

# VISUAL STORYTELLING

An Introduction



# WHAT IS VISUAL STORYTELLING?

When we think of storytelling, we usually think of written words. But there are so many other ways that we tell tales to each other; like through movies, theatre, musicals, photographs, paintings and even memes.

Visual storytelling is a story or narrative told mainly through visual media. This could be video, animation, or illustration, and it's usually accompanied with music, a narrator or graphics.

In this workshop, you will develop your own story based on the classic structure of **'The Hero's Journey'**, and will work through from writing to creating a visual **animatic**.



## KEY RESOURCE: VISUAL STORYTELLING

The best way to describe visual storytelling is to imagine a heavily illustrated children's story, where each picture is played one after the other and timed to go along with the reading of the story; such as in this example of a narrated version of 'The Gruffalo'.



### **The Gruffalo - Narrated by Alan Mandel**

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=s8sUPpPc8Ws>

There are many more examples of 'narrated illustrated stories' on Youtube if your curious to see more. Try to focus more on those that use still, non-moving images rather than any that are animated.

# CREATING A STORY: THE HERO'S JOURNEY

'The Hero's Journey' is a classic story structure, and has been used to create a wide range of tales in both books, film and animation.

In these story types we usually have a main character (our Hero) who we are following through an adventure filled with trials and lessons in order to reach a goal of some kind.

Throughout the next twelve pages we will go over each stage in the Hero's Journey structure. To help explain them in context, each stage also contains the relative example from the well known book and film, '***Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone***'.

# EXERCISE: THE HERO'S JOURNEY

As you work through the twelve stages of the Hero's Journey, there are some short prompts to help you begin creating your own.

**Make some notes on each stage, and maybe do some sketches or doodles along the way.**

This is an opportunity for you to start creating and getting to know your world. You don't have to make polished illustrations and in depth scenes, just short notes and quick explorations. Keep each part short and simple to begin with whilst you work through each stage, as you might find you need to change things or come up with different ideas as you progress.



# 1. THE ORDINARY WORLD

Here we meet our Hero and set the scene. This is where we find out what their everyday life looks like.

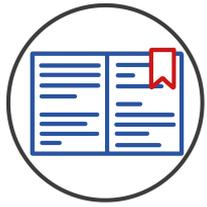
## **HP Example:**

Harry Potter lives in the cupboard under the stairs at Privet Drive with his Aunt, Uncle and Cousin. He is bullied and feels like he just doesn't fit in anywhere.



**Create a main character.** What do they look like? What is their personality like?

**Create their 'ordinary world'.** What is everyday life like for them? Do they have family? Do they have a job?



## 2. THE CALL OF ADVENTURE

This is where the adventure starts, and our Hero is taken out of his comfort zone. Do they decide to go on their own? Do they accidentally stumble on the adventure? Or does someone, bad or good, come along and give it to them?

This is where we first catch wind of the adventure and get a glimpse into the 'other world'.

### **HP Example:**

Harry receives a letter to attend Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry.



**Create your characters call.** Is it a letter? A person? An enticing tale? You don't have to know everything about the adventure yet, it should happen organically as we progress.



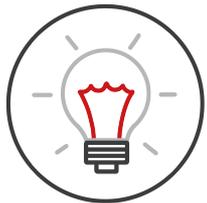
### 3. REFUSAL OF THE CALL

Here is where our Hero might refuse the call of adventure, especially if it wasn't their choice to go on it in the first place! Do they try to back out? Do they say "No" to the offer in the first place? Maybe they have a "Why me?!" moment. Or perhaps they want to go but other people try to talk them out of it or hold them back.

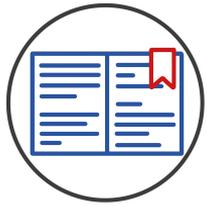
This may not be a long stage, maybe just a fleeting moment of hesitation.

#### **HP Example:**

Harry doesn't believe that he could possibly be a real Wizard, and his Aunt and Uncle do not want him involved in anything magical.



**Write out your characters immediate thoughts on the adventure, like a monologue.** Are they scared? Curious? What are their hang-ups about it? Are they worried someone may try to stop them?

