

Theater Marquee Design: Constraints



From the moment you encounter a theatre, before entering the building, you are in a designed experience that evokes excitement through a dazzling array of thousands of individual, sparkling light bulbs. These magnificent marquee signs leave a lasting impression, in Chicago, New York, Las Vegas, and theaters around the country. Marquee designers have very specific rules they must follow, using a grid of lightbulbs and lightbulb colors, usually red, white, blue, yellow and sometimes green. Design an eye-catching marquee shape for your favorite theater!

Learning objectives

- Basic understanding of using a grid through practice
- Ability to make abstract representations of complex imagery
- The value of constraints in a design process

Materials needed

- Paper
- Pens/markers/crayons/pencils
- Printouts of grids

What is your favorite theater? Does it show music, movies, plays, musicals, comedians? How could a marquee sign encourage people to visit? What would grab the attention of someone on the street? What would be iconic enough that people would know what theater it was just by the sign? Think about how your design might answer these questions.

— **Step 1: Decide what theater you want to design for.**

Pick a theater you'd like to design a marquee for. You can use the Chicago examples at the top, or pick a different theater. If you want, you can make up a theater of your own. What would the marquee of a theater in Hogwarts look like? In Auradon? In District 1 in Panem?

— **Step 2: Design your marquee shape and light colors**

What shape will your marquee be? Will it be the shape that is eye catching, or the colors? Maybe both? Does your design use a pattern? Does your design respond to the theater in any way, either its name or the type of performances, or is it just amazing looking?

Once you have an idea, use the different grids to fill in the "lightbulbs" and design your marquee sign. Pay attention to how the different grid sizes force you to adjust your idea. Are some more successful than others? Do you prefer one over another? Why? Constraints—rules, limitations, or guidelines—are important in design. They are often set by clients, or the person who hired the designer. Although they can sometimes be frustrating, they help to guide the design.

When you're done with your project, take a picture and share it with us! We'd love to know what theater you were designing for, and to see how your design changed between the three different grids. You can tag us on social media (@designmuseumchi on Instagram, Facebook, and Twitter) or email us at info@designchicago.org. We're looking forward to seeing your work!

Sample projects

Your Name: Kevin Grade: _____

Small Grid Medium Grid Large Grid

Step 1: Outline the basic shape of the sign in pencil on all three of the above grids.

Step 2: Pick only two colors, and color in white dots to represent the sign.

Remember: You won't make the perfect sign on your first try. Keep going!

Your Name: Nar Jewel Sincbir Grade: _____

Small Grid Medium Grid Large Grid

Step 1: Outline the basic shape of the sign in pencil on all three of the above grids.

Step 2: Pick only two colors, and color in white dots to represent the sign.

Remember: You won't make the perfect sign on your first try. Keep going!

Your Name: Tamariyan na Lev Grade: _____

Small Grid Medium Grid Large Grid

Step 1: Outline the basic shape of the sign in pencil on all three of the above grids.

Step 2: Pick only two colors, and color in white dots to represent the sign.

Remember: You won't make the perfect sign on your first try. Keep going!

Your Name: Joseph Andrew Grade: _____

Small Grid Medium Grid Large Grid

Step 1: Outline the basic shape of the sign in pencil on all three of the above grids.

Step 2: Pick only two colors, and color in white dots to represent the sign.

Remember: You won't make the perfect sign on your first try. Keep going!

