The power of belief: Implementing self-efficacy in the studio and the classroom

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The power of belief: Implementing self-efficacy in the studio and the classroom

by

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A thesis submitted to the graduate faculty

in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

MASTER OF FINE ARTS

Major: Integrated Visual Arts

Program of Study Committee:
Chuck Richards, Major Professor
Brent Holland
Stacey Weber-Fève

The student author, whose presentation of the scholarship herein was approved by the program of study committee, is solely responsible for the content of this thesis. The Graduate College will ensure this thesis is globally accessible and will not permit alterations after a degree is conferred.

Iowa State University

Ames, Iowa

2018

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS .................................................................................................................. iii

ABSTRACT ........................................................................................................................................ iv

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION
 Artist Statement (Visual Component) ............................................................................................... 1
 Artist Statement (Written Component) .............................................................................................. 3

CHAPTER 2: KNOCKING ON THE SKY
 Background ........................................................................................................................................ 4
 Inception ............................................................................................................................................ 7
 Collaboration ...................................................................................................................................... 10
 Timeline ........................................................................................................................................... 12
 Themes ............................................................................................................................................. 17
 Workflow/Studio Practices .................................................................................................................. 23

CHAPTER 3: TEACHING
 Introduction ........................................................................................................................................... 32
 Fall 2015: ARTIS 511: Seminar in Teaching & DSN S 131: Design Representation ................ 33
 Spring 2016: ARTIS 432/532x Sequential Narrative Drawing + Independent Documentation .................................................................................................................. 36
 Fall 2016: DSN S 131: Design Representation .............................................................................. 40
 Spring 2017: ARTIS 432x/532x: Sequential Narrative Drawing, DSN S 131: Design Representation .................................................................................................................. 44
 Fall 2017: ARTIS 431x/531x: Character and Scene Design, DSN S 131: Design Representation .................................................................................................................. 46

CHAPTER 4: CONCLUSION
 Introduction ........................................................................................................................................... 48
 Artistic Development .......................................................................................................................... 48
 Teaching Development ...................................................................................................................... 50
 Future Plans ...................................................................................................................................... 52

REFERENCES ..................................................................................................................................... 53

APPENDIX: FIGURES .......................................................................................................................... 57
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First, I’d like to thank my family for supporting me, celebrating my accomplishments, and helping shape my confidence. Thank you for instilling in me a love of Christ and the church.

Next, I must express my appreciation to my friends along the way—thank you to Corgi Medberry for their unwavering friendship and empathy, as well as the rest of the Frogstompers who encouraged my drawing and my obsession with Dungeons & Dragons. Thank you to Emily Artz; without you Knocking on the Sky never would have been born.

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Finally, to Peter: I love you. Thank you for your unceasing support—being there for every late night, every panicked deadline, and every finished page. No amount of success will ever measure up to the joy I have in spending my life with you.
ABSTRACT

The concept of self-efficacy is critical to success. Self-efficacy has two facets: a person’s ability to technically execute a task, and the person’s belief that they can do it. This thesis details the study and execution of self-efficacy my classroom and my studio—primarily in my graphic novel *Knocking on the Sky*.

*Knocking on the Sky* is a graphic novel I’ve been working on for four years with my collaborator, Stefanie Dao. It’s is a story about the things we care about: the importance of found family, the daily brush of the divine against the ridiculous, and the joys of companionship. Siobhan, the main character of *Knocking on the Sky*, is a magnification of my own faults and virtues. The thing I treasure about Siobhan is her unshakeable contrariness: tell her that something’s forbidden, and she’ll do it twice. Siobhan is the embodiment of self-efficacy. I hope that she inspires others to seize their own self-efficacy to make their goals attainable.

Self-efficacy is the core of my teaching philosophy as well. Self-efficacy can only be fostered in a safe environment that expects excellence, rewards experimentation, and provides transparent and clear critique. Eventually, students will no longer be students, and their work will be judged on the skills and critical opinions that they develop and internalize. It’s important not just to give students technical criteria in which to judge their work, but the self-confidence to apply their own judgment and act on it. Self-efficacy is the key to success in the studio and the classroom.
CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Artist Statement (Visual Component)

1

2

3

4
THEN I MADE MY LIFE MORE LIKE MY WORLD.

SLAYING A DRAGON IS PERILOUS AND PAINFUL. AND EVEN IF YOU SUCCEED, YOU'LL NEVER BE THE SAME.

BUT IT CAN BE DONE.

MY STORY, AND THE STORIES I LOVE, GIVE ME THE COURAGE TO ACT. I'M SO, SO THANKFUL.

"FAIRY TALES DON'T TELL CHILDREN THAT DRAGONS EXIST. CHILDREN ALREADY KNOW DRAGONS EXIST.

FAIRY TALES TELL CHILDREN THAT DRAGONS CAN BE KILLED."

— GEORGE BERNARD SHAW
Knocking on the Sky is a graphic novel about a handsome wizard with a treasure map. He’s on the search for a mysterious artifact that has the power to change the world. Unfortunately, this man is a psychopath, and the only people that can stop him are an undead little girl and her ragtag band of ill-suited heroes.

I’ve been working with Stefanie Dao for several years to put this spiraling tale into comic form. The spirit of collaboration is critical to every step of our work. Knocking On the Sky is a story about the things we care about: the importance of found family, the daily brush of the divine against the ridiculous, and the galvanizing power of self-efficacy. Graphic novels and comic books have always been a bastion of storytellers who want to tell stories that are simultaneously ridiculous and meaningful, and we’re no exception.

We believe wholeheartedly that the questions and joys we face in life are not so different than any of yours, and the stories we tell will resonate with you, and maybe even change you. But before all of that—we sincerely hope that Knocking On the Sky makes you laugh, and that you turn the page eager to read more.
CHAPTER 2
KNOCKING ON THE SKY

Background

When I was in elementary school, my uncle gifted me three books: Astro Boy, Usagi Yojimbo, and The Adventures of Tintin. I’d already snuck peeks at his comic books in the past, while the rest of the family finished off Christmas dinners: but these were mine, and I read them until they were worn out. These books still influence my work today, but they were only the start of my interest in sequential narrative.

What I didn’t realize is the true scope of my uncle’s gift: the books he gave me all underpinned graphic novel traditions all over the world. Astro Boy is one of the best-loved series by the god of manga (Japanese comics) himself, Osamu Tezuka, who shaped sequential narrative not only in Japan, but the whole of Asia. The Adventures of Tintin by Hergé is one of the primary examples of European sequential narrative works, pioneering the classic ligne claire (“clean line”) style. Usagi Yojimbo was created by Stan Sakai, an American artist who grew up in Japan. Sakai was one of the first people to cross Japanese and American comic streams and achieved commercial and critical success, with his works appealing to both children and seasoned critics. Before creating Usagi, Sakai worked under the famous Spaniard Sergio Aragonés on Groo the Wanderer, one of the first creator-owned comics.

It’s worth pausing here briefly to define a few terms. The term ‘graphic novel’ was coined by zine writer Richard Kyle in 1964, and popularized with Will Eisner’s 1978 graphic novel A Contract With God. By 1980, the term was familiar to the public when Art Spiegelman’s Maus (1986) and Frank Miller’s The Dark Knight Returns (1986) debuted. The term ‘graphic
novels’ was originally coined to help separate them from ‘comic books’ as the public knew them: cheap copies of Superman and collected newspaper comic strips (Eisner, “A Contract with God.”). Officially, the designation between ‘comic book’ and ‘graphic novel’ is that comic books are periodicals, while graphic novels are released more similarly to a novel, without individual issues. However, the designation was also made to help legitimize the graphic novel as a suitable medium for serious, adult stories, unlike ‘comic books,’ which were often silly and childlike. Today, these terms are more and more interchangeable, especially in a non-scholarly context.

Writers and artists of comic book ‘periodicals’ rebelled against the idea that their work was less valid or serious. Comic book periodicals are also released into larger trades (4-6 comic issues bound together into a single volume), further muddying the waters between ‘comic book’ and ‘graphic novel.’ I personally will use the terms ‘comic book’ and ‘graphic novel’ interchangeably when describing my own work.

Sequential narrative traditions outside of America have their own terminology. Franco-Belgo comics such as Tintin are referred to not as ‘graphic novels’ or ‘comic books’ but instead the more general bande dessinée. This is often translated as ‘drawn strip’ or ‘comic album.’ Franco-Belgo comics do not make any distinction between comics and graphic novels, which I appreciate! (“Franco-Belgian Comics.”) Japanese manga is defined as work created by Japanese creators, or at least in the Japanese language. Many of the things that Westerners refer to as ‘manga’ may or may not be from Japan. Korea has its own term for their comics and print cartoons, manhwa, which can also refer to Korean animated cartoons. There’s also very little classification on sequential narrative works which are not traditionally published, such as webcomics.
The books my uncle gave me would all be classed differently, and some have multiple possible classifications. Tezuka’s *Astro Boy* is certainly *manga*. Hergé’s *Tintin* would be classed as a *bande dessinée*, and incorrectly as both a comic book (primarily aimed at children, with a light storyline) and a graphic novel (not released periodically). Stan Sakai’s *Usagi Yojimbo* is created by a Japanese person, but was published in America and in English. It also features a serious storyline, but is released periodically, with some storylines being released all at once in the style of graphic novels. It could then technically be argued to be *manga*, a comic book, or a graphic novel. Classification of sequential narrative work has always been complicated, and more work needs to be done to respond adequately to the new types and global reach of sequential narrative today.

Of course, my eight-year-old self didn’t much care what the books I was reading were called. I loved to look at the cool artwork of rabbit samurai cutting down cat ninjas, and big-eyed robots punching out cyborg dogs on the moon. I wanted to read more comics, but as an eight-year-old, funds were short, so I satisfied myself with random library books I’d pick off the shelf. I found Mark Crilley’s *Akiko* series, as well as Jeff Smith’s *Bone*. (Incidentally, both of these titles were also well-loved by my uncle.) I read and re-read these favorites for years.

In adolescence, my love of graphic novels exploded: I discovered *anime* (Japanese animation). Anyone born in the 90s will remember the weird “emo” kids that wore anime headbands, Converse shoes, and called themselves ‘weeaboos’ (an extremely enthusiastic fan of anime, manga, and skewed Japanese culture). I was among their ranks, watching subtitled anime and scanlation (scanned amateur translated) manga. This was around the time that Japanese imports found their way onto American television—the time of Pokémon, *Dragonball Z*, and *Naruto*. I dove headfirst into the frenzy for most of my adolescence. There’s no way to possibly
list off all of the graphic novels, manga, and anime I consumed at this time—it’s all a miasma of awkward, politically incorrect middle school years—but I did come out with a foundation in Japanese contemporary manga. Some material from this time—most notably Masashi Kishimoto’s *Naruto*—can be seen in how I draw the human figure.

In college, I began to act not just as a consumer, but as a creator looking to learn. I traced works, made notes in the margins, and began to link graphic novels to other adjacent media—including movies, animation, books, and fine art. I also began to deliberately consume Western sequential narrative again. Although I’d always kept up with American superhero classics (Batman, the Justice League), it had always been through the medium of animation. I began to read contemporary superhero comics. I also began to read nonfiction narratives, most notably Art Spiegelman’s *Maus* and Marjane Satrapi’s *Persepolis*. I’ve always been (and will be) a prolific consumer.

Inception

My interest in sequential narrative went hand-in-hand with other expected nerdy interests: animated television, fanfiction and fanart (stories and art created by fans, based on plotlines and characters from popular television, books, and other media) (Bronwen, “What Is Fanfiction?”), and tabletop roleplaying games like *Dungeons & Dragons*. My current studio work, *Knocking on the Sky*, is inspired by a *Dungeons & Dragons* campaign I was a player in. It’s impossible to talk about *KOTS* without talking about its roots in tabletop roleplaying.

*Dungeons & Dragons* (often shortened to *D&D* or *DnD*) is a popular tabletop role-playing game. The first player handbook was created by Gary Gygax and Dave Arneson in 1971 (Dao 20-21). Tabletop role-playing games like *D&D* create a series of parameters for a game to take place. The format of a *D&D* session is similar to a television show—there is a group of
protagonists, acting in an imagined world to achieve a goal, with the story told in an episodic format. In any D&D group, there are two types of people: the players and the Dungeon Master (or DM). Players create characters using the provided system of rules, deciding things like the character’s species, occupation, and fighting style (Fig. 1). DMs create the world, the antagonists, and other characters not controlled by the players (non-player characters, or NPCs).

