

## **CIMS 3204.401 History of Children's Television**

**Fall 2023**

Linda Simensky [lindasim@sas.upenn.edu](mailto:lindasim@sas.upenn.edu)

ARTH 3874 | ENGL 0594 | FNAR 3185

Monday 3:30 – 6:30pm

### **Office hours: TBD**

Available other times by appointment

### **Teaching Assistant**

TBD

Available by appointment

Please note that this is not the final draft of this syllabus. Readings will change and assignments and dates will be adjusted. Please let me know if you have any questions about this course or this syllabus.

## **Course Overview**

This course will survey the history of children's television from the invention of television through the present, with an emphasis on series development and production, artistry, and the colorful personalities who built this industry. We'll consider important figures including Fred Rogers, Bill Hanna and Joe Barbera, Joan Ganz Cooney, Jim Henson and Walt Disney. We will discuss the history of animated cartoons that were made specifically for television, Saturday morning production, the rise of Japanese cartoons from the 1960s through *Pokemon*, and the growth of children's cable channels in the 90s, as well as other landmark moments. We'll also assess the impact of streaming platforms on television and the future of children's media.

## **Screenings**

There will be screenings during each class session. For your reference, links to the material we watch in class will be posted on a screening list on Canvas. A draft of the screening list for each class will be posted the weekend before class, but you are not required to screen this content before class. After class, a final screening list will be posted after class to reflect any revisions or additions to that list.

## **Topics, Readings**

All readings will be posted on Canvas unless you see a link below the reading citation.

Readings on Canvas will be labeled with the author's name and page numbers.

The readings listed below the date/topic should be read in advance of that class.

I will also assign some additional readings toward the end of the semester.

We may have a few speakers through Zoom. In advance, I will share the speaker's biography and/or articles about this speaker and their accomplishments.

## **September 11 Introduction to the class, Early Television**

Julie Dobrow, Calvin Gidney, and Jennifer Burton, "Why it's so important for kids to see diverse TV and movie characters," **The Conversation**, March 7, 2018.

<https://theconversation.com/why-its-so-important-for-kids-to-see-diverse-tv-and-movie-characters-92576>,

Julie Dobrow, "Oscars May be So White but So Are Kids' Cartoons," **Huffington Post**, March 4, 2017.

<https://www.huffpost.com/entry/oscars-may-be-so-white-bu b 9375072>

## **September 18 Early Television Animation, Children as a Target Audience, Local Programming, and Some Puppets**

Michael Frierson, "Clay Animation and the Early Days of Television: The *Gumby* Series," **Clay Animation**, pp. 171-180.

Gary Grossman, **Saturday Morning TV**, pp. 1-4, 7-10, 12-13.

Keith Scott, "Crusader Rabbit: His Rise and Fall," **The Moose That Roared**, pp. 14-30.

## **September 25 UPA, Hanna-Barbera, Walt Disney, and Mickey Mouse \*\* Yom Kippur (please see me if you will be out that day)**

David Bianculli, "*The Mickey Mouse Club*," **The Platinum Age of Television**, pp. 21-26.

Maureen Furniss, **A New History of Animation**, pp. 208-215.

Christian Moran, **Great Big Beautiful Tomorrow: Walt Disney and Technology**, pp. 67-70, 81-88

## **October 2 Waking Up Early Saturday Morning**

Bill Hanna with Tom Ito, **A Cast of Friends**, pp. 131-139.

Jason Mittell, "The Great Saturday Morning Exile: Scheduling Cartoons on Television's Periphery in the 1960s," in Carole A. Stabile and Mark Harrison, **Prime Time Animation: Television Animation and American Culture**, pp. 33-54.

Mark Nardone, "Saturday Morning Cartoons," in Judy Fireman, **TV Book**, pp. 116-118.

Cy Schneider, **Children's Television: How it works and its influence on children**, pp. vii-viii, 15-37.

Eugene Slafer, "A Conversation with Bill Hanna," in Gerald Peary & Danny Peary, **The American Animated Cartoon**, pp. 255-260.

### **October 9 The Groovy 1960s, Japanese Animation Part 1, Merry Christmas**

David Bianculli, "*The Bullwinkle Show/The Flintstones*," **The Platinum Age of Television**, pp. 43-48.

