

# Storytelling Across Media

English 375-01  
Monday, Wednesday & Friday 12:00 – 12:50 pm  
Liberal Arts Hall LBR-3214

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Office Hours: Mon/Wed/Fri 10:00 – 11:00 am (and by appointment).

## >> Course Description

Our lives are filled with media, but do you know how to decode these texts? This class introduces students to the building blocks of narrative in literature, sequential art, film, television, and digital media. Taking each medium one at a time, we will examine media forms and their narrative styles to understand how such storytelling strategies convey meaning and themes. Key concepts addressed in this course include: narrative forms, fundamental components of story, world building, and voice. Students will learn to critically examine images and stories, while also taking into account the larger industrial and cultural ecosystems that media are produced in. We will look at print, film, television and digital media individually and as part of larger flows of media content. Through readings, screenings, and discussions, students will develop sophisticated understandings of media narratives in terms of technical and aesthetic properties, industrial practices, representation, cultural theories, social responses and more.

Reflecting on different forms of narrative, the course asks: Why do the ways we access, read, write, and circulate stories as a culture matter? Expect to examine a variety of media texts, to review basic concepts and conversations drawn from narrative theory, and to creatively experiment with the storytelling strategies we are analyzing in class. No familiarity with specific print, digital, or visual media is necessary, but you are expected to take the material seriously and be ready to engage in thoughtful critique, discussion and experimentation with these different media forms.

Now, get ready! As we move through the course we will be regularly engaging with different media together. You will be asked to reflect on your own experiences as viewers and think about the ways media texts position and engage *you*.

## >> Texts and Materials

Our theoretical readings will be uploaded to our RIT MyCourses site (<http://mycourses.rit.edu>). You are free to save the articles and print your own hard copies to read. There will be readings that I expect you to print and bring to class. I will tell you about these ahead of time.

Our primary texts include of excerpts from comics, movies, television shows, and digital media. These will either be uploaded to our RIT MyCourses site (<http://mycourses.rit.edu>), on reserve at the library, or available as links to web content. The films and television shows we screen in class will be on reserve in the library, but you may opt to rent them from Amazon Prime, iTunes, or another online streaming service. If you choose this option, plan to spend roughly \$1-5 per rental.

I do my best to ensure that pdfs are easily readable and files are accessible in any browser, however, you may occasionally be required to take additional steps to access course materials. You may need to save files and rotate pages to make them more readable. You may need to switch web browsers or install plugins to

access files. What you need to do will depend on your particular tech set up and needs. The point is, you are responsible for ensuring that you can access, open, and read all course materials. You must plan ahead to ensure that you can access materials and come to class prepared. If you are having problems, email me. I will try to help you, but please remember that I am not tech support and you may need to seek help with your own computer/tech needs elsewhere.

Our class will also be using computers to screen digital texts, do media analysis, and our own storytelling. As part of this class you will need access to a computer with an internet connection. You may also need to pay \$30 (est) for software or make arrangements to work in an RIT computer lab that has the software you need.

## >> Course Expectations and Requirements

Your final grade is calculated in the following way:

- Attendance & Participation (15%)
- Weekly Assignments (25%)
- Media Projects (50%)
- Group Projects (10%)

### ***Attendance & Participation (15%)***

Course participation is vital to your success in this class. Your questions, opinions, feedback, and ideas are invaluable to your classmates. We want to hear your voice! Participation is not just about being present in the room. Your participation grade takes into account your contributions in class, online, and your overall preparation for class discussion. It is important that you come prepared for class and ready to share your questions, ideas and insights. If you are regularly unprepared and/or habitually miss assignments this will seriously impact your grade. Using technology in class for non-class related reasons will also impact your grade.

#### *Class Attendance Policies*

Since this class relies heavily on the active participation and presence of all students, ***missing more than six classes will result in an automatic failure of the class.*** That is the equivalent of missing two weeks of class this semester.

A few key points on attendance:

- I do not differentiate between excused and unexcused absences. You don't need to tell me why you've missed class; you are simply absent and have a bank of 6 absences to use. For students going over the absence limit, extenuating circumstances (a death in the family, serious illness, etc.) are considered on a case-by-case basis. For these exceptional situations, you may be required to provide documentation.
- I take attendance at the start of class. If you miss the attendance/roll-call you are late. Being late twice counts as one absence.
- If you fall asleep in class, this means you are not present and will be marked as absent for the day.

If you miss a class:

- You are still responsible for turning in your work on time. (If you cannot attend, assignments should be posted to MyCourses or emailed to me.)

