English 4 Honors: Heroes in Literature
Required Summer Reading Assignment

Required Texts: 17 Stages of Hero's Journey according to Joseph Campbell (see attached), film of choice, and *The Dark Knight Returns* by Frank Miller

Part I:

Joseph Campbell's The *Hero With A Thousand Faces*
Recognizing the Hero's Journey in Modern Film

Monomyth:
Twentieth-century mythologist, professor of literature, and author, Joseph Campbell, recognized an underlying storyline structure common to all hero stories. He called this universal story structure the monomyth. The monomyth of the hero applies to classical hero mythology, but it can be applied to modern stories as well.

Campbell organizes the hero's journey into three main stages: **Departure, Initiation**, and **Return**. Within these three categories, Campbell identifies specific steps or stages the hero will encounter. As we trace the hero's journey throughout our course, we will return to Campbell's structure.

Directions: Read about the 17 stages of a hero's journey below. Keep the stages handy (you may want to print them out). Then, **populate the organizer that follows,** based on your understanding of Campbell's 17 stages of the monomyth as they apply to a movie of your choice.

<u>The Monomyth: Understanding the Seventeen Stages of the Hero's Journey</u>

1. Departure: Call to Adventure
According to Campbell, every story begins with its version of "Once upon a time." In the ordinary world, the would-be hero is living a normal, boring life, usually without the cosmic-level conflict that is present later on. At some point, the hero finds himself being called on an adventure—perhaps he looks longingly in the distance at something, or an invitation to go somewhere arrives, or he has a run-in with a character that asks for help. Something not fully out of the ordinary—but definitely slightly out of the ordinary—beckons the would-be hero to find out more. Campbell calls this the Call to Adventure.

2. Departure: Refusal of the Call
The hero refuses. Excuses may be involved, such as, "I have to take care of the farm!" Or, "I'm just a kid!" Or, "No one can do that!" Or, it could just be the hero giving a plain-old look of disbelief and a shrug before continuing his day. Either way, whether there are excuses or not, whether it's verbal or nonverbal, the hero doesn't just let an opportunity pass by—in most cases the hero has actively determined to decline. In some cases, the hero vehemently declines, setting up a scenario later when the hero is brought to the world of adventure kicking and screaming.

3. Departure: Supernatural Aid
Campbell's name for this stage can be misleading. In the stories Campbell read, which were primarily works of folklore and mythology, the narratives tended to teem with magic, so it made sense to him to call this stage supernatural aid. However, in many cases in today's narratives which follow Campbell the supernatural aid isn't supernatural at all.

For something to count as the so-called ‘supernatural aid’, it has to be an event with two characteristics: it has to be outside of the hero’s control, and it has to definitively draw the hero into the adventure. Very often in old stories this aid is magical, but it doesn’t have to be. In rare cases, the event is a person; most of the time, though, if a person is involved they are the cause of the supernatural aid and are not the supernatural aid themselves. Perhaps the hero’s home is endangered and there is no way for the hero to protect it without joining the adventure; or perhaps the hero wants something and learns there is no way he can get what he wants without going through the adventure to get it. Sometimes the hero can just be in the right place at the right time to get dragged into the adventure. No matter how it happens, the supernatural aid causes the next stage in the journey.

4. Departure: Crossing the First Threshold

Now that the hero has been sucked into the adventure, he must leave the ordinary world behind. Campbell called this “crossing the first threshold.” While this is normally depicted spatially, in the sense that a hero actually physically moves from one place to another, from what is normal to what is unusual or different, the crossing of the first threshold is also always symbolic. To reference the film The Wizard of Oz (1939), if the supernatural aid was the cyclone that dragged Dorothy to Oz (and into technicolor!) then the crossing of the first threshold is when Dorothy leaves her home and everything she knows to walk around the colorful Munchkin village—she’s not in Kansas anymore!

The crossing of the first threshold as a symbol shows the hero leaving what is known and crossing the line into what is unknown and unfamiliar—the world of adventure. It also reveals the hero’s status; he is a novice and in over his head.

