

How to Create Comics

Course Guidebook

Peter Bagge
Cartoonist





4840 Westfields Boulevard | Suite 500 | Chantilly, Virginia | 20151-2299
[PHONE] 1.800.832.2412 | [FAX] 703.378.3819 | [WEB] www.thegreatcourses.com

LEADERSHIP

PAUL SUIJK	President & CEO
BRUCE G. WILLIS	Chief Financial Officer
JOSEPH PECKL	SVP, Marketing
JASON SMIGEL	VP, Product Development
CALE PRITCHETT	VP, Marketing
MARK LEONARD	VP, Technology Services
DEBRA STORMS	VP, General Counsel
KEVIN MANZEL	Sr. Director, Content Development
ANDREAS BURGSTALLER	Sr. Director, Brand Marketing & Innovation
KEVIN BARNHILL	Director of Creative
GAIL GLEESON	Director, Business Operations & Planning

PRODUCTION TEAM

INES I. PEREZ-THOMPSON	Producer
WALTER JACOB	Content Developer
LISA PERSINGER ROBERTSON	Associate Producer
TRISA BARNHILL	Graphic Artists
JAMES NIDEL	
OWEN YOUNG	Managing Editor
BEN BACHARACH-WHITE	Sr. Editor
CHRISTIAN MEEKS	Editor
CHARLES GRAHAM	Assistant Editor
EDDIE HARTNESS	Audio Engineers
CHRIS HOOTH	
ROBERTO DE MORAES	Director
JIM M. ALLEN	Camera Operators
PAUL SHEEHAN	
RICK FLOWE	Production Assistants
VALERIE WELCH	

PUBLICATIONS TEAM

FARHAD HOSSAIN	Publications Manager
MARTIN STEGER	Sr. Copywriter
KATHRYN DAGLEY	Graphic Designer
JESSICA MULLINS	Proofreader
ERIKA ROBERTS	Publications Assistant
JENNIFER ROSENBERG	Fact-Checkers
RENEE TREACY	
WILLIAM DOMANSKI	Transcript Editor

Copyright © The Teaching Company, 2021

Printed in the United States of America

This book is in copyright. All rights reserved. Without limiting the rights under copyright reserved above, no part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in or introduced into a retrieval system, or transmitted, in any form, or by any means (electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording, or otherwise), without the prior written permission of The Teaching Company.



PETER BAGGE
CARTOONIST

Peter Bagge is an alternative comic artist and creator best known for the comic series *Hate*. He served as managing editor of Robert Crumb's comic anthology *Weirdo* while simultaneously creating his first solo comic series, *Neat Stuff*, and he has been recognized as a Rockefeller Fellow of Literature by United States Artists.

Professor Bagge has contributed regularly to a wide assortment of publications, including *Discover* magazine, *MAD* magazine, and the *Weekly World News*. Additionally, he has produced dozens of journalistic comic features for *Reason* magazine; a collection of those appears in his book *Everybody Is Stupid except for Me*. He has also created three graphic novels—*Apocalypse Nerd*, *Other Lives*, and *Reset*—and has written and drawn three book-length biographical comics, which are titled *Woman Rebel: The Margaret Sanger Story*; *Fire!!: The Zora Neale Hurston Story*; and *Credo: The Rose Wilder Lane Story*. Another of his works is the collection of short biographical stories titled *Founding Fathers Funnies: Non-Stop Historical Hilarity*.

Professor Bagge's awards include the Harvey Award for Best Cartoonist and for Best New Series as well as the Inkpot Award at San Diego Comic-Con International. Outside of the publishing world, he has developed his work for television, worked as a designer for other electronic media projects, and taught a course on writing comics at Seattle University.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION

Professor Biography	i
Disclaimer	iv
Course Scope	1

GUIDES

1	Introducing Comics as an Art Form	2
2	Comics Formatting and Terminology	8
3	Tools of the Comics Trade	16
4	Writing for Comics: Beyond the Word Balloon	21
5	Creating Characters for Comics	31
6	Humor in Comics: Finding the Funny	38
7	Telling Dramatic Stories through Comics	46
8	Creating Memoirs with Comics	57
9	Comics as History, Biography, and Journalism	64
10	Working Relationships in the Comics Field	73
11	Making Comics in the Digital Age	80
12	Comics as a Career or Income Stream	85

SUPPLEMENTARY MATERIAL

Bibliography	92
------------------------	----

DISCLAIMER

This series of lessons contains explicit language and visual material that may not be suitable for minors and may offend other audiences. The opinions and positions provided in these lessons reflect the opinions and positions of the relevant presenter and do not necessarily reflect the opinions or positions of The Teaching Company or its affiliates.

The Teaching Company expressly **DISCLAIMS LIABILITY** for any **DIRECT, INDIRECT, INCIDENTAL, SPECIAL, OR CONSEQUENTIAL DAMAGES OR LOST PROFITS** that result directly or indirectly from the use of these lessons. In states that do not allow some or all of the above limitations of liability, liability shall be limited to the greatest extent allowed by law.

HOW TO CREATE COMICS

Comic art is a constantly growing and expanding field. The increasing number of film and television adaptations in particular has brought a lot of attention to the world of comics, as have the numerous awards and accolades that have been bestowed on comics, specifically in the form of graphic novels.

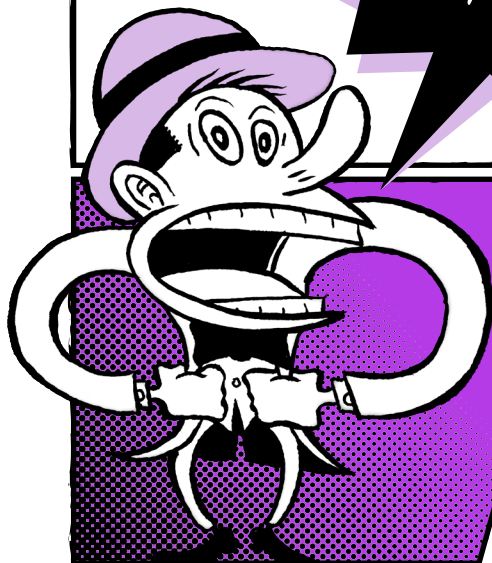
The purpose of this course is to introduce the student to all aspects of the art of cartooning. This includes not only basic tips in drawing and writing comics but also how they apply to specific formats and genres. Single-panel gags, comic strips, serialized comic books, and book-length stories are all discussed.

The course also examines what needs to be considered for various genres, from humor to action to books for children, as well as what you need to know to enter any of these fields. Memoirs and journalistic, historical, and other forms of nonfiction comics are also covered.

Pragmatic information is also shared, such as what tools to use—both traditional and digital—as well as how to work with collaborators. The latter includes creative partners, editors, and publishers. Additionally, the course discusses the many fields outside of comics in which a cartoonist's skills can be applied.

Overall, the course aims to impart a sense of how effective and satisfying creating comics can be as a form of self-expression. Comics are unique to the world of individually created art in that comics are a combination of words and pictures, and that combination can lead you in almost any direction imaginable.

INTRODUCING
COMICS AS AN
ART FORM



LESSON

1

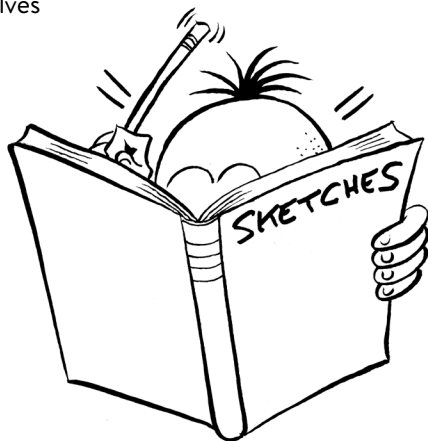
COMICS ARE A COMBINATION OF WORDS AND PICTURES. THAT COMBINATION IS WHAT DEFINES COMICS AS AN ART FORM, AND HOW A CREATOR GOES ABOUT COMBINING WORDS WITH IMAGES IS THE MOST IMPORTANT FACTOR IN WHAT MAKES A COMIC SUCCEED OR FAIL AS A WORK OF ART.

COMBINING WORDS AND IMAGES

- For a visual artist, combining a series of images to tell a story may be quite daunting when compared to creating one single image where there's no real obligation to say anything that can be put into words. Simply painting a landscape can be enough to satisfy yourself or a viewer.
- And if you are an experienced writer, writing a comic strip forces you to think visually, which may be equally unfamiliar to you. You must remember that you are showing things rather than merely telling them.
- Writing for comics is very similar to writing for film or television, and the same formatting and terminology can and often is employed. After all, the objective is the same: You're writing straight text to describe something that will eventually be presented visually. But there are numerous differences as well.

BASIC TOOLS

- Creating your own comics also involves making choices about the many drawing tools and formatting choices that cartoonists have at their disposal. This lesson will now turn to the basics: a sketchbook and a writing utensil.



DEVELOPING A STYLE

A DRAWING STYLE IS LIKE A SIGNATURE. THE MORE YOU DRAW, THE MORE IT WILL REVEAL ITSELF AND RISE TO THE SURFACE.

- A small, portable sketchbook should travel with you at all times, and this is especially true if you're a novice. The goal isn't just to sketch anything that happens to catch your eye but also to jot down ideas or simply to doodle. Many of the world's most iconic comic characters started out as mere doodles that then took on lives of their own.
- If you're still honing your drawing skills, a pencil will work better than a pen or a marker because you can keep making lines until you settle on the right ones, which you can then darken with a pen or darker pencil while erasing the lines that don't work for you. Think of it as sculpting a drawing.
- Never worry about your sketches coming out right, which can lead to a mental block. Just keep plowing ahead. If you want to draw well, it is important to draw constantly. Make it a daily habit.

TAKING CLASSES

THIS COURSE RECOMMENDS SIGNING UP FOR SOME LIFE DRAWING CLASSES, INCLUDING FIGURE DRAWING CLASSES. THIS DOESN'T REQUIRE ENROLLING IN ART SCHOOL. RATHER, IT CALLS FOR SIMPLY ATTENDING SOME LOCAL NIGHT OR WEEKEND COURSES THAT ARE AVAILABLE IN ALMOST EVERY CITY. JUST ATTENDING A MERE HANDFUL OF SUCH CLASSES WITH AN IN-PERSON INSTRUCTOR WILL HELP YOU SEE AND CAPTURE THINGS IN A WAY THAT YOU CAN LATER EMPLOY ON YOUR OWN.

DRAWING OBJECTS

- ☛ You should make a point of drawing mundane, everyday objects in your sketchbook. Some artists have an uncanny ability to retain and then recreate images of certain objects. But unless you also happen to have a photographic memory, accurately reproducing even the most common objects is a lot trickier than you'd think.
- ☛ For example, you should take note of how fabrics fold, particularly in the form of clothing and particularly when worn by humans. Capturing that on paper can be tricky if you're working solely from memory.
- ☛ Try drawing the clothing folds of someone else as they watch TV or do the dishes. Mastering clothing folds may seem absurd to someone who wants to keep their comic art super simple, but even the minimal use of such knowledge can come in handy in surprising and effective ways.
- ☛ Drawing people from real life is important, though you may have a hard time finding someone who will hold a pose long enough for you to draw it. The same goes even more so for pets, unless you want to just draw them napping.

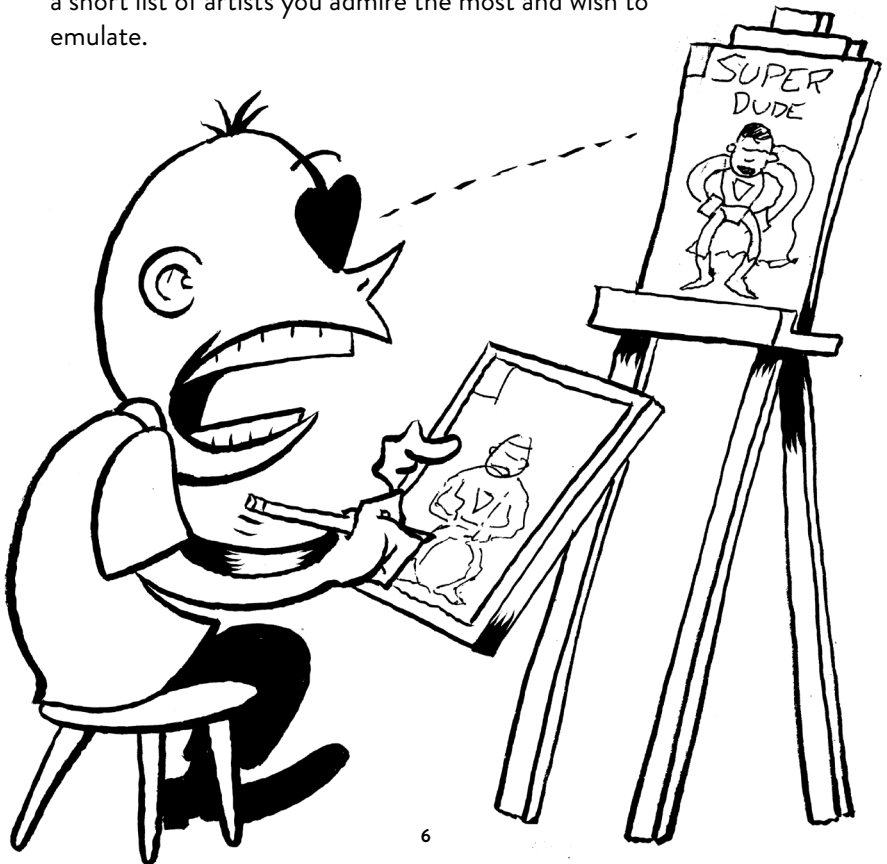
DETAILED SKETCHBOOKS

SOME ARTISTS REMAIN VERY DEDICATED TO THEIR SKETCHBOOKS AND CAN PUT SO MUCH DETAIL INTO THEM THAT THEIR SKETCHBOOKS THEMSELVES WIND UP BEING PUBLISHED. THE UNDERGROUND CARTOONIST ROBERT CRUMB IS PERHAPS THE MOST FAMOUS EXAMPLE OF THIS, AND HIS PRELIMINARY SKETCHBOOK VERSIONS OF HIS COMICS LOOK ALMOST AS FINISHED AS THE FINISHED PRINTED VERSIONS.

- Any exertive activity like running or jumping can be very hard to capture from life. To draw such activities, you'll find yourself relying on more on photographs than from real life.

LEARNING FROM THE MASTERS

- The first thing that draws people to a certain comic is the art style. It's likely that you already have your own preferences as to what kind of comics you're interested in, and you may have at least a short list of artists you admire the most and wish to emulate.



