



LESSON PLAN

Level:	Grades 1 to 6
About the Author:	Matthew Johnson is Director of Education for MediaSmarts

Teaching Media: Media Techniques



This lesson is part of *USE, UNDERSTAND & ENGAGE: A Digital Media Literacy Framework for Canadian Schools*:
<http://mediasmarts.ca/teacher-resources/digital-literacy-framework>.

Overview

In this lesson, students learn how different media use different techniques to communicate meaning.

Learning Outcomes

Big ideas/key concepts:

Media are constructions

- Media makers make conscious and unconscious choices when making a media work

Each medium has a unique aesthetic form

- Different media use different techniques to draw and direct attention

Key questions:

Know: Students will learn the following essential domain knowledge:

- Reading Media: Differences and similarities between media types; “rules of notice” used in different media to draw and direct attention

Understand: Students will explore the following big ideas/key concepts:

- Media are constructions: Media makers make conscious and unconscious choices when making a media work
- Each medium has a unique aesthetic form: Different media use different techniques to draw and direct attention



Do: Students will *understand* the differences and similarities between media forms by analyzing the similarities and differences between media forms

Preparation and Materials

Prepare to project or distribute the following handouts :

- *Same Technique, Different Media*
- *Comparing Media: Movies vs. Comics*
- *Comparing Media: Your Choices*

Procedure

Start by explaining to students that different ways of communicating or telling stories — like movies, video games, books, comics, and so on — are called *media*. Each different one is called a *medium*.

Now ask students : Have you ever seen the same story told in two different forms of media? A movie based on a comic, for example, or a cartoon based on a myth or a fairy tale? How were the stories different when they were told in different media forms?

Explain that different media have different *tools and techniques* that media makers can use to send a message or tell a story. They use these to get your attention, to tell you what to pay attention to, and to get ideas across.

Display or distribute the handout *Same technique, different media* and tell students that some techniques are used in many different media. Here, for instance, the same technique — called a *low angle*—is used in photography and film, in video games, and in comics.

Ask students: When we look up at a character like this, what does it tell us about them? (*That they are strong or powerful. It's like we're a child looking up at an adult.*)

Media techniques

Distribute the handouts *Comics Techniques: Neutral* and *Comics Techniques: Angle, Distance and Composition*.

Explain to students that the first one is the scene told as “neutrally” as possible — without using any tools or techniques to help tell the story, show you what’s important or make you feel a certain way about the story or characters.

Now have students compare the two and try to spot all of the techniques used in the second one that are not in the first one. Make sure the following techniques are identified:

Distance: How far is the “camera” from the action?

Angle: Is the “camera” looking up or down at the action?



Panel composition: How big is each panel? What is included in it?

Page composition: How many panels are there? How are they arranged? (Explain to students that just like using a mix of longer and shorter words affects the rhythm of a poem or another piece of writing, mixing panel shape and size changes the “rhythm” of a comic.)

Comparing media

Now explain that while some techniques are used in more than one medium, in other cases different media use different techniques. Ask: If we wanted to show that someone was strong or powerful in writing, how might we do it? (*Having them do something that showed their strength, or using adjectives like burly or mighty.*)

What techniques could we use in comics to show that someone was strong that wouldn't work, or would be more difficult, in a live-action video? (*We could draw them in an exaggerated way or have them do impossible feats of strength.*) What could we do in a film that we couldn't do in comics? (*We could use “heroic” music or cast an actor who's known for their strength, like a bodybuilder or a professional wrestler.*)

Comparing Media: Movies vs. Comics

Now ask students if they have ever seen a movie or TV show that was based on a comic book such as Marvel movies, Batman or Superman movies, etc. How were the movie and the comic similar? How were they different?

Let students discuss for a few minutes and then project or distribute the handout *Comparing Media: Movies vs. Comics*. Explain that the top circle is live-action movies and the bottom is comics, and go through it with the class:

- things that are just in one circle are techniques that one medium but not the other uses to tell stories and tell you what to pay attention to
- things in the middle section are techniques that both media use to tell stories or tell you what to pay attention to

Now ask: What would be some *challenges* of adapting something from one medium to the other? Are there kinds of movies or kinds of comics where the overlap is bigger? (For example, animated movies or photo-comics.)

Comparing Media: Your Media

Ask students to name other kinds of media. (Make sure they are listing media and not *genres*. For example, comics are a medium, while superhero comics are a genre; TV is a medium while reality TV is a genre.) Here are some examples you can use to prompt them:

- Video games
- Writing
- Live theatre
- Music
- Paintings



- TV
- Animated films
- Radio/podcasts

Once you have a long enough list, distribute the handout *Comparing Media: Your Choices*. Have each student choose two media and identify how they are similar and different. (Depending on the age of your students, you may choose to do this as a whole class activity or have students work in pairs or groups.)

