

## Activity 1A: What Is a Character?



Students analyze how characters are defined in part by their visual characteristics. They look at the visual aspects of existing animated characters and begin work on the unit project.

### Sequence

---

<b>1A.1:</b> <i>Analyzing Characters</i>	Students view two 3–5 minute clips of animated movies and analyze the visual elements that define the characters.
<b>1A.2:</b> <i>Introducing the Unit Project</i>	Students learn about the unit project and develop ideas for creating their own characters.
<b>1A.3:</b> <i>Initial Character Development and Research</i>	Students write descriptions of their characters and conduct research relating to their characters.

---

### Materials Needed

- **Handout 1: Unit 5 Overview**
- Two 3–5-minute clips from animated movies (see Advance Preparation)
- **Handout 2: Character Trait Sheet**
- Chart paper and markers
- **Handout 3: Unit 5 Project Description**
- **Assessment Checklist 1: Unit 5 Project**
- **Handout 4: Your Journal Assignments**
- **Handout 5: Character Description Worksheet**
- Computers with Internet access and (optionally) printers (one for each student)

## 1A.1: Unit Overview

### 1. Describe Unit 5.

Distribute **Handout 1: Unit 5 Overview** and give students a few minutes to read it. Tell students that they will focus on the development of characters in animated movies and TV shows. They will learn how to create believable characters, how to develop their own animated character, and how to create several works depicting the character.

Tell students that they will first analyze the visual qualities of characters from two animated movies. Their analysis will help them to see how visual features can convey a character's personality and to develop their own characters.

### 2. Discuss familiar animated characters.

Use questions like the following to generate discussion about characters:

- Who is your favorite animated character from a movie, TV show, or video game?
- Why do you like this character? What aspects make this character appealing?
- What does this character look like?
- How does the character's look fit with the character's personality? What particular visual elements (e.g., facial expression, style of clothing, the way the character moves) contribute to the unique look of this character?

### 3. Describe the activity.

Distribute **Handout 2: Character Trait Sheet**. Tell students that they will complete this handout as they watch two movie clips. For each clip, they should choose one character to analyze.

### 4. Play each movie clip twice and have students analyze characters.

For each clip, have students take notes during the first viewing and then add to or revise them during the second viewing. Allow a few minutes after the second viewing for students to review, clarify, or add to their notes.

### 5. Share character analyses.

Ask a few students to share their character analyses.

### Teacher's Notes: Sample Character Analysis of WALL-E

The following is a sample analysis of the character WALL-E, using a clip that begins five minutes into the film.

*Physical appearance:* WALL-E is a small robot consisting of a boxy yellow body, two triangular bulldozer-like treads for feet/legs, three jointed metal digits on each “hand” formed into pincers, and binocular-like eyes on a jointed neck. His exterior looks very worn—paint is flaking off, there are rust spots, and he is covered in dirt or dust.

*Clothing and adornments:* The character doesn't have any clothing or adornments, although his name is painted on the front of his “torso.”

*Facial expression:* WALL-E's “face” consists only of his eyes, but he is very expressive—his eyes have a wide range of motion—and he also uses his whole body to express himself. His facial expressions make him seem both worried and curious—he often moves his eyes closer together and brings an object closer to his body to get a better look. He also seems lonely—the expression on his face when he watches part of the movie *Hello, Dolly!* by himself seems to show longing for another person.

*Behavior:* In the clip, WALL-E seems to be engaging in a typical workday. He compacts trash into small squares, arranging them into tall structures. He sorts through the trash, looking for items he seems to find interesting, which he then takes “home” and organizes. He also watches part of *Hello, Dolly!*

*Movement:* Although WALL-E moves relatively smoothly on his treads, his movements seem comically clumsy and uncoordinated. He sometimes has a wobbly motion, which makes him seem almost childlike.

## 6. Discuss visual elements of animated characters.

Ask students the following questions:

- Based on the traits that you identified, how would you describe the personality of the character you analyzed?

**Possible answer for WALL-E:** *WALL-E seems to be curious and cheerful, but also somewhat anxious and lonely.*

- How does the way that the character looks reflect that personality?
- What are the differences between the characters in the two clips you watched? What are the similarities?
- How do a character's gestures and movements influence your perception of the character?

