



Challenging Conditions

Audrey Heller

Overview:

Students will learn about the artwork *Challenging Conditions*, by artist Audrey Heller.

They will discover how film directors use *storyboards* to help them tell the visual stories in their films. Students will collaborate to tell a story, draw pictures and write captions, creating a six-part storyboard sequence based on the artwork *Challenging Conditions*, by artist Audrey Heller.

Students will participate in a mock feedback session, from the points of view of department heads of a filmmaking venture.

Subjects:

Visual Arts, Language Arts, Film Studies

Age Group:

Upper Elementary - Middle School (Grades 3 - 8)

Standards:

21st Century Learning Skills:

- Critical Thinking and Reasoning
- Information Literacy
- Collaboration
- Self-Direction
- Invention

Colorado Academic Standards:

Visual Arts

- Observe and Learn to Comprehend
- Envision and Critique to Reflect
- Invent and Discover to Create
- Relate and Connect to Transfer

Language Arts

- Oral Expression and Listening
- Reading for All Purposes
- Writing and Composition
- Research and Reasoning

Additional Standards:

National Film Studies Standards

- Production and Creative Expression
- Viewers' Response and Aesthetic Valuing
- Cross-Curricular Connections

Essential Question(s):

- *What is visual language?*
- *What is visual storytelling?*
- *How does a picture tell a story?*

Rationale:

Developing a storyboard develops visual and language arts abilities while connecting students to the process of filmmaking.

Objectives:

Students will:

- learn about artistic characteristics and visual clues found in the artwork *Challenging Conditions*, by artist Audrey Heller
- discover how visual planning is done in filmmaking
- learn about wide shots and close-ups, and understand how they are used in visual storytelling
- work collaboratively to create a short story and storyboard sequence based on the artwork *Challenging Conditions*, by artist Audrey Heller
- learn about the elements of storytelling, including plot building blocks
- present their storyboards to the class
- participate in a mock feedback session, as if they worked in various film departments.

Materials:

- Ability to watch/project YouTube videos and other internet resources
- **The Art and the Artist** information on *Challenging Conditions* (found at the end of this lesson plan)
- One color copy of *Challenging Conditions* for every 3–5 students, or the ability to project the image onto a wall or screen
- Artist Audrey Heller's website:
 - <http://shop.audreyheller.com>

- A selection of comic strips, comic books and graphic novels
 - YouTube short: Storyboard process for *Toy Story* (8:51):
 - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QOeaC8kcxH0>
- Storyboard Worksheet #1: Telling the Story PDF: one per student/ team
- Storyboard Worksheet #2: Creating the Storyboards PDF: one per student/ team
 - printed on card stock
- Paper, pencils, erasers
- Assorted art supplies: crayons, markers, etc.
- Glue
- Scissors
- White poster board (22" x 28"); cut in half lengthwise (11" x 28") for mounting.

Duration:

1 - 2 50-minute lessons (may need additional student time to complete assignment)

Vocabulary:

- *Storyboard*: Small drawings and captions arranged in chronological order that show the action of a film step by step. Each picture is drawn in a frame. Basic shot details and dialogue will be included. Storyboards help the filmmaker plan the film and its structure.
- *Sequence*: a set of related events, movements, or things that follow each other in a particular order.
- *Key Moment*: The major points of a sequence, both of action and story development.
- *Plot*: the main events of a play, novel, movie, or similar work. Also called *storyline*.
- *Setting*: the environment, surroundings or time period in which the action of a novel, play, film, etc., takes place.
- *Character*: a person in a novel, play, or movie.
- *Action*: the unfolding of the events in a work of drama or fiction; the movement of incidents in a plot
- *Close-up*: a photo or film frame that shows something close up or at a very close distance
- *Wide Shot*: a photo or film frame that shows something from further away
- *Perspective*: the viewpoint in a work of art that gives the right impression of height, width, depth, and position when viewed from a particular point.

Lesson :

1. Show and discuss *Challenging Conditions*, by artist Audrey Heller.

- Invite students to share what they notice about the piece. What is happening in the scene the artist has created? What feelings do the students have when they look at the piece? Anticipation? Relief? Humor? What is it about the piece that brings on these feelings and observations?
- Ask students how being a theater director might influence the artist's visual language. How does the picture tell a story? Ask students to brainstorm a story the artwork might be telling.
- As desired, show students more artwork at the artist's website:
 - <http://shop.audreyheller.com>
- Read the artist statement of artist Audrey Heller:

"When I was little, I often imagined that my entire world was just an atom in a giant's universe. That idea is exciting and terrifying. It's exciting because it means that there is so much more to learn than we can even conceive of, and terrifying because we could be squashed at any moment. I admire Horton, Dr.

Seuss' elephant who protected a civilization inside a dust speck, and I try to notice and defend the small worlds around me.

