

THE GRAPHIC NOVEL

First Summer Session, 2024

CRN 40057 (4 cr. option) or CRN 40056 (8 cr. option)

This is a five-week, 4-credit course for students of all levels, with an 8-credit option for those who wish to pursue particular works and topics in depth or to create comics of their own. The class meets in person on Tuesday and Thursday evenings. Our books are listed on the following page.

Faculty:

Steve Blakeslee, Writing and Literature
E-mail: blakesls@evergreen.edu

Class Times and Location:

First summer session, Tuesdays and Thursdays, 6:00 to 9:30 P.M., with the exception of July 4. We are currently scheduled to meet in Seminar 2, D-3105.

First class meeting: Tuesday, June 25, at 6:00 P.M.

Description:

Over the past several decades, graphic novels have won numerous readers with their bold topics, innovative forms, and vivid artwork. These book-length, comic-art narratives and compilations employ a complex and iconic visual language. Combining and expanding on elements associated with literature, 2-D visual art, and cinema, the comics medium offers unique opportunities for reader immersion, emotional involvement, and even imaginative co-creation. Far from being kid stuff, the best comics can be serious works of both literary and visual art.

In *The Graphic Novel* we will explore the origins, development, and unique workings of these sequential narratives, including evocative wordless narratives (e.g., Lynd Ward's woodcut novel, *Gods' Man*); personal accounts by Navied Mahdavian (*This Country*) and Roz Chast (*Can't We Talk About Something More Pleasant?*); and contemporary fiction like Tillie Walden's *On a Sunbeam*. We will carefully examine each text at multiple levels of composition, from single frames to the story as a whole, and interpret their workings with the help of Scott McCloud's *Understanding Comics*. While this is not a studio art class, we will pursue drawing exercises that help us to develop an artist's-eye view of comics. Our overall goal is to develop an informed and critical perspective on this powerful medium.

Students who register for eight credits will read and research additional graphic works and artists or, with faculty approval, make comics of their own. Please note that this program requires regular attendance of classes held on campus; there are no options for remote/online participation in lieu of this in-person expectation. The faculty will offer alternative assignments, as appropriate, if conditions occasionally prevent students

from attending a class meeting. Whether you are new to comics, already a fan, or a committed cartoonist, come and join the fun!

Required Texts and Materials:

All of these titles are required for both 4- and 8-credit students and will be available in Evergreen's bookstore. Alternate editions are acceptable as long as they are complete. All ISBN numbers have a prefix of 978. I encourage you to obtain hard copies that will allow you to study the artwork in detail.

Scott McCloud, *Understanding Comics*. Harper Collins, 0060976255. First published in 1993, McCloud's guide, presented in comics form itself, is still the most informative and imaginative introduction to how comics work.

Emily Carroll, *Through the Woods*. McElderry Books, 1442465961. Carroll's free-flowing layouts, vivid colors, and unsettling story lines have established her as a master of the creepy tale.

Roz Chast, *Can't We Talk About Something More Pleasant?* Bloomsbury, 1632861016. Chast's quirky graphic novel captures the craziness and sorrow of taking care of her rapidly aging parents in New York. The author is a longtime cartoonist with *The New Yorker*.

Eleanor Davis, *Why Art?* Fantagraphics, 1683960829. Davis, who has won acclaim for her illustration work and for her collection *How to Be Happy*, here addresses a deep philosophical question with wit, whimsy, and calculated indirection.

Navied Mahdavian, *This Country: Searching for Home in (Very) Rural America*. Princeton Architectural Press, 1797223674. In 2016, Mahdavian and his wife left the Bay Area and resettled in (very) conservative rural Idaho. His gentle, original chronicle explores themes of identity, belonging, and the environment.

Tillie Walden, *On a Sunbeam*. First Second Books, 1250178138. Walden's feminist space romance unfolds in two different time frames and across much of the known universe. Be ready for fantastic locales, highly sympathetic characters, and evocative artwork.

Lynd Ward, *Gods' Man*. Dover, 0486435008. Published in 1929, this is the first and best-known of six wordless woodcut novels that Ward produced. The art is stark, symbolic, and expressionistic.

Plus, at least one additional graphic novel of the student's choice.

I will provide further materials via our program's Canvas site. Note: I suggest that you also purchase a 2X dome magnifier from the bookstore (stocked with our titles). This is an inexpensive and highly effective tool for exploring the details of comic art.

Format:

Our class meetings will include a variety of small-group sessions, seminars, brief lectures, drawing workshops, and perhaps a film screening or two. Students will develop and articulate their new understandings by means of response papers, program journals, bibliographic summaries, and other activities as assigned. Eight-credit students will pursue an individual project and an appropriately heavier reading load. Throughout the session our schedule will remain somewhat flexible so we can shape our activities around students' developing interests, abilities, and intentions.

Credit:

Four or eight quarter credits, with equivalencies distributed among 20th-century and contemporary literature, and comic art theory and practice. Award of credit will be based on overall participation and satisfactory completion of all assignments. You must submit a self-evaluation for this program as well as a formal evaluation of the faculty.

A Special Note: We will begin looking at both *Understanding Comics* and *Gods' Man* on the first night of class. Please be sure to have these texts in hand!

Questions? Please contact me anytime at blakesls@evergreen.edu