

# CMX HUM 235 FALL 2024 Comics & Culture!



SAN FRANCISCO  
STATE UNIVERSITY

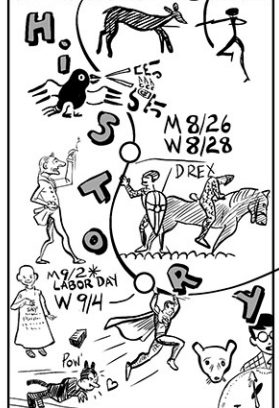
MW 11:00-12:15 BURK237 (+ZOOM)

NICK SOUSANIS@SFSU.EDU

STUDENT HOURS M 12<sup>30</sup>-1<sup>30</sup>; W 9<sup>45</sup>-10<sup>45</sup>  
office HUM581 OR ZOOM or by Appt

WE WILL READ, STUDY, AND ANALYZE COMICS ACROSS GENRES & CULTURES WITH AN EMPHASIS ON FORMAL ELEMENTS IN ORDER TO BETTER UNDERSTAND COMICS AS A DISTINCT MEDIUM/FORM. WE WILL ALSO ENGAGE IN THE PRACTICE OF HANDS-ON MAKING TO GET AN INSIDER'S VIEW OF HOW TO UNIQUELY CONVEY MEANING IN COMICS!

## SCHEDULE



## THEORY



## MATERIALS

NOTEBOOK/SKETCHBOOK  
DRAWING TOOLS -

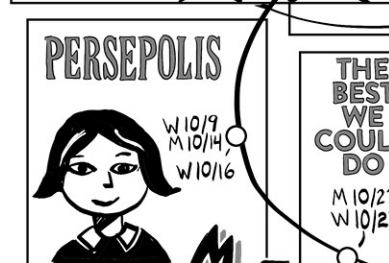
- PEN, PENCIL,
- COLOR, A BONUS

## MAJOR READINGS

- THE BEST WE COULD DO THI BUI
- MARBLES ELLEN FORNEY
- MARCH BOOK 1  
JOHN LEWIS, AYDIN, POWELL
- CITY OF GLASS  
MAZZUCHELLI, KARASIK
- PERSEPOLIS (COMPLETE)  
MARJANE SATRAPI
- ROBOT DREAMS SARA VARON
- MS. MARVEL V1 (NO NORMAL)  
WILSON, ALPHONA
- AMERICAN BORN CHINESE  
GENE LUEN YANG

## \*INSTRUCTOR-SUPPLIED READS

- \* VISIT COMIX EXPERIENCE FOR A DISCOUNT - THEY ROCK!



## ASSESSMENT

**STUDENT HOURS (5%):**  
TALK COMICS, ASK QUESTIONS, HELP ME GET TO KNOW YOU!

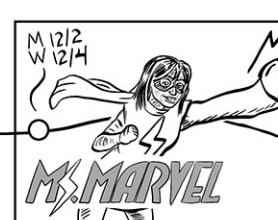
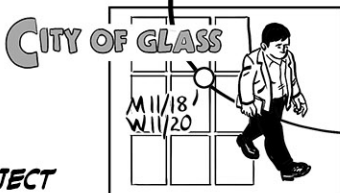
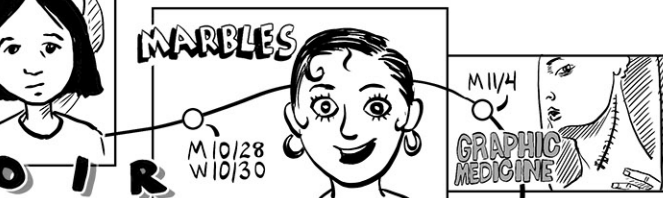
**ONGOING MINI-ASSIGNMENTS (25%):** FREQUENT IN-CLASS & AT-HOME DRAWING & COMICS-MAKING EXERCISES. NO PRIOR DRAWING EXPERIENCE NECESSARY!! EVALUATION ON COMPLETION NOT SKILL. EMPHASIS ON CURIOSITY + WILLINGNESS TO DIVE IN AND HAVE FUN!

**VISUAL ANALYSIS/ANNOTATION PROJECT (20%):** TRACE, SCAN, REDRAW INSTRUCTOR-SUPPLIED COMICS PAGES & ANNOTATE DIRECTLY ON. OBSERVATION AND DEDUCTION ARE KEY - UNRAVEL AND EXPLAIN AUTHOR'S CHOICES.