A D&D game (or ‘campaign’) may take anywhere between a few hours, to several months. Like a television show, D&D games take place in discrete, episodic chunks called ‘sessions.’ There are two key differences between the structure of D&D campaign and a television show: collaboration and random chance.

D&D is first and foremost a social game. The events that take place during a session of D&D depend on the interactions across the tabletop (Dao 20-21). Instead of a panel of writers creating and solving a problem, problem solving in D&D involves both the players and the DM in equal measure. In an episode of a Superman cartoon, Superman may find Lois Lane in danger, formulate a plan based on Lois being incapacitated, and then save the day. Every obstacle that Superman faces is planned and solved in advance. The audience passively receives the completed story. This is very different from D&D—everyone is participating, contributing to the story, and changing events. In a Superman D&D campaign, Lois Lane and Superman would be controlled by two separate players. Lois Lane’s player may choose to act instead of wait, a fact Superman’s player may not have planned for. The DM would then pivot the story to account for this new action, creating consequences for the decisions and moving the new story forward.

This situation leads to the second critical element of D&D: randomness. A player or DM may or may not succeed in what they choose to do. All actions in D&D are decided by dice rolls, which are more or less likely to succeed based on the attributes of the character attempting the
action. The parameters for determining success or failure are set up in the tabletop system’s rulebook. For example: Lois Lane decides to attempt to escape her bonds. She is not very agile, so she doesn’t succeed. The villain, a paranoid sort, notices the attempted escape and chooses to move Lois Lane to a more secure location. Outside, Superman chooses to punch through a wall. Since he is strong, he succeeds, but he does not find Lois Lane where he expects. Superman’s player character would then have to alter Superman’s actions to overcome this new obstacle created by Lois Lane’s decision to act. Alternatively, Superman could fail to punch through the wall. The DM would then need to provide an explanation which would then introduce new conflict: perhaps the walls are studded with Kryptonite, or Superman notices civilians down below and thinks that punching through the wall might endanger them. The group would then come up with a new plan to achieve their goals based on these new obstacles. The degree of randomness is decided by the DM, who may choose to fudge dice rolls, add or take away obstacles, or introduce other characters to aid or hinder the player’s goals.

Collaboration and randomness are the keys to $D\&D$, and they are also the keys to $KOTS$. The characters of $KOTS$ first existed as player characters in $D\&D$, and it’s how Dao and I fell in love with collaborative storytelling. The DM for the original $KOTS$ campaign was Emily Artz. Stefanie Dao and I both played in this campaign as player characters that are now protagonists in $KOTS$. The ways we write the scripts in $KOTS$ are very similar to the way the characters were played in their original $D\&D$ setting. This process is discussed in Chapter 2: Workflow.

Although many of the characters and locations in $Knocking$ on the Sky existed as early as this 2011 $D\&D$ campaign, the graphic novel $KOTS$ started in 2013. I began to untangle $KOTS$ from classic $D\&D$ lore, making it into its own stand-alone story. I’d always been interested in graphic novels, and I finally had the story I wanted to tell. However, at this point, the longest
“graphic novel” I’d ever made was a three-page excerpt from a prose piece. Additionally, I believed (and still believe) that the vibrancy of KOTS came from collaboration, which meant I needed to assemble a team. Although I was interested in continuing to work with Dao and Artz, I felt strongly that before I involved them in the project, I needed to have an unwavering commitment. I knew that graphic novels were grueling, technically demanding, and would require a heavy time commitment. Before I asked others to work on graphic novels with me, I needed to be able to complete the process myself. I gathered the material that I already had of the story and got to work.

The senior year of my undergraduate degree was spent working with Professor Chuck Richards at Iowa State University, a children’s book illustrator. The end product of this independent study would be The Bloody Man, a 26-page stand-alone graphic novel that took place in the KOTS universe. The first semester I worked alone, learning the basics of graphic novel creation and drawing more than ever had in my life. This period contained some of the most rapid technical improvement in my artistic career (Fig. 2a-b). In these images, there is a 3-4 month gap. The anatomical accuracy, consistency, and facial symmetry improve drastically. This invaluable first semester cemented my confidence in graphic novels as my career path. In spring 2014, I asked Dao and Artz to join me—Dao as an artist, and Artz as a writer. A detailed account of their roles in the creating process is discussed in Chapter II: Workflow/Studio Practices. 

Knocking on the Sky was thoroughly underway.

Collaboration

The summary and themes of Knocking on the Sky cannot be discussed without a brief explanation of the role of collaboration in the project. KOTS has been a team effort since its
inception, and continues to be to this day. The nature of the collaboration is both narrative (the themes, ideas, and stories we explore) and technical (who’s doing what step in the studio). *KOTS* is the product of three people: myself (Taylor Carlson), Stefanie Dao, and Emily Artz. Artz left the project amicably in December 2015. Although Artz’s contributions to *KOTS* were invaluable—Artz lead the original D&D campaign that inspired *KOTS*—the thematic elements have evolved significantly past Artz’s influence. From here on, I will be referring to the partnership solely between Dao and myself.

Dao and I are partners, both metaphorically and in business. Although all decisions must be agreed on by both parties, Dao and I agreed that I would be the tiebreaker (with Dao having veto power). This is because I set the schedule, and because I am the public face of Bictori. The speed and reach of *KOTS* is largely up to me. The primary document on Stefanie Dao’s artistic role in *KOTS* is her 2014 thesis paper, *Collective Word: Interdisciplinary Collaboration and Communication in the Visual Arts*. An overview of her current role in our collaboration can be found in Chapter 2: Workflow/Studio Practices. In our business relationship, Dao wears multiple hats. She serves as the accountant, books our conventions, maintains our online storefronts, and performs most organizational maintenance (categorizing receipts, handling mailing lists, etc).

Dao and I also create and sell non-*KOTS* related fanart, both online and at conventions. All of these proceeds go into the *KOTS* business account.

My primary duty as collaborator is setting and enforcing our schedule. I am the one who suggests timelines (which are then approved by Dao). I give Dao tasks to complete and dates by which to complete them. I am also the one who handles forming relationships with comic book shop owners, networking at conventions, and the printing and distribution of *KOTS* (Fig. 3a–h,
I also handle any purchasing done on the KOTS account, deposit earnings, and collect all necessary paperwork that Dao needs to handle the accounting side.

Timeline

The following section is an annotated timeline of important events in KOTS, from its inception in 2011 to its current state in December 2017. Some yearly events, such as conventions, are listed separately for every year they were attended. There is also a projected timeline of scheduled events for 2018.

2011 September  First draft of Knocking on the Sky is created.

2013 July  Convention: Anime Iowa (Iowa City, Iowa) (Fig. 3a)

This convention was the first where Stefanie Dao and I exhibited as a team. This collaboration was a dry run to see if we could work well together. It succeeded both financially and confirmed our ability to work together as a team.

August  Taylor Carlson begins work on KOTS Pitch #1: The Bloody Man

This pitch was the first of several. Here, I use the word “pitch” to describe a self-contained story arc, which is then sent to publishers for consideration. For convenience, we name and number each of our pitches.

2014 January  Stefanie Dao joins the KOTS team.

Emily Artz joins the KOTS team.

April  Pitch #1 presented at ISU’s Undergraduate Research & Creative Expression Symposium.
May  Pitch #1 is completed, sent to print, and sent to Image Comics.

June  Pitch #2: Short Stories begins.

August  Convention: Mayhempalooza (Des Moines, Iowa)

    This convention was our first time participating in the local comic book scene. Mayhempalooza is a yearly comic convention hosted by Mayhem Comics & Collectibles, a popular comic shop with locations in Des Moines, Iowa and Ames, Iowa. This set the stage for our future business opportunities at Mayhem Comics & Collectibles.

2015  February  Pitch #2 is completed.

        April  Stefanie Dao exhibits her thesis, Collaborative World, and receives her M.F.A. from Iowa State University.

        May  Pitch #3: Lizardfolk begins.

        August  Convention: Mayhempalooza (Des Moines, Iowa)

            Taylor Carlson begins her M.F.A. degree at Iowa State University.

        December  Emily Artz leaves KOTS team.

            When our writer Emily Artz departed from the KOTS team, Dao and I took on her responsibilities. This took some time, leading to a temporary break in work as we restructured our team.

            Pitch #3 paused.

            Taylor Carlson receives her B.F.A. from Iowa State University in Graphic Design & English.

2016  January  KOTS collaborative duties reshuffled.

        Pitch #3 resumes.
July

Pitch #3 completed and printed.

Pitch #3: Black Maria (Issue #1) begins.

Convention: Anime Iowa (Des Moines, Iowa) (Fig. 3b)

August

Convention: Mayhempalooza (Des Moines, Iowa)

Pitch #3 debuts commercially at Mayhem Comics & Games in Ames, Iowa and Mayhem Comics & Collectibles in Clive, Iowa.

More information how KOTS was marketed to comic shops can be found in Chapter 2: Workflow/Studio Practices.

Jeremy Caniglia visits Iowa State University and critiques Pitch #3.

Caniglia informally reviewed KOTS at my request, looking at the materials I had on hand.

September

Pitch #3 debuts commercially at Capes Kafe in Des Moines, Iowa and SHIELD Comics in Ames, Iowa. (Fig. 4a)

Pitch #3 sells out its first run of issues at both Mayhem locations.

'Selling out a run' means that a store has sold all copies of a comic that they have available. Additional copies were sold to Mayhem at their request.

Bictori LLP created.

More information about the formation of the Bictori and Bictori LLP can be found in Chapter 2: Workflow/Studio Practices.

October

Convention: Anime DeMoii (Des Moines, Iowa)

November

Convention: Midwest Comic-Con (Des Moines, Iowa)
December Convention: Fitch House Open House (Des Moines, Iowa)

_Bictori was invited to informally show our work at the Fitch House studios by Professor Brent Holland._

2017 January Convention: UnConventional (Omaha, Nebraska) (Fig. 3c)

Pitch #4: Black Maria (Issue #1) completed.

Pitch #4: Black Maria (Issue #1) begins.

March Pitch #4 (Issue #1) distributed to stores currently selling _KOTS_.

April Pitch #4: Black Maria (Issue #2) completed.

Pitch #4 Black Maria (Issue #1) debuts commercially at A Shop Called Quest in Los Angeles, California.

_KOTS_ website and online store established.

Convention: Planet Comic-Con (Overland Park, Kansas) (Fig. 3g-h)

May Pitch #4: (Issue #2) distributed to stores currently selling _KOTS_.

Guest Appearance: Free Comic Book Day (Ames, Iowa)

_Bictori was invited to sign copies of _KOTS_ at Mayhem Ames for Free Comic Book Day. Free Comic Book Day is a yearly event that is celebrated by comic book shops nationwide. Shops provide special free comic books and often have sales and special events at their stores._

Pitch #4 (Issues #1 and #2) debut at Altar Ego (Marion, Iowa)

_KOTS_ receives first online review.

_This online review was written by a reader who purchased KOTS from Planet Comic-Con in April 2017._
KOTS receives first critique from professional graphic novelist Adam Smith.

Pitch #4: Black Maria (#1-3 Revisions) begins.

- **July** Convention: miniCON (Des Moines, Iowa)
- **September** Convention: DBQ Con (Dubuque, Iowa) (Fig. 3d)
- **October** Convention: Mayhempalooza (Des Moines, Iowa) (Fig. 3e)
- **December** Convention: Comic Book I-CON (Des Moines, Iowa) (Fig. 3f)
  Convention: Fitch House (Des Moines, Iowa)

2018
- **January** Convention: Anime Zap (Des Moines, Iowa)
  Pitch #4 (#1 and #2) debuts at Source Comics (Minneapolis, Minnesota)
- **February** Pitch #4: Black Maria (#1-3 Revisions) ends.
- **March** Taylor Carlson’s exhibits her thesis and defends.
  Pitch #3: Black Maria (#1-3 Revisions) is distributed to stores currently selling KOTS.
- **April** Convention: Chicago Comic & Entertainment Expo (Chicago, Illinois)
- **May** Taylor Carlson receives her M.F.A. from Iowa State University.
  Taylor Carlson exhibits her thesis at Viaduct Gallery (Des Moines, Iowa)
Themes

When readers ask what *Knocking on the Sky* is about, they’re really asking two questions. First, what’s the genre and synopsis of the story? Who are the characters? What’s the plot? Second, what themes are being explored? What are the ideas at the heart of the story?

