Developing Personality

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Her works include:
Gasping for Air (1993)
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Developing the personality of animated characters is an important part of animation production and should not be left to story development alone. You must know who your characters are before you can animate them. This exercise will help you develop a character's life story, worldview, and attitude and relate them to how the character responds to circumstances, and ultimately how it moves. It employs the Laban Movement Analysis theory of "Effort," which is the outward manifestation of inner intent through various qualities of movement. Effort provides a way to observe how intent mobilizes the Flow of Weight in Space and Time. It is a useful tool for evaluating and refining what a character is communicating.

Objective:

This exercise aids in the development of complex characters who reflect their personalities through action. The goal is to design a character that is authentically expressive of the effect their life's experiences have on their view of themselves within the world around them.

The first step is to develop a back history for the character. Then its movements are created in response to a given scenario, according to your gut feelings. Results are observed to see what movement qualities were chosen for the character's personality. Finally, movements are refined, using Effort to accentuate the key communication points of the character's actions.

You will need:
– Paper
– Writing utensil

Back History

Age
Family, friends
Goals/ambition
Sex life
Weaknesses
Environment
Gender
Religion
Morals
Intelligence
Obstacles
Self view
Era
Profession
Physical health
Education
Values
Flaws
Culture
Income
Hygiene
Need/purpose
Sense of humor
Talent
Ethnicity
Dreams
Diet
Idiosyncrasies
Fears
Addictions
Childhood

1

Develop the character's back history by writing a few notes for each item on the list to the left. The goal is to be imaginative and create a character that has a rich background of life experiences, yet is consistent and believable.

2

Write a few paragraphs that summarize the character; form the most significant parts of his history into a descriptive narrative. Be colorful! This is where you bring the character to life.

3

What is this character's motto? The motto's scope should include his view of himself as well as his view of the world around him.

4

Now you're ready to explore the personality a little more deeply. Based on what you've developed so far, how does the character evaluate situations, make decisions, and take action in the world? Using the chart below, rate him along each of the spectra. How strongly does your character exhibit one characteristic or the other? If he has the ability to swing in either direction, indicate the extent.

Attention / Thinking / Where

Explores all possibilities, takes in multiple points of view. Flexible.

Focuses on one thing at a time, gets right to the point. Narrow point of view.

Intention / Sensing / What

Handles situations with gentle consideration.

Takes a firm stance and applies pressure to get things done.

Commitment / Intuition / When

Takes time, lingers over decisions.

Ready to take action now.

Progression / Feeling / How

Doesn't hold back, open, goes freely with circumstances.

Hesitates, resists, fights against the situation.

Developing Personality

How do these factors influence the way the character expresses himself through movement? Let's place him in one of several scenarios. Based on his preferences in the previous exercise, write a one-paragraph narrative that tells the story of what happens when:

– Driving alone on an empty highway, the car runs out of gas …
– A friend gives your character a very tacky birthday gift…
– The character receives news about the death of a close relative . . .
– The character wins the lottery …

The final stage is to plan the animation of your chosen scenario using thumbnail sketches. Start by roughing out the actions; imagine the scenario you described and go with your intuition about how the scene should unfold. Work quickly and spontaneously until all actions have been sketched on paper.

Now evaluate what message comes from the animation you've planned. At this point you may wish to do a line test of your thumbnail sketches so that you can observe how the character communicates in time. To conduct the evaluation, see how decision-making styles described can be associated with Effort qualities of movement, using the following chart.

Attention/Thinking /Where	Explores all possibilities, takes in multiple points of view. Flexible.	Focuses on one thing at a time, gets right to the point. Narrow point of view.
Space Effort	Indirect: moves with full, three-dimensional gestures that indicate the surrounding space; joints are loose and bendable.	Direct: moves toward a single point in space; focused, zeroing in, pinpointed.
Intention/Sensing/What	Handles situations with gentle consideration.	Takes a firm stance and applies pressure to get things done.
Weight Effort	Light: handles objects with a light touch; moves with lightness and delicacy.	Strong: uses strong, forceful movement; powerful, vigorous, and impactful.
Commitment/Intuition /When	Takes time, lingers over decisions.	Ready to take action now.
Time Effort	Sustained: leisurely, no rush, taking all the time in the world; gradual changes or variations of speed.	Sudden: urgency, hasty, hurried, anxious, quick, or sudden changes of speed.
Progression/Feeling/How	Doesn't hold back, open, freely going with circumstances.	Hesitates, resists, fights against the situation.
Flow Effort	Free: relaxed, easy, abandoned, ready to go.	Bound: controlled, precise, restrained, ready to stop.

