

Mary and Max: The Exhibition

Education Resource Kit



Education Resources



CONTENTS



Acknowledgements	3
Writer	3
Exhibition Text Panels	3
Images	3
Special thanks to.....	3
Interviews with Adam Elliot.....	3
Mary and Max: The Exhibition	4
On Tour - Mary and Max: The Exhibition	4
Adam Elliot, the filmmaker	5
Advice for Teachers.....	6
Mary and Max: The Exhibition Education Resource Kit.....	6
About this kit.....	6
Using this Education Resource Kit.....	6
PART A: PREPARING TO VISIT MARY AND MAX: THE EXHIBITION	7
Exploring the Mary and Max trailer.....	7
PART B - INTERVIEWS WITH ADAM ELLIOT	9
1. The Story is the Most Important Thing.....	9
2. The Director as Circus Ringmaster.....	11
3. Recording the voices	13
4. The creative style of Adam Elliot.....	15
5. Characters: Empathy and the Outsider	17
PART C - ENGAGING WITH MARY AND MAX: THE EXHIBITION	21
Module 1: Exploring the introductory panel text.....	21
Module 2: Exploring the opening sequence of Mary and Max	24
Module 3: Meet the filmmakers.....	26
Module 4: Introducing the key characters in Mary and Max	28
Module 5: Characters and puppets.....	32
Module 6: Design and storyboards	33
Module 7: Props.....	34
Module 8: Animation	40
Module 9: Creating animated movements.....	42
Module 10: In-camera approach	44
Module 11: Artistic practice and meaning.....	46
Module 12: Symbolism, metaphor and mise-en-scène	50
Module 15: Clayographies	61
PART D: FOLLOWING UP YOUR VISIT TO MARY AND MAX: THE EXHIBITION	63
Exploring the Mary and Max narrative.....	66
Story.....	66
Close Analysis.....	67
Characterisation: Mary and Max, a real-life pen pal relationship?	67
Close Analysis: Narrative	69
Close Analysis: Production Elements	70
Exploring Adam Elliot's Artistic Practice	72
Discussion points	72
Close Analysis task.....	73
Production Elements	74
Mary and Max: Exploring themes	75
Exploring themes: Mary and Max	76
Reflection - clayographies	77
PART E: References and Resources.....	79
Digital.....	79
Animation.....	79
Print.....	80

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Writer

CHRISTINE EVELY

Education Programmer
Australian Centre for the Moving Image

Christine is an Education Programmer at the Australian Centre for the Moving Image. She is responsible for developing and delivering screen literacy programs and resources for teachers and students from Year Prep to Year 10. She has a primary teaching background and a passion for language and literacy that is reflected in both her Grad. Dip. and M. Ed studies. As a parent of two young people who have grown up surrounded by screens of all sizes she is also keenly interested in promoting creative and purposeful uses of digital media and social networking tools.

Exhibition Text Panels

Written by Adam Elliot and Fiona Trigg.

Images

Provided courtesy of Adam Elliot and Melanie Coombes.

Melanie Coombes is the director and founder of Melodrama Pictures, an independent film and television production company based in Melbourne, Australia which creates distinctive feature films, drama, documentary and animation.

Special thanks to

Vyvyan Stranieri for extracts adapted from the ACMI Tim Burton Education Resource Kit.

Interviews with Adam Elliot

<http://generator.acmi.net.au/>

http://www.acmi.net.au/vid_adam_elliott.htm

MARY AND MAX: THE EXHIBITION

Mary and Max: The Exhibition explores the world of Adam Elliot's award winning animated feature film *Mary and Max*.

Written, directed and designed by Adam Elliot, *Mary and Max* spans 20 years and two continents, to tell the tale of a pen-pal relationship between two very different people: Mary Dinkle (voiced by Bethany Whitmore and Toni Collette), a chubby, lonely 8-year-old living in the suburbs of Melbourne, Australia; and Max Horovitz (voiced by Philip Seymour Hoffman), a severely obese, 44-year-old Jewish man with Asperger's Syndrome living in the chaos of New York City.

The exhibition features a range of 2D and 3D materials selected, in collaboration with Adam Elliot, from the thousands that were created for the film. It includes original sets, hand-made character models and props, original character drawings, storyboards, footage of the animators at work, production stills and moving image clips from the finished film.

Mary and Max: The Exhibition takes audiences behind the scenes and illustrates processes and techniques used in the making of the film. With a focus on the sets of Mary's lounge room and Max's apartment, the exhibition reveals the imagination, meticulous craftsmanship and attention to detail which makes the film so remarkable. Displays show the steps involved in transforming an idea into a final moving image sequence, and demonstrate how a second of film time can require numerous models to create the illusion of movement.

ON TOUR - MARY AND MAX: THE EXHIBITION

The Australian Centre for the Moving Image has built a reputation for presenting outstanding exhibitions since opening at Federation Square eight years ago.

Expertise in both the development and delivery of exhibitions as well as the craft of filmmaking makes it possible for ACMI to bring together all the elements required to form a unique and special exhibition touring package that has never before travelled to Victorian regional galleries.

In recent years ACMI has delivered filmmaking and education projects in regional Victoria, With *Mary and Max: The Exhibition* now ACMI launches its first exhibition touring project through which the organisation will, in partnership with NETS Victoria, collaborate with four public galleries in regional Victoria to deliver this major exhibition.

ADAM ELLIOT, THE FILMMAKER



Adam Elliot is a celebrated independent animator. His short films, *Uncle* (1996), *Cousin* (1998), *Brother* (1999) and *Harvie Krumpet* (2003), have participated in over five hundred film festivals and won over one hundred awards, including in 2004, the Oscar[®] for Best Animated Short Film for *Harvie Krumpet*.

Mary & Max (2009), Elliot's debut feature with longtime collaborator, producer Melanie Coombs, enjoyed its world premiere as the opening night film of the 2009 Sundance Film Festival and has since screened at film festivals and in cinemas across Australia, New Zealand, Asia, Europe, Middle-East, South America, the UK and USA. This year it has won several coveted awards including Best Animation at the Asia Pacific Screen Awards, the Inside Film Award for Best Production Design and numerous others, including those directly recognising the producer and cinematographer, and is in the running for an Oscar nomination in a competitive field of 20 world-class animations eligible for nomination in 2010.

ADVICE FOR TEACHERS

Mary and Max addresses some challenging issues including alcoholism, depression, anxiety and suicide.

Teachers are strongly advised to view the film before making a decision about its suitability for their students.

MARY AND MAX: THE EXHIBITION EDUCATION RESOURCE KIT

About this kit

This kit draws upon the **text panels** from *Mary and Max: The Exhibition*. This panel content is indicated with an outlined text box. Additional background information, questions, worksheets for note-taking activities, discussion points and student tasks are provided to support teachers and students wishing to explore the craft of Adam Elliot.

The kit is arranged into five parts:

Part A – Preparing to visit *Mary and Max: The Exhibition*

Part B – Interviews with Adam Elliot

Part C – Engaging with *Mary and Max: The Exhibition*

Part D – Following up your visit to *Mary and Max: The Exhibition*

Part E – References and Resources

Using this Education Resource Kit

Teachers are encouraged to select aspects of this kit that are relevant to students in their classes.

The interviews with Adam Elliot, provided in Part B of this kit, may be drawn upon to prepare students for their visit to *Mary and Max: The Exhibition*, or alternatively, to extend their thinking following the visit.

Twelve modules are provided in Part C of this kit to help students to explore elements of *Mary and Max: The Exhibition*. It is suggested that students work in pairs or in small groups to explore one or more modules both during and after the visit to the exhibition. Each pair or group could then be challenged to present their responses in an innovative way to the class.

Teachers and students may also draw upon Adam Elliot's website: <http://www.adamelliot.com.au>; along with two key ATOM study guides, *Australian Animation Showcase* by Jo Flack and *Mary and Max* by Marguerite O'Hara, both available from www.metromagazine.com.au

PART A: PREPARING TO VISIT MARY AND MAX: THE EXHIBITION

Exploring the Mary and Max trailer

Go behind-the-scenes of the marvellous miniature world of Adam Elliot's *Mary and Max*.

Oscar®-winning director and writer Adam Elliot in collaboration with ACMI, has developed a unique exhibition, exploring the plasticine world of *Mary and Max* (2009); the chronicle of an unlikely pen-pal friendship between lonely eight-year-old Mary Daisy Dinkle and Max Jerry Horowitz, who has Asperger 's Syndrome and loves chocolate hot dogs.

From the manicured lawns of Mount Waverley to the New York city skyline, *Mary and Max: The Exhibition* is an exclusive behind-the-scenes opportunity to see these wonderful creations up close.

Discover the ingenious artistry of Adam Elliot's stop-motion animation. Items on display include character models, costumes, sketches, sets, storyboards, props (meticulously crafted miniature hand-blown wine glasses, a working typewriter, light bulbs) and footage of the animators at work.

A labour of love by Adam Elliot and long-time collaborator Melanie Coombs, *Mary and Max* premiered as the opening night film of the 2009 Sundance Film Festival and has since won numerous Australian and international awards.

Did you know?

Adam Elliot's short films, *Uncle* (1996), *Cousin* (1998), *Brother* (1999) and *Harvie Krumpet* (2003), have participated in more than five hundred film festivals and won over one hundred awards, including in 2004, the Oscar for best Animated Short Film for *Harvie Krumpet*.

1. a) View the trailer found at the Mary and Max website: <http://www.maryandmax.com>
b) Sketch your favourite scene from the trailer.



2. After viewing the trailer, list three interesting things you discover about *Mary and Max*.

i)
ii)
iii)

3. List three questions you would like to find answers to in relation to the film *Mary and Max*.

i)
ii)
iii)

4. List three questions you would like to find answers to in relation to Adam Elliot or to the production techniques used in the creation of *Mary and Max*.

i)
ii)
iii)

PART B – INTERVIEWS WITH ADAM ELLIOT

1. The Story is the Most Important Thing

1 a) View the *interview with Adam Elliot* (ACMI, 2010, 14:59 mins)
found at: http://www.acmi.net.au/vid_adam_elliot.htm

Oscar®-winning animation director and writer Adam Elliot speaks candidly about his stop-frame animation processes and more importantly about why he makes films. He also talks about challenges he faced during the making of his first feature film, *Mary and Max*.

1 b) After viewing the interview read, discuss and respond to the following:

Adam Elliot coined the term 'clayography' in order to emphasise the integral connection between the careful hands-on craftsmanship of his formal technique, the stories he tells and the characters he brings to life. He describes his instinctive desire for a physical, tactile connection with the animation process and the pleasure of working collaboratively with a team of like-minded artists to bring a story to life.

- What do you think Adam Elliot means by 'clayography'?

- Why does Adam Elliot choose stop-motion animation?

- What examples of different styles of animation does Adam Elliot give?

