LEARNING GUIDE: PREPARE TO BOARD! CREATING STORY AND CHARACTERS FOR ANIMATED FEATURES AND SHORTS

Most of these exercises have been extracted directly from the text. For more details on any of the exercises check the associated chapter in the book.

CHAPTER 1

FIRST CATCH YOUR RABBIT: CREATING CONCEPTS AND CHARACTERS

Log Lines for Existing Animated Films

Write three newspaper ‘headlines’ based on the stories of existing animated films. Does each headline convey a visual image of the story?

This technique is actually used in animation pre-production under another name. The log line (a brief description of the story and conflict) is the foundation for the story edifice.

Compare your ‘headlines’ with those developed by others in the class.

Character Creation Exercise through Free Association

Step 1: Assemble a ‘found character’ based on a series of words pulled out of a series of envelopes. They are provided with a character name, sex, species, age, and time period. The student must design a character based on characteristics assembled at random with no relevance to any story context.

Step 2: Change a human character into an animal in three drawings. Start with the human, then draw the animal and do the ‘transformation’ last. The midpoint is sometimes more interesting than the final!

Step 3: Create a pair of characters that contrast Large with Small.
Step 4: Develop characters to illustrate a simple storyline taken from a nursery rhyme. All students should use the same rhyme. A second exercise may be added later where they illustrate the rhyme of their choice.

Shopping for Story: Creating Lists

Story can be created by chance or by deliberation. Or you can write a shopping list for the ingredients! You can get the creative juices flowing by free association. Use words that create visual images. Draw four columns on a sheet of lined paper and begin. It helps to do this exercise with another person since you can ‘bounce’ ideas off one another and build on each other’s word associations.

1. **Characters: Who’s in the story?**

Create a list of character possibilities in three columns on a sheet of paper.

(a) Describe characters in one or two words. Do not write lengthy biographies or backstories. The characters do not need to relate to one another in a story context.

(b) List various species in a second column.

(c) In a third column, list words that describe the creature’s abilities and appearance. Can it fly and swim? Does it tap dance and sing opera? Has it feathers, fur, scales or all of the above? Is it male or female? Write down as many variations as you can think of. At this point, everything is a possibility. The limitations come later.

List all of your ideas no matter how odd they may seem. Do not throw anything out at this stage. Use free association to suggest characters and relationships.

2. **Locations: Where does the story take place?**

On a new sheet of paper, make a new column listing possible locations. These can be fanciful and vary greatly in scale. Can you place your characters inside a refrigerator, in France, on a
dog’s back, inside a sock drawer, under the bed, on the moon, or under the ocean? Do not throw out any suggestions at this point. See if one location leads you to think of another, or of characters that might populate it.

3. **Situations or Occupations: What are they doing?**

List Situations and Occupations next to the Location column. Birthdays, weddings, funerals, alien abductions, trips to the dentist, preparation of a meal, a dance, a wedding, thieves, and insurance salesmen are all fair game.

List possible Conflicts in another column. Do their parents approve? Is the character in danger?

Is it searching for something?

4. **Start Drawing**

Mix and match words from the Character, Situation, Conflict, and Location lists and see which combinations suggest images or stories. You may be inspired by a single word or you may use material from all four lists. Draw thumbnails of characters and situations on a yellow lined pad.

Do not use an eraser and do not throw away any of the drawings.

**Nothing Is Normal: Researching Action**

Students should have sketchbooks reviewed on a weekly basis if possible. The sketchbook is an integral research tool that helps animators and designers observe the world around them and incorporate their interpretations of reality into the unreal characters.

**Draw Animals, Too**

Pets are great subjects for gesture drawing because they never stand still! Don’t try to draw formal portraits. Draw them while they are playing or moving around or draw from memory. You will know their characteristic gestures and attitudes from experience. Work quickly and
never scratch out a drawing—just draw another sketch on the same page if you are not satisfied with the first one. For more exotic animals, visit the zoo.

**Drawing from Video**

Run a tape or DVD in slow motion, watch the actors’ progressive movement and conduct a modeling session. Students should draw as if the model was in the room instead of onscreen. It is important not to stop the machine at any time but segments may be replayed. Charlie Chaplin movies are particularly useful in this exercise, though any good physical acting will do well. Some students have had excellent results drawing Johnny Depp in PIRATES OF THE CARIBBEAN: CURSE OF THE BLACK PEARL. Do not use still photographs for this exercise. Your subject should be moving in the third and fourth dimensions.

