ILLUSTRATED FICTION

Self-Determined Major Final Project Proposal

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Through my self-determined major, Illustrated Fiction, Skidmore College has enabled me to pave the way for my education in written and visual storytelling, geared towards the young adult. The Illustrated Fiction major combines courses from English, Art, World Language, and Education departments, as well as independent studies that have allowed me to construct my own curriculum. This curriculum focused on exploring and breaking down elements of storytelling such as narrative, world-building, character portrayals across cultures, and other concepts within my sphere of inspiration and creative influence.

The final project pulls together all that I have learned on storytelling for the young adult—unifying my interests and ideologies, technical and artistic understanding of narration, as well as the creative processes and mythologies of established author-illustrators—to create an original graphic novel.

In recent years, the graphic novel has become an artistic movement of its own in contemporary literature, striving for a fusion of both the visual and written world, that allows for a powerful, visceral method of storytelling. This unique combination of art and words traveled from a place of harsh criticism and condescension in the early nineteenth century—when the value of visual storytelling was both degraded and undermined—to a home among children and adults alike, eager to consume stories of a meaningful and subversive nature. [1] Every day the graphic novel format pushes to reflect the human condition, whether it is the vigilante world of *Batman* or the stone-cold reality of *Maus.*

YA (young adult) fiction authors and illustrators, whose works are directed at children

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[1] Jennie R. Davis. *On the Rise: Influences on the Popularity of Graphic Novels Among Readers.*

and emerging adults, have long since latched onto this graphic narrative form. With 21st century young adults demanding more inventiveness from visual and written communication, the graphic novel acts as a device to bring diverse and compelling stories to the youth. The YA genre

graphic novel will contain elements of storytelling that I have come to love and value in

published illustrated works, and have reproduce

This graphic novel is a combination of my ideas and skills developed through the course of my Illustrated Fiction major. In a typical art major capstone, I would be preparing larger bodies of work that simply showcase original artwork, while In an English capstone I would focus on a long-form written novel, that only showcases my writing. However, for my final project, the graphic novel is a reflection of my writing and drawing craft merging; two interwoven components creating a powerful narrative for the young adult, and other readers looking for immersion into an imaginative and childlike universe.

My graphic novel, titled *Vivid June*, spans the life of Juniper Tansy Root (a.k.a. June), a young girl living alone in the remote, drowsy, fictional Old Town. There, she is determined to have an uneventful life, shutting herself away from the rest of the world, meticulous in making her every day a string of repetitions, and ignoring the strange mystical world only she can witness. However, June's isolation comes to an abrupt end when she is forced to move to the city of Deep Waters: A busy, hyperactive island teeming with strange people and even stranger creatures. There, she must embrace the value of connection, and face the magic that she so desperately fears.

Vivid June delves into the nuances of loneliness in youth, and the power of connecting, not just with others, but with ourselves. The narrative also focuses on the struggles of being an anomaly within a society, and the importance of believing in things far beyond what we see. These themes of loneliness, belief, challenging assimilation and friendship/connection are significant aspects of the young adult experience, not only in graphic novel format, but in prose, art, and television. Today, more than ever, young adults struggle with loneliness, connecting, and being uplifted in their quest for imagination and uniqueness, in a world that is growing

increasingly more chaotic and fearful.[3] *Vivid June* will be a reminder of the quiet, important things such as human connection, inventiveness, childlike wonder; elements of life that birth revolutionary concepts and ideas, but are constantly disregarded in a world run by adults.

In this graphic narrative, I am creating a childlike visual—the feeling one gets when opening up a picture book, or reading an old fairytale—to tell a story of loneliness, connection, and magic. Much like Shaun Tan mentions in his essay *Picture books: Who are they for?* the medium of the picture book or any form of illustrated work (be it a graphic novel or a short-form comic), at times, carries a childlike graphic that is almost always declared juvenile.

