
ENGLISH 385

GRAPHIC NARRATIVES & CULTURAL THEORY

Winter 2017 | Mon & Wed 10:00 - 11:20 am | Knight 41

The growing acceptance of comics and graphic novels as “serious” literature owes much to the genre’s embrace as a powerful vehicle for memory, especially by minority writers seeking to showcase “non-normative” accounts of American life: the experiences of being gay, non-white, foreign, non-Christian, etc. This course offers an in-depth examination of one particular group – Asian Americans – which has gained especial prominence in the comics world in recent years. Artists like Gene Yang, Lynda Barry, and Adrian Tomine have begun to demonstrate how the combination of image and text can capture the unique position of Asian Americans as both racially hypervisible and socially invisible. How do these texts define what it means to be Asian in America, and what counts as an “Asian American” work? How do they visually represent the experience of being seen as a “model minority,” or of being racially discriminated against? How, ultimately, do these texts change what we think – or what we think we know – about Asian American culture, history, and literature?

In foregrounding important issues of racial difference and social inequality, the works in this course simultaneously raise crucial questions about graphic form and visual culture more generally. How do stereotypes and ideologies circulate through images – not only comics but caricatures or memes? How do we represent the complexity of race visually – particularly a racial group which has been stereotyped as all “looking the same”? How do we capture “broken” English or a foreign accent through speech bubbles?

Required Materials (for sale at UO Duck Store)

- Gene Yang, *American Born Chinese*, ISBN 9780312384487
- Sonny Lew & Gene Yang, *Shadow Hero* ISBN 978159643697
- G.B. Tran, *Vietnamerica* ISBN 978034550872
- Belle Yang, *Forget Sorrow* ISBN 978039333996
- Adrian Tomine, *Shortcomings* ISBN 9781897299753
- Lynda Barry, *One! Hundred! Demons!* ISBN 978157061459

All texts are required; students who attend class without books will be counted as absent for the day.

Some critical essays and additional comic book texts will be made available through Canvas in the form of PDFs (See the “Modules” Sidebar). In the case of the critical essays: you are required to print up copies to refer to in class when relevant. Again, students who do not bring a hardcopy will be marked as absent for the day. In the case of the comic book texts: you are not required to print them up, but you will need to read them on a computer or iPad before the class in question and make a note of particular pages for discussion.

Professor Tara Fickle

Office

372 PLC (3rd floor)

Office Hours

MW 2:00 pm - 3:30 pm

Contact

To ensure receipt and a quicker response, please contact me through Canvas message (“Inbox”), rather than through e-mail.

Learning Objectives

By the end of this course, you will have gained experience and proficiency in the following activities:

- Reading both comic book and critical texts with a view to better understanding their conventions.
- Drawing on relevant information to situate these texts within their cultural, political, and historical contexts.
- Employing creativity and interpretive skills to produce original, persuasive arguments.
- Employing a diversity of primary and secondary sources, with proper acknowledgment and citation,
- Becoming familiar with the genealogy of Asian American history and the basic scholarly terminology and theories for analyzing Asian American culture

Method of Assessment

Your grade for this course will be determined by how fully and effectively you meet the following requirements:

1. **Participation (15% of your total quarter grade):** presence, energy, effort, contributions to discussion, and occasional homework or in-class activities.
2. **Group Presentation & Discussion Leading (25% total):** Students will work in groups of 2-3 to present on one day's assigned reading to the class and facilitate discussion. Presentations should last ~15 minutes, and will include:
 - (i) a scanned and annotated key "scene" from the portion of the graphic novel assigned for that day, with a close reading that pays particular attention to visual cues and iconography, layout, narrative development, and racial construction/representation;
 - (ii) set side by side, two parallel (or importantly contrasting) pages from the graphic novel (one of the pages may be from an earlier section than the day's assigned reading), with careful analysis of how they might be understood together;
 - (iii) set side by side, two parallel (or importantly contrasting) pages from the graphic novel and another course text, with careful analysis of how they might be understood together. summary of the reading's argument and main points.

You should conclude your presentation by posing 2 or 3 specific questions you would like the class to address in discussion. Your group will then facilitate class discussion (and respond to any questions/comments) for ~15-20 minutes. You may also choose to develop a short in-class activity as a segue into discussion, to use the chalkboard or whiteboards, and any other resources in the classroom. I encourage you to begin work on your presentations early and am happy to discuss them with you in office hours beforehand. Students will sign up during Week 1 on Canvas. You must present on the scheduled day, except in the case of documented illness or emergency.