The answer to the first “what” is easy: *Knocking on the Sky* is a graphic novel about a man with a treasure map. He’s on the search for a mysterious artifact that has the power to change the world. Unfortunately, this man is a psychopath, and the only people that can stop him are an undead little girl and her band of ill-suited heroes. These six issues introduce our main protagonists (Siobhan, Alexei, Ismat, Jonah, and Sil) as well as our main antagonist (Red). The story of *KOTS* is the story of these ill-suited heroes doing their best to save the world and themselves. It fits loosely into the fantasy genre. The beginning of this story is the Black Maria arc. The Black Maria arc is the first six issues of *KOTS* and it introduces the setting, our protagonists, their goals, and the main antagonist. Runaway prince Alexei Valerian and his bodyguard Ismat stumble upon a political conspiracy—and at the center is an undead twelve-year-old girl. Mixed up in the conspiracy are mechanic Jonah, slacker Silvaine Rowley, and the mysterious mage Red Selle.

The themes of *KOTS* are trickier to explain. *KOTS* is a massive body of work (thousands of sketches; tens of thousands of written story, 100+ pages of sequential narrative). Much of that work has yet to be done. The Black Maria arc is only six issues; the full story of *KOTS* will run hundreds of issues. Many of the themes of the work are still in their infancy on the page—but Dao and I have been exploring these ideas since *KOTS* began. The themes we’re been developing since 2011 are still the bedrock of *KOTS*. In Dao’s thesis, *Collaborative World*, she wrote about some of the themes of *KOTS* as she perceived them. These include the definition,
creation, and exploration of family bonds, the concept of home and how it connects to cultural and racial identities, and the deconstruction of myths and legends (Dao 23). I couldn’t agree more with Dao’s analysis. *Knocking On the Sky* is a story about the things we care about: the importance of found family, the daily brush of the divine against the ridiculous, and the joys of companionship. The story we tell is modeled after the life we live: family is complicated. Life-changing events are punctuated by nose-picking and butt-scratching. In this way, we bring a mythic story full of magic and spells back down to a mundane, relatable level.

Race, inclusion, and identity politics have become a more central theme since the time of Dao’s writing in 2014—a change started by Dao and supported by me. Sociopolitical events have raised many concerns about race and immigration: a proposed border wall between the United States and Mexico (Waxman), a travel ban on many Muslim countries (Shear), the public rise of the alt-right movement (Polakow-Suransky), and the attempted repeal of the DACA act (Romo). Our stance on race in *KOTS* started as a response to a chapter of Naomi Klein’s book *No Space*. In it she decries how identity politics have been a distraction from socioeconomic equality: “In this new globalized context, the victories of identity politics have amounted to a rearranging of the furniture while the house burned down.” Klein goes on to point out that while there is more media representation of minority groups such as Black Americans, women, and LGBT, this has not translated in any notable socioeconomic output: “The abandonment of radical economic foundations of the women’s and civil-rights movements… fully trained a generation of activists in the politics of image, not action” (Klein 124). Dao and I immediately disagreed with Klein. We saw identity politics not as useless or distracting, but instead as a first rung in a ladder of socioeconomic change.
Dehumanization is the first step toward individualistic and systematic discrimination and all that follows (Smith, “Less Than Human”). We see identity politics as humanizing, and it’s especially critical for people who may not ever get a chance to meet someone from a minority group in person. The majority of KOTS is now non-white. Three of the characters in KOTS—Ismat, Silvaine, and Jonah—are all pulling from Dao’s experiences as a person of Japanese, Vietnamese, and American cultural influences. How Ismat relates to the concept of “home” is influenced by his lack of connection to his birth culture. Jonah’s performance of his cultural and racial identity results in xenophobia, not only to the white but also to the non-white members of the KOTS cast.

When I entered college, I had little to no experience thinking critically about minority groups—such as Black Americans. Media like Luke Cage, Aya of Yop City, and Soul Eater were my only frame of reference until I was able to meet and talk with Black students and learn more. This drive to meet others and educate myself would not have happened without that critical first step of humanization performed by books and television. This path of identity politics has led not just to personal growth, but also to behavioral changes and political activism.

KOTS is full of intersectional characters. Intersectional characters may have privilege in one area, but lack it in another—people don’t exist in a binary state of “privileged” or “oppressed,” but have multifaceted identities. The leading lady of KOTS, Siobhan, is a white person living in a majority white country, but comes from a lower social class without access to education and experiences heavy classism. The person who judges Siobhan most harshly is Jonah, a xenophobic foreigner that experiences racism on a daily basis and thinks that learning disorders aren’t real. Ismat, while visually appearing to belong to one culture, is totally removed from it—people assume he knows languages and cultural norms based on his face. All of these
characters come from our lives. Dao’s experience as a second-generation Asian-American is especially important in the interplay between the Asian-inspired characters Jonah, Ismat, and Silvaine. Identity politics are as complicated as people, and this is why intersectional characters are key to KOTS. Dao and I aren’t perfect, and neither are the characters of KOTS—but we are all learning.

Dao and I want to fight against the idea that identity politics and economic justice are opposing forces. Economic justice is social justice (Gray, Lynch). The drive to represent different racial & cultural identities, classes, family structures, and sexualities is critical to Dao and I. Intersectionality is the key to how we explore these ideas in KOTS.

The theme of self-efficacy is also critical in KOTS, both on the page and in the studio. Siobhan, the main character of Knocking on the Sky, is a magnification of my own faults and virtues. The thing I treasure about Siobhan is her unshakeable contrariness: tell her that something’s forbidden, and she’ll do it twice to spite you. Siobhan is the antithesis of excuses, and in many ways KOTS is here today solely because of her determination to exist on the page. At Siobhan’s core lies an unshakeable self-efficacy that permeates everything she does. In the current arc of KOTS, Siobhan is trying to find her missing father. This is held by other characters to be an impossible task, but Siobhan rejects their rejection and refuses to be swayed from her goal. Siobhan believes wholeheartedly that she can and will conquer any challenge that lies before her—not only finding her missing father, but any challenge that follows.

This idea of self-efficacy is not only a core concept Siobhan’s character, or of KOTS—it permeates my teaching, my studio practice, and my general outlook on life. Self-efficacy is defined by psychologist Albert Bandura as “how well one can execute courses of action required to deal with prospective situations.” (Bandura 122) It is a description of how strongly a person
feels they can affect a given situation. Self-efficacy requires two components: the subject’s ability to execute a task, and a belief that the task can be executed by the subject. A person with self-efficacy feels that they have (or can learn) the skills necessary to achieve a task, and they have faith in themselves and their ability to do that task.

The language I’m using is clinical, but the concept of self-efficacy is intensely personal and tied strongly to emotion, self-esteem, and courage. When I decided I wanted to become a graphic novelist (more specifically—when I decided I wanted to write and draw a long-running, serial, creator-owned comic distributed through a publishing house), it seemed a monumentally impossible goal. I was in a geographic location with no access to specialized formal training, I knew no graphic novelists that could serve as mentors, and my technical skills were lacking in every area. The amount of work that needed to be done was overwhelming, and I had no mentors or exemplars I could relate to.

Self-efficacy led me to where I am now. I nurtured the strengths of my geographic location, capitalizing on other types of formal training my location offered (graphic design, landscape architecture, and industrial design). I helped develop formal coursework to help train myself and other students in my geographic area. I sought out and nurtured relationships with experienced artists I had access to—professors like Chuck Richards, Brent Holland, Brenda Jones, Bambi Yost, and Amy Harris. I applied for and participated in conventions, attended lectures, and went to places where artists I wanted to be, went—artists like Jeremy Caniglia, Mauro Fiore, Jason Wright, Adam Smith, Christopher Jones, Ron Wagner, and Chelsea Walton. I developed relationships with comic shop owners (Rob Josephson, Katie Manchester, Curtis & Kyle Porter) and the shops themselves (Mayhem, A Shop Called Quest, Legend Comics & Coffee, and many others). I met clubs and convention organizers and began to establish our
presence on the Midwestern comic convention circuit with Scott Wirth and Gregg Paulsen. 
(Further discussion of convention schedules can be found in Chapter 2: Timeline).

As I amassed resources, I also honed my technical skills. I attended graduate school, spending at least half of my credit load each semester on technical drawing improvement. I studied drawing across disciplines, filled multiple sketchbooks with hundreds of images, and picked up new media like watercolor and marker. While teaching DSN S 131: Design Representation, I taught and practiced the basics of sighting, perspective, and proportion. Assisting in ARTIS 432/532: Sequential Narrative Drawing, I practiced executing my own sequential narrative based off course assignments, and evaluating other people’s work. In an effort to improve my color handling, I taught myself James Gurney’s gamut masking technique and learned multiple ways to execute this traditional technique in a digital medium. (Further discussion of technical execution can be found in Chapter 2: Workflow/Studio Practices). I took on extra commission work for many different kinds of clients.

We haven’t yet achieved our goal of publication, but we’re closer than we’ve ever been. My collaborator and I have created 100+ pages of sequential narrative. We have three issues of KOTS published in multiple locations across the United States, and more on the way. We’ve helped to build coursework in sequential narrative at Iowa State University. We have a full convention schedule and a robust relationship with professionals in our area.

Dao and I will finish our revisions of the Black Maria arc in spring 2018. This work will be shown in two separate shows in Des Moines, Iowa. Once I earn my graduate degree, we have two immediate goals: increasing our convention appearances and scope, and submitting to publishing houses. We have assembled a shortlist of conventions and comic shops in Minnesota, Nebraska, and Kansas. We plan to expand our convention docket east into Illinois, and possibly...
further depending on KOTS’ reception in those locations. This will start with the Chicago Comic & Entertainment Expo, as noted on the timeline. We’ll also be following up with a number of contacts for other opportunities to get KOTS seen.

None of this would be possible without our high self-efficacy. When I first started, I had little skill and fewer connections. But I had faith in my ability to learn what I needed to do to execute the task I’d set out for myself. I believed in my ability to faithfully evaluate my own work, and to find artists who would help me along the way. I believed that if I took things one step at a time, achieving my goal would be inevitable. I still believe this.

Workflow/Studio Practices

One of the most challenging parts of producing a graphic novel is the sheer technical demand, which is why working collaboratively is the norm for the industry. Finding a person with the ability to singlehandedly write and draw a graphic novel is difficult. Finding a single person that can do it in a timely manner is extremely rare. Across the world, any graphic novel tradition that relies on releasing on deadlines requires some form of collaboration.

Collaboration in deadline-driven graphic novel traditions can be very broadly divided into two categories: Western (American) and Eastern (Japanese). There’s an enormous breadth of sequential narrative work published outside of American graphic novel/comic book tradition, most notably in Europe. Many works I cite fall into this category such as the Tintin, The Adventures of Adele Blanc-Sec, Aya of Yop City, and Maus. This style of publication does not closely relate to our work, which is why I’ve chosen to omit the discussion of how these works are published. This should not be taken as a signal of this work’s influence on KOTS, only on the influence on KOTS’ preferred publication style.
American graphic novels are produced “assembly line” style—each step of the comic is split into a discrete task, with each collaborator specializing in a certain task. There is typically one writer (often working with an editor) who prepares the script. The script is then given to the artist(s). The first artist is the penciller. They decide how each panel will be arranged, where the text will go, and how the characters and scenes will look, and then draw detailed pencil sketches of the entire graphic novel. Next, those pages go to the inker, who turns the graphite pencil drawings into clean inkwork. The inks are then passed along to a colorist, who does all color and tonal work. Last, the comic goes to the letterer, who puts in all speech balloons and special effects text (SFX) (Schmidt 116-123, 130,148-159). In smaller teams (such as indie comics), one artist might perform all these tasks. Large publishers like DC or Marvel have specialized artists for each individual task. Because of this, most American graphic novelists work on multiple series simultaneously, and the same story can have multiple writers and artists—for instance, one Batman story arc may have an entirely different team than another arc running simultaneously.

Japanese manga has a completely different setup. Most manga is the product of one person, who serves as both artist and writer. As a series becomes more popular and demand increases, the team expands and the creator hands off mundane or undesired tasks to assistants, acting as head artist and supervisor. In an interview with VIZ Media, manga editor Hope Donovan comments on the fundamental differences between western and Japanese comics: “…Manga artists will do as much as possible themselves, and leave more tedious tasks such as backgrounds to their assistants. You don’t see the specialization breakdown of writer, penciller, inker, colorist that western comics has [sic]” (Pino). When we started KOTS, we first used the Western style of breaking down tasks into the discrete roles Donovan lists, but soon found that there was a lot of wasted effort and mediocre work. We soon abandoned these Western roles,
pivoting into the Japanese method of specializations. Dao specializes in speech balloons and environments, while I specialize in character expressions and thumbnails. The bulk of KOTS we do together, working as time constraints allow. This context is critical to understanding the KOTS studio practice. From the start, Dao and I have used a unique mix of Japanese and Western collaborative styles, even though we are seeking to be published in Western markets. The most significant departures from Western tradition is that we sign a single name to our work.

