

= South Park (season 1) =

The first season of animated television series South Park ran for 13 episodes from August 13 , 1997 to February 25 , 1998 on the American network Comedy Central . The creators Trey Parker and Matt Stone wrote most of the season 's episodes ; Dan Sterling , Philip Stark and David Goodman were credited with writing five episodes . The narrative revolves around four children ? Stan Marsh , Kyle Broflovski , Eric Cartman and Kenny McCormick ? and their unusual experiences in the titular mountain town .

South Park originated from Parker and Stone 's 1992 animated short , Jesus vs. Frosty . The low @-@ budget , crudely made film featured prototypes of South Park 's main characters and was followed in 1995 by another short film , Jesus vs. Santa . The latter became popular and was widely shared over the Internet , which led to talks for a series with representatives from Fox Network and Comedy Central . It debuted on the latter with an initial run of six episodes ; due to its success , an additional seven episodes were quickly produced . The complete season was released on DVD in November 2002 .

The first season was a ratings success for Comedy Central . The Nielsen ratings rose from 1 @.@ 3 to 6 @.@ 4 from the first to the tenth episode . Several episodes received award nominations , including for a 1998 Emmy Award in the " Outstanding Animated Program (for Programming Less Than One Hour) " and a GLAAD Award in the " Outstanding TV ? Individual Episode " category for the episode " Big Gay Al 's Big Gay Boat Ride " . During the season , South Park won a CableACE Award for " Best Animated Series " and was nominated for a 1998 Annie Award in the " Outstanding Achievement in an Animated Primetime or Late Night Television Program " .

The show was a financial success for Comedy Central and helped the network transform into " a cable industry power almost overnight " . Despite this , critics gave the season mixed reviews . Parents Television Council rated it so offensive that it " shouldn 't have been made " : " it doesn 't just push the envelope ; it knocks it off the table " , while another critic thought of it as " coming pretty damn close " to being a " perfect " television series season .

= = Episodes = =

= = Development = =

The idea for South Park originated in 1992 when creators Trey Parker and Matt Stone met in a film class as students at the University of Colorado . They discussed filming a three @-@ minute short film involving a boy who befriended a talking piece of feces named Mr. Hankey . Although such a short was never made , Parker and Stone created a Christmas @-@ related animated short commonly known as " Jesus vs. Frosty " . The crude , low @-@ budget animation featured prototypes for the main characters of South Park , including Cartman , Stan and Kyle . Fox Broadcasting Company executive Brian Graden saw the film and in 1995 commissioned Parker and Stone for \$ 1 @,@ 200 to create a second short film that he could send to his friends as a Christmas video @-@ card . Titled The Spirit of Christmas , but also known as " Jesus vs. Santa " , the short resembled the style of the later series more closely . In 1997 , the The Spirit of Christmas would end up winning the Los Angeles Films Critics Association award for " Best Animation " , thus further bringing the two filmmakers to the attention of industry representatives .

The " Jesus vs. Santa " video was widely copied and shared over the Internet . George Clooney was reported to have made 300 copies for his friends , and the short was subsequently regarded as likely the first viral video . When the shorts began to generate interest for a possible television series , Parker and Stone conceived the idea of a South Park @-@ like show with four child characters but planned to call it The Mr. Hankey Show by featuring a talking stool named Mr. Hankey as the main protagonist . They pitched the idea , but Brian Graden rejected it and said , according to Stone , " I 'm not putting poo on my network . " Parker and Stone adapted their original idea into a show revolving around four children in the South Park town , dropping Mr. Hankey as a protagonist but

planning to use the character in the future in a minor supporting role .

Later , Doug Herzog from Comedy Central saw the Jesus vs. Santa short and considered it to be " literally the funniest thing [he] ' d ever seen , " and requested Parker and Stone to develop a show for his network . During the negotiations , Parker and Stone brought up the idea of a Mr. Hankey episode , with Parker claiming to have asked " one thing we have to know before we really go any further : how do you feel about talking poo ? " The network 's executives were receptive to the idea , which would be one of the main reasons Parker and Stone decided to sign on with the channel . The first episode of the series , " Cartman Gets an Anal Probe " , debuted on Comedy Central on August 13 , 1997 , while Mr. Hankey debuted a few months later in the ninth episode , " Mr. Hankey , the Christmas Poo " .

