

The Ringling College Themed Entertainment Design Competition

Challenge: Parade Float



Rocky Horror Pride Parade Concept

Class of '23 - Susan Saulnier, Bella Cicci, Tiffany Beckler, John Treanor, Sophie Ruiz

Table of Contents

[Introduction](#)

[Project Conceptual Requirements - Let's THINK about this for a moment!](#)

[Project Design Requirements - Let's get VISUAL!](#)

[Project Deliverable - Let's Put it all together and DELIVER!](#)

[Additional Requirements](#)

[Rubric](#)

[Inspiration and Reference](#)



Photo by Joe Shlabotnik

Introduction

Few spectacles in the world match the magic of a parade! The music, the performers, and of course...those FLOATS! Magical platforms rolling down the street—a moving stage, a kinetic sculpture, a story told at 3 miles per hour. From the self-driving mechanical giants of Universal's Mega Movie Parade to the handcrafted, larger-than-life sculptures built by Kern Studios for Universal's legendary Mardi Gras celebration, and the iconic balloon-and-float extravaganza that has stopped traffic on 34th Street every Thanksgiving since 1924, the modern parade float has become one of the most technically ambitious and emotionally resonant art forms in entertainment design.

Your challenge is to conceive an original parade float—one worthy of a major theme park boulevard or a world-famous city parade route. You'll think like an artist, a sculptor, an engineer, and a storyteller. Your float must stop people in their tracks, make them feel something, and give them an experience they'll cherish forever!

The size of the float is very important. You must pack a lot of story, art, and entertainment into a very tight box. This brief outlines very specific size requirements and provides a template for a chassis to be used inside the float. Your design must fit on that chassis and be within the limits defined below.

Everything in themed entertainment starts with a story. Story includes a period of time, a sense of place, and the character(s) that live within the story, and what this is all about; what we collectively call Theme.

In addition to providing entertainment and a story, and enhancing the overall experience for guests, a parade float must function with operational safety and purpose within the themed environment. This can include navigating crowds, timing with dancers, music, and SFX, being safe to climb on and off for team members, and so much more...

...and, of course, it must look FANTASTIC!

Please read below to learn more about the process of designing a parade float, what you must deliver, and see some examples!

Are you up to the challenge?

Are YOU the next great themed entertainment designer?

Project Conceptual Requirements

For this challenge, you are tasked with designing a concept for a parade float with the following operational and thematic requirements.

Operations

Let's start with what the float needs to do. It doesn't matter how cool or fun your ideas are. If they don't work, they won't be built. What is the story? How is that story told in the visuals, movement, music, and performance? Where does the driver sit, and can they see? How is it lit? How is it powered, and how much power does it need? How do team members get on and off this thing, and how fast can that happen in an emergency? What else can you think of that might be important to consider when it comes to operating this float? We aren't expecting you to think of everything. That comes with years of experience in designing shows, environments, and attractions, then seeing them built, then learning from how that all went.

- **Functionality and Practicality**
 - The float needs to be telling a story.
 - The float needs a way to get on and off (off quickly).
 - There needs to be places on the float for performers, with attachment points for safety.
 - Guests should be able to view the float from all angles and understand the story.
 - Float must fit in a 24' x 12' footprint.
 - Total height not to exceed 20'.
 - Scenic can extend down over wheels, but ground clearance must be 6".
 - Driver needs main entrance and emergency escape hatch.
 - Driver position can vary.
 - Must add at least 1 hitch for emergency towing.
 - This float must be able to be built in the real world using real materials and processes.
(Don't let your limited understanding of materials and processes stifle your creativity. Propose a float that at least LOOKS like it could be built. In the industry, your fabrication partner will advise you on this.)

Theme and Story

Start by developing a theme and story for the float. Theme inspires Story, Story reaffirms Theme.

Theme should be thought of as what the thing is about. “The magic of the movies” might be a theme. “The beauty and wonder of nature” could be a theme. “Nostalgia for a specific place or time” is a great theme. Start here. Theme is like a wrapper for everything about this entire parade!

Story is a vehicle to communicate that theme. The story can be set in a Sci-Fi genre, or a western, or any time and/or place. As long as it’s the best conceptual choice. Each float might tell a story, or chapter in a larger story. The space you have to tell this story is very limited. How are you going to distill that story down to just a few key iconic visuals that can be crafted into a 3D sculptural set?

What is your parade's theme?

What is the story of this float?

Now, take that theme and story, and think about the operations of this float. How can you overlay that story, set in some fun visual genre, on top of the functional requirements, all while keeping in mind that you’re trying to entertain and delight the crowd?

