

Angel Dukhonina

Snowmom

Fall, 2021

Mentor: Yer Za Vue

Proposal

For my Thesis project, I am going to create a short animated film based on my own storyline, focusing on the themes of family, support, loss and grief. The film will show the story of a boy and his father, living through the loss of their mother and wife. The two of them live alone in a large house in Minnesota, where there were once a family of three. For the man, winter represents cold and sadness, but for the little boy, snow is not an obstacle, but on the contrary, a way of expressing his feelings. When the boy builds a snowman that resembles his late mother, his father realizes that it's time for them to move on.

In my work, I ask questions like how does it feel to deal with the loss of a loved one? How does the child deal with the loss? Do children and adults experience grief and loss differently? How to visually portray this story without verbal language? The animated film I plan to make will show difficult feelings, but at the same time it should not be too heavy, since it is also designed for a children's audience. So, I am wondering how I can show grief and loss in a film intended for all ages? In order to create this work, I'm going to look at how various short cartoons for children bring up the topic of death and loss. I am especially interested in short animated films without dialogue, as I plan to make this film with only offscreen music and sound effects, allowing the story to unfold visually. Since I am an immigrant (from Russia), I understand what it is like to have trouble understanding a second language and that is why it is very important for me that my viewers understand the context without words. Besides this, I am studying colors and how they affect the human psyche, what colors people associate with sadness and grief, happiness and home warmth.

The feeling of loss is very personal which people can experience in completely different times in their lives - this can be moving to another city, breaking up the relationships, or, finally,

death of a loved one. Children and adults process grief differently, children express feelings of loss through their emotions. Dr. Sandra Fox outlined four tasks that children work through as they mourn a loss.¹ These tasks include understanding, grieving, commemorating, and moving on. At the same time, experts noticed a pattern in the experience of grief of adults, and they summarized this pattern as the “five stages of grief,” which are: denial and isolation, anger, bargaining, depression, and acceptance.² Therefore, the process of going through loss in children eliminates a few steps and is slightly different from what an adult goes through. In my thesis animated film I plan to show a young boy who does not fully understand that his mother will never return. Going through the commemorating stage of grief, he will miss her, which is why he dresses the snowman in her clothes and sees in this snowman the image of his mother. According to the scale of Emswiler & Emswiler , the approximate age of my character will be a preschool age (4-5 years old).³

How do I show grief in my animated short film other than through character actions and their emotions? There are several ways to show it: through music, dialogue, and color. While there will be no dialogue in my thesis project, there will be some offscreen music from one of the following musicians: Kan Gao, Ben Belan or Andrew Karamilya. Since I'm going to make a rather sad, emotional story for my thesis, I believe that the choice of music is very important and should correspond to the general mood of my work. In order to explore this issue, I watched short animated films for children that raise serious topics. For example, in the animated film, “Trois Petits Chats” by Cheeky, a Parisian video director, the narration also proceeds with no

¹ Fiorini, Jody F., and Jodi A. Mullen. “Understanding Grief and Loss in Children.” Article for the American Counseling Association website, accessed on 19 October 2021.

<https://www.scribd.com/document/516295787/understanding-grief-and-loss-in-children>

² Elisabeth Kübler-Ross and David Kessler. “Five Stages of Grief.” In *On Grief and Grieving*. New York: Scribner Press, 2005.

³ Ibid.

dialogue. The animated film tells the story of a feline family, which goes through the loss of family members over and over again. In the end, only one kitten remains from the whole family. Cheeky uses music as a tool to show the best and worst moments of his characters, as well as their mood. In addition, his work has sound effects like laughter, clock ticking, sighing, etc. However, the British production of the animated film “The Snowman”, which is also my inspiration, has no sound effects at all. Instead, all of the characters' actions were “voiced” with musical instruments. In both of these animated shorts, there is no dialogue or songs with words, as all the background music is instrumental. Therefore, for my thesis project, I was inspired precisely by instrumental music. The main source of inspiration for my work was the melody by Kan Gao, “Time is a Place”, which conveys the atmosphere that I wanted to convey: magical, sad, but raising bright feelings of hope for the best.

