

ENGLISH 136

Comics

Spring 2013 - 105 Wagner, 9:45-11:00am TR

<http://noendofneon.net/comix>

Adam Haley

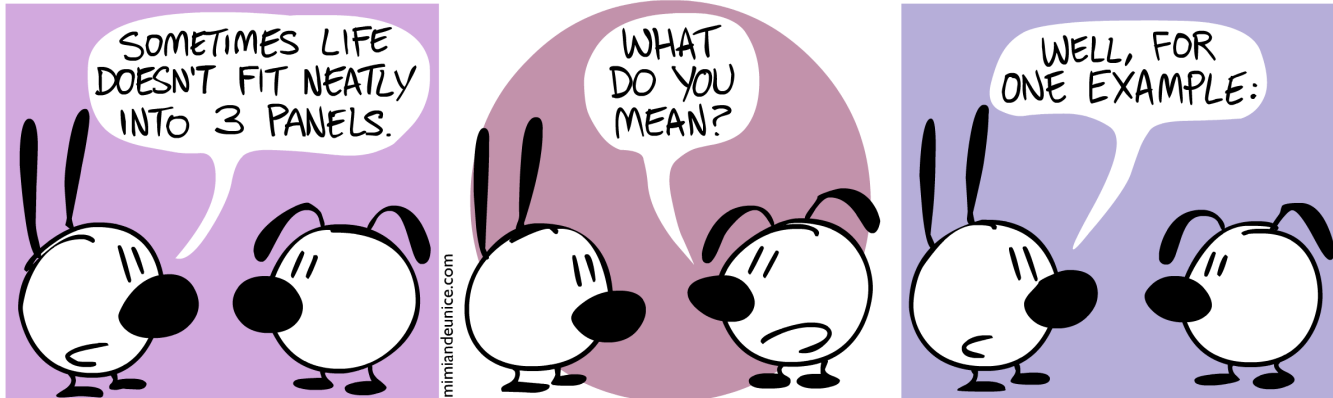
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Office Hours: W 12:15-1:45pm,

Th 11:15am-12:45pm

and by appointment



Disclaimer: every syllabus is a fiction. The syllabus as a genre implicitly says the following: over the next fifteen weeks, the handful of texts you read/discussions you have will adequately encapsulate, summarize, or represent the genre, time period, theme, or phenomenon in the course title. It says: you will come out of this course knowing all you need to know about [x], where [x] is anything from 18th century British drama or the contemporary American immigrant novel to science fiction or avant-garde poetry (or, for that matter, Newtonian mechanics or cultural anthropology). The fiction is that any syllabus could (or should!) ever be complete, that it could be sufficiently representative or exemplary of its topic, rather than being a highly subjective, particular slice of that topic.

The disclaimer, then: this is an incomplete, wildly idiosyncratic syllabus. It won't offer you a complete history or theory of the medium of comics, nor exposure to all of comics' most significant works. It will, I hope, give you a compelling but not exhaustive sense of what's out there, what comics can do, and why they might be worth pursuing. I aim for you to leave this class with a handle on why comics are far from the trivial, adolescent timesuck others often assume them to be—indeed, why they have been one of the most vital and interesting forms of cultural production over the last century. Our mode is exploratory: we will encounter a variety of texts from a variety of authors writing and drawing in a variety of styles and addressing a variety of subjects. We will use comics to think about the nature of image and its relation to text and meaning, to tackle the low culture/high culture distinction, to reconfigure our sense of what it is to read. Some of the things we read will be immediately entertaining; others, especially later in the course, will require more effort. Some will become fast favorites; others will rub you the wrong way or confuse you endlessly. Everything we'll read, though, is ultimately well worth reading. Buckle up and enjoy the ride.

Available at the PSU Bookstore in the HUB:

*Scott McCloud - *Understanding Comics* (ISBN: [006097625X](https://www.amazon.com/dp/006097625X))

Available at the Comic Swap (110 South Fraser St; info@comicswap.biz):

*Alison Bechdel - *Fun Home* (ISBN: [0618871711](https://www.amazon.com/dp/0618871711))

*Neil Gaiman et al. - *Sandman* volume 1: *Preludes and Nocturnes* (ISBN: [1401225756](https://www.amazon.com/dp/1401225756))

*Neil Gaiman et al. - *Sandman* volume 3: *Dream Country* (ISBN: [1401229352](https://www.amazon.com/dp/1401229352))

*Frank Miller - *The Dark Knight Returns* (ISBN: [1563893428](https://www.amazon.com/dp/1563893428))

*Grant Morrison and Dave McKean - *Arkham Asylum: A Serious House on Serious Earth* (ISBN: [1401204252](https://www.amazon.com/dp/1401204252))

*Nicolas Mahler - *Angelman* (ISBN: [1606995340](https://www.amazon.com/dp/1606995340))

