

= SpongeBob SquarePants =

SpongeBob SquarePants is an American animated television series created by marine biologist and animator Stephen Hillenburg for Nickelodeon . The series chronicles the adventures and endeavors of the title character and his various friends in the fictional underwater city of Bikini Bottom . The series ' popularity has made it a media franchise , as well as the highest rated series to ever air on Nickelodeon , and the most distributed property of MTV Networks . The media franchise has generated \$ 8 billion in merchandising revenue for Nickelodeon .

Many of the ideas for the series originated in an unpublished educational comic book titled The Intertidal Zone , which Hillenburg created in 1989 . He began developing SpongeBob SquarePants into a television series in 1996 upon the cancellation of Rocko 's Modern Life , and turned to Tom Kenny , who had worked with him on that series , to voice the title character . SpongeBob was originally going to be named SpongeBoy , and the series was to be called SpongeBoy Ahoy ! , but these were both changed , as the name was already trademarked .

Nickelodeon held a preview for the series in the United States on May 1 , 1999 , following the television airing of the 1999 Kids ' Choice Awards . The series officially premiered on July 17 , 1999 . It has received worldwide critical acclaim since its premiere and gained enormous popularity by its second season . A feature film , The SpongeBob SquarePants Movie , was released in theaters on November 19 , 2004 , and a sequel was released on February 6 , 2015 . On July 21 , 2012 , the series was renewed and aired its ninth season , beginning with the episode " Extreme Spots " .

The series has won a variety of awards , including six Annie Awards , eight Golden Reel Awards , two Emmy Awards , 12 Kids ' Choice Awards , and two BAFTA Children 's Awards . Despite its widespread popularity , the series has been involved in several public controversies , including one centered on speculation over SpongeBob 's intended sexual orientation , and another focusing on the perceived declining quality of the show 's content since the release of the first film . In 2011 , a newly described species of mushroom , *Spongiforma squarepantsii* , was named after the cartoon 's title character .

= = Premise = =

= = = Characters = = =

The series revolves around its title character and his various friends . SpongeBob SquarePants is an energetic and optimistic sea sponge (although his appearance more closely resembles a kitchen sponge) who lives in a sea pineapple and loves his job as a fry cook at the Krusty Krab . He has a pet snail , Gary , who meows like a cat . Living two houses down from SpongeBob is his best friend Patrick Star , a dim @-@ witted yet friendly pink starfish who lives under a rock . Despite his " mental setbacks " , Patrick still sees himself as intelligent . Squidward Tentacles is SpongeBob 's next @-@ door neighbor and co @-@ worker at the Krusty Krab . Squidward is an arrogant and ill @-@ tempered octopus who lives in an Easter Island moai and dislikes his neighbors (especially SpongeBob) for their childlike behavior . He enjoys playing the clarinet and painting self @-@ portraits , but hates his job as a cashier .

Another close friend of SpongeBob is Sandy Cheeks , a squirrel from Texas . She is a scientist and an expert in karate . She lives in an underwater tree dome (a tree Sandy brought with her that is entrapped in a clear glass dome locked by a tight , hand @-@ turned seal) . When outside of her dwelling , she wears an astronaut @-@ like suit because she cannot breathe underwater . Mr. Krabs , a miserly crab obsessed with money , is the owner of the Krusty Krab restaurant and SpongeBob 's boss . His rival , Plankton , is a small green copepod who owns a low @-@ rank fast @-@ food restaurant called the Chum Bucket , located across the street from the Krusty Krab . Plankton spends most of his time planning to steal the secret recipe for Mr. Krabs ' popular Krabby Patty burgers , so as to gain the upper hand and put the Krusty Krab out of business .

