

# ENG 136 The Graphic Novel

## Fall 2019



Class meets: Tue-Thur, 10:35 - 11:50 AM, Thomas bldg. 220  
Instructor: Camila Gutiérrez-Fuentes ckg5141@psu.edu  
Office hour: Monday 1:30-2:30pm and Thursdays 3-4pm in Burrowes bldg. #252 Cubicle 11  
Mailbox: 442 Burrowes bldg.

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This course will begin by looking at graphic narratives of different lengths in order to examine the formal characteristics of sequential art. Then, we will read important works that have come to be signaled as part of the “canon” of the Graphic Novel, and discuss the importance or necessity of establishing a canon at all. We will end the course by looking at current trends that have diversified the landscape of graphic narratives in the twenty first century. This way, the course will provide you with a formal/technical language to talk about graphic narratives, and will prepare you to discuss these texts critically. Please notice that the great majority of the texts in this class have been originally published in the English language, and are representative of the North American tradition of comics. Other regions of the world have graphic narrative traditions that precede or enrich what we will be studying (i.e., *bandes dessinées*, *manga*, etc). If you are interested in them, you may approach me during the semester and I can direct you towards resources or other courses that will help you study them.

*All contents and policies in this syllabus are subject to change during the semester, for any reason that I or the university deems necessary. Any changes will be communicated via e-mail, Canvas announcements, or in class.*

### Course Objectives:

- To acquire a formal/technical *language* to talk about sequential art.
- To read visual/verbal texts *being aware* of the intellectual skills at play.
- To develop a *visual literacy* that allows students to engage critically with graphic narratives.
- To comprehend “sequential art”, “comics”, and “graphic novels” as *distinct literary forms*.
- To observe the *chronological development* of graphic narrative in the English-speaking world.
- To produce written visual analyses that conform with academic standards at the university level.

### Humanities Domain Goals:

The Pennsylvania State University provides humanities courses (GH) and an appropriate learning environment for students to:

- engage in the qualitative study of the humanities;
- expand their knowledge of the variety of human experiences;
- gain access to various intellectual traditions and their changes through time;
- probe the foundations of communication and thought and become aware of the scope and limitations of human communication;
- encounter concepts and traditions that attempt to bring sense to human existence;
- develop their competency in interpreting and critically evaluating diverse ways of life, traditions, and shared or individual values, including their own.

### Required Texts:

- McCloud, Scott. *Understanding Comics*.
- Heer, Jeet. *Arguing Comics*.
- Tamaki, Mariko and Jillian Tamaki. *Skim*.
- Spiegelman, Art. *The Complete MAUS*.
- Sacco, Joe. *Safe Area Gorazde*.
- Ferris, Emil. *My Favorite Thing is Monsters*.
- Millar, Johnson and Plunkett. *Superman: Red Son*.
- Miranda, Edgardo. *Ricanstruction: Reminiscing and Rebuilding Puerto Rico*.

### GRADING:

|                          |     |
|--------------------------|-----|
| Class performance        | 15% |
| Visual analyses (x3)     | 30% |
| Group presentation       | 15% |
| Midterm                  | 25% |
| Guiding class discussion | 15% |
| Extra credit             | 2%  |

### GRADE SCALE %:

|              |    |              |    |
|--------------|----|--------------|----|
| 94 and above | A  | 79 – 77      | C+ |
| 93 – 90      | A- | 76 – 70      | C  |
| 89 – 87      | B+ | 69 – 60      | D  |
| 86 – 84      | B  | 59 and below | F  |
| 83 – 80      | B- |              |    |

### Class Performance (15%)

This course requires active discussion of literature. I expect you to attend every class meeting, and to prepare accordingly. You must contribute to discussions by bringing up relevant reading or discussion points, helping to clarify confusing points, and showing that you have prepared for class by following the *Class Preparation* guide posted on Canvas. If I get a general sense that the class is collectively coming unprepared, I will start weekly graded Quizzes or Discussion forum posts, to factor into the CP grade.

➤ **Attendance:** You may be absent up to 4 times in the semester no-questions-asked (illness/injury, family emergency, religious holiday, sports practice, etc.) All university-excused absences will also count towards these 4 free absences. Further absences will impact your class performance grade significantly. At 8 absences you will fail the course. I reserve the right to excuse further absences on a case-by-case basis should they be notified for **consideration**, via e-mail, **well in advance**.