**TAKE-HOME MIDTERM (20%):**  
1) MINI-ESSAY 2) VISUAL ANALYSIS  
3) COMICS CONSTRUCTION EXERCISE

\* LET ME KNOW IF YOU DON'T WANT ME TO SHARE ANY OF YOUR IMAGES ON SOCIAL MEDIA. - NS

WE WILL STUDY  
AND  
WE WILL PLAY  
& WE WILL SEE  
THAT THOSE ACTIVITIES  
AREN'T SO DIFFERENT.



MAKE A COMIC +  
MINI-REFLECTIVE  
ESSAY

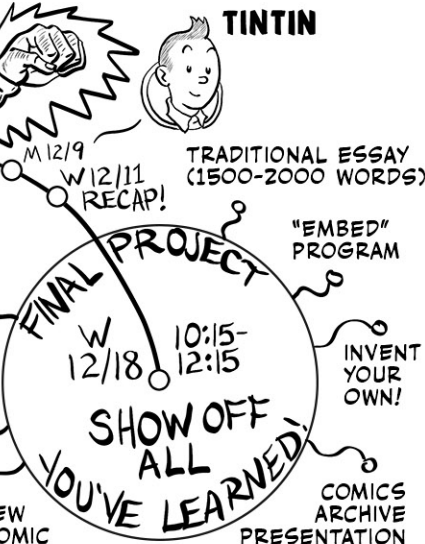
**FINAL (30%):** TRY A SUGGESTED FORMAT OR INVENT YOUR OWN - CREATIVE, CRITICAL, OR EDUCATIONAL!

COMICS IN THE  
CLASSROOM -  
LESSON PLAN,  
SYLLABI, ...

REVIEW  
AS COMIC



**NOTE:** YOUR HEALTH, YOUR LIVES ALWAYS COME FIRST. DEADLINES ARE IMPORTANT BECAUSE THEY KEEP THE CONVERSATION MOVING, BUT LIFE IS BIGGER, SO THINGS ARE FLEXIBLE. COMMUNICATE AND WE'LL WORK IT OUT TOGETHER.



San Francisco State University: Comics Studies  
**CMX/HUM 235 Comics & Culture** (formerly CMX325)  
Fall 2024

Class Meetings: M/W 11-12:15 Burk 237 [+ ZOOM]

Instructor: Nick Sousanis [sousanis@sfsu.edu](mailto:sousanis@sfsu.edu) Office HUM 581

Student Hours: M 12:30-1:30; W 9:45-10:45 or by appointment (in-person or Zoom)

**A Note about Now:** Let me acknowledge to start off, current circumstances aren't quite normal, and our expectations must reflect that. As understanding as I typically am about deadlines and workload, I'm even more so now. Your health, your lives *should always* come first and we can work out solutions for whatever is going on (with a good channel of communication). I want to see the work we do together as helpful to what you are experiencing and not an added burden. This doesn't mean we won't work hard and that it won't be challenging, just that it serves you as something meaningful and relevant to find your own ways into it. Deadlines are important, because they allow us to keep the conversation moving and keep learning from one another, but life is bigger, always, and definitely now, so I'll remain flexible and we'll work it out together.

The course will be in person, but to continue to take care of each other may mean masking in indoor spaces, and we'll do our best with ventilation/filtration. If you're sick – please stay home and take care of yourself. I will be streaming the class on zoom and recording it, so even if you can't make it, you can tune in live or watch when you can to access what we did, and all the instructions and resources will be available on Canvas. The key in all of this is to reach out and let me know what's going on and what you need. As a teacher, I see my role as being there *to support you in where you are going*. With that said, on with what we'll do together...

**Overview:** This course will introduce the scholarly study of comic books and graphic novels, with a particular focus on the formal elements that differentiate comics from other forms including prose, film, and poetry, and the history of the comic book format from its inception in the 1830s to today. The different ways that meaning is made in comics form will be demonstrated through close readings and discussion of significant global texts alongside readings of comics scholarship. Students will also get a first-hand understanding of what it means to make comics through various in-class and take-home comics-making and drawing activities.