In terms of color, the idea of contrasting between the muted toned adult life, and colorful way children perceive life even in spite of difficulties, runs through my work. Child psychologists claim that children use dark colors and shades when they are in a bad mood, offended, or upset about something. On the other hand, if you draw at least one bright spot among these muted shades, it is typically perceived as hope. I would like to develop this idea in my animated film. One of the two main characters, the boy, will represent *hope*, compared to his father, who will represent *longing*. This will be the hope that these main characters can go through the terrible loss of a loved one and move on. The color of hope can be different for every person, but usually these are bright spring colors. For me, blue and yellow, the colors of the blue sky and the sun, looking through the dark clouds, is a symbol of hope. We can depict specific emotions using a different color scheme. And if we express good feelings in light colors that surround us in good moments of our life and are associated with warmth and the beginning

of life (spring, summer), then sadness is associated with the colors of longing for the outgoing heat, when it seems like life stops for a moment - cloudy sky, slush (autumn and winter).

To find inspiration for my work, I need to observe, read, walk and explore the world a lot. I find this extremely useful as everything in this world was invented through observation. Usually my process of inspiration comes through music, as it did with the thesis idea, when I heard Kan Gao's music track "Time is a Place" and imagined the story of a man and a boy right away. In moments like this, my brain clings to an emotion in a melody or phrase, making up meaning and coming up with characters and a story for a fictional situation. In addition I do color research by reading books and watching videos and interviews with people related to the topic.

For my film *Snowmom*, I developed concept art in Adobe Photoshop and Procreate, in which I experimented with color and saw which color suits characters the most. In my completed thesis, I expect to see a short animated film that will be two minutes long and will be done in TVPaint. My project will be completely colored. There will be no dialogue, but there will be some offscreen music from one of the musicians (Kan Gao, Ben Belan or Andrew Karamilya). I see this film work on a big screen in a hall with seats for viewers and speakers for sound. I am convinced that this approach will give viewers the opportunity to focus on my work and feel the emotions of the characters while watching the film and listening to the music track.

My ultimate goal for this film is to make it a tool for understanding how people cope with the loss of a loved one, especially children. This is why my animated film will be made in brighter colors to make it easier to understand for children, but subdued, in order to attract both children and adults, as Disney, Pixar, Dreamworks, etc do in their short films.

Artist's Statement

Angelina Dukhonina is a Russian artist currently living in Vancouver, Washington.

In Russia, she studied for two years at the Leninogorsk Art and Music Pedagogical College, and then studied in the northern capital, St. Petersburg, at the Film and Television University. After completing her sophomore year, she transferred to Pacific Northwest College of Arts to continue her studies and earn a Bachelor's Degree in Animated Arts. Angelina is studying animation, illustration and storytelling as she wants to develop her own projects and create animated films.

Angelina can work both with various traditional materials (pencils, pastels, charcoal, acrylic, watercolor, tempera, gouache, oil, etc.), and digital (Photoshop, TVPaint, Adobe After Effects, etc.).

Back in Russia, she created her first animated film "Following the Unknown" about a disabled boy who goes into the forest for mysterious lights and finds a forest creature. Besides that, finishing her bachelor's degree in PNCA, she made another animated short film, "Snowmom", that tells about a man and his son, who misses his passed away mother and builds a snowman, dressing it in mother's clothes.

In her free time, Angelina reads, writes stories, creates music, writes songs and plays musical instruments, such as piano, ukulele, guitar, drums, etc.

Abstract

The death of a parent is a highly stressful life event for a bereaved child. In this difficult time, the child not only loses one parent and experiences trauma, but also copes with the loss of the second parent as well because of a misunderstanding during the proceeding through the grief. Adults feel negative emotions, while little children don't fully understand that their late parents will never come back.

“Snowmom” is a 2 minute animated short film focused on the themes of family, support, loss and grief. This film tells a story about a man and his son who are grieving the tragic loss of their mother and wife. When the boy builds a snowman that resembles his late mother, his father finally realizes that his boy is missing the parental attention and love. It's time for them both to move on. But how will they do it? And will they? How does it feel to deal with the loss of a loved one? How does the child deal with the loss? Do children and adults experience grief and loss differently? And, most importantly, can the boy and his father through the Snowmom say goodbye and move on?

Writing for the Thesis Oral Presentation

For my Thesis project, I created a short animated film based on my own storyline, focusing on the themes of family, loss and grief. For my Thesis project, I am going to create a short animated film based on my own storyline, focusing on the themes of family, support, loss and grief. The film will show the story of a boy and his father, living through the loss of their mother and wife. The two of them live alone in a large house in Minnesota, where there were once a family of three. For the man, winter represents cold and sadness, but for the little boy, snow is not an obstacle, but on the contrary, a way of expressing his feelings. When the boy builds a snowman that resembles his late mother, his father realizes that it's time for them to move on.