Other recurring characters appear throughout the series , such as SpongeBob 's ever @-@

suffering driving teacher Mrs. Puff ; Mr. Krabs ' whiney teenage whale daughter Pearl ; Plankton 's intelligent yet sarcastic computer wife Karen ; the muscular lifeguard of Goo Lagoon , Larry the Lobster ; a pirate specter known as The Flying Dutchman ; and retired superheroes Mermaid Man and Barnacle Boy , who are idolized by SpongeBob and Patrick .

= = = Setting = = =

The series predominantly takes place in the benthic underwater city of Bikini Bottom which , according to some third @-@ party sources , is located in the Pacific Ocean beneath the real @-@ life coral reef known as Bikini Atoll . In 2015 , Tom Kenny confirmed that the fictitious city was named after Bikini Atoll , but denied an Internet fan theory that connected the series ' characters to actual nuclear testing that occurred in the atoll .

The citizens live in mostly aquatic @-@ themed buildings and use " boatmobiles " , amalgamations of cars and boats , as a mode of transportation . Recurring establishments present in Bikini Bottom include two competing restaurants , the Krusty Krab and the Chum Bucket ; Mrs. Puff 's Boating School ; and Shady Shoals Rest Home . Goo Lagoon , a popular beach hangout , is within the vicinity of the city , as is Jellyfish Fields . There are also a few episodes with businesses such as the grocery store , joke store , and mattress store .

When the crew began production on the pilot , they were tasked with designing the stock locations where " ... the show would return to again and again , and in which most of the action would take place , such as the Krusty Krab and SpongeBob 's pineapple house " . The idea for the series was " to keep everything nautical " , so the crew used a great amount of rope , wooden planks , ships ' wheels , netting , anchors , boilerplates , and rivets in creating the show 's setting . Bubbles filling up the screen is also a nautical technique used to transition from scene to scene .

The series features " sky flowers " as a main setting material . They first appeared in the pilot and have since become a common feature throughout the series . When series background designer Kenny Pittenger was asked what they were , he answered , " They function as clouds in a way , but since the show takes place underwater , they aren 't really clouds " . Since the series was influenced by tiki , the background painters have to use a lot of pattern . Pittenger said that the sky flowers were meant to " evoke the look of a flower @-@ print Hawaiian shirt " .

= = Development = =

= = = Early inspirations = = =

Series creator Stephen Hillenburg first became fascinated with the ocean as a child . Also at a young age , he began developing his artistic abilities . However , these two interests would not coincide for a long time ? the idea of drawing fish seemed boring to him . During college , he majored in marine biology and minored 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 Hillenburg was there , he created a precursor to SpongeBob SquarePants : a comic book titled The Intertidal Zone , which was used by the institute to teach visiting students about the animal life of tide pools . The comic starred various anthropomorphic sea lifeforms , many of which would evolve into SpongeBob characters . Hillenburg tried to get the comic professionally published , but none of the companies to which he sent it were interested .

= = = Conception = = =

During his time of employment at the Ocean Institute , Hillenburg attended an animation festival and determined that he wanted to pursue a career in that field . He had already been planning on returning to college for a master 's degree in art . Instead , he chose to study experimental animation

at the California Institute of the Arts . His thesis film , Wormholes , is about the theory of relativity . It was screened at festivals , and at one of these , Hillenburg met Joe Murray , creator of the popular Nickelodeon animated series , Rocko 's Modern Life . Murray was impressed by the style of the film and offered Hillenburg a job . Hillenburg joined the series as a director and later , during the fourth season , he took on the roles of producer and creative director .

Martin Olson , one of the writers for Rocko 's Modern Life , read The Intertidal Zone and encouraged Hillenburg to create a television series with a similar concept . At that point , Hillenburg had not even considered creating his own series . However , he realized that if he ever did , this would be the best approach . He began to further develop some of the characters from The Intertidal Zone , including the comic 's " announcer " , Bob the Sponge . He wanted his series to stand out from most popular cartoons of the time , which he felt were exemplified by buddy comedies such as The Ren & Stimpy Show . As a result , Hillenburg decided to focus on one main character : the weirdest sea creature that he could think of . This led him to the sponge . Bob the Sponge resembles an actual sea sponge , and at first Hillenburg continued this design . In determining the new character 's personality , Hillenburg drew inspiration from innocent , childlike figures that he enjoyed , such as Charlie Chaplin , Laurel and Hardy , Jerry Lewis , and Pee @-@ wee Herman . He then considered modeling the character after a kitchen sponge and realized that this idea would perfectly match the character 's square personality .

