

ENG280: Introduction to Comics Studies

Spring 2017 | CRN: 36657 | Time: MWF 2:00 – 2:50pm | Room: Lillis 175



COURSE INFORMATION

Instructor

Rachel Tanner

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Office: PLC 241 (541.346.0531)

Office hours: Wednesdays 3:30 – 5:00 pm and Fridays 12:00 – 1:30 pm, and by appointment

Course Overview

This course provides an introduction to the academic discipline of Comics Studies, which focuses on comics as a form of literary production and asks questions about how and why comics are written and read. You will be exposed to a variety of comic-art forms (the newspaper strip, the comic book, the graphic novel) and a spectrum of modes and genres (fiction, non-fiction, kids comics, horror/noir comics, and so on). You will also be asked to read several examples of contemporary comics scholarship.

The theme of this course is “Growing Up.” Throughout the term, we will confront head-on comics’ reputation as “kids’ stuff.” Each comics text that we read will represent a stage of childhood and/or feature a main character(s) struggling with how to grow up. As we read these texts, we will ponder some big questions about the relationships between comics and growing up: Are comics just for kids? Are they ever for kids? What can comics bring to the representation of childhood and adolescence that other media can’t?

We will address this theme in five Units, each about two weeks long. Each Unit will begin with a guiding question about comics and growing up. We will read 2-3 comics texts in each Unit, and a handful of theory texts, to help us explore answers to the Unit Question. At the end of each Unit, you’ll complete a Unit Project that will ask you to develop (in a different way for each Unit) your own answers to the Unit Question.

Learning Outcomes

During a regular week, you should expect to put at least 10 hours into this course (in addition to class time). I will strive to keep your workload to approximately 2 hours between each class during the week (between Monday and Wednesday, and between Wednesday and Friday), and 4-6 hours over the weekends. Keep in mind, however, that you may have to devote more time during weeks when Unit Projects are due.

If you devote yourself fully to the readings and assignments, by the end of the class you will have gained experience and proficiency in the following activities:

1. Reading both comics and critical texts with a view to better understanding their conventions.
2. Drawing on relevant information to situate these texts within their cultural, political, and historical contexts.
3. Performing formal analyses of a narrative medium that combines visual and verbal elements in a unique way.
4. Employing logic, creativity, and interpretive skills to produce original, persuasive arguments.
5. Employing a diversity of primary and secondary sources, with proper acknowledgment and citation, to generate a persuasive written argument.

Required Texts

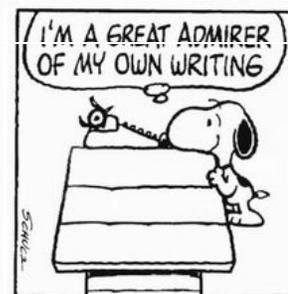
You will need to purchase the following books for this course. All are available at the Duckstore, but you have no obligation to purchase them there. If you do purchase any of these books elsewhere, please check the ISBN to make sure you’re getting the right thing (i.e. volume or edition). Please see me during Week 1 if the cost of books is going to create an undue financial burden.

Title	Author	ISBN
<i>Understanding Comics: The Invisible Art</i>	Scott McCloud	978-0060976255
<i>Swallow Me Whole</i>	Nate Powell	978-1603090339
<i>Stitches</i>	David Small	978-0393338966
<i>Nimona</i>	Noelle Stevenson	978-0062278227
<i>American-Born Chinese</i>	Gene Luen Yang	978-0312384487
<i>Black Hole</i>	Charles Burns	978-0375714726
<i>Ghost World</i>	Daniel Clowes	978-1560974277
<i>The Best of Archie Comics: 75 Years, 75 Stories</i>	Archie Superstars	978-1627389921

NOTE: Brubaker and Phillips' *Criminal: The Last of the Innocent* is on the book-list in the Duckstore, but not on the list above. This book is now out of print, so I'm not going to require you to purchase it. We will discuss in class other ways to access the text.

