



UNIVERSITY OF
OREGON



ENG 386: BODIES IN COMICS

Mondays and Wednesdays, 4-5:20 pm, 107 Peterson. CRN: 26844.

Prerequisites: None. 4 credits.

Instructor: Prof. Elizabeth Wheeler, ewheeler@uoregon.edu, 541-346-3929

Office Hours: Mondays and Wednesdays 2-3:30 pm, 238 PLC

ENG 386 counts for these requirements:

Arts and Letters Group Requirement (1)

Multicultural Requirement: Identity, Pluralism, and Tolerance (IP).

English Major: Category F

Comics Studies Minor

Disability Studies Minor: Social Models

One could say that most comics are *about* the human body, in all its variations, exaggerations, erotics, poses, powers, and vulnerabilities. This course examines the human body in contemporary comics with particular attention to disabilities. We'll read two memoirs, two novels that combine realism with science fiction, and two superhero comics. With each text we'll also read disability studies essays on themes like cross-species identity, the defiance of norms, the ethics and social contexts of visual representation, misfitting, passing, and the performance of identity. We'll consider questions like these: How does the multigenerational trauma of racism alter our definitions of disability? Is it possible to make disability cool without falling back into gender stereotypes? How do fans with disabilities identify with comics? You will do some image-making in class and as homework for this course. Your drawings will be judged not on their artistic talent but on the degree they reflect an understanding of comics.

Learning Outcomes

1. The successful student will: Analyze the visual-verbal art form of comics with discernment and comprehension and with an understanding of its conventions.
2. Demonstrate understanding of central concepts in disability studies.
3. Apply central concepts in disability studies to comics in written and drawn analysis and discussion.
4. Demonstrate understanding of comics through one's own artistic production.
5. Analyze the social construction of the human body in visual culture.

Assignments

- Jan 17** **10% Assignment 1: Character Sketch** due in class.
- Feb 5** **25% Assignment 2: Remaking the Past.** Part A due in class and Part B due to Canvas by 4 pm. All students do both Parts A and B.
- Feb 26** **25% Assignment 3: Concept Paper** due to Canvas by 4 pm.
- Dec 6** **30% Assignment 4: Final Paper** due to Canvas by Noon, Wed Finals Week.
- 10% Attendance, Homework, and In-Class Work.** These assignments may be unannounced and include in-class drawing, writing, and group work on readings.

Required Books

Available at the Literary Duck and Knight Library Reserves.

Brosh, Allie. *Hyperbole and a Half: Unfortunate Situations, Flawed Coping Mechanisms, Mayhem, and Other Things That Happened*. New York: Simon & Schuster, 2012.

Butler, Octavia. *Kindred*. Boston: Beacon Press, 1979.

Butler, Octavia, John Jennings, and Damian Duffy. *Kindred: A Graphic Novel Adaptation*. New York: Abrams Comicarts, 2017.

Lee, Stan, Wallace Wood, John Romita, et al. *Daredevil: The Man Without Fear!* Epic Collection, Issues #1-21. New York: Marvel, 2016.

Fraction, Aja, and Hollingsworth. *Hawkeye # 19*. New York: Marvel Comics, 2014.

Bell, Cece. *El Deafo*. New York: Abrams, 2014.

Ferris, Emil. *My Favorite Thing is Monsters*. Seattle: Fantagraphics, 2016.

Required Articles

Available on Canvas: “386 Readings” in Files

Squier, Susan. “So Long as They Grow Out of It: Comics, the Discourse of Developmental Normalcy, and Disability.” *The Journal of Medical Humanities* 29 (2008): 71-88.

Taylor, Sunaura. “Beasts of Burden: Disability Studies and Animal Rights.” *Qui Parle* 19.2 (2011): 191-122.

Jackson, Cassandra. “Visualizing Slavery: Photography and the Disabled Subject in the Art of Carrie Mae Weems.” In Christopher M. Bell, editor, *Blackness and Disability*. East Lansing: Michigan State U Press, 2011. 31-46.

