

# Brad Bird on how to Compose Shots

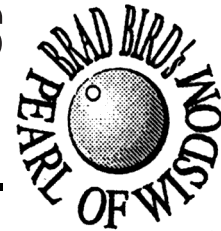
## For Storyboard and Layout Artists

Part 1

PDF provided by [www.animationmeat.com](http://www.animationmeat.com)

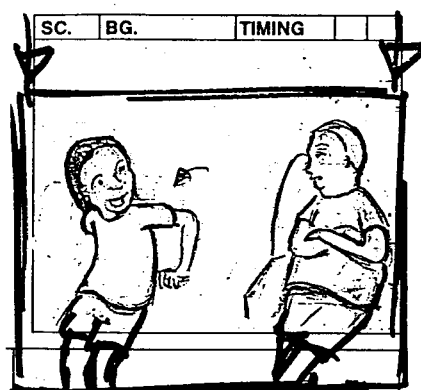
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**Samples of Visual Consultant  
Brad Bird's Composition Notes**



# Brad Bird on Composition

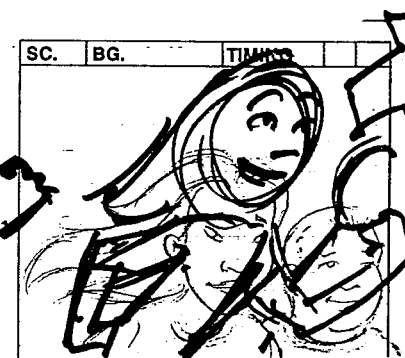
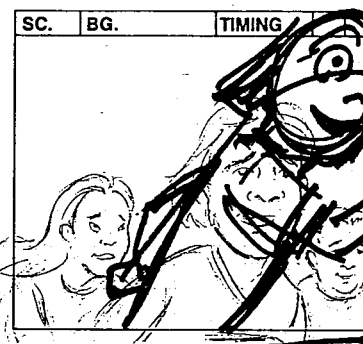
Part 1



ADJUST DOWN  
ON ACTION  
(WHEN ACTION  
MAKES THE  
do something  
COMPOSITION  
SUDDENLY SUCK,  
CORRECT FOR  
IT!!)

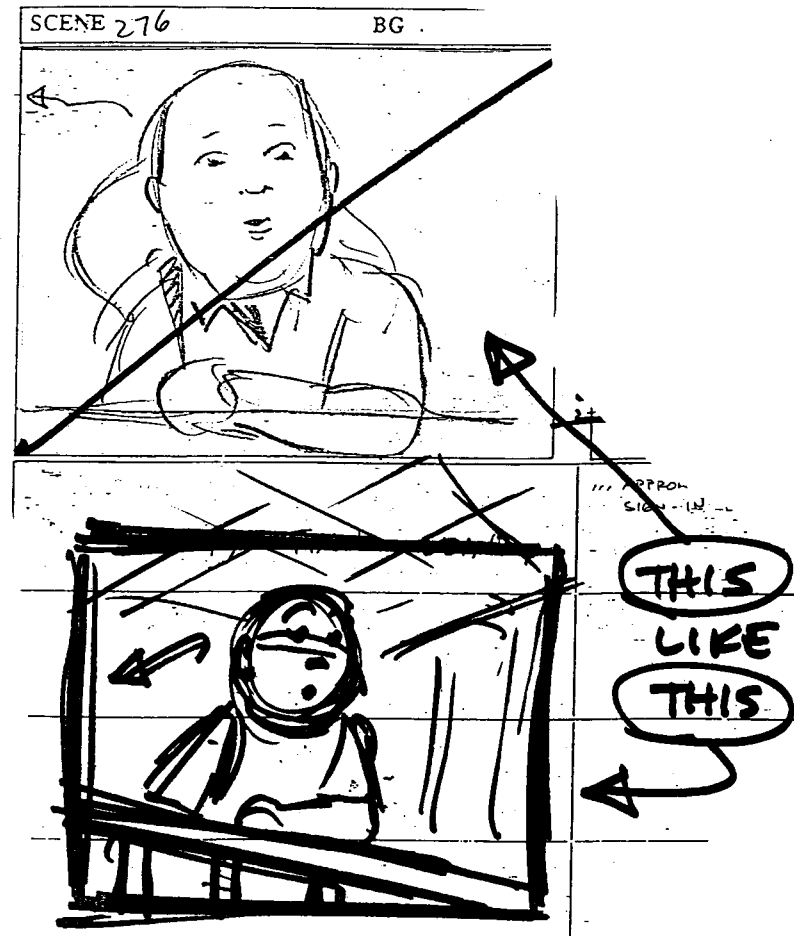
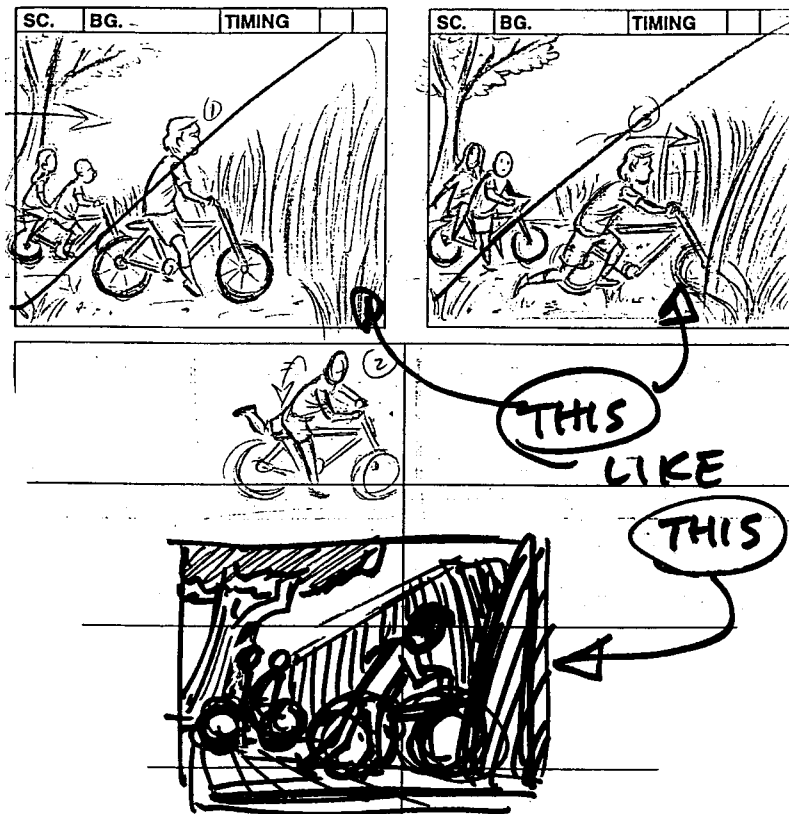


MAKE COMPOSITION  
LESS FLAT —



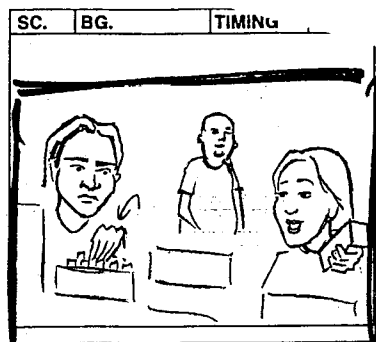
# Brad Bird on Composition

Part 1



# Brad Bird on Composition

## Part 1



JOSEPH PICKS LIGHTER FROM  
DISPLAY CONNIE LIFTS CANDLES

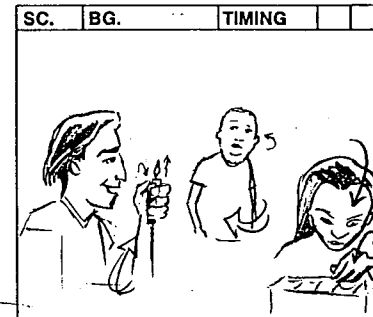
Connie picks up some scented candles.



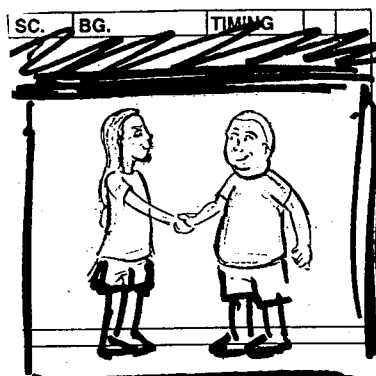
JOSEPH PICKS LIGHTER FROM  
A DISPLAY, BOBBY LOOKS DOWN IN BG

INT. GET IN GET OUT MINI-MART - CONTINUOUS

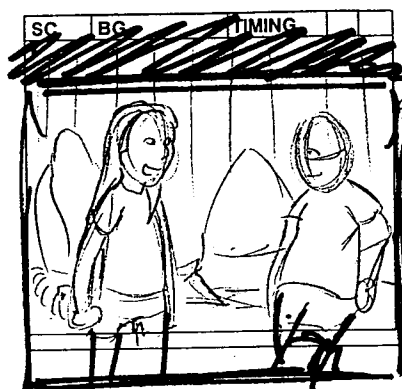
Bobby, Connie and Joseph wander through the aisles.



JOSEPH PICKS THE LIGHTER ON  
CONNIE REACHES FOR CANDLES  
BOBBY TURNS TO JOSEPH



bobby



CA' MON!

THIS LIKE  
THIS

(JOSEPH COMES)

Let's get butane lighters.

# Brad Bird on Composition

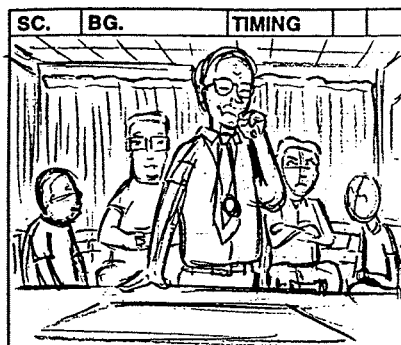
## Part 1



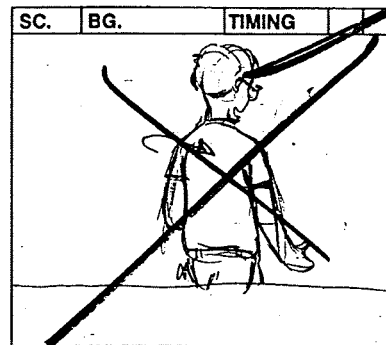
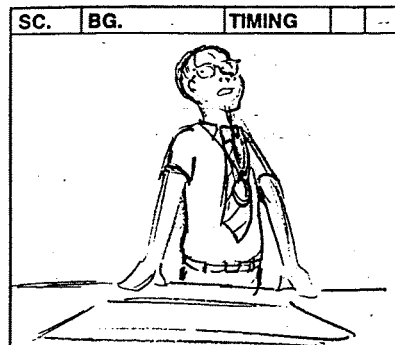
Use lower angles and remember to make sure characters aren't parallel to each other. Break things up!

