

## **THE QUEENS OF ANIMATION**

### **Questions and topics for discussion**

1. Bianca Majolie and Grace Huntington were two of the first women in Walt Disney Studios' story department. What were some of the challenges they both faced, and in what ways were their experiences different? Do you think those differences were due to individual personalities, or to an evolution in the way the department was run?
2. Why were so few women given on-screen credit in Disney's animated features? Do you think the struggle to be included in these credits was equally difficult for the men who worked on the pictures? To what extent was direct confrontation, such as the one Sylvia Holland had with Walt Disney about the credits for *Fantasia*, effective?
3. From very early on, Walt Disney Studios was plagued by financial troubles and, during turbulent times, laid off many members of staff. In what ways did these layoffs provide opportunities for the women employees, and in what ways may they have unequally penalized the women? How is Retta Scott's experience as an animator at the studio emblematic of both these effects?
4. In February 1941, Walt Disney made a speech to his employees defending the training of women for higher level jobs throughout the studio (pp. 127–8). He said, "The girl artists have the right to expect the same chances for advancement as men, and I honestly believe that they may eventually contribute something to this business that men never would or could." Do you feel that his actions and the studio's policies in subsequent years bore this out? If so, how? If not, why not?
5. In the early 1940s, the U.S. government subsidized several Disney pictures that were targeted directly toward a South American audience. How were they received? Do you feel they succeeded in paying tribute to the diverse cultures of Latin America?
6. World War II marked a colossal shift for the entire country as women were asked to take over the jobs of millions of men who left to fight overseas. What impact did the war years have on the women of Walt Disney Studios? How did things change for the women employees when the war ended?
7. The book reveals that, in features such as *Song of the South* and *Fantasia*, Walt Disney Studios sometimes got it very wrong, caricaturing African Americans and other ethnic groups, and objectifying women. To what extent did the women who worked on these features influence or ameliorate these representations? Do you think the studio has taken appropriate steps in subsequent years to address those past mistakes and avoid repeating them?

8. Throughout the book, the author charts the impact of technological innovation on the art of animation, from the advent of the grease pencil to the multiplane camera, from the Xerox machine to 3-D computer imaging. In what way did animation benefit or suffer from these advancements? How were Disney's women artists in particular affected by their adoption?
9. *The Queens of Animation* describes not only the professional accomplishments of the women story artists and animators of Walt Disney Studios, but also their personal struggles and triumphs, such as Mary Blair's tempestuous home life. Do you think this material is appropriate to include in a book about the women of Disney? If not, why not? If so, why do you feel it's important to their stories?
10. As one of Walt Disney's favorite artists, Mary Blair enjoyed remarkable autonomy and creative license as a concept artist on numerous animated features, but she also drew the jealousy of some of her colleagues. Do you think she would have been viewed or treated differently by these colleagues if she were a man? How did the resentment of coworkers ultimately impact Mary's career and legacy at Walt Disney Studios?
11. The book profiles women who have worked on numerous recent Disney animated features, including *Mulan*, *Brave*, *Moana*, and *Frozen*. How do think their contributions have influenced these films? Do you think they've had an impact on the features' critical and commercial reception? How has the portrayal of women and girls in animated features young audiences see today changed since the "golden age" of Walt Disney Studios?