- Although Adam Elliot talks about different styles of animation, he says it is something else that is important. What is this and why is it important?

Adam Elliot stresses that his distinctive style of animation – the way he tells his story – is secondary to the story-telling process. However, his hand-crafted style of animation undoubtedly enhances both the human dimension of his stories and the pathos of his characters' struggle to live their lives.

- The animated world of *Mary and Max* is a bit wonky with no straight lines or perfect finishes. How do you think this contributes to both the film's story and to its mood?

- Try to imagine what a computer-animated version of *Mary and Max* might look like. How might such a change in the animation form affect the story being told?

As well as delighting in the tactile physical connection that the claymation process offers, Adam Elliot relishes the opportunity to work with other animators.

- What would be the advantages and disadvantages of working collaboratively over a long period of time on such a painstaking process?

Advantages

Disadvantages

- What systems and working practices would you need to have in place for such a project to run smoothly?

2. The Director as Circus Ringmaster

2 a) View the *interview with Adam Elliot* (ACMI, 2010, 2:59mins) found at:
<http://generator.acmi.net.au/makers/animation/director-circus-ringmaster>

Once the storyboard and script of *Mary and Max* was in place, Adam Elliot tells us that the film entered an intensive pre-production stage during which a number of key logistical and artistic decisions had to be made about how the film was going to look (its aesthetic) and the studio, equipment, artists, animators and crew.

This period was the chance to get things right and was a time of intense pressure for Adam Elliot who in his role as director needed to make many important decisions on the spot.

2 b) After viewing the interview read, discuss and respond to the following:

- Why do you think it is important that the script and storyboard are firmly in place or 'locked off' early in the pre-production phase of such a large animation project?

Adam Elliot describes the intense pressure and crippling workload that came with the role of directing *Mary and Max*.

While acknowledging the danger of making a wrong decision about some aspect of the production, Adam suggests his intimate understanding of his characters kept the project on course: 'these characters were very real people to me so, in a way, they directed themselves'.

- Sketch an image that conveys the idea that the characters directed themselves.

- List one or two advantages of a director being able to work with characters and a story that she or he has created.

Advantages

Disadvantages

- What might be some drawbacks of a director being so emotionally connected to a story or to a personal vision?

- Explain what you think is meant by the phrase, 'The Director as Circus Ringmaster'.

3. Recording the voices

3 a) View the interview with Adam Elliot (ACMI, 2010, 2:43 mins) found at:
<http://generator.acmi.net.au/makers/animation/recording-voices>

In most animated films, the characters' voices are recorded first. However, because *Mary and Max* is driven by narration, it was possible to record the voices of individual characters towards the end of the filming process.

Celebrated American actor Philip Seymour Hoffman voiced the character of Max in a sound studio in New York via a remote hook-up.

As well as Philip Seymour Hoffman's voice, *Mary and Max* features the voices of Toni Collette and Eric Bana and it is narrated by Barry Humphries.

Adam Elliot's Academy Award winning short film, *Harvey Krumpet*, was narrated by Geoffrey Rush.

3 b) After viewing the interview read, discuss and respond to the following:

- Why might it be desirable to have well-known actors contribute their voices to an animation production?

Adam Elliot suggests his films are driven by narration. By foregrounding the role of the narrator, his films draw attention to themselves as stories or, perhaps, modern fables.

- The detached quality of the narrator's voice contrasts with the pain experienced by the characters and underlines their loneliness and isolation. Do you agree or disagree? Why?

- Listen to a narrative sequence in *Mary and Max* and analyse the impact of this way of telling the story.

What sequence did you listen to?

Based on this sequence, what is the impact of telling the story in this way?

- Because the characters' voices are used more sparingly in *Mary and Max* than is typical of feature animation films do they make a greater or different kind of impact? Give examples from the film to explain your opinions.

4. The creative style of Adam Elliot

4 a) View the *interview with Adam Elliot* (ACMI, 2010, 3:01 mins)

found at: <http://generator.acmi.net.au/makers/animation/animation-process>

Prior to working on *Mary and Max*, Adam Elliot had been responsible for all of his own animation and therefore had not needed to articulate the fundamentals of his creative style.

Adam Elliot produced designs of varying complexity for all of the 200 character puppets used in the film before handing these drawings over to his team of model-making sculptors.

It was important that the team remain true to Adam Elliot's distinctive 'chunky wonky' style, with its crooked lines and grungy aesthetic. Because the stop motion process is so painstaking, the team typically managed to produce two and a half minutes of animation each week.

4 b) After viewing the interview read, discuss and respond to the following:

- What is the 'style bible'?

- Do you think the process of pinning down the key elements of his creative practice in the 'style bible' would have been a satisfying one for Adam Elliot? Why or why not?

- Why do you think many visual artists might find it hard to talk about their art? (e.g. Tim Burton often chooses to explain his ideas by drawing a picture.)

As interviews with Adam Elliot show, he is extremely good at articulating his ideas and explaining the animation process.

Of the look of *Mary and Max*, Adam Elliot comments: ‘...there were no straight lines, every prop had to look like it had been dropped once, every prop had to look like it had been bought at an op shop and then everything had to be grunged up and aged...’

- Taking note of Elliot’s description of his style, look for these ‘organic’ qualities in a short scene from *Mary and Max*. Write a short, one paragraph, review of the scene.

- Compare the animation in *Mary and Max* with Adam Elliot’s earlier work. Draw and label an example from *Mary and Max* and one of Elliot’s earlier animations (*Uncle*, *Cousin*, *Brother* or *Harvie Krumpet*) to indicate similarities and differences.

Similarities	Differences

5. Characters: Empathy and the Outsider



5 a) View the *interview with Adam Elliot* (ACMI, 2010, 2:47 mins) found at: <http://generator.acmi.net.au/makers/animation/characters-empathy-and-outsider>

Adam Elliot tells stories about outsiders, inviting his audience to empathise with characters and to understand their differences. He appreciates the opportunity that filmmaking offers to educate and inform an audience, but is particularly concerned with making films that connect with people's emotions.

The characters in Adam Elliot's stories struggle to survive in a hostile world, but the bleakness of their existence is tempered by the incidental comedy associated with their everyday lives.

Adam Elliot comments that he finds it fairly easy to make people laugh but far more challenging and rewarding to get an audience to identify with and feel for a character.

Use of exaggerated physical features and distinctive characteristics, along with humour via visual gags, including slapstick, dialogue and other elements of the sound track such as the music and the silences all contribute to help audiences to create meanings.

The seriousness of the content is also balanced through the use of irony.

5 b) After viewing the interview read, discuss and respond to the following:

- In *Mary and Max*, the characters' lives are depicted as simultaneously comic and tragic. Focus on the way this works in one specific scene, and explain how the comedy affects the way you respond to each of the key characters.

Which scene did you consider?

How does the comedy affect your response to each character?

Mary

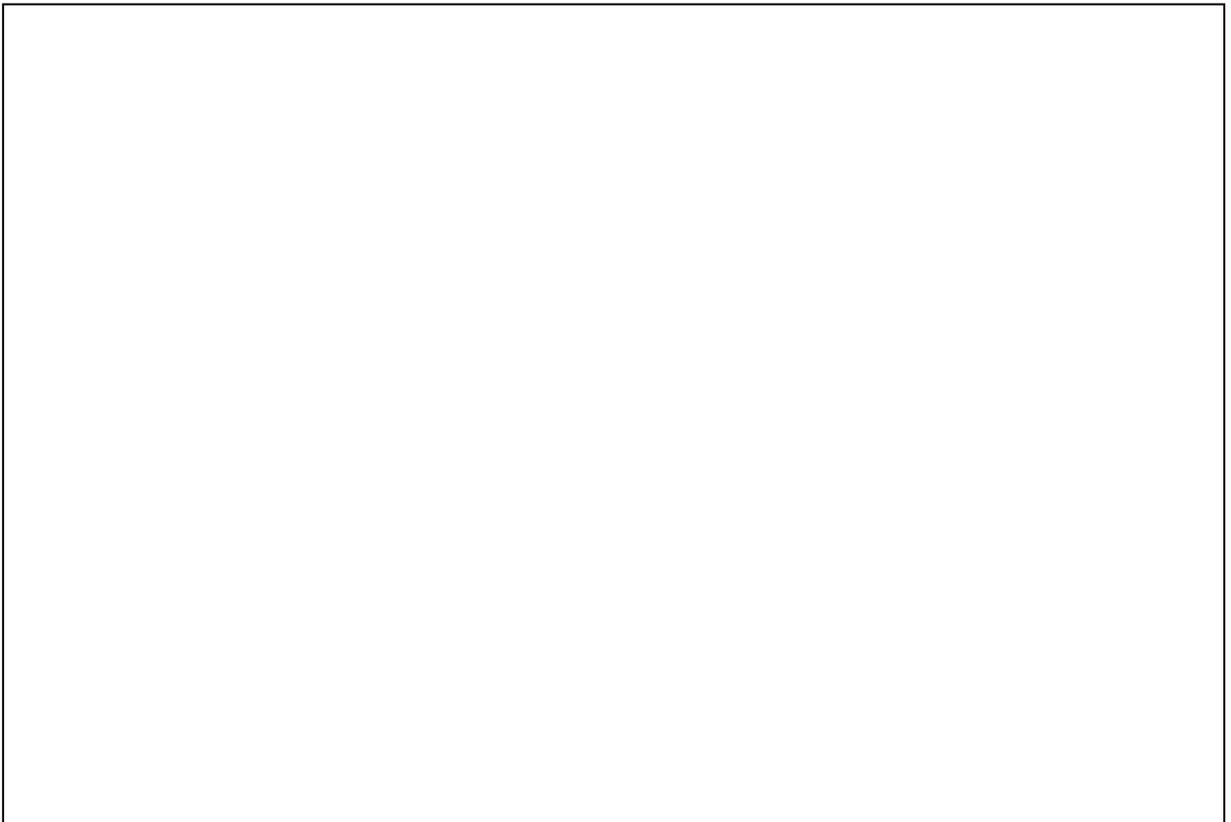
Max

How does Elliot's 'chunky wonky' animation style contribute to his compassionate portrayal of human frailty and imperfection?



The letters written by Mary and Max are a significant feature of the film's story.

- Think about how the way they look becomes almost as important as the ideas they communicate. For instance, what is the effect of the young Mary's wobbly handwriting, her spelling mistakes and her postscripts: 'P.S. 'Have you ever been teased?'' Choose a letter and examine it in terms of the way it is constructed and what it contains.





Adam Elliot attributes his preoccupation with making films about outsiders to feelings of injustice that he had as a child.