- You are responsible for speaking with your classmates to collect any documents, notes or news from that day. I will not recap missed classes over email. However, you are welcome to come by during my office hours to review the missed class and/or address any questions you have regarding the missed material.
- You are expected to make up any missed screenings on your own time and come prepared for the next class.

### ***Weekly Assignments (25%) & Extra Credit Opportunities***

There are assignments due nearly every week of class. These will typically be response assignments due Fridays at 10 am on MyCourses. I will build our class discussion around your responses, so come to class ready to discuss about what you have posted online.

#### *Weekly Assignments*

When in written form, each response assignment is expected to be at least 200 words long. You will typically find yourself writing 2-3 paragraphs. Responses are graded pass/fail basis. In order to receive credit, your response must do the following: Responses must fully address the assignment prompt. They also need to work carefully with the week's readings and assigned materials. Working with the class readings/materials means quoting, citing, and explaining. In each response assignment you are expected to 1) cite the readings and work with the author's words, 2) use clear and specific examples from the books, films, or TV shows you are assigned to support your claims (i.e. pointing to specific moments as evidence). If you are looking at an additional text (webpage, game, etc.) you are still expected to cite as well as use clear and specific examples.

However, these posting assignments are not exclusively in written form. The weekly assignments are also an opportunity for skill building and for engaging more deeply with the course texts. Be ready to make screencaps, video clips, and to post/discuss links to media online. We will go over the procedures for these assignments in class and requirements will be clearly stated on every assignment.

#### *Extra Credit Opportunities*

Several extra credit assignments will be offered in our class. Most of these will be assigned later in the semester. However, there is one long term extra credit assignment:

#### **Screening Notes**

Taking notes while screening films, and watching television is an important habit to develop. It gives you a record of the things you noticed while watching, letting you see trends in your own thinking. It also gives you a useful archive to return to when writing your class papers and responses. To help you develop this practice I will provide a few quick items to look for each time we watch something in class. I will also often ask you about your notes as part of our class discussions.

Everyone takes notes in their own way and what you notice is up to you. However, I expect all students to make a good faith effort at taking notes each week. Generally, you are expected to have at least one full page of notes per film/tv show. Once you get in the habit of it, you may find that you're writing down more and more each time. That's great!

If you keep all your notes and turn them in at the end of the semester I will give you extra credit points for taking notes regularly.

### ***Media Projects (50%) & Group Project (10%)***

In a class that's all about storytelling, the narratives *you* produce for class will be as important to our studies as the weekly screenings and readings. During this semester you will practice communicating your ideas in a variety of ways.

Our major class projects will consist of:

- 1.** Sequential Storytelling Project (can be creative or critical)
- 2.** Film Image Analysis Paper
- 3.** Group Remix Project
- 4.** Digital Media or Adaptation Project (can be creative or critical)

We will spend time in class prepping for these assignments and they will all be discussed in more detail during the semester. The weekly MyCourses assignments are designed to help you develop ideas for these projects. Each digital assignment will accommodate different levels of technical skill, from the first-timer to the more tech-savvy. I will also be offering regular "drop-in hours" in my office so that anyone who needs to can either meet with me for some additional help with projects or simply to have some additional time to work.

### ***Work Submission Requirements***

Most of your work this semester will be submitted on MyCourses. Feedback may be giving using the TurnItIn commenting/grading features built into MyCourses or through files I upload and attach to your assignment grades. When you submit work on MyCourses, the documents you upload can only be submitted in the following formats: .doc, .docx, .rtf, .pdf. If your word processing software does not automatically save in one of these file formats, it is your responsibility to convert your work as needed. If you have questions about converting files or using MyCourses, please see me or ask the IT Help Desk.

### ***Grading and Assessment***

Here is a breakdown of how grades are assigned in this class:

- A: Excellent work.** Student goes well beyond minimum assignment requirements. Student pushes themselves and their skills, is conscious of their peers, makes strong and useful contributions to class discussions, and makes significant effort to collaborate with peers. Student's work is original, inventive and creative. Work uses clear and focused arguments that are accompanied by careful use of strong evidence and analysis. Work is well organized, clearly written, and communicates its ideas in effective and compelling ways.
- B: Above average work.** Student exceeds minimum assignment requirements. Student pushes themselves and their skills, is conscious of their peers, makes regular contributions to class discussions, and regularly collaborates with their peers. Student's work has clear and focused arguments that are accompanied by strong evidence and analysis. Work is organized and communicates its ideas effectively ways.
- C: Average work.** Student meets minimum assignment requirements and class participation requirements. Student's work is relatively organized and coherent.
- D: Below average work.** Student work does not meet or only meets a few of the minimum assignment requirements and class participation requirements. Student's work may struggle with organization and coherency issues.
- F: Unsatisfactory work.** Student work does not meet minimum assignment requirements and class participation requirements. Student's work may struggle with significant organization and coherency issues.