Maureen Furniss, **A New History of Animation**, pp. 233-236.

Robert D. McFadden, "June Foray, Virtuoso of Cartoon Voices, Notably Rocky's, Dies at 99," **New York Times**, July 27, 2017.

<https://www.nytimes.com/2017/07/27/arts/television/june-foray-prolific-voice-of-rocky-the-flying-squirrel-dies-at-99.html>

Darrell Van Citters, **The Art of Jay Ward Productions**, pp. 8-9, 11-19.

Darrell Van Citters, **Mister Magoo's Christmas Carol: The Making of the First Animated Christmas Special**, pp. 22-27.

### **October 16 The Vast Wasteland, and Some Better Neighborhoods**

David Bianculli, "*Mister Rogers' Neighborhood/Sesame Street*," **The Platinum Age of Television**, pp. 26-32.

Michael Davis, **Street Gang: The Complete History of Sesame Street**, pp. 146-165.

(readings for October 19 continued on next page)

Newton Minow's Vast Wasteland speech, May 9, 1961.

<http://www.americanrhetoric.com/speeches/newtonminow.htm>

Newton Minow, "A Vaster Wasteland," **The Atlantic**, April 2011.

<https://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2011/04/a-vaster-wasteland/308418/>

Norman S. Morris, "What's Good About Children's TV," **The Atlantic**," August 1969.

<https://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/1969/08/whats-good-about-childrens-tv/305127/>

Emily Nussbaum, "Television: Reruns; That 70's Show: The Bouncy Everykids of *Zoom*," **The New York Times**, August 24, 2003.

<http://www.nytimes.com/2003/08/24/arts/television-reruns-that-70-s-show-the-bouncy-everykids-of-zoom.html>

Melena Ryzik, "How *Sesame Street* Started a Musical Revolution," **The New York Times**, August 22, 2019.

<https://www.nytimes.com/2019/08/22/arts/music/sesame-street-anniversary.html>

Associated Press, "Fred Rogers, Host of *Mister Rogers' Neighborhood*, Dies at 74," **The New York Times**, February 27, 2003.

<https://www.nytimes.com/2003/02/27/obituaries/fred-rogers-host-of-mister-rogers-neighborhood-dies-at-74-2003022794209268324.html>

Supplemental Readings:

Joan Ganz Cooney, "The Potential Uses of Television in Preschool Education," 1966. (This was the document used to pitch the idea that led to *Sesame Street*)

[http://www.joanganzcooneycenter.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/01/JGC\\_1966\\_report.pdf](http://www.joanganzcooneycenter.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/01/JGC_1966_report.pdf)

Marie Winn, "TV: The Children's Drug," in Judy Fireman, **TV Book**, pp. 325-328.

### **October 23 The 1970s: Hot Wheels vs. The FCC**

Jake Austen, "Rock'n'Roll Cartoons," in Daniel Goldmark and Yuval Taylor, **The Cartoon Music Book**, pp. 173-191.

Peggy Charren, "Changing Children's Television," in Judy Fireman, **TV Book**, pp. 344-346.

Heather Hendershot, **Saturday Morning Censors**, pp. 193-216.

Christopher Orr, "The Secret of *Scooby-Doo's* Enduring Appeal," **The Atlantic**, May 2020.

<https://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2020/05/the-secret-of-scooby-doos-enduring-appeal/609091/>

Bruce Weber, "Peggy Charren, Children's TV Crusader, Dies at 86," **The New York Times**, January 23, 2015.

<https://www.nytimes.com/2015/01/23/arts/peggy-charren-childrens-tv-crusader-is-dead-at-86.html? r=0>

Tom Yohe and George Newall, **Schoolhouse Rock!**, pp. ix – xiv.

### **October 30 Jim Henson, from Sesame Street to the Muppet Show**

Eleanor Blau, "Jim Henson, Puppeteer, Dies; The Muppets' Creator was 53," **The New York Times**, May 17, 1990.

<http://www.nytimes.com/1990/05/17/obituaries/jim-henson-puppeteer-dies-the-muppets-creator-was-53.html?pagewanted=all&mcubz=0>

Christopher Finch, **Of Muppets & Men: The Making of *The Muppet Show***, pp. 19-25.