- There's nothing wrong with copying these artists and even tracing their work. In fact, every comic artist started out copying their favorite artists from their youth. People with knowledge of comic art history can usually spot just who inspired whom with considerable accuracy.
- For example, more than a century ago, the artist Windsor McKay made a huge impact on other comic artists with his fantastically drawn Sunday comic feature *Little Nemo in Slumberland*, which soon inspired many other elaborately drawn dream-like comic strips. One generation later, the artist Milton Caniff made a similarly huge impact with the adventure strip *Terry and the Pirates*, which at the time was by far the most realistically drawn comic.
- Such factors as composition, pacing, pauses, and the use of close-ups or wide shots are as important to the making of a successful comic strip as the drawing style itself. For instance, one early Marvel great, Spider-Man cocreator Steve Ditko, was a master at composition, and many younger artists still borrow from his layout ideas.



SUGGESTED READING

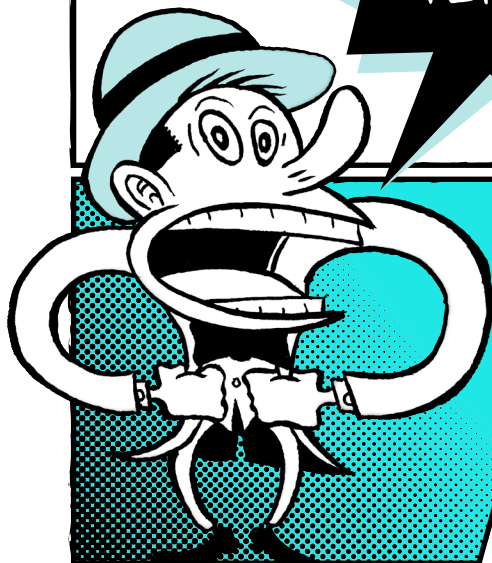
Brunetti, *Cartooning: Philosophy and Practice*.

McCloud, *Understanding Comics*.

QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

- 1 What is it about comics that appeals to you most as a reader?
- 2 How do you imagine best expressing yourself via comics? What type of comics would you like to create?

COMICS
FORMATTING AND
TERMINOLOGY



LESSON

2

THIS LESSON GOES OVER THE BASICS OF THE CONSTRUCTION OF COMIC STRIPS, STARTING WITH SINGLE-PANEL DRAWINGS BEFORE MOVING ON TO SINGLE-TIER COMIC STRIPS AND THEN FULL-PAGE COMICS. THE MAIN PURPOSE OF THIS LESSON IS TO FAMILIARIZE YOU WITH THE VARIOUS WAYS THAT ALL COMICS ARE FORMATTED AS WELL AS WITH THE TERMINOLOGY USED TO DESCRIBE THESE FORMATS.

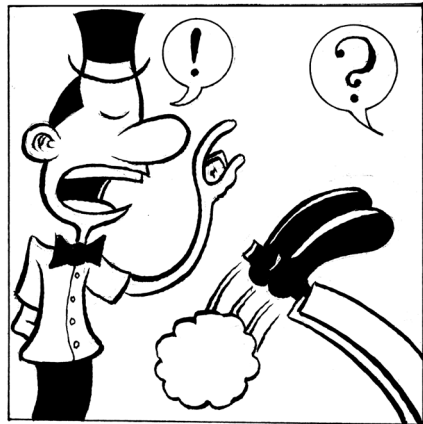
SINGLE-PANEL COMICS

- The simplest format is the single-panel comic, like the ones featured in *The New Yorker* magazine. These single-image comics are also known as gag panels or gag comics, though they don't have to be funny. In fact, they can be quite serious, since this format also includes editorial comics, which have long been featured in newspapers.



- Certain gag panels, such as those traditionally shown in *The New Yorker*, have no panel borders. These cartoons usually appear surrounded by straight text, which renders borderlines unnecessary. While this can also be an aesthetic choice on the part of the artist, in some cases, it has everything to do with the format of the publication that the work appeared in.

- Meanwhile, single-image strips like *The Far Side* and *Dennis the Menace* that are featured in newspaper funny pages almost always have panel borders. The format of newspapers practically demands that cartoonists use panel borders to make life easier for the papers' production departments as they go about laying out the grid that is the funny pages.



SINGLE-TIERED COMIC STRIPS

- Next, this lesson turns to the layout for a typical single-tiered comic strip. The term *tier* refers to a single row of panels. A comic book page can consist of numerous tiers. When roughing out an idea for a comic strip, you can draw the panels separately, thus creating gutters—that is, the gaps between panels.
- Or you can simply draw plain lines to separate the panels, since all you're trying to do is get your ideas down on paper. Some cartoonists' finished work can be gutterless, such as much of the work by Canadian artist Michael DeForge. If you make your work gutterless, you need to be careful that the lines separating the panels don't appear to be walls or anything else that may confuse the reader.
- While single-tiered comic strips don't have to be humor strips, when used as a standalone piece, they almost universally are joke-a-day strips. In fact, the comic strip format is tailor-made for joke telling, especially if you break it up into three panels. That's because jokes can be broken up into three parts: the setup, the response, and the punch line.
- Comic strips are just as often broken up into two, four, or more panels. In a two-panel strip, the setup and response are both in the first panel. In a four-panel strip, one of the panels, usually the third, is a so-called pause panel. Here, one of the characters ponders or reflects before delivering the punch line.





PROMPTING IDEAS

EVEN THE MOST PROLIFIC CARTOONIST CAN GET STUCK FOR IDEAS AT TIMES. THIS IS WHY JOTTING DOWN THOUGHTS IN YOUR SKETCHBOOK AS WELL AS DRAWINGS IS VERY IMPORTANT. MINOR EVENTS, NEWS STORIES, AND EVEN SNIPPETS OF PHRASES OR RANDOM WORDS CAN TRIGGER AN IDEA.

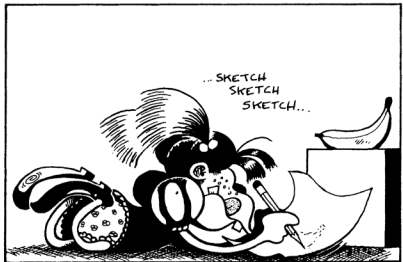
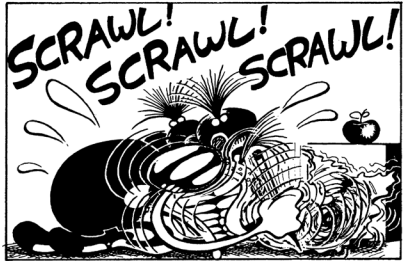
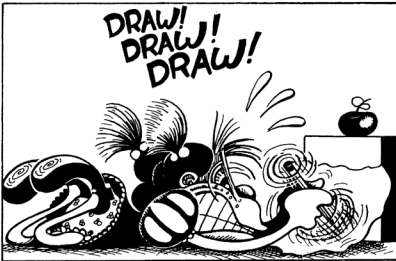
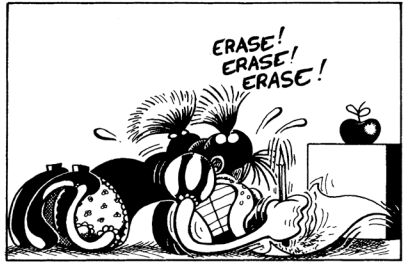
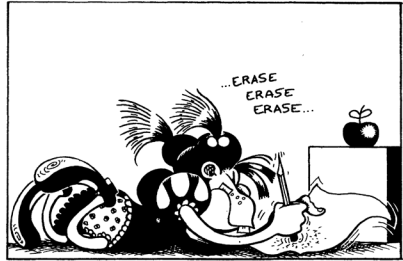
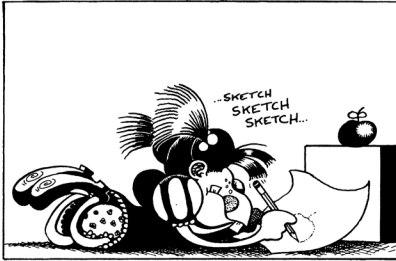
ANOTHER APPROACH IS TO MAKE LISTS OF WORDS THAT YOU LOVE, HATE, OR FIND AMUSING AND INCORPORATE THOSE WORDS SOMEHOW. SIMPLY TURNING ON THE RADIO OR OPENING A BOOK AND DRAWING SOMETHING BASED ON THE FIRST LINE YOU HEAR OR SEE CAN ALSO WORK. AN ADDITIONAL METHOD IS TO REINTERPRET AN EXISTING COMIC STRIP WRITTEN AND DRAWN BY SOMEONE ELSE IN YOUR OWN STYLE.

THE FULL-PAGE COMIC STRIP

- This lesson's next subject is the full-page comic strip. Creating one may not sound much different from doing a single-tiered strip, but the larger format presents more possibilities and challenges.
- Almost all full-page comics are drawn vertically to fit the book or magazine they appear in. There are exceptions, though, such as Sunday newspaper strips and many web comics, which almost always appear in a horizontal format. This lesson focuses on the vertical format, though.
- Though these can be broken down into two, four, or more tiers, the most conventional way to break down a full-page strip is to divide it into three equally spaced tiers.
- The presence of several tiers provides the space to tell a more elaborate joke or break free of jokes altogether. A full-page strip is all the space you need to tell a slice-of-life story, to relate an event in history, or to create a how-to guide.

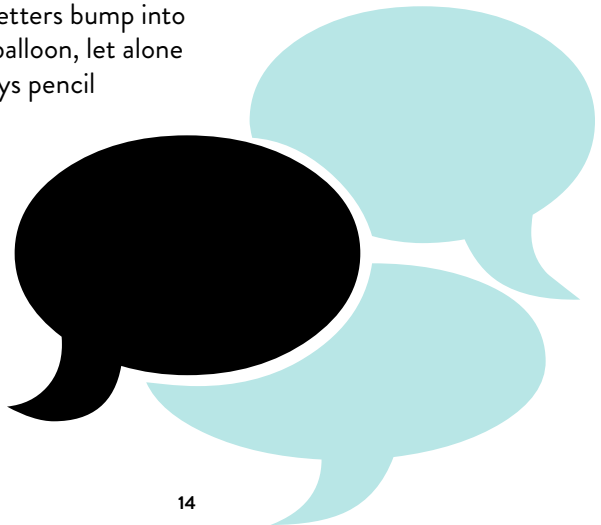
DIALOG-FREE STRIPS

ATTEMPTING TO DRAW A STRIP WITHOUT USING ANY DIALOG IS AN IMPORTANT LEARNING EXPERIENCE. IT CAN HELP YOU AVOID BECOMING TOO RELIANT ON TEXT AND DIALOG TO TELL YOUR STORIES.



WORD BALLOONS

- ☞ This lesson concludes with a look at word balloons. Word balloons and lettering are as integral a part of comic art as anything else, and great care and thought must be given to each one's size and placement. Because of this, it's never too early in the process to start thinking about where and how you'll be using them as you plan out a comic strip.
- ☞ For many decades, cartoonists placed almost all of their balloons at the top of each panel, and each balloon generally contained much more dialog than is typical in present times. Today, it is rare to see more than one sentence contained in a balloon.
- ☞ Some cartoonists feel free to place word balloons in any part of the panel. While this can be more visually interesting, one must take care not to block out any meaningful part of the drawing itself.
- ☞ Another consideration is the negative space inside each word balloon. This, as with everything else, can be an aesthetic choice, but you must always take care not to have the letters bump into the edge of the balloon, let alone run over it. Always pencil your lettering before you ink it.





SUGGESTED READING

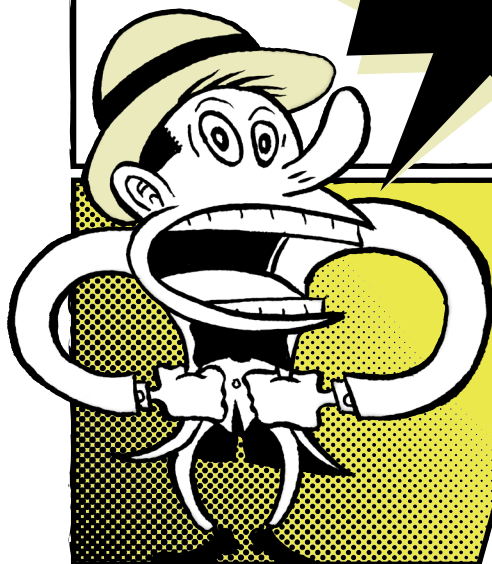
Barrier, *A Smithsonian Collection of Comic-Book Comics*.

Blackbeard, *The Smithsonian Collection of Newspaper Comics*.

QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

- 1 What type of comic format do you feel would be most suitable for you, and why?
- 2 What format(s) are you not comfortable with, and why?

TOOLS OF THE
COMICS TRADE



LESSON

3

THIS LESSON INTRODUCES THE MOST COMMON TOOLS THAT PROFESSIONAL CARTOONISTS USE TO PRODUCE COMICS. NONE OF THE TOOLS IN THIS LESSON ARE DIGITAL TOOLS, WHICH ARE THE SUBJECT OF ANOTHER LESSON. INSTEAD, THIS LESSON WILL BE ENTIRELY DEDICATED TO THE DRAFTING TOOLS THAT ARTISTS HAVE BEEN USING FOR DECADES AND, IN SOME CASES, CENTURIES.

PAPER

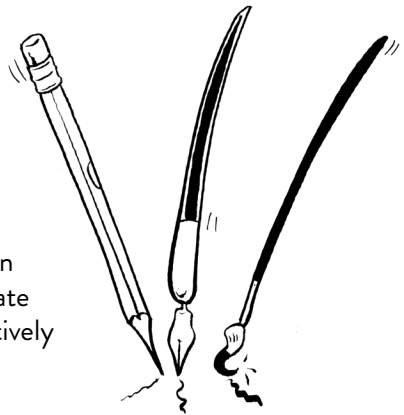
- The most common type of paper used by cartoonists is 2-ply Bristol paper. You can buy sheets of Bristol paper individually or buy them in pads of various sizes. This course's instructor usually uses 14-by-17-inch pads to draw a full-sized comic page. He also used 11-by-14-inch pads for simpler assignments as well as 9-by-12-inch pads for commissioned sketches at comic conventions. You can also buy pads of Bristol paper that are already cut into what is the standard industry size, which is roughly 11 by 17 inches.
- The general rule of thumb is to draw your art 50% larger than it will appear in print. That way, once it's shrunk down, the art will look tighter, and any small imperfections will become insignificant.



- Bristol paper generally comes with either a rough or smooth surface. The latter is sometimes referred to as a plate surface, while the former is sometimes referred to as a vellum surface. The plate surface helps you create a smooth, clean ink line, while the rough surface is more absorbent and can give an ever-so-slightly jagged look to your line art.
- Most cartoonists have a strong preference for one or the other. But there is no rule saying you have to produce your finished comic art on Bristol paper. Some artists do much of their work on thick boards generally referred to as illustration boards, particularly if they intend to color the work by hand.
- Meanwhile, there are plenty of artists who will happily use plain bond or printer paper for their finished work. This makes perfect sense if you ink your work with a marker or a ballpoint pen. Unconventional forms of comic making also can render Bristol paper superfluous.

