

# **HUM 250: Avenging the Universe: An Introduction to Environmental Humanities & Comics**

## **COURSE INFORMATION**

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Class Days / Times: TBD

Instructor: Dr. Soljour

Class Location: TBA

Preferred pronouns: She/Her/Ella

Email: [ksoljour@sdsu.edu](mailto:ksoljour@sdsu.edu)

Office location: AL 628

## **COURSE DESCRIPTION**

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*Avenging the Universe: An Introduction to Environmental Humanities & Comics* explores the relationship between humanity, nature and visual storytelling. The course begins with an examination of Environmental Humanities- a multidisciplinary field that engages history, literature, philosophy, religion, and anthropology to respond to environmental issues (such as climate change, pollution, deforestation, environmental disasters, biodiversity loss and food/water insecurity) and pose innovative solutions. Each week, we will combine foundational readings related to cultural, ethical, and philosophical knowledge systems and their representation in comics. The course centers the Bronze and Modern Age of Comics era(s), when various characters were reintroduced or their character arcs were revised to respond to developments within the Environmental Movement. These superheroes, villains, and anthropomorphic figures engage directly with notions of human progress, human-nature relationships, and environmental change. Engaging the full spectrum of visual medium, the course analyzes comics, graphic novels, cartoon strips, animation 3-D imaging and film. Utilizing different styles of written and visual communication, we will develop new ideas about environmental solutions and create stories that envision possible futures grounded in equity, justice and a duty to protect our dying world.

## **LAND ACKNOWLEDGMENT**

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For millennia, the Kumeyaay people have been a part of this land. This land has nourished, healed, protected and embraced them for many generations in a relationship of balance and harmony. As members of the San Diego State University community, we acknowledge this legacy. We promote this balance and harmony. We find inspiration from this land, the land of the Kumeyaay.

## **ESSENTIAL STUDENT INFORMATION**

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For essential information about student academic success, please see the [SDSU Student Academic Success Handbook](#).

- SDSU provides disability-related accommodations via Student Disability Services ([sds@sdsu.edu](mailto:sds@sdsu.edu) | <https://sds.sdsu.edu/>). Please allow 10-14 business days for this process.

- Class rosters are provided to the instructor with the student's legal name. Please let me know if you would prefer an alternate name and/or gender pronoun.

## COURSE MATERIALS

Materials:	Required or optional	Where and how it can be obtained
Hubbell, J.A., & Ryan, J.C. (2021). <i>Introduction to the Environmental Humanities</i> (1st ed.)	Required Course Textbook	SDSU Bookstore or Amazon
Comic Readings/Graphic Novels and Articles	Required	Access will be provided via Canvas
Digital Streaming	Required	Access to streaming content will be provided via SDSU Library resources.

## STUDENT LEARNING OUTCOMES

1. Examine the impact of human activities upon the environment across space and time using comics and graphic novels to explore real and imagined communities.
2. Analyze local, national and global perspectives on the relationship between humanity and nature (including ethnically diverse and underrepresented communities).
3. Evaluate the Bronze and Modern Age of Comics era(s) and its past and current connections to the Environmental Movement.
4. Analyze anthropomorphism and its function in narratives of progress/regression within nature and the built-environment.
5. Propose solutions to environmental issues using visual storytelling.

### ***This is an Explorations Humanities GE [CSU Area C]***

The Humanities and Fine Arts encompass works of the imagination, such as art, literature, film, drama, dance, and music, and related scholarship. Students better understand human problems, responsibilities, and possibilities in changing historical contexts and diverse cultures, and in relation to the natural environment. Students acquire new languages and familiarize themselves with related cultures. They gain the ability to recognize and assess various aesthetic principles, belief systems, and constructions of identity. Students acquire capacities for reflection, critique, communication, cultural understanding, creativity, and problem solving in an increasingly globalized world.

