

THE 6 PAGER

BY BARBARA SLATE

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My favorite comic to write is the 6-pager. I have written hundreds of them. They are mini graphic novels. All the requirements for doing a graphic novel are in these 6 pages— **characters, story, plot, layout**. The advantage of doing 6 pages is it's a whole lot faster than a graphic novel.

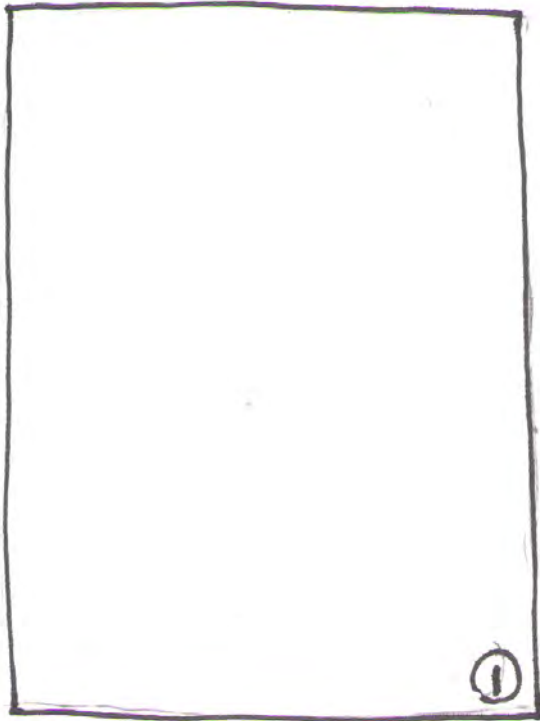
It may look simple but there are a lot of panels to fill on 6 pages. It can have 32 panels or more! If your goal is to do a graphic novel, you would be wise to start with a 6 pager.

Whether you are writing about superheroes, romance, horror, fantasy, or a story about the one and only you, every page is a new adventure.

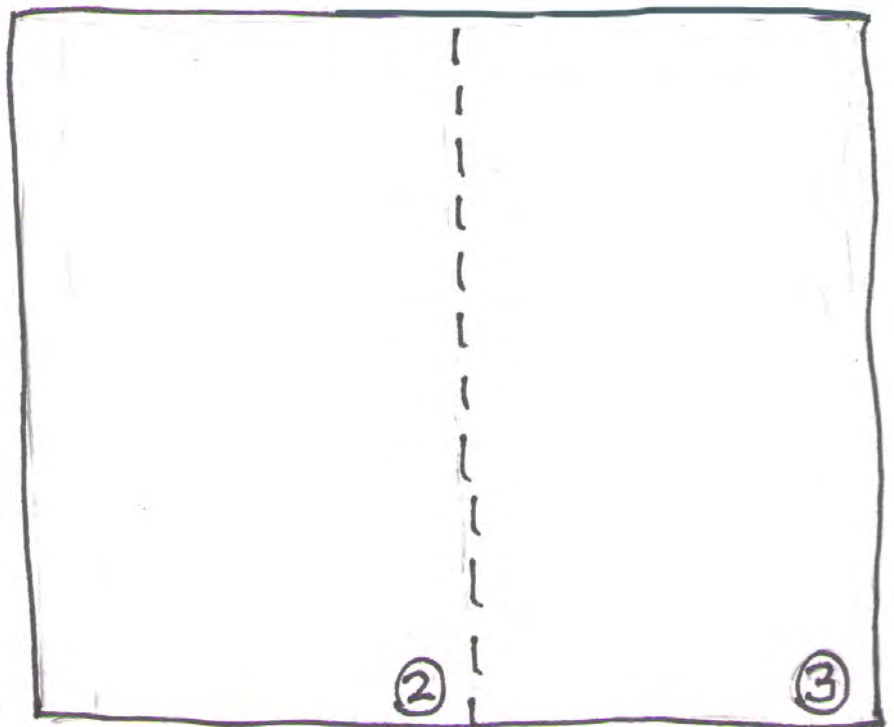
Ready to begin?

THE 6 PAGER

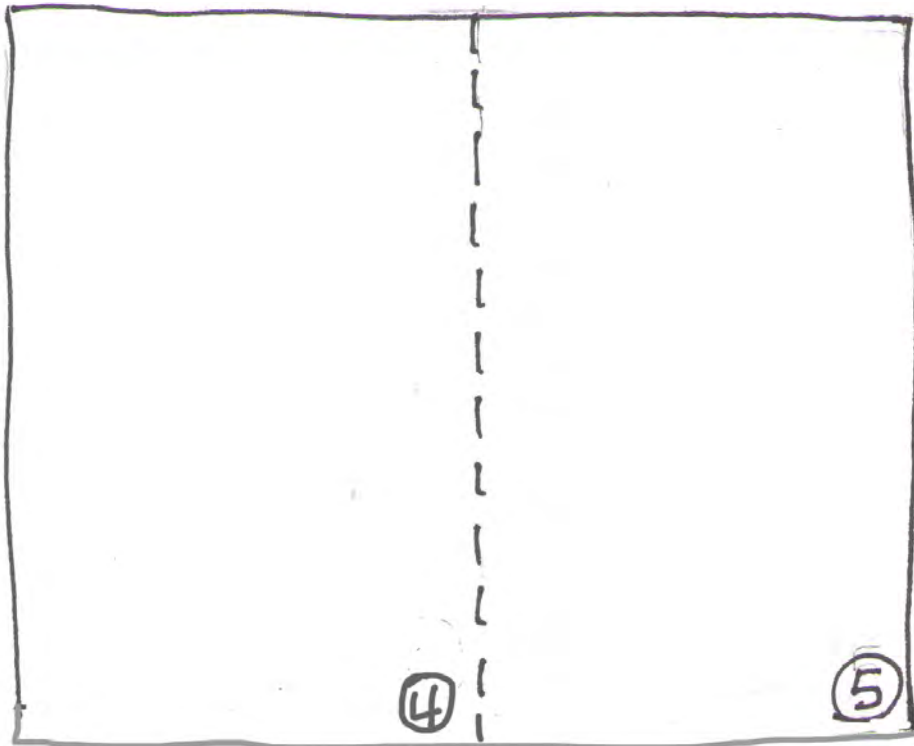
SPLASH PAGE



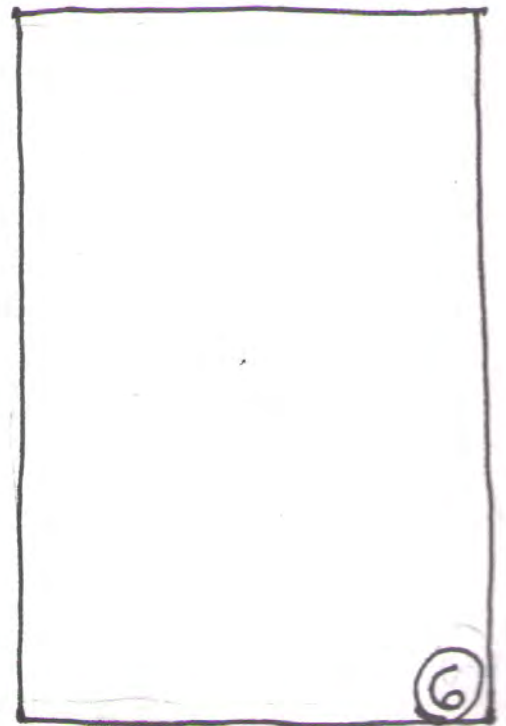
DOUBLE PAGE SPREAD



DOUBLE PAGE SPREAD



THE END



STORY

Even if your story is one thousand pages, tell it— **beginning, middle, end,** and **twist** (*the twist is the surprise, the unexpected*) in 3 to 5 sentences. I know that sounds impossible, but you can do it!

Get an index card or a small piece of paper. Write what you know or think you know about your story. If you only know your ending, write that. If you only know your beginning, write that. Sometimes getting those 3-5 sentences down can be the hardest part of doing a 6-pager.

Beginning-Archie loves Betty and Veronica and accepts a date from both girls at the same time.

Middle-Oh no!!! Archie tries to figure out what to do and falls asleep, missing both dates.

