

Contemporary Media and Fiction

An undergraduate course for 60 students

English 230 | Fall 2021 at UVic

TWF, 10:30 - 11:20am

Office Hours: W, 12-1pm (or by appointment)

Taught by Jentery Sayers (he / him / his; jentery@uvic.ca)

With Madyson Huck (she / her / hers), teaching assistant

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Description

How do we not only *read* fiction but also *see*, *watch*, *play*, and *listen* to it? This course engages that very question by attending to what audio, images, and text do in 21st-century fiction. We'll consider numerous formats along the way: comics, podcasts, games, animation, short fiction, and more. You'll learn how to write about media and fiction for a critical audience and to integrate a range of sensory modalities into your own interpretive process. The course materials will assume you've no previous experience with media studies or media arts.

Please note: "media" in the title implies "audio, images, and text," not news or communication outlets ("the media").

Aims

In this course, you'll learn to:

- Develop a vocabulary for approaching media in the context of fiction.

- Interpret what audio, images, and text do in fiction. We'll practice various techniques for watching, reading, playing, and listening to the stories people make with media.
- Communicate critically with audio, images, and text. You'll have opportunities to practice composing across these media, with an informed audience in mind.
- Use media as evidence in arguments and criticism. You will, for instance, integrate audio, images, and even video alongside quotations in your writing about fiction.

Each of these four outcomes should apply to work across disciplines and occupations, regardless of your major at UVic. They are useful whenever you're interpreting media or writing for the web.

About Us

My name is Jentery Sayers (he / him / his). I skip a syllable and say it in two: "JEN-tree." I spend 12.67% of the day looking for my glasses, and I enjoy writing about prototypes and experimental fiction. I grew up in Richmond, Virginia and went to VCU for my BA and BS degrees. Then I moved to Seattle, where I received an MA and PhD in English from UW. I've been at UVic, on lək'wəŋən and WSÁNEĆ territories, since 2011. I teach courses in English and Cultural, Social, and Political Thought (CSPT) and direct the Praxis Studio for Comparative Media Studies. You can email me at jentery@uvic.ca.

And my name is Madyson Huck (she / her / hers). I am a graduate student interested in Victorian periodicals, the digital humanities, and all things literary theory. I am a settler originally from Calgary, which is located on the traditional territories of the people of the Treaty 7 region in Southern Alberta. Through the course of this semester, I aim to leverage the skills from my BAs in English and Psychology, and my 5+ years of experience in the fields of mental health and leadership consulting, to support your learning. You are welcome to contact me via email with questions, or if you are eager for in-person conversation, please know I am happy to chat before / after our scheduled sessions, too.

Assignments

We're back to campus during COVID-19. These are complex and overwhelming times, so we'll try to keep this course as simple as possible.

We're asking you to complete two types of assignments this term:

- **Written responses to four prompts** (each 20% of your final mark): You'll respond (individually, outside of class time) briefly to four prompts through a combination of audio, images, and text. The prompts will ask you to examine assigned materials, with attention to detail, from a critical perspective. Each response will constitute 20% of your final mark, and you'll have an opportunity to revise one of your first three responses to improve your grade. All four responses will be assessed based on rubrics provided in the prompts themselves, and you will submit each of them via Brightspace.

(Please do not submit them via email or in print.)

- **Eight worksheets** (totaling 20% of your final mark): You'll complete (in small groups, during class time) a series of worksheets that will address the foundations of media and literary studies. These exercises will be assessed somewhat generously based on a scale of "exceeds expectations," "meets expectations," "meets most expectations," "meets some expectations," "incomplete," and "not submitted." The worksheets will be marked in two bundles of four, and each bundle will constitute 10% of your final mark (for a total of 20%).

There are no research papers, quizzes, presentations, or discussion forums in this course. There are no exams, either. Your fourth response to a prompt (submitted via Brightspace) will serve as your final exam in this course.