**Possible answers:** *A character that moves in an uncoordinated fashion might be seen as childlike or clumsy, while a character that moves forcefully or swiftly might be seen as aggressive, violent, or heroic, depending on the context. Often, the way the character looks and its gestures will reinforce one another—for example, WALL-E, with his big “eyes” and simplified figure, looks childlike or innocent, and moves in a way that reinforces this perception.*

- How does the setting help to make the character believable?

**Possible answer:** *The setting provides context that establishes the world that the character inhabits. For example, the trash-filled, dusty landscape that WALL-E inhabits mirrors his dirty and rusty appearance. Conversely, WALL-E looks distinctly out of place later in the movie aboard the antiseptic spaceship.*

- What visual elements are important in making a believable animated character?

**Possible answers:** *Facial expressions and body postures that register recognizable emotions, even if the character isn't human; movements and gestures that “make sense,” according to how we think people and animals move (and how we think animated objects might move); clothing, a hairstyle, and other adornments that fit with the character's personality; mouth and face movements that match the words being spoken by the voice-over actor*

## 7. Write and post visual elements of characters.

Write answers to the last question on chart paper and post it so that students can add to or change the list during the unit.



## Handout 1: Unit 5 Overview

*In many works of art, media, and entertainment (AME), believable characters play a crucial role. Think about your favorite movie. What would that movie be like with a different main character, even if the plot were the same? The movie would probably seem completely different, right?*

*The way that characters look and move is an important part of who they are. Think about the clothing or outfit worn by the characters in your favorite movie. Think about the look of a character's hairstyle. These visual cues can very quickly tell viewers a lot about a character. Developing believable characters—characters that look right for the parts they play—is an important skill to learn if you're thinking about a career in AME.*

*In this unit, you will learn about character development by creating your own animated character. You will analyze existing characters, develop drawing and sculpting skills, and create several works featuring the character that you have created. Your work in this unit will help you answer these questions:*

- *What makes an animated character compelling?*
- *How can I define a character through visual elements?*
- *What are the visual challenges of converting a 2-D character to a 3-D one?*

### Unit Project

For your unit project, you will create an animated character. You may invent a new character for an existing show or film or you may invent a character for a completely new TV show or film. You'll create a written description and a series of drawings of your character. You will draw *turnaround model sheets* showing your character from various angles and character studies showing different emotions and different actions.

You will also create a small sculpture of your character, called a maquette. Maquettes are often created to help the animator work out how the character looks from all angles. Finally, you'll animate your character by creating a flipbook.



## What You Will Do in This Unit

**Analyze animated characters.** Look at animated characters in movies and TV shows to determine the visual elements that make characters believable.

**Develop an idea for a character.** Invent an animated character. Write a description of the character and conduct research on the character's physical characteristics.

**Develop your character's look.** Draw preliminary sketches of your character, revise the sketches based on feedback, and create turnaround model sheets.

**Begin work on the AME Career Research project.** Choose an AME career that you're interested in and begin your research.

**Learn about animation forms and styles.** Find out about the characteristics of three forms of animation and research the style of an animator or animation company.

**Draw character studies.** Create character studies that show action and expression.

**Sculpt your character.** Practice sculpting from a model and then sculpt a maquette of your character.

**Animate your character.** Create a flipbook to bring your character to life.

## Portfolio Requirements

You will create the following items to keep in your working portfolio:

- A written description of your character
- A turnaround model sheet for your character
- Character studies showing your character in action
- Character studies showing your character expressing specific emotions
- A 3-D maquette of your character

You will also use your working portfolio to keep all your other course work: sketches, journals, class work, assignments, and writing.

## Vocabulary Used in This Unit

**Character studies:** Drawings that show how a character looks when engaging in specific actions, such as walking or dancing, or when expressing specific emotions, such as happiness or sadness.

**Maquette:** A 3-D model that animators use to help them draw the character consistently.

**Style:** A set of characteristics related to the art of a culture, period, or school of art; the characteristic expression of an individual artist.

**Turnaround model sheet:** A sheet of paper with several drawings of a character from different views; for example, front, back, and side views of a character.