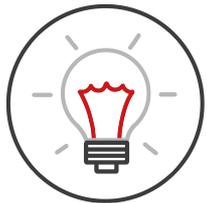


## 4. MEETING THE MENTOR

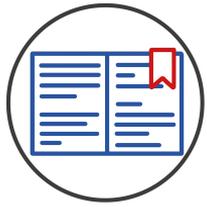
Our Hero has accepted that the adventure is happening, but they're not really prepared! This is when they meet their mentor...someone who is going to help guide them on their journey. Maybe the mentor is there to train our Hero? Or guide them through the wilderness. Or, maybe they're just there to give them encouragement and keep them going!

### HP Example:

Harry gets to know Hagrid, who takes him to Diagon Alley to purchase all of his school supplies and magical equipment, including his own owl.



**Create a mentor.** This is someone who your character trusts and who they depend on at this uncertain time. Who are they? What do they look like? What is your character's impression of them? And how are they related to the adventure in the first place?



## 5. CROSSING THE FIRST THRESHOLD

This is the point where the adventure kicks in. The Hero has accepted the adventure, has prepared and set off. From this point on, there's no going back!

This could come in the form of a physical threshold or barrier, or maybe the emotional acceptance that 'this is happening'.

### **HP Example:**

Harry crosses the barrier to Platform 9  $\frac{3}{4}$  and gets on the Hogwarts Express.



**Write a short scene or description of the moment your Hero crosses the threshold into the 'other world' and starts on their adventure.**

What are their thoughts and feelings? Are they excited? Worried?

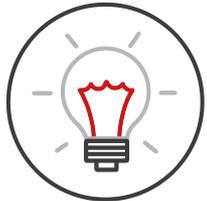


## 6. TESTS, ALLIES, ENEMIES

This is the longest part of the story. The journey from their home to their goal is littered with problems, fights, enemies and, above all, new friends and important lessons. They will also be learning more about their goal or, if they didn't have one to begin with, they may discover the existence of a treasure or important information.

### **HP Example:**

Harry adjusts to his new life at Hogwarts. He meets his new friends (Ron and Hermione), makes enemies (Draco Malfoy and Snape), encounters a troll, joins the quidditch team, and learns a lot about his magical abilities and lineage. He also learns more about Voldemort and the existence of the Philosophers Stone.



**Create at least one test, ally and enemy for your Hero to encounter.**

Describe or sketch out what they look like, and explain what your Hero has learned from them so far.

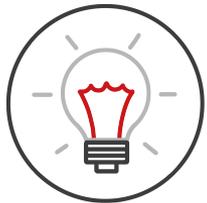


## 7. APPROACH TO THE INMOST CAVE

Our Hero is getting so close to their goal, but it's getting dangerous now! This is the point where they might be stepping into enemy territory, or sneaking into the evil lair of the villain. Or maybe our Hero is starting to have doubts? This is the build up just before they reach their goal.

### HP Example:

Harry, Ron and Hermione plan to find the Philosopher's Stone before Snape gets to it.



**Describe what the 'inmost cave' is in your world.** Is it a castle? A secret room? Another dimension? Your Hero is in definite enemy territory now. How do they feel? Are they scared or having doubts?



## 8. THE ORDEAL

Our Hero has come so far, and accomplished much, but they have one more thing standing in their way before that promised end goal. This point is where they reach rock bottom. Things are the worst that they've been so far, but if they get through this, they truly will be a Hero! Maybe this is where they face the villain, or approach the treasure. Or, perhaps this is the moment we wonder "how will they ever get out of this?". It's the moment we wonder if our Hero is truly going to reach their goal.

### HP Example:

Harry, Ron and Hermione face the dangerous trials set up to protect the Philosopher's Stone.



**Create the terrible trials or scenario that your Hero must encounter in order to get to who/what they want.** Maybe they have to fight evil minions, or solve dangerous puzzles.

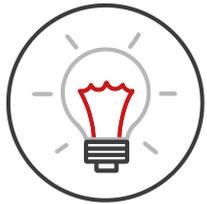


## 9. REWARD (SEIZING THE SWORD)

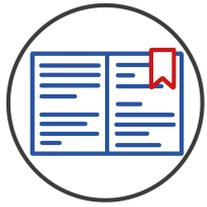
After everything they've been through, finally, our Hero has reached their goal and been rewarded! This is what this whole journey has been about, and they have finally done it!

### HP Example:

Harry enters the final room where the Philosopher's Stone is kept, and finds that it has appeared right in his pocket.