Many other artists are similarly motivated by childhood events and experience. You may, for instance, listen to Ivan Sen's comments about his childhood ambivalence about his Aboriginal identity and the way that this early confusion has fed into his films, found at: <http://generator.acmi.net.au/search/node/ivan%20sen> (ACMI, 2009 6:23 minutes)

Adam Elliot is the official patron of *The Other Film Festival* a festival by, with and about people with a disability. For information go to: <http://www.otherfilmfestival.com/>

- Think about Elliot's comments about the power of filmmaking as a means of representing people who feel like outsiders because of a failure of empathy and understanding on the part of others. With this in mind, what do you think is the role of a film festival like *The Other Film Festival*?

PART C – ENGAGING WITH MARY AND MAX: THE EXHIBITION

Module 1: Exploring the introductory panel text



Intro Panel: Inside the Plasticine World of Adam Elliot

Mary and Max is an Australian feature film made using the traditional technique of stop-motion animation. It tells the story of an enduring pen-pal relationship between Mary Dinkle from Melbourne, and Max Horowitz from New York. Every single prop, set and character is a real handcrafted object—nothing was built in a computer! A traditional in-camera approach was taken to ensure the audience knew that what they were watching was definitely not a computer-animated film.

Adam Elliot, who wrote, directed and designed Mary and Max, established two basic rules for the art department. Firstly, no straight lines, and secondly, every prop had to look like it had been dropped once or bought in an op-shop. Based on Adam's drawings, over 200 character puppets were individually sculpted. Thousands of props were designed and then hand built, ranging from a vast New York skyline to a little Spam sandwich, each one reflecting the “chunky wonky” style which defines the look of the film.

The film was shot using eight high-resolution digital stills cameras, with six animators moving the characters and props between each photograph. Approximately 138,480 still photos were taken to create the finished film, which runs at 24 frames per second for 92 minutes. The shoot was 57 weeks long, with the animators completing on average two and a half minutes of footage per week.

This exhibition contains only a small percentage of the materials used to make Mary and Max but offers a glimpse into the artistry, imagination, attention to detail and sheer hard work required to make a feature film by hand.

Read the introductory panel text (previous page) to formulate responses to the following questions and to help you to reflect upon the techniques involved in the creation of *Mary and Max*.

1. *Mary and Max* stats:

- How many animators were involved in creating the film? _____
- How many still photos were taken? _____
- What is the duration of the film? _____
- How long did the film shoot take? _____
- How much footage on average was shot per week? _____
- How many high-resolution digital stills cameras were used to create the film? _____

2. a) What two basic rules did Adam Elliot establish for the art department?

(i)
(ii)

b) How do you think these two rules contributed to the success of *Mary and Max*?

--

3. a) How many character puppets were individually sculpted? _____

b) Do you think the large number of character puppets contributed to the success of *Mary and Max*? Why or why not?

4. a) How is the style that defines the look of *Mary and Max* described?

b) Why do you think it is described in this way?

Module 2: Exploring the opening sequence of Mary and Max

Opening sequence introducing Mary and her world, *Mary and Max* (2009) Duration 8 mins

Mary & Max is a 92 minute stop-motion animation, directed, written and designed by Elliot which took five years to make, including one year of filming.

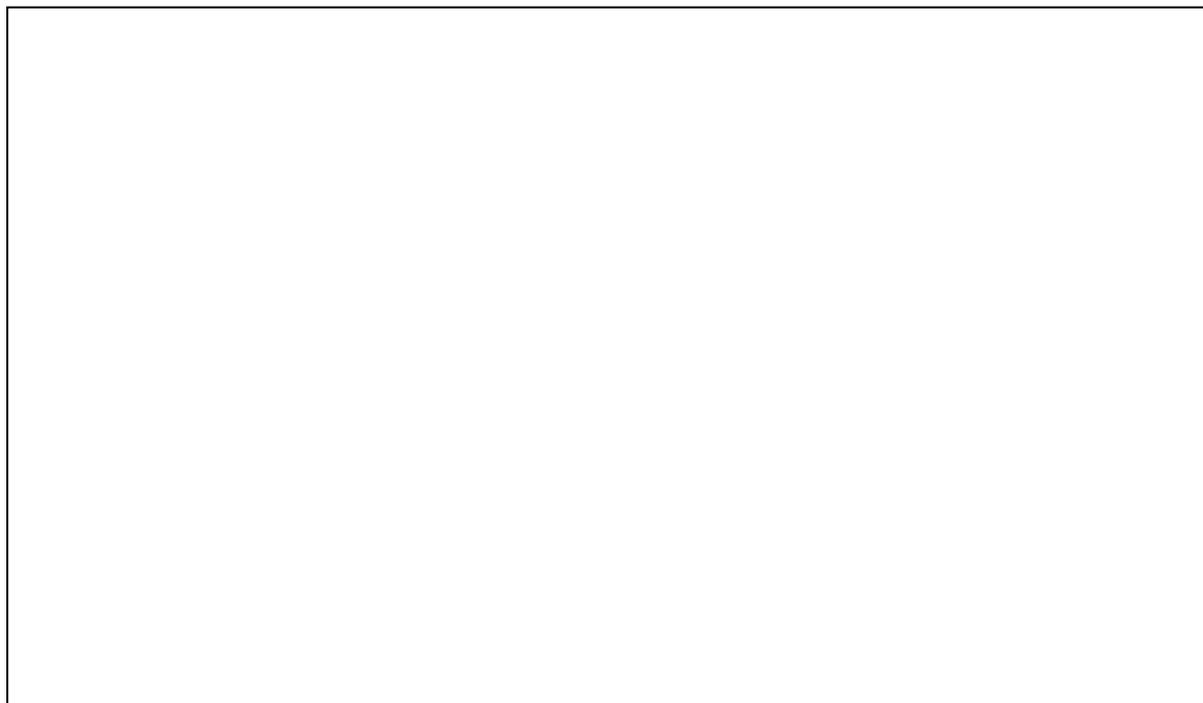
As with Elliot's previous works, which he describes as 'clayographies' (clay animated biographies) *Mary & Max* chronicles two simultaneous life stories: Mary's trip from adolescence to adulthood, and Max's passage from middle to old age, as it explores a bond that survives much more than the ups-and-downs of an average friendship.

Mary & Max is both hilarious and poignant as it takes us on a journey that explores friendship, autism, taxidermy, psychiatry, alcoholism, where babies come from, obesity, kleptomania, sexual differences, trust, copulating dogs, religious differences, agoraphobia and many more of life's surprises.

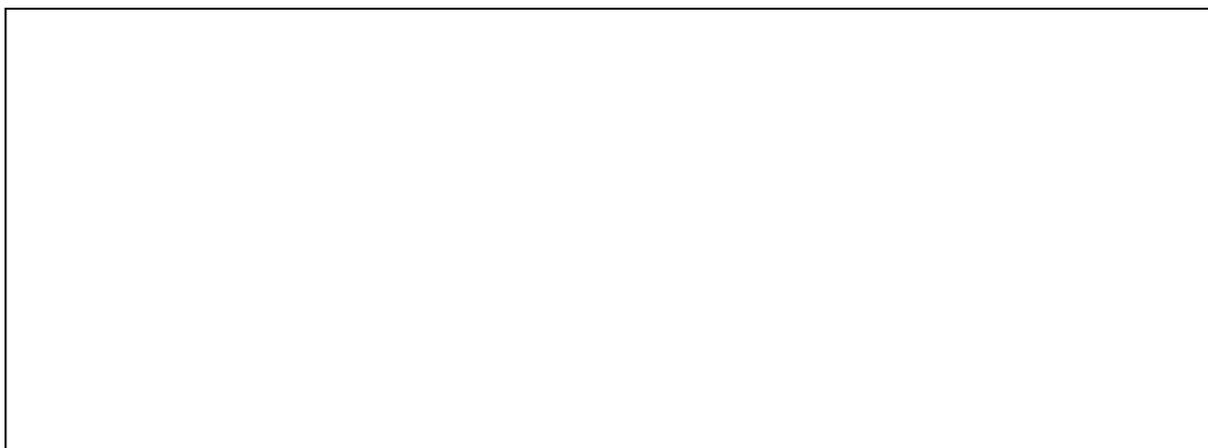
The voice-cast is an all-star affair, drawing on Collette and Hoffman's significant talents as well as narration by Barry Humphries, and other characters voiced by Eric Bana (Damien Popodopolous) and Molly Meldrum (Homeless Man).

When you enter the exhibition, locate and view the opening of the film *Mary and Max* that is playing to help you to respond to the following.

List or draw the characters introduced in the opening sequence



Draw or describe two key settings that are introduced in the opening sequence.



a) What characteristics does Adam Elliot focus on in Mary and Max when he introduces viewers to Mt Waverley, for example, the football on the roof, underwear on the Hills Hoist.



b) Why do you think he selected these items?



Module 3: Meet the filmmakers

Adam Elliot, 2008

Born 1972, Berwick, Australia
Courtesy Melodrama Pictures

Mary and Max Production Crew, 2008

Courtesy Melodrama Pictures



1. a) Examine the photo of Adam Elliot.
b) Imagine you are casting Adam Elliot in a film. Based on this photo, describe the personality your character would have?

2. How did you make use of stereotypes to construct a personality for your character?



3. Examine the photo of the *Mary and Max* production crew. What might be an advantage and a disadvantage of working as part of a team of people of this size?

Advantage

Disadvantage

Module 4: Introducing the key characters in *Mary and Max*

Mary, 2007

Adam Elliot
Pencil, ink and ink-wash on watercolour paper
Courtesy the artist

Max, 2007

Adam Elliot
Pencil, ink and ink-wash on watercolour paper
Courtesy the artist



The designs of Mary and Max were always very vivid in Adam's mind, but he did not begin sketching them until he had finished writing the final draft of the script. Both lead characters are an amalgamation of actual people.

Max is based loosely on Adam's pen-friend in New York to whom he has been writing for over twenty years, and Mary is a kind of self-portrait. Adam has commented that her birthmark is symbolic of his perception of his own inadequacies and imperfections.

The film, *Mary and Max* offers a glimpse into the lives of two very different individuals who find they have much in common as they share aspects of their day-to-day existence with one another.

1. Locate the designs of Mary and Max drawn by Adam Elliot. List or create labelled drawings to show similarities and differences between these two characters.

