Novice in Woodland Temple

Ellie Cayo

Final Portfolio

Thesis II

Fall 2021

Artist Statement

I aim to create work that is visually and conceptually fun, playful and appealing; Anything that really brings me back to that pure sense of childhood joy and wonder. I would definitely say my love for cartoons and animations heavily inspire my own character designs in puppet fabrication. My style is inspired by content of shows and comics like Jeff Smith's *BONE*, *Calvin & Hobbs*, *Adventure Time*, *Steven Universe*, and artist Gary Baseman, whose artwork is displayed in the board game*, Cranium*. These inspirations have influenced my simplistic, light-hearted, cartoon-led style to come to life in the form of puppet fabrication.

I've always had a strong passion for fantasy and was constantly enamored by the beauty of nature growing up. Getting lost in fantasy always allowed my mind to wander outside the confines of my own ordinary world, by seeing my own reality in its own enchanting way, allowing for the best kind of escape. I am excited by themes of fantasy regarding natural elements, strong and heroic females, adventure, mystic beasts, magic and lore. I aim to create work that is visually and conceptually fun, fantasy-themed, kid-friendly and wholesomely appealing. The driving force behind my work is to create content that brings me back to that pure sense of childhood joy and wonder. I would definitely say my love for fantasy books, comics, cartoons and other forms of media heavily inspire my own style of character designs in puppet fabrication. My style is inspired by a mix of content such as shows like *Adventure Time*, *Hilda*, *Steven Universe*, and Jeff Smith's *BONE* comics. Such inspirations have influenced my simplistic, light-hearted, cartoon-styled themes come to life in the form of puppet fabrication.

Thesis Proposal

Line of Inquiry:

Is the genre of contemporary fantasy becoming an equal platform for representations of characters? In what ways are these equal representations taking form, especially in regards to a character's gender? Why is fantasy becoming a popular genre for growing ideas relating to feminism, tolerance and equality in terms of character representations, qualities and ideas? What is the purpose behind these forms of representation for characters in contemporary fantasy? In what ways can contemporary fantasy spread these views? Can ideas in fantasy impact our views on reality? In what ways?

Context:

As a puppet fabricator, I aim to create work that is visually and conceptually fun, fantasy-themed, kid-friendly and wholesomely appealing. I am excited by themes of fantasy regarding natural elements, heroically dynamic female characters, adventure, magic and lore. Fantasy allowed me to read about all different kinds of complex characters that are all uniquely empowering in their own way. I mainly enjoyed these stories within the genre of high fantasy pertaining to heroic females because it seemed to be the only main form of entertainment granting access to unlimited possibilities for women that I couldn't find anywhere else. The stories I would read would address real-world related social issues such as sexism/racism/patriarchy/etc. in a parallel fashion to our own reality, but in a direction for positive social change. The potential of characters within these stories were portrayed as capably equal, regardless of gender, race or age, in relation to the traditional male hero type in past fantasy. My assumption is that fantasy has always reflected aspects of our reality and history, which has recently flipped to focusing on changes of representation in order to allow space for conscious awareness and broader acceptance.

The sub-genre of epic/high fantasy, specifically, "is your massively scoped out world filled with its own history, mythology, races, ideals, cultures, and more (Theazrianportal.com)." Rosemary Jackson, a critic of fantasy, states: "Traditionally, the genre of fantasy has been understood as stemming from Medieval Romance and fairy tales, and, even further back, from myths and legends of the ancients (A Common Language of Desire)." Since the beginning of

oral tradition of myths and fairy tales, our needs and desires have been reflected in fantasy throughout history. Fantasy offers access to our need for spiritual connection with nature, our want for character potential and relatability, and access to broadening perspectives on ideas of social constructs, especially in relation to the "other." Robert Olen Butler, winner of Pulitzer Prize for fiction, states: "We are the yearning creatures of this planet. There are superficial yearnings, and there are truly deep ones always pulsing beneath, but every second we yearn for something. And fiction, inescapably, is the art form of human yearning." In describing the way fantasy addresses the subject of the "other," Kathleen Skott-Myhre, writer of Feminist Spirituality Under Communism: Witches, Fairies, and Nomads, writes: "Fairy lore functions as the 'other,' articulating the force of the encounter with radical otherness. This force has the capacity to shatter dominant constructs of subjectivity opening them to revolutionary movements that reshape our perceptions of reality (Feminist Spirituality Under Communism)."

