Tallulah Tulip: A Reimagined Look at Children's Media Practices

by

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**Summary:** The show *The Quests and Quacks of Tallulah the Duck* and the comprehensive set of media and literary research that support it, are a cross-disciplinary approach to creating a project that extends beyond the classroom in teaching essential development and research skills in the Media Production industry. The project is a mock developmental stage for a new potential limited series of children's programming to be aired through the Canadian Broadcasting Company in Canada. The thesis includes the development of a pitch for the show, including character and design model sheets, episode descriptions, and research to back the social-emotional learning purpose of the limited series and its projected impact. I am building a children's media programming informed largely by research and critical theory about children's media, and pitching the creative elements of my project through the research I have conducted and developed through the point of view of critical practice and theory. In an article published by the Journal of Pediatric Health Care "Screen media overuse is associated with poor sleep quality, shorter sleep duration, greater likelihood for overweight/obesity, lower executive functioning, poorer academic performance, and increased internalizing and externalizing problems." (Liu). There are many shows currently on the market that are highly commercial and over-stimulating, as I will showcase later in the thesis, and do not have a focus on social-emotional learning in the development stage. Shows have also moved towards shows utilizing CGI and other computer-generated animation styles, whereas my show brings in a hand-drawn 2-D animation style. This creative pitching of a show was made with the intention of helping kids move through difficult topics as well as encouraging a collaborative viewing environment for guardians and their children to discuss the topics while watching with their kids. I will defend this media as a positive form of research-based educational entertainment.

**Format:** The format of my project will be released as a virtual compilation of materials that would serve as pitching and developmental material for a potential show. This will include a pitch deck and my thesis paper. It will be released both on my portfolio website as well as presented to be defended in front of the thesis panel. It will also contribute to my applications for future jobs post-graduation. Although considered a creative project, this project will not be exhibition-based and will include visual components to complement the primary focus on research and developmental documentation.

**Restated Research Statement:** The project's focus and deliverables have changed since the original proposal. Instead of including production management resources, I focused on the creative development and ideation stages for the show. Throughout the process of working on this project, I learned valuable lessons about the industry of my focus, as well as adapted to the challenges along the way. It occurred to me early in the development of my project that I would need to change the things I would end up delivering, and replace the "production manager" deliverables with things that I had never done instead. I also struggled with making the character model sheets, due to my lack of experience in drawing and animation, but feel that the opportunity to practice through this project has made me more prepared to pursue a career path in a similar field and have valuable documentation that I can include in my portfolio.

**Reflection:** My honors thesis served as a vessel for me to learn more about the creative process and formation of an animated children's show that considers the social-emotional learning impact that it will have on youth audiences, as well as being conscious of its overall significance in the greater space of children's media. The key contribution to the field and gap that my project would fill in the current landscape, is facilitating a watching experience for young viewers that not only promotes a calming television experience, but also promotes thinking about difficult subjects such as death, misunderstanding, and unfamiliarity that may be difficult for them to discuss if not for the show. I believe that through a robust research process, the show *The Quests and Quacks of Tallulah the Duck* has its youth audience in mind when pitching something that will be beneficial to the viewer's learning experience.

**Exhibition Plan:** The proposed exhibition plan for my work is to have it serve as a rigorous example of my skills and development in the creative media space and supplement my applications to graduate school in the future. This research and creative project has been planned for use in a forthcoming article in collaboration with the Renee Crown Institute at The University of Colorado Boulder for the interactive web-based project titled "InsideU" in partnership with Disney and Pixar Animation. The web-based project has been backed by a multi-disciplinary set of research conducted across departments at CU Boulder with Associate Professor Tara Knight, Dr. Sam Hubley, PhD in Emergent Technology Media Arts Practices candidate Emma Piper-Burket, Undergraduate Research Assistant Lily Fletcher, and PhD in Media Studies Candidate Marissa Lammon. My project helped to provide supplemental information on the effects of media on a youth audience and help guide their research, and provide a collection of useful data and research for what they continue to study. Inspired by Disney and Pixar's *Inside Out*, the Crown Institute's InsideU uses the film's potential as an entertaining and educational tool for promoting mental and emotional wellness, using evidence-based psychotherapies to create a highly engaging social and emotional learning tool, and in turn, fostering the creative application of skills through interactive learning through the website.

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The initial goals of my creative thesis project were to create an engaging piece of children's media that addressed what I felt was a gap in the overall children's media industry in its current stage. As a topic and career path I have been interested in since the start of my junior year of college, it has been facilitated by coursework, faculty, and creative projects such as this one to help me understand what it takes to make a meaningful piece of media that could be incorporated into the industry and have an impact on the children that consume it. I strongly believe that we must do everything we can as media makers, to ensure that our work is positively impacting its audience and its industry, and wanted to focus specifically on the best practices for educational media targeted towards youth audiences. The show I have created and conceived for potential release, *The Quests and Quacks of Tallulah the Duck,* is an introspective look at the concepting and research that serve as best practices when developing a show intended for a youth audience that aims to reinforce social and emotional learning (SEL) through its release into the public.

1. **Title & Logline:**

**Title:** *The Quests and Quacks of Tallulah the Duck*

**Logline:** Tallulah Tulip is a young duckling living in the quaint pond community of LilyPad Pond. She faces trials through everyday experiences that allow her to grow and experience life through the six-episode-limited series highlighting communication, compromise, and empathy for children ages 4-6 years old.

2. **Overview**

Tallulah Tulip is a bright and energetic young duckling that lives in LilyPad Pond. She is surrounded by a close-knit community including her two dads, her friends like Lily the Ladybug, Francis the Frog, Devin the Dragonfly, and others. Tallulah is at an age where she is starting to face challenges in her family, at school, through her friendships, and at the pond. The audience is invited to watch Tallulah face these challenges and grow mentally and emotionally through talking about tough subjects and learning life lessons.

3. **Synopsis**

In the enchanting world of *The Quests and Quacks of Tallulah the Duck* our protagonist, Tallulah Tulip, embarks on a journey of self-discovery through the everyday trials she faces at her home town LilyPad Pond. Tallulah is a spirited and curious duck, eager to learn about the world around her and to discover new things about her life as she grows up. Tallulah goes through many journeys throughout the limited series, learning about her parent's struggles, dealing with death, asking for help from her parents, and much more. The explores the themes of communication, compromise, and empathy. Each episode unfolds as an insightful tale, illustrating the transformative impact of effective communication and the profound connections that can be forged when young children are guided by their peers, parents, and life experiences to learn to listen and empathize. *The Quests and Quacks of Tallulah the Duck* is a journey that encourages young viewers to reflect on the importance of understanding, cooperation, and kindness in creating a harmonious world. Join Tallulah as she navigates the delicate balance of her curious nature and understanding the world around her, all while leaving a lasting impact on the diverse pond she calls home.

4. **Intended Audience and Distribution**

Wings flap out when interest is peaked

raised eyebrows showcase her constant curiosity

eyelash detail

bow worn when going outside

encouraged curiosity to show curiosity

polite & friendly demeanor

glasses inherited in aprizode

a playf Skip

runs with excitement

sleeps with hat

Tallulah Tulip

**Tallulah Tulip:** *(The name Tallulah is a girl's name of Irish, Native American origin meaning "leaping water, lady of abundance")* Tallulah is a preschool-aged duckling who is the main protagonist of the show. She has a big heart and a lot of curiosity. She attends school with her friends and was raised by her dad's Teddy and Tad Tulip. She is characterized by wearing a tulip hat on her head, as well as a bow around her neck, and eventually a pair of glasses to help her vision. She has a fluffy light yellow feathered coat and a bright orange beak.

I decided that I wanted a hand-drawn look instead of a stylized photo realistic CGI look for my show. CGI animated shows look very plastic, and that is partially because plastic is a smooth surface, easy to texture map, and therefore cheaper and less labor intensive in animation practices to produce. The style also looks very similar to a toy. I will use a hand-drawn quality that showcases a softness, analog, non-digital, and tactile real world through the experience of watching the show. This is because the aesthetic of a hand-drawn show aligns with a more relaxed overall tone of the show. This is also in part to make the show enjoyable for both the parents and kids watching the show. It closely resembles the show Winne the Pooh that I have referenced in my thesis (Fletcher, 7) in its style as it is one show that influenced a large majority of my choices.

