

## **Comics Studies Qualifying Examination Structure**

Students taking the Comics Studies Qualifying Examination must master a core list of canonical primary texts, as well as an established body of critical theory, while also creating a specialty list from these emphases:

- Twentieth-Century North American Comics History
- Comics Memoir
- Critical Approach: Comics Theory
- Critical Approach: Gender and Sexuality
- Critical Approach: Cultural Studies

A short list of required reading (between 5-10 texts) has been provided for each specialty area, and candidates should enhance their list with texts of their own choosing. In total, the specialty list should total between 20-25 texts.

The Comics Studies qualifying examination will have a core set of two questions and a specialty set of two questions. Students will answer one question in each part during the four-hour examination period.

## **Comics Studies Qualifying Examination Area Reading List**

### ***Overview***

Students taking the Comics Studies qualifying exam must be familiar with all primary and secondary sources on the Core List below. Each student must also be familiar with at least twenty additional texts, which should be chosen to reflect a sub-specialty area of interest to that student. Such areas of interest currently include:

- Twentieth-Century North American Comics History
- Comics Memoir
- Critical Approach: Comics Theory
- Critical Approach: Gender and Sexuality
- Critical Approach: Cultural Studies

Students should develop their own areas of interest and a list of corresponding texts in conjunction with Dr. Tarbox or Dr. Meeusen.

### **Core List**

Mastering comics studies requires knowledge of a number of canonical texts that are frequently mentioned in North American scholarship and are groundbreaking in

terms of content and/or form. Students should be familiar with all of the following primary texts:

1. Bechdel, *Fun Home: A Family Tragicomedy*
2. Eisner, *A Contract With God*
3. Hernandez and Hernandez, *Love and Rockets* (2-3 volumes)
4. Miller, *The Dark Knight Returns*
5. Moore and Gibbons, *Watchmen*
6. Moore and Lloyd, *V for Vendetta*
7. Sacco, *Journalism*
8. Satrapi, *The Complete Persepolis*
9. Spiegelman, *Maus I: My Father Bleeds History* and *Maus II: And Here My Troubles Began*
10. Ware, *Jimmy Corrigan: The Smartest Kid on Earth* or *Building Stories*

Additionally, candidates should read the following critical texts:

1. Baetens and Frey, *The Graphic Novel: An Introduction*
2. Chute, *Graphic Women: Life Narrative and Contemporary Comics*
3. Eisner, *Graphic Storytelling and Visual Narrative*
4. Hatfield, *Alternative Comics: An Emerging Literature*
5. Heer, ed. *The Comics Studies Reader*
6. Howard and Jackson II, eds. *Black Comics: Politics of Race and Representation*
7. Groensteen, *Comics and Narration* (Trans. Miller)
8. Groensteen, *The System of Comics* (Trans. Beaty and Nguyen)
9. McCloud, *Understanding Comics: The Invisible Art*
10. Postema, *Narrative Structure in Comics: Making Sense of Fragments*
11. Smith and Duncan, eds. *Critical Approaches to Comics: Theories and Methods*

### **Sub-Specialty Lists**

In addition to reading the required texts for their chosen specialty area, candidates should select 10-15 primary and secondary texts, in consultation with one of the examiners (primarily Dr. Tarbox or Dr. Meeusen).

#### **1. Twentieth-Century North American Comics History**

##### **A. Required Primary Texts**

- a. McCay, *Little Nemo In Slumberland 1906-1907*
- b. Siegel and Schuster, *Action Comics #1* (50th Anniversary Reprint Edition)
- c. Spiegelman, Mouly, and Scieszka, eds. *The TOON Treasury of Classic Children's Comics*
- d. Schultz, *The Complete Peanuts* (Choose 1 volume from volumes 1-6)

- e. Kurtzman and Davis, *MAD Magazine* #1

## **B. Required Secondary Texts**

- a. Gabilliet, *Of Comics and Men: A Cultural History of American Comic Books*
- b. Gardner, *Projections: Comics and the History of Twenty-First-Century Storytelling*
- c. Hatfield, Heer, and Worcester, eds. *The Superhero Reader*
- d. Nyberg, *Seal of Approval: The History of the Comics Code*
- e. Smolderen, *The Origins of Comics: From William Hogarth to Winsor McCay*

## **2. Comics Memoir**

### **A. Required Primary Texts**

- a. Barry, *One Hundred Demons!*
- b. Delisle, *Pyongyang*
- c. Green, *Binky Brown Meets the Holy Virgin Mary*
- d. Lewis, Aydin, and Powell, *March*, Volume I
- e. Knisley, *French Milk or Relish*
- f. Schrag, *Potential*
- g. Thompson, *Blankets*

## **3. Critical Approach: Comics Theory**

### **A. Required Primary Texts**

- a. Candidates should select at least 5 primary texts that they would like to analyze in conjunction with the secondary texts listed below. These texts cannot be drawn from the core list. Candidates are encouraged to select primary texts that are mentioned frequently in comics scholarship.

### **B. Required Secondary Texts**

- a. Baetens, "From Black & White to Color and Back: What Does It Mean (not) to Use Color?" *College English* 38.3 (2011): 111-128.
- b. Horstkotte and Pedri, "Focalization in Graphic Narrative." *Narrative* 19.3 (2011): 330-357.
- c. Lefèvre, "Some Medium-Specific Qualities of Graphic Sequences." *SubStance* 40.1 (2011): 4-33.
- d. Stein and Thon, eds. *From Comic Strips to Graphic Novels: Contributions to the Theory and History of Graphic Narrative*. De Gruyter: Berlin/Boston. 2013.
- e. Tarbox, Gwen. "Violence and the Tableau Vivant Effect in the Clear Line Comics of Hergé and Gene Luen Yang." *The Comics of Hergé*. Joe Sutliff Sanders, ed. Jackson, MS: Univ Press of Mississippi, 2016.

#### 4. Critical Approach: Gender and Sexuality

##### A. Required Primary Texts

- a. Bechdel, *The Essential Dykes to Watch Out For*
- b. Clowes, *Ghost World*
- c. Cruse, *Stuck Rubber Baby*
- d. Doucet, *My New York Diary*
- e. Gloeckner, *The Diary of a Teenage Girl: An Account in Words and Pictures*
- f. Hall, *No Straight Lines: Four Decades of Queer Comics*

##### B. Required Secondary Texts

- a. Allison, "(Not) Lost in the Margins: Gender and Identity in Graphic Texts," *Mosaic* 47.4 (2014): 73-95.
- b. Brown, *Dangerous Curves: Action Heroines, Gender, Fetishism, and Popular Culture*
- c. Kirtley, *Lynda Barry: Girlhood through the Looking Glass*
- d. Robbins, *Pretty In Ink: North American Women Cartoonists 1896-2013*

#### 5. Critical Approach: Cultural Studies

##### A. Required Primary Texts

- a. Beauchard, *Epileptic*
- b. Johnson and Pleece, *Incognegro*
- c. Modan, *The Property*
- d. Sacco, *Jerusalem*
- e. Tamaki and Tamaki, *Skim*
- f. Yang, *American Born Chinese or Boxers & Saints*

##### B. Required Secondary Texts

- a. Aldama, *Multicultural Comics: From Zap to Blue Beetle*
- b. Alaniz, *Death, Disability, and the Superhero: The Silver Age and Beyond*
- c. Oksman, "How Come Boys Get to Keep Their Noses?": *Women and Jewish American Identity in Contemporary Graphic Memoirs*
- d. Royal, ed. "Coloring America: Multi-Ethnic Engagements with Graphic Narrative." Spec. issue of *MELUS* 32.3 (2007).