### **Goals for GE Courses in the Humanities and Fine Arts**

- Goal 1: Analyze written, visual, or performed texts in the humanities and fine arts with sensitivity to their diverse cultural contexts and historical moments.
- Goal 2: Develop a familiarity with various aesthetic and other value systems and the ways they are communicated across time and cultures.
- Goal 3: Argue from multiple perspectives about issues in the humanities that have personal and global relevance.
- Goal 4: Demonstrate the ability to approach complex problems and ask complex questions drawing upon knowledge of the humanities.

## **COURSE DESIGN: MAJOR ASSIGNMENTS AND ASSESSMENTS**

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- Class Participation: 10%
  - There will be a number of in-person activities to promote student engagement and discussion.
  - A rubric detailing how your participation will be evaluated is provided under the section **Grading Policies**.
- Mini-Assignments: 20%
  - Each Unit includes a “mini-assignment” that relates to the course goals.
  - Family Migration Stories (Unit 1)
  - Alternate Endings in the World of Anthropomorphism (Unit 2)
  - Film Review (Unit 3): 15%
- Weekly Discussion Board, including 2 replies: 20%
- Attendance at 2 SDSU Comic Events and summary posts: 5%\*\*
- Final Comics Strip Project and Presentation: 30%

Grade conversions: 93-100 = A; 90-92 = A-; 87-89 = B+; 83-86 = B, 80-82 = B-; 77-79 = C+, 73 – 76 = C; 70-72 = C-; 67-69 D+; 63-66 D, 60-62 D-.

Detailed instructions will be provided for each assignment.

## **COURSE SCHEDULE**

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### Unit 1: Major Themes in Environmental Humanities

Week 1: Introduction to Environmental Humanities

Textbook Reading: Chapter 1: Introduction to Environmental Humanities: history and theory

Comics Reading: Excerpts from [John Muir: Earth – Planet, Universe \(Scottish Book Trust, 2014\)](#)

Week 2: The History of Environmentalism

Textbook Reading: Chapter 6: Environmental History: The Story of Co-Evolution

Comics Reading: Excerpts from [Crossroads: I Live Where I Like: A Graphic History](#)

Week 3: The Anthropocene

Textbook Reading: Chapter 3: The Anthropocene: A Superhero Species Comes of Age

Comics Reading: [Excerpts from Richard McGuire's Here](#)

Week 4: Climate Change

Textbook Reading: Chapter 2: Climate Change: the great disrupter

Comic Reading: [Excerpts from \(Climate Changed: A Personal Journey Through the Science \(Abrams ComicArts, 2014\)](#)

Week 5: Population Control, Migration, and the Environment

Textbook Reading: Chapter 5: Environmental Anthropology, Cultural Geography, and the Geo-Humanities: Space and Place

Comics Reading: [Against the Ecofascist Creep](#)

### Unit 2: Anthropomorphism in Comics & Graphic Novels

Week 6: African Folklore: Anansi & Spider Man

Textbook Reading: [Liminal Anansi: Symbol of Order and Chaos An Exploration of Anansi's Roots Amongst the Asante of Ghana](#)

Comic Reading: *Amazing Spider-Man Vol 2 48 (Posted to Canvas)*

Week 7: Indigenous Mythology: Turtle/Keya & The Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles

Textbook Reading: Chapter 4: Indigenous Cultures and Nature: Past, Present, and Future

Comic Reading: [Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles Vol. 1 #5](#)

Week 8: Innovation & the Imagination: Bionic Animals

Textbook Reading: Chapter 9: Environmental Art: Creativity, Activism, and Sustainability

Comic Reading: [Brute Force #1](#)

Week 9: Introducing the Rabbit: Differing Aboriginal & Settler Nature Paradigms

Textbook Reading: [Indigeneity, Ferality, and What 'Belongs' in the Australian Bush: Aboriginal Responses to 'Introduced' Animals and Plants in a Settler-Descendant Society](#)

Comic Reading: John Marsden and Shaun Tan. *The Rabbits* (Simply Read Books, 2003).