All of this conceptual development, and often so much more, goes into a document called a Concept Treatment. You should be able to loosely recite this concept treatment, or maybe a condensed version, at any moment. You must KNOW your concept before you start to draw it!

Project Design Requirements—Let's get VISUAL!

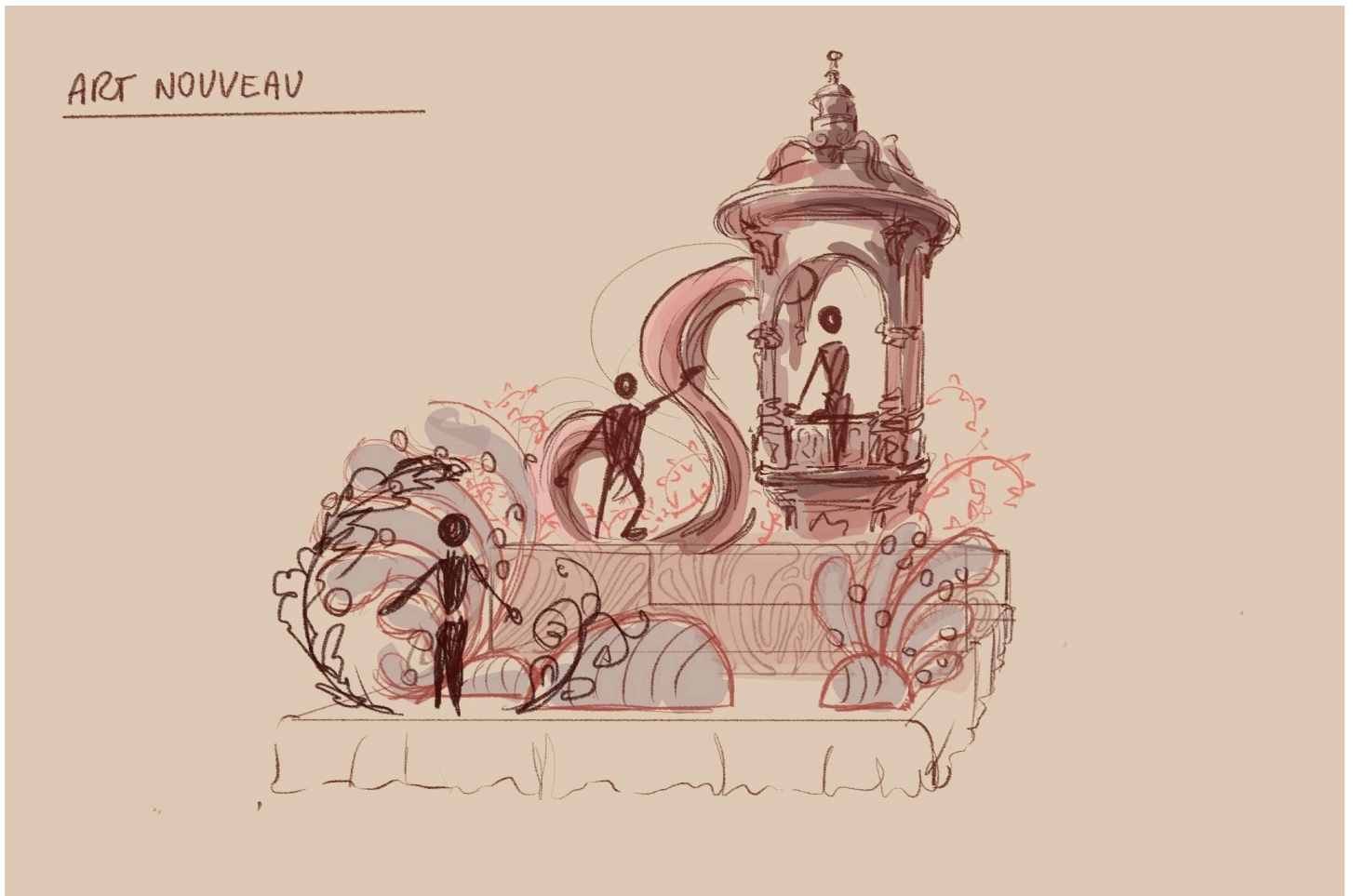
We often start with research and reference gathering. What do you know about the site where this parade takes place? How might that location inspire your concept? Can you find photos of the location? What is out there in the world that is 'like' this float? Other shows, rides, games, movies, etc??? Are there other floats like the one you're imagining? If so, how can yours be different? What is inspirational to you, that's relevant to this idea? Look for art or photos that capture the spirit, story, and/or theme of your float concept. Feel free to use AI to generate thumbnails and wild visual inspirations. AI usually only gives you what you ask for, but it can surprise you with things you might not have thought of.