**Describe the 'reward' in detail.** Think about it from the perspective of your Hero. What does it look like? What does it feel like? How does your Hero feel about holding it in their hands? Describe their emotions.

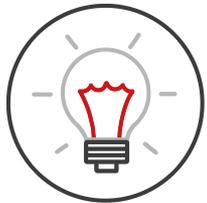


## 10. THE ROAD BACK

Our Hero may have reached their goal, but they still have a long way to go! It's never as easy as just picking up the prize and heading back home. Maybe they've angered the enemy? Or do they need to escape back out of where they got in? This is where our Hero has to deal with the consequences of reaching their goal.

### HP Example:

Harry must face off against Professor Quirrell, who has been hosting Lord Voldemort in his own body.



**Write the thoughts of your Hero now they have the treasure, but have so far left to go.** How are they going to escape with the treasure? What has taking the reward done? Maybe it has set off a trap. Does your Hero even believe that they will get home?



# 11. RESURRECTION

This is the Hero's final test, the last thing they need to do before they can get away for good. They might have the treasure in their hand, but who did they have to go through to get it? This is where they might have their final battle with the enemy, or perform their final daring feat! This is when we see what the Hero has truly learned from their long, hard journey.

## HP Example:

Harry defeats Quirrell, but is knocked unconscious by Voldemort's ghostly form before he can leave the chamber. When he awakens in the hospital, Dumbledore explains the trials, and that Harry is protected by his mother's' love.



**Describe the final battle, or the big escape.** This part is dangerous and daring, but your Hero will come out of it with the treasure in hand and the lessons they've learnt along the way.

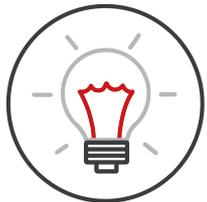


## 12. RETURN WITH THE ELIXIR

This is the Hero's triumphant return home with their prize. They did it! Perhaps they have gained treasure, skills, knowledge or simply inner peace. Finally, our Hero's journey has come to an end.

### **HP Example:**

Harry meets back up with his friends and celebrates in the great hall. Gryffindor wins the House Cup, and Harry returns to Privet Drive knowing now where he truly belongs.



**Describe your Hero's return.** What are the reactions of the mentor who brought them all this way, and the friends and enemies that your Hero has made? What are your Heros thoughts? And what effects has this adventure had on them?

## EXERCISE: YOUR STORY

**Go back over the notes you have written for each stage and piece them all together. Add in any important bits of information you feel you may have missed, and make any changes you think will help your story read better.**

Think about your audience. If your story is for young children, then it will be best to keep each stage short.

Young Storytellers might need a little help and further examples to write their story. Encourage and guide them to keep it short and snappy, but allow this story to be very much their own.

# EXAMPLE: HERO'S JOURNEY

Griffin lives in a poor village with her mother and young sister. Life is tough but they manage, until one day her sister becomes sick.

The village medicine woman cannot help her sister, but she tells Griffin of a magical healing amulet that is hidden far away that will cure the child.

Griffins mother tries to talk her out of going to find the amulet, saying that it's too dangerous, but she realises that they don't have a choice if they want to save Lucy. Griffin is a little scared, but excited at the prospect of adventure.

Before she leaves, Griffins mother enlists the help of the villages travelling merchant, Wisket, to accompany her daughter on her journey.

Griffin and Wisket reach the edge of the village boundary and step into the unknown forest.

On their journey they come across an abandoned cabin, where they rescue a dog who had become locked inside while searching for food. They save a woodsman from a swarm of tree goblins who attacked him when he strayed into their part of the forest and began chopping down their homes. Griffin cleverly comes up with the idea of trading the woodsmans safety for a bag of nuts and berries, which she knows the goblins won't be able to resist. They later battle off a terrifying hoard of Sharpwigs together. That night, around the campfire, the woodsman, Bron, tells them what he knows of the amulet and where it is kept. He says that it is locked away in an impenetrable tower and guarded by living vines.

As they travel closer to the tower the forest becomes darker. The trees are dying and there are no animal noises around.

The three of them approach the tower, and are confronted by the living vines. They see that the vines are coming from a large purple flower. The flower opens to reveal a giant mouth full of woody teeth. Wisket and Bron distract the vines whilst Griffin manages to sneak through the tower door.

