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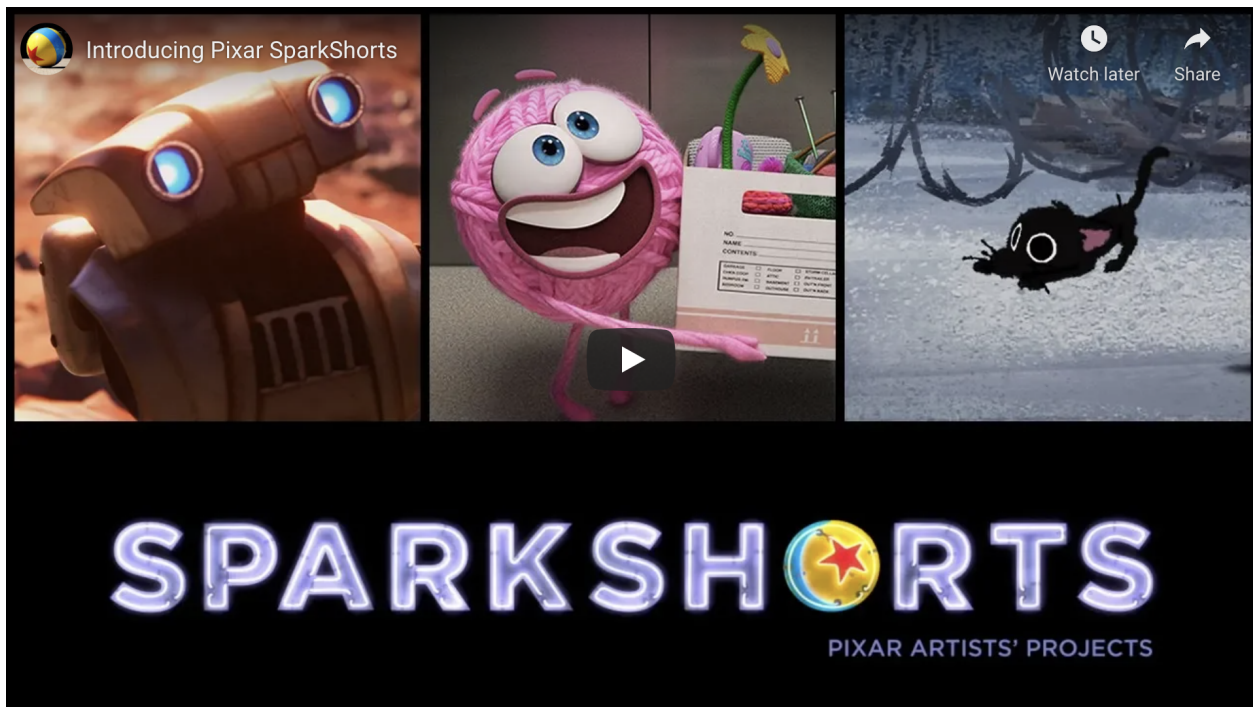
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ENGW3314

Professor Bushnell

Assignment #2: The Appreciation

Praise (and a few tears) for the Dialogue in Pixar's SparkShorts



Pixar.com - [Introducing Pixar SparkShorts](#)

One day, in the infancy of Disney+, I was scouring the site (as I often do) and I stumbled upon the SparkShorts tab of the Pixar section. Immediately, I was intrigued because I had never seen these mini wonders before! The length of the films reminded me of the Pixar shorts that I eagerly awaited before each Pixar film I saw in theaters as a kid. My family has always been the “10 minutes early is on time” type so naturally we would get to a movie at least thirty minutes before it started. This gave us plenty of time to eat all of our popcorn and get a refill before the movie began. It also gave me plenty of time to learn to appreciate the trailers. As such, Pixar

shorts quickly became my favorite movie experience. I felt like I was getting a little something extra every time I purchased a movie ticket. I loved the stories that were short but sweet and had the Pixar animation that I knew and loved. Fast forward to quarantine and again I felt like I was getting a little something extra with these SparkShorts. There I was, romanticizing going to a movie theater (mostly because I couldn't) with the nostalgic feeling of watching Pixar Shorts available at my fingertips.



