

The Graphic Novel (GNOV) CTY Course Syllabus

ABOUT THE COURSE

This is a writing course—and as with all exciting writing courses, GNOV gives us something to write about (as well as a variety of ways to write). In this course, we will explore the graphic novel genre and its various incarnations through our own critical and creative writings. Our primary purpose is to engage in a variety of assignments that demonstrate an understanding of the major formal elements and defining characteristics of the graphic novel. We will develop a working vocabulary for talking and writing about graphic novels as we learn how to read them closely and analyze how they work.

Diverse in their settings, our graphic novels connect with one another thematically: all involve not only political strife and economic hardship, but characters of all ages who live through war: World War II in England (*Ethel and Ernest*); World War II and the Holocaust in Poland (*Maus*); and the war between Iraq and Iran (*Persepolis*). But connections also exist on the personal front: children and parents who struggle in their relationships with each other. Love grounds the relationships, but sometimes characters are too caught up in their individual difficulties—past or present—to hear the other. These are not “heartwarming stories” or “after-school specials”—no easy answers emerge. Add to this the variety of artistic styles and storytelling techniques, and we have some great reading—about which we will write and write—and later draw and draw.

In addition to almost-daily journal writing, we will work on two analytical essays and two creative projects. For the analytical essays, we will concentrate on insightful reading; on brainstorming, webbing, and free writing; on developing a workable thesis and marshalling evidence to support it; on working through all the steps of writing, including revision; on learning how to give and receive appropriate feedback; on learning how to become our own editors. For the creative projects—most likely taking the form of a “graphic short story” or “graphic poem”—we will concentrate on developing characters and situations, as well as on practicing storyboarding, panel composition, and layout. On at least two of the four projects, we will concentrate on making deep and global revisions. We will go through a LOT of paper!

Finally, we will have a GNOV Symposium, where each writer will present one of his or her graphic works to the class. Like graphic novels, the symposia have panels, with presenters sharing their work (each participant giving a presentation of about 15 minutes), followed by lively, supportive question-and-answer sessions and concluding with a round-table discussion.

TEXTS

Briggs, Raymond. *Ethel and Ernest: A True Story*. New York: Pantheon, 2001.

McCloud, Scott. *Understanding Comics: The Invisible Art*. New York: Harper Perennial, 1994.

Satrapı, Marjane. *Persepolis: The Story of a Childhood*. New York: Harper, 1994.

Spiegelman, Art. *Maus: My Father Bleeds History/Here My Troubles Began (Box Set)*. New York: Pantheon, 1993.

WRITING ASSIGNMENTS (PAPER 1 and PAPER 2)

These are not book reports! Hurrah! In this class, always assume your reader has read what you are writing about—it isn't necessary to prove that you know everything about the book. No plot summaries, then. The instructor and the TA are going to teach you ways to write that are acceptable on the university level. Your writing is a way to have an intelligent discussion with your reader about some aspect of the work you have read. You may focus on a part of the text, a character, a technique, a problem, something else, some combination. We will both read your papers and provide feedback.

ARTISTIC ASSIGNMENTS (GRAPHIC 1 and GRAPHIC 2)

These assignments, which may spring from your in-class exercises or your reading, provide opportunities for you to create your own graphic short story or graphic poem. (We'd need a lot longer to create a bona fide graphic novel.) Creativity and discipline—willingness to try new things, to experiment—are encouraged. Here, too, the instructor and the TA will both review your graphic assignments and provide feedback.

WAYS OF BEING: CTY/CAA and GNOV

So that we may all pay respectful attention to each other and get the most out of the class, we will always follow all the CTY/CAA ways of behavior, which center upon mutual respect and upon dedication to working hard and challenging ourselves. Sometimes overlapping with, sometimes adding to the CTY/CAA ways:

Call one another by name. That means we need to quickly get to know each other's names.

Listen to the person who has the floor (the center of the conversational attention). This means not having side conversations, which may seem subtle, but distracts others, as well as showing a lack of respect to the speaker. During workshops, we talk freely, but during class discussions, we need to focus on the one speaking. Please raise your hand to be called on. The instructor and the TA try to make sure everyone gets a chance to speak, and we don't necessarily call on others in the order that hands go up. Still, if we inadvertently don't call on you when you have your hand raised—sometimes this happens during class discussions when we really get into the thick of them—please let us know during the break, and we will give you the first opportunity to speak when we reconvene.

In discussing literature and art, which are the focus of this class, we need to be supportive (or at least neutral) toward one another, even in the case of disagreement. It's quite all right to disagree—and it's quite all right to say something like "I disagree" or "I don't see it that way"...because...and then give your own reasons. We also do not have to come to a consensus. Each of us brings his or her unique outlook to a work of literature and each of us brings a way of vision to artistic projects.

