

Animation for education

Animation Course For Teachers

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Pre-Production Modelling

The pre-production part of making any film is the most important stage. Encourage the class to take their time making their models. If the models are rushed they won't last, look as good as they could or work when they are animated and brought to life.

There are some limitations to Model Animation using plasticine. The material is heavy and when hot, weak, not a great combination. So learning the limitations and rules of the art and craft of model animation is an important journey and can take time. But with the help of the clues listed below you can get excellent results quickly with age groups aged 8+.

From the moment you start to unwrap the plasticine you are on a journey of creative problem solving. And the reason why Nick Park is such a genius is because of his approach to problems within the art and craft of model animation. He doesn't shy away from them he embraces them. ie lip sync and making a human model walk.

1- Keep the models simple in their design, this makes it easier to animate them and bring them to life. The camera prefers to focus on a simple design, it makes it easier to watch the action/ animation later and the model has a better chance of staying in one piece for the duration of the filming.

2- The model must be able to stand up on it's own.

So big feet are a must.

Thick stumpy legs and not long thin ones.

Four legs are better than two.

Keep the all the weight of the model at the bottom and not the top, eg Dinosaurs are great because most of their weight is at the bottom, T-rex and Brontosaurus. Elephants are also good because they are solid and their trunks and ears are great to animate and bring to life.

3- Limit the models makers so they don't try to do too much.

Have two - three features on the models face and head that can be animated. So with the elephant this could be, eyes, ears and trunk. Plenty.

The same for the body two or three things that can be animated and brought to life. Legs would count as one thing, arms one thing and then a tail or a hoover attachment that came out of the aliens tummy and hoovered up the rubbish.

4- My experience is that if you don't limit pupils they naturally try and do too much and the model becomes so big and heavy that it will have no chance of standing up. Also if there's too much to look at we don't know where to look when we watch the animation later. Remind the class about Pingu the penguin. How many features does he have on his face that are animated and brought to life? Two. Simple and effective.

5- Keep the design bold.

Eyes must be able to stand out. Yellow eyes on a blue face looks great and the camera loves it.

The features must be animatable. So if a pupil chooses to animate the ears they must be large enough to manipulate and move and consequently bring to life.

Let them make yellow elephants and blue lizards.

With animation we can make the impossible happen.

Storyboarding

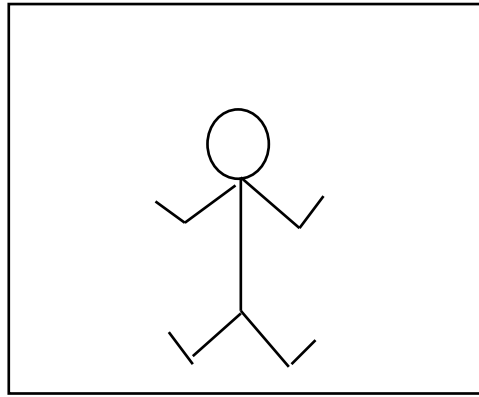
1- Start by making a bullet point list of about 25 actions all the models within the group can do.

After the description of the action write how long that particular piece of action will last in seconds then frames. This makes sure that the animators take enough pictures/frames.

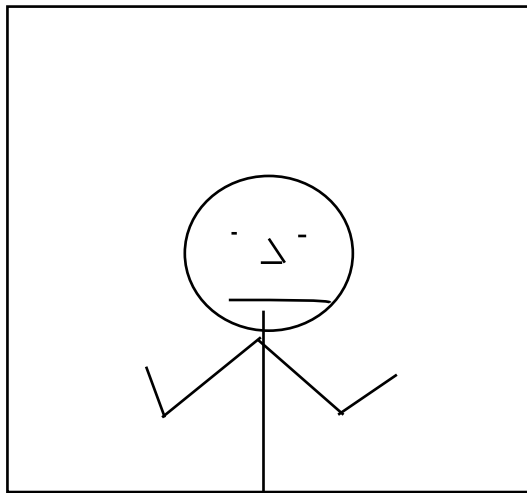
2- Then you have the option of turning these actions/ events into pictures with a storyboard.