Week 10: The Canine Detective: Clues to Save the Planet

Textbook Reading: Chapter 7: Environmental Philosophy: Thinking about Nature

Comic Reading: [Scooby-Doo! \(DC\) \(2008, no. 131\)](#)

### Unit 3: Superheroes, Villains and the Future of Humanity

Week 11: Aquaman

Textbook Reading: Chapter 12: Environmental Film: Projecting Nature  
Film Screening of *Aquaman*<sup>1</sup>

Week 12: Namor

Textbook Reading: Chapter 8 Ecological Religious Studies: Faith in Nature

Comic Reading: [Namor, the Sub-Mariner, Vol 1 #5 \(All the Rivers Burning\)](#)

Week 13: Superman

Textbook Reading: Chapter 13: Environmental Journalism: Mediating Ecological Issues

Comic Reading: [Superman, Vol 1 no. 707](#)

Week 14: Poison Ivy

Textbook Reading: Chapter 10: Ecological Literary Studies: Imagining Nature

Comic Reading: [Detective Comics, Vol 1., #751 \(A Walk in the Park, Part I\)](#)

Week 15: Our Universe, Our City: Humanity as Villain and Superhero

Textbook Reading: Chapter 14: Conclusion: Back to the Future Environmental Humanities

Comic Reading: Excerpts from [A Fire Story](#)

Week 16: Comic Project Due

## GRADING POLICIES

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**Readings:** Assigned readings are due on the days designated on the syllabus – make sure you've completed them BEFORE you come to class. *Readings must be completed before coming to class on the day for which they are assigned. You must bring a copy of the texts with you to class (either in hardcopy or on your screen).* The readings vary in length and type: some days we will read articles and documents; other days we will read sections of books. You know better than anyone else how quickly or how slowly you read. Make sure to review the schedule so that you can plan in advance and pace yourself accordingly. Don't be afraid to ask questions or come for help.

**Participation:** Your in-class participation will be evaluated each week using the rubric below<sup>2</sup>:

Criteria	Unsatisfactory	Developing	Accomplished	Exemplary	Total
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<sup>1</sup> The SDSU Library provides access to numerous video streaming resources. Film Selection is based on availability. Access to the film will be provided via SWANK.

<sup>2</sup> Participation will be evaluated based on attendance, contributions to class discussions, small group activities and online polling activities.

	0-5 points	5-10 points	10-12 points	13-15 points	
<b>Frequency</b>	<b>0-5 points</b>	<b>5-10 points</b>	<b>10-12 points</b>	<b>13-15 points</b>	<b>/15</b>
	Student does not initiate contribution & needs instructor to solicit input.	Student initiates contribution in at least half of the class sessions	Student initiates contribution once in each class session.	Student initiates contributions more than once in each class session.	
<b>Quality</b>	<b>0-5 points</b>	<b>5-10 points</b>	<b>10-12 points</b>	<b>13-15 points</b>	<b>/15</b>
	Comments are uninformative, lacking in appropriate terminology. Heavy reliance on opinion & personal taste, e.g., "I love it", "I hate it", "It's bad" etc.	Comments are sometimes constructive, with occasional signs of insight. Student does not use appropriate terminology; comments not always relevant to the discussion.	Comments mostly insightful & constructive; mostly uses appropriate terminology. Occasionally comments are too general or not relevant to the discussion.	Comments always insightful & constructive; uses appropriate terminology. Comments balanced between general impressions, opinions & specific, thoughtful criticisms or contributions.	
<b>Listening</b>	<b>0-5 points</b>	<b>5-10 points</b>	<b>10-12 points</b>	<b>13-15 points</b>	<b>/15</b>
	Does not listen to others; regularly talks while others speak or does not pay attention while others speak; detracts from discussion; sleeps, etc.	Student is often inattentive. Occasionally makes disruptive comments while others are speaking.	Student is mostly attentive when others present ideas, materials, as indicated by comments that reflect & build on others' remarks.	Student listens attentively when others present materials, perspectives, as indicated by comments that build on others' remarks, i.e., student hears what others say & contributes to the dialogue.	
				<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>/45</b>

Weekly Discussion Board: Most weeks, I will post a prompt on Canvas related to our theme for the week. *Using the assigned readings, you will post a 500 word response to the prompt and reply to at least 2 of your classmates with a 100 word minimum response.* In your response to the prompt, you will be required to:

1. Utilize at least 1 of the readings and provide one quote with a citation.
2. Connect to a real-world example of the week's issues, projects, or questions.
3. Reference at least 1 theory, term or time period provided in that week's lecture.