Here's an example to help you see how this works. Let's say your character is an exploring, urgent hesitator who considers things delicately, and has run out of gas. He sits in the car thinking about all the possibilities for dealing with this situation—his eyes seem to be looking at many thoughts inside his head as he sits quietly for a few moments. With sudden tension, he reaches for the door handle but rests his hand there lightly as he changes his mind about what to do. He looks around inside the car with tense anxiety, trying to decide on a plan of action. Then with

a sudden moment of focus, he decides, sitting upright and punching his fist down on the dashboard. With one quick, agile movement, he opens the car door and lands on his feet with a firm thud of conviction. He scans the horizon for signs of other traffic on the road and, gradually, headlights appear. As the car zooms by, the character becomes unsure once again—perhaps it's not safe to flag down a stranger? His waving gesture has little force behind it, as if his hand disappears into thin air, retreating in toward his torso with hesitancy and restraint.

The character's personality reflects Indirect Space, Light Weight, Sudden Time, and Bound Flow as movement preferences. Throughout the sequence of his postures and gestures, these different movement qualities ebb and flow, combining in different ways. While he is generally unsure of what to do, there are two accented moments when he combines Sudden Time with Strong Weight (punching the dashboard, landing with a thud), which shows momentary confidence toward taking action.

Tips and Cautions:

— Keep the ideas flowing and don't analyze or judge them! This is a preliminary exercise, and it is best to analyze and modify your character's actions only after you have committed initial ideas to paper.

Flipbook

Flipbooks are useful for helping animators to consolidate ideas, and to get an entire story, or aesthetic objective, expressed within a short period of time. If they can be easily reproduced, they also make interesting calling cards to give to potential employers or clients. This project provides the opportunity to draw animation by hand within a limited context: the two or three seconds of action provided by a flipbook.

Objective:

To create a fifty-page flipbook that explores the aesthetics of incremental movement, metamorphosis, and movement on three axes (x, y, and z).

You will need:

– Spiral sketchbook no bigger than 4 x 6 inches (10 x 15 centimeters) and no smaller than 2 x 3 inches (5 x 7.5 centimeters); it must contain at least fifty pages and the binding holes must be on the short side of the book
– Light table
– Drawing media or other creative materials
– Writing utensil
– White paper (for storyboard)
– Large needle
– Thread
– Lightweight card stock paper
– Scissors
– Glue stick
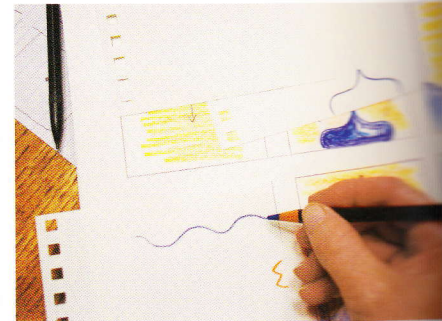– Ribbon or cord, approximately 1 foot (30 centimeters) long

Step 1a
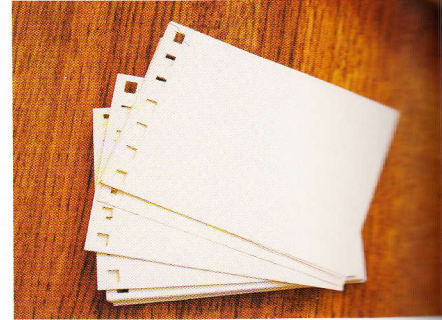
Step 1b
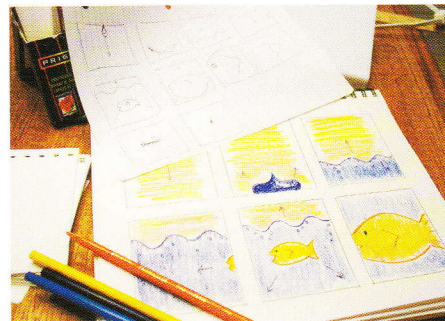
Step 7

Step 8

1

Remove the spiral binding that holds the sketchbook together. The holes in the paper will be used to bind the flipbook, so be sure to leave them intact.

