

Workshop: Embodying storytelling

Where: Motion capture studio

Who: Animation students, undergraduate animation students with experience making storyboards, and illustrations. Graduate students with interest in the topic. Four to eight participants, young adults.

When: Thursday April 6th 2023, 1:00 pm to 5:00 pm

After receiving email sign up, which will include their contact information and names, students will be asked to come in person bringing loose, comfortable clothing, extra warm clothes and/or a blanket. A late lunch will be provided

Part 1 - introduction

Start/end time: 1:15 - 1:25 pm

Duration: 10 minutes

Introducing myself, the description and duration of the workshop. We will also go around the circle and introduce our names, our pronouns, our access needs (physical impairments) and need-to-knows (subjects that are off topic, anything you're going through that you want to share with the group). I will then explain the process of the workshop.

Description for participants: "The workshop is intended to help you build trust and your intuitive sense of storytelling and story-making through embodiment practices.

That means that throughout the process, you will learn to think and act through your body first as opposed to just from your head.

By doing a few improvisation games and some basic theatre work, I'm hoping that these exercises will help better ground us in the stories you'll be depicting!

After this introduction, we'll do a few improvisation warm-ups. It'll help us get comfortable with one another and feel comfortable trying new things. We'll have a late lunch break at around 3 PM, then I'll share an indigenous story of Wesackejack, or the Trickster. We'll then go through a movement and dance activity, acting out scenes doing mask work, and exploring movement through puppetry. After all this, I'll share with you the story one more time. Then we'll then do a

quick, intuitive storyboard of the story, and then we'll close off the workshop, share some final thoughts, and I'll chat with you more about the survey for tomorrow.

So to recap, we're doing a few improv games, I'll share with you a story, we'll then move, act with masks, and play with puppets. I'll share the story again, and we'll make a storyboard. Then we'll close off the workshop."

I will seek permission from students to record our session. This will occur through photos and videos from my cellular device. I will make explicit that the information recorded will only be used for my reflection on the process and as a proof of concept to seek further funding. It will be referenced in my blog and seen by faculty. It will not be shared on social media platforms. Given that the workshop is informal and won't be directly referenced for my thesis research, I have chosen this method of consent.

Part 2 - icebreaker improv games

Start/End time: 1:25 pm - 2:55 pm

Duration: 90 minutes

We will then begin the next hour and a half doing improvisational games. The intent is to get participants out of their heads and into their bodies, work with and get to know each other, to accept failing and failing joyfully, and act intuitively rather than overthink their decisions. Four to five games will be played.

Three things (10 minutes)

Before we share names, I'd like for everyone to grab three things in the room! Something that looks like your favourite colour, something you don't often carry with you, and something that reminds you of your mom or caretaker!

Name game - Bang! (approx 10 minutes)

Here's a quick way to get to know one another! Make a circle, The leader in the middle will point at someone and yell bang! That person has to duck and the two people on either side will have to yell each other's names! After a few practice rounds, there will be eliminations. The last two will have to do a show-down. When the leader says a word that doesn't fit in the defined

category, both people have to turn around and say “bang bang bang” until one laughs or one runs out of breath!

Sambran (approx 10 minutes)

We'll sit for this activity. Two people decide to lift their finger when they have a word in mind. The group counts down “three two one” and clap! Based on the two words said, the next two brave people will find a word that most associates to both. When two people end up saying the same word. We all get up and dance yelling “SAME BRANE SAME BRANE!”

Woosh/woah (woosh, woah, ramp, volcano, hot potato little pig, Tunnel (3 ppl turn sideways)) (approx 15 minutes)

Stand in a circle. Woosh goes in one direction, woah changes the direction, etc. It's about ensemble work, a quick call and response.

Big Booty (approx 20 minutes)

We stand in a circle, the organizer is Big booty, and everyone to my left is numbered up from one up. One, two, three, etc. We all start off with slapping our thighs: “**Big Booty, Big Booty, Big Booty. Aw, yeah.**” I start off by calling my name, and then a person's number. That person says their number, then another person's number, and so on. A person can call back to Big Booty. If you mess up, the player goes to the back of the line, and everyone get a new number!

Ten seconds to... (approx 10 minutes)

This is an ensemble exercise. Everyone will have 10 seconds to make an object using only their bodies. Ten seconds to make a vase! Ten seconds to make a bear! Ten seconds to create a football! Etc

Extra games if we end before time

The statue: (approx 10 minutes) compliment the pose someone gives in the middle of the circle, bow and say thank you statue before leaving.

I love clams because... (approx 10 minutes)

Don't think! Name things you like! It doesn't have to be because they're clams. When someone is fibbing, someone else steps into the circle and keeps going.