Similarities	Differences

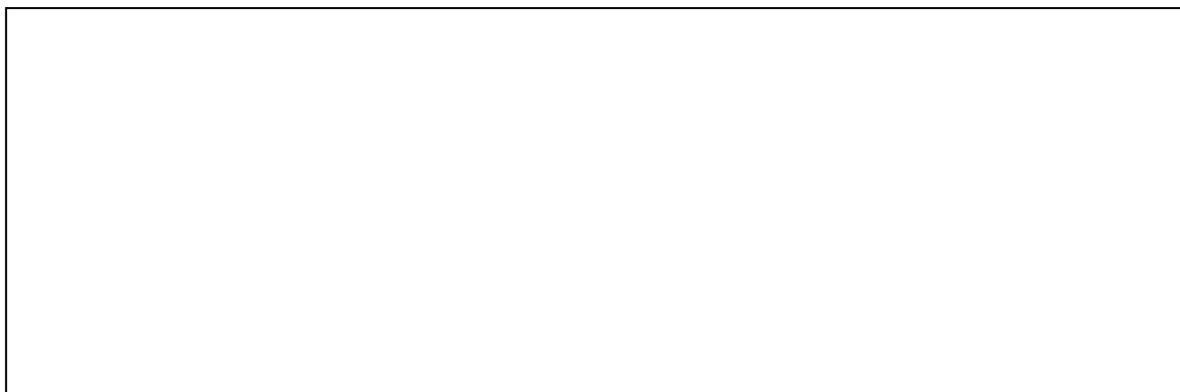
2. Why do you think Adam waited until he had finished writing the final draft of his script before he began sketching the lead characters?



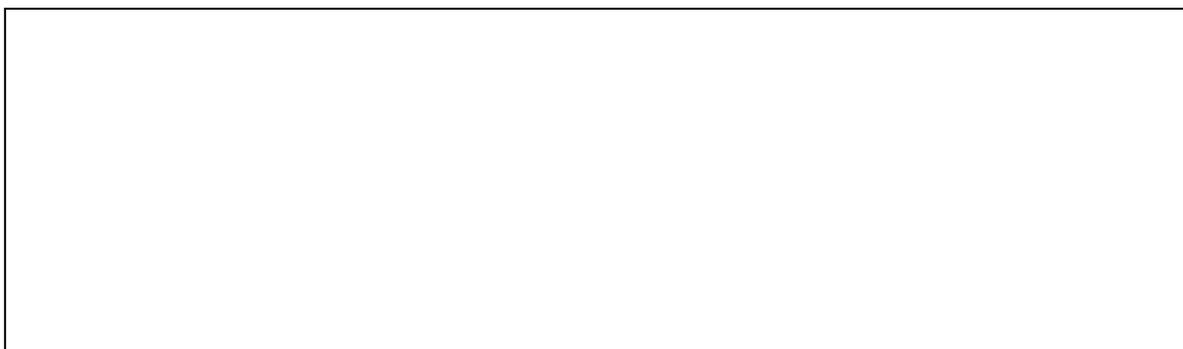
3. Sketch Mary and her mother. Label items that give viewers clues about each character's personality.

--	--

4. As you engage with the exhibition, identify aspects of the lives of Mary and Max, which you think they have in common. Give examples from the film to justify your opinions.



5. Describe Mary's birthmark.



6. What other symbols do you think Adam Elliot has used? How many of these are symbolic of inadequacy and imperfection? Why do you think they have been included??



Module 5: Characters and puppets

Character Puppets

These puppets are a selection of the 212 made for the film from a variety of polymers, clays, plastics and metals. The more complex puppets have fully articulated ball and socket armatures. There were up to a dozen multiples of the lead characters and many of the puppets took a team of artists up to eight weeks each to make.

The puppets are quite delicate, and some sustained damage in the filming process or subsequent handling. Many of the modelling materials also contain waxes and oils which break down over time.

To enable the characters to speak and have expression they needed plasticine replacement mouths that were removed and replaced in every frame. Over 1026 mouths were cast by pouring melted plasticine into rubber moulds. Max and Mary each had over 30 mouths so they could express emotions and speak. 886 plasticine hands with wire skeletons (armatures) were also cast and prepared. 394 individual pupils, the average size of a ladybird, were hand-punched and then had a white sparkly dot painted on them.

73 kilos of plasticine were used to make the mouths, hands and original sculptures of the puppets. Each batch of plasticine had to be perfectly colour-matched and mixed for exact texture, consistency and melting point.

147 tailor-made costumes were designed and created by costume designers Felicity Hardy and Marion Marks. Mary's wedding dress was based on Princess Diana's, and Ivy's jumpsuit was modelled on the photographer Annie Leibowitz's mother's jumpsuit

1. What is an armature?

2. Why might the puppets take up to 8 weeks to make?

3. Why do you think so many mouths were made?

4. What challenges do you think the costume designers faced?

Module 6: Design and storyboards

Time lapse

Art department creating Mt Waverley set

Storyboards

Drawn by Adam Elliot for the opening sequence of *Mary and Max*

Visualisations by Squarei

Melbourne animation and design company who translated Adam's drawings into designs for all the puppets, sets and props

1. What surprised you about the creation of the Mt Waverley set?

2. Choose a scene shown in the storyboards, e.g. Mary at the window waving. Draw it and explain why Adam Elliot may have selected particular shot types, for example, wide, close-up or mid shots.

3. What do you think might be the meaning behind the name of the company, Squarei, that translated Adam Elliot's drawings into designs for all the puppets, sets and props?

Module 7: Props

Small Props

475 miniature props were made—everything from a hand-blown wine glass to a spare pair of glasses for Mary, constructed by an optometrist with actual lenses so her pupils would appear enlarged.

808 miniature Earl Grey tea bag boxes were hand cut, folded, glued, wrapped and air-brushed. At one point, all staff helped create the teabag boxes, with everyone from the producer to the runner having a hand in them.

Every single prop set and character had to be 'aged' so nothing looked new. This was done using an airbrush and dry-brushing techniques.



1. How do you think the miniature props contribute to the story?

2. Why do you think it was important to Adam Elliot that props and characters were 'aged'?

Medium Props

Fitting in with the overall design of the film, Max's world is in black and white tones while Mary's is in shades of brown. Objects from one world maintain their colour when sent into the other world. Both worlds have occasional spot highlights in red.

Apart from the character designs Adam did himself, every other single item in the film was designed on paper first by a team of artists at the Squarei design studios in Carlton. This design process alone took over six months to complete.

3. Why might Adam Elliot have decided to use different colour tones for each main character?

4. What is the effect of objects maintaining their colour even when they are placed in the other character's world?

5. How does the spot highlighting in red contribute to the story?

Vehicles

The vehicles are made from many materials including foam, plaster, fibreglass and wood. Generally anything with wheels is easier to animate, yet in *Mary and Max* many of the vehicles had to perform stunts, which made animating them incredibly tricky.

The Mr. Whippy Van had to be built with full suspension and in a way so that when it crashes into a fence it also crushes and disintegrates. Many of the vehicles were fitted with electrics so their headlights would light up in night shots.



6. Why do you think Adam Elliot is so particular about the detail of even very small props?

7. Select one prop and sketch it in as much detail as possible.

Ethel

Ethel is Mary's pet rooster, who saves the day on many occasions.

Many of the props sets and characters were constructed in two scales. This Ethel puppet is 'large scale' and was built for close-ups and so the animators could create greater expression and movement. Made from plastic and rubber Ethel is fully articulated via a complex steel ball and socket skeleton called an armature. Even her eyelids are animatable!

The sound designers recorded a real rooster (Mr Peck) to capture sounds for Ethel's snores and cock-a-doodle-dos.

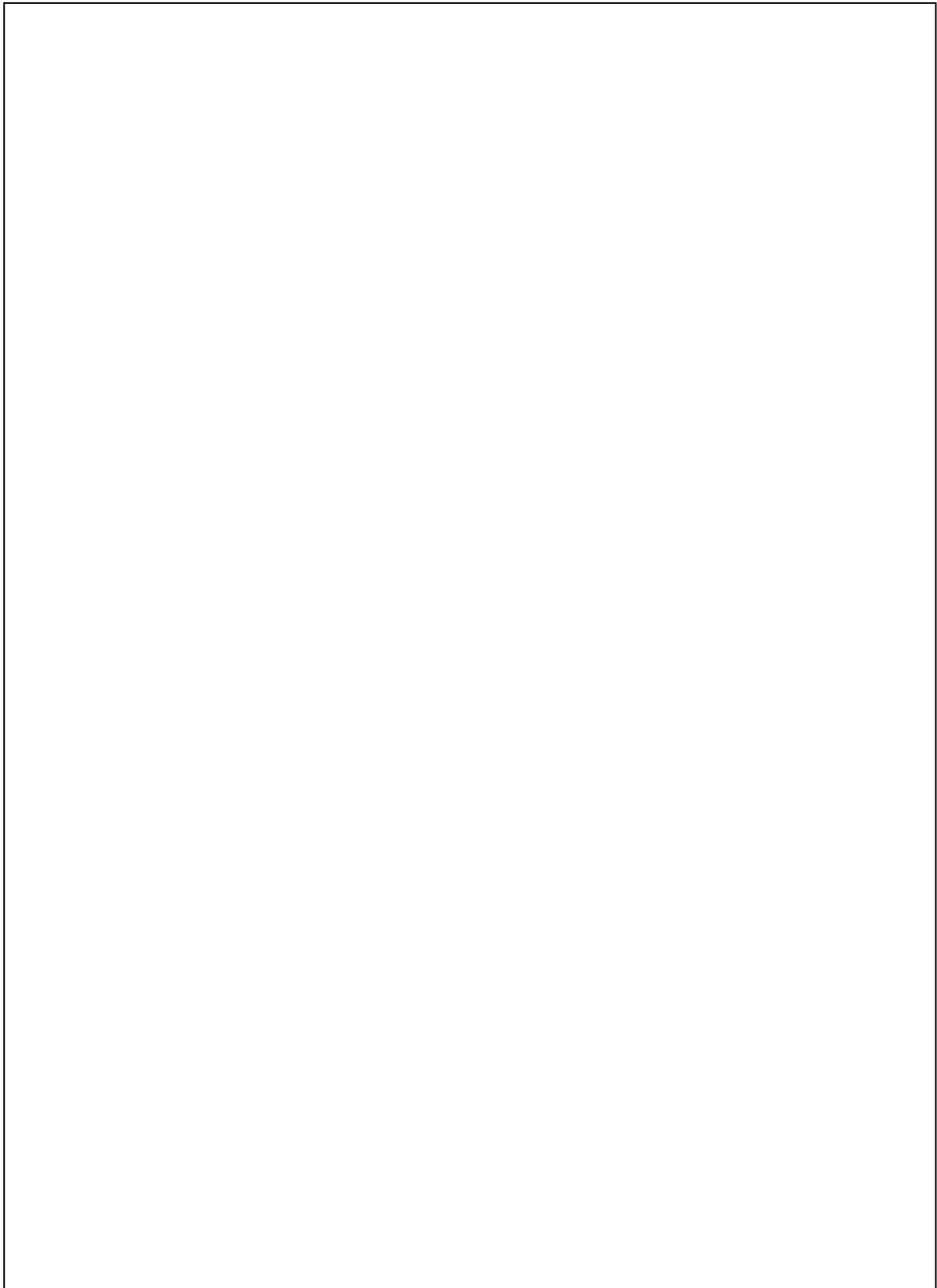


8. What was the name of the real rooster who provided the 'voice' of Ethel' (snores and cock-a-doodle-dos)?

9. Find out why Ethel was created in two scales.

10. What is the term for the complex steel ball and socket skeleton used in Ethel, and other characters, which enables movement to occur?

