

The Puub'e Gift: Designing and Producing a 2D Animated Short Film through Visual Storytelling

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ABSTRACT - 2D animation is a creative medium that combines visual design, movement, sound and storytelling to communicate values in a form that can be understood by young audiences. This paper presents the design and production of *The Puub'e Gift*, a diploma-level 2D animated short film intended to portray love, empathy and family bonds through visual storytelling. The objective of this project is to design and produce a 2D animated short film entitled *The Puub'e Gift* that authentically portrays the values of love, empathy and family bonds through visual storytelling. A creative production approach was applied through three main phases: pre-production, production and post-production. The pre-production phase involved idea development, target audience identification, scriptwriting, character design and storyboard planning. The production phase focused on asset creation, animation, colour, lighting and composition, while the post-production phase involved editing, audio synchronization, sound design and final rendering. The main production findings indicate that expressive character design, contrastive colour and lighting composition, and controlled scene pacing were the most significant visual storytelling elements in supporting the project objective. Character expressions and protective gestures were used to represent empathy and care, warmer tones were applied to suggest affection and family connection, and darker or cooler tones were used to separate conflict from emotional comfort. The final output is a completed 2D animated short film supported by production materials and technical workflow documentation.

INTRODUCTION

Animation is a creative visual communication medium that combines images, movement, sound, colour and storytelling to deliver meaning to audiences. In 2D animation, characters, backgrounds and visual elements are designed in a two-dimensional style to create the illusion of movement and emotional expression. This medium is suitable for student animation projects because it allows ideas, emotions and moral values to be presented in a simple, engaging and visually attractive form. Recent studies have shown that animation can influence viewers' visual attention and cognition through the integration of organized visual and audio stimuli (Praveen & Srinivasan, 2022). Therefore, animation can be considered not only as a form of entertainment but also as a meaningful medium for communication and value-based storytelling.

Visual storytelling plays an important role in animation production because it allows meaning to be communicated through character actions, facial expressions, body language, colour, lighting, composition and sound. Instead of relying only on dialogue, animation can show emotions and values through visual performance. This is important because audiences are able to understand the feelings and intentions of characters through visual cues. Studies on digital storytelling and animated media indicate that short animated content can be effective in presenting messages to young audiences because it is accessible, relatable and emotionally engaging (Coughlan *et al.*, 2021; Ito-Jaeger *et al.*, 2022). In addition, stories presented through media can help young audiences reflect on emotions, moral actions and empathy towards others (De Leeuw *et al.*, 2024). However, a key challenge in student animation production is presenting emotional values convincingly without depending too much on dialogue or direct explanation. When facial expressions, body language, colour, lighting and composition are not planned as part of the storytelling strategy, the emotional message may appear unclear or disconnected from the visual scenes.

In the context of animation education, producing a short animated film enables students to apply both creative and technical skills. These include idea development, scriptwriting, storyboard planning, character design, animation, editing and sound design. At the same time, animation production encourages students to think about how visual elements can support the message of the story. According to Kleftodimos (2024), computer-animated videos can support learning and empathy when storytelling is used to help audiences understand the experiences and problems faced by others. This shows that animation can be used to communicate human values such as care, responsibility and emotional understanding. The project *The Puub'e Gift* was developed as a 2D animated short film that focuses on the values of love, empathy and family bonds. The story presents an emotional and futuristic narrative that highlights the importance of compassion and moral decision-making. Through the characters' actions, expressions and relationships, the animation aims to show that love and empathy remain important even in situations involving science, technology and personal ambition. This is aligned with recent studies which suggest that narrative style, emotional vividness and meaningful story experiences can support empathy and emotional connection among audiences (Shen *et al.*, 2024; Atsalaki & Kazanidis, 2025).

