

This is Prompt 3 for English 230, "Contemporary Media and Fiction" (Fall 2021), at the University of Victoria. It is also available in [HTML](#).

Responses to the prompt should be submitted via the course Brightspace. Thanks!

Prompt 3

Written on Sunday, October 24th

This prompt asks you to shift from description (Prompts 1 and 2) to the application of course material as it relates to the study of images and text in fiction. You're welcome to respond to the prompt in **one** of three ways.

The Three Options

Option 1, Imitate: This option appeals to studies of "[mood](#)" and "[meta](#)." Please imitate the techniques and style of *Fun Home*, "Translated, from the Japanese," **or** *Undertale* to draw either a comic **or** a game scene that depicts an event or series of events from your own life. Please draw images with or without text (your choice!), no more than nine panels for a comic, and no more than three scenes for a game. Your drawing should be accompanied by 75-125 words describing what about *Fun Home*, "Translated, from the Japanese," **or** *Undertale* you imitated and what about that work's vibe ("mood") and narrative ("meta") you hope readers will learn from your imitation. As you imitate, try to "draw" (ha!) inspiration from the work you selected without copying it. Content matters here, one reason I'm asking you to "draw" (ha ha!) from your own life. You are welcome to use paper and/or software to produce your comic or scene, you can safely assume your audience read or played the work you're imitating, and you don't need to summarize the story or worry about spoilers.

Option 2, Annotate: This option appeals to studies of "[modules](#)," "[main content](#)," and "[meaning](#)." Select a page / page-spread from *Fun Home* **or** "Translated, from the Japanese" **or** a scene from *Undertale* and then thoroughly annotate it to describe how its parts ("modules") contribute to its story ("main content") and overall significance ("meaning"). You are welcome to use paper and/or software to annotate. If you've never annotated a comic or game, then consult [these compelling examples](#) from Nick Sousanis's courses. Note how many of them rely on colour coding, diagramming, and legends to convey significance and also how the comics are placed on either a larger canvas (in software) or a sheet of paper (print) to create space for the annotations. Your annotations should be accompanied by 75-125 words communicating your approach to annotation: which aspects of the work you decided to annotate, why you selected those aspects (and not other ones), and how you arranged your annotations a particular way on the page. You can safely assume your audience read or played the work you selected, and you don't need to summarize the story or worry about spoilers.

Option 3, Teach: This option appeals to studies of "[modes](#)" and "[massage or manipulation](#)." Use a combination of 3-5 images and roughly 500 words to teach an audience of your choice how *Fun Home*, "Translated, from the Japanese," **or** *Undertale*

shapes or trains ("massages or manipulates") the ways people see and read ("modes") stories on page or screen. How, for instance, does the work produce a perspective? How does it comment on norms and practices of looking? How does it play with graphic, optical, and perceptual images? The 3-5 images you include may be your own, someone else's, or a combination of the two, and ideally the images are integrated into the writing itself (i.e., in the document rather than attached to it). Please identify your audience at some point in the response. Examples include but are not limited to "first-year English students," "fans of role-playing games," "visual artists," and "comic book fans." Your choice of audience should inform what you teach and how you teach it: what information you include, how you present it, what your audience knows already, what they care about, and what they might do with the knowledge you're sharing. You can safely assume your audience read or played the work you selected, and you don't need to summarize the story or worry about spoilers.

Tips for Writing

- This response is not an academic essay. Think of it as a trial run in putting media and fiction studies to work in a particular context.
- Pick only one work (*Fun Home*, "Translated, from the Japanese", or *Undertale*), focus on it, and read / watch / play / listen to it multiple times. Take notes and document your experience as you go.
- Feel free to use first-person language ("I") where appropriate.
- Read the option (1, 2, or 3 above) you selected at least a few times before you start composing your response. Email us if any aspect of the prompt is unclear.
- Don't worry whether your drawing (option 1) is perfect or polished. Treat it as a sketch. This is not an art class.
- If you're annotating a comic or scene (option 2), then try to fill the margins with annotations that follow a clear strategy indicated by colour coding, diagramming, and a legend. Guide your reader across and around the page.
- You won't be able to teach all the things (option 3). Think small by identifying a particular aspect of the work and then unpacking it example by example for your audience, whom you should identify at some point and consider as you write.
- Review your notes and the class notebook before and as you compose.
- We will begin discussing text as a medium next week, on Tuesday, November 2nd.