In my work, I ask questions like how does it feel to deal with the loss of a loved one? How does the child deal with the loss? Do children and adults experience grief and loss differently? How to visually portray this story without verbal language? The animated film I made shows difficult feelings, but at the same it can be viewed by a children's audience, since the color palette along with a designed animation style created a children-friendly atmosphere. I was wondering how I can show grief and loss in a film intended for all ages? In order to create this work, I was looking at how various short cartoons for children bring up the topic of death and loss. I was especially interested in short animated films without dialogue, as I planned to make this film with only offscreen music and sound effects, allowing the story to unfold visually. Since I am an immigrant (from Russia), I understand what it is like to have trouble understanding a second language and that is why it is very important for me that my viewers understand the context without words. Besides this, I was studying colors and how they affect the human psyche, what colors people associate with sadness and grief, happiness and home warmth.

The feeling of loss is very personal which people can experience in completely different times in their lives - this can be moving to another city, breaking up the relationships, or, finally, death of a loved one. Children and adults process grief differently, children express feelings of loss through their emotions. Dr. Sandra Fox outlined four tasks that children work through as they mourn a loss.¹ These tasks include understanding, grieving, commemorating, and moving on. At the same time, experts noticed a pattern in the experience of grief of adults, and they summarized this pattern as the “five stages of grief,” which are: denial and isolation, anger, bargaining, depression, and acceptance.² Therefore, the process of going through loss in children eliminates a few steps and is slightly different from what an adult goes through. Moreover, the process of going through loss is different for children of different ages. Emswiler and Emswiler concluded that prior to age 3, babies may sense an absence among those in their immediate world and miss a familiar person who is gone, but they are unlikely to understand the difference between a temporary absence and death. A preschool child may talk about death but may still expect the person to come back. Before age 5, most children do not realize that all people, including themselves, will die. By age 9 or 10, however, most children have developed an understanding of death as final, irreversible, and inescapable (Emswiler & Emswiler, 2000; McEntire, 2003; Worden, 1996). In my thesis animated film I planed to show a young boy who does not fully understand that his mother will never return. Going through the commemorating stage of grief, he misses her, which is why he dresses the snowman in her clothes and sees in this snowman the image of his mother. According to the scale of Emswiler & Emswiler , the approximate age of my character will be a preschool age (4-5 years old).³

¹ Fiorini, Jody F., and Jodi A. Mullen. “Understanding Grief and Loss in Children.”

² Elisabeth Kübler-Ross and David Kessler. “Five Stages of Grief.”

³ Ibid.

How do I show grief in my animated short film other than through character actions and their emotions? There are several ways to show it: through music, dialogue, and color. While there is no dialogue in my thesis project, there is some offscreen music from one of my favorite musicians: Kan Gao. His soundtrack “Time is a Place” was my inspiration for creating this piece. Sometimes, when you hear a melody, you can see a story in your head right away, that is what happened in my case. I am using this melody for my animated film, but since I am going to put this project to different festivals and competitions, I asked another musician to create a music piece for my project in order to have an opportunity to go with this project further on. In general, I believe that the choice of music is very important and should correspond to the general mood of my work. In order to explore this issue, I watched short animated films for children that raise serious topics. For example, in the animated film, “Trois Petits Chats” by Cheeky, a Parisian video director, the narration also proceeds with no dialogue. The animated film tells the story of a feline family, which goes through the loss of family members over and over again. In the end, only one kitten remains from the whole family. Cheeky uses music as a tool to show the best and worst moments of his characters, as well as their mood. In addition, his work has sound effects like laughter, clock ticking, sighing, etc. However, the British production of the animated film “The Snowman”, which is also my inspiration, has no sound effects at all. Instead, all of the characters' actions were “voiced” with musical instruments. In both of these animated shorts, there is no dialogue or songs with words, as all the background music is instrumental. Therefore, for my thesis project, I was inspired precisely by instrumental music. The main source of inspiration for my work was the melody by Kan Gao, “Time is a Place”, which conveys the atmosphere that I wanted to convey: magical, sad, but raising bright feelings of hope for the best.

