

Proposal Title: Chewing with Your Mouth Eyes Open: Food & Graphic Novels

Proposal Description (495/500 words):

The medium of the graphic novel has evolved from the medium of the comic book. Today, graphic novels can be compilations derived from parts (or all) of a serialized comic book arc, or a stand-alone longer form that encapsulates a single narrative story. Although the medium has struggled historically with a reputation for providing juvenile, simplistic, popular or lowbrow stories, recent scholarship has shown that graphic novels can provide readers with unique and complex texts. As Brian W. Sturm writes, “Reading graphic novels is a very complex process that combines decoding what is provided in the text and pictures with filling in the gaps in the story left by the author and illustrator” (58). Graphic novels push readers to simultaneously interpret what is pictured and what is written; additionally, the reader must actively interpret or imagine parts of the story that are *not* directly described or illustrated. It is these gaps in narration, placed alongside potentially meaningful fragments of text and evocative illustrations, that create the graphic narrative. Unlike film, graphic novels don’t have to produce believable visual effects. Art can be bizarre or whimsical, and events can take place in the gutters between images. Indeed, the graphic novel format requires active participation by the reader; she must study visual images, read textual inserts, and successfully combine these visual and textual pieces in order to enjoy the story. Indeed, as Paul A. Crutcher has noted, graphic novels “can provide unique complexity not found in prose-based novels and traditional films” (53).

Through a range of graphic novels, the presenters will highlight the representation of food within this unique verbal/visual medium. How do we as readers of graphic novels engage with images of and language about food? Presenters will highlight the graphic novel’s unique medium while exploring both familiar and striking (odd, unrealistic, bizarre) representations of food: from the adventures of detective Tony Chu, who receives psychic impressions from whatever he eats (*Chew* by John Layman) to the story of Katie, a talented young chef, opening her second restaurant, needing a second chance (*Seconds: A Graphic Novel* by Bryan Lee O’Malley) to the crime narrative of Jiro, a renegade and ruthless sushi chef, entering into the bloody culinary war between master chefs in a not-too-distant future L.A. (*Get Jiro!* by Anthony Bourdain, Joel Rose, and Langdon Foss) to the memoirs of Lucy Knisley, who describes her trip to Paris and her life seen through time in the kitchen, as the daughter of a chef and a gourmet (*French Milk* and *Relish: My Life in the Kitchen* by Lucy Knisley) to the adventures of Gavin Cruikshank, once the world’s most famous chef, returning to stop the morally bankrupt food competition show of his creation (*Starve* by Brian Wood), to the horrors of Rick Grime’s survival in the zombie apocalypse (*The Walking Dead* by Robert Kirkman). Ultimately, this presentation will illustrate how graphic novels can push boundaries in our understanding of how humans both romanticize and abuse nourishing edibles.

Works Cited

Crutcher, Paul A. “Complexity in the Comic and Graphic Novel Medium: Inquiry Through Bestselling Batman Stories.” *The Journal of Popular Culture*, vol. 44, no. 1, February 2011, pp. 53–72.

Sturm, Brian W. "Creativity in the Space Between." *Knowledge Quest*, vol. 41, no. 3, Jan/Feb2013, pp. 58-63.

Proposal Abstract (42/50 words):

This presentation will highlight a variety of graphic novels, illustrating how graphic novels can uniquely depict the expression of food through visuals and literary elements. The unique verbal and visual features of the graphic form can prompt readers to question food, its place, and its representation in society.

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