CTY/CAA policy, which we follow, is that cell phones belong in the dorm room and are not to be taken to class. When we are working on your graphic projects and we have announced that it is all right to do so, you may listen to your iPod if it helps you concentrate, but it cannot be a distraction to you or to anyone else. Until we begin working on the graphic projects, we need for you to leave your iPod in the dorm room as well.

Push yourself to do your very best. Constructive feedback from others helps us see things in new ways. Sift through the advice you get and see what works for your revision. The first draft is never the best. It's a lot easier to be open to changes in our writing, but this also applies to our artwork. Block panels lightly in pencil—generally no great need for detail—until you are satisfied with your layout, then ink it in, then gently erase the pencil work. Think of different ways to arrange your panels (but still make sure that the reader's eye knows where to go)—experiment with different sizes and placements, with a variety of panel-to-panel transitions. Sometimes this takes some getting used to. If you are already producing graphic work and writing, you may have certain ways of doing things, but professional artists and writers always grow. Be open to learning new techniques to incorporate into your repertoire.

Stay with your work. In the shorter exercises, we want you to use all your time on that exercise—it's not a speed race—in class, we will discuss strategies of “what to do when we *think* we are finished.”

In the evening study sessions, you may have specific assignments of reading and writing, which people finish at varying speeds—if you are caught up (or temporarily “written out”), take a book from our in-class circulating library and give yourself a break.

Live by any other ways of being that we decide upon as a class.

CIRCULATING LIBRARY (AVAILABLE TO READ DURING THE EVENING SESSION). ALL BOOKS MUST BE RETURNED AT THE END OF THE EVENING. IF YOU WISH TO MARK A PAGE, USE A POST-IT—DO NOT FOLD CORNERS.

These books belong to the instructor:

- About, Marguerite, and Clément Oubrierie. *Aya*. Montréal: Drawn and Quarterly, 2007.
 Amar Chitra Katha Indian comics about gods, goddesses, epics (various).
 Banerjee, Sarnath. *Corridor: A Graphic Novel*. New Delhi: Penguin India, 2004.
 Barry, Lynda. *One Hundred Demons*. Seattle: Sasquatch, 2002.
 Castelluci, Cecil, and Jim Rugg. *The Plain Janes*. New York: DC Comics, 2007.
 Chinn, Mike. *Writing and Illustrating the Graphic Novel: Everything You Need to Know to Create Great Comics*. Hauppauge, NY: Barron's, 2004.
 Chopak, Deepra, and Shekhar Kapur. *Ramayan: 3392 AD*. New York: Virgin, 2007.
 Cruse, Howard. *Stuck Rubber Baby*. New York: Paradox, 1995.
 Modan, Rutu. *Exit Wounds*. Montréal: Drawn and Quarterly, 2007.
 Moore, Alan and Dave Gibbons. *Watchmen*. New York: DC Comics, 1987.
 Nakazawa, Keiji. *Barefoot Gen: Vol. 1: A Cartoon History of Hiroshima*. San Francisco: Last Gasp, 2004.
 ---. *Barefoot Gen: Vol. 2: The Day After*. San Francisco: Last Gasp, 2004.
 ---. *Barefoot Gen: Vol. 3: Life After the Bomb*. San Francisco: Last Gasp, 2004.
 ---. *Barefoot Gen: Vol. 4: Out of the Ashes*. San Francisco: Last Gasp, 2004.
 Pekar, Harvey. *American Splendor: The Life and Times of Harvey Pekar*. New York: Ballantine, 2003.
 Petersen, David. *Mouse Guard: Fall 1152*. New York: Villard, 2008.
 Rowson, Martin. *The Waste Land*. London: Penguin, 1990.
 Rudahl, Sharon. *A Dangerous Woman: The Graphic Biography of Emma Goldman*. New York: New, 2007.

- Sacco, Joe. *Palestine*. Seattle: Fantagraphics, 2006.
- . *Safe Area Gorazde: The War in Eastern Bosnia 1992-95*. Seattle: Fantagraphics, 2006.
- Satrapi, Marjane. *Persepolis 2: The Story of a Return*. New York: Pantheon, 2005.
- Sfar, Joann. Klezmer. *Book 1: Tales of the Wild East*. New York: First Second, 2005.
- . *The Rabbi's Cat*. New York: Pantheon, 2005.
- . *The Rabbi's Cat 2*. New York: Pantheon, 2008.
- Sheinkin, Steve. *The Adventures of Rabbi Harvey: A Graphic Novel of Jewish Wisdom and Wit in the Wild West*. Woodstock, VT: Jewish Lights, 2006.
- Ware, F.C. *Jimmy Corrigan: The Smartest Kid on Earth*. New York: Pantheon, 2002.
- Winick, Judd. *Pedro and Me: Friendship, Loss, and What I Learned*. New York: Henry Holt, 2000.
- Yang, Gene Yuen. *American Born Chinese*. New York: First Second, 2002.