The pilot episode received poor results from test audiences . Parker later conceded that regarding the language , he and Stone felt pressure to live up to their previous two shorts and " tried to push things ... maybe further than we should [have] . " In contrast , they allowed subsequent episodes to " be more natural " , focusing more on making fun of topics considered taboo " without just throwing a bunch of dirty words in there . " After the poor results from the test audience , Comedy Central executives were unsure whether they wanted to order additional episodes after " Cartman Gets an Anal Probe " . However , when buzz began to generate on the Internet about the two original shorts , the network commissioned Parker and Stone to write one more episode without committing to a full series until they had seen the script . While working on the 1997 film Orgazmo , Parker and Stone wrote the script for what would later become the episode " Weight Gain 4000 " . The duo sought to give Comedy Central executives an idea of how the series would be and how each episode could differ from the others . The network liked the script , and when Parker and Stone refused to write another script before signing off on at least six episodes , the executives agreed to commit to a series .

Comedy Central originally ordered only these six episodes , but when the show proved successful , they requested an additional seven , which Parker and Stone had to produce quickly . " Pinkeye " , the first of these new episodes , would air on October 29 , 1997 , only two and a half months after the show 's premiere . There were three holiday episodes ? " Pinkeye " , " Starvin ' Marvin " and " Mr. Hankey , the Christmas Poo " ? which aired at intervals of three weeks , while the remaining four aired later in February 1998 .

" Cartman Gets an Anal Probe " was the only episode animated almost completely with traditional cut paper , stop @-@ motion animation techniques . All subsequent episodes would be fully computer @-@ animated using Power Animator or Maya . By the eighth episode , " Damien " , much of the drawing and animation responsibilities handled by Parker and Stone were now being delegated to a team of animators . This would be the only episode aside from " Cartman Gets an Anal Probe " to receive a TV @-@ 14 (unsuitable for children under the age of 14) rating instead of the show 's customary TV @-@ MA (unsuitable for under the age of 17) . Parker and Stone credit the fourth episode , " Big Gay Al 's Big Gay Boat Ride " , with helping to raise the ratings during the early part of the season . They felt that the show 's first official Christmas special , " Mr. Hankey , the Christmas Poo " , brought South Park to a new level of popularity , and Parker said this episode " just vaulted everything . "

= = Reception = =

= = = Ratings = = =

South Park 's first season was a ratings success for Comedy Central . " Cartman Gets an Anal Probe " earned a Nielsen rating of 1 @. @ 3 , translating to 980 @, @ 000 viewers , which was considered high for a cable program in the United States at the time . It increased slightly by the third episode , " Volcano " , and by the sixth episode , " Death " , the show had reached a rating of 1 @. @ 7 . The ratings continued to rise rapidly from then on , to 3 @. @ 8 (" Pinkeye ") , 4 @. @ 8 (" Starvin ' Marvin ' ") , 5 @. @ 4 (" Mr. Hankey , the Christmas Poo ") , 6 @. @ 4 (" Damien ") , and

6 @. @ 9 (" Mecha @- @ Streisand ") respectively . This corresponded to an increase to 5 @. @ 4 million viewers in 3 @. @ 2 million households . The season finale , " Cartman 's Mom is a Dirty Slut " , received a Nielsen rating in the 8 @. @ 0 range and gained over 300 @, @ 000 viewers when first aired in Canada in August 1998 .

South Park became one of the first television series to be bootlegged via the Internet , just as The Spirit of Christmas had been before it . College students digitized many episodes from the first season and streamed them online for friends who were unable to receive Comedy Central .

