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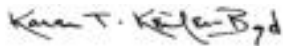
INCLUSIVE AND REFLECTIVE STORY TELLING, LGBTQ+ YOUTH AND COMICS

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF FIGURES	iv
Chapter 1 INTRODUCTION TO THE STATEMENT OF PROBLEM: CORRECTING A LACK OF LGBTQ+ REPRESENTATION IN ADOLESCENT COMIC CREATION RESOURCES	1
Chapter 2 LITERATURE REVIEW SEARCH FOR LGBTQ+ REPRESENTATION IN BOOKS FOR MIDDLE SCHOOL GRADES.....	7
Chapter 3 CASE STUDY DESIGN AND ARTS-BASED METHODOLOGY	9
Chapter 4 ANALYSIS	16
Chapter 5 FINDINGS: NEED FOR LGBTQ+ RESOURCES, TRUST-BUILDING ACTIVITIES, MULTI-WORKSHOPS, AND MULTI-SPECTRUM PROMPTS	37
Appendix A Verbal Assent Script and Letter for Adolescent Participants and Parents/Guardians	42
Appendix B Instagram Recruitment Image	44
Appendix C IRB Approved Lesson Plan.....	45
Appendix D IRB Approved Resource Packet	51
Appendix E Student Brainstorming Sheets	57
Appendix F Student Surveys	61

LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 1: Personal Illustrated Books/Comic Collection Visual Data Analysis; March 2021.	5
Figure 2: Comic from my Personal Journal Entries; September 2014	10
Figure 3: Graphic reflection on teaching; 2021	13
Figure 4: Reflection Graphic Workshop Introduction.....	17
Figure 5: Graphic Reflection Workshop Warmup.....	18
Figure 6: Graphic Reflection Workshop Brainstorming	19
Figure 7: Graphic Reflection Workshop Progress.....	20
Figure 8: Graphic Reflection Workshop Getting to Know.....	21
Figure 9: Graphic Reflection Future Plans.....	22
Figure 10: Graphic Reflection Wrap Up.....	23
Figure 11: Lynda Barry's Simple Character	24

Chapter 1

INTRODUCTION TO THE STATEMENT OF PROBLEM: CORRECTING A LACK OF LGBTQ+ REPRESENTATION IN ADOLESCENT COMIC CREATION RESOURCES

The purpose of this arts-based case study is to closely examine and reflect on my comics curriculum and resource for LGBTQ+ youth, ages 14-17, which employed personal storytelling skills and an LGBTQ+ inclusive art resource. I piloted the comics curriculum and resource in a two-hour workshop and documented student comic creations and surveys to assess student interest in and reaction to creating personal works that further LGBTQ+ visibility and representation in comics. I documented my findings using a graphic reflection process.

In what follows, I discuss the context and background that led to this study, the methodology for the study, and significance of the study, as well as my analysis and findings. I am museum educator, artist, and bisexual woman. Growing up as a youth in the 1990s and early 2000s, I looked for characters in youth oriented media that represented my experience and found none. My favorite comics were Archie Comics, and they did not feature an openly LGBTQ+ character until 2010 (Archie Comics Wiki, n.d., para.1). In 2022, there is more representation of LGBTQ+ characters in media created for middle and high school aged children. However, inclusion of books and comics with LGBTQ+ characters are still uncommon in most classrooms, and there are few guides or intentional inclusion within most curriculums. I want students I teach to have what I never did. Therefore, the purpose of my study was to develop curricular resources and pedagogical approaches inclusive of LGBTQ+ students to encourage

them to create graphic narratives based in their own lived experiences and identity explorations.

Context of the Problem: Noticing the Lack of Appropriate LGBTQ+ Representation in Adolescent Comics and Manga

During a graduate course preparing for my action research, I began reflecting on my teaching practices and resources that I used previously in comics and manga courses for students in grades five through twelve. Particularly, I investigated representations of LGBTQ+ characters and storylines in what I introduced via class resource packets, and in student creations in the past six years. In my initial analysis of my practice and resources that I have created over six years teaching comics and manga, I discovered that my resources were not nearly as diverse or representative as I thought they were or intended them to be, even as an educator coming from what felt like an informed and culturally responsive position. My resources included proportion models only on a gender binary rather than a gender spectrum, or genderless models for poses and clothing examples. I had avoided including examples of couples entirely.

Adrian D. Martin, assistant professor in the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education at New Jersey City University, and Tamara Spencer, associate professor in the Justice, Community Leadership Program/Teacher Education Department and Associate Dean in the Kalmanovitz School of Education at Saint Mary's College of California, emphasized the importance on multicultural literature in classrooms, stating, "if the plurality of human experience is reflected in the texts employed in classrooms and pedagogy enacted by teachers, learning to read (and reading to learn) can be emancipatory and affirmative" (Martin & Spencer, 2019, para. 2). While Martin and

Spencer (2019) focus on racial and ethnic representation in their writing, their statement is equally true for LGBTQ+ students.

In this arts-based action research case study, I examined my own teaching practices and resources, and taught a two-hour workshop to LGBTQ+ youth. Comics in curriculum advocate Gretchen Schwarz (2010) writes, “The history of the graphic novel marks it as an ‘outsider’ force or alternative medium in the United States” (para. 2). It is logical to conclude that this outsider status of comics, graphic novels, and manga is part of what draws in students who may feel different than their peers, such as LGBTQ+ students. I have taught several comic book and manga workshops over the last six years and noticed that an increasing number of students outwardly self-identified as LGBTQ+ in my anime and manga classes, more so than any other art class I taught. Given the trend I have noticed in my anime and manga classes, these students are excited to feel like they are among people who understand them and to be part of a LGBTQ+ community.

Therefore, I set my goal for this study to create a curriculum that not only recognizes but enhances a sense of belonging for LGBTQ+ students, as well as any other student who may not feel welcomed elsewhere. I intended to create a curriculum that can be used for both LGBTQ+ youth in comic and manga classes, as well as all adolescent youth in comic and manga classes. My hope is that with this curriculum and resource, students will gain more diverse resources to tell their own stories, and move away from stereotypical representation of characters from outside their personal experiences in their comic and manga creations. In my study, I sought evidence of change in LGBTQ+ student generated comics after the exposure to and use of inclusive resources, as opposed to resources that only portray heterosexual, cisgender figures and prompts.

Background of the Problem: Lack of LGBTQ+ Books on Shelves

The lack of LGBTQ+ representation in children's literature, and especially in comics and manga, aimed at adolescents has long been a problem and publishers are, only recently, slowly making progress towards correcting this issue. When looking for comics and manga to share with students in the classroom, I recognized the lack of LGBTQ+ inclusive literature that would be relatable and interesting to the students I teach. Books and guides with tutorials on drawing in comic and anime styles were even less inclusive. Outside of books written for middle and high school aged children, sometimes referred to as middle reader books and/or YA (young adult), LGBTQ+ comics are more prevalent, but often feature content that most educators would not deem "appropriate" for the classroom because of sexual content aimed at adult audiences.

In a review of my own bookshelf in March of 2021, I searched for books that were illustrated including anthologies, graphic novels, and comic books that included LGBTQ+ characters and were appropriate for middle school students. The last two categories are important to understanding what many publishers deem as appropriate for a middle school audience. The "openly gay" books only include two, but when I expanded the definition to include queer coded characters, it did expand representation. Queer coding in comics and animation was and still is prevalent. Esper Quinn (2021), bi, trans, genderfluid author and entertainment critic writes, "[Queer coding] is defined as imbuing a fictional work with queer themes or characters without ever explicitly acknowledging the queerness." However, having to include queer coded characters to increase representation means that LGBTQ+ readers of these books must settle for only veiled representations. This could potentially lead to feelings of shame or the need to hide. See Figure 1.

Figure 1. *Personal Illustrated Books/Comic Collection Visual Data Analysis; March 2021*



When I have taught comics and manga classes in the past, many students in my classes self-identified as LGBTQ+, yet often created comics and wrote stories in class that were heteronormative and more closely reflected stories they had seen in comics, manga, and anime. Some students would include very veiled representation or leave characters or situations ambiguous. Lori Don Levan (2016), instructor for the Pennsylvania State University School of Visual Arts and fat advocate, examined how body diversity, and specifically how fatness, is portrayed in media. She states: “As children begin to solidify their own ideas and become socialized to prevailing attitudes, their actions will reflect what they have come to believe is true” (Don Levan, 2016, p. 140). I began to ask myself: What images and media am I providing my students to challenge what may be presented to them in conventional outlets? How could this change how they see themselves, portray themselves and how they portray others? From these overarching questions, I began to develop my first cycle of action research with a critical review of my library that informs my teaching of comics (see Figure 1).

Chapter 2

LITERATURE REVIEW SEARCH FOR LGBTQ+ REPRESENTATION IN BOOKS FOR MIDDLE SCHOOL GRADES

In the 2018 School Library Journal's (SLJ) Diverse Book Collection Survey, SLJ invited librarians to give their input regarding their experiences with diverse book demand in their school or public libraries. SLJ noted that "out of 1,156 respondents, 72% work in schools and 28% work in public libraries" (Ishizuka, 2018, p. 2). When asked to rank demand for diverse books from a list including "Black or African America, Biracial/Multiracial, Disabled, Neurodiverse, LGBTQ+, English Language Learners, Asian, East Asian, and Southeast Asian," SLJ found that "public libraries put LGBTQ+ books in their top position [highest demand] and high schools put them in their #2 [second highest demand]. What I wouldn't expect is that rural libraries put LGBTQ+ books in their top three most highly demanded diverse representations in books (Ishizuka, 2018, p. 10). While they do list LGBTQ+ books as among the least difficult to find among the list above, those responses include high school appropriate books. When combining LGBTQ+ with other identity factors, and whose target audience is middle school aged students, it becomes more difficult. Two librarians are directly quoted, saying books with characters who are "LGBTQ+ for middle grade readers," and "LGBTQ+ that are middle school "appropriate" are among the more difficult to find (Ishizuka, 2018, p. 15). I have found when looking for graphic novels, comics, or manga for middle school aged children, or anime and comic drawing guides, it is difficult to find curricular guides that include any LGBTQ+ representation at all, or even implied representation.

While searching for anime drawing guides with LGBTQ+ representation, the results were limited for professional guides. For example, *The Master Guide to Drawing Anime: Romance* by Christopher Hart (2020) is typical to other anime guides I have found where only heterosexual, cisgender couples are depicted, especially couples where the male is significantly taller than the female and other norms that do not reflect the diversity of the world in which my students and I exist. *How to Draw Manga Volume 28: Couples* by Hikaru Hayshi (2002) does include both heterosexual and homosexual couples, but also includes sexualized nudity and characters in adult situations, and while images do not explicitly depict pornographic content, the book does discuss it. Hayshi's (2002) guide is certainly aimed at adults. This struggle to find inclusive content that is also appropriate for 14–17-year-old students is a common one, especially within this genre.