The decision to use a single name is both ideological (we are a team, first and foremost) and practical (our current division of labor has left us unable to credit our work with Western phasing like ‘writer,’ ‘penciller,’ ‘inker,’ and ‘colorist’ as we both perform each task). Instead of being credited as CARLSON / DAO, the author of Knocking on the Sky is listed under the team name BICTORI. The name is has multiple meanings. “Bic” comes from the Bic brand of pens, which is what I use to create my signature style of inking. “Tori” is the Japanese word for bird—birds appear frequently in KOTS, and Dao’s Japanese heritage influences the content and visuals of the work. The resulting portmanteau, BICTORI, rhymes with “victory,” reflecting our desire to achieve publication and popularity. Dao created an image to go with this logo (Fig. 5) and it is used on all of our works.

The idea of centering around one creative voice in this fashion is another Japanese trait. “Manga is based far more around a single artist’s vision and work,” Donovan continues. “This is one thing that’s great about manga—when you see a cover, you know it was drawn and colored by the artist and is representative of the art inside” (Pino). Instead of focusing on one artist, our creative vision is instead honed in on our team. The idea of specific teams having names is well established in Japan, both in fiction and life. One of the most famous named teams is C.L.A.M.P., a five-woman group behind some of the most popular titles of the 1990s including
Cardcaptor Sakura, Tsuba: Reservoir Chronicle, and xxxHOLIC (Chang). One of the most notable things about CLAMP is that the members of the team shuffle their duties, which is something we’ve taken to heart in our own studio. KOTS is influenced globally not just on an artistic or thematic level, but in the act of creating the work itself. I firmly believe that this mix of styles has allowed KOTS to flourish into a greater work than it would be if we had strictly adhered to one type of workflow. Dao’s excellent environmental scenes would have been stymied if I had insisted on doing all of the pencils as in traditional Western work. Conversely, our use of color is notably Western—Japanese comics focus heavily on black and white, and the use of colorists is unusual to say the least. Borrowing elements from different work styles has let us explore creative possibilities we’d have never considered otherwise.

Our studio practices have evolved significantly throughout the period of our collaboration. Since we live in different locations, all of our work is uploaded and shared digitally via cloud storage (Dropbox and Google Drive). To help keep track of our progress and assign work, each issue has a master document that is used to indicate what work is done, what work is started, what work is untouched, and relevant notes for each page (Fig. 6).

Every pitch begins with writing the script. Together, Dao and I brainstorm what we want the approximate story for the issue to be. After we have a rough outline, we break that outline into a series of discrete scenes—moments of action ended by a location or point-of-view switch (Fig. 7a-b). When we have the scenes finished, we assign an approximate number of pages that each scene will be, and break the contents of the scene across the number of pages. Once this is finished, we earmark who is writing which scenes. Some scenes are written by one collaborator (Black Maria #1/Scene 1 was written by Dao exclusively; she is the creator of Ismat and Alexei and thus the characters fall under her purview). Other scenes are written together in tandem in a
process resembling play-by-post roleplaying games: each writer assumes the identity of their character(s), responds to the given situation, and then lets the other writer’s character(s) act. The back-and-forth is continued until the scene is resolved. Once the script is finalized and approved by each collaborator, the drawing begins.

I thumbnail each page on 4”x6” boxes, deciding the composition and layout of each panel and page (Fig 8). Once these thumbnails are scanned into Dropbox, I leave a note on which environments I want Dao to pencil. Dao uses her skill in rendering environments to pencil the settings for the panels I indicate (usually 2-3 panels per page, or ~30% of the total issue). Dao completes the environmental panels based on the script and thumbnails, then gives me back her environmental pencils. I then complete the rest of the pencils, dropping in characters and props. Often, the script calls for extra artwork that is outside of my style, such as in Black Maria #3/Page 1 (an illustration for a romance novel) (Fig 9.1) or Black Maria #2/Page 9 (Fig 9.2). In these instances, Dao handles the thumbnails and pencils.

When the pencils are complete, I move onto inking. I complete all my inks using a cheap Bic ballpoint pen, an unusual choice in this field. The Bic works for two reasons: first, it best emulates the looseness and variable line weight of my pencils. Second, since the output of KOTS is digital, we don’t have concerns about archival quality or ink bleeding. (Prior issues of KOTS were completed with Maru and G dip pens and India ink (Dao 27) (Fig 9.3); we were ultimately dissatisfied with this and changed media in the Lizardfolk Pitch.). Supplementing the Bic pens is my black Micron .005, which I use to ink the more delicate lines and small figures. The inks are then uploaded into cloud storage, cleaned, and arranged into panels.

Once the inks are prepared, the rest of KOTS is completed digitally. Each scene is assigned an appropriate color palette. We use James Gurney’s gamut masking technique to select
a limited color palette. Gurney first chooses a limited amount of pigments from the spectrum, plots the colors onto a color wheel, and then connects all the colors to make one field that covers part of the color wheel. This process is called gamut mapping (Gurney 124) (Fig. 10.a-b). Everything that falls outside of this field is omitted from the color scheme. The pigments that remain over the wheel are called the gamut mask (Gurney 126). Using this mask of limited color, I color one ‘master’ panel for each scene (Fig. 10.c). I also include the gamut mask on a separate layer, so that Dao is able to sample any additional color she needs. After the master panel is set, both Dao and I can work independently to finish the scene on our own time using Photoshop’s eyedropper tool to pick up exact colors, and the gamut mask to sample any additional colors we need.

There are several advantages to the gamut masking technique. The advantages Gurney discusses in his book *Color and Light* are artistic: you don’t have to rely on pigments to make your primary colors, and can instead mix exactly what you want. The use of this technique also forces creativity by applying the mask to the wheel to make new colors schemes you might not have thought of. Gurney also points out that the gamut masking technique is similar to the ways that photographers and cinematographers use color filters, but with better control (Gurney 126). Besides these, there are two major benefits to the technique for us. First—it allows beautiful color use without much knowledge. The gamut mask helps define what colors a piece uses, and stops the painter from making random selections that may or may not fit the image. This is helpful for me, who doesn’t have much color experiences. Second, it is a huge timesaver. Instead of having to guess at color samples and fiddle with a composition until it works, the gamut mask allows for fairly instant success that can be replicated by simply matching colors panel to panel. The artifact of the gamut mask and master panel means that Dao and I can work independently
from each other. Dao is able to work on painting without any direction from me outside of the gamut mask. This is a huge benefit for us, because applying the color is the most time-intensive step of KOTS.

While the color is being applied, the remaining tasks are finished piecemeal. Dao shoulders most of the burdens of handling the text, which includes flowing in the text from the script to the comic page, adding balloons, and adding SFX text. I jump into help with the former two tasks if necessary. We both work on other last finishing elements, such as adding other special effects. These special effects include follow trails (lines of motion that show how an object, such as a sword or hand, moves through space), magical spells, and impact marks where objects collide with other objects (a vase falling off a table). We then fix weaker panels, and proofread the art and script. After everything is complete, both of us give the page one last proof before checking the “final sign-off” box, indicating that the page is ready for print.

After the story art is complete, there are a few more tasks yet to go. For each issue, Dao completes 2-4 omakes, another element borrowed from Japanese manga tradition. An omake (おまけ) is a small bonus comic traditionally found at the end or margins of Japanese manga (Mazzarella). These omakes are small four-panel joke strips, based off of the main story (Fig. 11). As Dao works on the omakes, I complete a cover image for the issue. When all of the elements for an issue are complete, I arrange and package the electronic files for print and send it off to our print vendor. Once the issues are delivered, they’re signed by each of us and ready for distribution. We distribute our comics in two ways: selling them at comic conventions, and distributing them to comic book shops (Fig. 3a-h, Fig 4a-d).

Comic conventions (often shortened to comic-cons or comicons) are gatherings where fans of comics, pop culture, and animation come together. These events can range hugely in size
from a few hundred, to hundreds of thousands. Comic conventions often feature celebrity appearances, panels on special interest topics, and a hall of vendors and artists that sell interest-specific merchandise. The topics of conventions can range all the way from general interest, to specifics like anime, sci-fi, or specific video games and television shows (Chafin). Attendees must purchase a badge, which is then used as pass to get them into the event. Vendors, artists, and others who seek to sell their merchandise at the convention must go through an application process. The application process for conventions are as varied as conventions themselves. Some conventions are very picky, accepting only selected applicants and requiring information about products sold, past conventions, and publication history. Other conventions offer space in a first-come, first-serve basis. All conventions require purchase of exhibition space and badges. This can range from $50 - $400 depending on the size of the convention, and the desirability of the space (a front corner space has more showing area and visibility than a back aisle space).

Once an exhibitor has been accepted, they set up their space and wares at their discretion and can sell their merchandise with impunity (Fig 3.1-8). Conventions do not take any percentage of the exhibitor’s earnings, although exhibitors with out-of-state business licenses must pay taxes to the convention’s home state. When Dao and I are deciding whether to apply for a convention, we must weigh a number of options. We consider our projected sales based on the size of the event, the cost of lodgings and travel, the size of the convention as compared to the exhibition space fee and badge cost, and the duration of the convention. Generally, Dao and I will not apply for a convention that will cost more than we project making back in profit. This rule may be bent if it is a region that we have not shown in before, or if we have been specially invited to the convention.
The second way we distribute *KOTS* is to stores (Fig. 4a-d). It is my duty to visit stores, pitch *KOTS*, and make arrangements for pricing and shipping. I currently approach all businesses in person. I inquire if they sell independent comics (comics without a publisher or distributor). If they answer yes, I will give them a sample of my work. Oftentimes, a comic store owner will make a decision on the spot whether or not to carry the book. When deciding to carry a book, comic shop owners typically decide between selling wholesale, or selling on consignment. Most owners prefer to sell wholesale, to cut down on the amount of hassle (since independent comics must be stocked by hand on the shelf and artists paid out separately). When selling wholesale, most comic shops will broker a 50/50 split with the artist. The artist receives 50% of the income from the sale price of the book, and the comic shop receives the other 50%. Alternatively, some comic shops will sell on consignment. If the artist is local and a frequent customer, the hassle of watching the stock of the book and figuring out payment is less of a problem. When selling on consignment, the store will agree to stock a number of issues agreed upon by the owner and the artist. After a certain date, the store will return the remaining issues to the artist at no cost. This places the burden of selling back on the artist and lessening the financial risk for the shop. Typical consignment rates are 70/30 or 80/20, with the artist taking the higher amount.

Dao and I learned everything about conventions and comic shop distribution through trial and error. One thing we quickly realized is that we needed a separate system of banking to handle the cash flow from printing and selling the books. In 2016, we formed an Limited Liability Corporation under our pen name, Bictori LLP. Stefanie Dao handles all accounting for this business. Thanks to our busy convention schedule and distribution market, Bictori LLP has operated in the black since its inception.
CHAPTER 3

TEACHING

Introduction

When I began my graduate degree at Iowa State, I had absolutely no experience teaching. The only times I had ever been in a classroom were when I was assisting in my mother’s Pre-K classes, where it quickly became clear that I had no aptitude for handling children. I mistakenly assumed that these experiences represented teaching as a whole, and quietly crossed off ‘teaching’ from my list of future vocations.

This changed when I began teaching at the collegiate level. I was shocked at how much I enjoyed teaching—and further, how much students enjoyed my classes. Teaching has come to be something I love to do, and it’s had a significant impact on my own studio work. I’ve been able to put together a varied teaching portfolio throughout my graduate career. This includes DSN S 131: Design Representation as the instructor of record, as well as assisting in several advanced sequential narrative classes (ARTIS 432x/532x: Sequential Narrative Drawing, ARTIS 432/532: Sequential Narrative Drawing, and ARTIS 431/531: Character and Scene Design).

