

The Graphic Novel: Memoirs, Lit 60A

Course Description and Learning Objectives

An online asynchronous survey of graphic novel memoirs published in the past 10 years. The class will focus on how the pairing of text and images in sequential art offers a form of disclosure for conveying experiences of personal identity, self-invention, and environmental degradation. Students will learn to think about the following:

- 1) Graphic novels as more than simply **words** and **pictures**, but as a multi-media art form called sequential art or comics. Focus will be on developing a basic vocabulary for what we see such as **panel, spread, splash page, gutter, transitions, and closure**.
- 2) Graphic novels as a form of **literature** and **representational art** which constructs **identity** through visual imagery and words on the page.
- 3) Why someone might choose the graphic novel form as their medium. What does it allow that other types of literary media do not? Why might a memoirist choose to use sequential art over text-only forms?
- 4) Consider the evolution of graphic novels and their place within culture through case studies on the history of **viral comics, internet comics, and environmental degradation**.

Course Requirements

Weekly readings, lectures, group work, and discussion posts
3 group papers (1-2 pages)
3 response papers (1-2 pages)

Class Preview

The class will “meet” twice a week. Each of these asynchronous meetings will have around 40 minutes of lectures, a required discussion post, and about an hour and a half of research and writing to be done with your assigned group. At the end of each module (3 total) students are required to submit a group project and an individual response paper. More information on each of these components below:

Asynchronous Pre-class Materials:

Lecture (1.5 hours a week) – These are split up into smaller topics and cover a range of elements that inform how we are reading the texts for the class. They are meant to give you ideas

of how you want to engage with the course. I am not here to present any sort of definitive reading but offer information to help you build your own.

Asynchronous Weekly Groupwork:

Group assignment (3 hours a week) – Generally to be done in small groups of 3-4 people set up at the start of class. I will set these groups up after the first discussion post assignment. These assignments are meant to take what we have learned in the lecture and discussions and put them into action. These activities might be as diverse as finding viral comics and using our vocabulary to comment on them or identifying different stylistic techniques in a work we read. You will have three total group assignments. I will periodically meet with the groups to answer any questions you may have.

After class:

Discussion post / Comic Response – Students are required to submit a discussion board power after each class “meeting” these are a way of gauging how you are all doing on the class. You are also asked to respond to two other students’ posts. Since this is asynchronous these posts are one of the only ways you are able to interact with one another. If you so choose, instead of writing a post you can draw a comic in response to meeting. These can be very simple but must have sequence and words. This can be uploaded to the discussion board. You will still need to respond to two other students’ posts. **EACH WEEK’S DISCUSSIONS WILL CLOSE ON SUNDAY.** This means both posts and responses need to be finished by the end of the day Sunday. Plan accordingly.

Expectations and Grading

For a 5-week summer session, students are expected to spend an average of **30 hours a week** on the course. This includes:

- **Lectures** (1.5 hours a week)
- **Discussion Posts** (3.5 hours a week)
- **Collaborative Group Work** (5 hours a week)
- **Reading** (10 hours a week)
- **Personal Assignments** (10 hours a week)

Attendance and participation (25% of final grade)

Throughout the 5 weeks we will read three graphic novels ranging from 224-436 pages. The first week and a half will focus on building up fluency for the form. You are expected to complete the readings as outlined below.

This course is asynchronous, so you are expected to complete all the work in a timely manner and find at least an hour and a half to meet with your group members each week. If you foresee any issues with this, please let me know immediately.

PLEASE CHECK YOUR UCSC EMAIL ACCOUNT REGULARLY. Your UCSC email is the only means we have to communicate with you and we will often send out course-related emails.

Syllabus Quiz (50 points)

Discussion Posts (10 total) (100 points)

A comic, at least 3 panels in length, that responds to each class. These are not graded on their artistic quality, but in terms of their engagement with the material. Extra points can be given for exceptional examples. Students are expected to post these on a discussion board and reply to their peers' posts with constructive feedback or analysis.

