ANIMATION HUB

YOUNG AUDIENCE RATING SYSTEM

Run by

cEE ANIMATION

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CEE Animation believes that animation for children and young audiences deserves thoughtful, responsible, and age-sensitive approaches that respect viewers' emotional, cognitive, and social development of viewers. As part of the Animation HUB project, CEE Animation collaborated with media psychologist Martina Peštaj to develop the Young Audience Rating System (YARS).The aim of YARS is to provide creators, distributors, festivals, educators, and other professionals with practical guidance for understanding how children and adolescents experience animated content at different stages of development. Rather than functioning as a restrictive classification tool, YARS encourages a deeper awareness of storytelling, emotions, humor, visual language, and themes in relation to young audiences.

The following documents present the theoretical background and practical guidelines of the Young Audience Rating System, offering a framework for more meaningful communication between animation and its youngest viewers.

CHILDREN, ADOLESCENTS AND ANIMATION: DEVELOPMENTAL PSYCHOLOGY IN THE CONTEXT OF ANIMATION

Martina Peštaj, Media psychologist

Children usually encounter the world of film through animation. This unique and appealing branch of cinematic art is often mistakenly seen as a genre created only for children. In reality, animated films are meant for a wide audience, yet some of them are crafted specifically for children and young people.

If we want to inspire children and adolescents to appreciate high-quality animated films, we need to offer them content that feels close to their own lives, characters they can relate to, and forms that engage them. The themes most engaging for them are those that resonate with their current developmental stage. As children grow, their taste in genres changes, and with age, their ability to process and interpret information increases significantly. Films that awaken curiosity in children and youth are therefore a valuable tool on their path of learning and maturation.

It is important to distinguish between films for children, created with their developmental needs and stage in mind, and films about children, in which children appear as subjects of the story but are not necessarily the intended audience. In making this distinction, one must consider children's interests, development, and interpretive abilities. For animation aimed at young viewers, it is crucial that stories are presented from their perspective, highlighting their skills and potential, and allowing them to identify with the characters.

While watching animation, children develop both social and cognitive skills: they imitate behavior, respond to social information, and acquire new experiences. Their attention is drawn not only to the personal experience of watching but also to the language of animation, the content, the visualization, the sound and music, the story, the characters, the emotions, and the humor.

DEVELOPMENTAL CHARACTERISTICS OF THE TARGET AUDIENCE

If we want children to fully experience and understand animated films, it is important to be familiar with the basic developmental characteristics of each age group. Developmental psychology divides childhood into stages, in which children grow and develop across all key areas: cognitive, perceptual, linguistic, emotional, social, and moral. Each period has its own recognizable features, yet every child develops at their own pace and at their own rhythm. Knowing the essential characteristics of each developmental stage allows us to meaningfully connect them with elements of animated film, such as the story, characters, emotions, and humor.

A particularly important aspect of creating films for children is humor. Humor plays a crucial role in children's development, and their understanding of it changes as they grow. If the structure of humor is not adapted to the child's frame of reference, or if it misses the way children perceive humor, the film will not be funny for them. The goal of creators is to make films that communicate with their audience. A film that includes humor will certainly attract children and adolescents, but it is essential that humor is genuinely suited to their age group.

Understanding the characteristics of each developmental stage—and the closely related development of humor—can be of great help in creating animated films that provide children with a full experience: entertainment, emotional engagement, and cognitive stimulation.

DEVELOPMENTAL STAGES AND THE UNDERSTANDING OF ANIMATION

TODDLERS (1-3 years)

Toddlers are the very first audience of animation, which is why the content must be carefully adapted to their cognitive and emotional world. At this stage, attention is short, less focused, and less controlled. Stories need to be linear if we want them to follow along. Toddlers are most engaged by simple stories in which they recognize familiar characters that also appear in other content they watch or listen to.