COURSE WORK AND GRADING

Grade Distribution	Participation	10%
	Lexicon	5%
	Unit 1 Project	10%
	Unit 2 Project	15%
	Unit 3 Project	20%
	Unit 4 Project	20%
	Unit 5 Project	20%
	100%	



Participation 10% of Course Grade

These points should be easy, because they're rewarding you for doing what you're supposed to be doing anyway. I know that everyone participates differently, so I will treat your participation grade on a demerit system: all of you start with this full 10% unless you prove that you deserve otherwise. The easiest (but not the only) ways to lose participation points are:

- *Come to class unprepared.* I expect you to come prepared to each class session—that means you've done the required reading for the day; taken notes and thought about the reading; brought the appropriate text to class; and perhaps even prepared questions and/or passages you'd like to discuss. If I notice that you haven't prepared the bare minimum (done the reading and brought the text), I will penalize your participation grade accordingly.
- *Refuse to take part in an activity or discussion.* I understand that speaking up in front of a large group is not everyone's cup of tea, and so I will make sure there are a variety of ways for you to pitch in, beyond full-class discussions. If you refuse to take part in some way, I will penalize your participation grade.
- *Fall asleep.* I will wake you up and then penalize your participation grade.
- *Misuse your technology.* You're all adults and professional students, so I'll expect you to use your phones, tablets, and laptops in an adult, professional way. The first time I catch you getting distracted by technology, I'll give you a Look of Doom. The next time, I'll start to penalize your participation grade.



Lexicon 5% of Course Grade

Throughout the term, we will work together, via Canvas discussion board, to build a lexicon of critical comics studies terms. A lexicon is the vocabulary of a specific branch of knowledge—so the terms we'll be adding to it will be terms that we pick up in our reading and discussion, which help us talk about what comics *do*. In addition to defining these terms, we will build out our lexicon with examples from our comics texts.

I will start the lexicon with a few basic terms and definitions, and then it will be your responsibility to add to it. During each Unit, 8-10 of you will be responsible for 2 entries, each worth 2.5% of your total course grade. I will pass around a sign-up sheet for lexicon duty during the second day of class. You must post your entries before the end of the Unit that you sign up for (due dates are in the course schedule below).

In addition to the two required entries, you have the opportunity to post a **third entry for two extra credit points** (2% added to your final course grade). You must post this third entry during your assigned Unit though—no exceptions.

You will find more detailed directions in the Discussions section of Canvas.

Unit Projects

85% of Course Grade

The majority of your grade in this class will come from your performance on each of five Unit Projects. I will give you the directions and my grading expectations for each Unit Project before the beginning of each Unit, so that you can scheme and plot your ideas for the Project as we work our way through the Unit's reading. Unit Projects will be due one week after we complete a Unit. (See the Course Schedule below for more specific dates.)

The Unit Projects will all ask you to develop answers to the Unit Question, but each Project will ask you to do that in a different way. The Projects will also all require you to follow roughly the same process of critical reading and writing: you will have to reflect on what you've read, observe and describe what you've read, and make an argument about what you've read. All five projects will involve a writing component (this is, after all, an English class), but they will not all be All Writing.

The Unit Projects are not cumulative in terms of content—each Project will only ask you to consider the texts and questions from that Unit. However, they will be cumulative in terms of your own development as a reader of comics. I will expect you to apply terminology, theory, and other critical reading skills that you gained in previous Units.

The first two Unit Projects are worth a lower percentage of your total course grade (10% and 15%), so that you have a chance to develop some reading skills and vocabulary and get accustomed to my expectations. The three later Unit Projects will each be worth 20% of your total course grade. I will provide holistic feedback on your Project (not marginal comments) along with your grade before we complete the next Unit, so that you have a full week with my feedback before you need to turn in the next Project. I'm always more than happy to provide additional feedback and guidance on Projects in my office hours.