Dodge and Crutcher (2015) discuss the importance of challenging only representation of marginalized groups by a single story. "Making LGBTQ stories a standard part of curriculum, just like other issues of diversity, serves to validate and promote acceptance of the experiences of LGBTQ youths who might otherwise not see themselves reflected in texts they read" (Dodge & Crutcher, 2015, pp. 95-96). In my study, I define LGBTQ+ youth as students between the ages of 14 and 17 years old, who identify as one or more of the following sexual or gender identities: lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, or other identities outside of heterosexual or cisgender. LGBTQ+ students are not a uniform, universal, or monolithic type of person but bring a wide range of experiences, opinions, expressions, and ideas into the classroom when they are creating art. Students should see LGBTQ+ experiences as nuanced, complex, and multi-dimensional reflected in the art that they are exposed to in the classroom.

Chapter 3

CASE STUDY DESIGN AND ARTS-BASED METHODOLOGY

I conducted a case study of a workshop at the Michener Art Museum applying an arts-based methodology, which included creating a graphic resource, teaching comic-making, and employing a graphic reflective process. I created a two-hour workshop on comic creation for students between the ages of 14 and 17 who self-identify as LGBTQ+.

I created a resource for this workshop that is more inclusive than my previous version of resources created for general comic and manga art classes, camps, and workshops at the Michener Art Museum. I taught, observed, and reflected. I reflected using my own comics process to record events and conversations in the workshop, as well as reflect on my own experiences as an LGBTQ student and educator. My practice of graphic reflection of a personal teaching experience is something I began exploring as a new educator (see Figure 2) and continued to develop for this study.

Site Selection

The Michener Art Museum is a mid-sized regional art museum in Bucks County Pennsylvania. The museum's collection focuses on artwork from the Delaware Valley region, including Impressionist and Modernist painting, and crafts and woodworking by artists such as George Nakashima. The Michener Art Museum also conducts to over 150 art classes and art making programs for people aged 3 through adult. These workshops range from drawing and painting to illustration, stained glass, and sculpture.

The Michener Art Museum classroom site had all the materials and the structure I needed to conduct the workshop. Materials included pencils, sharpeners, erasers, graphic markers, paper, bristol board, rulers, T-squares, a light table, copy machine, and

projector. The structure included a classroom with tables and chairs, outlets, and the resources to reach students who may be interested in this class. The Michener Art Museum was also open late on Thursdays, allowing students to meet after school during the week.

Figure 2.

Comic from my Personal Journal Entries; September 2014.



Note: I am the copywrite holder of the comic in Figure 2. This was a reflection on a conversation with younger students in my Saturday Drawing and Painting Class for children aged 5-10.

Purposeful Sampling Strategies and Protection of the Rights of Human Subjects

Following Institutional Review Board approval of my study to include a recruitment strategy and consent forms (see Appendix A and B), I selected 4 students who are between the ages of 14 and 17 and who self-identify as LGBTQ+ (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, and other non-heterosexual, non-cisgender identities). I have selected the age range so that participants understand the survey data will be part of my research study and reflect the typical ages of students in my classroom. The number of students was limited to 10-12 maximum due to space allowed in the classrooms at the Michener Art Museum. Space is additionally limited due to COVID-19 precautions. After recruitment following delays in IRB approval, four students that meet the criteria of participants for the study were able to attend the in-person workshop.

To recruit potential subjects, I contacted, via email, Marlene Pray, the director of the Bucks County Rainbow Room, a center for LGBTQ+ youth and allies ages 14-21 years old. I also asked that within their network, members recruit other potential subjects who may be interested in participating. I gave all potential subjects access to my contact information to express their interest in attending the comic workshop, the site of my study, rather than me initially contacting them. I shared information about the study during a live Zoom meeting for the Rainbow Room, as well as shared information about the study via their private Instagram (see Appendix B). Youth members also shared information on their private Discord server. Subjects were recruited for two weeks prior to the study date. The case study took place on Thursday, December 30, 2022.

The screening process occurred before obtaining informed assent of the potential subjects for the study. I informed potential subjects of the age and sexual identity parameters I used to screen subjects and I asked them to proceed with the informed assent process only if they fall within those parameters. I had another adult who has

experience working with adolescents and, as I also have obtained, has up-to-date Pennsylvania Criminal Background Check, Child Abuse History Clearance, and FBI Fingerprinting to support the participants in the classroom, as well as serve as witness for verbal assent from participants, as well as verbal parental consent, as required by the IRB (see Appendix A). This additional adult did not collect data but served as an adult in the room for the emotional and physical safety of the children involved in the study. I did not offer incentives to participants to ensure there is less possibility of coercion, especially given that participants are minors.

Data Collection Strategies

I created a comics curriculum that includes a resource pack for students. Students created sketches in the resource packet, brainstormed, and created a one-page comic before completing a short reflection survey during the two-hour workshop. I made photocopies as maintaining possession of final works was not possible. I also reflected using my own graphic reflection process. I did not take photographs, or record video or audio, to protect the identities of the participants.

My graphic reflection process includes personal reflections on interactions between myself and students as well as student interactions with their peers. I continue to develop this process; the second iteration of my graphic reflection process can be seen in Figure 3. I have continued to create a more refined structure leading up to and reflecting on action research and hope to continue this practice beyond this qualitative arts-based action research.

Figure 3

Graphic reflection on teaching; 2021



Note: I am the copywrite holder of the comic in this figure. This reflection is a memory of encouraging students to seek their own resources via web searches for a comic workshop in 2017.

Inductive Data Analysis

In reviewing their completed comics, in-class sketches, notes, and short survey answers, I reviewed the comics closely for representation of LGBTQ+ characters and storylines, and if the students perceived benefits from the LGBTQ+ curriculum and resource that I developed and provided. Specifically, I conducted qualitative analysis on how the research participants perceive the references and resources provided to them in relation to their LGBTQ+ identities and/or perspectives, as well as their behavior leading up to, during, and at the end of the workshop. The four-layered analysis consists of layer one: coding to disassemble and reassemble, layer two: inquiry prose, layer three: reflexivity and encompassing metaphors, and layer four: seeing patterns as major themes (Keifer-Boyd, 2012). I will reflect on the workshop and student interactions and present my findings with both a graphic and written reflection. Coding the data allowed me to categorize and organize my data. With the inquiry prose, I am able to write about the codes to discover connections to texts and the primary data. In layer three, I am able to weight codes to form a larger concept and interpret and build ideas. In layer four I am able to pull the data together with metaphors and themes.

Significance of the Study

My purpose was to create a curriculum and resource that is beneficial to self-identified LGBTQ+ students as well as informative for students outside of those

identities. Helping LGBTQ+ students see themselves in the curriculum and assist them in finding and using their own voice in this study and in the future is the priority of this study. Having student input in the survey reflecting on the curriculum, workshop, and resources in addition to their comic creation was integral. By recognizing student voices as essential knowledge, such acknowledgement contextualizes and politicizes students (Keifer-Boyd, 2012).

This study will serve as a guide for art educators to analyze their own curriculum in terms of inclusion of LGBTQ+ identities and to generate a curriculum resource for such representation. It is my hope that the creation of an inclusive comics curriculum and resource will allow other educators to build their library of resources as well as their practicum knowledge for reaching LGBTQ+ students. According to the GLSEN, a U.S. organization working to end discrimination against LGBTQ+ students in K-12 settings: “Students are most likely to reach their full educational potential in positive learning environments that are safe, secure, welcoming, and where they feel a sense of belonging” (GLSEN, n.d., para. 5). Ideally, by creating easily accessible resources for them, it will inspire them to create a safer, more supportive educational space for students, and to possibly share these resources with other educators, librarians, and parents.

Chapter 4

ANALYSIS

The workshop as an arts-base case study was conducted on December 30th, 2021. Due to Planned Parenthood and Rainbow Room regulations regarding COVID safety protocols, all Rainbow Room meetings shifted to virtual events a few weeks prior to the meeting where I was welcomed to recruit. Participants or their parents reached out to me with questions and clarifications after the recruitment process leading up to the evening. When they arrived, I read over the consent/assent form with them before they sat down.

I have reflected on some of the interactions of the workshop in graphic form (see Figures 4-10). I decided to depict myself and all participants using anthropomorphized animals. This allowed me to remove any physical characteristics that may give away the identities of any of the participants. I have also chosen to leave out any names or pronouns of the participants. This is for anonymity, as well as to allow the reader of the graphic reflections to leave gender presentation out of their analysis. Considering some of my participants are still figuring out their gender presentation, it feels right to allow them the flexibility in these reflections.

One student had met me previously, but only in a limited interaction through the Rainbow Room for a workshop leading up the Queer Prom held in 2020. I had not had any of them in any art making classes in the past, or any interactions with the one student between the first Rainbow Room workshop and the evening of the study.