They acquire experience and information through perception and movement, and by imitating the people they observe, they learn the key behaviors needed in the first years of life. This period is characterized by rapid motor, linguistic, and emotional development. With the use of language, they gradually enter the world of symbols. A strong sense of emotional security is crucial, as it allows toddlers to explore and cope with their own feelings as well as the feelings of others. Shared viewing therefore plays an especially important role at this age.

Films that capture their attention usually have strong perceptual contrasts, clear and simple visual material, engaging language patterns, repetition, rhymes, and appealing music. A clean and inviting visual design gives children a sense of safety and familiarity. A film can even work without words, as a lively musical atmosphere is often enough to engage a toddler's attention.

Toddlers eagerly follow situations taken from everyday life, very directly expressed emotions, and simple interpersonal relationships. Narratives need to be straightforward and clearly structured, both visually and in storytelling. Film can also invite them into an imaginative world, where familiar objects transform their function. At

this age, they especially enjoy slapstick, lively and funny situations, and surprising twists and turns in the action that create general disorder.

Toddlers are enthusiastic viewers who can watch the same content over and over again, experiencing and understanding it differently each time.

EARLY CHILDHOOD (4-6 years)

This is the period of the “grateful” audience. Children usually adore stories; their imagination produces vivid images, and film brings those images to life. They gradually come to understand the structure of narrative and are increasingly able to follow the classic flow of a story. Their attention improves year by year, becoming more focused and sustained.

The preschool years are a time of rapid cognitive development. Children weave neural connections with remarkable speed and creativity, linking things together and combining them with past experiences. They create a unique picture of the world while also learning to integrate it with the perspectives offered by the people around them. Alongside cognitive development, language growth is of exceptional importance. Language is used for communication, and children quickly acquire its grammatical foundations. They listen, recognize, understand, repeat, and experiment—playing with language in every possible way.

From around the age of four, metalinguistic development also becomes increasingly important: children begin to reflect on language itself, notice how words function, play with meanings, and gradually understand that language can describe not only reality but also thoughts, intentions, and different points of view. At the same time, they develop theory of mind—the growing ability to understand that other people may think, feel, want, or believe something different from themselves. This developmental achievement is essential for following stories, as it allows children to understand the perspectives, intentions, and emotional responses of different characters.

Emotional development also flourishes during this period. From their first encounters with powerful feelings, which often overwhelm both child and adult, children learn to recognize, understand, and express emotions, moving from simple to more complex forms. As their world expands, they gain real experiences, yet their vivid imagination still makes it hard for them to clearly distinguish between fact and fiction. This leaves them particularly sensitive to fear. They are most often frightened by content aimed at adults. Fear may be triggered by terrifying creatures that seem dangerous because of their appearance, behavior, or seemingly unlimited power. They are also deeply unsettled when a character they identify with is in danger, as well as by depictions of real disasters or scenes of physical injury.

Social development is very intense at this age. Children begin forming friendships, which are not yet strongly marked by gender stereotypes. They are increasingly able to connect with others as their communication skills, perspective-taking, and empathy grow—everything needed for relationships to function. With their first friendships also come their first disagreements, in which they learn how to resolve problems effectively.

Moral development is also important at this stage. It emerges from the child's growing understanding of reciprocity—that every action has consequences and that what we do will, in some form, come back to us. This lays the foundation for learning fairness, distinguishing truth from lies, and separating good from bad.

In this period, children are strongly moved by stories that they can understand and that are close to their own experience—stories that spark emotions and cognitive challenges. By the end of the preschool years, they are also attracted to the unfamiliar, to surprising tales with twists and unexpected endings. They enjoy familiar narratives such as folk tales, rhymes, riddles, and the playful animation of everyday objects that suddenly take on new dimensions.

Along with slapstick, they enjoy action, noise, and exaggeration. They laugh at situations where a story's hero solves a problem with cunning or trickery. The most amusing scenarios occur when a smaller, weaker

character outsmarts a bigger one—sometimes through a clever trick in a contest of strength, and other times through a carefully thought-out plan that saves the whole world.

