

Origin Stories: Narrative, Identity, and Comics Form

English 385 · Fall 2016 · CRN 12099

Class Time: TR 2:00– 3:20 · Location: 105 PET · Instructor: Dr. Andréa Gilroy · email: gilroy@uoregon.edu
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It's one of the easiest questions someone could ask you, but it might also be one of the hardest: Who are you? Well, it's complicated...as Walt Whitman famously wrote, "I contradict myself...I contain multitudes." Conceptualizing identity is hard enough; *representing* identity is even more challenging.

Enter comics. Because the form uses both words and images at the same time, comics presents creators and readers with unique opportunities to explore the concept of identity. This course will examine the way comics of various modes and genres represent multiple aspects of identity such as race, sexuality, and gender. In addition to reading comics, we will also read theoretical texts examining the complexity of constructing and representing "identity" in our modern world.

Objectives:

This term, we will work together to...

- ...better understand the literary and cultural conventions of the comics form.
- ...explore the relevant cultural and historical information which will help situate texts within their cultural, political, and historical contexts.
- ...discover the ways these conventions and contexts help us understand the way comics construct and represent identities.
- ...examine the way cultures and texts construct and imagine race, gender, sexuality, and other aspects of identity
- ...use this information to develop interpretations and perform critical, formal analyses of texts. These ideas will be expressed in class discussion and in focused, analytical essays that employ logic, creativity, interpretive skills to produce original, persuasive arguments.

Course Materials

American Born Chinese, Gene Luen Yang
The Shadow Hero, Gene Luen Yang
Batwoman: Elegy, Greg Rucka
Heartbreak Soup: A Love and Rockets Book, Gilbert Hernandez
The Girl from H.O.P.P.E.R.S.: A Love and Rockets Book, Jaime Hernandez
Bitch Planet, Kelly Sue DeConnick
Additional PDFs on Canvas

Course Policies

Accessibility

The English Department and I are committed to supporting your learning. If you have a disability (physical or learning) that you think may affect your performance in this class, please see me during the first week of the term so we can guarantee your full access to all classroom activities. You may also wish to contact the Accessible Education Center in 164 Oregon Hall at 541-346-1155 or uoacc@uoregon.edu. Please also remember that all exams taken through the Accessible Education Center must be scheduled with their office at least two weeks in advance (this may be done online: <http://aec.uoregon.edu/>).

Incompletes

Incompletes are strongly discouraged and only approved in the case of genuine emergencies. You must contact me to begin the process for filing for an incomplete as soon as you realize completing the class may be an issue.

Academic Integrity and Honesty

All work submitted in this course must be your own and be written exclusively for this course. The use of sources (ideas, quotations, paraphrases) must be properly documented. As a preventative measure, all written assignments for this course will be submitted through Vericite. Please refer to the summary of the Code of Student Conduct on the Office of Student Conduct and Community Standards website for a definition of plagiarism and information on documentation. In cases where academic dishonesty has been clearly established, consequences can range from failure of an assignment to failure of the course. Please see me if you have any questions or concerns about your use of sources. <<http://uodos.uoregon.edu/StudentConductandCommunityStandards/AcademicMisconduct/tabid/248/Default.aspx>>

Respect, Tolerance, and Difficult Content

Everyone in our classroom—regardless of race, gender, sexual orientation, ability, class status, education, physical features, political belief, or religious belief—is worthy of respect as a human being. Our diversity is our strength. We don't always have to agree, and genuine ignorance can be an opportunity for personal and communal growth. This is especially important to keep in mind because some of our course materials features plot details, language, and visual imagery you may find offensive and/or troubling.

We will critically engage with these texts and their underlying ideologies in class discussions based on mutual respect and understanding. You may wish to further interrogate these issues in your personal writing as well. Regardless of your personal beliefs, disagreement and ignorance are never excuses for cruelty. Intolerant language and/or harassing behavior is unacceptable and will lead to sanctions. If you are having particular difficulty with a text, or feel especially troubled by a specific discussion, please let me know.

Course Information

Grading Rubric

Participation.....	15%	Final Project.....	40%
Midterm Essay.....	30%	Final Project Presentation.....	10%
Final Project Abstract.....	5%		

Attendance and Tardiness

Coming to class late is disruptive and discouraged; repeated tardiness will severely affect your participation grade. Your regular attendance is vital to the goals of this course. You may miss two class meetings without penalty (excused or unexcused). Your final grade will drop 2% of a letter grade for each subsequent absence. Any further absences beyond the allotted two will only be considered “excused” in the case of *extreme emergencies*; you must be in contact with me about the issue as soon as possible. Regardless of your presence in class, you are still responsible for making sure your work is turned in on time.