Throughout history, fantasy has dealt with the "other" as parallel social constructs pertaining to nature, spirituality, racism, patriarchy, gender roles, stereotypes and more. Fantasy grants access to freedom of thought and expression beyond our current reality, granting access to "impossible," far-reaching ideas and possibilities. Fantasy is a tool granting access to a new world of understanding, a language of freedom, which has the potential to gain traction and translate into our own reality. It's an important and impactful genre that allows access to spaces for broadening perspectives, which can discourse into addressing our own social and cultural issues. Point being, the ideas projected within fantasy are a reflection of the mindset of current social constructs and desires of humanity throughout history.

Much of high fantasy's past history centers around the white, male hero stereotype: the common slayer of dragons and demons, savior of damsels, etc. This isn't surprising, concerning our history with social views pertaining to stereotypes and the projected preference of the white heterosexual male figure above others. But as our social views have changed, in return, so has the projected ideas, themes and representation of characters within contemporary fantasy. The past decade alone has given us characters of all different backgrounds, races, genders, and dynamic characteristic qualities that people today can currently relate to. The genre of fantasy is well known for its freedom of expression and experimentation, and as we head towards a future based on those principles, so does fantasy follow, if not pave the way for. I believe these potential themes in contemporary fantasy are important to the intellectual digestion of upcoming

generations. My proposal is to build on this new wave of representation in contemporary high fantasy, particularly young females portraying complex characteristic qualities that stray from traditional gender roles and stereotypes.

Materials/Process/Techniques:

When gathering images of inspiration for my puppet designs, I usually collect sources from Pinterest or Instagram. Since my feed is customized to my personal taste, inspiration is found through these outlets; whether it be inspiration for color palette, style, aesthetic, objects, clothing, background scenery, etc. Once gathering my image references for content and style, I begin sketching my own designs. Once a design is chosen, I print out my image for scale reference. I begin my puppet fabrication by measuring and cutting my metal K+S sockets, then glue bendable wire into the sockets to make the body ligament structure. For the body parts that need weight, I add baked clay pieces for the head, torso, and pelvis. For body ligaments that need "meat," I glue on and cut to shape some foam material, and then wrap it in felt fabric for a "skin" finish. For the setting itself, I will gather scenic photos references, sketch a setting idea, and fabricate my setting out of clay, blue foam material, glue, and paint.

Project Description:

I will fabricate a functional, animatible stop-motion puppet, which will be posed, staged and displayed within a small-scaled high fantasy setting. The puppet will be a young female character, dressed in heavy layered winter clothing in Medieval-inspired fashion, holding a weapon in hand. The puppet will have the sides and back of her head shaved, with a long top-braid. The costume design will be actively purposeful garments, such as a fur cloak, with a few of the garments' details and accessories in floral print fabric. I intend for my puppet to represent non-gender conforming qualities where feminine and masculine qualities are embraced. With these qualities, my aim with my puppet's design is to build on contemporary themes of representation and portray a character with qualities that aim away from traditional gender roles or stereotypes.

I am planning on fabricating a small-scaled high fantasy setting of an old stone frog temple ruin within a forest. A figure of a large stone frog will sit with its mouth agape, its open mouth shaped as an arched doorway which the puppet will be posed facing towards. The

setting piece will have to be propped onto a table or pedestal as an installation piece, allowing for both free range of access to viewers, and for documenting portfolio photos. Fabricating my puppet should take about less than 2 months to complete, while the puppet's costume will likely take one month. My remaining 3 months during Fall semester will go towards creating my setting.

Summary:

The overall potential for representation of gender roles within contemporary fantasy is further becoming disconnected from traditional gendered stereotypes, allowing for a new potential scope of relatability within characters. By building off contemporary forms of character representation, my proposal is to create a fabricated puppet design of a young female character featuring characteristic qualities which deviate away from traditional gender-based roles and stereotypes; which will be staged and displayed within a high fantasy, Frog Temple setting.