**Philosophy:** *We will study and we will play and we will see that those activities aren't so different.*

**Student Learning Objectives:**

- To examine how comics uniquely convey meaning;
- To gain an understanding of comics as a distinct medium (in part, by comparison to other media, including literature, film, visual art, poetry, etc.);
- To have a broad understanding of the history and evolution of the comics medium, an awareness of existing and emerging genres and styles of comics across the globe as well as historically significant creators;
- To consider ways in which we can draw on what we've learned from comics and apply it to our work, to reconsider how we approach writing, art, presentations, etc.;
- Students should be able to describe the formal features of the comics form, and ways in which comics are distinct from film, visual art, and poetry;
- Be able to place a comic in its cultural context through close readings of its formal details;
- Articulate cross-cultural differences, similarities, and relationships between comics and related forms produced across the globe;
- Perceive and articulate – both in discussion, writing, and in comics – formal and historical relationships.

**Required Readings** (*Comix Experience* offers discounts on readings and all comics for class members with a printout of the syllabus – visit them and other SF comics shops!):

Thi Bui *The Best We Could Do*  
Ellen Forney *Marbles*  
John Lewis, Andrew Aydin, and Nate Powell: *March Book One*  
David Mazzucchelli, Paul Karasik: *City of Glass*  
Marjane Satrapi *The Complete Persepolis*  
Sara Varon *Robot Dreams*  
G. Willow Wilson and Adrian Alphona: *Ms. Marvel Volume 1: No Normal*  
Gene Luen Yang *American Born Chinese*

Instructor-supplied shorter works include: David B. *Epileptic (excerpt)*, Ben Passmore *Your Black Friend*, Ebony Flowers *Lines*, Hergé *TinTin*, Citizen 13660, Richard McGuire *Here*, Moore & Veitch *How Things Work Out*, Jiro Taniguchi *Walking Man*, & more. Highly recommended, but not required, Scott McCloud's *Understanding Comics*. In addition to these required texts and excerpts, we will supplement discussion with theoretical and critical texts, all of which will be available via Canvas or online.

**Required Materials:** Since we will be drawing regularly in this course, you will need to have a few simple and readily available materials on hand. You can of course get more than these but here are some basics:

- A notebook/journal/sketchbook of some sort
- Drawing tool of your choice (pen, pencil, brush pen, etc.) (Color options are nice too)

#### **Assignments and Evaluation:**

25%	Ongoing mini-assignments
20%	Visual analysis/annotation project
20%	Midterm take-home exam
5%	Visit with instructor during <i>Student hours</i> or by appointment.
30%	Final project + advance Proposal for final

**Student Hours (5%):** You are required to visit with professor during *student hours* or make an appointment for a different time to check in and address any questions you wish to explore. To receive full credit – you must show up at least once. This is an opportunity to talk about your ideas one-on-one with your professor and help me get to know where you are coming from better. Take advantage of it!

**Ongoing Mini Assignments (25%):** A key component of this course will consist of frequent in-class or take-home quick drawing and comics-making exercises. You will keep a composition notebook or journal in which to do the majority of these assignments and then upload them to Canvas. Please note that **prior drawing experience is not necessary**, and that every exercise can be done by anyone of any skill level or background in drawing. It is expected that these activities will provide additional insight into understanding comics and what goes into making them. And, from past experience, I know that they will not only be fun to do, but they will likely awaken your interest in drawing. Student evaluation will be based entirely on *completion not skill*. Emphasis will be placed on inventiveness, curiosity, effort, and willingness to dive in and try with vigor something you haven't – we want to build a portfolio of your explorations that should be rich in depth.

You will submit these assignments by first taking a quick, clean digital photo of the work (cropping the photo if possible), and posting each assignment to Canvas before the start of class on the day it is due. For each assignment you will enter your **last name first**, followed by your first, then post your image(s), add any reflective text required (I will specify the particular requirements for each assignment), or, in some cases, upload a PDF, PPT, or other file. This will serve as a gallery to share with your classmates, as well as a place for us all to respond to your work. For each assignment, I will specify where you should upload it.

**Visual Analysis/Annotation Project (20%):** For this assignment, you will choose from a set of instructor-supplied comics pages to visually annotate and analyze. This means that you will either trace the pages, redraw in your own hand, scan, and then annotate the pages with notes and diagrammatic elements, in which

you explain the effect of the various stylistic and other creative elements of the page. In other words, you will need to offer analytical commentary about why certain interesting creative decisions seem to have been made, and what they do to your understanding of the comic. The emphasis here is on observation – how much can you notice? – and what can you deduce from everything you have observed. The assignment is designed to help you think about the construction of a comic – how is it made, why is it made in this way, and what is the effect of it being made this way?

