



DARK  
KNIGHTS

NEON  
LIGHTS

*Teaching the Graphic Novel  
through an 80's  
Cultural Analysis*

# SECTIONS



**SECTION I**  
INTRODUCTIONS & RATIONALE



**SECTION II**  
CONTEXT

- A. 80s ZEITGEIST
- B. HISTORY OF AMERICAN COMIC BOOKS & THE LORE OF THE DARK KNIGHT
- C. ROGUES & ALLIES
- D. MUTABILITY



**SECTION III**  
THE DARK KNIGHT RETURNS

IV

EVALUATIONS

V

RESOURCES

VI

FINAL  
REFLECTIONS

I.

**INTRODUCTIONS**



**RATIONALE**



# Julian, A.K.A. "MR. BEAUVAIS"



- SHSM teacher for 20 years
  - English Dept. Head
  - Religion Dept. Head (frm)
  - AP Psychology
- *MAUS* somewhat overdone; looking for new topic/era
- seminal critical & commercial graphic novel; genre-defining
- lifelong Bat-Fan & self-professed 80s geek





# Sarah Jones

## Career:

Worked at QAA, Riverside School Board and The Sacred Heart School of Montreal

- ★ Former Department Head for St. Johns and SHSM
- ★ Teachables include: English, History, Communications, Creative and Effective Writing



Looking for student engagement



80s Music and Movie fan



Creating assignments that can not be AI Generated

# TEACHING THE GRAPHIC NOVEL

## VISUAL & TEXTUAL LITERACY

1

- Combines images and words
- Builds multimodal reading skills
- Strengthens interpretation of visual cues

## SUPPORTS DIVERSE LEARNERS

2

- Helps reluctant readers engage
- Supports ELL students
- Provides context through visuals

## INCREASES ENGAGEMENT

3

- Connects to student interests
- Visually stimulating
- Less intimidating than traditional texts

# TEACHING THE GRAPHIC NOVEL

4

## DEVELOPS CRITICAL THINKING

- Requires inference between panels
- Analyzes symbolism and visual choices
- Encourages deeper interpretation

5

## EXPLORES COMPLEX THEMES

- Identity, power, social justice
- War, trauma, personal struggles
- Same rigor as traditional literature

6

## DEVELOPS CRITICAL THINKING

- Clear visualization of pacing
- Shows flashbacks and parallel plots
- Helps students understand story design

II.

# CONTEXT





# The 80s Zeitgeist: Key Elements

**Music:** A central element of the zeitgeist; focus on the emergence of MTV & impact on pop culture



**Television:** Marshal McLuhan – “Medium is the message” as television expands, begins to draw more people together in immediacy (i.e. Challenger explosion) and expansion into cable; emergence of CNN, talk shows, popular shows of the times (soap operas)



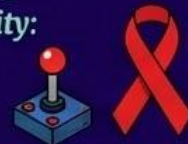
**Fashion:** Bright neon colours, black leather and lace, fringe and BIG hair



**Technological Revolution:** personal computers, cell phones, video games, etc.



**AIDS Crisis & Attitudes towards Homosexuality:** Homophobia and social attitudes



# 80s Politics



## The Legacy of the 70s

Watergate/Vietnam, distrust of the government and authority.



## Urban Decay

Economic setbacks, lack of infrastructure, rise in crime, youth gangs, NYC, etc. (FRANK MILLER interview).



## Reagan

Impact, legacy, and policies: economics, neoliberalism, role in end of Cold War, etc.



## Cold War & The Fall of the Soviet Union

Nuclear anxieties, non-proliferation, 'STAR WARS,' Gorbachev/reforms (perestroika, glasnost), 'Evil Empire,' fall of Eastern Block, etc.



## II.B.

# THE HISTORY OF AMERICAN COMIC BOOKS & THE LORE OF THE DARK KNIGHT

### THE GOLDEN AGE

1930s - mid 1950s



### THE SILVER AGE

mid 1950s - 1970s



### THE BRONZE AGE

1970s - mid 1980s

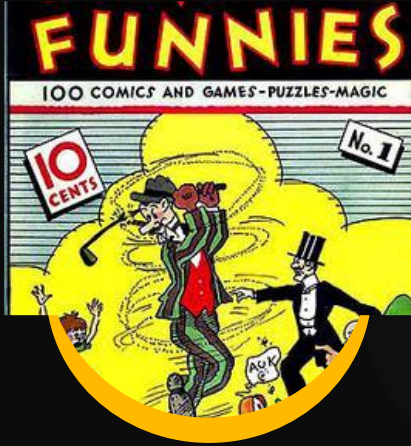


### THE MODERN AGE

mid 1980s - Present



# THE GOLDEN AGE



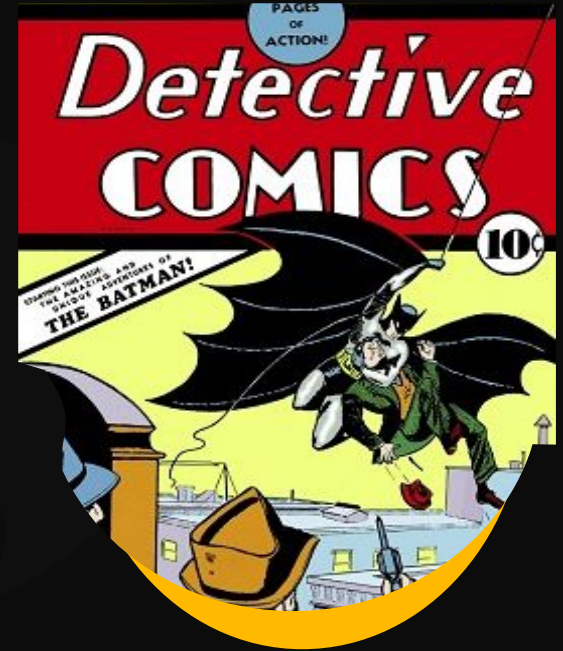
## ORIGINS

The origins of comic books  
(reprinted serials)