PENS, PENCILS, AND BRUSHES

- The most common type of pencil is a no. 2 pencil, which makes a pretty dark line. You can buy softer pencils that are even darker. Higher-numbered pencils are made of harder lead and thus make fainter lines. Be careful not to bear down too hard on the paper when using a hard pencil, since this can create tiny rivets in the paper that can negatively affect the inking process.



- ☞ As for erasers, many artists have long preferred to use kneaded erasers rather than the piece of rubber at the end of a wooden pencil. The latter makes a mess and chews away at the paper and inked line work. However, like so many art products, the quality of kneaded erasers has greatly deteriorated over time.
- ☞ To avoid issues with erasers, many cartoonists use non-photo-reproducible blue pencils. This course's instructor uses blue pencils solely for lettering, since that's where regular pencil lines can cause the biggest problems.
- ☞ Most cartoonists use guidelines for lettering, and this approach is practically required for mainstream comics. It makes your lettering more legible, and legible lettering is more important than anything else if you want people to actually take the trouble to read your comics.
- ☞ Technical pens can be used for lettering. There are many brands, with Rapidograph being the most famous. Another notable brand is called Staedtler. They can be bought individually or in sets. Technical pens use refillable India ink, and they need to be disassembled for refilling and cleaning.
- ☞ Brushes are another useful tool. Most cartoonists have an assortment of brushes at their disposal. Traditional brushes are made out of horsehair. When you're shopping for one, make sure that the hairs come to a very fine point, with no stray hairs splaying out. When you ink with a brush, you should be careful not to overload it with ink, since things can get messy very quickly.
- ☞ It's vital that you thoroughly clean your brushes with warm water and liquid soap after each use. Gently rub the hairs to get all the ink out. It's also wise to hold onto the clear plastic tube that the brushes were encased in when you bought them. These help retain its shape.



SUGGESTED READING

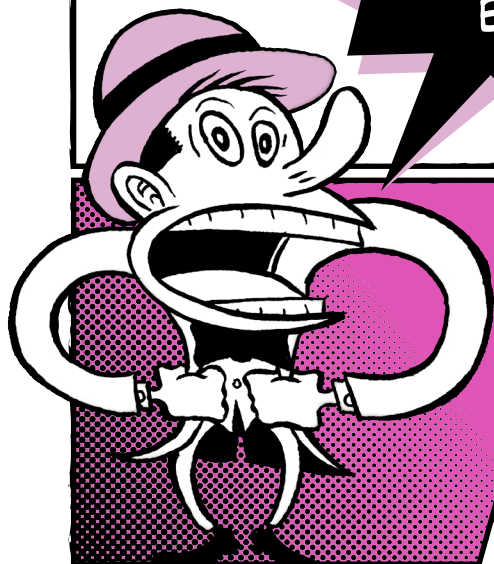
Hamm, *Cartooning the Head and Figure*.

Lee, *How to Draw Comics the Marvel Way*.

QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

- 1** Are you willing to try your hand at all or most of the tools described in this lesson?
- 2** Do you have a strong preference for digital tools over traditional tools? If so, why?

WRITING FOR
COMICS: BEYOND
THE WORD
BALLOON



LESSON

4

THIS LESSON IS DEVOTED TO THE WRITING OF COMICS. IT TALKS ABOUT THE TOOLS THAT ARE USED AND THE VARIOUS FORMATTING OPTIONS. IT ALSO BROACHES THE SUBJECT OF CREATING LONG-FORM COMICS. THOSE INCLUDE ANYTHING FROM A TWO-PAGE STRIP TO A 200-PAGE GRAPHIC NOVEL AS WELL AS SERIALIZED COMIC BOOKS AND COMIC STRIPS.

WRITING WHILE ROUGHING

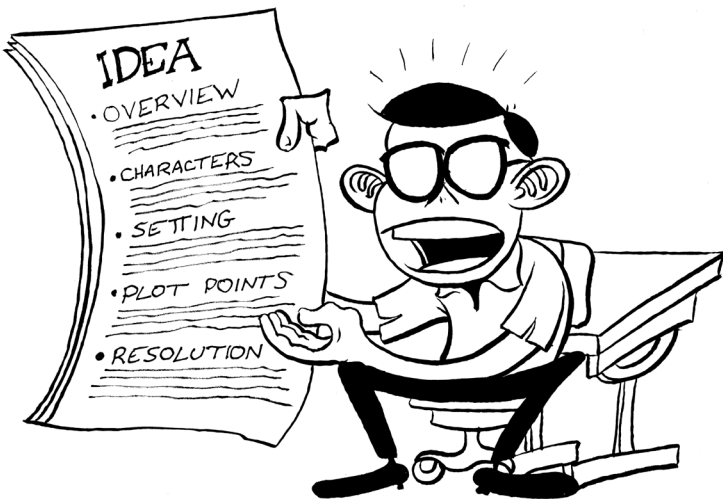
- When someone gets an idea for a comic strip, there's a natural impulse to start drawing it right away. But countless problems can arise by not writing a comic out first.
- You can write the strip while roughing it out at the same time. This works well with shorter strips. While studying your rough, you can see which panels should be bigger, smaller, cut into two or more panels, or combined into one larger one. You can see where the balloons and captions can go ahead of time as well as whether the balloons are too verbose and thus need to be shortened or split up.
- Some cartoonists can get their ideas down quickly and clearly, while some are even able to draw a final page right away. But for others, getting a page layout figured out ahead of time can be a real struggle, and you may find yourself roughing out the same story more than once. If this is the case with you, don't worry. Do whatever works.



- ☞ Avoid making up a story as you go along, particularly if it runs for more than a few pages. Strips turn out much better if the entire story is written out in advance.
- ☞ Before you attempt writing something of any length, make sure you know clearly what the main point of your story will be. These questions can help:
 - Does your protagonist learn something, or does she teach the world a lesson?
 - Is it based on something that happened to you? If so, what will the story say about yourself?
 - Why do you want to tell it?
- ☞ It's important to know yourself and stay true to yourself when you're writing something, even if your story is pure satire or science fiction. After all, every book ever written is in some sense an autobiography. Every story has one or more protagonist. Remain consistent regarding their personality traits, what motivates them, and what their strengths and faults are.
- ☞ Once these basics have all been firmly established, everything else is secondary. Plot twists, scene changes, and timelines can all be changed or tweaked with relative ease as long as you remain true to the core elements.

WRITING AN OUTLINE

- Editors may expect to see a story outline first before you submit a finished script, particularly if you're going to attempt a book-length story. However, writing an outline is a great idea whether it's required or not and regardless of your story's length. An outline is a story's skeleton, and it allows you or your editor to spot and fix any big-picture problems that may be less obvious once you delve into the details of the script itself.
- An outline can be represented in two stages, starting with a very basic pitch outline. In a pitch outline, you describe all the principal characters, their quirks and motives, and so on. You also describe the basic plot.
- A more detailed outline should touch on all the main events or plot points that will be occurring in your story. The writing in such an outline is usually dry and to the point, though if you come up with an appropriately clever or funny line, you might as well throw it in. You can also think of all your separate plot points as building blocks that you can move around or throw away as you go.



FORMATTING AND TOOLS

- A comic book script can be written in the same format that screenwriters and playwrights use. The only real difference is that the script is broken up by page and panel numbers. It also can designate which panels should be larger splash panels. Otherwise the formatting is very much the same as a movie or TV script, including scene descriptions, characters, dialog, shot descriptions, and so on.
- If you're already familiar with this scriptwriting format or imagine being comfortable with it, Microsoft Word has a scriptwriting option available to make the whole process easier. There are also professional apps like Final Draft.

Sample Script

By Peter Bagge 10-10-2020

PAGE 1

Panel 1

Full tiered WIDE shot. Two adolescent boys shop for LPs at a department store.

CAPTION:
Summer, 1966...

BOY 1:
How much money do you have...

BOY 1:
Altogether? About \$2.00... Why?

c

Panel 2

TIGHTER , as Boy 1 holds up a copy of The Beatles' "Revolver" LP.

BOY 1:
If we pool our money we could buy THIS.

BOY 2:
I thought you DIDN'T LIKE the Beatles.

- However, many comic writers don't bother with the screenwriting format at all and instead use a much more straightforward format, with the text starting on the left-hand margin. It starts with the page number, panel number, scene description, character, and dialog, in that order. However, the dialog usually runs to the right of the characters' names.

Sample Script

By Peter Bagge 10-10-2020

PAGE 1

Panel 1

WIDE shot. Two adolescent boys shop for LPs at a department store.

CAPTION: Summer, 1966...

BOY 1: How much money do you have...

BOY 1: Altogether? About \$2.00... Why?

Panel 2

TIGHTER , as Boy 1 holds up a copy of The Beatles' "Revolver" LP.

BOY 1: If we pool our money we could buy THIS.

BOY 2: I thought you DIDN'T LIKE the Beatles.

- Captions should be written out as well. You also should create a double space between each panel, and a triple space or a border line to separate the comic's pages.
- There are numerous websites that archive sample comic book scripts by various writers. Try finding a script for a comic you own so that you can compare and contrast with the finished work. You'll also notice that script formatting can change slightly from author to author, though the changes are so slight that it hardly makes a difference.

TIPS ON WRITING FOR COMICS

Writing for a visual medium can be a bit disconcerting at first, especially if you're an artist yourself. Rather than looking at a picture of what you're describing, you will instead be looking at an abstraction—the written word—that will later be transcribed into pictures. As such, you may lose track of certain things that can cause confusion for the artist later, even when you yourself are the artist.

It's a good idea to keep a piece of paper next to you to rough out the pages and panels as you go along. Even drawing stick figures is helpful because you're only trying to get the basics down on paper.



When you're writing dialog or caption boxes, keep it brief. Word and thought balloons can wind up taking over a panel if you're not careful. If and when this does happen, think about how to condense what you've written. The fewer words you use, the better, as long as you're still getting your point across. Sometimes a character doesn't even have to say anything: Their face and body language can do all the talking for them.

- ▶ Yet another thing to keep in mind is your use of pages. Think of each page as a conceptual whole. Start each new scene or sequence at the top of a page. End it at the end of a page. The simple act of turning a page serves as a slight mental break for the reader, so take advantage of that fact. Also take advantage of any potential surprise you could spring on your readers as they turn to a new page.
- ▶ Writing your comic story out on a word processor is the perfect way to make these page-fitting elements work. All you have to do is trim and pad the story and expand or shrink panels as needed. Instead of throwing anything away and starting from scratch, you're simply typing and deleting words on your keyboard.
- ▶ Before you write anything, you should figure out how you intend to resolve your story's main arc. For instance, if you can't decide if your protagonist is going to die or not at the end, then you will encounter problems. You can also consider including an epilogue that will leave the audience with more satisfaction.



WRITING SERIALIZED COMICS

- If you're planning on writing a daily or weekly strip or an ongoing comic book series, there are other elements to think about. You still have to think about story arcs and endings, particularly with a comic book series. Individual issues of the comic may be their own self-contained stories, but they also would have to work within the framework of an overarching story.
- To pull this format off successfully, you ought to work out what the overarching storyline will be in your outline. Do this before you get too caught up in the episodic stories. That approach will help inform the individual stories as well as keep you on the right track.



- You also can start up and end longer story arcs at any time, as Lynn Johnson often did in her daily strip *For Better or For Worse*. Pure inspiration can be the deciding factor, though it's still always wise to have a good idea where the storyline is going to avoid winding up lost and directionless.



SUGGESTED READING

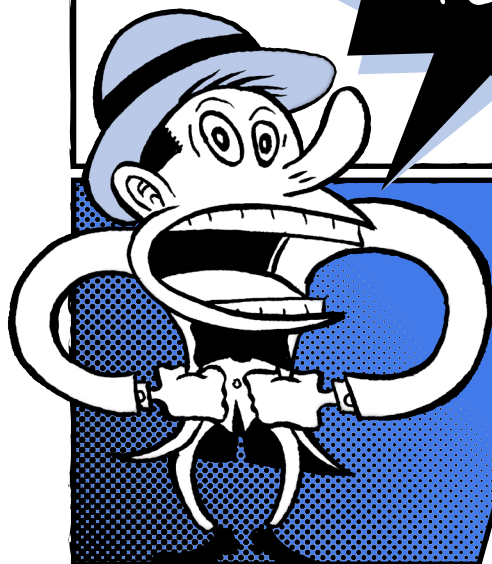
Kneese, *The Art of Comic Book Writing*.

McCloud, *Making Comics*.

QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

- 1 Do you have difficulty separating the processes of writing and drawing comics? Do you find the two inseparably linked while creating comics?
- 2 For non-artists: Do you have difficulty visualizing your stories while writing them? Do you have ways to resolve this problem?

CREATING
CHARACTERS
FOR COMICS



LESSON
5

A HUGE PART OF WHAT MAKES A COMIC STRIP WORK IS THE LOOK OF THE CHARACTERS, PARTICULARLY THE MAIN CHARACTERS. HOW CHARACTERS SHOULD LOOK HAS ALMOST EVERYTHING TO DO WITH THE NATURE OF YOUR STRIP AND THE PERSONALITY OF THE CHARACTERS THEMSELVES AS WELL AS YOUR OWN DRAWING STYLE. HOWEVER, THERE ARE CERTAIN THINGS TO KEEP IN MIND WHEN YOU START TO DEVELOP YOUR CHARACTERS.

KEEP IT SIMPLE

- It's important to keep it simple. You're going to be drawing the characters over and over again. Overly elaborate costumes, for example, can lead to frustration.
- Many artists highlight all of a character's features on the cover or in splash panels but then greatly simplify the look or the character in a regular panel, especially in wide shots or in the distance.
- Over time, many comic characters become softer, rounder, cuter, and less detailed. These changes are almost always subtle but can give a more universal appeal.



DOODLING

- Drawing regularly in your sketchbook is key to your development as a cartoonist. Many well-known cartoon characters first came to life as a mere doodle in a sketchbook or scrap of paper.
- These characters can start out as meaningless, stream-of-consciousness drawings, with no purpose behind them. One or more might jump out at you as a character design that you can work with. A personality befitting their look might start taking shape in your mind almost immediately.

FORM FOLLOWS FUNCTION

- ☛ The most common way a character's appearance takes shape occurs when you already have a type of character in mind and need to come up with a design that suits the character in question. If your character happens to be a familiar genre type—for instance, a detective or a superhero—you'll have two problems to address simultaneously.
- ☛ One is making sure the character's look suits the purposes you have in mind. The other is making sure the look doesn't too closely resemble any of the countless comic book characters of that type who already exist. There's always the threat of a lawsuit, and aside from that, you'll likely want your character to look as original as possible.



- ☛ With familiar character types, the basic look can be a template for you to add whatever quirks you have in mind that define your character. Think of options like spiky hair, antigravity shoes, a pet lizard, and so on.