Thesis Abstract

"Young Novice in Woodland Temple" is a stop-motion animation installation setting within the theme of contemporary high fantasy, staged with a functional stop-motion animation puppet of a young character of female gender, holding a weapon in hand. The project is meant to allow viewers to experience what would be a behind-the-scenes of an actual stop-motion animation production piece. The puppet character is staged facing the entrance of the Frog Temple, posed with sword in hand, their weapon meant to be a symbol of power, as this character is alone on their quest within this dark, woodland forest. The Frog Temple, though ancient and daunting in the middle of this woodland forest, is meant to add a bit of childlike wonder and magical lore to the theme of scenery, as frogs are used as a symbol of mischievous cuteness within this project.

The style of my puppet character is dressed in functional, heavy layered winter clothing within Medieval-inspired fashion, as is common within the theme of high fantasy stories. By building off contemporary forms of character representations, my project is aimed to portray a fabricated puppet design featuring characteristic qualities which deviate away from traditional gender-based roles and stereotypes in order to allow for a more broadened range of character representations, specifically, for female characters. To accomplish this, my character's design displays more of a focus on clothing and costume functionality (appropriate for the elements of the forest) over unnecessary "gender based" exaggerated features and accessories- such as skirts, bows and accentuated breast plates, for example. My project's focus is not in opposition to other forms of representations, but more about broadening the overall range and aiming away from gender-specific representations, in order to show that gendered characters don't always have to dress in a particular way just due to being M/F/X gender. The specific style choices of my puppet character are overall based on personal taste, and essentially represents a character design that I could have wanted to resonated with at a younger age.

Oral Defense

INTRO SLIDE: Hello and welcome to my oral defense. My name is Ellie Cayo and I am an Animated Arts major within the profession of puppet fabrication.

ARTIST/FABRICATOR SLIDE: As an artist and puppet fabricator, I aim to create work that is visually and conceptually fun, kid friendly, wholesomely appealing, and fantasy-themed.

INSPIRING THEMES IN FANTASY SLIDE: I am inspired by many themes of the fantasy genre, including: nature and natural elements, heroically dynamic female characters, adventure, magic, and lore. Understandably, the main themes I am attracted to and enjoy within fantasy are all themes and content I feel potentially out of touch with, or don't experience much at all, in real life. Our present reality feels out of touch with nature, heroic females, and a lot more, but within fantasy, it is all there.

ENJOYMENT FROM FANTASY SLIDE: Throughout my life, I have been able to enjoy stories of fantasy through numerous outlets, whether it's reading books, watching movies, TV shows, and more. Enjoyment from fantasy content has always been a lifelong form of escapism for me. Whether it's getting my wholesome and ridiculously humorous content through forms of TV shows or movies, such as the Addams Family, Steven Universe, or Adventure Time. Whatever the content, fantasy allows me to hand-pick and surround myself with all the qualities I enjoy out of life. Through these stories, I am able to find relatability with many characters in many different realities that don't have to be my own.

ARTIST INSPIRATION 1 SLIDE: Of course, I do have artists of inspiration behind this project. First, is Faith Schaffer, who is an illustrator, background artist, and visual developer. Her personal work consists of illustrations within high-fantasy portraying females as knights, vampires, or saint figures; figures which are always posed holding a unique sword as a symbol of power. The weapon as a symbol of power is a huge influence for this project, since I included the same form of symbolism in having my character posed with a sword as their weapon.

ARTIST INSPIRATION 2 SLIDE: My last artist of inspiration is puppet fabricator Adeena Grubb, from the UK. She creates her unique puppets with fabric-based materials for her finished looks, including my favorite, felt material. Adeena Grubb is actually the inspiration behind me using felt material for my own creations as a puppet fabricator.

PROJECT OUTCOMES SLIDE: As for overall project outcomes, my aim was to complete a functionally animatible stop-motion puppet, a functionally animatible puppet costume, a stop-motion setting instillation, and finally, portfolio documentation photos of my project. On this slide you can see my concept designs for both my puppet and Frog Temple setting.

COSTUME LAYER SLIDE(S): These next 7 slides are layer-by-layer images of each article of clothing for the costume, starting with shoes, and ending on the fur cloak.