5. Departure: In the Belly of the Whale

This stage is closely connected with both the supernatural aid and the crossing of the first threshold, and rather than be centered around an event or person, it is centered around a realization. It becomes woefully apparent that the hero is underprepared for what he’s about to do. This can be shown directly through dialogue, when the hero asks questions that his companions consider too simple, or it can be shown through action as the hero has to be rescued by his companions early on (and sometimes repeatedly) because he is inept. It can be a country boy who’s entered the big city and is looking at the skyscrapers in awe until a pedestrian yells at him to get out of the way, and he moves along, startled; it can be a city slicker entering farm country and realizing he has no business operating farm equipment. It can be a human entering a world of fairies or other magical beings and struggling to use magic that everyone else uses; and it could be the moment when the hero realizes he might not make it through this story. Campbell named this stage the belly of the whale because he was alluding to the biblical story of Jonah, who was swallowed by a big fish—it was in the fish that Jonah realized he was outmatched and began to beg for help. No matter what the setting or circumstance is, the hero has a similar revelation.

6. Initiation: The Road of Trials

At this point, the hero has left the ordinary world and entered the world of adventure, and the next six stages will deal with the hero’s struggles there. Campbell called these stages initiation because he believed that this is the process that made the hero into the hero.

The first of these stages is the road of trials, and this stage is not so much a moment in the story so much as a series of events where the hero gains skills, improves himself, and begins to grow into the hero he’s supposed to be. Often, the events that make up the road of trials are challenges, and often these challenges escalate the amount of skill the hero needs. To think of it another way by looking ahead in the story, if the hero is going to pull off some outstanding, impossible feat, he can’t just stay an average person—he has to grow into his role,

and this is the path by which he does it. If the previous stages are moments in time, this stage extends over quite a bit of time in the story, and can often include the next stages up to the apotheosis.

7. Initiation: The Meeting with the Goddess

This is perhaps the second-most obvious example of Campbell's sexism. In Campbell's version, the hero is always male and he always meets a female goddess figure. The goddess figure is not necessarily a goddess—often she's perfectly human, and in John Wick (2014) the goddess is Wick's dog—but the female character has to be alluring to the hero. She has to inspire him to continue in the quest. Very often this female turns out to be the male hero's love interest, but the level of love interest varies.

That might be Campbell's version, but modern storytelling has often found ways to flip this on its head with alternate gender roles and/or sexualities. The key has to do with the inspirational and relational nature of the goddess character. She doesn't have to be female, or heterosexual, to serve this role—the goddess just has to be someone who inspires the hero to prove him or herself. In Patty Jenkins's Wonder Woman (2017), Diana is the hero and Steve is the goddess, and his being in danger after stumbling into Themiscyra is what prompts her to leave with him on adventure. In Disney's animated Mulan (1998), Zhang is Mulan's goddess, and she desires to prove herself "man enough" in her military training to impress him

The most important part of this stage is that the hero is inspired to continue the journey by a character to whom there is an attraction which is more than platonic. To keep things simpler in our explanation, we will continue to use the terms hero and goddess, but these two characters need not be associated with male and female genders any longer.

8. Initiation: Woman as the Temptress

This is easily the most sexist, and therefore probably the most offensive, of Campbell's ideas. According to Campbell, the hero then is challenged to stop his journey by a woman, which is nearly always the same goddess character.

While the accusation that this stage assigns negative roles to women in the story is valid, modern storytellers have also managed to find ways to use this element of the story in far less sexist ways. For modern storytellers, the most important element of the woman as temptress is the idea that it is the same goddess character who is now trying to dissuade the hero. While this seems counter-intuitive at first, modern storytelling makes this make sense by focusing on the hero-goddess love interest.

