

## 4<sup>TH</sup> YR STORY LECTURE

dvd of film

go through and pull out all the doc cam items and keep them together.  
Make sure all items are prepared

copy of script

boards

recipe cards

list of libraries (word doc)

cartoon of protag, etc.

Arthur history book

binders

Jerry's service record

Maurice sendak book– Higglety Pigglety Pop! Highlighted

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My film is called The Magic Projector. It runs 15 minutes, and it's a mix of puppet animation and cut-out animation (not Flash, actual paper cutouts, animated by hand). It's my thesis film from York University's Graduate Film Program. This is basically a 2 year program. You can focus on screenwriting, film studies (history, critical studies of film) or production. In production, you spent most of your time making a film. What kind of film is up to you. But you basically have 2 years to make it, and it's very much self-directed. If you think of your films now, and the milestones you have to meet. In the program at York, there are similar milestones but they are fewer and further between. The program ends with what's known as a "Defense". You show your film to an academic committee, , you write a 60 page paper on the film and give them that, and then you "defend". You sit there for two hours while people with huge brains take shots at you. You're questioned on your motivation for various choices you've made in your project, the process you followed, the themes and

issues you deal with in the film and how they relate to your work as a artist... A pressure-cooker.

If that goes well, they give you your degree. If it doesn't, you go back and work on your film some more. And you weep.

**In essence– the program gives filmmakers the time and resources to develop as artists, while be guided by faculty that is very accomplished and talented.**

And so what I would like to present today is MY process, that I followed for this project. It works for me, but there will aspects of it that others will not agree with. YOUR challenge is to find what works for YOU as a filmmaker. The methods and techniques I used on this film might be completely at odds with some things you've been taught here! It's called "finding what works for you"...and it's my hope that something in what I will present will work for YOU.

So to begin, I'd like to watch the film, then I'll discuss the story development it went through, then if we have time we'll watch it again, and I'll talk through it to point some stuff out. And hopefully it won't be too painful for anyone involved. And then this way, you can sneak out for a bathroom break in Ottawa when it comes on!

#### AS PART OF MY STORY DEVELOPMENT

##### **Stage one– The brewing of the story:**

My challenge– to combine certain themes that were essential to me. These included: my own personal struggle with my mother's mortality (we are very close, but she's undeniably nearing the end of her life– she's nearly 80)... the power of one's geographical **roots**, cinema's role in our everyday lives, a fascination with the formal aspects of story.

So that began a process that was several months long. This stage took months. I really think of it as a stewing stage– I threw SO much into the pot, and stirred it, day by day... the LUXURY of having this much story development time!

Some areas I focused on:

European fairy tales/fables/ children's tales-- collections (Hans Christian Anderson, Grimm Brothers)

**Doc cam:**

History of Arthur books

Family photos—especially the school photo.

Drawings from mom

**My mother's stories: especially Jerry.—this began to stand out for me as an area to develop...**

National archives images.

At the end of this stage- I had the boy, Quinn (who is essentially my uncle). I had his sister Rose (who is essentially my mother). I had Mr. Flea, who would come to town with the movies. I knew Quinn, in the climax, had to "go away" somehow. Not LITERALLY die, like my uncle did, but metaphorically.

**Doc cam - Maurice Sendak- Higglety Pigglety Pop! (1976)-** grew out of Sendak's sad and frightened knowledge that his beloved terrier would one day die. So the book stars a dog (a carbon copy of Sendak's own dog), who shifts from one world to another. As Sendak observed, kids instantly get that the dog is now dead, even though it didn't die literally. And I knew that the ending had to FEEL sad, but not sad, that they were together somehow, still- brother and sister we tied together still, through their love. THIS would be the tribute to my mother's stories, and it would be a statement about how I felt towards her- that even after she passes, she will still be with me.