### Visual Analyses (30%)

For each visual analysis, you must pick one of the literatures read for that section and write a 1-page visual analysis to submit by the dates on the schedule. Your document must be written in Times New Roman font size 12, single-spaced, in [MLA style](#), and saved in a .docx or .doc format (no .pages files will be accepted). You must include **one** image in your file, which may take up to ¼ of the text area (hopefully less). For further details, follow the steps on *How to do a Visual Analysis* on Canvas.

We will have a “writing workshop” to help you get started with these assignments.

### Group Presentation (15%)

You will be asked to do one group presentation during the semester. Your presentation must be about the topic assigned for each date (see schedule below). You may choose to divide the work in any way you deem appropriate, maintaining a fair proportion of effort among group members. Just before starting your presentation, the group will need to turn in an **outline** of the presentation (1 page max, single spaced) along with a **bibliography** (1 page) of sources consulted. Use [MLA style](#). Presentations should be between 15 and 20 minutes (excluding Q&A). Audiovisual materials are encouraged, as long as they are **relevant** and **useful**. For further details, see *How to do a Presentation* on Canvas.

### Guiding Class Discussion (15%)

Once per semester you will guide our class discussion for a few minutes. Sign up will happen in the first two weeks of classes. For instructions, read the file *How to guide class discussions* on Canvas.

### Extra Credit (2%)

You may attend two extra credit events during the semester (1% each). Up to 48hrs after you attend the event, send me a 100-word report with “EXTRA CREDIT” on the subject line (e-mail). The report must reflect your attentive participation and your consequential learning or growth as a scholar. If you wish to plan ahead, here are some options: attend a [Comparative Literature Luncheon talk series](#), volunteer for the LAC conference (contact me if interested), read or volunteer at the [Marathon Read](#), or attend the Lynd Ward Prize award ceremony (time/place TBA). I’ll advertise other events later in the semester.

## COURSE POLICIES / ETIQUETTE / NETIQUETTE

- **Name/Pronoun Statement:** I will gladly address you by your chosen name and gender pronoun. Please advise me on your preference at any point in the semester if there is a change. ([Policy AD84](#)).
- **Communications:** You are expected to be clear, courteous, and concise in all e-mail communications with me; this includes starting your message with a salutation (I prefer “Dear Camila” or “Dear Ms. Gutierrez”, but either is fine), briefly explaining the reason for your message, following standard rules of spelling and grammar, and signing your e-mail with your full name. I do not check my e-mail after hours, and I may take a couple of days to reply to messages. Do not wait until last minute to ask important questions!
- **Electronic Devices:** I will enforce a **no phones** policy in this class. Laptops are allowed **only if you sit on the first row** and you participate of the class discussion (no checking e-mails, no online shopping, no doing work for other classes, etc). If it is my impression that you are distracted because of your laptop use, I will ask you to put it away. Repeated offenses will result in lowering your final Class Performance grade.
- **Dress Code:** Because this class requires your active participation, and you will need to listen, speak, and look, I require that you do not wear **hats**, earbuds, or earphones of any type during class period (students with authorized disability accommodations may be excused). You must also come to class fully dressed (i.e., wearing clothes that cover your body sufficiently for the semi-formal educational context that is the classroom).

## UNIVERSITY POLICIES

- **Academic Integrity:** Dishonesty of any kind will not be tolerated in this course. Dishonesty includes, but is not limited to cheating, plagiarizing, fabricating information or citations, failing to document sources, facilitating acts of academic dishonesty by others, having unauthorized possession of examinations, submitting work of another person or work previously used without informing the instructor, or tampering with the academic work of other students. Students found to be dishonest will receive academic sanctions. See the College policy at <http://undergrad.psu.edu/aappm/G-9-academic-integrity.html>.
- **Note to students with disabilities:** Penn State welcomes students with disabilities into the University's educational programs. If you have a disability-related need for reasonable academic adjustments in this course, contact the Office for Disability Services. For further information regarding policies, rights and responsibilities please visit the Office for Disability Services (ODS) Web site at: <http://equity.psu.edu/ods>. Instructors should be notified as early in the semester as possible regarding the need for **reasonable accommodations. Disability letters and accommodations are not retroactive.**
- **Registration policy:** During the drop-add period at the beginning of the semester, the Department of Comparative Literature encourages students to visit this and other courses in order to make informed judgments about which courses to take. After this drop/add period, however, only students registered in the course may remain; no student may late-add (or restore a dropped registration) after the third week of the semester without petitioning the department on a form available in the office, 466 Burrowes Building.