In the previous stage, the hero encounters the goddess—and we've already established that these two are not necessarily tied to specific genders—and is inspired to continue the journey to being the hero because it will advance the hero's relationship with the goddess. Over time in the story, the goddess character, who originally may not be interested in the hero at first, begins to see the hero as more than a platonic friend—a level of romantic attraction develops. At that point, the goddess doesn't want to see the hero endangered, because the hero is precious to the goddess. But, the hero's journey only increases its level of danger over time! So, the goddess tries to persuade the hero to stop the journey. Maybe the goddess tries to get the hero to run away together, ignore the troubles of the world and start a new life somewhere. Maybe the goddess tries to convince the hero that the hero has nothing to prove to anyone anymore, or that other people can handle the danger, or that it's not the hero's fight after all, etc.

But in trying to get the hero to quit the journey for the hero's own safety and for the sake of the hero-goddess relationship, the goddess has now become a temptress (or, a tempter), because the goddess figure is tempting the hero to quit (even if it is for good reason!). This is the essence of Campbell that modern storytelling uses, often well, in ways that do not necessarily preserve Campbell's sexism. In Wonder Woman, Steve tries

repeatedly to stop Diana from marching into danger because he is falling in love with her. In Mulan, Zhang sends Mulan home after she saves his life on the snowy mountain slope, partly because he discovers she is a woman but also partly because he is attracted to her and he doesn't think war is any place for a lady.

9. Initiation: The Atonement of the Father

Not much has been said of the "father" figure in the hero's journey so far, mostly to try to keep things simpler, but from an early point in the story a hero is usually introduced to a figure that serves as the hero's coach. Most often this character is a parent, and while in Campbell's version the coach is a male parent—hence atonement of the father—over time this character has been adapted into all sorts of roles, including mother, coach, trainer, older friend, and mentor. The important part is that this figure is a mentor who is given permission by the hero to challenge the hero to greatness, who is allowed to try to improve the hero. This "father figure" is different from the goddess figure because the level of inspiration tends to be parental or platonic, but not romantic. Sometimes this figure appears early and then disappears; other times the father figure is present all along.

At this point in the story, as the goddess tries to convince the hero to abandon the quest, the hero is sorely tempted—it's a burden that is more than the hero can bear in epic stories especially. In that moment the hero needs the father figure to reenter the story and reassure the hero that they can and will be victorious on the journey, and that the hero's journey should continue. The easiest example of this is Mufasa from Disney's animated Lion King (1994), where the spirit of Mufasa appears to remind Simba who he is and to tell him to go back to fight Scar. At the point where the hero is about to give up, the father figure makes an appearance to give the hero whatever the hero needs to finish the quest.

10. Initiation: Apotheosis

Apotheosis is a Greek term meaning to become quite the god, and Campbell uses it aptly to describe what happens next. The hero has been through the road of trials, been inspired and then tempted by the goddess, and in the moment of greatest weakness in the goddess's temptation the hero has been put back onto the journey by the father. Now the hero is fully actualized, and the hero's full potential has been reached. In a coming-of-age story, the hero is now an adult. In a sports move, the hero has finally become the professional athlete, not just in name but in skill. In movies with more magical or supernatural themes, the hero masters the mystical or magical arts, or embraces their divine or semi-divine or supernatural selves. A handy way to understand this stage is to see it as the point where the audience knows the hero will succeed in the hero's journey—it's only a matter of time.

11. Initiation: The Ultimate Boon

And that is exactly what happens next, because to wait would be to waste time. The hero often reaches apotheosis only moments (or in film, just one scene) before the final confrontation or final trial that the hero then overcomes. The ultimate boon is the single point in the story where the hero wins. It can be the destruction of the Ring of Power in Tolkien's Return of the King. It can be the winning point in the championship game of any sports movie ever. It's when the bad guy is defeated once and for all (at least until the sequel), and when the hero finally achieves what the hero set out to do.