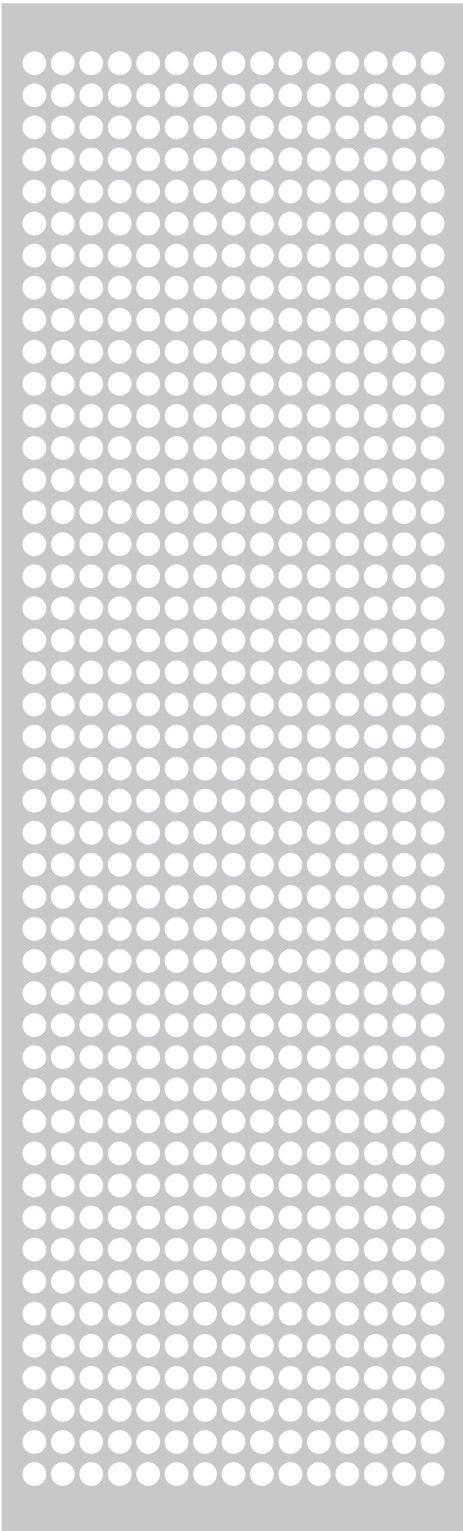
Can't get it

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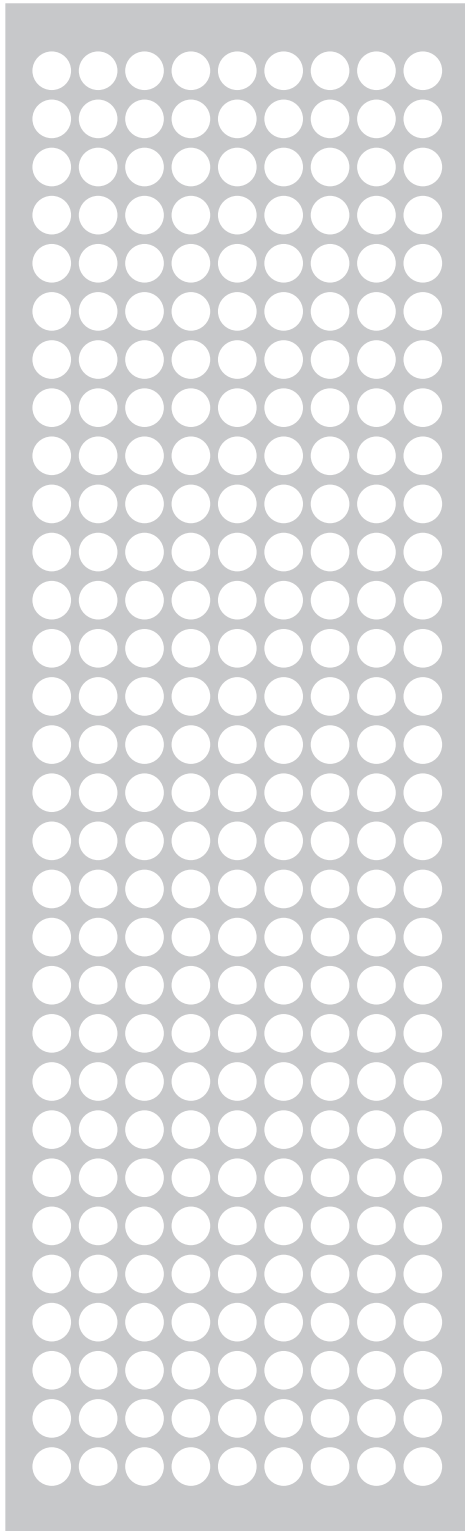