Once inside, Griffin climbs the winding staircase to the room at the top of the tower, where she finds the amulet sat on the open petals of a pink flower. She reaches out to take it.

Suddenly the flower clamps shut on her hand tightly. Vines burst up through the floor and begin to wrap around her. She uses her knife to fend them off and begins to climb out of the window. She loses her grip and falls, only to be caught by another huge vine.

The vine begins to tighten around her. Bron and Wisket see her and jump to her rescue. Bron, with the help of the dog, distracts the vines. Meanwhile, Wisket runs over to the giant purple mouth of the living plant, and sets a fire in the dry leaves, twigs and bones around it. The vine monster writhes in pain. Bron takes up his axe and swings a heavy blow into the vine holding Griffin. The vine shudders and drops her into Brons arms. The three run back into the forest, leaving the piercing wail of the living vine behind them.

The three Hero's return to the village, triumphant. Griffin rushes to her sisters side and uses the amulets powers to heal her. Griffin gives the dog to Lucy as a gift, and she names him Bracken. Bron decides to stay in the village, and he, Wisket and Griffin become lifelong friends.

# STORYBOARDING

Storyboards are a series of ordered drawings most often used in the film and animation industry. They help to visualise what a story will look like on screen and how the scenes will change bit by bit.

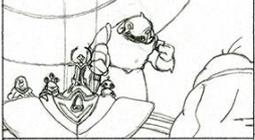
Storyboards are meant to be rough drafts, and aren't supposed to look polished and perfect. They are meant as a kind of 'cheat sheet' to use to figure out layouts, framing, scene changes and character movement alongside the script and speech.



There are many examples online of storyboards of famous movies and animations. Why not search to see if you can find the production storyboards of your favourite film?

# LILO AND STITCH STORYBOARD EXAMPLES (IMAGES COURTESY OF INKYPUNKART)

GALACTIC FEDERATION HQ / TURU



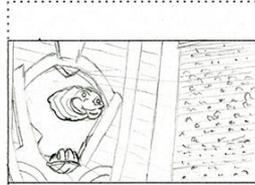
"Dr Jumba Jukeba. You stand before this council accused of illegal genetic experimentation!"

MS



"Crowd Gasps"  
Jumba turns his head.  
Captain Gantu stands straight.

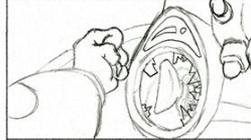
MS



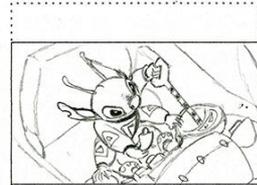
ship moves inside hatch

POV - Jumba

On board the Stolen Police Cruiser



POV



COMPUTER: "Hyper-drive activated. System Charging."

On board Gantu's ship.



"He's engaged his H-drive!"



CHAWAWAWAW: "How do you plead?"  
JUMBA: "Not Guilty! My experiments were only theoretical and completely within legal boundaries."



"We believe you actually created something."



"Created something? Ha! But that would be irresponsible, and unethical!"



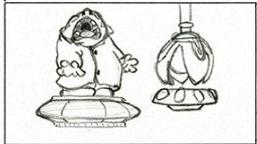
COMPUTER: "Warning! Guidance is not functional."



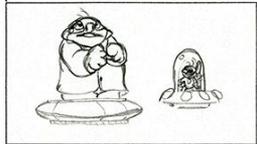
GANTU: "Pursuit commander! That crazy dog is about to make a jump!"



PURSUIT COMMANDER: "Break formation! Clear that ship!"



"I would never ever..."



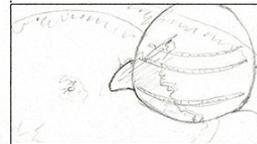
"make more than one."



\*snorling\*



COMPUTER: "Navigation failed. Do not engage Hyper..."