To properly position my work in the children's media space, I set specific aesthetic and formatted restraints on the scope and development of my project to specifically fill gaps with the correct knowledge and research to back the choices I made. These choices included setting an intended age group to target, aesthetics and design, and the topics I would cover. I knew after completing significant research that the use of animal characters for a children's show was an effective way to convey information that could be understood by a young audience. Rebekah A Richert states in *"Media as Social Partners: The Social Nature of Young Children's Learning From Screen Media." Child Development*:

> "Apart from the general repetition of Marshall McLuhan's (1964) claim that the medium is the message, suggesting that each medium has unique properties that influence users' reception of content in specific and constrained ways, few researchers have explicitly outlined what it means to consider the screen as a symbolic form. This is likely because screen media are best conceptualized as tools that use multiple symbol systems simultaneously (e.g., pictures, language, music, visual cues, auditory cues) rather than as symbol systems in their own right (Salomon, 1979). For children to learn from the information provided on screen, they need to view the screen as a symbolic source of information about present reality (Schmidt et al., 2007; Troseth & DeLoache, 1998)."

Children can be particularly drawn to animal characters in shows for their potential to reach across racial or gender stereotypes and their ability to provide a form of detachment from the viewer's own life experiences. Animator John Hubley states, "But there is in animation a quality that peculiarly distinguishes it from theater or live actors on camera, and makes it possible to move beyond stereotypes, to bring more definition to the drawing of a character and

more clarity to the evocation of an environment." (Hubley, 216) According to a study from Maura N. Snyder, "children showed little sign of prioritizing realism. The study adds children's perspectives to the literature on the effects of reality cues on early learning from educational TV." (Synder, 1)

It is important to address how media affects any given audience, before diving deeper into the specifics of how younger audiences receive and learn from it. According to Emily Moyer-Guse's study *Toward a Theory of Entertainment Persuasion: Explaining the Persuasive Effects of Entertainment-Education Messages,* entertainment media can encourage audiences to relate to the characters they love and watch on screen. After gathering research from other studies they found that "Some have speculated that entertainment education may offer a more effective way to influence attitudes and behavior than traditional persuasive messages by arousing less resistance to the persuasive messages contained within a narrative." (2008)

Unlike being forced to learn through "persuasive messages" as a student in a larger educational system often does, the audience can take messages, behaviors, and lessons from the characters that they watch on television. This can be applied to all ages, but I believe that there is a more profound impact when discussing the phenomenon for audiences of a younger and more impressionable age.

Research-based evidence proves how the media can provoke thoughts and actions both good and bad from viewers. I believe in using this innate power to strengthen and bolster the education of the younger generation. My research found lots of material based on this broad effect of media on a crowd, but I had a harder time finding academic research applying this theory to the more specific youth audience and to media that was created to educate them.

Researchers currently study how media can affect audiences of all ages and the impact that media has on human development, but it is crucial to consider making a guide for those in the creative media industry on how to ensure that the media they produce will impact their audience appropriately. My research builds on the research that already exists for the educational uses of media but adds the perspective of a media production timeline.

Understanding the different ways children identify with characters on screen is helpful to our understanding of their resulting learned behaviors. As showcased in the current research available for the effects of educational entertainment on a young audience, there are a plethora of things to consider when measuring how a given media will affect the audience. Through looking at these factors, I formed my characters to follow these principles.

I have taken a few examples from Moyer-Guse's outline for distinct ways audiences form relationships with the characters they see on screen, and how this affects their behavior post-watch.

- "Wishful identification" is often confused with "identification," but it's distinct as it involves a viewer's desire to emulate a character, while "identification" is about the viewer temporarily assuming a character's role and perspective in a narrative.

- "Parasocial interaction" (PSI) is the idea of a one-sided relationship between a viewer and a media figure, akin to traditional interpersonal relationships like seeking guidance from newscasters, radio hosts, and fictional TV characters, with perceived similarity and social attraction not being necessary components of this process.
- "Liking" pertains to positive character evaluations, measured through items like "I would like to be friends with this person," serving to understand initial viewer character perceptions before any parasocial relationship forms.

The Moyer-Guse article also states, "During identification, the viewer temporarily loses his or her own perspective and experiences events as does the character. Wishful identification falls somewhere in the middle of this continuum, with the viewer simultaneously aware of his or her own perspective (an awareness of his or her own desire to be like the character) while also imagining him- or herself as the character in a wishful way." (Moyer-Guse, 5) This is how I expect audiences to relate to and experience Tallulah Tulip. Since she is an animal, the audience won't directly relate to her but will appreciate her personality and actions and understand a liking for her without necessarily feeling the need to be exactly like her. This helps children of different races, classes, and genders to gain an equal opportunity to relate to the character without the setbacks of not seeing them reflected in the character.

According to a study conducted by Eveline A. Crone titled *Developmental Changes and Individual Differences in Risk and Perspective Taking in Adolescence,* their research pointed to the following results when studying perspective taking in youth.

"The developmental change toward more rational decisions versus emotional, impulsive decisions may reflect, in part, more efficient integration of others' perspectives into one's decision making. These developmental results are discussed regarding brain systems important for risk-taking and perspective-taking."(Crone, 1)

The age group that my limited series targets is 4-6 years old. This was a deliberate choice I made based on the content, design, release, and content of my show. According to the Sesame Age Group specification, they target children ages 2-4 years old. The article *What Television Can (and Can't) Do to Promote Early Literacy Development* by Annie M. Moses shows the resulting in language surrounding their decision; "Many new and innovative segments highlight crucial areas of a whole child curriculum… An evaluation of effectiveness has been conducted."

My research on language use from this article pointed me towards the age group 4-6 because of how I felt the topics and language would be the best received using the comparative language of shows I felt inspired by and that I had similar goals to:

*"What Television Can (and Can't) Do to Promote Early Literacy Development" Annie M. Moses*

This facilitated me in my overall development of the show, as well as in specific choices when plotting out episodes and making design choices for my main cast of characters. (Fletcher, 17-18)

The intended format of the show will include a 6-episode limited series, with 22-minute-long episodes to be released through the streaming platform Netflix. The show will be hand drawn using 2D technology, paired with soft colors to be showcased on screen. Due to the expensive nature of a hand-drawn show, it will be limited to a 6 episode limited series. As mentioned in other parts of my thesis, the chosen format of my show reflects the aesthetic and strategic choices I made in the formatting of my project. I decided to make *The Quests and Quacks of Tallulah the Duck* a 1 season 6-episode limited series to be released through The Canadian Broadcasting Corporation (CBC) live over 6 weeks, with one episode premiering on the Sunday of each week, during June and July. I chose the CBC because I feel that the moral values of my show align well with the values and practices of the company. Under the "Standards and Practices" section of their website, the CBC states: "Our obligations as a broadcast licensee include a commitment to refrain from broadcasting programs containing adult situations, scenes of violence or those that are sexually explicit."

Additionally, the *Little Bear* series that serves as a part of my mediography was also originally broadcast through the CBC. I chose the six-episode format because it allowed me to cover the six topics I felt were the most important lessons for children to learn through television. The choice of Sunday and the summer months is to promote a restful environment to watch the show for the intended audience, as well as to promote a viewing experience where the child and parent can watch the show together. This is backed by my research on effective SEL learning through media as stated in *Technology and Interactive Media in Early Childhood*

*Programs: What We've Learned from Five Years of Research, Policy, and Practice*, "Co-viewing and Active Parent Involvement; Using media together improves learning. Talking about what the child is seeing and doing, and connecting what is on the screen with real-life experiences builds language skills and vocabulary, encourages interactions, and strengthens relationships." (Donohue, Schomburg, 5)

As shown in my mediography and other creative elements of my show, I implemented aesthetic choices to support my overarching goal of a positive SEL experience for children watching my proposed limited series. These choices included a 2-D animation style, a "picture-book" inspired look, a muted color palette, a natural landscape setting (the pond), and the characterization of my main cast. The mediography below highlights the stylistic, academic, and strategic pieces I pulled from existing children's media examples, as well as elements that I actively avoided in media that I aim to stray away from.