Extension: Wacky Media Songs

You may consider supplementing this lesson with the TVOntario Original Series *Wacky Media Songs*. These short videos explore a variety of digital media literacy topics. Here are a few suggested videos and discussion topics:

Frame It!

Frames aren't just for pictures! When we tell a story, we choose what parts to keep in and what parts to leave out. What we keep is "in the frame". Every type of media has a kind of invisible frame, too! Get in the frame with Ava!

- Before the video, ask: What kinds of choices do you think people make when they make media, like filming a movie?
- After the video, ask: What's the difference between looking out a window and seeing something framed in media?
How can the media frame sometimes be misleading?

Reading Images!

Did you know you can read images almost like you read words? It's called visual communication and it has its own language. Sing along with Ava as she explores how camera angles and lighting are used to affect our emotions.

- Before the video, ask: Think about some of the best scenes in your favourite movies. What makes you remember them? What makes them exciting, or funny, or dramatic?
- After the video, ask: Did some of the movie scenes you thought of use the things Ava was talking about, like close-ups, camera angles, and light and colour? (You can use YouTube to watch some of these scenes if you don't have a copy or access on a streaming service.) Do other media, like comics or video games, use some of the same techniques? What other techniques do they use to do the same thing?



Same Technique, Different Media



Source: Depositphotos



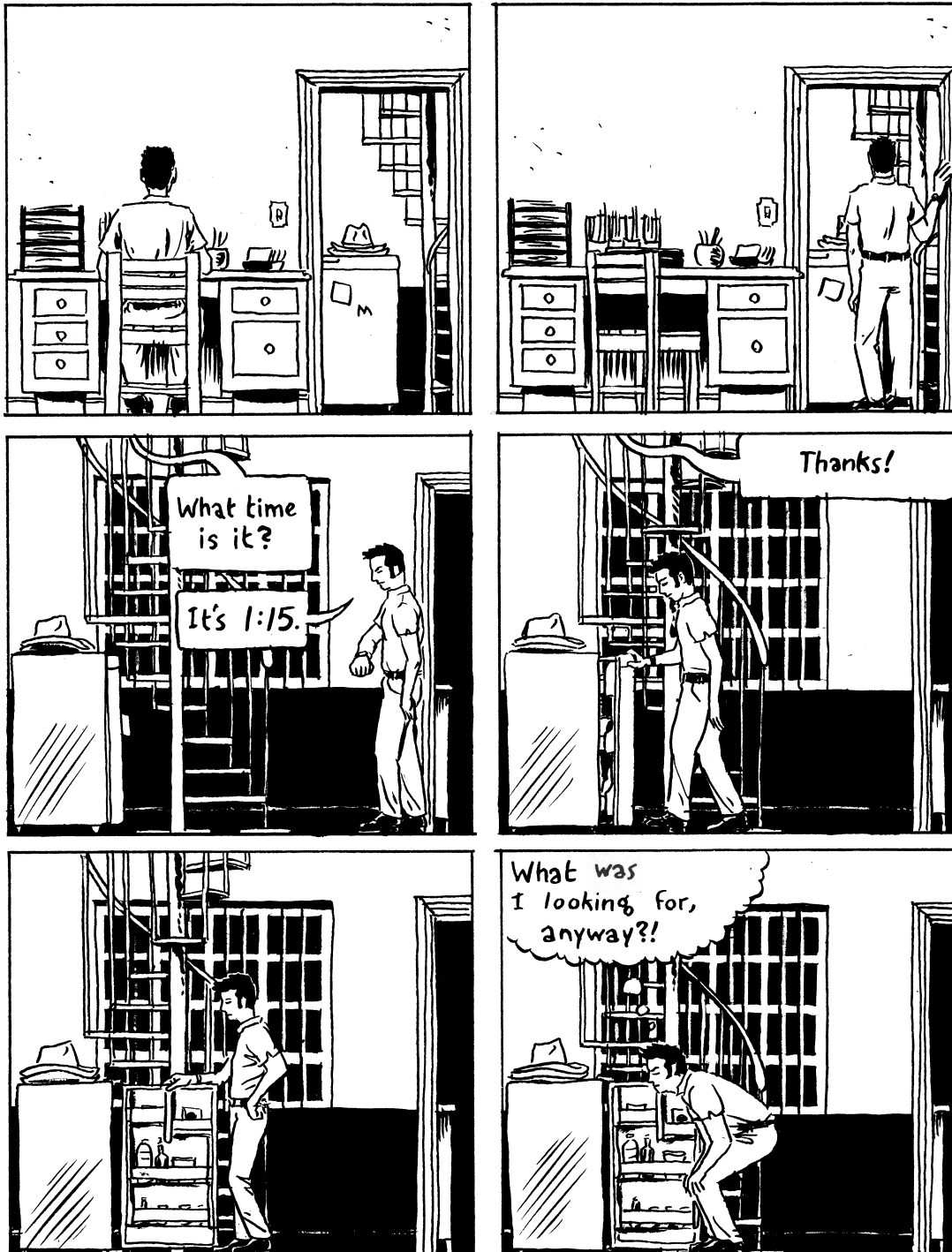
Shadow of the Colossus (2018)



