

Introduction to Comics

ENGL 20

Fall 2025 Section 01 In Person 3 Unit(s) 08/20/2025 to 12/08/2025 Modified 08/15/2025

Course Information

Course Description

Due to three major superhero “crazes”—one occurring during the late thirties/early forties, one occurring during the sixties, and one occurring now—U.S. comics have become particularly associated with superheroes. For our class, however, we shall attempt to develop a wider view of the field, exploring U.S. comics as a medium rich in a wide variety of genres and forms and attracting a surprisingly diverse readership. For the first half of the semester, we will trace the history of the comic book from its pulp origins to now. In the second half, we will read and analyze contemporary works. Throughout the semester, we will pay particular attention to the U.S. comic book’s long association with migrants, the working class, and marginalized communities.

Course Learning Management and Messaging

Course materials such as syllabus, readings, handouts, notes, and assignment instructions can be found on the Canvas learning management system course website. Please set your Canvas notifications so that you receive announcements, which will be sent out periodically. You are responsible for monitoring Canvas and completing the required Canvas modules throughout the semester.

Course Description and Requisites

Approaching the graphic novel as a form of popular literature, students examine the narrative and textual aspects of the form including the function of the text, its integration with the graphics, and formal aspects of narrative such as plot, character, theme, and symbol.

GE Area(s): C2. Humanities

Letter Graded

Classroom Protocols

Generative-AI Policy

All use of generative AI/ large LLMs at any stage of your course work is wholly prohibited. This course is designed to improve your skills of analysis and critical thinking, and the use of generative AI is an impediment to these goals. Again, no AI usage is allowed for any coursework in this class.

Academic Dishonesty

All students are responsible for knowing and observing University policies regarding academic dishonesty. See University policy: "[Academic Integrity](#)".

Classroom Protocol

You need to participate, complete the required module activities on time, and be courteous to your peers and to your teacher.

Program Information

Welcome to this General Education course.

SJSU's General Education Program establishes a strong foundation of versatile skills, fosters curiosity about the world, promotes ethical judgment, and prepares students to engage and contribute responsibly and cooperatively in a multicultural, information-rich society. General education classes integrate areas of study and encourage progressively more complex and creative analysis, expression, and problem solving.

The General Education Program has three goals:

Goal 1: To develop students' core competencies for academic, personal, creative, and professional pursuits.

Goal 2: To enact the university's commitment to diversity, inclusion, and justice by ensuring that students have the knowledge and skills to serve and contribute to the well-being of local and global communities and the environment.

Goal 3: To offer students integrated, multidisciplinary, and innovative study in which they pose challenging questions, address complex issues, and develop cooperative and creative responses.

More information about the General Education Program Learning Outcomes (PLOs) can be found on the [GE website \(https://sjsu.edu/general-education/ge-requirements/overview/learning-outcomes.php\)](https://sjsu.edu/general-education/ge-requirements/overview/learning-outcomes.php).

Course Learning Outcomes (CLOs)

GE Area C2: Humanities

Area C Arts and Humanities courses help students to respond subjectively as well as objectively to aesthetic experiences and to develop an understanding of the integrity of both emotional and intellectual responses. C2 Humanities courses encourage students to analyze and appreciate works of philosophical, historical, literary, aesthetic, and cultural importance.

GE Area C2 Learning Outcomes

Upon successful completion of a C2 course, students should be able to:

1. analyze and understand works of philosophical and humanistic importance, including their temporal and cultural dimensions;
2. explore and articulate their own subjective aesthetic and intellectual responses to such texts;
3. analyze and assess ideas of value, meaning, and knowledge, as produced within the humanistic disciplines; and
4. research and write effective analyses of works of the human intellect and imagination

Writing Practice: Students will write a minimum of 1500 words in a language and style appropriate to the discipline.