1. *Little Bear.* Created by Else Holmelund Minarik, Nickelodeon, 1995-2001.
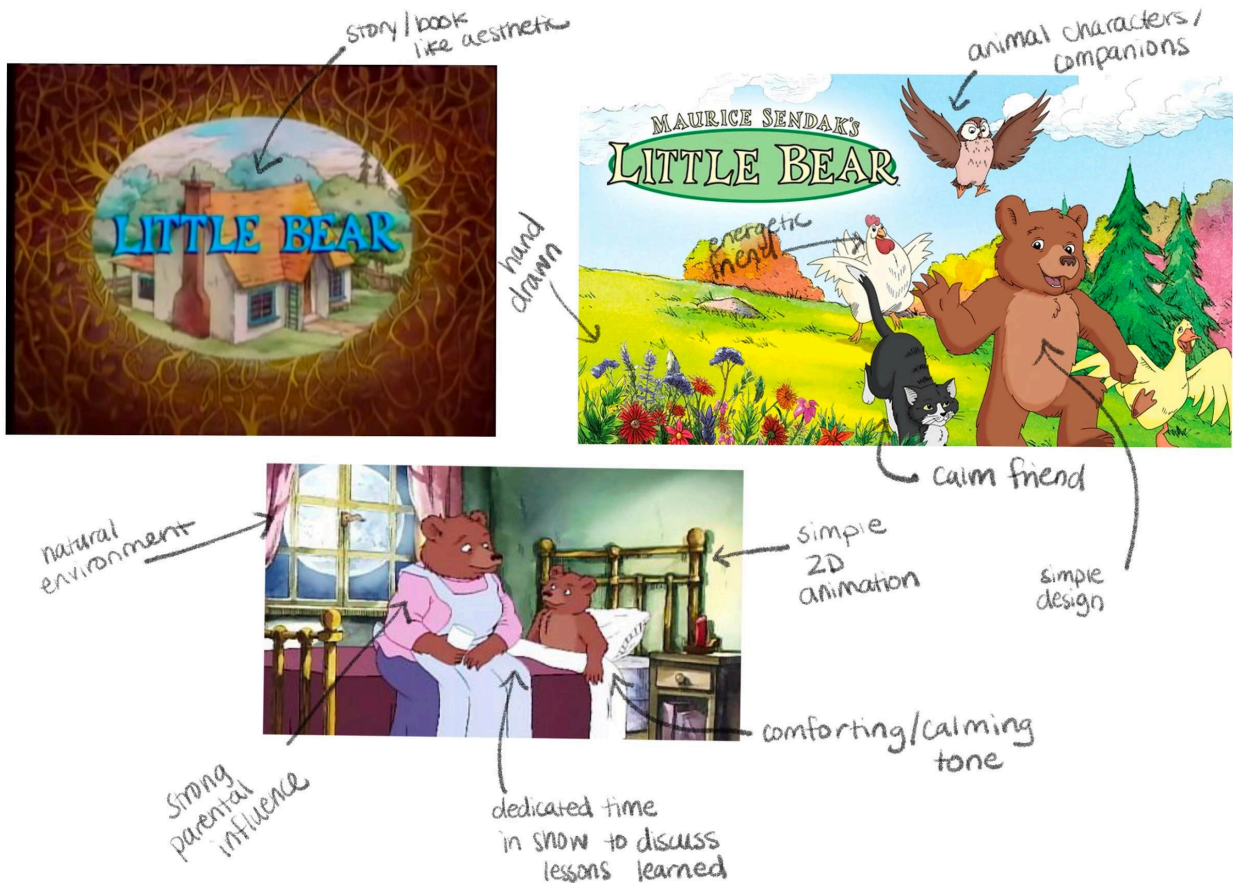


*Little Bear,* a Canadian show associated with the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation, is based on Else Holmelund Minarik's book series. Airing on Nick Jr. from 1995 to 2001, it follows Little Bear and his friends on adventures, emphasizing friendship and ending with a comforting

homecoming. The simple animation style mirrors the book series, offering a soothing experience for both kids and parents. As a childhood favorite, it profoundly influenced my artistic style. In my series, I aimed to capture a similar appeal to *Little Bear* in concept art, creating natural, picture book-like characters and backgrounds. Choosing a pond setting, I sought a calming backdrop for adventures, featuring animal characters to enhance relatability for young audiences. The content of each *Little Bear* episode aligns with my series, addressing problems and emphasizing community support. Like *Little Bear*, my goal is to explore issues children face while providing a safe space for learning from mistakes.

According to an article from Sam Hubley titled *The Impact of Entertainment Education for Social and Emotional Learning in Elementary Schools,* Entertainment Education can be used to improve the mental health of those watching it: "To examine the effect of the EE intervention on reducing students' mental illness stigma in elementary schools, we compared their perceived social distance scores to people with mental illness before and after watching the play. We recorded the social distance variables so that higher scores indicated closer perceived social distance and a lower level of stigma…The results of this evaluation demonstrated a small, but statistically significant improvement in mental illness stigma among elementary-aged students following an EE intervention." (Hubley)

2. *Winnie the Pooh.* Created by A. A. Milne, Walt Disney Television Animation, 1988-1991.
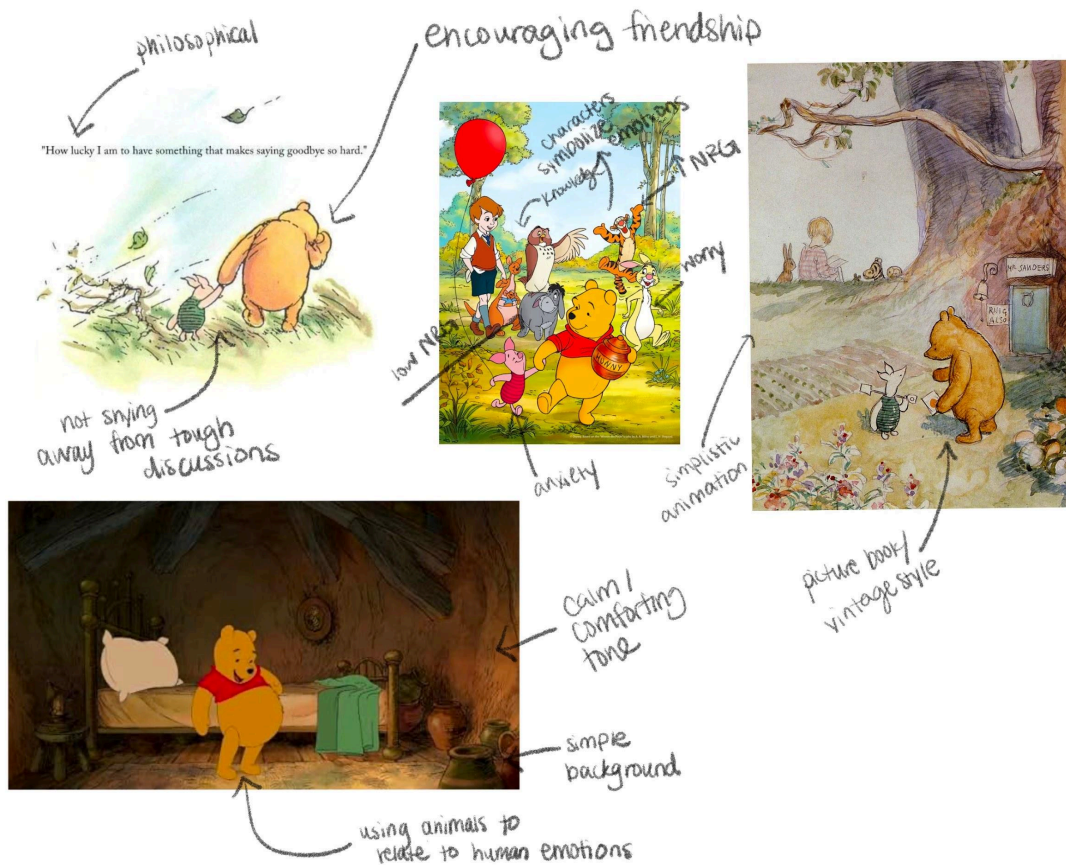
*Winnie the Pooh* is a media franchise composed of books, shows, movies, and other multimedia produced by The Walt Disney Company based on the stories written by A.A. Milne and E.H. Shepard. The start of the franchise can be dated back to 1966 with the release of *Winnie the Pooh and the Honey Tree.* This show heavily influenced my limited series due to the calming and storybook nature of the show and movies in particular. The stories have been adapted on multiple occasions, but all of the adaptations feature similar lessons. The stories include themes of friendship and the importance of support and understanding, as well as the importance of simplicity and being content in the simple beauties of life. *Winnie the Pooh* is able to do this through the simplistic nature of their adaptations as well as not over-stimulating the viewers with complex storylines and graphics. The show has remained a classic and a success throughout the years and represents a truly simple yet effective approach to children's media that I would like to emulate through my project.

