**Forms of Narratives and the Narrative**

**Abstract:** Narratives and storytelling have existed in some manner or another for functionally all of human history, and are elements that are at least near-uniquely human. One could argue that with the first recounted event, the first story was told, even if it was something as simple as prehistoric humans discussing something that had recently occurred. With the passing of time, more and more venues for conveying and sharing narratives have manifested, and with them, norms regarding what can constitute and what can’t constitute a narrative have changed. The fact that the term “text” has grown to encompass materials outside the written word is a testament to this: one could view, for instance, a painting or a sculpture as a “text” in some contexts, and could even discuss that painting or sculpture’s “narrative.” Furthermore, with the advent of the Digital Age, narrative forms will likely only continue to diversify.

In this course, students will analyze and engage with narratives from across human history in a wide variety of forms in a critical, intimate manner. The coursework will go beyond simply reading and responding to written works, or even examining other works, such as theatrical performances or movies. Students will often need to take part in hands-on interaction with assigned materials, often through play, creative exercise, or other forms of exploration. This will be both in addition to and in lieu of traditional course readings, and will be necessary in order for one to complete class assignments. This course will also emphasize concepts of intertextuality, author intent (or lack thereof), and critically considering the success, failure, and quality of works and the aspect of works.

Note: This syllabus contains information that will remain relevant throughout the semester. It will be referenced regularly, and a digital copy is available via the course website.

**Content Disclaimer:** This course may occasionally address potentially disturbing content, specifically in its more explorative portions. Use caution and discretion; students should know and respect the limits of others in addition to their own personal limits. Students are encouraged to contact the instructor in the case that any course content is unacceptably upsetting to them.

Additionally, some parts of this course may require a mild physical exertion. Again, students should know and respect their own limits in addition those of others. Students should contact the instructor in the case that any assignment requiring physical assertion is infeasible.

**Course Requirements and Grading:** This course focuses primarily on reflection, written and otherwise. This course will feature no exams: most major assignments will take the form of a written response to recently-covered course material. Most classes will be dedicated to group discussion of the course readings, but at several points over the semester, in lieu of traditional in-class meetings, class will meet at an off-campus location, such as a museum or a theater.

Below is an explanation of how one can be expected to be graded in this course, as well as some general expectations for conduct:

**Attendance and Participation (10%)**All students are expected to come to class prepared, ready and willing to participate in discussion, and on time. Additionally, students are expected to remain undistracted during class and to show respect towards one another as well as to the instructor. If a student is going to be absent, that student is expected to present a doctor’s note or other appropriate documentation excusing that absence. More than two unexcused absences during the duration of the semester will result in significant decrease in overall course grade.

**In-Class Presentation (10%)**Once during the semester, students are asked to present in class. This presentation will take the form of an independent presentation on topics covered by a week’s material, as well as on one’s personal, subjective experience with that material.

**Biweekly Upkeep (10%)**Every other week, students should expect to be assigned a brief written response that is meant to serve as a vehicle for reflecting on course material. For these assignments, students should choose one or two pieces of course material and/or in-class activities covered since they wrote their previous response and critically reflect on them, with a focus on personal experience and interpretation of those pieces and their context. These responses should show comprehension of the material they cover, but they need be no longer than between 300 and 500 words in length, although longer-form pieces certainly won’t be turned down. This category also covers smaller, lower-stakes assignments and other miscellaneous coursework.

**Projects and In-Class Activities (25%)**Several larger-scale projects, spanning one or more weeks, are required to be completed for this course. These are expanded upon in-depth in the “projects” portion of this syllabus, and students will be provided with detailed handouts covering the specific expectations for each project when it is assigned. This portion of the grade also covers various in-class activities, which are graded based on participation.

**Final Project (40%)**At the end of this course, students will complete a final assignment. Students will be provided with detailed handouts covering the specific expectations for this project when it is assigned.

**Course Material:** In the interest of accessibility, all required course material in this section will be made available either online on the course website, or through a course packet or handout.

* Roland Barthes’ “The Death of the Author” (.pdf available on course website)
* Walter Benjamin’s “The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction” (available via handout)
* Jonathan Gottschall’s *The Storytelling Animal* (available via course packet)
* Gerald F. Brommer’s *Illustrated Elements of Art and Principles of Design*
* Selected works by the Grimm Brothers.

The course will also examine the *SCP Foundation* collaborative fiction project and various *Twine* projects. These are freely available online.

**Course Schedule:**

**Week 1: Introduction**

* Consider: What is a narrative? Can a narrative be divorced from a “text?” What can be a text?
* Read: “The Death of the Author”, “The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction.”