This approach to assignments means you'll need to submit something to Brightspace only four times this term (or five, if you revise). The worksheets will be circulated, completed, and submitted during class time (usually on Fridays). We hope this strategy will help us all to avoid feeling (less) overwhelmed this Fall.

As for scheduling, you will know 40% of your final mark by Friday, October 17th; 70% by Tuesday, November 16th; and 80% by Wednesday, December 8th, before the final response to a prompt is due (on Tuesday, December 14th). And again, if you want to improve your mark, you'll have the opportunity to revise one response of your choice by Friday, December 3rd. (Your mark can only improve with revision.)

Due dates for the assignments are provided in the schedule below, the prompts will be available in Brightspace, and worksheets will be distributed (in print) during class meetings.

Structure

We'll meet three days a week (TWF). A typical week will include a lecture on Tuesday, a large group discussion about a work of fiction on Wednesday, and, on Friday, a small group workshop on foundations, from interpreting media in the context of fiction to writing critically about media. Detailed lecture notes will be provided in Teams for the purposes of accessibility and group discussion. If the notes are insufficient for the sake of access, then we will audio- or video-record lectures and discussions. Feedback on this approach is welcome from you along the way.

For details about what we will discuss and when, see the schedule below or visit the course Brightspace.

Workload

The most important thing to know about this course is that **we'll opt for care in every instance**. If the workload becomes too much, or we're juggling more than we should, or we

need to return to zoomrooms, then we'll cut materials, including assignments. We've planned for the maximum in advance, under the assumption that we won't get to everything. And that's totally fine.

We suggest dedicating 3 to 5 hours of study each week to this course, plus 3 hours for weekly meetings (TWF). To frame expectations and decrease overwork, we assign in the schedule (see below) a number of recommended hours to each week of the course. We should note that 3 to 5 hours per week is only a guideline. You may find that you need more or less time depending on the activity, your preferences, and your own familiarity with the work and materials involved.

In Brightspace, we will also message you once each week with an update on how the course is progressing and what you may wish to consider as we move forward (to plan for reading, assignments, due dates, and whatnot).

Materials

Here's a list of works ("assigned texts") we'll study in the course. You need to purchase only the first one (Bechdel's *Fun Home*). The rest are available either online (public) or in Brightspace (private to the class).

- The graphic novel and memoir, *Fun Home* (2006), by Alison Bechdel
- The collection of comics, *Killing and Dying* (2015; excerpts), by Adrian Tomine
- The speculative fictions, "Message in a Bottle" (2004), by Nalo Hopkinson, and *The Fifth Season* (2015; excerpts), by N.K. Jemisin
- Experimental fiction such as *With Those We Love Alive* (2014), by Porpentine Charity Heartscape and Brenda Neoténomie, and *THE MOOD OF THE MOMENT* (2007), by Young-Hae Chang Heavy Industries
- The animated short film, *Biidaaban (The Dawn Comes)* (2018), by Amanda Strong and Leanne Betasamosake Simpson
- The role-playing game, *Undertale* (2015), by Toby Fox and Temmie Chang
- The platforming game, *Celeste* (2018), by Extremely Ok
- The first-person game, *Gone Home* (2013), by the Fullbright Company
- The adventure puzzle game, *Secrets Agent* (2014), by Marina Kittaka
- The dramatic podcast, *Within the Wires* (2016), by Jeffrey Cranor, Janina Matthewson, and Mary Epworth

If this ends up being too much for the term, then we'll cut material, or some of it will become optional.

We're also providing you with a "notebook" on contemporary media and fiction that will document material from lectures and discussions to, again, render that material, and what we're doing in class, as accessible as possible. The notebook will be circulated as a Word doc via Teams, and we will invite you to comment, converse, and ask questions in the margins.

To reiterate, then: the only text we're asking you to purchase is a copy of Bechdel's *Fun Home* (print or ebook), which is available at the [UVic Bookstore](#). It's \$25 new and \$19 used.

You do not need to purchase any software for this course; however, you'll need access to the internet and a computer. We will use Brightspace and Teams, both provided by UVic. We will also use Zoom for office hours as well as appointments outside of class.