## >> Email

I will frequently use email to contact the class. Make sure you have access to your rit.edu email address and be careful to regularly check your email, even on the days we do not have class. Missing an email will not excuse you from missed assignments or late work.

You are welcome to email me with any questions and concerns you have about the class or your work. I generally respond to email quickly and you can expect a response in 24 hours. If you do not receive a response from me in 1-2 days, please email me again. I do receive a lot of email daily. It's rare, but occasionally someone gets lost in the shuffle or inexplicably stuck in a spam/junk mail filter. Failure to follow-up with me regarding emails or questions asked in class will not excuse you from missed assignments or late work.

Our relationship is a professional one. This means I expect our email exchanges to be professional as well. Please take the time to look into questions and check the syllabus before you contact me. Then, when you email me, be careful to explain the issue carefully and be clear about your questions. If you are unsure how to structure a professional email please contact me. I am happy to answer any questions you have about this.

## >> Technology in the Classroom

Smartphones and computers can be helpful tools and we will often use them as part of our work in class. Due to this, you are encouraged to bring technology to class. However, it is expected that you will turn off the ringers on your phones and only use these tools for class-related purposes. I reserve the right to ask anyone abusing this policy to put away their devices and/or leave the class.

## >> Course Screenings

As this is a media studies course, in addition to weekly readings we will be screening a film, television program or digital media piece nearly every week of class. To facilitate the digital projects and screenings, there will also be times when we meet in a campus computer lab instead of our regular classroom. Course screenings will often be started during class time, however many of these texts will not be finished during class. Instead, you are responsible for screening the rest of the text outside of class. You will often be given assignments that depend on your completion of the screening.

In-class screenings are part of the work we do as a class and your attendance is expected. If you miss an in-class screening it is counted as an absence and you must make up the screening on your own time. You should be able to find all the materials we screen in class online, on reserve the RIT Library, on Netflix, or through iTunes, Amazon Prime or Hulu. If, for any reason, you cannot find the screening on your own, you are responsible for contacting me and so that I can help you make arrangements to screen it.

## >> RIT Honor Code

As an institution of higher learning, RIT expects students to behave honestly and ethically at all times, especially when submitting work for evaluation in conjunction with any course or degree requirement. The Department of English encourages all students to become familiar with the RIT Honor Code and with RIT's Academic Integrity Policy.

- RIT Honor Code URL: <http://www.rit.edu/academicaffairs/policiesmanual/sectionA/honorcode.html>
- RIT Academic Integrity Policy URL: <http://www.rit.edu/~w-policy/sectionD/D8.html>

## **>> Student Accommodations**

RIT is committed to providing reasonable accommodations to students with disabilities. If you would like to request accommodations such as special seating or testing modifications due to a disability, please contact the Disability Services Office. It is located in the Student Alumni Union, Room 1150; the Web site is [www.rit.edu/dso](http://www.rit.edu/dso). After you receive accommodation approval, it is imperative that you see me during office hours so that we can work out whatever arrangement is necessary.

## **>> Content Warning**

During this semester we will be discussing a variety of subjects, watching films, and reading texts that may represent beliefs and life experiences that are different than your own. The readings and screenings for this course may contain adult material. Please read the course calendar carefully. If you have any reservations, for whatever reason, about watching, reading, or discussing certain types of content, contact me during the first week of class.