SETTING SLIDE: Now on to the setting. My setting piece will be of a Frog Temple ruin within a woodland forest. The stone frog's open mouth is the temple doorway entrance, which the puppet is posed facing towards. As for my decision based on the frog theme, I decided on frogs because based on my personal taste, they are cute creatures, which adds to the kid-friendly wholesomely appealing, magical lore aspect I'm aiming for. I picture them kind of like cats, which are usually portrayed as symbols that are both cute and mischievous. As an old temple made by frogs, is it a "nice" temple? Or a place of mischievous danger? Who knows what to expect from frogs. As for my decision on having a young novice character alone in the woodland forest, it is meant to portray that this character is perhaps an adventurer, or on a quest. Either way, being alone at a temple such as this, makes this character alone and courageous, because they are ready with their sword, just in case.

PROJECT CONCEPT SLIDE: On to the project concept. My project's is based within the theme of contemporary high fantasy, aimed to be visually and conceptually fun, kid-friendly, and wholesomely appealing. As for my line inquiry, I am asking the question: "Is contemporary fantasy becoming an equal platform for representations of characters?" By the term "equal," I mean fairness of representations in terms of a character's capabilities, or worthiness of important roles, regardless of race, gender, or age.

HIGH FANTASY SLIDE: Let's talk about high-fantasy and what it is. It is stated as being a world filled with its own history, mythology, races, cultures, ideals, etc. As for a quote from Rosemary Jackson, a critic on fantasy: "Traditionally, the genre of fantasy has been understood as stemming from Medieval Romance and fairy tales, and, even further back, from myths and legends of the ancients (A Common Language of Desire)."

FANTASY=WANTS SLIDE: Fantasy is an important genre. Fantasy reflects our wants and desires as people. The genre grants access to freedom of thought and expression, where anything can happen. Impossible worlds and scenarios can take any form, and it is acceptable because it is fantasy. Humans slaying demons, female knights and magic? You got it. So what does this mean? We are granted greater access to impossible, far-reaching ideas beyond our reality. In fantasy, we have control.

CONTEMPORARY FANTASY SLIDE: Now on to contemporary fantasy. As our social and cultural views evolve, in return, so have projected ideas, themes and potential of character representation within fantasy. The past decade alone has given us characters of all different backgrounds, races, genders, and uniquely dynamic characteristic qualities, bringing us up-to-date representations that people today can relate to. This includes broadened racial and gender roles and representations, including non-gender conforming identities, for example.

REPS TO STAY AWAY FROM SLIDE: There are many different directions one can take within contemporary fantasy, but due to my own stylistic choices as an artist, my project aim is to stay away from certain forms of representation. I am aiming to stay away from over-sexualized representations, or representations with a heavily gender-divided focus, being strictly masculine or feminine. That is not to say anything against these types of styles, they are just styles I am personally straying away from.

REPRESENTATION AIM SLIDE: As for the aim of my project, my perspective is not in opposition of other representations, but more about broadening the range of representations for female characters, as a way to state that you don't have to dress in a particular way just due to the fact of being female, male, or any gender. My desired direction is to display a focus on clothing and costume functionality over unnecessary "gender based" exaggerated features and accessories, such as skirts, bow accessories, or accentuated breast plates. The style of my design is inspired by medieval era garb and fantasy art, but my overall style choices are based on personal taste. Essentially, this is a character design representation that I could have resonated with at a younger age.

ADDRESSING INQUIRY/GOAL SLIDE: My goal of addressing and conveying such portrayals of broadened, contemporary forms of character representations heavily relies on the conceptual design of my puppet character and their overall appearance. My character's design is

meant to portray a mix of characteristics that are considered both traditionally stereotypical and non-stereotypical qualities for female characters, as a way of aiming to portray a design that strays from traditional gender roles or stereotypes. These specific characteristic qualities worth addressing to include the puppet's thick eyebrows, subtle sideburns, shaved sides of their head, long ponytail, and the puppet's stocky build. My puppet's design is of female gender, but is of younger age, which is why I designed their body to appear more stock-built. With that, there are no needed additions of curvy features, whether they'd be used as a means to emphasize gender or to add maturity, for example. Either way, those features were not included since it was not needed or necessary for this puppet's design. In portraying this specific character concept I've created, my goal is to further regulate the idea that character styles and designs don't need to be distinctly gender focused, aiming to close the gap on this separation of character representations.

