Drawing One Page Comics with Allan Dotson

Overview

Allan Dotson is a comics artist and fantasy illustrator. In this program students will be led through drawing a one-page comic. Students will learn how to pencil and ink a close-up, long shot, and action shot. Follow along with Allan's teachings and get ready to draw a one page comic of your own using the tips and templates provided in the guide.

Artist Bio

Allan Dotson is a comic artist, illustrator, game designer, and educator. He loves monsters, robots, action heroes, and using drawing to tell stories. Allan's comics have been published by Regina's Valuable Comics collective, the Saskatchewan Council for International Cooperation (*Millennium Development Goal series*), and Regina Public Library (*Four Tall Tales: A Graphic History of the Regina Public Library*). His online *Monster a Day* project features over a thousand drawings, and his artwork is on permanent display in the Saskatchewan Legislative Building and Regina downtown. Allan's first graphic novel, *Critters*: *Underdark* is a humorous fantasy adventure story about a group of child monsters struggling to survive and learning about friendship.

Allan has taught comics creation, creative writing, and game design at the Neil Balkwill Civic Arts Center, and in Regina schools through the CREATE program. When Allan isn't drawing, reading, or teaching comics, he enjoys climbing trees, and playing Dungeons & Dragons.

Broadcast Program (45 min)

Timeline of Broadcast
0:00-4:00: Artist Intro/ Bio

4:00-7:00 On-air Activity
- Draw a simple shape (snowman, sailboat, house) as quickly and lightly as possible.
- Add a few details.
- Darken up your "keeper lines"
- Erase your sketch lines

7:00-15:00 Artist Performance
- Sketching characters

15:00-20:00 On-air Activity
- Sketch characters. (heads, bodies, legs, arms)

20:00-28:00 Artist Performance
- Detailing characters

28:00-35:00 On-Air Activity
- Add character detail (face, hair, costume, hands)
- Erase your sketch lines

35:00-44:30 Demonstration
- Add background detail (Inside? Outside nature or street scene?)
- Make objects 3D (show 2-3 sides, overlaps, shadows, textures)

44:30-45:00 Wrap up
- Artist Conclusion: Q & A (5min)
- Thank-you. Great job.
- Coming up next you will have a special session drawing a character with your teacher! Make sure you take all the great skills you learned here into the classroom with you.

Broadcast Preparation
Students can work from their desks. Teacher will need a chalkboard or white board with a lot of demonstration space.

Materials:
- Print off paper templates provided in this guide or draw the boxes.
- 8.5"x11" printer paper (at least 2 sheets per student)
- Pencils (2H for clear light lines that are easy to erase)
- Erasers (big, soft, white erasers if possible)
- Sharpeners (not necessarily one per student, but students should have easy access to sharpeners)
- Optional: fine-tipped black pens (not Sharpies), pencil crayons

Curriculum Aims & Goals

Creative/Productive:
Students will learn illustrative techniques to place a figure in space

Critical/Responsive:
Allan Dotson will demonstrate techniques for students to emulate.

Cultural/Historical:
Allan will discuss drawing styles and why he chooses to work in this style.

Saskatchewan Curriculum Outcomes:

Grade 3

CP3.7 Create visual art works that express ideas about the natural, constructed, and imagined environments.

CP3.8 Create art works using a variety of visual art concepts (e.g., contour lines), forms (e.g., drawing, sculpture) and media (e.g., pencils, pastels, found objects).

CR3.2 Respond to arts expressions that use the environment (e.g., natural, constructed, imagined) as inspiration.

Grade 4

CR4.1 Analyze how dance, drama, music, and visual art works represent ideas and perspectives.

CR4.2 Respond thoughtfully to a variety of contemporary Saskatchewan arts expressions.

CH4.1 Investigate and share discoveries about the arts in Saskatchewan through collaborative inquiry.

Teacher Guided Post-Broadcast Activity (30min-1 Hour)

NOTE: The teacher should model these steps on the board. Give lots of time for each step. I suggest sketching two separate characters on the board, so that at each step, you can model the step quickly, so students see the result, and then again slowly, so they can follow along.

GET STARTED

1. Download page templates attached.

2. Connect the comic to your **curriculum content** or **theme**.

- **Identity?**
    - Story of your life so far in 3 or 4 major events.
    - A day in your life / Getting ready for school in the morning.
    - Your COVID / quarantine experience.
- **Novel Study?**
    - Summarize the whole novel / short story.
    - Choose a scene from the novel.
    - As a class, divide the novel into major actions, one per student.
    Establish visual details for major characters to look consistent.
    Each student draws one page of a class graphic novel.
- **Social Studies?**
    - Historical event / Day in the life
    - Social problem, and solution. (pollution, bullying, etc).
- **Health?**
    - Illustrate a procedure. (Washing hands, etc.)
- **Animals**
    - A day in the life. Animal hunts / escapes, eats, finds shelter, etc.
    - Life cycle. Animal hatches, grows, uses its adaptations, lays eggs.