2

Only the outer two-thirds of the pages can be used, since the inner one-third (the hole side) is covered when the pages are pinched together for flipping. Take one sheet of the sketchbook paper and mark out the inner one-third. The remaining area will be used as a guide to create windows for the storyboard.

3

Conceptualize a scenario that can be fully realized using about three seconds of information, and is simple enough to be seen in the small scale at which you are working.

4

To create dynamic movement, consider how the scenario can maximize incremental movement (moving around, rather than remaining in one spot), metamorphosis (changing shape), and movement on all three axes (x, or left/right; y, or up/down; and z, or foreground/background).

5

Create a rough ten-frame storyboard to guide the overall development of the book. Use arrows to indicate how figures will move from one frame to the next. The first window (1) should contain the first image of the flipbook and the last window (10) should contain the last.
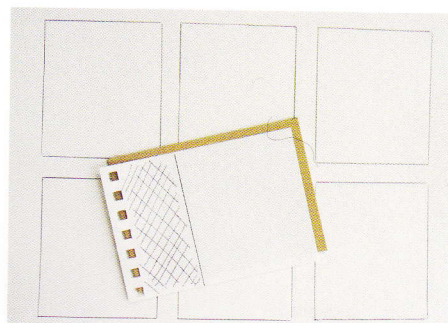
6

Now make a more refined storyboard. On a blank sheets of paper, create ten windows, each one the same of the two-thirds area on the sketchbook paper guide you created.
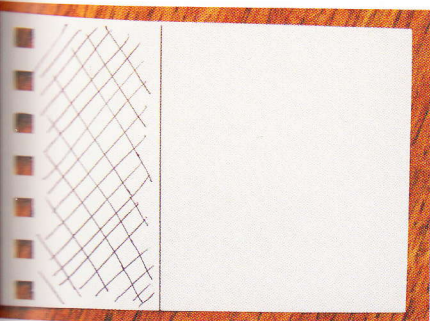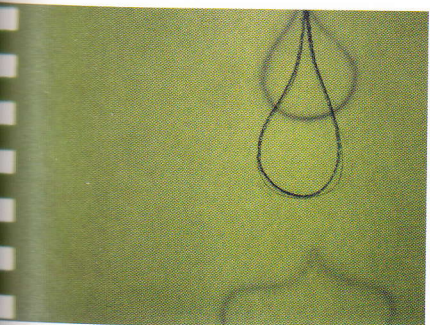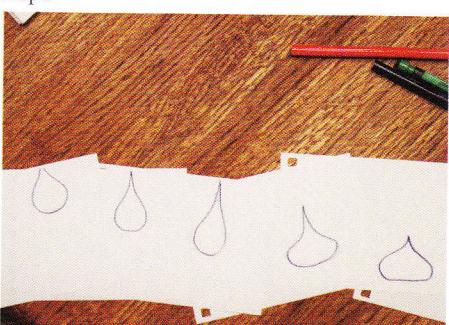
Step 2

Step 5

Step 6

Step 9

Step 10

7
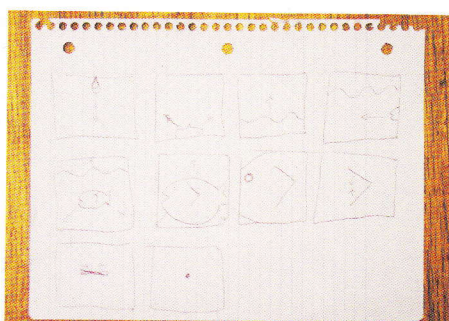
anslate the rough
oryboard sketches into
ages that are almost
actly like the ones for the
ipbook. You can add color
this storyboard to test the
ok before committing
urself to the final artwork.
umber the windows with
following frame
mbers: 1, 5, 10, 15, 20, 25,
35, 40, 45, 50.

