Lesson Plan: Brick Flicks - An Introduction to Stop Motion Animation

Subject: Digital Arts, Storytelling, STEM

Grade Level: Adaptable for Grades 4-8

Time Allotment: 45 Minutes

Materials Needed

- A smartphone or tablet
- A stop motion app (e.g., "Stop Motion Studio" - the free version is excellent)
- A stable place to mount the device (a small tripod, a stack of books, or a phone holder)
- Small objects to animate (e.g., LEGO figures, clay, small toys, paper cutouts, an eraser)
- A simple, non-distracting background (a piece of colored paper or plain tabletop)
- Good lighting (a desk lamp or a spot near a well-lit window)

Lesson Procedure

Part 1: The Spark - What is Stop Motion? (5 minutes)

1. **Hook:** Begin by watching a short, exciting clip of a professional stop motion animation. A trailer for a movie like "*Shaun the Sheep*" or a dynamic LEGO fan-made video works well.
2. **Inquiry:** Ask the student: "How do you think they made that character move? It's just a clay sheep/plastic toy!" Guide them to the idea that it's a series of pictures.
3. **Introduce the Core Concept:** Explain that stop motion is a filmmaking trick where you bring inanimate objects to life. You do this by taking a photo, moving the object just a tiny bit, taking another photo, and repeating this process many, many times. When you play the photos back quickly, it creates the illusion of movement. This is called "Persistence of Vision."

Part 2: The Setup - Becoming a Director (10 minutes)

1. **App Demonstration:** Open the stop motion app together. Give a quick tour of the most important button: the big red "capture" button. Explain the "onion skin" feature if the app has it (it shows a transparent ghost image of your last photo, which is super helpful for seeing how much you've moved your object).
2. **Set the Stage:** Work with the student to set up their "movie studio."
    - Place the background paper on a flat surface.
    - Position the light source so it doesn't create harsh shadows or glare.
    - Mount the phone or tablet so it has a clear, steady view of the "stage." **Emphasize: The camera must not move!** This is the most important rule of stop motion.
3. **Plan a Simple Story:** The goal for a first animation is to keep it simple! Brainstorm a 3-5 second "micro-story."
    - **Good ideas for a first film:** A LEGO figure walking across the screen, a clay ball squishing and bouncing, an eraser wiggling its way to a pencil mark.
    - **The "storyboard":** Have the student state the beginning, middle, and end of their micro-story. (e.g., "Beginning: The figure is on the left. Middle: The figure moves to the center. End: The figure is on the right.")

Part 3: Action! - The Animation Process (20 minutes)

1. **Guided Creation:** Now it's time for the student to animate! Guide them through the first few frames.
    - Place the object at its starting position. **Take a picture.**
    - Move the object a *tiny* amount. **Take a picture.**
    - Move it another *tiny* amount. **Take a picture.**
    - Encourage them to take at least 25-30 photos to get a few seconds of animation. Remind them that small, consistent movements create the smoothest animation.
2. **Facilitate and Troubleshoot:** Be on hand to help. Did the camera get bumped? (Just move it back). Is the movement too jerky? (Try smaller movements next time). This phase is all about experimentation and learning by doing. The student should be in full control of the creative process.

Part 4: The Premiere - Sharing and Reflecting (5 minutes)

1. **Movie Time:** In the app, press the "play" button and watch the creation come to life! Celebrate the accomplishment. It's magical to see the still objects start moving.
2. **Reflection:** Ask some thoughtful questions to reinforce the learning:
    - "What was the most challenging part of the process?"
    - "What part are you most proud of?"
    - "If you were to do this again, what is one thing you would do differently?"
    - "What's another story you could tell using stop motion?"
3. **Extension (Optional):** Briefly mention that for their next film, they could explore adding sound effects, title cards, or even voiceovers, which are often features within the app.

Merit-Focused Rubric Evaluation

Criterion	Evaluation
1. Learning Objectives	**Excellent.** The objectives are specific, measurable, and achievable (SMA): "Define stop motion," "Plan a simple sequence," and "Create a short animation." These goals are concise, realistic for a 45-minute introductory session, and can be directly assessed by observing the student's final product and their answers during the reflection phase. They are developmentally appropriate for the target grade range.
2. Alignment with Standards and Curriculum	**Excellent.** The lesson implicitly and explicitly aligns with recognized educational standards. It directly maps to the ISTE Standards for Students, particularly **1.6 Creative Communicator** (students create original works) and **1.4 Innovative Designer** (students use a deliberate design process to solve problems). The logical progression from theory (what is it?) to practice (let's do it!) reflects a standard pedagogical sequence.
3. Instructional Strategies	**Excellent.** The plan utilizes a well-rounded mix of strategies that promote active learning. It begins with a hook and inquiry-based learning, moves to brief direct instruction for the technical setup, and dedicates the bulk of the time to hands-on, project-based learning. This structure caters to visual (watching clips), auditory (explanation), and kinesthetic (creating the animation) learners.

Criterion	Evaluation
4. Engagement and Motivation	**Excellent.** Motivation is woven throughout the lesson. It connects to popular, real-world media (movies), incorporates technology in a creative way, and provides a high degree of student choice and voice in their "micro-story" and character selection. The immediate gratification of seeing their creation come to life at the end provides a powerful and motivating conclusion.
5. Differentiation and Inclusivity	**Excellent.** Though designed for a single student, the plan is inherently differentiable. • **For support:** The task can be simplified to animating a single, simple object (like a ball rolling) with a focus purely on the technical process. • **For a challenge:** The student can be encouraged to animate a more complex action (a character waving or picking something up), plan a more detailed story, or experiment with the app's advanced features like adjusting frames per second (fps).
6. Assessment Methods	**Excellent.** Assessment is seamlessly integrated. • **Formative:** The teacher observes the student's process, asks guiding questions, and troubleshoots in real-time during the creation phase. • **Summative:** The primary assessment is the finished animation itself. Does it demonstrate a basic understanding of the stop motion process? The reflection questions also serve as a summative assessment of the student's conceptual understanding and critical thinking about their own work.
7. Organization and Clarity	**Excellent.** The lesson plan is clearly sequenced with a distinct opening (The Spark), a main activity (The Setup/Action), and a closure (The Premiere). Timestamps for each section provide a clear and manageable flow for a 45-minute period. Instructions are presented as a step-by-step guide, making the plan easy for any educator to follow.
8. Creativity and Innovation	**Excellent.** This lesson excels in fostering creativity. Instead of focusing on rote memorization, the entire experience is an act of creation. It encourages storytelling, visual problem-solving (How do I make it look like it's walking?), and experimentation. It uses modern, accessible technology to reimagine classic art forms like puppetry and animation, making it a fresh and innovative approach to a STEAM lesson.
9. Materials and Resource Management	**Excellent.** The plan makes highly effective use of simple, readily available resources, which is ideal for a homeschool setting. It leverages powerful technology that is already in most homes (a smartphone) and combines it with common toys and household items. The materials list is specific, age-appropriate, and requires no significant expense or complex setup.