



PROUDLY PRESENTED BY



Autobiographical Comics *with Mandy Ord*

Workshop Activities

Publication and feedback opportunities for students

Stella has a section of its website dedicated to publishing student work produced in response to workshops in the Write Up digital workshop series. Responses to any of the exercises may be submitted, and can be submitted in the form of text or photographs/images. Work to be considered for publication and editorial comment from the workshop presenter must be submitted by teachers to the Schools Manager: schools@thestellaprize.com.au

Doodling

Drawing as a way of thinking.

Doodling is fundamental to creating comics.

Through the simplest doodles and mark making, ideas can take shape.

Doodling supports the development of a natural, individualistic style and energetic line work.

Drawing and being physically engaged and present in a moment can be a catalyst for thought and also can be the place where story sparks ignite

Activity

On a sheet of paper doodle for **5-10 minutes** in any medium. This can include multiple and repetitive patterns and mark making, characters, abstract shapes, objects, symbols, faces, words and anything that arises spontaneously.

Questions

- How evident is personal style?
- What are reoccurring motifs?
- What are the most satisfying elements to draw?
- Do the minimal or busy aspects of the pages reflect a thinking state?
- How did it feel to draw with no particular outcome?



Writing with pictures

Clarity, communication and visual vocabulary.

Comics are about communicating what you want to say in a way that is understandable to someone else. Drawing is one part of creating comics. Some of the most well respected cartoonists don't consider themselves to be particularly skilled artists. Their strength is that they know how to communicate clearly. The main purpose of the image is to carry information about what is happening in the story. Drawing ability can always be improved with practice and it should never stop anyone from drawing comics.

Activity

On a sheet of paper spend **3-4 minutes** drawing a car from memory. Draw as many details as the time constraint allows. Then draw the same car again in **1 minute**. Then draw it once more in **30 seconds**.

Repeat again with other subjects: e.g a dog, a castle, a shoe.

Questions

- Which drawing is the most successful in communicating instantly?
- Which drawing is the most appealing visually?
- What is your preferred speed of drawing in which both clarity and style support each other to produce a dynamic and interesting drawing?

Visual representations of the self

Cartoonists often use a symbolic visual character to represent themselves as the participant and narrator of their stories. It is often a character that is easy to recognise because they have something distinct about them in terms of the way they appear and what they have to say. They are often drawn across story panels from multiple viewpoints. This visual protagonist can take many forms and does not necessarily need to be realistic. They can even take the form of an animal or inanimate object. Approaches to this are personal, varied and limitless. Character portraits develop organically over time so all choices are good starting points. The creator has an opportunity to develop a unique sense of self on the page that suits their aesthetic and symbolic preferences.

Activity

- Draw a realistic and detailed version of yourself either from memory or from a photo. Notice something distinct about your features. For example I have shoulder length dark hair. It can be something simple.
- Draw a very simple version of this image with minimal line work thinking about the features that come to mind. Draw this version quickly.
- Draw an animal that you feel connected to because of how it looks and it's particular behaviour. This will be your animal persona. It is a hybrid person/animal e.g you are a cat who speaks and wears clothes.
- Choose your favourite character and on a piece of paper draw 10 versions of them without stopping.

Questions

- Which version of yourself as a character do you prefer and why?
- What aspect of it tells us that it is distinctively you?
- Have you chosen a character that will be easy and enjoyable to draw repetitively?

Ideas for stories

There are many approaches to finding ideas for stories. Sometimes they just come to you seemingly out of nowhere like a flash and other times you need to go searching for them. Finding inspiration and ideas for stories can come from exploring themes, memories, experiences, observations, as well as historical and personal interests. The key is to use your natural storytelling voice. What is personal to one has the potential to also speak universally to others. Think about the sort of words you already like to speak and write. Write about what you know and what you personally find interesting and exciting. This energy will transfer to the reader as you invite them into your world.



Activity

Write a Postcard to a friend. 'Dear...'