Siebers, Tobin. “Chapter Five: Disability as Masquerade.” *Disability Theory*. Ann Arbor: U Mich Press, 2008: 96-119.

Alaniz, José. “‘What Can We Ever Have to Fear From a Blind Man?!’ Disability, Daredevil, and Passing.” *Death, Disability, and the Superhero: The Silver Age and Beyond*. Jackson: U Mississippi Press, 2015. 69-86.

Garland-Thomson, Rosemarie. “Misfits: A Feminist Materialist Disability Concept.” *Hypatia* 26.3 (2011): 591-609.

Bahan, Benjamin. “Upon the Formation of a Visual Variety of the Human Race.” H-Dirksen L. Bauman, Ed., *Open Your Eyes: Deaf Studies Talking*. Minneapolis: U Minnesota Press, 2007. 83-99.

Fan Writings

Canvas

Bogard, Billy Dean. *Dark Vengeance*. Unpublished comic, 2016.

Online

Nowicke, Clint. “A Deaf Comic Geek’s Grateful Review of ‘Hawkeye’ #19.” *Pop Mythology* (blog), 4 Aug 2014. <http://www.popmythology.com/a-deaf-comic-geeks-grateful-review-of-hawkeye-19/>

McConnell, Kelsey. "Disability in Marvel Comics: The Necessity of Normalization." *Comicsverse*, 9 May 2017. <https://comicsverse.com/disability-in-marvel-comics/>

merryweatherblue, "I took my little brother (who falls on the autism spectrum) to see *Guardians of the Galaxy...*" *Just Keep Swimming Swimming Swimming* (blog), 13 August 2014. <http://merryweatherblue.tumblr.com>

E. "Disney's *Frozen* and Autism." *The Third Glance: A peek inside my (Autistic) mind* (blog), December 21, 2013. <https://thethirdglance.wordpress.com/2013/12/21/disneys-frozen-and-autism/>

Course Policies

Disability. I am happy to support your success by providing the accommodations you need, even if it's late in the term. Official diagnosis and/or accommodation letter not required. Please let me know by email or in person if there are aspects of the instruction or design of this course that result in disability-related barriers to your participation. Handy contacts: Accessible Education Center (formerly Disability Services) in 164 Oregon Hall at 541-346-1155 or uoaec@uoregon.edu. Counseling Center: 541-346-3230; <http://testing.uoregon.edu>.

Participation. This discussion-oriented class depends upon your active participation in the classroom. If problems interfere with your work or attendance, please let me know immediately. I am no fan of mysterious disappearances.

Late Paper Policy. I accept only one late paper per term, so please use this option wisely. If you choose to turn in a paper late, you must notify me ahead of time by phone, email, or in person, before 4 pm the day the paper is due. Late papers are due by 4 pm the day of the following class session, unless you arrange with me otherwise. I reserve the right to refuse an unnotified late paper or a second late paper.

Assignments include traditional academic essays and creative work. Each assignment should appear in polished final-draft form. Allow more time than you think you'll need for drawing homework: it takes a long time!

Course Schedule

Week

1 Introduction: Bodies in Comics

Monday Introduction

Wednesday Brosh, Allie. *Hyperbole and a Half*, pp. 1-98.

2 *Hyperbole and a Half*: Representing Identities

Monday MLK Jr. Day; No Class

Wednesday Brosh, *Hyperbole and a Half*, pp. 99-227.
Squier, Susan. "So Long as They Grow Out of It."
Discussion: Building characters in comics.



10% Assignment 1: Character Sketch due in class.

3 From *Hyperbole and a Half* to *Kindred*

Monday Brosh, *Hyperbole and a Half*, pp. 228-369.
Taylor, Sunaura. "Beasts of Burden."

