EDUCATION

Character Animation Crash Course By Eric Goldberg

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Introduction: Rediscovering the Soul of Movement

In the vast landscape of animation education, few resources manage to capture both the technical precision and the joyful spontaneity of the craft. Among these rare gems stands **Character Animation Crash Course By Eric Goldberg**, a book that has quietly become a cornerstone for aspiring and professional animators alike. Whether you are a student stepping into the world of motion graphics or a seasoned artist seeking to refine your principles, this volume offers something profoundly valuable. It is not merely a textbook; it is a masterclass in understanding how characters breathe, think, and feel through movement. Written by one of Disney's most celebrated animators, the book distills decades of studio experience into a clear, energetic, and accessible guide. In an era where digital tools often overshadow foundational skills, this course reminds us that the heart of animation remains firmly rooted in observation, timing, and personality.

Who Is Eric Goldberg? A Legacy of Lively Artistry

To appreciate the depth of this course, it helps to understand the person behind the pages. **Eric Goldberg** is a name synonymous with expressive, hand-drawn animation that leaps off the screen. He joined Walt Disney Feature Animation in the early 1990s, where he quickly made his mark as the supervising animator of the Genie in *Aladdin*. That character, voiced by Robin Williams, became a landmark in animation history—not just for its humor, but for its fluid, rubber-limbed physicality. Goldberg's work on the Genie showed an uncanny ability to blend classic squash-and-stretch techniques with modern comedic timing. Later, he animated characters such as Louis the alligator in *The Princess and the Frog* and contributed to the hand-drawn sequences in *Pocahontas* and *Fantasia 2000*.
Beyond his film credits, Goldberg has been a passionate educator, conducting workshops and sharing his philosophy that animation is, above all, acting through drawing. His book, therefore, is not a dry technical manual but a living conversation with a master who has dedicated his career to making characters believable.

What Does the Character Animation Crash Course Cover?

The **Character Animation Crash Course By Eric Goldberg**is structured as a progressive journey, beginning with the absolute fundamentals and building toward sophisticated performance. It is designed to be worked through sequentially, though animators often return to specific chapters for reference. The book is heavily illustrated, with Goldberg's own drawings demonstrating each concept in action. At its core, the course covers essential principles such as timing, spacing, weight, balance, and anticipation. However, what sets it apart is how these principles are presented not as abstract rules, but as tools for storytelling. Each chapter introduces a new building block, from simple bouncing balls to complex character walks, runs, and emotional reactions. The exercises are practical, encouraging readers to draw frame by frame and to think critically about why certain movements read as natural or exaggerated. The goal is not to copy a style, but to develop an internal sense of motion that can be applied to any character, in any medium.

Timing and Spacing: The Rhythm of Life

One of the first major topics tackled is the relationship between timing and spacing. Goldberg emphasizes that timing is not merely about speed; it is about intention. A slow movement can convey exhaustion or sadness, while a

fast movement can suggest excitement or panic. The book introduces readers to exposure sheets and timing charts, demystifying the tools used by traditional animators. Through carefully chosen examples, Goldberg shows how adjusting a few frames can completely alter the emotional tone of a scene. He also stresses the importance of spacing—the distance an object travels between frames—and how it affects the perception of acceleration and deceleration. These concepts, while technical, are presented with such clarity that even beginners can grasp them quickly. The **Character Animation Crash Course By Eric Goldberg**makes the abstract tangible by linking each principle to a recognizable character action.

Weight and Balance: Giving Characters Physics

Another critical area explored in depth is the illusion of weight. A character who floats without gravity loses credibility, no matter how beautifully drawn. Goldberg dedicates significant attention to how weight shifts during movement, using examples like picking up a heavy object, sitting down, or stumbling. He discusses the role of the center of gravity and how maintaining visual balance creates natural poses. One particularly useful section examines the mechanics of a walk cycle. Here, Goldberg breaks down the key poses—contact, passing, high point, and low point—and explains how subtle variations in timing and posture turn a generic walk into a unique expression of personality. A proud character walks differently from a shy one, and a tired character moves differently from an energetic child. By mastering weight and balance, animators unlock the ability to communicate character traits without a single line of dialogue.

Why This Book Stands Out in a Crowded Field

There are many excellent animation books available, from Richard Williams's *The Animator's Survival Kit* to Frank Thomas and Ollie Johnston's *The Illusion of Life*. So why should an animator choose the **Character Animation Crash Course By Eric Goldberg**? The answer lies in its approachability and focus. While Williams's book is encyclopedic and dense, Goldberg's volume is deliberately concise and energetic. It feels like a private workshop rather than a lecture hall. The tone is encouraging and often humorous, reflecting Goldberg's own personality. He does not shy away from admitting when something is difficult, but he always provides a path forward. Furthermore, the book is uniquely designed for active learning. Each chapter ends with practical exercises that require drawing, observing, and analyzing. This hands-on approach ensures that readers not only understand the theory but also internalize it through practice. For animators working in both 2D and 3D, the principles translate directly, making the book versatile across different pipelines.

