

A SHORT ANIMATED FILM
TITLED *BROTHERHOOD*
EXPLORING THE SUBJECT MATTER
OF THE DEALINGS OF DYSFUNCTIONAL FAMILY DYNAMICS

A CREATIVE PROJECT
SUBMITTED TO THE GRADUATE SCHOOL
IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS

FOR THE DEGREE
MASTER OF FINE ARTS

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Statement of the Problem

The world of contemporary animation is in a very intriguing phase. On one hand, it is now possible for nearly anyone to make remarkably creative animated works as the tools and means to do so are affordable. At the same time, however, there are now more animated short films than ever before, making it increasingly difficult for an emerging artist to both distinguish and root oneself in today's industry. Despite these challenges, there has also been an increase in regards to the number of opportunities animators have to showcase their work. From the growing number of film festivals, to the formidable sharing hub that is the internet, there are seemingly more ways to showcase one's work than ever before. As a storyteller, my aim is to create work that is appealing, well received, and is relative to a majority of today's society.

For this particular creative project I am interested in addressing a matter that I personally believe is becoming an increasing problem that affects most of the people I know in at least some shape or form. This problem being: the disintegration of the family within today's culture, as well as dealing with dysfunctional family relationships. We live in a world today where divorce is becoming increasingly prominent and numerous children are growing up in single-parent homes. Over the years there has been a steady decline when it comes to the heralded significance of family as seen by the American society, and the ramifications of this has had a direct impact on millions of homes. In a study done by the Pew Research Center in Washington D.C. posted on December 22nd 2014, it has been observed that society has steadily been moving away from many traditional family norms, and towards more different and dynamic family frameworks. As a result one of the changes we can observe is the focus shifting from parental figures

being concerned with the wellbeing of their personal family to greater self interest in regards to more personal affairs. The American dream itself is largely built upon the idea of climbing the economic ladder and getting as much revenue and the highest position possible. The catch however as many are now discovering is that if individuals who are parents begin to focus solely on their own personal interests, those closest to them are usually dismissed and to one extreme or another ignored. This tendency can be seen on a number of different levels from teenage moms whom are left to raise their kid alone due to the father's disinterest in the role of responsibility and pursuit of personal interests, to the married couple that eventually encounter hard times and ends up splitting to follow their own desires. In both of these common instances children are far too often caught directly in the middle and are forced to continue throughout life harboring a sense of confusion or pain being raised in what they may see as an atypical family environment. In a study done by the Columbian College of Arts and Sciences it was revealed that 63 percent of youth suicides come from fatherless homes, 85 percent of children exhibiting behavioral disorders come from homes without a father, 70 percent of juveniles in state-operated institutions come from scenarios without a father figure, and kids from healthy two-parent homes are almost twice as likely to achieve success in academics as well as their careers. While on the surface an action such as divorce may be seen as completely rational and fairly common, there are almost always a number of ramifications that go almost completely ignored. For starters, events such as family reunions can become exacerbating as matters such as seeing loved ones on both side of the family is typically far more complicated when you include elements like family tension. As of April 6th 2016, Warren Bowles of Mckendree University posted a

study online which covered in great detail many of the repercussions that accompany a child having to be raised through divorced and single parent homes. Many children growing up in broken homes are known to deal with deep feelings of being alone, unloved, and in extreme cases without a direction or purpose. Another common theme found in the cases of children growing up in broken homes is the unfortunate reality that the children often feel a deep sense of hurt which in the long run never fully goes away and can stifle their ability to truly excel in life. It is for these reasons that I believe the latent disintegration of the American family has become a huge problem. In my creative project *Brotherhood*, I take a close look at a middle-class family that is caught up in this exact kind of situation and explore ways that we may be able to rectify what has become an unfortunate issue.

So at this point we have been able to see how the increase of declining family environments has a major impact on our society as a whole, and more specifically in the lives of our children. With that acknowledged, the question we must ask is, what then can be done in order to address this particular issue. While it may be true that our society has begun to devalue the family dynamic itself, one aspect of life that is still held in fairly high regard is the importance of love. All you have to do is turn on a television or listen to a few songs on the radio, and it would not take long before you encountered a show, commercial, or song that touched upon this very matter. The problem is however, that the term “love” has been thrown around so regularly that it has begun to lose its original meaning. Through my experience whenever given the chance to discuss what love is with any person in their twenties or in their teen years, I encounter explanations that focus on the intense feeling between two people or even for an object. If you ask

