

Not Just An Idiot Box

Description

With my nephew of 16-months rapidly learning how to speak and walk, keeping him entertained with toys and activities is difficult at the best of times. And sometimes, the siren song of just plopping your child down in front of the TV for a little bit is very strong. Some parents avoid that temptation (like my sister and nephew), but others yield quickly and often.



There have been so many research studies and experiments done to figure out the effect television has on a child, with results bouncing between quite detrimental to beneficial. The debate continues to rage about how much computer/television screen time is too much, especially with all the programs geared specifically towards children on the air right now.

Some families strictly limit the time spent in front of the television/computer, like a friend of mine who lets her children watch 30 minutes of monitored tv a day, no exceptions and no excuses. Meanwhile, other families will let their kids watch whatever they want for hours at a time.

In my opinion, the ideal solution lies somewhere in the middle of the two extremes, striking a balance between un-educational and educational programs, as well as participating in other activities away from the television.

And yes, I did say educational programs. They do exist, and not always in ways you imagine.

For example, throughout my childhood, I watched a large assortment of programs ranging from Polka Dot Door and Fraggle Rock to animated shows like Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles and He-Man. They were all entertaining and some more than others attempted to imbue lessons within their shows, like accepting those who are different than you.

There are two shows that I watched as a kid, and would continue to watch if they were still on the air, that had a great impact on my education and development. The first show is one that has seen a bit of resurgence in recent years, while the other one is sadly gone, but not forgotten.

Practice Makes Perfect?

The show can be described in any one of the famous characters that it spawned: Foghorn Leghorn, Marvin the Martian, Speedy Gonzales, Daffy Duck, Elmer Fudd and of course, Bugs Bunny.

The list of classic characters that appeared in Looney Toons goes on and on, but for me, none more so than that one inseparable duo, locked in an endless cycle of predator versus prey.

Time and time again they would meet, with the results always the same “prey outwits/outmaneuvers predator, no matter how much we wish otherwise. The relationship viewers had with this particular predator was not one of fear or anger, but one of sympathy.

It’s not Sylvester and Tweety, Marvin the Martian and Duck Dodgers or even Elmer Fudd and Bugs Bunny.

No. Instead think of the stereotypical Texas desert, lightning fast speeds, the borderline omnipotent presence of the ACME Corporation and “meep, meep.”



That’s right, it’s Wile E. Coyote and The Road Runner.

After everything they’ve been through, how could you not want Wile E. Coyote to, at least once, catch that blasted Road Runner?

The misadventures of the coyote with a credit line at ACME were enjoyable and entertaining, but as a child, I learned a few lessons that made a difference (aside from the fact that gravity will give you a few seconds before you fall to hold up a little sign stating “Help!”)

Wile E. Coyote, as evil as he is for wanting to eat the peaceful roadrunner (or sheep or Bugs Bunny as the case sometimes was), he is simply acting out the cyclical relationship of predator versus prey. But more than that, it was all about persistence.

No matter how bad it got, how much pain he endured, Wile E. always came back with more and more ideas to catch his quarry. But, there is a difference between persistence and sheer fanaticism, as the Coyote could stop at any time and find some other prey or at least buy some food from ACME, they seem to sell everything else.

Chuck Jones, the creator of Looney Tunes, and the writers apparently created a series of rules relating to Wile E. vs. the Road Runner, examples of which are:

No outside force can harm the Coyote—only his own ineptitude or the failure of Acme products. Trains and trucks were the exception from time to time.

The Coyote could stop anytime—IF he were not a fanatic. (Repeat: —A fanatic is one who redoubles his effort when he has forgotten his aim.—George Santayana).

Whenever possible, make gravity the Coyote’s greatest enemy.

The Coyote is always more humiliated than harmed by his failures.



Thank you Wile E. Coyote for teaching me that persistence is a virtue, but that sometimes, the hardest thing to do is to admit defeat, re-group and move on when something truly is a lost cause. It is a difficult lesson to realize, but an important one to learn all the same.

But I realized that if a —super genius— could learn such a harsh one, than so could I.

Useful Knowledge

This next memorable show was also created by Warner Brothers Television, but premiered when I was nine years old, long after Looney Toons had already entertained millions of children. While the newer show was still animated with a lot of slapstick and gags, it also managed to educate, as well as entertain.

The show, Animaniacs, was produced by Steven Spielberg, who was actively involved in all manners of the show’s production and made sure that not only was the show entertaining, but also balanced that with quite a number of educational segments.

Animaniacs parodied a lot of pop culture and celebrities, everything from the Marx Brothers to the H.M.S Pinafore to Seinfeld, and even Spielberg himself! The content was directed at every age group, and was able to be silly without being immature and intelligent without being preachy.

Through elementary and high school, I was always surprised whenever something would come up that I already knew, not from the textbook or classes, but from watching an Animaniacs cartoon!

For example, what Canadian child could name most of the United States presidents in order to the tune of the William Tell Overture?

Or name all the U.S. States and their capitols to the toe-tappigly wonderful tune of Turkey in the Straw?

But the best of them all, and one I put to use in my final year of High School in my World Issues class, was "Nations of the World" set to the tune the Mexican Hat Dance. While it is a bit out of date now, the memory of it is locked away safely in my brain, so I still can name over half of all the countries mentioned in the song.

If you've never heard it, press play and prepare to watch it many more times and have it stuck in your head for years!

Shhhhh, TV

Television can entertain, it can marvel and it can educate, but it can also distract. Television, computers and other entertainment media have a wide array of applications, and deserve to be enjoyed and seen.

However, as good as watching an animal documentary may be or watching a sitcom about family, it is still entertainment, and cannot be substituted for the real thing. It has its place, as do other activities.

So, don't spend all your time daydreaming about what you see on the television screen. Go out and do it, and take your kids with you.

They may complain about missing their video games, television shows and movies, but do it anyway.

That's what PVR's are for anyway, right?

Category

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