



Comics in the Middle East

course syllabus

Department of African, Middle Eastern, and South Asian
Languages and Literatures (AMESALL)

Comics in the Middle East

In this class, participants will develop a working critical vocabulary with which to discuss comics and related graphic narrative forms from the "Middle East" and beyond. In addition to studying the formal dimensions of these works (composition, style, and language), we will examine their controversial role in society and politics, the lives of the artists behind them, parallels and precedents in art history, and the transnational trajectories of genres/media like sci-fi, manga, superhero comics, graffiti, and memes. No previous knowledge of Middle Eastern languages or literatures is assumed. All are welcome!

Format

In-person course.
M, W 7:30–8:50pm
SC-115

All readings
in English

Instructor

Prof. Ben Koerber
bk311@rutgers.edu

Office Hours by
appointment.

Grades

50% Participation
35% Quizzes (5)
15% Final Project

Course Requirements

Participation

Each class session, your participation will be graded on a scale of **0 to 5 points**. In order to achieve all 5 points, you must observe the following rules:

- Print out the appropriate **comics pages** & **worksheet** and bring to class.
- Use of all electronic devices is prohibited in the classroom. This includes, but is not limited to, phones, computers, earbuds, headphones, smart watches, AR glasses, and recording devices. Of course, exceptions are allowed for disabilities.
- Remain focused on the activity, discussion, or lecture.
- Arrive on time and stay for the full length of the session.
- Make at least one substantive verbal contribution to the class discussion (more than just a yes/no question or “fact check”).

There are many ways you can prepare for a discussion if you find speaking spontaneously to be challenging. The worksheets will certainly help. Consider also writing down a couple of questions or comments, or underlining some passages from the reading you found thought-provoking or confusing. You may want to practice tossing around ideas about the reading with friends or relatives (or even with the professor!) beforehand.

Attendance

Please note that attendance is mandatory. If you need to miss an occasional class for unverifiable illness or circumstances, you are responsible for submitting the absence through the [Rutgers Self-Reporting Absence website](#); this will

automatically generate email notification to your instructors. Reporting an absence does not excuse missed work; please still contact your instructors directly to discuss catching up.

Should you find yourself facing an extended absence, please connect with the [Office of the Dean of Students-Student Support](#) as soon as possible.

It is the policy of the Rutgers University not to cancel classes on religious holidays, but to honor students' religious observance and support makeup work. For information on the cancellation of classes due to inclement weather, please see the [University Operating Status page](#).

Readings (Comics)

- + You are required to purchase only one comic book: *Lebanon Is Burning and Other Dispatches* ([link](#)).
- + All other readings will be made available as PDFs free of charge! Go to Canvas → Files.
- + Students are expected to fully and carefully read the assigned comics, take notes, and come to class prepared to discuss.

Worksheets

Each reading will be accompanied by a “worksheet,” located in the same folder on Canvas. Students are required to print out the worksheet, complete it, and bring it to class in preparation for the lecture or discussion. The worksheet will not be graded or turned in, but failure to complete the

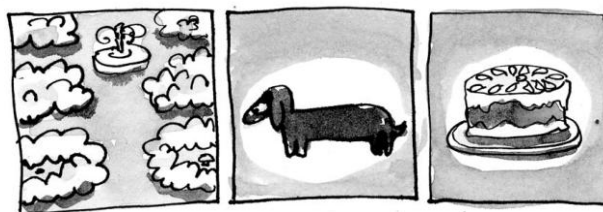
worksheet will negatively affect a student's participation grade.

Quizzes

In lieu of a midterm exam, there will be five (5) short, low-stakes quizzes spread evenly throughout the semester. Essentially, that means there will be a quiz every other week. The quizzes do not require any extra study time, as they are designed simply to test whether students have been following along with the readings.

Final Exam

Student will have a choice between a written, in-class exam, an oral interview exam, a comics exam, and a comics annotation exam. Details forthcoming.



(Image from: *Jam and Yogurt: or how my mom became Lebanese*, Lena Merhej)

Note on Content

Art is a form of therapy: it can help us heal wounds, provide solace during difficult times, and foster positive and affirmative explorations of our identities and relationships with others. Art is also a form of liberation. At the same time,

art, like therapy, is not always a simple walk in the park. Good art—great art—can and should be challenging on many levels: intellectual, emotional, ethical, etc. Some of the comics we will read deal with war, genocide, violence, sexuality, religion, and politics in ways that some students might find disturbing or offensive. Please remember that it is okay to feel offended, and that you are encouraged to share your reactions to the comics in class and/or with the instructor.



(Image from: “Tarek’s Fantastical Salon,” *Samandal* 2, Omar al-Khuri)

Instructor Information

Communication

I welcome and encourage you to share ideas, questions, and concerns about the class with your classmates and with me in whatever format you feel most comfortable with. I also

value your feedback on any aspect of the course, including content, format, or anything else you would like to discuss.

The best way to contact me is through email:

bk311@amesall.rutgers.edu. I usually respond within 48 hours during the week, or longer if it's a weekend. If I don't respond within that period, feel free to send me a follow-up email. I am also available for office hours via Zoom.

