



The wrong planet

When you go from a single panel to a sequence of panels, the choices you have to make increase exponentially. This activity will get you thinking about how to approach those choices. Plus, it's fun!

Materials

- several pads of 3" x 3" Post-it adhesive notes in white or another light color
- drawing implements of your choice

Instructions

Divide up into groups of five people. Read the story below, and assign one line of the story to each person in the group.

Story

1. An astronaut launches his rocket ...
2. lands on the moon ...
3. and plants a flag.
4. He returns home to much fanfare ...
5. but then realizes he has gone to the wrong planet.

Step 1

Each person draws his or her line of the story in four or five panels, one panel per Post-it note, without consulting with other group members or looking at their panels. Work on your panels for about 20 minutes.

If you have fewer than five people in a given group, combine parts of the story so that you have the appropriate number of sections (i.e., in a group of three, person one will draw parts 1 and 2, person two will draw 3 and 4, and person three will draw 5).

Step 2

Each group sticks their notes on the wall in order, re-creating the full story. Take a look at your own group's story, as well as the stories the other groups have generated. (Ignore differences in spaceship design or the astronaut's outfit from section to section. Use your imagination.) Go back to your story, and, in consultation with the other group members, create five or six new panels to insert into your story in order to stretch the action or smooth it out and create bridges between sections.

Think about pacing here—is there a really fast bit at the beginning of the story or a slow point somewhere in the middle? How can you control how the reader experiences the story by lengthening sequences? Take about 15 minutes for this part.

Step 3

Take a look at the extended comic. As a group, think about how you might change the sense of time passing by adding, subtracting, or rearranging panels. It might feel a little bloated in spots now. Discuss this with your group and decide how to trim those down to size. Does the astronaut need a long, contemplative space walk to set the scene? How does he figure out that he's on the wrong planet, and is it a positive or negative realization? Are there funny bits in the story? How can you make them funnier? Assign members of your group to draw at least four new panels and as a group remove at least two at this stage. Take 10 to 15 minutes.

Step 4

How many panels can you remove and still tell the whole story? How much will readers be able to understand by implication? What is the story you want to tell? Read the story again as a group and figure out just how much you can remove. Take those panels out, then assess it again. Can you take more out? How low can you go? At this point, the story may have changed quite a bit from its original version. If, for example, you have some funny business, how many panels can you subtract and have the joke still work? If the joke isn't part of the basic storyline, can you stand to cut it? The standing record for this step is three panels, by the way ...

Ronin

You can do "The wrong planet" by yourself. You simply need to run through the same set of steps looking at your own panels. There are also some sets of panels on the website, www.dw-wp.com, that you can download and use along with your own. ■