Experiencing The Arts

Exploring art forms and artistic techniques

Comic Art

"The artist is a witness of his time, but he can also be an accuser, a critic, or he can celebrate in his work the uneasy greatness of his day."

— Frans Masereel, visual artist and graphic novelist

A Day in the Life *By Wallace Ryan*

IT'S THE EARLY 1800s AND THE DAY BEGINS OFF THE COAST OF NEWFOUNDLAND AND LABRADOR AS SEVERAL BOATS LEAVE THEIR HOME PORT FOR ANOTHER DAY OF FISHING.

IT WAS A DANGEROUS WAY OF LIFE FOR THOSE WHO MADE THEIR LIVING FROM THE SEA.

THESE FISHERS KNEW WHERE ALL THE BEST FISHING GROUNDS WERE LOCATED...

...FROM EXPERIENCE!

THEY COULD ALMOST SNIFF OUT THE FISH!

THE FISHERS WOULD SOMETIMES USE LANDMARKS TO HELP FIND A GOOD FISHING GROUND.

IF ONE AREA GAVE UP LITTLE FISH THAT DAY, THEY WOULD CONTINUE ON TO THE NEXT FISHING AREA.

ONCE THEIR BOATS WERE FULL, THE FISHERS WOULD HEAD HOME TO OFFLOAD THEIR CATCH.

Fig. 1

THE FISHERS WOULD HAVE A "MUG-UP" ON THE WHARF BY THE STORES,...

...AND HELP THEIR FAMILIES SPLIT AND GUT THE FISH,

...AND THEN IT WOULD START ALL OVER AGAIN.

THEY KEPT AN EAGLE EYE ON THE WEATHER,...

...AND IF THE WEATHER TURNED BAD, THEY'D HEAD BACK IN TO SHORE,

THERE WAS ALWAYS WORK TO DO ASHORE ...EVEN IF IT MEANT NO INCOME WAS EARNED.

THERE WERE NETS TO MEND AND DUTIES ENOUGH TO TIRE AN ENTIRE REGIMENT.

...AT LEAST INSOMNIA WASN'T ONE OF THEIR BIG PROBLEMS!

ZZZZ

THE END,

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Comic Art 101: A Very Brief History

Humans have been using visual art to tell stories even before writing was developed. Drawings found on the walls of caves date as far back as 30 000 years ago.

Fig. 2

Perhaps one of the earliest examples of telling a **story** with sequential art in Europe dates to the 1070s CE. The Norman conquest of England by William the Conqueror is chronicled in a 70-metre-long embroidered cloth. Shown here is a reproduction of the cloth made in Victorian England.

Fig. 3

BAYEUX TAPESTRY

Over the past several centuries visual art has been used in Europe to satirize* politics or criticize society.

For example, in the early 1700s, English artist **William Hogarth** created a series of six paintings called **Marriage à la Mode** which showed the disastrous results of an upper class marriage arranged for money and status.

MARRIAGE À LA MODE #6: THE LADY'S DEATH

Fig. 4

In the early 1800s, Japanese artist **Katsushika Hokusai** began using woodcuts to create playful images, which were often displayed in sequential order.

Hokusai called these pictures "**Manga**," which means "whimsical sketches." Many feel manga has influenced modern cartoons. In fact, in the 20th century, Japanese magazines started serializing manga stories.

MANGA

Fig. 5

Fig. 6

AT THE TURN OF THE 20TH CENTURY, NEWSPAPER PUBLISHER JOSEPH PULITZER USED COMIC ART TO INCREASE SUBSCRIPTIONS TO THE NEW YORK WORLD. ONE OF THE PAPER'S COMIC STRIPS WAS THE YELLOW KID.**

PULITZER WENT ON TO FOUND THE PRESTIGIOUS PULITZER PRIZE AWARD FOR JOURNALISM AND LITERATURE.

SO IT'S A QUIRKY TWIST OF FATE THAT A PULITZER PRIZE WAS AWARDED IN 1992 TO A GRAPHIC NOVEL, A FORM THAT JOSEPH PULITZER HAD INFLUENCED. THE BOOK MAUS,*** BY ART SPIEGELMAN, RECOUNTS THE STORY OF A SURVIVOR OF THE HOLOCAUST.