Groupwork Assignments (3 total) (150 points)

These will be a space for you all to work in small groups each week to answer questions in a creative or a critical way. The goal of these groups is to get you all to work collaboratively to do research and respond to the material. Collaboration is such a key to modern comics and I want us to find a way to experiment with that.

Three Responses (3 total) (200 points)

The goal of these responses is for you to respond to the assigned reading for each week. These reflections are meant to be analytical more than personal. They should engage with the formal techniques used in the comics and demonstrate a developing understanding of comics as a literary medium.

Schedule of Readings and Assignments

Module 1: Introduction to the Comics Medium and Scott McCloud's *Understanding Comics* (1.5 weeks)

July 30th: Historical Background and What is a Comic?

- Read McCloud chapters 1-4

August 1st: Understanding Comics and Key Terms

- Read McCloud chapters 5-9

August 6th: Comic Creators and Fans

Reading: Scott McCloud, *Understanding Comics: The Invisible Art* (224 Pages)

Optional Additional Readings:

Will Eisner: *Comics and Sequential Art*.

If you read McCloud and want to build an even stronger foundation this book is generally considered the next to read.

Fred Van Lente and Ryan Dunlavey: *A Comic Book History of Comics*

A fun and pretty expansive story about comics. The basis for much of the history of comics lecture.

Module 2: Autobiography and Alison Bechdel's *The Secret to Superhuman Strength* (1.5 weeks)

[Content warning some violence]

August 8th: Autobiography and Personal Stories

- Read Bechdel pages 1-87 (up through the 1970s)

August 13th: Alison Bechdel and the Bechdel Test

- Read Bechdel pages 88-159 (up through the 1990s)

August 15th: The Secret to Superhuman Strength and Storytelling the Self

- Read Bechdel 159-234 (remainder of the book)

Reading: Alison Bechdel, *The Secret to Superhuman Strength* (234 Pages)

Optional Additional Readings:

Alison Bechdel: **The Essential Dykes to Look Out For**

Great collection of Bechdel's early work on the strip that made her famous.

Alison Bechdel: **Fun Home**

Bechdel reached more mainstream fame with this book which tells the story of her closeted father and her struggles with identity growing up. It is a phenomenal book, especially if you are also a fan of modernist literature. The follow-up on Bechdel's relationship with her mother, **Are You My Mother?** is also great though a more difficult read.

Module 3: The Influence of our Environments and Kate Beaton's *Ducks* (2 weeks)

[Content warning sexual assault, sexual violence, sexism]

August 22nd: Kate Beaton and Internet Comics

- Read Beaton 1-98

August 29th: Trauma and the Ethics of Storytelling

- Read Beaton 98-200

September 3rd: The Alberta Tar Sands

- Read Beaton 201-327

September 5th: Reading and Writing the Environment

- Read Beaton 327-430

Reading: Kate Beaton, *Ducks* (430 Pages)

Optional Additional Readings:

Rob Nixon, **Introduction to Slow Violence**

A crucial account of the disproportionate damage that energy extraction has on poor and BIPOC communities with an exploration of how many of these damages escape our notice.

Kate Beaton: **Hark! A Vagrant**: <http://www.harkavagrant.com/archive.php>

Beaton became well-known for this work. It is mentioned towards the end of Ducks that she has begun working on a web comic.

CLASSROOM POLICIES

Extensions, Late Assignments, and Makeup Exams:

All deadlines in this course are firm. Except in the case of medical or family emergency or religious observance, there will be no individual extensions for writing assignments. If, due to such an emergency, you cannot meet a deadline, please contact me **as soon as possible** so that we may work out an alternative schedule of due dates and times. No extensions will be granted on or after the day an assignment is due. There are serious consequences to missing deadlines and exams. Late writing will lose 5% for every 24 hours it is late and, after 72 hours, will no longer be accepted.

