

Spring 2024 ENG 400 Topics

Comics as Equipment for Living

Dr. Kyle Vealey

This seminar will take up comics and graphic novels as equipment for living. Examining comics as a unique and rhetorically vibrant form of storytelling, we will consider how the medium of comics can help us better understand what it means to be human in today's world. To do so, we will take a posthumanist approach in reading comics that challenge traditional notions of humanity, treat the human as a continually evolving category, and seek to contest the prevailing primacy of humans in visual narratives.

Truth & Authenticity in Creative Nonfiction

Dr. Kristine Ervin

No other literary genre is seemingly as fraught with debates about its definition as creative nonfiction. We often feel we have a firm grip on fiction (until we consider Truman Capote's *In Cold Blood*) or on poetry (until we read a prose poem), but creative nonfiction—with its blurred and blurring boundaries; with its swirling questions surrounding essential truth versus factual truth, memory, subjectivity, and allegiance to aesthetics; and with its often implied contract with its readers—begins and remains slippery with us. With memoir, autobiography, and the personal essay especially, these questions regarding truth and authenticity become further complicated when considering imagination as personal history or the influence of the postmodern perspective, with its attention to multiplicity and fragmentation.

In this course, you will engage with contemporary creative nonfiction texts, including memoir and the personal essay, and with current scholarship regarding the central questions and concerns of the genre—truth, yes, but also topics like identity formation, literary movements (confessionalism, literary journalism), form, and narrative. Along with exploring these subjects through a formal research project, you will also practice in art of writing creative nonfiction, thereby pushing the line of inquiry through multiple lenses to answer or to complicate the questions like “When does changing details bleed into just plain lying? What does truth in nonfiction mean, and does it even matter?”

Comics at the End of the World

Dr. Kyle Vealey

There is no doubt that our world is in crisis—socially, environmentally, economically. With our increasing collective experiences of large-scale, complex problems, such as climate change, racial injustice, and worldwide pandemics, it is also no wonder that such crises have become encoded in popular media such as comics. This seminar will examine comics and graphic novels depicting various end of the world scenarios (personal, social, environmental) and treat them, in

Kenneth Burke's words, as equipment for living. In other words, we will read these end of the world comics as public rhetorics that encapsulate and name our current apocalyptic anxieties. Through this examination, we will work to extract lessons and strategies from these visual narratives to make sense of ongoing global crises that threaten life as we know it.

Climate action planning

Dr. Cheryl Wanko

The English major doesn't offer any tools to help solve the climate crisis, right? Wrong! This seminar will showcase the unique strengths you as English majors are developing to tackle this global yet local problem. We'll approach the climate crisis by examining "cli-fi" or climate fiction to ponder how some authors have imagined our futures, by analyzing actual community Climate Action Plans – an increasingly important form of collaborative, interdisciplinary public writing – and by connecting the imagined with the present. We can't create a healthful and prosperous future for everyone without looking at where we are, imagining where we want to go, and then charting the steps to make our visions reality: that's what we'll do in this class.