Therefore, this technical paper focuses on the design and production process of *The Puub'e Gift*. The project is suitable for diploma-level animation students because it demonstrates the application of animation production skills through a structured workflow consisting of pre-production, production and post-production. The project also supports SDG 4 Quality Education by strengthening creative learning, technical animation practice and value-based communication among diploma students. The main objective of this project is to design and produce a 2D animated short film entitled *The Puub'e Gift* that authentically portrays the values of love, empathy and family bonds through visual storytelling.

METHODOLOGY

This project used a creative production approach to design and produce a 2D animated short film. The production process was divided into three main phases: pre-production, production and post-production. These phases were selected because they represent the standard workflow commonly used in animation and video production. Each phase had a specific role in ensuring that the final animation was well planned, visually consistent and emotionally meaningful. The scope of this paper is limited to the design and production outcome of the animation; formal audience testing and expert validation are proposed as future work.

2.1 Project Design Approach

The project was developed as a short 2D animation with a character-driven narrative. The target audience was young viewers aged approximately 15 to 25 years, including secondary school, college and diploma-level audiences who are familiar with digital media and animated content. The main focus was to communicate emotional values through visual storytelling rather than through long dialogue. The production team planned the story, designed the characters and visual style, animated the scenes and edited the final output into a complete short film.

2.2 Pre-Production

Pre-production is the planning stage of the animation project. This phase is important because it determines the direction, structure and visual identity of the animation. In this project, the pre-production phase involved idea development, scriptwriting, storyboard creation and visual planning.

2.2.1 Idea Development

The idea for *The Puub'e Gift* was developed through group discussion among the production team and was specifically targeted at young audiences aged approximately 15 to 25 years. This target group was selected because the emotional and futuristic narrative aligns with their cognitive comprehension level and digital media consumption habits. The team aimed to create an animation that was not only visually appealing but also meaningful to the audience. The story was inspired by themes related to emotional connection, responsibility and the relationship between humans and other living beings. The team wanted to show that love and empathy are important values even in a world influenced by science, technology and personal ambition. The title *The Puub'e Gift* reflects the symbolic meaning of a gift that goes beyond a physical object. It represents emotional understanding, care and the value of protecting those who are vulnerable.

2.2.2 Story Concept and Synopsis

The Puub'e Gift is a 2D animated short film set in a futuristic environment. The story centres on Sanka, a young character who forms an emotional attachment with Puub'e, a vulnerable non-human living being. The central conflict occurs when Puub'e becomes threatened by characters who view living beings as objects for scientific control and personal ambition. Through Sanka's response to this situation, the story highlights the importance of love, empathy and family bonds. The turning point of the narrative occurs when Sanka chooses care and protection over fear and selfishness, showing that true strength is not only based on knowledge, power or technology but also on the ability to protect others. The narrative was designed to be simple and suitable for a short animation format. The story structure consists of an opening, development, conflict, emotional turning point and resolution. This structure helps the audience follow the story clearly while allowing emotional moments to be delivered effectively.

2.2.3 Scriptwriting

Scriptwriting was an important stage in organizing the story. The script provided the foundation for the animation by arranging the sequence of events, character actions, dialogue and emotional moments. It helped the production team understand how the story would progress from one scene to another.

The script was written with emphasis on visual storytelling. Instead of depending only on dialogue, the script included actions, pauses, facial expressions and emotional responses. This approach allowed the animation to communicate meaning through visual performance. The values of love, empathy and family bonds were embedded in the character's choices and actions throughout the story. The script also helped guide the next stages of production, especially storyboard development, voice recording, animation timing and editing. By preparing the script early, the team could ensure that the story remained focused on the main objective of the project.

SCENE 4 – Sanka teringat kepada ayahnya Loka – Waktu Malam
[Sanka teringatkan kepada ayahnya, Loka]

SANKA
Hmmm...if dad is here surely, I won't feel different than any other friend. Because he would always support me no matter what. [Nada sayu yang merindui seseorang].

SANKA
Ayah...Sanka rindu ayah [Nada sayu yang merindui seseorang].

