

English 381.01: **Studies in Literary Genres: Graphic Narratives:
Comics and Graphic Novels**

Spring 2012 Professor: Jan Susina

Class Meets: 9:35 a.m.--10:50 a.m. Tuesdays and Thursday s

Meeting Place: Stevenson Hall 233-A

Office: Stevenson Hall 402

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Office Hours: Tuesday & Thursday: 11 am—noon

Tentative Syllabus:

Jan. 17: Introduction and Review of the Course

Hillary Chute's "Comics as Literature?"

Reading Graphic Narrative" *PMLA* 123.2 (March 2008) 452-46

and Jessica Abel's "What is a Graphic Novel?" (handouts)

Jan. 19: Scott McCloud's *Understanding Comics: The Invisible Art*: introduction and chapter 1, Thierry Groensteen's "Why are Comics Still in Search of Cultural Legitimization," Robert Harvey's "How Comics Came to Be" in *Comics Studies Reader*

Jan. 24: Charles Schulz's *Peanuts: A Golden Celebration (Early Years—The 60s)*
Thomas Inge's "Two boys from the Twin Cities" David Kunzle's "Rodolphe Topffer's Aesthetic Revolution," in *Comics Studies Reader*
PBS American Masters' David Van Taylor's "Good Old Charles Schulz" (film)
Oral Report 1: Rodolphe Topffer and the invention of the comic strip
(David Kunzle's *Father of the Comic Strip: Rodolphe Topffer*) _____.

Jan. 26: Charles Schulz's *Peanuts: A Golden Celebration* (Charlie Brown on Screen- Compliments and Comment)
Oral Report 2: Charles Schulz's *A Charlie Brown Christmas* (film) (Lee Mendelson's *A Charlie Brown Christmas: The Making of a Tradition*)
_____.

Jan. 31: Charles Schulz's *Peanuts: A Golden Celebration* (The 90s-Conclusion)
Gilbert Seldes's "The Vulgar Comic Strip," Frederic Wertham's *Seduction of the Innocents*," Amy Nyberg's "William Gains and the Battle over EC Comics in *Comics Studies Reader*
Oral Report 3: The Battle of Comics in the 1950s: The Comic Book Code
(Amy Nyberg's *Seal of Approval: History of the Comics Code*) _____.
Ron Mann's *Comic Book Confidential* (film)

- Feb. 2: Herge's *The Blue Lotus*
 Scott McCloud's *Understanding Comics*: chapters 2-6
 Oral Report 4: Herge (George Remi) and the *Tintin* series (Benoit Peiret's *Tintin and the World of Herge*) _____.
- Feb. 7 Scott McCloud's *Understanding Comics*: chapters 7-9
 Oral Report 5: Will Eisner's *Comics and Sequential Art* _____.
- Feb. 9 Craig Thompson's *Blankets*
 Oral Report 6: Winsor McKay and *Little Nemo in Slumberland* (John Canemaker's *Winsor McCay, His Life and Art*) _____.
- Feb. 14: Craig Thompson's *Blankets*
 Oral Report 7: George Herriman and *Krazy Kat* (Patrick McDonnell, Karen O'Connell & Georgia Riley's *Krazy Kat: The Comic Art of George Herriman*) _____.
- Feb. 16: Alison Bechdel's *Fun Home: A Family Tragicomic*.
 Oral Report 8: Alison Bechdel's *Dykes to Watch Out For* (Alison Bechdel's *The Essential Dykes to Watch Out For*) _____.
Analysis of Comic or Graphic Novel Due (5-7 pages)
- Feb. 21: Alison Bechdel's *Fun Home*.

 English Studies Lecture: "Repetition and Regeneration in Alison Bechdel's *Fun Home*." Hillary Chute, University of Chicago, Stevenson Hall 101, 7-8:15 p.m.
- Feb. 23: Gene Luen Yang's *American Born Chinese*
 Oral Report 9: Frederik L Schodt's *Dreamland Japan: Writings on Modern Manga* _____.
- Feb. 28 Lynda Barry's *One Hundred Demons!*
 Bart Beaty's "Autobiography as Authenticity in *The Comics Studies Reader*"
 Oral Report 10: Lynda Barry's *What It Is* (Hillary Chute's "Materializing Memory: Lynda Barry's *One Hundred Demons*" in Chute's *Graphic Women: Life Narrative & Contemporary Comics* _____).
- Mar. 1: Lynda Barry's *One Hundred Demons!*
Proposal for critical paper Due (1-2 pages)
- Mar. 6: Daniel Clowes's *Ghost World*.
 Oral Report 11: Harvey Kurtzman and *Mad* magazine (Maria Reidelbach's *Completely Mad: A History of the Comic Book and Magazine*) _____.