Dave Itzkoff, "It's Time to Re-Re-Re-Meet the Muppets," **The New York Times**, July 26, 2020.

<https://www.nytimes.com/2020/07/23/arts/television/muppets-now-disney.html>

Brian Jay Jones, "Muppetmania 1975-1977," **Jim Henson The Biography**, pp. 231-270.

### **November 6 The 1980s: He-Man and the Masters of Deregulation**

David Bianculli, "*Pee-Wee's Playhouse*," **The Platinum Age of Television**, pp. 32-34.

Timothy Burke & Kevin Burke, **Saturday Morning Fever**, pp. 175-187.

Maureen Furniss, **A New History of Animation**, pp. 230-232.

Martin Goodman, "Dr. Toon: When Reagan Met Optimus Prime," **AWN**, October 12, 2010.

<https://www.awn.com/animationworld/dr-toon-when-reagan-met-optimus-prime>

Heather Hendershot, **Saturday Morning Censors**, pp. 108-135.

Brent Staples, "Just a Toaster With Pictures," **The New York Times**, February 8, 1987. (book review)

<http://www.nytimes.com/1987/02/08/books/just-a-toaster-with-pictures.html?pagewanted=all&mcubz=0>

### **November 13 The 1990s: Cable, Nickelodeon, and the Second Golden Age of Animation**

David Bianculli, "*The Simpsons*," **The Platinum Age of Television**, pp. 52-55. (Add Link)

Carolyn Framke, "*Hey Arnold* premiered 20 years ago, but its hard lessons are still as relevant as ever." **Vox**, October 7, 2016.

<https://www.vox.com/culture/2016/10/7/13191424/hey-arnold-premiere-movie-interview>

Maureen Furniss, **A New History of Animation**, pp. 354-356.

Stephen Hillenburg, Original "*Spongeboy*" pitch, 1998. (scan)

Henry Jenkins, "Interview with Geraldine Laybourne," in Heather Hendershot, **Nickelodeon Nation**, pp. 134-152.

Darren King, "*Rocko's Modern Life: Inside the Barely Contained Chaos of a Nickelodeon Classic*," **Vanity Fair**, November 29, 2018.

<https://www.vanityfair.com/hollywood/2018/11/inside-rockos-modern-life-nickelodeon-cartoon>

Thad Komorowski, "Happy Happy Joy Joy: The Ren & Stimpy Story," **Forces of Geek**, August 3, 2020.

<https://www.forcesofgeek.com/2020/08/happy-happy-joy-joy-the-ren-stimpy-story-review.html>

Thad Komorowski, **Sick Little Monkeys: The Unauthorized Ren & Stimpy Story**, pp. 39-61.

Maya Phillips, "*Avatar: The Last Airbender* Imagines a World Free of Whiteness," **The New York Times**, June 19, 2020.

<https://www.nytimes.com/2020/06/18/arts/television/avatar-the-last-airbender-netflix.html>

Alan Sepinwall and Matt Zoller Seitz, **TV (The Book)**, "*SpongeBob SquarePants, The Rocky and Bullwinkle Show*," pp. 120-126.

Linda Simensky, "The Early Days of Nicktoons," in Heather Hendershot, **Nickelodeon Nation**, pp. 87-107.

## **November 20 The 1990s: Cartoon Network, The Production Process, Japanese Animation Part 2**

Julie Liesse, Cartoon Network 20<sup>th</sup> Birthday Celebration, October 1, 2012.

<http://brandedcontent.adage.com/pdf/Cartoon-Network-Turns-20.pdf>

Robert Lloyd, "Beyond Good and Evil," **L.A. Weekly**, November 30, 2000.

<http://www.houseofhere.com/Weekly/powerpuffcover.html>

Jason Mittell, "Targeting A Taste Culture: Cartoon Network and 1990s Television," **Genre and Television**," pp. 79-93.

Jonah Weiner, "Letter of Recommendation: *Pinky and the Brain*," **The New York Times**, November 3, 2016.