Attendance at 2 SDSU Comics Events: Attend and experience a Comics-related event dealing with the topics and themes of our class. I will frequently advertise events throughout the semester. If you find an event on your own, please check with me before you attend any event to see if it will count). After the event, write a 500 word review. In this review, you will analyze and evaluate your experience and make connections to themes/ideas and communities discussed within the course. **\*\*If you cannot attend an event, alternate opportunities will be provided.\*\***

Final Comics Strip Project and Presentation: The Final Comic Strip Project allows students to actively participate in the practice of visual storytelling and critically analyze themes presented in the 3 course units. Depending on your own interests and area(s) of expertise, you have the choice to create your own 6 panel comic strip from a provided template OR you may use a published comic/graphic novel of your choice and introduce a new character or plot that influences the story for better or worse! Beginning in Week

6 workshops will be provided to support you and the progress of the project. At the end of the semester, you will provide a brief presentation about the project and reflections about the learning process. Provided below is a rubric that will be used to evaluate your presentation:

	<b>Emerging (0-12 points)</b>	<b>Developing (13-16 points)</b>	<b>Advanced (17-20 points)</b>	<b>Score</b>
<b>1. Organization (20 points)</b>	Ideas may not be focused or developed; the main purpose is not clear. The introduction is undeveloped. Main points are difficult to identify. Transitions may be needed. There is no conclusion or may not be clear the presentation has concluded. Conclusion does not tie back to the introduction. Audience cannot understand presentation because there is no sequence of information.	Main idea is evident, but the organizational structure many need to be strengthened; ideas may not clearly developed or always flow smoothly and the purpose is not clearly stated. The introduction may not be well developed. Main points are not clear. Transitions may be awkward. Supporting material may lack in development. The conclusion may need additional development. Audience has difficulty understanding the presentation because the sequence of information is unclear.	Ideas are clearly organized, developed, and supported to achieve a purpose; the purpose is clear. The introduction gets the attention of the audience and clearly states the specific purpose of the speech. Main points are clear and organized effectively. The conclusion is satisfying and relates back to introduction. (If the purpose of the presentation is to persuade, there is a clear action step identified and an overt call to action.)	
<b>2. Topic Knowledge (20 points)</b>	Student does not have grasp of information; student cannot answer questions about the subject. Few, if any, sources are cited. Citations are attributed incorrectly. Inaccurate, generalized, or inappropriate supporting material may be used. Over dependence on notes may be observed.	Student has a partial grasp of the information. Supporting material may lack in originality. Citations are generally introduced and attributed appropriately. Student is at ease with expected answers to all questions but fails to elaborate. Over dependence on notes may be observed.	Student has a clear grasp of information. Citations are introduced and attributed appropriately and accurately. Supporting material is original, logical and relevant. Student demonstrates full knowledge (more than required) by answering all class questions with explanations and elaboration. Speaking outline or note cards are used for reference only.	
<b>3. Audience Adaptation (20 points)</b>	The presenter is not able to keep the audience engaged. The verbal or nonverbal feedback from the audience may suggest a lack of interest or confusion. Topic selection does not relate to audience needs and interests.	The presenter is able to keep the audience engaged most of the time. When feedback indicates a need for idea clarification, the speaker makes an attempt to clarify or restate ideas. Generally, the speaker demonstrates audience awareness through nonverbal and verbal behaviors. Topic selection and examples are somewhat appropriate for the audience, occasion, or setting. Some effort to make the material	The presenter is able to effectively keep the audience engaged. Material is modified or clarified as needed given audience verbal and nonverbal feedback. Nonverbal behaviors are used to keep the audience engaged. Delivery style is modified as needed. Topic selection and examples are interesting and relevant for the audience and occasion.	