\* Sonic boom noise \*



"Get me galactic control"

# EXERCISE: STORYBOARDING YOUR HERO'S JOURNEY

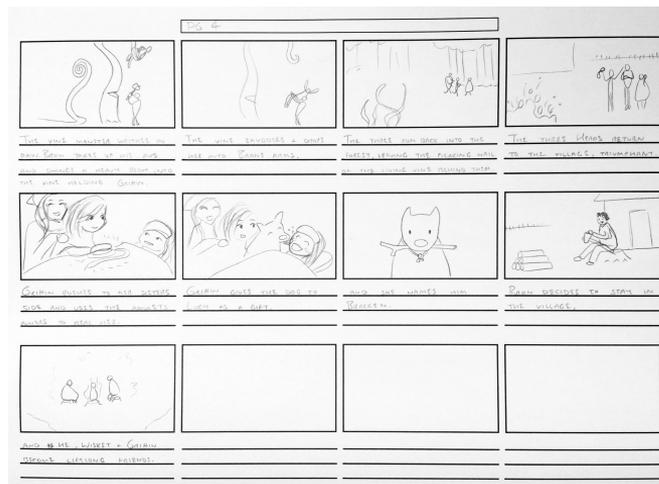
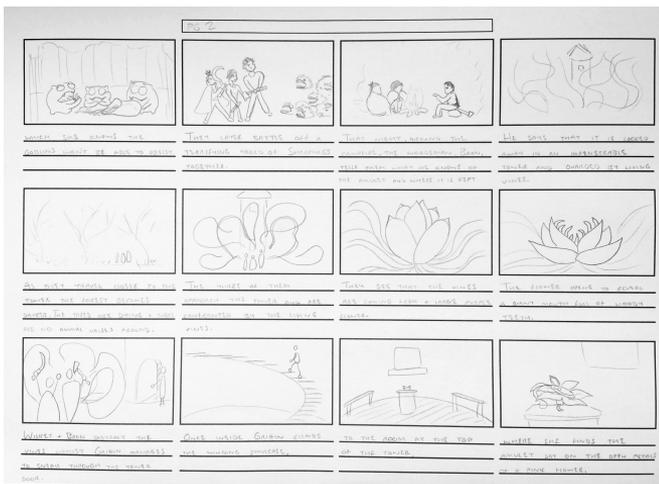
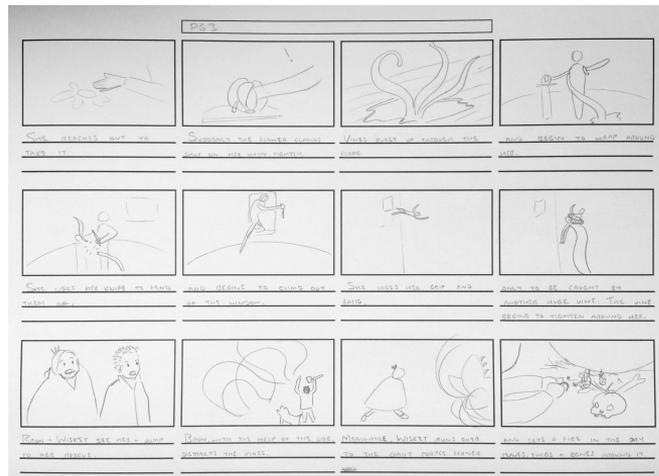
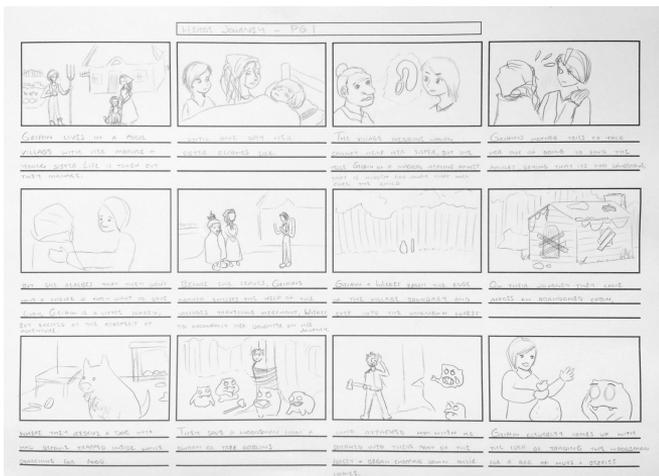
We can use storyboards to develop our Hero's Journey stories from their written forms to their visual forms by creating rough drafts of scenes and imagery.

**Download the Storyboard template provided** and print out a few copies, or draw out your own version by splitting a piece of A4 paper into eight rectangles (leaving enough room to write underneath each one).

**Break your story up into small parts. Each of these parts will have a different (or slightly different) image or scene. Draw a frame for each of these small parts on your storyboard that depicts each scene. Make sure they're in the right order.** If you have kept your Hero's Journey short you may only need one image per stage of the journey (1-12).