Below is an episode description to showcase my adaptation as derived from my research:

**Episode 1: Tallulah Learns about Money**
Tallulah Tulip finds herself in a perplexing situation. One evening, as she eavesdrops on the staircase of her home, she overhears her parents engaged in a quiet conversation. Their worried tones instantly capture Tallulah's attention. However, the complex nature of the discussion leaves her confused. Words like "budget," "expenses," and "savings" float in the air, words she isn't familiar with. To figure it out, she tries reading books she owns to look for the words and goes to the library to look them up in a dictionary. She then discovers that her family doesn't have enough money to pay for everything they need. Tallulah feels guilty as she sees the sacrifices her parents make to protect her from their struggles. Determined to help, Tallulah organizes a community event bringing neighbors together to share resources and support one another. Through teamwork and the event, her father meets someone who is looking for a handyman at their house, a job he can do to bring in some extra money. In the end, Tallulah learns about the importance of community and being resilient during tough times, as well as learning to not be afraid when it comes to asking for clarification or help from your parents.

The content of this episode serves as a launching pad for the child and guardian to discuss the topics at home as a unit and understand the larger concept together. It is important to acknowledge the target audience and the correlating language comprehension when forming the content of the episodes. According to the article, *Media as Social Partners: The Social Nature of Young Children's Learning From Screen Media,* the age in which children experience new language alongside their parents improves with age, and can significantly increase their understanding of words presented to them through the media:

> One study has suggested the importance of live interaction in helping toddlers learn words from a video (Roseberry et al., 2009). When 30- to 42-month-old children were taught action words either by a video alone or through a combination of video and live interaction with an adult about the video, children learned the verbs in the social

interaction condition, but only children older than 36 months learned verbs from the video alone (Roseberry et al., 2009)... Based on our review of the circumstances in which children at this age imitate on-screen models and use the information presented to them on screen, we would hypothesize an increase in learning words from socially contingent on-screen models. (Richert, 7)

The creative elements I included in my project were carefully picked in conjunction with the research I conducted in the earlier stages of my thesis. I also aligned the language and content of my show with other critical research on how that language is received as well as understood by different sets of audiences. The main focuses of my research and resulting design had to do with the intended age group I picked for the show, the overall character design, and the topics and content covered in the show. Educational media is becoming more and more a fundamental part of the way we educate children in America and has a unique ability to reach young audiences all around the country and world that are affected by a lack of sufficient education in their school systems. With the rising impact that television, streaming, and media have on the younger generation, it has become more and more important that the accessibility of media is studied, utilized, and positively impactful. According to the article, *"Effects of Excessive Screen Time on Child Development: An Updated Review and Strategies for Management"* by Sudheer Kumar Muppalla, "Excessive screen usage has detrimental effects on social and emotional growth, including a rise in the likelihood of obesity, sleep disorders, and mental health conditions including depression and anxiety. It can obstruct the ability to interpret emotions, fuel aggressive conduct, and harm one's psychological health in general." (Muppalla, 1). Recognizing the negative effects of screen time and media can allow media makers to make better decisions when implementing content and restrictions on the media being produced.

Research-based evidence proves how media can provoke thoughts and actions both good and bad from viewers. I believe in using this innate power to strengthen and bolster the education of the younger generation. Researchers currently study how media can affect audiences of all ages and the impact that media has on human development, but it is crucial to consider making a guide for those in the creative media industry on how to ensure that the media they produce will impact their audience appropriately. My research builds on the research that already exists for the educational uses of media but adds the perspective of a media production timeline.

Understanding the different ways children identify with characters on screen is helpful to our understanding of their resulting learned behaviors. As showcased in the current research available for the effects of educational entertainment on a young audience, there are a plethora of things to consider when measuring how a given media will affect the audience. Through looking at these factors, I formed my own characters to follow these principles.

**Lily the Ladybug:**
- A secondary character. Tallulah's best friend, whom she met at school. A very smart and often helpful character. Characterized by a soft voice, a level-headed demeanor, and a bow around her neck. Lily the Ladybug also has big warm eyes and loves to give hugs to her friends and family. Lily the Ladybug is introduced in episode 5 of the show.

**Episode 5:**

Tallulah Tulip finds herself face-to-face with a perplexing math lesson that seems to defy all logic. As her classmate Lily the Ladybug eagerly scribbles away in her notebook, Tullulah hesitates over the blank page, frustrated as she struggles to make sense of the numbers before her. Despite her best efforts, Tullulah feels disheartened and discouraged. She musters the courage to raise her wing and admit to her friend Lily the Ladybug, and eventually her teacher, that she's struggling. To her relief, her teacher responds with a reassuring nod, reminding Tullulah that it's okay to ask for help when needed. She begins to unravel the mysteries of multiplication, division, and fractions, one step at a time with the help of her friend Lily, who has discovered some different ways to think about the problem. With each question asked and answered, Tullulah's confidence grows, transforming her initial struggles into moments of growth and learning. Tallulah Tulip's journey teaches young viewers the importance of perseverance, resilience, and the power of asking for help when needed.

Although Lily the Ladybug is a very cute character that could be easily turned into a toy, I intentionally drew her in a 2-D style and actively avoided any marketing tactics in this project that have to do with creating toys. Another key part of the design and release of my proposed children's media was straying away from the marketing idea of "toyetic" products. This phenomenon describes where a character or show is particularly created to sell well to young customers. The term toyetic was coined by Bernard Loomis, an American toy maker and marketer who invented a variety of famous toys including Hot Wheels, Strawberry Shortcake, Baby Alive, and more. The word toyetic directly translates to "of a character or object from a movie, TV show, etc. potentially marketable as a toy:" and "of movies or other forms of mass entertainment) having merchandising potential."

Many shows and movies make their characters to be later sold, which is the opposite of what I would like to do with my own characters. Instead, my characters were developed solely for the show, and I put in no supplemental production material that would encourage selling *The Quests and Quacks of Tallulah the Duck* merchandise, as I believe it goes against children's media best practices and the overall message of the show.

An example of media that actively avoids a "toyetic" narrative and that served as an inspiration for my project are *The Boy, the Mole, the Fox, and the Horse* and *Charlie and Lola.*

3. *The Boy, the Mole, the Fox, and the Horse.* Created by Peter Baynton and Charlie Mackesy, Apple Studios, 2022.
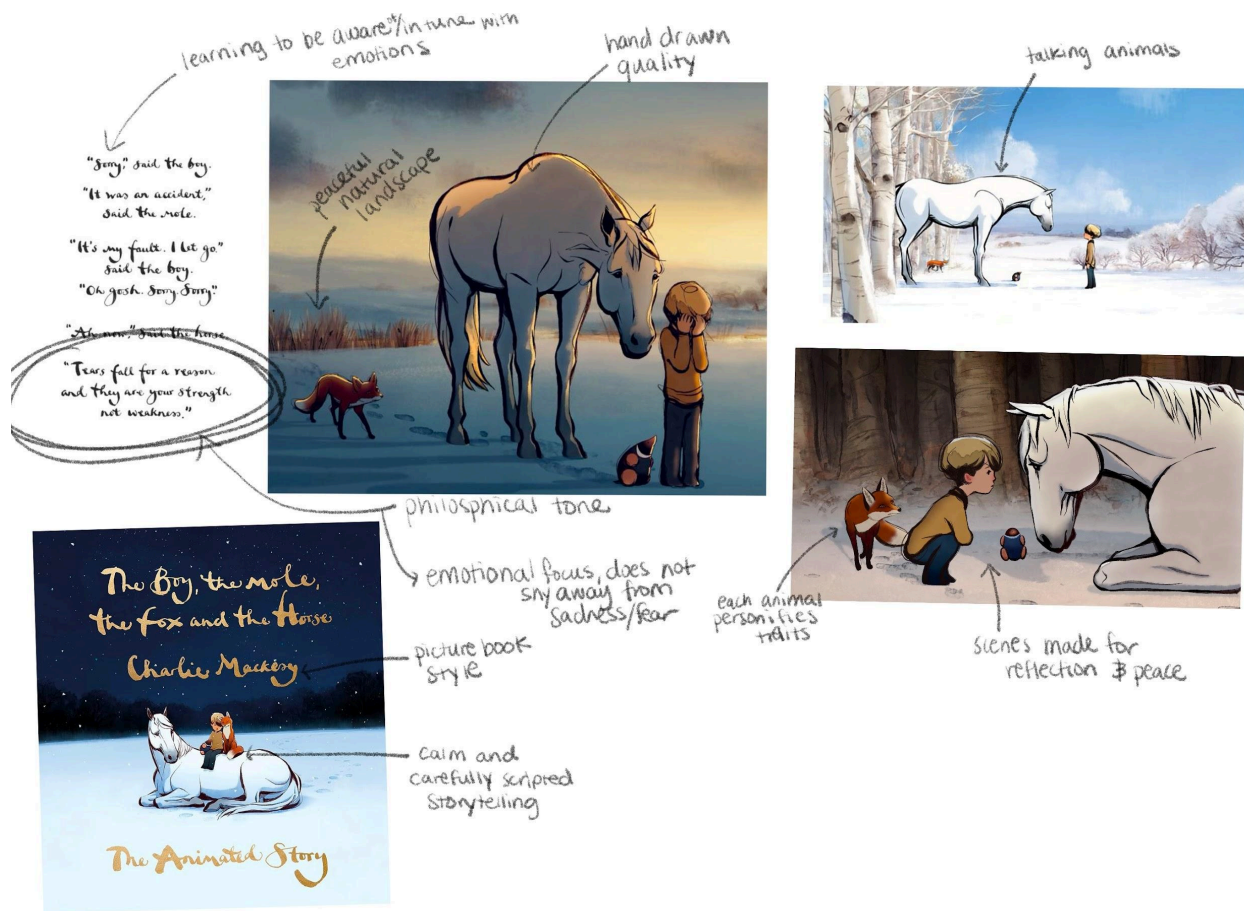
*The Boy, the Mole, the Fox, and the Horse* is a 2022 animated short film released on Apple TV Plus, directed by Peter Baynton and Charlie Mackesy, and written by Jon Croker and Charlie Mackesy. It's adapted from Mackesy's 2019 picture book of the same name, following a lost boy in the forest who learns philosophical lessons from animal friends, ultimately finding a home with them. The film explores themes of humanity, empathy, and kindness. My limited series shares stylistic similarities with the short film, using simplistic and sketchbook-esque designs to create a calming tone. Both projects aim to address serious issues and philosophical concepts for a young audience, deviating from the tendency to focus solely on trivial matters in children's media. Inspired by the film in 2022, my series differs in format, being a limited series with multiple storylines, and in its emphasis on familial relationships and the concept of home, in contrast to the film's more philosophical ending that suggests home is where friends are.