*Satire is the use of irony and sarcasm to ridicule human vice and folly.

**The main character of The Yellow Kid was a child from New York's ghetto. He wore a yellow nightshirt – thus his name.

Richard Outcault, the creator of the strip, used The Yellow Kid to ridicule class tensions and consumerism in the growing urban centre of New York.

***Throughout Maus, the author uses various animals to depict different nationalities. For instance, Jews are represented by mice; Germans are represented by cats; Poles are represented by pigs; and the Americans are represented by dogs.

THE YELLOW KID

THE YELLOW KID EXPERIMENTS WITH THE WONDERFUL HAIR TONIC.
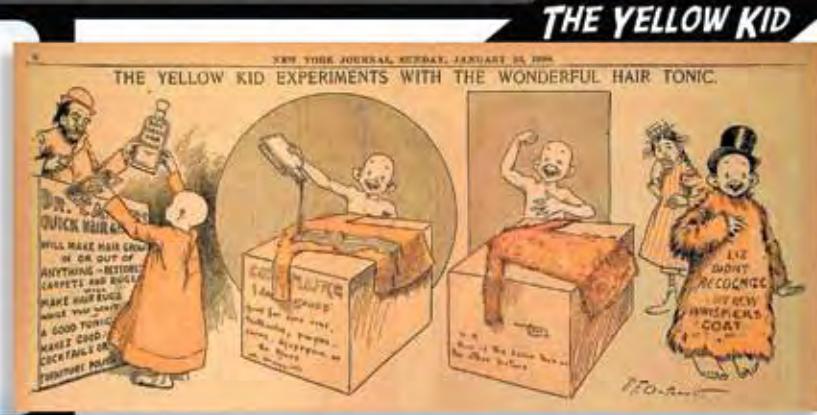
MAUS

Fig. 7

TODAY COMIC ART IS PART OF POPULAR CULTURE. POLITICAL CARTOONS AND COMIC STRIPS ARE FEATURED IN MOST NEWSPAPERS, AND GRAPHIC NOVELS ARE "FLYING OFF" THE SHELVES OF BOOKSTORES. IT SEEMS AS IF EVERYTHING OLD IS NEW AGAIN. BUT THERE'S NO ARGUING WITH THE SAYING:

"A PICTURE IS WORTH A THOUSAND WORDS."

Exercise One:

Comic art is found in many places. Find several examples of comic art and bring them to class. Examine the works to determine (i) what ideas are expressed and (ii) what visual devices the artist has used to tell his or her story.
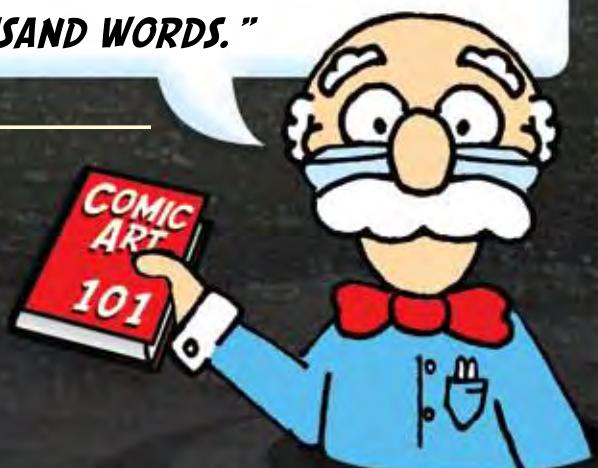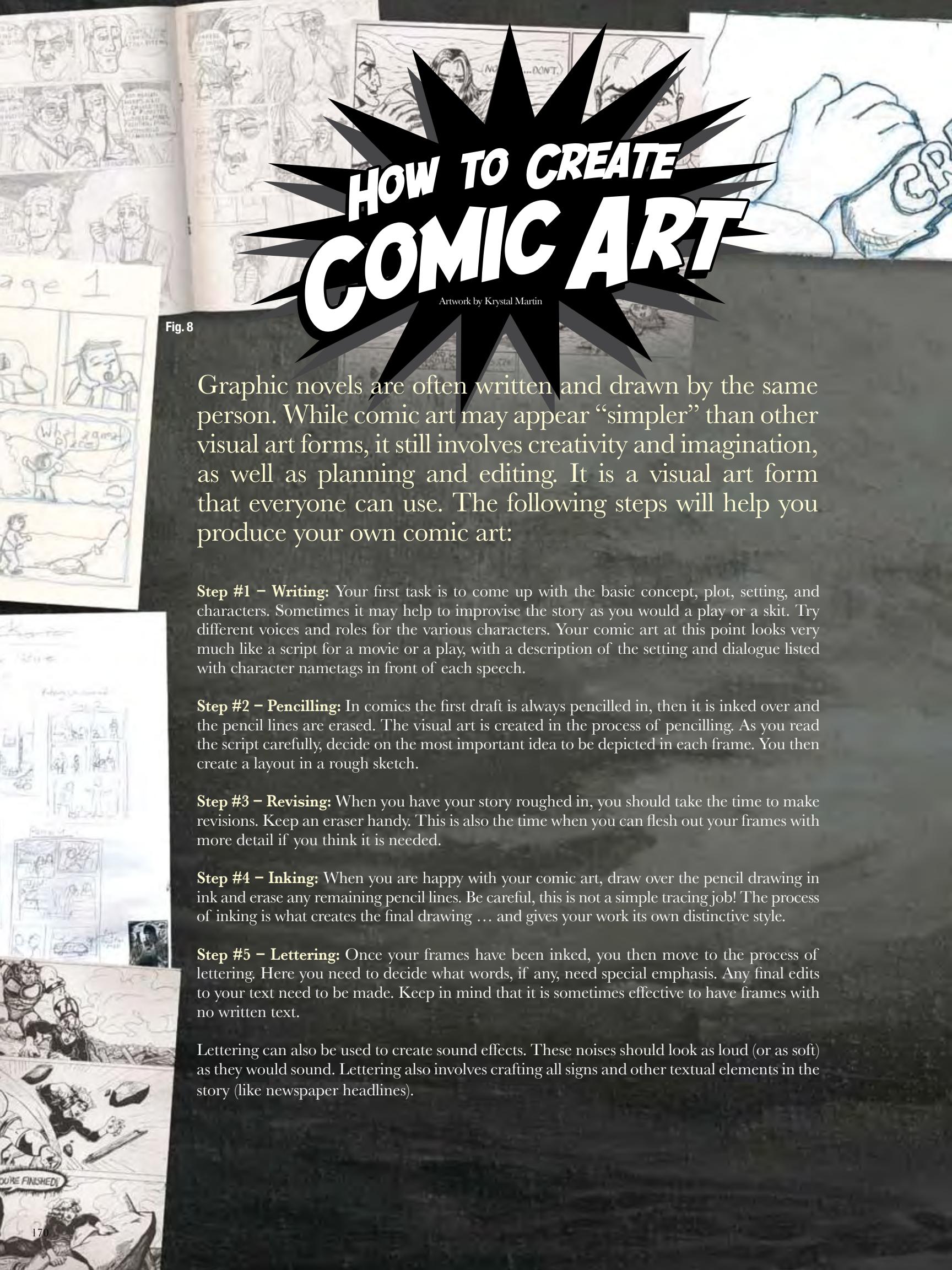
COMIC ART 101

Fig. 8

HOW TO CREATE COMIC ART

Artwork by Krystal Martin

Graphic novels are often written and drawn by the same person. While comic art may appear "simpler" than other visual art forms, it still involves creativity and imagination, as well as planning and editing. It is a visual art form that everyone can use. The following steps will help you produce your own comic art:

Step #1 – Writing: Your first task is to come up with the basic concept, plot, setting, and characters. Sometimes it may help to improvise the story as you would a play or a skit. Try different voices and roles for the various characters. Your comic art at this point looks very much like a script for a movie or a play, with a description of the setting and dialogue listed with character nametags in front of each speech.