## SUPERHEROES & WWII

The emergence of  
"superheroes," patriotism &  
WWII themes



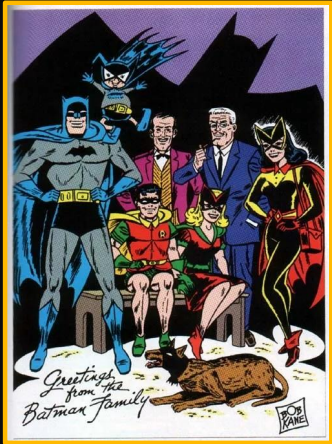
## FIRST APPEARANCE

Establishing a legend - origins  
& lore (grim loner)

# THE SILVER AGE

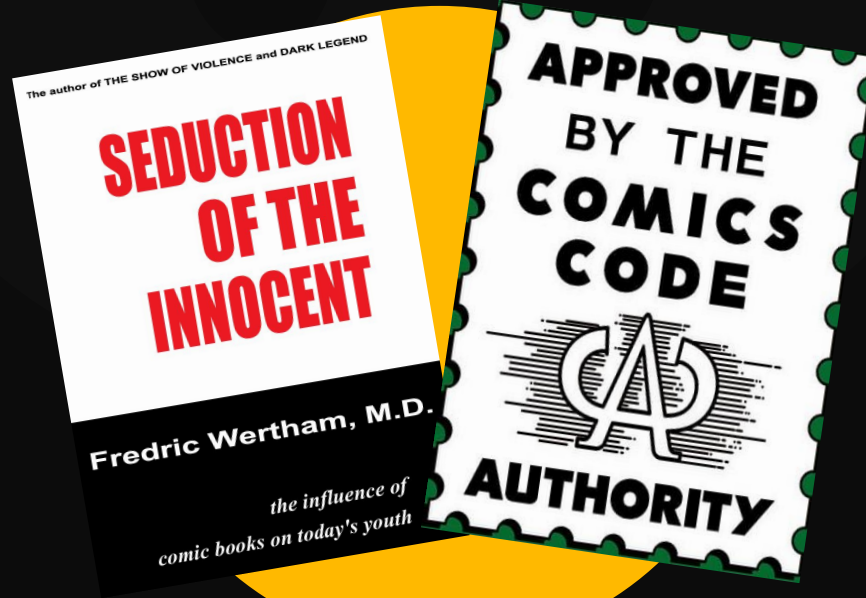
## TONAL SHIFT

Lighter stories; Bat-Family,  
Sci-Fi Elements



## FREDRIC WERTHAM & THE COMICS CODE AUTHORITY

Censorship & the impact of *Seduction of the Innocent* on the comic book industry



## 1st WAVE OF “BATMANIA” - CAMP & KITSCH

Explosion of popularity;  
remaking the character



# THE BRONZE AGE



## RETURN TO FORM

O'Neil/Adams run - grim loner returns; detective again; Joker revamped



## SOPHISTICATED STORYTELLING

Comics mirror social/cultural political trends (i.e. drug abuse, race relations, feminism, war, death)



## THE GRAPHIC NOVEL

Genre emerges; non-superhero; underground, but critical & literary acclaim



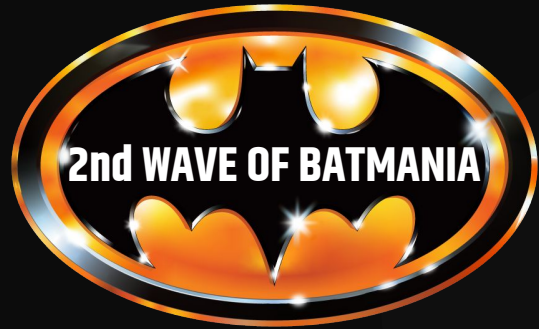
# THE MODERN AGE (1)

*Watchmen* (1986) & *The Dark Knight Returns* (1986)  
redefines genre:

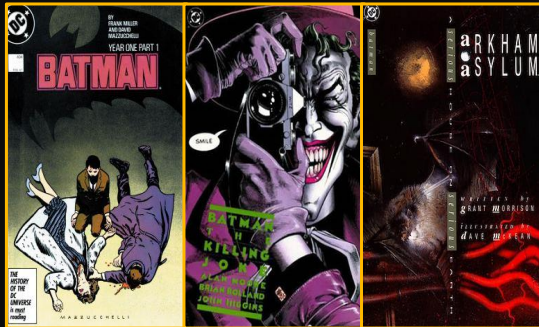
- mature storytelling in superhero genre
- *critical* & commercial successes = legitimacy for the genre
- sets trends in storytelling for years to come