Schedule

Here's the schedule for the term. It's subject to change, but we will use a Brightspace announcement to notify you at least two weeks in advance of any changes. In Brightspace, we will also update you each week on how the course is progressing.

Week 1 (Sept. 8 + 10): Welcome!

This week should consume no more than an hour of your time outside of class.

Wednesday, September 8th

- There's no need to prep for our first meeting. We'll introduce ourselves and talk about the course.
- Consider purchasing a copy of *Fun Home*, if you've not already.

Friday, September 10th

- Take a moment to scan the course outline and review the course policies.
- Email us any questions or concerns you have about the course.
- Expect a general introduction to media and fiction during this session.

Week 2 (Sept. 14, 15 + 17): Why Media?

This week should consume no more than three hours of your time outside of class.

Tuesday, September 14th

- Watch Young-Hae Chang Heavy Industries' *THE MOOD OF THE MOMENT*.
- Play Marina Kittaka's *Secrets Agent*.
- Expect a lecture about ways to understand media in the context of fiction.

Wednesday, September 15th

- Review and comment on the lecture notes for "Why Media?" in Teams. We'll be sure to answer your questions there.
- Review Prompt 1 in Brightspace and share your questions or concerns with us. A response to Prompt 1 is due next week, by Friday, September 24th.
- Expect a large group discussion about *THE MOOD OF THE MOMENT* and *Secrets Agent*.

Friday, September 17th

- Complete and submit Worksheet 1 in class. This worksheet will address ways to understand media in the context of fiction.

Week 3 (Sept. 21, 22 + 24): Media Aesthetics, Part 1

This week should consume no more than five hours of your time outside of class.

Tuesday, September 21st

- Read Nalo Hopkinson's "Message in a Bottle" (available in Brightspace).
- Expect a lecture on the "apprehension" and "comprehension" of media in the context of fiction.

Wednesday, September 22nd

- Review and comment on the lecture notes for "Media Aesthetics, Part 1" in Teams. We may even respond with more questions there.
- Expect a large group discussion of "Message in a Bottle."

Friday, September 24th

- Submit your response to Prompt 1 via Brightspace.
- Expect a workshop on integrating media (audio, images, and text) into your writing and criticism.

Please note that September 21st is the last day for 100% reduction of tuition fees for standard first term and full year courses, and Friday, September 25th is the last day for adding courses that begin in the first term.

Week 4 (Sept. 28 + 29 and Oct. 1): Media Aesthetics, Part 2

This week should consume no more than three hours of your time outside of class.

Tuesday, September 28th

- Watch Amanda Strong and Leanne Betasamosake Simpson's *Biidaaban (The Dawn Comes)*.
- Expect a lecture on the "synthesis" and "evaluation" of media in the context of fiction.

Wednesday, September 29th

- Review and comment on the lecture notes for "Media Aesthetics, Part 2" in Teams. We'll strike up a conversation there.
- Review Prompt 2 in Brightspace and share your questions or concerns with us. A response to Prompt 2 is due next week, by Friday, October 10th.
- Expect a large group discussion of *Biidaaban (The Dawn Comes)*.

Friday, October 1st

- Complete and submit Worksheet 2 in class. This worksheet will address the application of media aesthetics as a methodology.
- We will return marks for Prompt 1 prior to this class meeting.

Please note that Thursday, September 30th is National Day for Truth and Reconciliation.

Week 5 (Oct. 5, 6 + 8): Audio, Part 1

This week should consume no more than five hours of your time outside of class.

Tuesday, October 5th

- Listen to Janina Matthewson and Jeffrey Cranor's *Within the Wires*, Season 1, Episode 1.
- Expect a lecture on the foundations of addressing audio in fiction.

Wednesday, October 6th

- Review and comment on the lecture notes for "Audio, Part 1" in Teams. We'll listen to your thoughts in the margins.
- Expect a large group discussion of *Within the Wires*.