**Building a Morgue**

Assign each student a specific time period (Tudor England, the Wild West, early twentieth century Germany, ancient Egypt) and have them bring in reference materials. These may be downloaded from the Internet. Students should provide three or more URLs that can be viewed in class. Materials copied from books and complete books may be brought to class. Discuss research and analyze the websites and materials. Some may be better than others. Students should learn to discriminate between sources. A Halloween costume catalogue is not acceptable; a historic recreation site is.

**Foundation Shapes**

Draw representations of a Square, a Circle/Oval, a Triangle, and a Cylinder on the board. Students may be issued a set of cut paper silhouettes of these shapes and asked to physically juxtapose them in a manner that suggests a pleasing design.

**Dogs and Foundation/Primitive Shapes**
Design three dogs using the principles discussed in Chapter 6. (It is necessary to work out-of-
chapter-order at this point). Base one design entirely on circles, another on squares, and another
entirely on triangles. Are there certain breeds whose body types suggest these basic shapes? Is
the design more pleasing when the shapes are combined with others, rather than using one shape
exclusively in the design? Lastly, design a dog using all of the foundation shapes (circle, square,
triangle, and cylinder). Discussion points: Which design is the most interesting? Which is the
best design? Is it possible to create a good design using only one basic shape?

**Thumbnails of an Action**

Students should take a sketch from their sketchbooks and thumbnail the character performing a
simple action. The action can be as basic as picking up a cup and taking a drink, playing with a
ball, or sitting down. Each student does the same exercise but the results will vary since their
starting materials might be sketches of an old woman or a dog, a cat or a six-year-old child. A
minimum of three sketches should be used. When they are done post the sketches on the
storyboard and compare interpretations. Then have them get the ‘flavor’ of the exercise across in
one sketch only. This is actually a harder exercise than the multiple sketches since one sketch
must tell the story.

FAR SIDE and NEW YORKER cartoons may be shown prior to doing this exercise to show
successful examples of the technique; though any good one-panel strip will do.

**CHAPTER 2**

**VIVE LA DIFFERENCE! ANIMATION AND LIVE-ACTION STORYBOARDS**

**Comparing Live-Action and Animated Movies**

Analyze one sequence of a classic live-action film by stopping the DVD or video during each
scene of a sequence and drawing simple thumbnails of each shot’s composition. Observe how
the camera is used and when and why cuts are made. Next, repeat the exercise with one sequence from a classic animated cartoon of your choice. What are the similarities and differences between the two media?

**Caricaturing the Camera**

Animated film uses the camera differently from live action. Camera angles are forced, backgrounds distorted, and animated time and characters are speedier than in live-action film. Compare the camera angles and cuts used in live-action films that were directed by animators who shifted to live action. Some suggestions are:

- MONTY PYTHON AND THE HOLY GRAIL (Terry Gilliam)
- THE LADYKILLERS (Alexander McKendrick)
- THE GIRL CAN’T HELP IT (Frank Tashlin)
- PEE WEE’S BIG ADVENTURE (Tim Burton)

Screen animated films after the live ones that feature cutting that could only occur in animated film. A short list of suggested titles follows. You may find other examples that are equally suitable.

- PORKY PIG’S FEAT (Frank Tashlin, Warner Brothers Golden Collection DVD #3)
- THE GREAT PIGGYBANK ROBBERY (Bob Clampett, Warner Brothers Golden Collection DVD #2)
- PINK ELEPHANTS (Walt Disney, DUMBO)
- FEED THE KITTY (Chuck Jones, Warner Brothers Golden Collection DVD #1)

**Budgeting Your Time**

Based on the length of your term, develop a timeline for producing a short animation in a single term (if you are not a student select the time frame in which you would like to complete a
project). How long do you think the animation should be for successful completion within that time frame? Draw up a theoretical ‘budget’ for pre-production, production and post-production.

CHAPTER 3

PUTTING YOURSELF INTO YOUR WORK

Tell YOUR Story

Biographical elements provide a ‘human touch’ which enables the audience to identify with and sympathize with exotic or outlandish characters. It is not necessary to literally recreate the real-life event that inspired the story. The suggestion of humanity is what creates human interest.

