



**TAKE  
YOUR  
PLACE**

# Characters from objects

with Dan Kelby

Dan Kelby is a professional Character Designer living in the East of England providing characters, concept work, cartoons and illustration for the entertainment industry. His clients include Netflix, Disney Television Animation, Cartoon Network Studios. He also lectures part-time at Norwich University of the Arts on the Animation, Games and Fashion courses.

## Objective

This workshop will help you to bring the character out of everyday objects. As a character designer, one strategy Dan uses to create new characters is through analysing and extrapolating shapes and details from simple objects.

## YouTube workshop link

 [Youtube workshop video](#)

## Workshop duration

This activity should take approximately 1-1.5 hours to complete. Please adapt to your circumstances.

## What materials do I need?

Digital drawing

- Digital art program such as Adobe Photoshop, Procreate, Clip Studio Paint or similar

Traditional drawing

- Paper
- Pencil
- Eraser
- Pen (a permanent marker such as a Sharpie)



## Warmup

Find three everyday objects, e.g., a piece of stationery, some fruit, or furniture. Time yourself for 1 minute to capture the essence of it through a quick drawing. This is about fast mark making and not being precious - these are throwaway drawings to help you loosen up!

**TOP TIP:** when creating an observational drawing try to spend two thirds of your time looking at the subject and one third mark making.

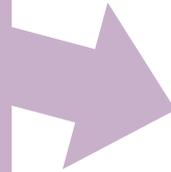
## Task one: finding the design

Take an object from your previous selection and sketch its silhouette, then break it down into a series of geometric shapes.

What do each of these shapes indicate about the possible character or 'mood' of the object?

## Catch up on the recording:

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## Task two: bring out the character

Shape language is the idea that all shapes communicate a message or personality.

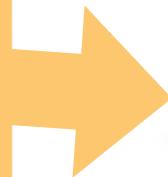
What do the dominant shapes indicate about the possible character of your subject?

**Squares and Rectangles:** ordered, dependable, stable, grounded, strong, honest

**Circles:** friendly, innocent, naïve, loveable, cute, unthreatening

**Triangles:** dangerous, kinetic, edgy, deceptive, sinister, intimidating, decisive

Now look at your drawing and try to see the areas where a head, torso and limbs might be. You can always draw extra parts if needed. Once you have a basic idea, start to draw over and distort the proportions to bring out a potential character.



**TOP TIP:** It is important to give a distinct personality to the drawing even in the early stages so we can begin to think of them as a living, breathing character.

## Task three – Adding story and personality

In the industry your initial concepts are given feedback from others, and you will always be asked to amend your ideas. Imagine an art director has given feedback to you and said “I like the design, but...”

- “I want you to make the character look like a lovable villain”
- “I want you to make the character look like they haven’t slept for the past week”
- “I want the character to be the type of person that everyone wants as their grandparent”

Take one of these scenarios and redevelop your character and their posture and silhouette to make it tie in with the desired requirement.

### Catch up on the recording:

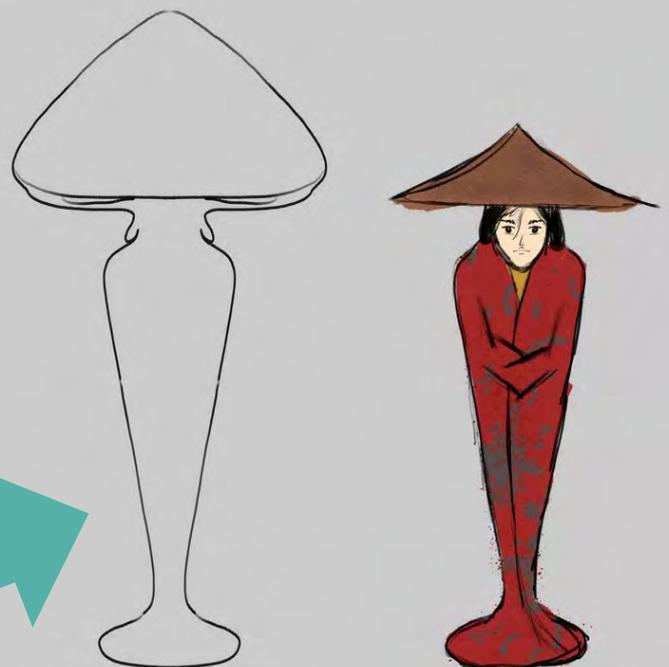
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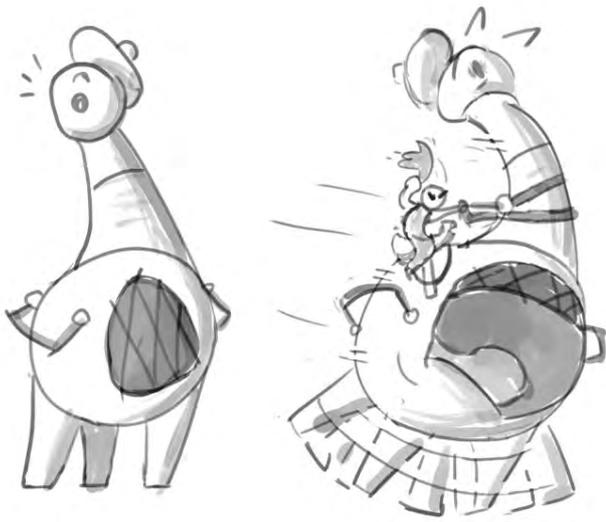
**TOP TIP:** Use your own body and look in the mirror (or take a photo of yourself with your phone) to help imagine the pose that might reflect the requirements of the art director. Many animators are shy actors!

## Next steps

Step back from your work and consider:

- What happens to the character’s personality when I use several distinctive shapes?
- Does my character have a distinct silhouette or outline to make them easy to identify?
- Is there a way I could improve my design?
- How could I apply this approach to other objects to create new characters and their worlds?





## Conclusion

This workshop is designed to help you explore anthropomorphism and shape language. We hope you will consider using this newfound knowledge in your own work, regardless of the kind of art you create.

As human beings we respond to unique artistic interpretations of reality, and as artists it is our job to present these unique visions to our audience.

Draw and design without fear, and, above all, have fun while doing it!



## Find out more about Dan Kelby

 [@dankelby](#)

 [Dan Kelby's website](#)

We would love to see your work! Share it with us on Instagram:

 [@NUAoutreach](#)

 [@takeyourplace\\_he](#)

Take a look at our Padlet board from the live session to see how others responded to the workshop!

 [View our Padlet board here](#)

## Further resources

 [Schoolism website](#)

 [Proko website](#)

 *Cartoon Animation*, Preston Blair

 *Force: Dynamic Life Drawing for Animators*, D. Mattesi

 *Framed Ink: Drawing and Composition for Visual Storytellers*, Marcos Mateu-Mestre

## Useful links

 [@norwichuniarts](#)  [Creative Careers](#)

 [Take Your Place](#)  [NUA website](#)