SCENE 5 – Kedatangan Puub'e – Waktu Malam
[Sambil Sanka leka dengan perasaan rindunya itu. Tiba-tiba Sanka mendengar bunyi loceng pintu. Sanka pun terus bergegas membuka pintu karena ia sangka bahwa drone yang datang itu membawa makanan dipesan oleh ibunya].

BUNYI PINTU
Ding dong.

[Sanka membuka pintu dan mendapati drone yang dihantar itu bukanlah makanan. Namun apa yang dilihat adalah drone yang menghantar sebuah kapsul].

SANKA
Hah! ni bukan makanan.

SANKA
[Sambil memegang kapsul itu]. Huh... seriously, apa benda ni ?!

[Sanka membawa masuk kapsul itu dan cuba untuk membukanya dengan cara menekan-nekan kapsul tersebut].

SANKA
How am i suppose to open this actually tho?

[Tiba-tiba kapsul itu teraktif sendiri dan terbuka. Maka, keluar lah Puub'e]

[Puub'e ketika itu dalam keadaan tertanya di manakah dia]

PUUB'E
Puub'e [intonasi tertanya]

PUUB'E
Puub'e [intonasi tertanya]

SANKA
Ehha???? [intonasi terkejut]

PUUB'E
PUUB'E [intonasi terkejut]

[Selepas itu, Puub'e keluar dari kapsul itu. Pergi ke arah Sanka dan keluaran caketnya untuk memberi kepada Sanka]

PUUB'E
Puub'e [intonasi pemberian]

SANKA
Ouh terima kasih, Puub'e.

[Secara mengejut, Puub'e menggunakan kuasanya terhadap Sanka. Akibatnya, Sanka mendapat bayangan yang bahawa ayahnya sedang memeluk Puub'e. Dengan ini, ia menandakan hubungan kenangan Sanka dengan ayahnya].

SANKA
Ayah...[suara sayu yang merindui ayahnya].

[Sanka yang terlihat bayangan ayahnya, air matanya mula berkilatan. Ini kerana, dia merindui bapanya itu yang telah lama menghilang sejak insiden eksplosi para saintis yang terjadi pada 17 tahun yang lalu.]

SANKA
Awak kenal ayah saya ?

Puub'e
[ngagak]

[Dilek itu, Sanka pun terkejut dengan berita itu dan dia terus memeluk Puub'e.]

SCENE 6 – Kedatangan Dr. Nerva di rumah Sanka – waktu malam
-2:30-3:55 (35 saat)-
[Sebaik sahaja Sanka sedang memeluk Puub'e, tiba-tiba dinding balik Sanka pecah akibat sebuah serangan misteri dari luar dinding tersebut. Sanka memberi reaksi terkejut akibat dari serangan itu. Namun, secara mengejut terdapat suatu makhluk misteri dengan pantas]

Figure 1. Script of *The Puub'e Gift*

2.2.4 Character and Visual Design

Character design was developed to support the emotional tone of the story. The characters needed to appear expressive so that the audience could understand their feelings and intentions. Facial features, body posture and movement style were considered during the design process. The main character was designed to show emotional conflict, care and determination.

The visual design also considered the contrast between futuristic elements and emotional warmth. Futuristic settings were used to represent science and technological advancement, while softer colours and expressive character moments were used to represent love, empathy and family bonds. This contrast helped strengthen the message that emotional values remain important even in an advanced world.



Figure 2. Character Design of *The Puub'e Gift*

2.2.5 Storyboard

The storyboard transformed the written script into a sequence of visual panels. Each panel showed the planned scene composition, character placement, camera angle, movement and important emotional moments. The storyboard acted as a visual guide for the production team before the animation process began. Through the storyboard, the team could identify how each scene would connect with the next scene. It also helped the team plan pacing, shot size and transitions.

For example, close-up shots were planned for emotional expressions, while wider shots were used to show the setting and character movement. The storyboard ensured that the animation had a clear visual flow and supported the intended storytelling.