12. Return: Refusal to Return

At this point in the hero's journey, the hero has left the ordinary world and achieved their objective in the world of adventure. Now, the story has to wrap up. Campbell noticed that stories following the monomythic cycle can go different directions here, and modern storytelling has taken up the theme as well, suggesting that the following stages aren't always all included in a mythic or modern narrative. To put it another way, the stages listed under the return phase don't always happen in every story. The ones that do happen, happen in order,

and the first eleven stages in the departure and the initiation are always present. But the return is a little more flexible.

For the refusal to return, the hero metaphorically looks back at the path taken so far and decides to herself or himself, “I don’t want to go back.” This makes sense especially when the hero in the ordinary world didn’t like their social status, was made fun of or ridiculed, or viewed themselves as weak. Why go back to that life when the hero has now accomplished so much? Sometimes the hero refuses to leave the world of adventure, but that refusal to return usually doesn’t last.

13. Return: The Magic Flight
If the hero does decide to return to the ordinary world, it won’t be the same. But before that happens, the hero has to actually make the return. This involves a journey back to that first threshold crossed so many stages earlier, and this journey back, because the adventure is now over, happens so fast that Campbell called it the “Magic Flight.” If the hero’s journey involved a physical journey from one location to another, then the magic flight has the audience skip the journey back almost entirely—the hero simply reappears near the first threshold. To put it a different way, the journey back home is boring, so it is summarized magically fast.

14. Return: The Rescue from Without
Sometimes the hero does not wish to return but has to return anyway—at this point the hero is dragged back against their will to the ordinary world by an outside person or force and this is what Campbell meant by the phrase “Rescue from Without.” The easiest example in film and twentieth-century literature is Tolkien’s Return of the King, where Frodo and Sam have defeated the dark lord Sauron and are waiting to die on the slopes of Mount Doom, an erupting volcano. Frodo in particular states he expects to die now—a refusal of return—when Gandalf the wizard appears riding on the back of a giant eagle, to swoop down and carry Frodo and Sam to safety. In another story, the hero might wake up to discover their journey was only a dream—this is what happens to Dorothy in the film The Wizard of Oz.

15. Return: Crossing the Return Threshold
If the hero does return, then there is a moment when the hero crosses the same boundary they had to cross back in the departure phase, the boundary between the world of adventure and the ordinary world. Back in the departure phase, the hero crossed the first threshold into the world of adventure; now, they cross the return threshold back to the world of adventure. This is oftentimes a stage that is seen but not heard—Disney’s Mulan simply pauses at the gate in the wall around her home before entering. Usually this stage is not overt or obvious, but it is still significant: the hero is now home.

16. Return: Master of Two Worlds
But, if the hero is home, the hero is not the same. They may be back at the starting point of the story, but they are also still fully actualized characters having reached their full potential. They were novices and in the belly of the whale at the beginning of their time in the world of adventure, but they have now mastered the world of adventure. That mastery they bring with them back to the ordinary world. If they weren’t already masters of the ordinary world before they left, they will use their mastery of the world of adventure to assert themselves in the ordinary world too—for example, a hero that may have been picked on in the ordinary world will now stand up to the bully unsuccessfully, or the hero who started our poor in the ordinary world is now rich and a person of means.

17. Return: Freedom to Live
And at this point the mythic story ends: the hero as a fully actualized victor, master of both the ordinary and adventure worlds, is freed by their victory to live however they want. This is where the end credits roll and the theme music plays, where the hero rides off into the sunset, the "happily ever after."

Joseph Campbell's Hero's Journey, while based on his study of mythology around the world, can be applied to more than just myth. In fact, it's applied to film frequently. One of the clearest examples of Campbell's Hero's Journey is none other than George Lucas's film Star Wars: A New Hope (1977). .

Sources:

Campbell, Joseph. The Hero with a Thousand Faces. Commemorative edition. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2004.
John Wick. Dir. Chad Stahelski. 2014.
The Lion King. Dir. Roger Allers and Rob Minkoff. 1994.
Lord of the Rings: The Return of the King. Dir. Peter Jackson. 2003.
Mulan. Dir. Tony Bancroft and Barry Cook. 1998.
Star Wars: A New Hope. Dir. George Lucas. 1977.
The Wizard of Oz. Dir. Victor Fleming. 1939.
Wonder Woman. Dir. Patty Jenkins. 2017.