Draw three thumbnails in silhouette using characters and situations from an interesting event from your past. Is the story staged clearly in three drawings? Pin the artwork on the board and describe the story while indicating the panels with a pointer. (This is the student’s first ‘pitch’.)

How did your audience respond?


*Design four cats.*

The students should design four cats with no other information given concerning their appearance or personality. This exercise should be completed after doing the FOUNDATION SHAPES exercise described above.

The assignments should be pinned on the storyboard and viewed by the class. Next, ask each student the following questions about their assignment.

Who are they? What are they? Where do they live? When does the action take place?

Why do they do what they do and who or what do they interact with? Can they answer these questions with ease and facility? Chances are that they cannot.

More Cats
Now try the assignment again, using the following information. Mama, a very proper and dignified cat, has three kittens. Now explore the characters. Are they ‘real cats’? Do they have human qualities or are they pure animal? Make a list of props that they could interact with.

Where do they live? Which locations and props offer the best possibilities for animation? You can experiment with the scale of the mother cat to her kittens, as shown in Figure 3-12.

Now do a few small drawings (thumbnails) of the cats working with some of the props and write short sentences under the drawings describing how the situation might develop.

Do not cross any of the drawings out and do not throw any of them away. At this stage, you should be open to all suggestions, no matter how crazy they may sound. You may sketch new ideas that will create a story, or take an existing story in a different direction.

How do you turn generic cats, rocks, or trees into individual characters? You could use human beings as a reference for their personalities. Start with the basics. Here’s where your ‘life experience’ literally comes into the picture.

**Two Five-Year-Olds**

Sketch two human characters based on yourself and a friend at five years of age. Change the two humans into cats, translating the humans’ attitudes and expressions to the cats’ faces and bodies.

Next, turn the humans into objects that portray their personality types.

Experiment with three different objects. You know your own personality and that of your friend. How do you translate this quality into a character design, especially a nonhuman one? You can base the designs on caricatures but that is not always necessary.

By just thinking about the pets, friends, and people you have met while you are working, you will subconsciously start to incorporate some of their mannerisms and appearance into your design and story. This will make the characters uniquely yours and not a mere imitation of a
style. No two people have precisely the same experiences in life. Referring to your own memory
bank will keep your designs and stories fresh.

CHAPTER 4

SITUATION AND CHARACTER-DRIVEN STORIES

Characters in Conflict

Design and thumbnail two characters in an action that illustrates the following conflicts. You
may use more than one drawing and include props.

1. I can’t do it.

2. I must do it.

3. I want something that you have.

Log Lines—Theirs

Describe the plots of existing animated films in one sentence.

For example, DUMBO’s log line might be “A freak turns his disability into an asset.”

Any Bugs Bunny cartoon has the same log line: “A peace-loving rabbit seeks revenge when
provoked.”

SPIRITED AWAY (Hayao Miyazaki) has “a small girl must rescue her parents and an enchanted
prince by following the rules of a fantasy kingdom.”

Some films will not be summed up in one sentence. Discuss. (These are generally the films with
the weakest stories)

CHAPTER 5

WHAT IF? CONTRASTING THE POSSIBLE AND THE FANCIFUL

Aliens, Dogs and Rabbits
Draw two or three thumbnails for a comic ending and two or three more for a dramatic ending to the alien-versus-dog-and-rabbits scenario discussed in Chapter 5. You may use different character designs for the two stories. Work on lined yellow paper and keep your early drawings rough. Add color to your final designs.

**More Characters and Situations**

Sketch simple characters for the following four situations. Next, list some Rules that might affect the character relationships and the story. Illustrate each Rule with a thumbnail of the characters in a recognizable setting. Try working on lined yellow pads.

Keep the sketches very rough and do not cross anything out. The lines on the pad serve as informal ‘construction lines’ that help you scale the character and the pads are easy and inexpensive to obtain. After you have drawn a few characters sketch possible conflicts and endings for each situation.

(a) A difficult mother-in-law is visiting her daughter and son-in-law. The mother-in-law is a Witch.
(b) Children on the first day of school. The characters are all single-celled Organisms.
(c) A hunter chases a small animal. Consider different animals and locations that might influence the story. Is the hunter a human or an animal?
(d) Your story takes place inside and on top of a dresser. All of your characters are made from different articles of clothing.

