

Syllabus: Intro to Manga

LINDSEY STIREK

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Keywords: Syllabus, Manga, Class, Teaching, Education**Author Bio:**

Lindsey Stirek is a Teaching Assistant Professor in the School of Art and Design and the Assistant Director of Academic Programming at Japan House at University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign. Dr. Stirek earned her Ph.D. from the Ohio State University where she specialized in premodern Japanese literature and manga. Currently, her research centers around how storytelling through manga and anime is used to create models of activism for Ainu people. Dr. Stirek teaches courses on manga, anime, and Japanese artistic practices, including chanoyu and lacquer repair. Her writings can be found in *The Routledge Companion to Gender and Sexuality in Comic Book Studies*, *Experiments in Art Research: How Do We Live Questions Through Art?*, and the upcoming *Handbook of Japanese Aesthetics*.

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PREFACE

This syllabus is a labor of love, and is the first syllabus I ever made, though it is almost unrecognizable from the first draft made nearly a decade ago. The hardest part of making this syllabus was, of course, deciding which manga to include. There are so many wonderful manga to choose from that narrowing it down was a herculean effort, and even having done so, I find myself updating the manga I use in each section every year. This is the beauty of teaching manga—it is ever-evolving, ever-changing, and so far I haven't found any wrong answers for what to include. This is also tragedy of teaching manga—you can never fully represent all the glorious variety there is to read, and some things will always get left out. The challenge then, is deciding what is too important to leave out. For example, I teach a seminar course that focuses exclusively on Queer manga, but I am only able to offer it occasionally, and it felt important to introduce more of these incredible works in the introductory class. My Brother's Husband has long been part of this syllabus, but *Boys Run the Riot* and *I Hear the Sunspot* are fairly recent additions. Replacing some of the more popular, mainstream manga with these more recent works representing diverse viewpoints was more popular with some students than others, but ultimately led to a better representation of the variety of manga available to read and opened space for some transformative conversations in the classroom.

Manga is such a powerful medium, and its influence is constantly expanding. While not as popular in the U.S. as anime, it has a dedicated fan base and Western comics artists often cite manga techniques and styles as influences on their own works. While one doesn't necessarily have to draw manga to understand the genius of manga techniques, playing a part in the creation of a manga is critical to gaining an applied knowledge of how manga works and why it is impactful. In the early versions of this class, I had every student make their own manga, which had some benefits, especially for the students who really had a story they wanted to tell, but on the suggestion of my student and later grading assistant, Jenny Han, I decided to try having the students work in teams to produce their manga. They are now split into groups of 2 or 3, matched based on their interests and have to fulfill the writer, illustrator, and editor roles between them. Not only does this replicate, with obvious limitations, the way many manga are produced, but it gives them a chance to play to their strengths and exchange ideas with teammates. This change resulted in extraordinary quality manga and was the impetus for the creation of the ongoing class zine, *Nenkan 301*.

Although this class has been through hybrid and online versions, the in-person iteration is my favorite way to run the class, as it allows students to work on their manga in a simulated studio setting as well as to see other groups' work and gather feedback and ideas as they go along. It is also a lot easier for me to make edits and gentle suggestions in real time, which I believe creates less stress in the long run of the creative process. This is truly a fun class to teach, and I have been told it is a fun class to take as well. But fun doesn't mean it isn't a serious, deep exploration of a medium that can serve as a window into diverse viewpoints and an expanded worldview. Stories are how humans understand each other and the world around us, and manga are simply stories told in word and image. I offer this syllabus as my own love letter to the medium, and I hope

you will find in it a good foundation to build off of as you incorporate your favorite manga, your students' recommendations, and the many fantastic manga I am sure are just waiting to be published.

SYLLABUS

At UIUC, we are on the lands of the Peoria, Kaskaskia, Piankashaw, Wea, Miami, Mascoutin, Odawa, Sauk, Mesquaki, Kickapoo, Potawatomi, Ojibwe, and Chickasaw Nations. These Nations were forcefully removed from these lands upon which UIUC resides, and these lands continue to carry the stories and struggles of these Nations.

These histories are also echoed in the experience of African American, Latinx, Asian American, and Pacific Islander communities, among others. As a land-grant university, it is our responsibility to address our part in the legacies of colonialism, enslavement, and marginalization through actions as well as words. Thus, this statement represents one manifestation of our ongoing commitment to supporting Indigenous scholars and communities and serves as a reminder of the work left to do in pursuit of an equitable future.

