

Name: _____ Class: _____

How Pixar Tells a Story

By Rachel Slivnick
2018

Pixar is an animation studio that uses computer images to create movies. You've likely seen several of Pixar's films, which include Toy Story, Finding Nemo, The Incredibles, and more. In this informational text, Rachel Slivnick discusses the types of stories that Pixar tells. As you read, take notes on what all Pixar films have in common.

- [1] Have you seen the movie *Coco*? Do you love music like Miguel? What about *Finding Nemo*? Have you ever felt lost and afraid like Nemo did in the ocean? Did you watch *The Incredibles*, a movie about a family of superheroes, with your own family? Which of their superpowers would you want to have?



"Colorful Balloons" by Megan McMillan is licensed under CC BY 2.0

These movies may seem different, but they actually share a lot in common. For starters, they were all made by an animation studio called Pixar. Since 1995, Pixar has been working hard to bring stories to kids just like you. But they're not just for kids — adults also love Pixar movies!

How can one studio make movies that everyone loves? The secret: Pixar tells stories that audiences of all ages and backgrounds can connect with. Pixar movies aren't just about silly characters, like Crush the sea turtle. They're more than just amazing action scenes, like in *The Incredibles*, and beautiful animation, like in *Coco*. The most important part of any Pixar movie is the story itself.

Great Storytelling Is Hard Work

The writers at Pixar spend a long time developing the story for each film. Sometimes, they work on a story for over a year! Why do the writers spend so much time on a story? Because they know that a movie with a good story will connect with more people all over the world.

- [5] Storytelling is an art and a skill. Pixar creators know this. They have put a lot of time and thought into what makes a great story. One Pixar storyboard¹ artist named Emma Coates created a list called "The 22 Rules of Storytelling According to Pixar." These are the rules that *all* Pixar stories must follow in order to be called a good story.

One rule is that "*You admire a character for trying more than for their successes.*" In *Finding Dory*, Dory isn't a perfect character. She finds it hard to remember things. She makes goofy mistakes, like waking up a giant squid! But Dory never stops trying to find her parents. This makes her the hero of her story. If you have ever tried hard for something, you can relate to Dory. Her feelings remind you of your own experiences, even though you aren't a fish!

1. a series of drawings that show what is planned for a movie

Here's another rule that Pixar creators think about: *"What is your character good at, comfortable with? Throw the polar opposite² at them. Challenge them. How do they deal?"* In the movie *Toy Story*, Woody is very good at being in charge of the other toys. But he isn't good at sharing attention with Andy's new toy, Buzz Lightyear. Woody feels like Buzz is the **polar opposite** of him. He feels jealous and lonely when Buzz begins to replace him as Andy's favorite toy. This conflict is the heart of *Toy Story*. If you've ever felt jealous or left out, you can understand what Woody goes through!

Great Storytelling Connects Us

Why are the stories that Pixar tells important? The director of *Up* and *Monsters, Inc.*, Pete Docter, has this to say:

"What you're trying to do, when you tell a story, is to write about an event in your life that made you feel some particular way. And what you're trying to do, when you tell a story, is to get the audience to have **that same feeling.**"

Feelings of anger, fear, sadness, joy, and love are universal. Everybody — no matter how old, how young, where they grew up, if they are a girl or a boy — feels emotion. In this way, Pixar's stories have the power to show audience members that we are more alike than different. Because we can connect with the characters' emotions, we can connect with each other.

- [10] The stories that Pixar tells are very creative. They tell stories about friendly monsters, space-traveling robots, talking cars, and balloon-propelled³ houses. No two movies are the same! But the stories and, more importantly, the feelings in each are universal.⁴ Even though we've never traveled the ocean with Dory, fought evil villains with the Incredibles, or played guitar with Miguel, the power of these stories inspires us. They push us to better understand each other and to seek out our own adventures.

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2. the complete opposite of something
3. **Propel (verb)**: to drive or push in a certain direction
4. **Universal (adjective)**: happening to or done by all people

Text-Dependent Questions

Directions: For the following questions, choose the best answer or respond in complete sentences.

1. PART A: What is the main idea of the text?
 - A. Pixar movies interest many people, as they tell stories that we can all relate to.
 - B. People find that it's easier to relate to movies that are far from reality.
 - C. Pixar movies largely appeal to children, as they teach them important life lessons.
 - D. Audiences are more interested in Pixar movies now that they use computer images.

2. PART B: Which quote from the text best supports the answer to Part A?
 - A. "They're more than just amazing action scenes, like in *The Incredibles*, and beautiful animation, like in *Coco*." (Paragraph 3)
 - B. "Storytelling is an art and a skill. Pixar creators know this. They have put a lot of time and thought into what makes a great story." (Paragraph 5)
 - C. "But he isn't good at sharing attention with Andy's new toy, Buzz Lightyear. Woody feels like Buzz is the polar opposite of him." (Paragraph 7)
 - D. "No two movies are the same! But the stories and, more importantly, the feelings in each are universal." (Paragraph 10)

3. Which alternate title best expresses the main idea of the text?
 - A. How to Write a Pixar Movie
 - B. Why Everyone Enjoys Pixar Movies
 - C. The Best Pixar Movies of All Time
 - D. How Pixar Movies Make Money

4. How does the author of "How Pixar Tells a Story" organize information?
 - A. The author discusses successful Pixar movies and then the movies that didn't do as well and why.
 - B. The author gives examples of different Pixar movies and then explores why their stories are important.
 - C. The author explains the rules that need to be followed for a good story and then how Pixar breaks these rules.
 - D. The author compares Pixar's steps for storytelling with other movie studios and explores why Pixar is the best.

5. How does the text help the reader understand the relationship between Pixar's rules for storytelling and why audiences care about their stories? Use details from the text in your answer.
