

# The Rhetoric of Comics

*Monday/Wednesday, 1:20–2:35 in Lathrop 210*

Meg Worley

Office hours in Lathrop 213B: Mondays 2:35–3:30, Fridays, 11:10–12:00, and by appointment

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## Course Description

What the heck IS a graphic novel? For that matter, what is a comic book? Is there a difference? And does it matter? How do words and pictures work against and with each other? We will spend the semester in pursuit of the answers to these questions, with the full knowledge that we may each find different ones, and we may find none at all. But we'll be smarter people for having tried.

We'll begin by sharpening our already-formidable powers of observation, while developing a vocabulary to describe what we're looking at. We'll then consider competing definitions (no one seems to agree), before doing a quick historical survey — origins, superheroes, so-called graphic novels, comic strips, and manga — before considering the future of comics.

Analysis rather than (or in addition to) enthusiasm is the central mode of the course, and our comics reading will be complemented with some theoretical essays. There will also be an emphasis on MAKING, because we'll understand the process more fully if we're not just spectators. Be assured, however, that artistic talent is not required; at no point will you be graded on the quality of your cartooning.

## Requirements & Grading

Attendance and participation	10%
Class blog	10%
Sketchbook	5%
Short assignments	2% x 10 = 20%
Midterm	15%
Research essay	15%
Final exam	25%

## Grading Scale

A+	96-100	B+	87-89	C+	77-79	D+	67-69
A	93-95 63-66	B	83-86	C	73-76	D	
A-	90-93 60-62	B-	80-82	C-	70-72	D-	

## Readings

Brunetti, Cartooning  
Madden, 99 Ways to Tell a Story  
Jurgens, The Death of Superman  
Ross, Kingdom Come  
Mignola, Hellboy I: Seeds of Destruction  
Vaughan, Scarlet  
Jacobson, The 9/11 Report  
Eisner, Dropsie Avenue  
Yang, American Born Chinese  
Johnson, Dark Rain  
Kôno, "Town of Evening Calm"  
Unita, Bunny Drop I  
Ôtsuka, Kurosagi Corpse Delivery Service  
Clowes, Ice Haven  
Assorted readings distributed by professor

## Course Policies

### Contacting Me

In general, email is the best way to reach me. I check it regularly, and I try to reply immediately. If you wrote and got

no reply after 36 hours or so, don't hesitate to write again. I respond well to nagging.

I'm not a big fan of telephones; they combine the disadvantages of email (distant, one-dimensional) with those of meeting up (real-time, high foot-in-mouth potential). But they are great for letting me know that you're going to be late for an appointment or to find out if I'm available if you're considering stopping by. And, of course, emergencies (hit by a car 10 minutes before the final exam, advisee calling from jail, etc.).

### **Attendance**

You get two days of sick leave to use however you need them. If you've got the creeping crud, by all means, take care of yourself. Be sure to talk to classmates about what happened in class; they will give you a better sense of the class than I can. And they will have taken some notes, unlike me. *You are responsible for all assignments that are due or given out in the class you miss.*

I'd rather you not miss *any* class. Every class you don't attend isn't just discussion you missed; it's also thinking you didn't do -- thinking that would have come in handy for assignments later on. In other words, every missed class handicaps you, even aside from grade penalties. As for those, your grade will drop 1/3 of a grade (i.e., a B+ will transmogrify into a B) for every class you miss after your sick leave is gone.

If athletic or other institutional obligations will cause you to miss classes, let me know at the beginning of the semester so that we can plan alternative assignments.

### **Lateness**

Everybody's late occasionally; it's no big deal. If you're frequently late, we'll have to have a little chat. I reserve the right to respond to persistent lateness with grade penalties (although I've rarely had to exercise that right).

Hit the loo before or after class; **one of my pet peeves** is people leaving in the middle of class (except for serious gastric distress, of course — please do not explode in class).

### **Participation**

Very, very, very, very, **very** important. I know some stuff, which I'm here to share with you, but most of our learning takes place when we're all together, talking. Not talking and not listening means not learning.

On the other hand, don't be that person who has to talk all the time and never stops to listen to others. I construe "participation" to mean both adding something to the conversation and taking something away from it.

### **Cellphone & Laptop Policy**

I'm not going to blow a gasket if your phone rings during class; I'm sure mine will ring at some point too. But *no texting during class*.

I'm all in favor of laptops in the classroom. But laptops are also a terrible temptation. Why not check Facebook/Twitter/Tumblr/email/4chan while that student is rambling on about that thing that you're not interested in? No one will know or care, right?

WRONG! For one thing, people *will* know. I can tell quite easily, even from a ways away, and I'll mark you down for participation. On top of that, it's obvious to the students around you, and for them it is both a distraction and an expression of disrespect. Lastly, there is a metric buttload of research showing that multitasking is worse-tasking: The more you do simultaneously (class plus email plus Twitter plus Portal 2), the worse you do all of it.

So, here's the deal: Use your laptop if you like, but use it only for class work. If I notice that you are doing other things on it as well, we will have a little chat. I reserve the right to forbid you to use your laptop in class if you are a flagrant multitasker.

### **Getting Help With Your Writing**

I am happy to help you with your work during office hours. If you're having trouble coming up with something to say, prepare for our meeting by thinking about what intrigues you most about the material. If you're having trouble with organization, come to our meeting with a rough outline or some bullet points of what you want to say. In general, preparing for meetings (and not just with me!) makes them more useful; the more you plan for them, the more you'll get out of them.

Of course, I'm not the only resource for help with your writing: I can't speak highly enough of the Writing & Speaking Center. Many of the best student essays I've read took a spin through the W&SC. No matter how good your work is, it will be better after a visit to the Writing Center, and the Speaking Center can help you put together a kickass presentation. You can get to their webpage via the portal and schedule an appointment online. They also have walk-in hours.

### **Disability Accommodations**

I am very happy to accommodate both learning and physical disabilities, and you can be assured that any confidential information entrusted to me will go no further.

Colgate has an office in the Center for Learning, Teaching, & Research that is devoted to disability support. Once you have contacted Academic Support & Disability Services, we will work together to make it happen.

## **Academic Honesty**

All the work you turn in must be your own, done for this class. The only exceptions are group work (where I will give you clear instructions about the process I expect) and quoting the work (text or image) of others, which must be correctly acknowledged and cited (I'll make my expectations clear there too). Bouncing ideas off of other people is a great habit to get into, and while the Honor Code doesn't require you to say "This idea is my own, arrived at in conversation with the Dalai Lama," it shows a lot of integrity to insert a footnote giving credit where credit's due.