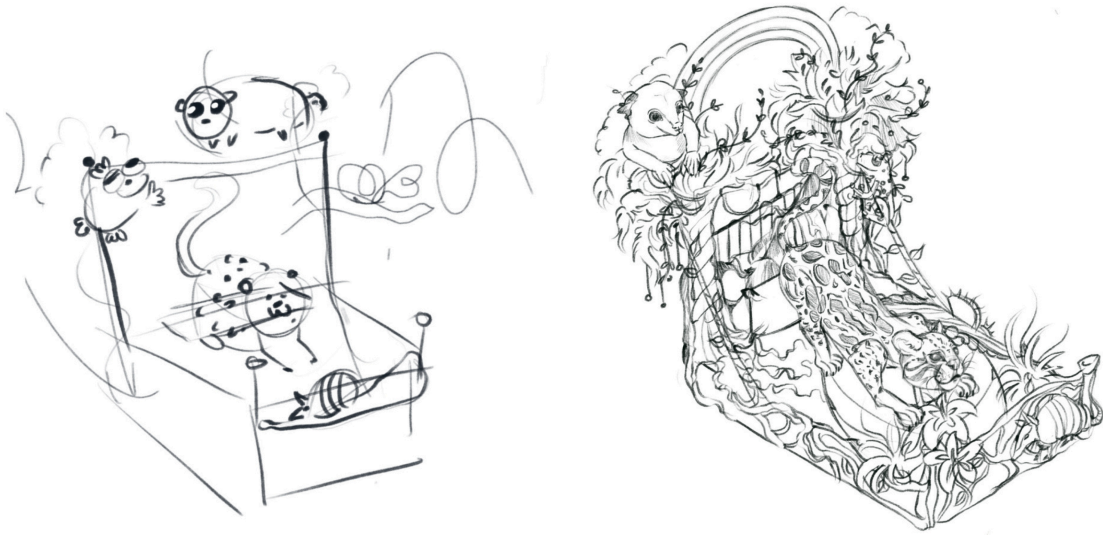
Jungle Float Concept
Nola Verseci, Larkin Holmes '28

Perspective

Now take all of that, plus all the conceptual development you did earlier in the 'thinking' stage (operations, theme, and story), and sketch some ideas for your float. Do as many small, basic thumbnails as you can. Get all the ideas out on paper. Zero in on what works and develop a more detailed, refined perspective concept drawing of your float concept.



Parade Float Concept Sketch
Tia Kassim '26



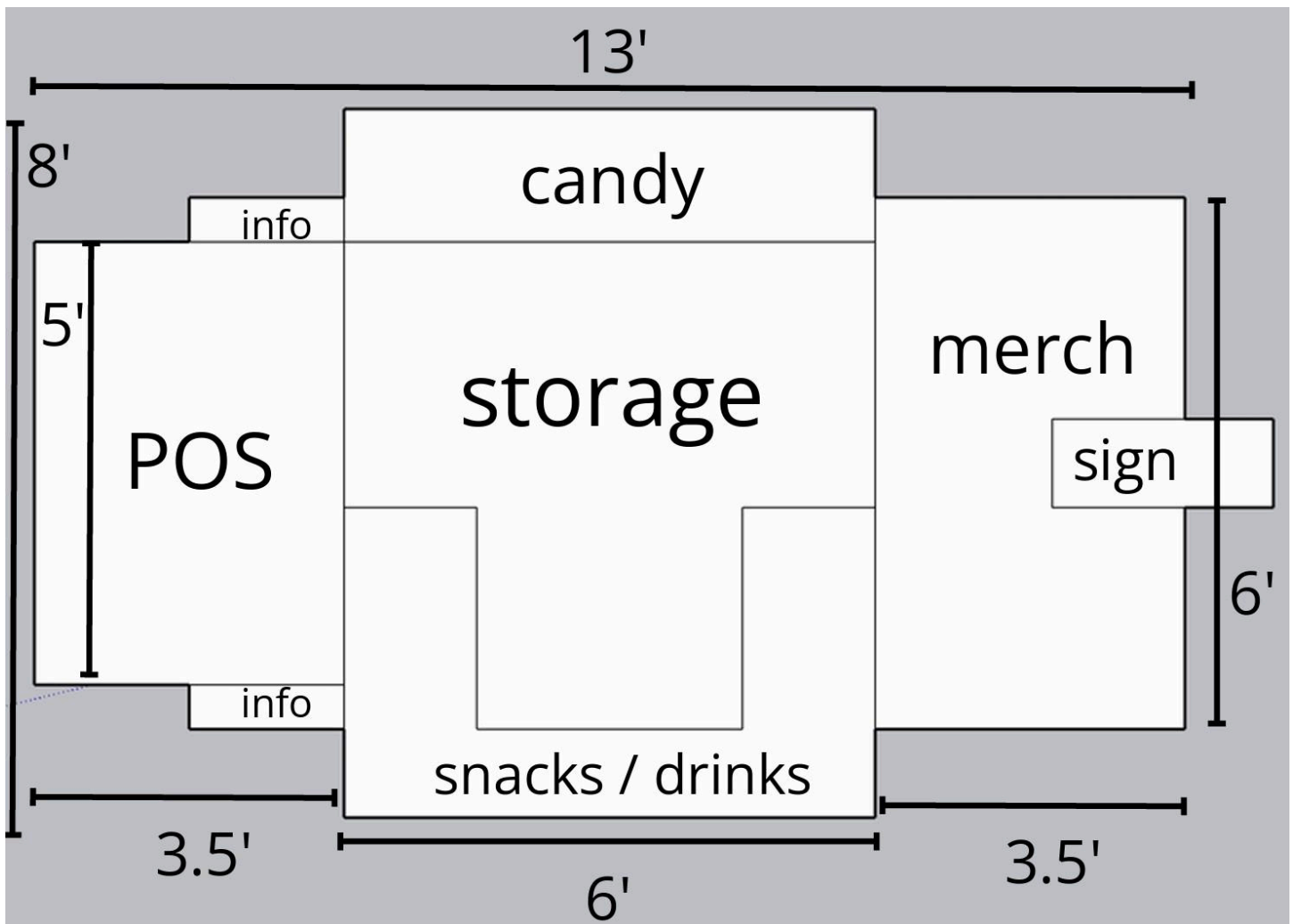
Jungle Float Concept
Nola Verseci, Larkin Holmes '28