At this rough stage you should be doing things by hand with pencil or pens rather than going digital.

# EXAMPLE: HERO'S JOURNEY STORYBOARD



# ANIMATICS

An animatic is an animated storyboard that is used in film and animation to help to express the timing of the story or film being developed. They display each image of a storyboard for a certain amount of time, and can even include some small bits of animation.

Animatics are mainly digital, and they are an opportunity to add the scripted speech, narration, sound effects or music that will help to demonstrate what is happening in each scene.

In our Hero's Journey stories, we can use an animatic to bring the storyboard to life by timing how long we see each image and playing them one after another. If you have the ability to do so, you can also add music and a voice over reading of your story.

# ANIMATIC SOFTWARE AND APPS

**Before we go any further you will need something to produce your animatic on. There are several ways to do this depending on what you have access to.**

For tablets and phones there are several apps available. Free versions will give you all the basic tools that you need.

**OCA recommends 'Storyboard Animator'** (in-app drawing),  
**Or 'Filmmaker-Pro Video Editor'** (uses image library).

If you have access to Google Slides, or Microsoft Powerpoint you can use these instead. Add an image per slide and add a timer so that the presentation plays through your animatic automatically.

You can also use Adobe Premiere or After Effects to create an animatic if you have the facilities available.

## EXERCISE: ROUGH ANIMATIC

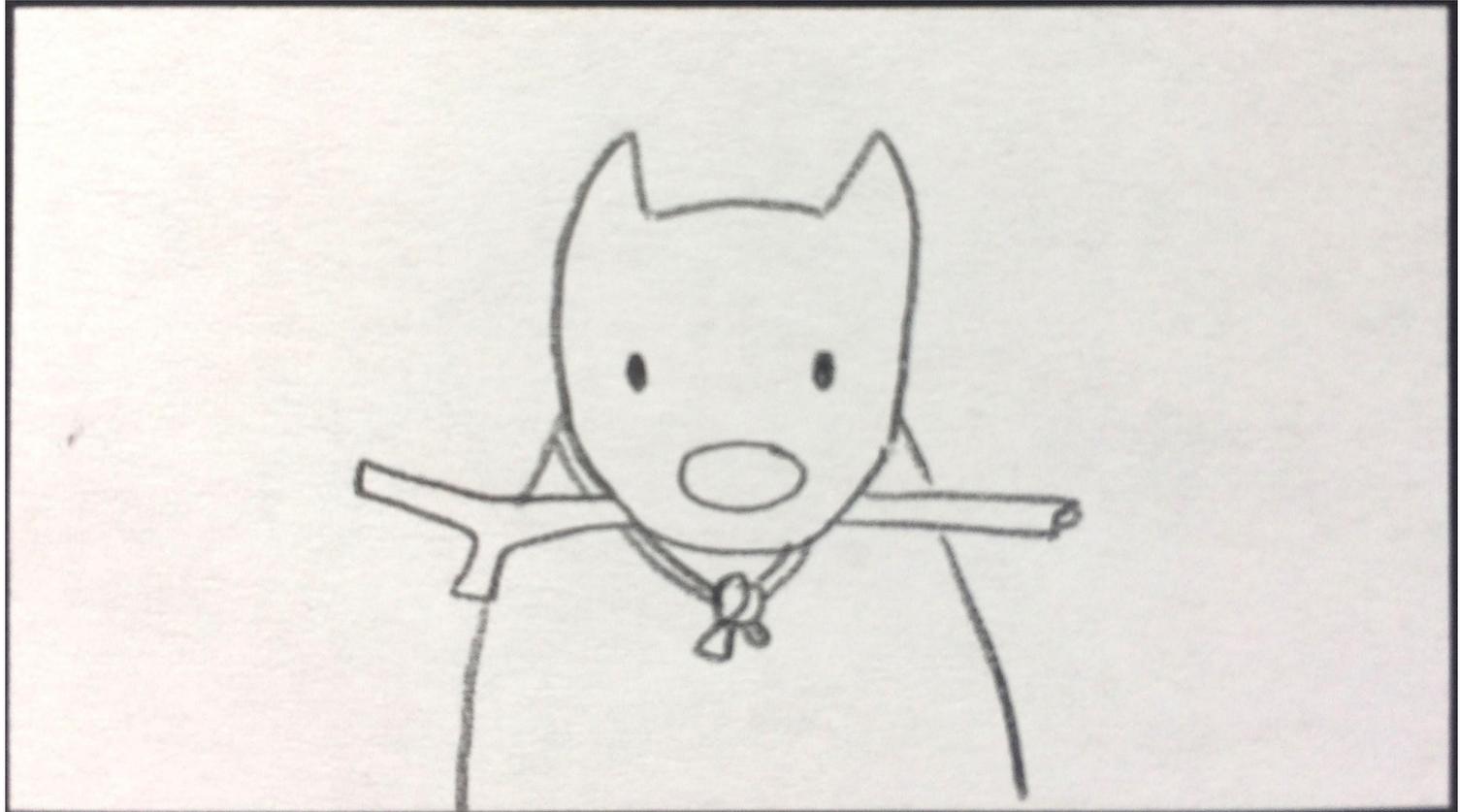
You will now use your storyboard to create a rough animatic. Remember that this part is mainly about getting the timing right.