Step #2 – Pencilling: In comics the first draft is always pencilled in, then it is inked over and the pencil lines are erased. The visual art is created in the process of pencilling. As you read the script carefully, decide on the most important idea to be depicted in each frame. You then create a layout in a rough sketch.

Step #3 – Revising: When you have your story roughed in, you should take the time to make revisions. Keep an eraser handy. This is also the time when you can flesh out your frames with more detail if you think it is needed.

Step #4 – Inking: When you are happy with your comic art, draw over the pencil drawing in ink and erase any remaining pencil lines. Be careful, this is not a simple tracing job! The process of inking is what creates the final drawing … and gives your work its own distinctive style.

Step #5 – Lettering: Once your frames have been inked, you then move to the process of lettering. Here you need to decide what words, if any, need special emphasis. Any final edits to your text need to be made. Keep in mind that it is sometimes effective to have frames with no written text.

Lettering can also be used to create sound effects. These noises should look as loud (or as soft) as they would sound. Lettering also involves crafting all signs and other textual elements in the story (like newspaper headlines).

SOME TIPS ON PLANNING YOUR COMIC ART

Suppose your teacher (or editor) tells you to convey a story in a certain number of pages. What will you show visually? What will the words explain? What can you leave to your audience's imagination without making the story disjointed or confusing?

Here are some tips to keep in mind as you craft your comic art:

1. Decide on the story you want to tell. For your first few attempts at comic art, you will want to keep the plot simple. Try to pick a storyline that doesn't involve lots of characters interacting at the same time. A page filled with too many speech balloons can be confusing for the reader.

2. Plan each page of your story by sketching **thumbnails** of the frames you want to create. Each frame should have one main action. Also, some action may be able to happen "off page." For example, instead of *showing* a character taking a test, you might be better able to *tell* readers that this has occurred with a simple caption like: Two hours later, the test was done …

3. As you plan your thumbnails, you also need to think about the best "angle" to use to show your action. Think of each frame as a camera shot. Some parts of the story may need a "close up," while others may work best if you "pull back" and show the whole scene.

4. Think about each page as a whole. The number of frames per page can vary. Using a wide range of frame shapes and angles within each frame can make your page more interesting.

5. Remember, people tend to read speech and thought balloons from left to right and top to bottom, so plan the positions of your characters accordingly. Long speech balloons can look awkward on a page, so keep your dialogue tight, but natural.

6. If you are going to set your story in the past, you will need to research so that you can portray the details of the setting and clothing accurately and modify the characters' dialogue to reflect the historic period.

Don't worry if, once you get started, you realize you need to deviate from your original plan. That is part of the process and the reason why artists do their planning in pencil instead of in ink!
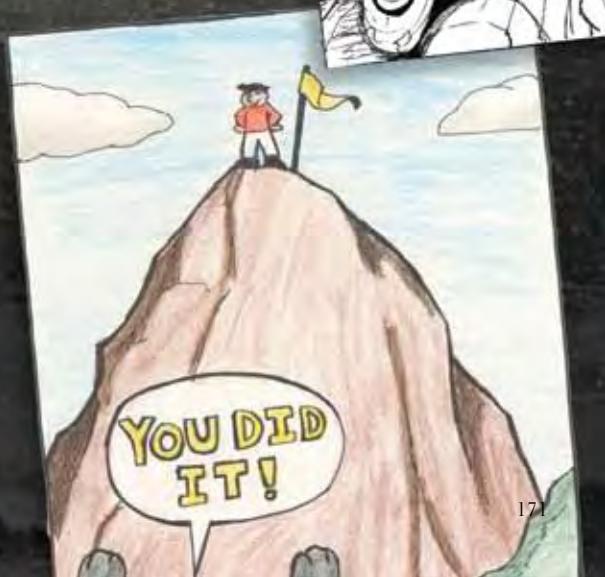
How to draw Comic Art

Ever wonder how comic characters are developed? Are they magically hidden inside the artist's pencil, or are they the product of practice? If you chose the latter you are right!