There seems to be this collective struggle among scholars of the literary institution, to appreciate whimsicality within illustrated stories, to see how these imaginative, playful visuals allow for deeper thinking and evaluation of the human experience. [4]Yet, it is that simplicity of narration that can bring to the reader's heart, powerful human emotions. One of the goals in creating my graphic novel is allowing a childlike visual to tell its own story, and deliver that magical simplicity that stays with the reader, young or old. Shaun Tan's *The Arrival* and *The Lost Thing*, both critically acclaimed and highly valued for their surreal and imaginative narratives, are fantastic examples of that fusion of playfulness/wonder with depth and introspection.

My process of creating my graphic novel began this summer. It included free-writing a loose plot (to understand the direction of my narrative), sketching out character designs, and jotting down world-building elements. With this brainstorming period complete, I am spending the rest of the fall semester drafting a solid script for *Vivid June.* Although the final products nearly always veer from the initial ideas, this script will allow me to work with a finished story. Having a

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[3] Goosby, Bridget J., et al. "Adolescent Loneliness and Health in Early Adulthood." *Sociological Inquiry*, vol. 83, no. 4, 2013

[4] Tan, Shaun. *Picture books: Who are they for?* 2010

loose story timeline with a beginning, middle, and an end will act as a guide in executing the final pages of the graphic novel with ease.

During this stage, I will be referencing *The Art of Comic Book Writing* by Mark Kneece as I make the script, as well as draft character sheets. This process will be completed by the end of the fall semester (December 20th). During the winter break, I will focus on world-building: the laws, magical or otherwise, that govern my invented locations, the type of feeling/infrastructure I want to build, etc. I will also create thumbnails and storyboards for how each scene within the story will unfold, as well as deciding on the layout of the comic. I will be pulling from certain visual stories with rich world-building and well-established fantastical characters, i.e. The storyboards of Miyazaki's *Ponyo on the Cliff by the Sea*, and Jason Brubaker's graphic novel, *Sithrah,* behind the scenes on world-building alongside character development.

During this winter break, as I storyboard and plan the layout, I will also be doing in-person studies of buildings/infrastructure, as well as creating a file of references to help craft the setting for *Vivid June.* Here, Scott McCloud's books *Making Comics* and *Understanding Comics* will act as a guide and reference, as I begin mapping out my story's structure and finding balance in both the visual and written aspects of the form. By spring semester, I will be armed with a solidly written script as well as a visual layout of how the comic will flow from beginning to end, and immediately dive into creating the finished final pages of the graphic novel.

In all, the preliminary work (scripting, storyboarding, deciding on layout) will be undertaken during the fall semester and winter break, therefore when spring semester arrives I have a solid guide, and an established end-goal as I create the final pages.

I have decided with my readers and professors, that physically binding the graphic novel on my own, should be left as an option. However, due to the amount of work that comes with

creating a graphic novel, with the aim of no less than twenty-five pages, I would like to get my book bound professionally.

In addition to creating the graphic novel, I would like to have an exhibit space set up, perhaps at the academic festival, within the library or in the Tang Museum, where I can have my original graphic novel displayed. This presentation of my capstone will contain blown-up prints of specific scenes within the story, sketches/images of my work process, and a few physical copies of my book for viewers to leaf through. I intend to immerse the viewer in the world I have created and excite them into exploring my story and its characters. This graphic novel, *Vivid June*, is a stepping stone into my long-term goal of working in illustrated fiction writing and publishing for the young adult audience, pushing me to begin creating original work, and compete in the artistic world with my personal vision.

<u>End of Fall Semester (November-December)</u>

1) Complete written script for *Vivid June*

2) Draft character design sheets

3) Gather more references, if required, to help with world-building, landscape design, storyboarding and other creative aids

<u>During Winter Break</u>

1) Complete storyboarding (this involves deciding the layout of the graphic novel through sketched thumbnails i.e. how the panels/spreads will look, the sequence of each plot point etc.)