*Mike Carey and Peter Gross - *The Unwritten* volume 1 (ISBN: [1401225659](https://www.amazon.com/dp/1401225659))

*Jason Shiga - *Meanwhile* (ISBN: [0810984237](https://www.amazon.com/dp/0810984237))

*Anders Nilsen - *Big Questions* (ISBN: [1770460470](https://www.amazon.com/dp/1770460470))

*Nate Powell - *Any Empire* (ISBN: [1603090770](https://www.amazon.com/dp/1603090770))

*Charles Burns - *Black Hole* (ISBN: [0375714723](https://www.amazon.com/dp/0375714723))

*Mat Johnson - *Incognegro* (ISBN: [1401210988](https://www.amazon.com/dp/1401210988))

Grading:

in-class participation: 15% ANGEL forum: 15% Twitter: 15%
outside reading report: 10% panel analysis: 10% tracing project: 20% minicomic project: 15%

Attendance: Regular attendance is **required**. Please come to every class, and please come on time. Your grade will be lowered if your attendance is poor, down to and including "F." Specifically, you are permitted **two (2!)** absences; after that, your grade begins to drop. Excused absences for illness or emergency are appropriate, but beyond that, let me repeat PSU policy: a student whose absences are excessive "may run the risk of receiving a lower grade or a failing grade," whether or not some of those absences are "excused." In other words: *don't miss class*. Pretty please.

Participation: I want to hear from you, in any and all forms you're comfortable with. This is why participation (in-class, Twitter, and ANGEL) totals nearly half of your course grade. What we're reading is not dry, stodgy, solitary Literature™. It should elicit responses from you—emotional, ethical, intellectual, or otherwise. I hope you'll feel comfortable weighing in during class discussions, and even if you're not normally inclined to talk in class, I'd encourage you to step outside your comfort zone here. We won't bite. (*Note: please don't bite.*) Those who still don't feel comfortable speaking up very often should focus extra energy on participating on ANGEL and Twitter, above and beyond the required postings.

ANGEL Forum: Each week, by Wednesday at midnight, you'll post a brief response on ANGEL to the week's reading. These should be more than mere value judgments ("I liked this book!" or "why did you assign this, you horrible bastard?!"); they should articulate something interesting or noteworthy about the reading. You may have observations or provocations about one or more of the readings in terms of visual aesthetic, comic form, style, theme, character, plot, and so on. Some moment in a text may have stood out to you for one reason or another. Or you might relate a given reading to other readings we've covered, other conversations we've had in class, or broader issues. Your response need only be a paragraph or so long (ideally more than "See Spot run. See Spot interrogate the relation between image and text. Interrogate, Spot, interrogate!"), but if you have more to say, by all means, let fly. These brief writings not only tell me that you're keeping up with the reading and thinking about the course material outside of class, they will also give me a better sense of the topics that interest and provoke you, so that our in-class discussions can be happier and more productive.

*(Note: if you want to make me really happy—and since I'm giving you grades, you probably should—start responding to and following up on each other's posts. This should be a **conversation**, ideally!)*

Twitter: You will be responsible for a minimum of **five** tweets a week that engage in some way with the course readings or with aspects of the class conversation. You need to start a Twitter account (if you have one, ensure that it is *public*, not locked) and send me an email identifying what your Twitter name is. Append our course hashtag (**#ENGL136**) to each tweet so your classmates and I can see it. Respond to others by using the @ symbol (e.g., @noendofneon). Ideally, a remark will come to you as you read for each class session, so keep your phone or computer handy if possible. You're also not only welcome but encouraged to tweet during class; most days, I'll have the feed displayed up on the screen. In general, it may be best to think of your tweets as *reactions* rather than *responses*; they don't need to be quite as composed or considered as the ANGEL forum posts. I suggest that two of your weekly tweets respond to other users' tweets on our hashtag. I will be posting questions and comments as well, off and on. (More on than off, in all likelihood.)

Academic Freedom: In English classrooms, academic freedom most frequently comes up in two contexts: charges of "offensiveness" on the one hand, "brainwashing" or "indoctrination" on the other. While you have the right to be free of gratuitous insult, you do not have the right not to be offended. I mean something very specific by this: at a university, you do not have the right to be protected from words, ideas, values, or beliefs—whether conservative or liberal, religious or secular, putatively obscene, or any other category—that you find distasteful. A key part of any education is the careful scrutiny of received ideas. By the same token, you should feel free to disagree, either verbally or in your written assignments, with any idea expressed in class, whether by me or by any student. Your grade will not be determined by how closely your thought agrees with mine or how aptly you mimic my own views in your papers and forum posts; rather, it will be the product of the quality of both your thinking and your expression of that thinking. Every semester, I happily give "A" grades to students with whom I strongly disagree, because they write and speak with such clarity and grace.