Late lunch and snack break

Start/end time: 3:00 pm to 3:15 pm

Duration: (Approx 15 minutes)

Part 3 - sharing the story

Start/end time: 3:20 - 3:35

Duration: 15 minutes

We will continue our warm up. To encourage participants to return towards an introspective space, we will play a more quiet game.

Counting to thirty (approx 10 minutes)

“Let’s all lie down with our blankets or mats and get a bit comfortable. Put on the extra layers you have, and grab anything else you need to get cozy. Start by placing your hand on your belly and on your chest, breathe normally. Notice the feelings in your tummy after eating your meal. Notice how your chest is feeling, and whether you’re feeling other sensations in your body. Take a moment to acknowledge those feelings, See them.

As a group, we are going to practice intuitively feeling our way to counting to 30. If someone speaks over someone else, we’ll start over the count.”

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As participants are lying comfortably in a circle, calm and limber from playing our improvisation games, they will then be asked to imagine this story with their eyes closed or slightly ajar.

The story (approx 5 minutes)

Every culture and every person in the northern hemisphere saw the same stars at night, and each person had their own connection to the cosmos. We see *Wesakcheak* the Trickster, up in the sky when the stars align in winter. They can be seen pointing at the seven sisters, known as the Pleiades star cluster, with their hips adorned with the stars of Orion's belt.

Wesakchak can change in whichever shape they please. One of the first to be blessed on this land by the great spirit, they are a natural adventurer, and like to cause mischief. The trickster likes to involve, to interject, to roar with laughter. And They like to play tricks on people all the time, only to get themselves hopelessly entangled in their web of troubles.

Known also as Nannubush, Naabe, Iktomi, and many other names across the land. The trickster is ubiquitous, all existing, and within all of us. The Trickster can even be a Bugs Bunny, a Wile E. Coyote, or a Charlie Chaplin-type, if you think about it. Wesakchak finds their way across all cultures, and they certainly like to visit the animals, trees and people as they're milling about their business.

Here is one story of Wesakchak told by my friend Stan McKay. One day on the land, the animals got together and had a meeting. They said to each other, we have to do something. The winters are very cold here and our coats are not warm enough. Maybe we should ask Wesakcheak to see if they can help us. Wesakcheak heard nearby. They proclaimed with confidence: "Okay, I'll make warmer coats for you and I'll let you know when they're ready so that you can come and get them."

One of the things they did was change some of the coats of the animals to winter, for example, the rabbit's summer coat is brown. So he made a white coat for him to better hide in the snow. The same was true of the fox, who got a shiny undercoat. All these animals got different coats.

The moose however, was on his way to get his winter coat when he began crossing an interesting pond. What he saw under his hooves was a plant in the water that he particularly liked. He had to stop and eat. It was so plentiful. But as the day went by, he didn't realize how quickly time had passed. He looked up and noticed how dark it was, and cold!

The moose jumped up from his daze and went to Wesakcheak to get his coat. Once there, Wesakcheak looked up at him and said: "I'm sorry. There's only one coat left that is a winter coat. I can't do any more for you now. I don't have any more time to work on anything else and that's the one thing that was meant for you. You'll have to take it."

So the Moose got the coat. But it was big, so big, that it just hung loose. That's why the moose has a coat that hangs loose on his shoulders and especially below the neck. He was late and he didn't get the right fit.

PART 4 - Activities

Start/end time: 3:25 - 4:15: pm

Approx total duration: 50 minutes

Dancing

Duration: 15 minutes

Material: Audio plug-in

“Slowly start to bring feeling back to the tips of your feet and fingers. Gently turn yourself to your side and gently bring yourself to a seated position. Hand on your chest and hand on your belly, take a deep breath in, and slow breath out from your mouth, gently awaken your eyes and bring yourself to standing.”

In a circle, I'll start by asking them to describe what they saw in the story. The creatures and the environment. I'll ask them to detail these things.

I'll introduce the movement part of the workshop: dancing as elements of the story. From the list of objects they described, we will be going, one by one, down the list of these things as they would exist in their own story.

For example: Let's start with the night sky, how would your stars twinkle, stand bright?

The dance will be led by myself, and will last about **five** to **seven** minutes.

“So now that we have an idea of what these animals are like in the story, we'll get to act like them!

Acting/theatre

Duration: 10 minutes

Objects: rabbit mask, moose fox mask, man mask, large monster mask, rabbit ears, comedia de arte masks, mirror, speakers

Participants will choose a mask they like. Now that they're limbered and energized, they will now explore what these animals are like in the story.

They will look at themselves with it on, move around in it. They will then practice some silly walks with the masks. How would a fox or coyote walk? How would the trickster walk? Or a rabbit, or moose?