this same question to a person a bit more advanced in years, there is a good chance that you would get a very different answers. Those who have had time to experience a lot more of life typically understand that love does not consist of simply a feeling alone, but instead addresses something that is a whole lot deeper. After all, feelings fade on a day to day basis, for instance the feelings you have for a friend while in high school may be completely different by the time you are in your thirties. If this is truly the case, then I would propose that the way love works is far more profound than simply feelings alone, but instead revolves around virtues such as empathy, service, and sacrifice. If love is a choice, then that means love can always exist regardless of circumstance. Today our culture does not put a great amount of weight on themes such as empathy and sacrifice. Sure most are willing to admit that these are fine virtues, but very rarely do you encounter individuals who are willing to make this the focus of their day to day life. Despite this, I believe these are the very virtues that are needed in order to prevent the further disintegration of family homes. For if every parent approached their marriage and family with the primary intention practicing service, sacrifice, as well as empathy, it goes without saying that the dynamic within these families would become distinctly different. If we were to examine the reasoning behind your average case of divorce, a vast majority would revolve around one or both of the respective parties wanting something different for themselves. In a study done for Utah State University's Divorce Orientation, it has been observed that 73 percent of divorcees say their reasoning for splitting dealt with a noticeable "lack of commitment". However, if you bring in virtues such as sacrifice and empathy and have married couples who are willing to incorporate these practices into their everyday lives, while it would not be easy it would vastly

reduce the issues that led to the desire for divorce in the first place and allow more families to potentially stay together. If more families choose to stay together, the result is fewer broken homes which would ideally mean better family environments. In my creative project, the main character and elder brother in the family finds himself in a situation where the father happens to die and is no longer part of the picture, and he has to decide whether he wishes to choose to take on the responsibility of raising his younger brother. Although the younger brother is rebellious in attitude and a bit of a tyrant, the elder brother incorporates what he learned from his father to show compassion to his younger brother. Through practicing sacrifice, service, and eventually empathy, the elder manages to connect with his sibling and restore a relationship that had been difficult for many years.

It is evident that a healthier and well received understanding of love is one of the key factors needed to reduce the number of disintegrating homes, but the question then might be raised as to why it matters. According to Warren Bowles of Mckendree University, studies have shown children who experience having divorced parents are more likely to have trust issues growing up. Seeing the marriage of two of the most significant people in your life unravel can be scaring, and experiencing this at a young age can have a large effect on how well a person approaches relationships themselves in the future. According to a study done by Rich Morin, a researcher who works for the Pew Research center, statistically it has been proven that children of divorce also have a significantly higher chance of divorce in regards to their own marriages, once again supporting the idea that disintegrating families can sometimes work like a domino effecting marriages for several generations. Along with an increase of healthy families,

there would also likely be a decrease regarding cases of children who are clinically considered mentally ill. In many cases, children suffering from extreme mental illness are plagued with unfortunate or abusive family history. That being noted, improving the family dynamic would in many ways improve the overall mental state of children around the country. Another way maintaining healthy families and relationships would be of great interest is that it would help improve our society as a whole. Essentially every nation is made up of primarily families. The healthier the families of a country are, the stronger the nation.

For these reasons, I am certain that the state of disintegrating families around the country is more than worth addressing. The nature of a family plays a large role in every child's future, and the battle to being united as a nation starts within the family. In order to maintain these healthier families, we need to encourage and demonstrate what it looks like to lean on virtues such as sacrifice, service, and empathy. This is the main premise of my creative project *Brotherhood*. Through the story of two brothers we can see the broken state many families are in today, the repercussions of having to live in a broken home, as well as exhibiting the best response needed when it comes to restoring challenging relationships.

In the world of animation in recent years I have noticed several issues have started to surface. One issue that I have noticed is the move away from works with substance. A lot of excitement comes along with the freedom to make nearly anything you can imagine, so much so that many artists have become more interested in showing something visually unique than saying something meaningful. While creating new aesthetics can be quite powerful and is something I acknowledge artists should

strive for, I think it is equally important that our works still say something with the intent of addressing important problems such as conflict between our fellow man and the need for healing within a broken society. In doing so we can help create a means for dialogue within our culture and ideally help move towards a healthier way of life.

Another major change that has taken place in recent years is the subtle diminishment of the 2D animation art form. When animation first came into being, it was hand-drawn art that paved the way for animators. However, over the past several years 3D animation has risen in popularity, pushing out the appeal of what was once considered a classical art form.

My primary goal in animation is to make work that connects with my viewer emotionally by sharing many of the things I've learned on my journey as an artist. A key factor to accomplishing this is creating a fresh innovative look as I develop my own film. I personally find myself drawn towards the aesthetic one might find in that of a children's book. The presence of light colors as well as a very hand-drawn look tends to have a lot of appeal for a wide audience. In many ways the style is reminiscent of my own childhood days creating a sense of nostalgia and is very approachable for all audiences both young and old. For this reason I plan to give my backgrounds a watercolor look that I think will be great for capturing the spirit of the film which is told in many ways through the eyes of children. Polish is an element that seems to be lacking in the work of beginning animators today. Far too often student and professional work alike are rushed for the sake of meeting certain deadlines, and the result of such habits is diminish in the overall quality. Leaving out elements such as attention to detail when it comes to lighting, which identifies where the implied light is coming from within a picture

or frame, perspective, which takes into account the angle and arrangement of all the objects and characters within a scene, and color theory, which highlights the importance of choosing colors that work harmoniously through and image can greatly detract from the overall caliber of an animated short. With this in mind, I am largely dedicated to put in as much work as required in order to meet the necessary standards I have set in place in order to make a professional film. Thus taking great emphasis in animation appeal, design, and execution is a top priority for the production of my project. As an artist my goal is to make work that is both well-crafted and memorable, thus garnering such professional practices is a great way I can accomplish just this.