4.  *Charlie & Lola.* Created by Lauren Child, Tiger Aspect Productions, 2005-2008.

*spirited/ curious main girl character*

*incorporating real textures (multimedia)*

Usually, when I say,
"Lola, Mum says it is time for bed,"
she says,
"No! I am NOT sleepy and
I
WILL
NOT
go to bed."
I say,
"But all the birds
have gone to sleep."

She says,
"But I am not a bird,
Charlie."

*hand drawn simple design*

Cbeebies BBC

Charlie and Lola ™
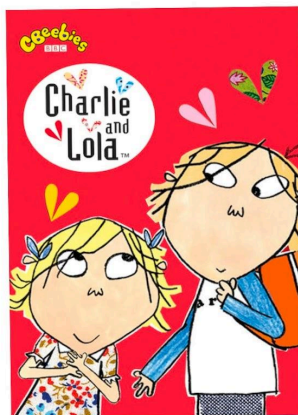
*familial support and lessons in sharing, empathy, & more*

*sylistic pieces character always wears*

*natural landscape*
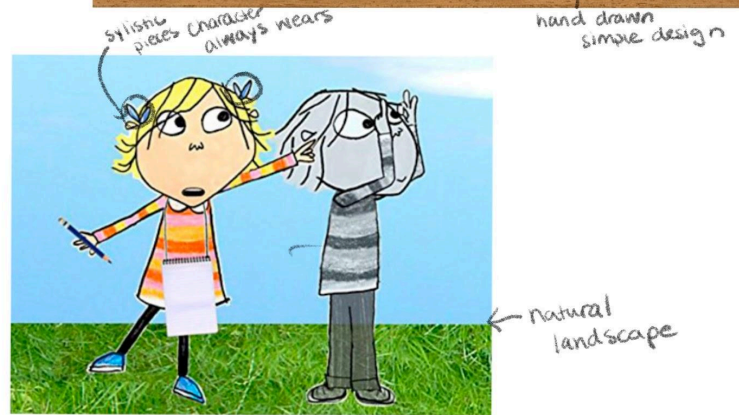
*Charlie & Lola* is a children's program based on the book *Charlie & Lola* by Lauren Child that was produced by Tiger Aspect Productions for Cbeebies and Playhouse Disney. The series ran from 2005-2008. This show is particularly inspiring for my project and overall creative style because of the simplicity of the animation and the way it mimics the original book's artwork. The show employs a multi-media approach utilizing textures from the real world such as real fabrics or items in combination with hand-drawn characters and backgrounds. I am drawn to this style because it feels comfortable, and raw, and draws away from the over-stimulating nature of many modern shows. This show also had a profound impact on me as a child and remains one of my favorite pieces of media to reference in relation to children's media. I believe this approach in style is most effective and have tried to mimic it in the use of paintbrush textures in my own concept artwork.

Devin the Dragonfly

up turned nose

eats pollen

further away legs less detailed

wings transparent

Wings in constant high energy movement

standing on tail

sassy stance
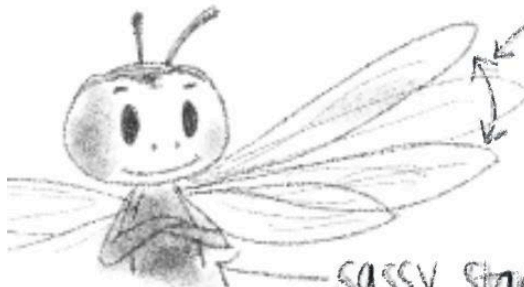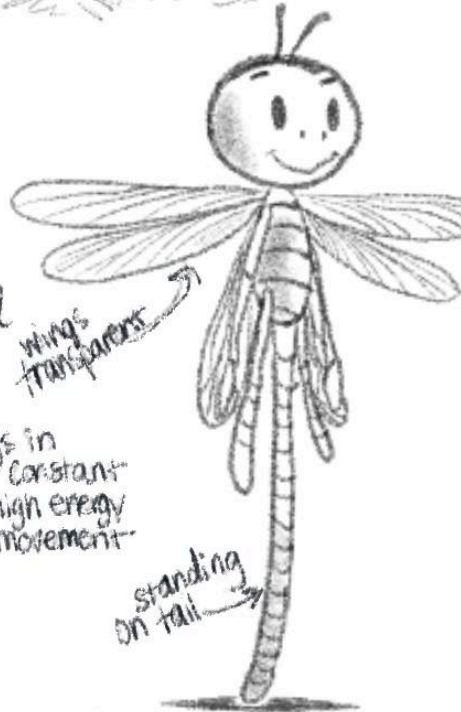
highly energetic/quirky friend
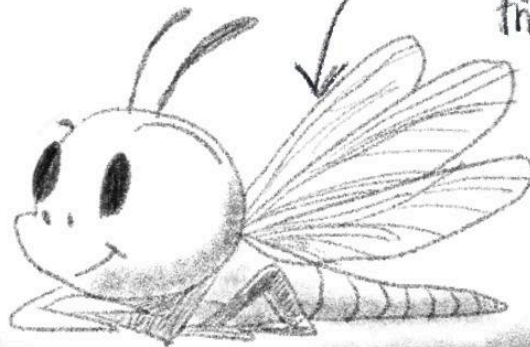
**Devin the DragonFly:**
- A secondary character. Tallulah's childhood friend, who keeps himself very busy. Characterized by fast-moving wings, a high speaking cadence, and an extreme craving for adventure and discovery. The character Devin the Dragonfly is introduced in episode 4 of the limited series.

**Episode 4: Tallulah Finds Her New Home**

Tallulah Tulip finds herself facing the daunting prospect of leaving the only home she has ever known. The familiarity of her neighbors is replaced by a new environment as Tullulah's family moves to a different part of the pond. She struggles with emotions she doesn't understand, and feels uncomfortable. She unpacks her toys into her room and explores her new backyard, but she still doesn't feel at home. Her parents, understanding the gravity of the situation, offer gentle support. Tullulah, however, can't help but feel a sense of loss for the familiar sights and sounds she left behind. After talking with her parents, she walks around the neighborhood to make new friends her age, learning that they can be found even in the most unexpected places. Tullulah gradually adapts to her new surroundings and meets Devin the Dragonfly, a lively neighbor who is always looking for an adventure. Devin helps her to discover the unique quirks of her new neighbors, the hidden gems of the pond that she had never noticed before. The transition becomes an opportunity for personal growth, as Tallulah realizes that home is not just a place, but a feeling of warmth and love that can be recreated wherever life takes her. Tallulah Tulip's journey reminds young viewers that change, though challenging, can be a stepping stone to exciting adventures and unexpected friendships.