PUPPET PROJECT PROCESS SLIDE: Next, let's look at the project making process. The puppet itself, including the costume, was worked on over a three-month period during the summer. The amount of hours logged were about over 60 hours of work.

K+S ARMATURE SLIDE: Here is a look at how I build the skeletal structure out of K+S socket armature and bendable wire.

FOAM AND TIE-DOWNS SLIDE: The head made out of clay, foot tie-downs to secure the puppet to the set, and some shaped foam added for the "meat" of the puppet.

FELT SKIN SLIDE: Complete foam build-up of the body, including felt sheet material for the "skin" of the puppet.

HAIR WIRES SLIDE: Here are the wires I drilled into the head to hold the hair in place, which I covered in glue before wrapping the felt wool over the wires.

PONYTAIL WIRE SLIDE: Some more hair process photos, including the ponytail wire build-up.

FINISHED BODY SLIDE: And here is the finished look of the puppet in her naked form.

COMPLETE PUPPET SLIDE: Lastly, the puppet in full costume.

PUPPET CONCEPT REFERENCE SLIDE: And my concept drawing, for reference.

SETTING PROJECT PROCESS SLIDE: Onto the setting, which I worked on for another three months over Fall term. The hours logged into making the scene took about over 45+ hours of work.

BASE PLATFORM SLIDE: The base platform, constructed out of blue foam and floral foam, along with the setting placements. Blue foam is traditionally what you would use to carve out structures or base figures, but due to running out of that material, I had to end up using floral foam for the rest of the setting base, which possesses less strength and has a higher brittle density compared to blue foam.

TEMPLE SLIDE: Here is the temple, which was made out of white foam, and bulked up in size with floral foam, which was easy to shape, and then spray painted.

TREES SLIDE: The trees, which were made out of bendable wire, wrapped cardboard paper, and fabric sheets for the bark.

ROCKS SLIDE: The rocks were made out of hard white foam, which I cut to shape and covered in Elmer's glue to fill the harsh bubbly holes. Once dried, I painted with acrylic paints and added felt fabric for the moss bits.

GRASS AND DIRT SLIDE: As for the grass and dirt, I created them out of spray-painted fabric and collaged fabrics.

FINAL DOCUMENTATION SLIDE(S): Finally, these are my official documentation photos, which I took in order to add to my professional portfolio.

CONCLUSIONS- HURDLES/MISSED MARKS SLIDE: On to conclusions. As with every project, there are going to be hurdles and missed marks. Let's talk about them! There were basically no hurdles with fabricating my puppet, it actually went very smoothly and according to plan. But as for my setting, many hurdles. A big hurdle was time management, especially with carving out my setting terrain, which took way too many weeks since I was carving with a 2-inch tool. I kept running out of materials as I was making my project, and since I didn't have a clearly prepared plan of execution as for materials, I was consistently exploring as I went. There was also no time to add any animation or video footage, which was asked about a lot. And lastly, I had a difficulty in keeping a consistent camera exposure when taking my documentation photos.

PLEASANT OUTCOMES SLIDE: Pleasant outcomes, because we want to end on a good note. I am absolutely happy with how my puppet turned out, and how smoothly fabricating went according to plan. I believe I ended up with a cohesive setting aesthetic, which I'm pleased with. I successfully added documentation photos to my portfolio, which was a big must. It was super pleasing to see my project in completion, and overall, I feel as though my project expectations were basically met. Overall satisfaction on project, I'd give myself an 8 out of 10.