- ☛ If you intend to do comics that are closer to home—for instance, a slice-of-life domestic comic, a workplace strip, or a piece based on your own life—you have a new set of issues to consider. For instance, how much do you want your main character to resemble yourself? Your protagonist is always going to be a stand-in for yourself to some extent, and it's important to acknowledge and work with that fact.

- The same goes for your supporting characters, who are sure to be based on people you know. You probably won't want them to recognize themselves, at least not in every instance. The wisest approach would be to make a composite of sorts, both in designing your protagonist as well as his or her cohorts.

CUTE OR STYLIZED CHARACTERS

- This lesson now turns to some general basics regarding the design of simple or cute characters. That includes anything intended for children, though these basics can apply to work intended for an older audience as well, depending on the style and nature of the work in question.



- Characters meant to appeal to children tend to have almost toddler-like proportions when it comes to the head-to-body ratio. This is just as true in animation, where even adult male characters like Elmer Fudd and Mr. Magoo have been infantilized in terms of proportion. This proportionality results in very young children identifying with the characters, though it appeals to people of all ages in the same way and for the same reasons: Everyone is drawn to babies and toddlers.

- The basic shape of such characters usually begins with a pair of ovals: one for the head and one for the body, with the body rarely being more than twice the size of the head. The two ovals can even be the same size, assuming you want to make an extremely infantile character, such as the Warner Brothers character Tweety.
- The other rule of thumb is to use big eyes. Big eyes make the character instantly endearing. Even nominally bad characters have big eyes in comics targeted for children.



DESIGNING ANIMALS

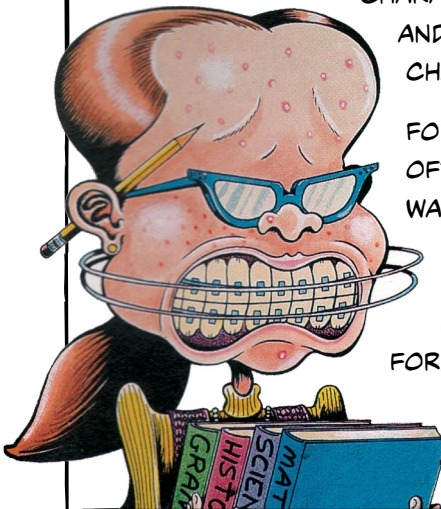
BEYOND OVERALL PROPORTIONS AND EYES, HUGE LIBERTIES CAN BE TAKEN WHEN IT COMES TO DESIGNING ANIMAL CHARACTERS. A HIGHLY STYLIZED ELEPHANT, FOR INSTANCE, CAN BARELY RESEMBLE AN ACTUAL ELEPHANT SAVE FOR TELLTALE FEATURES LIKE THE TRUNK AND EARS. ANTHROPOMORPHIZED ANIMAL CHARACTERS REPRESENT PEOPLE FIRST AND FOREMOST. THEIR ANIMAL FEATURES SIMPLY GIVE THEM A SET OF DISTINCT CHARACTERISTICS THAT IDENTIFIES THEIR SPECIES. SOMETIMES A FUNNY ANIMAL CHARACTER'S PERSONALITY WILL HAVE NOTHING TO DO WITH THE ANIMAL IT'S DESIGNATED AS.

DESIGNING CHARACTERS FOR TARGET AUDIENCES

WHEN IT COMES TO PEOPLE'S CHOICES IN ART AND ENTERTAINMENT, THEY MOST FREQUENTLY CHOOSE WORK IN WHICH THE PROTAGONIST MOST CLOSELY RESEMBLES THEMSELVES. CREATING A CHARACTER THAT IS IN THE SAME DEMOGRAPHIC THAT YOU ARE IS FAIRLY EASY. IN CONTRAST, STEPPING OUT OF YOUR OWN DEMOGRAPHIC CAN BE TRICKY, SUCH AS WHEN YOU'RE PRODUCING SOMETHING FOR YOUNGER READERS. THAT'S WHY IT'S VERY IMPORTANT FOR YOU TO GET INSIDE YOUR TARGET AUDIENCE'S HEADS—TO IMAGINE WHAT TYPE OF

CHARACTER WILL APPEAL TO THEM AND HOW THEY'LL PERCEIVE SAID CHARACTER.

FOR EXAMPLE, PREADOLESCENTS OFTEN RESPOND IN A CATHARTIC WAY TO CHARACTERS THAT EXHIBIT THE SAME AWKWARDNESS THAT THEY ARE FEELING. THIS CAN MANIFEST ITSELF IN THE FORM OF GLASSES, FRECKLES, BRACES, GANGLY LIMBS, AND THE LIKE. THINK OF PIPPI LONGSTOCKING.





SUGGESTED READING

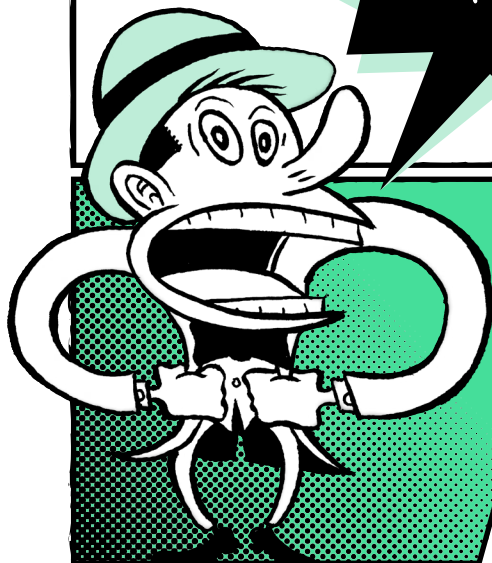
Hart, *Cartoon Faces*.

———, *The Master Guide to Drawing Anime*.

ACTIVITIES

- 1** If your characters routinely look more generic than you'd like, try pushing their appearance to an absurd degree. Then modify their look while keeping those elements that make them look unique.
- 2** When brainstorming on a character, focus on the qualities of a person you find particularly amusing or annoying, and exaggerate them even further.

HUMOR IN
COMICS: FINDING
THE FUNNY



LESSON
6

THIS LESSON TAKES A LOOK AT THE USE OF HUMOR IN COMICS, IN ALL OF ITS VARIOUS FORMS AND FORMATS. THE COMIC STRIP SEEMS TAILOR MADE FOR THE PURPOSE OF TELLING A JOKE, AND MANY CARTOONISTS STARTED CARTOONING WITH JUST THAT PURPOSE IN MIND. IN FACT, MOST OF THE EARLIEST RECOGNIZABLE COMIC STRIPS AND POLITICAL CARTOONS HAD AN OBVIOUSLY HUMOROUS INTENT TO THEM.

FORMAT AND TIMING

- Certain types of jokes are well suited for certain formats. For a single-panel gag, the joke can easily be in the drawing itself: something slightly off, or a sign that says something slightly or totally unexpected. If the drawing begs for a caption, you can try different ones until you've settled on one that best captures the incongruity of the situation.



- The single-tiered daily newspaper format is ideal for telling jokes, and the number of panels you use can vary based on the nature of your joke—for example, the traditional three-beat format of setup, response, and punch line. As with a single-panel gag, the punch line is almost always an unexpected turn, only it's preceded by an exchange of some sort.
- Peanuts* creator Charles M. Schulz worked with four even-sized panels for his daily strips for 50 years, without exception. As a result, he often came up with jokes that didn't really need four panels. But his superfluous panels often provide a moment to consider what's going on in characters' minds before their thoughts are revealed.
- Four or more panels are also good for establishing repetition. They can show your character observing the same thing over and over before eventually commenting on it.
- Timing options increase even more when you're doing a half- or full-paged comic strip. The extra space allows you to tell longer, more elaborately structured jokes.

THE CAST OF CHARACTERS

- Chances are that an ongoing comic strip's protagonist will to some degree be a stand-in for the strip's creator. Assuming your protagonist is to some extent a reflection of yourself, it's important to make your stand-in vulnerable in some way, since characters that come off as wiser or morally superior to everyone around them are ultimately insufferable.
- You need to be able to laugh at yourself and acknowledge your own moral and intellectual failings. A prime example of this is Cathy Guisewite's comic strip *Cathy*, whose title character personified all of the creator's own weaknesses and insecurities.
- Creating a strip that is at least somewhat based on yourself can be tricky, especially if your strip is of the domestic variety. In that case, the strip will involve how the people closest to you feel about the work; in addition, the public will speculate as to how close to reality the strip is.
- The decision on whether to create a supporting cast in an ongoing strip starts and ends with how the characters all interact with your protagonist. If there's no chemistry or humorous dynamic going on between them, then there's no point in using secondary characters in the first place.
- In some instances, a secondary character can become a breakout character and even potentially take over the strip. One notable example of this is Popeye, who initially was just a walk on character for an already on-going strip called *Thimble Theater*. But the public responded so strongly to him that it led to the strip eventually being retitled.



- ☛ Meanwhile, there are numerous ensemble strips with no real protagonist but rather a collection of characters who more or less take turns in the spotlight. An extreme example of this can be found in strips like Kaz's alternative weekly *Underworld*, which features a wide assortment of randomly appearing characters and numerous one-off characters.
- ☛ As is the case with formats, don't lock yourself in with specific characters. You should always be open to any kind of changes that might improve your strip.

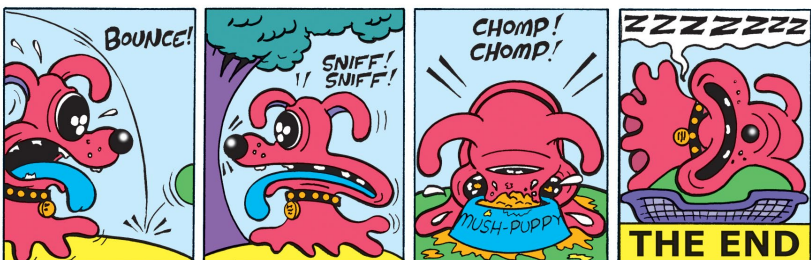
SATIRE AND POLITICAL HUMOR

- ☛ Political cartoons are almost purely satirical. Satire essentially is ridicule with a purpose. That purpose is most often pointing out some aspect of society that the satirist feels ought to be brought to everyone's attention.
- ☛ When targeting an individual person, a certain balancing act has to come into play to avoid coming off as cruel rather than funny. However, it's more or less a given that people in positions of wealth, power, and influence are fair game.
- ☛ Nearly all satire has some political component to it, with editorial cartoons being an overt example. Traditionally, these types of cartoons appeared in almost every newspaper as single panel gags, and they are the oldest form of cartooning there is. The early decades of the 21st century have seen a proliferation of overtly political comic strips that first appeared in alternative weekly papers and are now all over the internet.

- The overwhelming majority of these strips usually have a strong partisan slant to them. Whether you'll find them funny at all depends entirely on your own political leanings. While this has always been the case to some degree, lately it has become extreme.

HUMOR FOR CHILDREN AND YOUNG ADULTS

- When doing work that's intended for children, it's generally a given that you'll keep it clean and avoid discussing things that will go over their heads. This goes for young adult material as well, albeit to a much lesser degree. Still, try not to play it overly safe, or you may wind up with work that is too soft and precious, since children can tell when they're being pandered to or spoken down to.
- The best approach is to create something that appeals to you and that you personally find funny. And the best way of evaluating what a child might make of it is to remember what you responded to as a kid. It's also important to remember that, as is the case with adults, not all children have the same taste, so don't knock yourself out trying to come up with something that every kid will love.



- Also keep in mind that your potential customers aren't just the children but also their parents and, to a lesser degree, librarians and educators. These are the people who actually buy the material that children read, and they'll likely be evaluating things like if it has any educational value or what moral it may offer. Still, it ultimately matters most whether the kids themselves like the material.
- Today, the most popular humor comics for kids are sold in book form, such as series like *Captain Underpants* and *Diary of a Wimpy Kid*. Many traditional children's books are illustrated by artists who, due to their drawing styles, are also often thought of as cartoonists. Dr. Seuss and Maurice Sendak both come to mind in this regard.

INCORPORATING HUMOR INTO OTHER GENRES

- Across all forms of media, a considerable amount of humor is routinely incorporated into almost every kind of drama. Having a protagonist with a sense of humor helps to make him or her far more likable, especially when the character indulges in self-deprecating humor.
- Protagonists in genre fiction have always had moments of fallibility, but this used to be expressed in more despairing terms. They would verbalize their fears in a totally earnest manner.
- In comics, this began to change in the Marvel comics of the 1960s, most notably with the character Spider-Man. The wisecracks that Stan Lee sprinkled throughout the stories were a new element that especially appealed to college-age readers who otherwise had outgrown comic books, and this has increasingly become a staple ever since.

- Adding humor to a dramatic story can be a tricky balancing act, however, since a joke told at an inopportune time can kill whatever type of suspense you're trying to create. Humor is best employed early on in your story, especially when you're establishing the relationships between the various characters.
- However, if you find you have a knack for joke telling, you might as well make the most of it. For example, the writer Joss Whedon employs so much humor in his comics and TV shows that they often come close to being a farce, though he still manages to never cross that line.



SUGGESTED READING

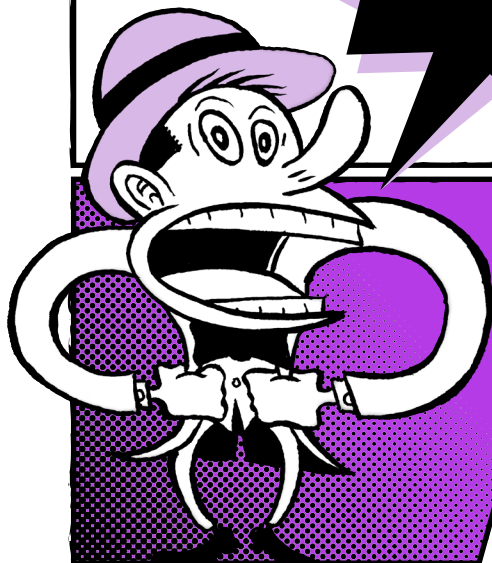
Mankoff, *The Complete Cartoons of "The New Yorker."*

Vorhas, *The Comic Toolbox.*

ACTIVITIES

- 1 Try recreating a comic strip or passage that you find particularly funny in your own style as a way to dissect what exactly makes the humor work so well.
- 2 Try redrawing the same gag in wildly different styles, just to see which style elicits the biggest laugh (from you or others).

TELLING DRAMATIC
STORIES THROUGH
COMICS



LESSON

7

THIS LESSON DISCUSSES DRAMATIC STORYTELLING, WHICH IS INVOLVED IN MOST TYPES OF GENRE FICTION. THESE GENRES INCLUDE SCIENCE FICTION, FANTASY, CRIME, AND ACTION STORIES, INCLUDING SUPERHERO TALES. THESE REPRESENT THE MOST POPULAR FORMS OF GENRE FICTION IN CONTEMPORARY COMICS. ALSO NOTABLE ARE FORMERLY POPULAR GENRES SUCH AS HORROR, ROMANCE, AND HISTORICAL FICTION, INCLUDING WESTERN COMICS.