Course Materials

Required Texts

The following texts can be purchased through the bookstore or any other bookseller:

Maus I: A Survivor's Tale: My Father Bleeds History, Art Spiegelman; ISBN 9780394747231
Roaming, Jillian Tamaki and Mariko Tamaki; ISBN 9781770464339

Students are also required to have and use a Hoopla account, provided free from the San Jose Public Library. We will be reading the following titles through Hoopla (free to checkout):

Excerpts from *Amazing Spider-Man Masterworks Vol. 1*, Lee and Ditko; ebook in Hoopla
Excerpt from *The Dark Knight Returns*, Frank Miller; ebook in Hoopla
Excerpt from *Watchmen*, Alan Moore; ebook in Hoopla
Ms Marvel Vol. 1: No Normal, G. Willow Wilson, Adrian Alphona; ebook in Hoopla
Excerpt from *The Girl from H.O.P.P.E.R.S.*, Jaime Hernandez; ebook in Hoopla

Other Readings

All other readings will be provided as PDFs. These include a large variety of comics from the late 1930s to now (see the below schedule for specifics), as well as excerpts from:

Comic Book History of Comics, Fred Van Lente and Ryan Dunlavey (PDF)
Understanding Comics: The Invisible Art, Scott McCloud (PDF)
Invisible Men: The Trailblazing Black Artists of Comic Books, Ken Quatro (PDF)

Pretty in Ink: North American Women Cartoonists, Trina Robbins (PDF)

American Comic Book Chronicles: The 1950s (PDF)

Maus II: A Survivor's Tale: And Here My Troubles Began, Art Spiegelman (PDF)

Course Requirements and Assignments

SJSU classes are designed such that in order to be successful, you are expected to spend a minimum of forty-five hours for each unit of credit (normally three hours per unit per week), including preparing for class, participating in course activities, completing assignments, and so on.

Reading

You will be assigned reading before every class, whether online or in-person. These reading are the central component of our class, and it is absolutely essential that you keep up with them.

Assignments

Three Exams: In the first half of the semester, students will complete three in-person, closed-book exams delivered through Canvas. The exams will require students to demonstrate basic comprehension of U.S. comics history and key aspects of the form. They will include essay questions, requiring in-depth analysis of specific comics and genres.

Seminar Essay: At the end of the semester, students will write an essay analyzing the thematic and formal components of one comic book, considering its place in the larger history of U.S. comics.

Short Comics: NO DRAWING ABILITY REQUIRED. One of the best ways to understand the distinct language of comics is to experiment with the comics page. So, over the course of the semester, students will complete a comic strip and a one-page narrative comic. Technical ability is not judged in the evaluation of these comics.

Module Participation: The last crucial element of this class is simply participation. Included in class modules will be required discussion board threads and sporadic short assignments. Students will receive 100 for participation when these required module elements are completed, and 0 when they are not.

Grading Information

Grading Policy

3 Exams 60%

Exam # 1 15%

Exam # 2 22.5%

Exam # 3 22.5%

Seminar Essay 15%

Comics 10%

Participation (Module Completion): 15%

A missed exam will result in a zero, and late papers or other assignments will be docked up to one full letter grade each day they are late.

About Grades

The Department of English reaffirms its commitment to the differential grading scale as defined in the SJSU Catalog ("The Grading System"). Grades issued must represent a full range of student performance: A= excellent; B= above average; C= average; D= below average; F= failure. Courses graded according to the A, B, C, No Credit system shall follow the same pattern, except that NC shall replace D or F. In such cases, NC shall also substitute for W (or Withdrawal) because neither grade (NC or W) affects students' GPA.

A (92-100); A- (90-91); B+ (88-89); B (82-87); B- (80-81); C+ (78-79); C (70-77); C- (70-71); D+ (68-69); D (62-67); D- (60-61); F (<60)

University Policies

Per [University Policy S16-9 \(PDF\)](http://www.sjsu.edu/senate/docs/S16-9.pdf) (<http://www.sjsu.edu/senate/docs/S16-9.pdf>), relevant university policy concerning all courses, such as student responsibilities, academic integrity, accommodations, dropping and adding, consent for recording of class, etc. and available student services (e.g. learning assistance, counseling, and other resources) are listed on the [Syllabus Information](https://www.sjsu.edu/curriculum/courses/syllabus-info.php) (<https://www.sjsu.edu/curriculum/courses/syllabus-info.php>) web page. Make sure to visit this page to review and be aware of these university policies and resources.