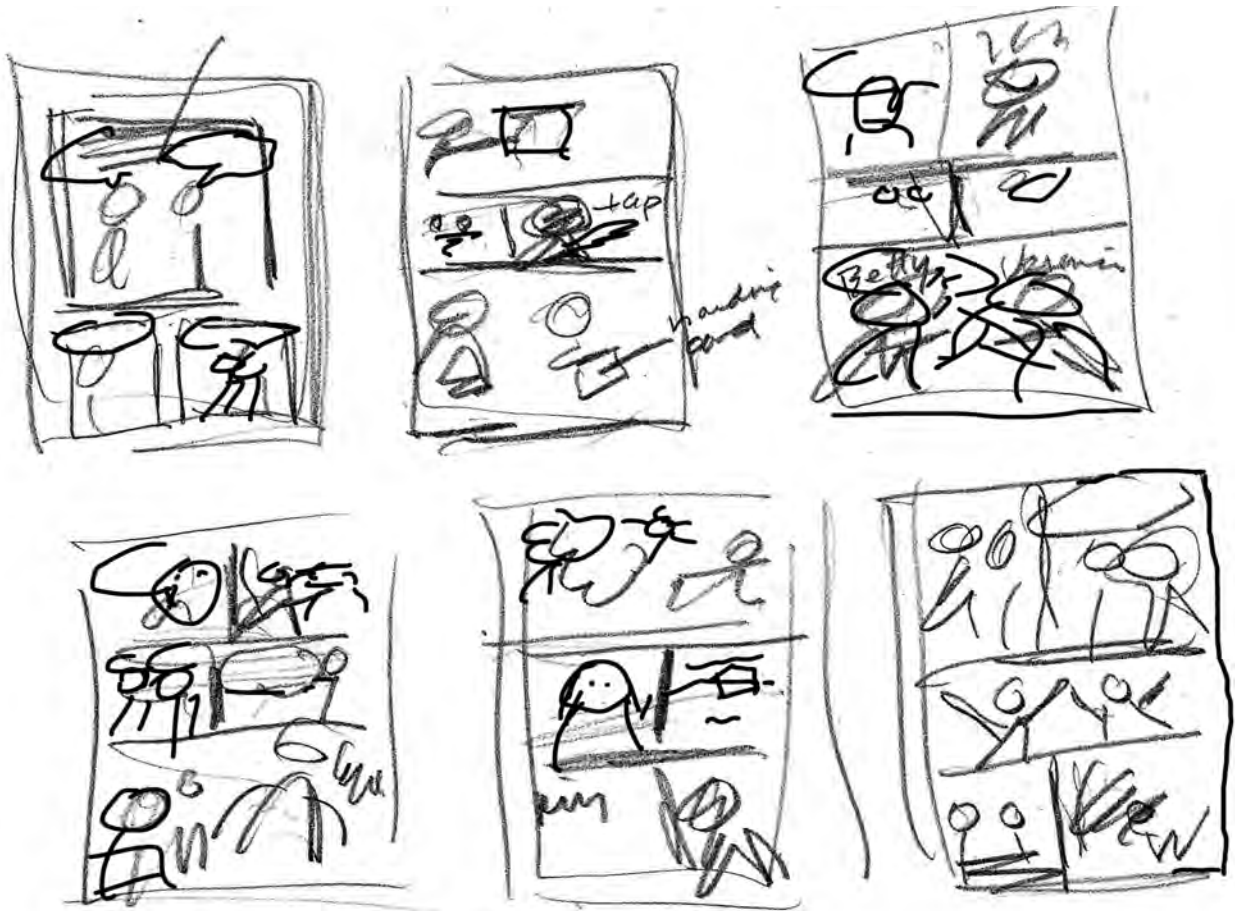
End-When he awakens he begs both girls for forgiveness and they forgive him asking for another date.

Twist- He did it again!

THUMBNAILS

Thumbnails are quick rough sketches. They are a huge time saver. They can be the size of a thumbnail or much bigger. A finished panel or close to being finished is too big of a commitment. Imagine staying up all night to complete the most intricate, detailed panel and finally getting it right, only to discover the next day that it doesn't even belong in the story!

Write notes if sketches need clarification. By keeping sketches loose, you can easily add or subtract panels and move them around. It's a lot easier to change and rearrange in the beginning layout stage.



Figuring out a 6 pager is like a giant jigsaw puzzle. There are lots of parts. Discover how they all fit together.

ARCHIE (IN)

SECOND CHANCE

BY BARRARA SLATE

LET IT SNOW
LET IT SNOW
LET IT SNOW!



CHRISTMAS TREE IN HOUSE

BETTY IS SHOVELING SIDE IN FRONT OF HER HOUSE + HEARS ARCHIE SINGING

(IT IS A WONDERFUL SNOWY DAY AS ARCHIE SINGS A HAPPY TUNE.)

HELLO ARCHIKINS.

Hi BETTY...

Wow!

YOUR CHRISTMAS TREE IS AWESOME!

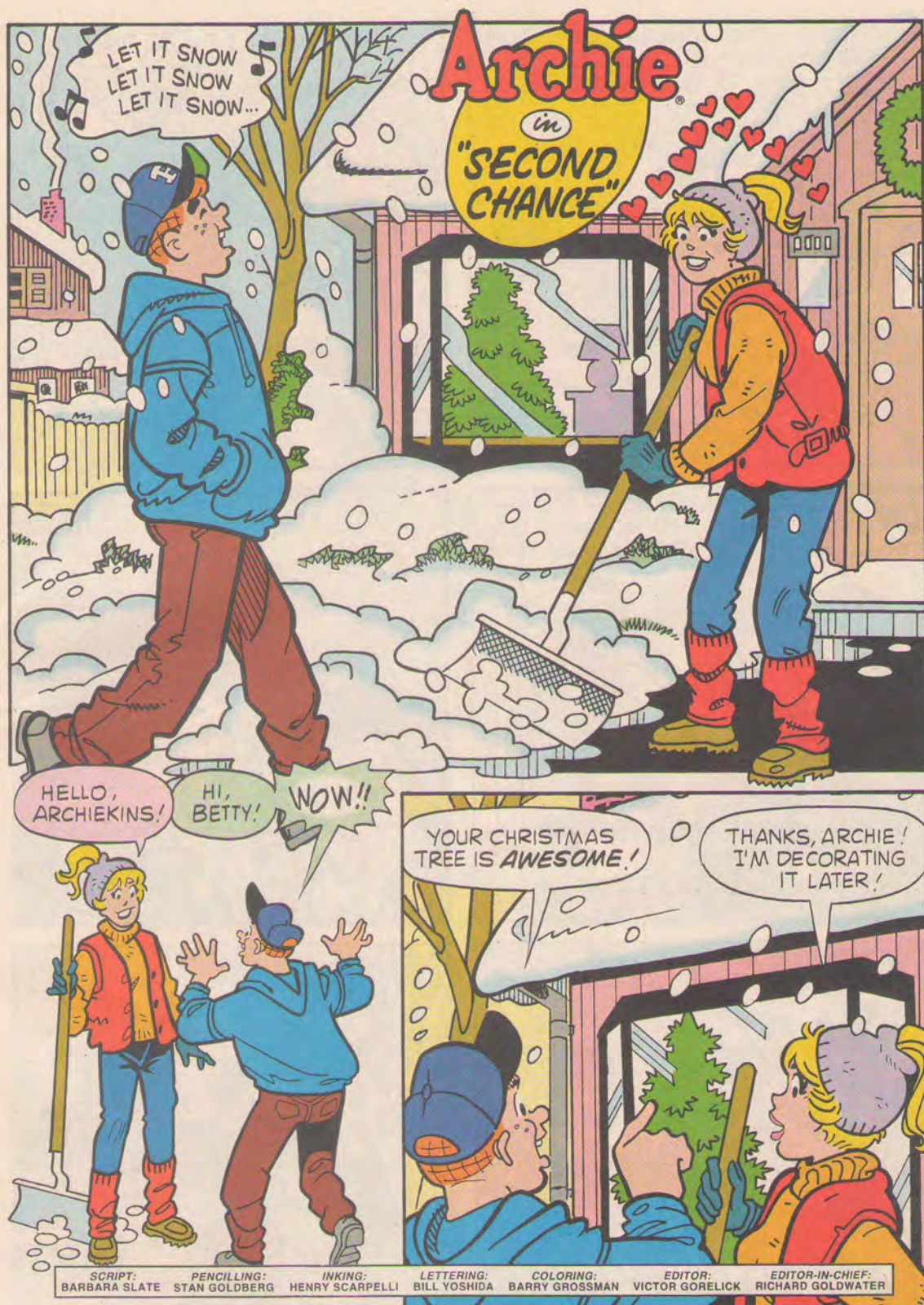
I'M DECORATING IT TONIGHT.



BETTY STOPS SHOVELING ARCHIE DOES DOUBLE TAKE



ARCHIE + BETTY ADMIRE THE BEAUTIFUL TREE IN THE BIG WINDOW AS THE SNOW FALL



SPLASH PAGE: is usually the first page. It has to make a big splash to grab the reader's attention. Many times the splash page is one large panel, introducing the **main character, the setting**, with the **author's name** and **title of the story**. In a 6 pager, the **conflict** is often introduced on the splash page.