SHORT-FORM DRAMATIC STORYTELLING

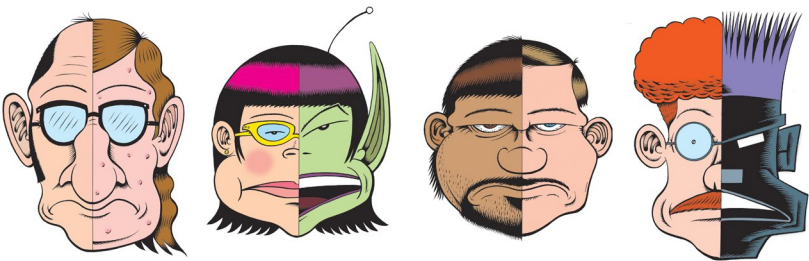
- To discuss the construction of a short dramatic piece, this lesson uses the example of a work that is roughly three to 12 pages in length. Work from EC from the 1950s specialized in this form of short storytelling. Their most famous title, the horror series *Tales from the Crypt*, routinely featured one of their regular witch characters introducing the main character and providing the setup for each story.
- A stereotypical beginning would be something like this: A young, recently engaged couple's car breaks down while they're on their way to meet the fiancée's parents. Miles from anywhere, they have no choice but to take refuge in a spooky old mansion. From this starting point, the reader already has a who, what, when, where, and why to rest on as the story continues.
- EC stories also used to routinely end with what used to be referred to as an O. Henry twist, named after the writer who specialized in this storytelling device. In such an ending, something totally unexpected is revealed. With horror stories—as with mystery stories in general—the big reveal usually involves the true culprit being the person that the reader least expected up to that point.

HARVEY KURTZMAN

HARVEY KURTZMAN WAS BEST KNOWN AS THE CREATOR OF *MAD* MAGAZINE, BUT DURING HIS TENURE AT EC IN THE EARLY 1950S, HE ALSO WROTE AND EDITED THEIR WAR TITLES, *FRONTLINE COMBAT* AND *TWO-FISTED TALES*. WHILE EC'S COMPETITORS WERE REGALING THEIR READERS WITH PATRIOTIC TALES OF DERRING-DO, KURTZMAN TOOK A FAR MORE REALISTIC AND HUMANE APPROACH. FOR INSTANCE, HE AVOIDED DEHUMANIZING THE ENEMY AND OCCASIONALLY EVEN TOLD STORIES FROM AN ENEMY SOLDIER'S POINT OF VIEW.

SERIALIZED STORIES

- ☛ The type of self-contained story described in the previous section of this lesson was the norm for the comics industry until the mid-1960s, particularly with the advent of Marvel Comics. The point was to end each issue with a cliffhanger or unresolved story element that would tempt readers to buy the next issue, though unlike serialized novels from the past, there was no real end of the story in sight.
- ☛ Instead, story arcs would be created over a span of issues, but the seeming resolution to each story arc would usually blend with the start of a new one. Thus, instead of presenting a single story about, for example, Spider-Man, this approach makes it feel more like you're following the life of Spider-Man. That results in an even heavier emotional investment on the part of a regular reader.
- ☛ When you're developing a character that you intend to serialize, the key is to devise an ongoing conflict that will play into each story to various degrees. With superheroes, that conflict almost always involves their alter egos—that is, how to maintain a normal life and remain anonymous while also keeping the dual aspects of their lives from spilling into each another.



- Almost all action genre protagonists also have their own set of vulnerabilities, with Superman's Kryptonite being the most obvious example. A character designed for a more mature audience might have substance abuse issues or suffer from PTSD. Being haunted by tragic past events is also a common device.
- Such struggles can help form the protagonist's personality as well as serve as a recurring plot development. They can also help humanize your characters, making them more endearing.
- Simultaneous story arcs have also become a norm. Each issue or episode serves as a self-contained story yet also as a part of an overarching storyline that in comics can span numerous issues. In television, that larger arc may encompass an entire season. This approach, as opposed to Marvel's endless to-be-continued format, provides for an easier entry point for new readers or viewers who haven't been following a character for ages.

GENERAL TIPS

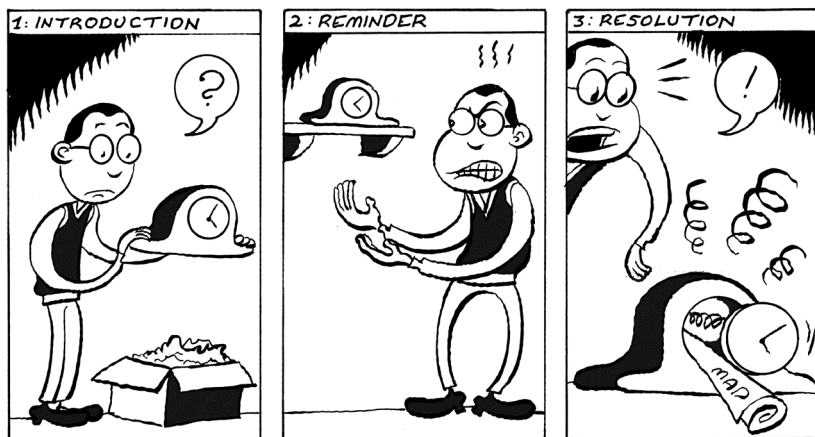
- Whether you're creating a one-shot graphic novel, a miniseries, or a story with a multi-issue arc for an ongoing series, the same general tips and rules apply. The first rule is: Write what you know. This may sound absurd if you're planning on writing a science fiction or fantasy comic, but even those books are first and foremost about people who think and act like individuals the author knows.
- Science fiction writers generally know a lot about science, while fantasy writers usually are very knowledgeable about history. They research what they don't know. Never wing it or fake it if you can avoid doing so, even if your story takes place on Mars. Facts and accuracy will give your story weight.

- ▶ Your protagonist will to some degree be a stand-in for yourself, even if your character looks nothing like you. You're still the puppet master, and your thoughts and impulses will come through no matter how much you try to disguise it.
- ▶ Also keep in mind that dramatic stories don't need to be devoid of humor, and ideally, they incorporate it. A sense of humor, particularly of the self-deprecating variety, humanizes your characters and makes them more likable.

THREE BEATS

- ▶ Dramatic stories rely on beats and repetition, often in sets of three. In almost every movie, for instance, there will be an element that is referenced three times, with each reference serving a different purpose. These can be referred to as the introduction, the reminder, and the resolution.
 - For example, imagine that the protagonist inherits his grandfather's estate, only to find that all his grandfather left him was useless junk. He picks up an old clock, which doesn't work, and he wonders why his grandfather still had it. That clock is the element, and it has just been introduced.
 - Thirty minutes into the movie, that clock is referenced again, this time as a symbol of all the useless junk the hero is now saddled with. That is the reminder, but it's done as a casual aside, since you don't want the viewer to become too focused on the clock.

- Finally, as the story reaches its climactic end, the frustrated protagonist smashes the clock, only to reveal that it contained a treasure map. An item that previously was presented as useless is now the opposite, and the hero's problems are all about to be solved, just in the nick of time. This third beat with the clock is the resolution.



- Genre fiction more often than not incorporates three beats like this. They frequently serve as markers for a story's three acts. Factoring in this rule of three won't make your story overly formulaic. It simply reflects the way that people listen to and respond to stories.

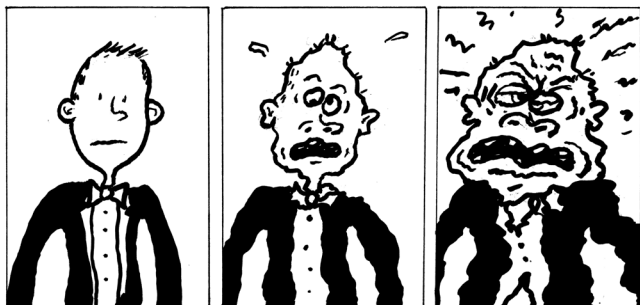
DRAMATIC VISUAL FORMATTING

- There are certain visual formats that generally are unique to dramatic comics, though some of them can also rely on the same forms of repetition used in comedic works. In those cases, the only thing that's different is the intent.
- Take, for example, a format with three panels, featuring the camera locked in on a woman's face. Someone off the first panel says something to her. In the second panel, she does and says nothing, and she finally responds in the third panel.



- As with a humor strip, the middle panel shows the protagonist processing the information she was just given, only in this example, she doesn't respond with a joke. Alternatively, she could respond with a joke, but she is not in a funny situation. While a humor strip can stand alone in three panels, a dramatic sequence like this can only work within a larger context.

- Repetition in a tier of three or more panels is also often employed in dramatic strips to show change—for example, someone transforming into something hideous. It can also convey suspense, as is the case when the camera closes in behind someone, who starts to turn around in the last panel.



- Dramatic comics use more upward- and downward-angle shots than humor comics. This creates a sense of unease and uncertainty in the viewer. It can also make the figures menacing (as in an upward shot) or vulnerable and unsuspecting (as in a downward shot). Comics can also use shadows for dramatic effect.



- Over the past several decades, two major formatting changes have come to almost define dramatic action comics. The less overt one is the replacement of traditional thought bubbles with thought caption boxes.
 - A character's thoughts are broken up into many small ones scattered throughout the panel, some of which may include only one or two words. This change generally gives the characters' thoughts more gravitas and a sense of profundity.
 - The increased use of these small thought caption boxes in mainstream comics has been accompanied by a relentless reduction in the size of word balloons. The number of words per page, in other words, has shrunk. Today's mainstream comic scripts often have a word count of 50 to 100 words.
- The other big mainstream format change in dramatic comics is the use of bleeds. The term *bleed* refers to panels and/or images that spill off of the page. Many mainstream comics now feature bleeds on almost every page, using a format where one or two panels serve as the bleed panels, while other smaller panels will rest on the bleed panels.
 - This technique is well suited for action genre comics. It can make an explosive or action-packed scene look even more explosive.
 - It's also good for adding depth to a wide-angle scene for the reader to revel in.

AN EXAMPLE OF A BLEED CAN BE FOUND ON THE FOLLOWING PAGE.





SUGGESTED READING

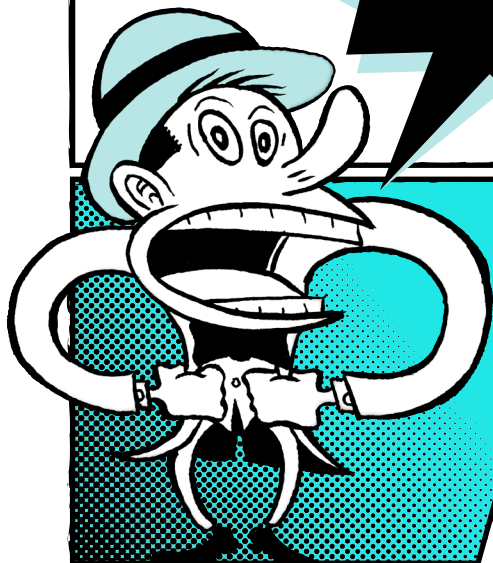
Egri, *The Art of Dramatic Writing*.

Kurtzman, *Corpse on the Imjin!*.

QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

- 1** Try reading your favorite dramatic works consciously. Take note of when the story takes a surprise turn, or when the tension mounts. How did the writer do it? Can you emulate it for the same effect?
- 2** Consider what may have motivated the writers to come up with your favorite works. Was it outrage, personal trauma, or perhaps pure escapist fantasy?

CREATING
MEMOIRS WITH
COMICS



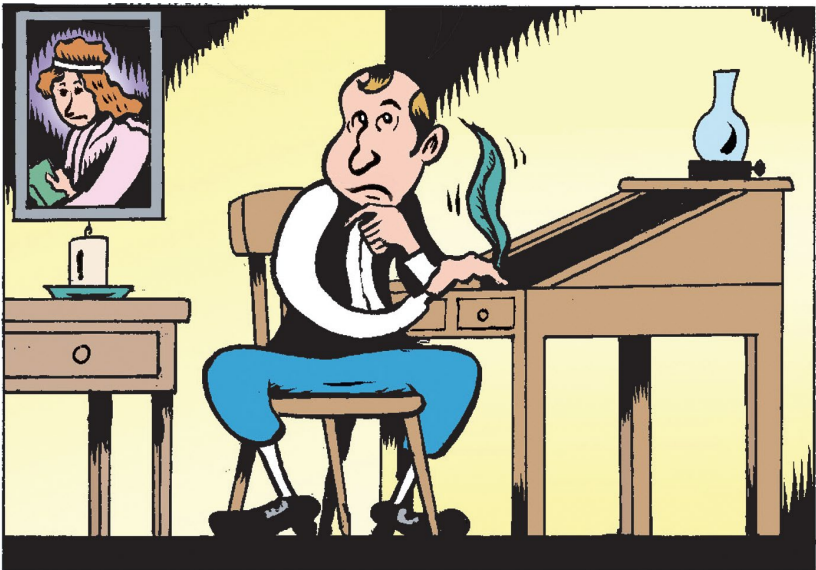
LESSON

8

FOR THE PAST SEVERAL DECADES, MANY OF THE MOST ACCLAIMED AND WIDELY READ GRAPHIC NOVELS HAVE BEEN MEMOIRS OR AUTOBIOGRAPHIES. THIS LESSON DISCUSSES SOME EXAMPLES OF THAT WIDE-RANGING GENRE TO PROVIDE A SENSE OF THE WAYS ONE CAN APPROACH SUCH WORK.

AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL COMIC STRIPS

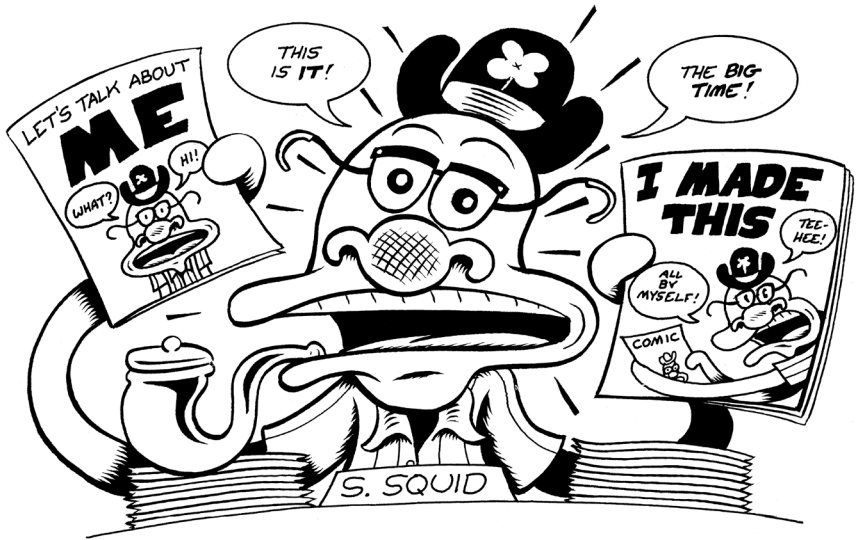
- Comic strips can be autobiographical. An example is *Peanuts*, in which the main character, Charlie Brown, was a self-admitted stand-in for the strip's author, Charles M. Schulz. Cartoonist Cathy Guisewite also didn't even bother to alter her character's name from her own in her eponymous strip.
- While there are many daily comics that still can be considered autobiographical, they generally don't tend to dwell too deeply on the characters' hang-ups or psyches. The nature of newspaper strips still is to keep things relatively light and family friendly.
- These restrictions have been much looser in alternative weekly papers, however, and even more so on the internet. Cartoonists have taken advantage of this freedom by delving more deeply into their past and present personal lives.



AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL COMIC BOOKS

- Autobiographical comic books were rare through the early history of comics. The 1960s, however, saw the beginning of a Japanese manga called *watakushi*, which mainly involved young artists writing about the struggles involved with starting a career in comics.
- In 1972, Japan also saw the appearance of a groundbreaking autobiographical comic called *I Saw It* by Keiji Nakazawa. This 48-page comic recounts Nakazawa's first-hand memories of the atomic bombing of Hiroshima when he was a young boy. *I Saw It* is an excellent example of taking a major historical moment and personalizing it in a most profound and gripping way.
- Meanwhile, in the US and elsewhere, underground comics suddenly erupted in popularity during a heyday that ran from roughly 1968 to 1973. The artists used—and occasionally abused—the creative freedom that they essentially granted themselves. While only some of this work strictly qualified as autobiographical, it did reveal a lot of subconscious impulses, sexual and otherwise, that up until then people felt obliged to suppress.
- The cartoonist Robert Crumb probably best exemplified this sudden movement, and he no doubt inspired others to do likewise. Crumb's work was an up-until-then unforeseen combination of the old-fashioned and cutting-edge. It was humorous, yet deeply disturbing. Some readers found his work cathartic, while others were outraged by it.
- Also notable is a seminal work entitled *Binky Brown Meets the Holy Virgin Mary*, which was created by another lesser-known underground cartoonist named Justin Green. This title appeared in 1972.

- ▶ *Binky Brown* is a barely fictionalized account of the mental struggles the author was going through during his adolescence, when he was tormented by a combination of religious guilt, puberty, and a condition now known as obsessive compulsive disorder. Though the story was told with considerable humor, it also was nakedly confessional to a degree that people were quite unaccustomed to at the time.
- ▶ *Binky Brown* was also notable for the formatting and styling shifts that Green employed, which helped to drive home the various emotional states he was going through. This visual approach, along with the brutally honest subject matter, had a profound effect on many of Green's peers.
- ▶ One of the artists who was profoundly influenced by Justin Green was Aline Kominsky, who later married the aforementioned Robert Crumb. Kominsky-Crumb came from a fine arts background. Thus, she wasn't concerned with comic art conventions. Instead, she used comics solely as a vehicle primarily to revisit her highly dysfunctional upbringing.
- ▶ Robert Crumb and Aline Kominsky-Crumb also collaborated on a series of comics that they called *Dirty Laundry*, which humorously recounts their daily life and relationship. They both would draw themselves in each panel and share drawing duties with other characters and objects. Pulling off a labor split like this is quite rare, but with these two, the effort appeared to be quite seamless.



AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL SERIES AND GRAPHIC NOVELS

- By the 1980s and early 1990s, a number of independent comic book titles began appearing with a strong autobiographical bent to them. As was the case with the underground comics that preceded them, some had a deeply personal, sexual, and confessional nature to them. One of these was 1992's *The Playboy* by Chester Brown, which mainly deals with his sexual obsession with *Playboy* Playmate centerfolds during his teen years.
- Another notable individual creating working at this time was Debbie Drechsler, who wrote two series in the mid 1990s, *Daddy's Girl* and *Nowhere*, both of which dealt with the incestuous sexual abuse she experienced during her adolescence. Her stories also deal with everything that was going on with her at that time, including her relationships with friends and siblings.

FAMILY MEMOIRS

- This lesson concludes with a look at notable family memoirs like Art Spiegelman's *Maus*, which first appeared as a three-page comic strip in an anthology called *Funny Animals*. Spiegelman recounted his father telling him a bedtime story, which involved what his father experienced as a Holocaust survivor. He chose to portray himself and his father as mice—which was no accident since anti-Semitic propaganda in Europe routinely portrayed Jews as vermin—while the Nazis, in turn, were the cats.
- This idea soon became the foundation of a much larger comic book project whose purpose was to tell what happened to his family leading up to and during World War II. Spiegelman envisioned it as a novel-length memoir from the outset, but he chose to serialize it in comic book form, with each installment included as an insert of *Raw*—the alternative comic anthology that he and his wife, Françoise Mouly, self-published.
- Prior to *Maus*, Spiegelman was a highly experimental artist, and his work could be quite dense. However, with this project, he softened up the line work while maintaining a gentle style throughout. This was a wise choice, since the art never gets in the way of the story but instead helps to move the narrative along. The slightly cartoony drawing style makes the more horrific moments easier to absorb without diminishing the terrible nature of those moments.
- Another notable memoir is *Persepolis*, created by Marjane Satrapi. This work recounts her family's experiences living through the Iranian Revolution, the repressive regime that followed, and the devastating Iran-Iraq War. Most of Satrapi's book is a first-person account, particularly the second volume, which recounts her experiences living as an expat in Europe.

- Also notable is Alison Bechdel's widely acclaimed *Fun Home*. This memoir is a coming-of-age story that deals mainly with Bechdel's complex relationship with her father, who, like the young Bechdel herself, was struggling with his sexuality.
- The story takes a unique approach in that Bechdel revisits the same events more than once, each time with different perspective as she, the protagonist, ages. It also addresses the concept of truth itself.
- *Fun Home* is a good example of how tricky it can be to write about people close to you, especially if they're still alive. In Bechdel's case, she received the reluctant blessing of her surviving family members. Not all authors receive such blessings, however, and sometimes find themselves forced to choose between caving to family pressure or plowing ahead in spite of it.



SUGGESTED READING

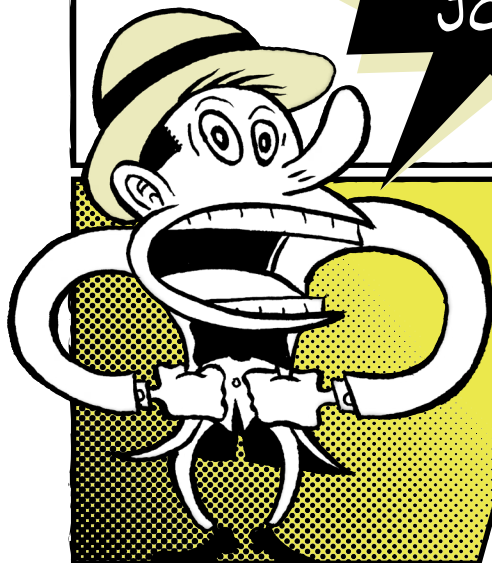
Satrapa, *Persepolis*.

Spiegelman, *Maus*.

QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

- 1 What is each author's prime motivation in writing their memoirs? Honor? Clarification? Self-analysis?
- 2 Consider writing your own memoir. Are there major aspects of your life that you would be afraid to reveal? Is that fear justified? If so, how?

COMICS AS
HISTORY,
BIOGRAPHY, AND
JOURNALISM



LESSON

9

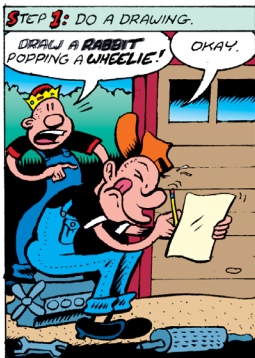
RECENT YEARS HAVE SEEN AN EXPLOSION OF NONFICTION COMIC TITLES, PARTICULARLY OF THE INSTRUCTIONAL, HISTORICAL, AND BIOGRAPHICAL VARIETY. THIS LESSON DISCUSSES THOSE FORMS OF COMICS, AND IT ALSO TOUCHES ON JOURNALISTIC COMICS.

THERE IS ONE GENERAL RULE THAT APPLIES IF YOU ARE TRYING TO CREATE WORK IN ANY OF THEM: GATHER AS MUCH INFORMATION AS POSSIBLE ON YOUR CHOSEN SUBJECT BEFORE YOU COMMENCE WORKING ON IT. THIS CAN TAKE A LOT OF EFFORT, AND IT DOESN'T ALWAYS YIELD CLEAR RESULTS, SO BRACE YOURSELF.

INSTRUCTIONAL COMICS

- Many people are visual learners who can absorb information much better by seeing and doing rather than reading an instruction manual. Such learners often appreciate products that come with a how-to instructional comic, which may involve no words at all.
- To pull off an instructional comic without any text, clean, carefully delineated artwork is absolutely essential. Instructional comics are not the time to try your hand at abstract expressionism. The reader should not be guessing what it is you're trying to draw.
- The comic strip basics discussed in previous lessons still apply. You'll need to choose a format that works, write it out in advance, and rough it out. To engage and entertain the reader, you'll need to fully incorporate your style and personality, just as you would with any other kind of comic.

MARK TRAIL
EDUCATIONAL COMICS CAN FEATURE REGULAR, ONGOING CHARACTERS. THE NATURE AND WILDLIFE COMIC STRIP **MARK TRAIL** IS A GOOD EXAMPLE. AS OF THIS COURSE'S PRODUCTION, **MARK TRAIL** IS STILL GOING STRONG AFTER MORE THAN SEVEN DECADES.



HISTORICAL AND BIOGRAPHICAL COMICS

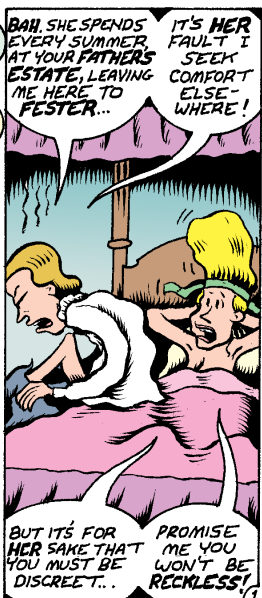
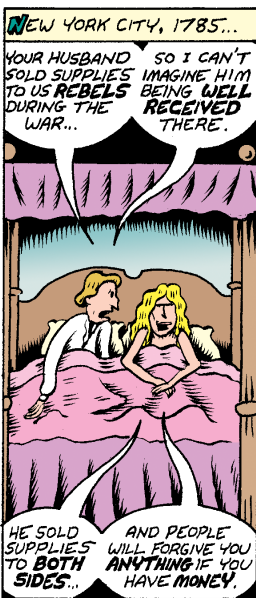
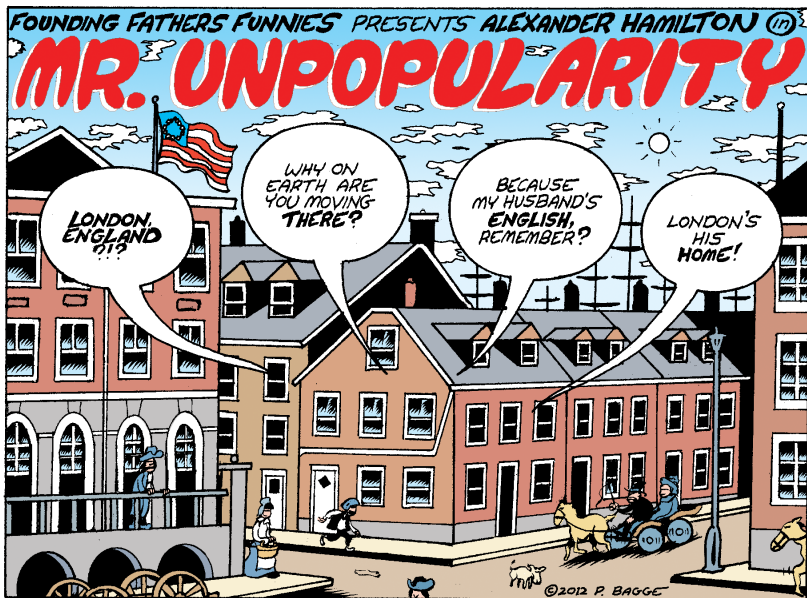
- Next, this lesson turns to historical and biographical comics. For a comic about a specific cultural event, the most common approach is to pick a main protagonist to focus on. This can make the narrative thread more concise and easier to follow. Thus, a comic about the Russian Revolution might wind up focusing on Vladimir Lenin, while one on the American Revolution could revolve around George Washington.
- If you resist the idea of using a character in this way, the result may come off less like a cohesive story and more like a chronological jumble of facts. A way to avoid this fate is to pick a topic and divide it into chapters, with each chapter devoted to a major player. For example, take Ed Piskor's multivolume *Hip Hop Family Tree*. Piskor deftly shifts the focus from one player to another in a seamless yet timely fashion.
- A notable approach to relating the past is through historical fiction, wherein the author creates a fictional character and places him or her either in the center or on the periphery of a historical event. This is most frequently seen in biographies aimed at younger readers, since it allows the creator to make the protagonist a young person, enabling the reader to perceive the unfolding events through the eyes of a child or teenager.
- An approach that has become just as common is taking a real yet relatively obscure figure from the past, then fleshing that person out—largely through speculation—to create a character who fulfills the author's purposes. This is yet another form of historical fiction, but one that can sometimes lead to controversy.

- Keep in mind that, while research is critical, there is still a catch when it comes to biographies: You still have to make up stuff. Unless you were there, you won't know for sure what your subjects did and said in private. And even if you were there, your recollections are sure to differ from those of others who were also there.



TIPS ON BIOGRAPHIES

- ▶ It's advisable to attempt a short biographical or historical comic first—perhaps one 12 pages or shorter—before attempting a full-length graphic novel or work of graphic nonfiction. As with all genres, biographies have their own quirks and challenges that you'll need to get used to.
- ▶ Settle on a subject, and then read everything you can on that person. Start by casting a wide net. For example, if you're going to write about Alexander Hamilton, you should see what Hamilton's enemies' biographers have to say about him.
- ▶ Biographers tend to become very attached to their subjects, and they almost always wind up hating the people that their subjects disliked. For example, John Adams detested Hamilton, so it should come as no surprise that his biographers almost universally portray Hamilton in a negative light.
- ▶ You don't need to read every word of every book or article on your chosen subject, however. In fact, you'll soon be able to tell within a few pages which of these works are blatantly agenda driven and poorly researched, at which point you should feel free to cast them aside.
- ▶ A big consideration after choosing your subject is what aspect of that person's life and work you want to focus on. Some biographers choose to portray the whole person, including their formative years as well as their waning ones. It's just as common for biographers to focus solely on their subjects during a single event or during their glory years.