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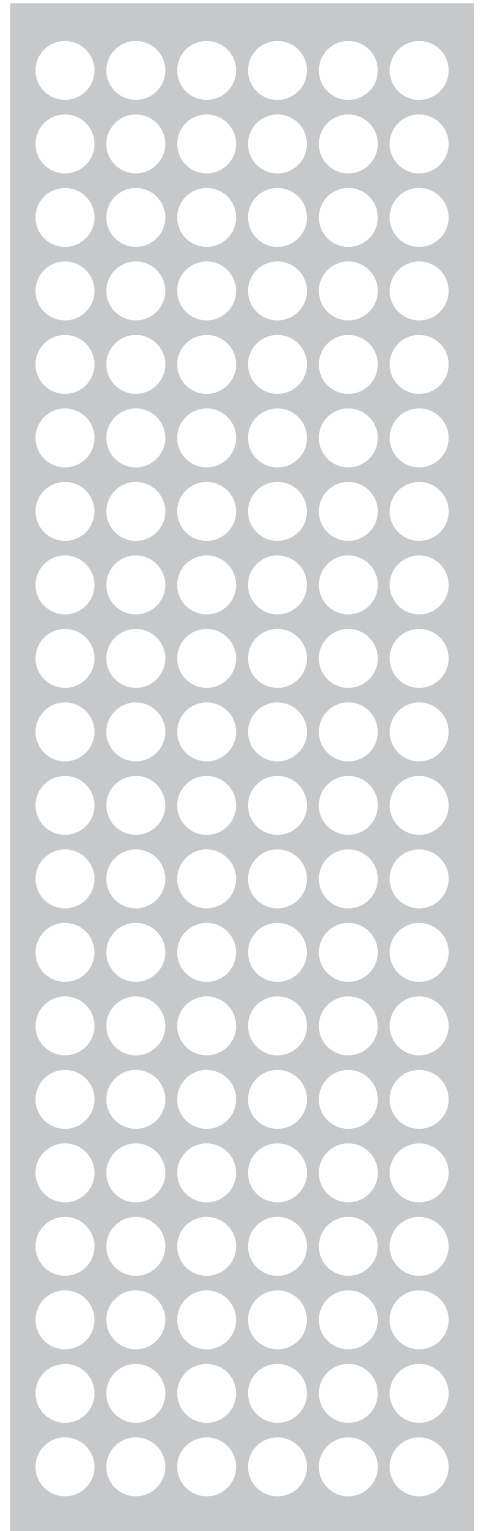
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Medium Grid