Laughter is also triggered by situations with unexpected twists and surprises, where someone breaks the rules or behaves in a way that is surprising, exaggerated, or inappropriate, or when misunderstandings and mix-ups occur. These are jokes where the punchline is only recognized at the end. The unfolding of the joke engages the audience's thoughts in one direction, while the final outcome takes them somewhere else—the surprise providing the amusement.

A special area of humor at this stage is irony, which poses great difficulties for children. They struggle to place irony into their mental frameworks, since they interpret language literally and find it hard to understand figurative meanings. The gradual development of metalinguistic competences is what enables children to recognize that words can carry meanings beyond their direct, literal sense and that speakers may intentionally say something different from what they actually mean. Preschool children do not understand irony and do not find it funny. The older they get, the more they begin to grasp the ironic meaning of words or situations. Cynicism and sarcasm are also difficult for them; they interpret both literally and perceive them as lies or rudeness.



This period marks the transition from intuitive, imaginative thinking toward more logical and structured understanding. Children's attention becomes longer and more controlled, allowing them to follow coherent storylines, grasp cause-and-effect relationships, and mentally fill in missing information. They are eager to understand how things work and to find patterns and rules in the world around them.

At this age, friendships and peer interactions become central. Through them, children learn cooperation, sharing, and fairness. They begin to see

moral principles such as honesty, justice, and reciprocity as meaningful concepts rather than just rules imposed by adults. Their emotional world becomes richer and more balanced — fear, once dominant in the preschool years, gradually gives way to worry, mild anxiety, and growing empathy for others.

Children in middle childhood enjoy films about people, friendship, differences among individuals, fairness, problem-solving, and helping others, as these themes resonate with their growing sense of justice and social understanding. They are fascinated by stories in which cleverness and resourcefulness triumph over strength. Trickery, playful disobedience, and mild chaos entertain them, especially when they lead to creative solutions. They like to see small or clever heroes outsmarting bigger or more powerful ones, and they delight in surprising twists or misunderstandings that are resolved humorously.

At this stage, irony and sarcasm remain difficult to grasp; humor is best when it is clever, visual, situational, or built on misdirection. Their understanding of fiction and reality improves, yet they still relate best to stories that are concrete and emotionally accessible.

High-quality animated films for this age group should combine clear storytelling with emotional warmth and gentle humor. The visual world can become richer and more detailed, yet it still needs to remain organized and purposeful. Children appreciate expressive characters with recognizable emotions and clear motives.

For them, animation is not just entertainment—it is also a way to practice problem-solving, teamwork, and emotional understanding. Films that show how cooperation and fairness help overcome challenges foster both cognitive and moral development.

LATE CHILDHOOD (10-12 years)

Late childhood represents the upper end of this developmental stage, when children become more self-aware, socially oriented, and cognitively sophisticated. Attention spans are longer, and thinking becomes more flexible and abstract. They are capable of anticipating outcomes, comparing perspectives, and recognizing symbolic meaning in stories.

Peer groups now play a decisive role in shaping behavior, interests, and values. Belonging to a group becomes important for self-esteem, but it is also a source of anxiety and self-consciousness. Children start to compare themselves with others and may become more critical of themselves and their surroundings. Moral reasoning deepens, with growing concern for fairness, justice, and the consequences of actions.

At this age, children enjoy complex stories with layered characters and real dilemmas—situations that do not always have easy answers. They are intrigued by films that show moral or social conflicts, and by protagonists who struggle, make mistakes, and learn from them. They increasingly understand cause-and-effect relationships and are able to recognize that different people may interpret the same event in different ways, depending on their perspective, intentions, or experience. This allows them to follow stories in which several viewpoints coexist and to understand the motives behind characters' actions. They identify with characters close to their own age or slightly older, who face realistic challenges but approach them with courage and intelligence.

Their sense of humor becomes more sophisticated. While slapstick and exaggeration still appeal, they begin to appreciate light irony, parody, and situational humor, especially when it references familiar cultural material. They laugh when they recognize something from their world—school, family, or social media—presented in a new, playful context.