**Midterm Exam (20%):** The midterm take-home exam is mixed format, and will include visual analysis, a brief essay assignment, and a comics construction exercise.

**Final Project (30%):**

**Proposal:** Before you begin the final project, you will be required to submit a formal proposal outlining your motivations, goals, and the form the project will take. The proposal must be between 100-150 words long, and should clearly state how your project relates to course material.

The final project may take any of the following suggested forms or others of your own imagining. Whichever route you decide upon, it should demonstrate what you've learned about comics over the term and the creative, educational, or analytical ways you can put that understanding to use. You are invited to discuss ideas with me and the class to help shape your project and aid others in figuring out their own:

- 1) **Make a Comic:** A creative work showing off your understanding of the form, any subject. If the work does not directly address theory or reflect on its creation (which it need not) – you will also submit a reflective essay of 500-1000 words that outlines how you used the form, explains your motivations and aims for the project in relation to the overall course content. This may also include the Comics Studies *Embed Program* – wherein a student cartoonist “embeds” in another department or unit on campus, and makes a comic in collaboration with them. I.e. spend time with biology faculty/students – make a comic explaining some project they are working on.
- 2) **Comics in the Classroom:** Devise a lesson plan, unit plan, syllabus, or something to that effect for a classroom or some other educational setting you might see yourself working in such as an afterschool program. You would create the necessary materials that you would share with students for the work and your supervisor to make the case for it.
- 3) **Traditional Essay:** For this assignment, you will draw on what you have learned about the comics form to write an analytical essay of 1500-2000 words. Your essay should have a clearly-outlined thesis—that is, it should have an argument, and be an attempt to convince the reader of something concerning the comic. What does this comic mean, how does it achieve its effects, and what is the value of reading the comic the way you do? Your essay must focus on a primary text (or texts, if your approach is comparative) we have read for the course, and while you are welcome to include secondary material (whether historical, theoretical, etc.), you are not required to do so.
- 4) **Review Comic:** For this assignment, you will pick a comic from outside the class material to review in comics form—that is, you'll be creating your own comic that describes, reflects on, and evaluates another comic. Your comic can take any form you like, but the result should display awareness, understanding, and use of the comics form as discussed in class. In addition, it should have a clearly-defined opinion about the quality of the comic that goes well beyond a simple binary (this is awesome/this sucks) evaluation. There is no specific length requirement, but your comic should represent a substantial engagement with the comic under review. If you genuinely feel like it is long enough to achieve this, it probably is.
- 5) **Research Presentation:** An opportunity to conduct original research in the library's *Thomas Bentley Rue Collection of Golden and Silver Age Comic Art* and present your findings. We are fortunate to have

access to Mr. Rue's boyhood collection, which consists of nearly 1,000 comics from the late 1930s to the early 1950s. <http://humanitiesliberalstudies.sfsu.edu/news-announce/prolific-comic-book-collection-donated-san-francisco-state> <https://oac.cdlib.org/findaid/ark:/13030/c8nc66v5/>

- 6) **Invent Your Own Project:** Finally, you have the option of inventing your final project. While there is no required format, your project, as with all of these, needs to address course material in some fundamental way. That is, your project should indicate an advanced understanding of the academic study of comics, whether or not it directly references course readings or in-class lectures and discussions. In order to ensure that your project will fulfill the requirements, this should be spelled out in your proposal, and you are encouraged to meet with me to discuss and help shape it.

**Course Outline:** Some changes to our outline may occur as we may end up devoting more time to some things or make room for ideas I hadn't anticipated. You will be apprised in class, as well as via email & Canvas. So that we all remain on the same page, you are expected to regularly check Canvas and your sfsu.edu account.