Devin's craving for adventure and whimsical nature are in part inspired by another portion of my mediography and a show that had a profound impact on me as a child. Its adventurous spirit allows for many lessons to be taught in the show, *Adventure Time*.

5. *Adventure Time*. Created by Pendleton Ward, Frederator Studios and Cartoon Network Studios, 2010-2018.

The series *Adventure Time* is an animated series that was produced by Frederator Studios and released on Cartoon Network. It premiered in 2010 and ended in 2018. The show was created by Pendleton Ward. The series is unique in its approach to philosophical concepts while also maintaining a comical and fantastical experience for viewers. *Adventure Time* is targeted to an older age group than my 4-6 age group, but I still believe it is a relevant piece for my project and was a formative piece of media for me in my childhood to adolescent years. The show follows a human boy named Finn and his talking dog brother and companion Jake, as they travel through the mystical Land of Ooo and conquer quests throughout the lands. There are many characters involved in the series and "lore" of the show, as well as an intense world-building aspect. I believe that my limited series explores similar themes of convincing the audience to consider more philosophical concepts, but I don't believe that it does that to the extent of *Adventure Time.* I believe that after graduating from watching my limited series, *Adventure Time* would be one that I would recommend for the next age group up, based on my research and stylistic preferences as a media maker in the children's media space.

The following pieces of media are examples of what I specifically intended to avoid during the development of my thesis project. The first example of media that has also tackled a high-energy topic and character is the show *Bubble Guppies,* but has done so in a different approach and has utilized different methods to do so.

6. *Bubble Guppies.* Created by Jonny Belt and Robert Scull, Nick Jr., Nickelodeon, 2011-2021.
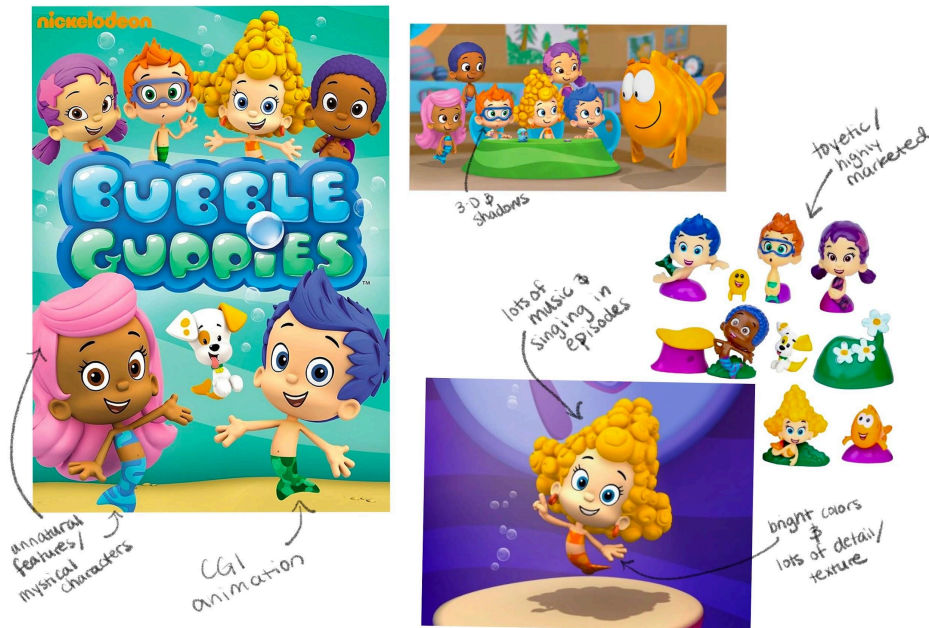


*Bubble Guppies* is another example of a piece of children's media that I am actively trying to avoid emulating through my project. Although it is a popular form of children's media and entertainment today, I believe that its approach and underlying values do not align with my project. *Bubble Guppies* is a CGI animated children's television program on Nickelodeon created by Jonny Belt and Robert Scull. The series follows preschool-aged merperson (mermaid and merman) as they solve problems in the ocean. The overall tone of the show is much more high energy and stimulating than the kind of experience that I am seeking to create through my limited series. The series has a large focus on humor and musical elements. Aesthetically, it opposes my preference for a sketchbook, simplistic style, but is an example of what many children's shows are employing today as stylistic choices in the current children's media landscape.

Francis the Frog

downturned smile/smirk

eyes protrude off head

non-binary character

calm/comforting demeanor

spot detail

Sits on lilypads

1

2

3

jumping motion
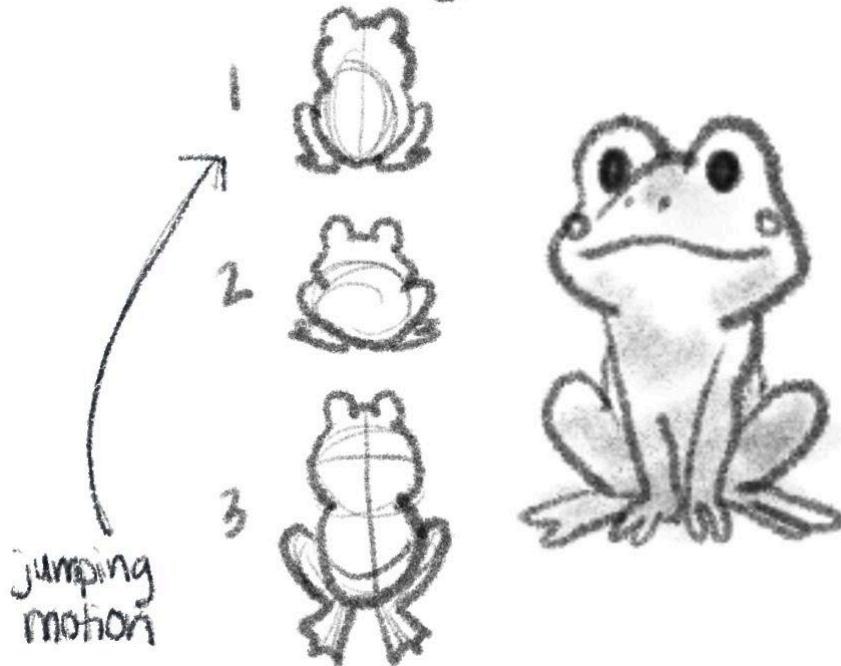
**Francis the Frog:** A secondary character. A non-binary character, who often has a hard time focusing in school. A frog in the pond who often quarrels with the other classmates. Has a lower voice and tends to remain with a flat smile on his face. Francis is introduced in episode 6 of the show.

**Episode 6:**

Tallulah Tulip finds herself navigating the emotions of anger and frustration after a disagreement with her classmate Francis at school makes her mad. Tallulah is confused, frustrated, and even sad after Francis the Frog blames a broken toy that he broke on Tallulah and she gets in trouble for it. Afraid to speak to her teacher about it in the presence of Francis, Tullulah turns to her parents, who encourage her to explore her feelings. With the support of her family, Tullulah gains the courage to speak to her teacher about the incident and confront her fears of Francis in the classroom. She engages in heart-to-heart conversations with Francis, discovering that they too were afraid of what would happen after breaking the toy and that they understand what they did was wrong. Tullulah takes the initiative to mend the rift with her friend. She listens attentively, offering empathy and recognizing the validity of their perspective. This episode serves as a lesson for young viewers about the importance of empathy, communication, and embracing diverse perspectives.

Another piece of media that also uses animal characters, but in a different way that I am actively avoiding is *The Mickey Mouse Clubhouse.*

7. *Mickey Mouse Clubhouse.* Created by Bobs Gannaway, Disney Junior, Disney Channel, 2006-2016.