## Handout 2: Character Trait Sheet

What visual qualities define an animated character? How does a character's look relate to his or her personality? Use this sheet to analyze two characters in different movies.

### Clip 1

Fill out the chart below as you watch a short clip from an animated movie. Be sure to choose only one character to analyze.

Character's Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Character Trait	Description
Physical appearance (e.g., skin or fur, coloring, fat or skinny, tall or short)	
Clothing and adornments (e.g., jewelry or tattoos)	
Facial expression (e.g., Is the character sad or happy? Is the character very expressive or withdrawn?)	
Behavior (How does the character act? What activities does he or she do?)	
Movement (Does the character move quickly or slowly? Gracefully or clumsily?)	





## Clip 2

Fill out the chart below as you watch the second movie clip.

Character's Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Character Trait	Description
Physical appearance (e.g., skin or fur, coloring, fat or skinny, tall or short)	
Clothing and adornments (e.g., jewelry or tattoos)	
Facial expression (e.g., Is the character sad or happy? Is the character very expressive or withdrawn?)	
Behavior (How does the character act? What activities does he or she do?)	
Movement (Does the character move quickly or slowly? Gracefully or clumsily?)	





## 1A.2: Introducing the Unit Project

### 1. Describe the unit project.

Distribute **Handout 3: Unit 5 Project Description and Assessment Checklist 1: Unit 5 Project** and answer any questions students may have.

### 2. Discuss the role of characters in arts and media.

Ask students the following framing question from the unit:

- What makes an animated character compelling?

Discuss the importance of characters. Explain that characters tell the story of a work, advance the plot, and involve viewers by giving them someone to root for (or against)—in short, characters are the driving force in most works of media and entertainment, and in many works of art.

### 3. Have the class remember and list animated characters they know.

To give students an idea of the range of characters they can develop, have the class list animated characters from TV and film. Point out that fictional characters do not have to be human.



#### Teacher's Notes: Animated Characters

Students may list the following types of animated characters:

- People based on historic or fictional figures (e.g., Pocahontas; Aladdin)
- Children (e.g., Dora the Explorer; Coraline)
- Adults (e.g., from *The Simpsons*; *Family Guy*)
- Superheroes (e.g., Powerpuff Girls; Spider-Man; The Incredibles)
- Animals (e.g., Mickey Mouse, Donald Duck, Bambi; Nemo; Wallace and Gromit)
- Insects (e.g., from *Antz*; *A Bug's Life*)
- Normally inanimate objects (e.g., from *Toy Story*; *Cars*; *SpongeBob Squarepants*)
- Monsters (e.g., from *Monsters, Inc.*)
- Mythical creatures, such as fairies and dragons (e.g., from *The Last Unicorn*; *Spirited Away*)
- Invented creatures (e.g., from *Star Wars: The Clone Wars*; *Howl's Moving Castle*)

#### 4. Complete Journal 1.

Distribute **Handout 4: Your Journal Assignments** and have students complete Journal 1 in class or as a homework assignment.

##### **Teacher's Notes: Managing Students' Character Choices**

Depending on the drawing and sculpture techniques that you plan to teach, you may want to limit students to certain kinds of characters. For example, you may want students to only develop characters that are human or human-like. In addition to TV shows and movies, you may also want to give students the option of developing a character for a video game. Be sure students know the requirements before they begin Journal assignment 1.

##### **Journal 1**

###### **Option 1: Characters for an existing TV show or movie**

Brainstorm new characters for TV shows or movies that you know. Make a list and name the show they would be part of. Choose two or three of the characters and describe them—what they look like, their personalities, and how they might move.

Then select one character for your unit project. Describe your character's role in a new episode of the show or a sequel to a film.

###### **Option 2: Characters for a new TV show or movie**

Brainstorm characters and write one-sentence descriptions of the new shows or movies they would star in. Choose two or three characters and describe them—what they look like, their personalities, and how they move.

Then select the character for your unit project. Describe your character's role in the new TV show or movie.

---

**Note:** Journal assignment 1 is a good opportunity for formative assessment.

---



## Handout 3: Unit 5 Project Description

For your unit project, you will create an animated character for either an existing or new TV show or movie. You will create your character using the same process that animators use when they develop characters.

