

Writing Poems for Animation

with Julia Webb

The brief was to explore a range of writing styles which lend themselves naturally to the medium of animation. We chose to focus on 2D collage and cut out animation and began the session by looking at examples of this genre, made by other students and professional animators. (Please refer to the Resources section for links to the examples used.)

After viewing each film, we asked the students to comment on the different ways animation can be used to enhance or extend the meaning of a poem or bring about fresh understandings of the text.

Julia then presented the following exercises, designed to loosen up the creative imagination at the start of a school day.

Anti-Words

Working alone students pick something to write about it can be a natural or inanimate object or an animal (not a person) – e.g. tree, cloud, fish. They then quickly write down the first ten words that come into their head when thinking about the object. For example if you were thinking of a cloud you might say things like white, fluffy, sky etc. The students are then asked to free write a short piece about their chosen item but they are NOT allowed to use any of the words on their list. This is challenging but broadens the scope of writing considerably, discouraging cliché.

Calligrams

Hand out some examples of calligrams e.g. Apollinaire's Eiffel Tower and A Mouse's Tail by Lewis Carroll. (See print friendly examples below.)

Ask students to think about subjects that might work well as a calligram, and especially if movement is then introduced to it via animation.

Students then work on individual concrete poetry/calligram ideas.

Dada poetry

Discuss the following method for creating a poem, and ways it might be adapted to inspire personal work.

How to Make a Dadaist Poem (method of Tristan Tzara)

- *Take a newspaper.*
- *Take a pair of scissors.*
- *Choose an article as long as you are planning to make your poem.*
- *Cut out the article.*

- *Then cut out each of the words that make up this article and put them in a bag.*
- *Shake it gently.*
- *Then take out the scraps one after the other in the order in which they left the bag.*
- *Copy conscientiously.*
- *The poem will be like you.*

And here are you a writer, infinitely original and endowed with a sensibility that is charming though beyond the understanding of the vulgar.

Tristan Tzara



Have available newspapers, old magazines glue, and scissors. Invite the students to cut and tear words and reorder them to make poems.

Discuss this random approach to finding ideas and starting points and where it might lead. Some enjoy the ambiguities or musical qualities of seemingly nonsensical lines of poetry. Others like to create order and clear statements from chance beginnings.

Does taking a random approach help us to think about language and poetry in new ways?

What happens if we tear up words and put them together again to make new ones?

If we were to make Dada animations, how might we choreograph the movement of typography or collaged images in order to tell our stories?

Poems for Animation

At this point, we invited the students to start work on the poems they will take to the animation session on the following day. We suggested they might use any of the preceding exercises as a starting point, or make a fresh start in a style of their own choosing.

We added these basic tips and questions for consideration:

Your poem should be no more than 90 words (due to the length of time it takes to make a short animation).

Decide if you want the words of the poem to be seen, heard or both.

If the words will be seen, how will their appearance or movement support the meanings of the poem?

What kinds of images will accompany the poem?

Can you use one thing to convey something else. e.g. a blowing leaf could represent loneliness or freedom. What could you use to represent love, anger, sadness, grief etc.?

At the end of the session we invited students to read their poems to the whole group, and talk about their ideas and creative methods.