To voice the central character of the series , Hillenburg turned to Tom Kenny , whose career in animation had started alongside Hillenburg 's on Rocko 's Modern Life . Elements of Kenny 's own personality were employed in further developing the character . Initially , Hillenburg wanted to use the name SpongeBoy ? the character would have had no last name , and the series would have been called SpongeBoy Ahoy ! However , the Nickelodeon legal department discovered ? after voice acting had been completed for the original seven @-@ minute pilot episode ? that the name " SpongeBoy " was already in use for a mop product . Flaming Carrot Comics creator Bob Burden also owned the trademark to a character of the same name . In choosing a replacement name , Hillenburg felt that he still had to use the word " Sponge " , so that viewers would not mistake the character for a " Cheese Man " . He settled on the name " SpongeBob " . " SquarePants " was then chosen as a family name after Kenny saw a picture of the character and remarked , " Boy , look at this sponge in square pants , thinking he can get a job in a fast food place . " Hillenburg loved the phrase upon hearing Kenny say it and felt that it would reinforce the character 's nerdiness .

= = = Pitching = = =

In 1997 , while pitching the cartoon to Nickelodeon executives , Hillenburg donned a Hawaiian shirt , brought along an " underwater terrarium with models of the characters " , and played Hawaiian music to set the theme . The setup was described by Nickelodeon executive Eric Coleman as " pretty amazing " . When they were given money and two weeks to write the pilot episode " Help Wanted " , Derek Drymon , Stephen Hillenberg , and Nick Jennings returned with what was described by Nickelodeon official Albie Hecht as , " a performance [he] wished [he] had on tape " . Although executive producer Derek Drymon described the pitch as stressful , he said it went " very well " . Kevin Kay and Hecht had to step outside because they were " exhausted from laughing " , which worried the cartoonists .

In an interview , Cyma Zarghami , the current president of Nickelodeon , said , " their [Nickelodeon executives '] immediate reaction was to see it again , both because they liked it and it was unlike anything they 'd ever seen before " . Zarghami was one of four executives in the room when SpongeBob SquarePants was screened for the first time .

= = Production = =

= = = Executive producers and showrunners = = =

Series creator Stephen Hillenburg has served as the executive producer over the course of the series' entire history, and functioned as the showrunner from the series' debut in 1999 until 2004. The series went on hiatus in 2002, after Hillenburg halted production to work on a feature film of the series, *The SpongeBob SquarePants Movie*. Once the film was finalized and the third season finished, Hillenburg resigned as the series' showrunner. Although he no longer has a direct role in the production of the series, he still maintains an advisory role and reviews each episode.

When the film was completed, Hillenburg intended for it to be the series finale, "so [the show] wouldn't jump the shark." However, Nickelodeon wanted more episodes, so Hillenburg appointed Paul Tibbitt, who previously served on the show as a writer, director, and storyboard artist, to take over his role as showrunner and produce further seasons. Hillenburg considered Tibbitt one of his favorite members of the show's crew, and "totally trusted him". Tibbitt still holds the showrunner position, and has also functioned as a supervising producer since 2005 and an executive producer since 2008.

On December 13, 2014, it was announced that Hillenburg would return to the series in an unspecified position.