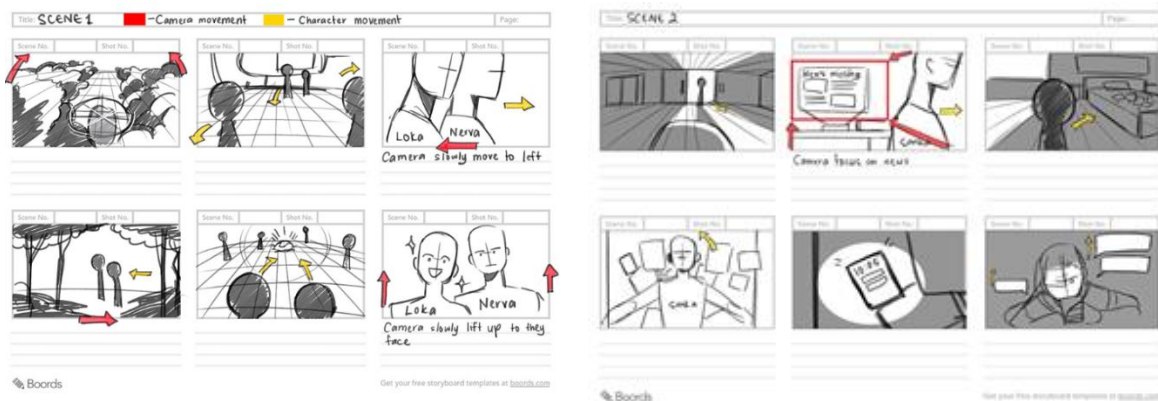


Figure 3. Storyboard of *The Puub'e Gift*

2.3 Production

The production phase involved the actual creation of the animated scenes based on the finalized script and storyboard. During this phase, the production team created drawings, animated character movements, applied colours and developed visual elements for the animation.

2.3.1 Drawing and Asset Creation

The drawing process began with rough sketches of characters, backgrounds and important props. These sketches were refined into cleaner line art before colour was added. The characters were drawn based on the approved visual style from the pre-production stage. This helped maintain consistency across different scenes. Backgrounds and visual assets were created to support the mood of each scene. The futuristic setting was designed to reflect the science fiction theme of the animation, while emotional scenes were designed with softer and more focused compositions. The use of visual contrast helped separate moments of tension from moments of care and emotional connection.



Figure 4. Environment and background sketches of *The Puub'e Gift*

2.3.2 Animating

The animation process focused on bringing the characters and story to life through movement. Key poses were created first to establish the main actions and emotional expressions. After that, in-between drawings were added to create smoother movement between poses. Special attention was given to facial expressions and body language because the story relies heavily on emotional communication. Expressions such as sadness, concern, fear, care and relief were used to show the inner feelings of the characters. Body movements such as hesitation, reaching out, protecting and turning away were

also used to represent emotional decisions. Timing was another important aspect of the animation. Slower timing was used for emotional scenes to allow the audience to feel the moment, while faster timing was used during tense or action-based scenes. This helped control the rhythm of the story and maintain audience engagement.