**CHAPTER 6**

**APPEALING VERSUS APPALLING? BEGINNING CHARACTER DESIGN**

**Putting the Character in a Specific Time Period**
Take drawings from your sketchbook and one photograph or illustration of a person from a specific historical era. Design a new character wearing period clothing standing in the sketchbook pose. Then ‘push’ the proportions in several drawings as shown in Figure 6-14 in Chapter 6. Note: This is an elaboration of the “Building a Morgue” assignment in Chapter 1 except that this time the student is designing their own character and adapting the costumes using the Foundation Shapes. The sketchbook drawings add the personal touch missing from the earlier assignments. Compare the new characters with the ones drawn in the earlier exercise. The new ones should display stronger character and personality traits.

**Using Body Language**

Design a simple human character. Use body language to make variations on that character. Add props to enhance the effect but do not use costume. (The figure should be nude but sexless.) Use the stance and pose to suggest young and old characters, male, female, intelligent or stupid, clumsy or graceful ones. You may even be able to use the poses to suggest characters from specific time periods. Pin the exercises on the storyboard. Discuss.

**Blending Animate and Inanimate**

Blend a human or animal design with an inanimate object.

Show the human or animal character in drawing A.

Then draw the object that you wish to combine it with as drawing C.

Blend the features in drawing B. (An example is shown in Figure 6-27.) You may find that the midpoint drawing is more interesting than the final. Each design will vary. Try changing your original character into several different objects. Then try the exercise in reverse, starting with the inanimate object and combining it with a human or animal.

**Animate and Inanimate Objects**
Design three characters based on inanimate objects. Will you be able to use the ‘foundation shapes’ to delineate different character types? Are these characters from the same universe?

**Rough Model Sheet**

Make a model sheet for one of the characters you have developed. Draw the character from different perspectives and in different expressive poses. A separate sheet may be needed for facial expressions.

**CHAPTER 7**

**SIZE MATTERS: THE IMPORTANCE OF SCALE**

**Same Characters, Different Sizes**

Select two characters, say a dog and a cat. Draw them next to each other in different relative scales. First draw the two characters at about the same scale. Then, make the cat large and the dog small. Is the cat a lion and the dog a chihuahua? Or is the cat an adult and the dog a puppy?

Make the dog large and the cat small. Now go to extremes. There is no need to be ‘realistic’.

**Character Lineup and Construction Model**

Select two or three of your characters or use some from the book. Create a rough character lineup (such as the one in Figure 7-4) or an atmospheric sketch to set the characters’ scale to each other, to the background, and to important props. Next, create a construction model showing the basic shapes (foundation shapes) that create the character. Be sure to show the construction models from front, side, 3/4, and back views. Some views may work better than others. Note this on the model sheet.

**Placing the Character in the Scene**

Test character silhouettes along with relevant props. Pay attention to the scale of the character in relation to the background and props. Place them all on a simple background and shade the
character silhouettes with the side of a pencil or crayon. Is the character reading well in relation to the other scenic elements? Can you suggest a foreground, a middle ground, and a background with different tones?

CHAPTER 8

BEAUTIES AND BEASTS: CREATING CHARACTER CONTRASTS IN DESIGN

Symmetrical versus Asymmetrical

Beautiful people in Western culture usually have asymmetrical faces. Take a full face picture of a popular actor or actress; duplicate one half of it and flip it using a mirror or Photoshop. Then try this exercise with a picture of your own face. The two resultant composites will show significant differences and may suggest two different people.

CHAPTER 9

LOCATION, LOCATION, LOCATION: ART DIRECTION AND STORYTELLING

Putting Characters in Houses

Draw a master background in gray tonal values full size on a sheet of animation paper, using the following description as a guide.

“We are in a country town near the seashore on a late summer day in the historical period of your choice. There are two houses on the background. One has a barbecue out back, a surfboard on the front lawn, and flowers in the windows. The next-door house is made of gingerbread and has odd growths in the front yard. Creatures fly in and out of the attic. The front yard features a deep hole with a chain leading into it and a sign marked ‘Beware.’ The surrounding fence is made of lollipops and candy canes.”

After the background has been designed (roughs, no cleanups) draw some rough thumbnails for the characters that live in these houses. What is the scale of the scene? Are the characters
human? Work for contrasts between the houses and their occupants. Even conventional-looking characters will seem less normal if they live in the second house. Add the characters to the master background with appropriate props.