# Course Schedule

<i>Week &amp; Topic</i>	<i>Assignments</i>
<b>Week 1: 8/24 – 8/28</b> <i>Narrative Theory</i>	<b>Monday, 8/24</b> - Introduction to the class. <b>Wednesday, 8/26</b> <i>Read:</i> Abbott, “The Universality of Narrative,” “Narrative & Time,” “Defining Narrative” (1-5, 12-24) <b>Friday, 8/28</b> <i>Read:</i> Abbott, “The Rhetoric of Narrative,” “Closure” (36-61)
<b>Week 2: 8/31 - 9/4</b> <i>Narrative Theory</i>	<b>Monday, 8/31</b> <i>Read:</i> Abbot, “Narration” (62-75), “Character” (123-129), & <i>Hawkeye</i> #1 <b>Wednesday, 9/2</b> <i>Read:</i> Abbot, “Interpreting Narrative” (76-92) & <b>Friday, 9/4</b> <i>Read:</i> <i>Hawkeye</i> #2 <i>Due:</i> Assignment 1
<b>Week 3: 9/7 – 9/11</b> <i>Narrative &amp; Sequential Images</i>	<b>Monday, 9/7 – LABOR DAY HOLIDAY - NO CLASSES</b> <b>Wednesday, 9/8</b> <i>Read:</i> McCloud, “The Vocabulary of Comics” & <i>Fun Home</i> #1. <b>Friday, 9/11</b> <i>Read:</i> McCloud, “Blood in the Gutter” <i>Due:</i> Assignment 2
<b>Week 4: 9/14-9/18</b> <i>Narrative &amp; Sequential Images</i>	<b>Monday, 9/14</b> <i>Read:</i> McCloud, “Time Frames” & <i>Fun Home</i> #2. <b>Wednesday, 9/16</b> <i>Read:</i> McCloud, “Living in Line” <b>Friday, 9/18</b> <i>Due:</i> Assignment 3 <b>PROJECT ONE PROPOSALS DUE ON MYCOURSES THIS WEEKEND.</b>
<b>Week 5: 9/21 – 9/25</b> <i>Film: Shooting the Picture</i>	<b>Monday, 9/21</b> <i>Read:</i> Giannetti, “Photography” <b>Wednesday, 9/23</b> <i>In class:</i> Begin watching <i>Touch of Evil</i> (Orson Welles, 1958). You are responsible for completing this & the accompanying assignment before class on Friday. <b>Friday, 9/25</b> <i>Due:</i> Assignment 4 <i>In class:</i> Be ready to discuss screening and assignment in class.

<i>Week &amp; Topic</i>	<i>Assignments</i>
<p><b>Week 6: 9/28 – 10/2</b>  <i>Film: Composing, Setting, &amp; Scenes</i></p>	<p><b>Monday, 9/28</b>  <i>Read:</i> Giannetti, “Mise En Scene”</p> <p><b>Wednesday, 9/30</b>  <i>In class:</i> Begin watching <i>Far From Heaven</i> (Todd Haynes, 2002). You are responsible for completing this &amp; the accompanying assignment before class on Friday.</p> <p><b>Friday, 10/2</b>  <i>Due:</i> Assignment 5  <i>In class:</i> Be ready to discuss screening and assignment in class.</p> <p><b>PROJECT ONE DUE ON MYCOURSES THIS WEEKEND.</b></p>
<p><b>Week 7: 10/5 – 10/9</b>  <i>Film: Stitching Shots Together</i></p>	<p><b>Monday, 10/5</b>  <i>Read:</i> Giannetti, “Editing”</p> <p><b>Wednesday, 10/7</b>  <i>In class:</i> Begin watching <i>The Hurt Locker</i> (Kathryn Bigelow, 2008). You are responsible for completing this &amp; the accompanying assignment before class on Friday.</p> <p><b>Friday, 10/9</b>  <i>Due:</i> Assignment 6  <i>In class:</i> Be ready to discuss screening and assignment in class.</p>
<p><b>Week 8: 10/12 – 10/16</b>  <i>Film: The Stories Moving Images Tell</i></p>	<p><b>Monday, 10/12 – NO CLASSES.</b></p> <p><b>Tuesday, 10/13 – MONDAY CLASS SCHEDULE.</b>  <i>Read:</i> Giannetti, “Story”</p> <p><b>Wednesday, 10/14</b>  <i>In class:</i> Begin watching <i>Wendy and Lucy</i> (Kelly Reichardt, 2008). You are responsible for completing this &amp; the accompanying assignment before class on Friday.</p> <p><b>Friday, 10/16</b>  <i>Due:</i> Assignment 7  <i>In class:</i> Be ready to discuss screening and assignment in class.</p> <p><b>PROJECT TWO PROPOSALS DUE ON MYCOURSES THIS WEEKEND.</b></p>
<p><b>Week 9: 10/19 – 10/23</b>  <i>Television: The TV Production Environment</i></p>	<p><b>Monday, 10/19</b>  <i>Read:</i> Butler, “Ebb &amp; Flow” &amp; Mittell, “Exchanging Audiences” (54-97)</p> <p><b>Wednesday, 10/21 – CLASS MEETS ONLINE</b>  <i>In class:</i> Television screening TBA.</p> <p><b>Friday, 10/23 – CLASS MEETS ONLINE</b>  <i>Due:</i> Assignment 8  <i>In class:</i> Be ready to discuss screenings and assignment in class.</p>
<p><b>Week 10: 10/26 – 10/30</b>  <i>TV: Form &amp; Storytelling</i></p>	<p><b>Monday, 10/26</b>  <i>Read:</i> Mittell, “Telling Television Stories” (213-268)</p> <p><b>Wednesday, 10/28</b>  <i>In class:</i> Television screening TBA.</p> <p><b>Friday, 10/30</b>  <i>Due:</i> Assignment 9  <i>In class:</i> Be ready to discuss screenings and assignment in class.</p> <p><b>PROJECT TWO DUE ON MYCOURSES THIS WEEKEND.</b></p>