Friday, October 8th

- Submit your response to Prompt 2 via Brightspace.
- Expect a workshop on integrating audio into your writing and criticism.

Week 6 (Oct. 12, 13 + 15): Audio, Part 2

This week should consume no more than three hours of your time outside of class.

Tuesday, October 12th

- Play or watch the Fullbright Company's *Gone Home*.
- Expect a lecture further elaborating on the foundations of audio in fiction.

Wednesday, October 13th

- Review and comment on the lecture notes for "Audio, Part 2" in Teams. Maybe we'll share playlists and mixtapes?
- Expect a large group discussion of *Gone Home*.

Friday, October 15th

- Complete and submit Worksheet 3 in class. This worksheet will address the analysis of audio in fiction.
- We will return marks for Prompt 2 by this class meeting.

Please note that Monday, October 11th is Thanksgiving Day, and Tuesday, October 12th is the last day for 50% reduction of tuition fees for standard courses.

Week 7 (Oct. 19, 20 + 22): Images, Part 1

This week should consume no more than five hours of your time outside of class.

Tuesday, October 19th

- Read at least the first half of Alison Bechdel's *Fun Home*.
- Expect a lecture on the foundations of addressing images in fiction.

Wednesday, October 20th

- Finish *Fun Home*.
- Expect a large group discussion of *Fun Home*.

Friday, October 22nd

- Review and comment on the lecture notes for "Images, Part 1" in Teams. Maybe some doodles in the margins?
- Complete and submit Worksheet 4 in class. This worksheet will address the analysis of images in fiction.

Week 8 (Oct. 26, 27 + 29): Images, Part 2

This week should consume no more than three hours of your time outside of class.

Tuesday, October 26th

- Read a story in Adrian Tomine's *Killing and Dying* (available in Brightspace).
- Expect a lecture further elaborating on the foundations of addressing images in fiction.

Wednesday, October 27th

- Review and comment on the lecture notes for "Images, Part 2" in Teams. We'll respond with heavily captioned panels.
- Review Prompt 3 in Brightspace and share your questions or concerns with us. A response to Prompt 3 is due next week, by Friday, November 5th.
- Expect a large group discussion of *Killing and Dying*.

Friday, October 29th

- Complete and submit Worksheet 5 in class. This worksheet will address integrating images into your writing and criticism.
- We will return marks for Worksheets 1-4 by this class meeting.

Please note that Sunday, October 31st is the last day for withdrawing from first term courses without penalty of failure.

Week 9 (Nov. 2, 3 + 5): Text, Part 1

This week should consume no more than five hours of your time outside of class.

Tuesday, November 2nd

- Play or watch Toby Fox and Temmie Chang's *Undertale*.
- Expect a lecture on the modern foundations of addressing text in fiction.

Wednesday, November 3rd

- Review and comment on the lecture notes for "Text, Part 1" in Teams. We'll respond in Papyrus or Sans there.
- Expect a large group discussion of *Undertale*.

Friday, November 5th

- Submit your response to Prompt 3 via Brightspace.
- Expect a workshop on analyzing the use of text in contemporary fiction.

Week 10 (Nov. 9, 10, and 12): Buffering . . .

Step away from the course and take a break this week. There's no class on Tuesday, November 9th, and Reading Break is November 10th - 12th.

Please note that Thursday, November 11th is Remembrance Day.

Week 11 (Nov. 16, 17 + 19): Text, Part 2

This week should consume no more than four hours of your time outside of class.

Tuesday, November 16th

- Read excerpts of N.K. Jemisin's *The Fifth Season* (in Brightspace).
- Expect a lecture further elaborating on the modern foundations of addressing text in fiction.
- We will return marks for Prompt 3 by this class meeting.

Wednesday, November 17th

- Review and comment on the lecture notes for "Text, Part 2" in Teams. We'll might cook up our own fan fiction there.
- Expect a large group discussion of *The Fifth Season* (first two chapters).