# Brad Bird on Composition

## Part 1



① GRANDY CLEARS THROAT.

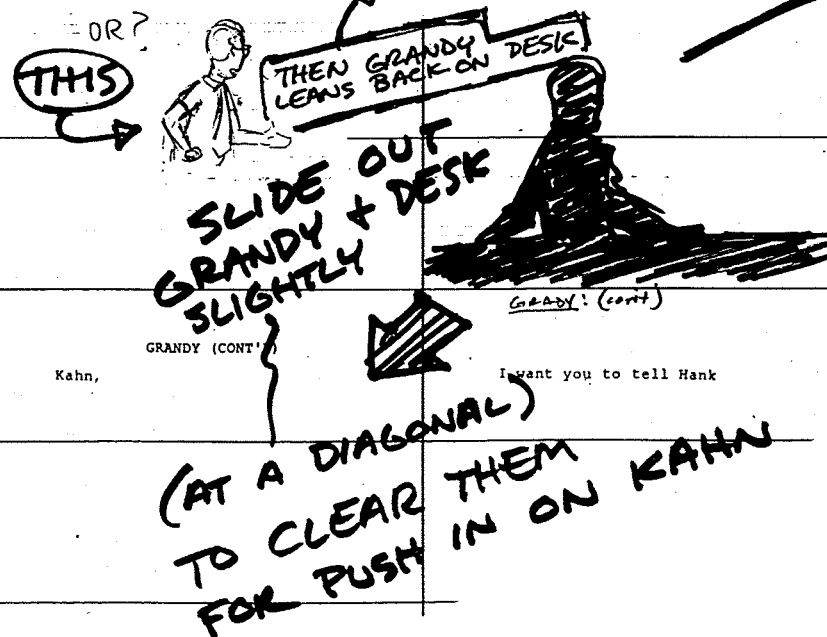


GRANDY  
(CLEARS THROAT) Gentlemen. Let's  
try an "active listening" exercise.

Kahn,

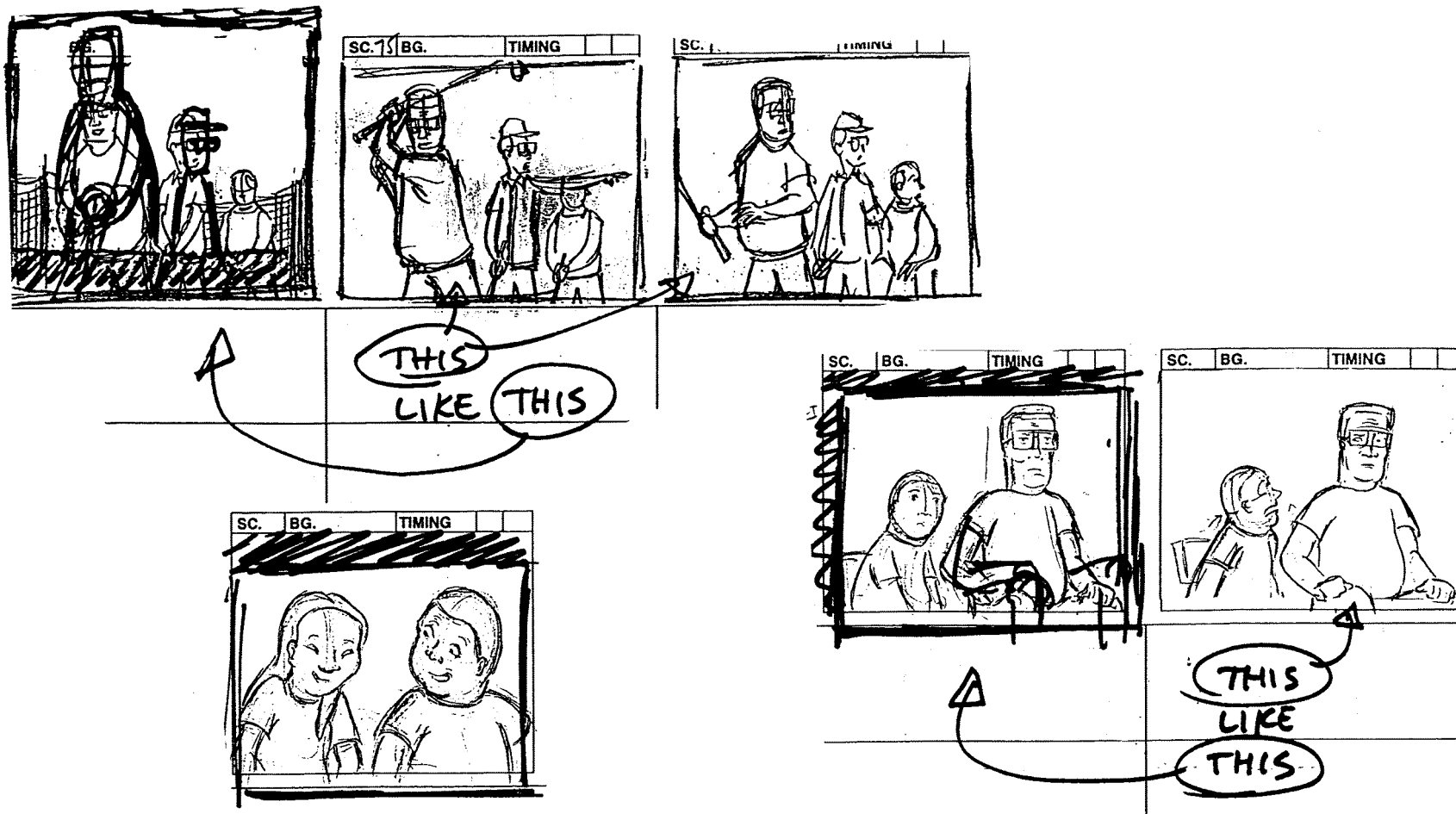
GRANDY (CONT')

I want you to tell Hank



# Brad Bird on Composition

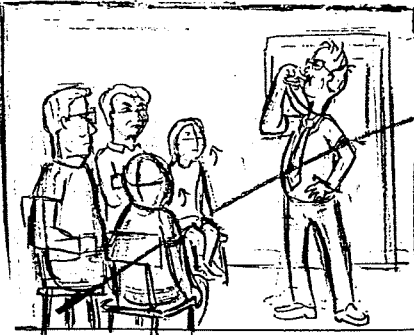
Part 1



# Brad Bird on Composition

## Part 1

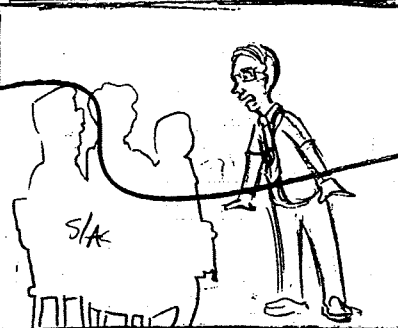
SC. BG. TIMING



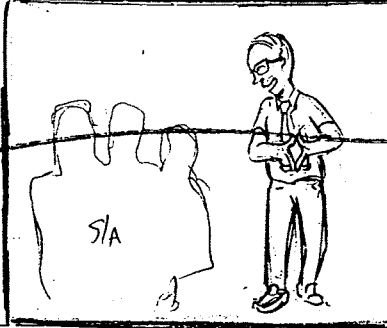
KIDS LOOK UP TO GRANDY  
HOOK UP TO PREVIOUS SC.

Grandy blows his pitch pipe at the two men.

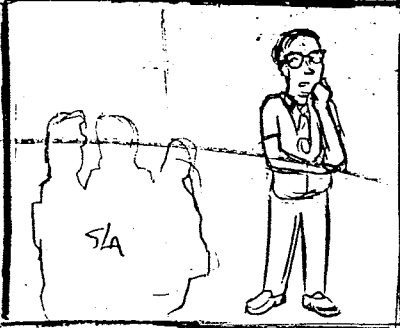
SC. BG. TIMING



SC. BG. TIMING



SC. BG. TIMING

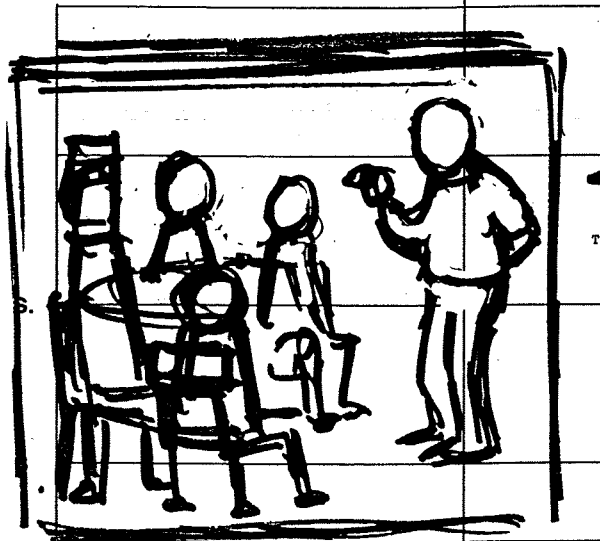


**CLEAN UP COMPOSITION**

**LIKE THIS**

GRANDY

Time out.