# THE MODERN AGE (2)

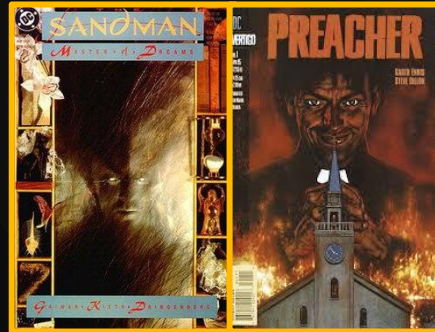


50th anniversary; Burton '89 film; prolific graphic novels



## RISE OF THE GRAPHIC NOVEL

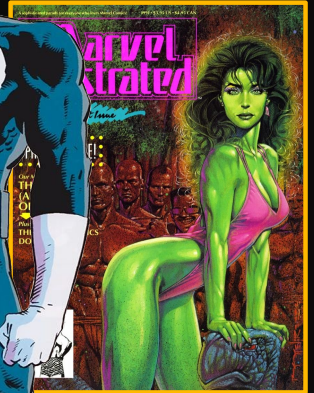
Vertigo imprint; "Suggested For Mature Readers;" mainstream acceptance & appeal; critical acclaim; no CCA



# VERTIGO

## THE 90s

"grim n' gritty;" sexualization



# C. ROGUES & ALLIES (1)



**THE JOKER**



**TWO-FACE**

# ROGUES & ALLIES (2)



**ALFRED**



**ROBIN**



**COMMISSIONER  
GORDON**

# D. MUTABILITY (1)

- **enduring** for almost a **century** with no signs of slowing down
- **reflects** the **eras** in which he appears, and **changes** with them; **mirror** into the times
- **core elements** are **universal & adaptable**
- joins the pantheon of literary & mythological characters who share the same characteristics of mutability (i.e. Robin Hood, Sherlock Holmes, Dracula, etc.)



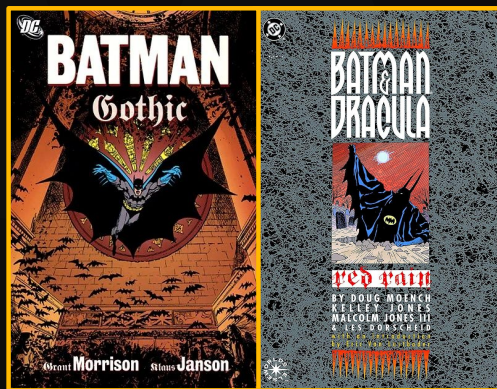
# MUTABILITY (2)

also transcends genres.....

**TRUE CRIME &  
NOIR / DETECTIVE**  
YEAR ONE, BLACK MIRROR, THE  
LONG HALLOWEEN



**HORROR**  
GOTHIC, RED RAIN



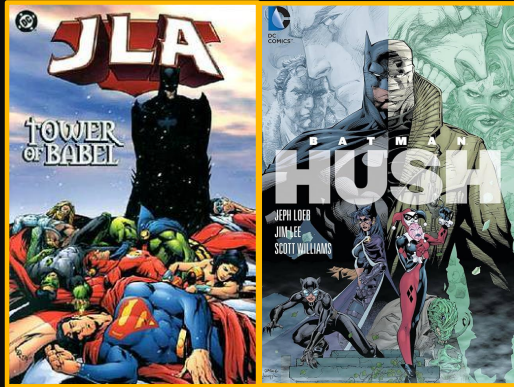
**PSYCHOLOGICAL  
THRILLER**  
ARKHAM ASYLUM, THE CULT,  
VENOM, THE KILLING JOKE



# MUTABILITY (3)

## ACTION

HUSH, TOWER OF BABEL,  
KNIGHTFALL, CATAclysm



## SCI-FI

RETURN OF BRUCE WAYNE,  
BATMAN VS PREDATOR



## DYSTOPIA

DARK KNIGHT RETURNS,  
YEAR 100



and many more...

# MUTABILITY (4)

Also transcends media.

Aside from comic books, novels, academia, and other printed material...

## FILM

40S SERIALS, BURTON FILMS,  
*DARK KNIGHT* TRILOGY, ETC.



## TELEVISION

60S SERIES, GOTHAM, PENGUIN,  
ETC.



# MUTABILITY (5)

## ANIMATION

(Film and Television)

ADVENTURES OF BATMAN,  
“DINI-VERSE” / DCAU, LEGO BATMAN, ETC.



## VIDEO GAMES

FILM ADAPTATIONS, RISE OF SIN  
TZU, ARKHAM TRILOGY, ETC.





III.  
THE  
DARK KNIGHT  
RETURNS

- GRAPHIC NOVEL IS DIVIDED INTO 4 BOOKS

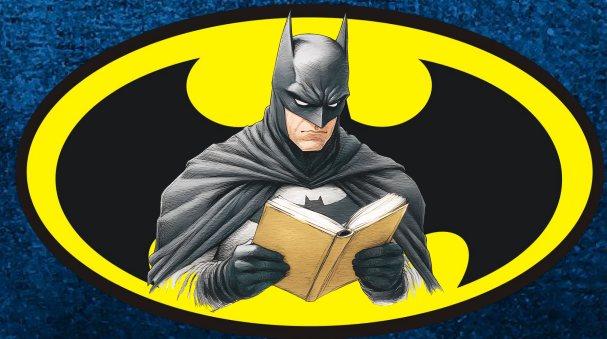
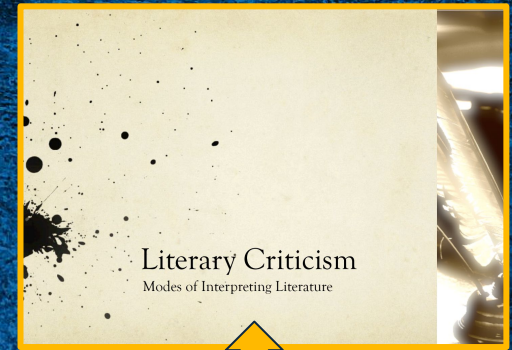
- EACH BOOK ANALYZED ACCORDING TO:

- FORMALIST APPROACH
- READER RESPONSE

- IN ADDITION, STUDENTS WILL ALREADY BE FAMILIAR WITH OTHER MODES OF LITERARY CRITICISM & USE THEM IN ANALYSIS:

- CULTURAL/HISTORICAL (C/H)
- POLITICAL (POL)
- FEMINIST (F)
- MORAL/ETHICAL (M/E)
- PSYCHOLOGICAL (PSY)
- ARCHETYPAL/MYTHOLOGICAL (A/M)

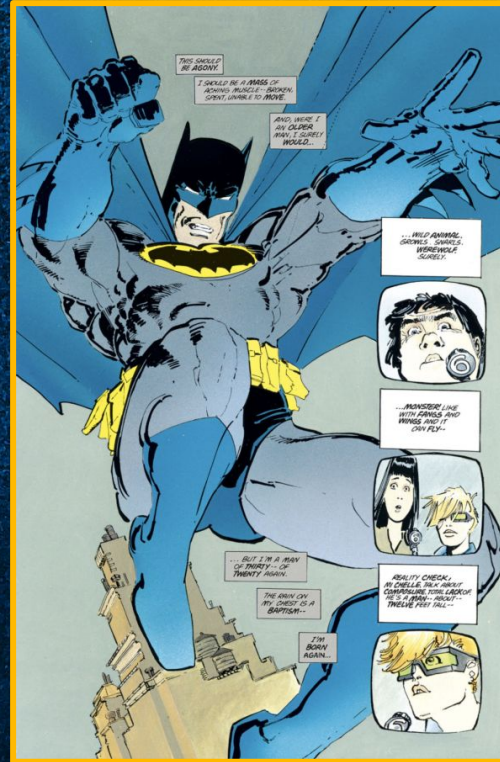
- SUPPLEMENTARY MATERIALS (I.E. SCHOLARLY ARTICLES, DOCUMENTARIES, ETC.) PROVIDED BY INSTRUCTORS AS WELL



# BOOK I

## TOPICS

- IDENTITY - TRAUMA, OBSESSION & DUALITY (PSY)
- AGING VS MATURING (PSY)
- ETHICS OF VIGILANTISM / BILLIONAIRE CLASS (M/E)



## 80S ZEITGEIST

- Urban Decay
  - Crime
  - Drug use
  - Economics
  - Politics of ethnicity
  - Disaffected youth
- Media
  - New forms
  - Oversaturation
  - Talk shows

# BOOK II

## TOPICS

- THE LAW VS JUSTICE; REVENGE (**POL**)
- TOXIC MASCULINITY & THE GLORIFICATION OF VIOLENCE (**FEM**)
- **ARCHETYPES**
  - BAT
  - THE FOOL\*
  - THE CAVE



## 80S ZEITGEIST

- Urban Decay (continued)
- Media (continued)
- Reagan Era
  - Legacy of the 70s (Watergate, Vietnam)
  - "Reaganomics"

# BOOK III

## TOPICS

- FASCISM (INTRO) (POL)
- RELATIONSHIP DYNAMICS & QUEER THEORY (FEM)
- THE ETHICS OF VIOLENCE (M/E)



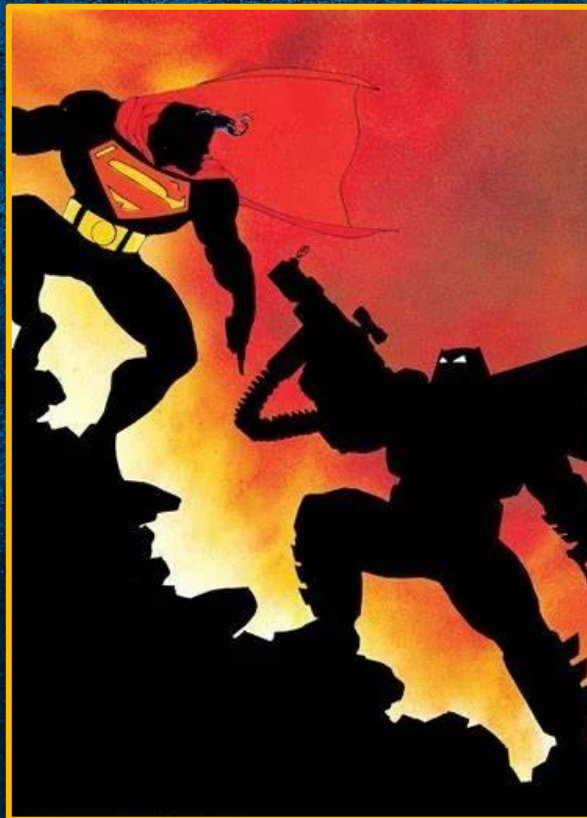
## 80S ZETGEIST

- Reagan Era
  - Cold War policies
  - Iran/Contra
  - Cult of Personality
- A.I.D.S. Epidemic & Attitudes towards Homosexuality

# BOOK IV

## TOPICS

- FASCISM IN DKR (**POL**)
  - BRUNO
  - REAGAN/SUPERMAN
  - "SONS OF BATMAN"
  - SOCIAL REACTIONS
  - MILLER?
- SIGNS OF FASCISM IN CURRENT GEOPOLITICAL CLIMATE (**POL**)



## 80S ZEITGEIST

- Cold War
  - Nuclear anxiety / M.A.D.
  - Proxy wars
  - Interventionism
- Media & Propaganda

IV.