8

ce each storyboard
ndow onto a separate
ce of flipbook paper.
te the number that
rresponds to the window
mber in the inner (spiral-
e) side of the paper. This
ll help you to keep the
es in order as you work.

9

Begin animating by
placing flipbook frame 1 and
flipbook frame 5 on the light
table, directly over each
other. Place a clean sheet of
flipbook paper on top of
them to form a stack of three
papers. Draw an image in the
middle of the two reference
images to represent the
halfway point (in this case,
frame 3). Use only a pencil or
pen to outline the image;
coloring will come later.
Number the frame on the
spiral edge of the paper.

10

Repeat this process,
creating frame 2 as an in-
between of frames 1 and 3;
then create frame 4 as an in-
between of frames 3 and 5.
Continue this process until
all the in-between images
have been drawn.

11

When you have completed
all the primary sketches,
begin the coloring process.
It is best to color one figure
from start to finish (on every
page), and then to move onto
a second figure, and a third,
and so on. This keeps the
colors consistent.

12

Check that all the flipbook
pages are in order. You might
like to place the pages back
to front, to allow flipping
from bottom to top so the
pages fall flat (when pages
are flipped from front to
back, they arch and the
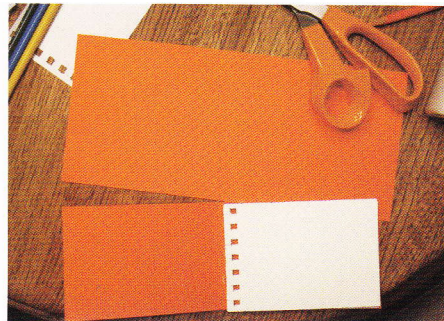images are harder to see).

13

Add five blank pages to the
front and end of the flipbook,
to aid with the flipping
process and with assembly
(the first and last pages will
be glued to the cover, so they
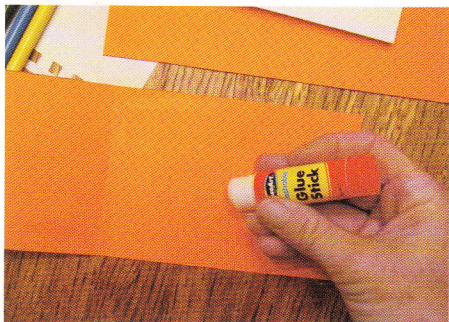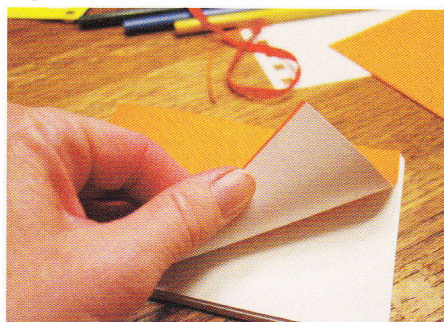cannot contain images).
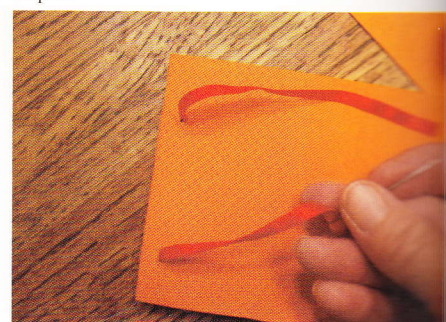
Flipbook
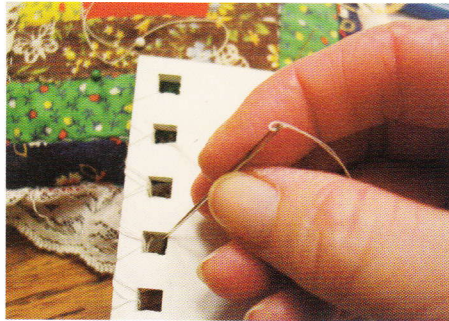
Step 14

Step 15

Step 16

Step 17a

Step 17b

Step 18

14

Use needle and thread to stitch the pages together, using the holes of the spiral binding. Be sure that the thread binding is very tight, and that the pages are stitched so that the flipping edge is evenly aligned. If it is not even, the book will not flip properly.