Coral Reef Conservation Parade Float Concept
Sophie Kramer, Amanda Caldera, Brian Gweon '24

Ground Plan

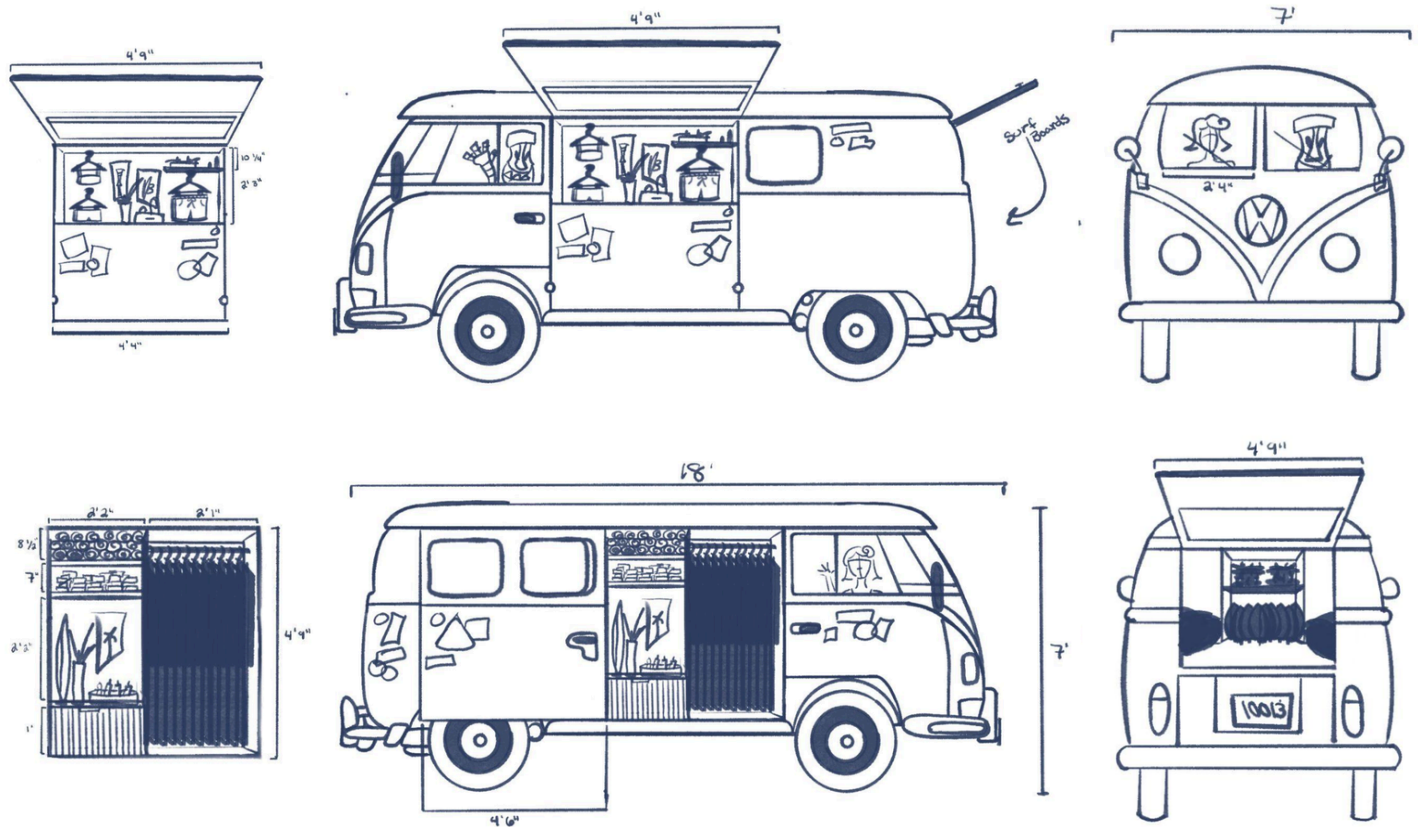
Once you think the perspective drawing captures the theme and story and fulfills the functional requirements, it's time to more accurately document the design visually. Start with a ground plan with dimensions. Draw the float as if you are way above it, looking down. Do not draw any perspective in this image. It should be truly orthographic. Indicate the overall width and depth of the float and maybe the dimensions of a few key features. Double-check this plan view against the perspective. Does it look like the same float? Are all the key features drawn on both? Do they match?



