

= SpongeBob SquarePants ( character ) =

SpongeBob SquarePants is a fictional character , the protagonist of the American animated television series of the same name . He is voiced by actor and comedian Tom Kenny , and first appeared on television in the series ' pilot episode on May 1 , 1999 .

SpongeBob SquarePants was created and designed by cartoonist and marine biologist Stephen Hillenburg shortly after the cancellation of Rocko 's Modern Life in 1996 . Hillenburg intended to create a series about an over @-@ optimistic sponge that annoys other characters . Hillenburg compared the concept to Laurel and Hardy and Pee @-@ wee Herman . As he drew the character , he decided that a " squeaky @-@ clean square " ( like a kitchen sponge ) fit the concept . His name is derived from " Bob the Sponge " , the host of Hillenburg 's comic strip The Intertidal Zone that he originally drew in the 1980s while teaching marine biology to visitors of the Ocean Institute . SpongeBob is a naïve and goofy sea sponge who works as a fry cook in the fictional underwater town of Bikini Bottom .

The character has received positive critical response from media critics and achieved popularity with both children and adults , though he has been involved in public controversy . SpongeBob appeared in a We Are Family Foundation video promoting tolerance , which was criticized by James Dobson of Focus on the Family because of the foundation 's link to homosexuality .

= = Role in SpongeBob SquarePants = =

SpongeBob is depicted as being an good @-@ natured , optimistic , cheerful , naïve , enthusiastic yellow sea sponge residing in the undersea city of Bikini Bottom alongside an array of anthropomorphic aquatic creatures . He works as a fry cook at a local fast food restaurant , the Krusty Krab , to which he is obsessively attached . At work , SpongeBob answers to Eugene Krabs , a greedy , miserly crab who shows SpongeBob favor , alongside his ill @-@ tempered , hostile , snobbish next @-@ door neighbor Squidward Tentacles . His favorite hobbies include his occupation , jelly @-@ fishing , karate ( albeit at an elementary level , with Sandy Cheeks as his sensei ) , relentless fandom of superheroes Mermaid Man and Barnacle Boy , and blowing bubbles .

He is often seen hanging around with his best friend Patrick , who lives on the same street as SpongeBob two doors down . However , SpongeBob 's varying intelligence , unlimited optimistic cheer , and irritating behavior often leads him to perceive the outcome of numerous endeavors and the personalities of those around him as happier and sunnier than they often actually are ; for instance , he believes that Squidward enjoys his company in spite of the fact that he clearly loathes him . A recurring gag in several episodes is SpongeBob 's extremely poor " boating " ( driving ) ability and his repeated failures to pass his road test at Mrs. Puff 's Boating School . He lives in an iconic pineapple with his pet snail Gary .

= = Character = =

= = = Conception = = =

Stephen Hillenburg first became fascinated with the ocean as a child . Also at a young age , he began developing his artistic abilities . During college , he majored in marine biology and minored in art . He planned to return to college eventually to pursue a master 's degree in art . After graduating in 1984 , he joined the Ocean Institute , an organization in Dana Point , California , dedicated to educating the public about marine science and maritime history . While he was there , he initially had the idea that would lead to the creation of SpongeBob SquarePants : a comic book titled The Intertidal Zone . The host of the comic was " Bob the Sponge " who , unlike SpongeBob , resembled an actual sea sponge . In 1987 , Hillenburg left the institute to pursue an animation career .

A few years after studying experimental animation at the California Institute of the Arts , Hillenburg

met Joe Murray , the creator of Rocko 's Modern Life , at an animation festival , and was offered a job as a director of the series . While working on the series , Hillenburg met writer Martin Olson , who saw his previous comic The Intertidal Zone . Olson liked the idea and suggested Hillenburg to create a series of marine animals . Hillenburg said , " a show ... I hadn 't even thought about making a show ... and it wasn 't my show " . It spurred his decision to create SpongeBob SquarePants and said , " It was the inspiration for the show " .

Rocko 's Modern Life ended in 1996 . Shortly afterwards , Hillenburg began working on SpongeBob SquarePants . For the show characters , Hillenburg started drawing and took some of the characters from his comic ? like starfish , crab , and sponge . At the time , Hillenburg knew that " everybody was doing buddy shows " ? like The Ren & Stimpy Show ? and thought that " I can 't do a buddy show , " so he decided to do a " one character " show instead . He conceived a sponge as the title character because , according to him , it is " the weirdest animal . " Hillenburg derived the character 's name from Bob the Sponge , the host of his comic strip The Intertidal Zone , after changing it from SpongeBoy due to trademark issues .