Take a photo of each image in your storyboard, so you have one picture per frame.

Using your chosen app or software, create an animatic by adding your images in the right order and changing the amount of time each one is shown for. The amount of time the image is shown should be enough time to read out that part of the story. Start by making them a few seconds long and read out loud to figure out if you need to make the amount of time longer or shorter.

# EXAMPLE: ROUGH ANIMATIC

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=U80zUPfBYpE&feature=emb\\_logo](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=U80zUPfBYpE&feature=emb_logo)



# CREATING VISUALS

Now that you have your story ready and a rough animatic to help with timing, it's time to create good looking images to use in the place of those rough sketches in your storyboard.

You can do this in a variety of ways, and there is no right or wrong way to visualise your story. Here is a list of just a handful of ways you could create imagery:

- Pencil or pen drawing.
- Painting.
- Digital painting.
- Photography.
- Collage.
- Film.

## EXERCISE: CREATING VISUALS

This is an opportunity to explore different ways of creating your images. It's always a good idea to try a couple of different methods, as you might find a better way of creating the imagery than the original way you were going to do it.

**Choose one rough image from your storyboard and use at least two different methods (such as those listed on the previous page) to recreate it and make it look as final and polished as possible.**

Use this experiment to decide on which medium you will use to recreate your entire storyboard into the final animatic.