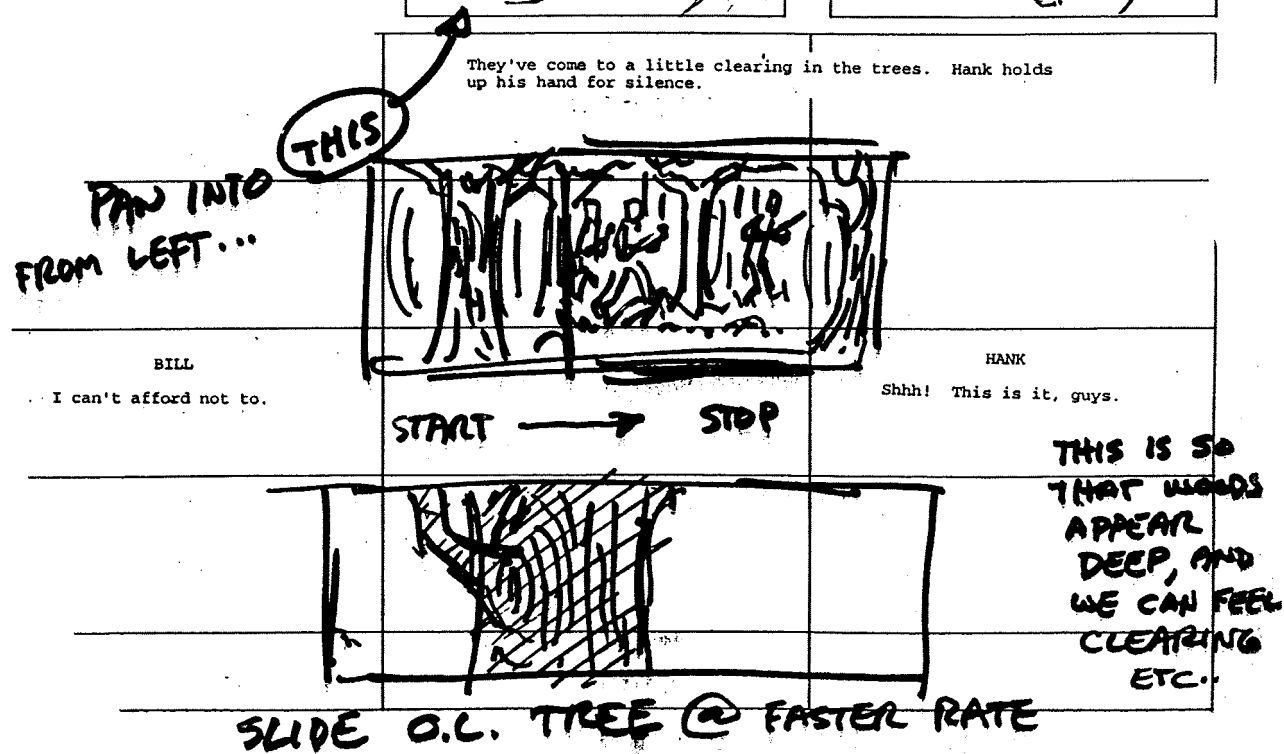
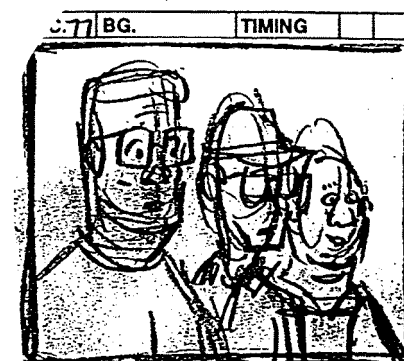
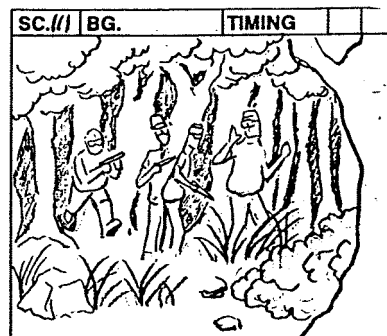
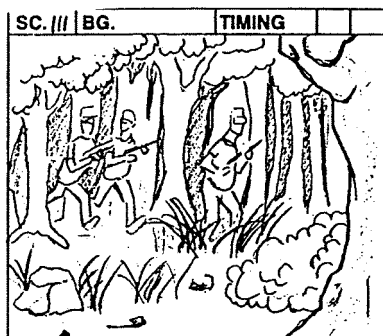


Does your composition have  
a nice silhouette?  
Make sure things read  
clearly.



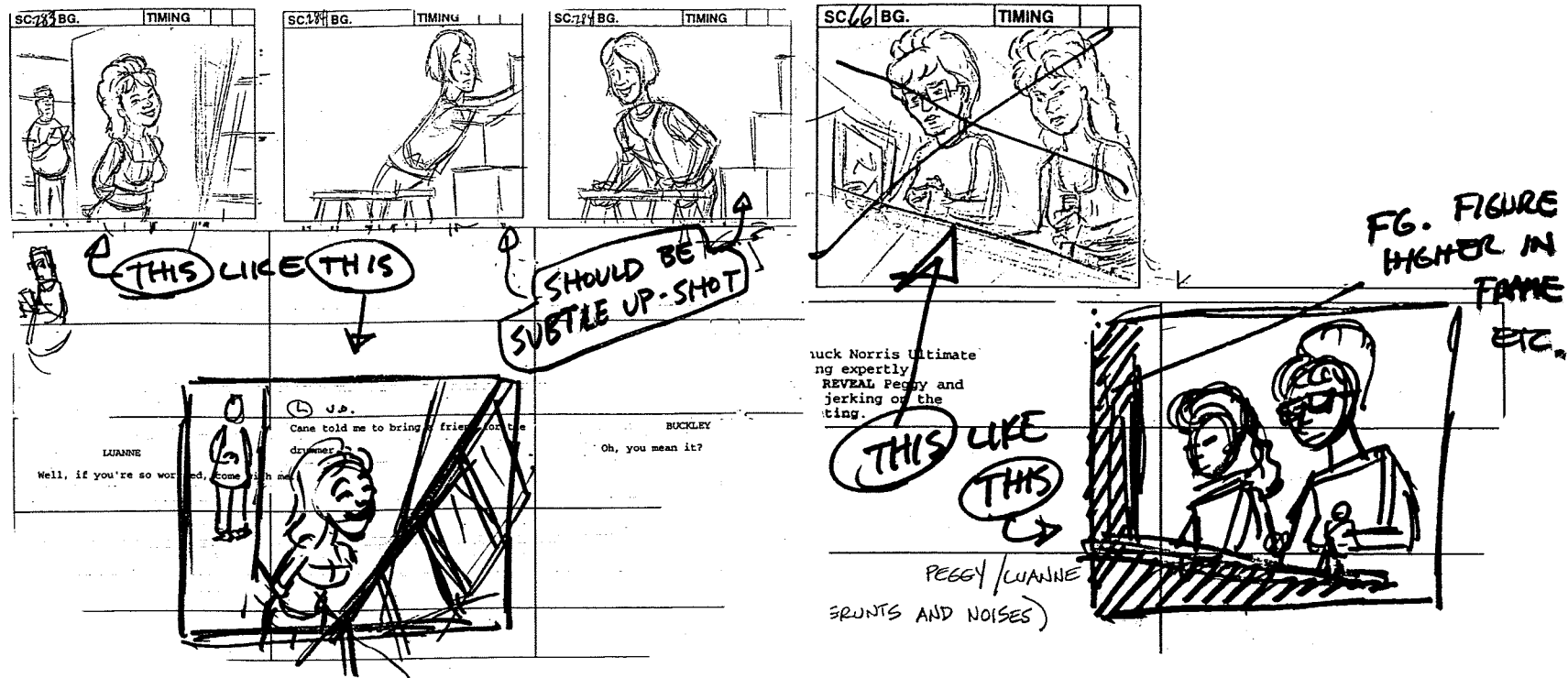
# Brad Bird on Composition

## Part 1



# Brad Bird on Composition

## Part 1



# Brad Bird on how to Compose Shots

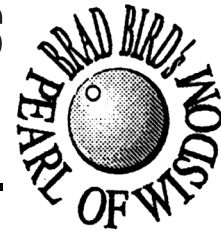
## For Storyboard and Layout Artists

Part 2

PDF provided by [www.animationmeat.com](http://www.animationmeat.com)

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**Samples of Visual Consultant  
Brad Bird's Composition Notes**



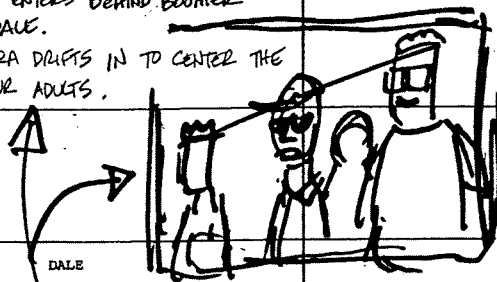
# Brad Bird on Composition

## Part 2



BILL ENTERS BEHIND BOOMER & DALE.

CAMERA DRIFTS IN TO CENTER THE FOUR ADULTS.



DALE

noise's been giving Nancy  
aches all week.