Merchandise Cart Plan
Zach Sullivan '28

Elevations

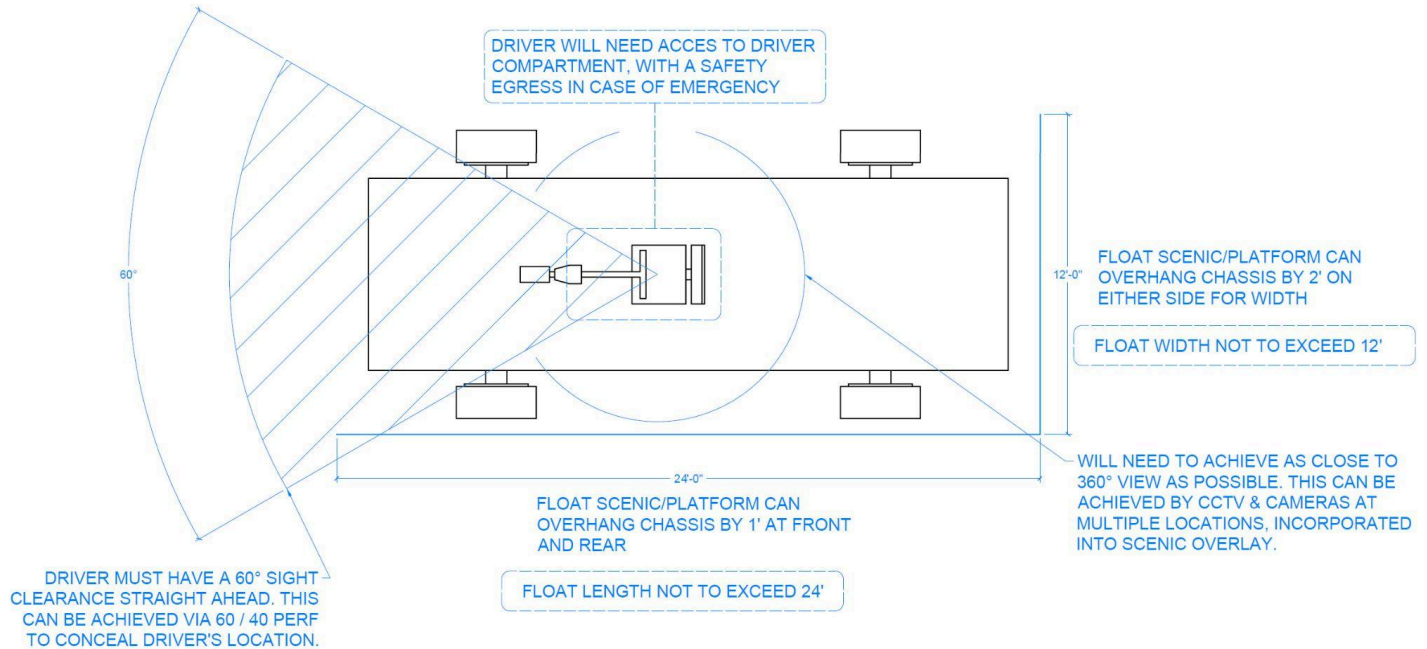
The design also needs left, right, front, and back elevations with dimensions. Draw these in close reference to the plan view. It's best to overlay the drawings using tracing paper or use layers in a digital app to be sure all the features of the float actually line up and are a consistent size. Label each drawing clearly.