Wednesday *Kindred*, "Prologue," "The River," and "The Fire"
Kindred: A Graphic Novel Adaptation to p. 57

4 *Kindred*: The Ethics of Looking at Slaves' Bodies

Monday *Kindred*, "The Fall" and "The Fight"
Kindred: A Graphic Novel Adaptation to p. 167

Wednesday *Kindred*: "The Storm," "The Rope," and "Epilogue"
Octavia Butler's Kindred: A Graphic Novel Adaptation to end

Jackson, Cassandra. "Visualizing Slavery."

View Carrie Mae Weems, "Black and Tanned..."

<http://www.getty.edu/art/collection/objects/239123/carrie-mae-weems-black-and-tanned>

Course Schedule

View “The Scourged Back”

<https://www.icp.org/browse/archive/objects/the-scourged-back>

Read “Strange Fruit” lyrics:

<https://www.azlyrics.com/lyrics/billieholiday/strangefruit.html>

Watch Billie Holiday, “Strange Fruit”

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dnlTHvJBeP0>

5 *Daredevil: Superheroes Performing Identities*

Monday

Daredevil: The Man Without Fear! #1, 4, 5, 6



25% Assignment 2: Remaking the Past.

Part A due in class and Part B on Canvas by 4 pm.

ART SHOW in class.

Wednesday

Daredevil: The Man Without Fear! #7, 8, 15

Siebers, Tobin. “Chapter Five: Disability as Masquerade.”

6 *Daredevil: Subhumans and Superheroes*

Monday

Daredevil: The Man Without Fear! #16, 17, 18

Alaniz, “What Can We Ever Have to Fear From a Blind Man?”

Wednesday

Movie: *FIXED*

Garland-Thomson, Rosemarie. “Misfits”

7 *Hawkeye: Visualizing Deafness*

Monday

Fraction, Aja, and Hollingsworth, *Hawkeye* #19 (read it all)

Guest Speaker: Anais Keenon

Wednesday

Bahan, “Upon the Formation of a Visual Variety of the Human Race.”

Fan Writings: Nowicke and McConnell.

Course Schedule

8 *El Deafo* and Superhero Fandom

Monday Bell, Cece. *El Deafo* (read it all)
Lecture: Prosthetic Play and Superhero Fandom
 **25% Assignment 3: Concept Paper due to Canvas by 4 pm.**

Wednesday Billy Dean Bogard, *Dark Vengeance*
Fan Writings: merryweatherblue and E.
Guest Speaker: Billy Dean Bogard

9 *Monster Bodies I*

Monday Ferris, *My Favorite Thing is Monsters*, to “Tales of the Eldritch and the Arcane”

Wednesday Ferris, *My Favorite Thing is Monsters*, to “Dread/April 67”

10 *Monster Bodies II*

Monday Finish Ferris, *My Favorite Thing is Monsters*

Wednesday Wrap-Up

11 Final Paper **30% Assignment 4: Final Paper due to Canvas by Noon December 6.**



Guide to Assignments

1 Character Sketch

Create a character in words and pictures. Words: List the 5 most important aspects of your own history: your family life, place of birth, big events, etc. Then create a new character who looks nothing like you, but has had the same key experiences in the past. Consider what kind of person could have emerged from that history. Pictures: Now draw model sketches for this character, including a close-up, whole body front and side, and the character's key expressions or poses. Dress them in their favorite clothes or their typical uniform or costume. **Due Jan 17 in class.**

2 Remaking the Past

NOTE: This is NOT a choice between 2 options. All students do both A and B.