COURSE POLICIES

Email and Canvas

This course relies heavily on email and our course Canvas site. I will send any announcements or last-minute changes to the schedule to your University of Oregon email account (not your personal email account). If, for some reason, you have not activated your UO email account, please do so ASAP and **make sure to check it before every class period.**

I will post all assignment directions, and you will submit all required work (minus some creative projects), to the course Canvas site. I will also record your grades in the Canvas gradebook, so that you will always have an updated picture of your performance in the class.

I will strive to answer all of your emails as promptly as possible, but I work off-campus on Tuesdays and Thursdays. Please allow me 24 hours to respond your emails during the week, and 48 hours on the weekend. In cases where your questions or concerns require a longer response or a conversation, I strongly recommend that you visit me in office hours.



Attendance

Attendance is required. You are allowed three unexcused absences, and I don't care what they're for—whether you're sick or going on a trip or just taking a mental health day, it all counts the same. If you are going to miss class, you're welcome to email me to say that you won't be there—but **do not ask me to email you what you missed**. It's your responsibility to come to my office hours to talk in person about a missed class and/or consult your class mates about what happened.

Emergencies: If an emergency arises, please do email me to let me know what's going on, and we'll discuss a fair arrangement.

Lateness: Attendance also involves coming to class on time. If you come into class more than ten minutes late, I will take note. Every **three** late entries will constitute an absence.

Penalties: After your three allowed absences, I will start to penalize your course grade. For every absence beyond two, your course grade will drop by 1/3 letter grade. For example, the first additional absence will reduce a B- to a C+, the second additional absence will reduce a B- to a C, and so on. **Any more than 9 absences will result in course failure.**

Adult Content Warning

You should be aware that some of the comics we will read this term deal with adult themes and subjects. A few 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—indeed, I hope for a more complicated response than that—but please be ready to meet the intellectual challenges of this material with an open mind.

Formatting and Submission Guidelines

All written work must be typed and double-spaced, using 10- or 11-point font and 1" margins on all sides. Formatting for quotes and cited sources must adhere to MLA requirements, and you must include a Work Cited page at the end of all formal assignments.

You will submit all of your work electronically, via Canvas. **All assignment submissions must be PDF or DOC/X files**—I will set Canvas assignments to only accept submissions in those forms. If you do not have Microsoft Word on your personal computer, please convert your file to a PDF before submitting it or use one of the computers in the library (which all have Microsoft Office). I will mark your assignment late until you submit it in the proper form.

Late Work

Since you will submit all of your work electronically, missing a class is not an excuse for submitting your work late. Late work will drop a full letter grade for each 24-hour period beyond the due time. If unexpected circumstances arise that keep you from submitting your work on time, please email me immediately so that we can discuss accommodations.

Cell Phone Use

As I mentioned above, you're all adults and professional students, and I expect you to use your technology like professional adults. I have no problem with laptops, tablets, and phones in the classroom, as long as they're used for class-related purposes. Remember that I see you: you're never really being as surreptitious about checking your texts as you think you're being.

Academic Honesty

All work submitted in this course must be your own and be written exclusively for this course, which means you may not submit papers or portions of papers you have written for any other course. The use of sources (ideas, quotations, paraphrases) must be properly documented. Please refer to the *Student Conduct Code* on the Office of Student Conduct and Community Standards website. Please see me if you have any questions about your use of sources.

Harassment

The UO is committed to providing an environment free of all forms of discrimination and sexual harassment, including sexual assault, domestic and dating violence and gender-based stalking. If you

(or someone you know) has experienced or experiences gender-based violence (intimate partner violence, attempted or completed sexual assault, harassment, coercion, stalking, etc.), know that you are not alone. UO has staff members trained to support survivors in navigating campus life, accessing health and counseling services, providing academic and housing accommodations, helping with legal protective orders, and more.