== Writing ==

For *SpongeBob SquarePants* a team of five outline and premise writers creates the initial storylines. Writer Luke Brookshier said, "SpongeBob is written differently than many television shows". Writing for an episode of the series starts with a two @-@ page outline. A storyboard director then takes the outline and develops it into a full episode. Jokes and dialogue are added during this stage. Another writer for the series, Merriwether Williams, described in an interview that she and Mr. Lawrence would write a draft for an episode in an afternoon and be done at 4 o'clock.

Hillenburg decided early on, prior to starting the production of the series, that he wanted *SpongeBob SquarePants* to be storyboard @-@ driven, rather than script @-@ driven. This required an approach in which artists "would take a skeletal story outline and flesh it out with sight gags, dialogue and a structure that would strike a balance between narrative and whimsy". Hillenburg originally wanted "a team of young and hungry people" to work on the series. The primary figures, who had previously worked with Hillenburg on *Rocko's Modern Life*, consisted of Alan Smart, Nick Jennings, and Derek Drymon. Head writer Steven Banks said, "The writers come up with an idea and write premises and outlines describing the story, and the storyboarders (who are also writers) write the dialogue while they draw the storyboard panels. Most other shows are script @-@ driven. We don't write scripts and that has made all the difference!"

The writing staff often used their individual life experiences for inspirations to come up with the storylines of the series' episodes. For example, the episode "Sailor Mouth", in which SpongeBob and Patrick learn profanity, was inspired by creative director Derek Drymon's experience of getting in trouble as a child for using the f @-@ word in front of his mother. Drymon said, "The scene where Patrick is running to Mr. Krabs to tattletale, with SpongeBob chasing him, is pretty much how it happened in real life". The end of the episode, in which Mr. Krabs uses even more profanity than SpongeBob and Patrick, was inspired "by the fact that my [Drymon's] mother has a sailor mouth herself". The idea for the episode "The Secret Box" also came from one of Drymon's childhood experiences. Hillenburg explained, "Drymon had a secret box [as a kid] and started telling us about it. We wanted to make fun of him and use it."

Almost every episode is divided into two 11 @-@ minute segments. Hillenburg explained that "[I] never really wanted to deliberately try to write a half @-@ hour show". He added, "I wrote the shows to where they felt right". Each 11 @-@ minute segment takes about five months to produce.

== Voice actors ==

SpongeBob SquarePants has six main cast members: Tom Kenny, Bill Fagerbakke, Rodger Bumpass, Clancy Brown, Carolyn Lawrence, and Mr. Lawrence.

Kenny provides the voices of SpongeBob SquarePants , his pet snail Gary , the French Narrator , Harold SquarePants , Patchy the Pirate , and the Dirty Bubble . Kenny previously worked with Hillenburg on Rocko 's Modern Life and , when Hillenburg created SpongeBob SquarePants , he approached Kenny to voice the character . The voice of SpongeBob was originally used by Kenny for a minor background character in Rocko 's Modern Life . Kenny says that SpongeBob 's high @-@ pitched laugh was specifically created to be unique . They wanted an annoying laugh in the tradition of Popeye and Woody Woodpecker .

Fagerbakke voices Patrick Star and other miscellaneous characters . At the same time when Hillenburg , Derek Drymon , and Tim Hill were writing the pilot " Help Wanted " , Hillenburg was also conducting auditions to find voices for the characters . Fagerbakke auditioned for the role of Patrick after Kenny had been cast . In an interview , Fagerbakke compared himself to the character and said , " It 's extremely gratifying " . Fagerbakke modeled his performance whenever Patrick is angry after that of American actress Shelley Winters .

Bumpass performs the voice of Squidward Tentacles and other miscellaneous characters . Arthur Brown , author of Everything I Need to Know , I Learned from Cartoons ! , has compared Squidward 's voice to that of Jack Benny 's . Hillenburg originally had Mr. Lawrence in mind for the role of voicing Squidward .

Clancy Brown provides the voice of Mr. Krabs .