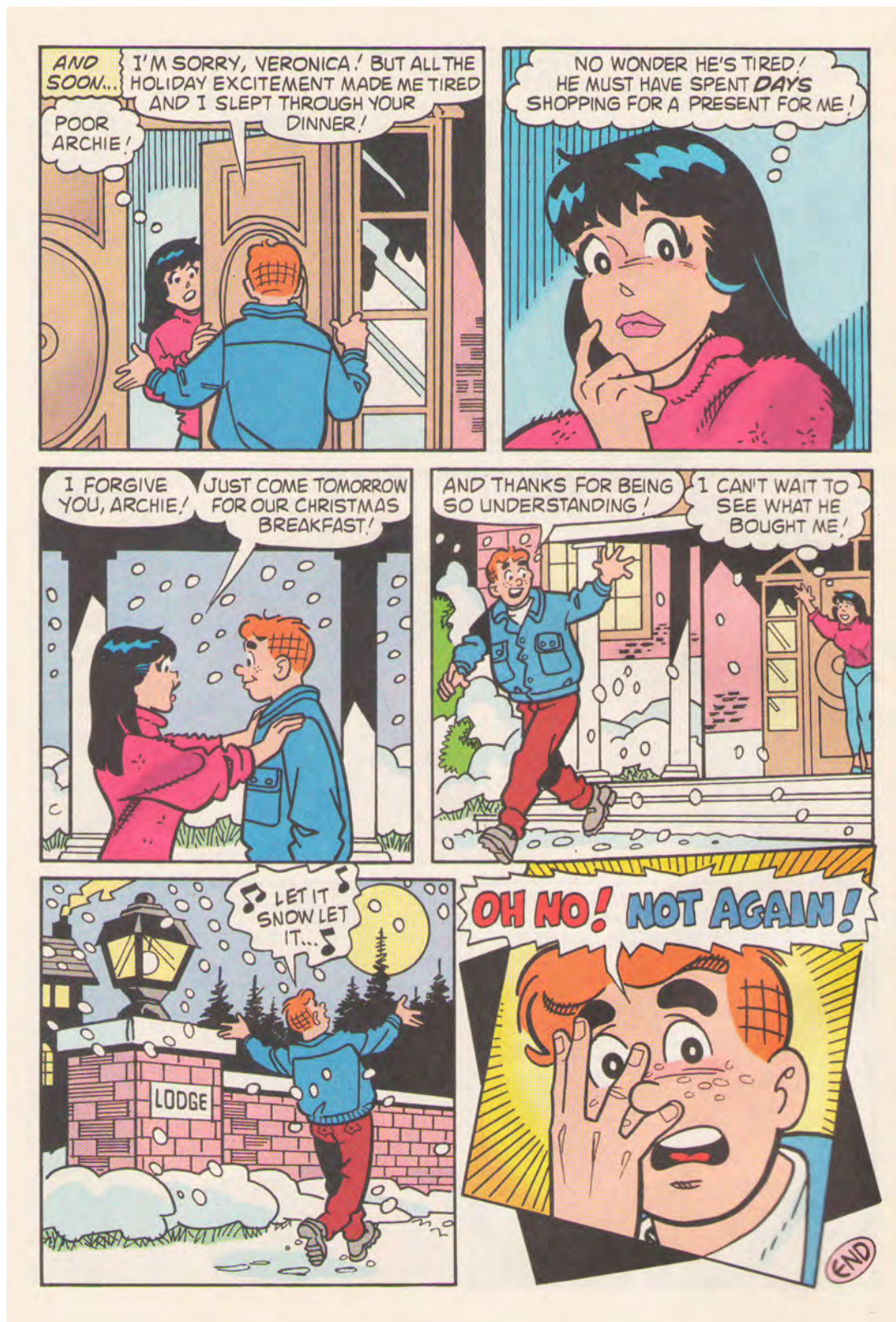


DOUBLE PAGE SPREADS: Look at the double page spread as a giant canvas. Although a comic/graphic novel is read one panel at a time, the eye naturally takes in the whole spread. Each panel stands alone as a work of art yet works in harmony with all the other panels on the spread.

Do closeups, long shots, birdseye, interior, exterior...talking heads get boring.



Think about what you want to accomplish. Decide the first panel and the last. Once you know where to start and where to end, it is easier to figure out what goes in the middle. Be sure the last panel is one that will make the reader want to turn the page to see what happens next!



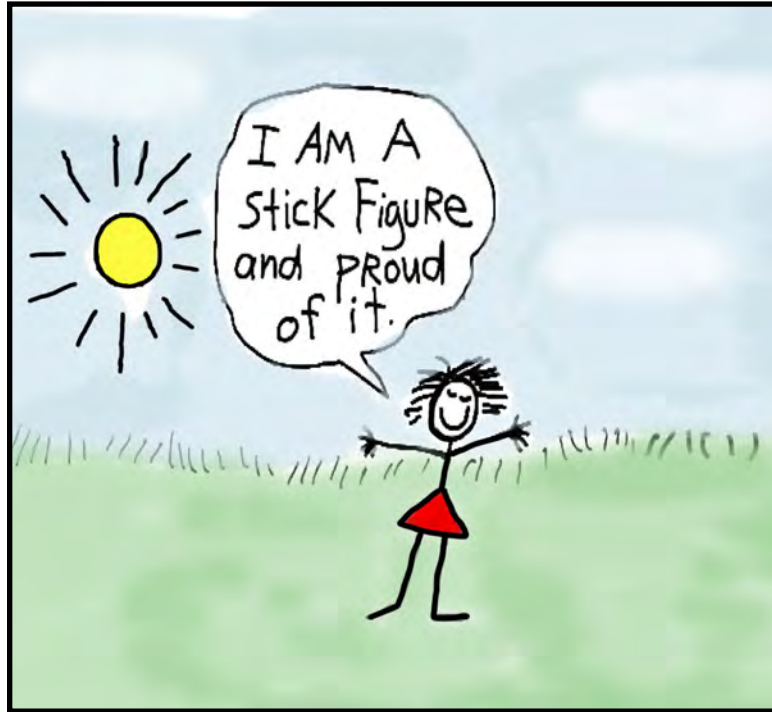
THE END: The story is wrapping up. Often in a 6 pager the twist is the last panel. It is the surprise...the reward for reading the whole story. Make it a good twist.

ART

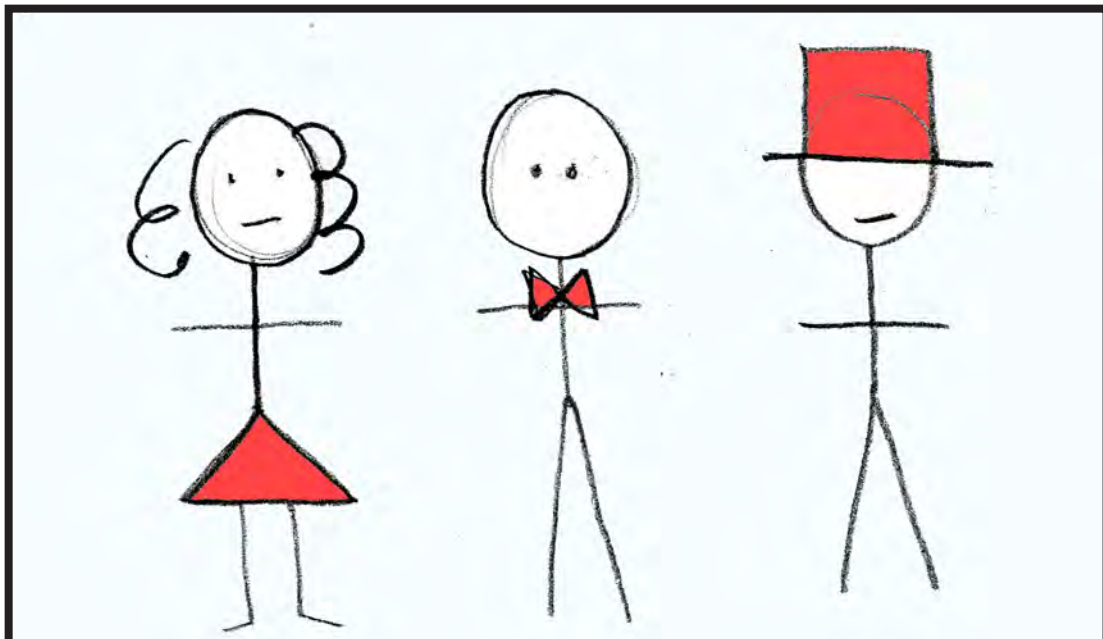
"I can't draw" is something I often hear.

Everybody can draw stick figures.

Sometimes stick figures have the most personality.



It is easy to distinguish one stick figure from another stick figure by adding something simple like a skirt or a bow tie or a hat.



DRAW YOUR MAIN CHARACTER

Draw something unique. Whether it's a hat, nose, suit, dress, or buttons, make something instantly recognizable. A reader will recognize Mr. Buttons, not only for his name, but also because he has buttons on his coat as well as button eyes.

