

Art 348 - Graphic Narration

Rob Stolzer
Ext. 4065
Office: 188
Office Hours:
T/Th 11:00-11:50
or by appointment

Graphic narration, graphic novels, sequential art, comic strips, and comic books all amount to roughly the same thing: the marriage of the visual and verbal as a way of conveying a narrative. Your sequence might depict a person walking from one corner of this room to another, or it might portray a scene of some alien being leaping tall buildings in a single bound. How well you convey that sequence will determine how believable the world you've created will be. Joe Kubert, the co-creator of Sgt. Rock, and longtime artist on Tarzan, as well as a great many other characters, likened the creation of a comic book sequence to a clip from a movie. He felt that if the audience bought into the reality he created—suspended their belief, if only for a few minutes—he had done his job.

How do you get an audience to buy into your world? How do you convince them that your narrative world is worthy of suspended belief? Does it require photorealistic drawing abilities? Incredible feats of pointillism? Renaissance-level abilities with pen and ink? No. While those attributes certainly wouldn't hurt, creating a graphic narrative that someone cares about begins with characters that one cares about. No matter how they're drawn, the characters need to be fleshed out, so that the audience will care about what happens to them. Next, you need to think of your sequencing in a way that makes sense to the narrative you want to convey. How do you vary the camera angles? What sort of contrasts do you bring into the drawing? Do you use light and shadow as a way of drawing the viewer's eye from panel to panel? Does the written narrative help convey the intent of the visual narrative? Can the written narrative work as a visual element?

Art 398—Graphic Narration will focus on the art of visual/verbal narrative sequencing. You will be presented with a number of assignments that are meant to broaden the way you think about the art form. You will also be presented with historical and contemporary examples of graphic narration. This is not a new art form. It has been going on for hundreds, if not thousands of years:

Frolicking Animals – A small section of a long narrative scroll – 12th C. Japan.



The portion of the 12th century Japanese scroll and the 1942 Caniff daily strip do the same thing: they tell a story. The pieces accomplish their stories in very different ways, using different narrative devices, but they both use imagery to convey a sense of time, space, mood, narrative and movement.

Some goals for this class:

- ❑ To give you a broad introduction to different aspects of graphic narration.
- ❑ To help you hone your conceptual, narrative and technical skills.
- ❑ To introduce you to the work of contemporary and historic graphic novel/narrative artists.
- ❑ To convey the importance of research in your work.

I cannot emphasize enough the importance of research. Research sometimes means hitting the internet or books to find source material or inspiration. But research also refers to the work you do for yourself. That means doing thumbnail sketches, roughs, comps; any of the preliminary work necessary to produce the best graphic narratives you can create. Yes, the finished work is ultimately what is published, but it's the exploration beforehand that matters most. It's what allows you to play with your sequencing, characters, compositions and space, to ultimately discover the elements that do and don't work.

Assignments: You will have six graphic narrative assignments over the course of the semester, covering a variety of approaches. Please refer to the course schedule for pertinent dates and information:

- **Narrate Your Route to School** – Single page narration incorporating multiple panels and text. Use your own photographic or sketch imagery to present varied angles, perspective and compositions. Strongly consider grounds (fore-, middle-, back-), lighting, contrast, and the use of text. India ink with pen and/or brush. Due: Wednesday, February 7.
- **Thematic Narration** – The class will decide on a common theme as a basis for all of the stories, incorporating narrative devices from the movie “Citizen Kane”, which we will view in class. Please do not miss this viewing day (Monday, 2/12). Some possibilities to consider: growth, loss, revelation, family, relationships, decay, etc. Stories can be autobiographical or fictional. Two pages. Black and white. Pay close attention to character details, image composition, innovative uses of space, perspective, lighting and atmosphere. Black and white. Due: Monday, March 5.
- **Art History Narrative** – Create a one or two page sequence that incorporates an iconic scene from art history as the basis for the graphic narrative work. Artists/works to consider: Edward Hopper (*Nighthawks*, interior scene), Grant Wood (*American Gothic*, *Death on Ridge Road*), Vincent Van Gogh (*Bedroom in Arles*, *The Night Café*, *Café Terrace at Night*, *A Pair of Shoes*), Vuillard, Bonnard, Gauguin, Guston, Neel, Kahlo, red or black figure vases, etc. Source material can be used only once, so once you've run your choice by me, please write it down on the sign-up sheet. The story is of vital importance, especially in how it relates to the source material. Minimum of nine panels. Black and white, with some color optional. Due: Wednesday, March 21.
- **Luck of the Draw** – Each of you will randomly select an object/subject, location, and attribute. Using those selected elements, you will create a two-page minimum narrative that incorporates a beginning, a troubled/conflictual circumstance, and a resolution. Open media. Due: Wednesday, April 11.
- **Childhood Event/Memory** – A narrative sequence based upon a meaningful childhood event or memory that made you cognizant of something. This knowledge needs to be something that has remained with you all of these years later. One page minimum. Open media, but must include elements of collage. Due: Monday, April 30.
- **Open Narrative Assignment** – Propose your own concept for a narrative assignment. Minimum page length is two pages. Open media. Due: Wednesday, May 9.
- **Presentations** – Present a PowerPoint (or other format) presentation on the work of an assigned graphic narrative artist. Half of you will be presenting on contemporary artists, while the other half will be presenting on artists from graphic narration history. All presentations must include a minimum of 12 high quality images, supplemented with very brief biographical information about the artist. The bulk of the presentation should focus on the narrative work of the artist, keying in on his or her stylistic approaches, and the way in which he/she convey(ed) and interesting and/or innovative narrative. Your presentation grade will carry the same weight as an assignment grade, so please do not take this lightly. Please, no elaborate presentations with music, dancing girls or guys, the colors of the rainbow, fancy fade-ins/outs, etc. Keep it vanilla. Check the semester schedule for dates.

Text Book: *One! Hundred! Demons!* by Lynda Barry. Please refer to the class schedule for reading/discussion dates.

Grading: Each of your assignments (and presentations) will be graded separately. Your assignments will carry equal grade weight, giving you an idea of your grade at any point during the course. You will *almost always* have the opportunity to re-work an assignment for a better grade. The only exception is if you were late in handing in your assignment originally. You will suffer grade loss with late

work (half a grade for each class that the work is late), and you will not have the opportunity for resubmission with a late assignment. Please be warned that simply resubmitting work does not guarantee a better grade. You cannot make trivial changes to an assignment and expect to go from a “C” to an “A”. Many students receive the same grade that they received originally. Please note too, that my definition of a “C” is average. That means that you come to class, work only during class time, do enough to get by, take no or little risks in your work and barely participate in discussions/critiques. In terms of the artwork that you produce, I consider grades with the following criteria:

- A = Excellent work that displays thoughtfulness, risk-taking, daring, craft, and challenge.
- B = Good work that displays some of the elements above, but to a lesser extent. Less challenging work in general.
- C = Average work, with little or no extra effort put in outside of class. Work that is okay, but does not venture into uncharted territory; always plays it safe.
- D = Weak work that displays little drive, effort and motivation.
- F = Work does not meet the criteria of the class. Poor attempts at quality and effort.

Other elements that factor into your final grade are:

- Critique and discussion participation
- Improvement in your work/risk taking
- Quality of Research
- Attendance

Plagiarism is covered in the UWSP University Handbook, Chapter 5, Section 2, 14.03, and is considered academic misconduct subject to disciplinary action. In short: don't steal someone else's work and claim it as your own.

Attendance: You are expected to attend class. After two unexcused absences, your final grade will drop by one full letter for each unexcused absence thereafter. If you are not ready for any of the scheduled events, i.e.; did not read the material for discussion of the readings, do not have work for a critique, are not prepared for class with the expected work, you will be marked absent for that day. Two late arrivals (of more than 15 minutes) will equal one absence.

Please note: In my classes, family and mental health issues take priority over school. If you have extenuating circumstances (death in the family, serious illness or other physical/emotional trauma) that may impact your performance negatively, please contact me as soon as possible. Arrangements may be made for your specific situation.

Lab Fees: Your lab fees are hard at work for you. You'll be receiving a copy of *One! Hundred! Demons!* by Lynda Barry, a course reader, a pack of 11"x17" comic book art board, and a Presto correction pen, Other miscellaneous papers may also be available to you.

Supplies: You will need dip pens, brushes, India ink, tracing paper, a metal ruler with a cork base, a digital camera, collage materials, and some sort of color drawing medium (color pencils, watercolors, markers, etc.). You should also have your usual assortment of art supplies.