The core of my teaching philosophy is self-efficacy. At the end of the day, I want to instill in each of my students confidence in their competency, whether those skills are in basic drawing or advanced sequential narrative practices. As I moved from teaching assistant to an instructor of record, I continued to develop the idea of self-efficacy and how it was implemented in my classroom and curriculum.
Fall 2015: ARTIS 511: Seminar in Teaching & DSN S 131: Design Representation
(Teaching Assistant: Lecture Component)

During my first semester at ISU, I was appointed to assist Professor Chuck Richards in his DSN S 131 lecture, a half-semester long lecture class that reinforced basic drawing concepts that students were already practicing in their studios. This was a class I’d taken myself in undergrad, but now I was listening to Professor Richards’ instruction with five years of drawing experience. This semester proved invaluable for me. First, I was able to brush up on my technical skills—perspective had always been a weak point for me, and the lecture allowed me to review before I taught. Second, I was able to view the class in the context of a future instructor. Professor Richards wrote and utilized his own textbook for the lecture component. I purchased a copy and structured my future DSN S 131 studio with his book in mind, listing relevant textbook chapters for each project I assigned. This served the dual purpose of saving me work (I was able to use Richards’ words and instructions as opposed to writing my own duplicates), as well as reinforcing what students were hearing in lecture. This is a practice I used for every DSN S 131 class I taught.

Concurrently, I was enrolled in ArtIS 511: Seminar in Teaching, taught by Professor April Katz. Professor Katz covered teaching on both practical and professional levels. I learned how to structure syllabi, rubrics, and projects, as well as how to find jobs in academia and how to put together an application packet and CV. It was in this class that I was able to test-run my project outlines and rubrics. The formatting of these documents in my current classes is very similar to my ‘tests’ in this class (Fig. 12a-b). In addition to these practical steps, I was able to narrow down my core teaching philosophy, centralized around the idea of self-efficacy. This concept was becoming more and more critical in my studio work, and I realized that self-efficacy
could be a valuable tool in teaching students at all levels. The two core elements of self-efficacy are having the skills to execute a task, and the belief in the subject’s own ability to complete it. I needed to develop teaching strategies that addressed both components, and then I needed to find ways to measure and evaluate the success or failure of these strategies. I built my curriculum on two principles: the taxonomies of Bloom and Anderson, and the writings of John Hattie.

Bloom’s taxonomy was developed in 1956 by a committee chaired by Benjamin Bloom. This taxonomy focuses on skill building, creating a bedrock of information through recall of facts and systems and then implementing that information to solve problems. This taxonomy was revised by a second committee in 2001, chaired by Lorin Anderson (one of Bloom’s former students) and David Krathwohl (Overbaugh, Schultz) (Fig. 13). This revised taxonomy reordered and reclassified Bloom’s, focusing on greater understanding of systems, how different systems connected, and de-escalating the importance of recall and memorization (Overbaugh, Schultz). This makes sense when you consider the time of writing—information was harder to access in 1956. Anderson and Krathwohl’s taxonomy focuses on critical thinking—students are assumed to already have easy access to information. Instead, it focuses on sorting and evaluating that information. There’s much to be said about the benefits of each taxonomy, but the specific application I took from these taxonomies is that the way students access information has changed drastically.

I quickly realized that being an ‘information dispensary’ was not going to equip my students to succeed past college (or even past my class). My students already have access to more information than they could ever parse, much less implement. Instead, the trick was to teach them how to evaluate information—including the information I provided to them—and sort the relevant from the irrelevant. Thus it was my job as a Teaching Assistant not just to instill
technical knowledge, but to help students practice critical thinking skills so that they would have the confidence to tackle tasks outside of the classroom, and outside of my guidance.

Contemporary education scholar John Hattie has written extensively on the topic of different teaching methodologies, and how to measure the success of educational tools. Hattie’s 2001 book *Visible Learning for Teachers: Maximizing Impact on Learning* collects and presents evidence for and against 138 different teaching strategies. This list is regularly expanded, most recently to 195 effects in his 2015 article *The Applicability of Visible Learning to Higher Education*. According to Hattie, the data has not changed significantly during his window of study (Waack). According to Hattie’s list, the most reliable and impactful strategy for student learning (when executed correctly) is self-reported grades (Waack). This fell in line with my personal experiences: when I had confidence in my own opinion and evaluation of my work, my self-efficacy rose and I was more likely to turn out quality work on time. Students who could identify and fix problems in their work—whether they were major or minor problems—were more likely to succeed then students who blindly followed technical advice.

I wrote about this in my first teaching philosophy, written for Professor Katz’s ARTIS 511 class in 2016:

“The single most important thing that I want to teach my students is to be their own most accurate critic. Eventually, students will no longer be students, and their work will be judged solely (or primarily) by their own tastes and values. It’s important not just to give students technical criteria in which to judge their work, but the self-confidence to apply their own judgment and act on it. The goal of self-efficacy is not to be your own worst critic, but your own most accurate critic. Students who devalue or overvalue their opinion will ultimately produce work that falls behind a more critically sound eye.”

Now that I had identified my core philosophy of self-efficacy and decided to teach self-efficacy via self-evaluation, it was time to figure out how to translate this idea into a class. Furthermore, I’d only addressed half of self-efficacy: I didn’t have any strategies for the second
half of the concept—belief in the subject’s abilities to complete a task. This was uncomfortably close to self-esteem, and seemed far trickier to teach.

Throughout my first semester at ISU, I’d been working closely with Professor Richards to develop the first class in sequential narrative that ISU would offer. Co-teaching this course with Professor Richards would give me critical time to practice my teaching skills, test the concept of self-efficacy, brainstorm and observe how Prof. Richards built confidence in his students, and see how my curriculum functioned when it was no longer theoretical.

Spring 2016: 432x/532x: Sequential Narrative Drawing

+ Independent Documentation

The first day of sequential narrative contained a valuable lesson, but I wouldn’t learn it until months after the course had completed. Professor Richards and I met our students (a good mix of advanced level students that were mostly interested in comic books, my area of expertise). Partway through the very first class, an irritated student asked me to stop clicking my pen so nervously. Thoroughly embarrassed—a rookie mistake on Day One! —I quickly switched pens and removed the rest of the click-top pens from my bag for the rest of the semester. I soon found myself comfortable addressing students both as a group, and one-on-one.

Professor Richards and I broke the class into four units: Character Design, Composition/Scene Design/Layout Design, Storyboarding, and the Final Project. The first three units were instructional and ran for a total of 10 weeks. The final 6 weeks of the course were a self-designed Final Project, where students could focus on one element of the course and do a more in-depth study. This course was jam-packed with content—we had to give students a large amount of data (basic concepts of sequential narrative across several media), and gauge their
understanding and implementation of this information via studio work. Both the deadline-driven nature of the work, as well as the rigorous and speedy delivery of information, meant that students had to learn and practice rapid iteration and sketching. Professor Richards and I worked hard to develop a targeted curriculum where each of us was able to teach in our area of expertise. For the majority of the class, we taught together, but there were two projects that I designed and implemented alone: Character Costumes, and the Shakespeare Comic Pages.

Costuming characters is something that I’m extremely interested in, especially as it impacts with character and silhouette design. I delivered a 30 minute lecture that would introduce this project. First, I introduced existing examples from pop culture. I analyzed these examples, all the way from color theory to the differences in their hemlines (Fig. 14a-i). Second, I broke down how these concepts appeared in my own work. I showed my step-by-step process of designing a character’s costume (Fig. 15a-k), using Scott McCloud’s three principles of character design: an inner life, visual distinction, and expressive traits (McCloud 63).

The goals in this assignment were twofold: to get students to design original, interesting characters that didn’t just rely on “default” decision making—things they were comfortable or familiar with. We challenged students to design characters outside of their own cultural and racial identities and gender presentations. We also pushed students to construct costumes to compliment silhouettes and shape language (terms we’d already covered), not just think of different colors of t-shirts and jeans. Although many students were successful, some students failed to fully grasp the differences that were available, making small changes (such as switching out jeans for shorts), rather than the silhouette-based costuming that was presented on and stressed. Despite this, the demonstration was successful enough that it was tweaked and brought
back for multiple iterations of 432x/532x, with the addition of in-progress critiques and the requirement of utilizing clothing from many cultures to help address some of the shortfalls.

The second project, the Shakespeare Comics Pages, was a personal favorite. Students produced excellent work that showed a deep understanding of the project’s learning objectives. I was inspired by Will Eisner’s short story illustrating the famous “To Be or Not To Be” monologue from Shakespeare’s *Hamlet* (Eisner 112-121). First, I selected two short sections from Shakespeare’s plays and modified the language to make them easier for students to understand. Next, I outlined the project expectations in a similar manner as I had outlined the Character Costume project—with a set of images of my own work, broken down. I showed different styles of panel layouts (Fig. 16a-e), and broke down when each was appropriate to use. Students then designed multiple design solutions using the different styles of panel layout with one of the Shakespeare scripts.

Students learned how to compose a panel to tell a story—when to use a close-up image, when to use a wide shot, and when to change the panel shapes to emphasize a certain story beat. By requiring multiple pages, we prodded students to think of multiple solutions. Students explored how changing a camera angle changed the story. By providing the text, we allowed students to focus wholly on the drawing and story beats. I truly enjoyed this project, and students performed excellently. This project was reprised in Spring 2017, and will be repeated again in Spring 2018.

While co-teaching this class with Professor Richards, I was enrolled in an independent study (FRN 590) with Professor Stacey Weber-Fève. In this independent study, I documented daily notes of my observations in ARTIS 432x/532x, composed and read a list of French *bande dessinée* and other sequential narrative works, and wrote and distributed an end-of-semester
evaluation for ARTIS 432x/532x. Both this study (Fig. 17) as well as ISU’s mandatory end of semester evaluation (Fig. 18) showed that students were overall extremely satisfied and felt they had learned an extraordinary amount. The latter point was backed up by excellent student work that consistently fulfilled our learning outcomes for the course. One student wrote “I have more sketches from this singular class than all the other drawing classes require,” dovetailing nicely with one of the core learning objectives of the class: rapid, iterative sketching. The overall course ratings trended about 20% higher than the College of Design’s average in course usefulness, relevancy, and professor effectiveness (Fig. 19). Overall, I was thrilled—students felt treated with consideration, and they were achieving their goals. The student’s grades indicated that they were learning technical skills—Professor Richards and I both evaluated 14 of the 16 students to have received an 80% or higher in the class overall). High marks on course usefulness and the quantity of learning meant that students were engaged with what they were being asked to learn, and were aware that they were learning. Students were gaining the technical skills they needed to succeed, and were achieving at least one goal we could measure—high marks in the course. We were doing something right with self-efficacy, and I felt confident that once I was given full control over a class, I’d be able to get a better bead on how to further explore the concept.

The lesson that the first day of the semester had for me was tucked away in the “Additional Items” section of ISU’s official evaluation—written student feedback. One student really took our requests for honest feedback to heart. The last item punctuating a long list of feedback was directed at me, and read simply: “Finally, [Taylor Carlson] should NEVER use click pens if she can’t control herself.”

I took it as a heartfelt lesson that I’d never quite satisfy everyone.
When constructing my curriculum for DSN S 131: Design Representation, I started by copying the class structure I went through when I had taken the course six years prior. I then began to restructure the curriculum based off of my strengths, what I found to be the most useful, and what I wished I had learned. I started by teaching the basics: sighting, proportion, box and elliptical construction. I then moved into more advanced concepts of one-, two-, and three-point perspective, value, and color. In my experience, this is where most studios stopped. However, I found that the drawing I used the most in my undergraduate work was not strict observational drawing—instead, I used rapid iteration to quickly sketch out multiple ideas that solved design problems in multiple ways. Most of the students that take DSN S 131 do not declare a major in Integrated Studio Arts (ISU’s fine art program), and will not be using drawings as final products. I decided to spend the first two-thirds of the semester on the same things I had learned—the fundamentals of proportion, perspective, and value—and then spend the last third of the semester on rapid, iterative drawing that focused on drawing as a step in the design process rather than the final product. These projects became the heart of the course. This type of drawing instruction was divided up into two projects: Synthesis, and Heuristics.

The Synthesis project had three learning outcomes: to develop confidence in drawing rapidly and efficiently, to move past representational drawing and to draw with specific exploratory purposes explained by supplementary notation on the drawings, and to become proficient in ballpoint pen and Prismacolor chisel-tip marker. Students chose from two categories of objects that rotated each semester. They drew 30 rapid sketches (ranging from 1-20 minutes each) from photographic reference, daisy-chaining their ideas. Students began to think about what parts of their drawings were interesting. A student drawing an eagle may choose to focus...
on the specifics of the eagle’s feathers for the next sketch, or perhaps they’d be interested in
comparing the shape of an eagle’s beak to a duck’s beak. Once students finished their 30
exploratory drawings, they began combining them into new imagined structures that included
elements of several different drawings. Their final drawing was chosen from among those
iterations, and they drew the outer and inner parts of their new imagined structure. Students
performed excellently (Fig. 20), and I was pleasantly surprised at how quickly students picked up
the rapid pace.