Carolyn Lawrence provides the voice of Sandy Cheeks . Lawrence got the role of Sandy when she was in the Los Feliz neighborhood in Los Angeles . She met Donna Grillo , a casting director , on a sidewalk . Lawrence was with a friend who knew Grillo , and she said Lawrence had an interesting voice . Grillo brought in Lawrence to audition and she got the part of Sandy . Lawrence modeled her performance of Sandy after that of American actress Holly Hunter .

Mr. Lawrence voices Plankton . Drymon said , " We knew Doug [Lawrence] from Rocko , where he was a storyboard director and where he also did the voice of Filburt . We were showing Doug the storyboard , and he started reading back to us in his Tony the Tiger / Gregory Peck voice . It was really funny , and we wound up having SpongeBob use a deep voice when he entered the Krusty Krab for the first time " . Hillenburg loved the voice and decided to give Lawrence the part of series villain , Plankton . Aside from Plankton , Mr. Lawrence also voices recurring characters like Larry Lobster .

Karen , Mrs. Puff , Pearl , and the Flying Dutchman are voiced by Kenny 's wife Jill Talley , Mary Jo Catlett , Lori Alan and Brian Doyle @-@ Murray , respectively . Mr. Krabs ' mother , Mama Krabs , who debuted in the episode " Sailor Mouth " , was voiced by writer Paul Tibbitt . However , voice actress Sirena Irwin overtook Tibbitt 's role as the character reappeared in the fourth season episode " Enemy In @-@ Law " in 2005 . Tom Kenny portrays Patchy the Pirate , the president of the fictional SpongeBob SquarePants fan club , while series creator Hillenburg voiced the character of Potty the Parrot . After Hillenburg 's departure as showrunner in 2004 , Tibbitt was given the role in voicing Potty the Parrot .

In addition to the regular cast , episodes feature guest voices from many ranges of professions , including actors , athletes , authors , musicians , and artists . Recurring guest voices include : Ernest Borgnine , who voiced Mermaid Man from 1999 until his death in 2012 ; Tim Conway as the voice of Barnacle Boy ; and Marion Ross as Grandma SquarePants . Notable guests who have provided vocal cameo appearances includes David Bowie as Lord Royal Highness in the television film Atlantis SquarePantis , Johnny Depp as the voice of the surf guru , Jack Kahuna Laguna , in the episode " SpongeBob SquarePants vs. The Big One " , and Victoria Beckham as the voice of Queen Amphitrite in the episode " The Clash of Triton " .

Voice recording sessions always include a full cast of actors , which Kenny describes as " getting more unusual " . Kenny said , " That 's another thing that 's given SpongeBob its special feel . Everybody 's in the same room , doing it old radio @-@ show style . It 's how the stuff we like was recorded " . Series writer Jay Lender said , " The recording sessions were always fun ... " For the first three seasons , Hillenburg and Drymon sat in on the record studio , and they directed the actors . In the fourth season , Andrea Romano took over the role as the voice director . Wednesday is recording day , the same schedule followed by the crew since 1999 . Casting supervisor Jennie

Monica Hammond said , " I loved Wednesdays " .

= = = Animation = = =

Approximately 50 people work together in animating and producing an episode of SpongeBob SquarePants . Throughout its run , production of the series has been handled domestically at Nickelodeon Animation Studio in Burbank , California , while the finished animation has been created overseas at Rough Draft Studios in South Korea . Storyboarding for each episode is done by the crew in California . The storyboards are then used as templates by the crew in Korea , who animate by hand , color cels on computers , and paint backgrounds . Episodes are finished in California , where they are edited and have music added . Every season , character designs are updated or modified to solve technical issues in the animation .

During the first season , the series used cel animation . A shift was made the following year to digital ink and paint animation . In 2009 , executive producer Paul Tibbitt said " The first season of SpongeBob was done the old @-@ fashioned way on cells , and every cell had to be part @-@ painted , left to dry , paint some other colours . It 's still a time @-@ consuming aspect of the process now , but the digital way of doing things means it doesn 't take long to correct " .