The storyboard encourages the process of thinking with pictures. A film is story telling with pictures/images.

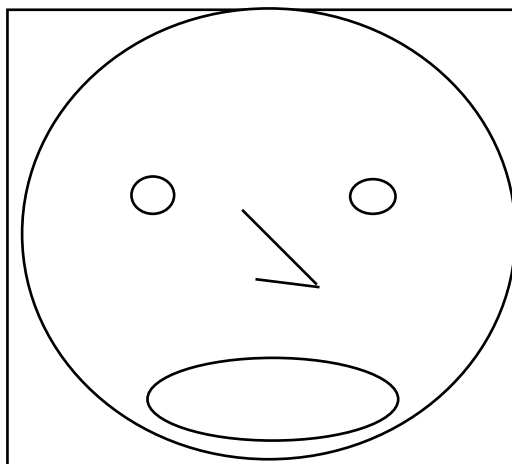
3- The three main shots to use are the Long shot, Mid shot and Close up. Try to get a good mix of all of them within your work. But beware too much camera movement and zooming around can ruin a film, it becomes very jerky and difficult to watch. And if the small units of action (blinking or winking) are in a long shots they will be missed because they're too far away.



Long Shot
Puts the subject matter in their environment



Mid Shot
Emphasis is on the subject matters actions and words.



Close up
Emphasise Emotion, information, action and reaction.

Shooting

1- Set the camera up for “One frame at a time” mode. The other options are “Normal” and “Time Lapse.” Click on the video camera picture and then settings.

2- Start each scene with 12 shots of just the scenery and no action.

One shot per movement of the model or models.

Six shots for a pause of the action.

Three or four shots before and after you move the camera angle.

12 shots to end a scene.

3- Keep the movements small and the action will look very smooth. If the movements are too big the action will become jerky.

Don't take the models off the table if you can help it.

Treat the models with care.

Make sure the camera person and animators communicate otherwise you will have lots of unwanted hands in the scenes.

4- When you watch your work you must remember to save the footage you've just shot otherwise you will lose it.

Resources:

Training CD from www.animationforeducation.co.uk

With the classroom friendly getting started interactive whiteboard presentation, animation software lesson plans, curriculum ideas, animation examples and printables. Works with Mac and PC.

£15.00 plus £3.00 postage and VAT

Materials.

Lewis, Newplast, Plasticine From Newclay Products.

Books

Visit the site below for links to some great books from Amazon.

www.animationforeducation.co.uk

A resource for schools.

Websites

www.animationforeducation.co.uk

A resource for schools.

www.stopmotionanimation.com

A fabulous resource for all animators and those curious about the art

www.animationartist.com

Always updated with animation news, articles and tips for new animators - includes product reviews

www.brickfilms.com

A great website with animations made only with lego.

ANIMATION FOR EDUCATION

I run Model Animation (Wallace and Grommet style) courses in Primary and Secondary Schools, using plasticine and five computers linked to digital cameras. The course introduces pupils and staff to the art and craft of model animation.

The day long course starts with a model making session where each pupil makes a model from Plasticine. Then in groups of five they story board a simple story involving each of their characters. After lunch they shoot their film in their groups with one group per computer and camera. During the afternoon five films the pupils will produce lasting 30- 45 seconds each. A DVD copy of all the pupils work with music and titles added is sent to the school a few days later.

All materials, equipment and a video copy of the days work are included in the price.

“The workshop was excellent, interesting and informative”- Saint Mary, Kings Ottery.

“An excellent platform to introduce young and old to animation” - Coombeshead College.

“Great day, great fun, I’m ready to teach the kids now!” - Queen Elizabeth's, Devon.

Model animation covers many areas of the national curriculum, maths, English, ICT practice, art and design and is the perfect cross-curricular activity.

I have been running model animation courses/workshops for young people in Schools, Art Centres and for film festivals for the last eight years. Over the last three years I have been working for LEA's, PDC's, EAZs and in schools, on inset training days, introducing teachers to the world of model animation, from Scotland to Cornwall.

Oscar has made short model animation films with community groups that have been screened at festivals, won awards and extracts screened on television