Purl and Float
Photos: Disney+

Purl was the first SparkShort that had the pleasure of watching. It piqued my interest because of the main character — a bright pink ball of yarn. Having recently seen *Toy Story 4* at the time, and being blown away by the animation detail of the toys, I had to see how they animated yarn (spoiler alert: it's so magically palpable). *Purl* is about a ball of bright pink yarn (a woman) that's recently hired by the male dominated workplace, B.R.O. Capital. She's faced with

the common struggle of trying to fit in with the dudes and not having her ideas heard. After the instant serotonin high I got from *Purl* — the short but full story that brings you up and down and then back up again all while leaving you with an important message to ponder - I immediately clicked on *Float*. *Float* was the automated next short and at this point I was determined to watch all of the SparkShorts so I played along.

Float simply made me cry. The dedication at the end made me ugly cry. *Float* reminds us that when you can fly, others will always try to pull you down. Sometimes, others include the people that love you most. That is, until your loved ones realize being different is something to celebrate, not something to hide. *Float* follows a little boy that can fly (a metaphor for autism) and his dad as they both navigate the pressures of society deeming them abnormal.



Float
Photo: Disney+

Both *Purl* and *Float* use dialogue (and lack thereof) to paint relevant themes and somehow lightheartedly illustrate social commentary. They celebrate differences and leave the audience feeling excited and hopeful for the future. These SparkShorts break down walls for

Pixar not only in terms of animation but also in terms of content. It's obvious that these shorts are testing the waters to see what audiences will accept. It's 2021 and Pixar artists are showing off.

Consider that dialogue always has a purpose. Pixar has always challenged themselves to use little dialogue, almost challenging the viewer as if to say "our animation speaks for itself". Well, indeed it does in *Float*. There is a singular line of dialogue in *Float* which makes it oh so powerful. Instead of using dialogue as a crutch, *Float* relies on animation and sound design to tell this impactful story. Sounds that characters make replace dialogue and are just as effective. Whispers can be heard by the judgemental neighbors. The boy's emotions are clear in his sounds and facial expressions. And, the dad barely holding himself together is conveyed through many gasps, sighs, and puffs of frustration.