her back broke

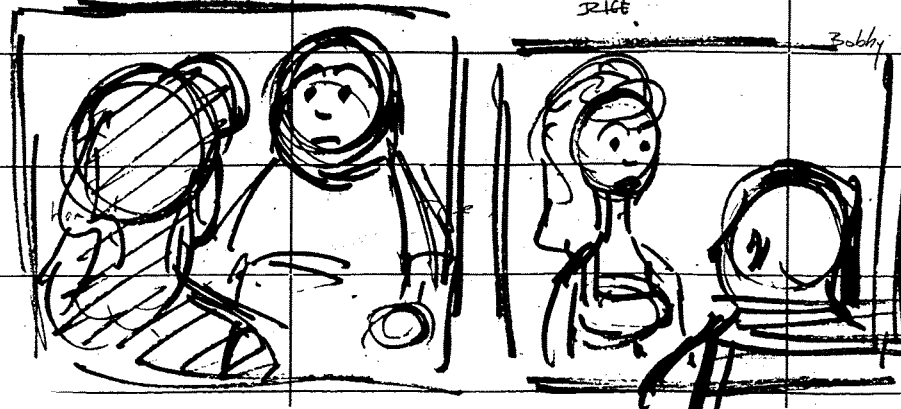
**BREAK UP  
COMPOSITION  
MORE**



THIS LIKE THIS



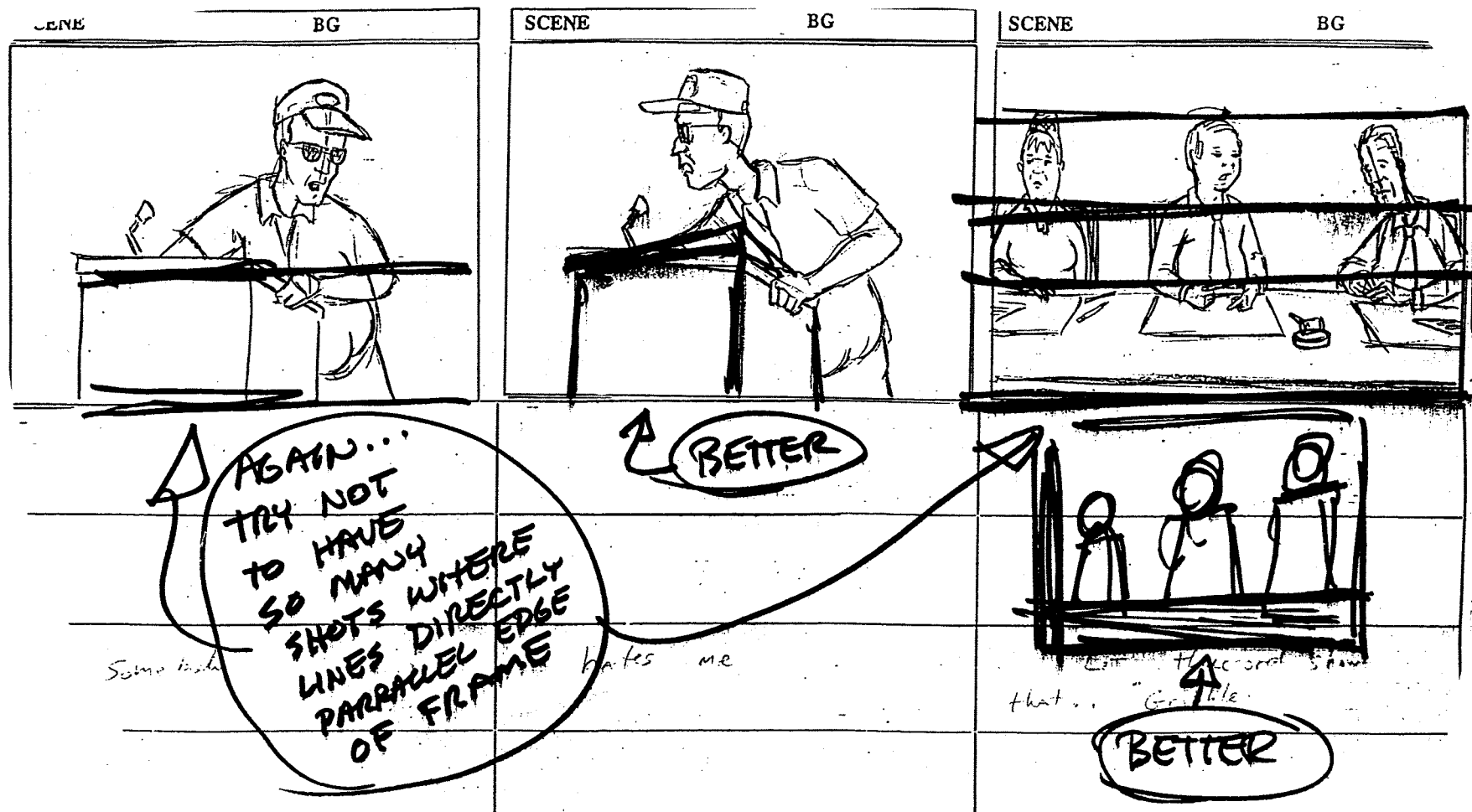
OPEN UP A LITTLE - TOO CRAMPED  
DICE



Bobby's

# Brad Bird on Composition

## Part 2



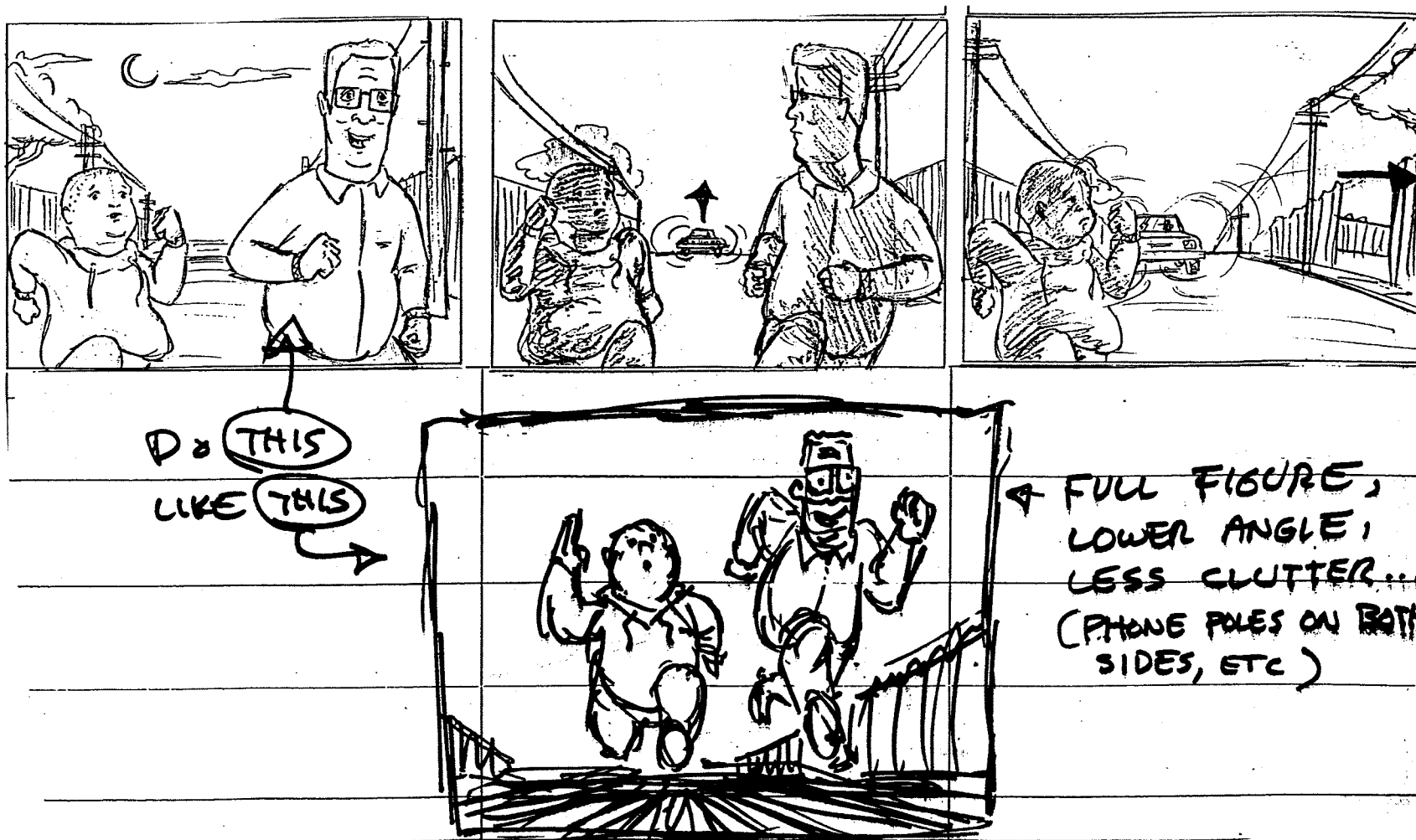
# Brad Bird on Composition

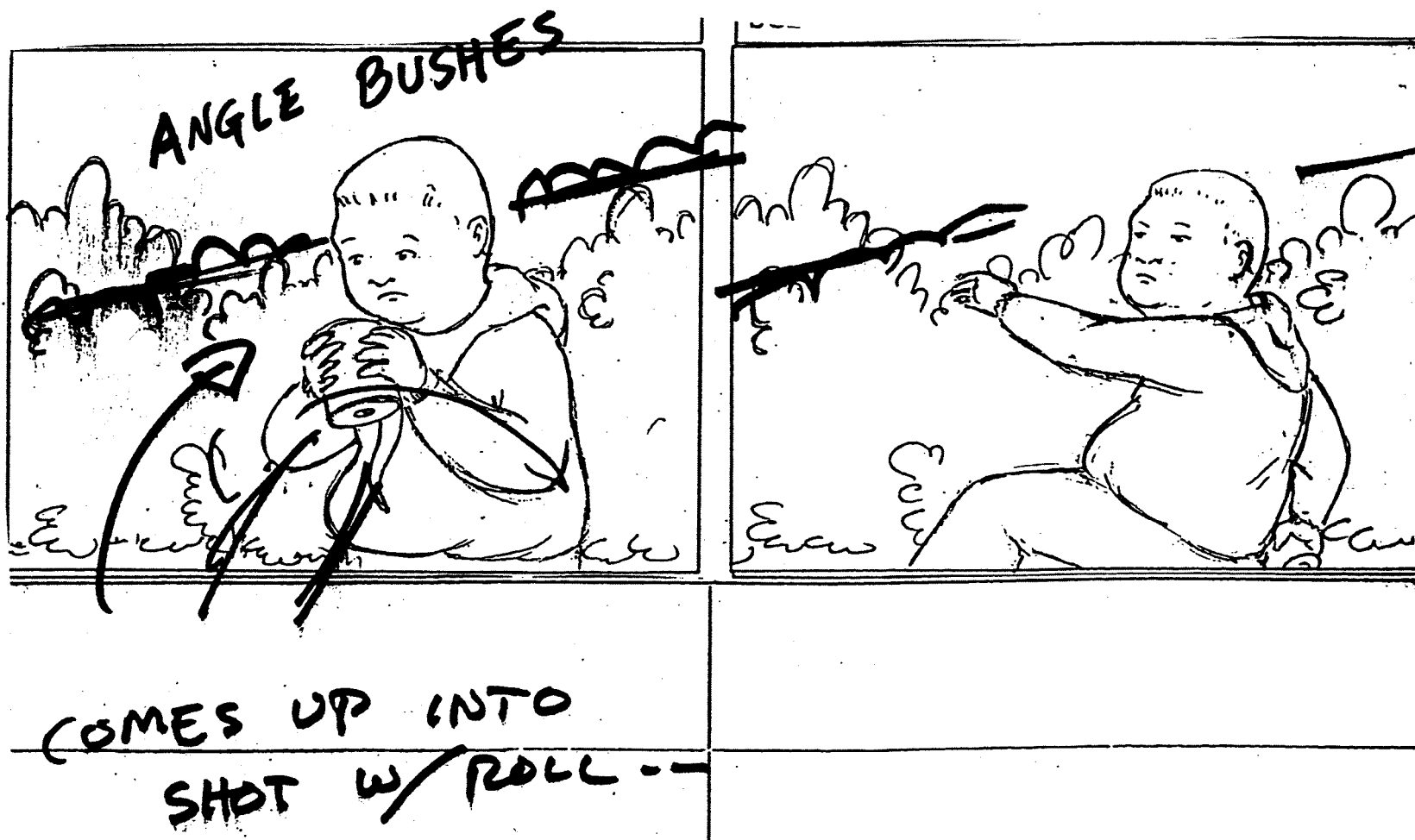
## Part 2



# Brad Bird on Composition

## Part 2

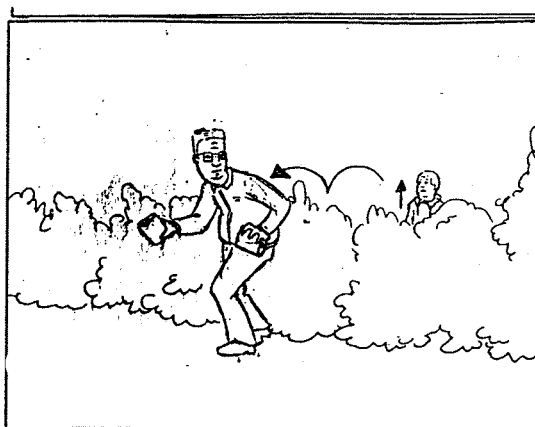
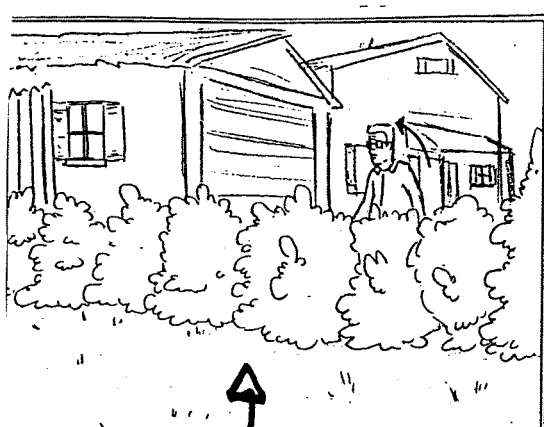