**Now, apply to a film

Directions:
Step 1: Select a film that you believe follows the Hero's Quest as prescribed by Campbell. While all 17 stages might not appear, a good number of them should apply, if you've selected well. *Note, they may not be in the same order.

Step 2: View the film, studying the hero's journey closely and taking notes to prepare for your outline. The hero may be male or female, and human or creature.

Step 3: Populate the outline that follows, applying the 17 stages to your film as best as you can.

Be prepared to explain and discuss your outline in class.

Here are some film suggestions, or seek out a different title on your own:

Star Wars (any)
Spider Man
Lion King
Lord of the Rings (any)
Men in Black
The Hunger Games
The Princess Bride
The Hobbit (any)
Jaws
The Wizard of Oz
Where the Wild Things Are
Avatar
Where The Wild Things Are
Buffy the Vampire Slayer
Shrek
Field of Dreams

The Monomyth of the Hero Movie Title:

I. Departure

a.

b.

c.

d.

e.

II. II.Initiation a.

b.

c.

d.

e.

f.

III.Return a.

b.

c.

d.

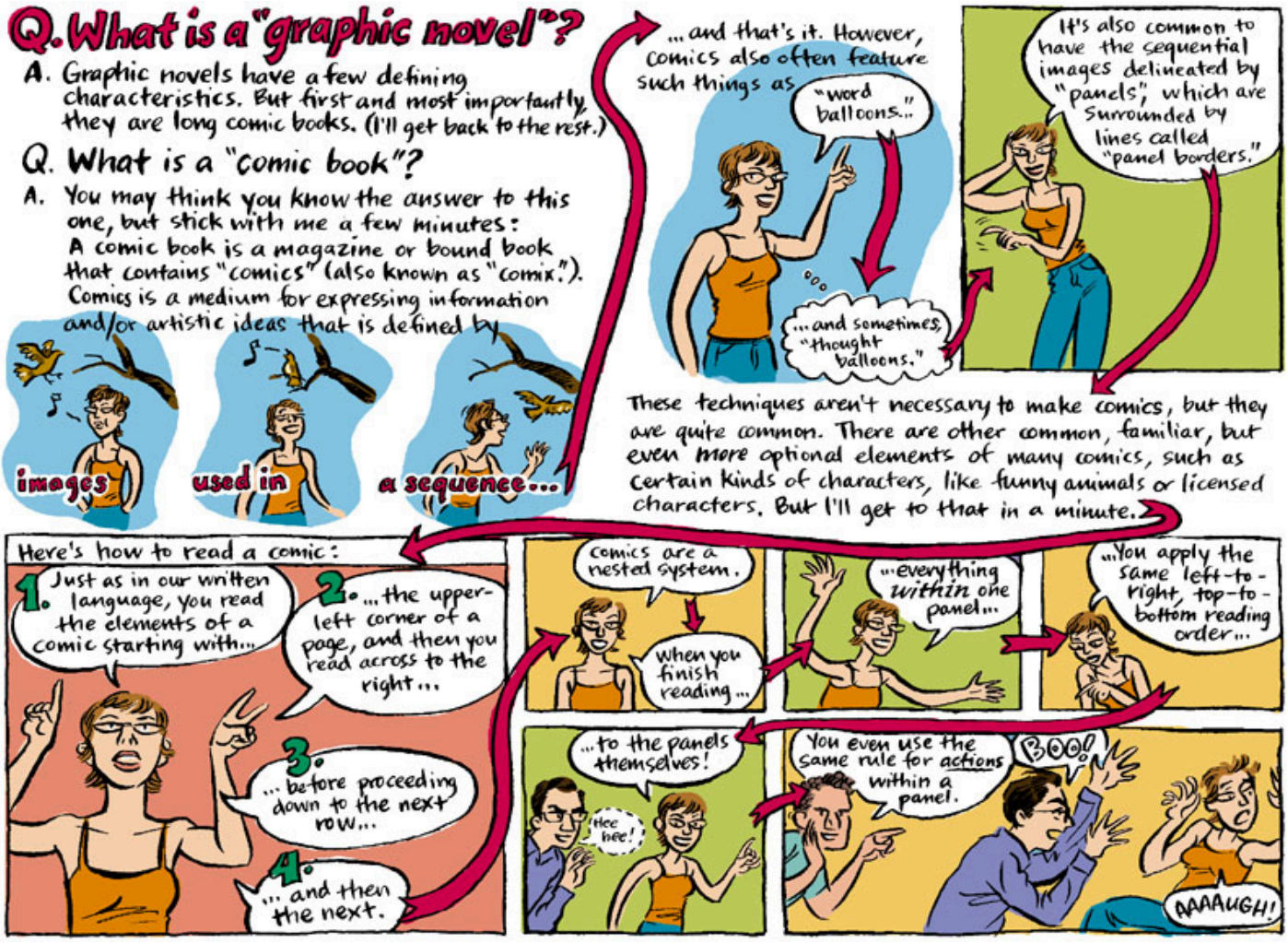
e.

