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R.Crumb

## **First-Year Seminar**

**Subtitle: Image, Text, and Story: An Exploration of Graphic Novels**

**Associate Professor, Rachel Williams, Ph.D.**

**Research Assistant/Comics Scholar, Mike Ayers (Doctoral candidate in Language Literacy and Culture)**

### **Description:**

Image, Text, and Story: An exploration of graphic novels is an interdisciplinary class designed to help students explore a variety of graphic novels that focus on social issues, personal stories, politics, and war. The graphic novel is a literary form that has grown in popularity over the past thirty years. They provide a compelling juxtaposition of image and narrative.

Students will discuss the visual construction and written content in excerpts from a series of graphic novels and cartoons.

Finally, students will construct their own graphic novella

### **Required Studio materials:**

Some drawing tool of choice: Pen, pencil, brush, crow quill pen & ink, laptop  
Eraser

White out pen

Ruler

A series of templates

Paper of choice: notebook paper, sketchbook, Bristol board, paper bags, tree bark, drawing paper, whatever

A SKETCHBOOK where you can also take notes (to become precious)  
8.5x11-Hardcover if possible. If you have a particular sketchbook,  
preference that falls outside the realm of what I have asked for see me so  
that we can end up on the same page 😊

Required Texts: (Available at IMU bookstore or Amazon.com or special  
order through Daydream Comics or Prairie Lights)

The Best American Comics, 2006

Edited by Harvey Pekar

Published by Houghton Mifflin Company

An Anthology of Graphic Fiction, Cartoons and True Stories

Edited by Ivan Brunetti

Published by Yale University Press , 2006

Making Comics: Storytelling Secrets of Comics, Manga, and Graphic Novels

By Scott McCloud

Published by Harper Collins, 2006

Class Expectations:

### **Goals and Objectives**

Students Will:

- **Explore, read, and discuss a variety of written/drawn text**  
(Some of the texts may contain language or situations that are  
offensive to some people. If you are uncomfortable with the  
assigned reading please see/contact me immediately, I will assign  
another reading without judgment or hesitation. I will present a  
short description of each reading verbally before I assign it. This  
description will note any offensive material contained within the  
reading.) Make sure to bring your books to each class!
- **Read one graphic novel of their choosing and write an analysis  
based on information found in Making Comics (Final exam [take  
home])**
- **Present a timed 3-minute critique of their chosen graphic novel**
- **Do a series of writing and drawing exercises each week in their  
sketchbook**
- **Create one graphic novella that is at least 12-15 pages in length  
over the course of the semester**

- **Participate actively in class discussions each week**
- **Come to class prepared**
- **Participate and share their work**
- **Evaluate their work and the work of their peers critically and supportively**

### **Grades:**

The final grade is a combination of four things

Participation/discussion 30%

Graphic Novella 30%

Written Assignments [including the take home final exam] 20%

Sketchbook 20%

### **Attendance Policy**

You are allowed one unexcused absence. This is because we only meet once each week. If you miss more than one class with no reasonable excuse then your participation/discussion grade will suffer. If you are absent and it seems as though your reason was excusable, then you must present me with an **absence from class form** found at the following website:

<http://www.registrar.uiowa.edu/forms/students.aspx>

**Please contact me if possible so that I can answer your questions regarding class content on the day you were absent. If an assignment was due then please give it to me the next day or place it in my locker located directly opposite of the art education department.**

### **Readings:**

Week 1-

Ppgs 1-38 in Making Comics

Ppg 7-36 in Graphic Fiction \*36

And xv-xxiii in The Best American Series \*166,167

Sketching ex. Go to a fast food restaurant, the mall, the union, the airport, a bar, a coffee shop, the pedmall, the roller skating rink, or the bus station- somewhere public where there are lots of folks or activity

Watch people, dogs, birds, trash, leaves, etc for a bit

Sketch a situation you observe (it may or may not involve you personally) in 4 panels or less words are optional-make sure there is some vignette or story implied in the drawing

Use what McCloud refers to as the five choices p. 10

Also consider panel to panel transitions-experiment

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## Week 2

Share drawings in small groups

Pick partner

Discuss Readings

For Homework:

Read 38-54 in *Making Comics*

For homework: Quanto comic ex. In sketchbook-- Partner's storyline/title (make one photocopy for partner to bring to next class) see pg. 11,12,13 in *Graphic Fiction* for ideas

Look at [24hourcomics.com](http://24hourcomics.com)

Develop a rough story concept for your graphic novella

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## Week 3

Look at sketchbook ex.