= = = Critics = = =

Despite high ratings , reviews from television critics for the season were mixed . Both The Washington Post and The New York Times had three articles mentioning the show , usually in terms of " class @- @ based taste arguments . " " Cartman Gets an Anal Probe " , the first episode of the series , received generally negative reviews after airing . Brent Bozell , founder and then @- @ president of the Parents Television Council , gave an unfavorable review to the episode , stating that the show " is so offensive that it shouldn 't have been made . It doesn 't just push the envelope ; it knocks it off the table . " Bruce Fretts of Entertainment Weekly thought poorly of the writing and characters , lampooning that " if only the kids ' jokes were as fresh as their mouths " and that " it might help if the South Park kids had personalities , but they 're as one @- @ dimensional as the show 's cut @- @ and @- @ paste animation . " Calling the series " sophomoric , gross , and unfunny , " Hal Boedeker of the Orlando Sentinel reckoned that the episode made " such a bad impression that it 's hard to get on the show 's strange wavelength . " Tom Shales of The Washington Post considered that " most of the alleged humor on the premiere is self @- @ conscious and self @- @ congratulatory in its vulgarity : flatulence jokes , repeated use of the word ' dildo ' (in the literal as well as pejorative sense) , and a general air of malicious unpleasantness . "

When " Weight Gain 4000 " aired , many writers in the mainstream media were still debating the longevity and the overall quality of South Park . With the series still in its earliest stages , the episode continued to shock many due to the characters frequent use of profanities . Nevertheless , several reviewers felt " Weight Gain 4000 " was a significant improvement over " Cartman Gets an Anal Probe " and felt that it went in a much more satirical direction . Several media outlets described the fifth episode of the season , " An Elephant Makes Love to a Pig " , as one of the most popular early episodes . Tom Carson of Newsday said it was the most outrageous South Park episode until " Mr. Hankey , the Christmas Poo " aired three months later . Many reviewers also said this mere title demonstrated the crudeness and originality of South Park .

Due to its impact , South Park made the cover of Rolling Stone in February 1998 , and of Newsweek in March 1998 . It was discussed in five different New York Times articles in 1998 . Franck Rich of The New York Times mentions the show 's " ability to engage political topics with far more success than other (more obviously political) shows " and considered that the show " is hilariously candid about faith , family and death as well " and " is neither politically correct nor incorrect ; it 's on a different , post @- @ ideological comic map altogether . " In 2002 , Jeremy Conrad of IGN wrote in a DVD review that it is rare when a television season is " perfect " , but " the first season of South Park comes pretty damn close " and that " almost every single episode in this three @- @ disc set is a classic and each is still funny as hell even after so many viewings over the years . "

In 2008 , scholar Stephen Groening argued that the show appeared as part of a reaction to the culture wars of the 1980s and 1990s in the United States , in which issues such as Murphy Brown 's motherhood , Tinky Winky 's sexuality , and The Simpsons ' family values were extensively debated . The culture wars , and political correctness in particular , were driven by the belief that relativism was becoming more relevant to daily life . Groening explained that South Park " made a name for itself as rude , crude , vulgar , offensive , and potentially dangerous " . Its critics argued that the Stan , Kyle , Cartman and Kenny were poor role models for children while its supporters celebrated the show 's defense of free speech .

== Impact on Comedy Central ==

In 2006, Devin Leonard of *Fortune* regarded that the launch of *South Park* transformed Comedy Central from a "not @-@ so @-@ funny" network to "a cable industry power almost overnight." The impact the show had ended up surprising everybody involved. At the time, the cable network had a low distribution of just 21 million subscribers. Comedy Central marketed the show aggressively before its launch, billing it as "that's why they invented the V @-@ chip." The resulting buzz led to the network earning an estimated \$30 million in T @-@ shirts sales alone before the first episode was even aired.

South Park became immediately one of the most popular shows on cable television, averaging consistently between 3 @.@ 5 and 5 @.@ 5 million viewers. The Denver @-@ based Tele @-@ Communications Inc., the largest cable operator in the U.S. at the time, had just dropped Comedy Central, but when *South Park* debuted, Denver newspapers and radio stations heavily criticized the operator for not carrying the hit show of the two local filmmakers? Parker and Stone. Doug Herzog, Comedy Central's president at the time, said that the public "went nuts" as the network received about ten million new subscriptions through Tele @-@ Communications Inc. alone, "which at that time was unheard of."