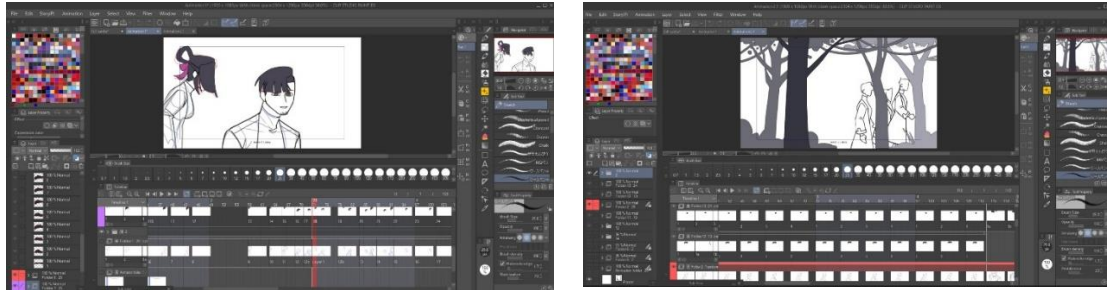


Figure 5. Animating in Clip Studio Paint of *The Puub'e Gift*

2.3.3 Colour, Lighting and Composition

Colour and lighting were used to support the emotional meaning of the animation. Warmer colours were used to represent love, care and family connection, while darker or cooler tones were used to represent tension, uncertainty and conflict. These choices were guided by studies showing that colour attributes such as hue, saturation and brightness can influence emotional interpretation, visual attention and cognitive response in visual media (González-Martín *et al.*, 2022; Hosap *et al.*, 2023). In this project, warm and cool colour contrasts were treated as design intentions to separate emotional comfort from conflict. Composition was also carefully considered. Important characters were positioned clearly within the frame to guide viewer attention. Close-up shots were used to emphasize emotional expressions, while medium and wide shots were used to show character interaction and environment. These visual choices helped strengthen the storytelling without relying too much on dialogue.

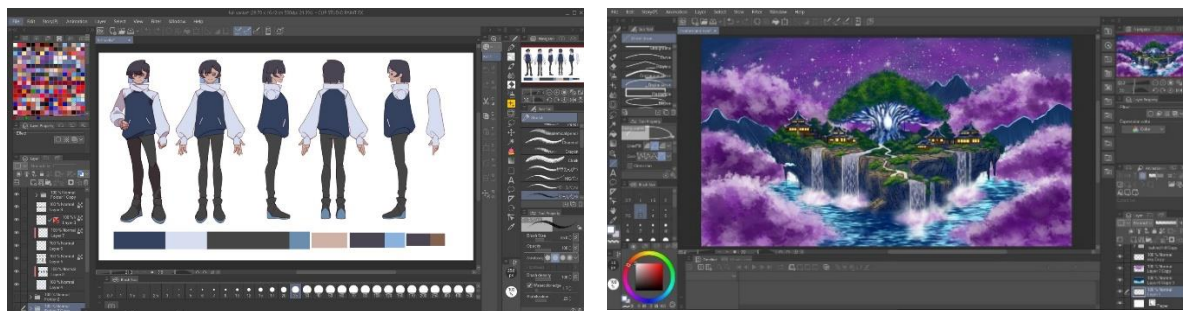


Figure 6. Colour, Lighting and Composition of *The Puub'e Gift*

2.4 Post Production

Post-production was the final stage of the project. This phase involved combining all completed scenes, arranging them according to the storyboard, adding sound elements and preparing the final animation output.

2.4.1 Editing

The editing process involved arranging the animated scenes into the correct sequence. Each scene was checked to ensure continuity, pacing and smooth transition. The editor adjusted the duration of each shot so that the story could be understood clearly. Emotional scenes were given enough time for the audience to understand the character's feelings, while action scenes were edited with faster pacing to create tension. Transitions between scenes were also refined to avoid sudden or confusing changes. The editing process helped ensure that the animation flowed as a complete short film.



Figure 7. Editing of *The Puub'e Gift*

2.4.1 Audio Synchronization and Sound Design

Audio elements played an important role in supporting the emotional tone of the animation. Voice recordings, sound effects and background music were synchronized with the visual scenes. The voice performance helped express character emotion, while sound effects supported character actions and environmental details. Background music was used to strengthen the emotional atmosphere. Softer music supported scenes related to love and family bonds, while more intense music supported scenes involving conflict or tension. The combination of visuals and audio helped create a more engaging viewing experience.