You will write a character description, draw initial sketches, and create a *turnaround model sheet*—a page of drawings showing your character from different angles. Then you will create two sets of character studies—drawings that show your character in a specific setting or situation. The first set will show your character in action, and the second set will show your character expressing different emotions.

Next, you will learn sculpting techniques and create a maquette—a 3-D model used by animators to draw a character consistently. As a final step, you will create a flipbook with your character and present your character for critique.

### Step 1: Choose a Character

#### Option 1: Create a New Character for an Existing TV Show or Movie

Choose an animated TV show or movie that you are familiar with. Develop a character that belongs in that world. Write a three- or four-sentence description of an episode of the TV show that your character plays a role in or describe the role your character plays in a sequel to the movie you've chosen.

Here's a sample description: "This episode of *The Simpsons* introduces a new character: Bart and Lisa's long-lost cousin, Steve. When Bart and Lisa first meet Steve, he seems polite and reserved. Bart makes fun of Steve for being prim and proper. But Bart and Lisa soon learn that Steve is not as he appears—Steve plays a series of pranks and practical jokes, including shaving the family cat, and places the blame on Bart! Bart and Lisa eventually catch Steve in the act, and Steve is sent home in disgrace."

#### Option 2: Create a Character for a New TV Show or Movie

Invent a character for a new animated TV show or movie. This option is more challenging, because you'll need to create the character's look completely from scratch. Write a three- or four-sentence description of your character's role in the new TV show or movie.

Here's a sample description: "*The Incredibly Strange Adventures of Sam the Wonder-Dog* is an animated film about Sam, a border collie who performs in the circus with her beloved owner, Lou. Sam's special talent is that she balances on the high wire. Sam is accidentally left behind when the circus leaves town. The film follows Sam's adventures with the animals and people who help her find her way back to Lou and the circus."





## Step 2: Create a Written Description and Conduct Research

Once you've chosen your character, write a detailed description. Be sure to include information about the character's personality (for example, his or her likes and dislikes) and backstory (for example, where he or she comes from), as well as physical characteristics, including appearance, movements, and aspects of personality that might affect an animation.

Conduct research to learn details that will make your character believable. Character-related research is an important activity for many animators as they develop characters. Animators for the film *Finding Nemo*, for example, went scuba diving at coral reefs to see what the underwater world looked like. If your character is an animal, you might research online to find videos of that animal so that you can observe how it looks and how it moves. If you are creating a character for an existing TV show or movie, you can research the other characters in that world and the style in which they are drawn.

## Step 3: Draw Preliminary Sketches, Get Feedback, and Draw Turnaround Model Sheets

Using your written description and your research as guide, make preliminary sketches of your character, drawing several different versions. Share these sketches with classmates and ask for feedback on specific aspects of your sketches.

Using the feedback, finalize your character's look and create a turnaround model sheet that shows your character from several different angles. Show a front view, a three-quarter profile view, a side view, and a back view of your character.

## Step 4: Draw Character Studies

Artists who work on animation projects often use character studies—drawings of characters in a variety of situations and poses—to help them create their animations. Create two sets of character studies, using your written description and turnaround model sheet as a guide. First, create at least four drawings that show your character in motion, for example, walking, dancing, or eating. Next, create another set of at least four drawings that show your character's expressions—for example, how he or she shows happiness, disappointment, anger, or confusion. Include both full-body and close-up facial drawings. Choose actions and emotions that fit with the way you have described your character and the role that he or she plays in the show or movie.

## Step 5: Sculpt a Maquette

Animators sometimes use maquettes when creating their animations. These 3-D models can help them maintain a consistent look as they draw, especially if the character they are drawing is a character that the animator did not create (which is usually the case with movies and TV shows). Use your character studies and turnaround model sheets for reference as you sculpt the maquette.



## Step 6: Create a Flipbook

Once you have determined what your character looks like both in 2-D and 3-D, you will set the character in motion by creating a short animation.

Develop an idea for an action that your character might do in the TV show or film. Choose a simple action and consider actions that happen in seconds rather than in minutes—animations take a long time to create! Think about how the action fits in with the character's role in your story and with the character's personality. Draft your animation using thumbnail sketches and then finalize it, using techniques that you will learn.

