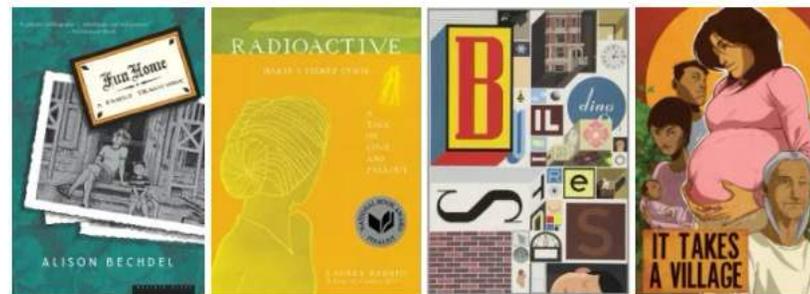




Writing Seminar



GRAPHIC NOVELS! INFO COMICS! TRANSMEDIA KNOWLEDGE!

ENGL 1168-106 • TuTh 1:25-2:40 • Rockefeller 102 Prof. Jon McKenzie • jvm62@cornell.edu • Office: Tues 3:00-4:00 • TBD

[Google folder link](#) [Cornell Library Catalogue](#) [OWL MLA citation guide](#)

Graphic novels and comics have long mixed research and storytelling. From *Maust* to *Logicomix* to *Fun Home*, graphic novelists often tackle complex historical, scientific, and literary issues. The *For Beginners* and *Introducing...* comic books series include such titles as *Climate Change for Beginners*, *Black Women for*

Assignment

Project 3: Information Comics

Using the Comic Life software, compose a 4-6 page info comic that uses dialogue and images to situate and dramatize the concept you analyzed in Project 2.

We have focused so far on the academic essay and the importance of making clear arguments through clear writing, sharpening concepts and their connections through lean, active sentences, coherent paragraphs, and an overall structure that builds toward concluding insights, questions, or recommendations.

At the same time, we have seen that info comics' visual narratives can translate specialized knowledge into common everyday situations and thereby appeal to *logos*, *pathos*, and *ethos* in subtle yet powerful ways: thus, *It Takes a Village* embodies the concept of culturally competent care for Aboriginal women in ways that a scientific article simply cannot.

However, essays and info comics also share many traits, such as tackling conceptual material, incorporating multiple perspectives, and providing choices and recommendations. Essays usually cite different authors' perspectives, while comics often stage different perspectives through characters. Essays present logical alternatives, whereas narratives present characters' behavioral choices situated in specific situations.

In this project, you will apply what you've learned about info comics and essay writing to experiment and create your own info comics. You will need to decide how to translate your conceptual analysis into an engaging narrative. The basic steps:

1. Decide on a scenario to situate key elements of your conceptual analysis: use 2-4 characters with one or more scenes that stages the struggle/drama of your concept.
2. Write a 350-500 word text with character dialogue (for speech bubbles) and narration (for narrator boxes).
3. Draw a simple but complete storyboard with panels, characters (stick figures are fine) and text.
3. Next find copyright-free images online for characters, setting, and props and save into one folder.
4. Bring text and images into Comic Life and compose your visual narrative. Tweak text and images.
5. Export as PDF and print drafts either in B/W or color to share with friends and family

Regarding characters: what characters can best embody your issue as protagonists, antagonists, helpers, and hinderers? Also, information comics target specific audiences, not just school children, but adults and researchers. Your audience here: fellow students and professors and/or friends and family.

Use Creative Commons or Google Image Search tool to filter for reusable images.