- a. On a blank piece of paper or card about the same size as a large postcard write a short story to a friend. This will be a story about some sort of personal experience.

Theme suggestions : Travel, Animals, Current events, Games, Nature. You can make up your own theme. You may have a story that you only just told someone that is already fresh in your mind or a story that you are already good at telling.

- b. Use your natural handwriting and make sure it is clear and easy to read. Write in 8-12 (or less) short sharp sentences or whatever fits onto the postcard to tell the story.
- c. Write in the first person and introduce the person you are writing to into the world of the story, your place in it, what happens and how it ends.
- d. On the other side of the postcard draw an image that captures the core essence or moment of the story. This can include your drawn self, a location, other characters, objects, a scenario, dialogue and an emotional state. It can be busy or it can be simple.
- e. This postcard will be the starting point for turning a piece of text into a breakdown of a script for a comic.

Questions

- What is the spark of the story?
- Why do you want to tell it, and why is it meaningful to you?
- Do images come to mind as you are writing the story or do words come based on the images that appear when you recall the story?

Comics and words

Writing for comics involves a lot of personal preferences. Some cartoonists write detailed scripts that describe every aspect of what will appear in each panel down to the tiniest detail, while others will write a looser script leaving scope for a more intuitive and spontaneous approach to writing the story. One thing is for sure, structure helps.

A script serves to keep a cartoonist on track. It is like a map to the initial idea. It has a beginning middle and an end. Words are also used in comics as content and to add extra levels of meaning in the form of narration, speech and thought bubbles, titles, sound effects and diagrams. The words and image work together in a way that neither could do separately. The power lies in their mutual dependence to clearly express meaning.

Activity (I)

- a. Using your postcard, write each sentence as a separate line on an A4 piece of paper. These sentences will be the narration for your comic and should be written in the first person. (Allow space between each sentence and number them clearly from 1 to however many sentences you have)
- b. As you are writing your sentences make changes to sentence structures as you see fit and be aware of spelling and the repetitious use of words. Simple and clear is best. (Cartoonists often edit their words as they go at each step of the process rather than at the end like traditional prose)
- c. The space under each sentence is there to allow you to write and draw any impressions that come to mind that you feel would add levels of meaning to the story. These are also called thumbnails. Like doodling it is a space to work out and problem solve ideas. This can include any visual detail, character expression, dialogue etc. This is your script and is still a working stage so it's ok if it's messy.

Activity (II)

- a. In a speech bubble or thought bubble write words that your character might speak or think.
- b. Draw/write a sound effect that would suit an element of your story.
- c. Read through your script and create a working title. The title will relate to the story theme with the aim of hooking the attention of the reader. It will generally be short and may contain visual as well as the written elements.

Questions

- What words do you like to use?
- Do you like longer or shorter sentences to describe things?

Embodiment

We can give our characters a sense of life on the paper by letting the body show us rather than tell us what is being experienced. What character does and how they behave tells us a lot about their personalities, their hopes and their fears. Body language, gestures and facial expressions carry story content and instantly communicate. Multiple characters and bodies in the limited space of a panel depict dynamics that are essential for showing how characters are relating to each other in non-verbal ways. Body language in conflict with an opposing inner emotion is also a powerful way to show the complex and often contradictory nature of the character.

Activity

- a. Draw your character expressing emotions through facial expressions. e.g happy, sad, angry, tired, bored, neutral.
- b. Draw examples of body language for your character. e.g disappointed, elated, annoyed, scared.
- c. Draw a range of hand gestures e.g a fist, holding a pen, waving.

(You may need to use your own body as a reference or source for images)

Creating a sense of place

A character is connected to the world around them through their involvement and relationship with their physical space. Any place can influence the behaviour and life experience of a character and may be intrinsic to their transformation during the course of the story. Like props on a stage each element is carefully selected in the limited space of the panel to communicate something essential to the story. Creating a sense of place can add important elements to the central action of a panel. This is why a minimal approach and simplification is key unless a story scenario demands otherwise.