- ☛ Creators have various choices when it comes to narration in biographies. One approach is to focus on the main subject's point of view, with only occasional shifts away to third parties. This keeps the reader inside the main character's head as much as possible.
- ☛ However, third-person narration is not inherently a bad thing. In fact, third-person narration was the norm in the earliest bio comics. There are plenty of contemporary examples in which third-person narration isn't the least bit cumbersome.
- ☛ Another approach that has become prominent—particularly in works that are marketed toward young adults—is to create heavily illustrated books. The illustrations also include word balloons.
- ☛ Most biographical comics are drawn with very serious and reverential drawing styles. However, some readers appreciate highly stylized or eccentric approaches to the genre. The takeaway point is that there is no “correct” way to draw a bio comic. Go with your gut instinct.

JOURNALISTIC COMICS

- ☛ In journalist comics, the cartoonist serves as a reporter of sorts. This is a category that hasn't been taken advantage of to any great degree because news outlets expect their reporters to file their stories fast. That is impossible for comic artists because of the slower, labor-intensive process involved.
- ☛ However, if an editor is willing to wait, the results can be impressive. In the past, editorial cartoonists like Thomas Nast neatly fit the description of journalistic cartoonists, since they were given the time and space needed to expand on a topic that their modern day successors are rarely afforded.

- Through the years, there have been sporadic long-form instances of journalistic comics. A notable creator in this field is Joe Sacco, whose detailed accounts from such war zones as Palestine and Bosnia greatly humanized those on the ground who were most adversely affected. Sacco's work makes great use of one way—and probably the best way—of establishing a point of view in such stories: making yourself the principal character in your comic reporting.
- Journalists are trained to be as objective as possible in their work, and to inject themselves into their reporting might be viewed in journalistic circles as unprofessional. But a comics reader wants to be able to track a main character, at least visually, so portraying yourself in such stories is the obvious way to go.
- After all, you were there. The only time not to make yourself the focus is when you weren't at the events being described, in which case the person or people recounting their stories should naturally be the focus.





SUGGESTED READING

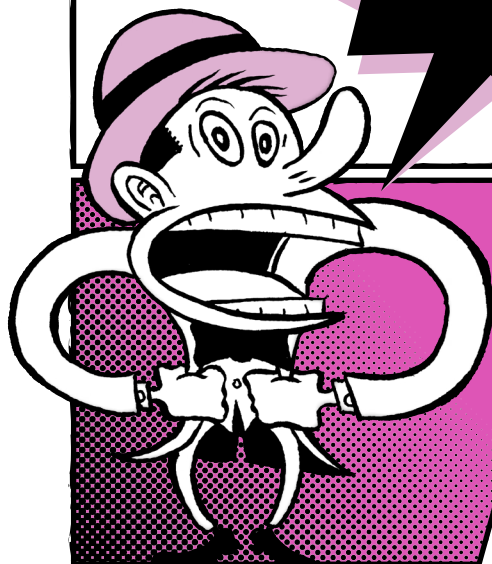
Doty, *Wordless Workshop*.

Piskor, *Hip-Hop Family Tree*.

QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

- 1** Why would an instructional comic work better for you than straight text? And how would you incorporate that preference into a comic?
- 2** Do you feel biographical comics make you feel you understand the subject better than in a text biography? If so, how?

WORKING
RELATIONSHIPS
IN THE COMICS
FIELD

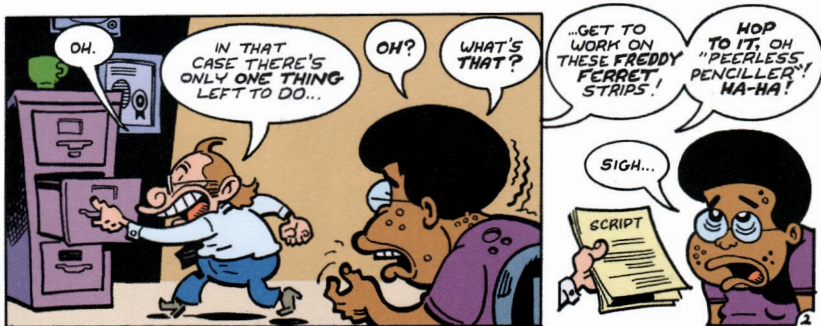


LESSON
10

THIS LESSON IS DEVOTED ENTIRELY TO THE TOPIC OF COLLABORATION. IN THE COMICS FIELD, COLLABORATION CAN OCCUR BETWEEN WRITERS, EDITORS, CARTOONISTS, PUBLISHERS, AGENTS, AND OTHERS. WHILE THIS LESSON FOCUSES ON THE CREATIVE SIDE OF THINGS, OTHER WORKING RELATIONSHIPS CAN BE JUST AS IMPORTANT, AND THEY ALSO CAN BE A HUGE FACTOR IN A WORK'S CREATIVE FORMATION.

WRITING FOR OTHERS

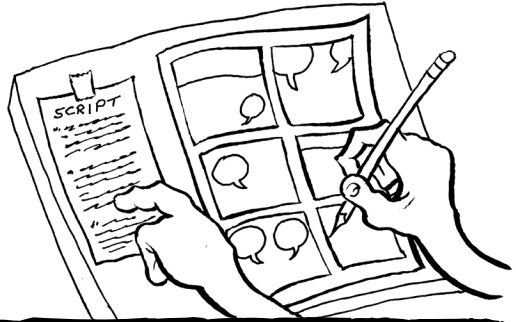
- ☛ If your interest is focused exclusively on writing for comics, your main concern may be to find a suitable artist to illustrate your stories, and your main question may be how to go about finding just the right person. One way to address these issues is to simply sell your idea to a publisher or syndicate first, at which point your editor at the publishing house or syndicate can suggest numerous artists who might fit the bill.
- ☛ In such a scenario, you will have the luxury of poring over numerous artists' samples until you come across one that particularly strikes your fancy. It's highly unlikely that the editor will try to force you to work with someone whose style doesn't appeal to you. After that, it will be a matter of contacting the artist and finding out if he or she is interested in the project.
- ☛ But if you're just starting out as a writer, this scenario is less likely, and you'll need to search for a collaborator by some other means. In this case, simply looking at artists' work online and contacting them through their websites is the obvious way to go. However, meeting cartoonists in person, either at local comic conventions or other gatherings, might be a wiser approach. Meeting in person will probably allow you to get a much better sense of your potential collaborator.
- ☛ You also need to know what the potential collaborator wants in the long run. For instance, is this person willing to accept a simple work-for-hire arrangement, in which you will own all the rights to the finished work? Many artists are, but it's highly unlikely they'll be willing to do so for free. And if they want to share the rights to the material, there are many other matters to discuss, like what happens if and when you try to develop the work into a movie, TV show, or video game.



DRAWING FOR OTHERS

- Almost all comic artists at least attempt to write their own stories when they're first starting out. Some quickly come to the realization that writing isn't their strong suit or that they simply don't enjoy that part of the process and would rather work from someone else's script.
- Others are happy to try it both ways, as in trying their hand at working from others' scripts while continuing to develop their own writing skills on the side. This can be a wise route to take, especially if you're working with experienced writers whom you could potentially learn a lot from.
- However, if you're still on the fence, it's important to remember what your role is when you enter a collaboration and stick to it. Accept whatever your agreed role is from the outset and perform it like a professional, even if you're convinced you could do better than others at their roles the whole time. With that in mind, don't be afraid to ask questions and offer suggestions as long as the writer and editor are open to it. Additionally, at the outset, everyone should at least be on the same page when it comes to what kind of script formatting and language is being used.

- Artistic collaborations can take many forms, but the writer/artist labor divide is the most common and the most symbolic collaboration. Contracts and page rates are usually built around this split, with artists generally getting paid twice as much as the writer due to the extra labor that's generally involved. Splits are negotiable, though, and can vary depending on the various contributors' popularity or experience.



WORKING WITH COLORISTS

- Coloring is something that artists are likely to have a strong opinion on, even if the artist on a certain project has no ownership or creator credit. Ideally, the artists themselves would color their own work, since their own color sensibilities are likely to match the art itself.
- However, just as is the case with artists who have no interest in writing, there are also those who have no interest in developing their color skills or who would rather leave coloring in the hands of someone who specializes in it. It's highly unlikely that an editor will force a colorist on you whose sensibilities don't jibe with your own.
- When it comes to preparing a colorist for a job, model sheets that denote all the main character's colors are essential. You also should to break down the color percentages using the CMYK color system. When new or incidental characters are added to the story, the writer or artist should also provide definite color guides for them.

- Matters become trickier when color is needed to create a mood or sense of place. In these instances, the colorist may know what is called for simply by reading the script, but the more specific guidelines you can provide, the better.
- At the same time, do your best to avoid micromanaging the colorist. That becomes much easier if you choose a colorist whose sensibilities are a good match for yours from the outset.

PENCILING AND INKING

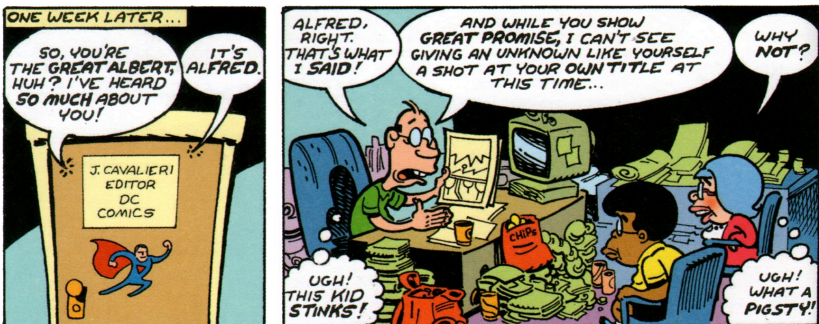
- One labor division that may seem especially strange to non-cartoonists is between a person who draws in pencil and a different person who inks the first person's pencil lines. But the reason behind this is the same as for all the other labor divisions: Some artists vastly prefer doing one thing over the other.



- If and when you're penciling something for someone else to ink, don't leave anything to guesswork, since the results could be disastrous. Many comic artists get in the habit of penciling things lightly and loosely, under the assumption that it will all come tightly together during the inking process. But inkers aren't mind readers.
- However, you also must take care not to overdo it. Overdoing it can result in line work that digs into the paper or pencil lines so dark that the inker is unable to erase them. Instead, just use your common sense while you pencil the page, and consider what the next person will be going through. Conversely, if you find yourself inking for someone else, do not hesitate to ask questions whenever you're unsure of what you're looking at.

EDITORS AND PUBLISHERS

- The relationship between cartoonists and their editors or publishers can be just as important as the creative partnership between writer and artist. In fact, the relationship between an editor and writer is probably the most important one in the world of publishing in general. A good editor can be vital to the making and shaping of a young writer's career.



- Editors and publishers can be as varied personality-wise as artists and writers are, so it pays to look closely at the type of work they edit and publish before entering into a working relationship. If, for instance, your sole interest is in creating work that fits neatly into established genres, then approaching publishers who specialize in such work is the obvious way to go.
- Likewise, if you just want to pursue your own vision with as much creative leeway as possible, then indie publishers would be far more suitable. Meanwhile, there are numerous companies that fall somewhere in between or are willing to work on either end of that spectrum.
- Most editors are able to sense what kind of working relationship you'd prefer to have with them and adjust to you accordingly. However, a good editor should also be able to detect your blind spots and challenge you on excessive stubbornness.



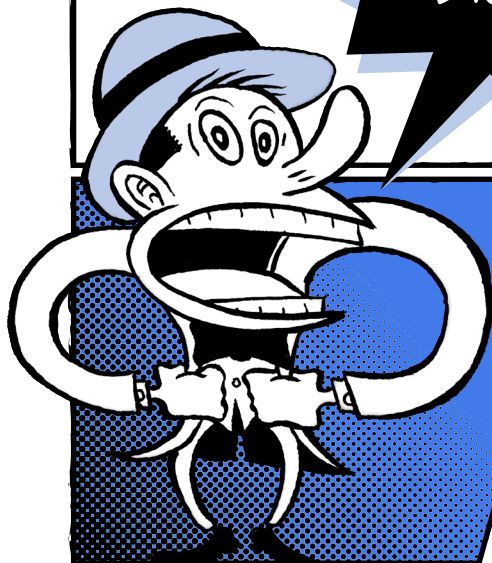
SUGGESTED READING

- Lee and Ditko, *Amazing Spider-Man Masterworks Vol. 1*.
- Moore and Gibbons, *Watchmen*.

QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

- 1 Assuming you can write and draw, what elements to a story would make you choose to work with another writer or artist instead?
- 2 Is personality vital to you in selecting a creative collaborator? Or are you solely interested in the finished product?

MAKING
COMICS IN THE
DIGITAL AGE

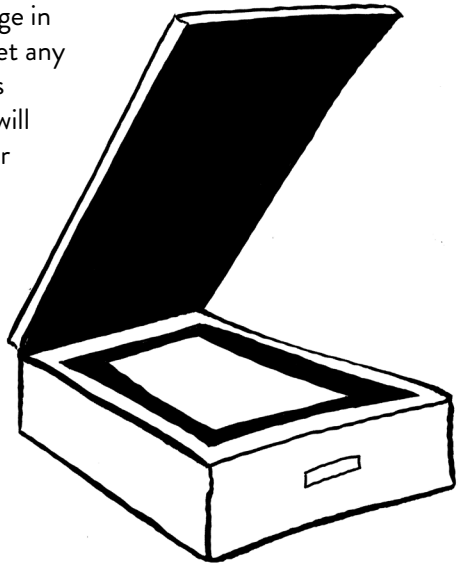


LESSON
11

THIS LESSON DISCUSSES THE DIGITAL TOOLS USED IN CREATING COMIC ART. CARTOONISTS ARE INCREASINGLY INCORPORATING DIGITAL TOOLS INTO THEIR CREATIVE PROCESS, SOMETIMES BY CHOICE, THOUGH OFTEN BY NECESSITY. THERE ALSO IS AN INCREASING NUMBER OF COMIC ARTISTS WHO DO MOST, IF NOT ALL, OF THEIR ART DIGITALLY.

SCANNING AND FILE SAVING

- ▶ A good scanner is an essential tool for creating comics digitally. It is advisable to shell out for a large-size, high-quality, single-purpose scanner. The American market is not ideal for such scanners, but the German market produces scanners that offers the use of a standard European paper size called A3. The A3 size is just under 12 by 17 inches.
- ▶ As of this course's production, a new German scanner this size usually sells for under \$500. They are ideal for working on standard-sized comic book boards, which match the A3 size. If you intend to routinely work bigger than 12 by 17 inches, you may want to buy an even larger flatbed scanner, though the price will jump up considerably.
- ▶ If you occasionally work larger than this size, you can scan your page in segments, taking care not to let any light seep in under the lid. This isn't a bad workaround, but it will require you to reassemble your art later in a graphics editor like Photoshop.
- ▶ Once you've scanned an image, you'll next see an app on your computer screen asking where and how to save the image you just scanned. Refer to the video lesson for tips on what to do at this stage.