11. Sketch Ethel, labelling her fully animated parts.



The Noblets

The Noblets is a cartoon series beloved by both Mary and Max. 120 Noblets were made and their creators were given great freedom with their designs, some of which are quite risqué!

Although only a few Noblets feature in close-up, the loving attention to detail is typical of the approach taken by the film's art department.

The Noblets are Adam's homage to *The Smurfs*, which he collected avidly as a child in the 1970s. When Adam's pocket money ran out and he couldn't afford the Smurfs he wanted, he and his brother would make imitation Smurfs like Mary makes Noblets, out of gum-nuts, rocks and other found objects.

12. What are the Noblets? Draw and explain.



13. Why do you think Adam Elliot included the Noblets in *Mary and Max*? Explain the significance of the Noblets.



Module 8: Animation

Making Mary and Max (2009)

Sculpting the characters
 Making Mary chew,
 Adam Elliot demonstrating Mary's movement style
 Mary takes a photograph.

Animation as a form of moving image production has a long history, with simple technologies like the flip book becoming popular in the nineteenth century. Soon innovators began exploring the creative possibilities of animation.

In his 1914 animated work, *Certie the Dinosaur*, Winsor McCay created a character with an appealing personality, paving the way for many successful animal characters.

1. Name three successful animated animal characters.

(i)

(ii)

(iii)

Cel or drawn animation

Traditional animation uses transparent cels, which allow parts of a drawing to be reused. This form of drawn animation dominated much of the twentieth century until computerised animation took over as the form used for most feature film animations.

Stop motion animation

Stop motion animation, using multiple photographs of a series of incremental changes or movements, has a long history and was integral to dramatic special effects sequences in some key early feature films including *King Kong* (Willis O'Brien/Buzz Gibson 1933) and *Jason and the Argonauts* (Ray Harryhausen, 1963).

Claymation

Tim Burton's *Nightmare Before Christmas* and *Corpse Bride* demonstrate the aesthetic and emotional appeal of stop motion puppetry, while the popular Wallace and Gromit characters and stories are animated in the distinctive claymation style of Nick Park and Aardman Animations.

Adam Elliot also creates claymation stories with a very distinct aesthetic, a 'chunky wonky' style.

2. Watch Adam Elliot demonstrate Mary's movement style. How would you describe her movement?

3. Explain the gag about Mary's eyes and the wearing of glasses.

4. Describe how Mary chews. Create a labelled diagram to support your description.

5. What is something new you have learned about *animation*?

6. What is something new you have learned about *claymation*?

Module 9: Creating animated movements

Noodle Kugel Factory

MAX
My second job was at Yiddel's Gourmet
Kosher supplies, where I worked at the machine
that made pre-packaged Noodle Kugels

This set appears in the film for approximately eight seconds.

When animators are working on a sequence with multiple objects moving at once, they sometimes create log notes called a dope-sheet. This reminds them of all the individual props and character parts that have to be moved, either for each frame or at set intervals, so that the movements flow when the images are put together.

This set has many moving parts, including working lights, dials, a pump, the wheels under the conveyer belt and the food chute. It took Tony Lawrence almost three days to complete this eight-second shot.

(Noodle Kugel is a traditional Jewish dish made from egg noodles, cream cheese, eggs, sugar and raisins baked together in the oven)

Animated films are created using everything from drawn pictures, cut-out paper or cardboard, puppets or dolls, clay models and even sand.

Whether an animator creates a moving image story using puppets or clay as in claymation, cut-out animation or traditional cel animation, they all rely on careful timing. In each case the animator must work out how much to move a puppet, change a drawing or other medium in order to create the movement he or she imagined.

In simple terms, animated films involve lots of still images or frames that are displayed in quick succession, at a speed that 'tricks' us into thinking it is a moving image. It works because our brains hold onto each image for a fraction of a second after each image passes.

This phenomenon is known as 'persistence of vision'.

Mary and Max was created using stop motion animation, in which models – characters, props or other objects – are positioned, moved slightly and photographed. This process is repeated seemingly almost endlessly to create the desired movements and generally involves 12 moves for every second of film since film normally runs at 24 frames per second.

1. Sketch the Noodle Kugel Factory.



2. Why might Adam Elliot have included a Noodle Kugel Factory in *Mary and Max*?



3. Why do you think Adam Elliot would have had his animators spend 3 days creating the Noodle Kugel Factory when it represents only 8 seconds of footage in *Mary and Max*?



4. Do you think this 8 seconds is important as part of this 92 minute feature film? Why or why not?



Module 10: In-camera approach

Max's Bathroom

NARRATOR

It had been 6 hours and 12 minutes since Henry the Eighth had passed away and Henry's death had thrown Max's life into disarray. It had become asymmetrical and the sooner he got a new fish the better. Tomorrow he would go to the pet store and get another Henry. Henry the Ninth.

Max has a series of pet fish called Henry, who each meet an unusual death. We see at least one Henry get flushed down the toilet in Max's bathroom.

Creating the illusion of moving liquids in stop motion animation is particularly difficult. The materials used as water in the toilet-flushing scene include cling wrap, hair-gel, lubricant, vaseline and glycerine.

The animator Tony Lawrence who devised and created many of these amazing effects is one of Australia's most ingenious animators. A lot of these tricks could have easily been done in a computer and composited in post-production, but Elliot insisted everything in the film had to be done in a traditional 'in-camera' fashion.



In-camera approach

A traditional in-camera approach refers to the creation of a film using techniques that draw upon the camera. So the look or the effect created is part of the original negative or recording, with no modifications, editing or effects added during post-production.

1. While engaging with the exhibition, list examples from *Mary and Max* where interesting looks or effects have been created in-camera.

2. a) Is the traditional in-camera approach successful in conveying the idea to the audience that *Mary and Max* is not a computer-animated film?

- b) Why do you think this? Draw or describe three or four examples to support your opinion.

Module 11: Artistic practice and meaning

Mary and Max (2009)

Max's first letter to Mary (9 mins)

Making Mary and Max (2009)

Creating the New York set
Adam Elliot demonstrates Max's movement style
Making Max sweat
Creating the smoking fish
Moving Max's eyes
Post-production processes

Time Lapse

Noodle Kugel factory
Max typing
Max and Lovers in the park



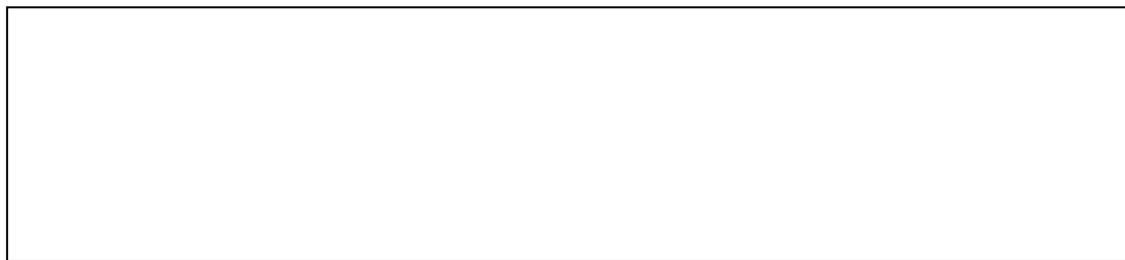
While we watch and listen as Max types his first letter to Mary, we learn much about Max. List three key things you learn in this sequence.

- (i)
- (ii)
- (iii)

creating the New York set?



3. What do you discover about Adam Elliot when he demonstrates Max's movements?



4. Use labelled diagrams to explain the process of creating the moving sweat using glycerol.



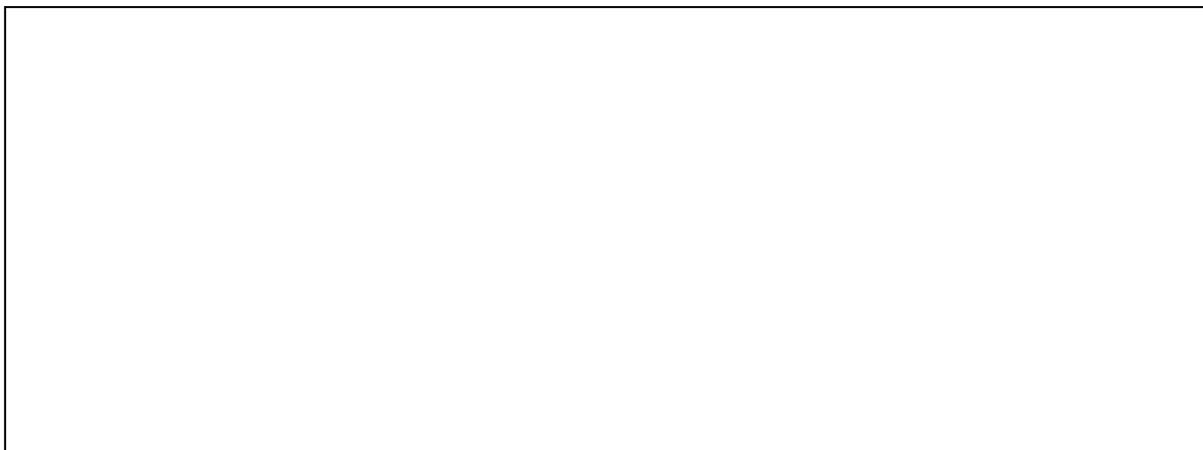


5. Use labelled diagrams to help you to describe the process used to create the smoking fish.

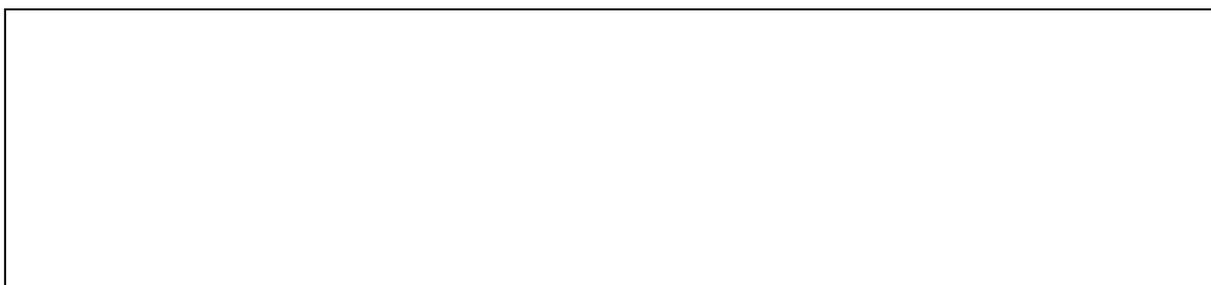
6. Compare and contrast the typing of the letter, Max walking to the Psychiatrist, then Max reading as he types.