Large Grid

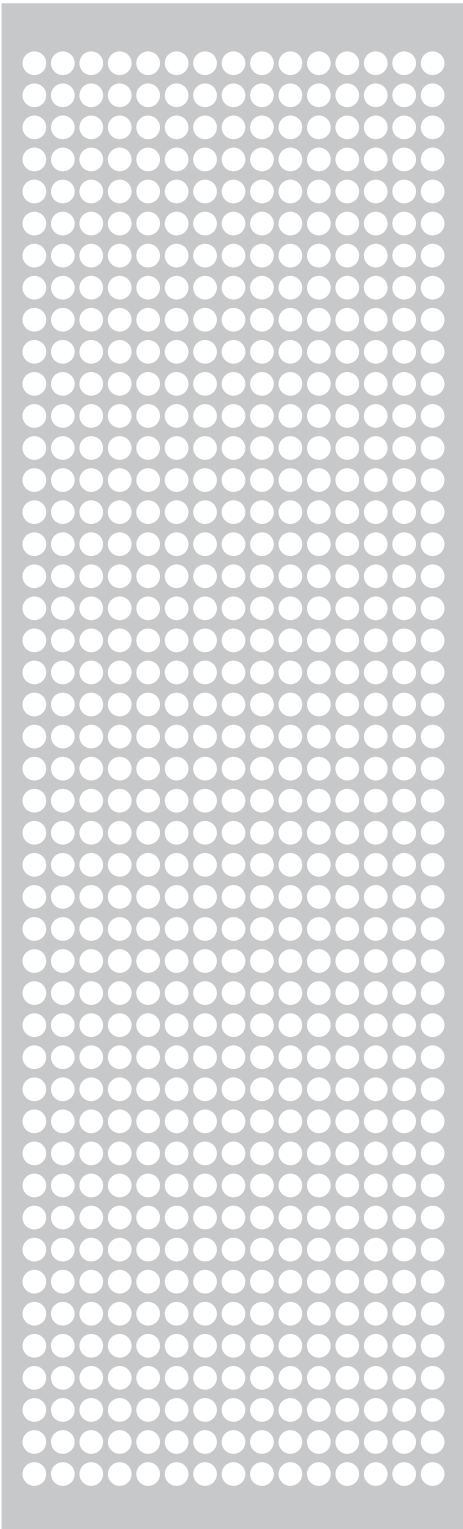


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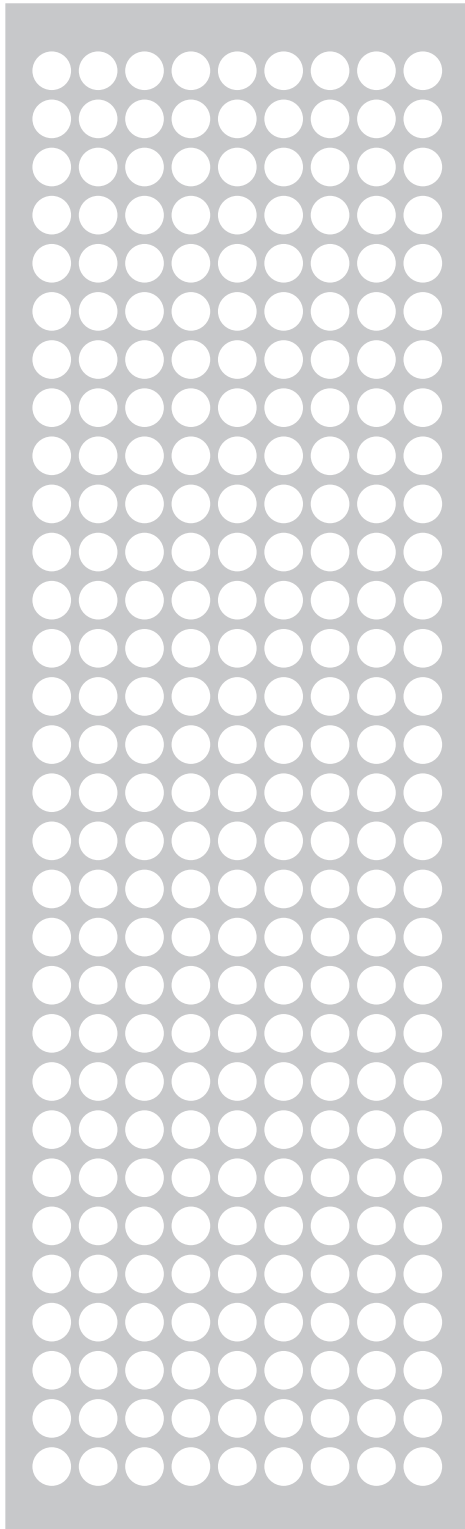
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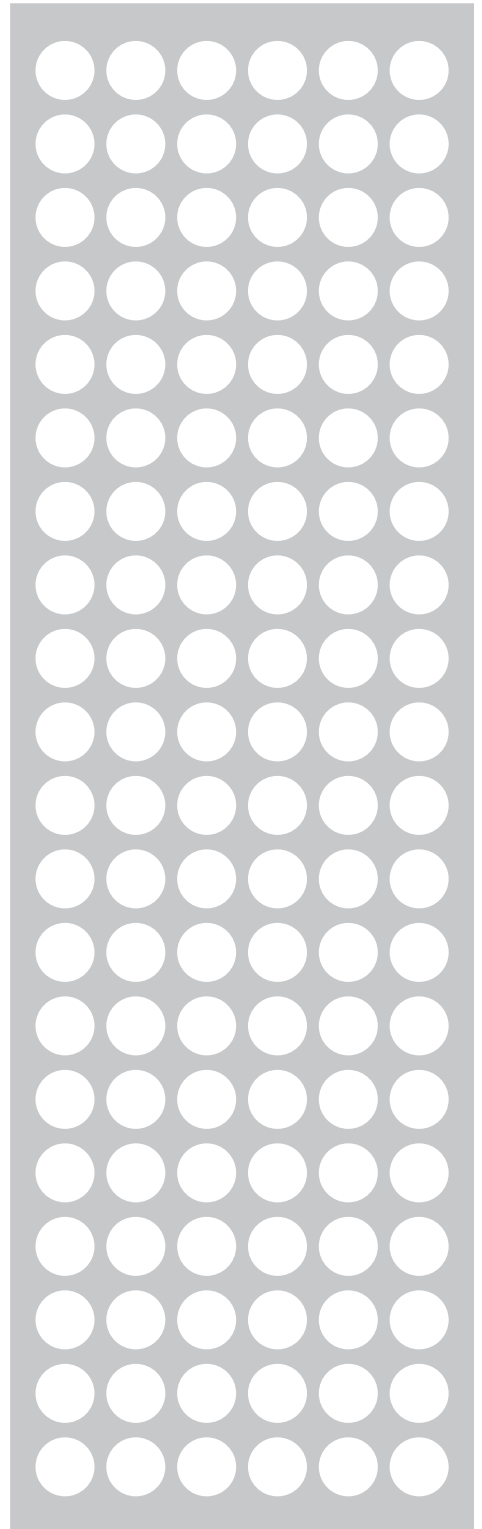
Small Grid