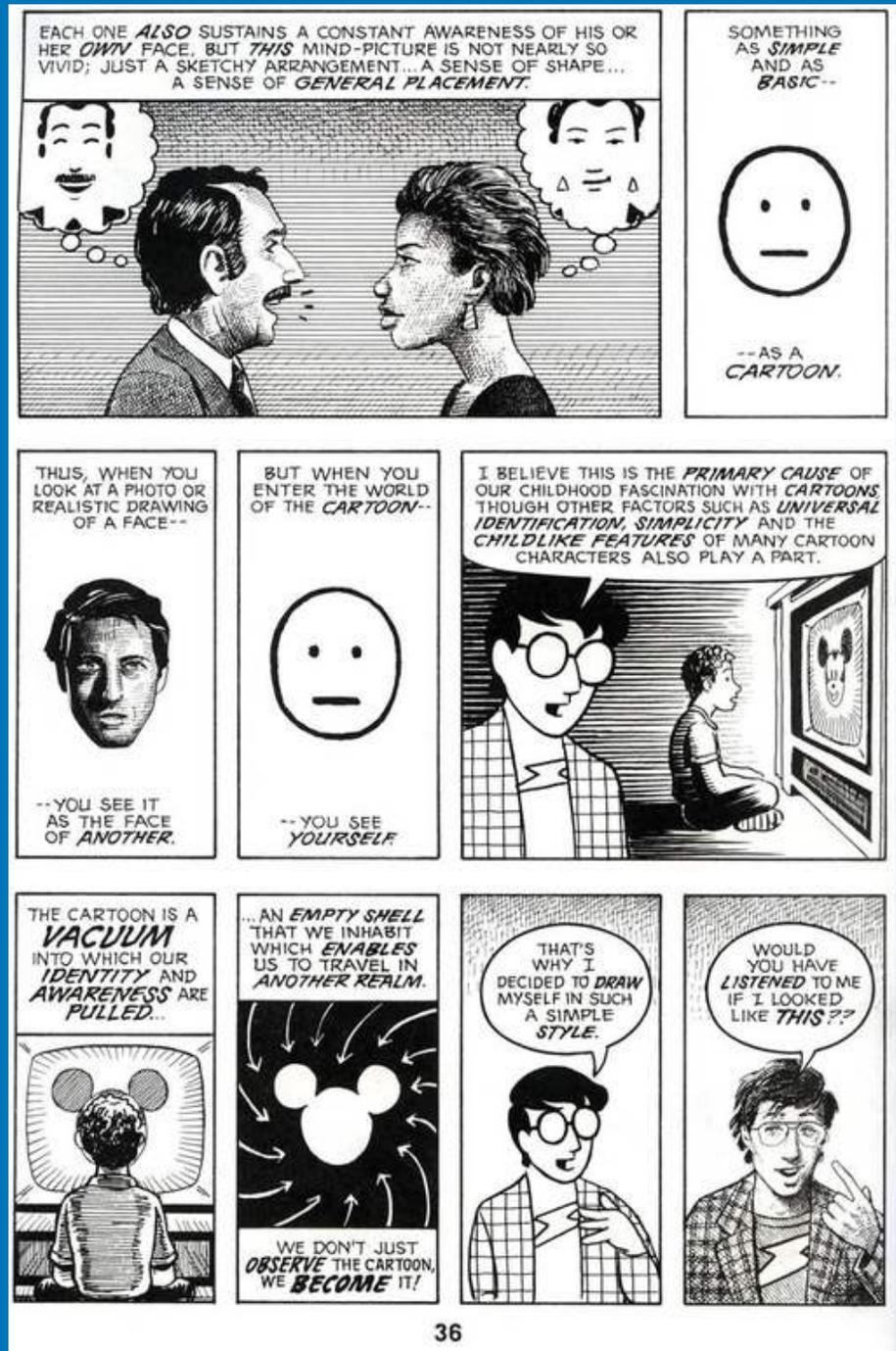
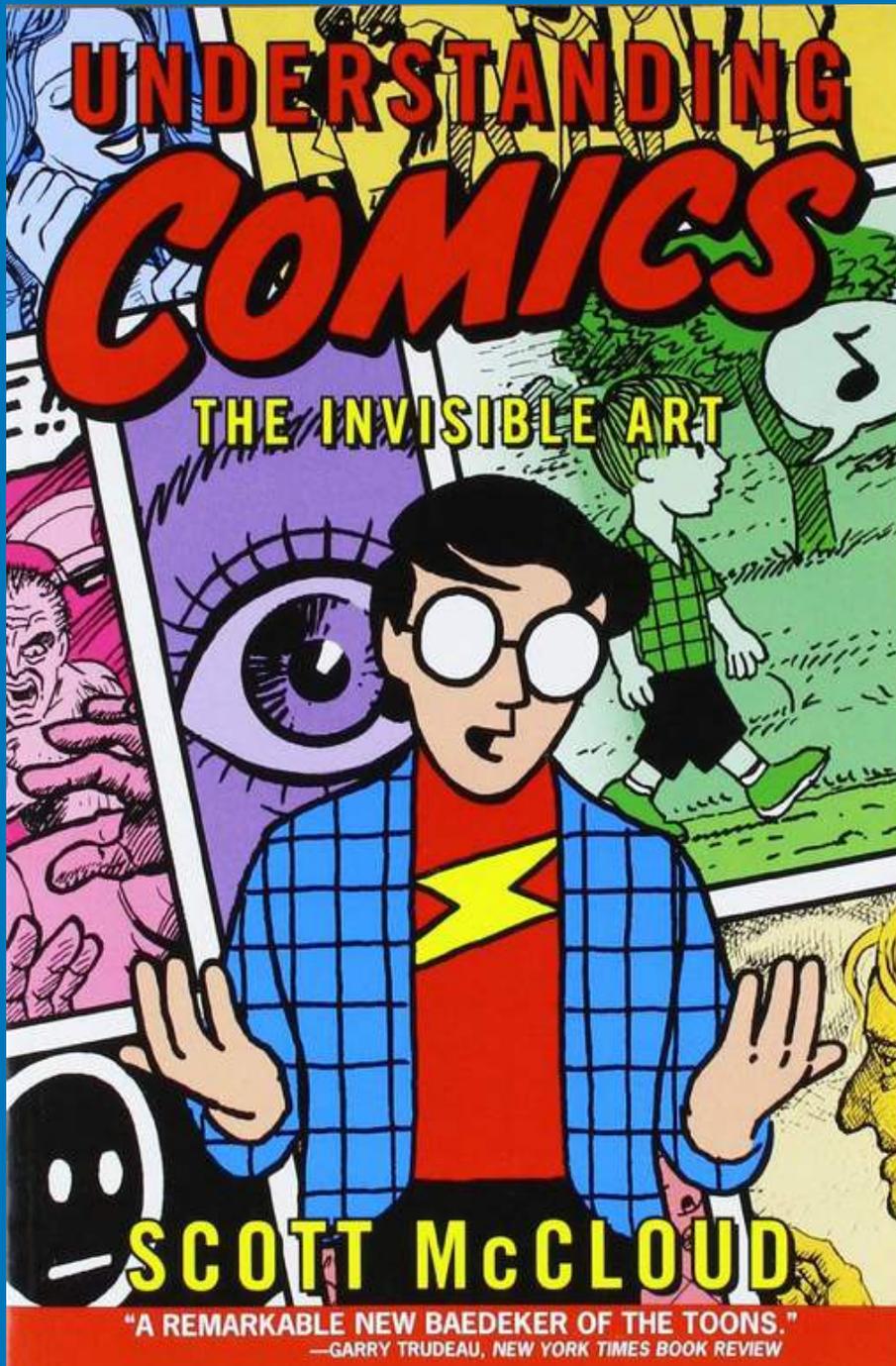
We will hold workshops on dialogues, Comic Life, and narrative sparklines that will provide additional guidance on creating your info comics.