Studio Materials: There are many changes in how we look at the materials being used in the classroom/studio. You'll note that we now have Right-to-Know stations in the studios, which contain the Safety Data Sheets (SDS) for the materials that we use in the classroom. These sheets communicate the "...hazards of hazardous chemical products." All of the chemical products that we use must have an SDS in the Right-to-Know book. This includes any chemically-based materials or mediums that you bring into the classroom. You can find the SDSs via Google searches, on the manufacturers' websites, or often on the website from which you purchased the materials. Feel free to email PDFs of the SDSs for me to print off.

Music: My preference is that folks listen to a communal music source, but understand that musical tastes vary widely. Personal MP3 players will be allowed in the class, unless they become problematic. I retain dictatorial power when it comes to the communal music choices.

Cell Phones are not allowed. Period. I don't want to see phones in the classroom. If I see anyone texting during class, you'll be asked to leave and will be marked as absent. If you have an emergency situation, let me know and accommodations may be made.

Final Exam: Monday, May 14th, from 8:00 to 10:00. Course evaluations and studio clean-up.

Art 398 – Graphic Narration

Semester Schedule - Spring 2018

Week 1	Mon. 1/22	Course intro – syllabus. PowerPoint presentations and class reader. Assignment #1: Narrate Your Route to School . For Wednesday 1/24, shoot and print reference photos, and begin the sketch process.
	Wed. 1/24	Narrate Your Route to School Workday.
Week 2	Mon. 1/29	Narrate Your Route to School Workday.
	Wed. 1/31	Narrate Your Route to School workday.
Week 3	Mon. 2/5	Narrate Your Route to School workday. Due on Wednesday, 2/7.
	Wed. 2/7	Narrate Your Route to School Critique. Class chooses the theme for the two-page Assignment #2 Thematic Narrative .
Week 4	Mon. 2/12	View “Citizen Kane” for the Thematic Narrative assignment. Rough outline due on Wed.
	Wed. 2/14	Thematic Narrative workday. Begin character development and storyboard work.
Week 5	Mon. 2/19	Thematic Narrative workday.
	Wed. 2/21	Thematic Narrative workday. One! Hundred! Demons! discussion, beginning to page 72.
Week 6	Mon. 2/26	Thematic Narrative workday.
	Wed. 2/28	Thematic Narrative workday. Due on Monday 3/7, along with art history choices.
Week 7	Mon. 3/5	Thematic Narrative critique. Begin Assignment #3: Art History Narrative . Choices, storylines and sketches due today. Presentations: Remi, Uderzo, Caniff, McCay, Eisner, Barks, Frost.
	Wed. 3/7	Art History Narrative workday.
Week 8	Mon. 3/12	Art History Narrative workday.
	Wed. 3/14	Art History Narrative workday. One! Hundred! Demons! discussion, pages 73 to 132.
Week 9	Mon. 3/19	Art History Narrative workday. Due on Wednesday, 3/21.
	Wed. 3/21	Art History Narrative critique. Assignment #4: Luck of the Draw . Ideas, storylines, character sketches due on Monday, 4/2.
SPRING	BREAK!	SPRING BREAK! SPRING BREAK! SPRING BREAK! SPRING BREAK!
Week 10	Mon. 4/2	Luck of the Draw workday. One! Hundred! Demons! discussion, pages 133 to end.
	Wed. 4/4	Luck of the Draw workday. Presentations: Tezuka, Herriman, Sterrett, Spiegelman, Bechdel, Thompson, Satrapi.
Week 11	Mon. 4/9	Luck of the Draw workday. Due on Wednesday, 4/11.
	Wed. 4/11	Luck of the Draw critique. Assignment #5: Childhood Event/Memory Narrative .
Week 12	Mon. 4/16	Childhood Event/Memory Narrative workday. Presentations: Bell, Briggs, Ferris, Beaton, Chast, Takahashi.
	Wed. 4/18	Childhood Event/Memory Narrative workday.
Week 13	Mon. 4/23	Childhood Event/Memory Narrative workday.
	Wed. 4/25	Childhood Event/Memory Narrative workday. Due on
Week 14	Mon. 4/30	Childhood Event/Memory Narrative critique. Assignment #6: Open Narrative .
	Wed. 5/2	Open Narrative workday.
Week 15	Mon. 5/7	Open Narrative workday.
	Wed. 5/9	Open Narrative workday. .
Final Exam	Mon. 5/14	8:00-10:00 – Course evaluation and studio clean-up. Final day for resubmissions.