

Department Head Make-up April Chaney talks about **ABBOTT ELEMENTARY**

BY NAME HERE?



Above: April Chaney. Below left: the cast of *Abbott Elementary*. Photo: ©2021 Warner Bros. Entertainment Inc.

How did you get started as a make-up artist in the entertainment industry?

I was recruited from the Armani counter at Saks Fifth Avenue by Emmy® winner Heather Currie, who is now a make-up artist for *The Ellen DeGeneres Show*. Working at Saks for 15 years educated me. I worked on many skin types, ethnicities, etc. I mastered the color wheel. Heather helped me get signed with an agency in Los Angeles, and I began assisting another artist and working on photo shoots.

You are currently the Department Head Make-up for the Warner Bros. Television/ABC comedy *Abbott Elementary*. How do you approach the make-up for a TV series? Does it start with the script?

It does begin with the script, and it is a joint effort with the talent and the producers. *Abbott Elementary* stars Quinta Brunson, who is also the creator and executive producer. We came together with a joint sense of what each character should look like.

How do you individualize each character's look?

If the character has a bolder personality, then we might use a bolder lip shade. Sheryl Lee Ralph's character of Barbara, for example, is

loosely based on Quinta's own mother who is very well put together. Her make-up always coincides with her outfit, which is something we took into consideration.

Do you collaborate with the actors on their look/personal preferences?

I communicate with each actor about their preferred look. We have actresses that do not want their lipstick to rub off on their mask, so for that we will use a matte lipstick. For some of our gentlemen, they prefer to use green beauty, and one of the lines we've chosen is Burt's Bees lip balm. Another actor prefers minimal make-up, so we use a tinted moisturizer on him. As an esthetician, I'm also conscious of scents and ingredients that might cause an allergic reaction or breakouts.

Some of my favorite lipsticks that do not have fragrance in them are Christian Dior and The Lip Bar.

Do you also collaborate with the costume designer?

Prior to each episode, I work directly with our costume department in creating each look. They give the actors five different options weekly, and each morning I look at what is selected.

The show is based on a school in Philadelphia and make-up trends often align with the location. How did you learn about Philadelphia trends?

I looked on Instagram for social media personalities based in Philadelphia. It is not all that different. You wouldn't believe how influential we are in California. We've changed the game when it comes to music, make-up, hair, culture, etc. There are some regional differences though; for example, I'm from the South, and we don't use as much foundation because it's so humid.

How do you approach putting make-up on children in this show?

We are currently working on an episode that features a step team, so we went in a very cute direction. The girls loved it. I worked on



The cast of *Abbot Elementary*.
Photos: ©2021 Warner Bros. Entertainment Inc.

multiple seasons of *Dancing with the Stars*, so we pulled out all the glitter and bright colors and we added adorable stars. For coverage, we just used a little tinted moisturizer. We're more conservative with lip color, because they are an elementary school, so we typically use lip balms.

Does watching dailies inform your make-up choices when you're on set?

Watching the dailies each week makes a huge difference. When I compare the dailies to what I'm doing in the trailer, there's always a way to improve. For example, when I watched the dailies on *Abbott Elementary*, I noticed that one of the actors looked a little too young for her character. I then decided to add black eyeliner instead of brown. For one of the male actors, I was using a tinted moisturizer, and I noticed via the dailies that his skin looked a little flush, so we used a little more concealer for coverage.

Has the pandemic also changed trends?

Yes. I used to come to work made up with make-up each day—lashes done, brows done, lipstick done. I've saved a lot of money on make-up since the pandemic began. I've also noticed more matte lipstick cosmetics lines are coming out because of the use of masks. Skincare has also become widely popular because people are wearing less make-up. There are more eyelash lines, too.

I've noticed that shade ranges have also changed a lot.

There have always been people of different colors from different countries, and the market is now recognizing that and developing colors for everyone. When I started out in make-up, I couldn't find colors that matched me. I worked for a make-up line that didn't have foundation for my skin tone. I give social media the credit for forcing the industry's hand.

Is it important to hire people who know how to work with the color wheel?

It is a must. We have a lot of people in our industry that struggle with finding foundation colors for people with darker complexions. I've had the advantage of working on multiple skin complexions, but if you haven't had that experience, then it can be difficult to match their color.

How would you define your leadership style?

My team loves doing make-up, and that is truly important. When hiring people on my team, I look to those who view make-up as a passion, not as a job.

Are there any make-up mistakes you have noticed over the years?

Make-up is always growing and evolving. One of the unfortunate parts of COVID-19 is that there are not as many hands-on classes available. Social media is also a great teacher. My team and I will message each other if we see a make-up trend on TikTok or Instagram that we like.

How big a role does personality play in your line of work?

Personality is 80 percent of why you're hiring someone. You want your team to be able to get along with talent. It is a much more successful experience when your teammates enjoy their actors.

You're rushing out of the house and can only grab three make-up items. What are they?

Mascara is my number one. Mascara has many uses—you can make an eyeliner out of it, and you can also use mascara in the brows. A great pair of lashes can also change a look instantly, and finally, a tinted lip balm ... nobody wants dry lips.