I see my work at animation festivals like *Redcat*, which shows animated films for all ages. One of the cartoons from this festival, "The Ride" by Katherine Clark, was an inspiration to me as I saw similar ideas to my work. This film tells the story of a family where a son desperately tries to get the attention of his hard-working mother. But, since the mother is busy with her work and does not pay attention to her child, the son has to entertain himself by means of his fantasies. This film raises the topic of the importance of parents spending time with their children. Ultimately, the mother and son find time for each other by fantasizing together. The work with color in this animated film, where the gray boring and cold scale of the mother is contrasted with the bright and colorful palette of her son, reminded me of my characters. Similar contrast can be seen in Cecile Carre's animated short film "Burn Out," which became the main source of inspiration for me in terms of ideas and style, as well as animation and color decision. The film tells about the young woman Stella, a space mechanic, who has broken down and ended up on a desert planet. While she is in despair, a little girl appears out of nowhere. Following the child into a tunnel, in the depths of the planet, she discovers a big cave full of objects that belonged to her, reminding her the dreams she has left behind. Cecile greatly transmits not only the movement of characters and their personality through this, but also skillfully uses colors to convey the emotions of their heroes and their characters. Throughout the movie we see how the child version of Stella is mainly surrounded by warm soft light, or stars, while the adult version of Stella is constantly in the shade or cold bluish-green light of crystals. I see symbolism that affects the meaning of the cartoon in this color decision. Child Stella lives with dreams and is not going to give up. The adult version of Stella is so accustomed to what happens in her life, that she stopped dreaming. Her dreams were extinct. The main heroine is sure, adult life is more serious, too complicated, and there is no place for children's dreams.

This idea of contrast between a muted toned adult life and colorful way children perceive life, even in spite of difficulties, runs through my work as well. Child psychologists claim that children use dark colors and shades when they are in a bad mood, offended, or upset about something. On the other hand, if you draw at least one bright spot among these muted shades, it is typically perceived as hope. I would like to develop this idea in my animated film, where one of the two main characters, the boy, will represent hope, compared to his father, who will represent longing. This will be the hope that these main characters can go through the terrible loss of a loved one and move on. The color of hope can be different for every person, but usually these are bright spring colors. For me, blue and yellow, the colors of the blue sky and the sun, looking through the dark clouds, is a symbol of hope. We can depict specific emotions using a different color scheme. And if we express good feelings in light colors that surround us in good moments of our life and are associated with warmth and the beginning of life (spring, summer), then sadness is associated with the colors of longing for the outgoing heat, when it seems like life stops for a moment - cloudy sky, slush (autumn and winter).

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brighter colors to make it easier to understand for children, but subdued, in order to attract both children and adults, as Disney, Pixar, Dreamworks, etc do in their short films.

Annotated Bibliography

Williams, Richard. *The animator's survival kit*. London: Faber, 2001.

In this book, Richard Williams talks about the basic principles of animation, touching on the transmission of emotions.

Van Baarle, Lois. *The sketchbook of Loish: Art in Progress*. London: 3dtotal Publishing, 2018.

Loish talks about composition, color, stylization, and also gives types, how to convey emotions in a 2D drawing.

Van Baarle, Lois. *The art of Loish: A look behind the Scenes*. London: 3dtotal Publishing, 2016.

The main chapters for me in this book are color selection and digital painting.

Kurtti, Jeff. *The art of Tangled*. San Francisco, CA: Chronicle Books, 2010.

In this book, the author talks about the development of the animated film Tangled, what principles were used to design locations and characters (antagonists, protagonists), what shapes and colors were used for this.

GOOD vs BAD Character Design: Tips and Tricks! September 12, 2021.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8wm9ti-gzLM>.

In this video, the authors talk about good and bad character design, talk about the level of detail and touch on color.

The Psychology of Color | Riley Johnson | TEDxLosOsosHighSchool. September 12, 2021.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=B7c0W5FZw64>.

The Physics and Psychology of Colour - with Andrew Hanson. September 12, 2021.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=af78RPi6ayE>.

Colour In Storytelling. September 12, 2021.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aXgFcNUWqX0>.

Disney's color psychology. September 12, 2021.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=916Kg0R9NPA>.

In this video, the author talks about what colors Disney usually uses in their cartoons in order to convey the character of the characters.

How Netflix's «Klaus» Made 2D Animation Look 3D | Movies Insider. September 12, 2021.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BIU49dJhfcw>.

This video explains the importance of light and color in the cartoon *Klaus*.