There are usually two things that a viewer will remember long after witnessing an animated feature: the visual design and the musical score. I am combining these two elements together in a masterful way, with the intention of leaving a memorable impact on my audience. Both sound and score will play a vital role in the successful communication of my film. Thus I am working closely with a composer who will be creating a new score specifically for the film.

Review of Artistic Influences

As a storyteller, there are many identifiable attributes that characterize my work. Specifically, there are several themes that I find myself attracted to. I like my projects to be a powerful reflection of the things I have experienced in life as well as the values I've come to develop over the years. For these reasons when taking an honest look at my

work I recognize that themes such as the importance of family, love, and truth emanate constantly throughout just about everything I have made. Engaging in these themes have helped make me who I am today and have been the underlying contributor to guiding every relationship I have had.

Looking back, I now realize that I have been largely influenced by a number of different artists, each of which have helped shaped me into the storyteller I am today. For starters, there are few artists that have inspired me as much as Mr. Bill Watterson. Author of the *Calvin and Hobbes* series, Watterson is considered by many to be the last great American cartoonist. One of the things that makes Watterson special is that he had a keen understanding of what it was like to be in the mind of a child. His characters were relatable and recognizable in that regardless of who you are, nearly everyone knows a child that is similar to Calvin. Drawn with lovable designs and vibrant colors, Watterson's work also seemed to almost pop off the page whenever read in the newspaper. The author was also good at varying up his linework. Linework in this sense would simply refer to how much volume, or how thick or thin the drawings within the panels would be. While it might seem simple on the surface, having a good understanding of how to vary up the volume of your linework makes a lot of difference when printed on the page, and Watterson knew how to do so in a way that had a lot of appeal. Watterson's excellent example of how to utilize linework as well as tell a story as through the eyes of a child has made a notable impact on how I have chosen to approach my own creative project.

Known the most for his work on the comic and television show titled *The Boondocks*, Aaron McGruder is another artist I have learned a great deal from. The

television show has been met with great critical acclaim and for very good reason. The show is drawn with a relatively warm color scheme, which helps makes the programming very approachable to watch with a pleasant aesthetic. In a world where many “adult” oriented cartoons use a relatively simple animation style, the creator of The Boondocks was not interested in simply cutting corners. While many shows like The Simpsons are very simple when it comes to character animation, using as little movement as possible, Aaron McGruder created a show that was almost adrenalized when it came to the shows energy. Dramatic fighting sequences and stylized dream clips occur quite regularly in the show, and serves to help the show stand out quite a bit from its competition. Above all else, I am greatly influenced by the shows approach to making a commentary on culture. Aaron McGruders work was known for addressing even the most controversial subject manners in almost a merciless fashion, and yet still managed to do so while maintaining its class. This intentional inclusion of relevant cultural matters alongside the dramatic manner of expression the characters would use throughout the show served as a serviceable example when it came to creating my own animated works.

Another cartoonist that has made an impact on my work is the solo independent artist known as Don Hertzfeldt. Hertzfeldt made animation history a few years back by becoming the first completely solo artist to ever win an Oscar for best original short animation. The artist has a very unique design in that nearly all of his work is completely hand drawn, which is now nearly unheard of within the world of animation. His films accomplish the almost impossible feat of being completely ridiculous while at the same time strikingly artistic. Filled with crude drawings and incomprehensible banter,

Hertzfeldt stories border on the insane, and yet still strike a chord with the viewer as it becomes evident that the artist does indeed have some profound things to say. While there is plenty of things to say about Hertzfeldt's work, the element I wish to highlight the most would be his ability to insert his own personality into his films. The more you can see an artist within his work, typically the more powerful the art piece tends to be, so for this reason I have learned to make every effort to infuse bits of who I am into everything I make.