The Heuristics project was the final project of the course, directly following Synthesis.
Students carried over learning objectives from Synthesis into Heuristics, building on their rapid
drawing skills to conquer more complex problems. Students were instructed to choose an object
or space they used every day, and complete 20 sketches of how it was used, stored, arranged,
how people used it or moved through it, how time changed its function, and any other facet that
influenced how it performed in everyday life. I then presented them with a deck of design
prompts called heuristics cards, a tool developed by a group of industrial designers (Daly, Shana,
et al.) to push interesting new ideas. For instance, a student who had selected a shoe for their
object, and “Bend” for their design heuristic card, would have to redesign their shoe to
incorporate bending into the design. Each student picked three different heuristic cards, and then
had to provide three distinct solutions for each card, for a total of nine solutions. Students had
open media choice. Many of them opted to stay with ballpoint pen and marker (a great indicator
that the learning outcomes from Synthesis were being correctly grasped). During this project,
most students do an excellent job pushing themselves to create new and exciting things—
students have designed a foldable piano bed, a rolling travel toothbrush, and a new secondary
entrance for ISU’s Parks Library.
As I wrote my coursework, I also developed a set of goals for the soft skills of teaching—specifically, how to implement self-efficacy. I already knew that I would be incorporating student-reported grades from John Hattie’s research. I decided to write and distribute project descriptions and rubrics for each project that clearly outlined the project’s goals, important terms, and how grades would be calculated. Students would be required to fill out this rubric, evaluating their performance. This is a practice I’ve carried through every class I have been the instructor of record on. As I grade, it helps to see how students’ views of their own work are accurate or inaccurate, and I often make notes of my evaluations responding to their evaluation.

After spending time in Spring 2016 with Professor Richards, I had a better idea of how to more completely teach self-efficacy. My approach split into three distinct prongs.

First, I created a transparent grading schema that I explained early on in the semester. I choose not to curve my course, so that every student can see and calculate their grade at any point in the semester. The rubrics that students use to self-evaluate also tells them how many points each project is worth, and how those points are awarded in relation to each project’s learning objectives. This way, there is no question or mystery in how I am evaluating.

Second, I strove to create an atmosphere of acceptance in my classroom. Each student is treated with respect, and I do not include any moral judgments in my verbal or written feedback. I also strive to be inclusive—the first day of class, I ask students for nicknames and preferred pronouns. I offer students extra credit for visiting various clubs and exhibitions that have different drawing philosophies and values, all tying back to the course’s learning objectives of being fluent and thoughtful drawers. When I pull classical works for instruction, I take special care to include often-marginalized groups such as women and people of color.
Third and most importantly is the way I speak to students. When I speak to them one-on-one or in a group, my goal is always to increase their self-efficacy. This means that I am growing one or both parts of self-efficacy: giving them the skills they need to complete a task, or increasing their confidence in their self-evaluation. The former is easy and comes naturally to me—technical feedback on drawing. The latter is more nuanced. As I’ve gotten more comfortable in the classroom, I’ve come to rely on a style loosely based off of the Socratic method of asking questions to stimulate critical thinking (Denman). A typical one-on-one encounter with a student follows the same rough pattern.

First, I approach the student and ask how they think their project is developing in light of the parameters I’ve laid out in the project description and rubric. I’ll then ask what they think is successful in their drawing, versus what is not successful. This kind of language frames the drawing as goal-oriented, based on specific criteria outlined in the rubric, not something that is being judged morally or based on feelings (such as ‘good’ or ‘bad’). I then listen to their answer. I’ve found that the overwhelming majority of the time, students have an accurate assessment of what is successful and not successful in their drawings. I then either affirm the student’s evaluation or correct it. If there is a discrepancy in how I am evaluating and how they are evaluating, I explain my reasoning and link it to their own observations. When appropriate, I will provide a copy of the rubric and point out how my feedback coincides with the rubric’s parameters. I then ask if the student has any more questions for me, and if my explanations have helped them.

This approach has led to success—my end-of-semester evaluations consistently have high marks in instructor competence, and the instructor’s treatment of the students (Fig. 21). As
students advance through the course, my evaluations and their evaluations are more likely to match. However, the true test of my teaching practices came at the end of the semester.

I had scheduled an in-progress critique of the Heuristics project and announced it for weeks. The day of the critique, I woke up and was mortified to see that I had slept through my alarm and had missed the critique completely. Frantic and mortified, I raced to class a full hour late. What I found was the most humbling and gratifying experience I’ve had as an instructor. The students had not only stayed in class despite my absence, but had run the critique themselves. They had taken photos of the critique, distributed copies of the rubric to each other, and broken themselves into small groups the way I’d done in the past. The students told me about the feedback they’d gotten from their peers—and as they relayed the feedback to me, I realized it was accurate, helpful, and nuanced. The goal that I had set down back in Fall 2015 in Professor Katz’s teaching seminar had been realized. The students had judged their work by their own tastes and values, they had the self-confidence to apply their own judgment, and they acted on it. The most embarrassing experience of my teaching career is also the most affirming: when my student’s self-efficacy was put to the test, they passed with flying colors.

I ended the year with a slew of useful feedback, and began the long journey of tweaking, pushing, prodding, and reorienting my curriculum.

Spring 2017:

ARTIS 432x/532x: Sequential Narrative Drawing, DSN S 131: Design Representation

The next iteration of ARTIS 432x/532x involved tweaking assignments based off of student feedback from the prior year. I made changes to both the Costume Design and the Shakespeare Comics Pages projects. The Costume Design change was mentioned in Chapter 3:
Spring 2016—I kept the same material, but added in an in-progress critique that gave much better, more consistent results. The Shakespeare Comic Pages assignment was simplified slightly to allow for better focus on the learning objectives. Students completed four pages of drawings, down from six pages. This change was successful—students were doing enough work to continue exploring multiple solutions, but they had more time to deeply dig into their solutions and achieve a higher level of technical excellence.

Professor Richards and I also developed an entirely new assignment to take the place of an older one that was judged unsuccessful. We decided to include a project about movie storyboarding that used existing movies as templates. I suggested a pair of movies that were popular, inclusive, and technically excellent—Dreamwork’s 1998 *The Prince of Egypt*, and Laika’s 2009 *Coraline*. These films demonstrate strong composition, color, storytelling, and animation—things we were teaching in the course. I also suggested utilizing a ballpoint pen and marker, tools that I had used successfully in my Fall 2016 DSN S 131 course and felt were applicable here. Professor Richards completed a set of six demo storyboards and wrote the assignment brief. To introduce this assignment, I led an in-class exercise and discussion. Students would learn how to identify and draw keyframes, how to indicate camera placement and movement, and observe how master filmmakers chose their shots by studying and copying them. During my demonstration, I showed a short clip of the Prince of Egypt and asked guided questions (using the Socratic method) about the material and how it related to specific parts of the learning outcomes. Students responded well, and we got wonderful results from the project (Fig. 22) that excellently fulfilled the learning outcomes. This project will be repeated in other classes. The validity of the project was also confirmed by Chelsea Jones, an editor at Pixar.
Studios. The project will be slightly tweaked (possibly including an audio component) based on her feedback.

I also continued to make small tweaks to my curriculum and my methods of teaching self-efficacy in my section of DSN S 131. I kept working on how I engaged students, both one-on-one and in groups. I also set aside a part of my syllabus to detail mental health resources on campus. This led to after-class meetings with students where I helped them navigate the Student Accommodations Office at ISU and learn about what resources they had available to them. My end-of-semester reviews were overwhelmingly positive, earning perfect marks on the categories of teaching effectiveness, and treating students with consideration. One written remark was particularly affirming: “[Taylor] is great at conveying what is wrong and instead of fixing it for you, she gives you helpful tips on how to so you’re always improving [sic].” This is exactly what I was aiming for—equipping students with the skills to succeed and the belief that they could perform well without me. The small changes I made were paying off.

Fall 2017:

ARTIS 431/531x: Character and Scene Design, DSN S 131: Design Representation

One of the most common pieces of feedback that we received in ARTIS 432x/532x was the request to split the course material into multiple courses. Due to high enrollment and student interest, Professor Richards successfully added a second course in sequential narrative to ISU’s curriculum. This course was ARTIS 431x/531x: Character and Scene Design. This paired with ARTIS 432/532: Sequential Narrative Drawing. The extra class gave us time not only to delve into concepts in a deeper way, but to allow students time to get their work more technically polished. Due to my high teaching load, I was not involved with this course the same way I was
prior iterations of ARTIS 432x/532x. Professor Richards fabricated the course and its assignments himself. I assisted on a voluntary basis, reprising a few of my more important talks on costume design and inclusive character creation (Fig. 21a-c), as well as helping with one-on-ones and large group critiques. I spent my time this semester educating myself and talking more informally with students about issues of race, gender inclusion, and diversity.

My teaching load doubled this semester—I taught two sections of DSN S 131. This has been an excellent experience. I’ve continued to tweak my assignments. I’ve also come across issues this semester where I have had to work more closely with the Student Accommodations office, which has been an educational experience. At the time of this writing, I do not yet have access to the end-of-class evaluations, so I can’t yet determine how successful my changes have been. I plan to use whatever feedback I get to further refine my approach in Spring 2018; I’ve been appointed to another two sections of DSN S 131 and will be informally assisting with ARTIS 432/532.
CHAPTER 4

CONCLUSION

Introduction

During my time in graduate school I’ve been teaching, working in the studio, and taking classes as a graduate student simultaneously. I’ve developed as both an instructor and an artist, and self-efficacy has fueled both parts of my life.

My development as an artist has been both technical and conceptual. I’ve been able to pick up new mediums, and brush up on old techniques. My thinking about identity politics have grown deeper as I’ve educated myself and talked with others that have different life experiences. Self-efficacy has been the key in getting *Knocking on the Sky* into comic book shops, and increasing the size and scale of the conventions we attended—at the beginning of my graduate career, we attended conventions with a few thousand attendees. Our planned exhibition at the Chicago Entertainment and Comic Expo is expected to draw more than eighty thousand.

During my time at ISU, I’ve developed curriculum both with Professor Richards and on my own. I’ve developed a teaching philosophy that centralizes around the idea of self-efficacy, and designed my coursework and instructing style to develop self-efficacy in my students.

Artistic Development

The most measurable results of the interplay between teaching, being a student, and being an artist concurrently are the technical benefits. I’ve seen a huge uptick in my technical abilities on the whole. There are three discrete areas in which I’ve seen the most remarkable growth: my handling of perspective, picking up new media, and the gamut masking technique.
Perspective—specifically, imaginary renderings in one-, two-, and three-point perspective—have always been a point of weakness for me. My collaborator Stefanie Dao has always been excellent at this, and because of her involvement, our collaborative work has always had a strong use of perspective. But I wanted to learn to avoid putting the burden entirely on Dao. Teaching perspective in DSN S 131 has been an invaluable opportunity to help me better grasp perspective techniques.

I was able to receive instruction via Professor Richards’ lecture component for DSN S 131, which I sat in on three times during the scope of graduate school. I also spent time each semester reviewing the course notes that had step-by-step guides and defined critical terms. I bolstered my skills during my demos to students, where I had to quickly render perspective drawings on site, while explaining to them what I was doing. The act of evaluating their drawings—both on the spot and in their final graded work—also helped me to better articulate issues I was having and plot out a route to fix them. My sense of perspective has vastly improved and I’m now confident in drawing one-, two-, and three-point perspective from imagination. I can now better communicate my ideas on scene and environment design to Dao.

I was also able to pick up two new drawing media during graduate school—watercolor, and Prismacolor chisel-tip marker. I learned watercolor painting from Amy Harris, and this proved critical to the later development of the gamut masking technique. I also was able to learn the basics of rapid marker rendering. During a DSN S 131 staff meeting, Professor Richards invited Daniel Neubauer, a lecturer in the Industrial Design department at ISU, to show us some tricks from his discipline. Professor Neubauer demonstrated various techniques from industrial design using Prismacolor chisel-tip marker, felt-tip pen, and white gel pens. He also explained the approach of industrial design sketching, which was centered on low-fidelity, iterative, rapid
sketching in perspective. I not only practiced this in my own studio work (Fig. 24a-b), but brought it into all the classes I teach that involve the same kind of rapid sketching. This includes the Synthesis and Heuristics projects in DSN S 131, as well as the Storyboard project in DSN S 432x/532x.