- Mar. 8: Daniel Clowes's *Ghost World*
 Oral Report 12: Charles Burn's *Black Hole* _____.
- Mar. 13: Spring Break: no class
 Mar. 15: Spring Break: no class
- Mar. 20: Art Spiegelman's *Maus 1: My Father Bleeds History*.
 Hillary Chute's "History and Graphic Representation in *Maus*" in *Comic Studies Reader*
 Oral Report 13: Art Spiegelman's *Breakdowns: Portrait of the Artist as a Young %@&*!* _____.
- Mar. 22: Art Spiegelman's *Maus 2: And Here My Trouble Began*
 Oral Report 14: Art Spiegelman and Francoise Mouly's *RAW Magazine* (Joseph Witek's *Art Spiegelman: Conversations*)
 _____.
- Mar. 26: Lois Lenski Children's Literature Lecture: "Crockett Johnson and Ruth Krauss: How an Unlikely Couple Found Love, dodged the FBI, and Transformed Children's Literature." Phil Nel, Kansas State University, Shroeder Hall 138, 7-8:15 pm
- Mar. 27: Art Spiegelman and Francoise Mouly's *Big Fat Little Lit*
 Dorothy Parker's "A Mash Note to Crockett Johnson" (website)
- Mar. 29: Joe Sacco's *Palestine*
 Oral Report 15: R. Crumb's *The Book of Genesis Illustrated by R. Crumb*
 _____.
- Apr. 3: Joe Sacco's *Palestine*
 Art Speigelman's "Drawing Blood: Outrageous Cartoons and the Art of Outrage" *Harpers* June 2006, 43-52 (website)
 Oral Report 16: The controversy and ethical issues over the publication of Danish cartoons depicting Muhammad (Jytte Klausen's *The Cartoons That Shook the World* _____).
- Apr. 5 Bryan Lee O'Malley's *Scott Pilgrim's Precious Little Life*, Vol. I.
 Oral Report 17: Patrick Rosenkranz's *Rebel Visions: The Underground Comix Revolutions, 1963-1975*. _____.
- Apr. 10: Bryan Lee O' Malley's *Scott Pilgrim's Precious Little Life*, Vol. I.
 Oral Report 18: Michael Barson's *Agonizing Love: The Golden Era of Romance Comics* _____.

- Apr. 12: Alan Moore's *The Watchmen*
 Peter Coogan's "The Definition of the Superhero" in *The Comics Studies Reader*
 Oral Report 19: Danny Fingeroth's *Superman on the Couch: What Superheroes Really Tell Us about Ourselves and Our Society* _____.
- Apr. 17: Alan Moore's *The Watchmen*
 Oral Report 20: Sara J. Van Ness's *Watchmen as Literature* _____.
- Apr. 19: Frank Miller's *Batman: The Dark Knight Returns*.
Research Paper Due
- Apr. 24: Frank Miller's *Batman: The Dark Knight Returns*
 Oral Report 21: Geoff Klock's *How to Read Superhero Comics and Why*
 _____.
- Apr. 26: Chris Ware's *The Adventures of Jimmy Corrigan*
 Gene Kannenberg's "The Comics of Chris Ware" in *Comics Studies Reader*
 Oral Report 22: David M. Ball and Martha B. Kuhlman's *The Comics of Chris Ware* _____.
- May. 1: Chris Ware's *The Adventures of Jimmy Corrigan*
 Oral Report 23: Damian Duffy & John Jennings's *Black Comix: African American Independent Comics, Art and Culture* _____.
- May 3: Chris Ware's *The Adventures of Jimmy Corrigan*.
 Oral Report 24: Dan Nadel's *Art Out of Time: Comic Visionaries, 1900-1969*
 (Bloomington Public Library) _____.
- May 5-10: Final Exam according to the Final Exam when announced.

Required Texts:

- Scott McCloud. *Understanding Comics: The Invisible Art*. HarperPerennial, 1993.
 Jeet Heer & Kent Worcester, eds. *A Comics Studies Reader*. U of Mississippi P., 2009
 Charles Schulz. *Peanuts: A Golden Celebration*. ed. David Larkin. It Books, 1999.
 Herge. *The Blue Lotus (The Adventures of Tintin)*. Little Brown, 1979.
 Art Spiegelman and Françoise Mouly, eds. *Big Fat Little Lit*. Puffin Books, 2003.
 Alan Moore & Dave Gibbons. *The Watchmen*. DC Comics, 1995.
 Frank Miller, Lynn Varley & Klaus Janson. *Batman: The Dark Knight Returns*, DC Comics, 1997.
 Art Spiegelman. *Maus I & II*. Pantheon, 1986 and 1992.
 Joe Sacco. *Palestine*. Fantagraphics Books, 2002.
 Lynda Barry. *One Hundred Demons!* Sasquatch Books, 2002.
 Daniel Clowes. *Ghost World*. Fantagraphics, 1998.
 Craig Thompson. *Blankets*. Top Shelf Productions, 2003.
 Alison Bechdel. *Fun Home: A Family Tragicomic*. Houghton Mifflin, 2006.

Chris Ware. *The Adventures of Jimmy Corrigan, The Smartest Kid on Earth*, Pantheon Books. 2000.