## Step 7: Present Your Character for Critique

Describe your character, along with the TV episode or movie that your character appears in. Display all the work you have done related to the character. Focus your presentation on your process in developing the character. For example, you might talk about how you decided about your character's clothes and why your decision was right for your character's personality. Explain why your character is believable—think about the visual elements that are important in developing a believable animated character.

Here are some questions to guide your presentation:

- How did you get the idea for your character?
- What movie or TV show episode does your character star in?
- Describe a point in the process when you had to make a choice about your character's look. How did you decide? What does your decision say about your character?
- What visual features do you think make your character believable?

## Step 8: Reflect on Your Work in the Unit

Reflect on your work in this unit by answering the following questions:

- What was your favorite part of developing a character? Why?
- What was most challenging? Why?
- Why do you think believable characters are such a crucial element of media and entertainment?
- What would you do differently if you were to do this project again?
- What else did you learn while doing the project?





## Assessment Checklist 1: Unit 5 Project

Use this assessment checklist to plan and assess your project. Your teacher will use this checklist to help evaluate your work.

Requirements	Percentage of Total Grade	Comments	
<b>Written Description</b>			
		<b>Student Comments</b>	<b>Teacher Comments</b>
Description includes background information about the character, such as personality, backstory, and appearance.	50%		
Description is a detailed, believable, written portrait of the character.	50%		
<b>Total</b>	<b>100%</b>		
<b>Turnaround Model Sheet</b>			
		<b>Student Comments</b>	<b>Teacher Comments</b>
Turnaround model sheet includes front, three-quarter profile, side, and back views.	40%		
Drawings depict a believable character that incorporates the conventions of animation, such as exaggerated features.	30%		
Student demonstrates effort and perseverance in learning and practicing drawing techniques.	30%		
<b>Total</b>	<b>100%</b>		



Requirements	Percentage of Total Grade	Comments	
<b>Action Character Studies</b>			
		<b>Student Comments</b>	<b>Teacher Comments</b>
Character studies include drawings of the character in at least four different poses.	35%		
Poses make sense, given the character's traits, the specific action, and the drawing style.	35%		
Student demonstrates effort and perseverance in learning and practicing drawing techniques.	30%		
<b>Total</b>	<b>100%</b>		

<b>Expression Character Studies</b>			
		<b>Student Comments</b>	<b>Teacher Comments</b>
Character studies include drawings of at least four different expressions, some of which are close-ups and some of which show the full body.	35%		
Each expression clearly conveys a particular emotion that fits the character's description and role in the show or film.	35%		
Student demonstrates effort and perseverance in learning and practicing drawing techniques.	30%		
<b>Total</b>	<b>100%</b>		

<b>Maquette</b>			
		<b>Student Comments</b>	<b>Teacher Comments</b>
Maquette successfully translates 2-D visualizations of the character into a 3-D form.	50%		
Student demonstrates effort and perseverance in learning and practicing sculpting techniques.	50%		
<b>Total</b>	<b>100%</b>		



<b>Requirements</b>	<b>Percentage of Total Grade</b>	<b>Comments</b>	
<b>Flipbook</b>		<b>Student Comments</b>	<b>Teacher Comments</b>
The flipbook clearly depicts the character completing an action.	<b>40%</b>		
The action, gesture, and expression of the character make sense in the context of the character's personality and story.	<b>40%</b>		
The flipbook creates a smooth and believable sense of motion for the viewer.	<b>20%</b>		
<b>Total</b>	<b>100%</b>		

<b>Presentation</b>		<b>Student Comments</b>	<b>Teacher Comments</b>
Presenter describes the character, the character's personality traits, and the role the character plays in a TV episode or movie.	<b>50%</b>		
Presentation focuses on the character development process and includes a description of at least one decision made during the development process.	<b>25%</b>		
Presentation demonstrates that the character includes visual elements that make it believable.	<b>25%</b>		
<b>Total</b>	<b>100%</b>		





## Handout 4: Your Journal Assignments

Complete the following journal assignments when you are instructed to do so by your teacher.