Assessment

I will assess your response to Prompt 3 based on the following criteria:

- Engagement with the prompt (25%): how well and to what degree the response addresses this prompt
- Awareness (25%): how well and to what degree the response demonstrates an awareness of its context, approach, and format (i.e., imitation, annotation, or teaching)
- Quality and potential (25%): the clarity, detail, precision, and overall quality of the response, plus the potential it demonstrates to educate its audience about the primary work at hand (*Fun Home*, "Translated, from the Japanese", or *Undertale*)

- Engagement with course material (25%): how well and to what degree the response engages the English 230 course material, including discussions, topics, concepts, assigned works, and the class notebook ("engagement" may be implicit and enacted, as with a sketch that demonstrates a concept; or it may be explicit, as with an annotation or teaching lesson that explains a concept)

You will receive a mark for each of the four criteria, which will be tallied (.25 x 4) to result in your mark for Prompt 3. I will send feedback to you via Brightspace. I will use [UVic's grading system](#) for assessment, according to this rubric: "exceeds and raises expectations" (A+), "exceeds expectations" (A, A-), "exceeds some expectations" (B+), "meets expectations" (B, B-), "meets some expectations" (C+, C), "meets few expectations" (D), and "no submission." You will have an opportunity to revise your response to Prompt 1, 2, or 3 by Friday, December 3rd. This revision can only improve your mark.

What to Submit

You may submit your response to Prompt 3 via Brightspace in PDF, DOCX, RTF, JPG, PNG, or HTML. You may need to submit multiple files (that's fine!), and you may also need to photograph or scan your drawing (option 1), annotation (option 2), or integrated images (option 3). If you wish, then you are also welcome to submit a physical copy of your drawing (option 1) or annotation (option 2) to me during class. Please attach a Works Cited page in MLA format to your response in Brightspace. If you have questions about how to cite a particular work, then don't hesitate to email me. Here are citations for the three works at hand (change the access date for *Undertale*, if you wish):

- Bechdel, Alison. *Fun Home: A Family Tragicomic*, Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2006.
- Fox, Toby and Temmie Chang. *Undertale*, 2015, <https://undertale.com/>. Accessed 24 October 2021.
- Tomine, Adrian. "Translated, from the Japanese." *Killing and Dying*, Drawn & Quarterly, 2015, 73-84.

When to Submit It

I recommend submitting your response by Friday, November 5th at 10:30am, before the reading break; however, you may submit your response as late as Tuesday, November 16th at 10:30am. This extra time may be especially useful if you are writing about *Undertale*, which we will discuss on November 3rd.

Mood

The mood of a work is about being in the world and engaging fiction. What's the work's vibe or feel?

Here are some ways to think about mood (it's probably best to focus on just one or two of them):

- Describe the work as an encounter. What or whom are you encountering? Does it feel close or distant?
- Describe the work as an atmosphere. What's the "weather" of the work?
- Describe the work's tone. Is it serious? Playful? Vague? Direct? Presumptuous? Subtle?
- Describe the work as a feeling. Any goosebumps? What emotions or experiences do you associate with it? What was felt instantly? What took some time?

Descriptions of mood prompt considerations of *distance, immediacy, intimacy, and familiarity*.

Meta

You may get meta about how the story is told in the work.

Here are some ways to get meta. I don't recommend trying them all during a single exercise. Maybe pick one or two?

Consider the:

- **Situation:** What's known or taken for granted in the work? How do characters understand each other (or so we assume)?
- **World:** What's the scope and scale of the setting and its systems, history, lore, or landscape? How is the world of the work bigger or more expansive than the story itself?
- **Duration:** How long does the story take to communicate certain things? How does it use abbreviation, summary, stretched time, or warped time? What moves quickly? What doesn't?
- **Frequency:** What's repeated in the work? What are its patterns or textures?
- **Sequencing:** How is the work arranged chronologically and non-chronologically? How does it flash-forward ("prolepsis") or flash-back ("analepsis")? How does it use leveling, achievements, or progressive disclosure? How does the story branch?
- **Evocation:** How does the work draw on memories and resemblances? What aspects of the past, and whose past, does it evoke?
- **Focalization:** How do we get our knowledge from characters and/or narrators (zero = omniscient narrator who knows more than characters, internal = narrator is a character and thus knows what the character knows, and external focalization = narrator or camera eye telling less than what characters know)?
- **Narration:** How is the story told? A narrative often involves abstract (summary), orientation (time and place), complicating action, resolution (climax), evaluation (commentary or elucidation), and coda (time of story meets time of narrative).