7. What visual gags are evident in these scenes?

8. What relationships exist between what is shown on the screen and the soundtrack? Select a scene and consider the music, dialogue and sound effects.



9. What do you think Adam Elliot might want people to think about in relation to Asperger's and Max's anxieties?



10. Why do you think this?



Module 12: Symbolism, metaphor and mise-en-scène

Mary's Loungeroom

NARRATOR

Loaded up with bizarre forms of chocolate
their letters flew thick and fast between
the continents...

Each nourished the other and as Mary grew
taller, Max grew wider, their friendship
becoming stronger than the glue on Mary's
Noblets.

As the years pass Mary grows into a young woman and marries Damian Popodopolous. Full of new-found confidence Mary studies Psychology at university and writes her thesis 'Dissecting the Asperger's Mind' based on her friendship with Max. Max feels so hurt, 'confuzzled' and betrayed he tears the M key from his typewriter and sends it to Mary, who sinks into a deep depression. Their friendship is eventually revived when Mary sends Max a can of condensed milk inscribed with the word 'Sorry', and Max sends his entire Noblet collection as a sign of forgiveness.

Mary's lounge room is based loosely on Adam's own lounge room from his childhood home in Mt Waverley. It has a 'rumpus room' quality with fake timber wall panelling, a 'dogs playing poker' painting, and the iconic kidney shaped coffee table.

Darren Burgess who animated the Que-Sera Sera dream sequence created one of the most visually spectacular scenes in the film and said it was the most challenging scene he had ever attempted in his twenty-year career!

SYMBOLISM AND METAPHOR

Symbolism: something concrete that stands for a larger and more abstract idea (e.g. a dead flower may symbolise mortality) or the attribution of symbolic meaning or character to something.

Metaphor: a figure of speech, word or phrase applied to an object or action which it does not literally denote in order to imply a resemblance (eg 'ship of the desert' referring to a camel).

In film, symbolism and metaphor help to represent meanings throughout the narrative, particularly through production design. We interpret and create meaning using the tools of semiotics and shared cultural signs, or codes and conventions of the moving image represented via images and sounds.

Put simply, think about how you come to understand or create meaning. What visual or aural signs did you read? What did these signify? Think in terms of denotation and connotation. Denotation is what the sign depicts and connotation is what we bring to the sign, or how we interpret it. For example, when we examine *Mary and Max* we see the importance of colour and tonal range in conveying emotions and other meanings. Colour, lighting and shapes work together to convey the themes and ideas of the film.

MISE-EN-SCÈNE

Mise-en-scène is an expression related to the design aspects of a film (or theatre) production. It refers to all that appears in the frame, or is seen through the camera lens, including the arrangement or positioning and movement of actors and objects. More specifically it refers to the composition within the frame.

The director of a film is generally responsible for what is 'put in the scene' or 'placed on the stage'.

All of the elements of mise-en-scène interact graphically to create overall composition. The mise-en-scène invites a 'preferred reading or response' from the audience. Key aspects of mise-en-scène include, but are not limited to – composition, sets, props, actors, costumes and lighting.



Décor and Production Design (setting, sets, props)

An important element of 'putting in the scene' is the setting itself, along with the placement of objects or décor within it. Décor can be used to amplify character, emotion or the dominant mood. Production Design is related to the overall look of the film.

Lighting and Colour (related also to Production Design)

The intensity, direction and quality of lighting can be central to the way an image is perceived. It can affect colours in terms of hue and depth. Lighting, colour and design can be used to establish the tone or mood of a scene and to focus attention on particular elements of the composition.



Actor's (casting, action and performance – movement or blocking)

Characters do not simply exist within a setting but rather form visual elements that merge with the setting. (Bordwell and Thompson)

This includes facial expressions, gestures and other movement. Styles of performance vary according to historical and cultural influences and traditions. In more recent times the early melodramatic styles, arising from 19th century theatre, have made way for a relatively naturalistic style, particularly in western cinema.

Costuming and Make-up

Along with mood and tone, costume can be used to signify time periods, genre, and to make clear distinctions between characters.

Framing (Camera position and movement)

All that appears in the frame is significant to the film; equally important is what is left out of the frame. The Director can emphasise relationships between actors and objects within the frame and focus audience attention through the arrangement and performance of actors and all other objects within the frame, along with the selection and use of sets and lighting.

Space

The camera can be used to affect depth, proximity, size and proportions of places and objects in a film. Lighting and décor can also be used to affect relationships between elements in the diegetic world.

Diagetic sound

This is sound that emanates from the scene, not extraneous sound such as a voice-over or music that is not being played within the scene.

Max's Lounge Room

Max's Lounge Room

It is now time for me to go to my over-eaters anonymous meeting. There is a woman there called Marjorie Buttersworth who confuzzles me. She kisses me without my permission. So tonight I have decided to rub onions underneath my armpits to repel her.

Your friend in America, Max Jerry Horowitz.

Ps please find enclosed some chocolate covered ants I found at the deli.

Pps Not much has happened since I last wrote except for my manslaughter charges, Lotto win, and Ivy's death.

Max's Apartment is the set that was used most often in the film, and the walls and floor can be removed to allow the camera inside the room.

Cinematographer Gerald Thompson and his camera team had to find new and visually stunning ways to shoot the hundreds of shots of Max typing.

John Lewis, Dik Jarman and Craig Ross were given the very difficult task of animating Max, whose movements were limited by the shape of his body. For example, because of his enormous weight, Max is unable to touch the top of his head or fold his arms!

Max, however, was designed so that he could type freely, and his Underwood typewriter took prop maker Roger Ferdinando almost eight weeks to build. Each key is fully functional, making the typewriter one of the most complex and intricate props in the film.

Adam wanted Max's apartment to have an art deco flavour and to be very sparse and minimal to reflect Max's melancholy. Art Director Craig Fison, along with the design team from Squarei spent hundreds of hours researching every aspect of New York to achieve the authentic and enchanting look Adam was after.

1. Use labelled diagrams to compare Max's lounge room with Mary's lounge room.

Max's Lounge Room

Mary's Lounge Room

List features that help to create a sense of melancholy in both the sets and the characters.

Mary		Max
Sets		
Characters/Performance		

Colour

3. What colours are evident in each of the sets?

Mary's Lounge room
Max's Lounge room

4. What do you think is the significance of the selected colours?

--

5. Explain why Adam Elliot may have decided to use a limited and muted palette of colours.

--

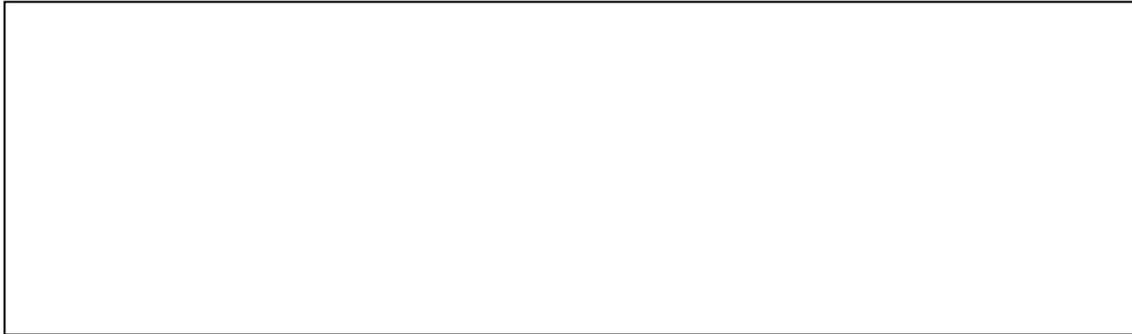
6. How does the use of colour contribute to the mood and atmosphere surrounding each character?

Mary
Max

7. What would be the key colour that would represent your life? Why?



8. Create your colour palette.



Lighting

9. Explain how lighting is used to create meanings in *Mary and Max*, for example, through use of bright lighting and use of dreary or dim lighting.



Production Design

10. Select one of the sets (Mary's Lounge Room or Max's Lounge Room). Draw or list 3 props that provide information about the location, in terms of time and place, in which Mary and Max is set.



11. Consider the technology evident in *Mary and Max*. What does the film suggest about 20th century lifestyles?

12. What evidence do you see of similarities and difference between communication strategies used by both characters, Mary and Max, and those used today?

13. What do you think it would have been like living in Mary or Max's house at this time? Why do you think that?

Mary
Max

14. Comment on similarities and differences between suburban Melbourne vs New York during the 1970s to the 1990s as they are portrayed in *Mary and Max*.

Courtroom

MAX
 Jurors are outstanding members of the
 Community ... who haven't murdered anybody.
 I made it to the short list for a trial,
 where a man killed all his friends ... at
 his own surprise birthday party.

This set appears twice in the film, firstly as Max recalls his time on jury duty in a letter to Mary, and secondly when he is charged with manslaughter, after his air conditioner falls from his apartment to the street below, accidentally killing a mime artist!

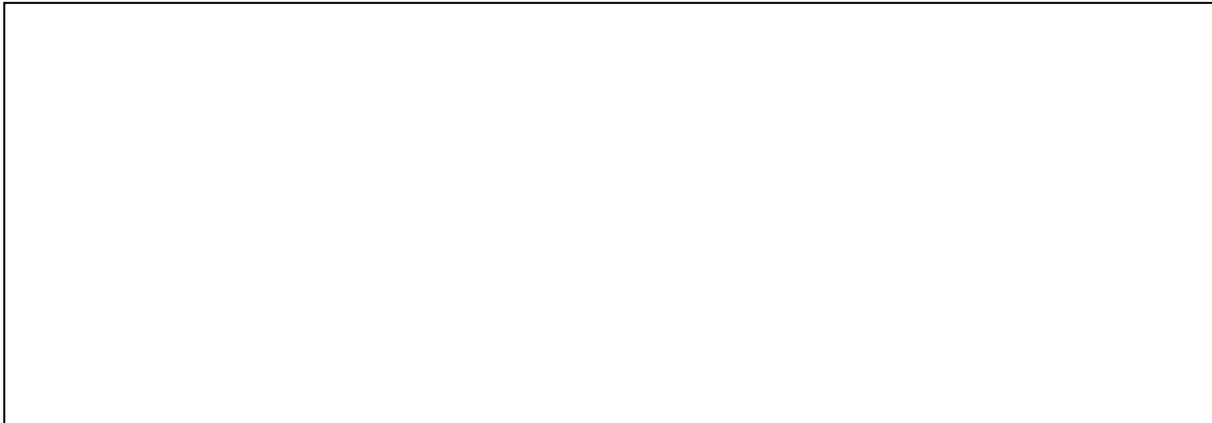
American Judges don't wear wigs, but Adam chose to exercise his right to artistic licence with this character design.

