DISCUSSION QUESTIONS TO ACCOMPANY:
Graphic Design: A History, third edition, by Stephen J. Eskilson

Introduction: The Origins of Graphic Design
1. In your mind, when did graphic design begin? With the invention of writing? Mechanical printing? Later?
2. Is manuscript illumination an example of graphic design? Why or why not?
3. How did nationalist sentiments play a role in the early history of movable type? Do you think certain typefaces convey specific national or political messages today?
4. Name some effects on society caused by the new ability to disseminate information through printing.
5. Why was Caslon type more popular than Baskerville? What does this say about designers' artistic interests vis-à-vis their commercial success?
6. Are typeface design and typesetting trades? Or artforms?

Chapter 1: The Nineteenth Century: An Expanding Field
1. Discuss the impact of the Industrial Revolution on European society. What benefits did it bring to design and to society at large? What were the negative results?
2. Victorian design is well-known for its revival of past styles. Did this represent laziness and/or a lack of sophistication on the part of designers? While historicism is often criticized in the Victorian age, it has been widely celebrated as a form of sophistication in our own. Why?
3. Discuss some of the theories of design reformers of the Victorian age. How did they set the stage for new aesthetics to arise?
4. Is Victorian "eclecticism" a recognizable design style? Does it have a conceptual framework?
5. Overall, do you think that new (19th century) industrial technology improved or degraded typography and graphic design?
6. Why was William Morris unable to implement his plan for radical reform of industry and design? Can you cite any contemporary examples of a similar disconnect between theory and practice?

Chapter 2: Art Nouveau: A New Style for a New Culture
1. What motivated some French Art Nouveau artists to adopt elements from the Rococo style, when they generally rejected that sort of historicism?
2. How were women depicted differently in posters in the United States as opposed to those of Europe?
3. Did Americans have their own stylistic tradition from which they could draw? Explain.
4. What are the differences between English Arts and Crafts (see Chapter 1) and English Art Nouveau? What did these movements have in common?
5. What role did national tradition play in various Art Nouveau styles?
6. Discuss the role of the *Gesamtkunstwerk* in design. Do you think it is a realistic and/or worthy goal for designers to aspire to?

Chapter 3: *Sachplakat*, The First World War, and Dada
1. What factors led to the decline of Art Nouveau in the early 20th century?
2. How did the *Sachplakat* style break with earlier models of Japanese-influenced simplification?
3. Do you see Bernhard's *Priester Matches* poster as constituting a revolutionary design shift or an incremental one? Why?
4. Do you think that the aesthetic quality of a propaganda poster is important to its success? Explain.
5. What fueled the Dadaists' desire to subvert European culture, and how did they imagine their art would bring about change?
6. In recent decades, Dada has been subsumed into the canon of art and design. Was this the Dadaists' goal? Have their original intentions been successful or subverted?

Chapter 4: Modern Art, Modern Graphic Design
1. Why did few professional designers, such as Edward McKnight Kauffer, have "official" status as part of a modern art movement like Cubism?
2. What were the overarching goals of the Futurists? How did they achieve these goals through design?
3. How did Art Deco contrast with Art Nouveau in terms of both style and theory?
4. Is it somehow inauthentic or unethical to "poach a style" without embracing the wider conceptual goals of a given movement? Why or why not?
5. What were the general political goals of Art Deco artists?
6. To what extent can it be argued that Art Deco is tainted as a style because of its association with

colonialism?

Chapter 5: Revolutions in Design
1. In what ways did the First World War serve as a catalyst for De Stijl and Russian Constructivism?
2. Is it a contradiction in terms for De Stijl artists to embrace both the modern machine world and older Neoplatonic ideas? How did the members of the group resolve this issue?
3. How can one reconcile Theo van Doesburg's simultaneous embrace of De Stijl and Dada?
4. Why did the new Bolshevik government reject Suprematist aesthetics?
5. For De Stijl, geometric abstraction represented universals, while for the Constructivists they represented a specific ideology. Who was right (or were they both)?
6. What political stance separated El Lissitzky from other Constructivists such as Alexander Rodchenko? Who do you think was correct?