# EVALUATIONS



# METHODS OF EVALUATION

## THE DARK KNIGHT RETURNS



As students read they are guided by questions that relate to literary criticism (Historical, political cultural...) Answers are graded

## MTV RIP

close analysis of an 80s music video



MOOD BOARD  
INTERVIEW  
FEATURE ARTICLE

 LITERATURE RESPONSES

 ARTICLE REVIEWS

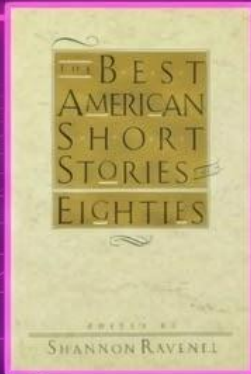
 GROUP PRESENTATIONS

 FINAL UNIT ESSAY

# Writing Evaluations

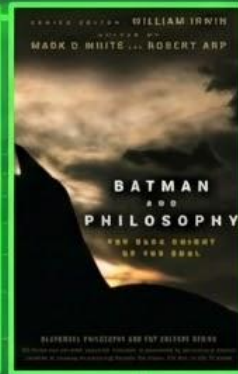
## Literature Responses

Taken from The Best American Short Stories of the Eighties



## Scholarly Article Reviews

Based on the 80s and Batman literature  
(ex. Charlie Angus' Article entitled "*What the 80s left us*".)



## The Feature Article

Personal interview of a trusted adult which then translates into a feature article



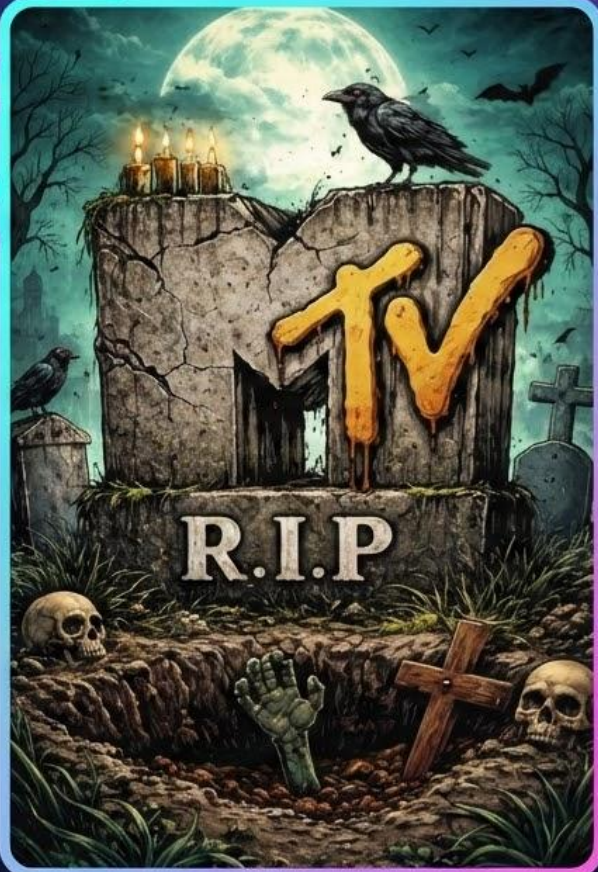
# RIP MTV ASSIGNMENT

## TASK:

- Select and analyze one of 89 music videos with strong social narratives (focusing on 80s culture).
- Deeply analyze lyrics, symbols, and underlying social attitudes.
- Present findings in an oral presentation.

## PRESENTATION DETAILS:

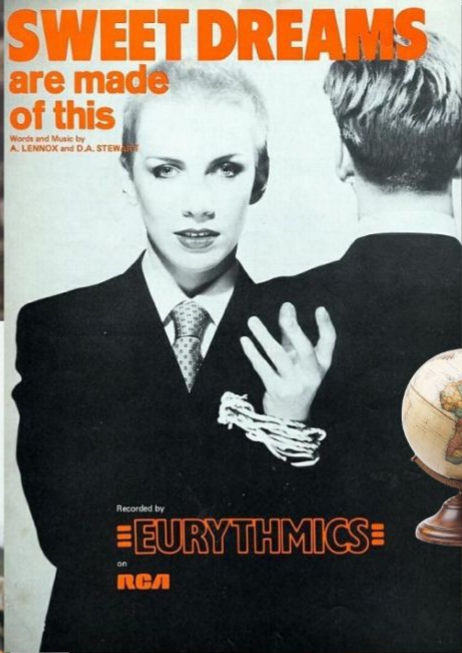
- Selected music video is shown to the class.
- One slide created to highlight visuals and findings.



# Dancing With Myself by Billy Idol - 1981

- Introduction
  - Iconic 1980 video reflecting youth rebellion and independence
- Visual Style & Mood
  - Dark, punk-inspired setting showing aggression and nonconformity
- Film Techniques
  - Low angles and fast cuts create power and chaotic energy
- Symbols & Meaning
  - Dancing alone represents individuality in a conformist society
- Social Issues & Relationships
  - Highlights pressure to fit in and rise of 80s individualism





**“SOME OF THEM WANT TO ABUSE YOU”**



**“SOME OF THEM WANT TO BE ABUSED”**



# Production: The Mood Board Assignment



Create a poster board that captures the “mood” of a cultural aspect from the 80s. That could be: political, economic, musical, social ideals, family dynamics, TV shows, fashion, movies, comic books, social justice issues, or any combination of those aspects.



It does not have to be limited to North America; the Eastern hemisphere was not living a similar existence. Any culture’s mood is accepted.



A small write-up should accompany. It will be presented to the class at the end of the unit.