The animator Craig Ross had the enormous challenge of animating the twelve jurors simultaneously. Adam insisted each character had to be doing something humorous, which made Craig's job even harder!



1. Why is Max's dialogue (above) ironic?

2. Draw or describe the courtroom scene in *Mary and Max*.



3. Identify the humorous thing each juror was doing. List or draw your response.



4. Why do you think Adam insisted on each juror doing something humorous?

5. What is the mood or atmosphere of the scene?

How have the animators constructed mood or atmosphere? Use examples to support your opinion, considering for example, light and shadows.

Module 15: Clayographies

Noel's Shed

MARY

In your letter you said you had no friends, well... neither do I. Yesterday at school Bernie Clifford weed on my Spam sandwich. He called me Poo Face cause of my birthmark. I wish I could peel it off like a band-aid. He also laughed cause I had no buttons. Ethel picked them off and Mum couldn't thread a needle cause she'd been testing the sherry, so she used pegs instead. When I got home I climbed into my secret place till dinner time...

Have you ever been teased? Can you help me?

Noel's Shed is one of the saddest places in the film. It's where Mary's father stuffs dead birds, where Mary hides from the world, and where Mary's mother Vera retreats to mourn Noel's death.

Animator Jason Lynch created many of these poignant scenes using extremely subtle movements and micro-expressions to convey a range of emotions.

Elliot's films have often featured innocent characters who are vulnerable to the cruelties of the world, as he explains:

I write from the heart, with a desire for a compassionate connection with audiences. I do not write for a specific niche audience, but rather try to tell stories that are universal. I imagine that I am telling the story of someone's life to a very large group of very diverse people from many various countries around an enormous campfire. I try to keep everyone engaged by peppering the story with moments of humour and melancholy. I attempt to mix and balance comedy and tragedy; humour and pathos in a rhythmic and potent manner. With each film I try and arouse ALL the senses; not just the ears and eyes! I see that my job is to 'nourish the audience in a compost of sensory stimulation.'

1. List strategies used by the animators to elicit empathy amongst viewers for Mary and Max.

2. Do you think Adam Elliot is successful in creating a compassionate connection with audiences? Why or why not? Give an example to support your opinion.

3. Do you agree that Adam Elliot's stories are universal? Explain your opinion by referring to one or more of his films (Mary and Max, Uncle, Cousin, Brother, Harvie Krumpet).

4. Do you think Adam Elliot's films 'nourish the audience in a compost of sensory stimulation'? What does this mean?

PART D:FOLLOWING UP YOUR VISIT TO MARY AND MAX: THE EXHIBITION

ANIMATION AS A STORYTELLING TOOL

Explore advantages and disadvantages of using animation as a storytelling tool compared with live action, for example, in relation to production time, ability to engage an audience, type of action that can be included, settings that can be used, the look that can be achieved, costs and so on.

	ADVANTAGES	DISADVANTAGES
Production time		
Engaging an audience		
Type of action		
Settings		
The 'look'		
Costs		

PLAN AN ANIMATED MOVEMENT

Imagine you wanted Mary to wave to Max.

Think about the movement you wish to create. Try it out for yourself. Do it again, and time the movement.

Let's say it took 1/3 second to move your hand across your body in a wave motion. To calculate how this would translate to film you need to know that 24 frames are projected per second for film or 25 frames per second for video or digital stories. So the calculation would be 24 or 25 frames divided by 1/3, that is, the desired movement needs to be shown in about 8 frames.

Use the storyboard (below) to sketch how this wave might be shown or try another idea, e.g.

- a growing plant
- a balloon being blown up until it bursts
- an analogue clock with turning hands
- a car driving past several houses.

CREATE A STOP MOTION CHARACTER AND SET

1. a) Would Mary and Max have been successful if the hand built 'chunky wonky' style of Adam Elliot had been replaced by a smoother, more perfect style?

b) Why do you think this? Justify your ideas.

2. Develop a short story based on two key characters and a world that reflects your childhood and turn those ideas into a short 30-60 second stop motion animation. Jot your ideas here:

Before you begin to animate your story you need to think about:

- What type of animation will you make? How will you make it? What equipment will you need?
- What frame rates will you use to create fluidity and movement that is believable to your audience? (Some websites that can assist you with this, are provided in Part E of this kit))
- What would the set and characters look like? Will you establish a personal 'style' of animation?
- What materials will you use?
- How will you light it?

You will also need to consider:

- Colour palette and tonal range of your set
- Shadows created by lighting
- Shapes and lines in your sets and mise-en-scene
- Patterns and repetition in your design.

CLOSE ANALYSIS

Characterisation: *Mary and Max*, a real-life pen pal relationship?

Mary and Max tells a story about the imperfection of being human. Incredibly we become engrossed in the lives of these characters fashioned from lumps of clay.

A story that is full of pathos that swings from tender emotional moments, to explorations of real life issues such as bullying, disability, alcoholism and loneliness that are often brutal and sad, while at other times morbidly comedic.

CHARACTER MAPPING OR PROFILE

A character mapping exercise can often help us to understand how the filmmakers have developed a character.

1. View the film *Mary and Max*, then use a table, such as the one on the following page, to record notes about the personality of Mary and of Max.
2. You might also consider secondary characters, including:
 - Ivy
 - Dr Hazelhof
 - Grandpoppy Ralph
 - Noel Dingle
 - Damien Popodopoulos
 - Mary's rooster, Ethel
 - Max's cat

Think about how each character is represented then discuss:

- Appearance/physical attributes: How is the character presented visually via facial look, body shape, costuming? What does it suggest about the character?
- Design: How does the design of the character help to achieve believability? How does design encourage the audience to feel empathy for the character?
- Voice: How do the character's words and voice (tone, inflection, and timbre) help to establish the character? What does it suggest about the character?
- Action: How do the character's action and behaviours help to establish the character? What other personal traits are evident? Describe the character's motivations, fears and desires.
- How does the character relate to the other main character or to other characters? What effects does the character's behaviour have? Describe the character's role in the overall storyline.
- Framing: Where is the character placed in the frame? What else is placed in the frame with the character? What shot types and angles are used?

CHARACTER PROFILE

Character design	Mary	Max
Physical appearance - key features of character's face and hair		
Physical appearance - key features of character's body		
Costume		
Sound of the voice (tone, inflection, timbre)		
Key phrases		
Key movements, mannerisms, gestures		
Other personal traits		
Motivations, fears, desires		
Relationships with other characters		
Effects of the character's behaviour		

Close Analysis: Narrative

SETTING

- How does the setting relate to the narrative? In other words, why has a background, location or set for a particular scene/sequence been chosen?
- Are any of the props significant?
- How do the mood and ambience of the setting create meanings for an audience?

STRUCTURING OF TIME

- Investigate how the narrative manipulates time. How are events ordered? For instance, are events chronological or is use made of flashback or flash forward?
- Explore the duration of events, that is, the expansion or contraction of time.
- How frequently are events or scenes shown in comparison with their presumed occurrence and existence?

POINT OF VIEW (POV) FROM WHICH THE NARRATIVE IS PRESENTED

- From whose POV is the narrative presented?
- Do we see the narrative through one character's eyes or more than one? Why? What are the effects of this?
- Is the POV other than that of the characters? To what effect?
- What story information is given or withheld at different points in the narrative?
- What effect does this have? How is POV technically communicated to an audience?

CAUSE AND EFFECT

- What motivates the characters?
- What events are motivated by character?
- If there are natural or supernatural causes, what are their consequences?

OPENING AND CLOSURE

- Are conflicts, motivations and issues resolved or unresolved by the end of the film?
- What expectations are established in the beginning and resolved or remain unresolved at the end?
- How are character developments, themes/issues and resolutions dealt with in the closing sequences?

NARRATION

- Why do we have a narrator?
- Comment on the tone and the rhythm of the narration.

THEMES AND ISSUES

- What themes and issues are introduced and how are they developed and explored?
- Are certain themes and issues exclusively related to particular characters? How do the themes and issues work in with the storyline?

Close Analysis: Production Elements

CAMERA WORK

- Angle (high, low, eye level, aerial) and movement of shots (shot reverse shot, panning, tracking, tilting).
- Distance of shots (i.e. close-up, mid shots, long shots and extremes of this), shot size and camera movement.
- Duration of shot on screen: what impact/effect does the concentration of the length of a shot have on the audience?
- What meaning is created for an audience by using different shot sizes, movement and camera angles?
- How does the camerawork inform the audience about a character's motivations, create identification with characters and communicate their relationship to the story?
- How is an audience's engagement with the narrative created by the choice of camerawork?

LIGHTING

- Is the lighting natural/artificial, realistic or expressive. How does it set a mood or create an atmosphere?
- Why and how effective is this?
- Are any lighting effects used, for example, to emphasis an object, a character or an action? Explain.

MISE-EN-SCENE

The way each shot is composed within the frame has an effect on the way we respond to the narrative. Composition relates to the production elements and story elements.

Look at how the following aspects of composition are arranged in particular scenes or in a sequence:

- Setting and set design
- Costumes and objects
- Colours
- Arrangement and movement within the frame
- Spatial relations between objects and characters (spacing)
- Framing: how is the shot framed, that is how is it positioned within the square of the frame?

FREEZE-FRAME A SCENE

For a clear analysis of mise-en-scène, freeze-frame on a selected frame of a scene and discuss the mise-en-scene and its relationship to the narrative. Consider the following in your discussion and analysis:

- Lighting: how are shadows and patterns used to create mood, atmosphere and meanings?
- Framing: What is in the frame? What has been left out?
- Placement of objects: How are objects placed within the frame and why?
- Setting/location: Where is the action located and why?
- Where are the characters placed within the frame and why?

In his animations, Elliot creates a unique world in which to situate his characters and their stories. The world of Nick Park's *Wallace and Gromit* is similarly distinctive.

- Compare a number of different frames from *Mary and Max* with some from one of Nick Parke's animations.
- Consider the *mise en scène* – in other words the way that each of these directors has 'staged the event' for the camera.

EDITING

- How does placement, timing, and the rhythm of the editing affect the mood of a sequence and of the overall film?
- How do the shots relate to each other visually and aurally – image to image, sound to sound, image to sound?

SOUND

Listen to the sound of the film. How is atmosphere created via the sound design? Consider the music, sound effects (including atmospheric sound) and what they convey. Look at the way any dialogue or narration is recorded.

- How does the soundtrack relate to the storylines, themes and issues of the narrative, characters and plot? Focus on both diegetic and non-diegetic sound.
- Reflect on the use of music – how does it add to the meanings associated with each character?
- How has music been used to support themes?
- How do the layers (atmosphere, dialogue, sound effects and music) work together to create the sound design?
- Are there any special or unconventional applications and explorations of sound design? Explain.

