



# Learning Life Skills

With Mitzy the Clown!

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# Acknowledgements

Thank you to my family for putting up with me being such a strange child.

Thank you to my friends for always supporting me and my strange interests.

Thank you to my cats for being a source of comfort to me in some of the worst of times.

And thank you to myself for allowing my true self to shine after many years in the dark.



# Artist Statement

Learning Life Skills with Mitzy the Clown is a parody of an educational children's cartoon with an unsettling twist. In these three episodes, Mitzy experiences a mental decline as she experiences wrongful mistreatment from the Narrator of her daily life.

I envision this work as a selected group of episodes from a much larger series that follows the life of Mitzy the Clown. By mimicking the appearance of cartoons on VHS from the 1980s, these episodes create a sense of nostalgia for childhood memories of other beloved cartoons. This approach to my work brings that feeling forward, but the uncomfortable subject matter taints those happy memories.

The nature of my work represents the complex experiences of my childhood. I have struggled with depression and anxiety for as long as I can remember. It felt strange to be so young but have such grown-up emotions. Because of my experience, I developed an interest in the mixture of cuteness and horror that reflects this strange, conflicting feeling.

I have always wanted to be an artist ever since I was old enough to hold a pencil in my hand. While my primary interest is animation, I will create anything that brings me joy.



# Contextualization



# Contextualization

## Learning with Pibby



*Come and Learn with Pibby!* was uploaded to Youtube by Adult Swim in October of 2021. This trailer for a hypothetical cartoon begins as a TV show targeted toward toddlers. But as time goes on, it devolves into a horror show full of an all-consuming tsunami of black glitchiness, popular cartoon characters who are grotesquely contorted, and an overall feeling of dread and fear. While I was already in the process of conceptualizing my project, this animated short perfectly encapsulated everything I wanted to achieve with my own work. It's so fantastic to see this sort of genre in animation be executed in the real world, and even more wonderful to see it so well received and immediately loved by everyone. This trailer and overall concept idea for this cartoon show are exactly what I wanted to create with my own making, and it makes me so happy to know that I'm not the only one who loves both consuming and creating this type of art as well.

# Contextualization

## Don't Hug Me I'm Scared

Don't Hug Me I'm Scared is one of my biggest inspirations, and upon viewing this youtube series the connection is very clear between me and these works. It's a fantastic combination of the educational children's show you'd see on Saturday mornings mixed with a horrifying nightmare you'd have as a child that still haunts you as an adult years later. I have always been worried about creating something that is seen as "edgy" for the sake of it, rather than something that is as deeply rooted in the mental wellbeing of a person such as Don't Hug Me I'm Scared. I wanted to create as much nuance and intrigue as this web series does, and it was my ultimate goal to even get anywhere close to this masterpiece for my project.





# Contextualization

The Psychology Behind Why We Love Horror & Gore

by Adie Pieraz



I won't lie, I have been a bit insecure in my own interests in the macabre. It's not often I find others who are just as dark as I am when it comes to the types of media they indulge in. Many would consider it strange and off-putting to enjoy it at all. Add that in with my cute artistic style, my joy to bring laughter and happiness to those around me, and a dash of a lifetime of awful mental health issues, I feel as if it makes my macabre interests even more strange to an outsider. I've often wondered if it was just me who was strange and if I needed to reevaluate my own interests, even outside of my making. Reading research articles such as this that explain how it is normal for people to enjoy these kinds of dark topics was incredibly encouraging to me to continue down the path I enjoy the most: making cute things scary.

# Contextualization

The Power of Cute by Simon May

This book, *The Power of Cute*, goes into immense detail about how strong of a grip cuteness has on our society. I was incredibly fascinated with this book and extremely excited about all of the topics it discusses. I have always been afraid of my art's aesthetic being too cute, thus not being taken as seriously as someone who has a much more abstract and mature art style. But after I had read passages from this book and seen how much power cuteness can hold over other people, I was completely blown away. This book completely reinvigorated me with the knowledge that just because my artwork is very cute in nature, that does not mean it is incapable of portraying very powerful messages.





