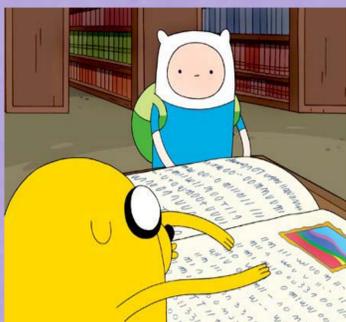


Unlocking Educational Entertainment: A Content Analysis of Literacy Skills Evident in Animated Cartoons

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Pendleton Ward (2012). Adventure Time. Retrieved from <http://sundial.csun.edu/2013/03/adventure-time-might-not-be-the-right-show-for-kids/>



Seth MacFarlane (Unknown). Family Guy. Retrieved from <https://slodive.com/inspiration/family-guy-pictures/>

Introduction

Low literacy (low text comprehension) among learners is a problem at all levels. Learners with low literacy struggle to make meaning from and comprehend academic texts. After working with low literacy GED students, it became evident that although struggling to apply literacy skills to academic texts, these learners were able to apply similar skills to draw meaning from entertainment texts such as cartoons. The purpose of this content analysis is to assess whether or not cartoons offer enough literacy value to serve as major texts for educational use.

Research Question & Hypotheses

- **Research Question:** Can entertainment media be utilized for literacy education, and will using it train people to apply literacy and critical thinking when using entertainment media?
- **Hypothesis 1:** Adult-oriented cartoons will have higher average literacy skills than non adult-oriented cartoons due to their longer lengths.
- **Hypothesis 2:** Both types of cartoons will show high instances of literacy, with 20+ average instances of inference, 20+ average instances of stated information, and 10+ average instances of other.

Main Category Definitions

- **Comprehension of Words & Symbols:** symbols and words that appear on screen; high-level words.
- **Plot Elements:** noted if episodes contained exposition, conflict, rising action, climax, falling action, & resolution.
- **Word context:** words with multiple meanings, sarcasm, innuendo, and made-up words.
- **Inference categories:** assumed information based on dialogue, actions, and background.
- **Stated categories:** information revealed in dialogue.
- **Characters:** Groups (coded as 1); all characters (repeat characters counted once) appearing on screen.
- **Setting:** All settings lasting longer than 10 seconds (repeats not counted).
- **World Knowledge:** information requiring knowledge of celebrities, countries, and other real-world information.

Method

- **Universe:** Animated cartoons (episodes 10-30 minutes) included in Cartoon Network's 2016 programming.
- **Sample:** 10 cartoons (5 adult and 5 non adult-oriented) randomly selected. For each series, 3 episodes aired before 01/01/17 randomly selected.
- **Emergent Categories:** Comprehension and Decoding of Words and symbols; Plot Elements; Word Context; Main Idea, Detail, Conclusion, & Prediction (broken into subcategories: Characters; Motivation Inferred, Motivation Stated; Relationship Inferred; Relationship Stated; Feelings Inferred; Feelings Stated; Traits Inferred; Traits Stated; Inference); Setting; Other Literary Devices; World Knowledge; Critical Literacy.
- **Coding:** visual information, dialogue, sound effects, and other elements were coded by a single coder. Intercoder reliability check is pending.

Results

Series Name	Av. Infer.	Av. Stated	Av. Other
Adventure Time	8.93	3.58	5.03
Powerpuff Girls	22.06	8.41	7.77
Gumball	12.8	3.33	4.85
Uncle Grandpa	27.06	10.66	12.48
Regular Show	19.66	8	8.33
Rick & Morty	26.8	6.91	9.62
Family Guy	27.06	10.66	12.48
Sclopio Peepio	6.53	2.66	10.85
Mike Tyson	14.26	3.33	5.11
Venture Bros	33.73	9.83	13.18

Discussion

- The preliminary data appear to support the first hypothesis. Adult-oriented cartoons achieved higher numbers in most categories, especially inference.
- The preliminary data do not appear to support the second hypothesis, with only five cartoons at 20+ average inference, none at 20+ average stated, and four at 10+ average other.
- Individual cartoons of both types showed high instances of inference, and slightly lower but still high instances of stated information.

Study Limitations

- Considers only a small portion of total animation content available, excludes many series, genres, and films.
- Unable to consider critical thinking skills and other forms of text synthesis due to not including learners in the study.
- Only considers basic literacy and comprehension skills without considering other important forms of literacy.
- Intercoder reliability check has not yet been conducted.

Implications & Future Directions

Most of the cartoon series of both types showed high potential for literacy skills when considering individual categories, suggesting that they may offer some potential as texts for literacy education. Some categories may need to be modified or adjusted for a second coding of the cartoons in order to rule out data created by category error. At the very least, cartoons show strong possibility for inference education. In future, it might be useful to compare these data of this analysis with a similar content analysis conducted on texts commonly used in literacy education (possibly 10 short stories, or 3 chapters each from 10 novels) using the same codebook.