Participation

This course will be a mixture of lecture and group discussion. In order for our class sessions to be as productive as possible, your participation outside of class (by completing the reading) and in class (by paying attention and engaging in discussion) is imperative. You must bring the relevant texts to class each meeting (either the book or the PDF). You cannot participate if you are texting, talking to a friend about unrelated issues, or are sleeping. If I see you using your cellphone or a laptop for non-classroom related use (texting, surfing the web, etc.), you will be counted as absent for the day *without warning*—this *is* your warning.

Submitting Work

All assignments must be submitted to me in class in a hard copy the day they are listed as **due** in the syllabus. I grade and comment on hard copies only, not electronic submissions. However, all formal written work must also be submitted to VeriCite (link on Canvas) before it will be graded.

Late Work

A hardcopy of all essays is due at the beginning of class on the date indicated on the attached schedule. Failing to turn in an assignment at the beginning of class means that the assignment is late and your grade will suffer. However, you may still earn some credit by submitting your work within 48 hours:

- Handed in within 24 hours of deadline: -10% (highest possible grade: 90%)
- Handed in 24-48 hours after deadline: -25% (highest possible grade: 75%)
- Handed in over 48 hours after deadline: 0 points - assignment will not be accepted.

If you are absent from class due to illness or emergency, I will accept email attachments (see “Technology” below).

Technology

I do not accept late work based on printer problems. If you do have this kind of problem, you can get full credit by emailing me your work before the class begins so that I can verify that you have done it on time. You must attach your document in a Word file AND paste the document text into the email. You still must bring in a hard copy of your work by the next class period in order for the work to be graded.

If you have any questions or concerns, please contact me as soon as possible. It is easier to be flexible and accommodating if I am aware there *may be* an issue than it is after an issue has become a problem.



Weekly Schedule and Class Agenda

Unit Zero: What is Comics Studies? Why am I Here?

Week One

- Tues, 9/27 In Class: Syllabus, Introductory Lecture
Thurs, 9/29 Reading: Roland Barthes, "The Rhetoric of the Image" (Canvas)

Unit One: Our Stories, Our Selves

Week Two

- Tues, 10/4 Reading: Charles Hatfield, "An Art of Tensions" (Canvas)
Thurs, 10/6 Reading: *American Born Chinese*

Week Three

- Tues, 10/11 Reading: Shawn Michelle Smith, "Visual Culture and Race" (Canvas)
Charles Hatfield, "I Made That Whole Thing Up!" (Canvas)
Thurs, 10/13 Reading: *Green Turtle* Selections (Canvas)
Snoopy Jenkins, "Superman is a White Boy" and "Figures of Empire: on the Impossibility of Superhero Diversity" (Canvas)

Week Four

- Tues, 10/18 Reading: *The Shadow Hero*
Thurs, 10/20 Reading: Ramzi Fawaz, "Superhumans in America" (Canvas)
In Class: Guest Lecture by Tara Fickle

Week Five

- Tues, 10/25 Reading: *Batwoman Elegy*
Thurs, 10/27 Reading: Laura Mulvey, "Visual Pleasure in Narrative Cinema" (Canvas)

Unit Two: Intertextual Intersectional

Week Six

- Tues, 11/1 Reading: *Heartbreak Soup*: "Chelo's Burden," "Sopa de Gran Pena," "Act of Contrition"
DUE: Midterm Essay
Thurs, 11/3 Reading *Heartbreak Soup*: "An American in Palomar"

Week Seven

- Tues, 11/8 Reading: *Heartbreak Soup*: "The Laughing Sun," "Duck Feet"
Charles Hatfield "Interdependence of Theme Form and Form" (Canvas)
Thurs, 11/10 Reading: *The Girl from H.O.P.P.E.R.S.*: "Locas 8:01 AM"

Week Eight

- Tues, 11/15 Reading: *The Girl from H.O.P.P.E.R.S.*: "The Return of Ray D.," "Vida Loca: The Death of Speedy Ortiz"
Jessica E. Jones, "Spatializing Sexuality in Jaime Hernandez's *Locas*"

Thurs, 11/17 Reading: *The Girl from H.O.P.P.E.R.S.*: “Flies on the Ceiling,” *Heartbreak Soup*: “*Ecce Homo*”
Jared Gardner, “Borders and Monuments”
Due: Final Project Abstract

Week Nine

Tues, 11/22 Reading: *Bitch Planet*
Reading: Thais Morgan, “Is There a Text in this Intertext?”
Thurs, 11/24 *No Class – Thanksgiving Break*

Unit: Wrapping it Up

Week Ten

Tues, 11/29 Reading: *Bitch Planet*
In Class: Presentations of Final Projects
Thurs, 12/1 In Class: Presentations of Final Projects

Finals Week: Final Projects due on Wednesday, December 7th by 5:00 PM