The most important technical achievement I’ve made in graduate school is the adaptation of James Gurney’s gamut masking technique. The execution of this technique has already been discussed (Chapter 2: Workflow/Studio Practices). I would not have been able to understand the technique without the basic foundation of color mixing and color theory taught to me by Amy Harris through watercolor painting. The gamut masking technique has been adapted into ARTIS 432x/532x, and shared laterally with other graduate and advanced undergraduate students. I share this technique through demonstration, showing screencaptures of my process as I work through it. The most succinct demonstration I have was composed for my collaborator (Fig. 25a-i). Dao and I have both adapted gamut masking. I discovered and practiced the technique before bringing it into our work. I hope to be able to further implement this technique in future curriculum.

In the figure cited above, each step of the process has been recorded and annotated. There is an obvious link to watercolor in how the color is being treated—the opacity of each layer has been reduced to act like a watercolor wash. The prior demonstrations I did on this technique greatly helped me to be able to explain it to Dao remotely.

Teaching Development

Although I never had plans to become an instructor, my time teaching at Iowa State has been incredibly rewarding and I plan to continue on teaching after I leave Iowa State. The most powerful way that self-efficacy has influenced my teaching is through identity politics. I wanted
to take care of students who are overlooked or at a disadvantage. In my classroom, I sought to educate these students on the resources available to them, seize those resources, and advocate for themselves. I’ve taken a number of approaches to this technique.

One of the first things I did was to discuss mental health in the classroom. During my undergraduate career, I watched many of my peers and friends go through significant academic struggle because of mishandled mental health problems. I wanted to do something about it. Professor Brenda Jones was instrumental in helping me to understand how to assist students in a professional way, and how to find and use policies ISU has in place. All of my syllabi now have an additional section detailing the mental health resources available at Iowa State.

I’ve followed up with students about mental health concerns multiple times, educating them on the resources available. Most students had no idea that their condition is covered—fitting in with my prior experiences in undergrad—and now have a better idea of how to get the most out of their education.

However, the most useful discussions have not happened inside of a formal academic setting—they’re been in casual conversation with people who have different life experiences from me. I’ve been able to ask LGBTQ+ friends what support they would have liked to have in college, with resulted in me asking students for nicknames and pronouns. Asian-American students have engaged with me about Asian representation in KOTS, sharing their personal thoughts and experiences. It was incredibly affirming to see an Asian-American student immediately relate to one of Dao’s o makes about language (Fig. 25), or to see readers of color picking up a KOTS cover of our nonwhite protagonist Jonah. When I had a question about the practice of dreadlocks, one of my Black students sat with me outside of class for an hour educating me about how to correctly execute dreadlocks in KOTS. I’ve found that the more open
I am about identity politics—and the quicker I own up to my inevitable missteps—the more opportunities I have to talk with students outside of my own straight, middle-class, white perspective.

Future Plans

*Knocking on the Sky* will continue post-graduation. I also plan to apply for collegiate teaching positions in drawing and sequential narrative. Our most immediate plan is to submit the revised Black Maria arc of *KOTS* to Image Comics (and other independent comic publishers such as Boom Studios, Top Cow, and Dynamite). The revised Black Maria arc will be completed and sent out in Spring 2018. We will receive word on if it has been accepted or rejected for publication before the term ends. Depending on that answer, we will either begin work as professional graphic novelists, or solicit feedback on the pitch and begin the next attempt at publication. My collaboration with Stefanie Dao will continue.

I hope to incorporate teaching into my career whether or not *KOTS* is published. This shouldn’t be an issue—many graphic novelists choose to take work adjacent to their field in addition to their work in sequential narrative work (notably Will Eisner, who taught at the School of Visual Arts in New York City). I plan to apply to positions that incorporate drawing and sequential narrative. Although my current experience is limited to fundamental drawing, I am willing to teach drawing at any level—seeing students seize their own self-efficacy and improve is a powerful thing and I want to continue doing it.

Self-efficacy is key to my studio work. It’s what allowed it to get off the ground in the first place. It’s also what will continue moving us forward.
REFERENCES

Definition and discussion of self-efficacy.

Definition and discussion of the term “fanfiction.”

Definition and explanation of comic conventions in the context of San Diego Comic-Con.

Information about CLAMP, a team of Japanese manga artists that work collaboratively under a single pen name. Each member rotates artistic duties.

Basic overview of the rules of Dungeons and Dragons tabletop roleplaying game by popular DungeonMaster and tabletop enthusiast Matt Coville.


Widely regarded as the first graphic novel. Preface contains discussion of how the term originated and how graphic novels separated themselves from comic books.


Article detailing the Franco-Belgian artform of the *bande dessinée* as the 9th Art, in contrast to U.S. comic books and Japanese manga. Also includes a list of examples of the artform.

Discussion of how identity politics factor into current events, including the Democratic nominations and general presidential election in 2016.


Video demonstration of James Gurney’s gamut masking technique.

First part of tutorial of James Gurney’s gamut masking technique.

Second part of tutorial of James Gurney’s gamut masking technique.


Opinion piece on the complementary nature of identity politics and class politics.

Definition of ‘omake’ including literal translation as “bonus.” Refers to the bonus content in a manga or other Japanese sequential narrative.

Overbaugh, Richard C., Schultz, Lynn. “Bloom’s Taxonomy.” Old Dominion University. N.D.

Introduction to Japanese manga industry by an American journalist. Discusses the prevalence and cultural force of manga in Japan and contrasts it to American comic books and graphic novels.

Interview detailing the work processes of Japanese manga artists, told from the point of view of a Japanese manga editor.

Opinion piece on the rise of the alt-right throughout the West.

Course notes for DSN S 131: Design Representation; 2017 edition.

Basics of roleplaying terms such as IC and OOC. Not specific to tabletop play.

Discussion of attempted DACA (Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals) program.


Discussion of new travel restrictions set down by President Trump’s executive order, in light of the first round of temporary travel restrictions which was challenged by the Supreme Court.


Fig. 1. *Dungeons & Dragons* 5th edition character sheet for Siobhan Kingsport, a revenant warlock.
Fig. 2a. Technical improvement made over the scope of *The Bloody Man* graphic novel. One month between top and bottom images.

Fig. 2b. Technical improvement made over the scope of *The Bloody Man* graphic novel. One month between top and bottom images.
Fig. 3a. Ambystoma Studios (would become Bictori) vendor table photo from Anime Iowa 2013.

Fig. 3b. Bictori vendor table photo from Anime Iowa 2016.

Fig. 3c. Bictori vendor table photo from unConventional 2016.

Fig. 3d. Bictori vendor table photo from DBQ Con 2017.

Fig. 3e. Bictori vendor table photo from Mayhempalooza 2017.

Fig. 3f. Bictori vendor table photo from Comic Book I-CON 2017.
Fig. 3g. *Bictori* vendor table photo from Planet Comic-Con 2017.

Fig. 3h. *Bictori* vendor table photo from Planet Comic-Con 2017, detail.
Fig. 4a. *Knocking On the Sky #1* displayed at SHIELD Comics (Ames, Iowa).

Fig. 4b. *Knocking On the Sky #1* displayed at Mayhem Comics & Collectibles (Ames, Iowa).

Fig. 4c. *Knocking On the Sky #1* and #2 displayed at Mayhem Comics & Collectibles (Clive, Iowa).

Fig. 4d. *Knocking On the Sky #1* displayed at A Shop Called Quest (Los Angeles, California)
Fig. 5. *Bictori* logo, designed by Stefanie Dao.

Fig. 6. In-progress image of Excel document for *Knocking on the Sky* #3 detailing progress of current pitch.
Fig. 7a. Image of a working script for *Knocking on the Sky #2* detailing general breakdown of each scene.

Fig. 7b. Image of a working script for *Knocking on the Sky #2* detailing the full script of a section of Page 15.
Fig. 8. Image of a thumbnails for *Knocking on the Sky* #1.1, pages 12 and 13.
The Queen of Death sat upon her icy throne, cold and imposing—speaking of which, so was she. Her gaze alone felt like it would eat me alive, as if her eyes were actually a mouth and I was, I dunno, a burrito, but like, a thinking, breathing burrito—

"Prince Xander," the Queen said sharply. "You have journeyed long and far on your laughable little mortal mission."

That's right! I WAS on a mission! And neither her mocking nor her big words were about to sway me! "Let Kori, the love of my life, the morning to my rescue—let her GO!" I demanded.

"Let her go!" The Queen laughed, a beautiful sound as dark as a starless sky at midnight inside a black hole.

"My dear, she is a revenant. She is my loyal servant, who has been assigned but one job: to reap your mortal soul! If she cannot fulfill this purpose, then she may never return to the world of the..."
I started my apprenticeship when I was a child just like normal, but before I could finish it...

...the Nicodemian King returned. He laid claim to the city, and removed my teachers from their posts. Luckily for me...

...there was an older kid who had taken me under his wing. When things went south, he was the one that got me out of the city. He saved my life.

I want to find him. Thank him, and pay him if I can.

Seems like you end up owing a lot of people favors, huh?

It's not like I try to...

Fig. 9b. Knocking on the Sky #3, Page 1. Panels 1-3 illustrated by Stefanie Dao; panels 4-5 illustrated by Taylor Carlson.
Fig. 9c. *Knocking on the Sky Short Stories: Red*, Page 4. Pencilled by Taylor Carlson, inked by Stefanie Dao.


**Gamut Mapping**

The entire group of possible colors for a given painting is called the gamut. It’s shown as a polygon superimposed over the color wheel. Good color comes not just from what you include in a composition but from what you leave out of it.

When we looked at triadic color schemes on page 116, we explored the idea of limiting ourselves to just three hues and their variations and relationships. Whatever colors you start with, those are the parent colors for your scheme. Everything else that you mix will derive from them.

The gamut for a triadic scheme would be a triangle. Gamut mapping is the practice of marking the boundaries of such a shape on top of the color wheel in order to describe or define the range and limits of a color scheme. The gamut map shows exactly what’s inside and outside.

For example, the painting opposite has strong cyan and magenta, with weaker yellows, violets, and some dull greens. The night scene above has an even narrower range of colors. It includes only yellow-green, blue-green, and a touch of dull red-violet. There are no yellow-oranges, high-chroma reds, purples, or browns.

**Subjective Primaries**

The gamut for the birdman painting is mapped on the color wheel above. The outer lines represent the cleanest mixtures between any two of the starting colors, called subjective primaries. Halfway along the straight connecting lines are the purest secondaries possible within your composition. Whatever colors are outside the gamut cannot be mixed from the starting ingredients.

**Subjective Neutral**

The color note that appears in the geometric center of the gamut is the subjective neutral for that given color scheme. It’s the mixture midway between all the extremes. In the painting at left, the subjective neutral is different from a zero chroma gray. It is shifted slightly to the green. The subjective neutral is the same as the color cast. In the tavern scene, a greenish gray paint stroke will look neutral, and a gray will look slightly reddish in the context of that particular color scheme.

**Saturation Cost**

Note that the secondaries of any triadic gamut will be lower in chroma than the primaries. In other words, the halfway point along each side of the triangle is closer to the gray center, and therefore more neutral than the corners of the triangle. This phenomenon of the lessened chroma of intermediate mixtures is called the saturation cost of a mixture.

---

PREMIXING

CREATING GAMUT MASKS

If you can describe a color scheme by drawing the gamut shape on top of a color wheel, why not cut a mask of that shape out of a separate piece of paper or plastic? Then you can slide it around on top of the color wheel to generate new schemes.