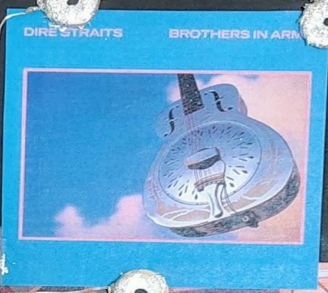


# The Mood Board Assignment

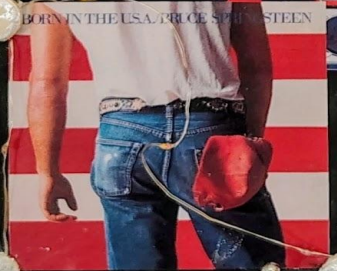
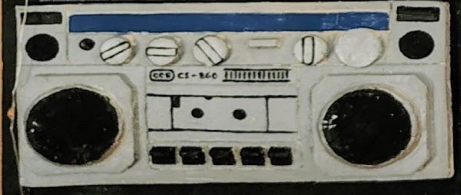
Student exemplars



BON JOVI



# 80s: MUSIC ON THE GO



The importance of Achism + Propaganda  
**FOCUS**  
think about dying every day. Death is in the back of my mind all the time. I can practically every minute of the day. I cope with things as they come.

Founder of gay church group to preside at chartering service

SUPPORT + CARE  
**A.I.D.S.: WE NEED RESEARCH,**

**LIVING WITH DEATH**  
**SILENCE**  
The Emotional Anguish of AIDS

# The AIDS Epidemic OF THE 1980S

... Bummy Avenue. A reception held after the service... celebration of its chartering. Joy will also have a banquet at 8 Saturday in the Langford Hotel, center Park. At that time Perry will a film clip from the Fellowship's Southeast Beach.

need research NOT hysteria  
**NOT BACTERIAL**  
only cared once he died

RIP, Killed By The FDA  
DEAD FROM LACK DEXTRAN SULFATE  
seen some people die in business, abandoned by friends

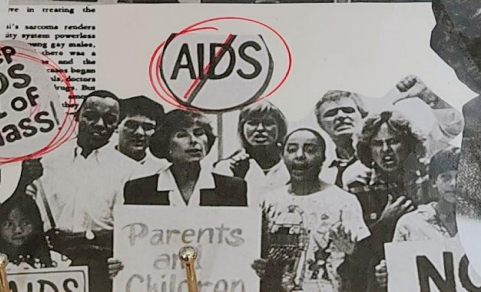


**The Empty Church**

**THE TRUTH HURTS BUT AIDS KILLS**

**Keep AIDS out of class**

**AIDS**



**amfAR**  
AIDS RESEARCH



# MADONNA

Madonna  
"I'm tough, I'm ambitious,  
and I know exactly what I want."



Like  
A  
Virgin



TAM MY OWN  
EXPERIMENT, I AM, MY  
OWN WORK OF ART  
- MADONNA

NEW YORK POST

What says vulgar Madonna  
recreates queen of sinners...

## WHAT A TRAMP!

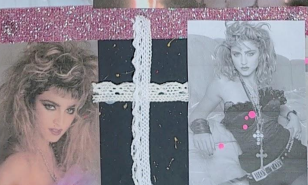
LOVE, HONOR & OBEDIENCE



NEW YORK POST METRO

## MADONNA: 'I'M NOT ASHAMED'

Rock star shrugs off media pix furor



NEW YORK POST

## STUPID MADONNA TRICKS



- Spews obscenities on Bravo 12 times
- Refuses to leave stage

Page 3

WE'RE NOT



Twisted Sister tour

Twisted Sister keeps heavy-metal popularity with humor

Continued from page 16  
a few fleeting moments  
sort of spectacular.  
The crowd exploded into a  
roy as the opening chords of  
"I Wanna Rock" took hold.  
The band broke into  
had little, a wave

P.K.'s Fashion

U2 In Dub.

GONNA



San Francisco Chronicle

DEAD KENNEDYS!

Pink Floyd: Freak  
out comes to town

TAKE IT

PINK FLOYD  
TEAR DOWN  
THEIR WALL



The mca  
JOURNAL

Springsteen rocks out the Dome rolls Rocket w

Brace  
Springsteen:  
Hello To "Last  
Verse Genius"

CHANEL

CHANEL

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CHANEL

1980s

# Haute Couture



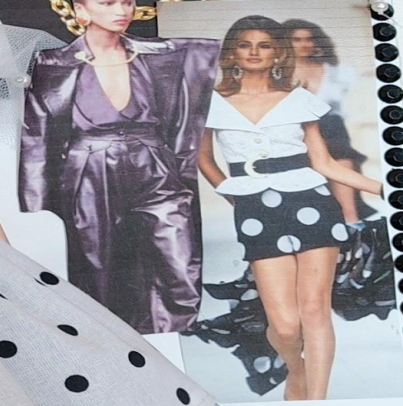
CHANEL

CHANEL



CHANEL

CHANEL



# ARCADE

TOUCH MY JOYSTICK

# BACK TO THE 80s



"NEW HIGH SCORE!"



"GAME OVER"



"PLAYER 1 READY"



Antonio.P  
Zoe.B  
VD



TICKET



# Personal Interview and Feature Article

## *The Personal Interview*



Choose an adult who lived through the 80's to interview.



Create a list of questions to ask their interviewee



Conduct and record the interview. The transcript or recording must be handed in.

## *The Feature Article*



Write a feature article on that person, and their experience growing up in the 1980's.

