

NACAE

National Association of Comics Art Educators

It's Easy as Changing the Film

Teacher's note: This project is just as relevant to comics as it is to storyboarding. Essentially the student is asked to chose an existing narrative which has been filmed in a "limited way", analyze it, and use his or her knowledge of framing and key moments to produce a new more dramatic version, or a version where a particular aspect is emphasized. I suggest that the students work within a uniform panel size (there's enough to worry about as it is!), but more advanced students could think about the panel structure and a varying panel size.

This exercise further explores the effect that camera positioning and framing has on storytelling.

Choose a brief section of a sporting event (preferably live) or "reality-based" TV show that you like. The sporting event could be basketball, hockey, football (but not the fancy post-game-produced "filmed" version), soccer, wrestling, whatever you like. The reality-based TV show could be "Cops," "The World's Wildest Police Chases," "When Good Pets Go Bad," etc. Your job will be to change the camera work so the sporting event or TV show is shot like a "feature film."

You can put the camera wherever you wish. You can put it on the field, in the action. You could include close-ups, extreme close-ups, detail shots, even POVs, or "ball-cams." Try to explore how much more drama you can get into the scene with more ambitious camera work and planning. For example, a brief scene from "Cops," originally shot with one constantly running camera, could be broken down into a series of action-packed shots, with very dramatic effect.

Tape the selection (which should probably be no longer than a minute in duration). Analyze the action and the existing camera work. Think about what the director is trying to achieve with her choice of existing shots (maybe she has little choice), the framing, the position of the camera, and the transitions between shots. The storyboard that you produce will portray exactly the same "action," but shot in a different way.

Notice how you will need to take into account the direction of play in a sporting event, or the direction of travel in a chase. Think about the dangers of moving the camera too much in terms of how we understand the action.

As you know, changing the way a scene is shot and edited can have a significant effect on the telling of the story. Your goal is to have an effect on the story itself. For example, in a simple chase scene, you might change the character we are identifying with, simply by changing where we "see" the action from. You might alternatively choose to make a gentle scene exciting, or perhaps emphasize one particular character's relationship to the action, by altering the camera work. You may choose to "privilege" the viewers to certain information or deny them it. Most importantly, you need to have an OVERVIEW of what you are trying to achieve. A single, simple idea will be much easier to execute. You are the director...DIRECT!

Specifics:

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- * Index cards. Medium: Pencil.
- * Choose a brief scene from a live sporting event or "reality-based" TV show.
- * With thumbnails and notes, work out exactly how many "moments" you will need to choose.
- * Take these moments and produce a simple storyboard in your sketchbook.
- * Working from this initial storyboard, move the camera position so that the story is changed.
- * **YOU MUST NOT CHANGE THE ACTION AT ALL... JUST THE CAMERA-WORK.**
- * You need not do a shot-for-shot translation. You can subdivide the existing shot(s) as much as you wish. The original may only technically be one shot anyway.
- * Arrange the panels symmetrically on the page.
- * The number of panels should be more than 15 and less than 27.
- * No dialogue or sound effects should be included.
- * A successful solution will change the feel and emphasis of the story by changing the camera work.
- * You should be able to explain your intent in a single sentence...be prepared to do so.

-- Contributed by Patrick Welch