

GRAPHIC NARRATIVES & CULTURAL THEORY

Fall 2015 | Tues & Thurs 2:00 - 3:20 pm | Anstett 191

Why do some people find superhero comics “empowering” while others consider them “marginalizing”? How can a comic book about a young boy and his dog who get lost in the African jungle give us an unparalleled understanding of European colonialism in the 1930s? How can we decide whether comics are a legitimate field for academic study? How can academics trained in literature or graphic design analyze texts which are a combination of both? How reliable are their conclusions?

In this course, you will have an opportunity to explore some of the most influential and fascinating works that have established the unique genre of graphic fiction in the 20th century, a genre which includes not only the graphic narratives (a.k.a. comic books) themselves but also the burgeoning academic discipline of Comics Studies. In the process, you will develop considerable insight into how comics work and their complex relation to other kinds of literary and visual media.

You may not become a comic book artist or a Comics Studies professor, but you will certainly have many experiences where you’ll have to decide how to interpret, construct, or critique some combination of words and images. This course will help you make those decisions wisely. It will also help you understand more about how your own reactions (positive and negative) to comics is deeply intertwined with your relationship to the culture that both stems from and produces graphic narratives.

Learning Objectives

By the end of this course, you will be able to:

- ★ Read and analyze comics critically as literary and visual texts, specifically in terms of “the formal techniques of comics storytelling, the content of their messages, the industrial practices that produce them, the social contexts that inform their meanings, and the ways audiences receive, interpret, and respond to them.”¹
- ★ Understand and apply major critical terms and common methodologies used in major graphic narratives and in Comics Studies.
- ★ Recognize and explain the major debates and controversies surrounding comics as art form and academic discipline of the 20/21 centuries.
- ★ Apply what you have learned to construct a creative, compelling comic of your own.

Professor Tara Fickle

Office

372 PLC (3rd floor)

Office Hours

Tues & Thurs 12:00 - 1:30 pm

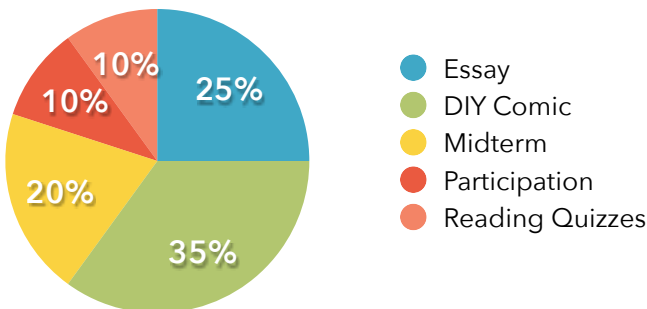
Email

tfickle@uoregon.edu

¹ This is a succinct description offered by Matthew J. Smith and Randy Duncan in their *Critical Approaches to Comics*, which we will refer to throughout the course.

To realize these objectives, you must take responsibility for your own learning and participate as an active learner. The best way to learn about comics is not just to read them, but also to read about them — and, even more, to write about them, and ultimately to make them yourself.

Assignments



Analytical Essay (25%). 4-5 pages, due Week 6 (11/9). Develop a thesis about 1 or more of the graphic novels (except *Jimmy Corrigan*), incorporating a) at least 1 of the secondary texts; and b) close readings of words, pictures, and their interactions. See Essay Guidelines below.

DIY Comic Book (35%). Students will work together in a 3-4 person DIY Comic Book Group of to create an original comic book (6 pages long + title page). Each student will have a particular job: writing, art, or lettering/production management. On the last day of class we will have a comic book art exhibition to share our work. See DIY Comic Book Guidelines below.

Midterm (20%). Oct 22, 2015.

Class Participation (10%). This class is strongly discussion-based. Students who contribute frequently (i.e. most classes) and actively get the full 10%; those who are present and attentive but rarely contribute get 5%; those who are consistently late, distracted, sleeping, etc. get 0%.

Reading Quizzes (10%). Most classes will begin with short iClicker quizzes to assess comprehension of

Policies

Late Work

Late work (including essays and DIY comic components) loses 1/3 grade (i.e. B to B-) every 24 hours after the due date, beginning 1 hour after the deadline.

Absences & Tardiness

While I do not take attendance, most classes will begin with a short in-class quiz; so if you miss class or arrive after the quiz begins, you are ineligible for those points. I will post lecture slides on Canvas before the Midterm; however, if you miss an individual class, you should contact a classmate to get notes. (See below)

Academic Integrity

All work must adhere to standards of academic honesty outlined in the Student Conduct Code. Plagiarism will result in failure of the course and additional sanctions as determined by the Office of Student Conduct and Community Standards.