Figure 4. Reflection Graphic Workshop Introduction



Figure 5. Graphic Reflection Workshop Warmup



Figure 6. Graphic Reflection Workshop Brainstorming

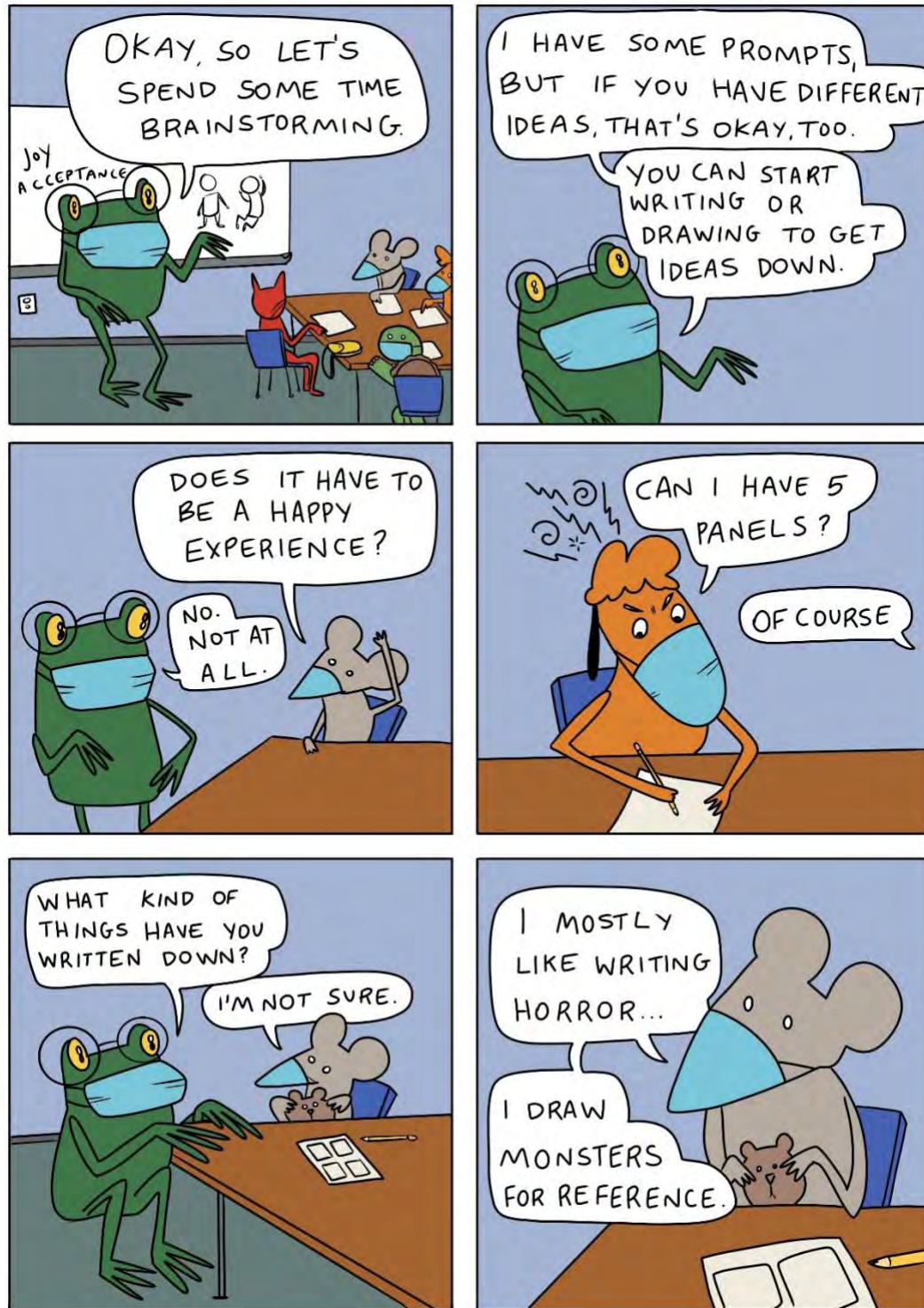


Figure 7. Graphic Reflection Workshop Progress



Figure 8. Graphic Reflection Workshop Getting to Know



Figure 9. Graphic Reflection Future Plans

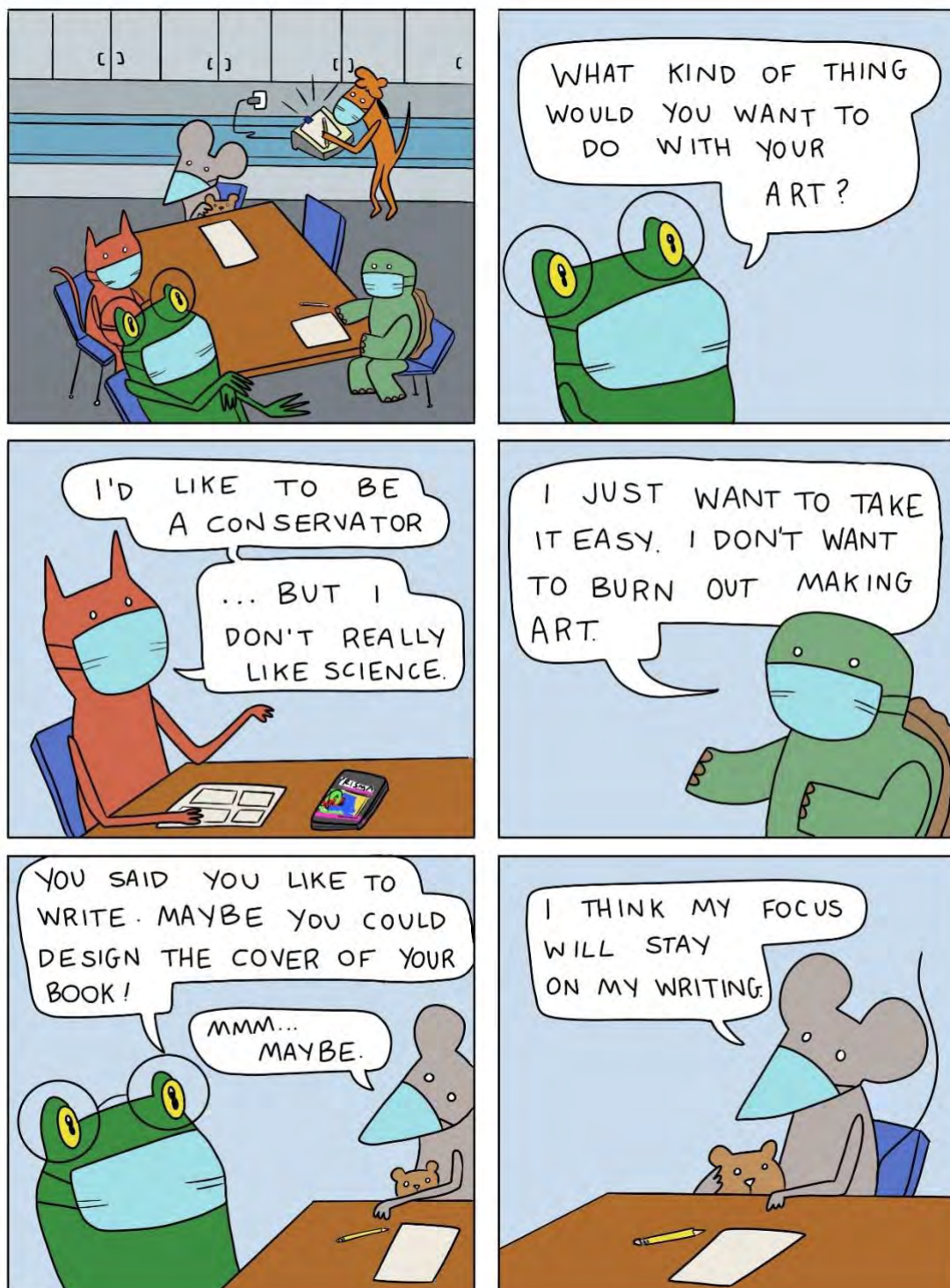
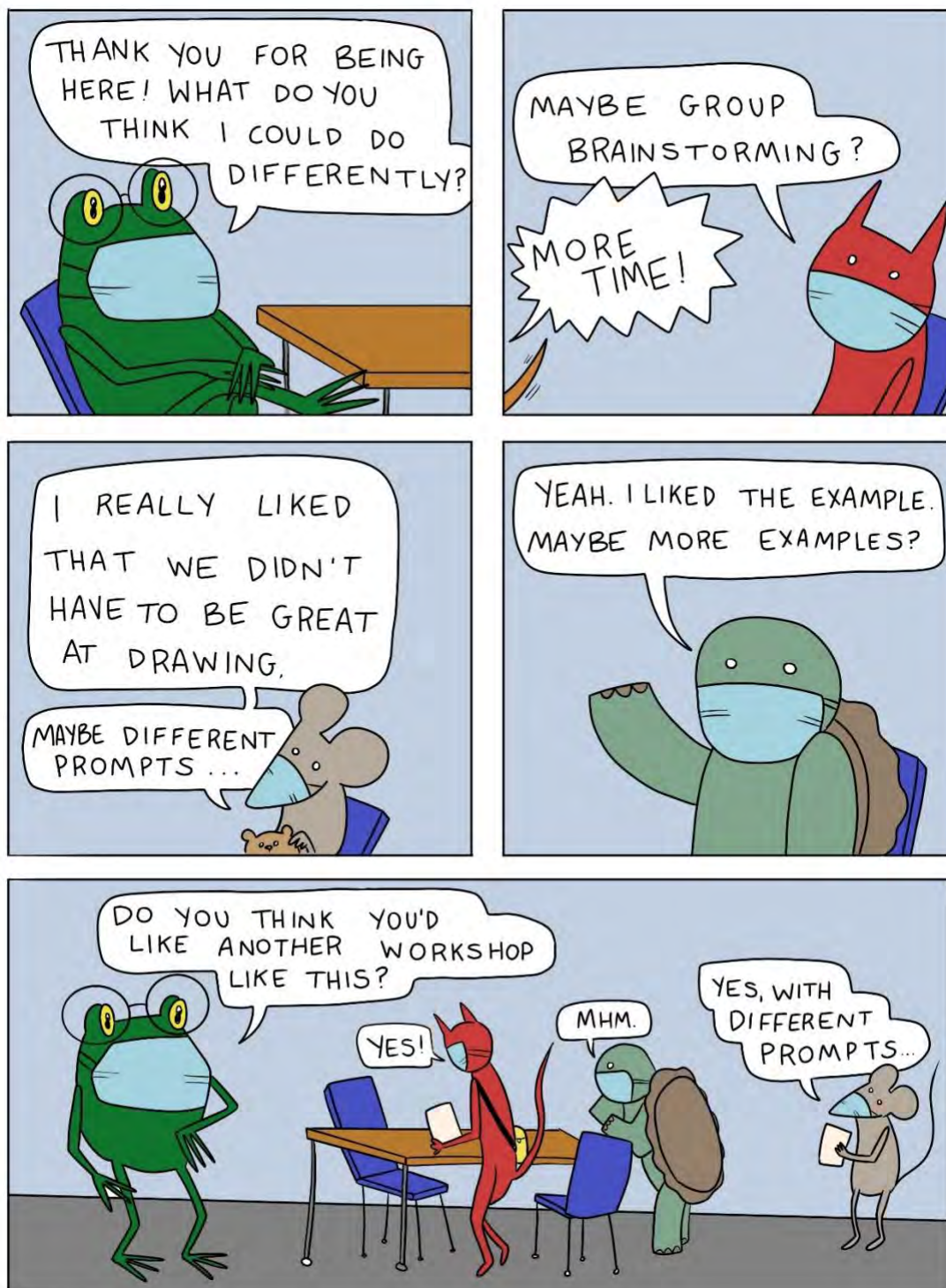


Figure 10. Graphic Reflection Wrap Up



As I guided students through the resource packet I had developed for the workshop, I discussed the idea of creating their own story, making small changes in each panel, and not trying to include too much in the time allotted for the workshop. I provided an example on the board of artist and educator Lynda Barry's Ivan Brunetti-inspired simple characters as a great starting point for drawing (Barry, 2019, p. 39). (See Figure 11 below for reference.) This basic character, and the reassurance that students need not be "good" at drawing in order to create a comic seemed like a comfort to some. There was even an audible expression of relief by one, and nervous laughter from others.