Key Lessons Every Animator Can Apply

Throughout the course, several recurring themes emerge that are worth highlighting. These lessons form the backbone of Goldberg's teaching philosophy and are applicable to any animation project.

- Observe real life: Goldberg constantly reminds readers to study how people and animals move. He recommends keeping a sketchbook and capturing tiny gestures—the way a hand rests on a hip, the sway of a standing person, the flicker of an eyebrow. These observations become the raw material for animation.
- Think in poses: Instead of getting lost in the in-between frames, Goldberg advises focusing on key poses first. A strong pose communicates the story clearly. The in-betweens then support the movement, but the poses are the anchor.
- Exaggerate with purpose: Exaggeration is not about making everything wild; it is about clarifying the action. A character who is surprised might jump higher than physically realistic, but that exaggeration serves the emotion. Goldberg shows how to push poses without breaking believability.
- Use arcs for natural motion: Almost every living movement follows an arc. Straight lines look mechanical and

robotic. The book provides multiple exercises to train the eye to see and draw curved paths of action.

- Embrace the "golden rule" of animation: Goldberg often returns to the idea that animation is acting. Every movement must serve the character's intent. If the action does not support the story or emotion, it is wasted motion.

Who Should Read This Book?

The **Character Animation Crash Course By Eric Goldberg**is remarkably inclusive in its audience. Beginners will find it a friendly yet rigorous entry point into the craft. The early chapters assume no prior knowledge and gradually build confidence. Intermediate animators will discover new insights that refine their existing skills. Even professionals often return to this book as a refresher or source of inspiration. Teachers and workshop leaders will appreciate the clear structure, which can easily be adapted into lesson plans. Moreover, because the course emphasizes principles over software, it remains relevant regardless of technological changes. Whether you animate with pencil and paper, in Adobe Animate, in Toon Boom Harmony, or in Blender, the lessons apply equally. The book also appeals to hobbyists and fans of animation who want to understand the artistry behind their favorite films. It is a rare resource that educates without overwhelming, inspiring without intimidating.

How the Course Fits into Modern Animation Education

In today's digital landscape, many animation tutorials focus exclusively on software or technical pipelines. While that knowledge is necessary, it can sometimes overshadow the foundational art of motion. The **Character Animation Crash Course By Eric Goldberg**fills a critical gap by grounding students in the timeless principles that have guided animators for nearly a century. Universities and online schools often include it in their recommended reading lists precisely because it bridges classical techniques with contemporary practice. Goldberg himself has taught masterclasses around the world, and the book reflects his real-world teaching experience. It acknowledges that animation is both a craft and an art, requiring patience, observation, and a willingness to fail and try again. In an industry where speed is valued, the book encourages taking the time to get the movement right. This philosophy resonates deeply with animators who want their work to stand out for its quality rather than its efficiency.

A Personal, Practical Approach to Learning

What makes the reading experience particularly engaging are the personal anecdotes woven throughout. Goldberg shares stories from his own career—the challenges of animating the Genie, the joy of bringing Louis the alligator to life, the lessons learned from his mentors. These narratives humanize the material and show that even legendary animators once struggled with the same problems that beginners face. He is generous with his tips, like how to use a mirror to act out expressions, or how to film reference video and then analyze the frames. The book also includes breakdowns of famous scenes, where Goldberg explains why certain choices work so effectively. These case studies are invaluable for developing critical thinking about animation. By the end of the course, readers feel equipped not just with skills, but with a mindset—a way of seeing movement as a language. They become more attentive observers of the world around them, which is perhaps the greatest gift any animation teacher can offer.

Conclusion: A Lasting Resource for Animators

The **Character Animation Crash Course By Eric Goldberg**is far more than a tutorial; it is a companion for anyone serious about the art of bringing characters to life. Its pages are filled with the wisdom of a master who has not only created iconic performances but has also dedicated himself to passing on that knowledge. The book respects the traditions of the craft while remaining fresh and accessible. For the price of a typical textbook, it offers

lessons that could otherwise take years of trial and error to discover. Whether you are taking your first steps in animation or looking to polish your portfolio, this course provides a structured, encouraging, and deeply practical path forward. In the ever-evolving world of animation, where tools change and styles shift, the principles within these pages remain constant. They are the foundation upon which great animation is built. And Eric Goldberg, with his characteristic warmth and precision, has given us an extraordinary guide to building that foundation ourselves.

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