

**Summer 2022**

Prof. Jean-Christophe  
Cloutier

**ENGL 0030 Comics & Graphic Novels**

Office Hours: via zoom

**MWF 5:15pm-7:44pm**  
**ONLINE—Canvas**

Email:  
cloutier@english.upenn.edu

**Course Description:**

Comics! That's right, folks, we're gonna be reading lots of comics in this course. Some will be short, some will be long—we'll call those "graphic novels" (for fun and for added respectability). Popular yet understudied for over a century, comics are now critically recognized as a major form of communication and contemporary creative arts. This course will combine literary and historical approaches to investigate this rapidly growing and increasingly influential form of literature, and will ultimately provide students with high levels of visual literacy to navigate today's ubiquitous multimedia landscape of image and text. The course fulfills "Sector III: Arts & Letters" of the College's General Education Curriculum as it represents an interdisciplinary approach to knowledge mirrored by the graphic novel's joint ancestry in fine arts and literature. Along with a historical overview of the form's development across the twentieth century, complete with analysis of relevant broader institutional and cultural factors illuminating the growth of American media culture more generally, the course shall emphasize the critical skills necessary to read and understand this deceptively complex medium—and visual storytelling in general. We will tackle a dazzling array of works that define and redefine the form while illustrating a variety of artistic & storytelling approaches to central themes of contemporary experience: politics, sexuality, class, censorship, violence, cultural and ethnic diversity. Assignments will include super-short discussion posts on Canvas, one short paper, one short presentation, and a final exam. 'Nuff said.

**Fulfills requirements**

Sector III: Arts & Letters of the College's General Education Curriculum

**Required Texts (in order of reading)**

- McCloud, Scott. *Understanding Comics: The Invisible Art*
- Spiegelman, Art. *Maus: A Survivor's Tale I & II*
- Bechdel, Alison. *Fun Home: A Family Tragicomic*
- Miller, Frank. *Batman: The Dark Knight Returns*
- Moore, Alan and Dave Gibbons. *Watchmen*
- Fábio Moon and Gabriel Bá, *Daytripper*
- Tsugumi Ohba & Takeshi Obata, *Death Note*, Vol. 1
- Hiroya Oku, *Inuyashiki*, Vol. 1
- Ware, Chris. *Jimmy Corrigan, the Smartest Kid on Earth*
- Drnaso, Nick. *Sabrina*
- Burns, Charles. *Black Hole*
- Adrian Tomine, *Killing & Dying; The Loneliness of the Long-Distance Cartoonist*

**Other assigned readings:** all other readings will be made available online through Canvas. Whenever possible, all required texts will be put on reserve in Van Pelt Library.

Attendance is required, and you will be expected to come to class prepared to pose and answer questions about the texts. Please remember to have required texts at hand during class. With comics, we need to be looking at the text itself!

## **Weekly Schedule May 23 – June 29**

### **Week 1**

#### Monday, May 23

- Syllabus; Course Guidelines; Schedule
- Lecture: Introduction to, and brief history of, comics and graphic novels
- Readings:
  - Roger Sabin, “What is a comic?” (PDF)
  - “Introduction,” *Modern Fiction Studies*, Winter 2006 (pp.767-773) (PDF)
- Short comic exercise

Recommended (browse through these early comics):

- Selected comics from *The Smithsonian Book of Newspaper Comics* (PDF)

#### Wednesday, May 25

- McCloud, *Understanding Comics* (Chapters 1-6) (1993)

#### Friday, May 27

Selected Mini-Comics exercises for close-reading analysis (PDF)

- “Here” by Richard McGuire (PDF)
- “The Plot Thickens” by Bill Griffith (PDF)
- “Master Race” by Bernie Krigstein (PDF)

### **Week 2**

Monday, May 30 – NO CLASS (Memorial Day)

#### Wednesday, June 1

- Spiegelman, *MAUS A Survivor’s Tale, I: My Father Bleeds History* (1986)
  - Spiegelman, “MAUS” *Funny Animals* #1 (1972) (PDF)
- Spiegelman, *MAUS A Survivor’s Tale, II: And Here My Troubles Began* (1992)

Friday, June 3

- Bechdel, Alison. *Fun Home* (2006)

### Week 3

Monday, June 6

The Politics of the Early Superhero (all readings PDFs)

- *Superman Chronicles*, Vol. 1 (selections)
- *Batman Chronicles*, Vol. 1 (selections)
- *Wonder Woman Chronicles*, Vol. 1 (selections)

The Changing Landscape of Comics After World War II (all readings PDFs)

- EC Comics: “Judgment Day”; *Tales from the Crypt*, “Taint the Meat, It’s the Humanity”
- *MAD Magazine*: Harvey Kurtzman and Wally Wood, “Superduperman”
- “One Man in a Million” (romance comic)
- Code of the Comics Magazine Association of America, Inc.

Underground Comix (all readings PDFs)

- Pekar, Harvey. *American Splendor: The Life and Times of Harvey Pekar* (selections)
- Clips from *American Splendor* (2003)
- Underground comix (selections) (PDF)

Wednesday, June 8

- Miller, Frank. *Batman: The Dark Knight Returns* (1986)

Friday, June 10

- Moore & Gibbons, *Watchmen* (Chapters 1-3) (1986-87)

### Week 4

Monday, June 13

- Moore & Gibbons, *Watchmen* (4-12—complete)

Wednesday, June 15

- Fábio Moon and Gabriel Bá, *Daytripper* (2010)

Friday, June 17 (Manga)

- Tsugumi Ohba & Takeshi Obata, *Death Note*, Vol. 1 (2003-2004)
- Hiroya Oku, *Inuyashiki*, Vol. 1 (2014-2017)

### **Week 5**

Monday, June 20 – NO CLASS (Juneteenth)

Wednesday, June 22

- Ware, *Jimmy Corrigan: The Smartest Kid on Earth* (2000)

Friday, June 24

- Drnaso, Nick, *SABRINA* (2018)

### **Week 6**

Monday, June 27

- Burns, Charles. *Black Hole* (2005)

Wednesday, June 29

- Adrian Tomine, *Killing & Dying* (2015); *The Loneliness of the Long-Distance Cartoonist* (2020)