

# S U P P O R T I N G L I T E R A C Y W I T H A N I M A T I O N

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### ABSTRACT

*Animation is an effective way of engaging students in literacy and topic-based projects, using ICT creatively and is a fun cross-curricular activity suited to the classroom environment. This hands-on course introduced tips and tricks to get started quickly and easily. We looked at examples of work, approaches to ideas that will engage and motivate students and then made a short 45 second animation in small groups. Animation is being used in schools wanting to work with a more creative curriculum.*

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I run Animation and Digital Video projects with local authorities all over the UK, from INSET days for teachers to creative projects with students in schools and colleges. I am also involved in production and training for the BBC, Creative Partnerships and the British Council. I started out fifteen years ago when the technology was emerging; during that time I have developed a method of learning and style of teaching that suits a variety of lesson times, resources, large mixed ability classes, and harnesses the ICT installed in every school around the UK.

Model Animation is also known as Stop Motion Animation, 3D Animation (not really correct) Claymation, Freeze Frame Animation and Stop Frame Animation.

The job of the animator is very simple, to give life! This can be with drawings, models, CGI (computer generated images) and even objects and people. There is a degree of magic and mystery surrounding any form of animation and during the countless workshops and courses I have run for every age group, I constantly see the same amazed reaction from the participants when they watch their first 10 seconds of animation. The amazement comes from the realisation that their models have been brought to life! They are alive! This magic empowers students of all ages and abilities to tell stories and entertain. Teenagers love model animation as it lends itself brilliantly to a more abstract and 'wacky' form of self-expression and storytelling.

Last year I finished a filmmaker's residency in a secondary school with Year 10 Art students. We made eight animation films on mental health issues and the films are to be used in other schools in the area with PSHE teachers as a way of kick starting discussions in class around the tricky issues of mental health. Model animation is a perfect medium for exploring these areas. Students don't feel so exposed and vulnerable exploring these awkward issues while a model is going through the experience, essentially the students are slightly removed but still completely involved making the creative and decisive decisions as well as understanding the issues. With animation we can make the impossible happen!

During CP3 2009 in Liverpool I was asked to run two x two hour sessions for up to 16 teachers. This is a common request during conferences to run short taster style sessions, giving participants a flavour of the possibilities of stop motion animation in the classroom. We used four Apple Mac laptops with webcams and 'I Can Animate' software. Participants worked in small groups and each group produced a short animated adaptation of a myth/legend, lasting between 12 and 30 seconds advert length. When the animation was finished we used iMovie on the Apple Macs to add a title, transitions, voiceovers and sound effects.

The finished films are excellent and prove that you can achieve great results in a short amount of time, while introducing participants to the three main areas of film production:

**Pre-production** – model making and writing a short story

**Production** – filming the advert length animated adaptation

**Post-production** – adding titles, transitions, music, voiceovers and sound effects

We are all used to reading the press articles surrounding the launch of a new animated classic which constantly refer to the fact that the animated film took 'Five years to make!' This is enough to put anyone off animating in the classroom. Teachers really don't have huge amounts of time to spare. So the two-hour animated session is a great way to prove that anyone can achieve great results quickly in the school environment, with limited and affordable resources.

I'm a great believer in animating stories/themes/topics that the whole class are familiar with, this keeps their minds focused and consequently the final outcomes are a lot better. If you do choose to take the more random approach and animate a dinosaur, doughnut and dog the students involved will have a great time, but the results will be unfocused and random.

There are now many opportunities for students and schools to screen their work at film festivals or online. There's no reason why the work shouldn't have a global audience when it's free to do so with YouTube or on the school website. I have a YouTube channel [www.youtube.com/claymot](http://www.youtube.com/claymot) one of the animations 'How to make a Mummy' made by teachers has been watched by 74,000 students from all over the world. And another made by Year 6 students, an adaptation of the Shakespeare play The Tempest, watched 3,500 times. So there are exciting opportunities to celebrate the work you make in school.

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### TIPS FOR MAKING GREAT MODELS THAT ARE EASY TO ANIMATE

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 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. 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, i.e. lip sync and making a human model walk.