ARTJ 301: Manga: The Art of Image and Word (3 credit hours)

Fall 2024

Room: 316 Art & Design Building

Day/Time: Tuesdays and Thursdays

11:00am-12:20am

Course Website: Canvas

Instructor: L. Stirek

Email: stirek1@illinois.edu

Office Hours: Schedule with instructor

This course introduces manga (Japanese comics), its production, and its history in both a Japanese and global context. You will read a variety of manga in translation and scholarly articles to explore the evolution of manga and how it interacts with culture and society. You will learn the fundamentals of manga as an art form and part of the cultural traditions of Japan.

Course Goals:

Our goal is to examine manga from multiple angles and to establish its role as a literary and artistic form. What role does manga play in contemporary society in Japan and abroad? How do we understand the phenomenon of manga in the context of Japanese culture, traditions, and social norms? What unique qualities does manga have that separate it from other forms of visual culture? How are manga similar to and different from Western comics? How do the visual and textual fields interact in manga and what impact does that have on readers? These are some of the main questions we will address by examining manga from a variety of genres.

Course Objectives:

We will examine the history and production of manga before moving on to survey representative works in several thematic categories/genres by reading both primary

readings and secondary scholarship. This course will help you develop the skills necessary to read manga and scholarly articles critically, engaging in constructive application of your own knowledge and of primary readings to evaluate arguments and identify themes and techniques. Through class discussion, we will be interrogating our assumptions about manga and exploring the larger picture of manga as a global phenomenon.

Learning Outcomes:

Upon the completion of this course, you will be able to:

- Interpret manga iconography.
- Explain artistic choices in manga.
- Differentiate between manga genres and identify associated drawing styles.
- Critically evaluate scholarly articles related to manga.
- Identify and discuss social, political, and economic effects on manga as a medium.
- Describe the history of manga and its connections to traditional Japanese culture.
- Work with a team to create an original manga.
- Give constructive feedback on creative works.
- Contribute your perspective during scholarly discussion.

You Will Succeed in This Course If You:

1. Come to class.
2. Do the readings (on time).
3. Participate in class discussion.
4. Complete all assignments.
5. Communicate with the instructor.

The most fruitful learning happens when we engage in open discussion and challenge ourselves to think outside our comfort zones. Successful students are those who contribute to the classroom community of learning and who enrich their own understanding in new ways.

Class Materials (Required)

Available in print:

Making Comics (2006) by Scott McCloud

Avg. Price: New: \$22.99, Used: around \$10)

Available as e-reader or in print:

Sailor Moon 1 (1998) by Naoko Takeuchi

Avg. Price: New: \$9.89, Used: \$4.50

My Brother's Husband Vol. 1&2 (2017-2018) by Gengoroh Tagame

Avg. Price Vol. 1: New: \$23.99, e-reader: \$12.99, Used: \$11

Avg. Price Vol. 2: New: \$18.55, e-reader: \$12.99, Used: \$10.50

Boys Run the Riot vol. 1 (2021) by Keito Gaku ISBN-13: 978-1646512485

Avg. Price: New: \$12.99, e-reader: \$7.99, Used: \$4.99

I Hear the Sunspot vol. 1 (2017) by Yuki Fumino ISBN-13: 978-1944937300

Avg. Price: New: \$11.00, e-reader: \$10.45, Used: \$1.50

Chihayafuru Vol. 2 (2008) by Yuki Suetsugu (e-reader: currently \$0.99)

Viz Media access (free)

Grading Policy

Class Participation (20%)
Manga Activities (15%)
Final Project Proposal (5%)
Final Project Draft Presentation (15%)
Final Project Draft Comments (10%)
Final Project (Manga) (15%)
Final Project (Analysis) (10%)
Final Project Editorial Review (5%)
Final Reflection (5%)

100%+	A+
93-100%	A
90-92	A-
87-89	B+
83-86	B
80-82	B-
77-79	C+
73-76	C
70-72	C-
67-69	D+
63-66	D
60-62	D-
0-59	F

Weekly Readings:

Weekly reading assignments are listed in the schedule. Readings not listed in the “Class Materials (required)” section above will be provided online via link or on the course website. Readings for each day must be completed BEFORE class that day to assure you can participate in the classroom discussions in a constructive way.