Draft dialogues due: Th 9/26 Draft comics due: Th 10/3 Final comics due: T 10/8

What ARE Information Comics?



EVERY CITY LOOKS THE SAME FROM THE 43 FLOOR ...



Information Comics: an Overview

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Abstract - The analysis of the structure of comics is increasing but only recently have "information comics" been analyzed. These are a subset of comics whose purpose is not to tell a story or entertain but to transfer information or communicate concepts, even though that narrative is often considered an essential element of comics. Information transfer is considered an essential element of many texts, especially educational ones. The effective use of comics in education settings has been discussed since at least 1944. While "information comics" do differ in some aspects, this study will show via Peircean Visual Design that "information comics" are fundamentally the same as other comics, and while comics as a whole may be effective in knowledge transfer there appears to be little data supporting this claim.

Index Terms - Comics, information transfer, Peircean Visual Design...

COMICS

As early as the 1940s, research into the effectiveness of comics in knowledge transfer was undertaken [1]. Unfortunately, due to social stigma and the perceived juvenile nature of comics, much of this research has been ignored or forgotten until recently. Comics are experiencing a resurgence in mainstream culture. Major publishing houses, such as Pantheon and Scholastic, are now publishing graphic novels, a.k.a. comics; and public and school libraries are building comics and graphic novel collections [2, p. 19]. Major motion pictures are increasingly based off comics (e.g., *Men in Black*, *Spiderman*, *Scott Pilgrim versus the World*, *Watchmen*, *Road to Perdition*, *Red*, etc.). The Savannah College of Art and Design has established undergraduate and graduate programs in comics. Academic journals are even accepting graphical abstracts [3] and some are even publishing articles in comic form [4]. All of this shows that comics as a medium are worthy of academic study in and of themselves.

I. Recent research

Thus, academic research has started to again examine comics. Three main areas of research exist: first, the values and social impact of comics; second, the use of comics in education; and third, how comics function as a medium of communication.

While the social impact of comics is research worthy, it has little bearing for this article and will not be covered. The use of comics in education directly relates to information comics and will be covered in detail. The research on the structure of comics provides a basis for analysis of the information transferability of comics, and thus a brief summary of this research will be provided.

This article will provide a brief overview and examples of information comics. It will then examine comics from a Peircean visual design perspective and evaluate current research on the effectiveness of comics in information transfer.

II. Information comics

Information comics are comics designed to educate, inform, or teach the reader something. Though sometimes described as "a cruel hoax," these "comics that introduce history, mathematics, reading, and even the theory of relativity are being gobbled up by parents for their comics-afflicted children and promise to be the growth area of the future" [5, pp. 152-153].

The most thorough examination of information comics is by Jüngst [6]. Her purpose is to show "how" information comics are designed and how they are meant to work as a means of knowledge transfer rather than "why" they might or might not work [6, p. 3]. She examines the type of pictures, texts, the relationships between the pictures, and the texts within information comics, and discovers that there is no significant structural difference between information comics and non-information comics [6]. Unfortunately, most common information comics are pamphlets and are readily discarded [6, p. 27].