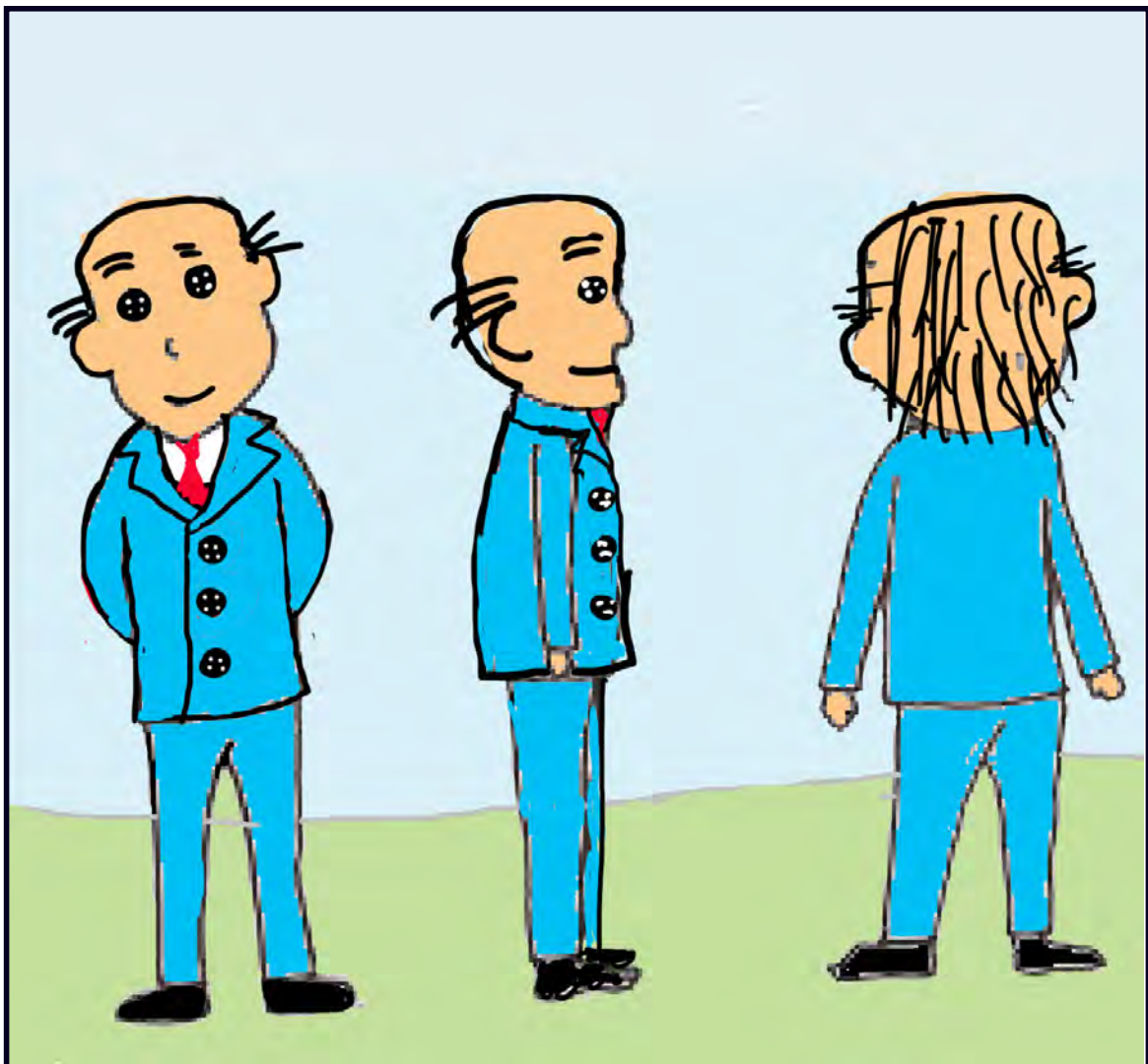
Think about a supporting cast of characters. Is Mr. Buttons married? Is there a Button family? Does the entire cast of characters have button eyes, including dogs? Where does Mr. Buttons live? In Buttonville?

MR. BUTTONS

FRONT

SIDE

BACK



DO A CHARACTER SHEET

A character sheet is everything you need to know about your character...*and more!* Know your character as well as or better than you know yourself. The list below is a good beginning.

NAME:

AGE:

POWERS: (if any)

OUTSTANDING CHARACTERISTIC: What is special, unique about your character? It could be that there is nothing unique which is what makes him/her/it unique!

BEST FRIEND:

Can be a sidekick, animal, plant.

LIFE GOAL:

What does your character want more than anything in the world? Who or what is stopping your character from achieving their goal?

BIGGEST FEAR:

BACKSTORY: Tell the origins of your character. What was his/her/its family life?

You may want to include your character's favorite food, color, sport, leisure activity. What does your character's voice sound like? loud? soft? an accent? What's for breakfast? What does your character dream? Keep asking questions. As you get to know your character, most likely you will want to change some things about them.

NAME: Angel Love

AGE: 18

PARENTS: Jane and Jay Love

SISTER: Mary Beth (12 years older)

CHILDHOOD: Angel Love was born in Oldstown, Ohio. Jay Love is a minister and Jane Love works as a seamstress. Angel was a happy child but all that changed when older sister Mary Beth ran away. Angel was only 6, but she remembers her mother crying every night after Mary Beth suddenly disappeared. Angel grew to hate Mary Beth for causing her mother so much pain. Although Angel remembered some harsh fighting between Mary Beth and her folks, she never knew the real reason she ran away. That topic, she knew, was off limits.

Being the daughter of a minister was not easy for Angel. She tried to set a good example in the community, she didn't like to do the things most of the other girls did like shopping or trying on lipstick. She would rather stay home and draw.

Although Angel loved her parents, she was ready to leave Oldstown the day she graduated from high school. She knew she would "fit in" better in a big city. There, she could feel free to be herself and pursue her dream of being an artist.

EDUCATION: Street smart rather than book smart. Got straight C's except for an A in Art.

HOME LIFE: Shares an apartment on West 106th street with Wendy Thornball, a struggling actress. The furniture is collected from the streets. Angel was shocked to learn that some New Yorkers threw out practically new stuff!

EMPLOYMENT: Works four nights a week as a waitress at Balloon Restaurant. The salary from this job covers rent and expenses. During the day, Angel is either at her drawing board or looking for work as an artist.

LEISURE ACTIVITIES: Drawing cartoons, roller-skating, and collecting treasures from the garbage.

CLOTHING: Angel has her own flair for fashion. She likes color and sometimes adds a streak of blue to her bright red hair. Her trademark is that she always wears hearts.

PERSONAL CHARACTERISTICS: Stubborn (a Taurus), strong-willed, ambitious, brutally honest, and finds peace by roller-skating in Central Park.

LOVE LIFE: When Angel falls, she falls hard. But that doesn't happen often.

BEST FRIEND: Cindy Lockheart. Tall, brown hair, and very opinionated. She works with Angel at the Balloon Restaurant.

NEXT DOOR NEIGHBOR: Everett is an African American 20 year old who lives down the hall from Angel and Wendy. He is very good friends with Angel and dislikes Wendy. For extra cash, Everett plays his guitar in Central Park. His girlfriend, Lola, is unhappy about his closeness with Angel.

FAVORITE COLOR: Red

CAREER GOAL: To be an employed artist.

ROOMMATE: Wendy Thornball, a spoiled, clueless, and lovable 22 year old. Wendy and Angel are friends even though they come from two different worlds.

HALO: The cartoon character that Angel draws.

WHEN CREATING CHARACTERS...

DO NOT THINK

Have some fun! Let your mind wander. Doodle. Then look at your doodles. Is there a character in there somewhere?



GIVE YOUR CHARACTERS TIME TO DEVELOP

Some characters come quickly while others take a long time.

TAKE BREAKS

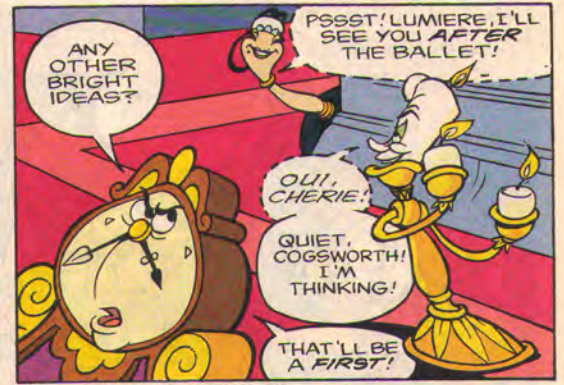
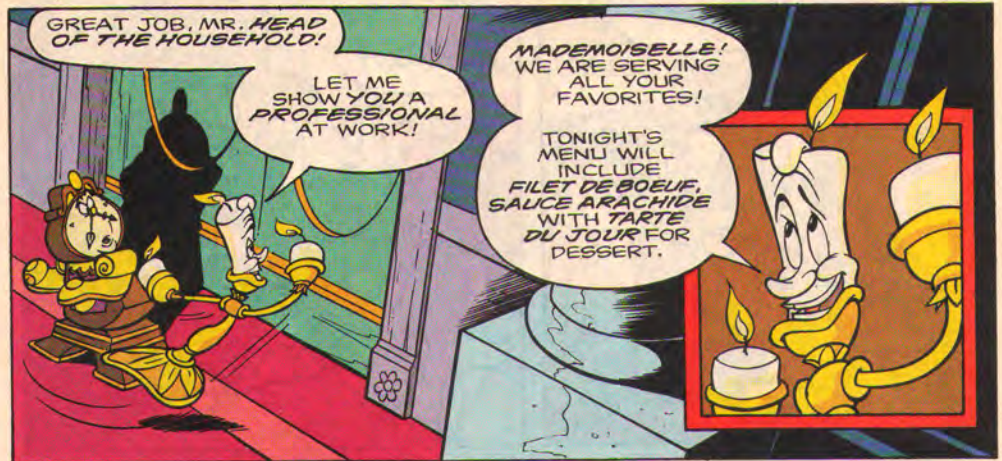
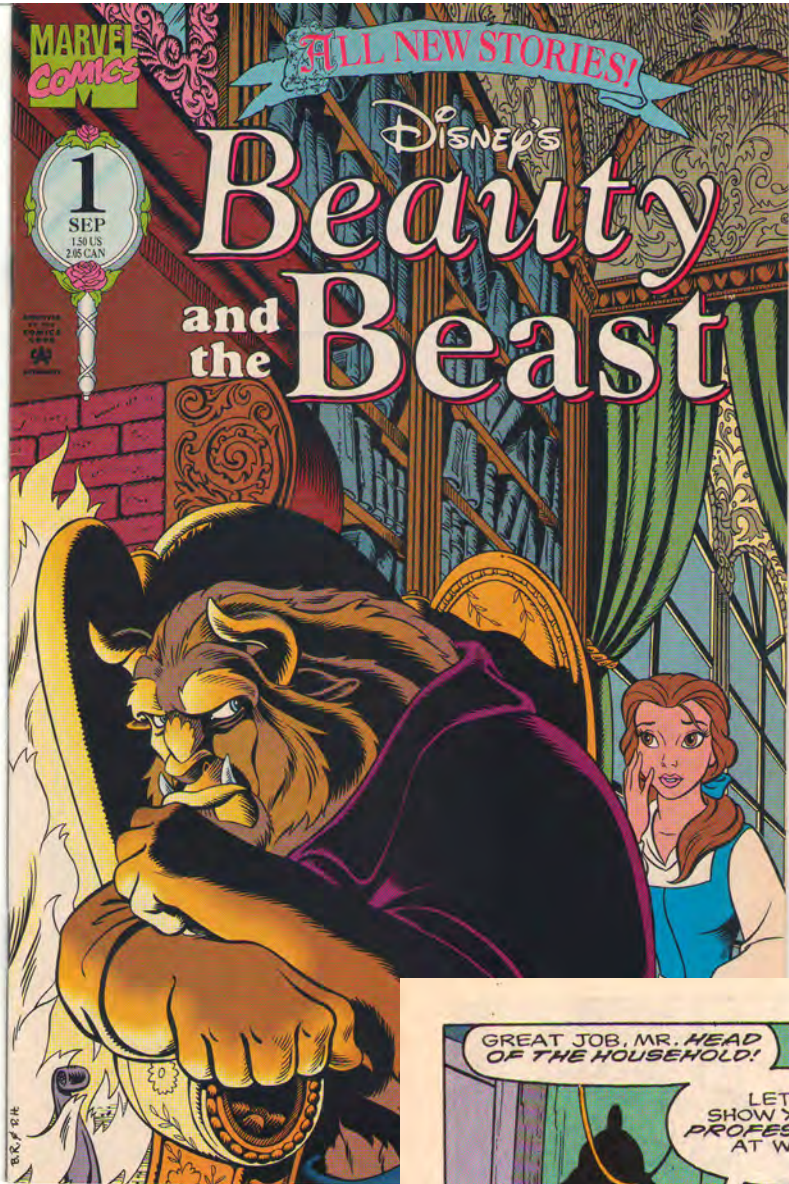
When you return, see your character *as if for the first time*.