# The 80s Party Idea



Parents are invited after school



The atmosphere - 80s music videos and decor



Mood Boards are displayed for parental perusal



Potluck meal / mocktails



Dance party

V.

# RESOURCES



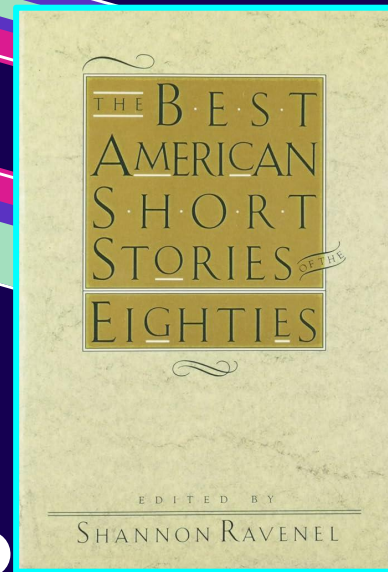
# The 80s



[Apple Tv](#)

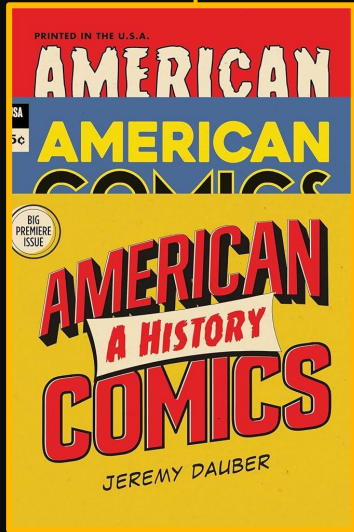


[Amazon](#)

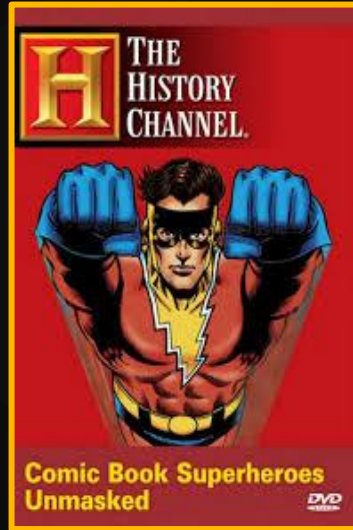


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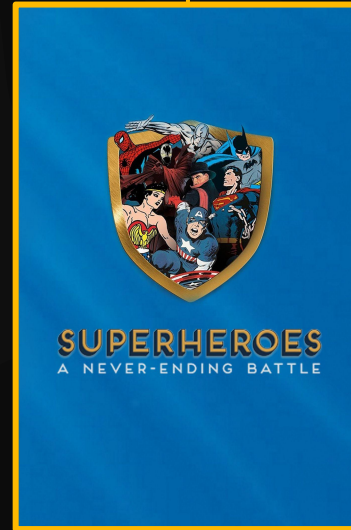
# AMERICAN COMIC BOOKS