Course Schedule

This schedule is subject to change with fair notice.

Week	Date	Topics, Readings, Assignments, Deadlines
	Aug 20	CLASS TOPIC: Myths of U.S. Comic Books; Introductions HOMEWORK: Read "Early Comic Strips" (PDF in Canvas); "CBHoC 1: Comic Strips" (PDF in Canvas); <i>Understanding Comics</i> (Chapter 1, pp. 1-23)

Week	Date	Topics, Readings, Assignments, Deadlines
1	Aug 25	CLASS TOPIC: Comic Strips HOMEWORK: Read <i>Action Comics</i> #1 (PDF); <i>Action Comics</i> #8 (first story; PDF) <i>Superman</i> #53 (first story; PDF); <i>CBHoC</i> 2: Pulp (PDF); <i>CHoC</i> 3: First Comics/ Early Superheroes (PDF)
1	Aug 27	CLASS TOPIC: Early U.S. Comic Books, Superman HOMEWORK: Read <i>Detective Comics</i> #27 (first story; PDF); <i>Detective Comics</i> #33 (first story; PDF); <i>Sensation Comics</i> # 1 (first story; PDF); <i>Captain America Comics</i> # 1 (first story, PDF); <i>CBHoC</i> 4: Early Comics Industry (PDF)
2	Sep 1	HOLIDAY
2	Sep 3	CLASS TOPIC: Early Superheroes and Pulp Heroes; look through <i>Mystery Men</i> as a class HOMEWORK: Read <i>Young Romance</i> #1 (PDF); Excerpts from <i>Love and Marriage</i>, <i>My Love Story</i>, and <i>Romantic Love</i> (PDF), excerpt from <i>Invisible Men</i> ("Clarence Matthew Baker," pp. 125-150, HOOPLA); <i>CBHoC</i> 5: Romance Comics (PDF)
3	Sep 8	CLASS TOPIC: Romance Comics HOMEWORK: Read Excerpts from <i>Crime Does Not Pay</i> (PDF); Excerpts from <i>True Crime Comics</i> and <i>Law Against Crime</i> (PDF); <i>CBHoC</i> 6: Crime Comics (PDF)
3	Sep 10	CLASS TOPIC: Crime Comics Homework: Read Excerpts from <i>Two-Fisted Tales</i>, <i>Frontline Combat</i>, and <i>Our Amy at War</i> (PDF); excerpt from <i>Weird Fantasy</i> # 18 (PDF), excerpt from <i>Pretty in Ink</i> (PDF)
4	Sep 15	CLASS TOPIC: War Comics HOMEWORK: Study for Exam

Week	Date	Topics, Readings, Assignments, Deadlines
4	Sep 17	CLASS ACTIVITY: EXAM # 1 HOMEWORK: Read <i>Vault of Horror</i> #30 (PDF); <i>Tomb of Terror</i> #4 (PDF); <i>CBHoC</i> 7: Horror Comics (PDF); excerpt from <i>Invisible Men</i> ("Alvin Carl Hollingsworth," 150-173, HOOPLA)
5	Sep 22	CLASS TOPIC: Horror HOMEWORK: Read <i>CBHoC</i> 8: Senate Hearing to Comics Code (PDF); excerpt from <i>American Comic Book Chronicles: The 1950s</i> (PDF); excerpt from <i>Invisible Men</i> ("Orrin C. Evans," et al., 204-229)
5	Sep 24	CLASS TOPIC: The Comics Code HOMEWORK: Read <i>Fantastic Four</i> # 1 (first story, PDF), <i>Fantastic Four</i> # 4 (PDF), <i>X-Men</i> #1 (PDF), <i>Avengers</i> # 4 (PDF), <i>Understanding Comics</i> (Chapter 2, pp. 24-59); <i>CBHoC</i>: 9 Marvel Comics
6	Sep 29	CLASS TOPIC: Marvel in the Sixties; Jack Kirby HOMEWORK: Read <i>Amazing Spider-Man Masterworks Vol. 1</i> (<i>Amazing Fantasy</i> #15, pp. 7-18; <i>The Amazing Spider-Man</i> #1, pp. 19-33; <i>The Amazing Spider-Man</i> #4, pp. 92-113; HOOPLA)
6	Oct 1	CLASS TOPIC: Marvel in the Sixties; Steve Ditko HOMEWORK: Read <i>Superman's Girlfriend, Lois Lane</i> #106 (PDF), <i>The Amazing Spider-Man</i> #96 (PDF), <i>Green Lantern/ Green Arrow</i> #85 (main story only), <i>Green Lantern/ Green Arrow</i> # 86 (main story only)
7	Oct 6	CLASS TOPIC: Superheroes, Race, and Social Commentary HOMEWORK: Read <i>X-Men: God Loves, Man Kills</i>
7	Oct 8	CLASS TOPIC: <i>X-Men</i> and (White) Anti-Racism Home: Read <i>The Dark Knight Returns</i> # 1 (Hoopla), <i>Watchmen</i> #1 (Hoopla), <i>The Sandman</i> # 18 (PDF)

