

ENG 280: Intro to Comic Studies
Spring 2014 (CRN: 39690)
MWF: 3:00pm-3:50pm
GER 242

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Welcome! This course is an introduction to the history and art of American comics in the 20th and 21st century. We will explore key perspectives in Comic Studies, including critical race theory, disability studies, and environmental justice discourse, in order to respond to a variety of comic art forms, including the newspaper strip, the comic book, the graphic narrative, the zine, and the webcomic. The course comprises five thematic units designed to give students an overview of the work comics do on the page and in the world. First we will examine how romance comics complicate identity and desire in the first half of the 20th century. Second we will engage the powerful legacies of fantastic and disabled bodies in superhero comics. Third we will concentrate on the formal processes of re-membering American history in two graphic narratives. Fourth we will ask how comics generate an environmental justice ethos in a wordless graphic novel and several contemporary webcomics and zines. And finally, we will consider a comic strip and several minicomics by contemporary queer women as explicit interventions in heterosexist discourse. Throughout the term, we will read contemporary works of comics scholarship to frame and to challenge our own critical readings. Ultimately, this course invites students to become alive to the material grammar and dynamic contexts that generate the possibilities of the comic art form.

Course Learning Outcomes. This course is guided by the six desired learning outcomes of English Department undergraduate courses. Students will:

1. read literary and cultural texts with discernment and comprehension and with an understanding of their conventions;
2. draw on relevant cultural and/or historical information to situate texts within their cultural, political, and historical contexts;
3. perform critical, formal analyses of literary, cinematic, and other cultural texts;
4. write focused, analytical essays in clear, grammatical prose;
5. employ logic, creativity, and interpretive skills to produce original, persuasive arguments;
6. employ primary and/or secondary sources, with proper acknowledgment and citation, as they contribute to a critical essay's thesis.

Required Texts (in reading order) BB= ENG 280 Blackboard Site

Scott McCloud, *Understanding Comics* (1993)

Grant Morrison and Frank Quietly, *We 3* (2011)

George Herriman, *Krazy and Ignatz, 1937- 1938* (2006)

A Young Romance Reader (BB)

Jackie Ormes, *Torchy and Heartbeats Reader* (1953-4) (BB)

Joe Schuster and Jerry Siegel, *Superman Chronicles, Vol. 1* (2006)

Ron Marz, Ian Edington, Mukesh Singh, and Edison George, *Silver Scorpion* (BB) (2013)

Howard Cruse, *Stuck Rubber Baby* (1995)

Laura Molina, *The Jaguar* (1996) (BB)

Lynda Barry, *One! Hundred! Demons!* (2002)

An Online Diary Comics Reader (BB)

Laurence Hyde, *Southern Cross* (1951)
 An American Environmental Comics Reader (BB)
 Yudith Nieto's T.E.J.A.S. zine (BB)
 Stephanie McMillian, *Code Green* (2009) (links available on BB)
 Rebecca Bratspies and Charlie LaGreca, *Mayah's Lot* (2012) (BB)
 Alison Bechdel, *Dykes to Watch Out For* Reader (BB)
 Erica Moen, *GirlF*ck, I Like Girls*, "Queer," "When We Hold Hands" (links available on BB)

Class Policies and Procedures

Grading Principles. Grades are based on a norm of "C." Work done competently and adequately is "C" work. A "B" represents work that goes beyond the requirements of the assigned task and an "A" represents superior achievement well above the norm. In grading, I am responsible to your peers, your other teachers, your future graduate school administrators, and your future employers to accurately record the grades you earn. Thus, I do not "give" grades. You earn your grades through hard work, and you should be proud of every success and improvement you accomplish in my classroom. I will not inflate grades for ANY reason. If you are ever unclear about your grades, please come talk to me.

Attendance and Participation. At the start of class, you must sign the attendance sheet (if you arrive late, please remember that it is your responsibility to make sure the sheet is signed). I consider attendance in your final grade: **for every absence beyond two, your final grade will be reduced by a third of a grade (e.g. A- to B+).** In this class, we all serve as teachers to one another. Your voice, your perspective, and your questions are essential to our work. In this spirit, electronic **distractions** (i.e. cell phones) are not permitted in the classroom. Now, some electronic devices will actually increase your ability to participate; these aren't distractions. For example, when we're discussing a comic on electronic file, you are encouraged to bring a laptop or device with a screen large enough to view the work. Even on these days, however, please be mindful that your screen use and body language communicate your respect for the work we do together. Please use permitted electronic devices to support rather than thwart your attention in class.