Medium Grid



Large Grid

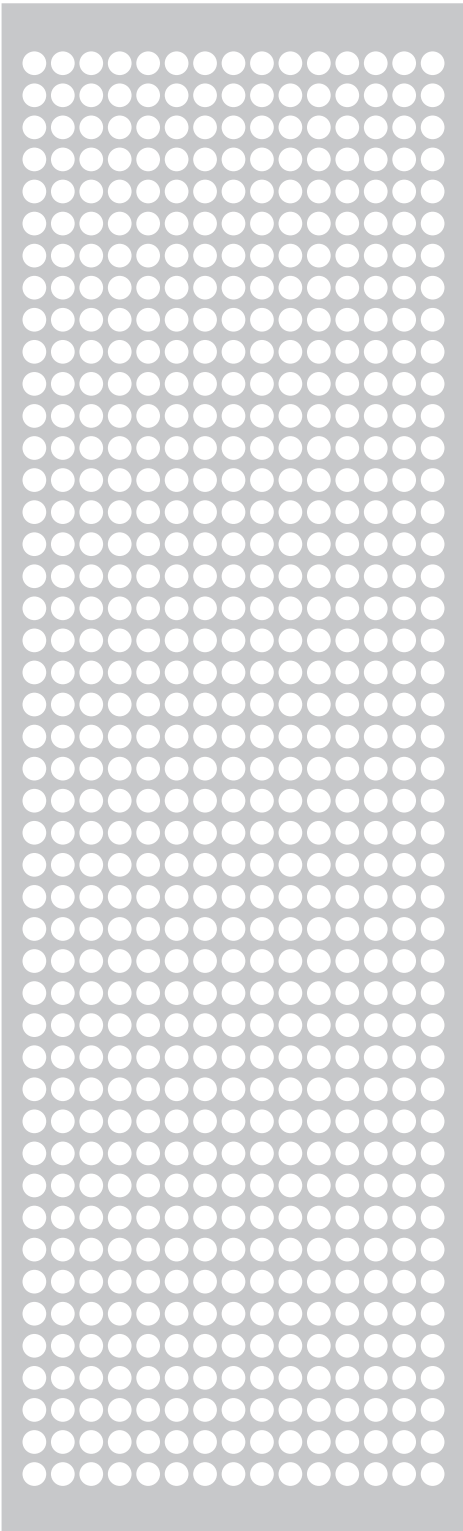


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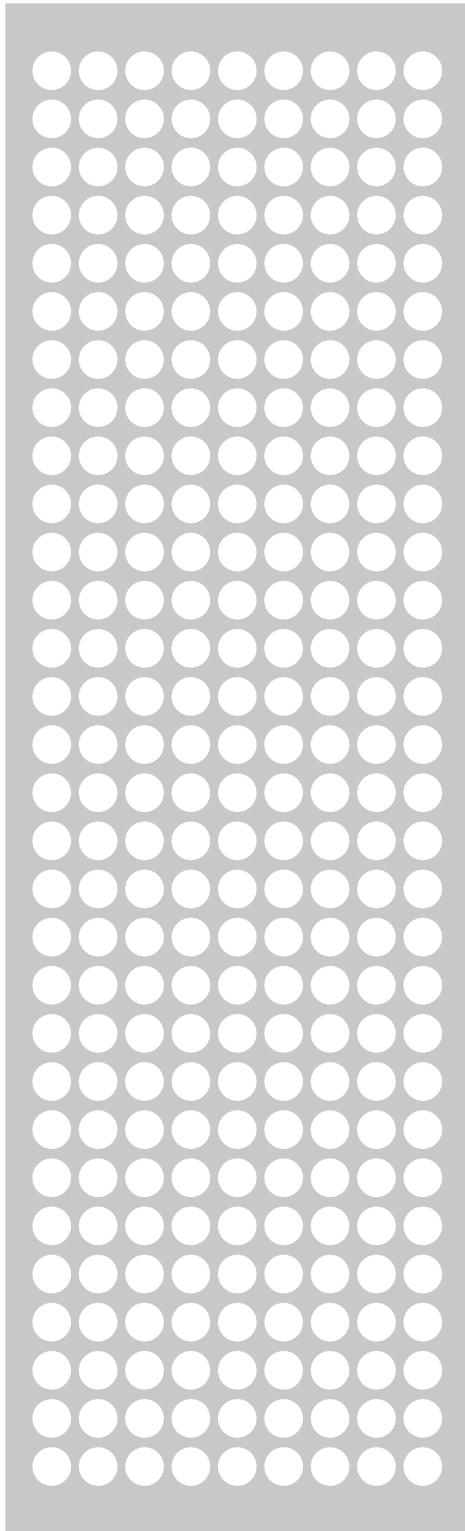
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Small Grid



Medium Grid



Large Grid