*Mickey Mouse Clubhouse* is a CGI animated children's television series produced by Disney Television Animation and created by Bobs Gannaway. The show premiered in 2006 and ran until 2016, but is looking to be re-released in 2025. The show invites viewers to solve mysteries with Mickey Mouse by using "Mouseketools" and other technology found in the clubhouse, as well as help from other Disney friends such as Goofy or Donald Duck. Although it is a popular form of children's media and entertainment today, I believe that its approach and underlying values do not align with my project. This is due to the CGI-stylized realistic animation style that mimics the texture of plastic, as well as the use of characters that live outside the show in other contexts (within the Disney franchise). It also utilizes participatory practices to get the audience to actively involve themselves, which is not something I will be attempting.

**Teddy Tulip:**
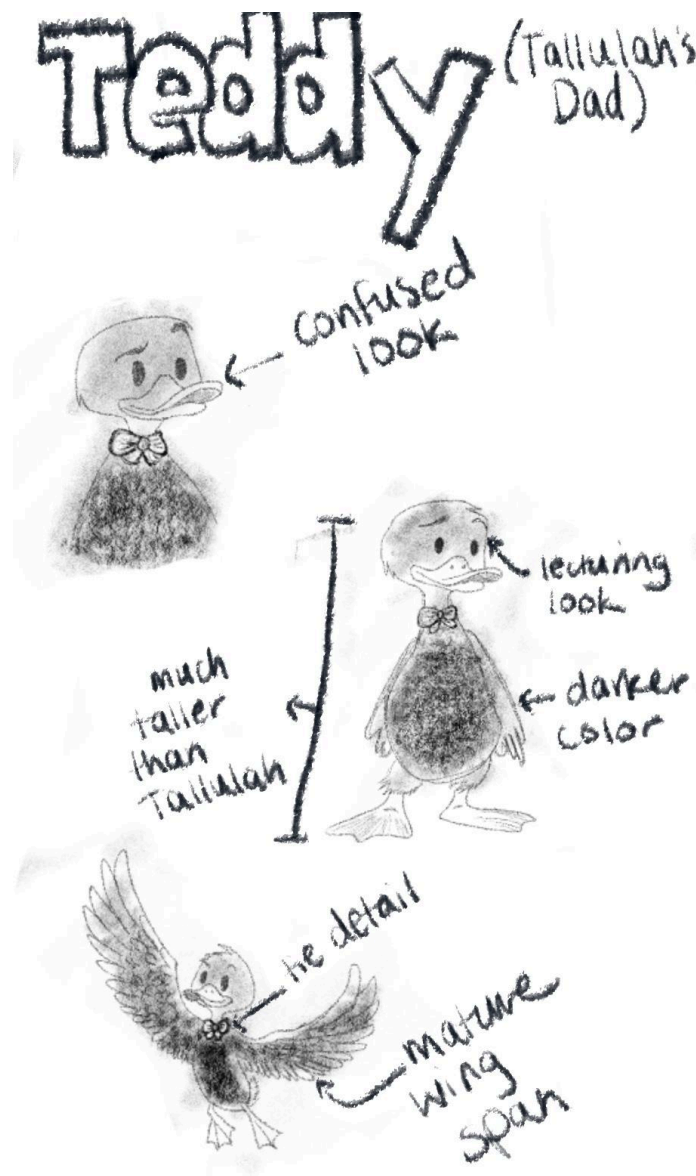
- Tallulah's father is a teacher at the Lily-Pad Elementary School. A rigorous father, quiet, loving, and loves to read. He often helps Tallulah with processing her emotions.

Tallulah's two dads (same design, but with different physical traits) are a guiding force throughout each episode, but mainly the two detailed below.

**Episode 2: Tallulah Needs Glasses**

Tullulah's world takes an unexpected turn when a routine eye examination at school reveals that her eyesight isn't as sharp as that of her friends. Tallulah struggles when she realizes her vision is not as keen as her classmates. She decides to confide in her parents about it. Tullulah's parents assure her that it's okay to be different and that they will help her in finding a way to address her visual challenges by getting her glasses. She picks out a pair of special pink round glasses and learns that seeking help and embracing her uniqueness only adds to her charm, and she gets to wear an extra accessory too! The episode highlights the strength found in vulnerability. Tullulah's courage in sharing her struggles not only helps her gain the support she needs but also encourages others to open up about their challenges. In the end, the classroom becomes a community that celebrates differences, showcasing the importance of acceptance and the beauty that can be found in embracing one's individuality.

**Episode 3: Tallulah Loses Grandma**

Tallulah Tulip finds herself facing the loss of her beloved grandmother. Tullulah's normally cheerful persona is replaced with contemplation as she navigates the complex emotions surrounding the passing of her grandmother, who had been unwell for some time. As Tullulah learns about how death is something that affects everyone, she has a journey of understanding and acceptance. She turns to her parents and the pond community for support. Tallulah learns about the cycle of life and saying goodbye to those we love. Together, they reminisce about the cherished memories they shared with her grandmother, celebrating by making her famous recipe of algae stew, and eating it as a family. Tullulah discovers that even in the face of grief, the love and lessons imparted by her grandmother will forever be a part of her. She emerges from this experience with an appreciation for life and family, and the knowledge that love and cherished memories have the power to endure even in the face of loss.

According to the thesis work from Marissa Lammon titled *Dead Serious: Death Presentations In Children's Animated Media*, the way children and adults comprehend the portrayal of death on screen is dependent on its representation and the child's developmental stage. Lammon states, "Children between the ages of four and six years ``see death as a temporary, nonpermanent condition" and do not understand that death is final (Grollman, 1990; Speece & Brent, 1984; Willis, 2002, p. 223). It is not until transitioning out of the preoperational stage of cognitive development around the age of seven that children are better able to understand death as irreversible, permanent, and inevitable (Brent et. al 1996; Cox, Garrett & Graham, 2005; Willis, 2002)." (Lammon, 17)

The role of media can help play a role in the way children are able to comprehend death in film and can supplement a better understanding. Lammon states, "While children's cognitive abilities are limited in comparison to adults, their thoughts and impressions are logically derived from information available to them in their environment (Willis, 2002). Since the cultural ideologies surrounding death discourse are restrictive, children rarely discuss death with parents or friends (Cox, Garrett & Graham, 2005). Young children's impressions, then, that death is temporary and reversible may be attributed to the presentations of death within children's media. Given that many children lack a complete understanding of death and that successfully coping with a real-life death involves understanding what death is and what it looks like, children naturally take information that is immediately available to them through the media they consume. (Baker, Sedney & Gross, 1992; Cox, Garrett & Graham, 2005)." (Lammon, 18)

Lammon also states, "The researcher affirms that the extremely disproportionate portrayal of death as non-natural and specifically a result of murder is problematic in children's death comprehension. Death as it is presented to children should be more accurate in regard to the manner of death, given the demographic's inability to distinguish reality from fantasy and fully comprehend abstract concepts. Including a reasonable and representative number of natural deaths in children's media can help prepare children for the death that they encounter external to media texts." (Lammon, 58)

8. *The Little Prince.* Created by Mark Osborne, ON Animation Studios, Orange Studio, LPPTV, M6 Films, Lucky Red, 2015.

The Little Prince is an animated film directed by Mark Osborne in 2015 based on the classic French novella *The Little Prince* by Antoine de Saint-Exupery. The film employs multiple animation techniques throughout the film, such as stop-motion in conjunction with a more realistic style. My main reason for choosing this piece of media as inspiration for my piece is due to the nature of the story. At the core of the story, it inspires viewers to maintain a childlike innocence and appreciate the beauty of life. It also emphasizes our relationships with others and that we should maintain those to live a happy life. I hope that through this project I can instill a childlike wonder in the viewers of the show, and also emphasize the same moral principles. I also am drawn to the movie's importance of empathy and understanding when approaching difficult situations and topics.