Merchandise Cart Concept
Jetta Gerds '26

Chassis Template

You may draw over the provided chassis template. The chassis may or may not be visible in your final drawings. Show it if it helps communicate any key features. Note the max width and length!



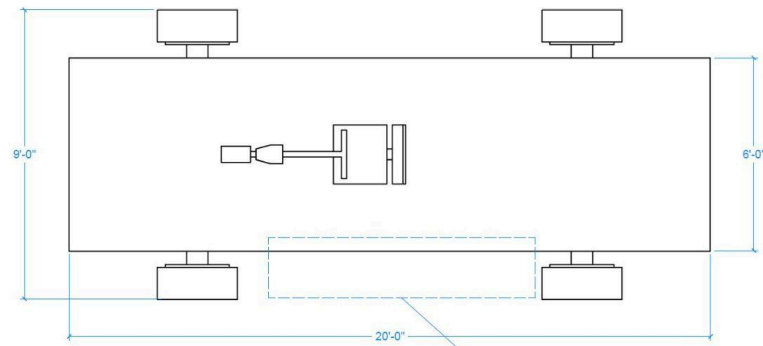
SPECIAL NOTES:

- FLOAT WILL NEED SAFE ENTRY & EGRESS FOR ANY PERFORMANCE OR SHOW PERSONNEL.
- MATERIAL SELECTIONS SHOULD BE CONSIDERED, KEEPING IN MIND FIRE SAFETY & MAINTENANCE CONSIDERATIONS.

Chassis Template

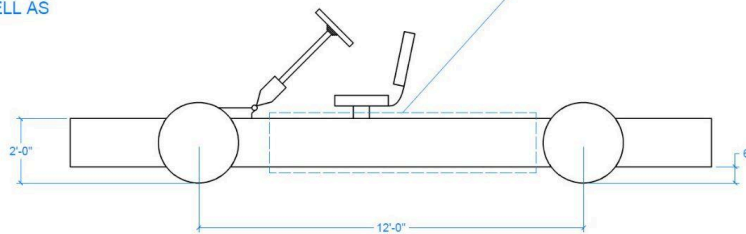
You may draw over the provided chassis template. The chassis may or may not be visible in your final drawings. Show it if it helps communicate any key features. Note the important features such as access panels for electrical and the driver!