High-quality animated films for late childhood can already offer multi-layered narratives, moral reflection, and emotionally nuanced characters. The visual style may be more stylized or detailed, and storytelling can include suspense, parallel plots, or ambiguity. Humor

that connects to their growing cultural awareness and sense of justice is particularly effective.

This is also the period when children begin to develop a critical relationship with media. While they are still emotionally open, they start evaluating what they watch and forming opinions about what is “good” or “meaningful.” Thoughtful animation at this stage can help refine their taste and prepare them for adolescence by offering stories that are entertaining but also intellectually and emotionally stimulating.

EARLY ADOLESCENCE (13-15 years)

Early adolescence marks the beginning of a deeply transformative phase, when a child enters the first stage of becoming an adult. It is a period of rapid physical change and heightened emotional intensity, filled with genuine feelings, curiosity, and confusion. The adolescent begins to form a sense of self but still views the world primarily from a personal, sometimes egocentric perspective—everything seems to revolve around their own experiences and emotions.

Hormonal and physical changes are accompanied by strong emotional reactivity and a growing awareness of self. Thinking becomes more abstract but remains somewhat concrete and polarized; adolescents often perceive the world in extremes—right or wrong, good or bad. Their imagination is vivid, yet they may struggle to grasp ambiguity or irony. Emotional safety, acceptance, and understanding are essential at this stage.

Peer relationships gain enormous significance. The group provides belonging, identity, and validation, but also pressure to conform. Acceptance or rejection by peers can deeply affect self-esteem. Adolescents experiment with roles, behavior, and identity, often mirroring admired figures from media or culture. Friendships intensify, and first romantic feelings appear—often idealized, emotionally intense, and highly romanticized. These early experiences of love and attraction

are usually more about imagination and emotional closeness than about physical intimacy.

Conflicts with parents may increase as adolescents strive for independence, yet emotional dependence on family remains strong. Stories that appeal to early adolescents often center on self-discovery, courage, friendship, loyalty, or overcoming obstacles. They connect strongly with characters their age, especially those who challenge unfairness or question authority. Fantasy and adventure genres—with clear moral structure and emotional depth—offer a safe space to explore complex feelings and growing autonomy.

At this stage, adolescents benefit from author-driven animated films that help them understand emotions, relationships, moral choices, and the broader social world around them. Films can support their growing awareness of society, different social groups, and inequality, helping them recognize that people may live under very different circumstances and experience the world in different ways. Films with expressive visuals, dynamic sound, and emotionally engaging music speak directly to their heightened sensitivity. They still appreciate humor that is visual, situational, or playful, but irony and sarcasm remain difficult to grasp and can easily be misunderstood. Gentle, intelligent humor that supports empathy and learning works best.

LATE ADOLESCENCE (16-20 years)

Late adolescence brings a significant cognitive and emotional shift. Thinking becomes more abstract, flexible, and reflective. Young people now have the ability to think critically, consider multiple perspectives, and question established norms. They actively shape their personal value system, worldview, and sense of moral responsibility. The formation of identity becomes central, along with the growing need for authenticity and self-definition.

This period often involves emotional turbulence—feelings of anxiety, loneliness, or even depression may appear as they reflect deeply on

themselves and their place in society. Intimate relationships gain new meaning, marked by emotional depth, mutual understanding, and trust. Love becomes more realistic, grounded in emotional reciprocity and personal connection. Sexuality gradually becomes an integrated part of emotional and relational life, bringing both new opportunities for intimacy and new emotional challenges. It is crucial that films portray these experiences with authenticity, respect, and sensitivity rather than sensationalism.