In 2008 , the crew shifted to using Wacom Cintiqs for the drawings instead of pencils . The fifth season episode " Pest of the West " was the first episode in the series to which the crew applied this method . Series background designer Kenny Pittenger said , " The only real difference between the way we draw now and the way we drew then is that we abandoned pencil and paper during the fifth season " . The crew began the shift while they were working on the episode . Pittenger said , " It was while we were working on ' Pest of the West ' , one of the half @-@ hour specials , that we made the switch ... did you notice ? " The shift to Wacom Cintiqs let the designers and animators draw on computer screens and make immediate changes or undo mistakes . Pittenger said , " Many neo @-@ Luddites ? er ... I mean , many of my cohorts ? don 't like working on them , but I find them useful . There 's no substitute for the immediacy of drawing on a piece of paper , of course , but digital nautical nonsense is still pretty fun " .

A stop @-@ motion opening sequence for the series ' 10th anniversary special was created by LA @-@ based animation studio Screen Novelties . The group was re @-@ enlisted a few years later to produce the eighth season episode " It 's a SpongeBob Christmas ! " This was the first full @-@ length episode in the series to be produced in stop motion animation . Mark Caballero , Seamus Walsh , and Christopher Finnegan of Screen Novelties animated the episode , and Caballero and Walsh also served as its directors .

= = = Music = = =

The theme song was composed by Mark Harrison and Blaise Smith , while the lyrics to the song were written by series creator Stephen Hillenburg and the series ' original creative director Derek Drymon . The melody was inspired by the sea shanty " Blow the Man Down " . An old oil painting of a pirate is used in the opening sequence . It has been dubbed " Painty the Pirate " , and according to Tom Kenny , Hillenburg found it in a thrift shop " years ago " . Patrick Pinney gives voice to Painty the Pirate , singing the theme song as the character . Hillenburg 's lips were imposed onto the painting and move along with the lyrics . Kenny joked that this is " about as close of a glimpse as most SpongeBob fans are ever going to get of Steve Hillenburg " , because of Hillenburg 's private nature .

A cover of the song by Avril Lavigne can be found on the SpongeBob SquarePants Movie soundtrack . Another cover by the Violent Femmes aired on Nickelodeon as a promotion for the series moving to prime time .

Steve Belfer , one of Hillenburg 's friends from CalArts , wrote and performed the music that is played over the end credits . This theme includes ukulele music , per Hillenburg 's request . Drymon said , " It 's so long ago , it 's hard to be sure , but I remember Hillenburg having the Belfer music early on , maybe before the pilot " .

The series' music editor and main composer is Nicolas Carr. After working with Hillenburg on Rocko's Modern Life, Carr struggled to find a new job in his field. He had been considering a career change when Hillenburg offered him the job. The first season's score primarily featured selections from the Associated Production Music Library, which Carr has said includes "lots of great old corny Hawaiian music and big, full, dramatic orchestral scores." Rocko's Modern Life also used music from this library. It was Hillenburg's decision to adopt the approach. The selections for SpongeBob SquarePants have been described by Carr as being "more over-the-top" than those for Rocko's Modern Life.

Hillenburg also felt that it was important for the series to develop its own music library, consisting of scores that could be reused and re-edited throughout the years. He wanted these scores to be composed by unknowns, and a group of twelve was assembled. They formed "The Sponge Divers Orchestra", which includes Carr and Belfer. This group went on to provide the majority of the music for later seasons, although Carr still draws from the Associated Production Music Library, as well as another library that he founded himself: Animation Music Inc.

