

Course Title: Modern Anime: Beneath the Purple Hair and Cat Ears (Grades 9-12)

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Program: Harvard HSSP; Fall 2010

Time Slot: To Be Determined

Course Description: Japanese animation, or “anime” for short, has enjoyed an impressive measure of success (and perhaps notoriety) on the international stage. From Anime Expo 2009 in Los Angeles seeing a record 44000 attendees to South Park dedicating a biting satirical (but hilarious) episode to Pokémon’s influence on American youth, anime now has a cultural presence here in America that is impossible to ignore. In this class, we will examine the modern state of anime through analysis of some of the (in your teacher’s humble opinion) most distinctive anime series of the last few years. What common themes and tropes do we expect from an anime series today? How is anime different from Western entertainment? To what extent is anime a cultural product? What’s with the green hair (and pink, and blue, and purple...)? Get your favorite media player ready and prepare to suspend your disbelief as we try to make sense of the crazy world of modern anime.

****Prerequisites**:** This course has no prerequisites (and you definitely do not need to know Japanese). Both anime novices and the most shameless otaku¹ can take this class and have fun with it (and learn a thing or two). So whether you have never seen any anime before and are just curious, or whether you’re reading this syllabus dressed as your favorite Naruto character, try this class out! Just don’t wear your Naruto outfit to class. Or you will be punished. Severely.

****Course Requirements and Homework**:** Most of the “homework” in this class will consist of watching the focus anime for that week at home. Students are expected to watch approximately three hours of anime on their own each week. **Students are highly encouraged to bring either a flash drive (at least 3GB to be safe) or a laptop to class in order to obtain their homework materials.** Otherwise, instructions on where to obtain these series and how to watch will be given. There may also be an occasional reading, and every week a set of discussion questions will be sent out to think about in preparation for the next class. Classes will consist roughly of 2/3 discussion and 1/3 anime screenings.

There will also be a fun final project, where students will examine and analyze an anime series that we could not cover due to lack of time. A short final presentation will accompany this final project. This final project can take any form (video, skit, powerpoint, etc.), and focus on any series (although some will be suggested), as long as it is approved by me. For more information, please refer to the Final Project handout.

¹For the uninitiated, an otaku is essentially a person deeply interested in the anime and/or manga (Japanese comics) culture. It usually carries a negative connotation in modern Japanese culture, which is something we will discuss in class.

Weekly Breakdown

- Week 1: Introduction
 - Focus Topics: What is anime? Why should we care? How has anime developed in Japan? What are some of the more distinctive qualities of anime? What demographics do anime cater to?
 - Focus Anime: Katanagatari
- Week 2: Romance
 - Focus Topics: What do we expect from a conventional Western romance, and to what extent do anime romances meet and/or defy these expectations? What role does character development play in anime? What are some distinctive character types in anime?
 - Focus Anime: Kimi ni Todoke, 5 Centimeters Per Second (movie)
- Week 3: Anime as a Cultural Product
 - Focus Topics: Anime is from Japan, but how is it Japanese? To what extent is anime a culturally nonspecific entity, and how does this affect how anime is received by an international audience?
 - Focus Anime: Baccano!, Black Lagoon
- Week 4: Slice of Life
 - Focus Topics: What place does anime culture have in modern Japan? In what ways does slice of life successfully live up to its name, and in what ways does slice of life (deliberately) deviate from “normal” life? Why is the slice of life genre so much more predominant in Japanese culture than in Western culture?
 - Focus Anime: Mushishi, Genshiken, K-On!
- Week 5: Fantasy
 - Focus Topics: How do fantasy and inhuman characters shape the atmosphere of an anime series? What role does religion play in modern anime? How has sexuality (especially female sexuality) affected the anime landscape?
 - Focus Anime: Spice and Wolf, Tengen Toppa Gurren Lagann
- Week 6: To the Future
 - Focus Topics: What themes in anime seem to be ubiquitous? How will anime evolve in the future?
 - Focus Anime: Bakemonogatari
- Week 7: Final Presentations (See Final Presentation Topics handout for some possible project ideas)