3. Pre-writing.

Write what happens in your comic page. This should be just a simple note, not a full story. Start with one action or change (*verb*).

- Girl *fights* monster.
- Students *pick up* trash.
- Fur traders *canoe* across Saskatchewan.

What happened before and after? Choose strong, interesting verbs!

- Students *notice* trash in their neighbourhood.
- Students *pick up* trash.
- Students *throw out* the trash.

Now you have a beginning, middle and end! Are there any gaps in between your actions that need to be filled in? What happened before that? What happened after that?

Tip: If you have to use "and' or "then", make it a separate action!

- Students *walk* to school.
- Students *notice* trash in their neighbourhood.
- Students *make a plan* to pick up trash.
- Students *pick up* trash.
- Students *separate* recyclables.
- Students *throw out* the trash.
- Garbage truck *drives* trash to the dump.

Choose the most interesting 3 or 4 actions to **show** in your comic.

4. Layout

Choose a page template, or divide your page into 3 or 4 panels. Draw **gutters** between your panels. Panels should be separated by a space, not just a line.

5. Words and Word Balloons

1. Words could include something the character is **saying** or **thinking,** a **title, labels, sound effects**, **narration**, or text elements of the **background** (like a signpost or graffiti behind the character).

2. Write **words first**, then draw **speech balloons, thought clouds** or **caption boxes**. You don't know how big to make the balloon unless you write the words first.

3. Words should be in the corners of the panels, not the middle.

4. Word balloons read just like text on a page. Left-to-right and top-to-bottom.

5. **Titles, sound effects**, or text elements in the **background** (signs, posters, etc.) should be turned into **block letters** or **bubble letters**, and possibly given some kind of outline.

GET DRAWING

1. Sketch Characters

Quickly sketch simple shapes for the characters into all your panels.
Use a variety of types of panels. At least one of each:

- Close-ups show mostly the **face**. Use this for showing emotion.
- Long-shots show mostly the **place**. Make the characters small. (Not tiny! Small characters are at least *half* as tall as your panel, including head, body, and legs.
- Action shots show the **whole body** and arms (it's okay to cut off the legs or feet).

2. Detail characters

1. Knees and feet forward. Elbows back.
2. Close arm and far away arm.
3. Head facing side vs. front.
4. Make facial expressions by changing the mouth and eyebrows.
5. Hair as a shape.
6. Thumb vs. fingers.
7. Clothes as curves.
8. Any important objects characters are holding / interacting with should be sketched as boxes or cylinders.

2. Background / Environment

1. Draw the place your character is in. Are they inside or outside?
2. Start with a **ground line** that goes **behind** your character's legs (Not under their **feet**!)
3. What details tell us what kind of place this is? Add something **close up**, something **far away**, and something **in between**.
4. Make objects **3-D** by starting with boxes and cylinders.

GO DEEPER

Inking (requires fine-tipped black pens, **not** Sharpies)

1. **Trace** over any line you want to keep with the pen.
2. Wait 1 minute for the ink to dry.
3. Carefully **erase** all pencil lines.
4. If you forgot to ink anything before, redraw it with ink now.

Colour (requires pencil crayons, **not** markers)

1. Ideally you should **ink first**, and erase all pencil lines, but it is okay to colour with pencil crayons without inking.
2. **Clean up** all unnecessary pencil lines and smudges with your eraser.
3. Darken up all keeper lines.
4. Colour **lightly** at first. Light colour will let your pencil details show through, and you can always make it darker later.
5. Add darker colour in **shadow areas**, or at the **edges of shapes**. Try to **fade** between light and dark colours for a more rounded, 3D look.

EXTRA TIPS

Characters (10 minutes)

1) Remind students to draw as **lightly** as possible! As long as you press lightly with your pencil, any other mistakes are easy to fix. Hint: It's easier to draw   lightly with a very **sharp pencil**, so keep your pencil sharp as you go.

2) Start with a **tall oval** for the body (about ⅓ as tall as your page). Use your stick figure as a guide. Is the body straight, bent, curved?

3) Add a **head**, about ½ or ⅓ as big as the body.

- The head should not be quite a circle, but shaped like a balloon or an egg.
- Leave a little space for the neck (about ⅓ as tall as the head)

4) Add **legs**, as long as the body + head together (measure with your fingers on the page).

- Legs bend **forward** at the knee, and **feet** point forward. (knees and feet point the same direction)
- One leg crosses in front of the other one at the top. Either leg can cross in front of the other.

5) Add **shoulders** at the top of the body.

- One shoulder is **close** to us, behind the character's head, and crossing in front of their body.
- The other shoulder is **far away** from us, in front of the character's head, and disappearing behind their body.

6) Add **arms**, coming from the shoulders, and reaching to the pockets (top of the thigh).