FINAL SLIDE: And that brings us to the conclusion of my presentation. Thank you and now I will take questions.
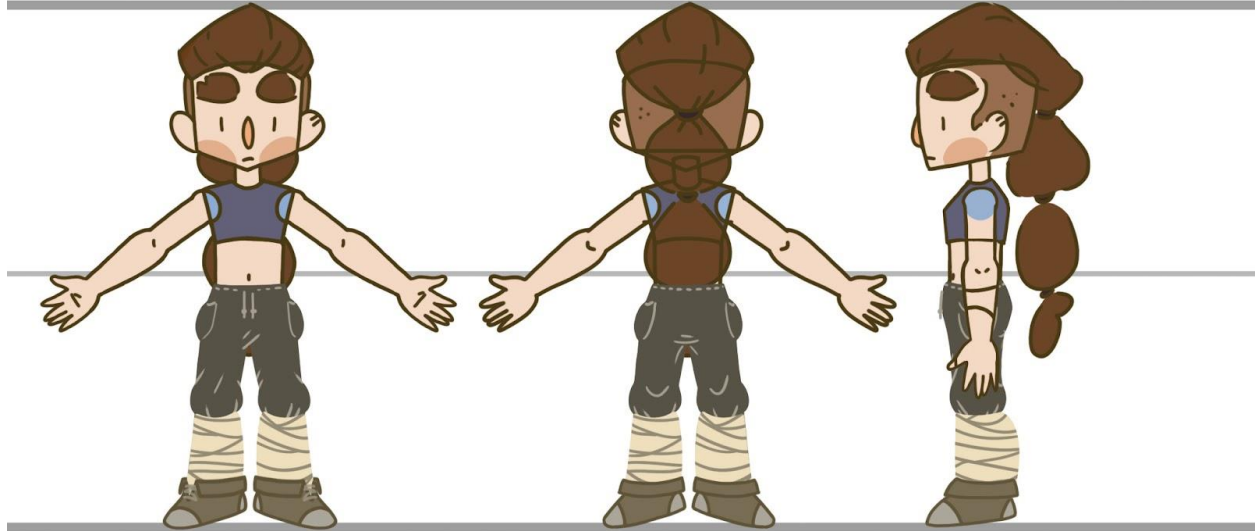
Documentation