"My photography is an extension of my work as a theater director and lighting designer. I create my mixed-scale scenarios in front of the camera, using traditional techniques in untraditional ways. The figures come from model railway sets and I want these surreal scenes to illuminate the beauty and power of everyday objects and the drama of daily interactions.

"Sometimes I start with figures, and look for settings for them, but more often I start with an object. I look for props that have resonance, either a personal connection for me, or something that speaks to common culture. Then I'll play with different figures and scenarios to see if I can create something evocative. Sometimes particular figures have ongoing stories, like the scuba divers who are always looking for water, or the cycling group who are exploring."

2. Introduce students to the idea of storyboards and how they are used.

- Explain that when a director is making a film, they plan out the story in picture form. For this visual planning, they hire artists to draw the story in step-by-step sequences. It looks a bit like a comic strip. This is called a *storyboard*.
- Show students the YouTube short: *Storyboard process for the movie Toy Story (8:51)*:
 - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QOeaC8kcxH0>
 - call attention to the collaborative nature of the storyboarding process.

3. Have students look over the selection of comic strips, comic books and graphic novels.

- Open a discussion by asking Guiding Questions: What is visual storytelling? What happens in the scenes? How does the artist create a sense of movement? Mood? Emotion? How is color used? How do the visuals move the story along? What about different sizes of the images — some images are close-ups, some are wide shots. Why?
 - Explain that in wide shots, the audience can see the setting and the action.
 - In close-ups, audience can focus on character and emotion.

4. Tell students they will have the opportunity to work in teams, creating a story and matching storyboard based on the artwork *Challenging Conditions*.

- Divide students into working teams of two.
- Distribute *Storyboard Worksheet #1: Telling the Story PDF*: one per student/team
 - Review the worksheet with the students.
 - **Note:** for younger students, you may wish to simplify some of the sections on the worksheet
 - Go over the Elements of Storytelling (plot, setting, characters, action).
 - Remind them to consider Who, What, Where, When, Why, How
 - Explain Plot Building Blocks
 - Every story has a beginning, middle and end.
 - Give students time to work together, filling out the worksheet.
 - Simple answers to most of the questions are fine.
- Distribute *Storyboard Worksheet #2: Creating the Storyboards PDF*: one per student/team
 - Print this worksheet on card stock.
 - You may want to print extra copies of the blank storyboard frames (Page 2)
- Explain that students will create a six-part storyboard based on *Challenging Conditions*.
 - Students will cut out the six frames.
 - One frame has *Challenging Conditions* placed on it.
 - Students may use this in any order they wish — it could be at the beginning of their story, in the middle or at the end.
 - Have students follow the directions on the last page of *Worksheet #2*:

- Directions:
 - You will create a six-part storyboard based on the artwork *Challenging Conditions*. Cut out all six frames. You may place the frame with *Challenging Conditions* in any sequence (positions 1 through 6) that fits your story. Continue drawing the rest of the sequences. Make sure to draw some close-ups and some wide shots.
 - 1. The first sequence should set the stage for the story. Draw a picture that shows the setting and the main character(s).
 - 2. Tell the story. Draw four pictures to show what happens in the middle of the story.
 - What are the *Key Moments* in your story? How will you highlight these?
 - 3. Draw a picture that shows the conclusion of the story.
 - 4. Write a caption below each picture.

Shot #	Description	Music	Sound Effects
• The Shot # should include the title of the film (Ex: <i>Challenging Conditions</i> Shot #1).	• Describe what is happening in each sequence.	• What music does your sequence have?	• Does your sequence have sound effects?

5. Have students mount and present their storyboards.

- Have students arrange their storyboard sequences in order, and glue to poster board.
- Ask for volunteer teams to present their storyboards to the class.
- Invite class members to participate in the discussion from multiple points of view — of different film department heads: writers, actors, costumers, set designers, directors, music, etc.
 - Divide the class into “film department groups” and create a mock feedback session.
 - Remind them of the YouTube clip for *Toy Story*, and the collaboration they saw in the clip.
 - Students in each group will give only the feedback that relates to their “department.”

Additional Resources

- Audrey Heller’s website:
 - <http://shop.audreyheller.com>
- Website for The Film Foundation:
 - <http://www.storyofmovies.org/common/11041/aboutFoundation.cfm?clientID=11041>
 - Horton Hears a Who
 - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hGp4VSw8-A>

The Art and the Artist



Audrey Heller
Photograph

Artist Statement

When I was little, I often imagined that my entire world was just an atom in a giant's universe. That idea is exciting and terrifying. It's exciting because it means that there is so much more to learn than we can even conceive of, and terrifying because we could be squashed at any moment. I admire Horton, Dr. Seuss' elephant who protected a civilization inside a dust speck, and I try to notice and defend the small worlds around me.