Examples of information comics include:

1. Jay Hosler's *Sandwalk Adventures*, a comic book starring Charles Darwin and a talking follicle mite that introduces readers to evolutionary biology [7].
2. The book titled "Hello! Global Citizens" aims to teach children about peace, human rights, and sustainable development. UNESCO Asia-Pacific Centre of Education for International Understanding created the educational comic aimed to help elementary and high school students to overcome cultural differences [8].
3. The financial newspaper Nihon Keizai Shinbun published *Japan Inc., An Introduction into Japanese Economics in Manga (Manga Nihon Keizai no Nyumon)*, a Japanese comic about Japanese economics [9].
4. *Skin Deep!* was developed by the National Drug and Alcohol Research Centre and the NSW Department of Corrective Services to inform inmates about the dangers of hepatitis, HIV, etc. [10, p. 139].
5. Eisner's military work: *Army Motors* and *The Preventive Maintenance Monthly* [11].
6. Scott McCloud's *Understanding Comics: The Invisible Art* [12], a comic about the structure and theory of comics.

III. Comic structure

While non-academic sources have formed the basis for much of the discussion of comics' structure, the writings of comic artists Will Eisner [11] and Scott McCloud [12] being the most influential, both academic and non-academic sources propose that comics function as a system and communicate via rules, often described as linguistic in nature.

Research in this area is often sidelined by a discussion of the exact definition of comics. Many people may find an exact definition of the term "comics" to be simply superfluous, believing that everyone knows what a comic is [6, p. 11]. The debate over the definition focuses on whether comics are a language in themselves, a medium of communication, or a form of communication written in a visual language.

McCloud defines comics as "juxtaposed pictorial and other images in a deliberate sequence intended to convey information and/or produce an aesthetic response" [11, p. 9]. This definition ignited the debate. It is criticized as being too broad. As Magnussen explains, a collection of paintings by a particular artist arranged chronologically would fit into this definition [13, p. 199] because it would be any deliberate sequence conveying information, e.g., the evolution of an artist's style through time. Much of the discussion mixes the form with the method of

communication. Kunzle specifically requires that comics be created for a mass medium [14, p. 5]. Magnussen emphatically insists that comics be narratives [13, p. 199]. Many "information comics" meet neither of these requirements, but are intuitively a form of comics. Thus, for the remainder of this paper, comics are a form of communication written in a visual language.

Comics make use of both verbal and visual elements to communicate. These verbal and visual elements can be arranged into an overarching framework or visual language.

The visual elements used within comics are often associated with specific meanings. "Readers of comics learn how to associate certain repetitive pictorial elements with specific meanings, effectively treating them as linguistic units" [15, p. 439]. An example of this can be seen in Figure 1 and Figure 2, examples from the Asterix the Gaul adventure comic, *La Zizanie* [16].



FIGURE 1. MULTIPLE VISUAL ELEMENTS DEPICTING ANGER

In Figure 1 we see multiple visual elements indicating that this person is angry; the squiggly spirals emanating from his face, the darkened, reddish hue, the closing of his eyes and the arching of his eyebrows, the jagged tail of his speech box, etc. all indicate anger. Taken together the meaning of these elements is transparent.

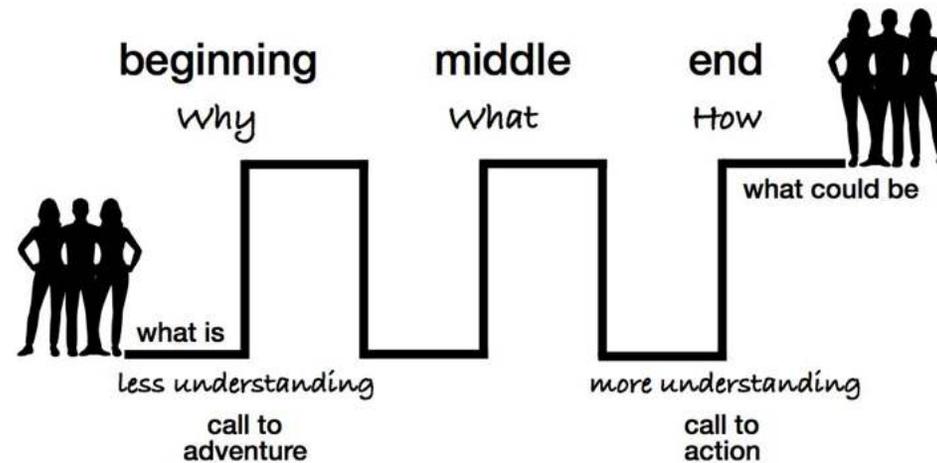
Caldwell on Information Comics McKenzie on Information Comics

Lots of commonalities

Word/image language that moves across comics, PPT, articles (transmedia knowledge)