READ OUT LOUD

Dialogue works best when it is the way real conversations sound. When you read out loud, you can hear if your dialogue rings true.

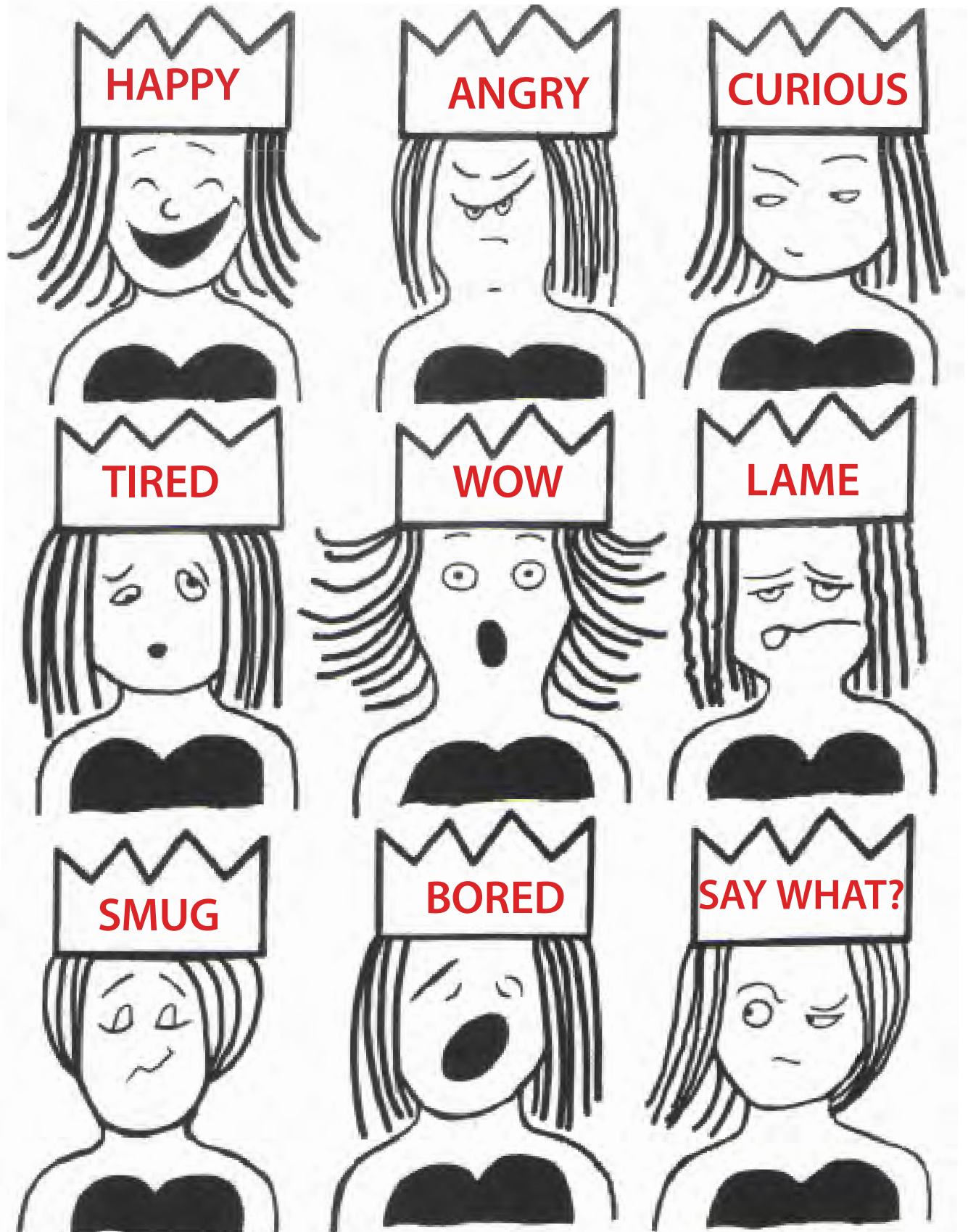
HEAR THEIR VOICES IN YOUR HEAD

You are not going crazy. Sometimes your character's voice comes even before you finish your drawing. Your creation may be telling you how it wants to look, dress, or be. *Pay attention*.



PRACTICE EXPRESSIONS

Just like you, your characters will have many emotions, therefore many expressions. Below are some. To draw other emotions, get a mirror and **you** make the feeling. Study the lines in your face and draw them. The more you do this the easier it is to see the lines.

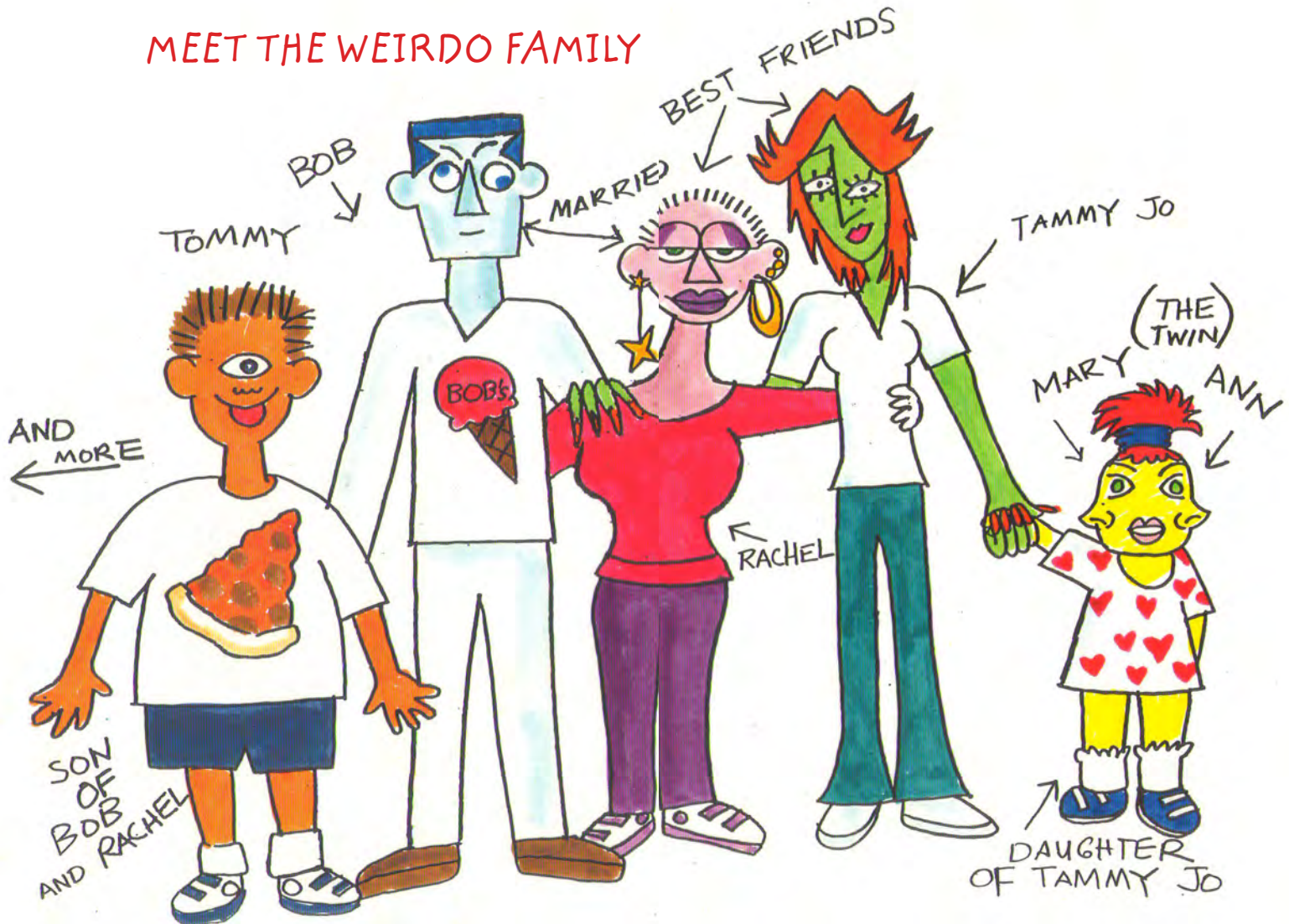


CREATE A CAST OF CHARACTERS

Do they look good together? Who is the tallest? shortest? roundest? loudest? oldest? youngest? Do you know something about the characters by just by looking at them? Is there something unique? Something nobody ever saw before?