Written work:

Format

Written work must be typed in 12-point font and double-spaced. Pages should be numbered and your name should appear at the top. You should proofread for grammar, punctuation, and spelling. When quoting from class materials cite the author and page number in a parenthesis at the end of the sentence, followed by the period that ends the sentence.

Missing Assignments

The written work in this class is mandatory. Missing **any 2** of the response assignments will result in a failing grade in the class, even if your point totals remain in the passing range. It is always better to turn in *something*, even if it is incomplete.

Plagiarism

Always cite the works and ideas of others in your writing. If you quote someone, enclose the quoted material in quotation marks and identify the source in a parenthetical citation or, if you prefer, a citation at the end of the paper. If you consult additional resources beyond the course readings, please include a citation to them as well. If you have any questions about what might or might not qualify as plagiarism, you should speak with me or your TA. Any evidence of plagiarism or cheating will be dealt with in accordance with university policy. For more

information, please see the University policy on academic integrity for undergraduate students at http://www.ue.ucsc.edu/academic_integrity.

Accessibility accommodation:

UCSC's Disability Resource Center (DRC) provides resources and support for students with documented disabilities. Any student who thinks s/he/they needs accommodation, based on the impact of a disability, should contact me privately to submit their Accommodation Authorization and discuss specific needs, preferably within the first week of Summer Session. Please contact the Disability Resource Center at 831-459-2089 in room 125, Hahn Student Services or by e-mail at drc@ucsc.edu to coordinate those accommodations.

Mental health resources:

UCSC Counseling and Psychological Services (CAPS) provides a wide range of short term and long-term mental health services. Counseling services are confidential and free of charge to all UCSC students. For more information, contact CAPS at 831-459-2628 or visit <http://caps.ucsc.edu/>.

Title IX:

Title IX prohibits gender discrimination, including sexual harassment, domestic and dating violence, sexual assault, and stalking. If you have experienced sexual harassment or sexual violence, you can receive confidential support and advocacy at the Campus Advocacy Resources & Education (CARE) Office by calling (831) 502-2273. In addition, Counseling & Psychological Services (CAPS) can provide confidential, counseling support, (831) 459-2628. You can also report gender discrimination directly to the University's Title IX Office, (831) 459-2462. Reports to law enforcement can be made to UCPD, (831) 459-2231 ext. 1. For emergencies call 911.

Faculty and Teaching Assistants are required under the UC Policy on Sexual Violence and Sexual Harassment to inform the Title IX Office should they become aware that you or any other student has experienced sexual violence or sexual harassment.

AI Policy:

In this class, I ask that you complete your work without using AI-generated sources to augment, think through, or write your assignments.

There is one exception: you are welcome to use AI tools for pre-submission editing (spell-check and grammar-check) as long as you do not use them for thinking or drafting.

If you submit work that appears to have been written using AI sources, I will ask you to meet with me to discuss your thinking and writing process. If, after our conversation, I conclude it's more likely than not that you did not personally

complete an assignment you submitted under your name, I may refer you to your college provost for further conversation.

If you have questions about AI use and/or proper attribution of other people's work, please come ask me! Scholarly citing is not particularly intuitive, and part of my role is to help you learn those conventions.

Difficult Conversations:

In our in-class and online discussions and dialogues, we will have the opportunity to explore challenging, high-stakes issues and increase our understanding of different perspectives. Our conversations may not always be easy. We sometimes will make mistakes in our speaking and our listening. Sometimes we will need patience or courage or imagination or any number of qualities in combination to engage our texts, our classmates, and our own ideas and experiences. We will always need respect for others. Thus, an important aim of our classroom interactions will be for us to increase our facility with difficult conversations that arise inside issues of social justice, politics, economics, morality, religion, and other issues where reasonable people often hold diverse perspectives. This effort will ultimately deepen our understanding and allow us to make the most of being in a community with people of many backgrounds, experiences, and positions.