INTRODUCTION TO COMICS
ALISON BECHDEL’S FUN HOME: A FAMILY TRAGICOMIC

Discussion Questions:
1. Let’s take a minute to think about Fun Home in relation to the other book that we’ve read thus far for class: Shaun Tan’s The Arrival. How might one see these books as working within the comics tradition that Scott McCloud discusses in his book, Understanding Comics? How might we see these two books working in similar/different ways – formally, tonally, narratively, etc. etc.?

2. A significant part of Fun Home is Bechdel’s understanding and depiction of her parents and the extent to which those understandings/depictions may be fluid, problematic, “mythologized,” etc. How did the class feel about Bechdel’s father and mother during various points in the text? How did your impressions of the parents evolve or remain static throughout? How do you feel about Bechdel’s portrayal of her father’s sexuality (and her own)? What specific moments most informed your reading (and understanding or perhaps “judgment”) of the parents? For those who have read Fun Home before, to what extent did your character assessment change upon another reading?

3. At several points in Fun Home, the character Alison Bechdel expresses her frustration, hesitancy, or mistrust toward symbolism, narrativity, and mythmaking (e.g. pp. 47, 195-196, 200, 206-209, etc.). However, the author Alison Bechdel frequently utilizes symbolism, narrativity, and mythmaking in her text in order to draw explicit comparisons/contrasts between characters, events, and conflicts (both public and private). How might one interpret this seeming ideological tension or difference between Bechdel (as author) and Bechdel (as character)? What are some of the specific symbols used within Fun Home that were especially evocative, memorable, effective, significant, etc. to your own reading of the text? What are some ways in which other characters within the comic also use symbolism, coded text, figurative language to disclose and/or hide their own thoughts, experiences, desires, frustrations, etc. to Alison and each other?

4. How might the form of Fun Home, a graphic memoir, mirror the ways disability and queerness are managed within the pages of the text? Bechdel attempts to control her escalating anxiety through compulsive behaviors just as her father, Bruce, attempts to control his own sexuality. Do the images in the text, each contained in separate boxes (panels), come to highlight the desire for containment formally, to not let the supposed “otherness” (anxiety, queerness, etc.) leak out?

5. Bechdel’s compulsions – behaviors that she believes help wipe away “the invisible substance that hung in doorways” (135) – are obviously repetitive, but so too are her father’s attempts to contain his homosexuality. Anyone who has studied queer theory knows Judith Butler’s theory that gender is a “stylized repetition of acts.” How is the text itself a performance of identity? How might the literary, historical, and political references serve to highlight this performance?
**Research Resources:**