Share story ideas with partners

Review McCloud

For homework:

Pick one comic in either anthology

Write a one- page paper and explain the choices the artist made with regard to panel to panel transitions, and McCloud's five choices

Read 13 cats on page 232 in *best American comics*

Write a short descriptive character sketch of the major character (s) in your story (See bottom panel on pg. 64)

Answer the following questions in your sketchbook or type them and paste them into your sketchbook

Name, Age, build (ht. Wt.), distinguishing characteristics (scars, moles, smells, etc.)

What would they wear on a typical day

How would you describe their personality

How would they spend a typical day

What would they eat

What major event has had the most impact on their life

What about their parents-what were they like?

Where did the character grow up?

What are they most afraid of?

What regrets do they have?

Who do they love and hate why?

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#### Week 4

Discuss characters and stories with partners

Share

Talk about drawing faces

Read pg58-122 in McCloud

Draw 4 facial expression using your main character in your sketchbook

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#### Week 5

Mike will present the elements of a good story and how to use words to enhance a comic/drawing

Read the Power of Words in Making Comics 128-154

Do Clip art ex. For homework

Using clip art photo copies I provide

Paste up a short comic strip include words to tell as short story. Feel free to re-copy, shrink, enlarge, and change the resolution. (If you want you can also scan them) add this to your sketchbook

Bring a copy or two to pass around

Include sounds words and play with 7 word types p.140 in McCloud

For fun see p.252 in Best American Comics

Also pg. 29 in Graphic fiction

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#### Week 6

Share word art ex.

Discuss Perspective

For Homework read chapter 158-180 in Making Comics

Also read p.28,70-76, 256-263,351-363

Create 4 sketches of the world where your story is set

Try to draw from life if possible and if it suits your story.

Incorporate perspective if it suits your story

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#### Week 7

Share world drawings with partners and class



Read 184-212 in Making comics

Fill out comic worksheet so that next week you can start working on your final graphic novella

Also visit Daydreams or Prairie lights or Barnes and Nobles or the Iowa city Public Library and pick out a **graphic novel** for your take home exam paper Pick one you like in terms of art so that you can get inspired.

Bring it to class next week

Make an appointment with Me or Mike to discuss story idea, etc

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Week 8

Mike will demonstrate simple software that can be used to make comics

Rachel will demonstrate drawing techniques with different pens etc.

And return Sketchbooks.

Share graphic novels and discuss genres

Homework: Read Chapter 6 and 7 in Making comics

Begin on rough thumbnail Storyboard for graphic novella using worksheet

Be ready to share next week

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Week 9

Discuss Comic culture, genres, etc

How would you categorize your story in terms of genre?

What hallmarks of that genre does it contain?

Share storyboards in groups and get feedback

Homework:

Begin working on graphic novellas

Finish 1/6<sup>th</sup> of the frames for next week

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Week 10

Discuss process and share work so far in small groups

Homework:

Keep working on graphic novella

Finish 2/6<sup>th</sup> of the frames for the following week

Bring to share in class

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Week 11 group critique of work so far

Finish 1/2 of novella

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Week 12-

Guest Speaker-Gail Boldt to talk about Manga? Or Adam from Daydreams or both

Finish 2/3 of novella

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### Week 13

Peer evaluation ex.

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### Week 14

Graphic novel analysis is due

Share graphic novel analyses

Timed 3-minute presentations (thumbs up, thumbs down, what it is about, why you liked or did not like the story, drawings, design)

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### Week 15

Finish graphic novel presentations

Turn in Final Graphic Novella and Sketchbook

Determine final evaluation system.

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### Week 16

Publishing pot-luck party!

Time and Place to be voted on by class members

Anthologies will be distributed at this time!

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List of Graphic Novel Websites of interest

<http://www.fantagraphics.com/>

<http://www.nbmpub.com/cool/sites/cool/sites.html>

<http://leep.lis.uiuc.edu/seworkspace/aspisak/Home.htm>