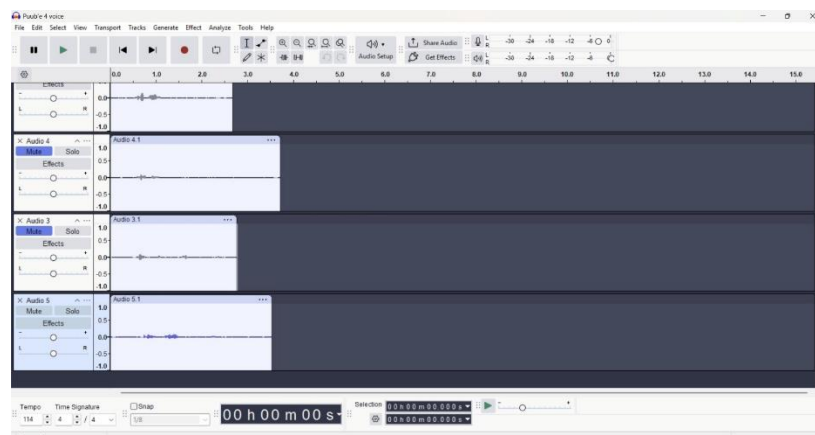


Figure 8. Audio Synchronization and Sound Design of *The Puub'e Gift*

2.4.3 Final Rendering

After the editing and audio synchronization were completed, the animation was rendered into a final video format. The final output was checked to ensure that the visuals, audio and timing were properly combined. Any technical errors such as missing frames, audio delay or inconsistent transitions were corrected before the final submission.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The final outcome of this project is a 2D animated short film entitled *The Puub'e Gift*. The animation was developed through three main phases: pre-production, production and post-production. Based on the completed production output, the project met its design objective by translating the values of love, empathy and family bonds into planned visual storytelling elements. The animation used narrative structure, character expressions, body language, colour, lighting, composition and sound as production

strategies to communicate its intended emotional message. This approach is consistent with Praveen and Srinivasan (2022), who explain that animation can influence visual attention and cognition through the combination of movement, organized presentation and multimedia stimuli.

The production analysis identified three (3) main visual storytelling outcomes. First, character expressions and body language became the main method for presenting love and empathy. Second, colour and lighting contrast helped separate emotional comfort from conflict. Third, scene pacing and audio synchronization supported the emotional rhythm of the narrative. These outcomes provide a concrete basis for discussing how the project objective was achieved through production decisions rather than through unsupported claims of audience effectiveness.

3.2 Portrayal of Love through Visual Storytelling

The value of love was portrayed through care, protection and sacrifice. In the animation, love was shown through the actions and emotional responses of the characters rather than through direct explanation. For example, gentle character movements, close-up facial expressions and warm visual tones were used as design elements to represent care and emotional attachment. These elements were intended to communicate that love can motivate a character to protect others and make moral decisions.

Through the use of visual storytelling, the design intent was to strengthen the portrayal of love by guiding viewers to observe the characters' feelings through actions and expressions. According to de Leeuw et al. (2024), stories in media can become meaningful when they allow young audiences to reflect on emotions, moral beauty and care for others. Therefore, the emotional scenes in *The Puub'e Gift* were designed to communicate love as a meaningful value that influences the characters' decisions and relationships. Future audience evaluation will be necessary to determine whether this design intention is interpreted by viewers as intended.

3.3 Portrayal of Empathy through Character Action

Empathy was portrayed through the character's ability to understand and care about the condition of another living being. The animation showed empathy through visual cues such as concerned facial expressions, protective gestures and emotional pauses. These visual elements were designed to communicate the character's internal conflict and moral awareness. The contrast between empathy and selfishness also strengthened the story conflict by showing different ways humans may respond to vulnerable living beings.

This interpretation is consistent with recent studies which suggest that storytelling can support empathy by allowing audiences to observe personal experiences, emotional situations and moral choices. Shen et al. (2024) explained that empathy can be influenced by how a story is told, particularly through vivid emotional expression and narrative style. Similarly, Atsalaki and Kazanidis (2025) highlighted that visual and narrative-based environments can support social and emotional learning when they provide relatable situations and emotional responses. Therefore, the use of character action and visual emotion in *The Puub'e Gift* was intended to make the value of empathy clearer within the production outcome.