Although there are many credible artists that have made their mark in today's day and age, few have managed to make as wide an influence as world famous director Hayao Miyazaki. Having made numerous films each of which have been met with great critical appeal, the Japanese Director has managed to capture the hearts of millions around the world with his imaginative approach to storytelling. There are many elements that make Miyazaki's movies special, but among the chief components for me would be the lush environments as well as the attention to detail. While it may be very simple to throw together or put minimum effort into a minor background, Miyazaki knew full well that when it came to creating an absorbing world, every bit of detail mattered. As a result, each of his films are brimming with what resemble hand painted masterpieces for his characters to inhabit. Nevertheless, the depth does not end with the environments, but rather each character is crafted with an immense amount of love and attention as well. None of the characters in his film are shallow, but are rather incredibly intricate, garnishing traits that make each person more than just a two dimensional figure. The films also are layered with symbolism, all of which adds to the overarching story and reflect Japanese culture in an endearing way. As impressive as all this is from an

animator's standpoint, what I strive to employ the most is Miyazaki's also incredible ability to of make stories that are timeless, and able to be enjoyed for many generations.

While there have been many artists who have undoubtedly influenced me over the years, the one artist who has arguably influenced me the most is a comic artist by the name of Bryan Lee O'Malley. Like myself, Bryan grew up an individual who just really liked cartoons, so much so that during his mid-twenties he decided to just make one. The storyteller found great success in his Scott Pilgrim books, a series that sold millions of copies and was even made into a feature film. Being a largely self-taught artist, Bryan quickly created his own style that at first glance seems simple in nature but at the same time was very well received sporting largely expressive characters. Each of his books are light-hearted and action packed, forming a series that is approachable and enjoyable for a wide age-group. Although I enjoy a great number of genres, the story type that resonates with me the most would those which involve a coming of age tale. Bryan Lee O'Malley's books in many ways are just about growing up, a journey in which everyone must embark on. Taking this approach makes the author's stories very relatable, an element of storytelling that I consider largely important within my own work. Rather than make art pieces that are relevant to only a small demographic, by talking about largely relatable topics like life, I can reach a much larger audience. This is an approach that has been proven chiefly effective by studios like Pixar, since although that primarily make kids films, their movies have also been known to be enjoyed by teenagers and adults alike.

The past seven years have been a crucial period in my life, as they have served to help me develop my own personal aesthetic amongst my artwork. A mentor of mine

by the name of Brian Ballinger once told me that everyone has their own unique art style, and the key is to discover it by making more and more art. In developing my own style, I've learned that I tend to lean towards creating work that is light in nature, or that is otherwise very approachable and appealing. I like to work with bright vibrant colors in my paintings and use gentle lines in my linework. Recognizing and developing my own style has allowed me to slowly form my own identity as an artist.

In regards to my artistic philosophy, I have two basic beliefs that help inform all of my work. The first is that art and stories alike should entertain or in some way capture its audience. The second is that art should inform its audience. While every project doesn't necessarily have to be profound, I do think it should add some sort of contribution to the world we live in. An example of this would be Bill Amend's comic *Foxtrot*, his work mostly consists of short episodes surrounding a modern American family, and while many of his stories aren't profound, they still say quite a bit about the world we live in and explore today's interesting family dynamic. Both captivating and informing the viewer are two equally important ways an art piece can have meaning.

Reading and studying other artists has played a pivotal role in developing my own aesthetic and philosophical outlook. In doing so I've been able to review closely the works that impact me the most and discover common successful themes between them. It is through this process that I came to learn the value of powerful themes such as family, love, and truth. Nearly every moving piece I have encountered has one or more of these themes present, and has helped me form my own philosophy in the art of storytelling. That stated, it is thanks to these influences that I have been able to develop my own style and approach to making stories. I now have every intention of making

work that is light and appealing like Bill Watterson's *Calvin and Hobbes* series, that is entertaining like Bryan Lee O'Malley's *Scott Pilgrim* books, and that reveals truth like Hayao Miyazaki's feature films. I have also come to discover that the best works of art come from personal life-changing experiences, which moves me to make my own work as personal as possible.

Through my research, I have encountered numerous books and sources that have served to help me develop my creative project. One of my first sources is Blake Snyder's *Save the Cat*, a critically renowned book that reveals exactly what nearly every story needs decidedly by genre. Every story needs an outline or script, and very few books go into greater detail than Blake Snyder's work as it clearly underlines what it takes to make a story that will sell. One of the key elements to finding success in any field

Recently this past summer I read a book titled *Love Does*. Written by Bob Goff this New York Times Bestseller does a profound job of helping readers examine what a loving life really looks like. This book served as a great resource for me, as it helped me better understand part of the philosophical argument I am addressing in my thesis, which is to understand what a loving relationship really looks like.

One of the most impactful books I've read in recent years is *The Writer's Journey*. In this book Christopher Vogler takes a close look at the art of storytelling and reveals the timeless arc that nearly every successful story contains. Understanding how to break your story up into acts and how each character needs to play an important role is instrumental in crafting the type of moving tale I intend to make with my creative project.

If there's one thing every impactful story needs, it would be dynamic and compelling characters. In Joe Murray's book *Creating Animated Cartoons with Character*, the author takes an in-depth look at how to build a character that is interesting, likable, and relatable. One of my primary goals as a storyteller is to create characters that are memorable, thus this resource has been highly valuable when it comes to understanding the art of character development.