Chapter 6: The Bauhaus and the New Typography
1. Cite some parallels that link Dada and Constructivism in Germany.
2. Is an Expressionist idiom somehow more appropriate as a vehicle for dark feelings than for other sentiments? Why or why not?
3. Why was architecture so central to the Bauhaus in both a practical and theoretical sense?
4. How did gender play itself out at the Bauhaus? Was the later machine aesthetic in some way demonstrably "masculine"?
5. How did different Bauhaus professors approach the political issues inherent in design work in Germany during the 1920s and early 1930s? Was the Bauhaus at its core an essentially conservative or liberal institution?
6. If the "essence of the new typography is clarity" then why did its practitioners embrace sans serif type?

Chapter 7: American Modern and the Second World War
1. Why do you think that Art Deco design was absorbed into American culture much more quickly than Constructivism?
2. For what reasons did the US government prove to be a prominent patron of "cutting edge" graphic design in the 1930s?
3. In exhibitions at the Museum of Modern Art, Constructivism was presented in a depoliticized context. Why? Is this a responsible curatorial strategy?
4. How did the Museum of Modern Art further public acceptance of Constructivist design?
5. How did the Nazi government attempt to define and control German culture?
6. How did the various combatants in the Second World War devise different propaganda strategies than they had utilized in the First World War?

Chapter 8: The Triumph of the International Style
1. Why did Switzerland in some ways represent the most logical locale for the expansion of the International Style?
2. Some scholars have suggested that it was positively immoral that the International Style so completely depoliticized the avant-garde designs of the 1920s. In what ways might this criticism reflect contemporary concerns rather than historical ones?
3. In what ways does Helvetica's success represent a parallel to the commercial power of Caslon type in the 18th century?
4. How can someone distinguish between the Zurich and Basel design styles? In your estimation, was the Zurich school too inflexible? Explain.
5. Why do you suppose that the International Style garnered so little attention in England?
6. Contrast the styles of Alvin Lustig and Paul Rand. Is there a regional trend evident, such as the one between Zurich and Basel?

Chapter 9: Postmodernism: The Return of Expression
1. What is postmodernism as it pertains to graphic design? Why is it difficult to define?
2. Discuss several reasons why designers felt the need to reject some or all of the International Style.
3. Is postmodernism necessarily a politically engaged trend? Explain.
4. Discuss the aesthetic and conceptual connections between postmodern architecture and graphic design.
5. Discuss the strengths and weaknesses of "conceptual design" as practiced by Tibor Kalman and others.

6. To what extent did national styles that were suppressed as part of the International Style reappear in a postmodern context?

Chapter 10: Contemporary Graphic Design
1. Is "grunge" design inextricably tied to the 1990s in your view? Or does it have continuing appeal?
2. Has celebrity impacted the graphic design profession in a positive or negative manner?
3. Does the pervasive influence of Western graphic design amount to a new kind of colonialism? Explain.
4. Looking back in design history, has illustration always been associated with women designers? How do you think this gendering of different aspects of the profession came about?
5. To what extent would you be willing to go in order to create an eye-catching poster? For instance, would you allow an assistant to cut you with a razor blade or have your skin tattooed? Why or why not?
6. Is irony still viable as the conceptual basis for a design style or has it become so ubiquitous as to be denuded of meaning?

Chapter 11: The Digital Present
1. Contrast the Machine Aesthetic of the 1920s with the Digital Aesthetic that arose in the 1990s. What are the visual and conceptual consonances? Differences?
2. It has been argued that Flash made the web what it is today, and subsequent changes have been mainly technical and/or cosmetic. Do you agree?
3. How important is the soundtrack to motion graphics?
4. What do you make of the contemporary design focus on "experiences"? Is this a major shift or just a buzzword/fashionable trend?
5. Why do so many typefaces promoted by technology companies look alike? Do you consciously evaluate type when you are not working on it?
6. Overall, has digital technology been a blessing or a curse for graphic design?

Epilogue: The Citizen Designer
1. Do graphic designers have a unique responsibility to be socially engaged? How is the profession different from, say, being a teacher or accountant in this regard?
2. Can you think of any additional sustainability strategies relevant to graphic design?
3. Where would you hope to see the graphic design profession in ten years time?