- Arms bend **backwards** or **down** at the elbow.

7) **Optional**: You may want to change the shape of your original oval body, if you want a character that is rounder, skinnier, muscular, or curvy. Clean up any sketchy lines with your eraser.

Hands (10 minutes)

1) Ask students to look at their own **hands** and observe that:

- The **fingers** come from the front of the hand, and the **thumb** comes from the back of the hand. The thumb is not beside the fingers, it is beside the hand, and stops where the fingers start.
- There is a **space** between the thumb and fingers. This is how we can hold things!
- Thumbs are on the **top** or **front** of the hand (thumb and elbow point in opposite directions)

2) **Optional**: Draw a large practice hand on a separate piece of paper.

3) Add **hands** to your character. The thumb is on the **top** or **front** of the hand.

Face (10 minutes)

A lot of students will already have a method of drawing faces they are comfortable with. That is just fine, encourage them to draw faces however they want. This is just one method, for those who want to try it.

1. Add eyes:
    - Eyes are in the **middle** of the head (not too high or too low).
    - Eyes are in **front** of the face, facing forward.
    - Eyes are shaped like a **leaf,** or a **piece of pie**. Round in the front, pointed in the back.

2) Once you've got eyes, it should be easy to see where the **nose, mouth, ear** (only one ear!) and **eyebrows** go. Remember that the nose points forwards.

3) Add hair by drawing a **shape**.

    - Hair should be a little bit **bigger** than the head, and cross **in front** of the forehead.
    - Feel free to **cover up** parts of the ear, neck, or shoulder.
    - **Erase** anything covered up by hair.

Clothes / Costume (10 minutes)

1. Encourage students to think of clothes as a **costume**. What do these clothes tell us about who the character is? Even if they are wearing "normal" clothes, that tells us that they are a modern day, normal person.

2. Connect the costume to your **curriculum content** or **theme**.
    - **Identity?** How does this costume look like you?
    - **Novel Study?** What costume details does the text give you? What is left open to your imagination?
    - **Social Studies?** Research appropriate costumes from the time period.

       Use reference photos.

    - **Anything goes?** How about a robot, werewolf, or zombie costume?

3) Start the costume by drawing **smile curves** at the **neck, waist,** and **ankles**,

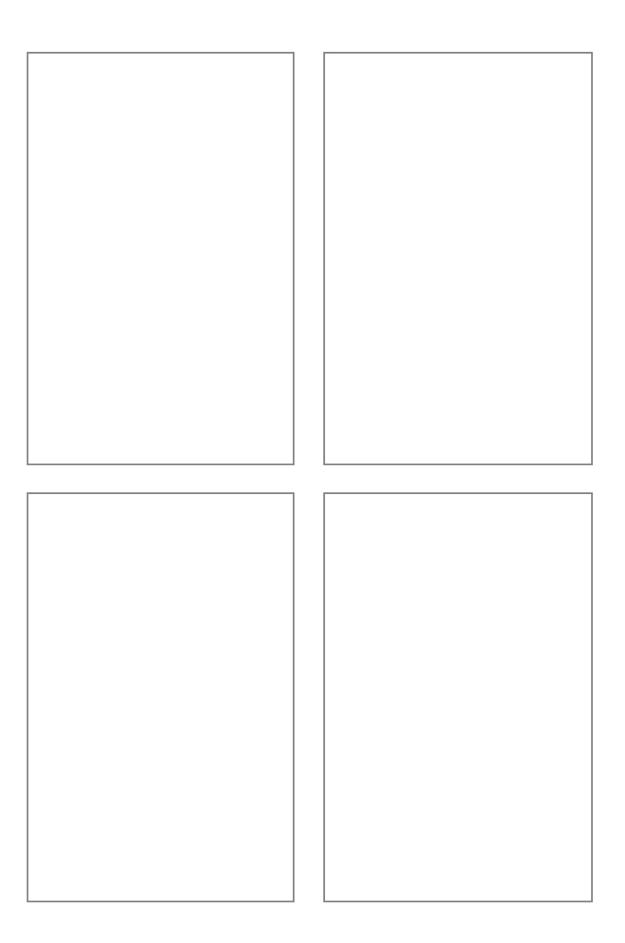and **frown curves** at the **sleeves** (long or short sleeves).

4) To make a **dress or skirt**, draw a new shape bigger than the legs.

   Note: Make the bottom of the dress a **smile curve**.

5) Add **details** to the clothes. Note: Anything on the **front** of a shirt (like a logo, design, buttons, zipper, necktie), should be on the **front** of the body, not the middle.

6) **Clean up** with your eraser. Erase your sketch lines.

Finish / Repeat / Extend (15 minutes)

Detailing a character will take most students an hour. You may need to go back and repeat some of these steps, or review parts of the video. If anyone is finished early, or you have extra time as a class, do one of these extension activities.