

Making Cartoons





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The Cartoonist

Betsy Byars

“Alfie?”

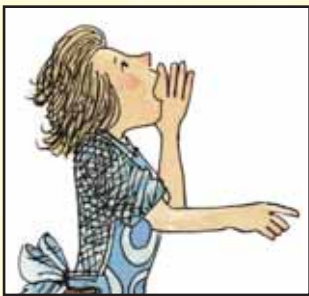
“What?”

“You studying?”

“Yes,” he lied.

“Well, why don’t you come down and study in front of the television? It’ll take your mind off what you’re doing,” his mother called.

He didn’t answer. He bent over the sheet of paper on his table. He was intent.



“Did you hear me, Alfie?”

“I heard,” he called without glancing up.

“Well, come on down.”

Alfie didn’t answer. He was drawing a comic strip called ‘Super Bird’. In the first square a man was scattering bird seed from a bag labelled ‘Little Bird Seed’. In the next square little birds were gobbling up the seeds. In the third square the man was scattering bird seed from a bag labelled ‘Big Bird Seed’. In the next square big birds were gobbling up the seeds.

In the fifth square the man was scattering huge lumps from a bag labelled 'Giant Bird Seed'. In the last square a giant bird was gobbling up the little man.

There was a smile on Alfie's face as he looked at what he had done. At the top of the drawing he lettered in the words *Super Bird*. He was going to do twelve of these super comic strips, he had decided, one for each month. When he got through, he would call it 'Super Calendar'. Maybe he would get it published, and later, when he learned how, he would animate 'Super Bird', make it into a film. Whenever he drew something, he always saw it in motion.



"Alfie?" his mum called again.

"I'm busy, Mum. I'm studying."

"Well, supper's ready."

"Oh."

"Come down right now."

"I am. I just want to get my papers in order. If I leave them in a mess, sometimes I can't...". He trailed off.

He now had two strips for his calendar: 'Super Bird' and 'Super Caterpillar'. He didn't know which he liked best. He looked from one to the other, comparing them.

In the first square of 'Super Caterpillar', a giant caterpillar was happily eating New York City. In the second square he was happily eating America. In the third he was happily eating the world. In the last square, he was unhappily falling through space, his stomach a big round ball. Alfie was especially pleased with the expression in Super Caterpillar's eyes as he tumbled helplessly through space.

"Alfie!" his mother called loudly. Alfie knew she was at the foot of the ladder now.

She rattled the ladder as if she were trying to shake him down.
"I'm coming up there if you don't come this minute."

"I'm coming."



He got up quickly and turned his papers face down on the table. He started for the ladder that led downstairs.

Coming down from the attic was like getting off one of those rides at the amusement park, Alfie thought. It left him feeling strange, as if he had moved not from one part of the house to another but from one experience to another, without time to get his balance.



Alfie and his family had been living in this house for seven months, and when Alfie had first seen it he had thought of the old rhyme about the crooked man who lived in a crooked house. Nothing about this house was straight. It had started as two rooms, and then another room had been added. A kitchen had been made from the back porch. The roof was three different colours. The doors were crooked and so were the windows. The floors slanted. If you set a ball on the floor, it would roll to the wall. The house had been built by three different men, none of whom had ever had a lesson in carpentry.

The only thing Alfie liked about the house was the attic. That was his.



MOVING PICTURES

Alfie, the boy in the story, always imagined his cartoon characters moving. The process of making cartoon characters move is called **animation**, which means 'bringing to life'.

In fact, in an animated film, the pictures do not really move at all. Actually, many pictures are shown, one after the other, very quickly. Each of the pictures is slightly different from the one before. Our eyes cannot see each of these different pictures separately; instead, we see one picture which looks as if it is in motion. You may have seen how this works with a simple 'flick-book'. If you draw a character in a slightly different position on each page, and then flick quickly through the pages, you can see how the character seems to move.

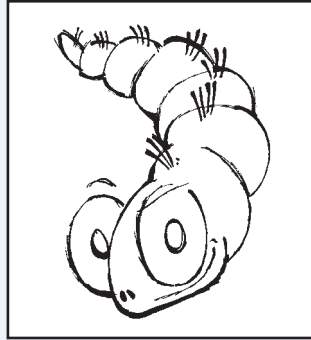


Modern cartoon films are made from many pictures shown one after the other. It takes 24 pictures to make one second of film, and so a 10-minute cartoon film needs more than 14,000 pictures. Before there were computers, the animation team had to draw all of these pictures. But even with computers, making a full-length animation is very complicated. There are many different parts to the process which need to be planned carefully and brought together.