One element that is thoroughly explored in my creative project is the idea of effective parenting. How to raise a child is a growing debate amongst America's public today, as many are beginning to question just how to effectively parent a child. *Parenting Young Children* is a book that takes a close look at parental procedures that have been studied and are considered effective, shedding a great deal of light on how I should address the parenting issue in my own work.

Recognizing my influences and utilizing solid resources is a necessity when it comes to developing my creative project. My research has prepared me to produce a creative project I can be proud of and that will further my artistic career.

Exhibition Statement

Brotherhood is a short animated feature that follows the lives of two brothers growing up in a home where the parental structure suddenly falls apart. However, a glimmer of hope remains as long as the oldest brother can discover one important truth:

Sometimes the people in our lives who are hardest to love, end up being the most important people we should cherish.

Conclusion

When I was young, I read a book called *I Am the Messenger*. The book literally changed the trajectory of my life as I realized the importance of concepts such as sacrifice. Discovering this truth through reading a novel helped me realize that stories have power: they have the power to change and transform life for the better. In a world that is obsessed with the individual self, my creative project will highlight the significance of matters such as love and sacrifice. Visuals are great, and creative procedure may be interesting, but at the end of the day, what is remembered in my field is not so much how things look but how it makes one feel and what it makes us think. I want to help people tap into truths they did not realize existed and nurture a desire for change. Today, the animation industry is in need of work that challenges and encourages change. In a nation that often loses sight of things that we should value, such as family, being reminded of many of the aforementioned universal truths can sometimes go a long way, and this is exactly what I will accomplish through the example of *Brotherhood*.

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Figure 1: Sketches from *Brotherhood* that shows Character exploration