## Schedule

### Aug

- T 27 Introductions, syllabus
- What is the “novel”, and what is the “graphic novel”? What is “comics”, and how about “sequential art”?

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### Th 29 UNIT 1: DEFINING THE FIELD

- *Arguing Comics* (pp. 4-21)
- *God's Man* by Lynd Ward, and excerpts from *Modern Language Studies* (on Canvas)

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### Sept

- T 3 Sign up for group presentations and guiding class discussion.
- *Arguing Comics* (pp. 30-34, 63-66)
  - Excerpts from “Krazy Kat”, “Little Nemo in Slumberland” (on Canvas)

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|------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------|
| Th 5       | - <i>Arguing Comics</i> (pp. 43-51, 67-80, 138-141)<br>- Excerpt from “Seduction of the Innocent” (on Canvas)<br>- “Master Race”, “...And All Through the House”, <i>Wimmen’s Comix</i> , and <i>To The Heart of the Storm</i> by Eisner (on Canvas)      |                                                    |
| T 10       | - <i>Understanding Comics</i> : “Setting the record straight”, “The vocabulary of comics” (pp. 2-59)<br>- “Everywhere disappeared” by Patrick, “A short history of America” by Crumb, and excerpt from <i>Buddha</i> by Tezuka. (on Canvas)               |                                                    |
| Th 12      | - <i>The Oven</i> , by Sophie Goldstein. (on Canvas)                                                                                                                                                                                                      | Guest lecturer:<br>Irenae<br>Aigbedion             |
| T 17       | - <i>The Oven</i> , by Sophie Goldstein.<br>- Excerpt from <i>Unflattening</i> . (on Canvas) pp.1-37, 62.                                                                                                                                                 | Guest lecturer:<br>Irenae<br>Aigbedion             |
| Th 19      | No class today. Instead, you will attend <b>one</b> of three talks of the <u>Visualizing the Self in Flux</u> conference. Take notes, then post them on Canvas under the assigned Discussion forum.                                                       |                                                    |
| T 24       | <b>UNIT 2: THINKING AND RETHINKING THE CANON</b><br>Writing workshop: how to write a visual analysis according to Nick Sousanis.<br>- <i>Understanding Comics</i> : “Blood in the gutter” (pp. 60-93)<br>- <i>MAUS</i> by Spiegelman (Chapters 1-4 vol.1) | Presentation<br>group #1 on<br><i>MAUS</i> .       |
| Th 26      | - <i>MAUS</i> by Spiegelman (Chapters 5-6 vol.1)<br>- <i>Understanding Comics</i> : “Time Frames” (pp. 94-117)<br>- Notes on “postmemory” (on Canvas)                                                                                                     | Visual analysis<br>#1 due tonight.                 |
| <b>Oct</b> |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                           |                                                    |
| T 1        | - <i>MAUS</i> by Spiegelman (Chapters 1-2 vol.2)<br>- “Comics as Literature?” by Chute (on Canvas).                                                                                                                                                       |                                                    |
| Th 3       | - <i>MAUS</i> by Spiegelman (Chapters 3-5 vol.2)<br>- Excerpt from <i>Belonging</i> by Nora Krug. (on Canvas)<br>- <i>Understanding Comics</i> : The Six Steps. (pp. 162-184)                                                                             |                                                    |
| T 8        | - <i>Understanding Comics</i> “Living in Line” (pp. 118-137)<br>- <i>Safe Area Gorazde</i> by Joe Sacco. (pp. i-93)                                                                                                                                       | Presentation<br>group #2 on<br><i>Safe Area G.</i> |
| Th 10      | - <i>Safe Area Gorazde</i> by Joe Sacco. (introduction, bibliography, A note..., Special thanks, and pp. 94-161)<br>- “The Hateful Self” by Bartley. (on Canvas)<br>-                                                                                     |                                                    |
| T 15       | - <i>Safe Area Gorazde</i> by Joe Sacco. (pp. 162-227)<br>- Tomorrow (16 <sup>th</sup> ): attend the Lynd Ward Prize award ceremony.<br>-                                                                                                                 |                                                    |
| Th 17      | - <i>Arguing Comics</i> (pp. 102-106, 112-121, 146-164)<br>- <i>Superman: Red Son</i> (chapter: “Rising”)                                                                                                                                                 | Visual analysis<br>#2 due tonight.                 |
| T 22       | <b>MIDTERM EXAM</b><br>Today 25% of your final grade gets decided. Prepare accordingly.                                                                                                                                                                   |                                                    |