= = = Creation and design = = =

Hillenburg had made several " horrible impersonations " before he finally conceived his character . Hillenburg compared the concept to Laurel and Hardy and Pee @-@ wee Herman . He said " I think SpongeBob [ was ] born out of my love of Laurel and Hardy shorts . You 've got that kind of idiot @-@ buddy situation ? that was a huge influence . SpongeBob was inspired by that kind of character : the Innocent ? a la Stan Laurel .

The first concept sketch portrayed the character as wearing a red hat with a green base and a white business shirt with a tie . SpongeBob 's look gradually progressed to brown pants that was used in the final design . SpongeBob was designed to be a child @-@ like character who was goofy and optimistic in a style similar to that made famous by Jerry Lewis .

Originally the character was to be named SpongeBoy but this name was already in use . This was discovered after voice acting for the original seven @-@ minute pilot was recorded in 1997 . The Nickelodeon legal department discovered that the name was already in use for a mop product . Upon finding this out , Hillenburg decided that the character 's given name still had to contain " Sponge " so viewers would not mistake the character for a " Cheese Man . " Hillenburg decided to use the name " SpongeBob . " He chose " SquarePants " as a family name as it referred to the character 's square shape and it had a " nice ring to it " .

Although SpongeBob 's driver 's license says his birthdate is July 14 , 1986 , Hillenburg joked that he is fifty in " sponge years " . He explained that SpongeBob actually has no specific age , but that he is old enough to be on his own and still be going to boating school . The decision to have SpongeBob attend a boat driving school was made due to a request from Nickelodeon that the character attend a school .

= = = Voice = = =

SpongeBob is voiced by veteran voice actor Tom Kenny . Kenny previously worked with Hillenburg on Rocko 's Modern Life , and when Hillenburg created SpongeBob SquarePants , he approached Kenny to voice the character . Hillenburg utilised Kenny 's and other people 's personalities to help create the personality of SpongeBob .

The voice of SpongeBob was originally used by Kenny for a minor background character in Rocko 's Modern Life . Kenny forgot the voice initially as he created it only for that single use . Hillenburg , however , remembered it when he was coming up with SpongeBob and used a video clip of the episode to remind Kenny of the voice . When Hillenburg heard Kenny do the voice , he said , " That 's it ? I don 't want to hear anybody else do the voice . We 've got SpongeBob . " He said that to Nickelodeon ; however , the network said , " Well , let 's just listen to 100 more people . " Kenny said , " But one of the advantages of having a strong creator is that the creator can say , ' No , I like that ? I don 't care about celebrities . ' " Kenny says that SpongeBob 's high pitched laugh was

specifically aimed at being unique , stating that they wanted an annoying laugh in the tradition of Popeye and Woody Woodpecker .

SpongeBob 's voice evolved from " low @-@ key " to high @-@ pitched . Kenny said , " I hear the change . I hear it . It 's mostly a question of pitch . " He said that " It 's unconscious on my part " because " I don 't wake up and think , ' Hmm , I 'm going to change SpongeBob 's voice today , just for the hell of it . " He described it that " It 's like erosion : a very slow process . As time goes on , you need to bring him to different places and more places , the more stories and scripts you do . " Contrasting first season episodes to those of the seventh season , Kenny said that " there 's a bit of a change [ in voice ] , but I don 't think it 's that extreme at all . "

When SpongeBob SquarePants is broadcast in non @-@ English languages , the voice actors dubbing SpongeBob 's voice use Tom Kenny 's rendition of the character as a starting point but also add unique elements . For example , in the French version of the series , SpongeBob speaks with a slight Daffy Duck @-@ style lisp .

= = Reception = =

= = = Critical reception = = =

Throughout the run of SpongeBob SquarePants , the SpongeBob character has become popular with both children and adults . In June 2010 , Entertainment Weekly named him one of the " 100 Greatest Characters of the Last 20 Years " . TV Guide listed SpongeBob SquarePants No. 9 on its " 50 Greatest Cartoon Characters of All Time " list . However , not all critical reception for the character has been positive . AskMen 's " Top 10 : Irritating ' 90s Cartoon Characters " ranked SpongeBob No. 4 , saying that his well @-@ meaning attitude is extremely annoying .