Penn State Sexual Harassment Policy AD-41: Penn State is committed to an open, sensitive, understanding, and responsive campus environment, and as such, sexual harassment of faculty, staff, or students will not be tolerated. Penn State's sexual harassment policy is available in greater detail [online](#).

Penn State Accommodations Policy: It is Penn State's [policy](#) not to discriminate against qualified students with documented disabilities in its educational programs. If you have a disability-related need for modifications in this course, contact the Office for Disability Services at University Park (located in 116 Boucke Building) at 863-1807, preferably as early as possible, and please let me know as well.

Schedule

DATE	READING DUE
1.8 (T)	McCloud - <i>Understanding Comics</i> chapter 1; Eisner - <i>Comics and Sequential Art</i> chapter 1
1.10 (R)	<i>Understanding Comics</i> chapter 2; Jason - <i>Why Are You Doing This?</i> ; xkcd #150 , #616 , #881 , #931 , and #933 excerpts: Spiegelman - from <i>Maus</i> ; Delisle - from <i>Pyongyang</i> ; Lappé and Goldman - Shooting War chapter 1 ; Gloeckner - from Diary of a Teenage Girl
1.15	<i>Understanding Comics</i> chapters 3-4; Andrews - Sarah and the Seed ; America: Elect! ; Google's Little Nemo doodle excerpts: Ware - from <i>Acme Novelty Library</i> ; Carré - from <i>Tales of Woodsman Pete</i>
1.17	<i>Understanding Comics</i> chapters 5, 6, 8; Dahl - "Sick"; Roselló - <i>The Well-Dressed Bear Learns to Fly</i> ; xkcd #784 , #817 , and #1110 excerpts: Thompson - from <i>Habibi</i> ; Powell - from <i>Swallow Me Whole</i> ; Lemire - from <i>The Nobody</i> ; Wood - from <i>Channel Zero</i>
1.22	Eisner - <i>Comics and Sequential Art</i> chapter 4; Eisner - <i>A Contract with God</i> excerpts: Tomine - from <i>Optic Nerve</i> ; Bell - from <i>When I'm Old and Other Stories</i> ; Woodring - from <i>Weathercraft</i>
1.24	excerpts: Pekar - from <i>American Splendor</i> ; Thompson - from <i>Blankets</i> ; Brown - from <i>Little Things</i> ; Backderf - from <i>My Friend Dahmer</i> ; Barry - from <i>One! Hundred! Demons</i>
1.29	Bechdel - <i>Fun Home</i> p. 1-150 (ch. 1-5)
1.31	<i>Fun Home</i> p. 151-232 (ch. 6-end) excerpts: Farmer - from <i>Special Exits</i> *** PANEL ANALYSIS DUE ***
2.5	Gaiman/et al - <i>Sandman</i> vol. 1
2.7	Gaiman/et al - <i>Sandman</i> vol. 3
2.12	Miller - <i>The Dark Knight Returns</i>
2.14	Morrison/McKean - <i>Arkham Asylum: A Serious House on Serious Earth</i>
2.19	film: <i>The Dark Knight</i> <i>Batman #1</i>
2.21	excerpts: Gaiman/Bisley - from <i>Batman: Black and White</i> ; <i>Detective Comics</i> #27 *** OUTSIDE READING REPORT DUE ***
2.26	film: <i>Dr. Horrible's Sing-Along Blog</i> ; Mahler - <i>Angelman</i>
2.28	Clowes - <i>The Death-Ray</i> ; Wood/Cloonan - from <i>Demo</i>
3.5 - 3.7	SPRING BREAK - go be somewhere warm and not-State-College-y
3.12	Carey/Gross - <i>The Unwritten</i> vol. 1
3.14	Shiga - <i>Meanwhile</i>
3.19	Nilsen - <i>Big Questions</i> p. 1-294
3.21	<i>Big Questions</i> p. 295-end
3.26	Powell - <i>Any Empire</i> (no page #s; go roughly to the midway point)
3.28	<i>Any Empire</i>
4.2	Burns - <i>Black Hole</i> (beginning through "Under Open Skies")
4.4	<i>Black Hole</i> ("The Woods" to end) *** TRACING PROJECT DUE ***
4.9	Johnson - <i>Incognegro</i> ; Arnold/Koslowski - <i>BB Wolf and the Three LPs</i>
4.11	excerpts: Baker - from <i>Nat Turner</i> ; Sacco - from <i>Palestine</i> ; Satrapi - from <i>Persepolis</i>
4.16	Hines - <i>Duncan the Wonder Dog</i> p. 1-195
4.18	<i>Duncan the Wonder Dog</i> p. 196-end
4.23	Clowes - <i>Ice Haven</i>
4.25	*** MINICOMICS DUE *** ; minicomic expo!

The full minicomic project (with reflection writeup) will be due on **Wednesday, May 1st by 11:59pm.**