An affiliate of the MTV Network until then, Comedy Central decided, in part due to the success of *South Park*, to have its own independent sales department. By the end of 1998, Comedy Central had sold more than \$150 million worth of merchandise for the show, including T @-@ shirts and dolls. Over the next few years, Comedy Central's viewership spiked largely due to *South Park*, adding 3 million new subscribers in the first half of 1998 alone and allowed the network to sign international deals with networks in several countries.

== Awards ==

Some episodes of the first season received nominations for several entertainment awards. The season's fourth episode "Big Gay Al's Big Gay Boat Ride" was nominated for an Emmy Award in 1998 in the "Outstanding Animated Program (for Programming Less Than One Hour)" category but lost to the *The Simpsons* episode "Trash of the Titans". The same episode was also nominated for a GLAAD Award in the "Outstanding TV? Individual Episode" category but lost to another *The Simpsons* episode, "Homer's Phobia". "Volcano", the season's third episode, was nominated for an Environmental Media Award in the "TV Episodic Comedy" category but ended up losing to another *The Simpsons* episode, "The Old Man & the Lisa".

During the series first season, *South Park* won a CableACE Award for "Best Animated Program or Series" and was nominated for an Annie Award in the "Outstanding Achievement in an Animated Primetime or Late Night Television Program" category. In 1998, the two creators of the show Matt Stone and Trey Parker won the "Nova Award" given by the Producers Guild of America for the most promising producers in television.

== Media release ==

Six episodes? "Cartman Gets an Anal Probe", "Volcano", "Weight Gain 4000", "Big Gay Al's Big Gay Boat Ride", "An Elephant Makes Love to a Pig" and "Death"? were released in a three @-@ VHS set on May 5, 1998, marking the first time *South Park* was made available on video. The first DVD releases came later that year, when the first thirteen episodes were released by Warner Home Video on October 27 on the compilation collections *South Park*, Volume 1, Volume 2 and Volume 3. The last episode of the season "Cartman's Mom Is a Dirty Slut" was released on the *South Park*, Volume 4 on December 14, 1999.

South Park? The Complete First Season was originally released by Warner Home Video as a three @-@ disc region 1 DVD box set in the U.S. on November 12, 2002 and received an MA rating. The season was re @-@ released on June 29, 2005 by Paramount Home Entertainment. The DVD releases featured bonus material such as introductions for each episode, two Christmas carols by

Eric Cartman and Ned , a short clip featuring Jay Leno and another clip in which the four boys present at the 1997 CableACE Awards . Trey Parker and Matt Stone produced commentaries for each episode but requested they be pulled off altogether when they found out the commentaries would be edited . Instead , the commentaries were released unedited by Comedy Central on a set of five CDs . In October 2005 , South Park : Complete Series 1 was released in Australia and with a 15 rating in region 2 . " Mr. Hankey , the Christmas Poo " was released again on November 13 , 2005 on the compilation DVD Christmas Time in South Park .

The distribution licenses for six episodes of the South Park 's first season (" Volcano " , " An Elephant Makes Love to a Pig " , " Pinkeye " , " Damien " , " Starvin ' Marvin " and " Mecha @-@ Streisand ") were purchased in 2000 by the Pittsburgh , Pennsylvania @-@ based company and website SightSound.com. The site made the episodes available for download for \$ 2 @.@ 50 for a two @-@ day copy and for \$ 4 @.@ 95 for a permanent copy . It was one of the first experiments with downloadable television videos , thus making South Park one of the first shows legally obtainable on the Internet . In March 2008 , Comedy Central made the first season 's episodes as well as almost all other South Park episodes available for legal streaming on the South Park Studios website from within U.S. , and later from within Canada and the United Kingdom .