James Poniewozik of Time magazine considered the character as " the anti @-@ Bart Simpson , temperamentally and physically : his head is as squared @-@ off and neat as Bart 's is unruly , and he has a personality to match ? conscientious , optimistic and blind to the faults in the world and those around him " . The New York Times critic Joyce Millman said , " His relentless good cheer would be irritating if he weren 't so darned lovable and his world so excellently strange ... Like Pee @-@ wee 's Playhouse , SpongeBob joyfully dances on the fine line between childhood and adulthood , guilelessness and camp , the warped and the sweet " . Robert Thompson , a professor of communications and director of the Center for the Study of Popular Television at Syracuse University , told The New York Times , " There is something kind of unique about [ SpongeBob ] . It seems to be a refreshing breath from the pre @-@ irony era . There 's no sense of the elbow @-@ in @-@ rib , tongue @-@ in @-@ cheek aesthetic that so permeates the rest of American culture ? including kids ' shows like the Rugrats . I think what 's subversive about it is it 's so incredibly naive ? deliberately . Because there 's nothing in it that 's trying to be hip or cool or anything else , hipness can be grafted onto it " .

In a 2007 interview with TV Guide , Barack Obama named SpongeBob his favorite T.V. character , and admitted that SpongeBob SquarePants was " the show I watch with my daughters " . British Prime Minister Gordon Brown has also said he watches the show with his children .

= = = Criticism and controversy = = =

In 2005 , a promotional video which showed SpongeBob along with other characters from children 's shows singing together to promote diversity and tolerance , was criticized by a Christian evangelical group in the United States because they saw the character SpongeBob being used as an advocate for homosexuality though the video contained " no reference to sex , sexual lifestyle or sexual identity . " James Dobson of Focus on the Family accused the makers of the video of promoting homosexuality due to a gay rights group sponsoring the video .

The incident led to questions as to whether or not SpongeBob is a homosexual character . In 2002 , when SpongeBob 's popularity with gay men grew , Hillenburg denied that SpongeBob was gay . He

clarified that he considers the character to be " almost asexual ; " he has been shown in various episodes to regenerate his limbs and reproduce by " budding " , much like real sponges do . After Dobson 's comments , Hillenburg repeated this assertion that sexual preference was never considered during the creation of the show . Tom Kenny and other production members were shocked and surprised that such an issue had arisen .

Dobson later stated that his comments were taken out of context and that his original complaints were not with SpongeBob or any of the characters in the video but with the organization that sponsored the video , the We Are Family Foundation . Dobson noted that the foundation had posted pro @-@ homosexual material on its website , but later removed it . After the controversy , John H. Thomas , the United Church of Christ 's general minister and president , said they would welcome SpongeBob into their ministry . He said " Jesus didn 't turn people away . Neither do we " .

Jeffrey P. Dennis , author of the journal article " The Same Thing We Do Every Night : Signifying Same @-@ Sex Desire in Television Cartoons " , argued that SpongeBob and Sandy are not romantically in love , while adding that he believed that SpongeBob and Patrick " are paired with arguably erotic intensity . " Dennis noted the two are " not consistently coded as romantic partners , " since they live in separate residences , and have distinct groups of friends , but claimed that in the series , " the possibility of same @-@ sex desire is never excluded . " Martin Goodman of Animation World Magazine described Dennis 's comments regarding SpongeBob and Patrick as " interesting . "

In April 2009 , in a tie @-@ in partnership with Burger King and Nickelodeon , Burger King released an advertisement featuring SpongeBob and Sir Mix @-@ a @-@ Lot singing " Baby Got Back " . Angry parents and the Campaign for a Commercial @-@ Free Childhood protested the ad for being sexist and inappropriately sexual , especially considering that SpongeBob 's fan base includes pre @-@ schoolers . Susan Linn , the director of the Campaign for Commercial @-@ Free Childhood said " It 's bad enough when companies use a beloved media character like SpongeBob to promote junk food to children , but it 's utterly reprehensible when that character simultaneously promotes objectified , sexualized images of women . " In an official statement released by Burger King , they claimed that " this campaign is aimed at parents . "

= = = Cultural impact = = =

Throughout the run of SpongeBob SquarePants , the SpongeBob character has become very popular with children , teens , and adults . The character 's popularity has spread from Nickelodeon 's original demographic of two- to eleven @-@ year @-@ olds , to teenagers and adults , including college campuses and celebrities such as Sigourney Weaver and Bruce Willis . Salon.com indicates that the unadulterated innocence of SpongeBob is what makes the character so appealing . SpongeBob has also become popular with gay men , despite Stephen Hillenburg saying that none of the characters are homosexual . The character draws fans due to his flamboyant lifestyle and tolerant attitude .