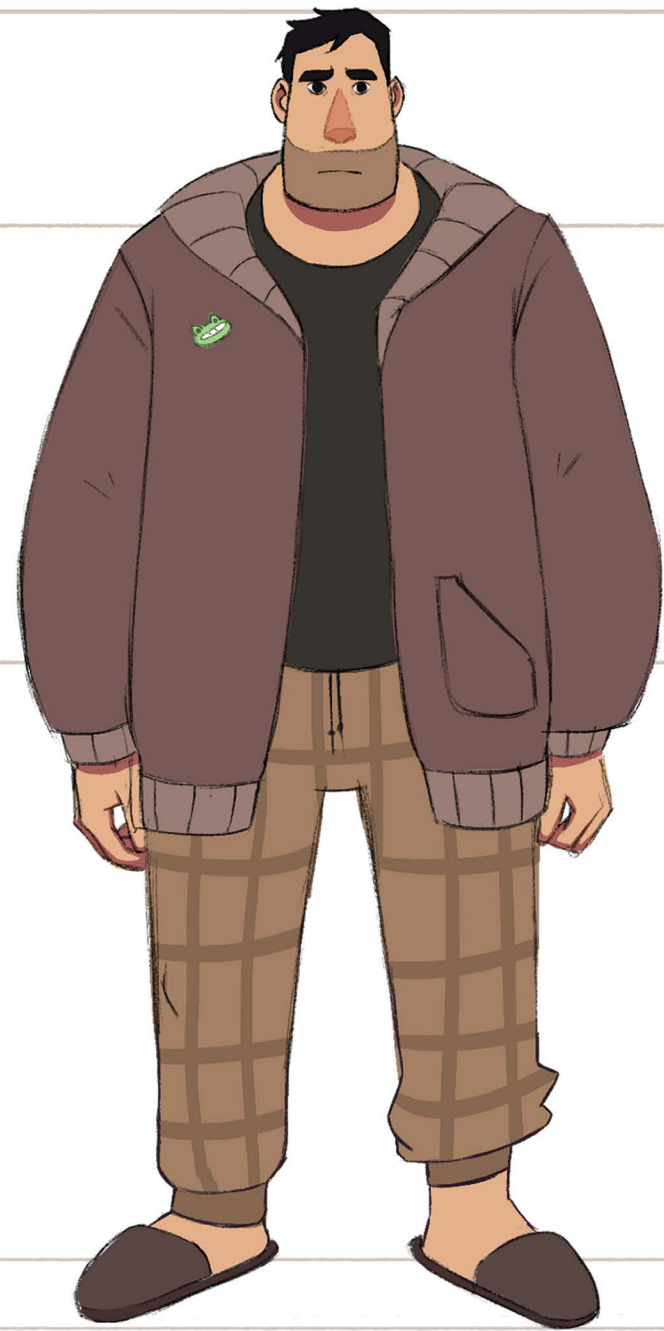
Zwimpfer, Moritz. *Color, Light, Sight, Sense: An Elementary Theory of Color in Pictures*. West Chester, Pa: Schiffer Pub, 1988.

In this book, the author touches the theme of light and how it affects the color.

“Understanding Grief and Loss in Children | PDF | Grief | Adolescence.” Scribd,
<https://www.scribd.com/document/516295787/understanding-grief-and-loss-in-children>.
Accessed 19 Oct. 2021.

Authors of this article talk about steps of children's grief, at what age children become to understand loss, and how parents should react to the feelings of their kids.

SNOWMOM CAST



DAD



MOM

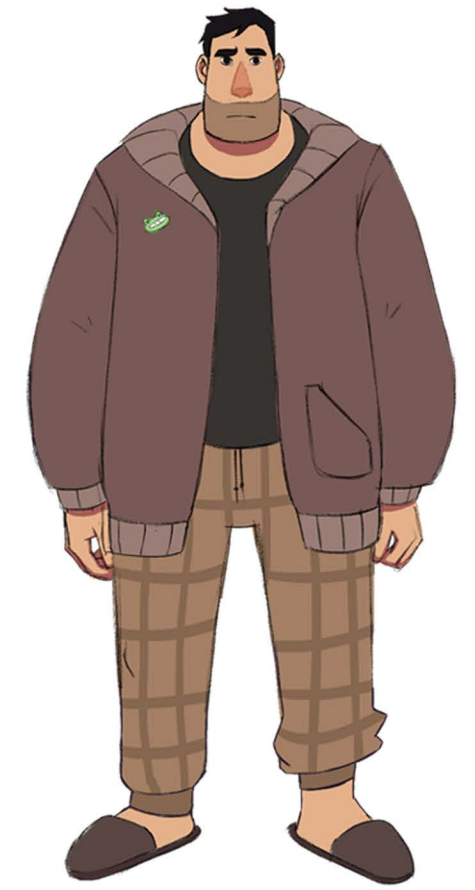


CHILD



SNOWMOM

VISUAL DEVELOPMENT OF DAD



not home clothes?

younger?

more mature

DAD

THUMBNAILS

DETAILS

VALUE/COLOR COMP

VISUAL DEVELOPMENT OF MOM



right feeling

THUMBNAILS



love the height



DETAILS



too short?