In this section we are going to examine one possible method for character development. You will develop a character, adding one feature at a time, by using simple lines and shapes. With a little practice you will find creating comic art a fun and relaxing exercise. Who knows … one day you may see your "toon" in the Sunday funnies!
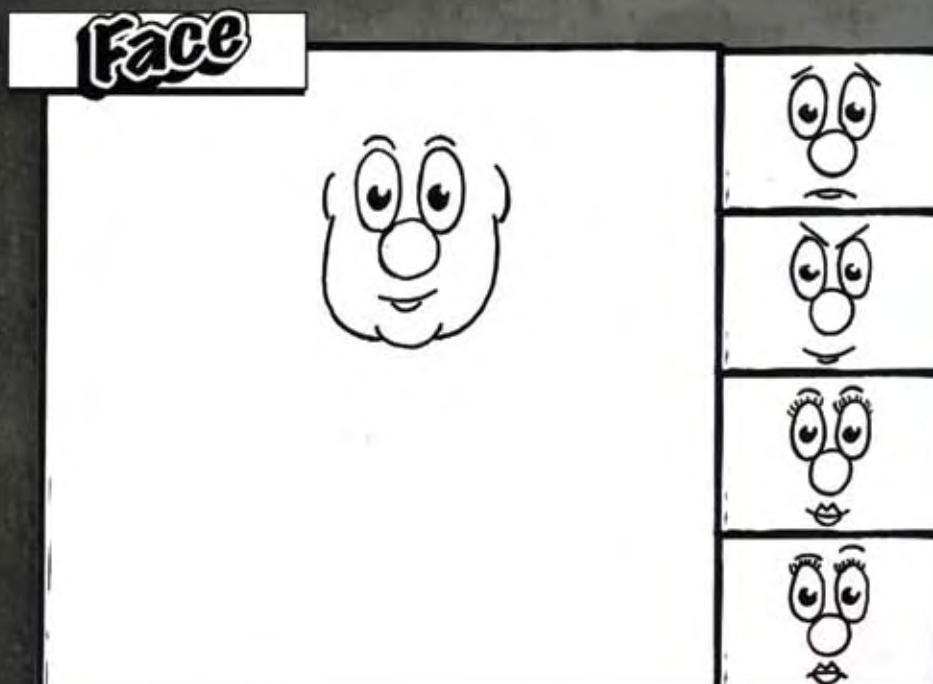
Face

Fig. 9

Your first step is to draw the subject's face. Try to reproduce one of the faces illustrated above. As you can see, in comic art the method for drawing male or female characters is very similar. Add some eyelashes and fuller lips and voilà! When you draw the face, make sure that you place it high enough on the page so that you have enough room to add the body and other embellishments.
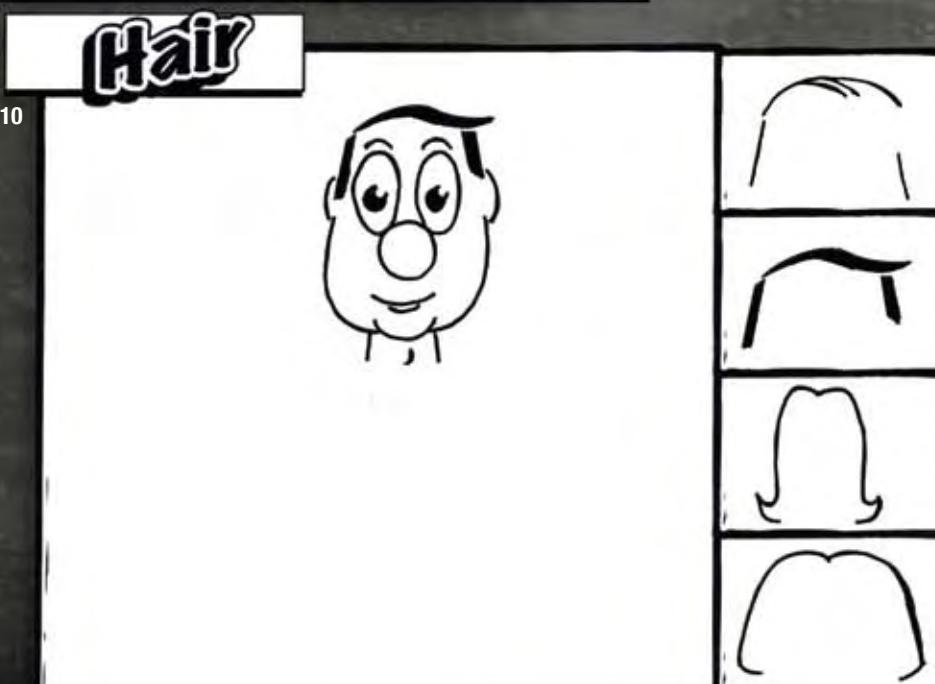
Hair