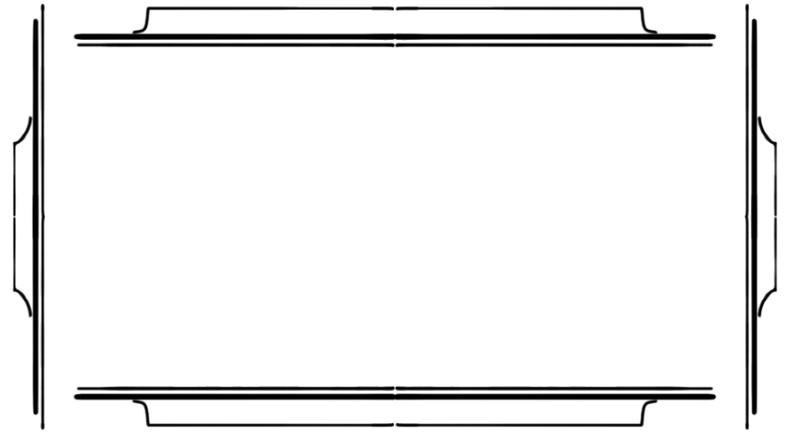
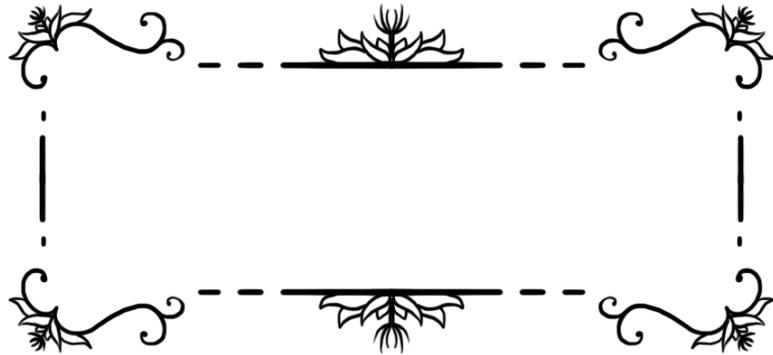
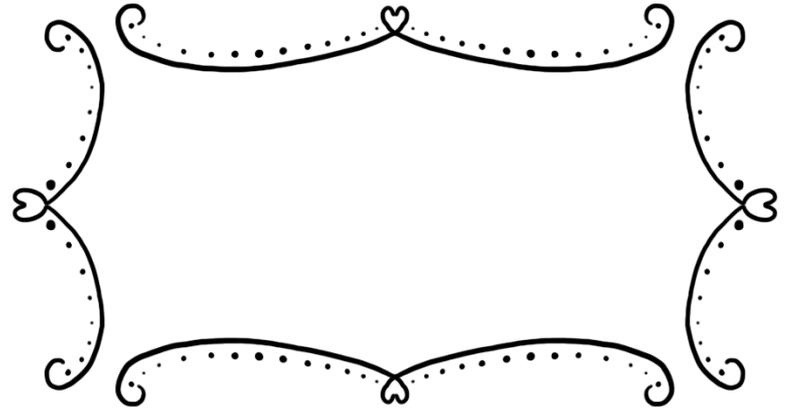
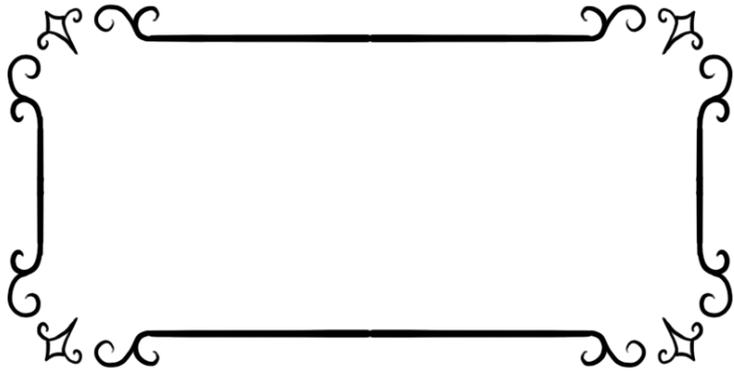
# NARRATION

Your Hero's Journey may have beautiful visuals, but it will need the story alongside it. This will come in the form of written words, audio narration or both. Depending on what app or software you are using you will have different things available to you to add these in.

If your final animatic will be visuals only, then you will need the words of the story to be on screen at the same time as each image. You could add them to the bottom like captions, or create more stylised text boxes (there are some templates on the next page to use if you'd prefer).

If you are narrating the story, remember to speak clearly and try not to have a lot of background noise in the recording.

# TEXT BOX TEMPLATES



# ADDITIONAL EFFECTS

Familiarise yourself with the features available to you on your app or software. The platform you are using will determine what extra effects you can add into your story.

**It is very easy to go overboard and try to add in too much, so keep it simple.**

One of the most effective additions to your story will be background music. It should complement your adventure and help the viewer to become immersed in the world you've created.

It's always good practice to search for and use **Royalty Free music** so that you can share it without breaching copyright. There are lots of libraries available online by searching 'Royalty Free Music'. Don't forget to read the 'terms of use' on the website you choose.

# FINAL PROJECT: YOUR VISUAL STORY

You will now create your final visual story for your Hero's Journey by compiling everything you have created together.

**Use your final 'finished' images to recreate the animatic of your storyboard, but this time with either the written story or the narration alongside it, and (if you have it) your background music.**

If you have both music and narration be sure to balance the volumes so that your music doesn't make it hard to hear your narrator.

Be sure to adjust the timings of each image to either give the viewer enough time to read the story, or ensure they are timed right with the narration.

**Don't forget to add a Title to your story!**

# REFLECTIONS

**We hope you have enjoyed learning the basics of visual storytelling with us. You can now take what you've learned and develop it further. The only limit is your imagination.**

It is important to remember to constantly self-evaluate your work as you go along. Keep re-reading your story and watching your animatic so that you can improve and learn from any mistakes. Good storytelling isn't easy to do, and making visuals to go with it is even harder, so whatever you create you should be proud of!



**The OCA would love to see what you've created. Share your stories and experiments with us by tagging us in them on Facebook, Instagram and Twitter.**



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