

Get Graphic! Toolkit

One! Hundred! Demons!

by Lynda Barry

This toolkit is one of the many resources offered by Get Graphic! with the Ohio Center for the Book at Cleveland Public Library.

We aim to promote the study of comics in spaces from public libraries to academic institutions and all outside and between.

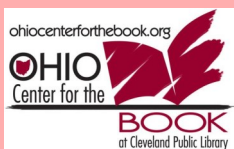
Toolkit created by the Ohio Center for the Book Scholar-in-Residence, Valentino L. Zullo, Ph.D.

About the Comic



Lynda Barry's *One Hundred Demons* was first published as a serialized comic on *Salon.com* from April 2000 to January 2001. Focusing on the many demons that populate Barry's life, the comic gives insight into her personal history and the current events of the time including a chapter on the Bush/Gore election. Featuring one demon per chapter, Barry documents how her past continues to influence her present life including relationships with her mother and ex-boyfriends as well as other seemingly everyday events. Barry explores the way these demons were deposited into her during her younger years and continue to dominate her current relationships.

Where Barry truly succeeds in her comic lies in her invitation to the reader embedded within her narrative. Her invitational style asks the reader to co-create each story — utilizing the best parts of the comics form — which requires active reader participation. Her comic is made up of painted images and hand-lettering all done on cheap paper including legal pad paper, all of which reminds the reader of the constructed nature of the comic. Barry's colorful comic may initially deceive the reader about the seriousness of these stories, but they are all powerful and overwhelming. The demons with which she confronts the reader may also be recognizable as some of their own. Thus, her call to create makes this comic a communal exercise in healing.



Who is Lynda Barry?

Lynda Barry is a cartoonist, teacher, and comics theorist. Barry's popular weekly comic strip, *Ernie Pook's Comeek* featuring Marlys Mullen, gained her early recognition. While the strip ended in 2008, it was one of the longest running underground comix strips. Her illustrated novels, *The Good Times are Killing Me* (later adapted into a play) and *Cruddy*, are also well-known works.

Published in 2002, *One! Hundred! Demons!*, is what Barry considers a work of "autobifictionalography" — stories told from memory that contain both fact and fiction. Her other comics, including the Eisner-Award winning *What It Is* (2008), *Picture This* (2010), *Syllabus* (2014), and *Making Comics* (2019), further her work into exploring creativity and the process of creating comics. Inducted into the Eisner Hall of Fame in 2016, she was awarded a MacArthur Fellowship as part of the Class of 2019.

Currently she serves as an Associate Professor of Interdisciplinary Creativity at the University of Wisconsin-Madison.

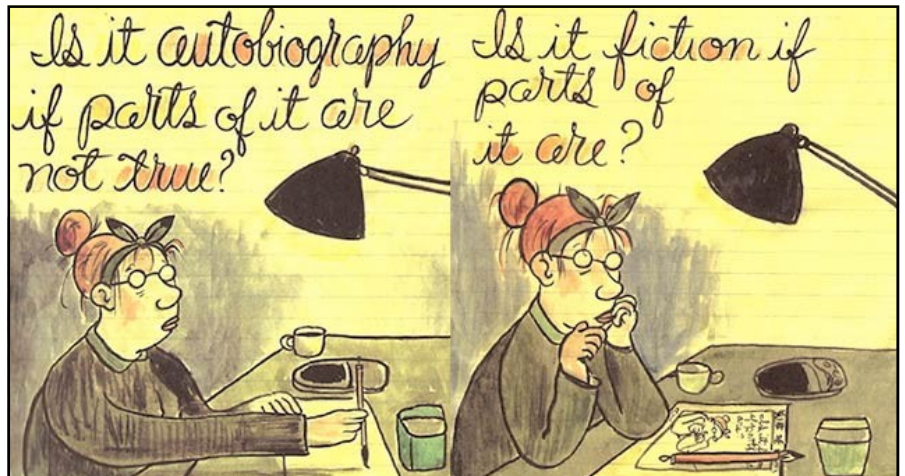


Figure 1 *One! Hundred! Demons!*, p. 7.

Context: Making Comics

Lynda Barry is perhaps best known for her invitational style as she asks others to make comics with her. Her book, *One! Hundred! Demons!*, begins and ends with a self-conscious reflection on the process of making comics. She ends her work by inviting others into the creative process and helps others to think about sharing their own stories and letting out their own demons. Her later works *Syllabus* (2014) and *Making Comics* (2019) again explore creativity and the invitation to make comics as a journey of self-exploration and healing. Perhaps the best way to understand Barry's work is in the context of the self-reflective invitational nature of her work.