Grades. Your final grade will be based on three major writing assignments, worth 20%, 25%, and 30% of your final grade, as well as four minor writing assignments (Reading Responses + Important Comic! Pitch), which together are worth 15% of the final grade. I will provide guidelines for each of your major writing assignments. An additional 10% of the final grade will be allotted for class participation. This does not mean that you will get points just for showing up. Students who demonstrate familiarity with the readings, who advance discussion by asking pertinent questions, and who ground their observations in specific details from the texts will be rewarded for their contributions.

Writing Format. All writing assignments must be typed in Times New Roman 12-pt font and double-spaced with one-inch margins on all sides. Please **single-side print and use a stapler**. Your name, date, and course number should be typed in single spacing on the first page in the upper left hand corner. After page one, insert the last name and page number at upper right-hand corner of every page. All essays must be titled. You must proofread carefully; spelling, punctuation, and grammar count because these aspects affect the clarity of your argument.

Please submit all essays under my office door by noon on the assigned due date unless otherwise directed.

Late Writing Assignments. If you anticipate needing an extension on a major or minor writing assignment, you must contact me before the due date. I'll deduct a third of a grade for each day these assignments are late (weekends count as two days): if you turn a B essay in one day late it will receive a B-; two days late, it will get a C+. After two class periods, I will not accept late writing assignments for a grade; they count as missed assignments (F). **In order to pass the course, students must turn in all three major writing assignments.**

Plagiarism. Unacknowledged borrowing of others' words or ideas constitutes plagiarism, a serious academic crime that results in disciplinary action up to expulsion. So please don't do it. If you use someone else's words or ideas, just quote them and provide the relevant source info. If you have any doubts or questions about plagiarism or the University's policy on it, come talk to me or refer to the summary of the Code of Student Conduct on the Office of Student Conduct and Community Standards website.

Email Policy: I will respond to email Monday through Friday within 48 hours. If you email me and two days (weekends do not count) pass with no reply, please email me again with a friendly reminder that you have yet to receive a reply to your message. Please include a salutation, clear message, and closing (with your full name) when you email me; this is both courteous and respectful. It shows that you care about what you want to communicate and you care about my response. On Blackboard (BB) you will find pro tips for emailing professors.

Always bring the assigned text(s) to class. Please bring hardcopies of the assigned text when appropriate. Please **print out** all critical essays (a little less than \$20 total at .08 cents a page) and bring them along on the relevant day. On days when we're reading a digital comic, please borrow or bring your own portable electronic device to reference during discussion.

Access. The University of Oregon is working to create more inclusive learning environments. I want this class to be responsive to the diverse experiences of all students with disabilities. Please let me know if there are aspects of the instruction or design of this course that make it difficult for you to participate. If you have a disability, medical condition, or learning style that you think may affect your ability to participate in this class, please contact me as soon as possible so we can make arrangements for your full access to all classroom activities and assignments. You may also wish to contact the Accessible Education Center in 164 Oregon Hall at 541-346-1155 or uoaec@uoregon.edu. The AEC can offer guidance, support, and official documentation to help you request accessibility-related accommodations in all your classes. Also be aware that the Teaching and Learning Center is a great resource for study support and writing help. Located in PLC 72, their hours are 9-5 Monday through Friday and their phone number is (541) 346-3226.

Finally, a Note About Graphic Content. You should be aware that many of the comics we will read this term deal with **adult themes** and subjects. Some of them are **violent**; others explore the range of **human sexuality**. Some are shockingly unconventional in their treatment of **political and religious** issues. You are not required to like everything you read, but please be ready to meet the intellectual challenges of this material with an open mind if you choose to take this course.