15

Using card stock paper, cut out a cover for the book. It must be the same height as the book, and twice its width, plus the depth ("spine") of the fifty pages. For example, the cover for a 4 x 6-inch (10 x 15-centimeter) book with a ½-inch (1.25-centimeter) spine must be cut to 4 inches (10 centimeters) high and 12½ inches (31.25 centimeters) wide.

16

Fold the cover so that there is a central part that can be fitted around the flipbook spine area. Gently scoring the inner side of the spine edges with scissors helps to make the creases look sharp.

17

Generously coat the front, back, and spine areas of the cover with glue. Insert the bound flipbook pages into the cover, pushing it deep into the spine. When the pages are in place, press the first page against the glue on the front cover, and press the last page against the glue on the back cover.

18

For extra reinforcement, thread a needle with ribbon or cord and, working from back to front, pull the ribbon or cord through the cover and one spiral hole at the top of the book and one hole at the bottom. Tie or knot it firmly.

19

Design your cover. Create an image based on the contents; include a title for the book and your name. Glue them on the cover. Trim the cover so that it is just slightly narrower than the pages of the flipbook, to help with the flipping process.

Something Fishy
by Maureen Furniss

6
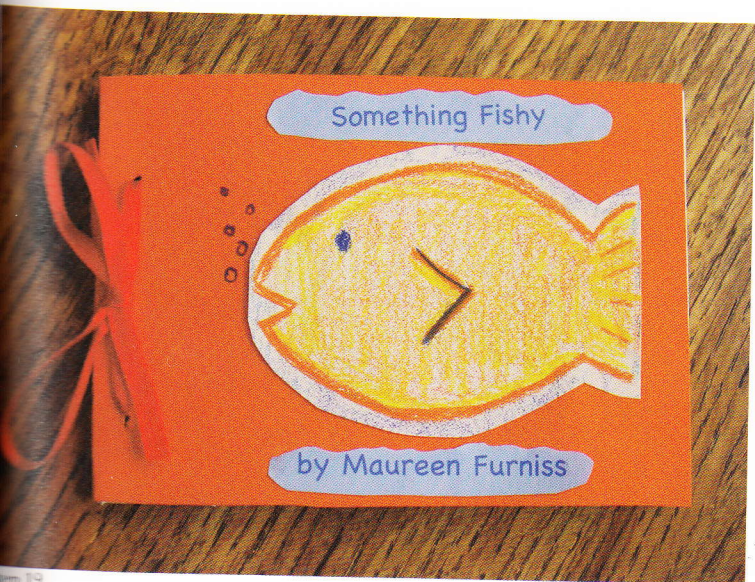
Tips and Cautions:

— Start planning early; the project will probably take longer than you think.

— Consider how the book will be bound before you begin drawing; if pre-punched paper is not used, it is vital to punch the paper as a first step, to ensure flipping will be possible when the book is completed.

— It is important not to hand-trim the flipping edge of the book as any irregularities will impede the flipping process; shorter pages will be bypassed.

— Remember to draw only on the outer two-thirds of each pages (leave the one-third on the binding edge blank).

— You probably should not attempt to use "cuts" in the action to depict two or more scenes; these common cinematic transitional devices do not translate to flipbooks, in part because the total running time of the action is too short.

— Remember that an image by itself might look awkward, though it works when flipped in the sequence of other images.

— Remember to include a few blank pages at the beginning and end, so that all parts of the action can be seen easily.

— While any technique (stamps, photocopies, etc.) can be used, be aware that items pasted onto pages tend to impede flipping and/or fall off.