To set up an appointment, please send me an email so we can agree on a time.

A note on sending emails: You do not need to begin your message by apologizing for something, whether that's lateness or illness or whatever. No excuses needed. Just begin with a simple greeting ("Hello Prof. Koerber ...") and explain how I can help you.



Instructor Information (cont.)

Teaching Approach

I am committed to helping everyone succeed in this class. I recognize and respect differences in learning styles, reading speed, comfort with academic and literary language, and so forth. If you contact me for help, I will think *more* highly of you, not

less. *Please **do** reach out to me as frequently as you want to, so that I may help you more effectively.*

I subscribe to the theory of “multiple intelligences.” Some of us are better with visual-spatial intelligence, others are better with verbal-linguistic intelligence or logical-mathematical intelligence. Some of us are geniuses when it comes to emotions, sounds, bodily movement, or moral and spiritual dimensions.

As much as we all have different kinds of intelligence, all of us also have what are called “learning disabilities.” These might be technical aspects of how our brains function differently, or they can be related to medical or emotional/mental states. I recognize all of these as potential hurdles to academic success, and urge you to reach out to me, or to advising and counseling services at Rutgers. Any information you share with me will be confidential.

Finally, whatever your strengths and weaknesses, please be advised that **self-advocacy is key** to your success in this class and beyond. I can only help if you communicate with me as clearly and frequently as possible.



Course Policies

Electronic Devices

Use of all electronic devices is prohibited in the classroom. This includes, but is not limited to, phones, computers, earbuds, headphones, smart watches, AR glasses, and recording devices. Of course, exceptions are allowed for

disabilities. Failure to respect this policy will result in a lower [participation grade](#).

Workload

Students are expected to spend approximately 6 hours outside of class each week on all assignments. This includes time spent reading, taking notes, completing the worksheet, and preparing for participation.

Course Announcements

You must check your email regularly for course updates and announcements. Reminders/changes may be issued regarding readings, assignments, or due dates.

Plagiarism and Cheating

Plagiarism or cheating in any form is a serious offense and will result, at the very least, in a grade of F for the course, and possible expulsion from the university. It is your responsibility to familiarize yourself with policies on academic integrity at Rutgers: academicintegrity.rutgers.edu/

“Artificial Intelligence”

Use of so-called “artificial intelligence,” including but not limited to LLMs like ChatGPT, text-to-audio apps, Grammarly, etc. etc., is strictly prohibited for all components of this course. Let us join together and fight against the evil robots!



Help!

Rutgers SAS has a very useful webpage for students needing help with anything from writing skills and tutoring to mental health counseling, disabilities, and registration issues:

sasundergrad.rutgers.edu/help

Please take advantage of this resource!



Course Schedule

UNIT 1: Introduction to the study of comics

Week 1 (Wednesday, Jan. 21): Introduction

- ☐ First class meeting
- ☐ Carefully read syllabus
- ☐ Access Canvas

Week 2 (Jan. 26 & Jan. 28): History of Comics

- ☐ worksheet
- ☐ Readings: McCloud, *Understanding Comics*

Week 3 (Feb. 2 & Feb. 4): How to Read Comics

- ☐ Youtube videos ("Strip Panel Naked")
- ☐ worksheet
- ☐ Quiz 1 (in class on Monday)

UNIT 2: Fantasy and Sci-Fi

Week 4 (Feb. 9 & Feb. 11)

- ☐ Reading: *Shubeik Lubeik* (Part 1)
- ☐ worksheet

Week 5 (Feb. 16 & Feb. 18)

- ☐ Reading: *Shubeik Lubeik* (Part 2)
- ☐ worksheet
- ☐ Quiz 2 (in class on Monday)

Week 6 (Feb. 23 & Feb. 25)

- ☐ Reading: selections from *The Solar Grid*
- ☐ worksheet

Week 7 (March 2 & March 4)

- ☐ Reading: selections from *The Solar Grid*
- ☐ worksheet
- ☐ Quiz 3 (in class on Monday)

UNIT 3: Memoirs and Family Histories

Week 8 (March 9 & March 11)

- ☐ Reading: *Baddawi* by Leila Abdelrazaq
- ☐ worksheet

Week 9 (March 16 & March 18): SPRING BREAK

Week 10 (March 23 & March 25)

- ☐ Reading: selections from *The Rabbi's Cat*
- ☐ worksheet
- ☐ Quiz 4 (in class on Monday)

Week 11 (March 30 & April 1)

- ☐ Reading: selections from *Persepolis*
- ☐ worksheet

UNIT 4: Comics Journalism

Week 12 (April 6 & April 8)

- ☐ reading: *Lebanon is Burning and Other Dispatches*
- ☐ worksheet
- ☐ Quiz 5 (in class on Monday)

Week 13 (April 13 & April 15)

- ☐ reading: *Metro*
- ☐ worksheet

Week 14 (April 20 & April 22)

- ☐ reading: selections from *Samandal*
- ☐ worksheet

Week 15 (April 27 & April 29)

- ☐ Final Exams in class

Syllabus Cover Art: Andeel (*Tok-tok* magazine, Egypt)