Accessible Education

In compliance with UO policy and equal access laws, I am available to discuss appropriate academic accommodations that may be required for student with disabilities. Requests for academic accommodations are to be made during the first two weeks of the quarter. Students are encouraged to register with the Accessible Education Center to verify their eligibility.

Inclement Weather or Class Cancellations

The Prof. will e-mail you if class is cancelled for any reason.

Classmate 1	Name:
	Email:
Classmate 2	Name:
	Email:

material and provide direction for the day’s discussion.

Required Materials (for sale at UO Duck Store)

- iClicker (2 or 1)
- Bechdel, *Fun Home: A Family Tragicomic*. 2006. ISBN 978061887171
- Mazzucchelli, *Asterios Polyp*. 2009. ISBN 9780307377326
- Ware, *Jimmy Corrigan: Smartest Kid on Earth*. 2000. ISBN 978037571454

WARNING
 Please note that many of the texts we will be reading include graphic and explicit depictions of violence, sex, and other behavior which readers may find offensive.

Secondary Readings (available on Canvas as PDFs)

- Log-on to ENG 385 Canvas Site (<http://canvas.uoregon.edu>).
- Click “Modules” (left sidebar); see “PDF Readings.”

Schedule

Date	In-Class Activity; To Read/do
Tues 9/29	Introduction
	★ Read Jenkins, “Should we discipline the reading of comics?” (PDF on Canvas)
Thurs 10/1	Discussion of Jenkins
	★ Read Fun Home, part 1-3 (pp.1-86)
Tues 10/6	Intro to Fun Home & Discussion
	★ Read Fun Home, part 4-6 (pp. 87-186)
Thurs 10/8	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sign up for DIY Comic Book Jobs • Fun Home discussion, cont.
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ★ Read Fun Home, rest of book ★ Read Cvetkovich, “Drawing the Archive in Alison Bechdel’s <i>Fun Home</i>” (PDF)
Tues 10/13	Fun Home & Cvetkovich

Date	In-Class Activity; To Read/do
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ★ Read Tintin in the Congo, part 1 (see Canvas Modules>PDF Readings & >Reading Schedule)
Thurs 10/15	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Intro to Tintin • DIY Comic Book Groups Meet
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ★ Read Tintin, rest of book ★ Read Rifas, "Ideology: The construction of Race and History in Tintin in the Congo" (PDF)
Tues 10/20	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Tintin, conclusion • Midterm preview • Possible guest speaker
	Review for midterm
Thurs 10/22	<u>MIDTERM</u>
	★ Writers: DIY Script draft due Sun 10/25, 11:59p (on Canvas)
Tues 10/27	Comics-Making Software Workshop (Location TBD)
	★ Read Asterios Polyp, part 1
Thurs 10/29	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Asterios intro & discussion • DIY Comic Groups Meet (discuss Script revisions)
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ★ Read Asterios Polyp, part 2 ★ Writers: DIY Final Script due Sun 11/1, 11:59p
Tues 11/3	Discuss Essay guidelines and expectations
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ★ Read Asterios Polyp, rest of book ★ Work on Essay (due 11/9)
Thurs 11/5	Asterios
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ★ Read Duncan, "Image Functions: Shape and Color as Hermeneutic Images in Asterios Polyp" (PDF) ★ Essay due Monday 11/9, 11:59p
Tues 11/10	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Asterios Conclusion •

Date	In-Class Activity; To Read/do
	★ Read <i>Jimmy Corrigan</i> , part 1
Thurs 11/12	Intro to Jimmy Corrigan
	★ Read Jimmy Corrigan, part 2 ★ Artists: DIY Sketches Due Sun 11/15, 11:59p
Tues 11/17	• Corrigan discussion • DIY Comic Groups Meet (discuss Sketch Revisions)
	★ Read Jimmy Corrigan, part 3
Thurs 11/19	Corrigan
	★ Read Jimmy Corrigan, rest of book ★ Artists: Final art due Sun 11/22, 11:59p
Tues 11/24	Corrigan
	★ Read Bredehoft, "Comics Architecture, Multidimensionality, and Time: Chris Ware's <i>Jimmy Corrigan</i> " (PDF) ★ Letterers: DIY Sketches due Sun 11/29, 11:59p
Thurs 11/26	Thanksgiving - No Class
Tues 12/1	• Corrigan conclusion • DIY Comic Groups Meet (discuss Final Revisions)
	★ Finalize your comics and prepare them for the exhibition! ★ If you would like the Prof. to make photocopies for you, give 48 hours lead time!
Thurs 12/3	DIY Comic Exhibition: Bring at least 5 hard copies

Essay Guidelines

Due date. Monday, November 9, 2015 @ 11:59p (on Canvas > Assignments)

Length. 4–5 pages, double spaced, 1” margins, 12 pt. Times New Roman or other standard font.