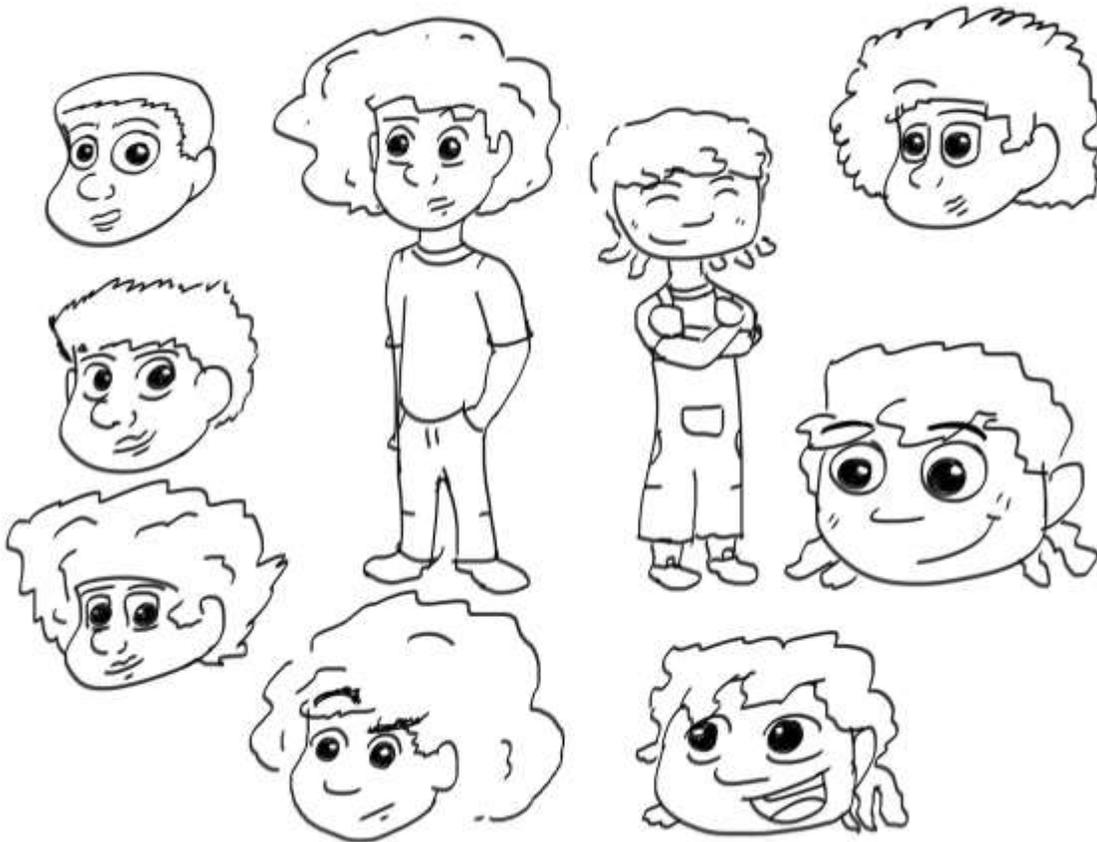


Figure 2: Sketches from *Brotherhood* that shows Character exploration

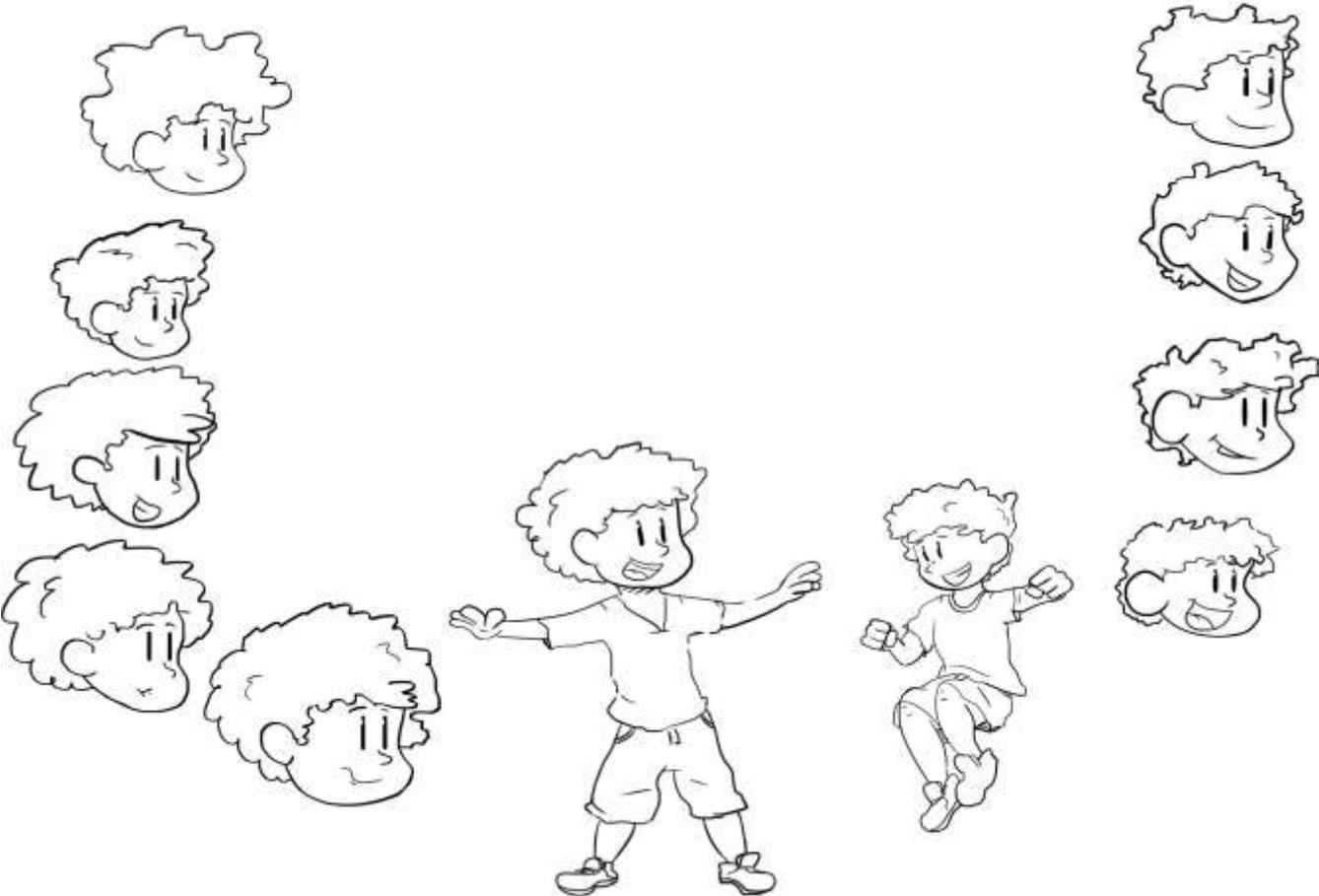


Figure 3: Turnaround from *Brotherhood* that shows Character exploration

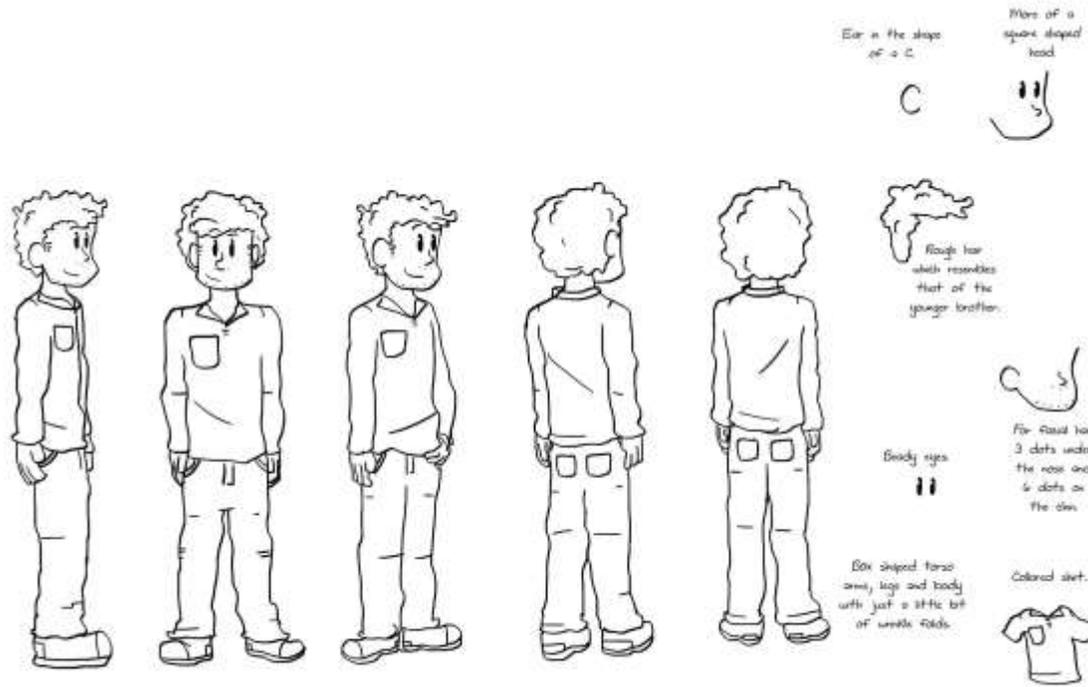


Figure 4: Turnaround from *Brotherhood* that shows Character exploration

