

Comprehensive Course Syllabus

Graphic Novels: Image and Text

Course Description:

Since the 1980s, the so-called graphic novel, or long-form comic, has become a popular and accomplished literary and artistic form. Transcending its origins in pulp fantasy and adolescent entertainment, this evolving and hybrid medium represents, in the words of author and artist Eddie Campbell, “an emerging new literature of our times in which word, picture, and typography interact meaningfully and which is in tune with the complexity of modern life” This course offers a survey of some of the best graphic novels of the last thirty years, and it provides the skills for reading comics critically in terms of what they say and how they say it.

INSTRUCTOR:

- Dr. Michael Hancock
- Office Number: A136B
- Office Hours: A: Mods 4, 6-7; B & D: 4, 6; C: 6-7
I: 1-4 PM;
also by appointment (Mon.-Fri.)
- Office phone: (630) 907-5981
- E-mail: mhanc@imsa.edu

Meeting Days, Times, and Room:

Section 1: A-B, D (Mod 3, 10-10:55), A117
Section 4: A, C-D (Mod 8, 3:20-4:15), A113

Texts/Materials:

Linda Barry, *One Hundred Demons* (2002)
Ivan Brunetti, *Cartooning: Philosophy and Practice* (2011)
Hergé, *Tintin in Tibet* (1960)
Scott McCloud, *Understanding Comics* (1993)
Richard McGuire, “Here” (1991)

Alan Moore and Dave Gibbons, *Watchmen* (1987)
Mark Newgarden and Paul Karasik, “How to Read Nancy” (1988)
Hollis Margaret Rudiger, “Reading Lessons: Graphic Novels 101” (2006)
Marjane Satrapi, *Persepolis* (2000-2003; trans. 2003-04)
Art Spiegelman, *Maus I-II* (1986, 1991)
Shaun Tan, *The Arrival* (2007)
Osamu Tezuka, *Buddha, Vol. 1: Kapilavastu* (1972; trans. 2006)
Chris Ware, “Thrilling Adventure Stories” (1991) and *Building Stories* (2012)
Gene Luen Yang, *American Born Chinese* (2006)
Free digital comics on comiXology
Selected comic strips, essays, articles, and reviews

Essential Content/SSLs and Outcomes:

- Students will understand techniques and conventions of comics as a medium and be able to explain their uses and effects [SSL IV.A-D].
- Students will develop new skills in reading and creating multimodal works [SSL IV.B, D].
- Students will evaluate the influence of historical context on form, style, and point of view [SSL II.A].
- Students will apply knowledge gained from comics as a means of understanding contemporary and historical economic, social, and political issues and perspectives [SSL III.B].
- Students will work collaboratively to come to an understanding of readings [SSL I.A-B].
- Students will develop greater autonomy as readers by generating and responding to their own substantive questions about authors and literary works [SSL I.B].
- Students will make and support informed judgments about issues of literary and aesthetic value [SSL IV.A-D].

Instructional Design and Approach:

In order to understand the ways in which comics create and manipulate meaning, we will be concerning ourselves (especially in the first few weeks of class) with questions about comics’ formal practice. Here, we will take our cue (when possible) from Scott McCloud’s *Understanding Comics*. As the semester progresses, you will develop habits and skills of active reading that will help you to be aware of meaning in comics and of what authors and artists have done to create or suggest what you understand. Your own readers’ questions will help to guide our discussions.

Moreover, this is a course in writing critically: in building an argument, in gathering and organizing evidence, and in engaging your audience. Although I will give you sample writing topics, one of the most important skills we’ll practice in this course is that of finding an interesting topic, one that will satisfy both you and your readers. Class

discussions may provide a starting point, but your papers should bring something new to the table.

Finally, I will ask you to use shared inquiry, creative writing, and your visual imagination to inform and even to entertain us. Your insights into our readings will expand our understanding of the graphic novel movement of the last few decades. Cartooning exercises will help to prepare you for your final project, a narrative comic with a written self-analysis.