My photography is an extension of my work as a theater director and lighting designer. I create my mixed-scale scenarios in front of the camera, using traditional techniques in untraditional ways. The figures come from model railway sets and I want these surreal scenes to illuminate the beauty and power of everyday objects and the drama of daily interactions. I use no digital enhancement.

Sometimes I start with figures, and look for settings for them, but more often I start with an object. I look for props that have resonance, either a personal connection for me, or something that speaks to common culture. Then I'll play with different figures and scenarios to see if I can create something evocative. Sometimes particular figures have ongoing stories, like the scuba divers who are always looking for water, or the cycling group who are exploring.

Did you know?

Sometimes in advertising sets are created and materials are used to make the products look their best on camera. Do you think Audrey used milk for the shredded wheat cereal? What else could she have used? Yes, glue!

Storyboard Worksheet 1

Telling the Story

Storytelling

Story Elements: Plot, Setting, Characters, Action
Content: Who, What, Where, When, Why, How

Plot Building Blocks

Beginning: Description, Conflict
Middle: Rising Action, Climax
End: Falling Action, Conclusion

Vocabulary

- *Storyboard:* Small drawings and captions arranged in chronological order that show the action of the film step by step and help the animator plan the film's structure.
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- *Perspective:* the viewpoint in a work of art that gives the right impression of height, width, depth, and position when viewed from a particular point.

*Invent a story of your own, based on the scene in the artwork **Challenging Conditions**, by artist Audrey Heller. You will create a six-part storyboard with simple captions.*

Consider and briefly answer these questions about your storyboard:

Title of film:

Characters

Who are the *characters*? Are the characters animals, appliances, kids, adults?

Who is the most important character in each sequence? How would a viewer know that?

Setting

Where does the story take place (*setting*)?

Do your backgrounds make the *setting* clear?

When does the story take place?

Plot

Plot Building Blocks

<i>Beginning:</i>	Description, Conflict
<i>Middle:</i>	Rising Action, Climax
<i>End:</i>	Falling Action, Conclusion

What is the *plot* (*storyline*)?

How does it begin?

What problem (conflict) arises?

How are the problems addressed?

What is the conclusion?

Action

What happens in the sequences (*action*)?

Why are these things happening?

How does the *action* flow from one key moment to another?

Key Moments

What are the Key Moments in your story?

Create a storyboard sequence, using sketches and captions to tell your story. Then arrange the key moments in order.

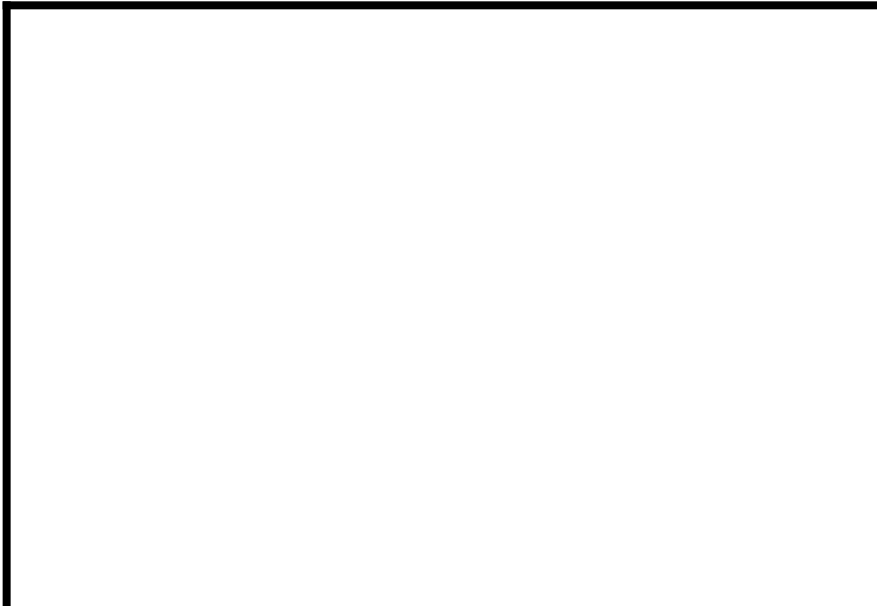
Which storyboard frames are seen in *close-up* and which ones are seen from a distance (*wide shots*)?

Why?

Is the information clearly presented?

Storyboard Worksheet 2
Creating the Storyboards

Challenging Conditions



Shot #:
Description:

Music:

Sound Effects:

Shot #:
Description:

Music:

Sound Effects:

<p>Shot #: Description:</p> <p>Music:</p> <p>Sound Effects:</p>	<p>Shot #: Description:</p> <p>Music:</p> <p>Sound Effects:</p>

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|----------|---|-------|---------------|
| • | The Shot # should include the title of the film (Ex: <i>Challenging Conditions Shot #1</i>). | | |
| • | Describe what is happening in each sequence. | | |
| • | What music does your sequence have? | | |
| • | Does your sequence have sound effects? | | |