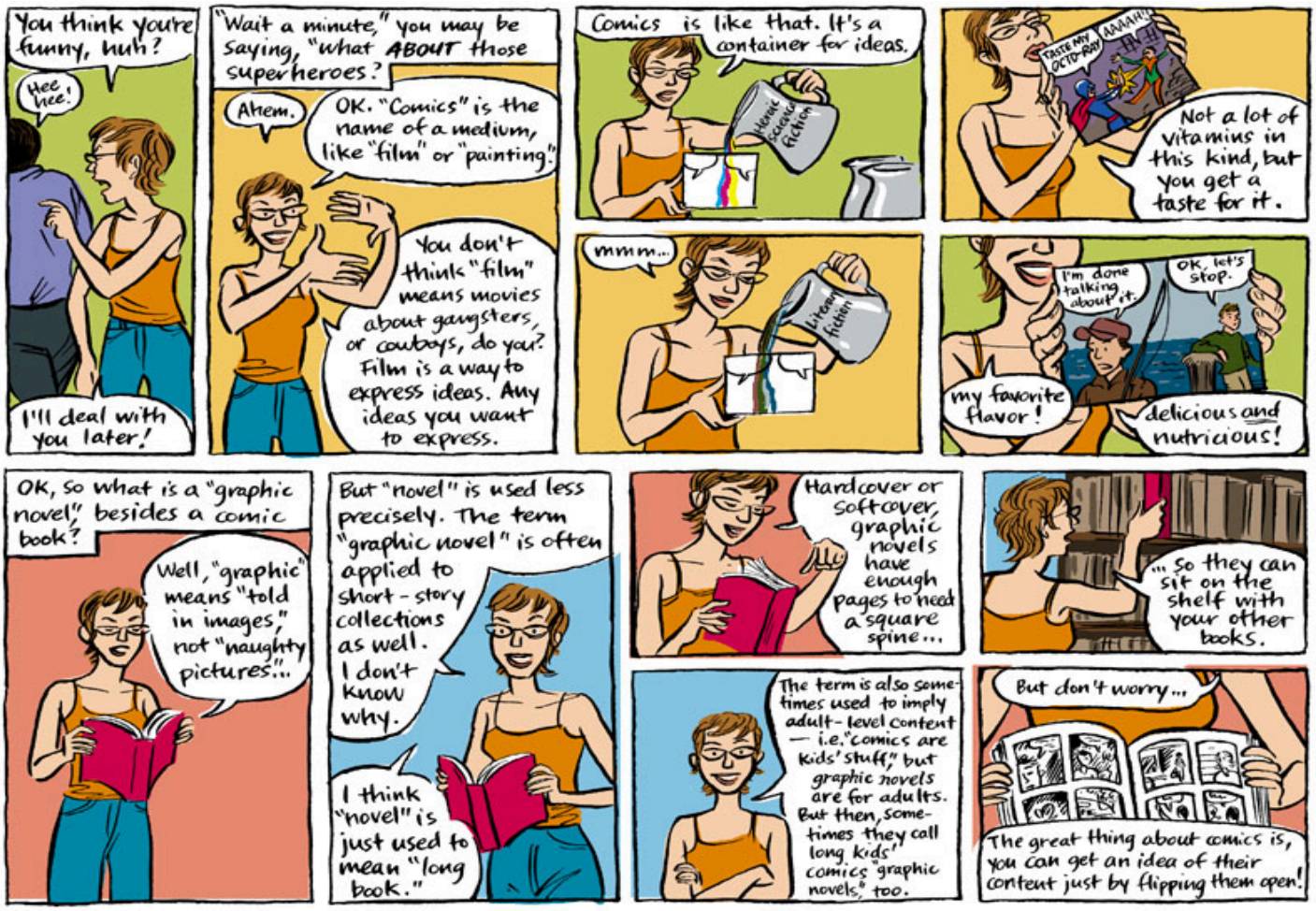
f.

