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ANIMATION

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Bigscreen projects cross genres, while tube series keep the pipelines humming



DRAWING THE LINE: Instructor Miguel Andrade and AnimAction founder Clifford Cohen offer a few lessons in animation to a group of L.A. Unified School District students.

AnimAction workshops inspire L.A. students

By STEPHANIE ARGY

Ten years ago, Clifford Cohen wanted to produce an anti-smoking public service announcement. But when he realized how little control he would have over whether the PSA ever got seen, particularly by the children who needed it most, he decided to find a more direct approach. "It developed into kids producing their own programming," he says. "And then it evolved into animation."

In 1989, Cohen founded AnimAction, which sends animators into schools to teach 12-hour workshops in which students learn the basics of animation, then make anti-smoking PSAs targeted at their schoolmates and peers. AnimAction instructors have taught in different cities around the United States, Canada, the United Kingdom and Europe, but the Los Angeles-based company runs programs mainly in Southern California, and mainly in the L.A. Unified School District.

The district's participation in the program is funded by a state tax on cigarettes, the proceeds of which voters earmarked for programs that discourage children from smoking.

According to Francine Eisenrod, director of the LAUSD's Health/Drug, Alcohol and Tobacco Education division, the district has been involved with AnimAction for nine years. Over that time, she says, about 50,000 students have taken the two-day workshop, with just under 5,000 students at 27

schools going through the program every year. The district rotates the workshops from school to school, so that students in all areas of the city have the opportunity to get involved.

"Equity is very important in our schools," she explains. About 18-20 instructors work for AnimAction, traveling to the different schools. "We're basically set up as a mobile unit, to carry our artists and animation supplies," Cohen says. Each instructor oversees two teams of 10 students each. Under the teacher's guidance, the teams come up with a concept for the PSA, then divide up the animation work.



COHEN

Miguel Andrade went through the AnimAction workshop while a student at Wilmington Junior High, then took it again when he was in 11th grade. Now in college studying architecture, Andrade has returned to AnimAction, this time as an instructor. He says that while he does teach the children animation and drawing skills, he has other goals in mind, too.

"It's more how to use their imagination, and how to work as a team," he says. "There's a lot of kids, they're good at drawing, but they're quiet, and I try to get them out of their shell."

The animation community supports AnimAction's efforts in the LAUSD by participating in the annual Team award ceremony in February. At the ceremony, one of the year's 400 or so PSAs is chosen to represent all the others. This year, for the first time, the winning PSA will be broadcast nationally, on Kid's WB! during March.

"You have the perfect example of what everyone is striving for—an outside company being brought in to run an arts program, some corporate support and all this feedback and experience being brought into the classroom," Cohen says.