### Journal 1

#### Option 1: Characters for an existing TV show or movie

Brainstorm new characters for TV shows or movies that you know. Make a list and name the show they would be part of. Choose two or three of the characters and describe them—what they look like, their personalities, and how they might move.

Then select one character for your unit project. Describe your character's role in a new episode of the show or a sequel to a movie.

#### Option 2: Characters for a new TV show or movie

Brainstorm characters and write one-sentence descriptions of the new shows or movies they would star in. Choose two or three characters and describe them—what they look like, their personalities, and how they move.

Then select the character for your unit project. Describe your character's role in the new TV show or movie.

### Journal 2

If you are basing your character on an existing TV show or movie, watch the movie or an episode of the TV show. If you are inventing a character for a new TV show or movie, watch a TV show or movie in a similar genre. Take notes on the way the characters look. Describe their defining visual traits, noting such details as the color scheme and the way they move. Make several sketches of the characters in action poses and close-ups.

### Journal 3

Write a short list of objects that your character might use in daily activities, for example, a skateboard, headphones and a music player, a briefcase, or a cell phone. Choose one object and describe how the character uses it. Explain what the object tells about the character's personality. Sketch the object.

## React, Practice, Imagine: Weekly Journal Activities

In addition to the journal assignments described above, choose one of the following three activities each week to do in your journal:

**React**—Respond to a piece of art or media shown in class by writing about it. Then write two questions you'd like to ask the artist about the work. Try to answer the question as you think the artist might.

**Practice**—Sketch something from observation or from your imagination.

**Imagine**—Describe an art or design project that you are interested in creating.



## 1A.3: Initial Character Development and Research

### 1. Share character ideas.

Ask a few students to share the characters they want to develop, based on their response in Journal 1. Some students may not be familiar with the amount of drawing that animations require. Make sure that their ideas for characters are feasible and use drawing styles within the range of their abilities.



### 2. Have students write descriptions of their characters.

Distribute **Handout 5: Character Description Worksheet** for students to use as they develop and describe their characters. If students are having difficulty describing their character, suggest that they instead use one of the other ideas they generated for Journal 1.

### 3. Have students conduct research related to characters.

Once students have completed the handout, have them research details for their characters either online or in the library. Handout 5 includes some suggestions, but you might discuss additional elements that students might research. Emphasize that realistic details help make characters believable.

### 4. Complete Journal 2.

Have students complete Journal 2 as a homework or in-class assignment.

#### Journal 2

If you are basing your character on an existing TV show or movie, watch the movie or an episode of the TV show. If you are inventing a character for a new TV show or movie, watch a TV show or movie in a similar genre. Take notes on the way the characters look. Describe their defining visual traits, noting such details as the color scheme and the way they move. Make several sketches of the characters in action poses and close-ups.

---

**Note:** Journal assignment 2 is a good opportunity for formative assessment.

---



## Handout 5: Character Description Worksheet

---

### Part 1: Personality and Backstory

An important part of developing a believable character is thinking about the character's personality and backstory—where the character comes from, the character's goals and desires, the kind of world that the character inhabits.

1. What role does your character play in the TV series or film?
2. What is the world like that your character inhabits? What people or creatures live there?
3. How old is your character?
4. What is your character's family like?
5. What is your character's personality (e.g., happy-go-lucky, serious, anxious)?
6. What are your character's goals (e.g., to be a rock star, to find the circus, to make people laugh)?
7. What are your character's likes and dislikes?





## Part 2: Physical Appearance

Use what you have described about the character's personality and backstory to describe his or her appearance. For example, a happy-go-lucky character who makes people laugh will look different from a mean-spirited character who wants to take over the world.

Physical Trait	Description
Is the character human or humanoid, an animal, a usually inanimate object, or something else?	
Physical appearance (e.g., skin or fur, coloring, fat or skinny, tall or short)	
Clothing and adornments (e.g., jewelry or tattoos)	



Physical Trait	Description
General facial expressions (e.g., Is the character sad or happy? Is the character very expressive or withdrawn?)	
Behavior (What kinds of activities does the character engage in?)	
Movement (Does the character move quickly or slowly? Gracefully or clumsily?)	
What does the environment that the character lives in look like?	