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**Stage two- plotting the story out**

**Plot:** the cause and effect of the story. "A leads to B, which leads to C, etc".

**Doc cam**= Amon's book, Syd Field's book.

--a 15 minute film is quite a bit of time to accomplish a fair amount of plot, if one wants to. And I did, but it didn't happen easily. Plotting is tough.

**Doc camera**- recipe cards

Emphasis on seeing the **WHOLE** story, at once- reveals relationships you can only see from that "zoomed back" pov.

-- a process that has proven to be **MOST** helpful to me, and might be one you'd care to explore as many of you are approximately at this stage now on your films...

**plotting your story is not something that occurs independently of other parts of story development. It's all happening together, in a mess inside your head.**

**Doc cam**--drawing of protag, objective, obstacle= conflict. Write "know your specific time and place" on it too.

Ask questions, constantly, of your story. Example of "is the machine a camera? Or a projector?"

Don't be afraid to have a story question that you can't answer. For example, "I know I need my character to wind up in the grocery store. But **WHAT** gets here there?" Sleep on it, let it rest... it's working itself out, somewhere in your mind. Go deep into yourself, your mind...it's mysterious and weird and invigorating...

David Lynch- catching the big fish.

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**stage three- writing the script**

**doc cam:** the script. (Mark will talk more about scripts next week).

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**Stage four– specific research that stems specifically from the earlier stages**

I now knew I had the kids go to a traveling movie tent. So? What's that going to look like?

**Doc camera:** movie tent image.

**Doc camera:** word doc with: Reference library Toronto Public Library

All of this research, all of this reference material, all of this story development, was kept localized, united, in these binders...

**Doc camera:** binder.

**Stage five– storyboarding**

Putting them ALL up, to see the whole story!—practical benefit of this. I actually shot live action versions of some of the trickier scenes, with 1:20 scale models, to make sure my cuts would work! Then I boarded them...

**Stage six– constantly going back and forth, tweaking things here and there in all the other stages**

----this is the luxury of making your own film, you won't be screwing someone else up, cause YOU are in charge of everything---(Contrast this with standard production system). Pros, cons...

**THEN– PRODUCTION AND POST...**

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Items to consider when rewatching–

**The bedroom**

**the billboard** Flea has, and the research I did on that.

**The tent**

**The story of Beowulf.**--- THAT did not come easy to me. WHAT should be happening in the film? How much should its story impact the story of Rose and Quinn? Chose Beowulf because it is SIMPLE– good vs. evil, with a clear need for a capable hero. Which Quinn becomes by entering the projector.

**The screen movement of the characters, and my motivation.** From left to right, then inward (to the tent). Then back along that same path, then back again (left to right) but much deeper this time, into the projector.

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IN CONCLUSION: I first talked about the major themes I wanted to grapple with in my film, and one of them was the mortality of my mother. If you consider the “tagline” for the film- “Goodbye is not forever.”

Within the film, it’s a goodbye that is not forever between Quinn and Rose. They are still together, through their love, and through cinema. Think of family movies, and how they keep relationships and family members alive in our hearts when we see them.

But for me, in real life, “goodbye is not forever” is also relevant to my relationship with my mother. And it’s safe to say, for all people who are faced with losing someone we love (something we’ll all go through, if we haven’t already), this statement is also true. Loved ones stay with us, through pictures, through movies, and in more personal ways, like memories, through stories we share with family members...

Love is a very strong thing, and it can move through any wall that might divide it.

These ARE heavy concerns. These ARE heavy ideas. But they are presented in my film in a fashion that (hopefully) does not FEEL heavy. My intent was to create an entertaining, engaging captivating story that audiences would enjoy, and that ALSO strived to be mature in its themes. Think of Snow White, and all that it accomplishes, emotionally.

Animation can be complex, substantial, and sustain our souls. It doesn’t HAVE to, and that’s part of its beauty- it can simply brighten our lives, make us smile, take us away for a moment of entertainment before we go “back to reality”.

But it can do more. Why not strive for that?