

Closure Exercise

After the students had read Scott McCloud's *Understanding Comics*, I set aside about an hour for this activity (with fewer students, it would be closer to forty minutes). I give them the handout and ask them to talk with a classmate for five or six minutes about how one could draw a second panel in this sequence that behaved like each of McCloud's closure types (from his third chapter, "Blood in the Gutter": p. 70-72). Then the students have ten or twenty minutes to draw two or three of the possibilities they have discussed.

Once they've done this, I hand out blank sheets of overhead transparency film and markers. I ask them to trace their best one or two second panels, so we can project them and discuss them as a group. (I've already got an overhead of the "blank" sequence, with the first and third panels as they appear on the handout.) We spend the remainder of the time discussing these contributed examples, and fitting them into the taxonomy. Wherever possible, I try to get the students to describe the "story" they see, and what the second panel is doing to the reading experience.

The exercise is meant to give them a sense of the value of McCloud's six-part taxonomy of closure types, while it also starts to raise questions about the fixity of those types. (Some panels might read like "aspect to aspect" or "subject to subject" when they were intended as "non sequitur," for example: one student had drawn a dog sitting on a porch, and we were easily able to imagine that our cowboy had thought it was rabid, and needed to be "put down," but then realized that it was no threat... The dog was supposed to be a "non sequitur," but we read it as a sequence: "subject to subject.") A good way to close the exercise is to ask why a cartoonist would want to use one type of transition over another for telling certain sorts of stories (or sequences).