Mix of logos and stories, ideas and images

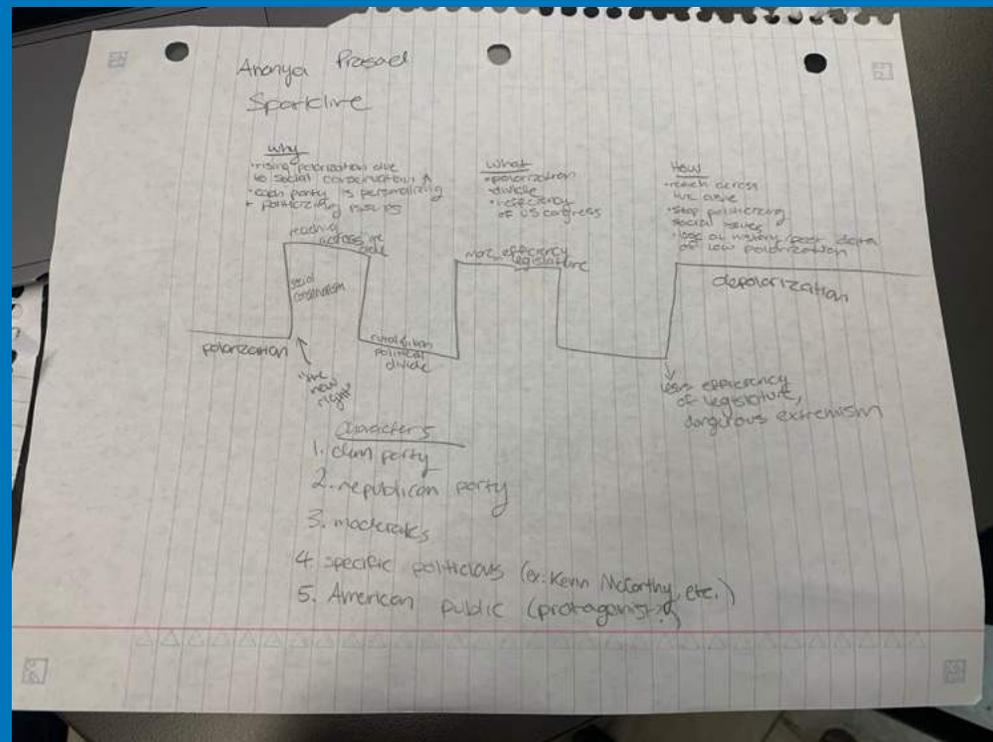
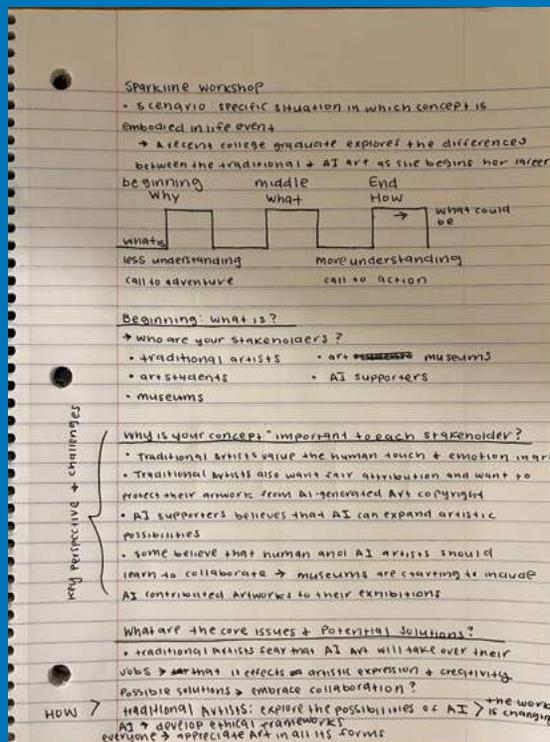
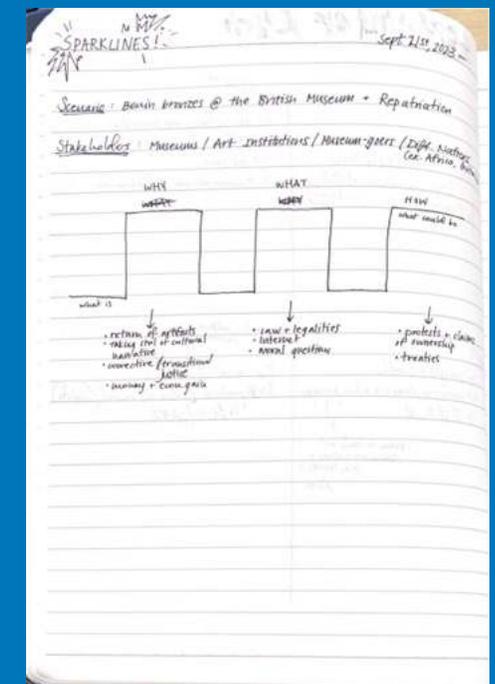
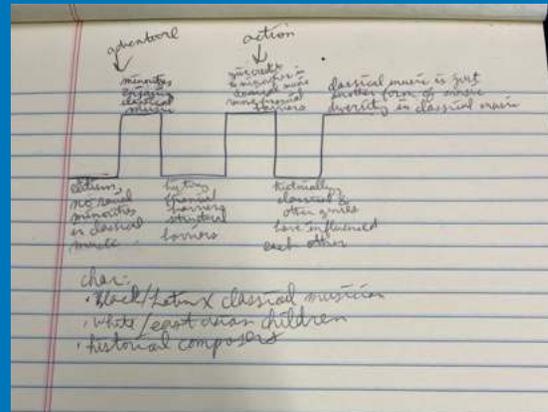
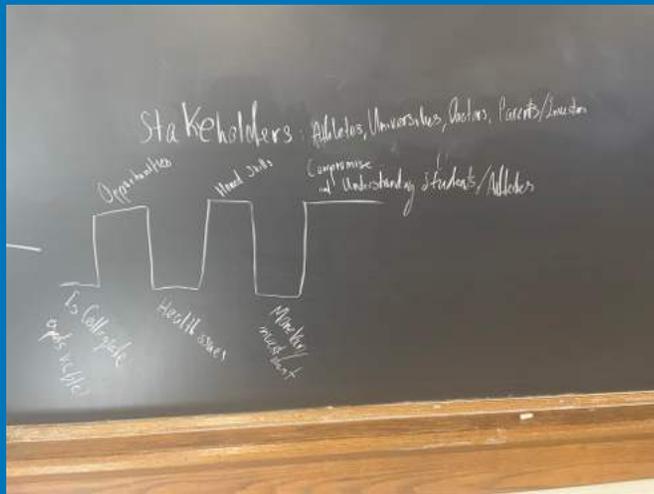
Info comic as communication of information	Info comic as generation and sharing of transmedia knowledge
Communication: writing communicates thought	Generation: thinking through writing (Horton)
Knowledge assumed, then transferred	Creation of knowledge and sharing of wisdom
Specialized knowledge	Holistic wisdom and practices
Pierce/semiology (science of signs)	Derrida/grammatology (science of writing)
Informative signs over decorative(!) & indicative	All signs polysemic, concept are metaphors
Panels function as tables of information	Panels frame scenes of actions, passions, ideas
Kunst: Comics create no new genres	Info comics and graphic novels are new genres
Representation of one true world	Designing of multiple possible worlds
Focus on WHAT: content	Focus on WHY-WHAT-HOW: context, content, action
Top down: Episteme over doxa: From expert to commoners	Bottom up: doxa precedes episteme: Mix of experts & commoners
Dumbing down: Episteme becomes doxa	Wising up: Knowledge becomes smart, agile, wisdom via doxa
Informing of reader	Transforming of reader
Reader/viewer as passive audiences	Reader/viewer as active stakeholders
No quantitative data that shows reading skills improve for all	Qualitative data shows info comics creating new modes of reading, writing, and thinking
Conclusion: ethical duty to study comics' effects	Ethical duty for experts to engage nonspecialists