Participation:

Frequent, quality participation in class discussion is expected for maximum points. Quality participation is proactive contribution of unique ideas or constructive questions that further discussion and build off or incorporate the ideas of others. Frequent participation is making such contributions at least once per class.

Manga Activities:

You will be assigned three brief manga creation activities throughout the semester (each worth 5% of your grade). You will not be graded on artistic ability, but rather on your ability to implement the techniques, tropes, and iconography of manga learned in the course.

Final Project Proposal:

As a team, you must come up with a general plot idea for your manga (paragraph 1, this can be the same for each of you). As an individual, you must propose the role(s) you anticipate fulfilling within the team and explain why (paragraph 2, individually written). In total, this assignment should be approximately 1/2 to 1 page long (double spaced, 12pt font). Each person must turn in this assignment separately on Canvas.

Final Project Pitch Presentation:

Your team will pitch your manga to the magazine editorial board (your classmates) utilizing a visual aid of your choice. Each team will be given ten minutes to present. You should present:

1. Your plot
2. Your main characters and character design
3. The genre of your manga and any ways in which you plan to create interest/novelty
4. A rough storyboard

Final Project Presentation Comments:

As your classmates present their manga draft ideas, you will act as the magazine editorial board and be responsible for commenting on each group's project and making suggestions for improvement. More details on this requirement will be discussed in class.

Final Project (Manga):

Your final project will be a creative project made in a collaborative team of 3 to 4 people. The creative project should be a manga of at least 25 panels of your group's own collaborative creation. You can hand-draw, make a webtoon, etc., but you must make a manga (the definition of which we discuss in class). It must fit into one (or more) of the genres examined in this course and use tropes and/or iconography common to that genre. The final manga from each group will be anthologized in our class manga magazine.

Between you, you must fulfill three roles: writer, illustrator, and editor. You may mix-and-match these roles as suits your team, but no one person should take on all three roles at once and equal effort is expected from all teammates. Play to your strengths, foster each others' creativity, and take risks knowing your teammates are there to help you.

Final Project (Analysis):

Individually, you will also be required to write a 2-3 page critical analysis of your team's manga utilizing a minimum of three course readings (including manga) to evaluate, situate, and comment upon your work. You must include a bibliography of the sources you use.

Final Project Editorial Review:

Acting as an editor for the magazine, propose which order the manga should be in for the final magazine and explain why (1 page).

Final Reflection:

Your final reflection will be due one week after our last course meeting. The prompt is posted in Canvas.

Extra credit:

You may create manga (minimum of 4 panels each) of your own design at any point in the semester for a maximum of 2% towards your final grade. More details on Canvas.

Attendance Policy

Unexcused absences and frequent tardiness (more than 5 minutes late for class) will negatively affect your grade.

Late Assignment Policy

With the exception of the manga for your final project, late assignments will be accepted until all on-time submissions for that assignment have been graded by the instructor and returned. The instructor will make an announcement when they have begun grading submissions for an assignment but will not guarantee how long grading will take to complete and will not provide updates on their progress. Any assignments not submitted by the time the instructor has completed grading will be given a 0 for that assignment.

Accommodation Policy for Attendance and Assignments

Reasonable accommodations will be made for absences and late assignments at the discretion of the instructor. Accommodations for assignments and absences must be discussed with the instructor in advance or as soon as possible after incurring an absence or missing assignment.

Technology Policy

During class, phones must be on silent and put away unless the instructor indicates it is appropriate to use it to take photos of your work.

AI Policy

When used effectively, predictive writing technologies/generative AI (e.g. ChatGPT, Google Translate, Grammarly, Midjourney) can be valuable writing tools in many contexts. However, if you use predictive technologies in this class, use them ethically by disclosing how you used them (see, for example, the [MLA citation guidelines for generative AI Links to an external site.](#)). Regardless of whether you use AI for assignments, you are responsible for what you turn in and will be held accountable. For example, including inaccurate citations and sources from predictive technology puts you at risk of academic integrity violations, and overly vague, generalized writing will lose points on assignments.

Schedule

Week 1: **Intro to the Course and History of Manga and Global Comics**

Readings:

Tuesday: None.

Thursday: Read “A Brief Global History of Manga” by Lindsey Stirek.

Week 2: **Making Comics: The Visual Art**

Readings:

Tuesday: Read Introduction and Chapter 1 in *Making Comics*.