		relevant to audience needs and interests.		
<b>4. Language Use (Verbal Effectiveness) (20 points)</b>	Language choices may be limited, peppered with slang or jargon, too complex, or too dull. Language is questionable or inappropriate for a particular audience, occasion, or setting. Some biased or unclear language may be used.	Language used is mostly respectful or inoffensive. Language is appropriate, but word choices are not particularly vivid or precise.	Language is familiar to the audience, appropriate for the setting, and free of bias; the presenter may "code-switch" (use a different language form) when appropriate. Language choices are vivid and precise.	
<b>5. Delivery (Nonverbal Effectiveness) (20 points)</b>	The delivery detracts from the message; eye contact may be very limited; the presenter may tend to look at the floor, mumble, speak inaudibly, fidget, or read most of the speech; gestures and movements may be jerky or excessive. The delivery may appear inconsistent with the message. Nonfluencies ("ums") are used excessively. Articulation and pronunciation tend to be sloppy. Poise of composure is lost during any distractions. Audience members have difficulty hearing the presentation.	The delivery generally seems effective – however, effective use of volume, eye contact, vocal control, etc. may not be consistent; some hesitancy may be observed. Vocal tone, facial expressions, clothing and other nonverbal expressions do not detract significantly from the message. The delivery style, tone of voice, and clothing choices do not seem out-of-place or disrespectful to the audience or occasion. Some use of nonfluencies are observed. Generally, articulation and pronunciation are clear. Most audience members can hear the presentation.	The delivery is extemporaneous -- natural, confident, and enhances the message – posture, eye contact, smooth gestures, facial expressions, volume, pace, etc. indicate confidence, a commitment to the topic, and a willingness to communicate. The vocal tone, delivery style, and clothing are consistent with the message. Delivery style and clothing choices suggest an awareness of expectations and norms. Limited use of nonfluencies is observed. Articulation and pronunciation are clear. All audience members can hear the presentation.	

## ACADEMIC HONESTY

The University adheres to a strict policy prohibiting cheating and plagiarism, including:

- Copying, in part or in whole, from another's test or other examination.
- Obtaining copies of a test, an examination, or other course material without the permission of the instructor.
- Collaborating with another or others in coursework without the permission of the instructor.
- Falsifying records, laboratory work, or other course data.
- Submitting work previously presented in another course, if contrary to the policies of the course.
- Altering or interfering with grading procedures.
- Assisting another student in any of the above.
- Using sources verbatim or paraphrasing without giving proper attribution (this can include phrases, sentences, paragraphs and/or pages of work).
- Copying and pasting work from an online or offline source directly and calling it one's own.
- Using information found from an online or offline source without giving the author credit.



- Replacing words or phrases from another source and inserting one's own words or phrases.
- Any use of generative AI (like ChatGPT) not assigned by the instructor constitutes academic dishonesty and is subject to discipline under the terms of the [SDSU Student Code of Conduct](#).
- During this course, I may require students to use Respondus Lockdown Browser, or to require web-cam use during course sessions. I will notify students in advance of examinations requiring web-cam use. Students who wish to participate in a recorded course session shall be allowed to turn off their webcam.

Under CSU policy, instructors must report instances of academic misconduct to the Center for Student Rights and Responsibilities for disciplinary review by the University, which may lead to probation, suspension, or expulsion. Instructors may also, at their discretion, penalize student grades on any assignment or assessment discovered to have been produced in an academically dishonest manner.

## **DIVERSITY AND INCLUSION**

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We are committed to honoring our intersecting socio-historical experiences with respect to diverse embodiments, lived experiences, and structural locations that include race, ethnicity, language, culture, social class, national origin, immigration status, religion, colonial status, age, ability, gender, gender identity and expression, sexual orientation, body diversity, as well as non-traditional, underrepresented, first-generation, and veteran status. Equity seeks to ensure that members of underrepresented and under-resourced groups have similar opportunities and outcomes as other groups. Inclusion efforts challenge racism, sexism, classism, settler colonialism, and other forms of inequity and create spaces where members of all groups are visible, valued, and can freely contribute to the community.