Laptop Policy:

The default position for your laptop in this class is closed. This means, from the moment class starts, unless I ask you to use it, I don't expect to see it open. We will use laptops frequently for in-class work and research and even for online readings, but to the greatest extent possible, this will be a laptop-free class. I will let you know when you need to use your laptop, but otherwise, your screen should be closed. Research shows that taking notes by hand is more effective than doing so on a laptop, as it improves comprehension and recall and minimizes distractions for yourself and others around you, so get some practice doing that. If you have a special need that requires accommodation in this area, please see me. Facebook, e-mail, games, messaging, smartphones, etc.: don't.

Academic Honesty:

Any work you turn in should be yours alone and should not have been previously submitted for other courses. Acknowledge your indebtedness for what you borrow from others, and cite your sources consistently and appropriately using MLA format. Do not copy from other sources, published or unpublished, or present others' work, in part or whole, as your own. Students suspected of academic dishonesty will be referred for formal discipline, with possible sanctions including but not limited to loss of credit for an assignment and academic suspension. For more details, please see the *Student/Parent Handbook* for IMSA's academic behavior code, which applies to all of our assignments: <https://www.imsa.edu/wp-content/uploads/2018/08/2018-2019-Student-Parent-Handook-1.pdf>.

Assessment Practices, Procedures, and Processes:

The work of the course is assessed on a percentage basis: A=100-93; A-=92-90; B+=89-87; B=86-83; B-=82-80; C+=79-77; C=76-73; C-=72-70; D=69 or lower. **It is the policy of the English Department not to round up quarter or semester grades.**

Grades are calculated according to the following category weights:

Paper #1 & #4: 15% each (30% total)

Paper #2 & #3: 20% each (40% total)

Formative assessments (homework, quizzes, ownership of learning): 10%

Group lesson: 10%

Final project: 10%

Grades are to be interpreted in the following manner:

A=Exceeds course requirements

B=Meets course requirements

C=Needs improvement

D=Does not meet course requirements

For written work, “A” work is eloquent, cogent, and sometimes profound; “B” work is committed but a bit prosaic, clunky, or off-the-mark; “C” work suffers from serious writing and/or comprehension errors. More detailed guidelines are available on Moodle. Students are encouraged to confer with me before and after assignments are due so that they understand their strengths and areas for improvement.

You may revise your papers (A- or below) within a week of their return for a higher grade; the revision grade will be averaged with the original grade. For revisions, include the original (graded) and revised copies of your paper, along with a brief synopsis of your changes (bullet points are fine). The revision policy is intended to help you improve your writing and encourage significant changes, so **revision will not hurt your grade**. If a revised version is less successful than the original, its grade will not count towards the average.

All assignments should be turned in by the day and time and in the format specified in class or on Moodle. **Late papers and projects will be lowered by half a letter grade (five percentage points) for each calendar day they are late, and late papers are not revisable.** Late homework and missed quizzes cannot be made up, except in the case of excused absences.

WHAT YOU CAN EXPECT FROM ME

RESPECT: I assume that my students have ideas to contribute to our discussions and to the world. Even when students have difficulties in class, I believe in their capacity to improve their thinking, writing, and communication. I will strive to take your ideas seriously and to fully acknowledge you as a person with a complex life.

HELP AND GUIDANCE: I want you to succeed in my class, and I have chosen this profession because I want to work with you inside and outside of class to make that happen. If you are confused by an assignment or are struggling with something we are doing in class, stop by my office so we can talk about it. If you are having trouble understanding something, contact me early and often. Plan ahead so if you need help, you have time to get it.

AVAILABILITY: I will respond to clear, self-contained questions direct to my IMSA email within 24 hours. I will make myself available during office hours.

ENTHUSIASM FOR YOUR IDEAS: As a teacher, I am interested in helping you understand my ideas and the ideas of authors. I'm even more interested, however, in helping you hone and communicate your own ideas. If you're having trouble connecting the content of the course with the things that interest and concern you most, please come see me during office hours so I can help you find the connections.

USEFUL FEEDBACK: I will spend a lot of time crafting comments and feedback on your assignments. It is important to me that you do your best to understand that feedback and produce work that responds to it. If you have trouble understanding my comments on your work, please see me during office hours.