3.4 Portrayal of Family Bonds

Family bonds were portrayed through emotional connection, memories and the desire to protect loved ones. The animation used character relationships and emotional scenes to show that family can provide strength during difficult situations. This value was supported through scene composition, warm colour tones and slower pacing during meaningful moments. These techniques were intended to direct viewer attention towards the emotional connection between the characters.

The portrayal of family bonds is important because family relationships are often associated with love, protection, responsibility and emotional support. Through visual storytelling, the scenes were designed to show that family bonds can influence a character's choices and emotional growth. This is aligned with de Leeuw et al. (2024), who suggest that meaningful stories can help young audiences reflect on life experiences, emotional values and relationships with others.

3.5 Technical and Creative Strengths of the Project

The project demonstrated several technical and creative strengths suitable for diploma-level animation production. First, the story was planned through scriptwriting and storyboard development, which helped organize the narrative flow. Second, character expressions and body language were used to communicate emotion visually. Third, colour, lighting and composition were used to support mood and meaning. Fourth, the post-production process combined visuals, sound effects, voice recordings and background music to create a complete animated short film.

These strengths show that the production team was able to apply the basic animation pipeline effectively. The project also shows that diploma students can use 2D animation not only to demonstrate technical skills but also to communicate intended emotional values through planned design choices. As noted by Kleftodimos (2024), animated videos can support understanding and empathy when the story is designed to help audiences connect with the experiences of others. However, since this paper focuses on production outcomes, audience reception should be validated in future studies.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, *The Puub'e Gift* was successfully designed and produced as a 2D animated short film that portrays the values of love, empathy and family bonds through visual storytelling. The project applied a structured animation production workflow involving pre-production, production and post-production. Through scriptwriting, storyboard planning, character animation, visual design, editing and sound integration, the team produced an animation that communicates emotional values through planned visual and technical choices. The project shows that 2D animation is not only a technical production process but also a meaningful storytelling medium. For diploma-level animation students, this project demonstrates the importance of combining creative ideas, technical skills and emotional storytelling to produce an animation with clear messages and production value. Several limitations should be acknowledged. This paper focuses on the design and production outcome; therefore, it does not include formal viewer validation, expert review or technical benchmarking data. Some animation movements could also be improved by adding more in-between frames to create smoother motion. In addition, the background design could be enhanced with more depth, texture and environmental details, while the sound design could be improved through clearer audio balancing, additional environmental sound effects and more refined background music.

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CONFLICT OF INTEREST

Authors declare that there is no conflict of interest regarding the publication of the paper.

AUTHORS CONTRIBUTION

The authors confirm their contribution to the paper as follows: **project idea and concept development:** Nagginah Krishna Moorthy, Alia Ameera Safiyah Md Fauzan and Muhammad Afif Danial Johan; **scriptwriting and storyboard development:** Nagginah Krishna Moorthy, Alia Ameera Safiyah Md Fauzan and Muhammad Afif Danial Johan; **animation production and post-production:** Nagginah Krishna Moorthy, Alia Ameera Safiyah Md Fauzan, Suhaila Basar and Muhammad Afif Danial Johan; **supervision and academic guidance:** Muhammad Fazrulhelmi Ahmad; **manuscript preparation:** Muhammad Afif Danial Johan, Nagginah Krishna Moorthy, Alia Ameera Safiyah Md Fauzan and Muhammad Fazrulhelmi Ahmad. All authors reviewed and approved the final version of the manuscript.

DECLARATION OF GENERATIVE AI

During the preparation of this work, the authors used ChatGPT by OpenAI to assist in improving the clarity, language, sentence structure and readability of the manuscript. After using the tool, the authors reviewed, edited and verified the content as needed. The authors take full responsibility for the accuracy, originality and integrity of the final manuscript.

ETHIC STATEMENTS

Not applicable

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