Friday, November 19th

- Complete and submit Worksheet 6 in class. This worksheet will address integrating text into your writing and criticism.

Week 12 (Nov. 23, 24 + 26): Action, Part 1

This week should consume no more than four hours of your time outside of class.

Tuesday, November 23rd

- Read (or play?) Porpentine Charity Heartscape and Brenda Neotenie's *With Those We Love Alive*.
- Expect a lecture on the foundations of addressing action and interfaces in the context of fiction.

Wednesday, November 24th

- Review and comment on the lecture notes for "Action, Part 1" in Teams. We might drop some hyperlinks there.
- Expect a large group discussion of *With Those We Love Alive*.

Friday, November 26th

- Complete and submit Worksheet 7 in class. This worksheet will address the analysis of action (as input, output, and feedback) in fiction.

Week 13 (Nov. 30 + Dec. 1 + 3): Action, Part 2

This week should consume no more than five hours of your time outside of class.

Tuesday, November 30th

- Play or watch Extremely Ok's *Celeste*.
- Expect a lecture further elaborating on the foundations of addressing action in fiction as well as a large group discussion of *Celeste*.

Wednesday, December 1st

- Review and comment on the lecture notes for "Action, Part 2" in Teams. We'll dash from word to word, comment to comment.
- Complete and submit Worksheet 8 in class. This worksheet will address integrating action into your writing and criticism.
- We will return marks for Worksheets 5-8 by Wednesday, December 8th.

Friday, December 3rd

- Submit your revised response to Prompt 1, 2, or 3 (optional).
- Expect a recap of what we learned this term as well as some time to complete course experience surveys.
- We will return marks for revised responses by Wednesday, December 8th.

Exam Period

This final assignment should consume no more than five hours of your time.

Tuesday, December 14th

- Submit your response to Prompt 4 via Brightspace.
- Enjoy your holiday!

Policies

Prerequisites

There are no prerequisites for this 200-level English course.

Assessment and Feedback

Responses to three prompts are required to pass this course. Failure to complete these three assignments will result in a failing N grade (calculated as a 0 for your GPA).

We will use UVic's [official grading system](#) to produce rubrics to assess your work. We will not post marks publicly or outside our offices, and we do not use plagiarism detection software.

We will comment on each of your four responses to prompts. We will provide feedback on worksheets by appointment.

Attendance

Medical documentation for short-term absences is not required for the Fall 2021 term (approved by Senate). If you need access to course materials due to absence, and you find that the access we are providing is insufficient, then please let us know, and we will improve our approach.

Late Submissions and Extensions

If you need to request an extension or you're concerned about the possibility of a late submission, then please email me (Jentery). I understand that extensions may be necessary for numerous reasons, especially right now.

Communications

The best way to communicate with me (Jentery) is by email (jentery@uvic.ca) and via Zoom, either by appointment or during my office hours, which are Wednesdays, 12 - 1pm. You can also communicate with Madyson by email and via Zoom (by appointment).

We respond to work email between 9am and 5pm, Monday through Friday, excluding holidays.

Learning Climate

The University of Victoria is committed to promoting, providing, and protecting a positive, supportive, and safe working and learning environment for all its members. We are expected to adhere to [UVic's equity and human rights policies](#). You should alert me (Jentery) immediately if you have any questions about these policies and their application, or if you have concerns about course proceedings or participants.

Academic Integrity

We are expected to adhere to [UVic's academic integrity policy](#) and be aware of the policies for the evaluation of student course work. Violations of the integrity policy will result in a failing grade for the given assignment and may additionally result in a failing grade for the course. By taking this course, you agree that all submitted assignments may be subject to an originality review. We do not use software to detect plagiarism in essays or any other assignments.

Copyright

All course materials, including this course outline, are made available for educational purposes and for the exclusive use of students in this course. The material is protected under copyright law, even if not marked as such. The syllabus itself is licensed [CC BY-NC 4.0](#). Any further use or distribution of materials to others requires written permission, except under fair dealing or another exception in the Copyright Act. Violations may result in disciplinary action under the Resolution of Non-Academic Misconduct Allegations policy (AC1300).