Her recent works *Syllabus: Notes from an Accidental Professor* and *Making Comics* both offer practical approaches to understanding comics theory. Her earlier work including *One! Hundred! Demons!* and *What It Is* also explored theoretical questions like "what is an image?", "what is visual?" and "what is memory?". While the latter more than the former explore the role of the image, her work is uniquely situated in not only telling stories in comics form but also trying to understand comics. While theorists like Scott McCloud define comics, Barry appears interested in how comics can be used as reflective tools of exploration. There is perhaps no cartoonist out there whose work has done more outside of McCloud to theorize about the cartooned image and visual media while also inviting others to understand comics and to tell their own stories through the medium of comics.

Questions for Discussion

1. The question of whether comics memoir should be categorized as fiction or non-fiction has dominated discussion of the form. Barry reignites this question in her book as she asks whether her story is autobiography or fiction (Fig. 1). How does her comic challenge our conceptions of memoir and memory? What if a memory is misremembered? What are the boundaries of nonfiction? Barry's book asks these questions and more in her work. How does *One! Hundred! Demons!* attempt to outline the contours of her genre of "autobifictionalography?"
2. Barry documents her story on disposable paper such as a legal pad. What is the significance of her telling this story on legal pad? How does the paper affect the perception of the comic? How does this appeal to the history of comics storytelling which in its early years was seen as a disposable form?
3. Barry's invitation to create comics is part of a long history of asking others to create their own comics going back to the early years of the form. Historically, however, anti-comics crusaders have feared this invitation, declaring the form's lack of artistic merit and its ability to corrupt. How does Barry's request serve as a reparative act in comics history? By utilizing disposable paper, how does she invoke that history and how does she aim to create a new future for comics outside of the major industries?
4. Barry's art style is perhaps one of the best examples of what Scott McCloud refers to as "amplification through simplification." How does her art form invite in readers the chance to identify with her characters and cultivate empathy? How does her art style also challenge the dominant styles of comics art that are often associated with the form?
5. Barry's use of the vignette style presents an opportunity for others to tell their stories in these short narratives. How might the use of the vignette assist readers in imagining telling their own stories? What might be a story for a vignette? How does the vignette style presented through a series of comic strips differ from a long-form comic in its purpose?
6. How does Barry's use of color affect our reading? How do the deceitfully bright colors affect the reading? How do the colors ask the reader to think about the darkness and pain in the lives of children and young adults in ways that other comics do not?
7. Barry's stories like "Common Scents" (Fig. 2) quite literally document everyday events. How does her focus on the "everyday" experience allow us to think about what comics can do and what insights they can give us into personal experiences?
8. In her story "Resilience" (Fig. 3), Barry reflects on her own story of coming-of-age children and others as "strong" as a form of gas-lighting. How does Barry's story challenge our perceptions of how we define mental duress and what we think of as strength?

Interviews & Additional Questions

- Hillary Chute, "An Interview with Lynda Barry," *The Believer*, December 1, 2008.
<https://believermag.com/an-interview-with-lynda-barry/>
 - In the interview, Hillary Chute repeats Barry's questions from *What It Is* back to her, asking the cartoonist to respond to those same questions she poses in her work. One such question which Chute turns on Barry is "What's the difference between memory and imagination. What do you think?" Barry responds, "I think that they're absolutely intertwined. I don't know if there's necessarily a difference, but I don't think they can exist one without the other, absolutely not. Like that question, can you remember something you can't imagine? I like those questions that when I think about them they make my brain kind of stop. You know, is a dream autobiography...Is it autobiography or fiction?"
 - How does the comics form ask us to think about this space between fiction and fact? How does the cartoon, which resembles the fragmentation and condensation of dreams, prod us to reconsider the categorization of dreams and what insight we might gain from them?
- Thom Powers, "The Lynda Barry Interview," *The Comics Journal*, January 2, 1989.
<http://www.tcj.com/the-lynda-barry-interview/>
 - In this interview, Barry suggests that she has always been an archivist, something that many comics creators point to in their histories. Barry states, "I started writing about my past when I was 19. I always compulsively kept diaries and journals. When I was 19, I looked behind me, rather than looking forward or looking straight at the table. I started to write about my past then. Compulsively. I mean, like a problem. It became a problem, like some people chew their nails; I wrote journals."
 - What is the connection between comics and archiving? Barry is one more example of a list of cartoonists who have made this connection before. What is it about the comics form that lends itself to archiving stories of both personal and political import for others?
- Nicole Rudick, "Lynda Barry on *Picture This*," *The Paris Review*, December 1, 2010.
<https://www.theparisreview.org/blog/2010/12/01/lynda-barry-on-picture-this/>
 - Barry continues to explore what leads so many to stop drawing, to inhibit themselves, a line of thought she reflects on in this essay as she asks, "What makes us start drawing and what makes us stop? And what happens to drawing when we think we don't draw anymore—because most people say, Oh my drawing's so terrible, I really can't draw. But then if you're sitting in a meeting and you have a paper in front of you, you probably have something that you draw, this doodling thing that everybody does. I like to ask people, Why do you think you do that? Why do we draw in that situation?"
 - In both her interviews and her comics, Barry asks the reader why they stopped drawing and invites them to draw again especially in the case of *One! Hundred! Demons!* How does her invitational style affect you as a reader? Does her use of throw away paper and deceitfully simplistic drawings affect your desire to draw and tell your own story?