Figure 11: Lynda Barry's Simple Character



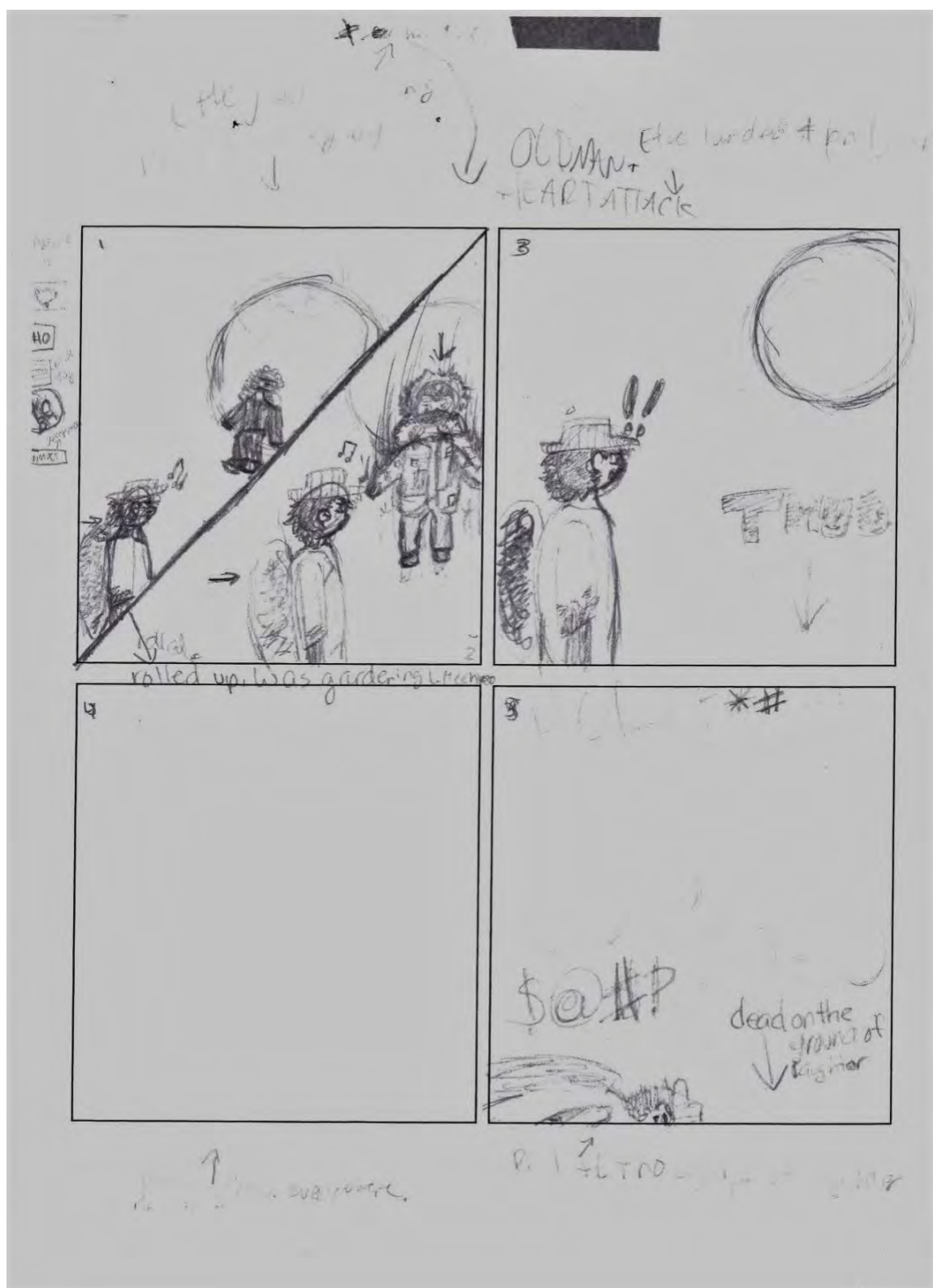
I drew some quick examples of character in motion, and how they could change their framing to vary their panels. I discussed with students how their characters did not have to be proportionate human characters, or even human. (See Appendix D for my resource packet.) Aware of our time restraints, I began discussing brainstorming with students about different scenarios to build their stories for their short comic. One student expressed repeatedly that the positive prompts that I had provided to them were not necessarily reflective of all LGBTQ+ experiences. I acknowledge the observation as accurate but, also, suggested that they explore a place of healing or safety from struggles. I reminded students that the comic did not necessarily have to reflect a true experience, or that it could even alter an experience from their past to reflect how they would have liked to have changed it. Students spent some time quietly brainstorming in their packets. I briefly discussed mind-maps as a brainstorming tool, where they could write down loose ideas and connect them to create fuller thoughts. I also suggested students work on very simple outlines on the last page of their packet before moving to their final drawing paper.

Students began working in their packets while I circulated the room. I checked in with them while they worked, and gave feedback or suggestions as needed. Some students jumped right in, working quickly and loosely. Others seemed were hesitant to start or overwhelmed by trying to fit too much into their comic in the time we had available. For example, in comparing the drafts in Appendix E with the final comic in Figures 12-16, I observed that some students had an almost fully developed idea before they moved to their final draft.

One student, however, seemed to become more and more overwhelmed with the time we had and the amount of story that they wanted to include in their comic. Student 2 was unable to move beyond their rough draft in their packet. The number of notes

surrounding their panels suggested that they had extensive context that they wanted to include. The other comics explored points of stress, with some resolution at the end.

Figure 12: Student Two Comic (Draft from Packet)



I was able to speak with three of the four students during and after the completion of their comics. One student depicted themselves as the red cat in the reflection graphics, entered the workshop eager to show me the supplies they had brought. This student seemed excited to be working and began working almost immediately on their comic once prompted. This student asked very few questions, and seemed to have characters already formed, suggesting that perhaps these were original characters (OCs). The student's limited use of dialogue, and abundant use of color and texture resulted in a visually strong comic. The comic depicts one character perhaps confessing their love for the over by giving them their heart. This student did not seem to want to discuss the meaning of this comic, but was instead excited to talk about materials, and about possible art careers in their future.

Figure 13: Student One Comic



Another student's comic, "The Escape of Music," is able to depict a scene that I imagine many adolescents would relate. This student is depicted as the mouse in my reflection comics. As my reflections show, this student asked multiple times if there were other prompts that could be used and reminded me and the other students that not all LGBTQ+ experiences were positive ones. They noted that by focusing only on positive experiences, students having a hard time at home might feel even more isolated or alone. This student seemed nervous and took longer than the other students to begin working. As depicted in the reflection graphics, this student expressed more of an interest in writing, and needed reassurance throughout the process. In the end, they created a completed comic, and expressed that they would be interested in exploring this again, if only there were a wider variety of prompts.

Figure 14: Student Three Comic



Student Four, depicted as the tortoise in the graphic reflections, created "Portrait Stress."

This comic has no dialogue at all but rather depicts a powerful transformation from a

character that is distressed seeing themselves in the mirror to a character that is able to fully design their own image and have control over not just how others see them, but, also, how they see themselves. In conversations leading up to this workshop, their parent confided in me that this student was experimenting with different pronouns and encouraged me to ask them that day of which they preferred. Student Four was quiet to start but did begin to open-up to the group throughout the duration on the workshop. This student, like Student One, brought their own supplies, including the crayons they used to complete their comic, and a sketchbook that they showed off but did not use. During and after the creation of their comic, Student Four mentioned that they had taken a break from making art because it changed from being something that helped them relieve stress to something that caused them stress. They stated that they were beginning to explore art again but were looking for a way to explore it without losing a balance. This student also seemed reassured that there was no pressure to draw a certain way during the workshop. They mentioned that the character next to the title, and final character on the wall in the comic was a depiction of themselves that they had begun using in their art recently, after exploring many different ways to depict themselves. This comic was almost fully formed in the brainstorming phase, as evident in Appendix E. Student Four was also the only one to complete their comic using the back of the page. The final panel has no border and is in the bottom right corner of the page. This gives the panel space and feels open. The character is relieved and satisfied. After completing this comic, the student also seemed relaxed, and was comfortable talking about their struggles with art and self-image. They seemed interested in speaking more with me and the other students.

Figure 15: Student Four Comic Front

Portrait Stress

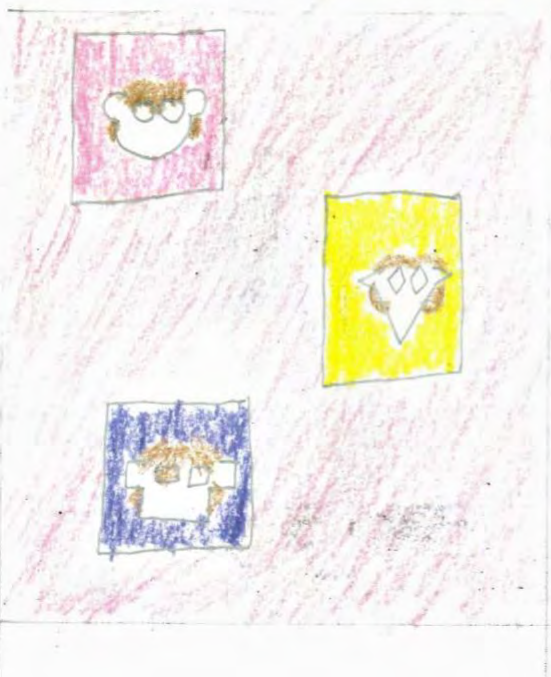


Figure 16: Student Four Comic Back



As the students finished their comic, before they began their surveys, they chatted with each other, and talked with me about their future plans in the arts. Some of them, like Student Three, expressed that they would like another workshop if it were longer, and they had more choice. Student One expressed interest in working in the arts as they got older, and asked me questions about working in a museum. They were noticeably more relaxed and conversational than they had been at the beginning of the workshop.

Before they left, they completed the anonymous surveys. (See Appendix F for the student surveys in full.) None of the students have taken an anime or comic book class at the Michener Museum before. Only one of them reported reading any “how-to” draw manga or anime books, and the student that had read a how-to book did not report seeing any LGBTQ+ representation.

However, when asked about how they felt seeing LGBTQ+ characters, the students reported that they felt “seen and represented,” and that when LGBTQ+ characters are present, “it just feels normal” and that it “feels less ‘taboo.’” When asked about seeing LGBTQ+ representation in a classroom setting, students reported that it would positively affect them. One student wrote, “it makes me feel more comfortable incorporating it into my own work because i’ll [*sic*] know how people in the class will respond.” Another student wrote, ““It was greatly effect [*sic*] me in that setting. I often hide that I’m gay in the classroom. I hide a lot of thought[s] and feeling[s] that I want to express because it involves being gay/trans.”

When asked about the resource packet, students that answered the question “What were you most excited to see in the resource packet?” both students reported that the comic example was the most helpful. However, when asked what they felt was missing, the students that chose to answer this question reported that more help with the writing and storyboarding

would be helpful. One student wrote, “Not all lgbtQ+ [*sic*] experiences are filled with joy or acceptance and it’s hard to feel alone when not given the option of a bad topic.” Students expressed to me similar statements as we wrapped up at the end of the workshop.

Chapter 5

FINDINGS: NEED FOR LGBTQ+ RESOURCES, TRUST-BUILDING ACTIVITIES, MULTI-WORKSHOPS, AND MULTI-SPECTRUM PROMPTS

My study has given me lasting impressions that will affect how I teach in the future. I am excited by the results with the comics created during the workshop but have also learned many things that I will improve or change. Even with the limitation of creating short four-to-five panel comics, students explored themes around identity, conflicts with family, confessing love, and more.