Part A: In some of the pictures from her series *From Here I Saw What Happened and I Cried*, Carrie Mae Weems reshapes photographs of slaves displaying their wounded bodies by adding her own words on and below the pictures. For this assignment, you also will take an image—made by yourself, someone you know, or off the internet—and reshape its meaning by adding your own words on or below the image. The image can be a photo, a drawing, or any other kind of visual depiction. You can put your words on the image digitally or manually. The image does not have to reflect the themes of this course, although I welcome your contribution to that dialogue. It does, however, have to provide a way for you to make a comment on the past in the present—your personal past or the historical past. Please bring a hard copy of your remade image to class; we will hang them on the walls and have a student art show. Please also write an Artist's Statement about one page long describing your experience of remaking the past in this way. The Artist's Statement should start with your name and the title of your artwork. Bring a hard copy of the Statement to class and post it in the classroom next to your art. **Due Feb 5. Bring Part A to class.**

Part B: Write a **2-3 page essay** about *Hyperbole and a Half* or *Kindred: A Graphic Novel Adaptation*. How does the book you chose use the comics form to represent the personal past or the historical past? Please focus on specific formal elements of comics, such as panel sequence, line, and artistic choices in representing the body. **Also due Feb 5. Part B to Canvas by 4 pm.**

3 Concept Paper

In a 3-4 page essay, take a concept from a disability studies article and apply it to one of the comics we've studied so far: *Hyperbole and a Half*, *Kindred: A Graphic Novel Adaptation*, *Daredevil*, *Hawkeye*, or *El Deafo*. (If you write about *Hyperbole and a Half* or *Kindred*, please don't write about the same book you chose for Assignment 2.) **Due Feb 26 to Canvas.**

4 Final Paper

NOTE: This one IS a choice! Choose between Creative or Conventional Options.

Choice 1: Creative Option

A two-page comic and 4-5 page essay on bodies and minds in comics.

Two-page Comic. Compose your own 2-page comic in imitation of one of the cartoonists we have read, but with your own story. Pay special attention to the ways this artist represents human bodies and minds.

You could create a long lost superhero comic by Wally Wood, a blog comic like Allie Brosh's, a sci fi literary adaptation like *Kindred*, a colorful memoir for young readers like *El Deafo*, or an intricately sketched tale like *My Favorite Thing is Monsters*. Think about what humans look and sound like in your cartoonist's work. How does the art style convey the characters' identities? Your imitation should aim to reproduce the artist's signature ways of representing human appearance, movement, action, emotion, speech, and turns of thought. Your imitation should also reproduce the original comics' linework and coloring, typical plots and storytelling style, page layout and panel design.

You have only **2 printer pages (8.5" x 11")** to work with. You can cut, fold, or tape the papers. Determine the page size, layout, and panel construction by studying your cartoonist. If your artist draws on a computer, imagine how the digital screen translates to paper. I recommend you use pencil to sketch out panels, images, and lettering, then go over everything with pen or brush. You can use digital illustration tools, but you may not cut and paste from the original into your work.

Expectations for 2-page Comic:

- 1) Quality of story.
- 2) Faithfulness to the artist's original style.
- 3) Legible lettering and images.
- 4) Appropriate use of artistic tools.
- 5) Insights into the representation of human bodies and minds.

Plus 4-5 page essay. Analyze your own comic. Close read yourself. Explain how the imagery, characterization, dialogue, tone, use of gutter, panel organization, and story imitate the original cartoonist's style and content and lend insights into the representation of human bodies and minds. Explain the significance and strategy of your design. It might be helpful to describe what your whole (imaginary) website or book would look or sound like. You can also refer to and analyze examples from real works by the cartoonist to explain your work.

Due Wed March 21. Artwork and essay together in a folder under my office door in 238 PLC by noon.

Choice 2: Conventional Option

A 6-8 page essay on bodies and minds in comics.

Compare the representation of human minds and/or bodies in two or more of the books we've read this term. Combine formal analysis with a larger argument. Pay close attention to artistic techniques and choices in representing bodies and/or minds. If you feel it will improve your argument, refer to the disability studies articles we've read and/or engage in your own research and consult additional critical sources. **Due to Canvas by noon on Wed March 21.**

Expectations for Essays

Assignment 2 Part B Essay, Assignment 3 Concept Paper, Assignment 4 Essays

- 1) Originality.
- 2) Thoughtful, detailed close reading of quotations and visuals.
- 3) Constructive application of disability studies concepts.
- 4) A clear, strong enthymeme (AKA: main point, thesis statement).
- 5) Clear linkage of each paragraph to the main point.
- 6) Polished, well-revised prose with no grammatical or spelling errors.

