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Sociology Students Skype with Award-Winning Author

April 4, 2016

Categories: News

Tags: Appalachia, sociology news



Robert Gipe

by Rachel Terman

For the students in [Sociology of Appalachia](#), author [Robert Gipe](#)'s virtual visit to the classroom in March provided a rare opportunity to dig even deeper into the course material by learning about the perspectives of the author straight from the source.

Students in the course had just read his 2015 novel, [Trampoline](#), which tells the story of Dawn Jewell, a 15 year old girl living in Eastern Kentucky.

Dawn deals with many of the sociological issues the students study in class such as limited educational opportunities, environmental degradation, economic instability, drug abuse, crime, and family dysfunction as well as sense of place, community engagement, and the value of family.

Student reactions

After reading the book, one student said, "I thought Gipe's depiction of Appalachia was incredibly accurate and vivid — at least, in terms of my own experience growing up in Appalachia and what I've been given to understand about other regions of Appalachia from this course."

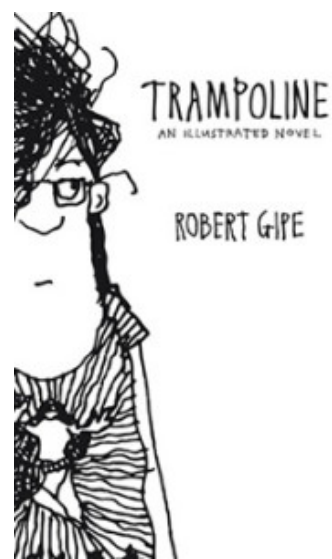
Another student mentioned that many of the characters exhibit negative stereotypes about Appalachia, such as their "drug abuse and poor grammar."

"I think that this is definitely true, but I'm not altogether sure that it's done in a completely negative way. They certainly do exhibit these stereotypical behaviors, but I think that Gipe still manages to paint these characters beyond the stereotypical — as real, dynamic human beings."

Students were able to ask Gipe questions about the book, and he answered from his seat at a lunch table after having enjoyed a pot roast sandwich before our call.

Students asked him questions about why he chose a young girl to be the protagonist, why he set the book in Kentucky, and how he balanced portraying Appalachia in a realistic way with the stereotypes that readers might attach to the story.

Writing the book



Gipe explained that he had worked on the book for six or seven years and based it on the experiences he had living in Eastern Kentucky and working with many young women from the area through his position as director of the Appalachian Program at Southeast Kentucky Community and Technical College.

The author also said that he had purposefully included social issues important to the region in his book and playfully noted that having the book be a part of a sociology course was “a dream come true.”

Book awarded for “illuminating” Appalachia

Less than two weeks after the class’s Skype session with Gipe, his novel, *Trampoline*, published by [Ohio University Press](#), received the [Weatherford Award](#) at the 39th Appalachian Studies Association Annual Conference.

The Weatherford Awards, presented jointly by the [Appalachian Studies Association](#) and Berea College, honor works published in the prior calendar year that “best illuminate the challenges, personalities, and unique qualities of the Appalachian South.”