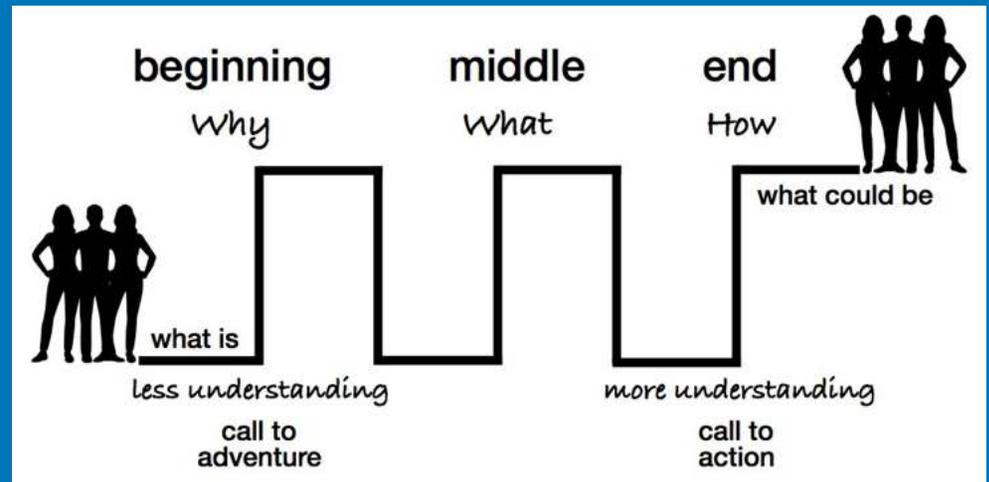
Use the info comic to gather and present arguments, stories, and images that create resonances between your concept and your target audience or stakeholder: try to transport them from *what is* to *what could be*.

<p>Beginning: What Is? Who are your stakeholders?</p>	<p>Middle: Contrast of What Is/Could Be What makes the concept distinctive?</p>	<p>End: What Could Be? How can project best succeed?</p>
<p>Why is your concept important to each stakeholder?</p>	<p>What are the core issues and potential solutions?</p>	<p>How does your concept engage each stakeholder?</p>
<p>What is the adventure, what's at stake for each stakeholder?</p>	<p>What are the key perspectives and challenges?</p>	<p>What action can your stakeholders take?</p>

Sparklines



Sparkline workshop



- Scenario: specific situation in which concept is embodied in life event
- 3-4 Stakeholders as characters, plus protagonist
- Conceptual plotting: Use WWH sparkline
 - Why (context: values and goals of each stakeholder)
 - What (what concept/issue is for each stakeholder)
 - How (actions each stakeholder can take)
- Call to adventure: appeal to values and goals of different stakeholders.
- Call to action: desired actions for different stakeholders.