FIRST IDEAS

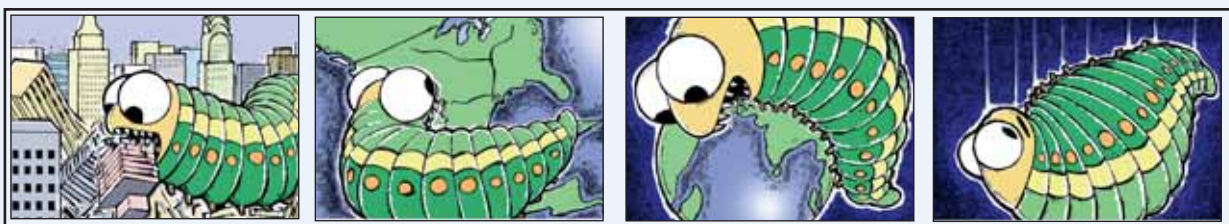
Cartoon films are sometimes based on books, but it is the artist's imagination that creates the characters. The different characters that cartoonists have invented appeal to different people. Some people like cartoons about animals, such as *Mickey Mouse* or *Arthur*. These characters are not like real animals: they wear clothes, talk and live in houses. Other people prefer characters that look more like humans, for example Bart Simpson. *The Simpsons* are a human family, but with exaggerated appearances, like tall blue hair.

The animator (the artist who does the drawings) draws these characters in several different ways before the director of the film or television series chooses the final version.



STORYBOARD

The story is sketched in a series of pictures called the **storyboard**. The storyboard looks like a strip of cartoons. It shows what happens in each scene, and which characters and background will be included.



The storyboard also gives information about different viewing angles. As in all films, long shots show the whole scene and are used to create the setting for the animation. Close-ups can show detail, such as the expression on someone's face. Having a variety of viewing angles helps to create the atmosphere of the film. For example, when you are looking up at an object it can look large and scary and looking down at something can make it seem less important.

SOUNDTRACK

What the characters are saying is written as a play script. Actors read the lines for each of the characters, and these voice-overs are recorded for each scene. Sometimes very famous actors 'star' in cartoon films.

The soundtrack also has sound effects, such as crashes and bangs, and often music. Music can help bring the events to life. For example, fast music is used when characters are chased and spooky music is used in frightening scenes. Sometimes well-known pop songs feature in cartoon films and can help make the film more popular.

Silence can be as important as sound. A pause can keep you on the edge of your seat, waiting to see what will happen next.