Please be aware that all UO employees are required reporters. This means that if you tell me about a situation, I may have to report the information to my supervisor or the Office of Affirmative Action and Equal Opportunity. Although I have to report the situation, you will still have options about how your case will be handled, including whether or not you wish to pursue a formal complaint. Our goal is to make sure you are aware of the range of options available to you and have access to the resources you need.

If you wish to speak to someone confidentially, you can call 541-346-SAFE, UO's 24-hour hotline, to be connected to a confidential counselor to discuss your options. You can also visit the SAFE website at safe.uoregon.edu.

Access

The University of Oregon is working to create inclusive learning environments. Please notify me in week one if there are aspects of the instruction or design of this course that result in disability-related barriers to your participation. You may also wish to contact the Accessible Education Center in 164 Oregon Hall at 541-346-1155 or uoaec@uoregon.edu.



TENTATIVE COURSE SCHEDULE

Below is a schedule of each the reading and assignments for each of the five Units. Readings marked “on Canvas” can be found in PDF form in the appropriate module on Canvas.

I reserve the right to add short additional readings to supplement what’s below—especially later in the term. In fact, **everything below is subject to change**. If I do change anything, I will let you know in class and via email/Canvas announcement.

Unit 1: Growing Up in the Strips

Questions: What are comics? How do they communicate to readers?

Texts:

- McCloud, Scott. *Understanding Comics: The Invisible Art*. Harper Collins, 1993.
- Cohn, Neil. *The Visual Language of Comics: Introduction to the Structure and Cognition of Sequential Images*. Bloomsbury, 2013. Pp 1-3.
- Duncan, Randy, & Matthew J. Smith. *The Power of Comics: History, Form, & Culture*. Continuum, 2009. Pp 3-7. **(on Canvas)**
- *Peanuts* Reader Pt 1 (1955) **(on Canvas)**
 - from Schulz, Charles M. *The Complete Peanuts: 1955 to 1956*. Fantagraphics, 2015.
- *Peanuts* Reader Pt 2 (1965) **(on Canvas)**
 - from Schulz, Charles M. *The Complete Peanuts: 1965 to 1966*. Fantagraphics, 2015.
- *Peanuts* Reader Pt 3 (1966) **(on Canvas)**
 - from Schulz, Charles M. *The Complete Peanuts: 1955 to 1956*. Fantagraphics, 2015.
- *Peanuts* Reader Pt 4 (1977) **(on Canvas)**
 - from Schulz, Charles M. *The Complete Peanuts: 1979 to 1980*. Fantagraphics, 2015.
- Spiegleman, Art. “Abstract Thought is a Warm Puppy.” *The New Yorker* 14 February 2000. **(on Canvas)**
- Hatfield, Charles. “Redrawing the Comic-Strip Child: Charles M. Schulz’s *Peanuts* as Cross-Writing.” *The Oxford Handbook of Children’s Literature*, Eds. Julia Mickenberg and Lynne Vallone. Oxford UP, 2012. Pp167-187. **(on Canvas)**
- *Calvin & Hobbes* Reader, Pt 1 and Pt 2. **(on Canvas)**

Schedule:

Week	Date	Reading Due	Other Due
1.2	4/5	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • McCloud, Chapter 1 • Cohn • Duncan & Smith 	
1.3	4/7	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Peanuts</i> Reader Pt 1 • <i>Peanuts</i> Reader Pt 2 	
2.1	4/10	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • McCloud, Chapter 2 • <i>Peanuts</i> Reader Pt 3 • <i>Peanuts</i> Reader Pt 4 	
2.2	4/12	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Spiegelman • Hatfield 	
2.3	4/14	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Calvin & Hobbes</i> Reader Pt 1 	
3.1	4/17	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Calvin & Hobbes</i> Reader Pt 2 • McCloud, Chapter 3 	Lexicon

Unit 2: Saying the Unsayable

Question(s): How do the elements of comics combine to communicate more than just words or visuals can communicate on their own?