The influence of peers remains strong, but adolescents increasingly rely on their own judgment and individuality. They seek genuine relationships, autonomy, and purpose. In this phase, adolescents are drawn to stories that mirror real life, explore psychological complexity, and deal with social and ethical dilemmas. They want to be taken seriously—as thinking, feeling individuals capable of reflection. Themes such as identity, justice, belonging, love, intimacy, and freedom resonate deeply. They are increasingly able to grasp broader social structures, diverse social groups, and the inequalities that shape people's lives, responding strongly to stories that encourage critical reflection on fairness, responsibility, and social position. They appreciate artistic and authorial animation that offers them space to interpret meaning rather than providing direct answers.

For this group, the language of animation—its imagery, narrative rhythm, symbolism, and sound—is as important as the story itself. They enjoy films that challenge them intellectually and emotionally, that are bold in expression but honest in intention. Humor becomes adult-like: intellectual, ironic, absurd, even dark or socially critical. Parody and satire appeal to them when they recognize cultural references and the humor arises from insight rather than ridicule.

Carefully crafted animated films for older adolescents can become a powerful tool for self-reflection and social awareness. By engaging them with stories that resonate emotionally and intellectually, creators can offer experiences that help young viewers better understand themselves, others, and the society around them.

ANIMATION AS AN EXPERIENCE

For children, animated films are first and foremost a deeply personal experience. The image captivates them, the sound draws them in, and the story unfolds in the here and now. The characters become friends—companions they laugh and cry with, worry about, and cheer for. In the images on the screen, children project their own wishes and fears, working through their own stories and shaping new experiences of life in this world.

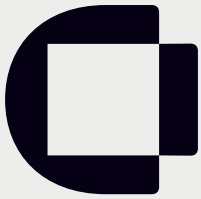
The individual expressive tools of film, which children gradually learn to recognize, serve as signals for meaning and even for identifying different genres. Step by step, they learn to focus their attention on sounds, music, images, colors, structure, and rhythm. They begin to grasp the elements of cinematic language—such as transitions into dreams, shifts from the present to the past, or the interplay between animation and live action. All of this is necessary for a full and effective engagement with film.

To truly understand and follow a film's content, children need to have developed several cognitive structures: the ability to recognize narrative form with its beginning, complication, resolution, and ending; the ability to distinguish between reality and fantasy; the capacity to take on different social perspectives; to empathize with characters; and to distinguish between good and bad.

Like all art forms, animation carries high experiential, social, and aesthetic value. This means that each film affects every child in a unique way: it may awaken memories, allow them to connect what happens on screen with their own experiences, and stir up a variety of emotions that they process either on their own or in conversations with peers and adults. Every animated film brings its own story, which each child understands, accepts, and evaluates in their own way—drawing new knowledge and insights from it.

By retelling a story, children develop their thinking and language; by evaluating it, they develop critical judgment. They also reflect on what they have seen and heard: Did they enjoy it? Did the colors attract or repel them? How did they feel about the music, the words, the gestures, the movement? All of this significantly contributes to the development of critical thinking and aesthetic awareness, helping them to express what they like or dislike, what feels meaningful and what does not. If, through watching films, they discover that this form of expression resonates with them—that it is a language through which they, too, can speak—they will also strengthen their creative abilities.

It is important to continually offer children a variety of animated films made in different techniques and with diverse themes. In this way, they can discover the full breadth of animation, decide which themes resonate with them, which artistic techniques captivate them most, and which characters they can most easily identify with. Through this process, they gradually build their own understanding of the world they live in and develop a meaningful relationship with art created specifically for them.



GUIDELINES FOR YOUNG ANIMATION AUDIENCES BASED ON DEVELOPMENTAL PSYCHOLOGY

1+ TODDLERS (1-3 years)

DEVELOPMENTAL STAGE

- Attention is short, less focused, and poorly controlled.
- Learning occurs mainly through perception, movement, and imitation.
- Language starts to develop, slowly introducing the child into the world of symbols and communication.
- Emotional security is crucial for exploration and coping with feelings.
- Rapid development of motor, social, and emotional skills.

STORY & CONTENT

- Simple, linear stories that are easy to follow.
- Familiar characters and everyday situations.
- Directly expressed emotions and simple social relationships (friendship, helping).
- Stories can also invite them into imaginative worlds where familiar objects change their function.

