

[view this email as a webpage](#)



sesameworkshop.

The nonprofit educational organization behind Sesame Street and so much more



Sesame Family Newsletter

February 6, 2008

## Joys and Perils of Television

by Jordan Brown

Helping kids develop healthy TV habits.

[Click to continue...](#)

### Featuring:

Philo to the Rescue!

Mr. Rogers, The Three Stooges, and Me

So, What's a Parent to Do?

The Past and the Future



## Games and More

### Beat the Winter Blahs

Brighten up winter days with favorite Sesame pals.

- [Close-Up Game](#)  
Look at things in a whole new way.
- [Make-a-Story: Telly in Space](#)  
Create a story using words, pictures, and a little bit of magic.
- [Painting Fun](#)  
Click to paint with Elmo and friends.
- [Weekly Trivia](#)

### Muppet Diplomacy

Muppets around the world teach letters, numbers, self-respect and mutual understanding -- all thanks to supporters like you.

[Help Us Today](#)

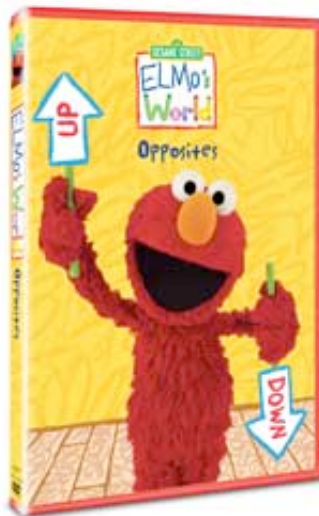
### Sesame Street Podcast

This week's word: **Expert**

Parent Tip: Teach your child about a subject or activity you're an expert in. Is it something they'd like to learn about? Maybe you can teach them how to become an expert too!

[Subscribe Now](#)

## Elmo's World : Opposites on DVD



Elmo and his friends explore the idea of opposites. How do you go up and down on a seesaw? What types of things open and close? With appearances by Elmo's pet goldfish, Dorothy, the zany Mr. Noodle, and the one and only Super Grover!

[Watch a clip now!](#)

Shop our [Sesame Street Store](#)

**PHILO TO THE RESCUE**



### [BERT & ERNIE WATCH TV](#)

Search the term "television" in Sesame Workshop's new online video player to see this funny clip.

### [ANYTHING GOOD ON TV?](#)

The new rating systems won't tell you how to find quality TV programs for your preschooler, but this article will.

Dinnertime is fast approaching at our house. I am trying to slice vegetables, prepare tomato sauce, and cook up a batch of pasta while my children Olivia and Finn (ages 3 and 7) are buzzing about the kitchen with the intensity of hummingbirds. Since my wife Ellen has to work late -- and my son has yet to invent a robot assistant for me -- I have my hands full, to say the least.

As I chop onions, Olivia shows me a new ballet dance she made up. I feel a mix of laughter and frustration when I notice that her face and arms are covered with paint. (Isn't fingerpaint supposed to be just for fingers?) Meanwhile, Finn is decked out in his Darth Vader costume, busy tying up Olivia's princess doll, while admonishing me for my lack of knowledge about the "dark side of the force."

"Finn! Olivia! Please settle down!" I implore, "Do you think you could entertain yourselves for a few minutes while I finish dinner?"

"Daddy! We're hungry!" Olivia announces, as she gracefully rubs the multi-colored paint from her arms onto the kitchen cabinets. I nearly slice off my finger when I spy Finn at the other end of the room, swinging his toy light saber inches away from my laptop on the kitchen table. I look briefly out the window, and sigh; it is too cold to let the kids play in the yard.

Then it hits me: They could watch TV!

But I feel guilty turning to TV to help me. In recent months, I've read cautionary articles saying that too much television can squelch children's attention spans, interfere with the development of their social skills, and encourage kids to become lethargic "couch potatoes." On the other hand, I realize that if I let them watch one of their favorite shows for 30 minutes, three things would happen: Olivia and Finn would take it easy, no computers would be accidentally destroyed, and I would actually finish cooking dinner before midnight.

Amid the chaos, I propose, "Hey! Would you kids like to watch PEEP?" (That's our shorthand for one of my kids' favorite programs, PEEP AND THE BIG WIDE WORLD, a funny cartoon that teaches about science and nature.)

Enthusiastic "Yaaayys" from Finn and Olivia fill the room. I put a pre-recorded show on the TV, return to the kitchen, relieved...and once again productive.

(In case you're puzzled by the title of this section, "Philo to the Rescue!" the reason is that Philo T. Farnsworth did something impressive in 1927: He invented television!)

---

## MR. ROGERS, THE THREE STOOGES, AND ME

A few minutes later, I check in on Olivia and Finn, and am glad to see them laughing with glee at the characters on PEEP. I am reminded of my own television-watching experiences as a kid growing up in the 1960s. Back then, I was especially fond of MR. ROGERS' NEIGHBORHOOD, CAPTAIN KANGAROO, SESAME STREET, ROMPER ROOM, and a superhero cartoon called THE MIGHTY HERCULES. (Crazy as it sounds, I sometimes think of the Hercules theme song when I'm at the gym, struggling with some challenging weight-lifting exercise.)

But in many ways, my kids' TV experiences are different from the ones I had as a child. Our family had a small black and white television set with only a handful of channels and no remote



### [DO YOU KNOW WHAT YOUR CHILD IS WATCHING?](#)

The tide of violence on TV is rising, and new research points to growing dangers for young viewers.

control. This was long before the days of the VCR, so all my TV-watching experiences were "live." If I wanted to watch a particular show, I had to make sure to turn on the TV at the right time.