It would be wise to do a character sheet about your cast of characters.

MEET THE WEIRDO FAMILY



BE SURE TO KNOW...



PROTAGONIST: Main character. The protagonist is the person the reader cares about.

ANTAGONIST : Adversary/opponent. Tries to stop the protagonist from accomplishing his/her/its goals.

SETTING : The time and place of the story.

CONFLICT: The struggle.

PLOT: The way the story unfolds and resolves.

UNDERLYING THEME: The message at the core of your story. These themes are universal, like, *crime doesn't pay, where there's a will, there's a way, or love conquers all.*

FEEDBACK

Feedback is important because you may be so absorbed in your story you can't see it clearly any more. You will need an objective opinion. Show it to somebody who you trust to give you an honest opinion. You may find several people or just one person. It can be a friend, teacher, relative, editor, or your graphic novel partner.

Not all feedback is going to be positive. Try not to get offended. Listen to what the person has to say. When an editor gives me feedback, I write everything down and then go over the notes. If I have questions, I ask for more details. I wasn't always so calm about negative feedback, but after ranting about how misunderstood I was, nine times out of ten the editor was right.

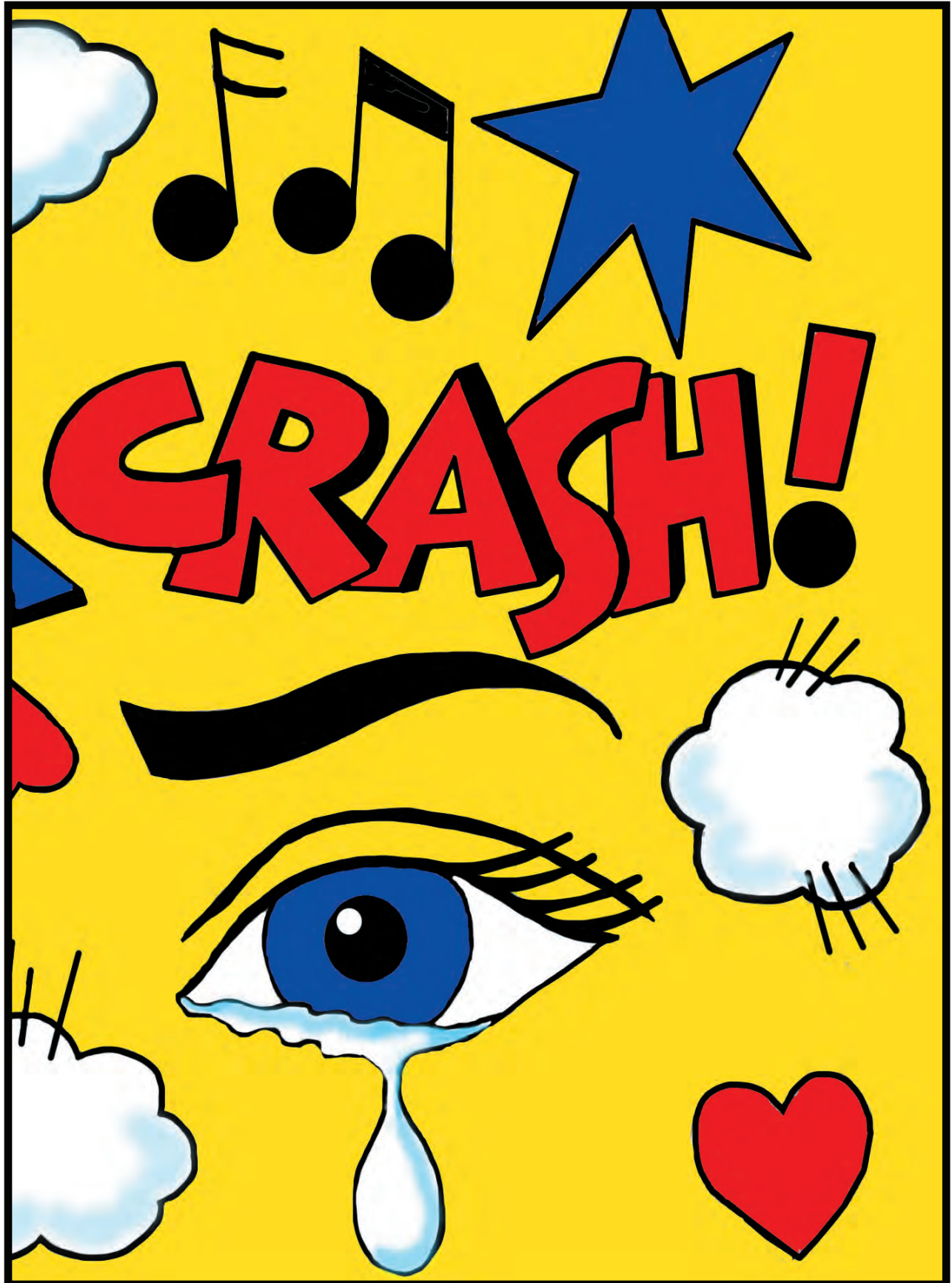
WHY FEEDBACK IS IMPORTANT

- Somebody might say something that sparks an idea you never thought of.
- Somebody might say something you do not agree with, but upon reflection, you get what they were saying.
- Somebody might say something that is so ridiculous you wonder why you asked their opinion in the first place.

Whether you like or don't like the critique, always thank the person who took the time to read your story.

LAYOUT

MAKE SOMETHING POP ON YOUR PAGE

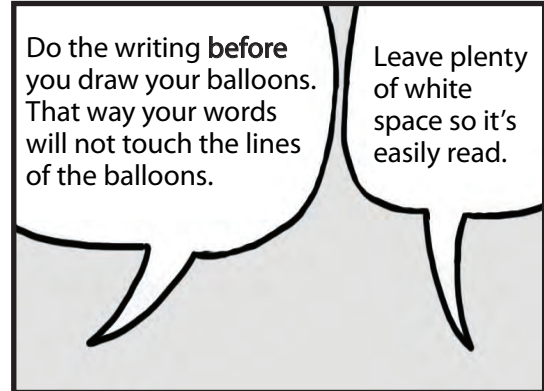


ABC'S OF LAYOUT LANGUAGE

This is a **panel**. It can be any size or shape. Each panel moves your story forward.



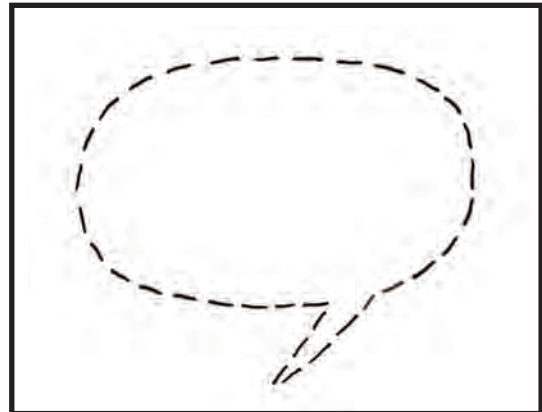
These are **dialogue balloons**. Use them to show characters talking.



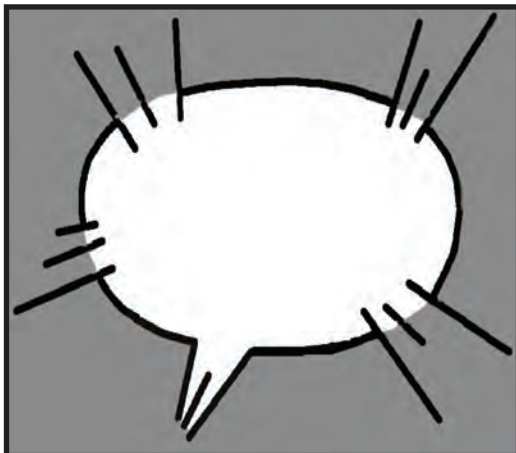
This is a **thought balloon**. It tells you when your character is thinking to him/her/itself.