Texts:

- Powell, Nate. *Swallow Me Whole*. Top Shelf, 2008.
- Hatfield, Charles. "An Art of Tensions: The Otherness of Comics Reading." *Alternative Comics*. U of Mississippi Press, 2005. Pp 32-67. **(on Canvas)**
- McCloud, Scott. *Understanding Comics: The Invisible Art*. Harper Collins, 1993.
- Small, David. *Stitches: A Memoir* McClelland & Stewart, 2011.
- Duncan, Randy, Matthew J. Smith, and Paul Levitz. "Experiencing the Story." *The Power of Comics: History, Form, & Culture*, 2nd ed. Bloomsbury Academic, 2015. Pp136-160. **(on Canvas)**

Schedule:

Week	Date	Reading Due	Other Due
3.2	4/19	• Powell, first ___ pages	
3.3	4/21	• Powell, finish the book	
4.1	4/24	• Hatfield • McCloud, Chapters 4 & 6	Unit 1 Project
4.2	4/26	• Small, pp 1 - 122 • Duncan, Smith, & Levitz	
4.3	4/28	• Small, pp 123 - end	Lexicon

Unit 3: Those Kids Are Animals!

Question(s): How do/can comics use visual symbolism to represent identity and personal experience?

Texts:

- McCloud, Scott. *Understanding Comics: The Invisible Art*. Harper Collins, 1993.
- Stevenson, Noelle. *Nimona*. Harper Collins, 2015.
- Yang, Gene Luan. *American-Born Chinese*. First Second, 2006.

Schedule:

Week	Date	Reading Due	Other Due
5.1	5/1	• McCloud, Chapter 8 • Stevenson, Chapters 1 - 8	Rachel returns Unit 1 Project
5.2	5/3	• Stevenson, Chapters 9 - end	
5.3	5/5	• Yang, pp 1 - 106	
6.1	5/8	• Yang, pp 107 - end	Unit 2 Project
6.2	5/10	• TBD	
6.3	5/12		Unit 3 Project Proposal; Lexicon

Unit 4: Teenage Wasteland

Question(s): What formal elements and tropes can comics tap into to make readers feel uncomfortable?

Texts:

- McCloud, Scott. *Understanding Comics: The Invisible Art*. Harper Collins, 1993.
- Burns, Charles. *Black Hole*. Pantheon, 2008.
- Clowes, Daniel. *Ghost World*. Fantagraphics, 2001.

Schedule:

Week	Date	Reading Due	Other Due
7.1	5/15	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Burns, beginning to “Cook Out”	Rachel returns Unit 2 Project
7.2	5/17	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Burns, “Seeing Double” to “Summer Vacation”	
7.3	5/19	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Burns, “A Dream Girl” to end	
8.1	5/22	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• McCloud, Chapter 5• Clowes, Chapters 1 – 3	Unit 3 Project
8.2	5/24	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Clowes, Chapters 4 – 8	
8.3	5/26	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• TBD	Lexicon

Unit 5: That Guy?

Question(s): What is the relationship between comics and nostalgia? (Sub-question: Can *Archie* ever be modern?)

Texts:

- Archie Superstars. *The Best of Archie Comics: 75 Years, 75 Stories*.
- Waid, Mark and Fiona Staples. *Archie*, vol 1. Archie Comics, 2016. (on Canvas)
- Brubecker, Ed and Sean Phillips. *Criminal: The Last of the Innocent*. Image, 2015.

Schedule:

Week	Date	Reading Due	Other Due
9.1	5/29	Memorial Day: No Class	Rachel returns Unit 3 Project
9.2	5/31	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Archie, pp 1 – 396 (1941-1995)	
9.3	6/2	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Archie, pp 397 – 636 (1996-2015)	
10.1	6/5	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Waid & Staples	Unit 4 Project
10.2	6/7	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Brubaker & Phillips	
10.3	6/9		Lexicon; Rachel returns Unit 4 Project
Finals	6/16		Unit 5 Project
Finals	6/20		Grades due