

Course Description:

Understanding the cultural diversity of Chicago involves more than a study of race and ethnicity. It is concerned with the interests and activities of subcultures such as those in popular media. A study of the texts of these subcultures should reveal a fresh perspective on the issues of diversity, and a unique view of the city. This course will focus an analysis and scholarly examination of the “Chicago-based” graphic novel – Jimmy Corrigan: The Smartest Kid on Earth. Its author, Chicago resident, artist / writer Chris Ware is a creator of comic books and graphic novels whose narrative / visual context has received notable critical attention. We will study his work for its important Chicago urban, narrative, history and visual themes.

Using selected monographs (from the Course Packet on Multicultural Comics), and other ERES sources, students will write bi-weekly “summary / reflective / reaction” papers.

Chicago Quarter Criteria:

This course will ask students to use and interpret the works of a local comic book author and artist to understand the interplay of the city and his work. The course will combine classroom study with field trips to local comic book stores and a possible meeting with the author of our text.

The assignments will be written projects and the course will require in-class discussion of the materials under consideration. The text – Jimmy Corrigan: The Smartest Kid on Earth Chris Ware – has the diversity of ethnic minority characters and the relationship between the Chicago landscape and its immigration patterns.

Furthermore because of the visual nature of the graphic novel and its stress on Chicago landscapes and buildings, students will gain and greater awareness of the city and its varied physical appearance. Moreover the work of Chris Ware focuses on Chicago experiences including – The 1893 Chicago World’s Fair / Columbian Exposition – the Chicago Public Schools, Chicago based small businesses and larger corporations, Chicago’s weather, and architecture.

There is in this course the occasion to do some small group projects such as taking photographs and discussing some examples of real estate, homes, businesses and other visual backgrounds that Ware includes in the graphic novel. Research on historical Chicago topics and references in the graphic novel.

Learning Goals:

1. Involve experiential learning through participation, direct observation, personal discovery, and reflection;
2. Develop student’s writing and rhetorical skills through classroom exercises, and projects;
3. Promote the Vincentian values of community service and respect for diversity;

4. Acquaint students with the Chicago Metropolitan area, its neighborhoods, cultures, people, institutions, organizations, or issues;
 5. Introduce students to group-based learning, what it means to be a life-long learner, and the enjoyment of learning; and
 6. Encourage community building among first year students, provide students with an opportunity for academic mentoring and intellectually socialize students to the University.
1. Reflective Activity: The course emphasizes reflective goals because it requires students to examine visual and written materials to both discuss and analyze through written means.
 2. Value Consciousness: The urban nature of the subject matter will spark students interests in problems of identity, urban alienation, parent – child relationships, racism and prejudice.
 3. Critical and Creative Thinking: both the class discussion and the written work require students to think critically about the ideas and themes presented in the graphic novel. Because of the visual aspect of the graphic novel perhaps somewhat more creative responses and assessments (i.e. An online visual – student generated comic book) can be explored.

Syllabus

Week 1 – Dates: 9/10 – 9/12

Introductions – Texts – explanation of group and individual group projects. Brief explanation of terms and background of comic’s texts using Scott McCloud’s – Understanding Comics. Chicago Comics Field Trip

*Common Hour: Introduction to Common Hour
Explanation of Journal / 1st Journal assignment
Time management – Series 1*

Week 2 – Dates: 9/15 – 9/17- 9/19

Narrative – Author information concerning the graphic novel and how to read it.

*Common Hour: Navigating the System –1 (CTA online – and others DePaul
Resources online
Activities
Journal #2 assignment*

Week 3 – Dates: 9/22 – 9/24 – 9/26

Visuals – Theory and Principles – Perspectives – –interactive forms of reading in Chris Ware’s – *Jimmy Corrigan: The Smartest Kid on Earth*

*Common Hour: Sense of Belonging and Community
Stress activity (“How to Drive You/ Sell Cray”) 1*

Week 4 – Dates: 9/29 – 10/1 – 10/3

Chicago – The World’s Fair / Columbian Exposition -
History and Ideas in Chris Ware’s – *Jimmy Corrigan: The Smartest Kid on Earth*

Common Hour: Education and Career Planning
Career Center and Ray Meyer speakers
Journal #4 assignment

Week 5 – Midterm – Dates: 10/6 – 10/8 – 10/10

In-class writing – Chris Ware’s “places in Chicago” as an indicator of “time” in *Jimmy Corrigan: The Smartest Kid on Earth*

Common Hour: Sense of Belonging and Community –2
Family and Friends
Drug and Alcohol Abuse – programs on campus
Journal #5 assigned
Final essay assigned

Week 6 – Dates: 10/13 – 10/15 – 10/17

Language - “Text, Image, and Visual Narrative Strategies” - (see attached essay) as study of the language in the graphic novel.

Common Hour: Understanding Diversity and Culture #1 (discussion & activity)
Journal #6 assigned

Week 7 – Dates: 10/20 – 10/22 – 10/24

Architecture – The architecture drawings in the novel and Chicago residence, and business buildings.

Common Hour: Navigating the System –2
Library Tour – Lincoln Park
S.A.C. Interactive tour of Campus Connect
Journal #7 assigned

Week 8 – Dates: 10/27 – 10/29 – 10/31

Chicago’s Weather and its visual presentation in Chris Ware’s – *Jimmy Corrigan: The Smartest Kid on Earth*.

Common Hour: Time Management / Academic Success #2
Learning Styles test

Money managing exercise
“Are You a Time Master” – exercise
Academic Survival skills handout
Journal #8 assigned

Week 9 – Dates: 11/3 – 11/5- 11/7

“Corrigenda”: A study of the postscript of the novel. Possible class visit by the Chicago based author / artist

Common Hour: Understanding Diversity and Culture –2 (discussion and activity)

Journal #9 assigned

Week 10 – Dates: 11/10 – 11/12 – 11/14 – 11/17

Final Examination – Alternative Assessment - Assignment Sheet

Common Hour: Journal #10

Final Essay Due

Activities

Common Hour assessment

Unbirthday Party

Grading criteria:

Attendance and participation: 10%

Alternative Assessment: 25%

Short Papers-Group Reports 30% - These short reports and 2-3 page papers will consist of student reaction papers and those that draw connections between a scholarly essay about comic books and its application to our graphic novel.

Midterm: 15%

Common Hour: 20%

Course Text (Required):

Jimmy Corrigan: The Smartest Kid on Earth –Illustrated, F.C. Ware – Pantheon Books

Reference Texts: (not required) -

Selected Chapters from:

The Language of Comics: Word and Image (Studies in Popular Culture) – Robin Varnum – Christina T. Gibbons

Reinventing Comics – Scott McCloud – Harper-Perennial – 2000

NACAE

National Association of Comics Art Educators

Comic Book Culture: Fanboys and True Believers – Matthew J. Pustz – University of Mississippi Press - 1999

Comics and Sequential Art – Will Eisner – Poorhouse Press – 2001

Graphic Storytelling & Visual Narrative – Will Eisner – Poorhouse Press – 2001

Understanding Comics: The Invisible Art – Scott McCloud – Harper-Perennial – 1994