Iconographic Language in Comics

Homework to prepare for class:
read *Understanding Comics* Chapter 2

Discuss *Understanding Comics* Chapter 2:
- What does it mean when a celebrity, say, Marilyn Monroe, is called an "icon?" What is an ICON? Is any drawing an icon?

Does a simplified reality(vs. physical reality) better focus our attention on an idea. Does something universal (general) communicate more effectively (i.e.: a road sign)?
- bottom teir p.36, McCloud's question: "Would you have listened to me if I looked like THIS?" Yes or no? Do you see yourself in a simplified image? Or how does this universality work?

- What are the different ways icons communicate their messages (p.27)? Write on board examples of icons:

> symbols that represent concepts and ideas: Star of David, company logo;
> language, science and communication: numbers, musical notes, graphic representations: portrait, chair

ABSTRACT ICONS have meanings that are absolute and fixed: the   number "2", peace symbol
PICTURES have meanings that are fluid and variable: Apple = an apple, a teacher, New York, computers, health

Class Activity
Pictionary.
Divide into groups of three or four. Each group has a stack of paper, a 1-minute timer, and a small stack of Pictionary cards. Team members take turns drawing while the other team members guess the word/phrase. No letters, no numbers. Write the word/phrase on the bottom of paper AFTER the team guesses correctly; write the word/phrase and a little "x" if it wasn't guessed correctly. Play for about 20 minutes. Whichever team has the most correct word/phrases, WINS! Hooray, congratulations to them.

Each team chooses four drawings: two that the team guessed, and two they didn't. Post on wall. Discuss what happened? What makes some easier to read than others? It's easy for artists to get stuck drawing literal or detailed illustrations, when sometimes simple visual solutions COMMUNICATE more effectively.

Visual Language in Comics
Very basic intro to iconographic cartoon language, on board. Brainstorm.
comic's formal structure: panels, word balloon, thought bubble, narration box
Emotions: crying, surprised, drunk, angry, in pain, embarrassed

Actions: speed, waving, fluttering butterfly, path of motion (baseball bat)
Using clichés: sometimes they are useful, sometimes they are too pre-digested. What communicates best what you are trying to say?

Pass out Xeroxed comics: page with no words from Bill Watterson's Calvin & Hobbes; page with no words from Ron Rege's *Skibber-Bee-Bye*. Watterson uses more conventional cartoon language, but creatively; Rege creates his own set of visual language for motion, dreaming, etc. Discuss, compare, contrast.

Draw a six- to nine-panel story incorporating these elements:
Three-member family
Water
Funny
Fence or wall
Hidden

Use a basic story arc structure: problem, development, resolution.
Draw a pretty good rough. Label things if they're not clear FOR SHORTHAND ONLY.

This is what we're looking for:
Does it clearly show the five elements?
Are they incorporated organically into the story?
Does the story make sense on its own?

Post sketches. Crit. Note changes.

Homework: Redraw a tight penciled version