<i>Week &amp; Topic</i>	<i>Assignments</i>
<p><b>Week 11: 11/2 – 11/6</b>  <i>Digital Narratives:</i>  <i>Transmedia Storytelling</i></p>	<p><b>Monday, 11/2</b>  <i>Read:</i> TENTATIVE: Jenkins, “The Cultural Logic of Media Convergence” (33-42), Jenkins, “Transmedia Storytelling,” &amp; Jenkins, “The Revenge of the Origami Unicorn: Seven Principles of Transmedia Storytelling”</p> <p><b>Wednesday, 11/4</b>  <i>In class:</i> Convergence/transmedia screenings TBA.</p> <p><b>Friday, 11/6</b>  <i>Due:</i> Assignment 10  <i>In class:</i> Be ready to discuss screenings and assignment in class.</p>
<p><b>Week 12: 11/9 – 11/13</b>  <i>Digital Narratives:</i>  <i>Web-based Stories</i></p>	<p><b>Monday, 11/9</b>  <i>Read:</i> TENTATIVE: Ryan, “Web Based Narrative” (148-180)</p> <p><b>Wednesday, 11/11</b>  <i>In class:</i> Meet in lab (location TBD). Class will be spent screening several web-based stories.</p> <p><b>Friday, 11/13</b>  <i>Due:</i> Assignment 11  <i>In class:</i> Be ready to discuss screenings and assignment in class.</p>
<p><b>Week 13: 11/16 – 11/20</b>  <i>Digital Narratives:</i>  <i>Interactive... Narratives?</i></p>	<p><b>Monday, 11/16</b>  <i>Read:</i> TBD (Possible readings include: Arseth, “Genre Trouble,” Murray’s “Game Story as Cyberdrama, Ryan, “Computer Games as Narrative” (181-203), and Jenkins on game design and narrative architecture.)</p> <p><b>Wednesday, 11/18</b>  <i>In class:</i> Meet in lab (location TBD). Class will be spent screening several web-based texts.</p> <p><b>Friday, 11/20</b>  <i>Due:</i> Assignment 12  <i>In class:</i> Be ready to discuss screenings and assignment in class.</p>
<p><b>Week 14: 11/23 – 11/27</b>  <i>Digital Narratives: Remix Culture &amp; Transformative Work (p1)</i></p>	<p><b>Monday, 11/23</b>  <i>Read:</i> Lessig, <i>Remix</i> (excerpts)  <i>In class:</i> Group work and screenings. More info to come.</p> <p><b>Wednesday, 11/25 - Friday, 11/27 – THANKSGIVING BREAK</b></p>
<p><b>Week 15: 11/30 – 12/4</b>  <i>Digital Narratives: Remix Culture &amp; Transformative Work (p2)</i></p>	<p><b>Monday, 11/30</b>  <i>Read:</i> Stein &amp; Busse, “Limit Play”  <i>In class:</i> Group work continues.</p> <p><b>Wednesday, 12/2</b>  <i>In class:</i> Group work continues.</p> <p><b>Friday, 12/4</b>  <i>In class:</i> Group work continues.</p> <p><b>GROUP PROJECTS &amp; PROJECT THREE PROPOSALS DUE ON MYCOURSES THIS WEEKEND.</b></p>

Week & Topic	Assignments
<b>Week 16: 12/7 – 12/11</b> <i>Digital Narratives: Remix &amp; Transformative Work</i> (p3)	<b>Monday, 12/7</b> <i>In class:</i> Group presentations. <b>Wednesday, 12/9</b> <i>In class:</i> Group presentations. <b>Friday, 12/11 – LAST DAY OF CLASSES</b> <i>In class:</i> Group presentations.
<b>Finals Week</b>	<b>FINAL &amp; EXTRA CREDIT DUE ON MYCOURSES THIS WEEK.</b>

*Note: This schedule is tentative and subject to change.*