

STOPMO

Studio

Stop-Motion Animation Workshop



LESSON
5

CREATING CHARACTERS FOR ANIMATION



Introduction

This guide will introduce you to the methods and process involved in the creation of sturdy clay characters for use in stop-motion animation. You will learn about armatures, including how to construct them, and view examples of animated films that employ them. You will then create and build the characters needed for your stop-motion animation video.

- Appreciate the attention to detail and time requirements associated with professional animation production;
- Identify the characters needed for your animated production;
- Create and build stop-motion animation characters.

Learning Outcomes

Upon completion of this lesson, you will be able to:

- Identify methods and parameters for successfully building strong and sturdy stop-motion animation clay characters;
- Explain what an armature is and how to construct one;
- Discuss various examples of animation that contain armatures;

Simple Sturdy Characters

Materials Required to Make a Simple Character

To make your own clay animation characters, here is a list of basic materials you will need:

- Plasticine in a variety of colours (you can also use similar products called Sculpey and Fimo)
- Sculpting tools

Modelling clay that is oil-based is perfect for stop-motion animation characters, as it will not dry out and crack.



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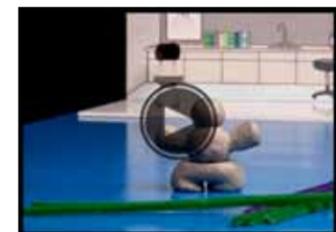
To see how sturdy characters are made in NFB workshops, watch the following video:



Creating Characters, Clip 7:
(4 min 30 s)

More Complex Characters

For more creative tips on how to build more elaborate characters, watch the following video:



Creative Tips, Clip 4:
More about Creating Characters
(1 min 23 s)

Armatures

Materials Required to Make an Armature

A more elaborate character, often used in professional animation, requires the building of a wire armature. An armature is the strong inside skeleton of a clay character that

can articulate, usually by means of ball-and-socket joints. This allows for the creation of a stronger character that can be positioned in more complicated poses.

Materials required to build an armature include:

- Aluminum wire (or pipe cleaners)
- Aluminum foil
- Various bits of hardware, wing nuts, bolts, screws, etc.
- Wire cutters
- Needle-nose pliers
- Safety glasses (tiny pieces may snap off the wire while you're cutting it)

The following site provides examples of wire armatures:

Joshua Mosley's Tutorial on Building Armatures for Clay Animation

joshuamosley.com/tutorials/claymationArmature/armature.html

Stop Motion Works' Photo Gallery of Armatures

stopmotionworks.com/gallery2.htm

Explore the following examples of NFB animation containing armatures. As you will see, armatures can be made to look quite realistic or be totally outrageous. As you watch different selections, pay particular attention to the armature's facial features and movements. Also, note the detailed intricacies of the sets or backgrounds.

Animated Films Using Armatures

Madame Tutli-Putli by Chris Lavis and Maciek Szczerbowski (2007, 17 min 15 s)

nfb.ca/film/madame_tutli_putli_en

Synopsis: This film takes viewers on an exhilarating existential journey into the fully imagined, tactile world of Madame Tutli-Putli. As she travels alone on the night train with all her earthly possessions and the ghosts of her past, she faces both the kindness and menace of strangers. Finding herself caught up in a desperate metaphysical adventure, adrift between real and imagined worlds, Madame Tutli-Putli confronts her demons. (Recommended for grades 11–12.)

Note: While this film effectively shows the elaborate nature of puppet armatures, certain scenes contain mature content. It is recommended that educators view this film and select scenes of interest before screening it for their students.

Subservience by Patrick Bouchard (2007, 8 min 9 s)

nfb.ca/film/subservience

Synopsis: Bourgeois selfishness and the passivity of its servants take centre stage as a puppet show presents the tragicomedy of a society in its death throes, post apocalypse. (Recommended for grades 9–12; Ethics and Religious Culture, Ethical Values, Civics/Citizenship/Human Rights.)

The Hungry Squid by John Weldon (2002, 14 min 35 s)

nfb.ca/film/hungry_squid

Synopsis: This animated short spins a tall tale about young Dorothy and her myriad troubles: absentee parents, bad hair and a menagerie that devours her homework. But when her pet squid rampages through town and people finally realize that the homework-eating creatures aren't a figment of her imagination, Dorothy decides that it's time to get the situation under control. (Recommended for grades 5–9; Diversity/Pluralism/Identity, Health/Personal Development/Problem Solving, Family Studies.)