Week	Date	Topics, Readings, Assignments, Deadlines
8	Oct 13	CLASS TOPIC: Miller, Moore, Gaiman, and the "Mature" Mainstream Comic HOMEWORK: Read <i>Ms. Marvel Vol. 1: No Normal</i> (HOOPLA)
8	Oct 15	CLASS TOPICS: Ms. Marvel and the 21st Century Superhero HOMEWORK: Study for Exam
9	Oct 20	CLASS ACTIVITY: EXAM # 2 HOMEWORK: Read <i>excerpts from Zap #0 and #1</i> (CONTENT WARNING; PDF); <i>Binky Brown Meets the Holy Virgin Mary, Ebon #1</i>; Make a COMIC STRIP
9	Oct 22	COMIC STRIP DUE CLASS TOPIC: Underground Comics HOMEWORK: <i>Wimmen's Comix # 1</i> (PDF), Excerpts from <i>Pandora's Box/ Tits & Clits</i> (PDF)
10	Oct 27	CLASS TOPIC: Feminist Underground Comics HOMEWORK: <i>Gay Comix</i> Excerpts, <i>Alpha Flight</i> #106, <i>Gumballs</i> # 1
10	Oct 29	CLASS TOPIC: Queer Comics: From Underground to Marvel/DC HOMEWORK: Read excerpt <i>The Girl From H.O.P.P.E.R.S</i> (pp. 68-132, HOOPLA)
11	Nov 3	CLASS TOPIC: <i>The Girl From H.O.P.P.E.R.S</i> HOMEWORK: Read <i>Understanding Comics</i> (Chapters 3 & 4, PDF); Make A One-Page Comic
11	Nov 5	ONE-PAGE COMIC DUE CLASS TOPIC: <i>The Girl From H.O.P.P.E.R.S.</i> HOMEWORK: Read <i>Maus I: A Survivor's Tale</i>

Week	Date	Topics, Readings, Assignments, Deadlines
12	Nov 10	CLASS TOPIC: <i>Maus</i> HOMEWORK: Read Excerpt from <i>Maus II</i> (PDF)
12	Nov 12	CLASS TOPIC: <i>Maus</i> and Nonfiction Comics HOMEWORK: Nonfiction Comics PDF
13	Nov 17	CLASS TOPIC: Nonfiction Comics HOMEWORK: Study for Exam
13	Nov 19	CLASS ACTIVITY: EXAM # 3 HOMEWORK: Read Indie Comics Today PDF; Plan Seminar Essay
14	Nov 24	CLASS ACTIVITY: Indie Comics Today HOMEWORK: Read <i>Roaming</i> , Work on Seminar Essay
14	Nov 26-28	HOLIDAY
15	Dec 1	CLASS TOPIC: <i>Roaming</i> Homework: Finish <i>Roaming</i> , Work on Seminar Essay
15	Dec 3	CLASS TOPIC: <i>Roaming</i> Homework: Finish Seminar Essay
	Dec 8	SEMINAR ESSAY DUE CLASS TOPIC: Bringing it all Together
Final	Dec 12	Culminating Activity due by 10:45 AM, Friday, December 12