Activity

- a. Draw 6 objects that you can see from where you are sitting.
- b. Draw 6 elements from a place you are interested in but have not been. Research this place to find the inspiration for your choices.

Questions

- What are the key objects, backgrounds that will instantly give a sense of where the story world is set?

Panels

Panels are a composition of images and words that are framed in time to capture a key moment beneficial to the telling of the story. Panels arranged on a page make a grid and are read in a sequential order. Each panel contains a moment in time and moves the story forward. Time is contained within panels as well as between panels. Cartooning is about finding a rhythm and depicting how time and the story moves forward. The reader is expected to participate in the telling of the story by filling in the gaps (gutter) between panels with their own experience, story logic and search for meaning. Because the reader is expected to make connections between the panels, the cartoonist has no need to show every tiny aspect of a story. The cartoonist trusts that the reader will bring their experience and participation to the story.

Activity

Choose one line of narration from your script and draw three 10 x 10cm panels.

- Write the narration at the top of panel one. Draw the image inspired by the narration in the panel from the perspective of the main character. The character will not be physically visible in the panel.
- Write the narration at the top of panel two. Draw the image inspired by the narration with the main character taking centre stage, fully participating in the scene.
- Write the narration at the top of panel three. Draw the image inspired by the narration from the main characters point of view but also with the main character visually in the panel. We are seeing what the main character is seeing but also watching them participate in the scene.

Grammar

Comics have their own grammar for describing the invisible yet very real world within the story. Although the comic itself is static and doesn't move, the world within the story does. It is vibrant and alive and sometimes very loud. It is musical and tactile, and it smells. This is all implied with pictures, words, visual metaphor, patterns and marks making.

Cartoonists use a particular visual grammar and a special type of mark making called *emanata* to show movement, texture and emotion.

Activity

- Draw a character moving in a quick, erratic way through a space. Use lines to show the trajectory.
- Draw a character's emotional state using expressive mark making e.g sweat beads for surprise, a dark cloud for a mood.
- Draw lines that express that someone is either hot or cold. What line work would communicate this non-verbally?
- Draw three different textures e.g crosshatch, dots, close vertical or horizontal repetitive lines. What tactile surfaces in the world could they communicate?



Creating the work

So now it's time to put all of the pieces together and make a comic.

The key to making comics is to take what you already know but to also learn as you go. Mistakes and making decisions are the quickest ways to learn. Because we are working on paper, no problem, grab another piece and start again if you make a mistake. Making discoveries is the exciting part about drawing comics. Be in the moment and really enjoy living in the world of the story. Trusting in your intuition, your gut feeling. It's fun and a lot of work and it's worth it.

Activity

- a. Take your script with working notes, drawings and thumbnails and read through again making any adjustments to the narration and elements that you feel are necessary.
- b. Draw up a whole lot of 10 x 10 cm panels* that match the amount numbered in your script. Each numbered line of narration will match one panel. Number the panel at the bottom to match.
- c. With clear lettering write in pencil your matching narration at the top of each panel.
- d. Starting with panel 1 pencil in the visual and written elements of the panel under the narration. Continue to do this for each panel.
- e. When you feel happy with the arrangement of elements in each panel, ink over the top using a pen, nib or brush.** Take your time and enjoy the process. Work at your own speed. Be open to making spontaneous decisions.
- f. After the ink has dried rub out the pencil marks.
- g. Share with your teachers, fellow students, friends and family.

*The beauty of drawing on single cut out panels is that they can be stuck up in order to get a sense of flow/panel transition and they can be ordered to be read on multi-panelled pages or as separate units (this is good for online content).

**I use white out for corrections. Ink goes over the top quite well. Otherwise draw again from scratch.

Don't forget!

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Work published on our website will receive editorial comment from the workshop presenter and be accessible to all participating students. Feedback from presenters will be positive in nature, and students will be referred to by first name only. We look forward to reading your submissions.