EMOTIONAL SENSITIVITY

- Need for security, sensitivity to loud sounds, easily overwhelmed by intense emotions.

DESIGN

- **Visuals:** Bright colors, strong contrasts, simple shapes, slow movements.
- **Characters:** Big faces, exaggerated expressions, familiar people, animals or objects.
- **Sound:** Repetition, rhythm, rhymes, sing-song voices, nursery rhyme patterns; engaging music can work even without words.
- **Narrative:** Short, linear cause-and-effect sequences, clearly structured.
- **Humor & Action:** Slapstick, playful mischief, harmless chaos, funny surprises.

FOR CREATORS

- Engage toddlers' senses and their short attention span.
- Provide a sense of comfort and security through repetition and predictability.
- Spark joy and laughter with playful and safe situations.
- Encourage early symbolic thinking through simple storytelling.
- Use short episodes that can be watched repeatedly.
- Keep the narrative familiar and close to daily life and play.

4+

EARLY CHILDHOOD (4-6 years)

DEVELOPMENTAL STAGE

- Attention is improving but still limited; children are easily distracted.
- Thinking is concrete; imagination is vivid — fact and fiction often blur.
- Theory of mind develops: growing understanding of self and others.
- Language skills expand rapidly; children experiment with words and grammar, metalinguistic awareness develops (children learn words for thoughts and feelings).
- Emotional development: from simple feelings to more complex emotions.
- Learning empathy, reciprocity, and fairness.
- Sensitive to fear: scary looks, unpredictable behavior, or danger to beloved characters can strongly affect them.

STORY & CONTENT

- Stories aligned with their cognitive, emotional, and social stage.
- Gentle challenges to spark curiosity.
- Repetition and predictable structures help understanding.
- Humor is highly engaging:
  - Action, noise, exaggeration, and playful mischief.
  - Clever tricks where the small/weak outsmarts the big/strong.
  - Surprising twists, misunderstandings, and chaos.
- Irony, sarcasm, and cynicism are not yet understood.

EMOTIONAL SENSITIVITY

- Avoid overly threatening content (scary creatures or characters with seemingly unlimited power).
- Danger to relatable characters, realistic disasters, or physical harm can be traumatic.
- Highly susceptible to fear (due to confusion between reality and fiction) and to intense emotional experiences.

DESIGN

- **Visuals:** Bold, simple design; clear cues for "good" vs. "bad."
- **Characters:** Clear roles (helper, friend, villain); animals or objects with human characteristics.
- **Narrative:** Simple, linear plots with repetition; obvious resolutions.
- **Humor & Action:** Slapstick, chaos, clever tricks, playful rule-breaking.
- **Learning Hooks:** Prosocial modeling—sharing, empathy, problem-solving.

FOR CREATORS

- Support cognitive, social, emotional, and moral growth.
- Reinforce safety and predictability.
- Stimulate imagination and joy through engaging, playful scenarios.
- Introduce stories about cooperation, fairness, and empathy.
- Provide clear emotional cues so children can understand what characters feel, think, and want.
- Allow safe exploration of fear with reassuring resolutions.

7+

MIDDLE CHILDHOOD (7-9 years)

DEVELOPMENTAL STAGE

- Attention is more controlled and sustained.
- Can solve problems using logic and perception, not only sensation.
- Constructive memory develops: children begin to use memory strategies, fill in missing information and complete stories mentally.
- Peer interactions and friendships become central.
- Fear decreases; it is replaced by worry, anxiety, and self-consciousness.
- Moral judgment strengthens: fairness, empathy, cooperation.

STORY & CONTENT

- Interested in people, helping, and problem-solving.
- Humor:
  - Clever tricks, misdirection, playful rule-breaking.
  - Small heroes outsmarting bigger ones.
  - Mild chaos and surprising twists.
- Irony and sarcasm remain difficult.