Reading Schedule. *Please have all readings completed by the day listed.*

Week 1: Questions of Form

- 3/31, Monday Lecture: What is Comic Studies?
- 4/2, Wednesday McCloud, *Understanding Comics* (Chapters 1-2, pp. 2-59)
- 4/4, Friday McCloud, *Understanding Comics* (Chapters 3-4, pp. 60-117)

Week 2: Questions of Reception

- 4/7, Monday McCloud, *Understanding Comics* (Chapters 5-6, pp. 118-161).
Beaty, "Mass Culture in the Twentieth Century"
- 4/9, Wednesday McCloud, *Understanding Comics* (Chapters 8-9 (skip 7), pp. 185-215).
Litton, "No Girls Allowed!"
Whitted, "Yes, Comics Can Empower Black Girls!"
- 4/11, Friday Morrison and Quietly, *We 3*

Week 3: Race, Gender, and the Politics of Romance

- 4/14, Monday Lecture: *Krazy Kat* & The Early Newspaper Comic- Strip.
Herriman, *Krazy & Ignatz, 1937- 1938*, pp. 11- 63.

Heer, "Race and Comics"
- 4/15, Tuesday First Assignment Due
- 4/16, Wednesday Herriman, *Krazy & Ignatz, 1937- 1938*, pp. 64- 117.
Harvey, "Peddlers and Poets"; Wolk, "The Gift"
- 4/18, Friday *Krazy & Ignatz* continued
Boxer, "Krazy Criticism: The Tics of the Trade"

Week 4: Race, Gender, and the Romance Boom

- 4/21, Monday Lecture: Four Color Love
Gagne, "Simon and Kirby's Romance Comics: A Historical Overview"
Nolan, "Introduction"
A Young Romance Reader (BB)
- 4/23, Wednesday Ormes, *Torchy in Heartbeats* Reader (BB)
Goldstein, "The Trouble with Romance"
- 4/25, Friday Ormes, *Torchy in Heartbeats* (1953-4) (BB) continued

Week 5: Legacies of the Superhero: Discourses of the Body

4/28, Monday Lecture: Superheroes and Disability
 Segel and Shuster, *Chronicles of Superman Vol. 1* (1938) pp. 3-110
 Alainz, "Supercrip: Disability and the Silver Age Superhero"

4/30, Wednesday *Chronicles* pp 111-201.

5/2, Friday *Silver Scorpion* (2013) (BB)

Week 6: Re-memering History: The Violence of Images

5/5, Monday Lecture: Comics, Race, and Trauma
 Howard Cruse, *Stuck Rubber Baby* (1995) pp. 1-103

5/7, Wednesday *Stuck Rubber Baby* pp. 104-210.
 Richards, "Everybody's Graphic Protest Novel"

5/9, Friday Molina, *The Jaguar* (1996) (BB) *Please print for zine folding tutorial.*

Week 7: Re-memering History: Graphic Memoir and Diary Comics

5/12, Monday Lecture: Women, Comics, and Autobiography
 Barry, *One! Hundred! Demons!* (2002), pp. 6-120.
 Kirtley, "Scrapbooking the Self"

5/14, Wednesday *One! Hundred! Demons!* (2002), pp. 121-224.

5/16, Friday Online Diary Comics Reader: Kochalka, Beaton, MariNaomi, King (BB)

Week 8: Graphic Ecologies: Imagining the Postwar Chemical Era

5/19, Monday Lecture: Environmental Mobilizations in American Comics
 American Environmental Comics Reader: Nash, Dodd, Schultz, Beaton

5/20, Tuesday Second Assignment Due.

5/21, Wednesday Hyde, *Southern Cross* (1951) (read in full)
 Frye, "Lawrence Hyde, *Southern Cross*"

5/23, Friday Hyde, *Southern Cross* (1951) discussion continued

Week 9: Graphic Ecologies: Environmental Justice on the Web and in the Zines!

5/26, Monday Memorial Day

5/28, Wednesday Lecture: Distributing EJ: Webcomics and Zines
 Yudith Nieto's T.E.J.A.S. zine (BB)
 McMillain, *Code Green* (links on BB)
 Fenty et al, "Webcomics"

5/30, Friday *Mayah's Lot* (2011) (BB)

10: Speaking Collectively: Comics as Activism: Invited Speaker: Erika Moen

- 6/2, Monday Lecture: Queer Comics and Social Protest
Bechdel, *A DTWOF* Reader (BB)
- 6/4, Wednesday Moen, *GirlF*ck, I Like Girls* “Queer,” “When We Hold Hands” (links on
BB)
- 6/5 Thursday Third Assignment Due.
- 6/6, Friday Course Review