The Sand Castle by Co Hoedeman (1977, 13 min 17 s)

nfb.ca/film/sand_castle

Synopsis: A short animated film about the sandman and the creatures he sculpts out of sand. They build a castle and celebrate the completion of their new home, only to be interrupted by an unwanted guest. (Recommended for grades K–6; Arts Education/Visual Arts.)

Dehors novembre by Patrick Bouchard; in French (2005, 6 min 49 s)

nfb.ca/film/Dehors_novembre

Synopsis: Patrick Bouchard has crafted a poignant, unflinching animated film on the subject of death, as experienced outdoors, in the night, during the month of the dead. (Recommended for grades 9–12; Health/Personal Development/Substance Use, Abuse/Addiction, Family Studies/Home Economics, Aging/Death, Dying/Ethics, Religious Culture/Ethical Values, Arts Education.)

Note: Certain scenes of this film contain mature content. It is recommended that educators view this film and select scenes of interest before screening it for their students.



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Glasses by Brian Duchscherer
(2001, 22 min 32 s)

<http://www.nfb.ca/film/glasses>

Synopsis: An exploration of elementary school life and just how hard it can be when you don't see things quite the way everyone else does, yet still long to fit in. Milo would like to be invincible like his comic book hero, but for a shy, nearsighted kid, the humiliations of Grade 1 know no bounds. He lives in a lonely, blurry world until a visit to the eye doctor brings things into focus. Full of new-found confidence, he loses sight of who his friends really are—until an accident reminds him. (Recommended for grades K–6; Health/Personal Development/Healthy Relationships/Bullying and Discrimination.)

Through My Thick Glasses by Pjotr Sapegin
(2003, 12 min 31 s)

[nfb.ca/film/through_my_thick_glasses_film](http://www.nfb.ca/film/through_my_thick_glasses_film)

Synopsis: In this animated short, an old man tells his granddaughter of his experiences during the Second World War in an effort to distract her while putting on her winter hat. The tale is filled with strange characters, surprising plot twists and a world far beyond the little girl's comprehension. (Recommended for grades 7–12.)

Class Discussion: Armatures

Discuss the above animation containing armatures. What did you think of the characters? Did you find them to be realistic? Did you find the armatures that could display facial expressions and eye movement portrayed emotion extremely well? Could you relate to the characters? Did you like the characters' imperfections? Did the characters help pull you into the story?

Learning Activity: Investigating Puppet Armature and Set Creation

Review the following sites to get a sense of the elaborate work involved in the creation of puppet armatures and sets used in professional animation productions:

Madame Tutli-Putli Puppet and Set Design films.

<http://madametutliputli.com/putli.html>

<http://madametutliputli.com/putlimovies.html>

How long did it take to complete this production, from start to finish?

Fantastic Mr. Fox – In the Puppet Shop with Wes & Bill
(1 min 49 s)

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Q5pQvytHIEE>

Coraline: A Handmade Fairy Tale (13 min 3 s)

<http://www.laika.com/details.php?id=279&company=studio>

Coraline (2009; written and directed by Henry Selick) was the first stop-motion feature to be conceived and photographed in stereoscopic 3D.

Create and Build Your Characters

Now it's time to create the characters required for your production.

Learning Activity: Create Your Characters

In teams, discuss the number of characters you need to develop for your stop-motion video, as well as who these characters will be. You can use this **Creating Your Characters** sheet to help you with this task. The entire team will be responsible for contributing to the creation of these characters.

For some productions, you may need only one or two characters; for others you may need more. Your team will need to decide which team members will build the character(s) required for the animated production. Each student can build a maximum of one character.

Learning Activity: Building Your Characters

Now that you all know about character creation and have decided who your characters will be, it's time for you to start building. Regardless of the above team decision, all students will be expected to build a character, even if it is not used in the production. Students who do not build a character for the production can build a character of their choice.

CREATE YOUR CHARACTER

It may be helpful to conduct an imaginary interview with the character you are creating. Before you begin, decide whether you want your character to be male or female.

Then, ask your character to answer the following questions:

1. What is your name?

2. How old are you?

3. Where do you come from? Can you describe what it is like there?

4. What do you do there? Do you work? Can you discuss your work or studies?

5. What kinds of clothes do you like to wear?

6. Can you describe your culture?

7. What types of things do you like to do for fun?

8. Now, ask yourself: What “role” will your character play in your animation? (if applicable)