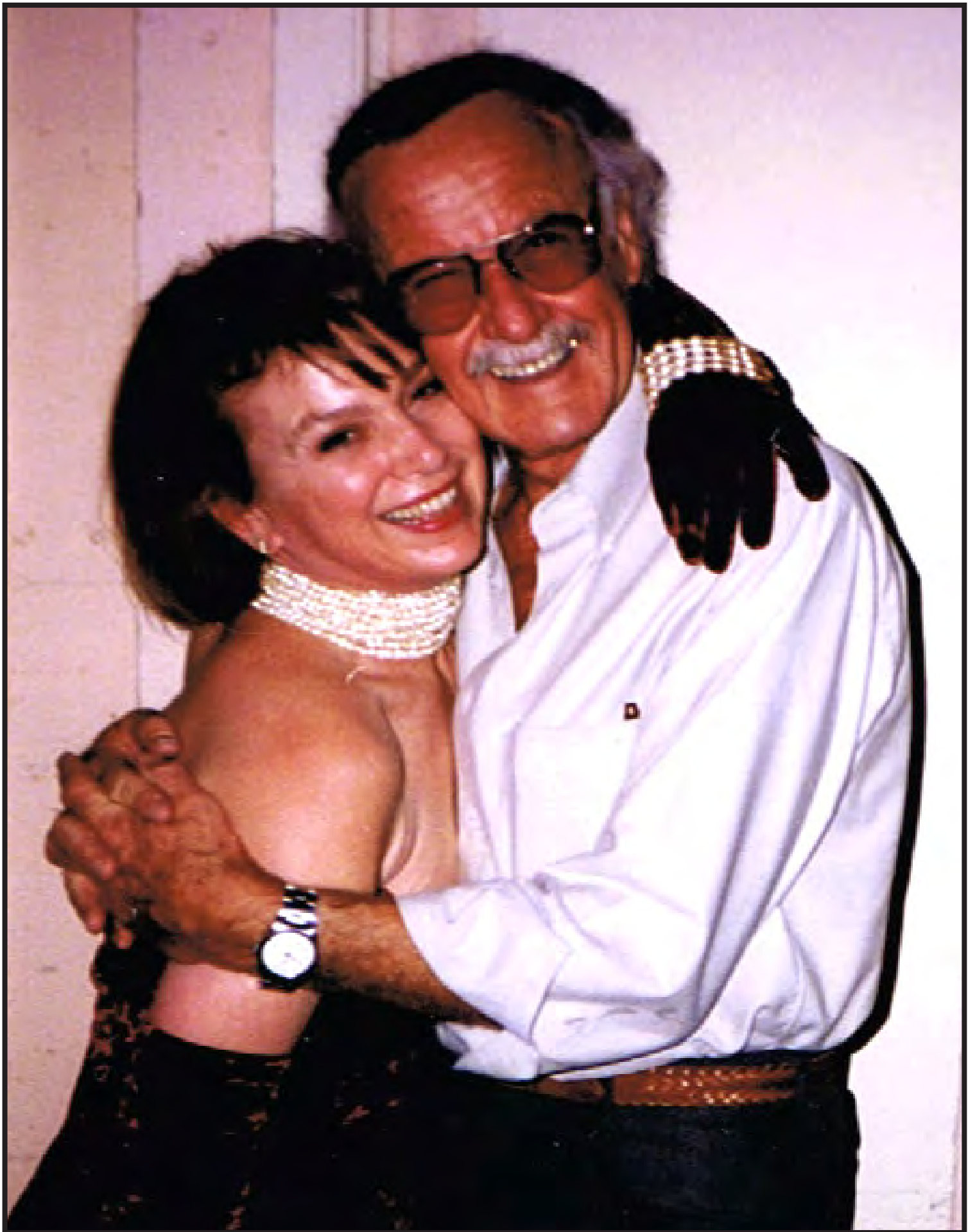
Your character is whispering.



Your character is shouting! *Improvise!*
You can express emotion in many ways.



Dialogue balloons, thought balloons, and other shapes are all part of your layout. You can draw the most amazing art but if the balloons are not included as part of your design, then your reader will be distracted. They should not be squeezed into your panel as an afterthought. Practice drawing and placing balloons. They will give your layout a clean and cohesive look.



BE SURE TO...

REMEMBER

YOU ARE THE CAMERA. Do a layout by using close ups, distance shots, birdseye view, and indoor and outdoor shots. Choose an over-the-shoulder view, a front, side, three-quarter or a back view. Different viewpoints or angles keep the panels exciting!

NUMBER THE PAGES

It's not just in stories that a wind comes sweeping along, blowing your pages everywhere. It happens in real life, too. Numbering also serves as a point of reference when you give your work to somebody for feedback.

KEEP PANELS ORDERLY

If the panels are arranged haphazardly and the eye cannot follow which panel comes next, the reader will be confused. Be sure the character that is talking first gets the balloon furthest to the left. Even *Knock Knock* jokes don't work out of order.



LET THE PICTURE TELL THE STORY

A layout is successful when a reader can grasp the story just by looking at the pictures and not reading one word. This is why a two year old can "read" a comic.

WRITE CLEARLY Do not make the letters too small. Make sure your handwriting is legible. There is nothing more distracting than small illegible handwriting to ruin a good layout.



CREATIVE TIPS

GET TO KNOW YOUR PROCESS

Do I like being alone?

Who dreams?

Am I a Morning Person or
a Night Owl?

Where do I work best?

Do I work better
with music?

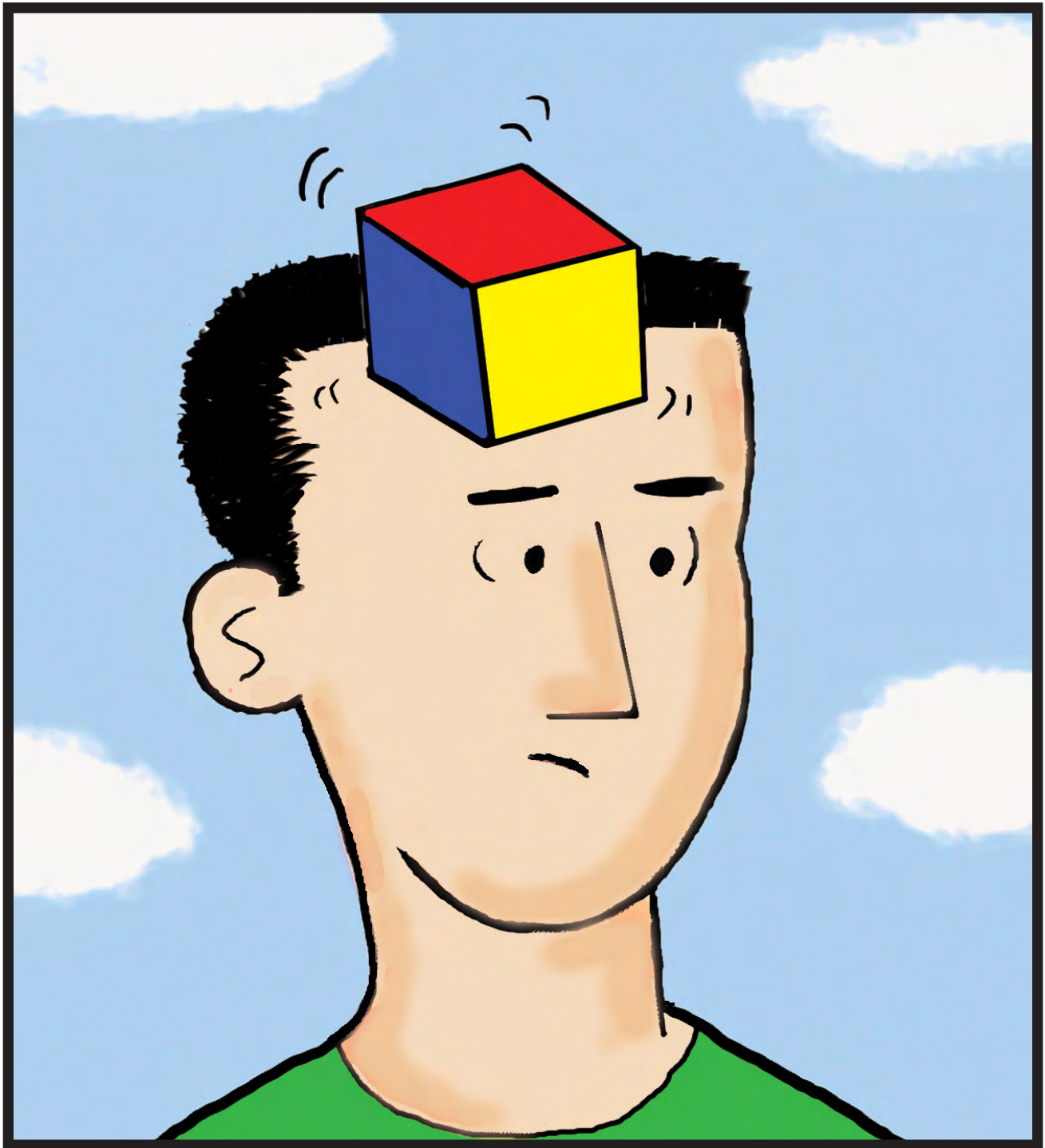
How are you with **deadlines**?



I am soooo outta here.

Hey! And just where do you think you're going?

The Creative block... is it real?