A.) What are these papers? These papers are traditional college essays. Each should have an original argument that hangs together well and has a clear main point. There are a million ways to interpret our readings and viewings, and I want to know what YOU think. For the readings, the evidence you use to prove your arguments will come from your own close readings of text and visuals. Every time you make a point about a text, back up that point with a quotation, long or short, and your interpretation of that quotation. Show your readers the connection between the point you are making and the lines you have quoted. Every time you make a point about a picture or scene, take our hands, lead us to the image, and explain to us what you see. This process is called close reading. You can develop your argument out of your close reading, or decide on your topic first and then look for textual and visual examples to prove it. Either way can work. Papers should be typed, double-spaced, with the pages numbered.

B.) How to do a close reading:

Choose a picture, scene, or set of quotations that catches your imagination and gives you something to say. Sit down to write with the book or image in front of you. Look at your chosen example very carefully and thoroughly and write down all the ideas that occur to you. For words, really set your eyes on the page and dig into the meanings. What do you notice first? What do you notice second? Do the two things go together or contradict each other? Look closely at the vocabulary, images, figures of speech, rhythm, and point of view. What is the relationship between what is being said and how it's being said? What is left unsaid? Does the work appeal to the five senses? What does the passage reveal about the characters? Is

there symbolism, or literal language that could be read symbolically? What mood does the passage leave with you? What do the artistic and literary elements teach us about the work as a whole? Could the chosen example serve as a microcosm of the work as a whole? Include the quotations or passage in your paper, either woven into your commentary, placed before the start of your argument, or between 2 paragraphs of argument. For visuals, you can include a photocopy of the example, or refer readers to the correct page number in the book.

C.) Tips on structuring your paper:

1. Originality. It is OK (and more than OK: highly desirable) if you choose a paper topic that others probably won't choose.

2. Your introduction should do 3 things:

- a. Present your thesis statement;
- b. Briefly introduce your topic;
- c. Provide a road map for the rest of the paper.

3. Strengthen your thesis statement through attention to counterarguments. Think about possible objections to your argument and respond accordingly.

4. Organization of paragraphs. Each paragraph of your paper should illustrate a different subpoint that supports your main point. If some ideas/sentences just don't seem to fit, cut them out, or make their relevance to the main point clearer. Add a topic sentence to each paragraph, stating the paragraphs's main point and linking this paragraph's point to the main point of the essay. **Each paragraph must have a topic sentence.** Go over the essay carefully, making sure each paragraph connects to the introduction and the other paragraphs. Add connector sentences and expand on your thoughts.

6. No plot summary. Don't summarize the story--you can assume I've read the work 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, substitute a direct quotation or picture from the text combined with your own close reading and interpretation.

7. Revise several times. Identify the essay's key concepts. Make sure the introduction and conclusion refer to all of them. Make sure every paragraph relates to at least one of them. Cut needless words and word repetitions. Break run-on sentences into several smaller thought-clusters. Read your whole paper aloud and make the prose flow.

8. Spelling and grammar count. Make sure your essay is free of errors. **About spelling:** Your computer's spellcheck is not sufficient to eliminate spelling errors. Please proofread yourself, too.

9. Correct Quotation. Make sure the quotations are properly punctuated. Long quotes should be indented 1 inch on the left margin with no quote marks around them. Shorter quotes of no more than 4 lines should be integrated with your prose and have quote marks on both ends. For books and pdfs from our assigned course readings, you don't have to footnote or attach a Work Cited page. Just put page numbers in parentheses after quotations. If you cite sources not included in the assigned course readings, please do add a Works Cited page in MLA style.