CHASSIS → FRONT WHEEL STEER / REAR WHEEL PUSH



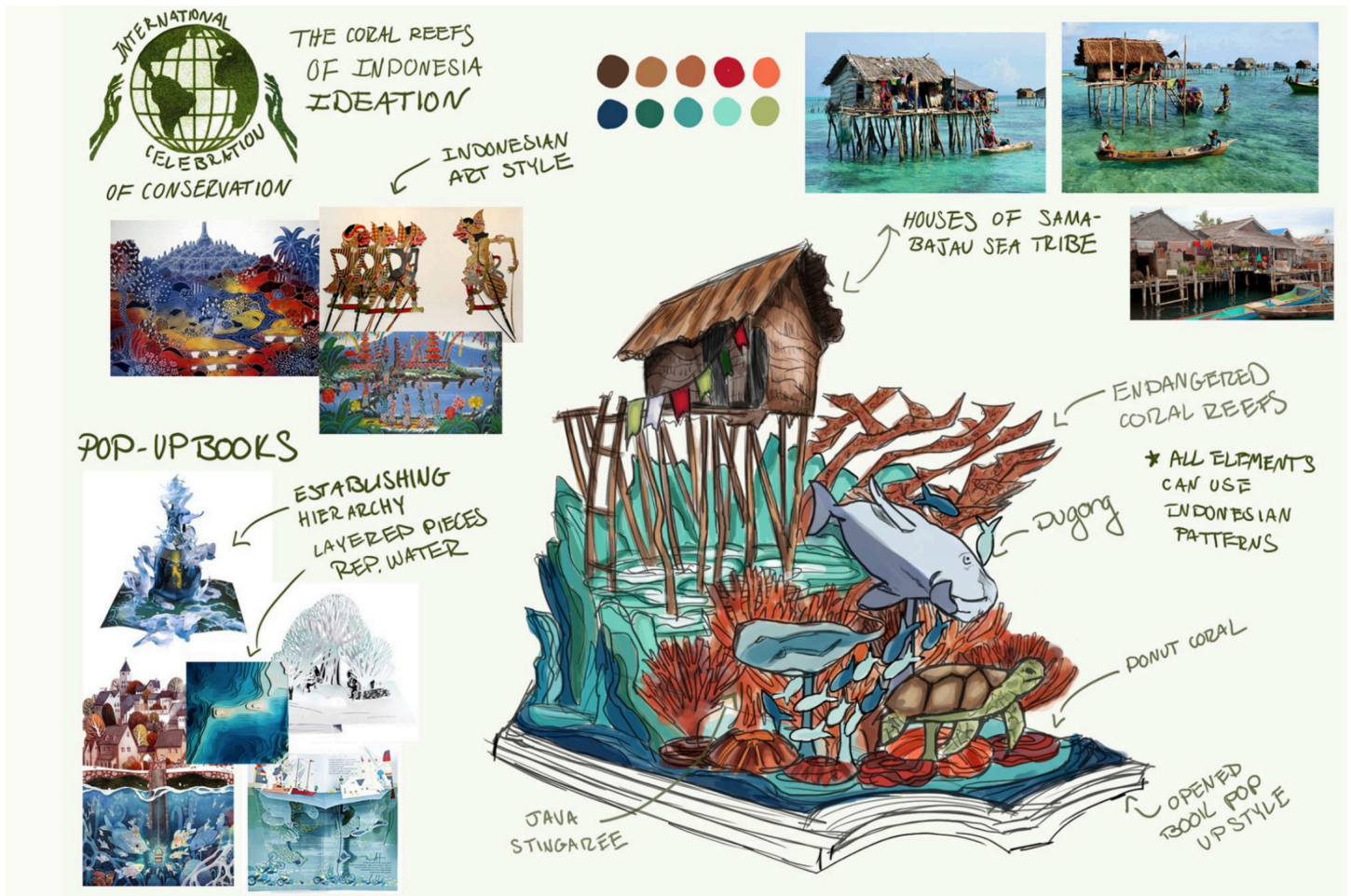
NOTE: MUST INCORPORATE A SCENIC/PERFORMANCE PLATFORM/DECK ON TOP OF CHASSIS. THIS WILL PROVIDE STRUCTURE TO ATTACH SCENIC & ALLOW SPACE FOR HOUSING MECHANICAL/ELECTRICAL COMPONENTS, AS WELL AS DRIVER COMPARTMENT.

A COMPARTMENT WILL NEED TO BE DEDICATED TO BATTERIES/CHARGING SYSTEM & ELECTRICAL PANELS. THESE COMPONENTS WILL NEED TO BE ACCESSIBLE THROUGH THE SCENIC OVERLAYS FOR DAILY OPERATIONS & MAINTENANCE.



Callouts

Now make a copy of the perspective drawing and identify the locations of the important features specified in the operational requirements, and any special features, technology, movement or lighting within the float. This is a callout sheet. You may use images inset on the sheet to add additional clarity to your concept.



Coral Reef Conservation Parade Float Concept

Sophie Kramer, Amanda Caldera, Brian Gweon '24

Project Deliverable - Let's Put it all together and DELIVER!

The deliverable for this project is a pitch deck or slide show. Below is a basic outline for that deck and a template is provided. Have fun with the design of the deck. How can you let the theme and story of this float be reflected in the layout, colors, fonts, and graphics of the presentation deck? You may develop this deck in any app you like, as long as the file you upload is a PDF version of that deck. Be careful, often exporting PDFs of slides alters the formatting or fonts. Test your PDF exporting early before you get too attached to your layouts, fonts, and graphics.

Final Submission must be delivered in a PDF presentation with the following:

1. Project Title (give it a fun name!), Your Name, School, Grade Level
2. Concept Treatment – Four short paragraphs that explain your design concept
 - a. Paragraph 1 – Introduction. Give us a sentence or two about it.
 - b. Paragraph 2 – Theme (what's it about) & Story (what happens).
 - c. Paragraph 3 – Operations. Describe some key features of how this float works.
 - d. Paragraph - Closer (Summarize how amazing this is going to be!)
3. Inspiration/reference photos that capture the spirit, story, and theme of your float concept.
Feel free to use AI to generate some inspiration.
4. A few sketches that explore multiple ideas.
We don't recommend using AI for these.
5. One final perspective concept drawing of your float concept in full color.
6. Plan view with Dimensions
7. Left, right, front, and back elevations with dimensions (all 4 views on 1 sheet)
8. Callout drawing identifying key features
9. BONUS: Create a cast of characters for your float, such as star characters, supporting actors, dancers, puppeteers, musicians, etc. Communicate this through writing and some drawings.