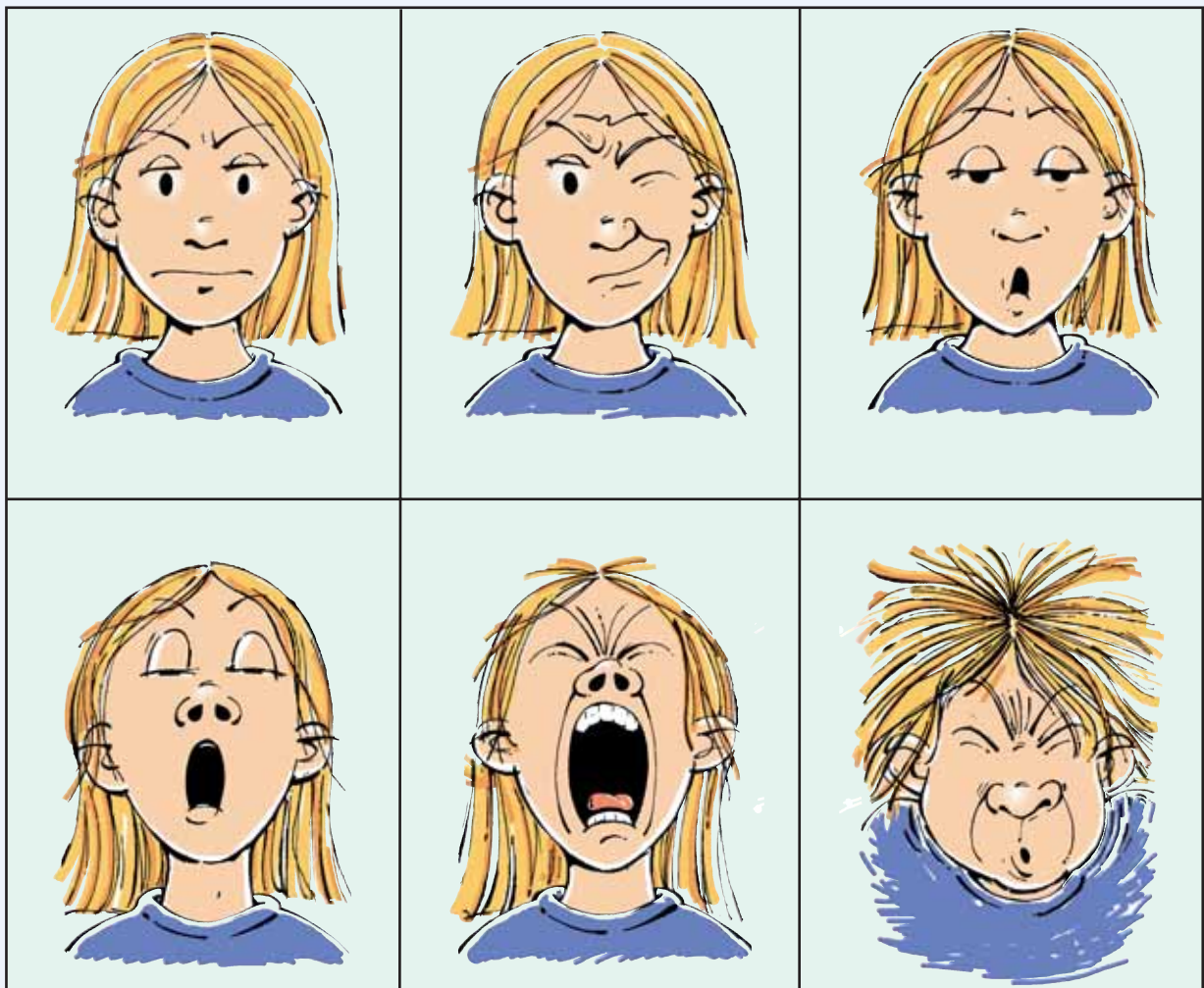


MATCHING PICTURES AND SOUND

The finished storyboard gives an exact timing for each scene. So for each split second of the film the speech, the sound effects and the music are all carefully matched to the action.

Each scene is broken down into different movements and artists have to make drawings showing all the different stages of movement. For one particular movement, for example a sneeze, the animator draws the start and end of the sneeze and computers fill in the gaps.

All the sound is mixed onto a single soundtrack. The music, sound effects and speech are carefully checked against the pictures to make sure they occur at exactly the right moment. The combined soundtrack and pictures are then turned into a film ready for the cinema or television.



Some highlights from the

Animated films today look very different from those seen in the past. These pages show some of the important developments in the history of animation.

Late 1880s

The first attempt at creating an animated film was made in Paris. Pictures were painted on glass slides that were attached to a leather strap and pulled through a machine by hand.

1890

1900

1910

1920

1930

1940

1909

One of the earliest cartoon characters was *Gertie the Dinosaur*.

1937

Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs was the first feature-length cartoon. It took 200 animators 3 years to bring the 82-minute film to the screen and required more than 2 million drawings.

1925

The first talking cartoon was about a dog called Bimbo. He played the trombone and said the line: "Now let's all follow the bouncing ball and sing along."

1928

Mickey Mouse first appeared in a silent film. Later in the same year he spoke for the first time.



history of animation

1954

Animal Farm was Britain's first animated feature film.

1964

Mary Poppins was an award-winning film containing scenes with animated backgrounds, including an actor dancing with cartoon penguins!

1995

The Plasticine characters Wallace and Gromit appeared in the very successful model animation film *A Close Shave*.

2001

The computer-generated comedy *Shrek* was famous for its realistic characters.

1950

1960

1970

1980

1990

2000

1960

The Flintstones was the first animated sitcom. More recently, live action films have been made with actors playing the roles of Fred and Wilma Flintstone.

1989

The first series of the television animation *The Simpsons* was shown.

1995

Toy Story was the first full-length all computer-generated animated film.

ANIMATORS REQUIRED

Alfie, the boy in the story, hoped to make his cartoons into films. Here are some adverts for jobs that might appeal to animators or boys and girls like Alfie when they are older and looking for a job.

1

Thinking about a career in animation?

Now is your chance to find out what the job really involves.

We have **5 work experience placements** available for one week in July.

If you enjoy drawing and like to be creative we want to hear from you.

What you have to do:

In no more than 200 words tell us why you think you would make a good animator.

Please send your writing to us by **May 20th**.

For more details please call us on
07809 039 0055

Animate • Albany Road • Brighton

2

Animation talent required

Ever wanted to see your name on the credits of a hit film?

NOW IS YOUR CHANCE

No experience required, just superb drawing skills. Come along to our open day on 2nd June and show us what you can do.

We are looking for 5 new gifted animators to join our team. If animation is your thing, you could help create the next big blockbuster film.

Contact Linda Harris for more details: l.harris@animationstudios.uk

Some overseas travel might be needed.

3

JOB: Animators

Location: London

Contact: Darren Moore

Who says sequels are never as good as the original?

Well, this one can be with your help.

We are looking for new animators to work on a follow-up to a hit cartoon film. We will be working to tight deadlines so you must be able to work under pressure. Some knowledge of computer-based animation required.

Please send sketches of a variety of characters to:

application@filmproductions.uk

Interview date: 5th July

4

Few remaining places for animators

Location: North

Job type: Full-time

Start date: Immediately

This famous studio is currently working on a new children's TV series and has an urgent need for good animators. You should have experience within the television or film industry. Please send a completed application form together with some examples of your work as soon as possible.

**Animation Limited,
56 Trinity Road, Leeds**

Acknowledgements: 'The Cartoonist' adapted from *The Cartoonist* by Betsy Byars, Puffin.

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