Some successes, with implications to further develop, include more emphasis on content and story writing, and how the students can best communicate their experiences. This shifts from my previous teaching, where my focus had mostly been drawing style. Ivan Brunetti, educator and cartoonist, describes the importance of substance over style in the introduction to his book, *Cartooning: Philosophy and Practice*, in a comparison to Italian cooking, stating, “If it tastes good, it will perforce also look good (note that the inverse is not also true” (Brunetti, 2011, p. 8). Looking at the comics created in this workshop, I find this metaphor to also apply to the most successful comics. Students who created comics that expressed their ideas effectively also had a visual language that worked well, while students who only focus on the illustrations without content leave the reader wanting more.

Moving forward, I hope that I can conduct a multi-week or multi-day workshop with students. The process for building trust with students in the classroom was rushed, and it only felt like we were truly starting to connect at the end of the workshop. Students

had also begun to speak with each other more and mentioned that group brainstorming may have been helpful. I wonder how open and comfortable students would have been with each other during brainstorming if they had not yet had time to become familiar with each other and me first. Having a student stressed about completing their comic, who was unfamiliar with the classroom, and access of materials, was something that could have been avoided if the workshop had taken place over a series of classes, as originally planned but not carried out due to time limitations for the study.

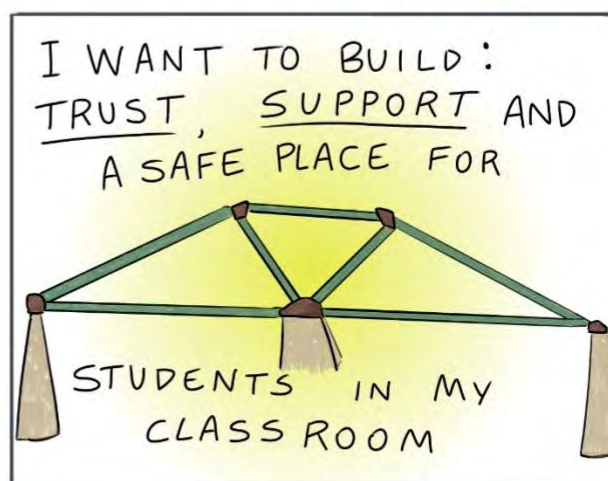
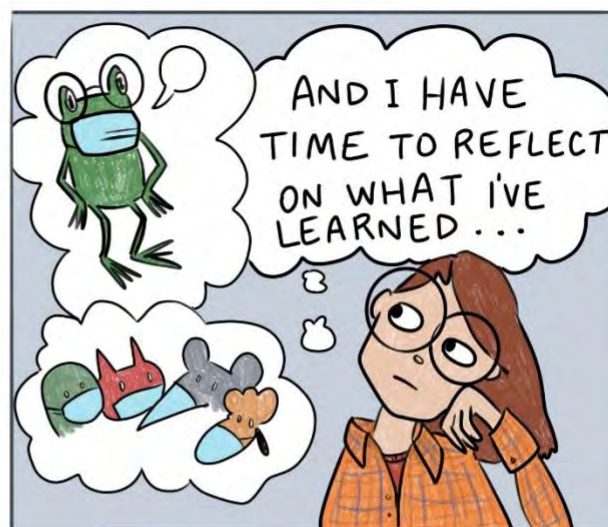
The multiple requests and suggestions for other types of prompts from one student made me reconsider the positive-focused prompts I included in the packet. I do plan to vary and add the prompts moving forward. However, I am also very aware that asking students to explore difficult topics in their first workshop, especially when they are not familiar with me, could have been a particularly upsetting or difficult challenge. Art educator and queer comics creator G.H. Greer writes,

Art educators must be mindful that the power differential inherent to teacher-student relationships gives us the capacity to cause harm if we are not careful.

Teachers should never push students to engage with subject matter that may be a source of trauma. (2021, p. 39)

I plan to further explore how to offer options that reflect students' real-life experiences in a responsible way.

Moving forward when I offer comics workshops, I will plan the workshops as a multi-day or week session, and build-in a trust building exercise, include multiple short examples, sketching warm up and group brainstorming, and will break down the process into even more manageable steps to help students from feeling overwhelmed.



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APPENDIX A:**Verbal Assent Script and Letter for Adolescent Participants and
Parents/Guardians**

Project Title: Inclusive and Reflective Storytelling, LGBTQ+ Youth, and Comics

Investigator: Andrea Thompson

I am doing a research study about how LGBTQ+ inclusive materials like resource packets and lessons will affect comic and manga creations by LGBTQ+ youth. A research study is a way to learn more about people. If you decide that you want to be part of this study, you will be asked to attend a two-hour comic creation workshop at the Michener Art Museum, create a one-page comic, and complete a short survey about your experience.

There are some things about this study you should know. We will take as many precautions as possible to keep the participation in this study confidential to protect you (or your child's) privacy. While we can ask that all participation in the study remain confidential, we cannot guarantee that other participants in the study will not share who attended or what was said during the study. I will not be taking photographs or video or audio recordings of participants, but I will be collecting the comics made, taking photographs of artwork, and collecting the anonymous surveys.

Not everyone who takes part in this study will benefit. A benefit means that something good happens to you. We think these benefits might be having the

opportunity to see LGBTQ+ representation in comic resources and creating a work of art.

When I am finished with this study, I will write a report about what was learned. This report will not include your (or your child's) name or physical description, or that you (or your child) were in the study.

You (Your child) do not have to be in this study if you do not want to be. If you decide to stop after we begin, that's okay too. Parental permission is a requirement of participation in this study, but parents will not see final comics created in the study, or read any survey answers.

If you decide to be in this study, please verbally confirm with me when asked. / If you agree that your child can participate in this study, please verbally confirm with me when asked.

I will not be collecting written consent to minimize any paperwork linking you (your child) to this study to protect your (your child's) privacy.

Appendix B:**Instagram Recruitment Image**

Appendix C: IRB Approved Lesson Plan

Andrea Thompson

Inclusive and Reflective Story Telling, LGBTQ+ Youth and Comics

Study / Workshop Lesson Plan

Materials:

- Resource Packet
- 4 panel comic template
- Pencils and erasers
- Micron pens
- Graphic markers
- 9x12" sulphite drawing paper

Introduction:

As participants and parents/adult caregivers arrive, we will review the terms of participation in the study. All participants attending, and their respective adult caregiver must give verbal consent/assent. It will be reviewed again that participants may choose to start participating at any time during the 2-hour study.

I will welcome participants into the classroom for introductions. I will introduce myself, including my pronouns. I will then ask for participants to verbally agree that names of other participants and what they say during the study should remain anonymous. Participants will then introduce themselves and their pronouns. We will discuss rules for communication and brainstorming as a group. This includes using language to build each other up, and be respectful of each other during our time together.

I will begin by introducing comics as a medium for story telling across styles and genres, including pages from a number of comics targeted at middle school readers. See Comic Resources for full list. These comics all feature characters who are LGBTQ+,

as well as authors, illustrators, and others involved in the creation of the books are identify as LGBTQ+.

We will then take some time for quick drawing warmups. I will reiterate with participants that their drawing ability is not being tested, and that all drawings that they generate will be anonymous.

We will then review the resource packet. The resource packet includes information about human proportions but also includes information on creating a 4-panel comic, including an example comic.

Participants will be asked to reflect on their own experiences along the following prompts:

- A time you felt JOY
- A time you felt accepted
- A new realization
- Meeting someone that “gets you”

Participant reflections will be on the back of their packet. Once they have an idea, participants will be asked to spend time creating their own four-panel comic in the template provided. Participants will be reminded to change any names or places to keep anonymity if using an event from their life.

I will circulate the room, answering questions and giving feedback to participants as needed.

Once drawings in pencil are finished, participants may use graphic markers or microns to add details or color as desired.

Once 4-panel comics are completed, I will ask if any participants would like to share their work. This will be optional.

Participants will be asked to complete the anonymous survey reflecting on the workshop and will place all material generated in a plain folder.

Comic Resources:

Ellis, G., & Beagle, S. (2018). *Moonstruck* (Magic to Brew ed., Vol. 1). Image Comics.

Stevenson, N., Watters, S., Ellis, G., & Allen, B. A. (2015). *Lumberjanes Vol. 1* (Beware the Kitten Holy ed., Vol. 1). BOOM! Box.

Stevenson, N., Ellis, G., Watters, S., & Allen, B. A. (2015). *Lumberjanes Vol. 2* (Friendship to the Max ed., Vol. 2). BOOM! Box.

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Appendix D:
IRB Approved Resource Packet

MAKING A 4-6 PANEL COMIC

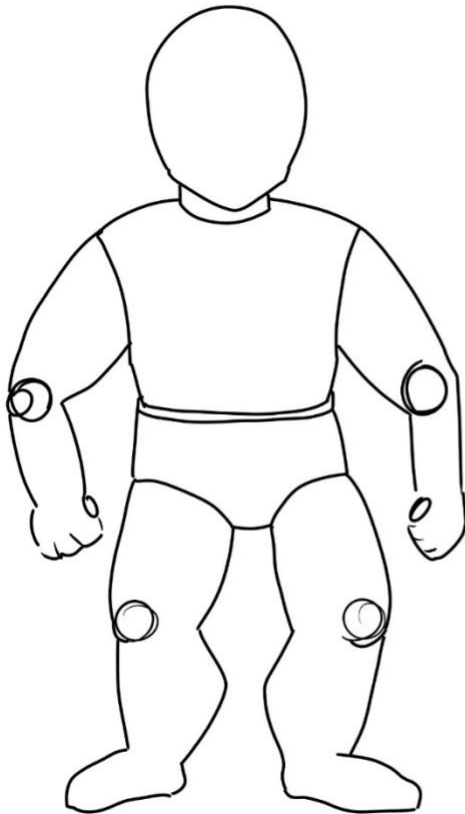
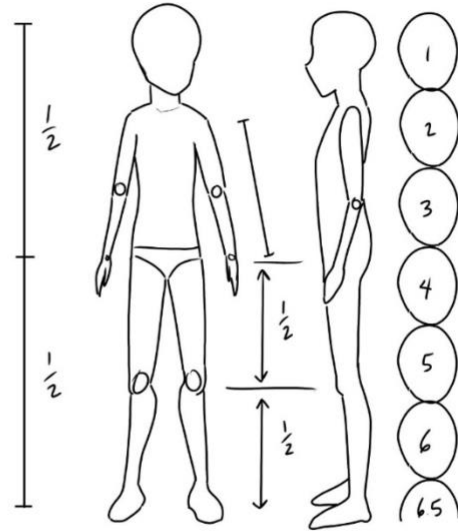
- ★ KEEP IT SIMPLE
- ★ MAKE SMALL CHANGES
- ★ DOESN'T NEED LOTS OF WORDS
- ★ SMALL PART OF A STORY
 - *BUT SOMETHING HAPPENS