Part II: *The Dark Knight Returns* by Frank Miller

Like comics, graphic novels tell a story through sequential art with dialogue and/or narration. Graphic novels are essentially standalone stories with plots that are more complex. They can also be comprised of a compilation of several comics that were previously published in separate issues. Like traditional text, graphic novels come in a variety of genres and sub-genres, such as fiction, non fiction, romance, science fiction, action, and so on. *Batman: The Dark Night Returns* by Frank Miller falls into the action and superhero categories. These tend to be the most popular categories, and go back to the oldest roots of graphic novels, which were originally comics published in small and separate issues. The superhero genre in comic and graphic novels were made famous and controlled by mainstream publishers, namely Marvel, DC, and Dark Horse ("What Are Graphic Novels"). It can take a bit of practice to read a graphic novel.

Before you begin the novel, examine the cartoon that follows for some tips. For helpful background on Batman, you may also wish to check out the links below. Directions for the novel itself follow.





You may wish to view the following BEFORE you begin reading the graphic novel:

Video segments on the history of Batman.

https://youtu.be/Ayzl41mz1qA

https://youtu.be/uZwxseZiBpw

https://youtu.be/IwOgaUkG9VA

https://youtu.be/C5uHCYPkINw

Directions for *The Dark Knight* Returns:

1. Read and reflect upon the following:

Scholars note that In America, "literary" heroes have largely assumed characteristics separate from those of Campbell's traditional monomyth, forming what John Shelton Lawrence and Robert Jewett call the "American monomyth." In the American monomyth, "A community in a harmonious paradise is threatened by evil; normal institutions fail to contend with this threat; a selfless superhero emerges to renounce temptations and carry out the redemptive task; aided by fate, his decisive victory restores the community to its paradisal condition; the superhero then recedes into obscurity" (Lawrence and Jewett: "The Myth of the American Superhero" 6). However, in *The Dark Knight Returns* by Frank Miller, Batman's role does not appear to be so simple. "Good"

and “evil” are questioned, as are the ideas of the “harmonious paradise” and the “selfless superhero.” As readers, we question if “good” can even exist without “evil,” and we consider who determines the nature of “justice.” In Miller’s text there are “dualities”* within the characters that call into question our notions of hero, of morality, and of justice.

***duality* refers to having two parts, often with opposite meanings.

2. During (or immediately upon completing the graphic novel), **take notes** addressing the following:
   - Identify dualities and/or inconsistencies or contradictions within characters or in how characters are perceived by others.
   - Consider how and to what extent you recognize Campbell’s stages in The Dark Knight Returns.

****You may use these notes when we write an in-class essay on the nature of Batman as hero, both in the traditional sense as outlined by Campbell in his stages and according to the “Myth of the American Superhero” as briefly referenced above.**