

Understanding Manga



Emotion is Key

- Things happen on a melodramatic scale
- Pacing most often sets the tone, long silences in the story extend tension and highlights inner turmoil of characters

Some Visual Symbols

- Anger indicated by distortion of the face (character's face may suddenly lose distinctiveness and will be shadowed.)



- Animal Characters – set up mood
 - Most common: wolfish set of ears and tail to be creepy, dog ears, paws and wagging tail with pleading eyes to indicate begging.

Symbolism & Layouts

“Being There Over Getting There”

- Storytellers concentrate on emotion which influences everything; spend much of the story building character and setting.
- By using panels more like a camera's eye, the storyteller focuses on images of the environment to establish a scene and will spend a number of panels this way.
- Symbols are used lavishly and many have weightier meanings.
- “aspect to aspect” associations between panels, splintering a scene into parts of a whole instead of using panels mainly for different places, people or actions.
- Entire pages represent the emotional forces of an argument; show basic conflict at the center and splinter panels off toward to edge showing details like an edit and closeup in film.
- Panels are used to show necessary information to highlight emotional story arc or summarize background

Speech Bubbles and Backgrounds

- Speak tails are small, delicate or even missing.
- Bubbles represent different characters' speech feature different edge designs.
 - If a character is upset, the text bubble may be jagged.
 - When characters are thinking, thoughts may appear with a bubble.
- Flashbacks are indicated by a change in the background colour.
- How a character is perceived is also indicated by elements in the background.
 - A cheerful character grins and may be accompanied by sparkles and glints to brighten the mood.

Adapted from: *Understanding Manga and Anime* By Robin E. Brenner

http://books.google.ca/books?id=uY8700WJy_gC&pg=PA58&lpg=PA58&dq=symbolism+in+manga&source=bl&ots=4fBD6aRT96&sig=xnGF919yOlpMuupYkA3Su3RaYpY&hl=en&ei=Zt_LSaqDM5KmsAONh92qCg&sa=X&oi=book_result&resnum=6&ct=result#PPT1,M1

Gutters

The space between panels are known as gutters.

Iconicism

Manga's most interesting feature is its heavy use of iconicism (symbolism). Here is a short list that may be of some use:



- 1) EYES - One of the most important features in a manga character's face are his or her eyes. To put it simply, the eyes are a window to the soul. You can discover what type of personality a character may have just from looking at the eyes. Despite popular belief, not all manga characters have those large doe eyes we've come to expect on this side of the world. Large eyes are used predominately in comedies or manga with a rather light-hearted storyline. Villains or stories with a more somber mood would have harsher and more realistic looking eyes.
- 2) NOSE BUBBLES - A feature of manga that tends to gross out less knowledgeable readers is the ever-popular enormous-bubble-of-goo-sprouting-from-a-character's-nose look. This is actually meant to symbolize that the character is asleep, just as we would use a trail of z's.
- 3) CLOSE-UPS - The answer is simple, adding more emotion and suspense sells comics.
- 4) MOTION LINES - This is a topic where Japan beats us hands down. While early superhero comics only had a few trailing lines to show movement, Tezuka created a more realistic and dramatic approach. Have you ever watched cars pass by or been sitting in a car watching the scenery roll past in the window. Looks blurry, doesn't it? Manga began utilizing large amounts of streaks and lines to show either an object or its background in motion. Motion lines also helped in determining from whose perspective we were viewing a scene, the protagonist (or antagonist) or a bystander?
- 6) CARTOONY OR REALISTIC? - Scott McCloud described manga as using a masking effect which combined cartoonier characters in lavishly-detailed backgrounds. The fact is that cartoons are heavily iconic in nature. Why do we look at a circle with two dots and a line in the center and call it a face? That's what iconicism is all about. Its simplicity allows us to relate to it quickly and easily. As far as backgrounds go, a more realistic background helps draw the reader into the imaginary world that the artist has breathed life into.



Adapted From: *Manga-Where the Sun Never Sets* <http://library.thinkquest.org/3177/gather/manga.html>