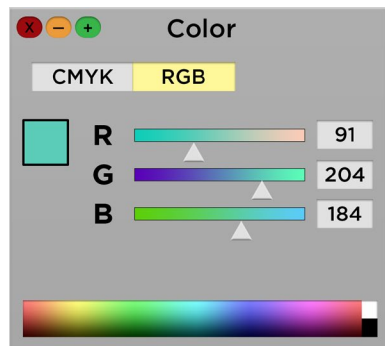
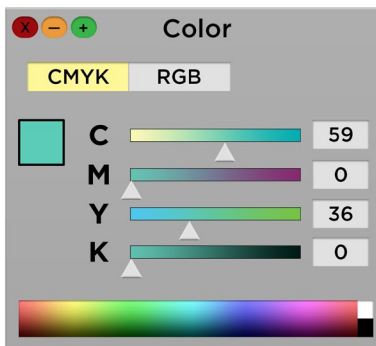
GRAPHIC DESIGN APPS

- Once you've saved your work, you should be able to open the file in a graphic design or graphic editing application. Almost all desktops and laptops come with one, and there are numerous options you can find online that you can download for free. Many cartoonists are happy with these free apps. However, most prefer to graduate to the higher-end ones like Photoshop.
- If you are struggling with the decision of which app to use, keep in mind that the only factor that should really matter is whether your application can create and save files in the TIFF and JPEG formats. These are the industry standard for either print or web purposes.
- While working in Photoshop, this course's instructor usually keeps the file in Photoshop's default format, also known as a PSD file. Working in any app's default format helps minimize any glitches that might otherwise occur. Once you've completed a piece, you can convert it into another format before sending it off to a client.
- If you're about to send off a multiple-page, full-color story to a publisher via email, you'll want to compress the entire story into a ZIP file. File-sharing apps, file transfer protocol services, and transfer websites can also be used.

COLOR SYSTEMS

- While working on a full-color page, this course's instructor always works with a CMYK color slider (as opposed to an RGB color slider). CMYK is based on the colors generically referred to as red, yellow, and blue. Red and blue are a blend of other colors, as are most of the colors you'll find in a box of crayons.

- That is important because if you want to select a specific color from an app, you need to do it by specifying the combination of colors you desire. Otherwise, the end result won't be what you want. That's where a color slider comes in handy.
- The Y in CMYK refers to yellow. The C in CMYK stands for cyan, which is a deep sky blue, and the M stands for magenta, which by itself looks like a deep pink. To describe the intensity of a particular color in the CMYK system, you speak in terms of saturation on scales of 0% to 100%. Thus, if you were to color an American flag using CMYK, the blue field would in reality be about 100% cyan and 40% or 50% magenta, while the red stripes would consist of 100% magenta and 100% yellow.
- Rounding out the CMYK is the color black, which is represented by the letter K (to prevent confusion with blue). Using this four-color combination, you can create any color imaginable. It's the basis for the four-color printing process that printers have been using for almost 600 years.



Cyan

Magenta

Yellow

Black

- If you've been coloring using the CMYK color system, you should convert your art to the RGB color system before saving it as a web file. RGB stands for red, green, and blue, which are the three primary additive colors in the RGB color-combining process. Each color is broken into a range of 0–255. Overall, it doesn't truly matter which of these scales you work in because if your scale isn't RGB, you can simply use the software to convert to that scale and solve any adaptation issues.



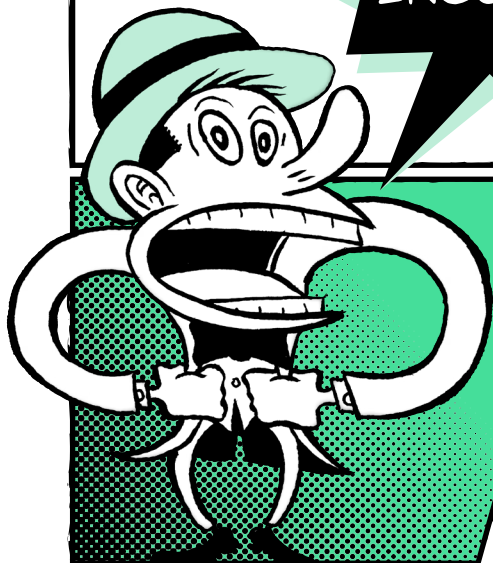
SUGGESTED READING

3dtotal Publishing, *Beginner's Guide to Digital Painting in Procreate*.
Williams, *The DC Comics Guide to Digitally Drawing Comics*.

QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

- 1 Is having some experience with traditional drawing tools vital to becoming fully proficient with digital tools?
- 2 Should artists try their hand at all graphic design software, even if they feel perfectly content with the ones they're used to?

COMICS AS A
CAREER OR
INCOME STREAM



LESSON
12

THIS LESSON DISCUSSES MAKING A CAREER IN CARTOONING AS WELL AS THE NUMEROUS WAYS YOU CAN USE IT TO CREATE SUPPLEMENTAL INCOME. IT ALSO LOOKS AT HOW YOU CAN APPLY YOUR CARTOONING SKILLS IN OTHER CREATIVE FIELDS. APPLYING YOUR SKILLS TO ONE ART FORM CAN ENHANCE YOUR SKILLS IN ANOTHER.

SELF-PUBLISHING, WEB COMICS, AND COMIC CONVENTIONS

- ▶ The act of self-publishing can be a full-time job in itself. It entails dealing directly with printers, distributors, retailers, and so on. But for some, self-publishing has proven to be a preferred option. The benefits are obvious: You'll have total creative control of the work, and you also keep all of the profits—assuming there are any to be made.
- ▶ Many self-publishing success stories started on the internet. It's likely that you already own the means of production for a web comic. Once you have a digital image in place, you just have to post it on a blog or social media.
- ▶ At that point, you'll be a self-publishing cartoonist. However, you will face large amounts of competition. You'll need to keep producing more content at a fast pace. As is the case with all comic strips and comic books, it's impossible to tell why some web comics become popular and why others don't. It's all a matter of talent, timing, and luck.
- ▶ Eventually, almost all long-running web comics end up with a physical book collection, usually sold on demand. The most popular ones usually wind up with collections being published by established publishing houses.
- ▶ There are other ways of gaining attention. One increasingly common method is tabling at comic conventions, of which there are many these days. Unlike starting a web comic, this does take some up-front money, in that you have to rent the table space and fill up your table with something to sell, which can take the form of book collections, shirts, and so on.

- The other benefit of tabling at conventions is the communal aspect. Even if you don't come away making a profit, you still get to spend time with other like-minded artists. They may wind up being lifelong friends and colleagues. Many potential clients will be there as well.



- You also can make money selling original art and doing sketches. Ideally, people will pay you to draw your own characters, though most attendees will request familiar licensed characters like Batman or Homer Simpson and the like. Some artists balk at such requests, but there are others who make a living doing just that.

ILLUSTRATION




- If you're fairly adept at drawing, there are many ways you can make a full-time living or supplement your income using your cartooning skills. Traditionally, illustration has been the main source of side income for cartoonists. For some, it can be so lucrative that it becomes their main or sole source of income. Unfortunately, the state of the ever-shrinking magazine market has put a huge dent in the illustration field, and websites have hardly made up the difference.

- Still, illustrators have a wide range of options, including product and package design. As with everything else, this is a tough line of work to break into, and it may take years before there will be any demand for your services. If illustration is something you want to pursue, you should also make yourself adept at graphic design and web design.

STORYBOARDING

- Storyboarding is another option for those with a knack for cartooning. A storyboard is an illustrated visual breakdown of a movie, cartoon, or TV show that serves as a guide, primarily for camera operators to refer to in planning their shots. However, anyone involved with a production can refer to a storyboard as well.

PROJECT STUDS KIRBY SHOW PROMO ACT 1 PAGE 4

	Scene: 2 Bg: 4	Scene: 2 Bg: 5	Scene: 2 Bg: 5
Action			
Dialogue	STUDS + MARTA IN HIS APT. WATCHING THE SAME PROMO ON HIS TV. MARTA'S LAUGHING.	TIGHTER. STUDS LEANS TOWARDS MARTA TO MAKE HIS POINT.	TIGHTER ON MARTA
Notes	ANNOUNCER (COWY): "TOMCAT AT 11" STUDS: "THEY USED THAT?" MARTA: "OH, SURE... IT'S FINE... AND THAT'S YOUR STON EVERY BEER, BEERS, GULS, DRIPS AND TATE MAKING ATE TOUT OF HIM SELF."	STUDS: "AND WE PROVIDE A MOBILE SERVICE." MARTA: "YEAH, 'CONSUMER REPORTS' IT'S NAMED CHIPS!"	STUDS: "A BUYER'S GUIDE TO NAMED CHIPS", WHEN WAS THE LAST TIME YOU SAW A STANDARD ? THE FINE MAN AT YOUR SISTERS BIRTHDAYETTE PARTY?" MARTA: "I GUESS. SO SHOW ME I'VE BEEN INTOING DEERISE AGU. DARE. DESIDE A LIPD. MACHAETRE. I WANT TO GET OUT."

- ▶ Animated cartoons are always turned into storyboards first once a script is completed. But any film or TV show that relies heavily on visuals is also storyboarded. Animation directors often do their own storyboards, and film directors who have a distinctive visual style also draw their own boards. However, most directors hire storyboard artists to do their boards for them. Most potential clients in this field are based in Los Angeles.

CHARACTER DESIGNS

- ▶ Another potentially lucrative line of work is character design—that is, creating the look of a character for someone else’s story. Character design work almost always occurs on work-for-hire basis.
- ▶ While some artists can adapt to a wide variety of drawing styles, you’re likely to be hired based on your own natural drawing style, which clients will likely ask you to emulate for their own project. This can be a touchy business, since if you do wind up developing a signature style, you might understandably want to keep it your own, rather than offering it for sale.
- ▶ But the sad fact is that, should you decline such offers, your would-be client can always hire someone to emulate your style. If someone asks you to rip yourself off for their project, this course’s advice is to at least first ask, “How much?”



DEVELOPING IDEAS FOR OTHER MEDIA

- The final way for a cartoonist to make extra money is through selling an idea or existing property for potential development in other media. Those other media would include film, television, video games, internet channels, and even live stage productions.
- Option deals are relevant in this area. A producer may approach you with an option deal, which is a time-limited agreement in which you grant the producer the right to pursue a development deal on your behalf. You also promise not to make a similar deal with someone else in the meantime. The time limit on such deals can range from months to years, and the option fee is equally negotiable.
- How much you can make all depends on how much clout you have at the time. If lots of people are asking you for option rights, you can get a bidding war going. If no one else is calling, you'll just have to accept what your sole suitor is offering. It's advisable to keep the time window on the short side, though.
- This would be a good time to hire an agent, lawyer, or both, assuming you can afford that expense. Otherwise, you can wait until a development deal is offered, at which point you should definitely hire one or the other.
- As far as lawyers go, you'll definitely need an entertainment lawyer, and preferably one based in Los Angeles. These are specialists and are definitely not cheap. A good agent can set you up with a good lawyer, though finding a good agent can also be tricky. If you know anyone in the industry who has one and is happy with that person, then ask him or her for the agent's contact information.

- ☛ As with lawyers, agents specialize. If it's a film or TV deal you're pursuing, you'll want someone based in Hollywood, where simply having firsthand access to industry gossip is a huge plus. Agents almost always work on a percentage basis, and thus don't get paid until you do.
- ☛ If all goes well, you will eventually reach the stage of a development deal. This usually entails a signing bonus for you and sets out how much you'll make and for what. Rights and any ensuing negotiations will come into play here. In the case of negotiations, your lawyer will play a huge role.
- ☛ There are certain negatives to dealing with such large-stakes industries like Hollywood. There are many people with competing agendas involved, and there will be meetings you'll never take part in but affect you nonetheless. Creative collaborators may be foisted on you that you may be unhappy with. The list goes on.
- ☛ On the plus side, the development money alone can be lucrative. Still, it may come as no surprise that many cartoonists opt to never venture down this road.



SUGGESTED READING

Hale, *Story Selling*.

Love and Withers, *The Complete Guide to Self-Publishing Comics*.

QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

- 1 Should a cartoonist always commit himself or herself to their comics first, or should one be fully open to other career options?
- 2 Is self-publishing always preferable for a newcomer?

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Bagge, Peter. *Buddy Does Seattle*. Fantagraphics, 2012.

———. *Woman Rebel*. Drawn and Quarterly, 2013.

Bechdel, Alison. *Fun Home*, Mariner Books, 2007.

Brown, Chester. *The Playboy*. Drawn and Quarterly, 2015.

Brunetti, Ivan. *Cartooning: Philosophy and Practice*. Yale University Press, 2011.

Bushmiller, Ernie, Paul Karasik, and Mark Newgarden. *How to Read “Nancy”*. Fantagraphics, 2017

Clowes, Daniel. *Ice Haven*. Pantheon, 2011.

Crumb, Robert. *The Complete Crumb Comics*. Vol. 15. Fantagraphics, 2001.

Hamm, Jack. *Cartooning the Head and Figure*. Tarcher Perigree, 1986.

Hernandez, Gilbert. *Heartbreak Soup*. Fantagraphics, 2015.

Hernandez, Jaime. *Maggie the Mechanic*. Fantagraphics, 2017.

Kaz. *Underworld: From Hoboken to Hollywood*. Fantagraphics, 2016

Kurtzman, *Corpse on the Imjin! and Other Stories*. Fantagraphics, 2014.

Lee, Stan, and John Buscema. *How to Draw Comics the Marvel Way*. Atria Books, 1984.

- Lee, Stan, and Steve Ditko. *Amazing Spider-Man Masterworks Vol. 1*. Marvel, 2003.
- Moore, Alan, and David Gibbons. *Watchmen*. DC, 2019.
- McCay, Winsor. *The Complete "Little Nemo"*. Taschen, 2019.
- McCloud, Scott. *Understanding Comics*. Marrow, 1994.
- Piskor, Ed. *Hip-Hop Family Tree*. Vol. 1. Fantagraphics, 2014.
- Sacco, Joe. *Palestine*. Fantagraphics, 2001.
- Satrapi, Marjane. *Persepolis*. Pantheon, 2004.
- Schulz, Charles. *The Complete "Peanuts"*. Vol. 7. Fantagraphics, 2007.
- Spiegelman, Art. *Maus I* and *Maus II*. Pantheon, 1993.
- Woodring, Jim. *The Frank Book*. Fantagraphics, 2011.

IMAGE CREDITS

All images courtesy of Peter Bagge.