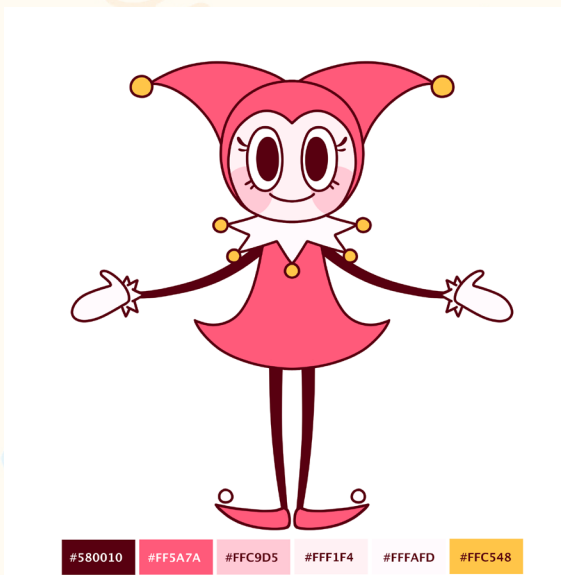




# Creative Process

## Creation of Mitzy

From the very beginning, I knew that I wanted to create a character that felt as if they could be a popular mascot for a children's franchise. I also knew that I wanted to combine this concept with my recurring interest with using the theme of clowns I have used in almost every project. With these goals and concepts in mind, I created a rough sketch of the main character of my project.



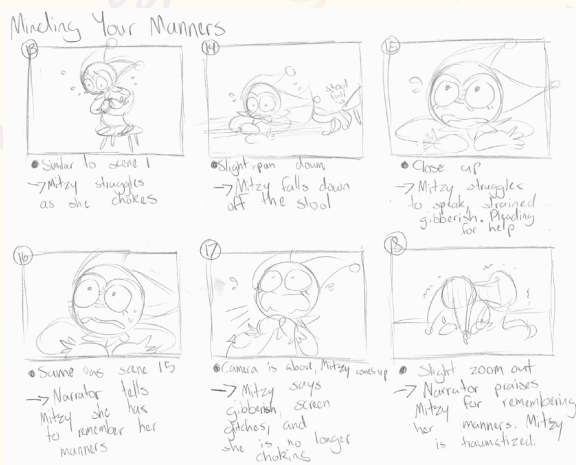
It wasn't long until I grew attached to this design, and not much longer until I affectionately nicknamed this creature of mine "Mitzy." Her design was both fun and easy for me to draw, which would make it incredibly helpful to me when it came to animating her in the future. After being sure that Mitzy would be the star of the show, I made a reference image of her that I could frequently look at as I animated her for my cartoon.



# Creative Process

## Storyboards and Scripts

After Mitzy's creation, it came time for me to start creating her story. The plotlines and overall themes for my cartoon had changed several times throughout the course of the two semesters I had spent working on this project. Mitzy had gone from a mischievous creature with an insatiable thirst for violence to an innocent victim of violence herself. To help visualize and propel my project forward, I began brainstorming interesting scenes that came to mind. Each scene had subtle, dark undertones while still maintaining the educational lesson it was trying to teach.



### Scene Ideas: Innocent into Scary

- Good Hygiene**
  - Washing hands before a meal
  - Always seen as dirty no matter what. Imperfect and unclean
  - Anger for failure to clean herself up in a manner that is good enough and quick enough
- Manners**
  - No matter the situation, manners must be remembered
  - Mitzy is given a new toy, but it is teased and pulled away from her until she says thank you
  - Mitzy needs help reaching the cookie jar, she has to say please
  - Mitzy chokes on the cookie, but will not be helped until she says please
- Forgiveness**
  - Forgiveness must be earned (aggressive connotation)
  - Forcing one to forgive you
  - Feel as if an apology is disingenuous or even given mockingly, but you have to accept it because that's the best you'll get

Once I had felt confident in the storylines I had created for each of Mitzy's episodic adventures, I began to sketch out the storyboards for these episodes. While most of my art is made through digital means, I felt drawn to making my storyboards through traditional means of pencil and paper. I was able to create much looser ideas for each of the scenes, unafraid to get messy with my art. This choice was incredibly beneficial as I was able to explore and experiment with the settings I wanted to create.