- DOESN'T HAVE TO BE EXACTLY FROM YOUR LIFE
 - *BUT USE YOUR EXPERIENCES FOR INSPIRATION

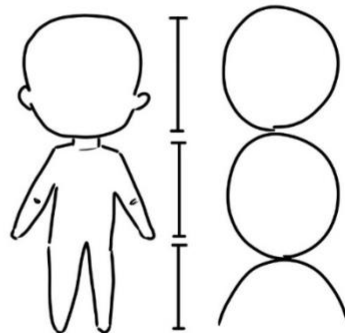
TOPICS

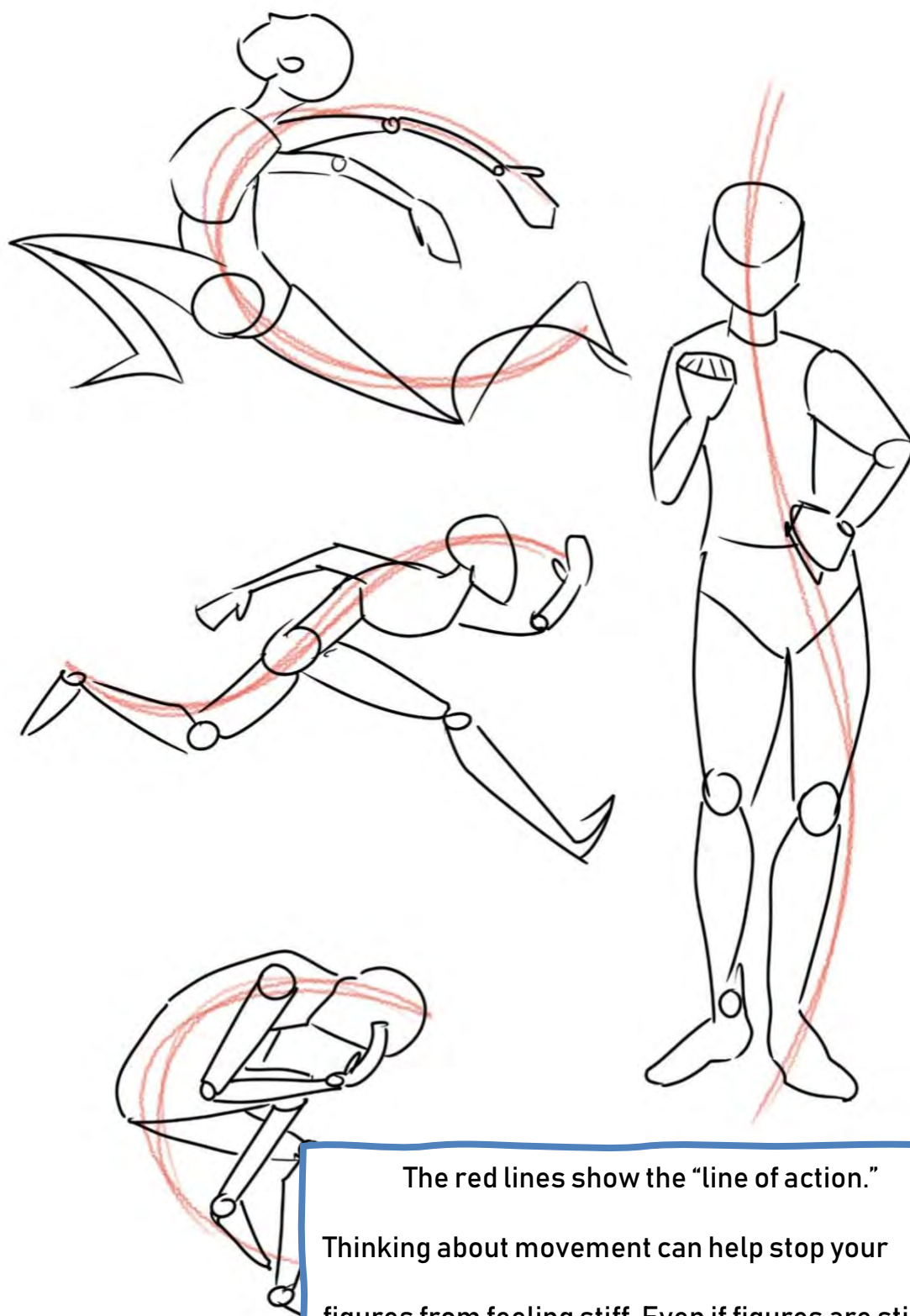
- A TIME YOU FELT JOY
- A TIME YOU FELT ACCEPTED
- A NEW REALIZATION
- MEETING SOMEONE THAT "GETS YOU"

There are many different resources online and in books for basic poses but remember that these are just guidelines. They often don't show all types of bodies, and it is a good idea to look for photos of people if you are trying to capture realistic people and expressions.

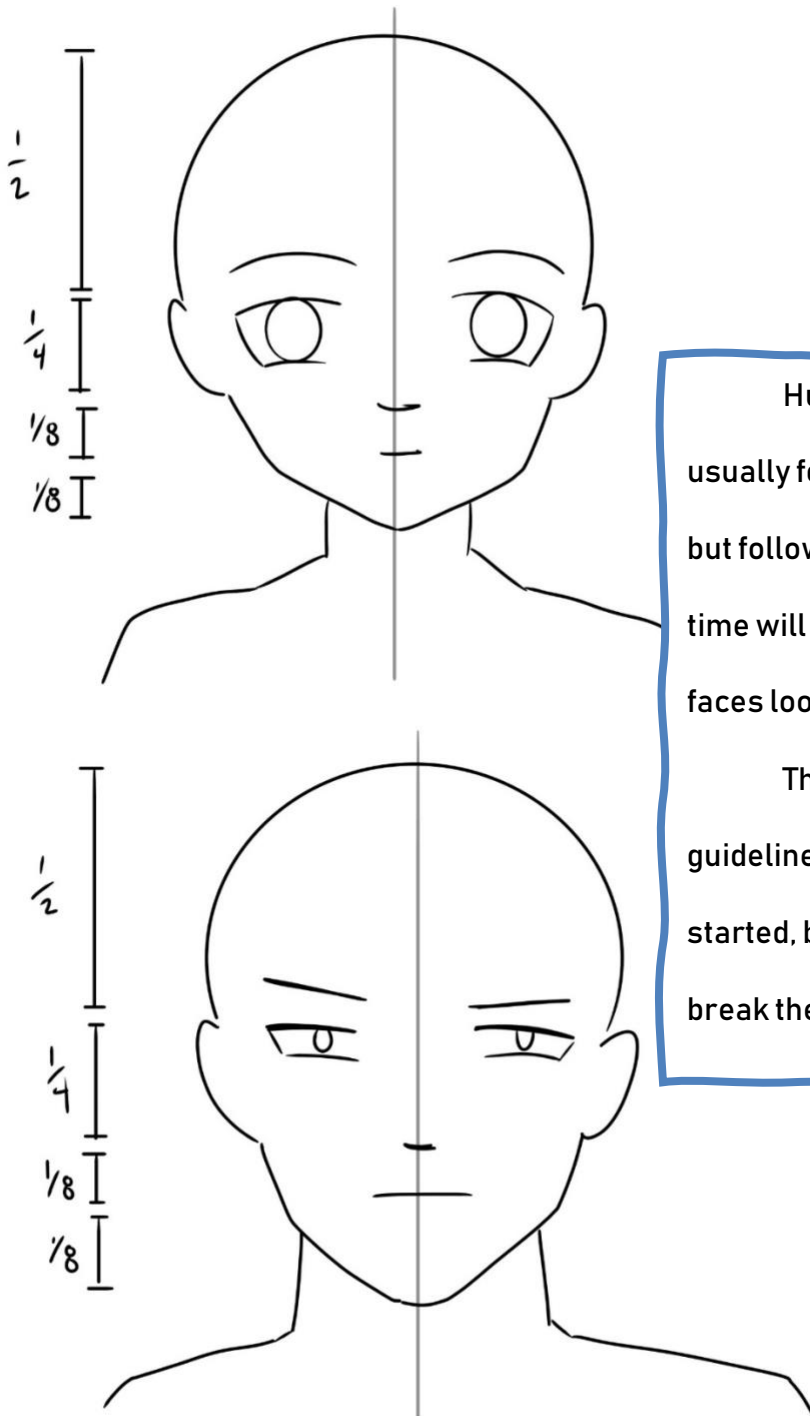


Break bodies down into basic shapes before worrying about the details.



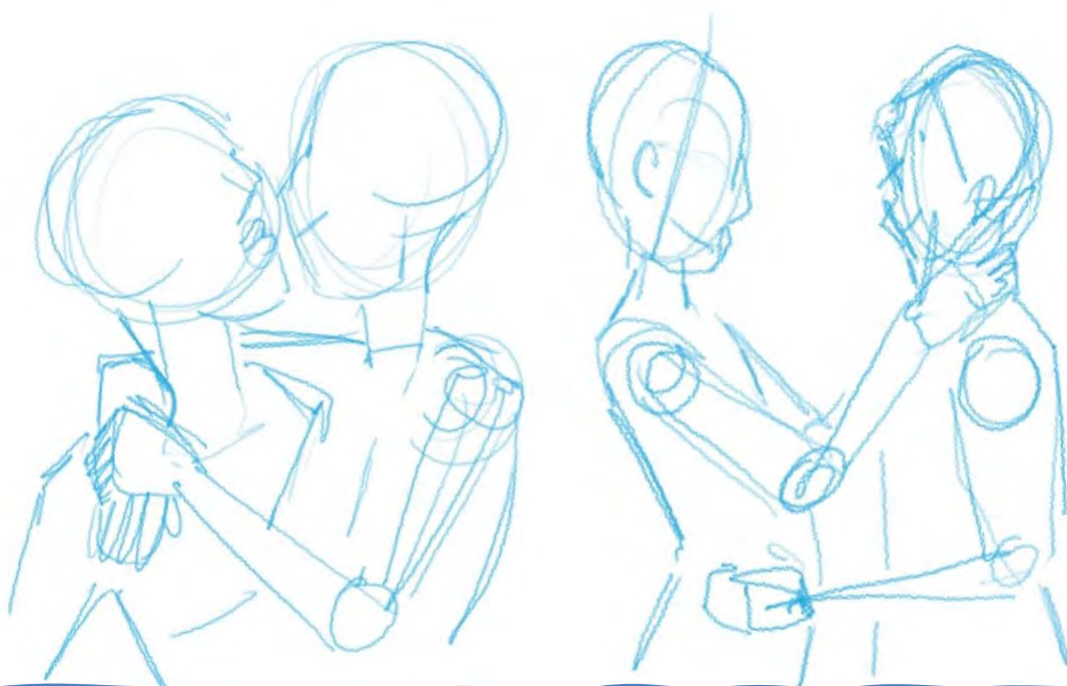


The red lines show the “line of action.” Thinking about movement can help stop your figures from feeling stiff. Even if figures are still, you can consider what shape their body might make.