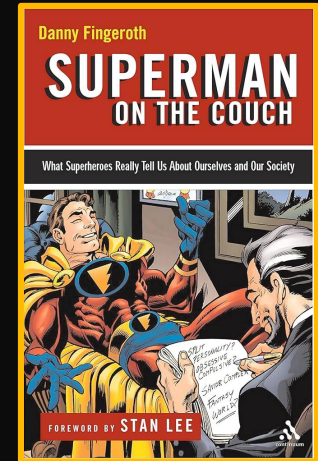
Amazon



YouTube



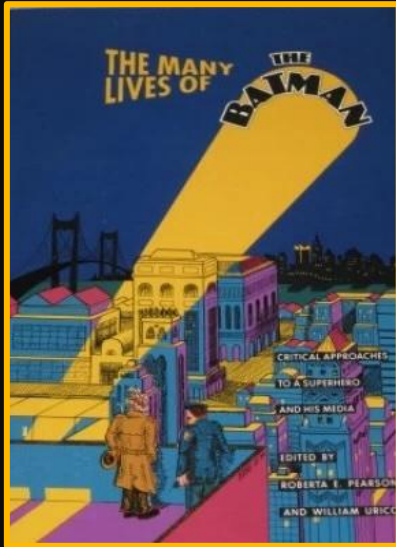
Prime Video



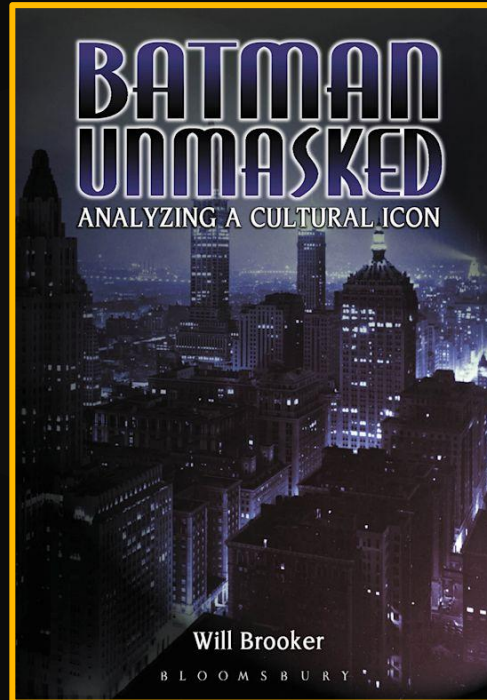
Amazon



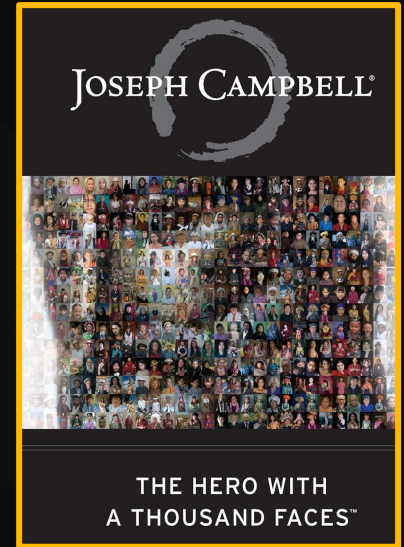
# BATMAN



Amazon

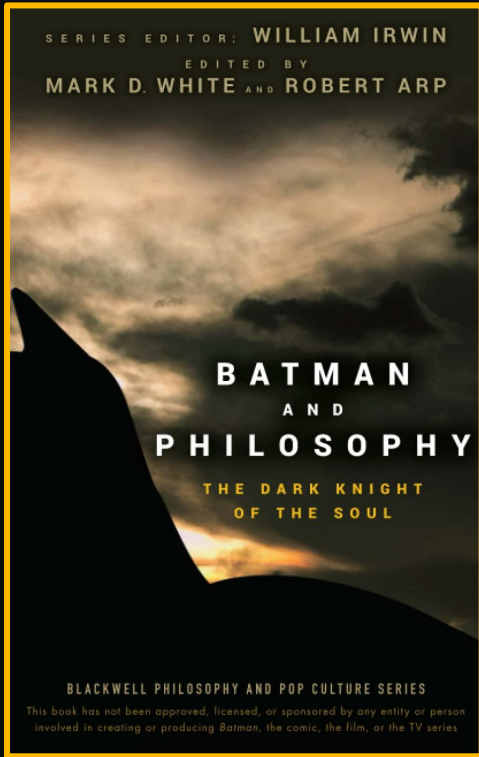


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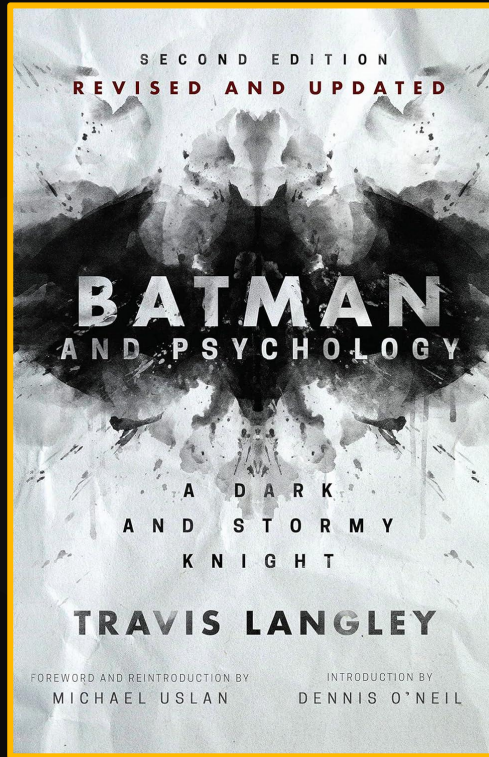


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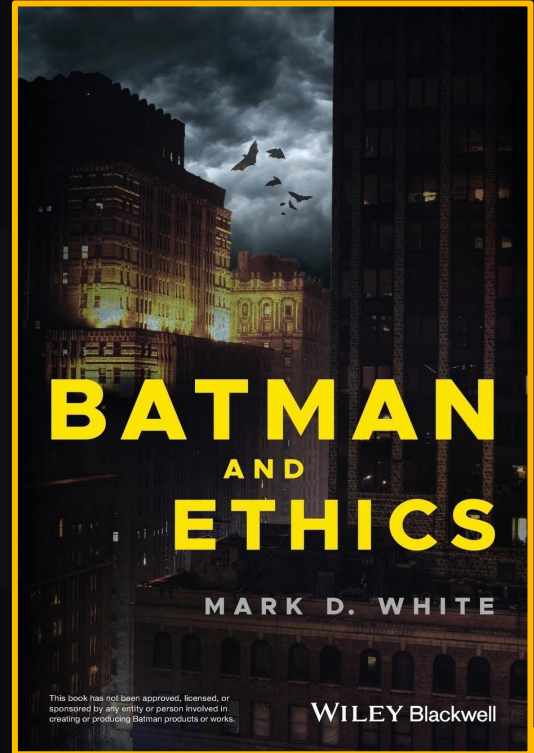




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Amazon



Amazon



V.

**FINAL**

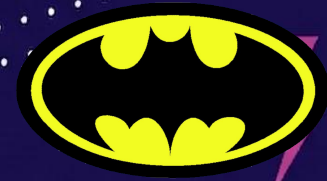
**REFLECTIONS**



A graphic of the number '80s' in a stylized, colorful font (blue '8', purple '0', pink 's') inside a pink speech bubble shape.

# 80s

- Fun and holistic way to introduce students to academia & in-depth, multidisciplinary studies
- Only 2nd year of unit implementation; still refining
  - Malleable elements, new ideas
- Core of idea is adaptable; can change subject/era
- Helps engender student/teacher rapport, relationships, and understanding



- Different type of literature study - wide appeal
- Helps students connect with their parents and Gen X.
- Cross Curricular
- AI has limited use therefore it is harder to plagiarize
- Personal and authentic writing
- Culminating party - appreciation and connectivity



**THANK**

**YOU!**

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[sjones@sacredheart.qc.ca](mailto:sjones@sacredheart.qc.ca)

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