Costume Concept
Brian Gweon '25

All of these deliverables serve one key purpose...Communication! You are communicating to your leadership, the marketing department, finance, operations, talent, all the other creative departments, and, very importantly, a fabrication partner. The drawings and all that thinking you captured in your concept treatment should say as much as you can about the float concept. Try to imagine what questions you are leaving unanswered. Pitch this to your peers who are either theme park fans, aspiring artists and designers, your teachers, or anyone who might be interested and have interesting insights. If you can gather feedback, make revisions, and even document THAT process...

...NOW you're DESIGNING!!!

Additional Requirements

- Students may work in black & white for most of the deliverables.
- The final perspective image must be in color.
- Students may work in traditional drawing, digital 2D design apps, or digital 3D modeling apps.
- Students may NOT use intellectual property (“IP”) from existing parks like Universal or Disney, nor any other existing IP from any other media.
- The ideas you develop must be original.
- The design you submit must NOT have been entered in, or won, previous contests or awards. (You can recycle ideas, but not the actual designs)
- The submission also must NOT have been published or distributed previously in any media
- By submission of an entry, you grant to Ringling College and any prize providers, including Universal Creative, all necessary rights to display the work in any medium for promotional purposes.
- AI may be used for early brainstorming and inspiration only.
- Perspective, Plan, and Elevation views may NOT be generated using AI!

Rubric

RCAD + UC Design Competition							 
Criteria	Ratings					Pts	
Storytelling An understanding of storytelling concepts and the ability to develop a narrative and experience centered on story. The ability to translate stories into themed experiences.	20 pts Killing it!	17 pts Exceeds expectations	15 pts Meets Expectations	13 pts Below Expectations	0 pts Not Evident	20 pts	
Functionality & Practicality Consideration for the operational requirements of the proposed design. The thing must perform the desired function(s) and be feasible to build, maintain and operate.	20 pts Killing it!	17 pts Exceeds expectations	15 pts Meets Expectations	13 pts Below Expectations	0 pts Not Evident	20 pts	
Ingenuity Designs must be uniquely original and well thought out. Surprise the guest with design solutions that they don't see everyday.	20 pts Killing it!	17 pts Exceeds expectations	15 pts Meets Expectations	13 pts Below Expectations	0 pts Not Evident	20 pts	
Visual Appeal All deliverables should be pleasing to the eye, interesting to look at and clean.	20 pts Killing it!	17 pts Exceeds expectations	15 pts Meets Expectations	13 pts Below Expectations	0 pts Not Evident	20 pts	
Concept Communication Demonstrate the ability to create and communicate multiple creative concepts utilizing various visualization tools and techniques. Proficient skills in drawing, CAD drawing, ideation sketching, digital drawing, model-making, and written and verbal communication of creative concepts.	20 pts Killing it!	17 pts Exceeds expectations	15 pts Meets Expectations	13 pts Below Expectations	0 pts Not Evident	20 pts	
Total Points: 100							

Inspiration and Reference

Universal Mega Movie Parade

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Lxpjhu8NmEc>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8ywL7XNAnsE>

Behind the Scenes - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xR8svyysZPE>

<https://blog.discoveruniversal.com/attractions/a-deep-dive-into-universal-mega-movie-parade/>

Universal Mardis Gras

<https://blog.discoveruniversal.com/behind-the-scenes/behind-the-beads-how-mardi-gras-parade-floats-are-brought-to-life-at-universal-orlando-resort/>

Universal Orlando's Holiday Parade Featuring Macy's

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8o7PT0Pcm4Q>

POKEMON, MINIONS & MARIO! NO LIMIT PARADE!

[Universal Studio Osaka Japan](#)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=69K2o7gpUf8>

Disney's Magic Happens

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kYN7hkwA7Gg>

<https://www.laughingplace.com/w/articles/2020/02/12/preview-behind-the-scenes-of-magic-happens-disneylands-all-new-daytime-parade/>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JdUFiWU3D8s>

A working roller coaster float! Note the chassis inside!

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KL8TFISLlu4&t=7s>

What Does It Take to Make a Rose Parade Float?

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=i92SyuPUQJw&t=3s>

Raul Rodriguez - Mr. Rose Parade

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gtlYkxUIxR0&t=1s>

Miscellaneous

<https://thedesigntourist.com/louisiana-mardi-gras-behind-the-scenes-and-a-brief-history/>

<https://www.studioycreations.com/portfolio/parade-floats-2>

<https://www.studioycreations.com/post/7-parade-float-theme-ideas>

<https://www.studioycreations.com/post/types-of-parade-floats-and-their-benefits>