Thursday: Read Chapter 2 in *Making Comics*.

Assignments Due: Manga Activity 1

Week 3: **Making Comics: The Written Art**

Readings:

Tuesday: Read Chapters 3 and 4 in *Making Comics*.

Thursday: Read Chapters 5 and 6 in *Making Comics*.

Assignments Due: Manga Activity 2

Week 4: **Traditional Arts/Aesthetics Influence on Anime and Manga**

Readings:

Tuesday: IN-PERSON CALLIGRAPHY LESSON during class hours

Thursday: IN-PERSON CALLIGRAPHY LESSON during class hours

Assignments Due: Manga Activity 3

Week 5: **Manga Categories 1: Shōnen**

Readings:

Tuesday: Read the first chapter of *Naruto*, *Haikyuu!!*, and *One Piece*

Thursday: Read *Bakuman* vol. 1

Read “What Boys Will Be: A Study of Shōnen Manga” by Angela Drummond Mathews

Week 6: **Manga Categories 2: Shōjo**

Readings:

Tuesday: Read the first chapter of *Ouran High School Host Club*, *Skip Beat!*, and *Nana*

Read “Chapter 1: The Heart of the Matter” in *Straight from the Heart* by Jennifer S. Prough on Project MUSE: <https://muse.jhu.edu/chapter/15992>

Thursday: Team Meeting Day

PROJECT PROPOSAL DUE by 11:59pm

Week 7: Manga Categories 3: BL and GL

Readings:

Tuesday: Read *Sailor Moon* 1.

Read Chapter 4 (p. 64-75) of *Beautiful and Innocent Female Same-sex Intimacy in the Japanese Yuri Genre* by Verena Maser:

<https://img.4plebs.org/boards/tg/image/1494/08/1494087296957.pdf>

Thursday: Read *I Hear the Sunspot* vol. 1.

Read "An Introduction to 'Boy's Love' in Japan" in *Boys Love Manga and Beyond: History, Culture, and Community in Japan* by McClelland and Welkner on Project MUSE: <https://muse.jhu.edu/chapter/1477208>

Optional: Read "I Hear You Just Fine": Disability and Queer Identity in Yuki Fumino's *I Hear the Sunspot*" by Corinna Percy

<https://doi.org/10.21900/j.jams.v1.233>

Week 8: Manga Categories 4: LGBTQIA+

Readings:

Tuesday: Read *My Brother's Husband* Vol. 1&2

Thursday: Read *Boys Run the Riot* vol. 1.

Read "A Really High Hurdle' Japan's Abusive Transgender Legal Recognition Process" <https://www.hrw.org/report/2019/03/20/really-high-hurdle/japans-abusive-transgender-legal-recognition-process>

Week 9: Manga Categories 5: Seinen

Readings:

Tuesday: Read chapter 1 of *Tokyo Ghoul* and *Uzumaki*.

Thursday: Team Work Day

Week 10: The Relationship between Anime and Manga

Readings:

Tuesday: Read *Chihayafuru* vol. 2.

In-class: Watch *Chihayafuru* anime ep. 1

Thursday: Team Work Day

Week 11: Final Project Draft Presentations

Tuesday: Draft Presentations

Thursday: Draft Presentations

Week 12: Final Project Draft Presentations

Tuesday: Draft Presentations

Thursday: Draft Presentations

COMMENTS DUE Friday by 11:59pm

Week 13: Manga Production 1

Tuesday: Team Work Day and Editor-in-Chief Meetings

Thursday: Team Work Day and Editor-in-Chief Meetings

Week 14: Fall Break!

Week 15: Manga Production 2

Tuesday: Team Work Day

FINAL MANGA DUE BY 11:59PM

Thursday: Final Editing Day

FINAL EDITORIAL REVIEW DUE BY 11:59pm

Week 16: Final Project Read-Through and Discussion

Tuesday: Publication Day.

FINAL MANGA ANALYSIS DUE BY 11:59pm

Final Reflection DUE: December 17 BY 11:59PM CST

ASSIGNMENTS/RUBRICS

Manga Activity 1

1. Type “manga page” into Google image search or if you have a favorite manga, choose one page from it.
2. Look at the choices the author made and write one paragraph addressing the following: what transitions did they use between panels? What perspective do they use? What moments were selected and what moments left out?
3. In a rough sketch (hand-drawn or digital), redraw the page but add or remove one moment or panel, adjusting the other panels (size, position on the page, etc.) so the addition or removal is not immediately noticeable.
4. Write one paragraph about how this addition or subtraction changed the flow or even the meaning of the narrative.
5. Upload the unedited original page, your redrawn page, and your responses to questions 2 and 4 to the Manga Activity 1 assignment in Canvas.