Fig. 10

Now it's time to add another layer of detail to your character. Choose from the examples above to add some hair. Then, draw some basic lines to define the face and neck. Pencil in an Adam's apple if your character is male.

Exercise Two:

Now it's your turn to experiment. Make at least two different male and female faces.

Body

Fig. 11
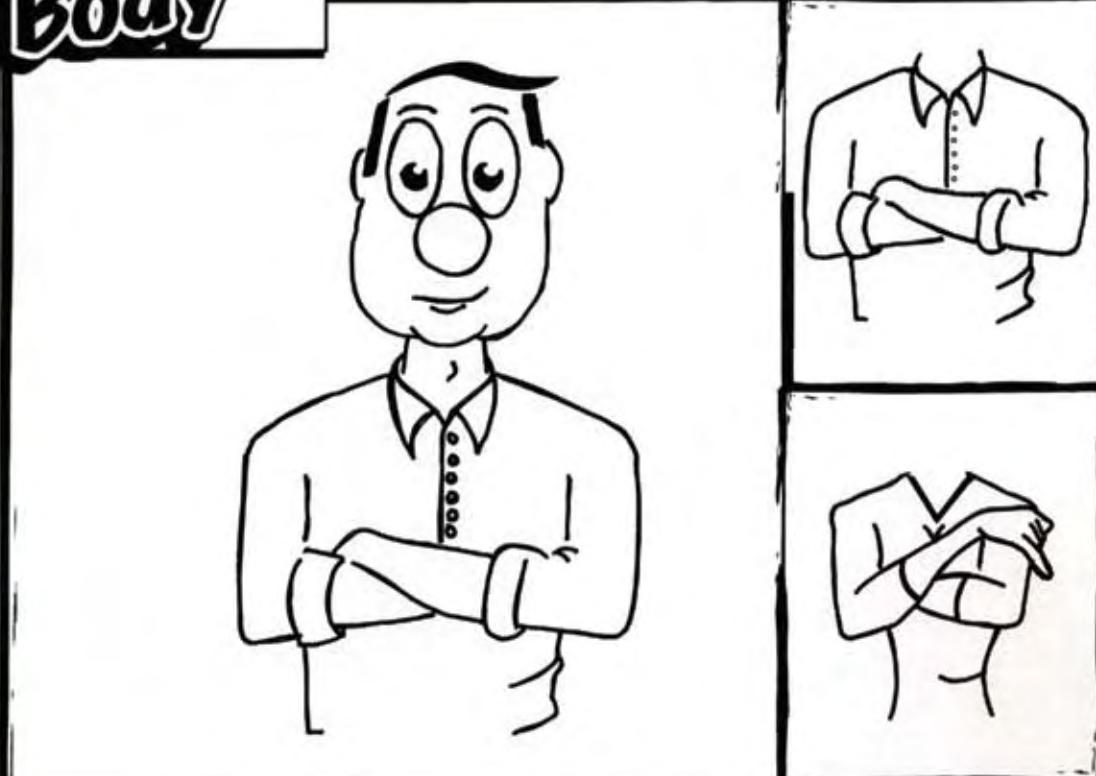
Choose a body type, male or female, from the samples above. To start, sketch the body using light pencil strokes. Once you are happy with your character's shape, simply trace over your lines to make them darker.