Supporting Materials

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Young Novice in Wodland Temple
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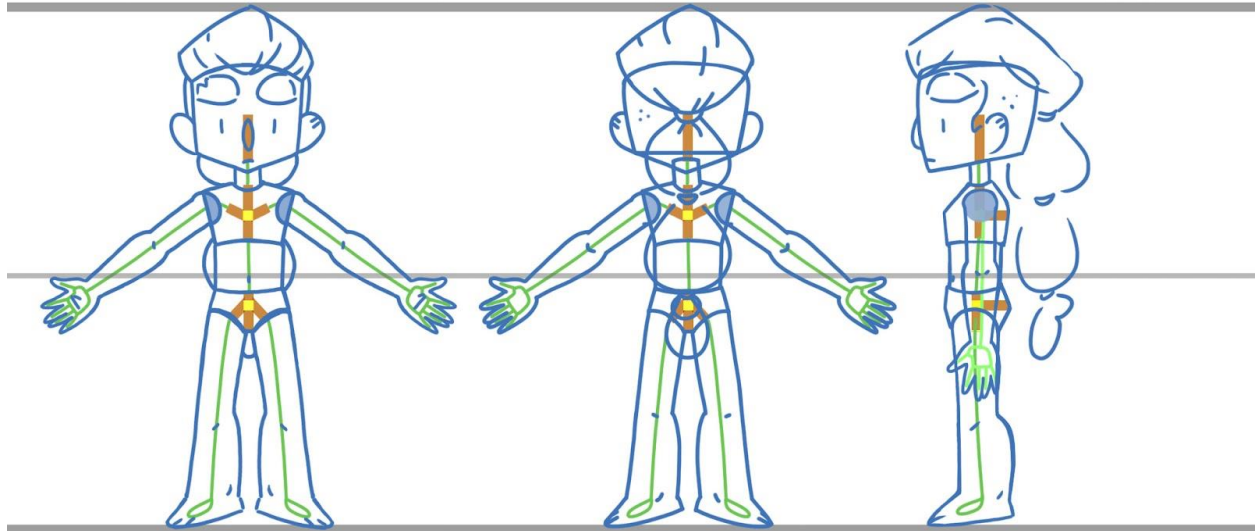
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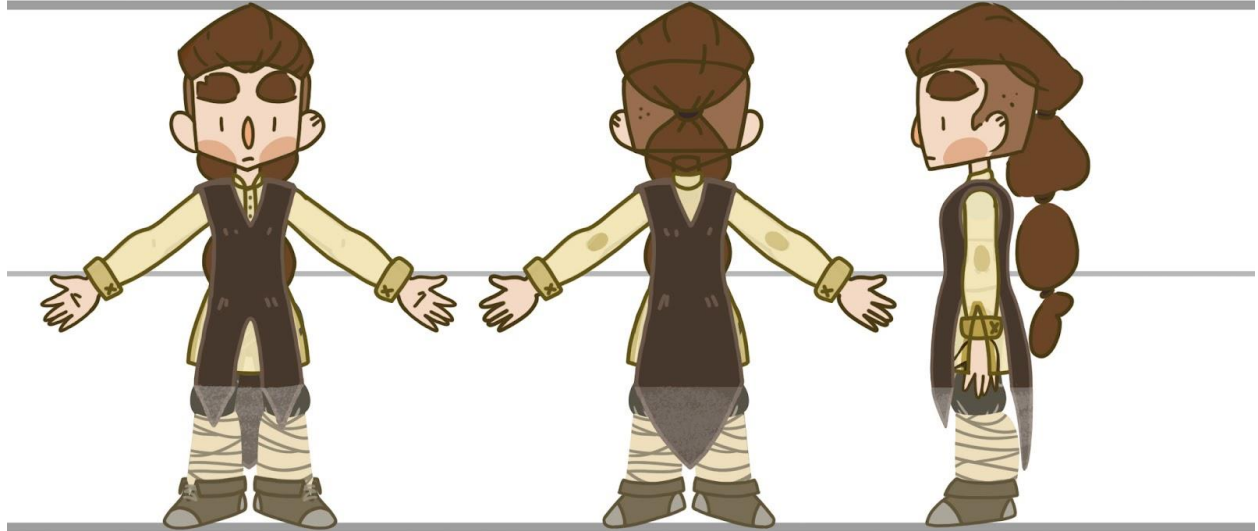