# Creative Process

## Animation

It finally came time to bring Mitzy to life. I love animating, but I love to do so in a method that most would not even consider being a possibility in the first place. Similar to paper cutout animation, I dissected Mitzy into several pieces. Her head, body, arms, legs, and so on. Each of her parts was drawn separately and saved as its own individual image. I would then reassemble all of these pieces into After Effects, and there I was able to manipulate each piece to move a certain way to mimic the type of movement that one would create through hand-drawn animation.



# Creative Process

## Animation



Drawing these pieces separately gave me a task that became very tedious and even quite confusing at times. I was doing mental backflips in my mind as I tried to figure out which parts needed to overlap and which parts needed to be hidden underneath. Not to mention what would these parts look like once they started moving. There were plenty of times where I had separated parts that I ended up not manipulating in After Effects, making the separation of this piece useless. But there were also plenty of times that this effort had paid off, and I had managed to create some of the most subtle but desperately needed movements within my animation that really brought it to life.







# Exhibition



# Exhibition

## Full View

The part of my project I was excited about the most was designing my exhibition space. But with my work being 4D work, it became a confusing problem for me to figure out how I would design a space that connected with my animation. There was no physical presence my artwork would provide, besides the old VCR television it was being displayed on. With my determination and stubbornness to decorate my exhibition space as much as possible, I designed a space that became somewhat of an immersive experience.



# Exhibition

## VCR Television



The VCR television was something I had planned on incorporating into my exhibition since the very beginning. The low-quality display of the screen, the droning buzzing sound that constantly plays when the TV is turned on, the memories that flood back into people's minds of similar TVs their parents owned when they were a child, were all incredibly important to my final work. The usage of the VCR TV had created an immediate connection to childhood through these nostalgic triggers. I felt transported back to my youth, and I wanted others to feel that way too.



# Exhibition

## Decorations



On the walls of my small studio space, I had hung up four white shelves. On each of these shelves, I had crammed as many knick-knacks of mine as I could find. Some of these items are purchases I had made recently due to my ever-growing resurgent interest in vintage children's toys. While other items I had discovered in my parents' attic. These toys were once so beloved by me when I was younger, but now were covered in the hollow carapaces of unidentifiable bugs and discolored from mysterious stains. These decorative items brought me back to a time when I was young and innocent, but also to a time right before my mental health began to deteriorate into a case of severe depression.

# Exhibition

## Television Setup

Another element that I deemed vital to my exhibition was the rolling cart that the TV sat upon. If you were to ask anyone who is around the same age as I am now what their favorite memories from elementary school were, almost everyone would say the same thing. The most cherished memories from childhood are when the teacher would wheel in a large VCR TV on a rickety old cart, playing a PG-rated movie and passing out slices of greasy pizza and Walmart-brand cupcakes. Placing the TV on this metal cart was the cherry on top of my vision for my final exhibition.







# Reflection

At the beginning of my time at art school, I found myself creating art that I thought my professors would fawn over. But through this desire for praise and to prove my worth as an artist, I had lost myself and what I enjoyed the most in making art. It wasn't until my second year at Stamps that I had grown a fiery passion in myself to no longer abide by the personal artistic tastes of my professors. I strove to create an identity for myself, an identity that truly resonated with who I am as both a person and as an artist. I became determined to make a name for myself, and I was going to make sure that everyone around me knew that name as well.

I used to be so afraid of showing what I could do, as I felt like what I could do just wasn't good enough. Critique day was always a horrifying nightmare for me to present art that looked so childish and simple compared to something so beautifully realistic or thought-provokingly abstract. If I wanted to create art that made me happy, I had to commit to it with every fiber of my being and be proud of my differences from my peers. I no longer felt afraid of becoming too personal with my work of combining cuteness with such dark topics. Nor did I feel anxiety holding me back from what I truly wanted to create. I felt free, I felt alive, I felt happy, and most importantly, I felt like me.

Learning Life Skills with Mitzy the Clown became the ultimate test for me as an artist. This project was a culmination of all the strength I had earned over the years of being proud of who I am as an artist, despite my art is so different from many of my peers. It was exciting to create something that I truly enjoyed making, but it was fulfilling to create something that made me feel worthy enough to even call myself an artist in the first place.