Lastly, add color to set the mood and time of day.

**Different Houses**

Do the ‘house exercise’ a second time with different props, characters, and colors. If you boarded the same story twice using the different locations, you’d end up with radically different results even if you never changed another thing.

**CHAPTER 10**

**STARTING STORY SKETCH: COMPOSE YOURSELF**

**Establishing Tonal Values for Story Sketch**

Create a simple palette of basic tonal ranges by dividing a rectangle into four sections as shown in Figure 10-5. The rectangle need not be very large.

(A) Use a soft pencil to put your darkest value in the top panel. Label this “A”.

(B) The lightest value is determined next. It will be at the bottom of your chart. If your lightest value is ‘white’, leave the bottom panel blank. If you are boarding a shadowy or foggy scene, the lightest value could be gray and not pure white. Whichever way you go, put your lightest tone at the bottom of the diagram and call it “B”.

(C) Next, take a value that is roughly halfway between the darkest and lightest. Put that tone on “C”, the second panel from the top.

(D) Take a tone ‘halfway’ between your middle value “C” and lightest value “B” and put it in the third panel. Label it “D”. Refer to these values when completing the storyboard exercises.

**Using Tonal Values on a Story Panel**
Draw a storyboard panel in line similar to the one shown in Figure 10-6. Pin it on the wall and view it from the other side of the room. Does the image read clearly? Next, shade the central figure with your darkest tonal value (A). Use the lightest value (B) on the background and the two medium values (C, D) for prop or background detail. Pin the second drawing on the wall and view it from the other side of the room. The second drawing should read more clearly.

CHAPTER 11

ROUGHING IT: BASIC STAGING

Using the Camera to Define Scale

How can you use the camera to make a character feel small? Large? Tall? Short?

Compare shots with Captain Hook and Tinker Bell in Peter Pan for reference. Other good films to run are THE BRAVE LITTLE TAILOR with Mickey Mouse, FUN AND FANCY FREE (Mickey and the Beanstalk), or any of Jiminy Cricket’s scenes in PINOCCHIO.

Who Is Your Camera?

Imagine that your camera is a character too. Who is your camera? Choose two different characters that your camera might be and storyboard the same scene from those different vantage points. How does that affect the story? Is the camera a small child watching the scene or the big bad wolf watching from behind a bush?

(Hint: The student may do the exercise on Post-it or other self-stick notes before graduating to storyboard panels. All boards should be done in tonals and be viewed from at least 10 feet away during the pitch.)

CHAPTER 12

BOARDING TIME: GETTING WITH THE STORY BEAT

Developing a Beat Board
Create a beat board for a short nursery rhyme. Use one panel for each line of the nursery rhyme. Work in tonal values and stage each panel clearly.

Storyboard panels can be mounted on sheets of foam core or pinned on bulletin boards.

Make sure that the panels are reading from 10 or 15 feet away, and write a short description of the story point on a separate card. These descriptions are generally pinned to the right of the panel so that the artwork ‘reads’ before the description. Then pitch the beat boards to the audience, reciting the title cards and adding verbal embellishments if they help put the story over.

**Log Lines: Yours**

Students should create one-sentence descriptions of a simple story similar to the log lines in Chapter 4. They may use the ‘slice of life’ story based on an incident in their own life that was developed in Chapter 3.

**CHAPTER 13**

**THE BIG PICTURE: CREATING STORY SEQUENCES**

**Sequencing the Story: Sub-Plots and Structure**

Flesh out a story sequence from the sequential list. Add the new drawings to the beat board. The THREE BEARS feature outline from the book may be used for this exercise. Sequences add subplots and give a film structure. They enable filmmakers to vary the pace of the storytelling, develop the characters’ personalities, and create a realistic production timetable for that sequence.

Is there a secondary character whose story might help interest us in the protagonist? Is Goldilocks becoming more interesting than the Bears?
Are the secondary characters in animated films occasionally more interesting than the heroes? View a film such as PINOCCHIO or SNOW WHITE AND THE SEVEN DWARFS that keep the hero’s predicament as the primary focus even when the secondary characters are interesting in their own right. Then ask the students to bring in examples of films with unsuccessful subplots that distract from the main story (these are too many to mention here; they may use live-action or animated films for examples). What could less successful films have done to avoid losing sight of their heroes? How could their heroes have been made more interesting? Discuss.