HIGH STANDARDS: A high level of quality work is expected in English courses. IMSA students themselves, past and present, have demonstrated the capacity to think critically, speak cogently, and write with power and elegance. That norm governs student expectation. I believe that writing and literature are serious, important pursuits that will be crucial to your life, education, and career whether you end up being a biologist, a mathematician, a doctor, an engineer, a teacher, or a novelist. Grades in my class are not "given," and points in my class are not "lost" from some arbitrary beginning point. Instead, grades in my class are earned through hard work and the difficult process of completing excellent assignments and projects.

WHAT I EXPECT FROM YOU

CONSISTENT ATTENDANCE AND SIGNIFICANT PARTICIPATION: At the scheduled start time of class, you should be in your seat and ready for a conversation. Come prepared with questions and observations about the text, and be willing to share those questions and observations in small groups and in the large-group conversation.

RESPECTFUL ENGAGEMENT WITH CLASSMATES' IDEAS: Discussions of literature—and contemporary ways of thinking about literature—can involve challenging, contentious topics. Even when you disagree with your classmates, it is absolutely crucial to the success of our conversations that you treat them with respect. I will treat you like adults, and I expect you to treat your classmates like adults engaged in a respectful conversation.

HONESTY: I assume that you will tell me the truth and that your work represents your own effort. Please match my respect with your honesty.

COMMITMENT TO PROCESS: You will probably enjoy many of the texts we read in this class, but there are some you may not enjoy. Even if you realize a certain text is not your cup of tea, work through it and try to find what's interesting about it, even if it's hard. Similarly, commit to improving your writing, whether you believe you are a strong writer or a weak one. All of us, including me, still have lots to learn when it comes to writing.

WILLINGNESS TO SEEK HELP: I love nothing more than helping students improve their work. I can only do so, however, if students seek out my help. Taking advantage of my help—and, as importantly, the help of tutors at the writing center—will help you become a stronger writer, thinker, and communicator.

Sequence of Topics and Activities (subject to change):

The Language of Comics

Week 1 (1/14-1/18): Introduction to course; Newgarden and Karasik, “How to Read Nancy” (<http://www.laffpix.com/howtoreadnancy.pdf>); Rudiger, “Reading Lessons: Graphic Novels 101” (on Moodle); selected comic strips and short comics

Week 2 (1/22-1/25): McCloud, *Understanding Comics*, Ch. 1-2; Hergé, *Tintin in Tibet*; Paper #1 assigned

Week 3 (1/28-2/1): McCloud, *Understanding Comics*, Ch. 3-4; McGuire, “Here” (on Moodle); selections from Nicholas A. Theisen, [What Is Manga?](#); Tezuka, *Buddha, Vol. 1*

Week 4 (2/4-2/8): McCloud, Ch. 5 and 8; Tezuka (cont’d.); **Paper #1 due (2/8)**

Week 5 (2/11-2/14): Tan, *The Arrival*

Coming of Age

Week 6 (2/19-2/22): Yang, *American Born Chinese*

Weeks 7-8 (2/25-3/1, 3/4-3/8): Hillary Chute, “Comics Form and Narrating Lives” or excerpt from *Graphic Women* (handout or PDF); Satrapi, *Persepolis*; **Paper #2 due (3/8)**

Week 9 (3/11- 3/15): Barry, *One Hundred Demons*; **3rd Quarter Ends**

SPRING BREAK (3/18-3/22)

Reinventing Comics

Week 10 (3/25-3/29): Spiegelman, “MAUS” and *Maus I*; Hillary Chute, “History and Graphic Representation in *Maus*” (handout or PDF)

Week 11 (4/2-4/5): Spiegelman, *Maus II*

Weeks 12-14 (4/8-4/12, 4/15-4/18, 4/23-4/26): (Pete Coogan, “The Definition of the Superhero” (handout or PDF); excerpt from Fredric Wertham, *The Seduction of the Innocent* (handout or PDF); Ron Goulart, “The Wertham Crusade” (handout or PDF); Moore and Gibbons, *Watchmen*; **Paper #3 due (4/12)**

Weeks 15-16 (4/29-5/3, 5/6-5/10): Group lessons on Ware, *Building Stories*; **Paper #4 due (5/10)**

Weeks 17-18 (5/13-5/17, 5/20-5/24): Work on final project in class; **Final project due (5/24); 4th Quarter Ends**