VALUE/COLOR COMP



CHILD SNOWSUIT DEVELOPMENT

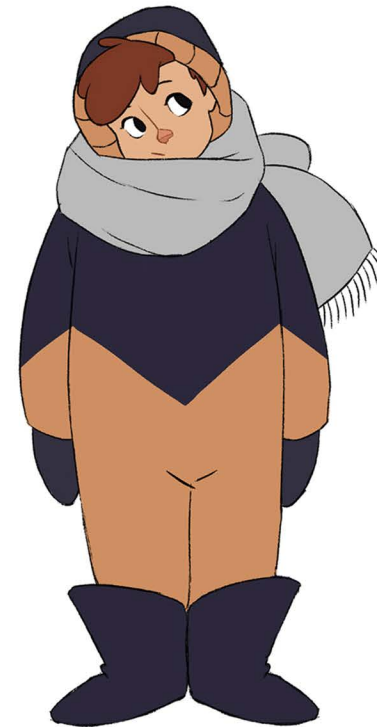


CHILD

original



1



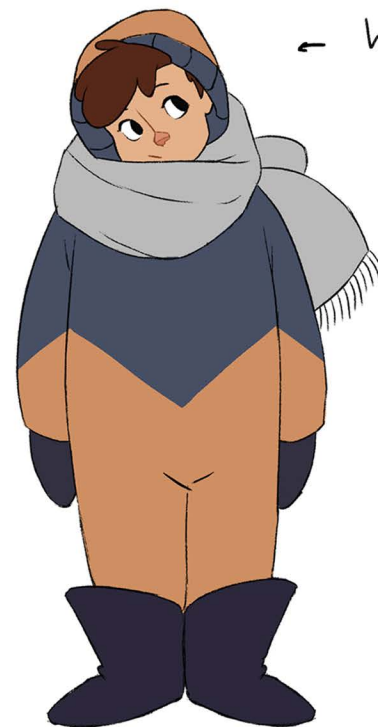
2



3



4



← hat is different →

5



← suit is different →

6



7