CHAPTER 14

PATTERNS IN TIME: PACING ACTION ON ROUGH BOARDS

Charting the Climaxes

Climactic charts are not commonly used in storyboard, but you may find it helpful to sketch one out when plotting an original story. The strongest climax should come just before the story’s denouement. Create a climatic chart from your beat board.

Rough Storyboard

Draw a rough storyboard of one of your story ideas. Use simple unlined index cards (you may draw thumbnails on Post-it or other self stick notes first.). Use tonal values but don’t use color.

CHAPTER 15

PRESENT TENSE: CREATING A PERFORMANCE ON STORYBOARDS

Thumbnailsing Holmes and Watson

Try thumbnailing the script from the ABBEY GRANGE in a different manner and mood from that in the book. After you have finished, design rough model sheets for Holmes and Watson based on your storyboard sketches. Can you make these familiar characters seem new and different? Have the students read the entire story before doing this assignment.
CHAPTER 16

DIAMOND IN THE ROUGH MODEL SHEET: REFINING CHARACTER DESIGNS

Rough Character Suggestions

Take storyboard drawings, model sketches, and thumbnails that seem to best depict your character’s personality. Paste these drawings up and label them ACTION ONLY or ACTION SUGGESTIONS. Do the next exercises using this rough model as a guide, since the character’s design has probably changed or ‘evolved’ during the storyboarding process.

Lessons in Walking and Talking

Animate your character on paper in a 24-frame walk cycle. Work in profile or 3/4 views. Next, animate a short scene where the character acts and speaks in a 3/4 view. Use a scratch dialogue track and animate lip synch. Give the character a prop to work with. Do not have it simply stand and talk. Your objective is to show an individual personality, not a mechanical action. The source of the dialogue is unimportant; you may use a line from an old movie, record it yourself, or use an actual line of dialogue from your picture if it is available. After the scene(s) are done, take your best extremes and breakdowns and paste them up on ‘action model sheets’. Then draw your character in new poses that show its acting and action range. Rework your original construction and turnaround models if the character design has changed. It is not at all unusual to redo the model sheets after the design’s animated trial run. This is ‘animation evolution’ in action. The final design will be much stronger than the original. Revise your original construction model sheets based on what you have learned.

IMPORTANT: The dialogue mouths should have a separate model sheet but it should be made clear that these are not standard. A character’s mouth shapes will vary with its mood and the actor’s voice inflection. There are no such things as standard mouth shapes in good animation,
but there are rough guidelines that can be used for typical expressions. Model sheets will contain
drawn and written notes indicating if a character talks from the side of its mouth without moving
its upper lip, as shown in the illustration of Humphrey Bogart in Figure 16-20.

CHAPTER 17
COLOR MY WORLD: ART DIRECTION AND STORYTELLING

‘Scouting’ Locations

Create a small atmospheric sketch (4” x 6”) set in a specific location. The scene may take place
indoors or outdoors. Draw simple background details, props, and one character.

Construct a simple color script by creating four copies of the same sketch, each painted in color
palettes that indicate different times of day. Computer graphics or actual paint may be used for
this exercise. The first panel will take place at dawn, the second will depict the scene at midday,
the third at dusk, and the last one at midnight during a full moon.

You may paint roughly and put the pigment directly on the drawings if you are working on
paper. Filters may be used in the computer graphic program. (Note: It would be good to have the
student try varying the actual colors on one panel for comparative purposes.) Will your
composition use different values of the same basic hues or will there be a complete color shift as
time passes? Are your light sources from the sun and moon, electric lights, gas lamps, candles,
firelight, or reflected light? What time of year do you wish to indicate?

Summer light is very different from that of winter. Next, scan each of your designs and turn them
into grayscale black-and-white versions. Do the tonal values work well?

Please note: Never use the de-saturate command in Photoshop since this will result in inaccurate
gray tones. Grayscale must be specified in the assignment.

CHAPTER 18
SHOW AND TELL: PRESENTING YOUR STORYBOARDS

The boards are the most important part of the pitch but the quality of your presentation is nearly as important. A bad presentation will hurt a good storyboard. You’re providing the acting and the timing for the action, so your commentary is 50 percent of the pitch and has to communicate as clearly as the boards do.