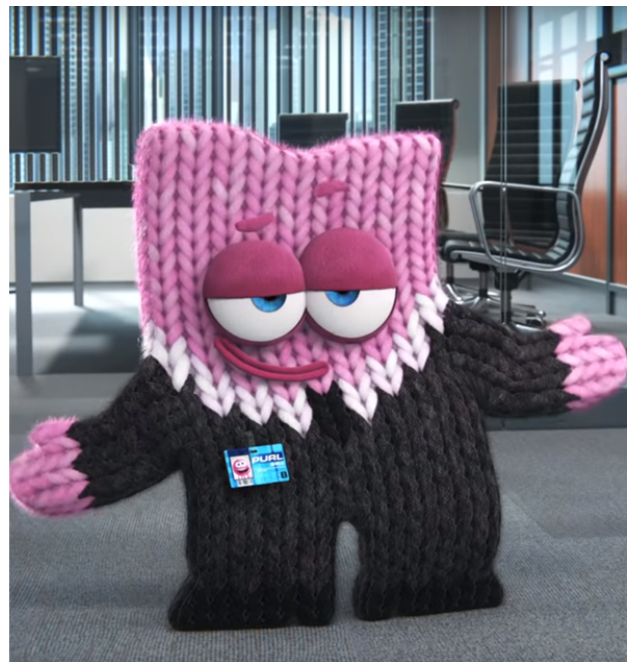
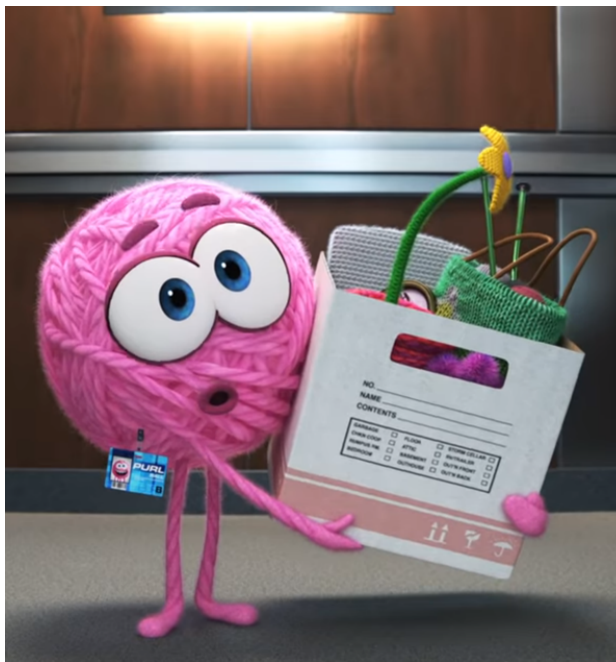
The climax of *Float* is a singular line of dialogue. This comes after several close calls of people seeing the son and thinking he's different. People all react with wide eyes, angry eyes, and/or judgmental eyes. They all see the son as a potential threat to their child or a nuisance. The dad seems to be protecting his son from the outside world and it's clear at this point that attempting to hide his son's ability to fly is wearing on him. As he brings his son to the playground, he fills the boy's backpack with rocks so he stays grounded, quite literally weighing him down. The dad hides behind a car when the neighbors with the "normal" daughter walk by - going to extremes to hide the boy because he's embarrassed. At the playground, the boy breaks away from his leash and flies around while trying to play with the other children. When the dad pulls him down, the boy has a tantrum ending when the father exclaims "Why can't you just be normal?" ("Watch Float | Disney+")

Read that line again. Why can't you just be normal? Six words that are absolutely heartbreaking. If you've been on the receiving end of those six words, you probably know the sinking feeling of your bubble being popped so dramatically. It's even worse if the person saying it to you is someone you love so dearly. It hurts being on the delivering end of those words too. Immediately you can feel the other person's bubble pop and you have instant regrets. This one line is so impactful because it's so relatable. In *Float*, the dad has instant regret too. The son immediately sinks to the ground and cries. The music cuts out here and all we're left with is the devastating sound of the little boy crying. The dad apologizes by bringing the boy onto the swings, finally accepting who he is by letting him fly in front of everyone at the playground. The laughs here are almost too loud, probably on purpose. The utter joy and happiness that is felt by the duo is loud and proud for everyone to hear. *Float* is a beautiful display of how words but more importantly, lack of words can paint the picture of a story.



Float
Photo: Disney+

Conversely, *Purl* uses way more dialogue that is quite specifically chosen to create the atmosphere of B.R.O. Capital and therefore drive home the main message. Is being accepted more important than being yourself? Purl has a happy go lucky attitude that is quickly squandered on her first day of work when she realizes that everyone sees her as different from them. Her ideas are ignored and her spirits are dampened but not for long. Her solution? She knits herself into a flatter piece of yarn, complete with a suit. Purl changes herself to fit in. She acts more aggressive and it works! Suddenly, she's one of the guys. But not for long. Another ball of yarn is hired and Purl has to make the tough decision of staying accepted in the workplace or being true to herself.



Purl
Photo: Disney+

Writer Kristen Lester, juxtaposes four main interactions that Purl has with her co-workers to emphasize the difference in the way Purl is treated when she is herself and when she is trying to fit in. I've categorized these exchanges into the following: morning, water cooler, staff meeting, and bar. Interestingly, *Purl* plays on male stereotypes to make its point which she does

through her dialogue. Is this problematic? Maybe. But by emphasizing the stereotypical behavior of men in the workplace, Lester highlights a reality that many women can relate to. It's in this way that she so plainly calls attention to the problem and makes the audience think about it.