Accessories

Fig. 12
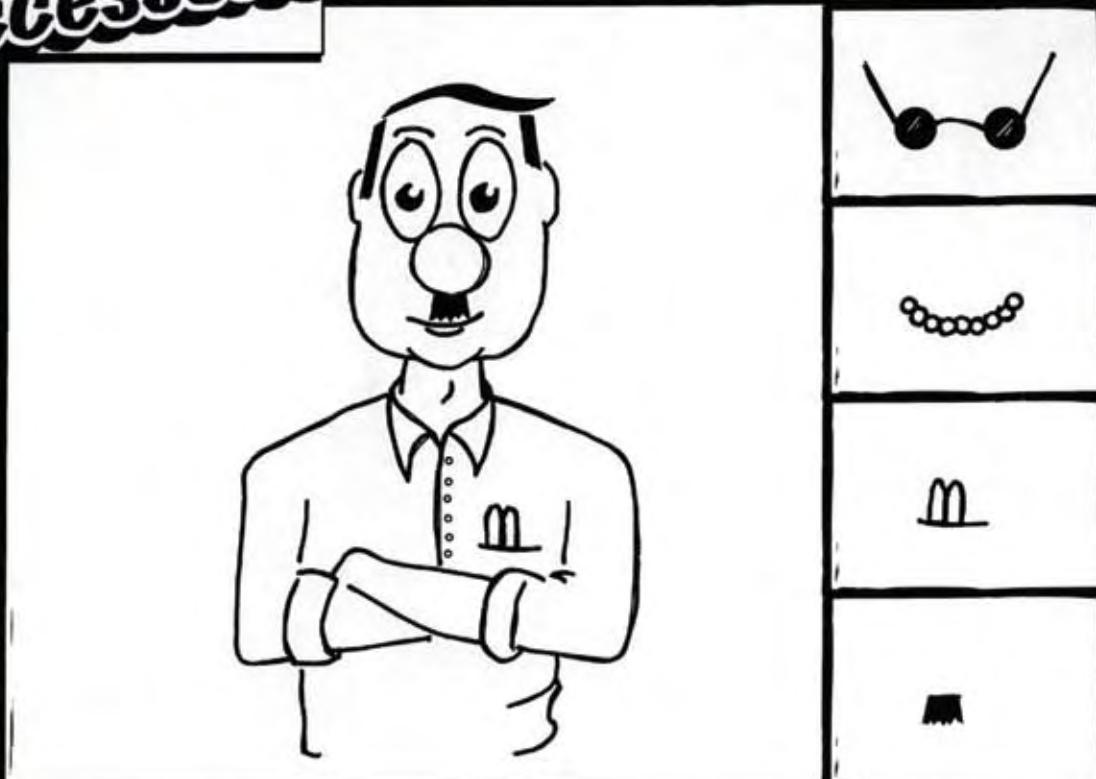
Sometimes the little things make all the difference. Try adding some of the accessories above to your character.

Exercise Three:
Using two of the faces that you created in exercise two, add bodies and accessories of your own creation. Be sure that one is male and the other female.