Miracle Man (date unknown)



Comics Techniques: Neutral



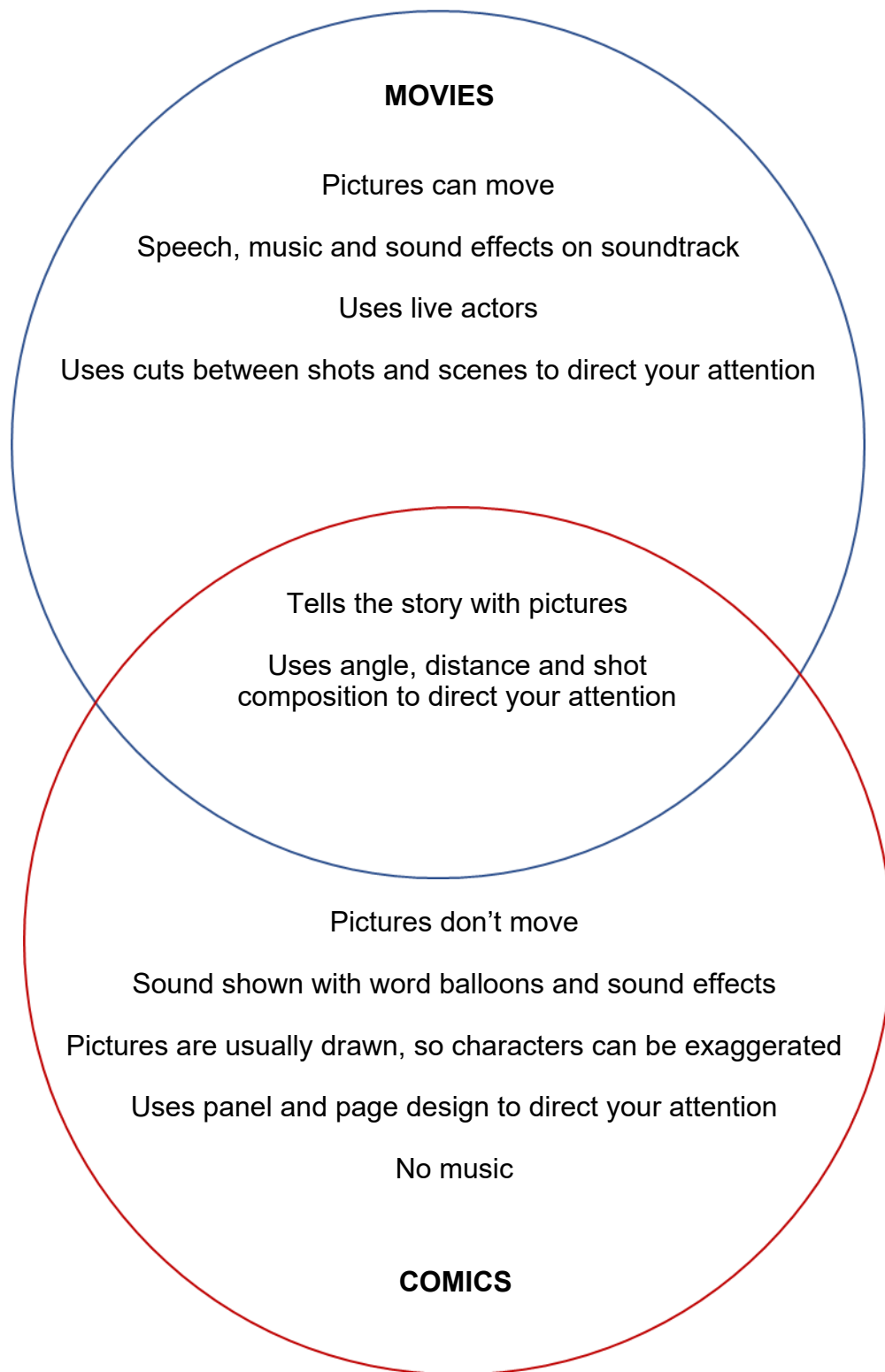
From *99 Ways to Tell a Story: Exercises in Style* © Matt Madden 2005.
Used with permission

Comics Techniques: Angle, Distance and Composition



From 99 Ways to Tell a Story: Exercises in Style © Matt Madden 2005.
Used with permission

Comparing Media: Movies vs. Comics



Comparing Media: Your Choices