Sample dialogues

Scene 1: Intro to the Case

Judge: “We are gathered here to discuss the case of Johnson vs. GlobalLink, where the plaintiffs allege negligence on the part of GlobalLink contributed to the tragic suicide of their teenage daughter Alexandra Johnson. Both parties are present, and we will proceed with opening statements. Plaintiff, you may begin.”

Plaintiff's Attorney: “Your Honor, members of the jury, we are here today not just to seek justice for the Johnson family but to hold GlobalLink accountable for the role they played in fostering an environment where cyberbullying thrives. Evidence will show that GlobalLink failed to implement necessary safeguards to protect its users, directly impacting the Johnson's child, Alex, and leading to an irrevocable tragedy.”

GlobalLink DA: “Your Honor, while we deeply sympathize with the Johnson family's loss, GlobalLink provides a platform for free expression and has policies against harassment. The responsibility of monitoring and controlling individual behavior online should not solely fall on GlobalLink. We will demonstrate that the company has made considerable efforts to safeguard its users.”

Scene 2: Witness Testimony - Friend

Plaintiff's Attorney: “Please state your name and relation to Alexandra Johnson.”

Witness (Friend): “(timidly) Jamie Carter, I am ... was Alex's best friend. We spent everyday together, and we spent a lot of that time on GlobalLink.”

Plaintiff's Attorney: “Can you describe what Alex experienced on GlobalLink, Jamie?”

Witness: “At first everything was fine, Alex would post videos of her singing and people were really positive, but then a nasty rumor started spreading.”

Plaintiff's Attorney: “What was the rumor?”

Witness: “That she had messed around with multiple guys at school. None of it was true but that didn't stop anyone from leaving hateful comments telling her she should kill herself. It was so bad they ended up making a hate group dedicated to her and the rumors surrounding her.”

Plaintiff's Attorney: “Did she ever report this behavior?”

Witness: “Yes, multiple times but every time she did nothing would happen or their accounts would be banned for a couple days before they were allowed to come back and keep doing what they did.”

Scene 3: Expert Testimony - Psychiatrist

Plaintiff's Attorney: “Please introduce yourself and explain your expertise.”

Witness (Psychiatrist): “Yes, I'm Dr. Emilia Rivera, a psychiatrist specializing in adolescent mental health. And my work primarily involves counseling teens, usually those who have faced cyberbullying themselves.”

Lauren Tavolacci
ENGL 1168
Draft Dialogue

Two College Students Eating Together in Dining Hall

Mason: How have your classes been going this semester?

Tyler: The classes themselves have been fine, I've just been feeling kinda overwhelmed this semester

Mason: I totally get it school can get like that sometimes

Tyler: Yeah, It's not even classes, sometimes I just get this feeling like everything around me is going up in flames.

Mason: Have you tried talking to someone, like a professional about it?

Tyler: I don't have the money for that right now man

Mason: Yo try asking Chat GPT that might help you

Tyler: I never even thought about that, next time I'm going through it I'll ask

Later that night...

Tyler is typing away at his computer

Tyler: I've been feeling really overwhelmed lately what can I do to stop this feeling

Chat GPT: Feeling overwhelmed is a common experience, but there are several strategies you can try to alleviate these feelings. Here are some suggestions: *(Insert List on screen)*

Remember, it's essential to listen to your body and mind. If feelings of overwhelm persist or intensify, seeking professional help is crucial. Don't hesitate to reach out to a mental health professional for personalized guidance and support.

Tyler: Okay, these seem like they could help in the future, but when do I have the time to do these things, I've got so much going on and taking breaks may help a little but I also don't want to feel like I'm behind or missing out on things with friends

Tyler (typing): when I start feeling overwhelmed I get really anxious

Chat GPT:

It's not uncommon for feelings of overwhelm to be accompanied by anxiety. Here are some additional strategies specifically tailored to help manage anxiety:

(show list on screen)

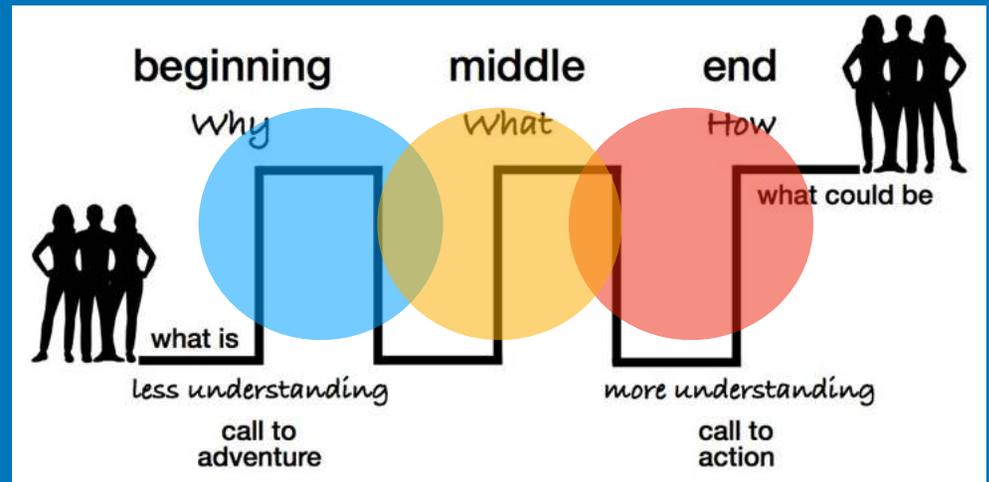
Remember that it's okay to ask for support from friends, family, or a mental health professional. Developing a toolkit of coping strategies can empower you to manage anxiety more effectively. If your anxiety is significantly impacting your daily life, seeking professional help is important for tailored guidance and support.

