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Expressive Lettering and Balloons

Understanding Comics Chapter 5 is useful for this lesson, especially page 134.

Discuss: How do you make lettering engaging to read? To read easily? To "read" with the sound of a voice?

The right lettering will allow the reader to feel comfortable reading. The best lettering blends in naturally with the art around it. The best lettering, from a purely technical standpoint, is spelled correctly, laid out legibly, and flows smoothly.

Write "LETTERING" and "BALLOONS" on board:
(Use "What?" or other versatile words to demonstrate effects):

LETTERING DEMO :

- Standard lettering:

upper case, lower case, variations on comic book fonts

- Special standard lettering

scripty, serif vs. sans-serif (Todd Klein apparently created about 50 standard lettering styles in *Sandman*),

- Display lettering

Lettering used for titles and not part of dialogue balloons. Show DISPLAY LETTERING examples (Charles Burns).

BALLOONS:

Can express: Speech, thought, radio, whispering, loud, etc.

CLASS EXERCISE

Hand out template of a four panel grid with two very plain heads facing each other, above heads plenty of room for text balloons

Each student gets 3 pages of this handout (12 identical panels).

Students will write the following dialogue in each of the panels:

A: What did you say

B: Nothing

Adding various punctuation, using different lettering styles and balloon shapes; as in a drama class, playing these lines with as many interpretations as possible (angry, coy, sing-song, loud, quiet, etc.) Encourage experimentation and abandon.

Annoyed students will look at you blankly. So:

Write on board (don't draw examples of all of these, the student needs to generate ideas):

Different kinds of lettering:

All caps.

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- Upper and lower case.
- Child-like lettering.
- Script.
- Serifs.
- Outlined letters.
- Emphasis on different words.
- Punctuation marks; combinations of punctuation marks.

Emotive lettering:

- Angry.
- Sweet-talking.
- Quiet.
- Shouting.
- Drunk/crazy.

Different balloon shapes:

Square, irregular, icy, tight around the words, lots of white space, enclosed in the panel or extending to or outside panel border, talking up most of the panel, no balloon outline, no tail, different-shaped tails.

After students have worked on those for a while:

Hand out template with following script instructions:

"What did you say" and "Nothing" is now panel 2 of a 4-panel story.

Use display lettering for the title.

Use expressive lettering and expressive balloon shapes to convey voice, tone, and emotion.

Pencil the whole thing for 1/2 hour.

Take a little break, and come back and read it as if for the first time. Does it read how you want it to? Make changes where necessary.

Ink it.

Post these. Look and discuss.

What works? What is visually interesting but doesn't express a specific tone? Cliché imagery (e.g. hearts, musical notes) vs. innovative imagery (e.g. weird balloon shapes, difficult- but interesting-to-read lettering) -- what are their strengths and limitations?