(a) Exercise: Pitch the board you began developing in Chapter 12. Your objective: Convey the story point clearly to the audience, in real time. Your assignment: pitch your board. The student may have to work against ‘time’ if the class is large. (The Disney studio usually allowed only two minutes for original story ideas; five or six minutes is standard pitch time for sequences.) Does the performance drag? Does it go too fast? Did the pitcher avoid making the mistakes delineated in Chapter 18?

(b) Conduct a turnover session after the pitch. Do the suggested changes improve the storyboard and help to tell the story clearly and well?

CHAPTER 19

TALKING PICTURES: ASSEMBLING A LEICA, STORY REEL, OR ANIMATIC WITH A SCRATCH TRACK

From Board to Reel

Create a story reel with a scratch track from the storyboard you pitched. Only use dialogue where absolutely necessary. Include sound effects and background music. Screen it.

Make note of how the audience responds. Did they understand the story? Don’t tell the audience what they should be seeing. Ask your viewers for their impressions after the screening. See if their interpretations coincide with yours. If not, ask for suggestions on how the material could be
improved. Take notes. Revise the boards and story reel accordingly and screen it again for the same audience if possible. See if the problems are solved.

Note: A variation on the assignment in the book would be to create two versions of the story reel/animatic using two different musical scratch tracks. How does the music affect the perception of the action? (The student need not re-edit the boards at all to note the difference!)

CHAPTER 20
BUILD A BETTER MOUSE: CREATING CLEANUP MODEL SHEETS

Refining the Model Sheets

Cleanup model sheets standardize surface details, line quality, and the appearance of all characters. It is the Wardrobe, Makeup, and Hairstyling Department of animation.

Inconsistencies in design such as cheats must also be labeled on the cleanups. Clean up the rough model sheets. Standardize the designs if necessary. They may have changed considerably after the boarding process.

CHAPTER 21
MAQUETTE SIMPLE: MODELING CHARACTERS IN THREE DIMENSIONS

Make a Maquette

A maquette helps you determine how your character’s volumes turn in space and also enables you to ‘evolve’ any lingering weaknesses or inconsistencies out of the character design before it is too late to change it further. A maquette is the last checkpoint on the long road an animated character must travel before it goes into production. Sculpt a maquette for one of your characters following the directions in the chapter. When it is finished, sketch the maquette from different angles. Vary the direction of the light for each drawing. Does the maquette support the model sheet or modify it? Is the character design cheated or does it actually turn in three dimensions?
(suggested screening: THE LITTLE WHIRLWIND, THE NIFTY NINETIES or MICKEY’S BIRTHDAY PARTY from the Mickey Mouse in Living Color DVD. These films show Mickey’s ears working in perspective for the first and last time.)

CHAPTER 22

AM I BLUE? CREATING CHARACTER THROUGH COLOR

The Eyes Have It

Create a simple human character. Design him or her so that the eyes are prominent. Color the figure using hues that are found in nature. Now change only the eye and pupil color of this character, leaving all other colors consistent with your original. Create several examples since it’s difficult to choose between ‘one’. You need not use naturalistic color, but may try any combination that takes your fancy.

Other Body Parts

Redo this assignment with three new identical drawings. All colors should be the same with one difference: on the first drawing, change the color on one of your character’s hands. Put the new color on one of its feet in the second drawing, and over its entire face in the third.

Other Colors

Repeat the exercise with Red, Yellow and Green variants and see how your perception of the character changes.

Props and Proportions

Add props that help define the character. Or: Distort a portion of the character’s anatomy to suggest its personality (most mad scientist cartoon characters have overlarge crania to indicate their allegedly high intelligence; a thief might have very long, thin arms and hands, the better to pick pockets with.)
CHAPTER 23

SCREEN AND SCREEN AGAIN: PREPARING FOR PRODUCTION

Assemble all of the materials developed in the exercises in this book into one notebook as documentation of your efforts. The exercises in the book may not have resulted in completed pre-production for a single project. A next step is to complete the pre-production for a single project using the methods learned with this book. After the pre-production is complete, production can begin.

CHAPTER 24

FURTHER READING: BOOKS, DISCS, AND WEBSITES

The books in Chapter 24 provide information on the production phase of animation. One or more may be reviewed at this time. The recommended websites and DVDs provide good reference for most of the exercises in this book.