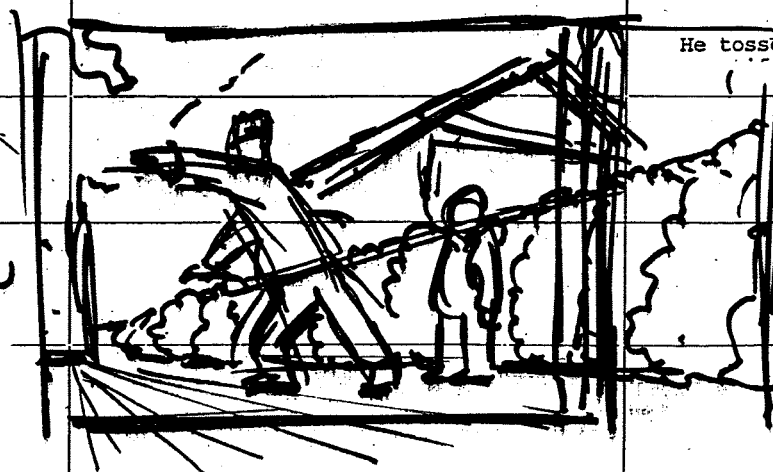
# Brad Bird on Composition

Part 2



↑  
THIS  
LIKE  
THIS →

BREAK UP COMPOSITION  
LOWER ANGLE  
EMPHASIZES SKY, ETC

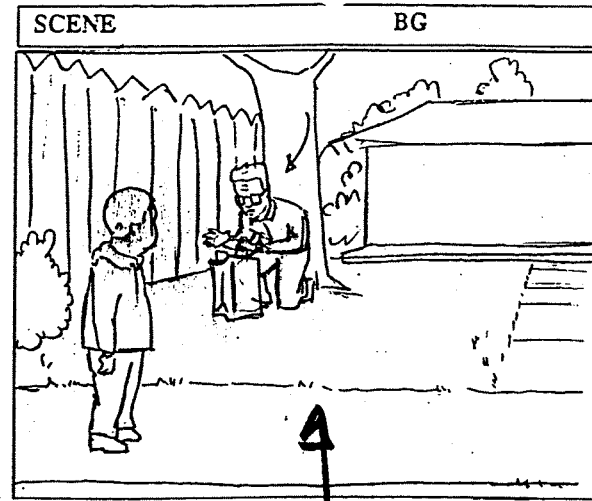


He tosses the roll of toilet paper,

# Brad Bird on Composition

## Part 2

MAN INC. SHOW # 77001- 0006



Use perspective to your advantage. Try get some depth into your comps!

A lower horizon line really sets your characters into the composition.

THIS IS A REALLY  
WEAK COMPOSITION

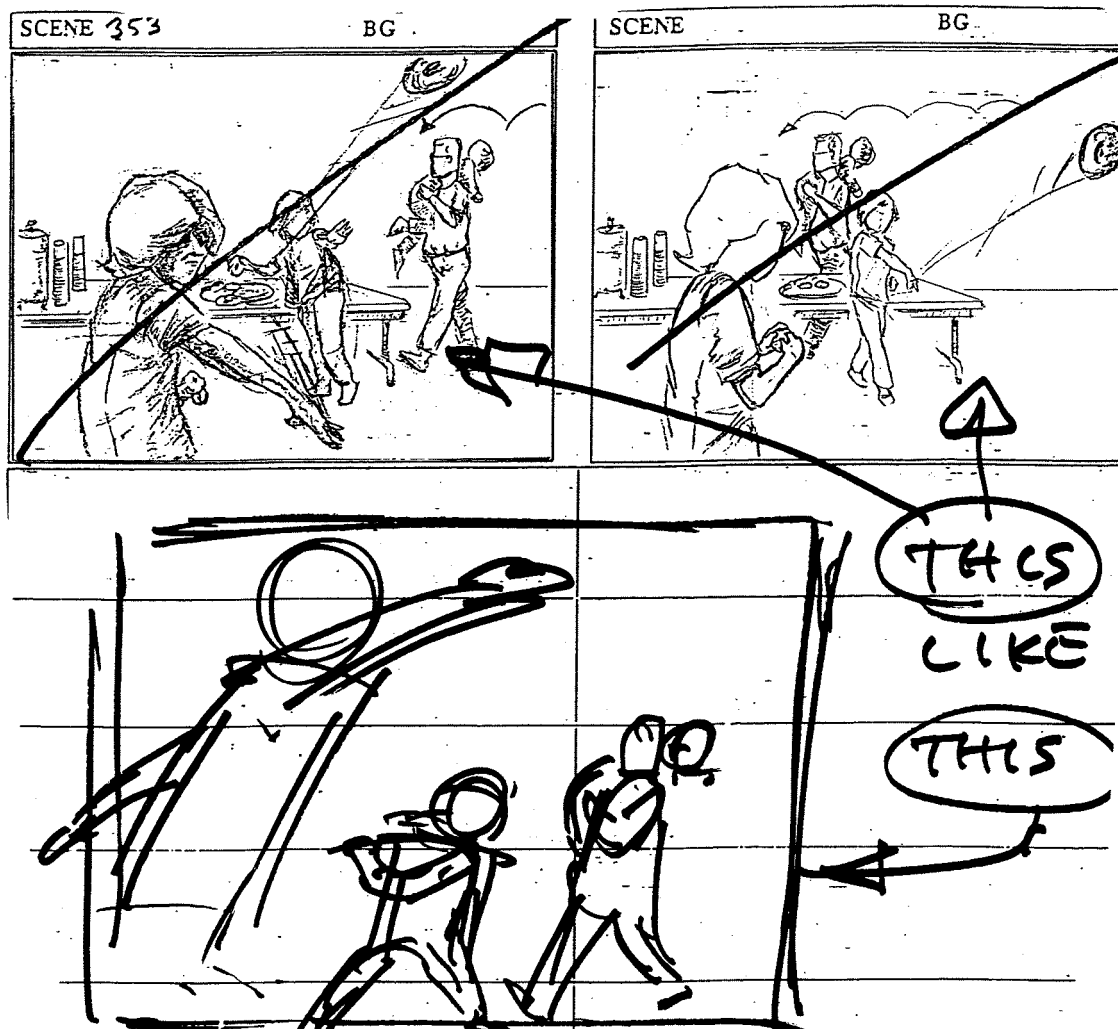
MORE LIKE THIS



Treats\* are only  
half of trick or treat.

# Brad Bird on Composition

## Part 2



Once again, lowering the horizon really helps!

Try make your compositions more dynamic.

Be aware of how the eye flows around the comp, and what you want the eye drawn to.

# Brad Bird on Composition

## Part 2



# STORYBOARDING THE SIMPSONS WAY

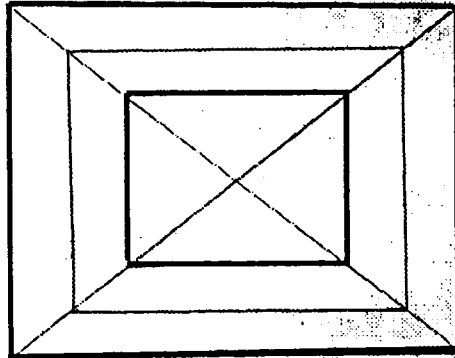
By Chris Roman

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Contents:  
Tooltime for Storyboarding  
Showing Camera Moves  
Angles are our Friends!  
Lower the Horizon  
Don't cut off Heads

# TOOLTIME FOR STORYBOARDING

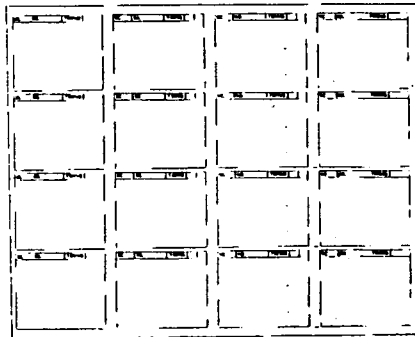
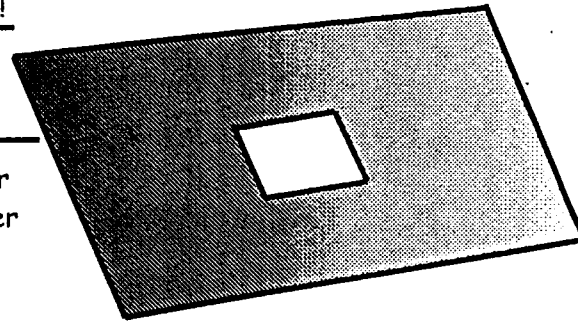


This 'grid' will save layout lots of trouble! When you do a TRUCK IN or TRUCK OUT, use the center square as a guide for HOW SMALL YOU CAN GO! For layout, a square 1/4 the size of a storyboard frame is equal to a 6 field on a 12 field grid. Any closer and they'll need to do a 'match-cut'; not taboo, but not easy to do.

So unless the scene really calls for it, try to avoid going in too close!

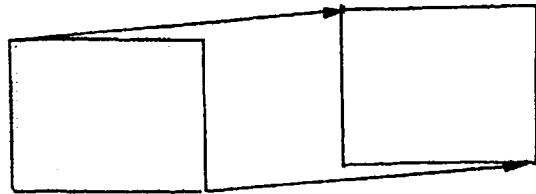
## The MAGIC WINDOW of COMPOSITION

Take a piece of cardboard and cut a hole in the center the size of a storyboard frame. Place it over whatever drawing you're working on! Eliminates the unwanted white space around it and lets you focus on the panel, and FIX THAT COMPOSITION!