Aaliyah

Lauren

Scenario Sparkline Dialogue Workshop

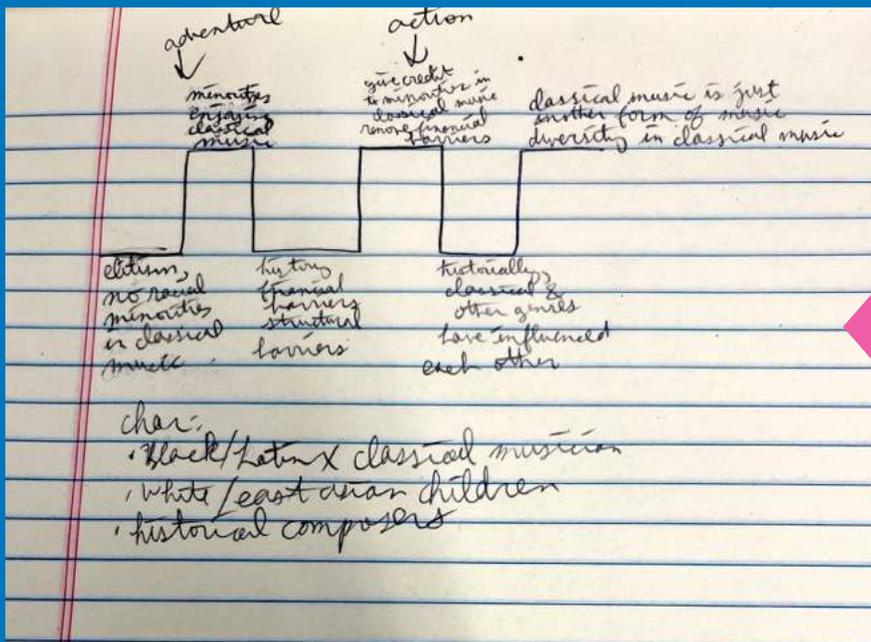
- **Scenario** : a clear quest/question and suitable time and place with flexibility and potential: topos can be
 - literal (robots in robot factory), metaphor (intersectionality at intersection),
 - borrowed (AI in Matrix); abstract (atoms nowhere), surreal (dental floss farm), mix (ITAV)
- **Character dialogue**: stakeholders sharing distinct perspectives and knowledges:
 - Logos and ethos over pathos (concepts and action over emotions)
 - Stakeholders with values and ideas, while Hollywood characters emotions and actions
 - Avoid single or two stakeholder scenarios: goal is diversity of perspectives/ideas



- **Scenes along Sparkline**: Use scenes to transform different stakeholders/ideas
 - Topos where topics/ideas explored, developed, contested, reframed
 - Scenes plotted in Sparkline sequence that takes reader from what is to what could be
 - Scenes have internal structure of old/new way, what is/what could be (sparkline)
 - Scenes function like sections/paragraphs that articulate and shape quest/ion

Homework

Start transmediating sparkline into draft dialogue



Installation .01 In a Thanatorium, metabolist decor, the sonic glare of neon lights, not too bright, buzzing in constant conjugation with translucent walls. Different channels, wind tunnels.

ERNST JÜNGER: I considered engaging a total mobilization of spirit.

MARTIN HEIDEGGER: Nobody talks that way anymore. At least put quotation marks on spirit.

JACQUES DERRIDA: Don't get hooked on spirit. All these quotation marks are so many signs of being hooked.

HEIDEGGER: Sometimes I withdraw the quotation marks, but they're like vampiric bites, they leave traces and, anyway, it's hard to get off spirit.

DERRIDA: I see. But you do recognize the spectral supplement, don't you, the way we've swished from spirit to spirits. That can't be merely an accident. (*Looking around.*) This place is still too metaphysical for me. Can't you ventilate this textual space? X

HEIDEGGER: You French are so fast. Your velocities overwhelm me. I'll never forget that high speed drive with Lacan in the country. It nearly freaked out my wife. He refused to slow down. But you have to slow down, we all do, thinking takes time, *its* time. I'm going back to Aristotle. Why don't you stay?

DERRIDA: There's something about this thanatopos that seems too, how shall I say, scientific to me. Anyway, you're