2) Study references—highlight and file information I would need in creating the novel (these references are listed in the annotated bibliography).

3) Begin drawing mock-ups/sketches of important scenes/landmarks within the novel (this allows me to measure how much time it takes to

*Note: As it is within my personal budget, I will supply the drawing materials used for my graphic novel.

Brubaker, Jason. *Sithrah.* Coffee Table Comics, 2015-2018.

Chute, Hillary. "Comics as Literature? Reading Graphic Narrative." *PMLA*, vol. 123, no. 2, 2008,

　　　pp. 452–465. *JSTOR*, www.jstor.org/stable/25501865.

Davis, Jennie R. *On the Rise: Influences on the Popularity of Graphic Novels Among Readers.*

　　　A Master's Paper for the M.S. in L.S degree, 2004.

Goosby, Bridget J., et al. "Adolescent Loneliness and Health in Early Adulthood."

Abate, Michelle Ann., and Gwen Athene Tarbox. *Graphic Novels for Children and Young Adults:*

A Collection of Critical Essays. University Press of Mississippi, 2017.

In this collection, Abate and Tarbox present critical analysis and insights on the graphic

narrative's accomplishment within children and young adult literature. Here, the importance of

creative career.

Hansen, Kathryn Strong. "In Defense of Graphic Novels." *English Journal*, vol. 102.2,

    pp. 57–63, 2012.

In her article, *In Defense of Graphic novels*, Kathryn Hansen, teacher and scholar speaks volumes the significance of graphic novels as a vital part of literature, not just in entertainment but within the classroom as an educational tool. Not only does the graphic novel provide an inviting blend of word and image, many in the YA genre act as bridges between cultures and perspectives of the youth.

Kneece, Mark. *Art of Comic Book Writing.* Watson-Guptill Publications, 2015.

A general step-by-step guide to scripting and visual storytelling from the Savanah College for Art

come in contact with the studio during a special exhibition, and was introduced to their production process (how they work, and the reasoning behind their stories). I will be using Tonko House's main work *The Dam Keeper* as both inspiration and reference in preliminary sketches, thumbnails and plotting for my graphic novel.

McCloud, Scott. Making Comics Storytelling Secrets of Comics, Manga and Graphic Novels. Harper, 2008.
Scott McCloud is one of the very few artist-scholars valued in the comic/graphic narrative world. This book is a great asset to my project and I will be relying on it heavily in thinking about engaging storylines, plot and sequential image-making. McCloud breaks down the nitty-gritty parts of world-building and character designing but also focuses on the nuances of telling a great story. I have used this book in previous courses and art programs and will be using it as a reference to keep me grounded in my creative process and guiding me in generating impactful content within my story.

McCloud, Scott. *Understanding Comics: The Invisible Art*. Simon Fraser University Library, 2018.
While McCloud's book *Making Comics*, delves into the nitty-gritty aspects of story and character development within comics, *Understanding Comics: The Invisible Art* focuses on the historical and cultural appreciation of the graphic narrative, and its impact on literature and how we read; a testament to the legitimacy of comics/graphic novels as an art form. This book acts as a resource for me in understanding how we interpret and digest the graphic narrative, and how that connection of words and images has impacted readers and continues to prevail within society and across cultures.

McCranie, Stephen. *Brick by Brick: Principles for Achieving Artistic Mastery.* Stephen McCranie, 2014.

On his extensive online resource for young creatives, called Doodle Alley, McCraine freely shares

his knowledge and expertise in making comics and dissects the principles of successful creative

processes. His book *Brick by Brick* is a short culmination of his visual essays. McCraine has

independently published webcomics for the young adult (including the well-

Rousmaniere, Nicole Coolidge, and Matsuba Ryoko. *Manga: The Citi Exhibition.*

Thames & Hudson, 2019.

In *Manga: The Citi E*