Cartoon Fundamentals: How to Create Emotions from Simple Changes in the Face.

There are millions of eyes, mouths, noses, ears, chins in the world, each with their own characteristics. However, to draw faces in a cartoon style, you just need to understand the basics of them. Once you have mastered these concepts, pay attention to the depth, make sure that the head of your characters give the impression of being three-dimensional and you have mastered the technique of drawing them from every imaginable angle. If you can do that, great! But if you really want to draw attention to your art, you have to master the technique to bring them to life with facial expressions!

Practically anyone can draw a face. You make a circle with some dots and lines and anyone who looks to it will say that it's a face. But, in the same way that it's something easy to build, it can also become difficult when dealing with feelings and emotions...

Behavior of the Human Face

The various expressions of the human face, like the different tones of voice, can be changed with ease. Expressions aren't only result of muscles contraction, but the combined action of several muscles and relaxing of the opposite muscles. The same group act, for example, in both situations of smiling or laughing, only in different intensity levels.

If I ask you to describe exactly what kind of feelings do you identify in the image below, what do you say?

I know what, you'll tell me that the figure gives you a sense of calm and reflection. Maybe he's thinking about something. It's actually none of that! This is actually an image that expresses the complete absence of expression, since none of the facial muscles are being used. We're looking at an absence of emotions, so perhaps calm and relaxed is a good description of the emotion otherwise.

That's OK if you use this expression every day in your drawings. In fact, this is the expression that people use in 80% of the day! The thing is that these people are only with this face when they are alone, because, when looking to someone else or placing the person into a situation, there is a reaction; that will be answered with another reaction! And when it comes to cartoons, we must exaggerate this effect to the fullest to make it clear to our audience what emotions are being conveyed.

Primary Emotions

The primary emotions are those where we humans, don't have enough control of how they originate. This means that this kind of emotion doesn't have a correct direction. For example, it comes on suddenly, in response to a primary stimulus.

These basic emotions are expressed in our face regardless of culture, race or age. Below you can see the main ones:

- **Happiness (1):** Mouth curved upwards - higher eyebrows - eyes wide open;
- **Anger (2):** Mouth curved downward - eyebrows with the tip slightly lower down - eyes wide open;
- **Scared (3):** Mouth erratically curved down, higher eyebrows with irregularly shaped - eyes wide open;
- **Sadness (4):** Mouth curved downward; eyebrows with the tip slightly up - eyes with lower eyelids;

These are the main expressions of the face and which are most frequently used during our lives. For the cartoon, the vast majority of what you will need to develop are those four expressions. From this we can derive the other emotions.

There are two more expressions somewhat lesser known that compose the group of basic expressions:

5.   6.

- **Astonished (5):** Small and semi-open mouth - higher eyebrows with irregular shaped - eyes wide open;
- **Shucks (6):** Mouth erratically curved down, lower eyebrows with the tip down - eyes closed;
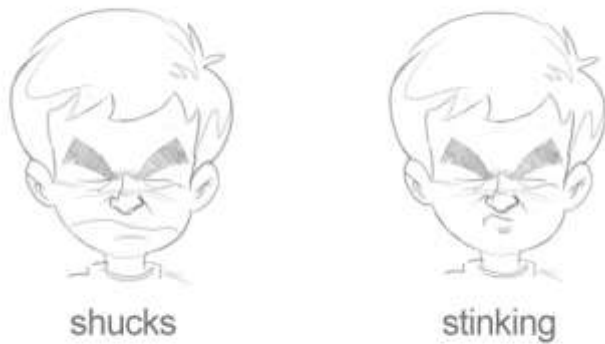
Now that you've been introduced to the primary expressions, you must be wondering why they are so few, right. It's simple: Just as there are **primary colors**, which can be mixed to give life to other colors, primary emotions can also be mixed to create several other secondary expressions! Just take a look:

Notice that, to build a sleepy expression, we took the eyebrows from the **happiness** expression and mixed with the almost closed eyes of the **sadness**. Cool, isn't?

= sleepy

Family Emotions

The fun doesn't stop there! The family emotions are those which build similar emotions by changing only one component of the face, finding **another** emotion!

shucks   stinking

Notice that only the mouth was modified in the two drawings. We can express two different feelings just by altering a single element of the face! Here is another example:

astonished   apprehensive

Once again, we just changed the mouth to convey the emotion we want.
This time we use the mouth and eyes to mount another variant of the same primary emotion.

astonished   confused

Not only are primary expressions that give rise to other emotions, we can extract a third emotion from a secondary emotion too.

sleepy   in love!

The mouth was the only fix what we did.
Fantastic, isn't it? It is quite possible that you get dozens or even hundreds of emotional possible faces for your designs applying these techniques!

Physical State Emotions

Emotions from physical states have a concept very close to primary emotions, but, unlike these, can assume several and unpredictable forms.

tired

Notice that physical emotions are also derived from primary emotions. **Tiredness** here is derived from **sadness**.
We can enhance an emotion just adding a complementary element, such as expiration drops, for example:

heat

Let's see another example of physical reaction which we do not have much control. This time our character is being exposed to an electrical current!

shock

As the reaction of a shock is something we can't control very well, in the cartoon it's an advantage, since we can exaggerate the expression to get the desired result. In this case, we exaggerate the mouth.

Also notice how the primary emotions are dominant. The shock, even being unmanageable, is a variant of **fear**. The most interesting in relation to physical emotions is that, in real life, we get these expressions without being aware of how we get it, as we are being exposed to external factors and other conditions.

Intensity and Additional Elements

The cartoon facial expressions are not just limited to a specific degree of intensity. Depending on intensity, we can create very interesting results:

happy

so happy!

shock

huge shock!

Vegeta? (Dragon Ball character if you're not in the know)
Besides the intensity, we can also insert additional elements to enhance the emotions. In the first image we added a few drops of sweat bouncing from the face to reinforce the fear. In the second one, we put the tongue out to strengthen the desired effect.

scared

shucks

Returning to fear, let's explore more.

scared to death!!!

By increasing the character's eyes and make him cover his face, we reached a spectacular effect.