According to my parents, most of my childhood TV watching had a positive effect on me. TV was a fun way to spend time on a rainy afternoon, and a nice bonding experience for my younger sister and me. We chuckled together at the silly skits and songs, and enjoyed imitating our favorite characters. In addition, I learned the alphabet and numbers, got ideas for crafts activities, science experiments, and more. Today, as Olivia yearns to snap her fingers like her older brother, I am reminded how I was inspired to learn how to snap my fingers after watching Mr. Rogers do this action as part of his closing song. Later in my childhood, shows like STAR TREK inspired me to write stories, create costumes, and even make homemade sci-fi movies.

But I wasn't immune to the negative influences of TV. My parents recall that after watching a Three Stooges movie on television, I tried out some of their slapstick techniques on my sister. When my parents connected my behavior to TV, I was no longer allowed to watch the Stooges. Fortunately, the other cartoons I watched as a child never featured any violent behavior. (Ahem.)

Thinking back on my childhood, I am reminded of an important but overlooked fact about TV: ALL TELEVISION IS "EDUCATIONAL." By that, I mean that anytime a child watches TV, they are, in fact, learning things. And not just things that we, as parents, would like them to learn. Sure, cartoons can teach children the names of the planets, or how to use a map. Many preschool shows present positive role models for learning how to get along with others. But, like it or not, kids pick up much, much more. Unfortunately, many TV programs (even those intended for children) inadvertently support stereotypes about gender and race. To say nothing about the, um, "values" taught by commercials... But don't fret. With the right attitude and a game plan, it is possible to minimize the downside of TV and boost its positive influences.

## SO, WHAT'S A PARENT TO DO?

Through trial and error, and by talking with other parents, I have come up with some strategies for making the most of TV time in our home. The key is to make smart choices about what programs our children watch, how much TV, and what they do afterward.

1) Limit screen time. The answer to the question "How much is too much?" is a personal choice for each family. According to the American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP), children age 2 and older should watch no more than 1-2 hours a day of quality programs. Most children in the U.S. watch twice that amount. The AAP asserts that young children need to spend most of their days exploring the real world, playing and learning with parents and others.

2) Focus on high-quality "educational" programs that are age-appropriate, and not too scary. Ideally, you should preview the programs ahead of time, so you know what to expect, or select ongoing series that are recommended by national organizations such as [Common Sense Media](#) and [What They Like](#).

In short, quality kids' programming does the following:

- Encourages children to "do things" as they watch: dance along with the characters, repeat vocabulary words, solve problems, and so on.
- Inspires children to try new activities when the TV is turned off, such as science experiments, reading a book, cooking, exercising, doing arts and crafts projects, etc.
- Motivates parents and caregivers to watch with their children, so that they may extend the learning during or after the show. Shows that appeal to adults often feature endearing characters, lively songs, celebrity guest stars, and humor that appeal to adults as well as kids.
- Engages children by presenting the educational material in meaningful contexts (such as within a dramatic story or humorous skit) rather than presenting a laundry list of facts. As they watch, children are often asked to connect the new material with experiences in their own lives.



### [FOCUSING ON TOTS' TV VIEWING](#)

Why it's important to limit TV time.

### [HEALTHY HABITS FOR LIFE](#)

A comprehensive, preventive effort to address the threat of childhood obesity.

### [WHAT IS MEDIA LITERACY?](#)

Helping children make the most of screen time.

## THE PAST AND THE FUTURE

While cleaning out a closet, I recently found an old FAR SIDE comic strip by Gary Larson. It shows a family staring at a blank living room wall. The caption reads, "In the days before television..." It not only made me laugh, and think about how TV influences our family life, but it also made me ponder the future. In particular, I wonder what TV viewing will be like when my children are parents. Given how fast technology is advancing, I suspect it will look nothing like TV as we know it today. However, with any luck it will still be a useful tool for entertaining and educating children as their overwhelmed parents pull together dinner.

Jordan D. Brown  
Sesame Workshop

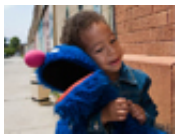


## WEEKLY TRIVIA

### Did You Know?

Big Bird was once on the TV program Mr. Rogers' Neighborhood. It's true! Fred Rogers invited Caroll Spinney to be on his show as Big Bird, and then take off his costume and explain what it was like to be the world's most famous bird. Spinney wanted to preserve the fantasy of Big Bird and declined the invitation. However, the men came up with a compromise. Spinney appeared on the show as Big Bird, hanging out in the Land of Make Believe.

## ABOUT THE WORKSHOP



Sesame Workshop is a nonprofit educational organization making a meaningful difference in children's lives around the world. Founded in 1968, the Workshop changed television forever with the legendary *Sesame Street*. Today, the Workshop continues to innovate on behalf of children in 120 countries, using its proprietary research methodology to ensure its programs and products are engaging and enriching. Sesame Workshop is behind award-winning programs like *Dragon Tales* and *Sagwa, The Chinese Siamese Cat*, *Pinky Dinky Doo* and ground breaking multimedia productions in South Africa, Egypt and Russia. As a nonprofit, Sesame Workshop puts the proceeds it receives from sales of *Sesame Street*, *Dragon Tales* and *Sagwa* products right back into its educational projects for children around the world. Find the Workshop online at [www.sesameworkshop.org](http://www.sesameworkshop.org).

[Support Us](#) | [Privacy Policy](#)

 **Sesame Workshop | 1 Lincoln Plaza, New York, NY 10023 | 212-875-6119**

To prevent mailbox filters from deleting mailings from Sesame Family Newsletter, add [sesamefamily@sesameonline.org](mailto:sesamefamily@sesameonline.org) to your address book.

[Unsubscribe from this mailing.](#)