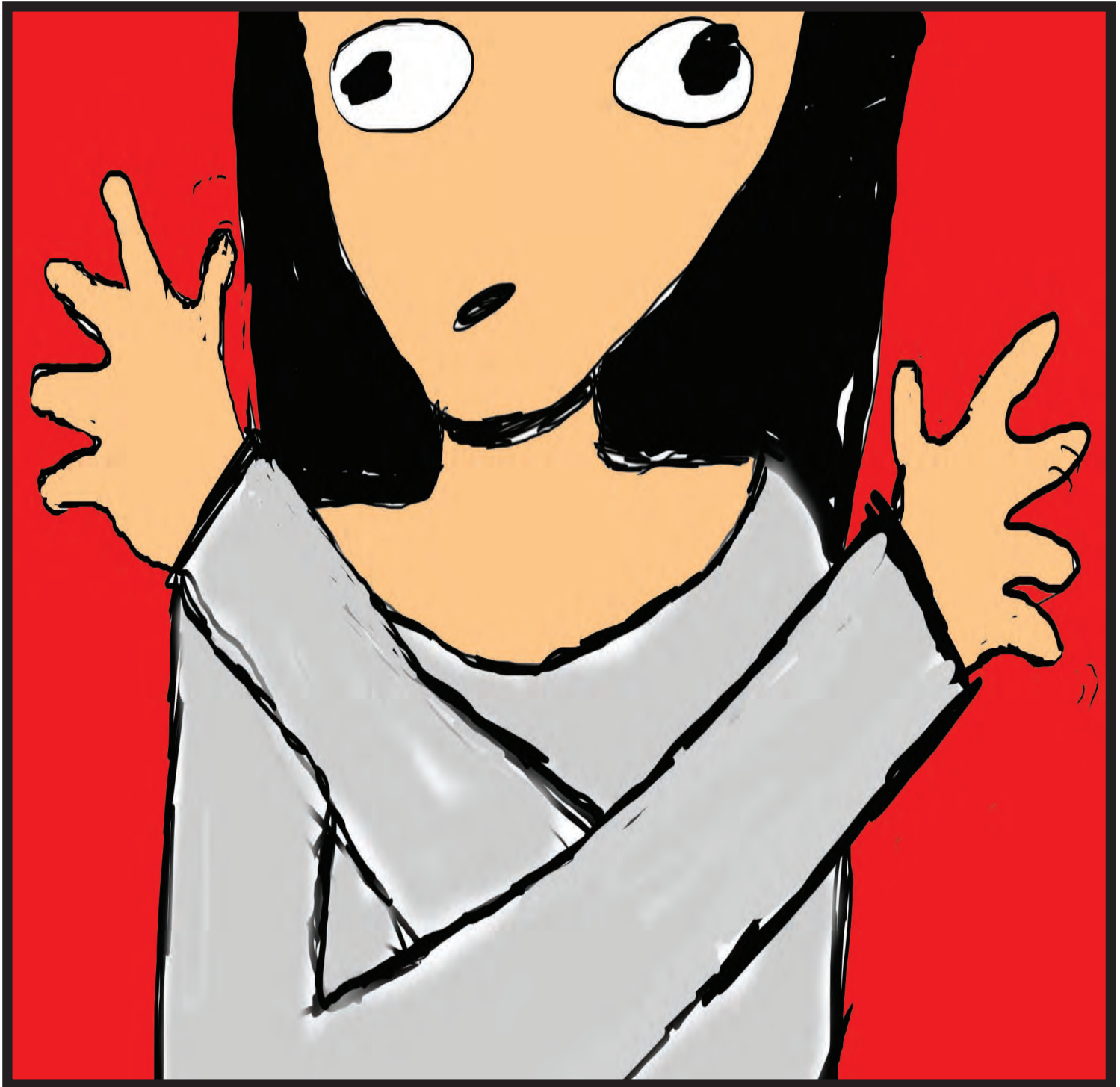
Before Breakthrough



After breakthrough



Switch Hands.



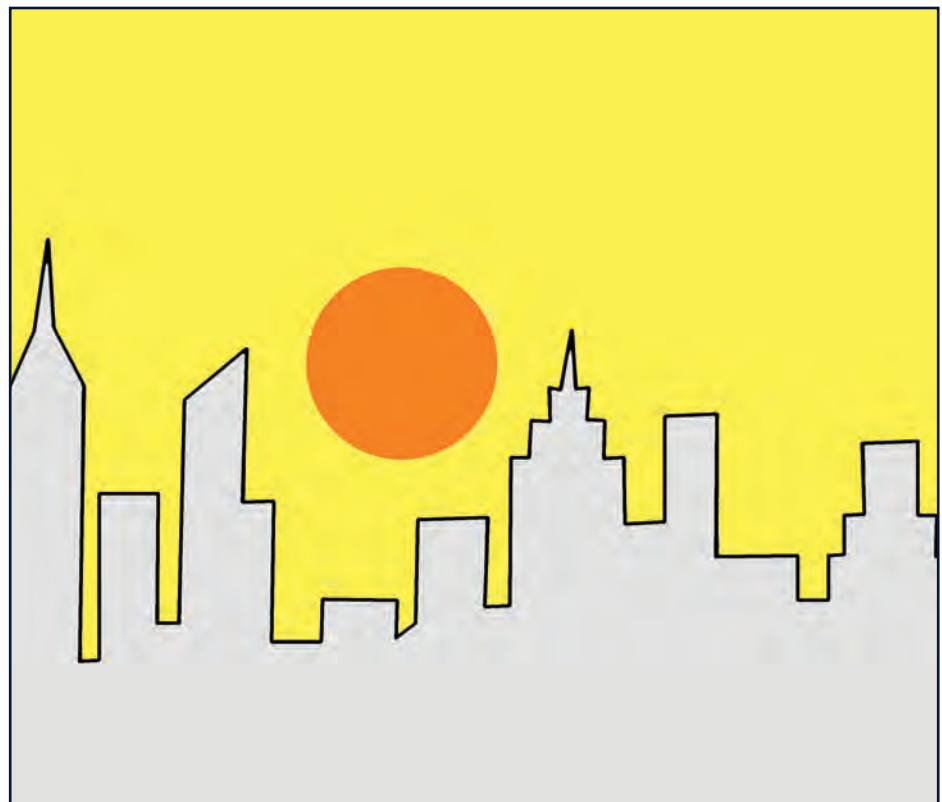
Make lots of Mistakes.



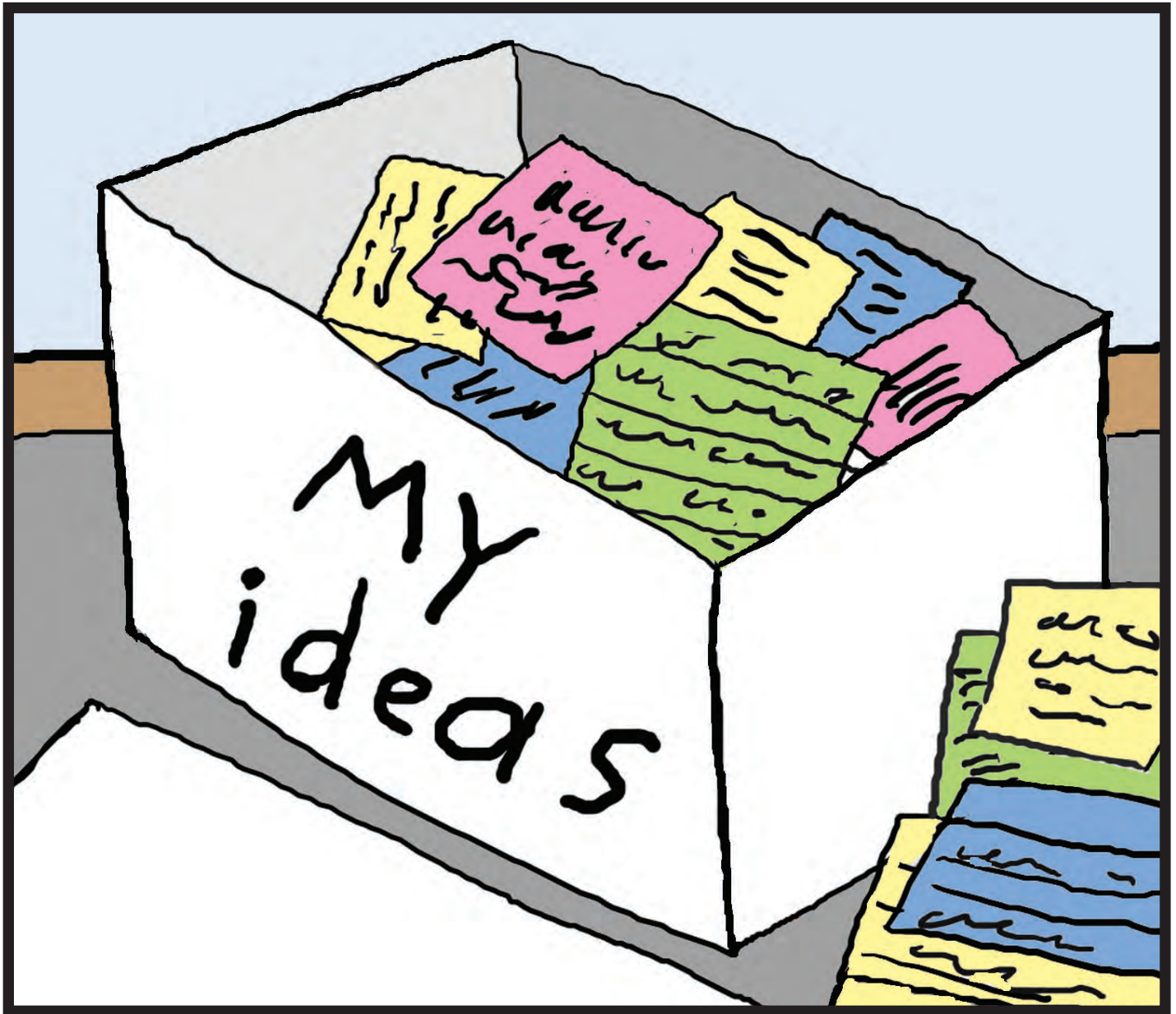
Go to sleep



Things always look brighter in the morning



Don't throw anything away.



Don't worry what people say about you.



Never leave home without a pencil and paper.