1. **M 8/26** – First day of Classes INTRO + Prehistory
2. **W 8/28** Early History  
**\*\* M 9/2** Labor Day NO CLASS
3. **W 9/4** Modern History
4. **M 9/9** Sequential Art/Modern History Concluded
5. **W 9/11** Time/Space
6. **M 9/16** Simultaneity
7. **W 9/18** Theory wrap-up
8. **M 9/23** Robot Dreams (Wordless Comics 1)
9. **W 9/25** Robot Dreams
10. **M 9/30** Wordless Comics + Image-Text & Multimodality
11. **W 10/2** American Born Chinese + Cartooning
12. **M 10/7** American Born Chinese
13. **W 10/9** Persepolis
14. **M 10/14** Persepolis
15. **W 10/16** Persepolis
16. **M 10/21** The Best We Could Do
17. **W 10/23** The Best We Could Do
18. **M 10/28** Marbles
19. **W 10/30** Marbles
20. **M 11/4** Graphic Medicine/Epileptic
21. **W 11/6** March  
**\*\* M 11/11** Veteran's Day NO CLASS
22. **W 11/13** March
23. **M 11/18** City of Glass
24. **W 11/20** City of Glass  
**\*\* NO CLASS M 11/21 – Thanksgiving**  
**\*\* NO CLASS M 11/23 – Thanksgiving**
25. **M 11/27** Ms. Marvel
26. **W 11/29** Ms. Marvel
27. **M 12/4** TinTin? TBD
28. **W 12/6** Last Day of Class – RECAP!

**Final Exam Wednesday December 18** 10:15 – 12:15 Project Sharing!

**Note:** I frequently share examples of what we do in class on my educational website/social media. Please let me know if you *do not* want me to share any of your images.

**Canvas:** We will be using Canvas for this class. Those of you unfamiliar with Canvas can find resources and assistance online as well as with the office of Academic Technology. You are automatically enrolled in Canvas for all of your courses registered at SFSU. *Academic Technology* website: <http://at.sfsu.edu>

Canvas log-in page: <https://canvas.sfsu.edu/canvas>

## Course Policies

**Classroom approach:** I consider learning as acquiring the tools to follow one's own curiosity, and thus teaching means providing a framework, establishing an environment for participants to explore and thrive. Rather than being out in front, I see my role as accompanying students on a journey we all make together.

**Classroom Policies:** This is a class that thrives on interaction, improvisational collaboration, so it's best if everyone is in attendance and on time. That said, given the circumstances and in regards to my note at top – our expectations will be different. The main thing is to keep me posted on what's going on if you can't join in regularly – we can work with anything from a point of communication.

**Late Assignments:** Again, as above, I'd like to see deadlines observed or clear communication about missing them if necessary – conversations grow best when we're working together. But understanding, flexibility, and grace are essential now more than ever – so keep me updated as you can, and we can make it work.

**Contact and Feedback:** You are encouraged to visit me during student hours or make an appointment to discuss class, raise questions, or just check in. When emailing me, please use your "sfsu.edu" account when possible and put "CMX 325" and topic in the subject line so I am sure to address it more quickly.

**Plagiarism:** Plagiarism is a form of cheating or fraud; it occurs when a student misrepresents the work of another as his or her own. Plagiarism may consist of using the ideas, sentences, paragraphs, or the whole text of another without appropriate acknowledgment, but it also includes employing or allowing another person to write or substantially alter work that a student then submits as his or her own. Any assignment found to be plagiarized will be given an "F" grade. All instances of plagiarism in the College of Liberal & Creative Arts will be reported to the Dean, and may be reported to the University Judicial Affairs Officer for further action.

**Accommodations for Students with Disabilities:** Students with disabilities who need reasonable accommodations are encouraged to contact the instructor. The Disability Programs and Resource Center (DPRC) is available to facilitate the reasonable accommodations process. The DPRC is located in the Student Service Building and can be reached by telephone (voice/TTY 415-338-2472) or by email [dprc@sfsu.edu](mailto:dprc@sfsu.edu).

**University Policy on Sexual Harassment & Violence:** SF State fosters a campus free of sexual violence including sexual harassment, domestic violence, dating violence, stalking, and/or any form of sex or gender discrimination. If you disclose a personal experience as an SF State student, the course instructor is required to notify the Dean of Students. To disclose any such violence confidentially, contact:

**The SAFE Place** - (415) 338-2208; [SAFE Place website http://www.sfsu.edu/~safe\\_plc/](http://www.sfsu.edu/~safe_plc/)

**Counseling and Psychological Services Center** - (415) 338-2208; [Counseling and Psychological Services Center website http://psyservs.sfsu.edu](http://psyservs.sfsu.edu)

For more information on your rights and available resources see: [Title IX at SF State http://titleix.sfsu.edu](http://titleix.sfsu.edu)