

**STATE UNIVERSITY OF NEW YORK  
COLLEGE OF TECHNOLOGY  
CANTON, NEW YORK**

**COURSE OUTLINE**

**ENGL 217 – COMIC BOOKS AS LITERATURE**

**Prepared By: Douglas V. Rose  
Revised By: Kirk Jones**

**SCHOOL OF BUSINESS AND LIBERAL ARTS  
ENGLISH/HUMANITIES DEPARTMENT  
MAY 2015**

**ENGL 217 – COMIC BOOKS AS LITERATURE**

- A. **TITLE:** Comic Books as Literature
- B. **COURSE NUMBER:** ENGL 217
- C. **CREDIT HOURS:** 3
- D. **WRITING INTENSIVE COURSE (OPTIONAL):** As determined by the instructor for Liberal Studies and Support Services
- E. **COURSE LENGTH:** 15 weeks per semester
- F. **SEMESTER(S) OFFERED:** Spring/Fall
- G. **HOURS OF LECTURE, LABORATORY, RECITATION, TUTORIAL, ACTIVITY:**  
3 hours per week, combination of lecture, discussion, and in-class small group activities
- H. **CATALOGUE DESCRIPTION:**

Comic books as literature? Certainly, skeptics will scoff at the idea. However, in recent years, comic books have become accepted as a respected form of literature by scholars, critics, and faculty alike. Students in this course examine the academic value of comic books and graphic novels through study of their history, similarity to other forms of literature, their own specialized literary and artistic techniques, and development as compelling narratives.

- I. **PRE-REQUISITES/CO-COURSES:** Expository Writing or Oral and Written Expression or an accepted transferred writing course, or permission of the instructor.
- J. **GOALS (STUDENT LEARNING OUTCOMES):**

<i><u>Course Objective</u></i>	<i><u>Institutional SLO</u></i>
<b>a.</b> <i>Evaluate</i> , and discuss the process by which comic books are developed.	<b>2. Crit. Thinking</b> <b>4. Inter-Intrapersonal Skills</b>
<b>b.</b> <i>understand</i> and <i>apply</i> specific literary and sequential art terms and techniques to assigned readings, thereby <i>creating</i> solid arguments about the literary nature of comic books.	<b>1. Communication</b> <b>2. Crit. Thinking</b>
<b>c.</b> <i>identify</i> and <i>compare</i> the principles used in the process of writing and illustrating a comic book	<b>2. Crit. Thinking</b>
<b>d.</b> <i>evaluate</i> which comics and graphic novels are truly literary, and <i>analyze</i> how they relate to their lives and the lives of others.	<b>2. Crit. Thinking</b> <b>4. Inter-Intrapersonal Skills</b>

- K. **TEXTS:** The following titles and authors are highly recommended. The instructor may choose which are best suited for his or her approach to the course and its contents.

*Batman: The Killing Joke*. Alan Moore and Brian Bolland. DC Comics, 1998.  
*Comics & Sequential Art*. Will Eisner. Poorhouse Press, 2000.  
*Concrete: Depths*. Paul Chadwick. Dark Horse Press, 2006.  
*Concrete: Killer Smile*. Paul Chadwick. Dark Horse Press, 2006.  
*Hellboy: Seed of Destruction*. Mike Mignola and John Byrne. Dark Horse, 2003.  
*Superman: Peace on Earth*. Paul Dini and Alex Ross. DC Comics, 1998.  
*Wonder Woman: Spirit of Truth*. Paul Dini and Alex Ross. DC Comics, 2001.  
*V for Vendetta*. Alan Moore and David Lloyd. DC Comics, 1989.  
*Watchmen*. Alan Moore and Dave Gibbons. Warner Books, 1995.

- L. REFERENCES:** The following texts, as well as updated ones, are recommended to be placed on reserve in Southworth Library.