- 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 later also the model has a better chance of staying in one piece for the duration of the filming.
- The model must be able to stand up on its own, so big feet are a must. Thick stumpy legs and not long thin ones. Four legs are better than two. Keep all the weight of the model at the bottom and not the top, e.g. dinosaurs are great because most of their weight is at the bottom, T-rex and Brontosaurus. Elephants are good because they are solid and their trunks and ears are great to animate and bring to life.
- Focus on two or three features on the models' faces and head that can be animated and brought to life. So with an elephant this could be eyes, ears and trunk. The same for the body; two or three things that can be animated. (Legs would count as one item.)
- Keep the design simple and bold. Eyes must be able to stand out. Yellow eyes on a blue face look great and the camera loves it. The features must be **animatable**. So if a student chooses to animate the ears they must be large enough to manipulate and move and consequently bring to life, so big features.

### TIPS FOR STORYBOARDING AND PLANNING AN IDEA

Start by making a bullet point list/shot list of about 25 actions highlighting the main action of the story. Next to each bullet point make a note of how long the action will last in seconds, then frames. This ensures the students will take enough shots/frames of the action. Even though they will be guessing the time of each bullet point/action it's better than ignoring and forgetting about the time.

Example:

- Elephant walks into frame, 3 seconds = 36 shots/frames
- Elephant waves trunk at camera, 4 seconds = 48 shots/frames

These times are based on the software working at 12 fps (frames per second)

Animation is a time-based medium. Nick Park for example times every tiny action that Wallace makes with a stopwatch. So if he wants Wallace to wave for three seconds, he knows that he needs to take 36 frames when working at 12 fps.

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 storytelling with pictures/images.

To help keep the story focused and simple keep the cast/models of the film down to just three or four characters. Frequently I've worked with students where there's a huge cast of fantastic models and the story becomes unfocused and messy. There are parallels with literacy; a story with too many characters is a lot harder to tell. Stick with ideas that the classes are familiar with.

### TIPS FOR SHOOTING YOUR ANIMATION

- Set your animation software to record at 12 or 15 fps this will make it much easier for students to achieve quality results.
- Start each scene with 12 shots of just the scenery and no action.
- One shot per movement of the model.
- Six shots to pause the action. These pauses are very important like a comma or full stop in a sentence.
- 12 shots to end a scene.
- Keep the movements small and the action will look very smooth. If the movements are too big the action will become jerky. Watch the work back as often as possible this will allow the students to evaluate their work and adjust the size of the moves.
- Don't take the models off the table if you can help it.
- Treat the models with care.
- Make sure the camera operator and animators communicate otherwise you will have lots of unwanted hands in the scenes.
- Filmmaking is a team activity and the groups that work the best together will make the best films.

### RESOURCES

#### TRAINING CD FROM [WWW.ANIMATIONFOREducation.CO.UK](http://WWW.ANIMATIONFOREducation.CO.UK)

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

£15.00 plus £3.00 postage and VAT

#### BOOKS

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

[www.animationforeducation.co.uk](http://www.animationforeducation.co.uk)

#### WEBSITES

[www.animationforeducation.co.uk](http://www.animationforeducation.co.uk)

Resource for schools

[www.stopmotionanimation.com](http://www.stopmotionanimation.com)

Resource for all animators and those curious about the art

[www.animationartist.com](http://www.animationartist.com)

Updated with animation news, articles and tips for new animators – includes product reviews

My own website

[www.oscarstringer.co.uk](http://www.oscarstringer.co.uk)

With examples of work and more tips and tricks for getting started.

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*Oscar Stringer has been working in schools all over the UK teaching animation to students of all ages and abilities for 12 years. During this time he has developed methods of approaching and using animation to suit the educational environment, supporting key areas of the curriculum.*

*Oscar works for the BBC as a freelance trainer and facilitator, using ICT as a creative tool to empower people of all ages. He has also worked with the British Council, Institute of Education, eTwinning and Apple Computers. When not teaching and training Oscar makes his own short films, which have had screenings on TV and film festivals all over the world. To watch his short films and animation projects made in schools visit [www.oscarstringer.co.uk](http://www.oscarstringer.co.uk)*