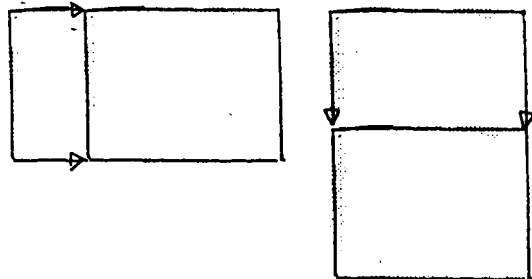


Doing roughs on a page with only four panels on it doesn't let you see enough of the whole story. By drawing on paper with 16 panels on it (keep the panels actual size, and you may be able to use your roughs for final!), you can be sure that the pacing is good, and that you're not using too many of the same shots!

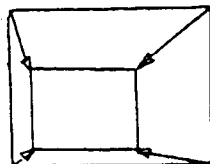
# Showing Camera Moves on a Simpsons Board



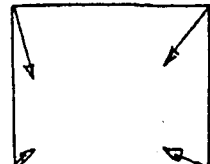
PAN: Arrows from one frame to another...  
the clearer the better!



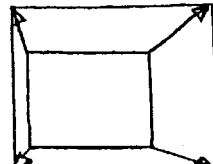
Camera Adjust: the camera moves less than  
one full frame in any direction; arrows drawn  
from one frame to the other.



Push In / Truck In  
Slow In / Smash in

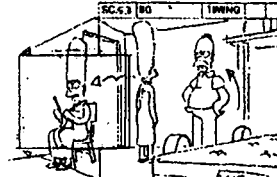


Drift In  
if the cut to the next shot  
comes before the camera stops

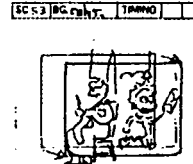


Push Out / Truck Out  
Slow Out / Smash Out  
WIDEN

Using moves in combination-

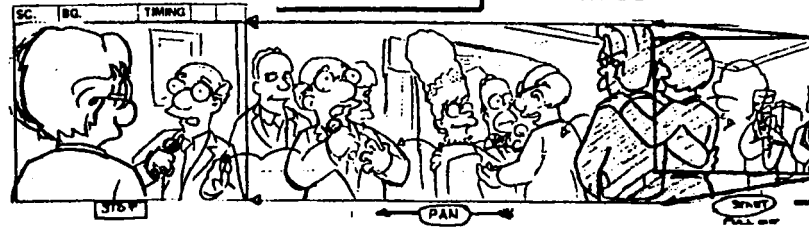


Push In/ Cam. Adj. Left with Marge



Slight Adj. Right with Lisa

Remove all the top labels of the frames except the one on the stop point



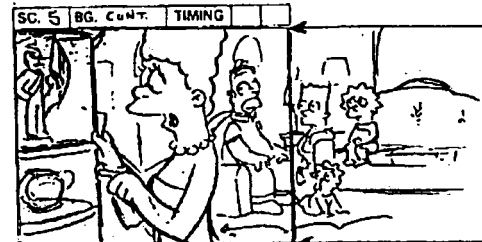
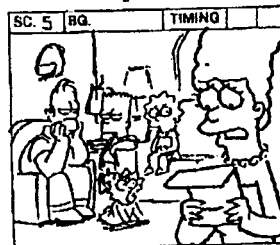
Show the stop point;

box it to clearly make it different from the start point

If the acting changes through the pan, show a few of the poses

Show the direction of the pan

Show the start point



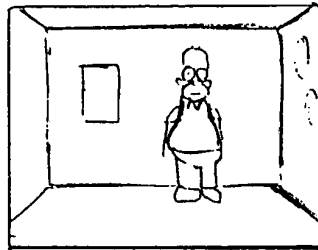
Adj. Left

Only show the entire frame of the stop point

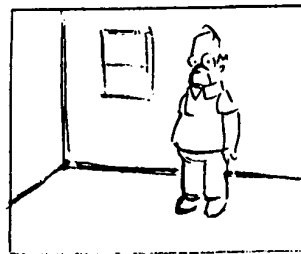
## CAMERA MOVES WITHIN THE FRAME

# Angles are our friends!

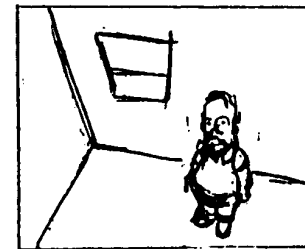
or  
Springfield is NOT a two dimensional world



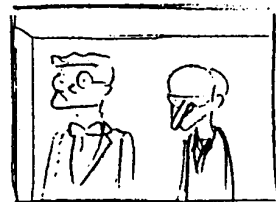
BORING! FLAT! UNINSPIRED!  
Unless that's what you WANT,  
don't draw it!



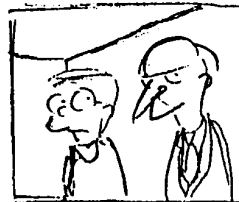
Better!  
Show at LEAST 3 PLANES  
in a room!  
Try to avoid having floor lines  
exactly parallel to the bottom  
of the frame!



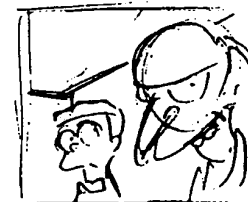
Whoa! This is dynamic...but, the  
angle draws TOO much attention  
away from the scene.  
Unless it's a really dramatic  
moment, keep it simple!



Ok, there are three planes in  
the Background, but Smithers  
and Burns are standing exactly  
next to one another...which  
flattens the scene out.  
BORING!

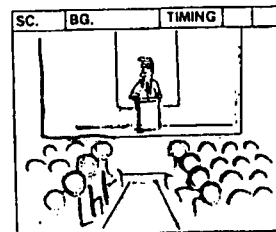


BETTER! MORE DYNAMIC!  
3 planes of the room, Burns is  
closer creating depth. He  
is placed higher in the frame  
than Smithers, subconsciously  
making Burns more important!

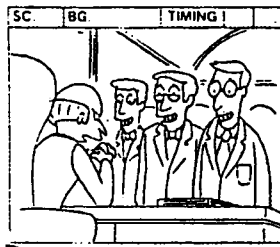


Whoa! Burns is almost on TOP  
of us. Very dynamic, but again,  
save it for the scenes that  
call for it!

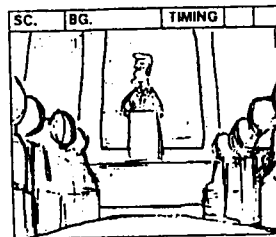




This is a 'STOCK' shot of Rev. Lovejoy speaking to the congregation. Since it's been used in shows before, it'll be easy to layout...but...the Rev. better not be saying anything too important, cause it's a fairly boring shot.



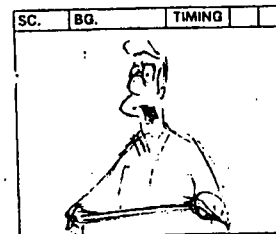
A mundane shot...Burns has no power here, and the lawyers seem to be standing the same distance from the camera as Burns is in his seat!



Better! Lovejoy must be saying something important, because he's above us and all the 'lines' of the shot draw the eye to him. And it still shows us where we are AND that the congregation is there...but easier to draw since you only see those people on the aisle!

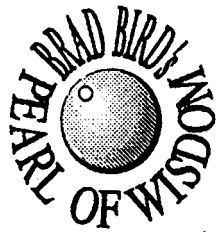


A more dramatic shot. The difference is subtle. But now Burns holds more power, and the distance between the lawyers and Burns is emphasized. All thanks to LOWERING THE HORIZON!

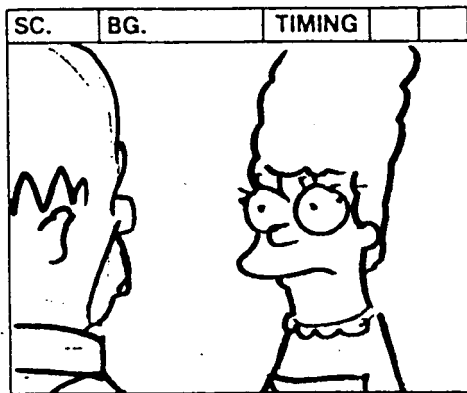


If what Lovejoy's saying is more important, you could even START on a low shot of him...then later cut to a wide shot showing the congregation...maybe an 'over the Rev.'s shoulder' shot.

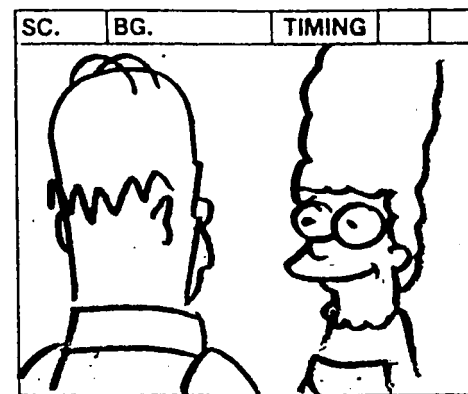
ANOTHER



Don't cut off heads in the frame.  
Cutting off heads is bad.  
I hate people who cut off heads.



Homer! Is that you? By only showing half of an already abstracted character, it's harder subconsciously to recognize that it's Homer.



Ahhh! It IS Homer. Even though his head takes up almost half of the frame, it feels more comfortable than when it was cut in half. Also, he doesn't draw focus from Marge because you can't SEE HIS FACE.

Of course, this isn't set in stone...some directors don't have a problem cutting off heads on 'over the shoulder' shots. And sometimes, the scene may even call for it...you may want the viewer to feel boxed in or slightly confused. But, just keep in mind...BRAD HATES IT!