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| Th 24      | - “Art Spiegelman: Golden age superheroes were shaped by the rise of fascism” (on Canvas).<br>- <i>Superman: Red Son</i> (chapters: “Ascendant”, “Setting”)                    |                                                                          |
| T 29       | <b>UNIT 3: ETHNO-RACE, GENDER, SEXUALITY, IN GRAPHIC FORMS</b><br>- Excerpt from <i>La Borinqueña</i> (on Canvas)<br>- <i>Ricanstruction</i> (pp. 4-91)                        | Post your notes from the “Visualizing...” conference before class today. |
| Th 31      | - <i>Ricanstruction</i> (pp. 92-157)<br>- Excerpt from <i>Ms. Marvel</i> (on Canvas)                                                                                           | Presentation group #3 on <i>Ms. Marvel</i> .                             |
| <b>Nov</b> |                                                                                                                                                                                |                                                                          |
| T 5        | - Read your classmates’ notes from the “Visualizing...” conference and be prepared to discuss them in class.<br>- Excerpts from <i>Black Panther</i> . (on Canvas)             |                                                                          |
| Th 7       | - <i>Love and Rockets</i> : “Flies on the Ceiling”, “The Death of Speedy”, and excerpt from <i>La Perdida</i> . (on Canvas).                                                   | Presentation group #4 on <i>Love and Rockets</i> .                       |
| T 12       | - <i>Skim</i> (pp. 1-74)                                                                                                                                                       |                                                                          |
| Th 14      | - <i>Skim</i> (pp. 75-143)                                                                                                                                                     |                                                                          |
| 19 T       | <b>UNIT 4: TRENDING IN GRAPHIC NARRATIVES</b><br>- Excerpts from <i>Mom’s Cancer</i> by Fies, <i>Monsters</i> by Dahl, and “Comics and the Iconography of Illness” (on Canvas) |                                                                          |
| 21 Th      | - <i>My Favorite thing is Monsters</i> by Emil Ferris.<br>- <i>Understanding Comics</i> : “Show and Tell” (pp. 138-161)                                                        | Presentation group #5 on <i>My Favorite thing...</i>                     |
| 26 T       | Thanksgiving break                                                                                                                                                             |                                                                          |
| 28 Th      | Take a nap, rest, forget about this class for a week.                                                                                                                          |                                                                          |

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|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------|--|
| <b>Dec</b>                                                                           |                                                                        |  |
| 3 T                                                                                  | - <i>My Favorite thing is Monsters</i> by Emil Ferris until this page: |  |
|  |                                                                        |  |

|       |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                         |                                 |
|-------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------|
| 5 Th  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- <i>My Favorite thing is Monsters</i> by Emil Ferris. Until this page:</li> </ul> <div> </div> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- <i>Understanding Comics</i>: “A Word about Color” (pp. 185-192)</li> <li>- <del>Excerpt from <i>I swear I saw this</i> (on Canvas)</del>. I will explain this text in class.</li> </ul> | Visual analysis #3 due tonight. |
| 10    | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- <i>My Favorite thing is Monsters</i> by Emil Ferris. <b>Finish the book.</b></li> <li>- In-class: start working on “show and see” assignment (instructions will be given today).</li> </ul>                                                                                                                                                                                    |                                 |
| 12 Th | <p>Last day of class – Wrap up</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Show and see day (W.J.T. Mitchell exercise, or present an exercise on adaptation).</li> <li>- Absences will count double today (attendance too!)</li> </ul>                                                                                                                                                                                 |                                 |
| 17 T  | <p>Finals week</p>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                      |                                 |
| 19 Th | <p>This class does not have a final.</p>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                |                                 |