

A Crash Course in Animation History

- 30,000 BCE** – Pottery discovered in Shahr-e Sukhteh in Iran shows the first known example of sequential art, a “comic strip” of a goat eating leaves
- 1659** – Dutch Scientist Christiaan Huygens invents a version of the magic lantern, which uses convex lenses to project light and shadow
- 1827** – British physician John Ayrton Paris credited with inventing a popular optical illusion toy called the thaumatrope or “wonder turner”
- 1833** – Belgian physicist Joseph Plateau invents the phenakistiscope, fantascope, or “eye deceiver”, an optical illusion device that spins images in a sequence to create a motion loop
- 1866** – Milton Bradley introduces the zoetrope, a cylinder version of the phanakistiscope, sold with replaceable filmstrips showing different images in motion
- 1906** – Vitagraph Studios and J. Stuart Blackton create ***Humorous Phases of Funny Faces***, considered the first animated film on standard picture film
- 1914** – Max and Dave Fleischer release the ***Out of the Inkwell*** series of animated short films using rotoscoping for the first time; animator Windsor McCay releases ***Gertie the Dinosaur***
- 1926** – German animation ***The Adventures of Prince Achmed*** released, the earliest surviving feature-length animated film at 65 minutes long
- 1928** – Laugh-O-gram Films Studios (later Walt Disney Studios) in Kansas City, MO releases ***Steamboat Willie***, the first cartoon with synchronized sound
- 1930s** – Fleischer Studios introduces Betty Boop, an original character, and Popeye the Sailor, based on the strip comics by Elzie Segar
- 1932** – Disney releases “Flowers and Trees”, the first Technicolor short animation
- 1937** – the first colorized, sound-synchronized feature-length animated film, ***Snow White and the Seven Dwarves***, is released by Walt Disney – used lots of new technology and techniques like the multi-plane camera
- 1940** – Disney’s animated anthology film ***Fantasia*** released the same year they also released ***Pinocchio***
- 1972** – British animation studio Aardman Animations founded – best known for Wallace & Gromit, Morph, and Shaun the Sheep shorts and feature films
- 1973** – The Annie Award established by ASIFA-Hollywood for Distinguished Contributions to the Art of Animation established; the first was given to Max Fleischer. Categories have expanded widely since
- 1975** – Will Vinton Studios founded, known for 1980s animated shorts, commercials and special effects for film and TV - they only ever make one feature film, ***The Adventures of Mark Twain***
- 1979** – Nickelodeon launches their cable channel nationally with programming including animation aimed at kids – they started making their own original animated work in the 90s
- 1980s** – computer animation is beginning to be used to make animated short films and as special effects in film



- 1987** – team at CompuServe led by Steve Wilhite releases the graphics interchange format or GIF, the oldest form of web animation
- 1985** – Studio Ghibli founded - their first acclaimed film, *Nausicaä and the Valley of the Wind*, is released in 1984
- 1989** – Disney releases *The Little Mermaid*, returning to animated films after producing extensive TV media for their cable channel
- 1992** – Cartoon Network created by Turner Broadcasting System after they purchased Hanna-Barbera studios' animation library – their Adult Swim nighttime show block expanded US animation beyond kids' programming
- 1993** – Universal Pictures releases Jurassic Park, using advanced computer animation effects blended with blocking and puppetry work to create realistic dinosaurs for screen actors to interact with
- 1994** – Dreamworks Animation founded; Cartoon Network Studios founded through Hanna-Barbera
- 1995** – Pixar Animation Studios releases Toy Story, the first entirely computer-animated feature-length film
- 1997** – Ren & Stimpy Show creator John Kricfalusi experiments with Adobe Flash animation for the first internet webseries for adults – starts an era of independent web cartoons
- 2000s** – Web cartoons grow in prominence with sites like Albino Blacksheep, Homestar Runner, and How It Should Have Ended.
- 2002** – The Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences adds a Best Animated Feature award
- 2005** – Will Vinton Studios becomes LAIKA production company - known for stop-motion films; YouTube launches, allowing animators to release videos directly without needing their own site
- 2007** – Golden Globes add Best Animated Feature Film award
- 2013** – Online streaming service Netflix pairs with DreamWorks to start making original animation for kids
- 2018** - Netflix launches its own animation studio amid a boom of TV and streaming animation for all ages, adult shows as well as kids
- 2022** – Warner Brothers Discovery CEO David Zaslav begins cancelling in-progress and completed media projects for tax write-offs, including animation (which requires more time and costs to create than other media Warner offers).
- 2023 - present** - Zaslav continues removing animated media from streaming access, some while the shows are still in active production, allegedly to avoid paying creators for shows on streaming
- 2024** – Warner Bros Discovery shuts down the website for Cartoon Network
- 2025** – Max, HBO's streaming service, removes all Looney Tunes shorts produced from 1930 to 1969 after declaring a year before that Looney Tunes would be unaffected; spin-off cartoons remain on streaming
- 2025** – Ketchup Entertainment releases *The Day the Earth Blew Up: A Looney Tunes Movie*; produced by Max and then sold to Ketchup, it opens in theaters on the heels of Max pulling Looney Tunes classic cartoons off their streaming service
- 2025** – *Flow*, a computer animated film made entirely with animation software Blender and released by Sideshow and Janus Films, wins the Best Animated Film Oscar for 2025

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