Human faces also usually follow general rules but following them 100% of the time will result in all your faces looking the same!

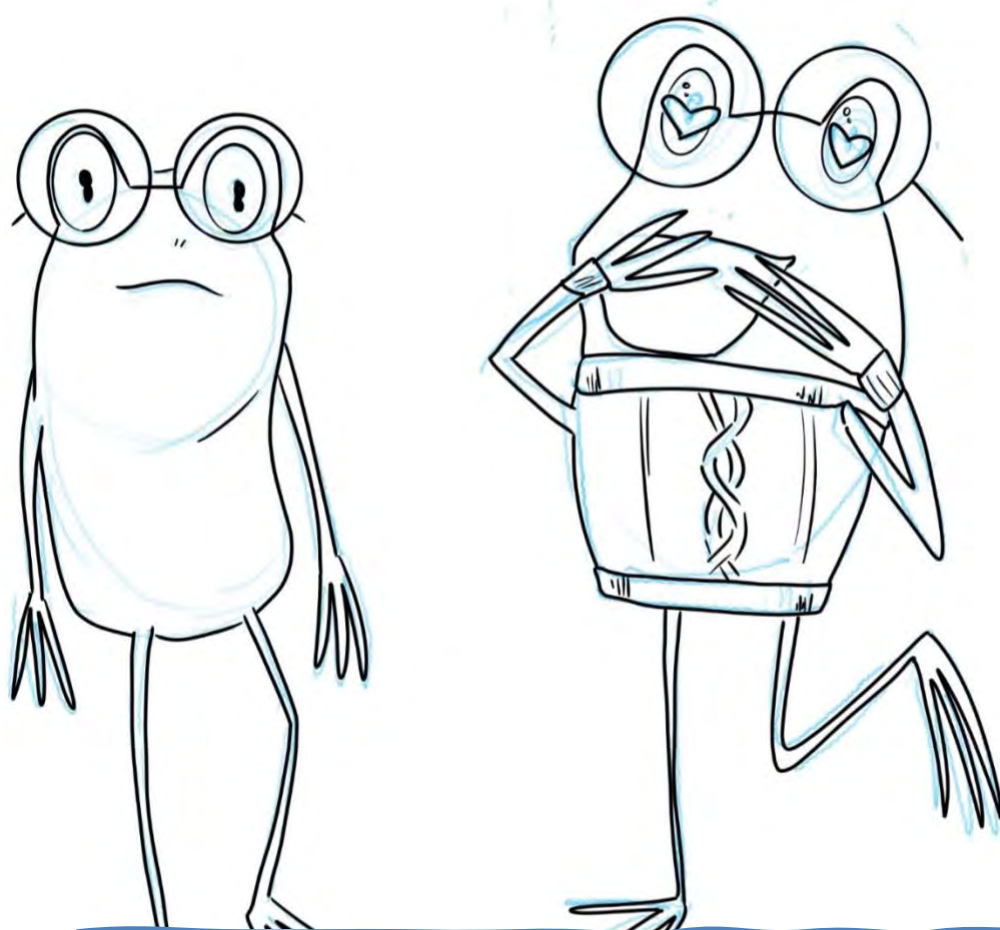
These general guidelines can help get you started, but don't be afraid to break the rules!



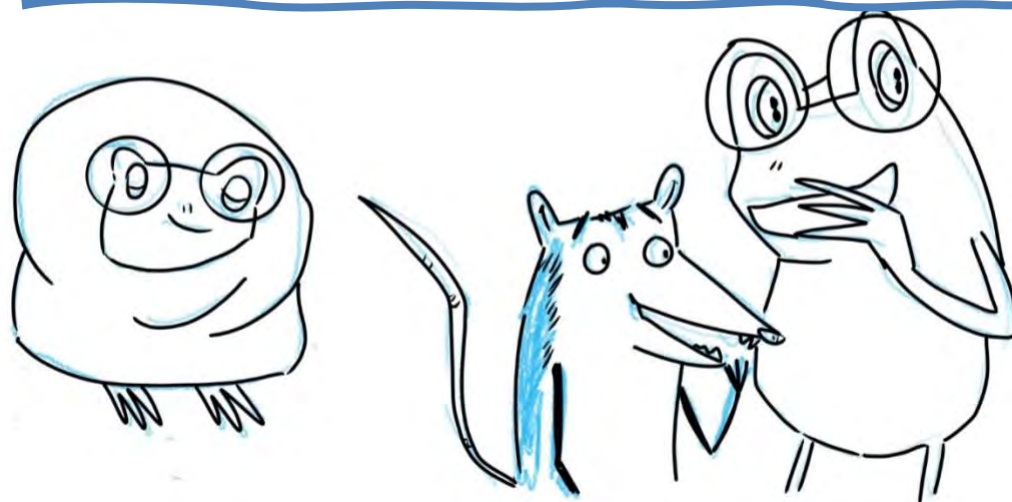
Templates for poses are there to give you a base to start with.

Don't be afraid to make it your own! Use photos for inspiration.





You don't always need your comic characters to look like people, or even follow rules for things like proportion. I often draw myself as a frog, like the character on this page.



FOUR PANEL COMIC



Time to create your own!

Remember – Do not include your name, or the real names of other people or places in your comic, anywhere on the page or on this packet.

Take some time to think about the topics suggested. You can use the bottom of this page and the back of this packet to jot down ideas related to these topics.

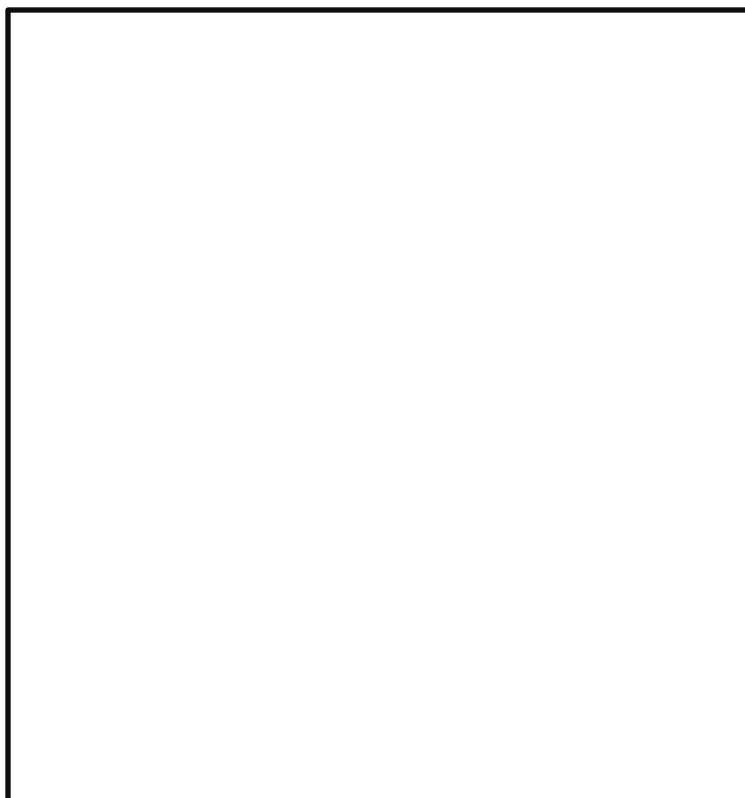
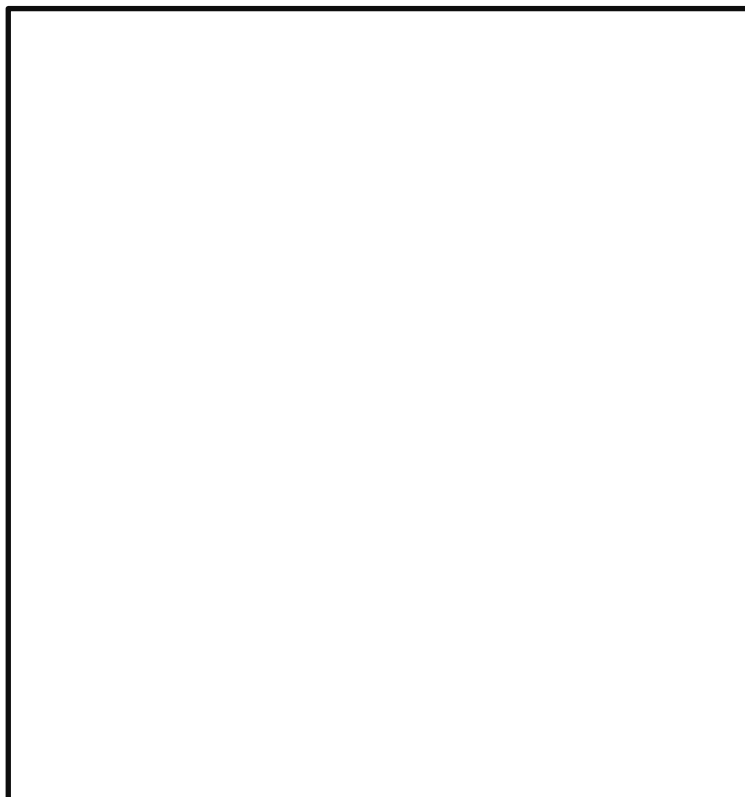
- A time you felt JOY
- A time you felt accepted
- A new realization
- Meeting someone that “gets you”

Remember that your comic/characters looking perfect isn't the goal – **telling a story is!** The more you practice drawing and telling stories, the better and faster you will become.

Draw your comic in the template. When you are finish, add a title to the top of the page.

