

Questions and Prompts, Medieval Meets Modern, "Book of the City of Ladies" and "Fun Home"

Topic	Context	Sample Assignment
Verbal and visual self-portraiture	Bechdel's <i>Fun Home</i> depicts her real-life family's experiences through words and images. In <i>The Book of the City of Ladies</i> and other works, de Pizan describes her work as the experiences and reflections of "I, Christine." Images depicting this narrator appear in British Library Harley MS 4431, an illuminated manuscript whose production was overseen by de Pizan.	Choose a sample passage or image from <i>Fun Home</i> and de Pizan's works. Analyze how the excerpt visually and/or verbally "frames" each writer as she reads, engages in creative work, encounters potential friends or opponents, and makes important decisions. Do these depictions strike you as moments of self-authorization?
Community connections and exclusions	<i>The Book of the City of Ladies</i> brings its narrator from a state of frustrated isolation into a mutually supportive community. <i>Fun Home</i> describes changes in Bechdel's life once she gets to college and becomes part of the LGBTQ community there.	Describe the strengths and limitations of the communities depicted by de Pizan and Bechdel. Do you think de Pizan would let Bechdel into her City of Ladies? Which aspects of women's lives does de Pizan exclude in her efforts to uphold their authority and virtue? What relationship does Bechdel propose between sexual and political awareness?
Spatial and structural metaphors	De Pizan uses the metaphor of a city to illustrate her efforts at defending women's reputations against hostile antagonists. Bechdel focuses on her family's homestead as a central way to make sense of their relationships to one another.	Compare Bechdel's and de Pizan's discussions of buildings and collaborative construction. If you were going to tell a story of your past, what might you use as a central "space"? Sketch this space or structure, and describe it in relation to those depicted by de Pizan, and Bechdel.
Allusion and citation	De Pizan and Bechdel both shape their stories by quoting, and at times challenging, textual authorities. De Pizan draws from a wide range of Scriptural and classical sources, while Bechdel invokes Virginia Woolf, William Faulkner, and James Joyce.	Focus on one allusion/citation in de Pizan's work and <i>Fun Home</i> , respectively. Read the cited passages in their original context. How does this context shed new light on each work? Do you think allusions/citations function the same way in de Pizan's and Bechdel's writing?