Accessibility and Accommodation

Students with diverse learning styles and needs are welcome in this course. If you have a disability or health consideration that may require accommodations, please feel free to approach me and/or the [Centre for Accessible Learning \(CAL\)](#) as soon as possible. CAL staff are available by appointment to assess specific needs, provide referrals, and arrange appropriate accommodations. Please note that you do not need to, and are by no means expected to, disclose disability or health considerations to us for the purposes of accommodations.

University of Victoria Students' Society (UVSS)

The UVSS is a social-justice-based non-profit run by students, for students, and is separate from UVic. As an undergrad student, you are already a member. UVSS works on issues affecting students, such as affordability, public transit, sexualized violence, sustainability, student employment, and much more. They fund clubs and course unions, and have several advocacy groups. They also have a Food Bank and Free Store, a Peer Support Centre, and run your health and dental plan. They are here to support you. Reach out to them at uvss.ca.

Diversity and Inclusion

We want to create a learning environment that supports a diversity of thoughts, perspectives, and experiences, and also honours your identities (including race, gender, class, sexuality, religion, and ability). Integrating a diverse set of experiences is important for a more comprehensive understanding of the course content. We (like many people) are still in the process of learning about diverse perspectives and identities. If something is said in class (by anyone, including us) that makes you feel uncomfortable, don't hesitate to talk with us. If you have a name and/or set of pronouns that differ from those that appear in your university records, please let us know. If you feel like your performance in the class is being impeded by your experiences outside of class, please don't hesitate to talk with us. We want to be a resource for you. You can also submit anonymous feedback, which, with your permission, we may use to make a general announcement to the course. If you prefer to speak with someone outside of the course, you may contact Michael Nowlin (Chair, Department of English). Finally, please contact us or submit anonymous feedback if you have any suggestions to improve the quality of the course materials, the class environment, and the instruction / pedagogy.

(Language for this policy was drawn from the Harriet W. Sheridan Center for Teaching and Learning at Brown University, and from the work of Monica Linden, in particular.)

Online Conduct

The University of Victoria is committed to promoting critical academic discourse while providing a respectful and supportive learning environment. All members of the university community have the right to this experience and the responsibility to help create such an environment. The University will not tolerate racism, sexualized violence, or any form of discrimination, bullying, or harassment.

Please be advised that, by logging into UVic's learning systems and interacting with online resources (Brightspace, Zoom, Teams), you are engaging in a university activity. All interactions within this environment are subject to university expectations and policies. Any concerns about student conduct may be reviewed and responded to in accordance with the appropriate university policy. To report concerns about online student conduct, email onlineconduct@uvic.ca.

Basic Needs

We want you to thrive in this course and everywhere else. Please let us know as early as possible if you have any concerns or if you require any assistance to succeed. We'll do our best to help.

UVic takes student mental health very seriously, with a [website](#) full of resources. We offer services such as assistance and referral to address students' personal, social, career, and study skills concerns. Services for students also include crisis and emergency mental health consultation and confidential assessment, counselling services (individual and small group), and referrals. Many of these programs are connected with Health Services, which you may contact by phone.

The [Student Services website](#) lists several policies that you might want to know about and may make your life at UVic safer and easier. Only some of them are directly related to this course, but they're still important.

(Language for this policy was drawn from the work of Richard Pickard.)

Territory Acknowledgement

As researchers and instructors at the University of Victoria, we acknowledge and respect the lək'wəŋən peoples on whose traditional territory the University of Victoria stands, and the Songhees, Esquimalt, and WSÁNEĆ peoples, whose historical relationships with the land continue to this day.

Many thanks to Yu-Hsuan Liou, Faith Ryan, and Ian Waddell, who taught previous iterations of this course with me. Thanks as well to Julie Funk and Stefan Higgins for providing feedback on the course materials, and to Faith for collaborating with me to develop the lectures and workshops.

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