# STORYBOARDING

# THE SIMPSONS

**Part 2 by Chris Roman**

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# WAY



Contents:

TRANSITIONS

FOCUS

Screen Direction Part 1

Screen Direction Part 2

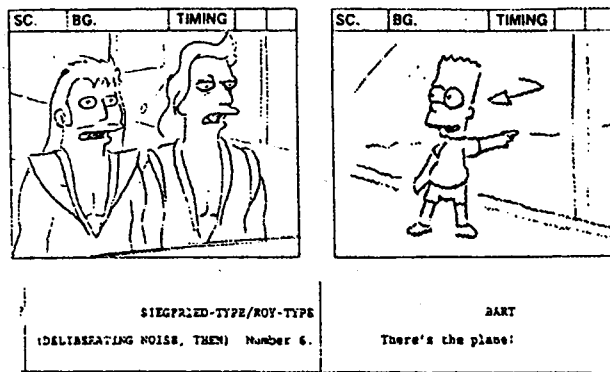
Screen Direction Part 3

Types of Shots (Wide/Med/CU)

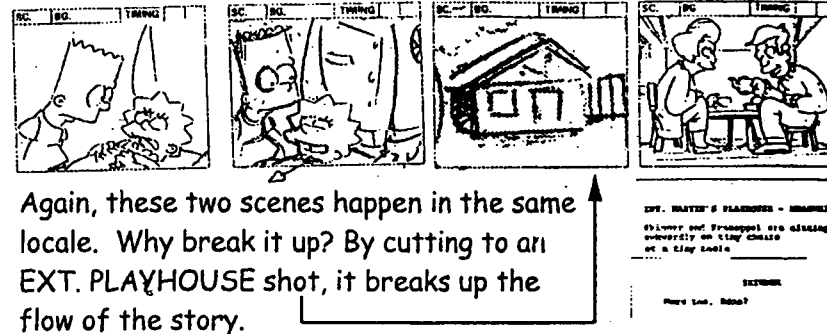
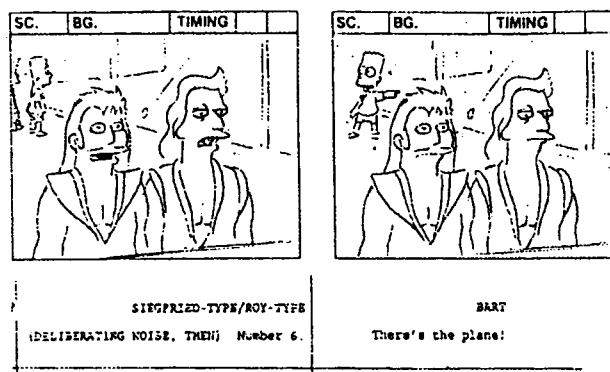
More Types of Shots

# TRANSITIONS

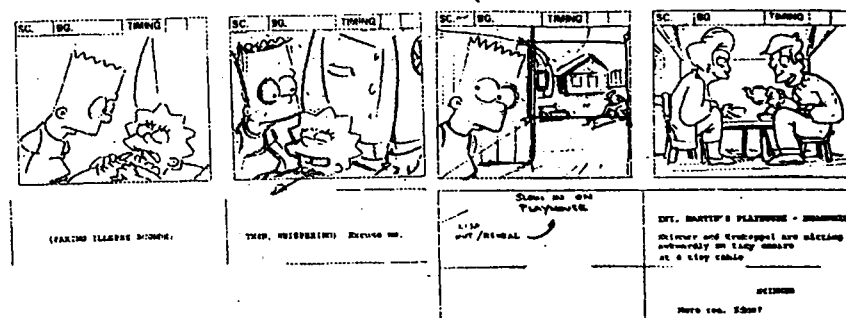
One of the most important jobs of a good storyboard artist is to create smooth transitions between scenes! Don't just cut to the next scene, or to a new establishing shot...try and be creative!



two scenes happen in the same locale. Why break it up?



But by PUSHING IN past Bart the flow is maintained, and yet we move into a new scene.



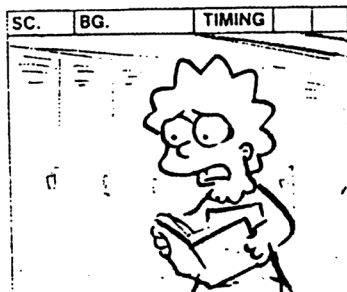
# FOCUS

What are we REALLY looking at?

I have no idea.

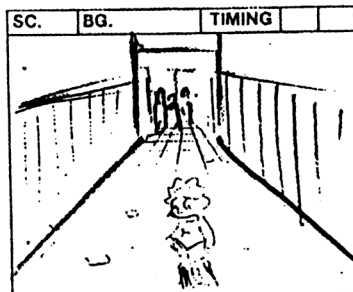


Think about each scene and what it's really about. Should we be drawn in? Or should we feel detached? Who or what should we be looking at?



LISA  
But I should be the most popular girl in school.

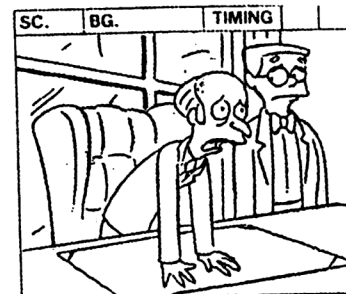
Lisa's just been snubbed by her classmates, even though having lots of extra-curriculars should make her popular...so she thinks. THIS SHOT shows Lisa, but who cares?



LISA  
But I should be the most popular girl in school.

THIS SHOT emphasizes Lisa's aloneness by isolating her. PLUS it puts her below us, making her even more pathetic.

Sometimes the text alone can carry a scene, but it's up to you to find where you can enhance the FOCUS, literally and psychologically, with your composition!



BURNS  
My money's all gone?

Burn's has just been told all his money's gone. Still, he's a powerful man...but not in this drawing. In fact, although he's in the center of the frame, he's competing for focus with Smithers, who's as big as Burns, and the ample background space visible.



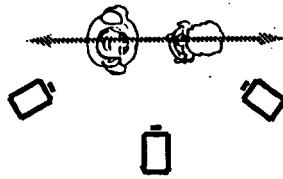
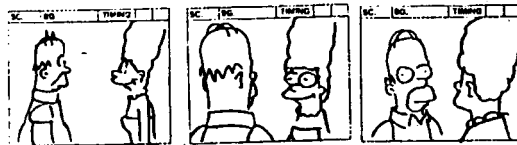
BURNS  
My money's all gone?

Brad's revision makes Burns the clear focus, plus adds drama with an unshot on Burns; he's still powerful but his plea here is more urgent than in the other composition.

# SCREEN DIRECTION

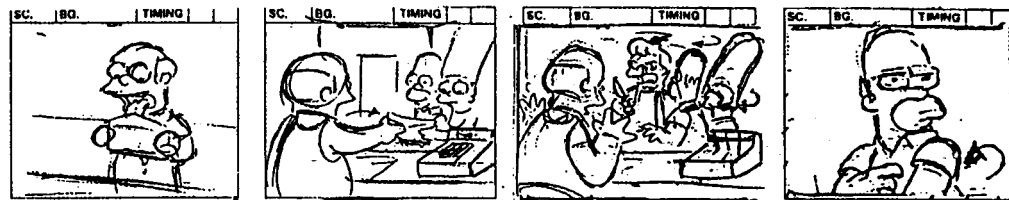
## PART ONE: STAYING ON THE GOOD SIDE OF THE CAMERA LINE

Keeping the 'camera' from jumping the 'camera line' is the easiest thing to learn, easiest mistake to spot, but is still the most common mistake board artists make!



Whichever direction the characters are **FACING** at the beginning of a scene...the invisible eyeline between them is the **CAMERA LINE**. Crossing over that and seeing the characters from the opposite side is a **JUMP CUT** (a bad thing).

In live action...this line can be formed just by the directions the person's eyes are looking... but because animation deals with abstract two dimensional characters, the direction they **FACE** is the key factor.



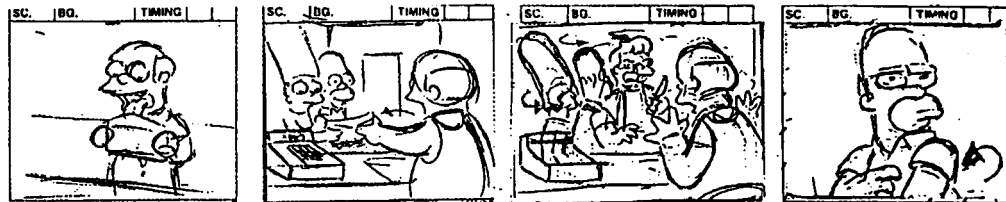
This scene starts with the man behind the counter facing **LEFT**.

Then **SUDDENLY** he's facing **RIGHT**!?

Jailbird comes in, making Homer turn to the **LEFT**.

But we cut to him **SUDDENLY** facing **RIGHT**!

In this sequence, the camera's jumping all over the place! Even though no one actually moves anywhere in the room, it's harder for the viewer subconsciously to keep everything straight with the camera randomly jumping around.



By simply flopping the two middle panels, we keep the man behind the counter and Homer facing the right way...and it makes the scene much more comprehensible.



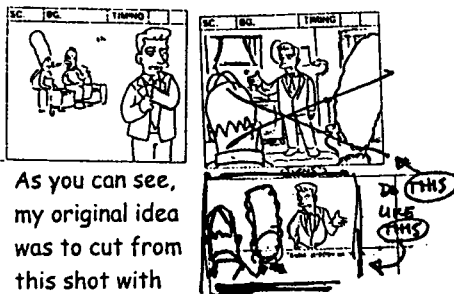
**AN EASIER WAY TO REMEMBER THIS:**  
If the character is facing one direction in one shot, keep them facing that way in **EVERY SHOT** (unless you see them turn).



# SCREEN DIRECTION

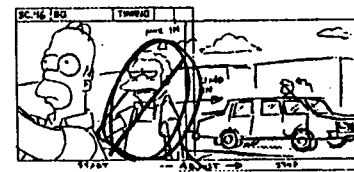
## PART TWO: STAYING ON THE SAME SIDE OF THE SCREEN

This isn't as much a rule as crossing the CAMERA LINE, but it's just as helpful in keeping things CLEAR in your staging and storytelling.



As you can see, my original idea was to cut from this shot with Homer and Marge in the background, to a shot where the Security Salesman stands between them. IN theory, this would put him psychologically between them as well... **BUT**

The scene would be better served by keeping the Homer and Marge TOGETHER, since the Sec. Salesman is playing against BOTH of them.



This scene starts out with Moe on the left and Homer on the right...and the next shot DOES work in the context of the scene. Homer is still facing left, and Moe doesn't start out in the scene. This allows for him to enter the frame now facing screen left...

ACCORDING TO PREVIOUS SHOT, MOE IS ON OTHER SIDE OF HOMER.



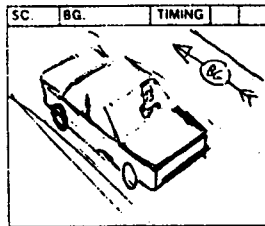
**BUT**

The cutting is smoother if we STAY on both Moe and Homer, keeping them both in the same spots in the frame relative to one another.

KEEP THE CUTTING CLEAN BY KEEPING THE CHARACTERS IN THE SAME RELATIVE SPACE IN SEQUENTIAL SHOTS... (NOT THE SAME SIZE (WHICH WOULD CREATE JUMP CUTS)).

# SCREEN DIRECTION

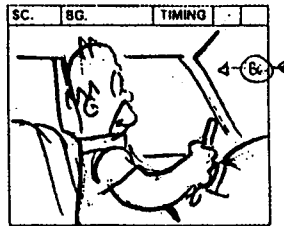
## PART THREE: CONTINUITY IN MOVING DIRECTIONS



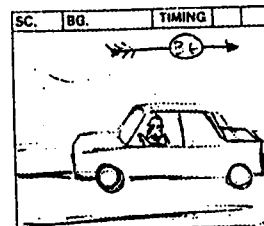
Psychologically speaking... LEFT TO RIGHT is more natural to the eye (we read that way).