VISUAL DEVELOPMENT OF BOY'S ROOM

THUMBNAIL/
LINE ART



VALUE
STUDY



SCENE #2
SEQUENCE #03



COLORED
VERSION 1



COLORED
VERSION 2

VISUAL DEVELOPMENT OF LIVING ROOM

VALUE
STUDY



LIGHTING/
SHADING



COLOR
COMP



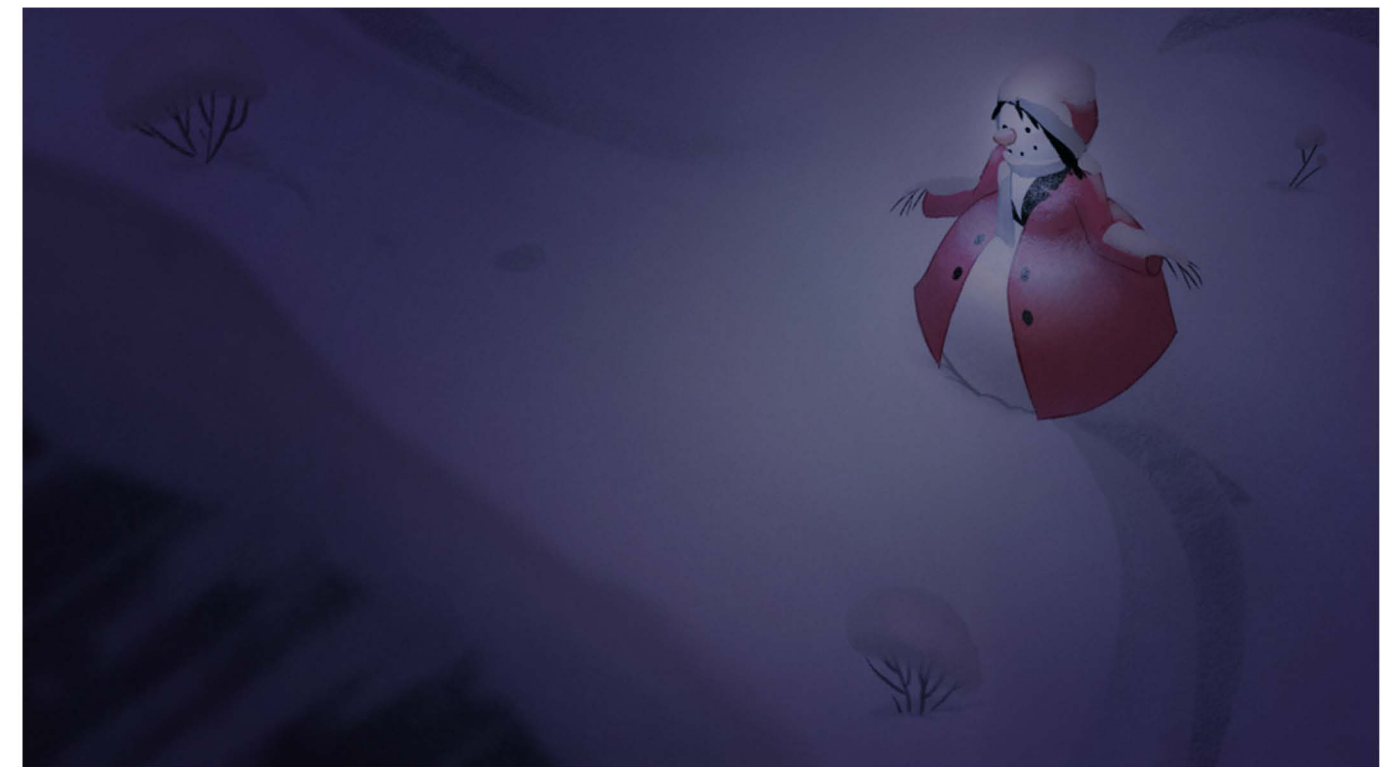
