

BASIC WRITING STUDY UNIT

# Pixar

For English and Lit and Writing Classes

*Critical thinking and writing exercises based on Pixar and Disney films*

**TOM DURWOOD**



# Note from Tom

Dear Fellow Teachers –

I hope you will look through this material and cherry-pick the lesson plans you like. Use them as you like.

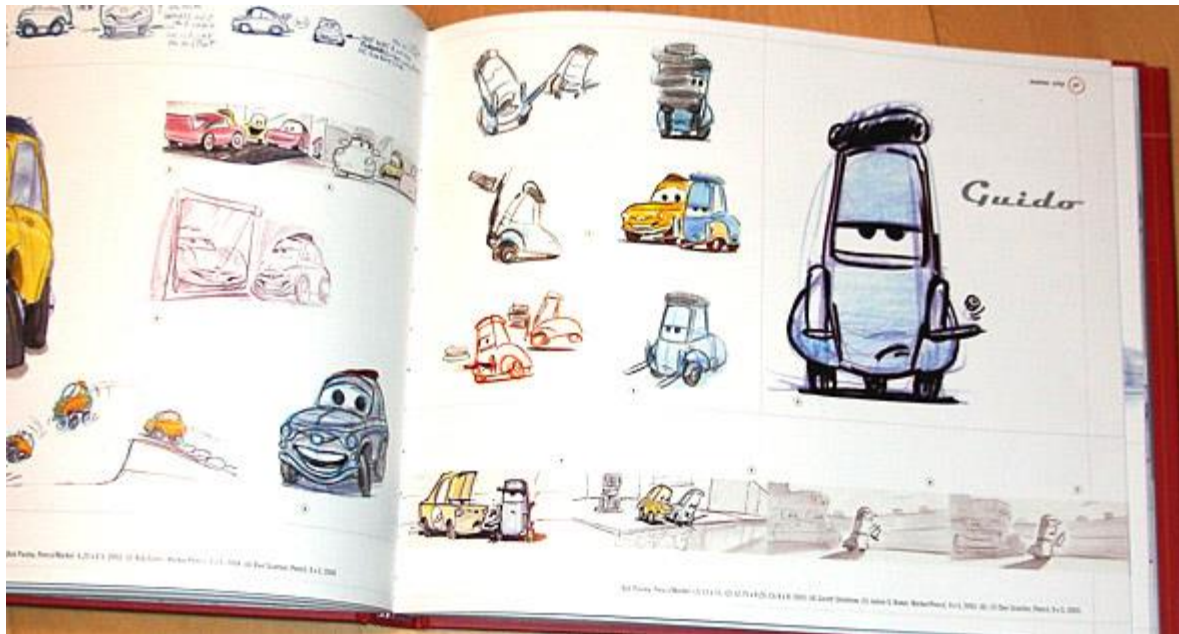
Pixar and Disney are favorite topics among scholars, so this could go on forever. I often listed ten questions with this:

## ANSWER ANY FOUR QUESTIONS

The first section contains essay questions, while the second section content is in a format that I have found useful for in-class work.

Good luck!!

-- Tom Durwood



"The Art of Pixar" Copyright © 2008 Pixar

# Essay Questions (200 words or more)

1. What is the deal with mothers in animated movies? They keep getting killed off! Why does by Suzan G. Brydon think that is happening?

Why does she like Marlon from “Finding Nemo” so much?

Who is your favorite screen mother? Who is your least favorite?

Would you rather have Bambi’s mother or Molly Wesley from “Harry Potter” as your own mother? Name a Pixar character who shares qualities with your own mother.

2. Please connect the Pixar coming-of-age stories to your own coming-age-narrative. Here are some of the common elements to most such stories:

- a) beloved state of innocence at the story’s beginning
- b) foreshadowing = the hint that big change is about to come to this family
- c) Sidelined parent or family member
- d) knotty situation or moral dilemma developing
- e) the central tragic (often violent) event that marks the loss of innocence
- f) magical trinket or symbol
- g) a discovered connection to the past and one’s true powers
- h) beloved sidekick offed by betrayer or villain
- i) wise older guide who shows the way forward
- j) resolution = act of retribution or balancing the scales of justice

What are three lessons for our own stories which we might take from Pixar?

**3. Who is Emma Coates? How does she know so much about Pixar?**

Name your favorites three of the “Pixar rules” that Emma sets out. Are they 100% true, or are there exceptions? Give examples.

Name one of the rules that you believe is NOT true.

**4. What are Kyle Munkittrick’s four rules of Pixar? Do you agree with these? Does “Coco” or “Inside Out” disprove one of the rules?**

Which is the most powerful rule? Give three examples of that rule in action.

**5. Who is Jonathan Decker? What is Jonathan Decker’s thesis (the main point of his argument)?**

**6. Here is one of Jonathan Decker’s conclusions:**

Those tales that have endured over the past 150 years,” writes Decker, “are generally those that emphasize feminine beauty as a dominant theme, such as *Cinderella*, *Sleeping Beauty*, and *Snow White*.

Pixar has changed the landscape. While never drawing attention to it, Pixar has made films in which gender traits are much more equally distributed.

Do you think it is true? Give two specific examples from Pixar, and two from “traditional” animated movies.