Guidelines. The Essay is open topic, based on your own ideas about the books. As evidence you’ll use your own close readings of pictures and quotations from the texts. Please close-read the visuals as carefully as you do the words. The essay should include at least 1 thorough close reading. The grading criteria are detailed in the Rubric on the Canvas Assignments page; make sure to read it carefully before beginning. The major categories are:

1. Originality.
2. Careful, detailed close reading of text and visuals.
3. A clear, debatable, non-obvious thesis statement.
4. Clear linkage of each paragraph to the main point.
5. Skillful use of at least one secondary source.
6. Polished, well-revised prose with no grammatical or spelling errors.

We will discuss each of these categories, and tips for approaching the essay, in class on Tues, November 3.

TIPS FOR WRITERS

1. Close reading is important because it is the building block of your paper. Your topics evolve not from someone else’s truth but from your own observations. Therefore, the more closely you can observe, the more fresh ideas you will have. Pick a page that catches your imagination and gives you something to say. Sit down to write with the page in front of you. Look at it very carefully and thoroughly and write down all the ideas that occur to you. Really set your eyes on the page and dig into the meanings. Don’t be afraid to “go out on a limb” with your interpretations.
2. Analyze the visuals as carefully as you do the words. What do you notice first? What do you notice second? Do the two things go together or contradict each other? What mood does the excerpt convey? Are there paradoxes? What is left out, kept silent or invisible? How does the author call upon the 5 senses? Look closely at style, vocabulary, images, figures of speech, rhythm, body postures and gestures, and point of view. What is the relationship between what is being said, how it’s being said, and how it’s drawn? What does it teach us about the work as a whole? Does your example remind you of other authors you’ve read or other ideas you’ve had?
3. Your introduction should do 3 jobs: state the paper’s thesis, declare the paper’s topic, and provide a road map for the paper.
4. Carefully think over possible counter-arguments, and strengthen your arguments against them.

5. Make sure every paragraph has a topic sentence, stating the paragraph's main point and linking this paragraph's point to the main point of the essay.
6. Cut out all plot summary. Don't summarize the story--you can assume I've read the book or article and remember what's going on. Organize your essay according to the logic of your argument, not according to the order of the story itself. Instead of summarizing information, whenever possible substitute a specific quotation or example of a picture from the text combined with your own close reading and interpretation.
7. Revise the essay's style. Cut needless words and word repetitions. Break run-on sentences into several smaller thought-clusters. Make the prose flow.
8. Check the essay's spelling and grammar. Make sure the quotations are properly punctuated. Long quotes should be indented with no quote marks around them. "Shorter quotes should be integrated with your prose and have quote marks on both ends." Please give page numbers. You don't have to footnote the works we read in class; just put the author's name and the page number in parentheses after the quotation, like this: (Moore 2)
9. Provide a Works Cited page; make sure your external sources are legitimate (we will discuss this in class.)
10. You should include a picture or two of the pages under discussion in your paper.

Do-it-Yourself (DIY) Comic Book Guidelines

We'll work together in a team of 1 writer, 2 artists, and 1 letterer/production manager to create a 6-page black-and white comic book. The genre, characters, style, and story are up to you.

In Week 2 you'll sign up for your first, second, and third choice of job and your preferred genre(s). In Week 3 you'll work with your group to develop a basic idea. In Weeks 4-10 you'll have a comic book assignment due on Sunday of most weeks.

You will be submitting your work online through Canvas; please make sure that you allow time to produce and upload a high-quality scan (scanners available at the Library). The Professor will make photocopies to distribute to the rest of the group during in-class meetings, but you should also consider bringing a laptop/tablet on those days.

Because this is a group assignment, keeping your promises and sticking to deadlines is essential. The artists can't do their job until the writer has done his or hers, and so forth. Procedures are in place to assure that no extra burden will be placed on group mates for late or undone work by one group member. Groups will meet both in and outside class. Leave plenty of time for revisions. We'll have a comic book art show on the last day of class.

MINI-DEADLINES FOR DIY COMIC BOOKS

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| Week 2 | Sign up for jobs. Have in mind your preferred genres (realistic memoir or fiction, superhero, fantasy, manga, children's cartoons, etc.) and first, second, and third choices of jobs (writing, art, lettering/production management). |
| Week 3 | First group meeting in class. |
| Week 4 | Writers: Script draft due. Group meeting in class following Tuesday. |
| Week 5 | Writers: Final scripts due. |
| Week 7 | Artists: Sketches due. Group meeting in class next Tues. |
| Week 8 | Artists: Final art due. |
| Week 9 | Letterers: Sketches due. Final in-class meeting next Tues. |
| Week 10 | Comic Books due. Art Show in class. (Bring 5 hard copies! If you would like the Professor photocopy them for you, give 48 hours lead time.) |