stories or excerpts from his writing book ("On Reading" & "What Writing Is"). Students cannot get enough of Stephen King! And given that most of my students loathe reading and writing (gotta love Common Core)--well, Stephen King ain't such a bad idea, folks--could be much worse. At least King cares about literacy and writing. Section 2 is nearly lost on my students. The excerpts from Borges and Ovid are too brief. This is where I'd cut to a book length work, such as a monster novel or text (Frankenstein, Dracula, Beowulf, Jeckyl, Heart of Darkness, etc) or Asma's excellent book on monsters. Section 3 has more hits than misses. The Beowulf excerpt is too brief. Students find the Poole essay dull. I can make the same comment about Sections 4 and 5. My students weren't thrilled about gender issues or "romancing the vampire." In Section 5, most of my students haven't seen the movie 'Halloween' so I had to skip the film essay. My students could hardly remember who Jeffrey Dahmer was--so the essays on modern-day "murdering minds" are somewhat interesting but don't really sustain much interest beyond 5 minutes of discussion. And most of the discussion involves remembering people, places, and events. "Do you remember when???" The discussion questions and instructional apparatus

are solid and are an excellent feature of this book. Great class discussion questions. Great writing topic questions that stimulate critical thinking and require students to make textual connections. The book contains about 36 readings. Most of them are very brief. Some don't seem to be college level reading (OK, yeah, so not Foucault). Some are not terribly memorable. I think that about 25 out of 36 readings are assignable and engaging for most students. Not bad, but enough value for students? The literary excerpts are way too brief to yield much value. If I had to purchase this book for a class, then I might be inclined to sell it back to the bookstore at the end of the term. I don't really see this on many bookshelves. I might be interested in a monster theme in the short-term (over an academic term) but unsure of long-term value and interest. Will a comp course on monsters be memorable for students?? Perhaps. Will you feel like Robin Williams's Mr. Keating in 'Dead Poets Society' if you adopt this book? Hard to say... perhaps you can fit in a touch of Whitman (all that barbaric yawping), Emerson, and the good ol' Bard.... Macbeth anyone? Iago? Gorgeous villains... lots of monsters in Shakespeare, Milton, and medieval lore (Beowulf, Sir Gawain??) If your classroom is activity oriented, student-centered, and emphasizes more verbal than written response to readings, then this book may be a solid option for you. It does generate discussion. I found that I can talk about 1-2 articles per class session but students get bored returning to or revisiting articles (they believe) that they've already discussed. I didn't find that any particular reading can sustain a lot of critical effort and attention (perhaps a few late entries in Section 5) beyond 1-2 class sessions. I must say it was fun having good reasons to teach Frankenstein, Dracula, and addressing "Mistah Kurtz" as a monster. Perhaps fun is reason enough to adopt this book. I assume that if you've read this entire review, then you're likely a teacher. Entirely unrelated to the monster theme is an eye-opening book by David Denby (film critic for the New Yorker magazine) entitled 'Lit Up.' I highly, highly recommend it. Denby offers fairly objective reporting on how 10th and 11th graders approach classic literary texts (some surprises here). Check out what's possible. Most importantly, check out the value of teaching literature (literary fiction, drama, poetry) in English classes. I mention this because in CA our state curriculum for transfer-level college comp requires primarily nonfiction texts. Hear ye all English teachers, we need to teach classic literature too! Our students desperately need it... Perhaps this thematic reader is a good way to "sneak in" fiction (if you pair it with a book length fictional text). And here's another text I enjoyed reading... Laura Bates, 'Shakespeare Saved My Life' ... on teaching Shakespeare in prison... (can be paired with Scott-Douglass, 'Shakespeare Inside.'

a good value for the money.

As expected

Good

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