<https://www.nytimes.com/2016/11/06/magazine/letter-of-recommendation-pinky-and-the-brain.html>

*Pokemon* reading to be added

*Courage the Cowardly Dog* article to be added

Supplemental Reading:

Linda Simensky, "The Revival of the Studio-Era Cartoon in the 1990s," in Daniel Goldmark and Charles Keil, **Funny Pictures: Animation and Comedy in Studio-Era Hollywood**, pp. 272-290.

### **November 27 The 1990s: Disney Channel, the End of Saturday Morning**

Jason Mittell, "*Phineas & Ferb*: Children's Television," **How to Watch Television**, pp. 56-64.

Gerard Raiti, "The Disappearance of Saturday Morning," **AWN**, April 30, 2003.

<https://www.awn.com/animationworld/disappearance-saturday-morning>

James Sterngold, "After 14 Years, One Network for Children Refocuses..." **The New York Times**, July 27, 1997.

<http://www.nytimes.com/1997/07/27/arts/after-14-years-one-network-for-children-refocuses.html>

Bernard Weinraub, "Disney Channel Broadens its Reach," **The New York Times**, May 18, 1992.

<http://www.nytimes.com/1992/05/18/business/the-media-business-disney-channel-broadens-its-reach.html>

*High School Musical* reading to be added

### **December 4**

#### **Blue's Clues, Dora, Barney, and the Rebirth of Preschool Television**

Daniel R. Anderson, "Watching Children Watch Television and the Creation of *Blue's Clues*," in Heather Hendershot, **Nickelodeon Nation**, pp. 241-268.

Meredith Blake, "How civil rights icon John Lewis wound up in an episode of *Arthur*," **The Los Angeles Times**, July 25, 2020.

[https://www.latimes.com/entertainment-arts/tv/story/2020-07-25/john-lewis-arthur-pbs-kids-civil-rights-hero-guest-star?\\_amp=true](https://www.latimes.com/entertainment-arts/tv/story/2020-07-25/john-lewis-arthur-pbs-kids-civil-rights-hero-guest-star?_amp=true)

Sara DeWitt and Linda Simensky, "From Mission to Screens: The PBS KIDS approach to Content," in Shelley Pasnik, ed., **Getting Ready to Learn**, pp. 16-26.

Dade Hayes, **Anytime Playdate**, pp. 65-86.

Jill Lepore, "How We Got to *Sesame Street*," **The New Yorker**, May 11, 2020  
<https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2020/05/11/how-we-got-to-sesame-street>

Madrigal, Alexis C., "Raised by YouTube," **The Atlantic**, November 2018.  
<https://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2018/11/raised-by-youtube/570838/>

Lizzie Widdicombe, "*Bluey*, the Coronavirus, and the Weirdness of Little Kids," **The New Yorker**, August 1, 2020.  
<https://www.newyorker.com/culture/on-television/bluey-the-coronavirus-and-the-weirdness-of-little-kids>

## **December 11**

### **A Look Back and a Look Forward: Parodies, and the Future of Children's Programming**

Nicole Clark, "The Healing Powers of *Steven Universe*," **The New York Times**, March 28, 2020.  
<https://www.nytimes.com/2020/03/28/opinion/sunday/steven-universe-finale.html>

Zosha Millman, "*Legend of Korra* Walked So Queer Characters on Kids' TV Could Kiss," Vulture.com, August 19, 2020.  
<https://www.vulture.com/article/legend-of-korra-korrasami-queer-characters-kids-tv-legacy.html>

Corinne Segal, "Rebecca Sugar, Cartoon Network's first female creator, on writing LGBTQ stories for kids," September 4, 2016.  
<http://www.pbs.org/newshour/art/rebecca-sugar-steven-universe-lgtbq/>

Stand by for up-to-the-minute articles on recent series and streaming services, as well as new platforms that have started up since this syllabus was distributed

## **Grading**

Grades will be based upon the following:

Assignment 1-3 will each be worth 15% of your grade

Assignments 4 will be worth 40% of your grade

Attendance / Participation / Curiosity / Discussion will be worth 15% of your grade

## **Assignments**

There will be four assignments this semester. There will be no midterm or final exam.