3. **Tracing Project (25%):** For this project you will trace two pages from one of our required books of comics (you'll choose which), then you'll annotate your tracings with notes, and finally you'll write a synthesis and reflection in essay form (~ 4 pages) that explains what you learned through the process. You'll do this in lieu of a midterm exam. This assignment has been adapted, with thanks, from Dr. Mark Sample's terrific Graphic Novel course syllabus at George Mason University.

4. **Take-Home Final (35%)**: Your final will be the culmination of your 385 experience; expect it to draw on everything you have done and learned in the course. It will include both a critical and a creative component, and will require you to revisit both your comics-making exercises and your Tracing Project. Expect to write an analytical essay, and to share your comics work with everyone else in class. Further instructions and guidelines will be forthcoming in class and via Canvas. The Final will be due on our last day together, March 15. (I expect we'll discuss it at length two weeks beforehand.)

Buyer Beware

- **Late papers will not be accepted without a valid medical excuse.**
- **Attendance is mandatory.** Unexcused absences and recurring tardiness will result in a lowered grade, at the rate of 1/3 of a letter grade (e.g. from A to A-) for every unexcused absence or every 3 tardies. No further warnings will be given.
- In the event of illness, an unanticipated family commitment, or other approved University business (such as participation in a sporting event), some absences may be considered unexcused. **Excused absences generally require some form of official documentation** (for example, a doctor's note, a letter from your coach, and so on), but I'll make this determination on a case-by-case basis if documentation is unavailable. Courteous students will contact me about their unavoidable absences, either before or (in the event of an emergency) as soon as is reasonable after the class in question.
- **There will be no second chances on written assignments.** You need to make it your best work the first time around. If you are concerned that you will underperform on a particular assignment, you need to come and see me beforehand; afterwards is too late.
- **Always bring a text to class. Students without a text will be marked as absent: unexcused for the day in question.** You can't even pretend to be interested if you don't have the book in front of you.

Finally, if you have any questions about any of the above, feel free to ask. That is why I am here.

Additional Course Policies

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

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

Laptop Policy

The use of laptops are STRONGLY discouraged unless otherwise required/necessary for a particular reason. Cellular phones and other mobile devices should be powered off.

Reading Schedule

			TOPIC	Reading/Assignment Due
1	M	1/9/17	<i>Introductions</i>	Sign up for Group Presentations on Canvas
	W	1/11/17	<i>Racial Caricature & Asian American History</i>	"Strangers from a Different Shore" (PDF) AND McCloud Chapter 2 (PDF)
2	M	1/16/17	No class - MLK Holiday	
	W	1/18/17	<i>Visualizing The Model Minority</i>	American Born Chinese (ABC), pp. 1-84 AND "Asian Americans as the Model Minority" (PDF)
3	M	1/23/17		American Born Chinese (ABC), pp. 85-160
	W	1/25/17		American Born Chinese (ABC), pp. 161-End
4	M	1/30/17	<i>Making of an Asian American Superhero</i>	Shadow Hero pp.154-158 AND Green Turtle Blazing Comics Excerpts (PDF) AND Fawaz, "The New Mutants" (PDF)
	W	2/1/17		Shadow Hero, pp. 1 - 84
5	M	2/6/17		Shadow Hero, pp. 85 - 154
	W	2/8/17	No Class - Turn in Digital copy of Tracing Exercise by 11:59 pm; hard copy of 2 tracings due in class Monday 2/13	
6	M	2/13/17	<i>Reimagining the Refugee</i>	Vietnamerica, pp. 1-93 AND Whitlock, "Autographics" (PDF)
	W	2/15/17		Vietnamerica, pp. 94-179
7	M	2/20/17		Vietnamerica, pp. 180-End
	W	2/22/17	<i>Translating Secondhand Memories</i>	Forget Sorrow, pp. 1 - 86
8	M	2/27/17		Forget Sorrow, pp. 87 - 172
	W	3/1/17		Forget Sorrow, pp. 173 - End
9	M	3/6/17	<i>Asian American Masculinity</i>	Shortcomings, Entire Book
	W	3/8/17	<i>Autobifictionalography</i>	One! Hundred! Demons!, 1-97
10	M	3/13/17		One! Hundred! Demons!, 98-End
	W	3/15/17		Final Project (in-class presentations)