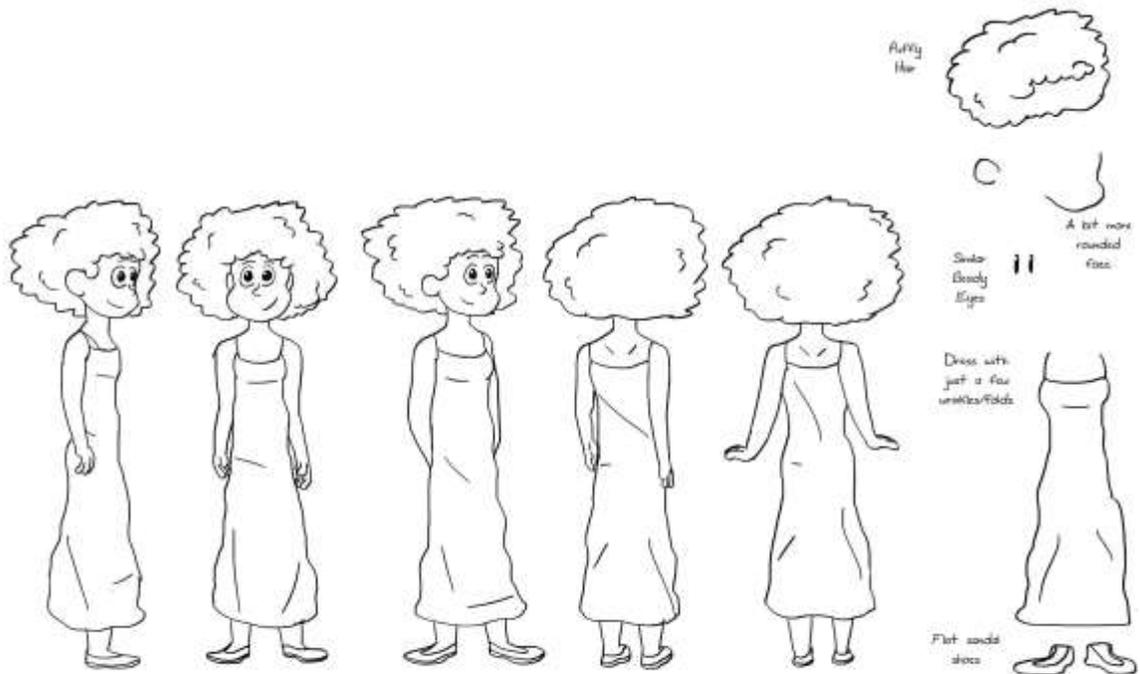


Figure 5: Turnaround from *Brotherhood* that shows Character exploration

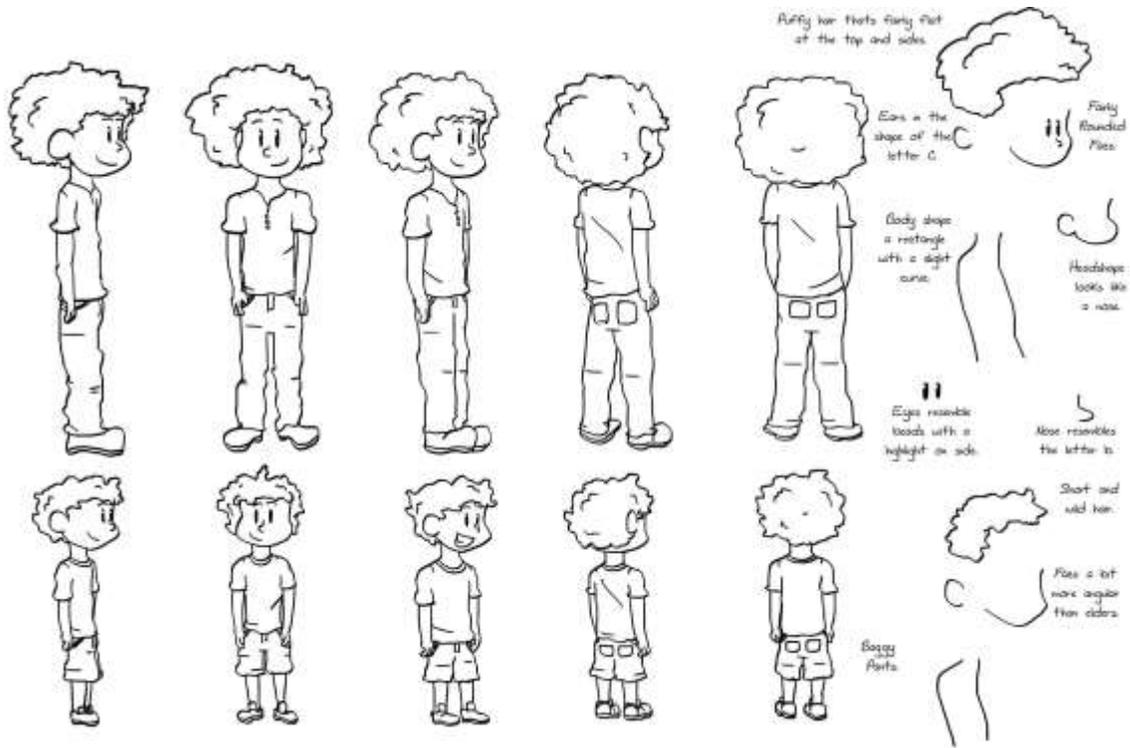


Figure 6: Colored Drawings from *Brotherhood* that shows Character exploration

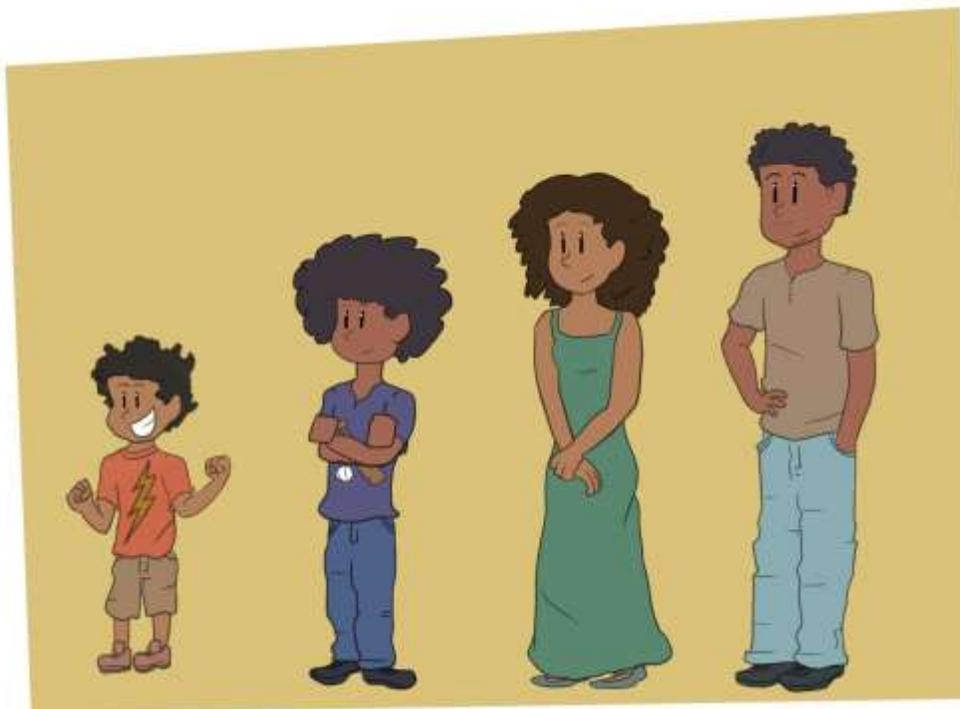


Figure 7: Exploration Stills from *Brotherhood* that shows Visual Development



Figure 8: Exploration Stills from *Brotherhood* that shows Visual Development



Figure 9: Exploration Stills from *Brotherhood* that shows Visual Development



Figure 10: Exploration Stills from *Brotherhood* that shows Visual Development



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