Please submit your assignments through Canvas by midnight on the day they are due. If you need additional time for an assignment, please contact me and we can work out a reasonable due date.

Assignments should be double-spaced and should use a readable 12-point font. Bibliography citations aren't included in the page count. Feel free to use the citation style you prefer.

Do not use AI to write your papers, unless you are using it for Assignment 3/option 2.

**Remember: Always have a solid thesis statement that captures the big idea of your paper.**

### **Assignment 1 – due TBD (3 pages)**

Autobiographical essay – your television animation history

People in the television industry – film directors, show creators, network executives, etc. – are often asked about the series and films that influenced them when they were young.

For this assignment, talk about the television shows and other content that you watched from the time you can remember. Here are some starter questions, but you don't need to answer all of these. What were your favorite series? Which series influenced you? What sorts of material did you like, and what didn't you like? Were there shows you were not allowed to watch? Was there a channel, streaming service, or site that you particularly connected with? Why are you interested in children's content? What do you hope to learn about in this course? And if you are hoping to work in television, what or who inspired you to do that?

### **Assignment 2 – due TBD**

Oral presentation – details TBD

### **Assignment 3 – due TBD (4-5 pages)**

History/Biography/Significance

Select one of these topics:

Choose a show creator, director, producer, designer, or other key individual in children's programming and then place your chosen subject within their historical context. Who was the person and why are they of interest to us now? What did they do? What was their source of inspiration? What impact did their work have? How did world events, technology, other visual artists or shows influence this work? Did this person have any further or lasting influence? What was the relationship between this person and their contemporaries?

**OR**

Using AI, write this paper and then give AI a grade. Your paper should include a history of the all the prompts you used. After writing the paper, assess it – does it include all the key information relevant to this topic? Give AI the grade you feel the paper deserves, explaining what it did right and what it didn't include. (You may need more than 4-5 pages to cover all this)

#### **Assignment 4 – due between December 14-21 (5-6 pages)**

**These topics will be explained in greater detail in class**

**Select one** of these topics:

- Write a book proposal for a book on an academic topic in children's television – a book that you wish existed or that you would like to write. A format for this will be shared as we get closer to the end of the semester.
- Interview someone working in the children's television industry to get a firsthand understanding of their work and their inspiration, or their studio. I can work with you to contact this person, but please note that you'll need to start several weeks before the assignment is due. For the paper, discuss your conversation and your observations.
- Create a proposal for a children's series. We'll discuss what a proposal includes in class. Discuss why this would be a good fit for the intended company (broadcaster, streaming service, etc.)
- Propose a documentary on a children's television topic. Discuss why this topic is important, as well as what viewers would be interested in this topic and why.
- If you have a topic in mind that doesn't fit into any of these categories, please let me know and we can consider it.

If you have questions about your topic or need help shaping your idea, please feel free to discuss this with me for additional feedback and guidance.

Please note: It will be necessary for you to determine your topic in advance of the night before it's due.

## **Class Policies**

### **Attendance**

Please sign the attendance list that will circulate at the beginning of class.

**Absentee Policy**

If you are not in class, you will be marked absent. Both attendance and participation make up a percentage of your grade, so it is important that you attend class and are here to participate in class discussions.

If you need to arrive in class late or leave early, please let me know. Also, if you need to miss class for an exam, a school-related conference, a religious holiday, or a family emergency, please let me know.

**Breaks**

During each class, we'll have a 10-minute break around 5:00.

**Participation**

Please participate in the discussion and please feel free to ask questions during the lectures. You'll get more out of the course if you participate, and it's part of your grade.

**Late Papers**

It is in your best interest to turn in your papers on time.

If you need extra time to complete a paper, please discuss this with me, and we will work together to determine an acceptable due date for you. If you are late without discussing this with me, your assignment will lose points.

**A final grade reminder:**

Incompletes are a privilege that students must request.

**Not Remote**

This class is an in-person seminar. There will not be a Zoom link provided.

**Policy Regarding Electronic Devices**

Please consider how you spend your time in the classroom and focus on the class. After all, it's a course about television. If I notice you on your phone regularly or if you seem busy online during class, this will be noted and reflected in your participation grade.

**If you have any questions about these policies, please let me know.**