

NACAE

National Association of Comics Art Educators

Cartoon Characters Doodled from Memory

Draw quick doodles (5-10 seconds) of cartoon characters from memory. Students call out characters as instructor also draws them on board. Try to do at least 20 characters, more if possible.

It's interesting how students get them, technically speaking, wrong---but also kind of right at the same time. One can always tell who the character is supposed to be, even though it's a quick doodle and is not strictly "on model." There seems to be some core to these characters that can be represented with just a few lines, or key elements.

One would need a reference to draw these characters exactly on model, and in that case, any little mistake or deviation would stand out. This is instructive, as it shows that even having a reference to make sure everything is drawn "correctly" doesn't always help one's cartooning. In fact, if one begins to draw a comics page with a great amount of detail, one has to keep that level of detail generally consistent. Any "imperfections" pop out a lot more and are distracting to the reading process.

One character that almost always gets called out is Charlie Brown (and the instructor should do so, if the students forget). An interesting thing to note is that one could draw a circle and a couple of dots, a little squiggle for a nose and another for hair, and one intuitively sees Charlie Brown on the page. If one looks at drawings Charlie Brown (meaning by Charles Schulz) in 1950 versus 1965 versus 1980 versus 1995, his head looks very different through the decades. Yet one always recognizes the character as Charlie Brown. An interesting thing to consider is: at what point would it not be Charlie Brown anymore? Can one stretch the character to a point where it's no longer recognizable as that character anymore, and more importantly, where exactly is that point?

When drawing characters quickly, from memory, one can be quite inaccurate, almost as if one is inventing new characters, and these "mistakes" can serve as the basis for new character designs. This lets the students see their own styles more clearly. A page full of these doodles can help the student discern certain qualities that are consistent within their set of drawings. These qualities are a clue as to what makes one's particular "visual handwriting" different or unique, and these should be embraced by the student.

-Contributed by Ivan Brunetti