ACTING/PERFORMANCE

- How does the actor's performance (puppet's action and voice) contribute to the characterisation?
- Does the actor (puppet's action and voice) bring associations from outside the narrative to the character?
- What effect does this create in terms of character believability/acceptance?
- Does an audience have empathy for the characters? How is this achieved?
- Are there characters who repel the audience? Why?

EXPLORING ADAM ELLIOT'S ARTISTIC PRACTICE

How we respond and engage with art is subjective and individual. Artworks inspire, challenge, and stimulate our senses and our feelings. We observe the content of the artwork before us, but it is the sensation of experiencing the artwork that triggers ideas, thoughts and emotions in us, which ultimately draws us in and leaves a lasting impression.

Discussion points

When looking at the Adam Elliot's films consider and explore the following:

CHARACTERS

- Focus on the look of the two main characters. Consider what meanings an audience takes from their construction. Consider the shapes of the faces and bodies, appearance and gestures.

SUBJECT MATTER

- What is happening? Where? To whom? When?

TECHNIQUE

- What materials are used? How? Why?

FORM AND DESIGN ELEMENTS

- Line, colour, tone or shading, shape, texture, mass, volume, space

FORM AND PRINCIPLES OF DESIGN

- Unity, balance, harmony, contrast, repetition, scale, focal point, lighting, organisation of composition
- Composition and design elements: Line and shape, straight lines, curved lines, colour, rule of thirds, space
- Expression

STYLE

Style can be interpreted in various contexts:

- A personal style, which may be the mark of the artist with recurring motifs, ideas, shapes, colours, subject matter, technique.
- A historical style, which represents a style of working identifiable with a certain time, fashion, beliefs, and interests of a particular community.
- A cultural or sub-cultural style, such as belonging to or representing particular cultural and sub-cultural identities, customs, mores of a class, race, gender, social group.
- Think about what the purpose may be: to inform, to challenge, to educate, to shock, to suggest.
- How does the work address the viewer: directly, indirectly, via an emotional representation such as anger, happiness, torment, etc.?
- How is the subject matter expressed: is the work whimsical, assertive, timid, reflective, daring, humorous, confusing?

Close Analysis task

Write either a short answer response (300–500 words) or an extended response (500–750 words) related to three key scenes from *Mary and Max*.

Adopt a close analysis approach. This is when you watch the selected sequences several times and focus on specifics in detail.

- Be coherent and direct.
- Use direct examples to illustrate your analysis (you may draw, use flow charts, concept maps etc).
- Begin by making notes. You can use a table, such as the one that follows on the next page, to record direct examples from the chosen sequences of the film.
-

Use your notes related to story and production elements to explain how Adam Elliot's artistic practice allows viewers to create meanings. Draw connections between the elements in your notes from the table.

Production Elements

ELEMENT	SCENE/SEQUENCE	DESCRIPTION OF ELEMENT	EXAMPLE
Sound Design			
Editing (pace & rhythm)			
Mise-en-scene			
Camera Placement (shots, angles, movement)			
Special Effects			
Lighting			
Character/s			
Themes/Issues			
Setting			
Structure of time			
Cause and effect			
Point of view			

Mary and Max: Exploring themes

1. View the film, *Mary and Max*, with a view to identifying scenes that illustrate one or more key themes. These may include:

- Identity
 - individuality, similarities and differences, being different
 - uniqueness of ordinary individuals
 - belonging and identity
 - ability/disability
 - difficulties associated with disability
- Rites of passage
 - childhood – adolescence – adulthood
 - middle – old age
- Loneliness
- Bullying
- Resilience, connectedness
- Tolerance, acceptance, understanding
- Personal issues (alcoholism, agoraphobia, depression, anxiety, suicide)
- Friendship, loyalty
 - What makes a friend?
 - How can friendships be nurtured?
 - Surviving when friendships or relationships are tested
- Fatalism, for example, que sera sera- ‘whatever will be, will be’ (NB This reference is reflected in a scene related to attempted suicide in *Mary and Max*).

2. Identify the themes of *Mary and Max* and discuss how these themes are established in the opening sequences, explored throughout the narrative and then resolved in the conclusion.

- What role do the letters play in progressing the themes and issues of the narrative? Explain.
- How is the mood of *Mary and Max* conveyed? What production elements allow the mood to be conveyed? Discuss.
- Could it be argued that *Mary and Max* is a positive film? Discuss.

3. Use the template, such as the one on the following page, to explore thematic ideas in one or more key scenes from *Mary and Max*.

Exploring themes: *Mary and Max*

Describe the scene?

What themes are explored in the scene?

Provide examples of how the animators convey, portray or represent each theme.

Reflection - clayographies

Adam Elliot coined the term 'clayography' (clay + animated + biographies) in order to emphasise the integral connection between the careful hands-on craftsmanship of his formal technique and the stories that he tells and characters that he brings to life.

He describes his desire for a physical, tactile connection with the animation process and the pleasure of working collaboratively with a team of like-minded artists to bring a story to life. You can listen to him talk about this at:

<http://generator.acmi.net.au/makers/animation/story-most-important-thing>

1. What do you discover about Adam' Elliot's ideas about biography and clayography?

2. What is a biography?

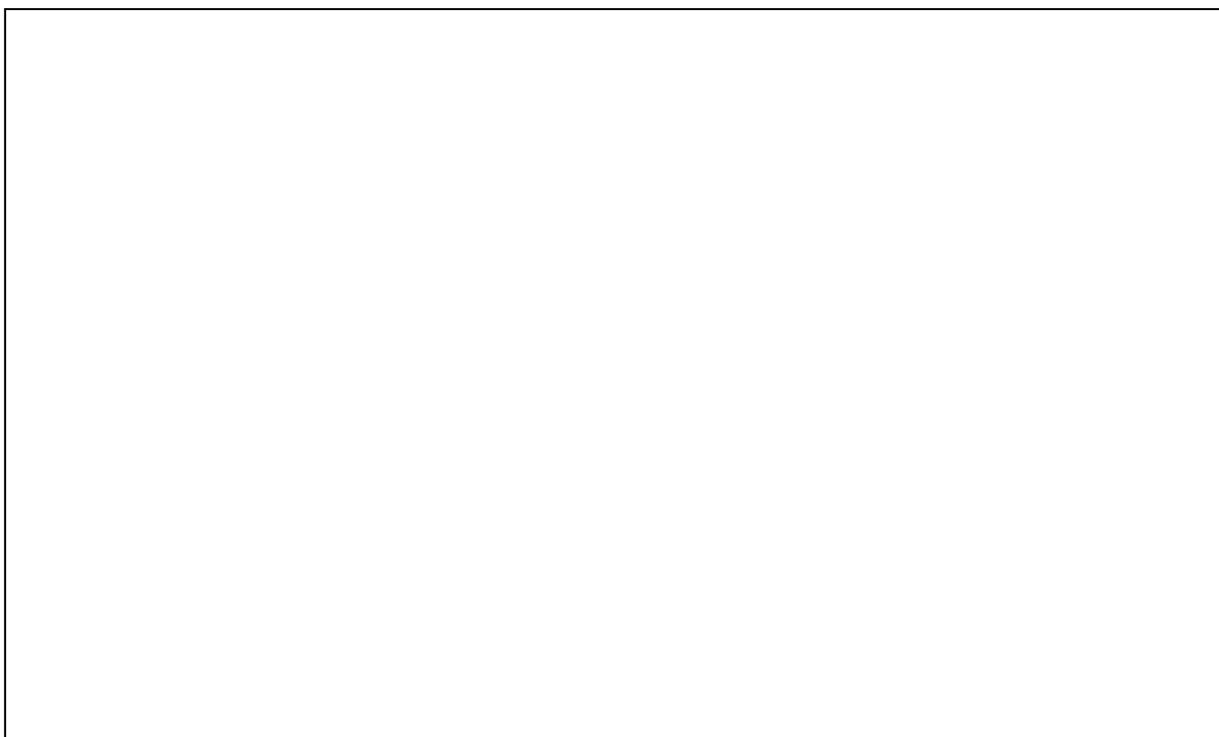
3. Explain how Adam Elliot uses the features of biographies in his films.

4. Make notes, then write a short biography (approx. 250 words) to share with the class describing a few key aspects of your life e.g. family and friends, daily routines, hobbies and interests, favourite foods, strengths, weaknesses.

Notes



Biography



PART E: REFERENCES AND RESOURCES

Digital

Aardman Animation

<http://www.aardman.com>

This site provides a studio tour that gives some insight into the animation work done at the Aardman studio.

ACMI Generator

<http://generator.acmi.net.au/>

Adam Elliot's official website

<http://adameliot.com.au>

ATOM website – Get Animated!

http://atomvic.org/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=68&catid=68

The Other Film Festival

<http://www.otherfilmfestival.com/>

MacKinnon and Saunders

<http://www.mackinnonandsaunders.com>

Visit the website of UK puppet makers MacKinnon and Saunders for a great introduction to the construction of animation puppets.

Animation

<http://www.acmi.net.au/animators.htm>

<http://www.wikihow.com/Create-a-Stop-Motion-Animation>

<http://www.mackinnonandsaunders.com>

Writing for animation

<http://www.jeffreyscott.tv>

<http://johnkstuff.blogspot.com/2007/03/writing-for-animation-keep-it-simple.html>

Children's literature

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Children's_literature

Print

Bordwell, David and Thompson, Kristin (1989) *Film Art: An Introduction*, McGraw-Hill, New York.

Burke, Liz (2004) 'Adam Elliot on Carbog, Clay and Harvie Krumpet', *Metro Magazine: Media & Education Magazine*, No. 139, Feb., pp. 133-136.

Elliot, Adam and O'Hara, Marguerite (2009) 'Making Mary and Max: An Interview with Adam Elliot', *Metro Magazine: Media & Education Magazine*, No. 160, March, pp. 18-22, 24.

Flack, Jo, 'Australian Animation Showcase', *ATOM Study Guide*

Kroenert, Tim, (2009) 'Affectionate Portraits of "the Outsider"', *Eureka Street*, Vol. 19, No. 6, 9 Apr., pp. 24-25.

O'Hara, Marguerite, 'Mary and Max', *ATOM Study Guide*

Quigley, Marian (2009) 'Animated Outsiders: Harvie Krumpet and Mary and Max', *Screen Education*, No. 55, pp. 82-89.

Salisbury, Mark ed. (2006) *Burton on Burton CPI Mackays*, Chatham. Tim Burton discusses the importance of his initial individual creative vision in driving the highly collaborative process of animation. Refer in particular to the chapters on *Nightmare Before Christmas* and *Corpse Bride*.

Tan, Zona Marie (2009) 'Cover Story: Adam in Wonderland', *Inside Film: If*, No. 118, March, pp. 18-20, 22, 24.