I'll then give them various scenarios for their walk: choose one part of our body that's holding an orb or weight. Walk as though you have a secret. As if you just discovered a large feast. Walk as if you've never seen this forest before. As if you are afraid of those around you. As if you have just lost something precious. Choose another person in the room and try to learn his or her walk. As well, try another mask.

Puppetry

Duration: 30 minutes

Objects: two (2) brown paper puppets

Paper puppet

As an ensemble, we will move each member of the puppet as a unit. Three people take a hold of the puppet. One at the neck, and arm, the third at the waist and arm, and the last person holding the ankles of the puppet.

Try seeing how the puppet would breathe. Bobbing up and down, now choose objects for it to give its focus towards. Now imagine the weight in his body, his feet, arms, hands, gravity pushing down on it. Have it do a jump.

Now as a group, share with me a simple story that you're all familiar with, and work through how your puppet would move through that space.

Now, as a group, depict a moment or scene from the Trickster story I shared.

Part 5 - retelling of the story

Start/end time: 4:15 pm - 4:30 pm

Duration: 5 to 10 minutes

Participants will shake off the final exercise. They will then be asked to lie or sit down again and be guided in a short mindfulness meditation to bring awareness to the present.

The original story will be shared with them. This time, they will be asked to see themselves as the characters as opposed to seeing the characters as separate. They will be asked to allow their minds to invite all sensations without judgment. After 5 deep breaths. Students will be given material for the sixth part of the workshop.

Part 6 - storyboarding

Start/end time: 4:30 - 5:40

Duration: 10 minutes

Material: five sheets of paper, pencil (no eraser necessary).

Students will be given 5 minutes to intuitively draw a rough storyboard of their story. Any drawing is correct, provided that they draw from the experience and feelings they brought forward from our exercises.

Once the drawings are completed, I will take the copies. I will notify them that copies of the original will be sent to them.

Part 7 - closing

Start/end time: 4:40 - 4:50

Duration: 10 minutes

Let's move the table aside and sit on chairs and in a circle. I'll ask students to close their eyes and scan their bodies and see what feelings come to the surface. After 3 breaths, we'll bring our attention back to one another.

I'll ask how everyone is feeling and express any experiences they're having. Afterwards, I'll mention that there will be a short survey to complete tomorrow. I will scan and give them the original copy of the storyboard.

We will close off the workshop with a thank you from my part, and a **last improv game**, where we shared something they noticed or enjoyed, and a noise that expressed how they currently are or feel.

Feedback (recorded)

Fun, a good break from school and the stress and anxiety of the week. The workshop loosened them up, and helped them feel confident and encouraged them to try something scary and new and open their mind to moving. Tapping into other sights of their creativity that less mechanic, felt like they used a different part of their brain. Enjoyed being creative in different ways and not having to draw to express themselves. Felt energized.

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Part 8 - the survey

Three of the five full participants responded to the survey.

The survey will be sent the morning following the workshop. Students will be asked to submit the answers to the surveys up to two days after receiving it.

How do you feel after taking the workshop?

I felt like I loosened up a lot and felt more confident in moving around.

I felt very relaxed and loose, i forget sometimes that moving my body always makes me feel better

Very creatively inclined

What did you appreciate about the workshop?

I appreciated that we all allowed space for each other to talk and it felt like a safe space.

I really liked that for one it allowed me to tap into a different typo of creativity, i got to think in a different way than I usually do, It gave me a oppportunity to be less mechanic about the way create .

I appreciated getting up , feeling my body and loosening up concepts i placed for myself

What are some elements that could be improved?

I zoned out a bit during the first storytelling, but I also appreciated the meditation before the storytelling. I really enjoyed being in that relaxed state while listening to the story but maybe if there's some time to bring us back a bit from the meditation before the storytelling so that we can be more awake during the storytelling.

I feel like during the meditation and then the story I disassociated a bit. I don't know how to do this but maybe find a way to make us be more engaged during the story.

I really enjoyed the session, I don't really think I can give any input on improvement.

One of the goals was to see whether you infused your worldview into the Cree story of the moose and the Trickster. Do you feel like you did that?

No

A bit (33%)

Yes (**66%**)

Very much so

Has this given you a new perspective of your capacity to storytell? If yes, how so?

Yes, I never used my body to tell a story and I felt more immersed into the characters and environment.

It has, I realized that storytelling can come from anywhere, it does not necessarily needs to be drawn or storyboarded like I normally do, I can tell stories through my actions and my body and I think that is awesome. Also for animation being more connected with the way my body can move will improve the movement in my work.

Yes, I think I was able to explore another side of coming up with concepts, like engaging with others and moving to see how my body feels in the story.

