

Spring 2026 ENG 400 Seminars

Truth and Authenticity in Creative Non-fiction

Kristine Ervin

NOTE: Dr. Ervin's section was canceled and replaced with a seminar exploring graphic nonfiction, including memoir and essays in comic format, taught by Dr. Vealey.

No other literary genre is seemingly as fraught with debates about its definition as creative nonfiction. We often feel we have a firm grip on fiction (until we consider Truman Capote's *In Cold Blood*) or on poetry (until we read a prose poem), but creative nonfiction—with its blurred and blurring boundaries; with its swirling questions surrounding essential truth versus factual truth, memory, subjectivity, and allegiance to aesthetics; and with its often implied contract with its readers—begins and remains slippery with us. With memoir, autobiography, and the personal essay especially, these questions regarding truth and authenticity become further complicated when considering imagination as personal history or the influence of the postmodern perspective, with its attention to multiplicity and fragmentation.

In this course, you will engage with contemporary creative nonfiction texts, including memoir and the personal essay, and with current scholarship regarding the central questions and concerns of the genre—truth, yes, but also topics like identity formation, literary movements (confessionalism, literary journalism), form, and narrative. Along with exploring these subjects through a formal research project, you will also practice in art of writing creative nonfiction, thereby pushing the line of inquiry through multiple lenses to answer or to complicate the questions like “When does changing details bleed into just plain lying? What does truth in nonfiction mean, and does it even matter?”

Feminist Politics of Emotion

Megan Schoettler

When and where are women allowed—or expected—to express emotions such as rage, hope, shame, and joy? This research seminar will examine how we are “schooled” into gendered and rhetorical experiences of emotions and how feminists have pushed back against scripts that dictate how and when women and men should feel and act on those feelings. The course will center Black feminist theory and investigate how dominant narratives, including those of rape culture and the Sapphire stereotype, reinforce gendered ways of feeling and acting. Students will take on their own research project, investigating the social-cultural scripts of emotion, including how these scripts are represented and resisted across various forms of media. Students can learn about Dr. Megan Schoettler’s research interests from the English Department’s website.

Native American Literature and Print Culture

Carolyn Sorisio

This course examines American Indian authors' diverse, creative, and extensive use of authorship and print culture in the nineteenth century. We will ask what circumstances encouraged some American Indians to become authors and examine the choices they made when doing so. We will discover how authors such as Black Hawk, William Apess, Elias Boudinot, John Rollin Ridge, Jane Johnston Schoolcraft, Sarah Winnemucca Hopkins, and Zitkala-Sa wrote in diverse and evolving genres such as life writing, non-fiction, poetry, and fiction. Drawing upon Native American literary studies, book history, and postcolonial and historical methods, this course will build upon methods and methodologies that you may have been introduced to in ENG202 or ENG 206/296. See more about Professor Carolyn Sorisio's scholarship [here](#).

Comics at the End of the World

Kyle Vealey

There is no doubt that our world is in crisis—socially, environmentally, economically, politically. With our increasing awareness of large-scale, complex problems, such as climate change, racial injustice, and viral pandemics, it is also no wonder that such crises have become encoded and/or reflected in popular media such as comics. And historically this has always been the case with comics as a medium. Since their rise in popularity from the 1930s onward, comics have long been used to address social, environmental, and economic crises in ways that communicate, translate, or frame them for a larger public.

In this ENG 400 seminar, we will delve into the way comics and other visual narratives grapple with our world's most complex and wicked problems—both historically and contemporarily. Specifically, we will consider questions such as: what role do comics play in creating public narratives of social, environmental, or economic crises? What are the rhetorical and/or visual affordances of the comic medium? And in what way can comics and other forms of visual narratives work to help us address contemporary matters of concern, such as climate change or social injustices? This seminar will examine comics depicting various end of the world scenarios (personal, social, environmental) and treat them, in Kenneth Burke's words, as equipment for living. That is, we will read these end of the world comics as public rhetorics that encapsulate and name our current apocalyptic anxieties. Through this examination, we will work to extract lessons and strategies from these narratives to make sense of ongoing global crises that threaten life as we know it.