On her very first day, Purl is herself. She enthusiastically says "Good morning!" to everyone she walks by and she's simply ignored. The next day, after she's changed and when the men enter, Purl simply says "Gronkowski." ("Watch Purl | Disney+") with her eyes lowered which immediately gets their attention. It's sad but true that enthusiasm doesn't always work for women in the workplace. For Purl to be noticed, she has to act like she doesn't care what her co-workers think of her. These snippets of dialogue are small and may seem insignificant but they serve a purpose.

Purl has a brilliant idea to try and fit in at the water cooler on the first day. One of the men says a lame BMW joke which isn't even worth quoting and Purl follows up with an adorable knitting joke (corny, but cute) and again, she's ignored. After she changes however, she comes in guns ablazing with a sexual joke saying "And then he says I know this suit is expensive but at my apartment, it's 100% off" ("Watch Purl | Disney+") which gets everyone rolling. To her pleasure, she's on her way to being one of the bros! I thought this joke was particularly clever of Lester because it's pretty offbeat for something has the Pixar logo attached to it but it's powerful in its emphasis on the issue at hand which is the extreme measures women have to go to to be respected in a male dominated field.

Lester uses the daily staff meeting to show the aggressive stereotype of men. At her first meeting, Purl offers her idea to "bring finance in and we can knit our strategies together!" (side note: the knitting puns add sew much pizzazz) to which she is immediately shot down by the men telling her that she's too soft. Immediately following, the whole room erupts in a frenzy that

just sounds like all of the men screaming that they have to be more aggressive. The next day, Purl is standing on the table shouting “I say we go for it and if finance doesn’t like it, they can kiss our ass!” (“Watch Purl | Disney+”) which is again, pretty off beat for Pixar. This is perhaps my favorite line in whole short because it’s so aggressive. Purl gets high fives down the table for screaming this which isn’t even really an idea but because she’s conforming, she gets praise.



Purl
Photo: Disney+

The invite to the bar is a paramount part in this story and the wording used is so deliberate. When the guys go to the bar the first time the one guy in the elevator asks “Hey, have we got everybody?” and the other guy responds “Yeah... that’s everybody.” while looking directly at Purl. She’s quite literally a nobody while she’s acting like herself. The next day, the same question is asked but this time, the guy responds “Hey, hold up. Not everybody,” and ushers Purl into the group. She’s only somebody because she’s acting how they want her to. And, she’s so happy because she’s finally one of the dudes. The music in the background is triumphant

and all signs point to this being the end of the short which would be mildly concerning. What kind of message does it send that you can only be accepted if you change yourself to fit in?

Purl's happiness as one of the dudes is short-lived because another ball of yarn, Lacey is hired, throwing Purl into a dilemma of staying in the group or being true to herself. At first, Purl seems to have chosen the first option by saying "Leave the knitting at your nana's house. Am I right?" which is amazingly constructed because it's a knitting joke. A knitting joke that is meant to be an insult shows that no matter how hard Purl tries, she'll always be toeing the line between bro and yarn. She can't be a bro because it's not who she is and deep down she knows this which is why she chooses last minute to stay with Lacey, introduce herself, and invite Lacey to the bar. The short ends by Purl introducing a new male employee to the newly diverse workplace that B.R.O. Capital has become where balls of yarn are mixed in, and not all men are in suits.



Purl
Photo: Disney+

The difference between the use of dialogue in *Purl* and *Float* emphasizes that these SparkShorts are accomplishing their goal of lifting talented and new artists by giving them a place to showcase their talents. Although done in two completely different manners, both shorts have the same wow effect on the audience. My initial overwhelming awe of these two particular SparkShorts came from their unique form of social commentary. They're so beautifully done in a way that isn't aggressive but instead, obvious. Pixar has always loved to pull on heartstrings but, gone are the days that they don't also punch you in the gut which is a true testament to their storytelling in their SparkShorts.

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