DUE DATES (GENERALLY AT END OF AFTERNOON SESSION ON EACH DAY)

- Friday, 4 July: First analytical essay (Paper 1).
- Thursday, 10 July: Second analytical essay (Paper 2).
- Friday, 11 July: Revision of Paper 1 or Paper 2.
- Monday, 14 July: First creative project (Graphic 1).
- Tuesday, 15 July: Revision of Paper 1 or Paper 2 (whichever you haven't yet done).
- Thursday, 16 July: Second creative project (Graphic 2).

ACTIVITIES: (IMPORTANT CAVEAT: THIS IS THE GENERAL PLAN, BUT IT MAY CHANGE FROM TIME TO TIME, DEPENDING UPON THE NEEDS AND INTERESTS OF THE CLASS).

Monday, 30 June:

MORNING: Introductions to CTY and to our writing community. Discussion of reading visual art and of our backgrounds of experience with this genre. Discussion of the overall genre of graphic novels and of ways to look at them as literature, as well as ways to look at them as "literature-plus." Discussion of journaling.

AFTERNOON: Pre-test. Read and discuss McCloud, *Understanding Comics*, Intro. and Chapters 1-3 (Setting the Record Straight; The Vocabulary of Comics; Blood in the Gutter). Journaling self as a fictional character (writing only).

EVENING: Read Spiegelman, *Maus I*, 5-71 (Chs. 1-3). Write a brief journal entry. **Be sure to flag with Post-Its or other markers anything in your reading that you want to discuss (this is standard practice with any reading—please do this throughout the course). Try to come up with at least five things to contribute to the ensuing discussions.**

Tuesday, 1 July:

MORNING: Discuss journal entries and first three chapters of *Maus I* (no spoilers!), analyzing how McCloud's Chs. 1-3 play into it. What techniques does Spiegelman employ, and where? Discuss how you would write about *Maus* so far, knowing what you know. Discuss the extended metaphor of this novel. Computer lab for writing exercises.

AFTERNOON: Read and discuss McCloud, Chs. 4-6 (Time Frames; Living in Line; Show and Tell). Continue to discuss and critique literary papers. A little word about the relevant parts of

MLA format and about various literary ways of writing. Scavenger hunt for concepts from McCloud and plot elements from Spiegelman.

EVENING: Read Spiegelman, *Maus I*, 73-161 (Chs. 4-6). Write a brief journal entry.

Wednesday, 2 July:

MORNING: Discuss *Maus I* (cumulative); analyze how McCloud's Chs 1-6 play into it. Journal work on *Maus*. Discuss embedded "Prisoner on Hell Planet" in *Maus I*, paying attention to Spiegelman's earlier techniques and discerning which he has carried into his later work. Computer lab for writing exercises.

AFTERNOON: Read and discuss: McCloud Chs. 7-9 (The Six Steps; A Word about Color; Putting It All Together). Workshop: Based on what you have read so far, what questions/predictions do you have concerning *Maus II*? Brainstorming, webbing, freewriting in your journal. If you have already read ahead, journal about what you originally predicted, as well about how *Maus II* fulfilled your expectations, surprised you, or played with your expectations in some way.

EVENING: Read Spiegelman, *Maus II*, 164-234 (Chs 1-2). Write a brief journal entry.

Thursday, 3 July:

MORNING: Discuss first part of *Maus II*. Journal: catch up writing about other graphic novels. In computer lab, brainstorm, web, freewrite, look over your journal to see what you can incorporate: start/keep working on Paper 1. Peer review afterwards. (Be sure to print out 2 copies of your draft.)

AFTERNOON: Peer review, continued. Finish reading *Maus II*, 235-96 (Chs 3-5). How do McCloud's insights play into your understanding of *Maus*? What new artistic techniques popped up in *Maus II*? What questions does McCloud inspire concerning *Ethel & Ernest* and *Persepolis*? Drawing exercise: draw a well known character (or current celebrity) in the style of one of the graphic novels you've read.

EVENING: Read *Ernest & Ethel*. Work on draft. Also, spend at least 10 minutes writing a journal entry, even if it means not completing the reading (we'll have time tomorrow). Don't forget the Post-its!