*Alternative Comics: An Emerging Literature*. Charles Hatfield. U Press of Mississippi, 2005.  
*Arguing Comics: Literary Masters on a Popular Medium*. Jeet Heer and Kent Worcester, eds. U Press of Mississippi, 2004.  
*The Art of the Comic Book: An Aesthetic History*. Robert C. Harvey. U Press of Mississippi, 1996.  
*Artists on Comic Art*. Mark Salisbury. Titan Books, 2000.  
*The Classic Era of American Comics*. Nicky Wright. Contemporary Books, 2000.  
*Comic Book Culture: Fanboys and True Believers*. Matthew J. Pustz. U Press of Mississippi, 1999.  
*The Comic Book Heroes*. Gerhard Jones and Will Jacobs. 1997.  
*Comic Book Nation: The Transformation of Youth Culture in America*. Bradford W. Wright, 2001.  
*Great American Comic Books*. Ron Goulard. Publications International, 2001.  
*Men of Tomorrow: Geeks, Gangsters and the Birth of the Comic Book*. Gerard Jones. Basic Books, 2004.  
*Seal of Approval: The History of the Comics Code*. Amy Kiste Nyberg. U Press of Mississippi, 1998.  
*Seduction of the Innocent*. Fredric Wertham. 1954.  
*Writers on Comics Scriptwriting 2*. Tom Root and Andrew Kardon. Titan Books, 2004.

- M. EQUIPMENT:** Overhead (ELMO) projector; laptop computer for Power Point presentations; DVD player for DVDs. Multimedia classroom preferred.

- N. GRADING METHOD:** A-F

- O. MEASUREMENT CRITERIA/METHODS:**

Learning Activities:

1. Lecture-discussion.
2. In-class writing exercises and/or quizzes.
3. Small-group discussions on analyses of comic book stories and chapters from graphic novels.
4. Small group discussions and/or written reports on assigned topics about writers/illustrators of comic books and graphic novels.

Evaluation:

Grades will be determined from the following course components:

Analytical paper	25%
Response papers	25%
In-class writing exercises and/or quizzes	25%
Journal/Class participation	<u>25%</u>
	100%

**P. DETAILED TOPICAL OUTLINE:** Attached.

**DETAILED TOPICAL OUTLINE FOR  
ENGL 217 COMIC BOOKS AS LITERATURE**

- I. Introduction to course
  - A. Syllabus: course description, course objectives, policies, grading, assignments.
  - B. Questionnaire on students' experiences with and knowledge of comic books.
  - C. Small group examination of comic books and genres: funny animals, super heroes, romance, science fiction, war, western, etc.
  
- II. History of Comic Books and Graphic Novels
  - A. 19<sup>th</sup>-20<sup>th</sup> Centuries: The Platinum Age (1883-1933): newspaper strips
  - B. 20<sup>th</sup> Century:
    - 1. The Pre-Golden Age (1933-1938): newspaper strips and first comic books
    - 2. The Golden Age (1938-1945): super heroes, World War II
    - 3. The Atom Age (1945-1956): postwar characters and genres
    - 4. The Silver Age (1956-1970): rebirth of super heroes
    - 5. The Bronze Age (1970-1984): rise of underground comics and relevant stories in mainstream comics
    - 6. The Copper Age (1984-1992): Growth of independent comic book publishers; advent of mini-series and graphic novels; creation of specialized comic book stores
    - 7. The Modern Age (1992-present): decline of comic book publishing; renewal of comic book popularity
  - C. The Comic Books Codes: regulation of content, 1954-present
  
- III. Comic Book Terminology and Techniques
  - A. Terminology: panel; border; gutter; balloons (dialogue, thought, special); caption box, splash page/panel
  - B. Techniques: splash pages/panels; time & timing; flashbacks; transitions; motifs; lightning & shading; color; dialogue; sound effects; silent panels
  
- IV. Influential Writers and Illustrators
  - A. The Golden Age: Jerry Siegel & Joe Shuster; Bob Kane; Will Eisner; William Gaines; Jack Davis; Wally Wood; Al Feldstein; Harvey Kurtzman
  - B. The Silver Age: Stan Lee & Steve Ditko; Jack Kirby; Carmine Infantino; Joe Kubert; John Buscema; Sam Glanzman
  - C. The Bronze and Copper Ages: Frank Miller; John Romita, Jr.; Todd MacFarlane; Paul Chadwick; Alex Ross; Alan Moore; Dave Gibbons; Brian Bolland; Mike Mignola

- V. Comic Books and Graphic Novels as Narratives
  - A. Review of Literary Terms: traditional uses of character, plot, irony, imagery, figurative language
  - B. Single Stories: sequential art narratives in 4-8 pages
  - C. Extended Stories: sequential art narratives in two or more parts per issue, from 12-20 pages.
  - D. Complete Graphic Novels: sequential art narratives in book form, compiled from a series of individual issues or written/illustrated as one work
  
- VI. Determining Values of Non-Literary and Literary Comics and Graphic Novels
  - A. Mainstream Comic Books: Entertainment at Face Value
  - B. Comic Books as Literature: More Than Just a Pretty Picture

**Q. LABORATORY OUTLINE: NA**