EMOTIONAL SENSITIVITY

- Fear gives way to worry and anxiety; there is an improved understanding of others' emotions.

DESIGN

- **Visuals:** More detailed environments; motives clearly signaled.
- **Characters:** Relatable, sometimes flawed;

clever underdogs.

- **Narrative:** Linear plots with moderate complexity, subplots are allowed.
- **Humor & Action:** Exaggeration, clever strategies, playful mishaps.
- **Learning Hooks:** Teamwork, empathy, problem-solving, awareness of consequences.

FOR CREATORS

- Foster logical thinking and curiosity.
- Encourage moral reasoning and cooperation.
- Offer clever, entertaining humor without irony.
- Create relatable heroes who solve problems cleverly.
- Show cause-and-effect links clearly in storytelling.
- Encourage group problem-solving and teamwork.

10+ LATE CHILDHOOD (10–12 years)

DEVELOPMENTAL STAGE

- Longer, more flexible attention spans.
- Capable of abstract ideas, multiple perspectives, and predictions.
- Peer groups strongly influence behavior and values.
- Anxiety and self-consciousness may increase.
- Moral reasoning develops further: fairness, justice, solidarity.

STORY & CONTENT

- Interested in complex social situations and ethical dilemmas.
- Humor:
  - Clever solutions, exaggeration, situational comedy.
  - Irony, sarcasm, or cynicism are still difficult to interpret.
  - Enjoy parodies of familiar cultural content reframed humorously.

EMOTIONAL SENSITIVITY

- Sensitivity to peers, increased self-criticism, beginnings of social anxiety.

DESIGN

- **Visuals:** Stylized or detailed worlds; nuanced expression and interaction.
- **Characters:** Complex, with personal conflicts; clever protagonists, layered villains.
- **Narrative:** Multi-threaded plots, suspense, moral choices.

- **Humor & Action:** Clever twists, playful chaos, satire, parody.
- **Learning Hooks:** Ethical reasoning, empathy, teamwork, social problem-solving.

FOR CREATORS

- Support identity development, moral awareness, and critical thinking.
- Provide humor that is culturally relevant and sophisticated.
- Engage through rich, meaningful storytelling.
- Include parodies or playful twists on familiar stories.
- Show characters facing real dilemmas with no easy answers.
- Encourage viewers to discuss and reflect after the film.

13+

EARLY ADOLESCENCE (13–15 years)

DEVELOPMENTAL STAGE

- Onset of puberty; rapid physical and emotional changes.
- Thinking becomes more abstract but remains partly concrete and polarized ("all or nothing").
- Strong emotional reactivity and sensitivity to peers' opinions, and increasing ability to express suggestions, initiatives, and arguments.
- Adolescent egocentrism: the world is often seen through a personal lens.
- Need for belonging and peer acceptance; early identity exploration.
- First romantic feelings appear—idealized, emotional, and highly romanticized.
- Desire for independence grows, yet emotional dependence on family persists.

STORY & CONTENT

- Themes of self-discovery, friendship, loyalty, courage, justice, and belonging resonate strongly.
- Fantasy, adventure, and emotionally charged stories allow a safe exploration of independence.
- Characters should mirror adolescents' emotional intensity and moral questioning.
- Humor preferences:
  - Playful, situational, visual, or exaggerated humor.
  - Clever trickery, surprise, and mild rebellion.
  - Smaller or clever characters outsmarting stronger ones still work well.
  - Light irony and simple sarcasm.

EMOTIONAL SENSITIVITY

- Intense, fluctuating emotions; quick mood shifts.
- Fear of rejection and the desire for acceptance are powerful.
- Early experiences of love and friendship are deeply felt and idealized.
- Need for emotional safety, reassurance, and understanding.

DESIGN

- **Visuals:** Expressive, colorful, emotionally rich imagery; clear symbolism.
- **Characters:** Relatable, emotionally open, still discovering themselves.
- **Narrative:** Linear or moderately complex; clear moral resolution.
- **Humor & Action:** Satire, parody, surprise, clever trickery, mild rebellion.
- **Learning Hooks:** Emotional awareness, empathy, moral choice, cooperation.

