

### 3-Panel Assignment

Your first comic assignment is to create a very short comic that nevertheless communicates a full idea or mini-story. Although the title of this assignment calls for three panels, you can use up to five if you so choose. Your final comic must include pictures and words, although not every panel has to contain both. Finally, your comic must be accompanied by a one-page (typed, double-spaced) Creator's Statement that should explain the choices you made using the vocabulary of comics you have acquired so far.

**Step 1: Think of a little story to tell or an idea to communicate.** Here are some ideas:

- spoof or parody of a superhero comic
- a four-panel representation of the high school experience
- "a day in the life" of a teenager/superhero/teacher/rock star/vampire/etc.
- an interpretation of a current event or news story
- illustration of a "eureka!" moment

A couple things to keep in mind: humor is not always easy to achieve, and sometimes the most powerful comics simply come from your own experiences or from those mundane moments in everyday life. Please feel free to write a funny comic or a comic that includes the melodrama of high action, but don't underestimate the power of a simple comic that illustrates the beauty or tragedy of daily human experience.

**Step 2: Make your comic, and be creative!** For example,

- Your panels can be any shape or size (and they don't all have to be the same)
- Consider how you combine words and pictures--mix it up and try to avoid simply "narrating" in text boxes. More words are not better--remember that Will Eisner calls word balloons "desperation devices."
- Use color creatively--although you may want to work in black and white, color is a great way to emphasize elements or ideas. Even the use of a single color can dramatically change the impact of a comic.
- Remember that your format and materials are also a creative choice: 3-5 panels can be compiled into a little book (staples!), you can paste your comic onto a small piece of poster board, you can use text for a background (newspaper, magazine); the possibilities are endless!

**Step 3: Write up your Creator's Statement:** Using the vocabulary of comics (see Chapters 2, 3, and 4 of *Understanding Comics*) explain why you made the choices you did in terms of your topic, images, panel size + number, and materials).

### **But I can't draw!**

For those of you who do not consider yourself "artists" or "illustrators," you may want to revisit your assumptions (comics do not have to contain humans!) But, here are some ideas of ways you can create a comic without possessing advanced drawing skills:

- Create a collage using cut-out images from magazines/newspapers. You can also use magazines and newspapers as the background for your comic and then draw your own "characters" (simply faces or bodies) to paste on top (the masking effect!)
- Purchase (or download for a free 30-day trial!) Comic Life, which is a very cool piece of software that allows you to design and create your own comics using digital photos and images. If nothing else, download it for free and try it out. It can be addictive. It's very easy--anyone can do this.
- Even if you don't use Comic Life, you can still print out digital photos and use those as your images. This could be especially effective if you stage your own photos. Word balloons can be cut and pasted onto the digital photos (the old fashioned way or with Photoshop if you are really tech savvy)
- Remember that you can create a very interesting and thoughtful comic out of stick figures or very, very simple drawings.
- Don't forget the power of technology: you can always draw a simple background, setting, or character once, scan it or copy it, and then use it in multiple panels.
- Finally, you are not being graded on how well you draw but instead I am looking for a willingness to be creative and an attempt to use as many of the "tools" of comics (panel size/shape, closure, iconic representation) as possible.
- Make the most of the elements you can control, such as your use of color, simple icons (everyone can draw a peace sign or a flag!), layout, and your design materials. Many comics can work on a symbolic level and don't need realism to be effective.