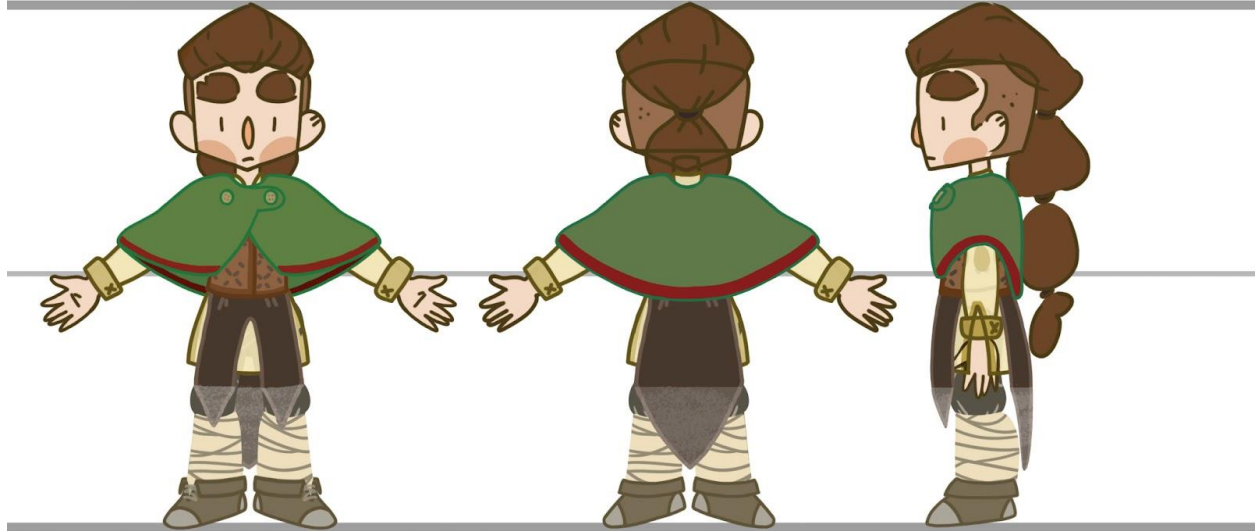**Young Novice in Wodland Temple**
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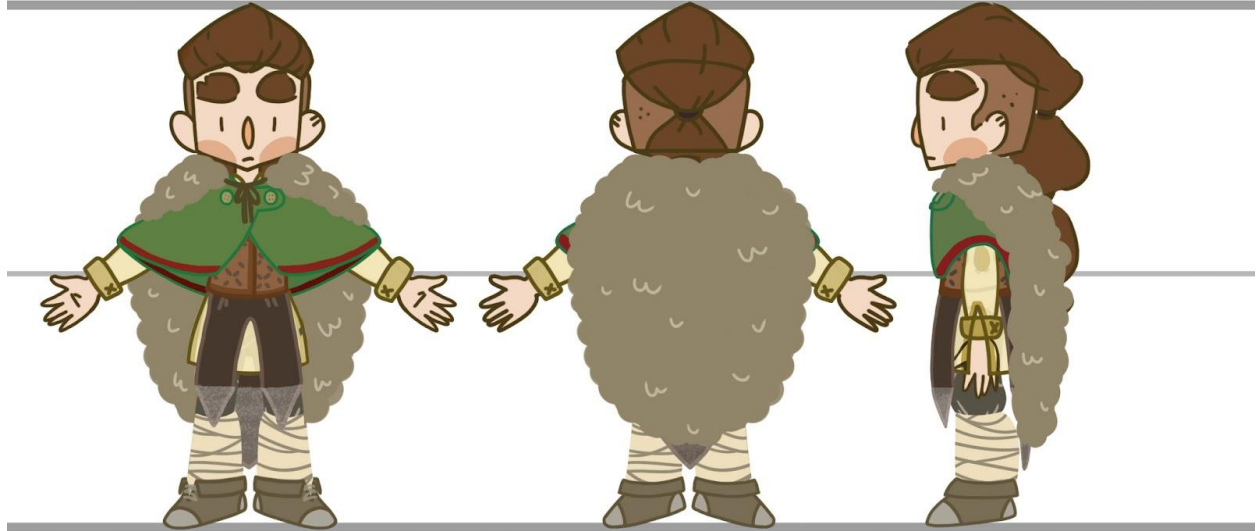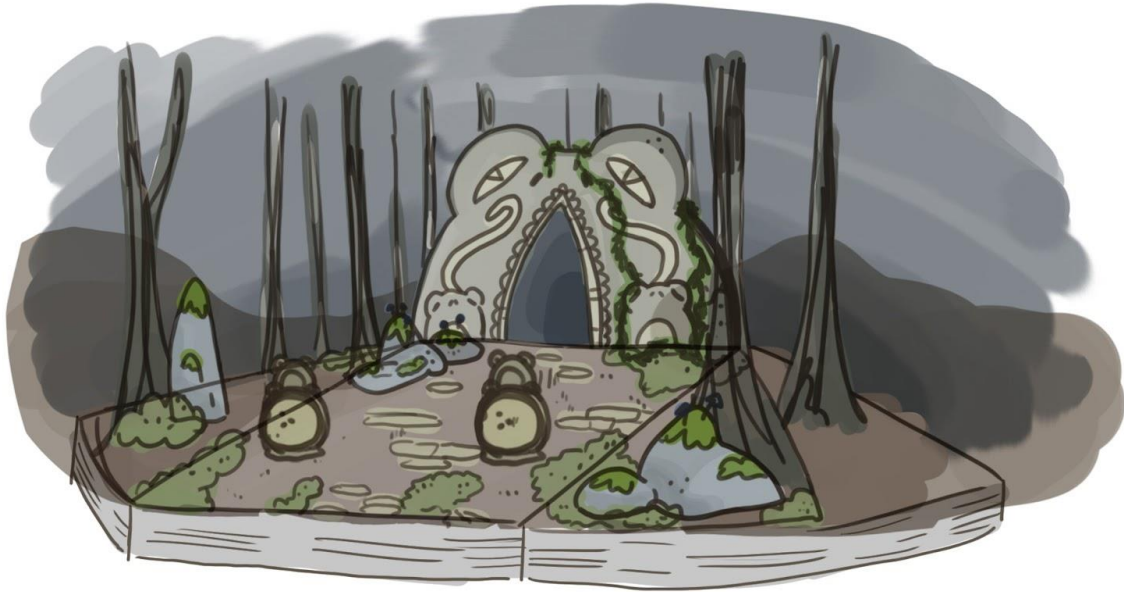Young Novice in Wodland Temple
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