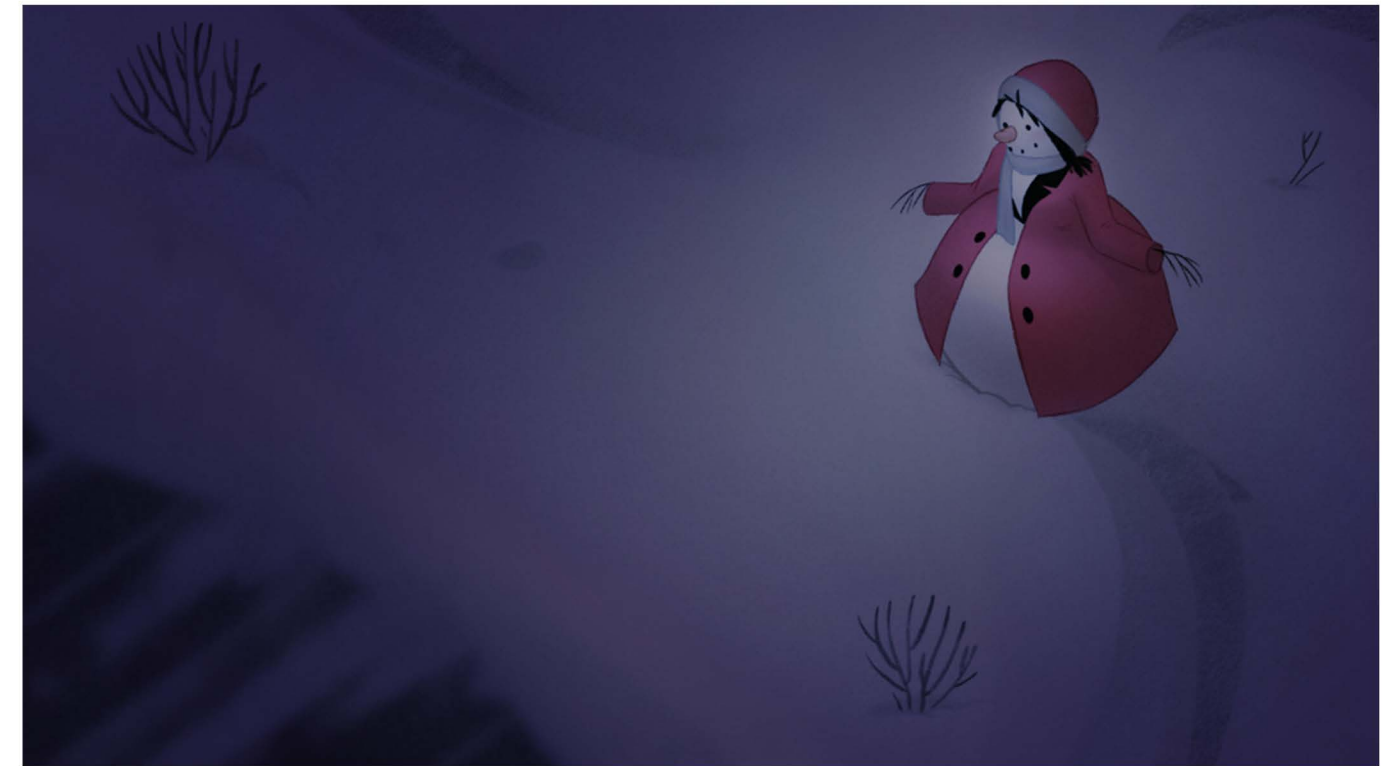
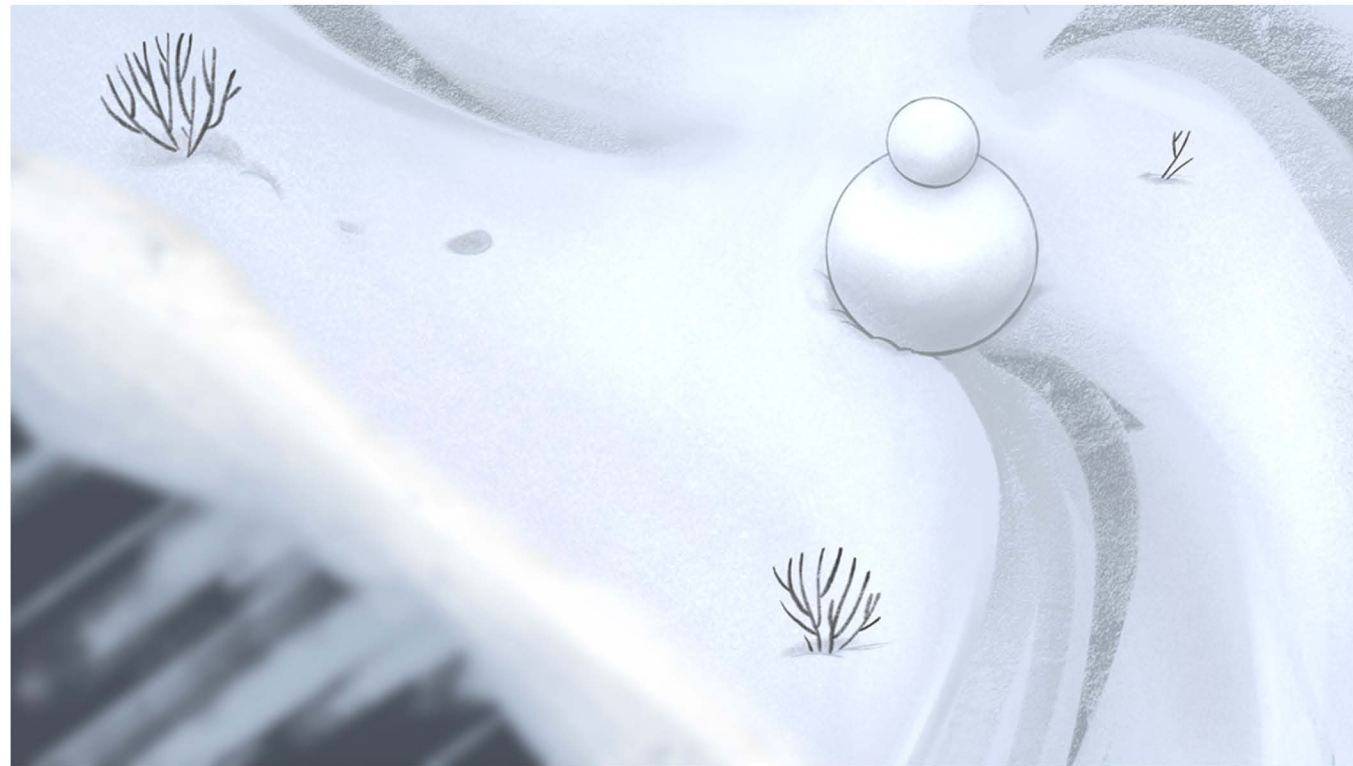
VERSION FOR
ANIMATION



SCENE #2
SEQUENCE #01

VISUAL DEVELOPMENT OF OPENING/ENDING BACKGROUND

SCENE #1
SEQUENCE #01



SCENE #1
SEQUENCE #17