**Pinterest Moodboard Link:** Pinterest Mood Board
**Font Family:** "Hey Eloise" font pack or "Typeka"
**Color Swatches:**

| pink | Yellow | Blue | Red |
| COLOR THEME | COLOR THEME | COLOR THEME | COLOR THEME |

| Purple | Green |
| COLOR THEME | COLOR THEME |

**Background Design:**

9. *Sesame Street.* Created by Joan Ganz Cooney, Jim Henson, and Lloyd Morrissett, Sesame Workshop. 1969-present.



human /animal /creature interaction

live action rather than animated

longstanding impact in children's media space

different characters personify different traits

explores community & friendship
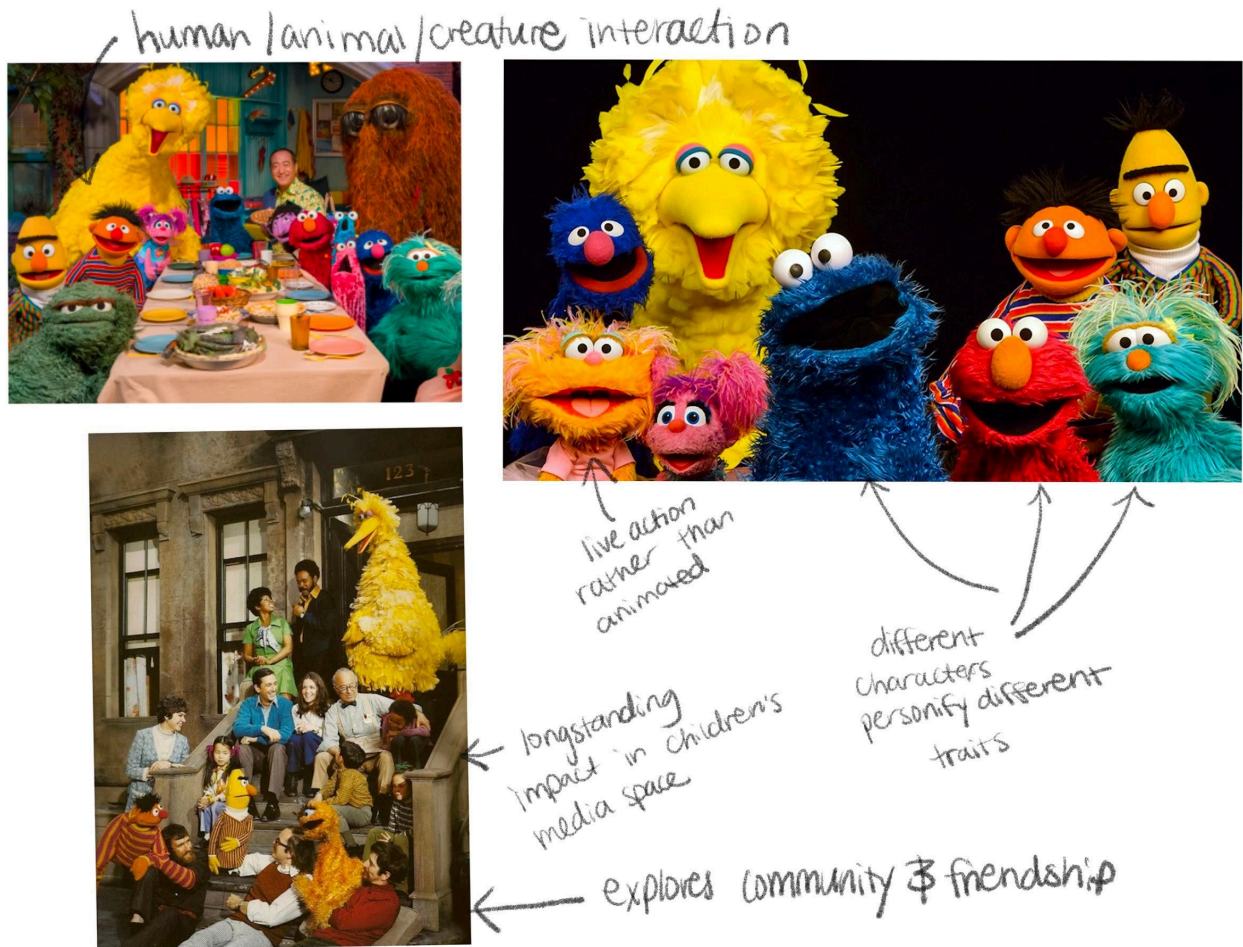
*Sesame Street* is an educational children's series created by Joan Ganz Cooney and Lloyd Morrisett in 1969 and continues to be one of the longest-running shows in the world. The show remains one of the most important and popular examples of children's media and is one of the most academically studied forms of children's media. The original goal of the creators was to create a show that according to the writer of the book *Street Gang: The Complete History of Sesame Street. New York* Michael Davis, "masters the addictive qualities of television and do something good with them." I strongly believe in this framework in using children's media to benefit children and fill gaps in the education system and the experiences they have growing up. *Sesame Street* does not align with my stylistic choices, but instead with the moral backing and reasoning behind my limited series and pursuit of the children's media industry.

10. *Cocomelon.* Netflix, Moonbug Entertainment, 2020.



highly "toy-etic" (show designed so company could easily profit off of toys)

characters don't speak much, show is more of a sensory experience

3-D, CGI animation

using babies/small children as main characters

often use songs/music during the show

very bright colors

FAMILY FIGURE SET

JJ, YoYo, and TomTom

*Cocomelon* is an example of a piece of children's media that I am actively trying to avoid emulating through my project. Although it is a popular form of children's media and entertainment today, I believe that its approach and underlying values do not align with my project. *Cocomelon* was started as an American YouTube channel from the company Moonbug Entertainment, but now has content on Netflix. The show features a highly stimulating environment, employing techniques such as realistic animation styles, music, and sound design. The show also tackles more simple topics such as repeating nursery rhymes, rather than approaching emotional or social issues. Overall I am seeking to avoid this form of children's media.

**Conclusion**

Through my honors thesis process, I experienced a creative exploration into the development of an animated children's show, "*The Quests and Quacks of Tallulah the Duck,*" designed to foster positive social and emotional learning among young audiences. This project aimed to fill a significant gap in children's media by addressing a variety of complex themes in a manner conducive to open discussion. As I navigated the research and development process, I encountered challenges that pushed me to adapt and grow. Moreover, the thesis showcased the importance of resilient research in crafting meaningful content for youth audiences. By grounding the show's development in critical research and a deep understanding of child psychology and media, I aimed to ensure its positive impact on social-emotional learning. Looking ahead, I envision my thesis project serving as a testament to my creative abilities and developmental insights, supplementing my post-graduation job applications. As I graduate and continue into the next phase of my career, I will carry with me the lessons learned and the passion to continue creating impactful media for young minds.

The creative elements I included in my project were carefully picked in conjunction with the research I conducted in the earlier stages of my thesis. I also carefully aligned the language and content of my show to align with other critical research on how that language is received as well as understood by different sets of audiences. The main focuses of my research and resulting design had to do with the intended age group I picked for the show, the overall character design, and the topics and content covered in the show. Educational media is becoming more and more a fundamental part of the way we educate children in America and has a unique ability to reach young audiences all around the country and world that are affected by a lack of sufficient education in their school systems. With the rising impact that television, streaming, and media have on the younger generation, it has become more and more important that the accessibility of media is studied, utilized, and positively impactful.

My intended purpose for this creative thesis project in the media production department is twofold; to improve my knowledge of educational media where my studies do not supplement me as well as to fuel my professional goals in participating in a well-researched and developed show. Beneath the scholastic goals, this project also serves as a vessel for my overall media philosophy and how I have shaped the morals and ideals surrounding the purpose of media throughout my time at school. Through the research and development of my project, I have showcased my strong belief that media makers are responsible for creating content that is not only well-developed but also beneficial to the greater community, especially when it comes to more susceptible audiences like children. I hope that I can carry this moral foundation on media throughout the remainder of my career.

I originally proposed the in-depth proposal of a children's show to be pitched to a major network supplemented by pre-production best practices. Much like any creative project, my goals and deliverables were tweaked and refined to best fit what I wanted to intellectually gain from the completion of the project, as well as how I wanted to situate the final result of the

project. In contrast to my original project plan and result, I decided to forgo the inclusion of pre-production forms such as budgeting, contracts, call sheets, etc. I made this decision based on what the industry looks like, and what I think I could gain from the project. I was already gaining valuable pre-production experiences in my coursework, practicing my producer skills through the completion of short documentary projects and through working on other peers' projects. I felt that the best use of my time would be to delve into the research and development process that would be conducted by a different department and employee, in a career setting. In turn, my deliverables morphed into a set of creative model sheets as well as a robust set of research to support the strategic and aesthetic designs that I employed. The time I spent in the creative development and mock-up stages broadened my perspective on a different kind of role I could hold in my future career, and how the deliverables and research differ from the production management role I had explored before.

   This thesis has been completed by crossing academic areas of study and taking critical media materials from different institutions in order to produce a piece of critically researched media. The research was pulled from communications studies literature, media studies literature, psychological literature, educational practice literature, animation, and art literature, as well as from an array of media examples spanning 50 years of programming. Together these points of my research come together to support a piece of creative media that was produced to incorporate best practices from all aspects of its development to make something critically informed and with cross-disciplinary value.

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