**7. How does Decker claim the depiction of masculinity is different in Pixar movies? What is the ‘old’ model of masculinity? What is the ‘new’ one? Can you think of examples?**

Who is the ideal male, in your eyes? What qualities does he possess?

**8. Who are your favorite and least-favorite female characters in Pixar movies? How would you compare cowgirl Bess in “Toy Story” to Mara in “Brave”?**

9. In Pixar stories, the characters often do not get the perfect outcome – the toys in “Toy Story” do NOT go to college with Andy, Wall-E does NOT get the girl, Merida in Brave does NOT marry the handsome prince.

Isn't this frustrating? Why or why not?



Copyright © 2012 Pixar

# Villains

[illegible]

CAPTURING ESSENCE IN 5 LINES

# Pixar Cinquains

DUE IN 20 MINUTES

## What is a cinquain?

At the most basic level a cinquain is a five-line poem or stanza.

The poem has one topic and the details describe the topic's actions and feelings.

Here are two approaches.

### Method One

Line 1 - one word for the topic

Line 2 - 2 words to describes your topic

Line 3 - 3 words that describes the actions relating to your topic

Line 4 - 4 words that describes the feelings relating to your topic

Line 5 - one word that is another name for your topic

### Method Two

Line 1 - two syllables

Line 2 - four syllables

Line 3 - six syllables

Line 4 - eight syllables

Line 5 - two syllables

**Sample:**

Sisters  
Such lovely cats  
Running, jumping, purring  
Nibbling lovebites, wakeup timeclock  
Houseguests

**YOUR ASSIGNMENT:** Please write a simple yet brilliant cinquain which evokes your favorite Pixar hero

---

---

---

---

---

Now a cinquain to honor your favorite Pixar villain:

---

---

---

---

---

Cinquain about a Pixar character (or entire movie) which you did not fully understand

---

---

---

---

---

Cinquain about yourself at the time you saw a particular Pixar movie.

---

---

---

---

---



CRITICAL THINKING CHALLENGE

# Pixar General Knowledge Multiple Choice Quiz

<https://www.beano.com/posts/the-ultimate-pixar-quiz>

Your score: \_\_\_\_\_

<https://www.buzzfeed.com/andrewziegler/pixar-trivia-quiz>

Your score: \_\_\_\_\_



Copyright @ Pixar 2012

## CRITICAL THINKING ABOUT YOUR FAVORITE MOVIES

# Conflict and Resolution

A good writer establishes two things in a story. First, the main character (protagonist) starts out the story with a **need** or a **conflict** to resolve. The conflict can be an inner conflict or one with an external force. Second, the character must **change** by the end of the story – that is, he or she should show that they have become a different (usually wiser) character by all the trials and tribulations of the adventure.

Do Pixar and Disney follow these rules? Tell me what the main character's need or conflict is at the beginning of each story and how he or she changes over the course of the story. How is Belle different at the end of *Beauty and the Beast* than she is at the beginning? Please answer three of the following:

*The Little Mermaid (Ariel)*

Need or conflict at the beginning \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Who or what helps him change? \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Resolution \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

At the end \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

*Beauty and the Beast (Belle or the Beast)*

Need or conflict at the beginning \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Who or what helps bring about the character's change? \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Resolution \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

At the end \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

*Toy Story (Buzz Lightyear or Woody)*

Need or conflict at the beginning \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Resolution \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Who or what helps him change? \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

At the end \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

*Brave*

Need or conflict at the beginning \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Resolution \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Who or what helps him change? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

At the end \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

*Coco*

Need or conflict at the beginning \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Resolution \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Who or what helps Coco change? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

At the end \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

*Cars (Speed McQueen)*

Need or conflict at the beginning \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Resolution \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Who or what helps him change? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

At the end \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

*The Incredibles (Father)*

Need or conflict at the beginning \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Resolution \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Who or what helps him change? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

At the end \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

# Open Letter to a Pixar Character

Please write an open letter to a character in a Pixar movie. You might ask them to explain their actions, or feelings. You might inquire as to their motives, or ask what they really thought about another character. You could clear up any questions you have about the plot, ask if they lived happily ever after, that sort of thing.

[illegible]

---

---

---

---

---

---

Sincerely yours,

---



Toy Story 3 color script by Pixar art director Dice Tsutsumi, via [The Pixar Blog](#).

SAMPLE OPEN LETTER

# To Optimus Prime

Dear Optimus Prime,

This is a little awkward talking to a Transformer, but I go to a college where crazy things happen all the time. I hope you're still in that box I put you in. Mommy (yes, I still say "mommy" and there's no shame in that) tends to find toys I don't play with a whole lot and give them away to my destructive cousins, who don't know the meaning of "take care of something you care about."

You can ask the other Transformers who are lying there with you, I take care of you guys. But when it comes to my cousins and other little kids that I meet, I see their toys in pieces (and they're not Legos). An invisible tear forms in my eye when I see that, just seeing a good-looking toy torn apart because that little kid wants your leg to bend this way instead of that way.

I know you, Optimus Prime. You can go through anything. You are the leader of the Autobots. Toy companies love making you big and huge like. I just hope you can last long enough for me till I get back.

Friend and Beloved Owner,

*Timothy Balinsat*