Bryan Lee O'Malley. *Scott Pilgrim's Precious Little Life*, Vol. 1 Oni Press, 2004

Gene Luen Yang *American Born Chinese*. First Second, 2007.

Joseph Gibaldi. *MLA Handbook for Writers of Research Papers*. Seventh edition. MLA, 2003.

Course Description:

“The graphic novel is not literary fiction’s half-wit cousin, but, more accurately, the mutant sister who can often do everything fiction can, and, just as often,” writes Dave Eggers, author and editor of *The Believer* and *McSweeney’s*. Comics and graphic novels are found everywhere: in public libraries, in the classroom and even in the *New York Times Magazine*, although the newspaper still refuses to feature Sunday comics. Comics and graphic novels have not only come of age as significant visual narratives, they are increasingly being created for and read by children and teen readers.

This course will focus on the history and development of contemporary comics and graphic novels. The primary focus will be on some of the more critically acclaimed contemporary examples.

In addition to the required texts, the course will also be examining selections from the work of Rodolphe Topffer, Herge, George Herriman, Winsor McKay, Frank King, Charles Schulz, Stan Lee, Will Eisner, Robert Crumb, Harvey Pekar, Art Spiegelman, Daniel Clowes, Chris Ware, Craig Thompson, Lynda Barry, Charles Burns, and Alison Bechdel. We will view selects of Ron Mann’s “Comic Book Confidential” as well as selections. The primary critical texts for the seminar will be Scott McCloud’s *Understanding Comics* which will be supplemented with reserve reading and class handouts. While this course is intended for students working in the fields of visual culture and popular culture, it should be applicable to those students interested in children’s and adolescent literature and contemporary literature.

Course Format:

The course will be conducted as a seminar which means that students are expected to come to class for active discussion of the reading assignments. All students will give an oral presentation on a prearranged topic and will create and distribute a handout (2-3 page) on the topic for every member of the class. Students will write an analysis and critique (5-7 page) on a specific graphic novel or comic and a longer research paper 12-15 pages for undergraduates and 15 to 20 pages for graduate students dealing with comics and/or graphic novels. Students will create a one page abstract for their research paper and. Throughout the semester, there will be short written assignments related to the primary texts and critical readings.

Class Attendance:

Class attendance is an important and valuable aspect of the course. If you aren't in class, you ought to have a good reason for your absence. Since the class only meets twice a week and you can't be two places at the same time, avoid scheduling other activities during class time. It is your responsibility to get the information that you missed during your absence from other members in class. If you must miss a session, contact me before class by email or telephone, if at all possible. Since class participation will be evaluated as part of your responsibilities in this course, missing more than three classes will lower your final grade one half a letter grade for each additional class sessions missed.

Research Paper:

Each student will write a critical paper (12 to 15 pages for undergraduates) and (15 to 20 pages) on a topic dealing with comics or graphic novels with approval by the instructor. Students are encouraged to write on one of the texts that the class is reading in common or another one composed by one of the authors/illustrators read in the class. Students will write a short (1-2 page) proposal for their research topic, which needs to be reviewed and approved by the instructor. In addition to the research paper, students will construct a one page abstract for their critical paper. Written work should conform to the format presented in the *MLA Handbook* for appropriate quotation and citation. Critical papers need a minimum of *seven* secondary sources in their Works Cited section. Only half of the secondary sources used in the Works Cited can be electronic sources. Students need to keep a copy of all their written work. Student work needs to be original and created for this class.

Class Presentation and Presentation Handout:

Each student will give a fifteen-minute class presentation selected from a list of rearranged topics. Students will introduce the topic to the class and lead class discussion on the subject. In addition to the presentation, each student will construct a handout (2-3 page) to accompany their presentation to be distributed to each member of the class on the day of the presentation. Presentation handouts should list at least *three* secondary sources as part of the handout's Works Cited section.

Class Assignments:

Through the semester, students will be asked to complete a series of short writing assignments linked to the reading and class discussion. A student missing a class in which in-class assignment is given or a class when an assignment is due will be unable to turn in the assignment late. This will be factored into your Class Assignment and Class Participation section of your final grade.

Plagiarism/ Cheating:

Please review the Illinois State University policy in the *Undergraduate Catalogue* or the *Graduate Catalog* and chapter 2: "Plagiarism" (66-75) in the *MLA Handbook*.

Plagiarism and cheating are serious academic offenses and will be punished by failure on an exam, paper, project, and in some cases result in failure in the course and/or expulsion from the university. All written work submitted for this course needs to be your own and produced for this specific course. Please consult the *MLA Handbook* for appropriate format for quotations and citations for your written work. Student work needs to be original and created for this class.

Final Exam:

There will be a final exam in the course given according the Spring 2012 Final Exam schedule. The exam will include essay questions and short identification questions. Purchase a blue book for the final exam.

Grading:

Grades will be assigned according to the following standard:

Class presentation & Presentation handout: 15%

Analysis of comic or graphic novel: 15%

Research Paper & Abstract: 25%

Class Assignments: 15%

Final Exam: 20%

Class Participation: 10%