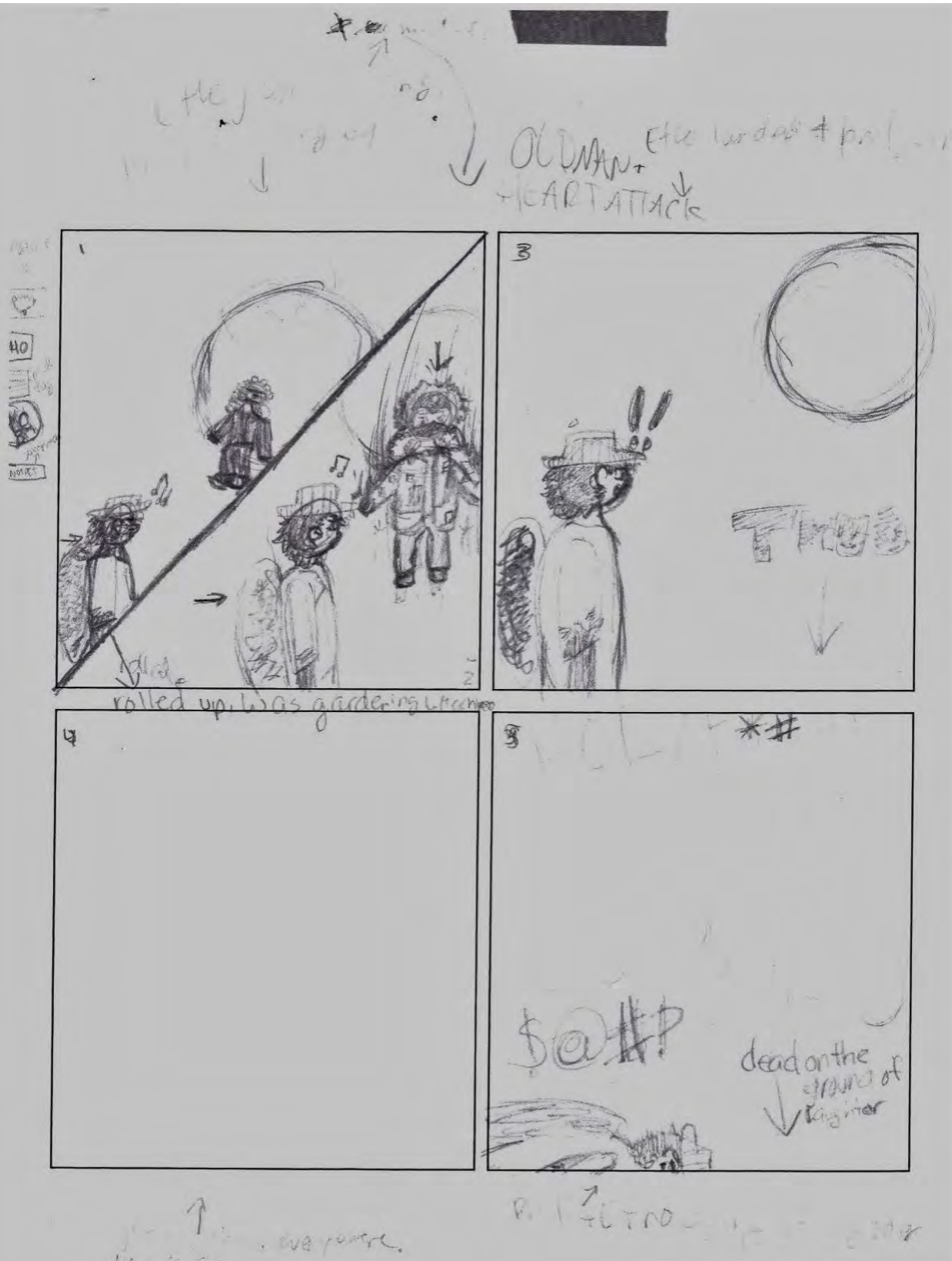
Keep drawing – many artists use this 4-panel comic style to create diary comics to reflect on what happens to them. It doesn't have to be a huge story!

You are important, and I am glad that you are here!

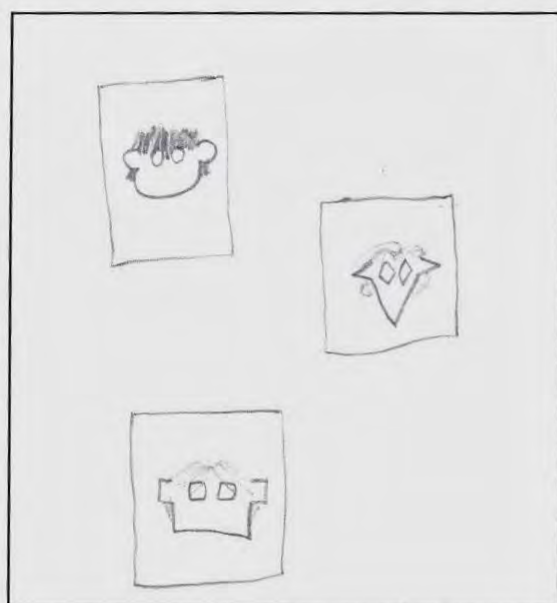
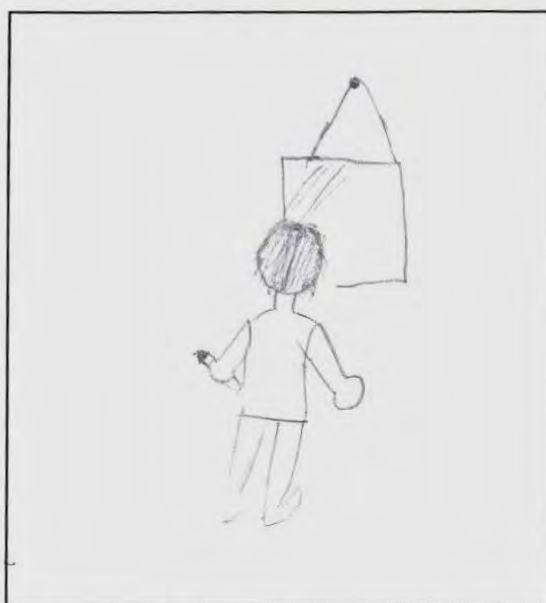
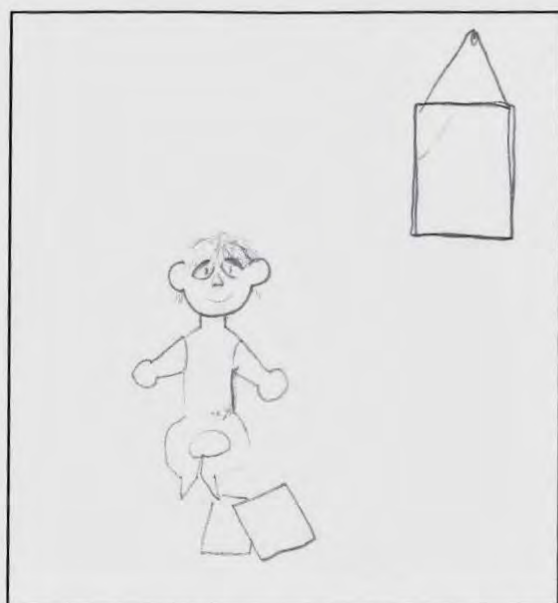


Appendix E:
Student Brainstorming Sheets









APPENDIX F: Student Surveys

INCLUSIVE AND REFLECTIVE STORY TELLING, LGBTQ+ YOUTH AND COMICS

Survey Fall 2021

These results will be recorded anonymously. Please do not write your name on this paper.
Please answer to the best of your ability. You are not required to answer all questions if you do not feel comfortable. You can choose to stop completing the survey at any time.

1. Have you taken a comic book, anime, or manga class at the Michener Art Museum in the past?

Circle one YES

☒ NO

2. Do you read any Comic Book or Manga "how-to" books on your own?

Circle one YES

☒ NO

3. If you answered YES to question 2, do you recall seeing LGBTQ+ representation in any of the "how-to" books on comic books or manga creation?

Circle one YES

☐ NO

4. In your own words, what does it mean to you to see LGBTQ+ characters and stories in your comic books and/or manga? You can write on the back if you need to.

to me it means like... making things more realistic? idk it just feels like normal then i see it even when it isn't very common

5. Do you feel that seeing LGBTQ+ character and stories represented in a classroom setting affects what artwork you create in that setting? Explain in your own words. Continue on the back if needed.

it makes me feel more comfortable incorporating it into my own work because i'll know how people in the class will respond

6. What were you most excited to see in the resource packet? Why?

probably the example of the comic because examples are always a good way to get started

7. What do you feel was missing from the resource packet?

maybe more storyboarding? like just more to get you thinking about making the story & not just drawing characters

INCLUSIVE AND REFLECTIVE STORY TELLING, LGBTQ+ YOUTH AND COMICS

Survey Fall 2021

These results will be recorded anonymously. Please do not write your name on this paper.
Please answer to the best of your ability. You are not required to answer all questions if you do not feel comfortable. You can choose to stop completing the survey at any time.

1. Have you taken a comic book, anime, or manga class at the Michener Art Museum in the past?

Circle one YES NO

2. Do you read any Comic Book or Manga "how-to" books on your own?

Circle one YES NO

3. If you answered YES to question 2, do you recall seeing LGBTQ+ representation in any of the "how-to" books on comic books or manga creation?

Circle one YES NO

4. In your own words, what does it mean to you to see LGBTQ+ characters and stories in your comic books and/or manga? You can write on the back if you need to.

It makes it feel like I'm not alone.

5. Do you feel that seeing LGBTQ+ character and stories represented in a classroom setting affects what artwork you create in that setting? Explain in your own words. Continue on the back if needed.

Yes, I've seen close to 0 LGBTQ+ characters in stories in classes and it feels like it's taboo.

6. What were you most excited to see in the resource packet? Why?

The frog comic gave me some insight on what exactly was needed. I also liked the poses and motion sketches.

7. What do you feel was missing from the resource packet?

Some more topics. Not all LGBTQ+ experiences are filled with joy or acceptance and it's hard to feel alone when not given the option of a bad topic.

INCLUSIVE AND REFLECTIVE STORY TELLING, LGBTQ+ YOUTH AND COMICS

Survey Fall 2021

These results will be recorded anonymously. Please do not write your name on this paper.
Please answer to the best of your ability. You are not required to answer all questions if you do not feel comfortable. You can choose to stop completing the survey at any time.

1. Have you taken a comic book, anime, or manga class at the Michener Art Museum in the past?

Circle one YES

☒ NO

2. Do you read any Comic Book or Manga "how-to" books on your own?

Circle one YES

☒ NO

3. If you answered YES to question 2, do you recall seeing LGBTQ+ representation in any of the "how-to" books on comic books or manga creation?

Circle one YES

☒ NO

4. In your own words, what does it mean to you to see LGBTQ+ characters and stories in your comic books and/or manga? You can write on the back if you need to.

I feel seen and represented. It makes me happy to see other people in the community properly represented too.

5. Do you feel that seeing LGBTQ+ character and stories represented in a classroom setting affects what artwork you create in that setting? Explain in your own words. Continue on the back if needed.

It would greatly effect me in that setting. I often hide that I'm gay in the classroom. I hide a lot of thought and feeling that I want to express because it involves being gay/trans.

6. What were you most excited to see in the resource packet? Why?

7. What do you feel was missing from the resource packet?

INCLUSIVE AND REFLECTIVE STORY TELLING, LGBTQ+ YOUTH AND COMICS

Survey Fall 2021

These results will be recorded anonymously. Please do not write your name on this paper.
Please answer to the best of your ability. You are not required to answer all questions if you do not feel comfortable. You can choose to stop completing the survey at any time.

1. Have you taken a comic book, anime, or manga class at the Michener Art Museum in the past?

Circle one YES NO

2. Do you read any Comic Book or Manga "how-to" books on your own?

Circle one YES NO

3. If you answered YES to question 2, do you recall seeing LGBTQ+ representation in any of the "how-to" books on comic books or manga creation?

Circle one YES NO

N/A

4. In your own words, what does it mean to you to see LGBTQ+ characters and stories in your comic books and/or manga? You can write on the back if you need to.