

Graphic Novel/Comics Terms and Concepts

<http://www.readwritethink.org/classroom-resources/lesson-plans/pictures-tell-story-improving-1102.html>

Figures

Faces: Faces can be portrayed in different ways. Some depict an actual person, like a portrait; others are iconic, which means they are representative of an idea or a group of people. Other points to observe about faces include:

- They can be dramatic when placed against a detailed backdrop; a bright white face stands out.
- They can be drawn without much expression or detail; this is called an “open blank” and it invites the audience to imagine what the character is feeling without telling them.

Hands/Feet: The positioning of hands and feet can be used to express what is happening in the story. For example, hands that are raised with palms out suggest surprise. The wringing of hands suggests obsequiousness or discomfort. Hands over the mouth depict fear, shame, or shyness. Turned in feet may denote embarrassment, while feet with motion strokes can create the sense of panic, urgency, or speed.

Text

Captions: These are boxes containing a variety of text elements, including scene-setting, description, etc.

Speech balloons: These enclose dialogue and come from a specific speaker’s mouth; they vary in size, shape, and layout and can alternate to depict a conversation. Types of speech balloons include those holding:

- External dialogue, which is speech between characters
- Internal dialogue, which is a thought enclosed by a balloon that has a series of dots or bubbles going up to it

Special-effects lettering: This is a method of drawing attention to text; it often highlights onomatopoeia and reinforces the impact of words such as bang or wow.

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Layout

Panel: A distinct segment of the comic, containing a combination of image and text in endless variety. Panels offer a different experience than simply reading text:

- The spatial arrangement allows an immediate juxtaposition of the present and the past.
- Unlike other visual media, transitions are instantaneous and direct but the exact timing of the reader's experience is determined by focus and reading speed.

Frame: The lines and borders that contain the panels.

Gutter: The space between framed panels.

Bleed: An image that extends to and/or beyond the edge of the page.

Foreground: The panel closest to the viewer.

Midground: Allows centering of image by using natural resting place for vision. The artist deliberately decides to place the image where a viewer would be most likely to look first. Placing an image off-center or near the top or bottom can be used to create visual tension but using the midground permits the artist to create a more readily accepted image.

Background: Provides additional, subtextual information for the reader.

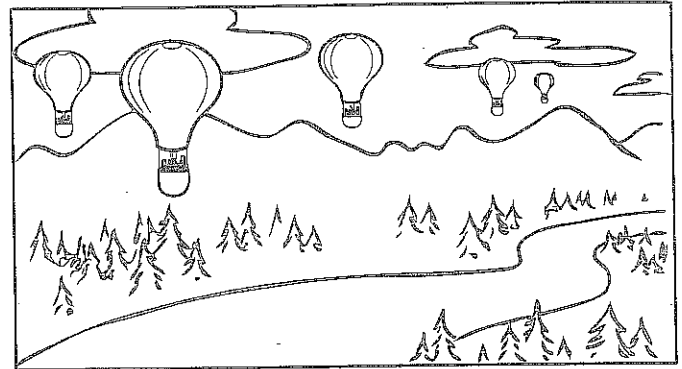
Graphic weight: A term that describes the way some images draw the eye more than others, creating a definite focus using color and shading in various ways including:

- The use of light and dark shades; dark-toned images or high-contrast images draw the eye more than light or low-contrast images do
- A pattern or repeated series of marks
- Colors that are more brilliant or deeper than others on the page

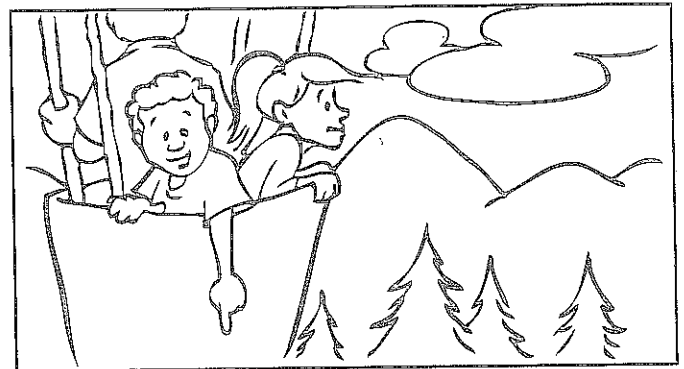
Perspective

Perspective refers to how a scene is shown—from close-up or far away. It also often refers to *point of view*. It tells readers who is narrating a story or who is observing an action.

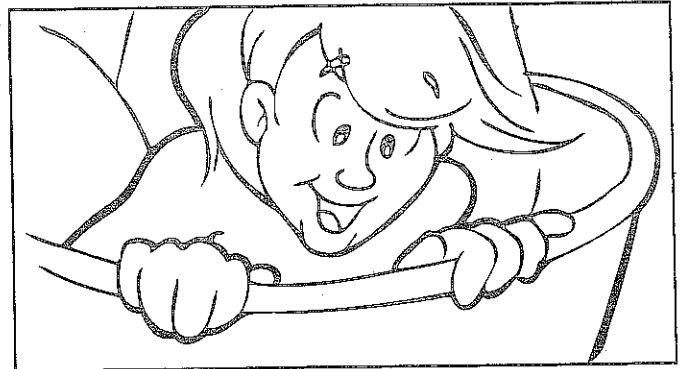
Graphic novels use several techniques to show perspective. The first technique is the **wide-angle**. A wide-angle gives readers a sense of where the scene is taking place. The frame might show the bottom of the Grand Canyon, the inside of someone's living room or a galaxy. Often, the characters are very small in a wide-angle frame, to give a sense of a big space. However, there may still be dialogue in this type of scene.



The next form of perspective is the **long-shot**. This isn't as vast as a wide-angle frame, but it often contains at least two characters and most of their bodies. Readers can still see surrounding details such as rocks, furniture or stars, but they don't see them as clearly. They do, however, see clothing and hair details much more clearly than they would in a wide-angle frame.



The next technique is the **close-up**. A frame that uses a close-up might choose to focus on a character's head as he or she speaks. But words aren't necessarily shown. A close-up can convey characters' sorrow by showing tears on their cheeks. It can show a character's anger by showing a furrowed brow and clenched teeth. It can let readers know that a character is happy by showing a wide smile and shining eyes.



An **extreme close-up** focuses on a very small part of a scene. A frame that shows only a golden cup overturned on a table might imply that the liquid inside contained poison. A frame that shows just a woman's hand with a large diamond ring on one finger might emphasise her wealth or the idea that she's just got engaged. And an extreme close-up of a policeman's badge might remind readers of a particular character's authority.