FOR CREATORS

- Build emotional connection through sincerity and authenticity.
- Offer stories that encourage courage, empathy, and moral reflection.
- Use animation to validate their feelings and imagination.
- Portray early romantic experiences with warmth, sensitivity, and respect.
- Avoid over-simplifying or moralizing; instead, guide through relatable emotions.

16+

LATE ADOLESCENCE (16–20 years)

DEVELOPMENTAL STAGE

- Advancing toward cognitive, emotional, social, and moral maturity.
- Capable of abstract thinking, critical judgment, and complex reasoning.
- Increasing independence and consolidation of identity.
- Peer influence remains strong, but individuality strengthens.
- Relationships gain depth—love becomes more realistic and reciprocal.
- Sexuality becomes integrated into emotional and relational experience.
- Reflection on social issues, ethics, and personal values deepens.

STORY & CONTENT

- Drawn to stories about identity, relationships, freedom, social justice, and authenticity.
- Enjoy multi-layered narratives with moral or emotional complexity.
- Prefer open-ended stories that invite reflection and interpretation.
- Humor preferences:
  - Intellectual, ironic, absurd, satirical, or politically aware.
  - Dark humor or parody of familiar cultural contexts.
  - Enjoy recognition of shared social and cultural experiences.

EMOTIONAL SENSITIVITY

- Strong, often conflicting emotions—search for meaning and self-acceptance.

- Increased vulnerability to loneliness, anger, or depressive moods.
- Need for authenticity and emotional honesty in storytelling.
- Desire for deep emotional and physical intimacy in relationships.

DESIGN

- **Visuals:** Stylized or complex worlds; nuanced expression and atmosphere.
- **Characters:** Multi-dimensional, flawed, seeking growth and authenticity.
- **Narrative:** Nonlinear or multi-threaded; allows for ambiguity and debate.
- **Humor & Action:** Satire, irony, social commentary, mature emotional wit.
- **Learning Hooks:** Moral reflection, empathy, social awareness, identity integration.

FOR CREATORS

- Respect adolescents' maturity and autonomy.
- Encourage critical thinking, emotional depth, and self-reflection.
- Depict intimacy and sexuality with authenticity, empathy, and sensitivity.
- Use humor as a bridge to cultural understanding and social critique.
- Trust young audiences to engage with ambiguity and complexity.
- Offer characters with doubts, contradictions, and inner growth.
- Create films that speak honestly about life, love, and responsibility.

CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE DESERVE ANIMATION THAT SPEAKS TO THEM HONESTLY, CREATIVELY, AND WITH CARE.
IF WE SUCCEED IN THIS, WE DO NOT JUST CREATE FILMS — WE CREATE EXPERIENCES THAT STAY WITH THEM FOR LIFE.



MARTINA PEŠTAJ, MA, is a media psychologist working as a Head of Children's and Youth Programme at RTV Slovenija. She has worked for many years as an author, screenwriter and editor. She is a selector for foreign animation and life-action series for children and youth. Her professional interests include studying the impact of digital content on the development of children and youth. She also devotes her professional knowledge to cultural and art education projects in the field of film, animated film and theatre for children and youth. For many years, she has served as a consultant and children's programme selector at the Animateka Festival in Ljubljana and Animafest in Zagreb. She writes articles and greatly enjoys giving lectures.

ANIMATION HUB

Animation HUB is a European platform initiated by CEE Animation to support the visibility, circulation, and accessibility of animated films, with a special focus on European animation. The platform connects creators, industry professionals, festivals, educators, and audiences through curated film collections, editorial content, audience development activities, and international collaborations. By creating new opportunities for discovery and exchange, Animation HUB aims to strengthen the position of animation culture, encourage cross-border cooperation, and help animated works reach audiences beyond the traditional festival circuit.

www.animationhub.eu

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