Friday, 4 July:

MORNING: Continue drafting Paper 1 in computer lab. Bring printed Paper 1 into final form, turning in at end of morning.

AFTERNOON: Finish reading *Ernest & Ethel* (or reread). Discuss *Ernest & Ethel*, contrasting Briggs's techniques with those of Spiegelman. Discuss comparison/contrast patterns in literary writing (it is not necessary for Paper 1 to be comparison/contrast, but it's a good pattern to learn, and you might want to use it for Paper 2).

Sunday evening, 6 July:

Read *Persepolis*, and write a journal entry. If you have already read ahead, write a journal entry on *Persepolis*, then take a graphic novel from the lending library, read it in its entirety, and write about it. Any graphic novel (except *Maus*) can be the subject of Paper 2. If you commit yourself to a graphic novel from the lending library, you have dibs on it while you are writing your paper. But you must notify your instructor or TA.

Monday, 7 July:

MORNING: Working with feedback: receiving the instructor and TA feedback to Paper 1. Continued discussion of the revision process in computer lab.

AFTERNOON: Workshop: preliminary work for Paper 2. You may expand a promising journal entry into a paper, or come up with something new.

EVENING: Watch Hayao Miyazaki's *Porco Rosso*, paying attention to graphic art techniques.

Tuesday, 8 July:

MORNING: Workshop: peer-reviewing and proofreading Paper 2. Continuing to draft Paper 2 in computer lab. Discuss *Porco Rosso*.

AFTERNOON: Continuation of editing process of second literary-analysis paper. "Dark/Light" comic exercise.

EVENING: Watch Keiji Nakazawa's *Barefoot Gen*, Part 1 (film, corresponding with Books 1-4); discuss Nakazawa's filmic techniques.

Wednesday, 9 July:

MORNING: Workshop: continue work on Paper 2..

AFTERNOON: Discuss storyboarding. Do "American Splendor" storyboard/drawing exercise in pairs (each person storyboarding something for his/her partner). Discuss idea generation for Creative 1; begin brainstorming.

EVENING: Watch Nakazawa's *Barefoot Gen*, Part 2 (film, corresponding with later, as yet untranslated books in the series).

Thursday, 10 July:

MORNING: Discuss *Barefoot Gen*. Bring Paper 2 to final form in computer lab.

AFTERNOON: Storyboard first creative project.

EVENING: Work on panel composition and layout for first creative project. Read special assignment—civil rights reading from Race and Politics class in preparation for tomorrow's joint project. Visualize how to illustrate a civil-rights struggle incident.

Friday, 11 July:

MORNING: Finish revision of Paper 1 in computer lab—turn in by end of morning. Continued work on first creative project (Graphic 1).

AFTERNOON: Special project, in collaboration with Race and Politics class—in RPOL/GNOV groups, storyboard and create a four-panel comic on a civil rights theme (Brown v. Board of Education; Montgomery Bus Boycott; Freedom Riders).

Sunday evening, 13 July:

Choose a graphic novel from the class library. Read it, and write a brief journal entry. You may also continue working on Graphic 1.

Monday, 14 July:

MORNING: Bring Graphic 1 to final form, if you haven't done so already. Brainstorming and storyboarding second creative project (Graphic 2).

AFTERNOON: Panel composition and layout for Graphic 2. Peer review. (Graphic 1 is due at the end of the afternoon.)

EVENING: Choose a graphic novel from the class library. Read it, and write a brief journal entry. Or work on Graphic 2.

Tuesday, 15 July:

MORNING: Continued workshop on Graphic 2. Computer lab—revise Lit Paper 2.

AFTERNOON: Graphic 2 workshop.

EVENING: Watch Isao Takahata's *Grave of the Fireflies*.

Wednesday, 16 July:

MORNING: Working on Graphic 2. (If you have finished by now, please use this time to simply enjoy a graphic novel and write a journal entry on it.)

AFTERNOON: Continued work on Graphic 2. Discuss *Grave of the Fireflies*.

EVENING: Hayao Miyazake's *Spirited Away*.

Thursday, 17 July:

MORNING: Discuss *Spirited Away*. "Marketing" discussion: How might you take one of your creative projects and expand it in the future? Discuss what we've learned in the class. Post-test. Student Program Evaluations.

AFTERNOON: Continued work on Graphic 2, or reading graphic novels of interest and writing about them in your journal.

EVENING: Read graphic novels of your choice.

Friday, 18 July:

MORNING: GNOV Games: comic exercises of all sorts.

AFTERNOON: Instruction team/parent conferences.