Fig. 10.3. Process image of gamut masking technique by Taylor Carlson.
Fig. 11. Knocking on the Sky #1 omake, by Stefanie Dao.
ASSIGNMENT 1 RUBRIC: DURER’S PILLOWS
DRAWING 436 “THE CLOTHED FIGURE”

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Grading Points</th>
<th>Advanced</th>
<th>Proficient</th>
<th>Basic</th>
<th>Needs Work</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>A</td>
<td>B</td>
<td>C</td>
<td>D</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adherence to assignment directions</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>Every direction is followed.</td>
<td>Most directions are followed.</td>
<td>Some directions are followed.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tone</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>Tones are rendered to their fullest extent with thoughtful markmaking.</td>
<td>Tones are rendered accurately with thoughtful markmaking.</td>
<td>Tones are muddy but decipherable. Markmaking is inconsistent.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Folds</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>Folds are deeply analyzed and drawn correctly.</td>
<td>Most folds are drawn correctly.</td>
<td>Some folds are drawn correctly.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student Expectations</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>Student has exceeded the expectations of his/her ability level.</td>
<td>Student has met most of the expectations of his/her ability level.</td>
<td>Student has met few of the expectations of his/her ability level.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Exploratory Drawings</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>Student has multiple exploratory drawings that are relevant to the assignment.</td>
<td>Student has some exploratory drawings that are relevant to the assignment.</td>
<td>Student has some exploratory drawings.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

ASSIGNMENT TOTAL: ________/100

EXPLORATORY DRAWINGS TOTAL: ________/20

ADDITIONAL COMMENTS (OPTIONAL):

Fig. 12a. Sample rubric completed for ARTIS 511.

PROJECT 1: BOX DRAWING

NAME ________________

DSN S 131

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Points</th>
<th>Advanced</th>
<th>Proficient</th>
<th>Basic</th>
<th>Needs Work</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>A</td>
<td>B</td>
<td>C</td>
<td>D</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thumbnails</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>Student completed all thumbnails, and has additional exploratory sketching.</td>
<td>Student completed all thumbnails.</td>
<td>Student completed all thumbnails, but some lack eye level or other information.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Sighting</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>Composition fits onto the page. Student has used perceptual grid with horizontal, vertical, and angular lines.</td>
<td>Composition fits onto the page. Student has used perceptual grid.</td>
<td>Composition is slightly too large/too small for the page. Student has used a perceptual grid.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Proportion</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>All objects and spaces are proportionally accurate.</td>
<td>Size relationships between objects are usually correct. Both negative and positive spaces are proportional.</td>
<td>Size relationships between objects are sometimes correct. Some negative and positive spaces are proportional.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pentimenti/ Organizational Line Drawing</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>Organizational line drawing uses multiple vertical, horizontal, and diagonal lines. Pentimenti is present. All proportions are correctly resolved.</td>
<td>Organizational line drawing uses many vertical and horizontal lines. Pentimenti is present; most proportions are resolved.</td>
<td>Organizational line drawing lacks vertical or horizontal lines. Pentimenti is underdeveloped; proportions are not resolved.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sighting Sketches</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>Student has completed 10 or more sketches with perfect proportion.</td>
<td>Student has completed 10 sketches.</td>
<td>Student has completed 8-10 sketches; 3-4 are proportionally inaccurate or lack subdivision.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

ASSIGNMENT TOTAL: ________/100

ADDITIONAL COMMENTS (OPTIONAL):

Fig. 12b. Current rubric for DSN S 131, Project 1.
Bloom's Taxonomy

In 1956, Benjamin Bloom headed a group of educational psychologists who developed a classification of levels of intellectual behavior important in learning. During the 1990's a new group of cognitive psychologists, lead by Lorin Anderson (a former student of Bloom), updated the taxonomy to reflect relevance to 21st century work. The two graphics show the revised and original Taxonomy. Note the change from nouns to verbs associated with each level.

Note that the top two levels are essentially exchanged from the traditional to the new version.

| Remembering: can the student recall or remember the information? | define, duplicate, list, memorize, recall, repeat, reproduce state |
| Understanding: can the student explain | classify, describe, discuss, explain, identify, locate, recognize, |

Fig. 13. Overbaugh, Richard C., Schultz, Lynn. “Bloom’s Taxonomy.” Old Dominion University. N.D.
Fig. 14a. ARTIS 432x/532x presentation on character creation; Slide 1.

Fig. 14b. ARTIS 432x/532x presentation on character creation; Slide 2.

Fig. 14c. ARTIS 432x/532x presentation on character creation; Slide 3.

Fig. 14d. ARTIS 432x/532x presentation on character creation; Slide 4.

Fig. 14e. ARTIS 432x/532x presentation on character creation; Slide 5.

Fig. 14f. ARTIS 432x/532x presentation on character creation; Slide 6.

Fig. 14g. ARTIS 432x/532x presentation on character creation; Slide 7.

Fig. 14h. ARTIS 432x/532x presentation on character creation; Slide 8.

Fig. 14i. ARTIS 432x/532x presentation on character creation; Slide 9.
Walkthrough: Designing Jonah

Fig. 15a. ARTIS 432x/532x presentation on creating Jonah; Slide 1.

Fig. 15b. ARTIS 432x/532x presentation on creating Jonah; Slide 2.

Fig. 15c. ARTIS 432x/532x presentation on creating Jonah; Slide 3.

Fig. 15d. ARTIS 432x/532x presentation on creating Jonah; Slide 4.

Fig. 15e. ARTIS 432x/532x presentation on creating Jonah; Slide 5.

Fig. 15f. ARTIS 432x/532x presentation on creating Jonah; Slide 6.
Fig. 15g. ARTIS 432x/532x presentation on creating Jonah; Slide 7.

Fig. 15h. ARTIS 432x/532x presentation on creating Jonah; Slide 8.

Fig. 15i. ARTIS 432x/532x presentation on creating Jonah; Slide 9.

Fig. 15j. ARTIS 432x/532x presentation on creating Jonah; Slide 10.

Fig. 15k. ARTIS 432x/532x presentation on creating Jonah; Slide 11.
Composing Panels & Pages

Grid
- Stable, calm, ‘blank.’

Breaking the Grid (Unusual Panel Shapes & Overlapping)
- Action scenes, emotionally charged scenes
- Calls attention to important elements, enhances depth of the page

Fig. 16a. ARTIS 432x/532x presentation on composing panels and pages; Slide 1.

Fig. 16b. ARTIS 432x/532x presentation on composing panels and pages; Slide 2.

Fig. 16c. ARTIS 432x/532x presentation on composing panels and pages; Slide 3.

Fig. 16d. ARTIS 432x/532x presentation on composing panels and pages; Slide 4.

Fig. 16e. ARTIS 432x/532x presentation on composing panels and pages; Slide 5.
End of Class Survey: ARTIS 432x/532x S2016

<table>
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<tr>
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<th>13</th>
<th>14</th>
<th>15</th>
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<td>I became more confident at proficient at rapid sketching.</td>
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<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
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<td>4</td>
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<td>I've learned how to design settings with character and mood.</td>
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<td>4</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
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<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
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<td>I have improved my compositional skills (both single-panel and multipanel layouts)</td>
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<td>5</td>
<td>5</td>
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<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
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<td>I've learned the fundamentals of visual storytelling through this course.</td>
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<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
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<td>3.9</td>
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<td>I've become more engaged with the collection and study of visual research.</td>
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<td>5</td>
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<td>4</td>
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<tr>
<td>I've discovered other artists through this course whose work now influences my own.</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
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<td>5</td>
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<td>Assigned readings were helpful and relevant to the coursework.</td>
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<td>Large group critiques with the entire class have helped improve my work.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Small group critiques with the entire class have helped improve my work.</td>
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<td>2</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5</td>
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<td>The in-class exercises were relevant and helped my understanding of the assignments.</td>
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<td>5</td>
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<td>4</td>
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<td>3.9</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Fig. 17. Unofficial survey results from survey results from ARTIS 432x/532x Spring 2015. Survey written by Taylor Carlson and distributed to students mid-semester.
Fig. 18. Official class evaluation survey results from ARTIS 432x/532x Spring 2015. Aggregate results from key questions.
Fig. 19. Official class evaluation survey results from ARTIS 432x/532x Spring 2015.
Fig. 20. Final result from DSN S 131 Project 7; drawn by Jackson Donels (2016).

Fig. 21. Excerpt from Fall 2016 DSN S 131 Student Evaluation
Fig. 22. Storyboards from ARTIS 432x/532x. Drawn by Nancy Acosta.
AGENCY

“Character agency is a demonstration of the characters ability to make decisions and affect the story. The characters has motivations all her own. She is active more than she is reactive. She pushes on the plot more than the plot pushes on her. Even better, the plot exists as a direct result of the character’s actions.”

-Chuck Wendig

Fig. 23a. ARTIS 432x/532x presentation on agency; Slide 1.

AGENCY

- Make decisions that affect the plot
- Has motivations/goals
- Active > Reactive
- Plot is a result of character action

- Sleeping Beauty
- Kairi (Kingdom Hearts)
- Bella Swan (Twilight)
- Sakura (Naruto)
- Christine Daee (Phantom of the Opera)
- Jake Sully (Avatar)
- Emmett (Lego Movie)
- Kevin Tran (Supernatural)
- Hawkeye (Avengers, First Movie)

Fig. 23b. ARTIS 432x/532x presentation on agency; Slide 2.

STAY BEHIND ME, PRINCESS—I MEAN, LAMP!

Fig. 23c. ARTIS 432x/532x presentation on agency; Slide 3.
Fig. 24a. Sample of marker rendering using Prismacolor chisel-tip markers.

Fig. 24b. Sample of marker rendering using Prismacolor chisel-tip markers.
Fig. 25a. Tutorial of gamut masking technique on *Knocking on the Sky #1.1*, Page 14. Step 1.

Flat color put in -- I chose the tan of the rocks from this color gamut, since most of this stuff was walls. It's also a warm color, and I wanted the feeling to be 'warm' rather than 'cool.' Thinking about it from a narrative perspective -- how I want the scene to feel -- not just what it might actually look like. Since this scene happens after something scary and is 'slowing down' and safer, the warm made sense.

Fig. 25b. Tutorial of gamut masking technique on *Knocking on the Sky #1.1*, Page 14. Step 2.

Painting the first layer of shadow. I pulled a purple shadow color from the original gamut -- since there is a warm light, there will be a cool shadow. In this case the shadow was a cool purple. I painted in areas of shadow with a hard, 100% opacity brush. I then put a layer mask onto that shape and began working subtractively, carving out areas of light. Last, I dropped the opacity of the entire layer down, so that the purple wouldn't be too overpowering. I had to mess with this to get the right opacity.
Painting the second layer of shadow, I chose a darker and deeper purple, and used the same technique of applying a layer mask and working subtractively to reveal areas of light.

Fig. 25c. Tutorial of gamut masking technique on *Knocking on the Sky #1.1*, Page 14. Step 3.

Painting the third layer of shadow, I chose a darker and deeper purple, and used the same technique of applying a layer mask and working subtractively to reveal areas of light.

Fig. 25d. Tutorial of gamut masking technique on *Knocking on the Sky #1.1*, Page 14. Step 4.
Fig. 25e. Tutorial of gamut masking technique on *Knocking on the Sky #1.1*, Page 14. Step 5.

Making the lights and darks clearer. I had a Desaturate filter on. I focused on making the layered space clearer— for example, Imaa's arm. He is in the fore/midground, and the other stuff is in the background. I didn't want it to compete with his arm, so I put it further back in shadow. (If we're thinking about realistic lighting, it's too dark. But I've chosen to prioritize readability and narrative— Imaa's arm is more important than the background— so I put more shadow on it).

Fig. 25f. Tutorial of gamut masking technique on *Knocking on the Sky #1.1*, Page 14. Step 6.
Fig. 25g. Tutorial of gamut masking technique on *Knocking on the Sky #1.1*, Page 14. Step 7.

Putting in flat colors. I was only partway through when I took this image— in the final file, I have two layers of flats. I pulled all of these colors from the gamut.

Fig. 25h. Tutorial of gamut masking technique on *Knocking on the Sky #1.1*, Page 14. Step 8.

Turning all the layers on. The layers of light and shadow function almost like watercolor washes— they are semiopaque planes of color that interact with the flat colors to make new and interesting shapes. The difference is that since we're working digitally, we don't worry about 'losing the light' and we can make really vibrant colors. We can also mess around with each of the layers in different parts. I had to mess with the opacity settings of the Shadow/Light layers until I found something I was happy with.
Final image. In addition to doing the remaining 4 panels, I've also done more work on the top panel. I have all the flats in (you can see a color difference now in the red brick wall/the brown/ish plaster sections/etc). I've also added some edge lighting, such as the pools of water on the ground, and highlights on shiny stuff (Siobhan's arm, the glass of the lantern by Ismael's head).

Fig. 25i. Tutorial of gamut masking technique on *Knocking on the Sky* #1.1, Page 14. Step 9.
Fig. 25. Omake by Stefanie Dao. This omake was based off her experiences as *gosei*, a fifth-generation child of Japanese immigrants.