Would you do another version of this workshop?

Yes **100%**

No

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Reflections

The set-up

The space was large, but sometimes a bit large for movement exercises. The lighting was very important, and having what feels like a centre stage helped bring it all together. The larger speakers were an extra addition that was not necessary. Having additional provisions and tool in case the initial plans failed proved to be useful.

Introduction

- Students knew each other thanks to being in the same year, they were friends, but also showed a genuine interest in these activities.

- Ages were early 20's.
- Two boys, four girls
- During the names, pronouns and access needs, need to knows, students shared how stressed and how they lacked sleep, one was okay overall
- One student seemed a bit shy but interested and willing to experience the session.
- We started off with seven, one student had to leave for a meeting, another had to leave but returned for a meeting.

Improv games

We played all our improv games. All the participants were laughing and jesting with each other, people were warming up.

Lunch

- Still on schedule, lunch was delicious, ordered with uber eats, no hiccups.

The story

- Participants really appreciated the mindfulness, grounding and embodying meditation i did before jumping into the story
- The counting to thirty exercise got them into the energy feeling headspace. They were quietly excited when they got to 30
- The lights were off, blankets were on the floor to help them get settled.
- They were all very light and relaxed after the story sharing
- People referenced seeing different versions of the trickster in their minds, some characters from folk stories from back home, some from pop culture, others from theatre like cirque du soleil
- Nature seemed lush and green, others dry and cold like winter.
- Some people didn't see the smaller animals in the story
- People didn't seem to remember the fox and the rabbit too much when they heard the story for the first time.
- Add notes from notebook

Dance/movement

- People got into it more when i joined in and kept chiming new element and movement suggestions

- Reading my notebook pulled people away from the movement
- The size of the space made people seem awkward, following each other in a circle as opposed to moving freely in the environment.
- I could have had one person be just a person and have people act more like the elements of the story.

Maskwork

- Participants seemed unsure or perhaps uncomfortable moving around in the masks
- One participants had to leave briefly for a meeting,
- There were only four masks so four dancers were somewhat uncomfortable
- They took a group photo with the mask
- I instructed them to engage with the extra person when they returned, which they enjoyed
- One got very much into it - all these activities reminded him of his theatre days.
- It took a bit of time for participants to get more comfortable, but progressively they gained more comfort in moving with the masks
- Some masks didn't fit as well on them

Puppetry

- I'm unsure if the puppetry exercise helped them better embody the version of the story. They were learning the mechanics of the puppet and were enjoying their time, but it was difficult for them to imagine
- One story was Wesakechak swimming in the stars (Raphael and Syd and I)
- One story was Wesakechak putting on coats on the animals (emilio, Ryah, Aranza)
- One story was a man on the toilet without toilet paper
- Another story was a man sneaking around
- Lots of laughter and interest in the story being shared
- I was worried I was losing their attention, but only one was seemingly thinking about having to leave at 5 pm.
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The story, second retelling/drawing

- I decided to allow them to draw while I told the second retelling of the story
- The story took five minutes to tell.

- I also told them they'd have five minutes to do the storyboard, they had 12 minutes roughly
- People didn't need seven minutes to complete the story
- Music was playing while they were drawing their story
- Some boards didn't line up
- Some wanted to hear the story a bit first before drawing,
- The art style resembled the art style they would use for their other storyboard animations
- Many were trying to quickly add-in last bits of details to their storyboard drawings, even after the time had gone off.
- I gave them extra time than they needed

Drawings:

- Their own art style, heavily influenced by pop culture and their own culture, can through the drawings
- Some drawings resembled the art style that they had practiced for other projects, rather than something unique from their own imagination
- All the storyboards were quite different from one another
- The fox and rabbit were more prominent in the storyboards even if they weren't initially in what they visualized
- There were many different versions of the trickster, not based on the the mask design but uniquely from their own imagination
- The personality of the trickster came out in their designs of them.

Closing remarks

- People were apt to share how they felt
- Reviews were very positive and reflective.
- People's "noise of relief" was calm, parky, or excited.

Overall impressions

- We were able to stay on time because I shortened the maskwork and dancing part of the workshop
- Maybe having quick sketching exercises to get them into a flow-drawing state would be ideal.

- I felt comfortable and connected with students for the most part, but I was reading and sometimes a bit uncomfortable with the silence students expressed when they were thinking, taking it as ambivalence or lack of energy to do a part of the exercise.
- It went really well!
- Some

Reflections on the reflections

- Gaining insight on the power of pause and silence
- How much processing has to happen slowly internally, versus none at all, like the “getting out of our head” exercises.
- Could we find more ways to include movement in the stories we visualize?
- Music is a great way to get people more out of their heads.