Manga Activity 2

Using the unedited original image of the manga page you selected for Manga Activity 1, or a different manga if necessary,

1. Write a paragraph in which you identify the expressions of the characters and how they are shown through body language, facial expressions, words or other context. Be specific!
2. Re-draw the page, but give the characters different expressions, different body language, and/or change the lettering of the words (but don't change the words themselves!).
3. Write a paragraph to explain what you did and the effect it has on the page and how the reader might see it.
4. Make sure to upload both the original and edited images.

Manga Activity 3

Pick one a manga page as in previous manga assignments OR use a manga you have read and answer the following (at least one paragraph for each):

1. How is *ma* (active, empty space) used in the manga (or rather, the volume/chapter you read) as a whole?
2. Pick one or two pages and analyze the use of *ma* (active, empty space) in it/them. Make sure to provide a screenshot or picture of the page and mark (with a draw tool, a text box, or otherwise) each specific visual area you address in your analysis. Upload both the original and the marked image.
3. Other than the concept of *ma* (active, empty space), what ideas from calligraphy do you see carrying through into manga? Phrased differently, what influence do you think traditional Japanese arts/aesthetics has on manga?
4. (Extra Credit) Attach a picture of your calligraphy from Tuesday's or Thursday's class and write a few sentences describing why/how it embodies the concept of *ma*.

Grading Rubric for Manga Activity Assignments

Manga Activities				
Criteria	Ratings			Pts
This criterion is linked to a Learning Outcome Images	1 pts Full Marks Original page and redrawn page provided	0.5 pts Half marks only one image provided	0 pts No Marks no image provided	1 pts

Manga Activities				
Criteria	Ratings			Pts
This criterion is linked to a Learning Outcome Answers the Prompt	2 pts Full Marks Fully answers all parts of the prompt in detail.	1 pts Half points Answers the prompt but the answer is not thorough or lacks clarity and/or only answers some of the prompts.	0 pts No Marks Does not answer the prompt or is extremely vague and unclear	2 pts
This criterion is linked to a Learning Outcome Analysis	2 pts Full Marks Provides sufficient specific examples from the page to support answer.	1 pts Half points Examples lack specificity and/or sufficiency, or are not applicable to prompt/answer	0 pts No Marks no examples or examples are extremely vague and unconnected to the prompt	2 pts
Total Points: 5				

Project Presentation Comments

As your classmates present their manga draft ideas, you will act as the magazine editorial board and be responsible for commenting on each group's project and making suggestions for improvement. More details on this requirement will be discussed in class.

For this assignment, act as if you are an editor for a manga company.

Give constructive comments on the flow of the story, the panel layout, the dialogue, plot devices, etc. Address the following questions:

- Is the plot clear?
- Does the panel layout make sense/flow?
- Does the dialogue/plot suit the scenes presented?
- Is the story and the way it is presented impactful?
- Does the story/art convey emotion well?
- Does the manga fit into the chosen genre?
- Will the manga appeal to readers?
- Is the character design impactful and/or suit the character's role?
- Does the division of labor in the team make sense?

If the answer to any of these is "no," please provide recommendations on how to improve!

Final Reflection Assignment

1-2 pages, 12 pt font, double spaced

In your reflection, address the following prompts:

1. What are the three main things you would say you learned from creating your own manga?
2. How does manga reflect and comment upon society/"real life" and how does manga push boundaries?
3. Has reading manga and learning about it changed or enhanced your ideas about art, storytelling, Japan, society, and the world?
4. Name and discuss at least one skill you feel you developed or gained from this class.
5. What is one fact, idea, or discussion point that you think you will remember and/or use in the future.

FINAL THOUGHTS

Though I often teach manga and anime separately for the sake of ease, as teaching multiple mediums can be rather challenging, it has been an interesting exercise to incorporate some anime into the course, particularly to compare the manga and anime versions of the same work. There is truly so much room to maneuver in this syllabus based on what direction you want to go with your course. Play with the schedule, the assignments, throw the whole thing out! But please do try your hand at teaching manga, I am sure your students will be thankful for it!