What is interesting about the work's treatment of each or any of these? What's familiar or predictable?

Getting meta prompts considerations of a work's *design and structure*.

Modules

The modules of a work are about its parts, composition, and arrangement.

Here are some ways to think about modules:

- Is the work available as a collection of files? If so, describe them. Consider a website, for instance. It may have HTML, CSS, and media files.
- Describe the component parts of the work, even if they are not available as separate files. Consider podcasts, for instance. Their components may include dialogue (DX), sound effects (SFX), background sound (BG), and music (MX). Or, consider comics. Their components may include panels, gutters, tiers, and speech bubbles. (We'll talk more about comics and podcasts later in the term.)
- Describe how "seamless" the composition appears to be, or where and when you notice the seams that knit together the work's components. What feels polished? Rough? When is it rough on purpose?

Descriptions of modules prompt considerations of the *relationships between parts and whole*.

Main Content

The main content of a fiction is about its story.

Here are some ways to think about the main content (it's probably best to focus on just one or two of them):

- Characters: humans, robots, nonhuman animals, mythological creatures, and even environments or parts of the environment.
- Setting: time, place, and location of the story.
- Plot: major events and what unfolds in the story; typically understood through exposition, rising action, climax, falling action, and denouement or resolution.
- Theme: core ideas, threads, and even morals or lessons.
- Conflict: between characters, events, groups, and/or environments. Conflict is the tension upon which the story relies.
- Point of view: first-, second-, or third-person, including the camera or narrator, where perspective may be omniscient or limited.

What is interesting about the work's treatment of each or any of these? What's familiar or predictable?

Descriptions of the main content prompt considerations of *shared interpretation*, or which aspects of the work and its plot put people on the same page.

Meaning

You may want to consider what the work means to you and others. Meaning is produced in all sorts of ways.

Here are some ways to think about meaning. Again, you may want to pick just one or two of these for a given exercise.

- Describe why the work is, or was, considered to be important in a given moment, or why people say it matters.
- Describe how the work produces multiple, even incongruous interpretations. Or, describe why people interpret it in multiple, even incongruous ways.
- Describe the effects of one of the work's devices or techniques, such as irony, allegory, metafiction, worldbuilding, collage, montage, voiceover, chance, leveling, point of view, or allusion.
- Identify what you consider to be the most important meaning of the work and explain whether that meaning is referential (points to something in or beyond the work), explicit (what it says directly), implicit (symbols or codes), or symptomatic (unstated beliefs, assumptions, or ideologies). (I am borrowing these terms from David Bordwell.)
- Identify aspects of, or moments in, the work that resist meaning or are indifferent to it.

Attending to meaning prompts considerations of *significance*.

Modes

The modes of a fiction are about how it addresses or engages people's senses.

Here are some ways to think about the modes (sometimes it's best to focus on just one or two modes):

- Which of the five senses (hearing, seeing, tasting, smelling, and touching) are engaged? Which are engaged more than others?
- How is it WOVEN? Consider Written (including reading), Oral (what's said and heard), Visual (colour, layout, and images), Electronic (how the work transmits media, and whether it's only electronic), and Nonverbal (gesture, audio, and movement) communication in the work. (Thanks to Georgia Tech's Writing and Communication Program for this approach and the acronym, WOVEN.)
- Are you perceiving with the work or against it? Maybe somewhere in between? What's the flow or rhythm like?
- Are you in control of when the work starts and stops, or how you navigate it? Do you want to be?

Descriptions of mode prompt considerations of how we *attend* to fiction.

Massages or Manipulates

You may want to consider how the work massages or manipulates people's senses.

Here are some ways to think about massage and manipulation. Again, maybe pick just one or two for a given exercise.

- Is the work attempting to secure consensus? If so, then how? And what sort of consensus? Among whom?
- Is the work a distraction? If so, then how? And from what?
- Do people consider the work to be immersive? If so, then how? What strategies does it use to immerse people?
- Does the work involve interaction? Is it responsive? Does it invite input? Or maybe dialogue? If so, then how does it change, if at all, with each interaction?
- Does the work have a rhythm? If so, then describe it. How does it encourage flow?
- Does the work involve simultaneity? Does it ask you to balance things or to multitask? If so, then to what effects?
- Does the work address you (hey you! hi there)? If so, then how? Directly or indirectly? Under what assumptions?

Asking how a work massages and manipulates people's senses prompts considerations of *discipline and pleasure* (how we are trained to perceive and also what we enjoy).