

## Opportunities

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Now in its third semester, the Earthlight Teletraining program is basically divided into one class for beginners and another for more advanced students, though Teton also does individualized instruction. "Early on, students learn about developing project ideas and learn the principles of cinematic storytelling and setting up a production. I also cover character de-

sign, introduction to acting, layout and cel techniques."

More advanced classes tend to vary, depending upon the individual films that the participants are developing. "We cover things like sound design, shot pacing, gauging in-betweens and how one- and two-point perspective affects backgrounds. Most of the students thus far tend to create hand-drawn animation, but some have used

computers, clay and even [LEGO figures]. My goal is not to restrict them."

One thing he's adamant about is not talking down to students, however young they may be. J.J. Villard, who first inspired Teton to develop a curriculum for young animators and went on to graduate from CalArts, says, "John talks to kids just like he does to adults. Having someone talk straight to kids and tell them that they can do big things with animation really has an impact. I didn't realize until I got to DreamWorks years later how lucky I had been."

Being exposed to professional production standards at a young age also prepared Carolyn Chrisman to enter USC's film school "knowing what animation takes," she says. Under Teton's tutelage, Chrisman spent two years animating her prize-winning film *Envious Heart*, which she completed at age 16 and which was chosen for the Santa Barbara Film Festival. Teton's approach to teaching animation isn't just about learning techniques, notes Chrisman. "It's about understanding visual storytelling and the elements that make a plot work."

Teton believes that young artists readily grasp the principles of cinematic storytelling and that animation programs suitable for kids don't have to be what he calls "glorified childcare with animation equipment. Students as young as 10 years old are learning to predict accurately how long a project will take to complete many months down the line. That's something that many college graduates never learn."

As proof, he points to a rising star student named Aidan Terry, who at age 13 has been creating award-winning animation for three years. "For one film, Aidan did 2,000 hand-drawn frames that he colored in Adobe Photoshop. Talented students shouldn't have to wait until high school to learn this art form. There are incredibly fine musicians in elementary school, so why not animators?" ■

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