Setting

Fig. 13
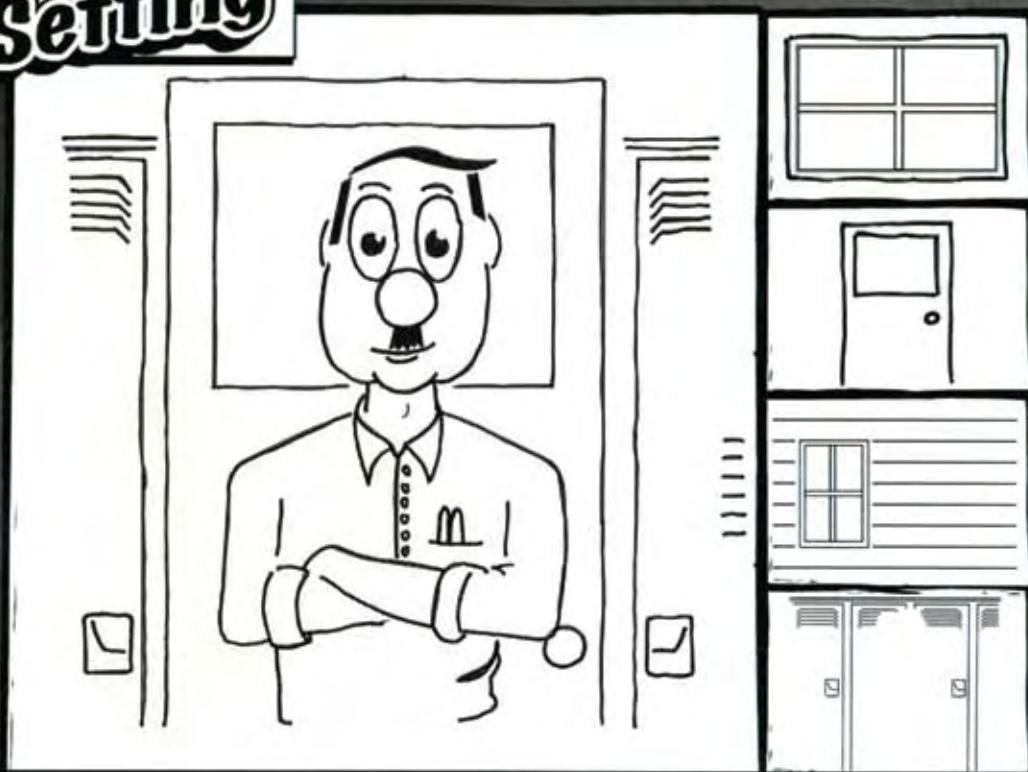
Next, think about where you want to place your character – the setting. Where is your character? Inside or outside? What time of day is it? Keep in mind that the setting may affect your character's mood … so be sure that the facial expression shows this. From the examples shown, practise reproducing one inside and one outside setting.

Fig. 14

Exercise Four:

Using two characters you created in exercise three, place one in an inside setting of your own creation and the other in an outside setting.

Shading

Fig. 15

Finally it's time to add a sense of depth to your art piece. One way to do this is through the use of light and shadows. Shadows can be shown using a variety of techniques, such as stippling, hatching, and cross-hatching. Try reproducing each of the examples shown here.

Stipple

Stipple: a series of dots that gives the appearance of shading; a shadow can be made to appear darker by increasing the density of the dots.

Hatch

Fig. 16

Cross-Hatch

Fig. 17

Hatch: a series of short parallel lines that gives the appearance of shading. A shadow can be made to appear darker by increasing the density of the lines.

Cross-hatch: combines two sets of hatches that overlap in opposite directions.

Exercise Five:

Choose one of the characters that you created in exercise three. Add a sense of depth by applying one of the shading techniques discussed here.

Fig. 18

Comic Art

By Jennifer Morgan

What's the matter with you?

The assignment for this chapter is to create a piece of comic art and I have no idea what to do!

Why not? You love comic art.

I do?

Sure. You always read the Saturday comic strips.

That's true... I do love The Far Side.

And what about those comic books your brother is always reading?

Yeah, they are comic art, aren't they?

You bet, comic art can be as short as a single-frame cartoon....

...or a few frames like a comic strip...

Fig. 19

Warsaw 1940

Berlin 1961

West Bank 2002

Wallace Ryans, the TELEGRAM

...or as long as a comic book or graphic novel.

(And in some cases comic art can be animated, but we'll leave filmmaking for chapter 6.)

So maybe this won't be so hard after all...

Right! It's all about telling a story in a picture or a series of pictures.

It's called a sequential NAR-RA-TIVE!

I don't even need to use words, right, Cassie?

Err? Cassie?

Oh, and another thing! Comic art does NOT need to be funny!

The important thing to remember is that comic art is a creative medium...

...that allows you to try out virtually any idea you have!

Fig. 20 *Cape Spear* **by Jennifer Barrett, acrylic and permanent marker on canvas**
Contemporary artists are often just as influenced by comics as they are by the recognized masters of European art. Jennifer Barrett is a Newfoundland and Labrador artist whose work bridges the gap between "pop art"(available through mass media) and "high art" (available in publicly funded galleries).

"To make a piece of art that is all your own in terms of thought, passion, and execution is a momentous 'high' whether you're five or 55 … And that magic moment never goes away."

— Anne Meredith Barry, artist