Figure 2 One Hundred Demons, pp. 50-51.

Scholarship & Additional Questions

- Hillary L. Chute, *Graphic Women: Life Narrative and Contemporary Comics*, Columbia University Press, 2010.
 - Commenting on Barry's use of paper such as legal pads and other cheap materials, Chute notes that, "The recontextualization of cheap, common, or utilitarian paper (which also harkens back to the historical avant-garde) may be understood as transvaluation of the idea of working on "waste"—a knowing, ironic, acknowledgment on Barry's part that her life narrative, itself, perhaps considered insignificant, is visualized in an accessible popular medium, comics, that is still largely viewed as 'garbage'" (125).
 - Chute captures the unique space within which comics exist, both collectible and yet also disposable, in her statement. How does Barry capture this feeling in her comics? How does she also address the feeling that we too easily consider the past to be disposable?
- Susan E. Kirtley, *Lynda Barry: Girlhood Through the Looking Glass*, University Press of Mississippi, 2012.
 - According to Kirtley, this is the first time Barry explicitly explores her Filipina identity as she considers that "Barry's ethnicity was not directly addressed in her work until *One Hundred Demons*, in which she explores how her mixed Norwegian/Irish/Filipino heritage set her at a distance from the Filipino community as well as the white lower-class community where she sometimes chose to pass as white" (14).
 - How does Barry's reflection on her Filipina identity and her status as the child of an immigrant family help the reader to better understand her story? How does the inclusion of her racial identity affect her storytelling practices? What new stories open up with the inclusion of such integral information in the life of the author?
- Stella Oh, "Colonial hauntings in Lynda Barry's *One Hundred Demons*," *Studies in Comics* 9, no. 2 (2018): 265-278.
 - Oh reflects on the complex relationship Barry has with her mother and the way it is told in the comic as she notes that "Through Barry's troubled relationship with her mother, we see the transmogrification of the mother's trauma into anger towards her daughter. ...The emotional storm that envelops the daughter and the mother reflects the traumatic emotional effects of war and the aftermath of imperial violence. ... Wondering whether her mom would 'have been a more momish mom if the war had never happened', Barry reflects on the fractured maternal relationship and the ways in which trauma and shame felt in one generation can boil and expand into anger in the next [Barry 2002: 188]. The affective consequences of such marginalization and violence are haunting inheritances that linger over Barry" (269).
 - How does Barry explore the intergenerational transmission of trauma in her comics? How does she use the comics form to capture this psychic violence passed down from one generation to the next? Barry does not seem to hold on to the anger and in doing so she offers us a hopeful future. How does she achieve what we might call her sublimation?



Figure 3 *One Hundred Demons* , pp. 62-63.

Further Supplemental Materials

Additional resources to supplement this toolkit.

- Lynda Barry, "IMAGES 1 Introduction to the Review Frame Exercise"
 - (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TvXCeW4TcrM>) (September 4, 2020)
- Lynda Barry, "Lynda Barry Full X Page Exercise"
 - (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IDOoi-Mke50>) (May 7, 2020)
- Q on CBC, "Cartoonist Lynda Barry teaches us how to silence our inner critic and draw like a child"
 - (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2CfmeTPQHLE>) (November 25, 2019)
- University of Michigan Stamps, "Lynda Barry: Accessing the Imaginary"
 - (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=x5QsOg-7B6w>) (October 7, 2013)
- INK Talks, "Lynda Barry: The answer is in the picture"
 - (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hmT4wLWksOw>) (April 19, 2012)

Further Reading

If you are interested in other works by Lynda Barry:

- *What It Is* (Drawn & Quarterly, 2008).
- *Picture This* (Drawn & Quarterly, 2010).
- *Making Comics* (Drawn & Quarterly, 2019)

If you are interested in reading stories about girlhood and coming of age:

- *Hot Comb* by Ebony Flowers (Drawn & Quarterly 2019).
- *This One Summer* by Mariko Tamaki and Jillian Tamaki (First Second, 2014).
- *Turning Japanese* by MariNaomi (2dcloud, 2016).

If you are interested in other comics which explore the experience of immigration and growing up with immigrant parents:

- *Blame This on the Boogie* (Drawn & Quarterly, 2018)
- *My Favorite Thing is Monsters* (Fantagraphics, 2018).
- *Algeria is Beautiful like America* by Olivia Burton and Mahi Grand (Oni Press, 2018).