**Week 2: Early Narratives and the Essence of Narrative**

* Consider: What are the essentials of a narrative? What can a narrative not function without? What does a narrative “do?”
* Read: *A Practical System of Rhetoric* (available via handout)

**Week 3: Fairytales, Fables, Folklore**

* Consider: How do fairytales differ from other narratives? What makes a fairytale a fairytale? What is the relationship between fairytales, folklore, mythology, and culture?
* Read: Any 5 of the fairytales from the *Brothers Grimm* selected works and any 5 pieces in the Curated Mythology and Folk Tale Collection (available via course website) of your choice. Don’t worry – the individual pieces are not particularly long
* Start: Fairytale project.

**Week 4: The Book, Its History, and “Usual” Narratives**

* Consider: Do we take narrative for granted? What has shaped our understanding of narratives and storytelling? Does this restrict our ability to engage with certain sorts of narrative?
* Read: *The Storytelling Animal* (pages 1-87)

**Week 5: Narratives in Classical Visual Art**

* Consider: How does a painting as a text differ from, for instance, a book as a text? How can the narrative of a visual art piece manifest? What role does intertextuality play when examining works across mediums?
* Read: *Illustrated Elements of Art and Principles of Design* (whole piece. This reading isn’t due immediately, but please do get started on it and finish it by Week 7, if possible.)
* Due: Fairytale project.
* In-Class Activity: still-life painting

**Week 6: Narrative in Contemporary Visual Art**

* Consider: How have visual art narratives evolved over time? How does treating contemporary visual art as text differ from treating classical art as a text? Does the evolution of narrative have anything to do with this, and how?
* In-Class Activity: museum trip

**Week 7: Dance and Theatrical Narratives**

* Consider: What is the difference between reading a play, reading a script, and watching a theatrical production, movie, or dance recital? What does the dimension of visually-present actors add to a narrative? Is there any sort of textually significant connection between a character and an actor?
* In-Class Activity: Theater trip, cinema trip.

**Week 8: Music, Radio, and Auditory Narratives**

* Consider: Is there any sort of relation between reading and writing, and listening and speaking? How is a narrative that you can only hear different from a narrative that you can only see? How can audio enhance a narrative?
* Listen: Select a podcast, radio show, or similar media form and listen to two hours’ worth of its material. Recommendations can be found on the course website.
* In-Class Activity: Concert trip

**Week 9: Games and Ludic Narratives**

* Consider: What is the relationship between games, texts, and art? How does the addition of gameplay affect a narrative? With digital, visual, and auditory components, are digital games, in some respect, the most complex narratives?
* Play: Choose any two of the *Twine* games listed on the course website that and play through them.
* In-Class Activity: Collaborative storytelling exercises.

**Week 10: Non-Linear and Emergent Narratives**

* Consider: What happens to a piece when its narrative structure is set up so that it can be started and finished at any two points? What is the importance of subjective experience in narratives? Why and how do narratives leave lasting impressions on those who engage with them?
* Play: Choose any two of the *Twine* games listed on the course website that and play through them.

**Week 11: Hypertexts and Digital Narratives**

* Consider: What is a hypertext and does it need to be digital? How does being composed digitally affect texts and narratives, their contents, and their structure? Are hypertexts and collaborative works inherently intertextual or interdisciplinary?
* Read: Choose any work from the curated *SCP Foundation* article list on the course website and read through it.
* Play: Choose one of the *Twine* games listed on the course website that you haven’t played yet and play through it.
* Start: Final project

**Week 12: Outsider Art, Animal Art, and “Weird” Narratives**

* Consider: Why is outsider art “outsider art?” What are the implications of non-human animals producing art? How and why do we “other” certain forms of art, text, and narrative?
* Explore: Outsider art collection (available via course website)
* Read: *The Storytelling Animal* (Pages 139-207)

**Week 13: Bringing It All Together**

* Consider: What are the benefits of putting texts in conversation with one another? Should narrative be applied, or simply enjoyed as it is? Is it worth the time and effort to expand one’s horizons and engages with works outside one’s usual sphere of interest; how and why?
* Due: Roundtable discussion this week. Essentially, we will be running through each of the topics this semester and giving them a final once-over, but with the knowledge of each of the other topics. Continue to work on final project.

**Week 14: Wrapping Up, Part 1**

* Consider: Was this course intellectually stimulating? How has what you’ve learned, for instance, during week 1, impacted your understanding of the content of week 12, or vice versa?
* Due: Continue to work on final project.

**Week 15: Wrapping Up, Part 2**

* Consider: What’s next for you? How much do you think what you learned in this course will be helpful in your future, academic or otherwise?
* Due: Final project