Compositionally, keep some space in FRONT of the car or character in the direction they're moving; the viewer subconsciously needs to feel the character has someplace to go.

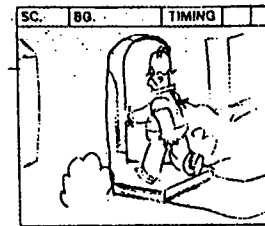
IN THIS SHOT, the car is moving left to right shown by the ARROW CALLING FOR THE BACKGROUND (BG) TO PAN BEHIND THE CAR FROM RIGHT TO LEFT.



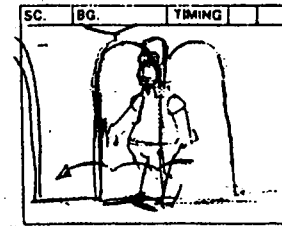
We cut to inside the car. The BG continues in the same direction- Right to Left...keeping Homer travelling LEFT TO RIGHT.



After a few scenes, Homer's on his way home. To emphasize that he's going home, the OPPOSITE of where he was going, he should now be travelling RIGHT TO LEFT.



Homer's back, and he's outside his house going in. He's STILL moving LEFT TO RIGHT, continuing the emphasis that he's going AWAY from wherever he'd been.



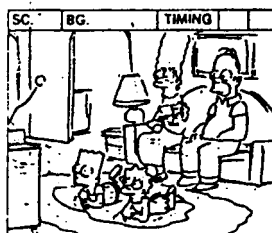
Inside, you keep Homer going LEFT TO RIGHT ...not just to continue the 'going home' feel, but also because Homer creates a

**CAMERA LINE ALONG THE DIRECTION HE'S TRAVELLING!**



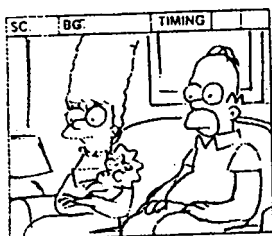


# TYPES OF SHOTS



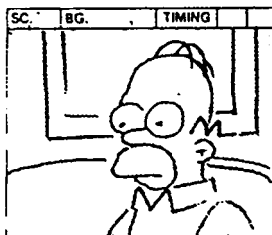
## WIDE SHOT (also LONG or ESTABLISHING)

Composition showing **WHERE** we are, **WHO** is there, and where they are **IN RELATION TO ONE ANOTHER**. Simply staged to allow the viewer easy comprehension and acclimation. This shot is the most important shot of any sequence...all shots afterwards are based around it. It doesn't have to be the first shot of a scene, but it **MUST** happen at some point, otherwise the viewer will be disoriented.



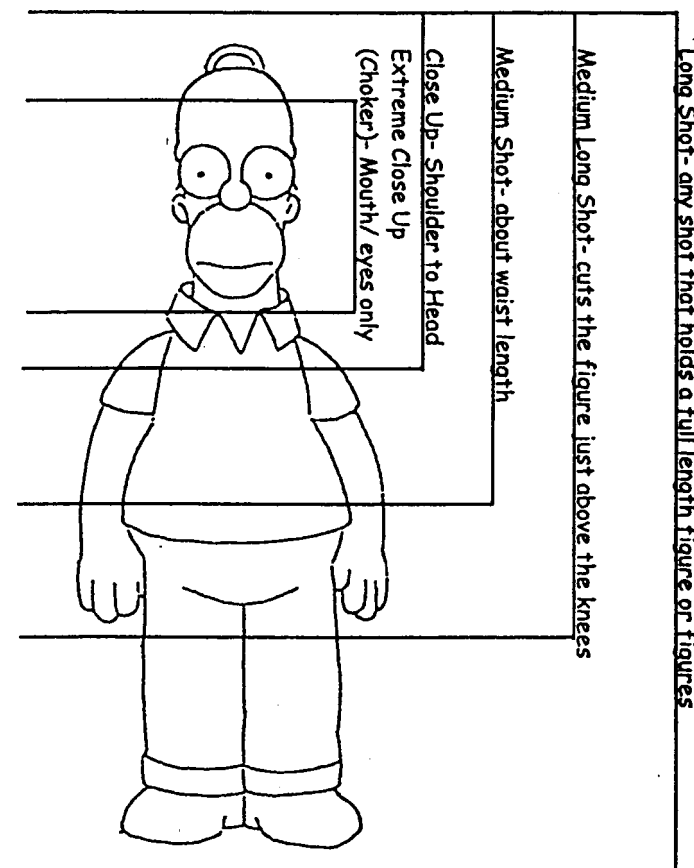
## MEDIUM SHOT

Used when the characters become more important than the surroundings. Shows facial expressions **AND** gestures while continuing the relationships between one or two other characters.



## CLOSE UP

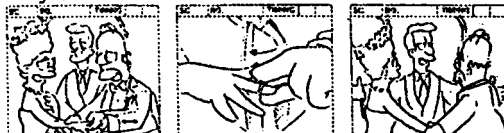
This shot involves the viewer more, focusing on a particular character or object. Subtle facial acting is used, or there is text to be read, small details to be noticed. Close-ups involve minimal animation while being powerful images...just don't overuse them.



# MORE TYPES OF SHOTS

## INSERTS

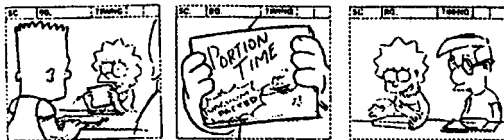
Full screen close-ups of actions, objects, text, or character's reactions placed as if inserted over a longer scene, or over another character's dialogue.



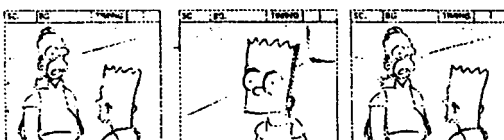
Inserted close-up of important action within a wider shot scene



Inserted close-up of important object linking two separate shots in the same location



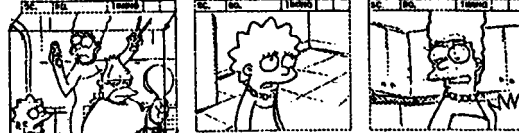
Inserted close-up of important object with text to be read



Inserted close-up of Bart's reaction to what Homer is saying  
(Homer's dialogue continues over shot of Bart)

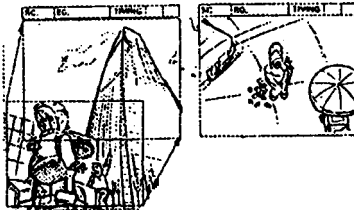
## UPSHOTS and DOWNSHOTS

Upshots place the viewer beneath the focus and downshots place the viewer above, physically AND psychologically. Since most shots are straight on, upshots and downshots add variety and drama to scenes.



From the med. long shot we cut to a DOWNSHOT of Lisa, Marge's POV, which sets up the UPSHOT of Marge, Lisa's POV.

This UPSHOT accentuates the height of the World Trade Center, and the distance Homer must go. The DOWNSHOT on Homer, the virtual POV of the top of the tower, isolates Homer and makes him even more pathetic.



## TILT/ DUTCH ANGLE

Used when wierd, violent, unstable, impressionistic or other novel views are needed.



TWIST IN to a tilt over-dramatizes a reaction to someone or something.

## REVERSE SHOT



Normally, it's a bad idea to cross the CAMERA LINE...but sometimes rules can be broken, like in this scene.

Here, we cut to a REVERSE ANGLE to see Homer & Marge's reactions. We can do this, because their locations in relation to Rev.Lovejoy were strongly established in the first shot.

When you choose your shots, think in terms of both the

**DRAMATIC IMPACT**  
on the audience, and  
**VISUAL VARIETY!**



**EVEN MORE**

# TYPES OF SHOTS

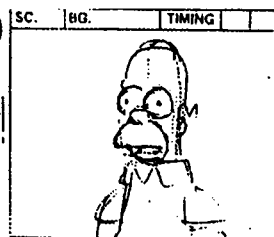


## ONE SHOT

How basic can you get?

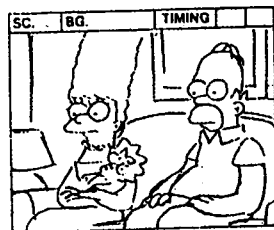
One person in the shot!

They're the focus!



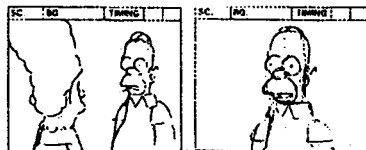
## TWO SHOT

Two people, usually with dialogue relating to one another.

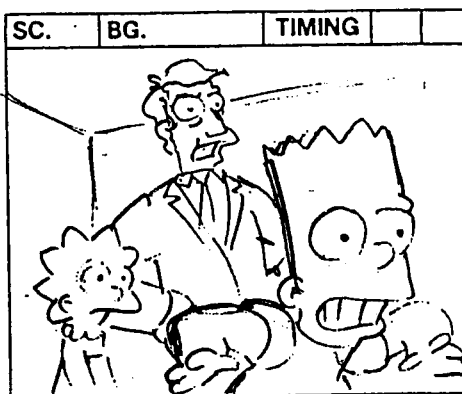


## OVER THE SHOULDER (OTS)

Two shot which puts focus on the character facing camera, yet still subconsciously includes the other character. This shot sets up for the ONE SHOT, as if the viewer has assumed the other character's POV.



## THREE SHOT



Three characters in a shot...duh!

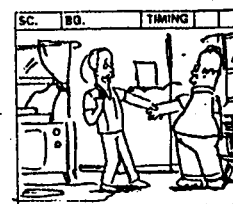
## STAGING IN DEPTH

As in this THREE SHOT, not every composition needs to be viewed from straight on! Move the camera to angles which create depth, placing one or more of the characters closer in the foreground, or back into the background.

THIS THREE SHOT makes Bart the focus by being face front, but also closest to us. But, because of the triangular shape created, Skinner is in power in the scene standing at the top of the triangle.

## USING THE AUX. PEGS TO CREATE 3 DIMENSIONS

Take advantage of auxillary pegs to create multi-plane effects when you think it might enhance the flow! Use it to PAN IN characters during a truck out (see example) or PAN OUT a character the viewer is looking over to truck into the character being spoken to (OTS example- PAN OUT Marge as camera TRUCKS IN to a ONE SHOT of HOMER)



PAN IN Bart



PAN IN Marge/Lisa  
TRUCK OUT