In July 2009 , the Madame Tussauds wax museum in New York launched a wax sculpture of SpongeBob . SpongeBob is the first fictional character to be featured in Tussauds . In May 2011 , a new species of mushroom , *Spongiforma squarepantsii* , was described in the journal *Mycologia* . The mushroom was named after the famous cartoon character . The authors note that the hymenium , when viewed with scanning electron microscopy , somewhat resembles a " seafloor covered with tube sponges , reminiscent of the fictitious home of SpongeBob . " Although the epithet was originally rejected by the editors of *Mycologia* as " too frivolous " , the authors insisted that " we could name it whatever we liked . "

The character has also become a fashion trend . In 2008 , American fashion designer Marc Jacobs donned a SpongeBob tattoo on his right arm . He explained that " Well , I just worked with Richard Prince on the collaboration for Louis Vuitton and Richard has done a series of paintings of SpongeBob . He had brought up in our conversation how he saw the artistic value of SpongeBob as the cartoon and I kind of liked it , so I did it . " He further added that " It 's funny . " The tattoo was described by blogger and TV personality Perez Hilton as one of the " Worst Celebrity Tattoos " . In

the same year , A Bathing Ape released SpongeBob @-@ themed shoes . Singer Pharrell Williams backed a line of SpongeBob T @-@ shirts and shoes targeted at hip adults . In 2014 , the character was among the popular culture icons referenced by American fashion designer Jeremy Scott in his Moschino debut collection at the Milan Fashion Week .

In Egypt 's Tahrir Square , after the Egyptian Revolution of 2011 , SpongeBob became a fashion phenomenon , appearing on various items of merchandise from hijabs to boxer shorts . The phenomenon led to the creation of the Tumblr project called " SpongeBob on the Nile " . The project was founded by American students Andrew Leber and Elisabeth Jaquette , and attempts to document every appearance of SpongeBob in Egypt . Sherief Elkeshta cited the phenomenon in an essay about the incoherent state of politics in Egypt in an independent monthly paper titled Midan Masr . He wrote , " Why isn 't he [ SpongeBob ] at least holding a Molotov cocktail ? Or raising a fist ? " The phenomenon has even spread to Libya , where a Libyan rebel in SpongeBob dress was photographed celebrating the revolution .

= = Merchandising = =

The popularity of SpongeBob translated well into sales figures . In 2002 , SpongeBob SquarePants dolls sold at a rate of 75 @,@ 000 per week , which was faster than Tickle Me Elmo dolls were selling at the time . SpongeBob has gained popularity in Japan , specifically with Japanese women . Nickelodeon 's parent company Viacom purposefully targeted marketing at women in the country as a method of building the SpongeBob SquarePants brand . Skeptics initially doubted that SpongeBob could be popular in Japan as the character 's design is very different from already popular designs for Hello Kitty and Pikachu . The character also spawned a soap @-@ filled sponge product manufactured by SpongeTech .

In early 2009 , the Simmons Jewelry Co. released a \$ 75 @,@ 000 diamond pendant as part of a SpongeBob collection .

On May 17 , 2013 , Build @-@ A @-@ Bear Workshop introduced the new SpongeBob SquarePants collection in stores and online in North America . " For the first time ever , Build @-@ A @-@ Bear Workshop Guests can finally take home the underwater fun of SpongeBob SquarePants and his friends , " said Maxine Clark , Build @-@ A @-@ Bear Workshop founder and chief executive . " We are excited to be working with Nickelodeon to bring this iconic series and its lovable characters to life at Build @-@ A @-@ Bear Workshop . " Shoppers can dress their SpongeBob and Patrick plush in a variety of clothing and accessories . Sandy Cheeks and Gary the Snail are also available as pre @-@ stuffed minis . Build @-@ A @-@ Bear Workshop stores nationwide celebrated the arrival of SpongeBob with a series of special events from May 17 through May 19 .

SpongeBob also inspired vehicle designs . On July 13 , 2013 , Toyota , with Nickelodeon , unveiled a SpongeBob @-@ inspired Toyota Highlander . The 2014 Toyota Highlander as launched at the SpongeBob Day at San Diego 's Giants v. Padres game . The SpongeBob Toyota Highlander visited seven U.S. locations during its release , including the Nickelodeon Suites Resort Orlando in Florida .