

BOOT CAMP

Building a Showstopper

OBJECTIVE: Students will evaluate a topic and determine whether a showstopper spread is the best coverage choice by identifying what content and images could visually tell the story of one major topic area.

STEP 1: MINI-LESSON

Before watching the video, bootcamp builds on the foundational design concepts covered in the 2025 series. If your staff is new to yearbook or still learning the basics of spread design, dominant photos, headlines, captions and grid design, watch the 2025 Bootcamp videos first before completing this activity. The 2026 series focuses on selecting the best coverage approach for a topic, not teaching the basic components of a spread.

Watch the Bootcamp 2026: Showstopper Spread video.

After viewing, discuss the following:

Characteristics of a Showstopper Spread

- Designed around the content and images that best tell the story
- Features one dominant element that immediately grabs attention
- Uses large photos, cutouts, typography and visual storytelling
- Serves as a visual break from traditional coverage spreads.
- Focuses on one major topic or idea
- Allows designers to push beyond the grid while still maintaining structure

Emphasize the key question from the video:

"What is the biggest way I can showcase this story to my reader?"

Explain that showstopper spreads work best when:

- A topic has strong visual potential
- One image, object, trend or experience can become the focal point
- The content is significant to student life or school culture
- The goal is to create a memorable visual experience for the reader

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STEP 2: SHOWSTOPPER BRAINSTORM

Part 1: What's Worth Going Big? (Group Activity)

Place students in groups of 3-4.

Provide each group with a topic card such as:

- Homecoming
- Friday Night Football
- Band Camp
- State Fair
- School Trends
- Student Backpacks
- Painted Parking Spots
- School Spirit
- Pep Rally Traditions
- Favorite Fall Foods

Groups discuss:

- What is the most visual part of this topic?
- What could become the dominant element?
- What would immediately grab a reader's attention?
- Why does this topic deserve a showstopper instead of another spread type?

Students then select one dominant storytelling element to build around.

Examples:

- A giant backpack cutout
- An oversized painted parking space
- A collection of student trend items
- A large action image from band camp
- A dramatic football photo

Part 2: Inspiration Hunt

Place students in groups of 3-4.

Using magazines, yearbooks, Pinterest boards, Walsworth samples or design galleries, students find one design idea that could inspire their showstopper.

Students should identify:

- One design technique they like
- One photo treatment
- One typography idea
- One way the design breaks from a traditional spread

The goal is to train students to look for inspiration, just as recommended in the video.

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STEP 2: SHOWSTOPPER BRAINSTORM

Part 3: Software Design Sprint

Using InDesign or Yearbook 360 – Online Design, students create a rough showstopper wireframe.

Their layout should include:

- One dominant visual element
- A large headline package
- One supporting coverage area
- Intentional white space
- At least one area where they move beyond the traditional grid

The goal is creating visual impact, not finishing the spread.

STEP 3: CLOSURE

Conduct a quick gallery walk.

Each group shares:

- Topic
- Dominant Storytelling Element
- Why It Deserves a Showstopper
- Favorite Design Choice