== Broadcast ==

== Episodes ==

== Tenth anniversary ==

Nickelodeon began celebrating the 10th anniversary of the series on January 18, 2009 with a live cast reading of the episode "SpongeBob vs. The Big One". The reading, a first for the series, was held at that year's Sundance Film Festival. The episode, which would not premiere on TV until April 17, featured Johnny Depp as a guest star. Other celebratory actions taken by the network included the launching of a new website for the series (spongebob.com) and the introduction of new merchandising. A "SpongeBob and water conservation"-themed element was also added to Nickelodeon's pro-social campaign The Big Green Help. In an interview, Tom Kenny said, "What I'm most proud of is that kids still really like [SpongeBob SquarePants] and care about it... They eagerly await new episodes. People who were young children when it started 10 years ago are still watching it and digging it and think it's funny. That's the loving cup for me".

Three nights before the official anniversary date, an hour-long documentary of the series, Square Roots: The Story of SpongeBob SquarePants, premiered on VH1. Critically acclaimed duo Patrick Creadon and Christine O'Malley created the film as a followup to I.O.U.S.A., a documentary on America's financial situation. Creadon remarked, "After spending two years examining the financial health of the United States, Christine and I were ready to tackle something a little more upbeat. Telling the SpongeBob story feels like the perfect fit." On Friday July 17, Nickelodeon marked the official anniversary of the series, with a 50-hour television marathon titled "The Ultimate SpongeBob SpongeBash Weekend". The marathon began with a new episode, "To SquarePants or Not to SquarePants". Saturday saw a countdown of the top ten episodes as picked by fans, as well as an airing of The SpongeBob SquarePants Movie. The marathon finished on Sunday, which saw a countdown of episodes as picked by celebrities, as well as the premiere of ten new episodes.

Nickelodeon continued celebrating the anniversary through the rest of the year. An eight-episode DVD set featuring "To SquarePants or Not to SquarePants" shortly followed the marathon, with a July 21 release. Next a 2-hour, 14-disc DVD set titled The First 100 Episodes was released on September 22. Finally, on November 6, an hour-long television film, titled Truth or Square, debuted on Nickelodeon. The film is narrated by Ricky Gervais and features live action cameo appearances by Rosario Dawson, Craig Ferguson, Will Ferrell, Tina Fey, LeBron James, Pink, Triumph the Insult Comic Dog, and Robin Williams. It was released

as part of a five @-@ episode DVD set on November 10 .

= = Reception = =

= = = Ratings and run @-@ length achievements = = =

Within its first month on air , SpongeBob SquarePants overtook Pokémon 's position as the highest rated Saturday @-@ morning children 's series . It held an average national Nielsen rating of 4 @.@ 9 among children aged two through eleven , denoting 1 @.@ 9 million viewers . Two years later , the series had firmly established itself as Nickelodeon 's second highest rated children 's program , after Rugrats . It had gained a significant adult audience by that point ? nearly 40 percent of the series ' 2 @.@ 2 million viewers were aged 18 to 34 . That year , 2001 , Nickelodeon took the " Saturday @-@ morning ratings crown " for the fourth straight season . In response to this weekend @-@ found success , the studio gave SpongeBob SquarePants time slots at 6 PM and 8 PM , Monday through Thursday , to increase exposure of the series . By the end of that year SpongeBob SquarePants boasted the highest ratings for any children 's series , not only on Nickelodeon , but on all of television . Weekly viewership of the series had reached around fifteen million , at least five million of which were adults .

In October 2002 , another Nickelodeon series titled The Fairly OddParents ranked as the No. 2 program for children between 2 and 11 years old . Its ratings at that time were almost equal to SpongeBob SquarePants ' then @-@ average of 2 @.@ 2 million viewers per episode . The Fairly OddParents even briefly surpassed SpongeBob SquarePants , causing the latter series to drop into second place ? at this time The Fairly OddParents had a 6 @.@ 2 rating and nearly 2 @.@ 5 million child viewers , while SpongeBob SquarePants had a 6 @.@ 0 rating and 2 @.@ 4 million kids 2 ? 11 . Nickelodeon " recognized " The Fairly OddParents for its climbing ratings and installed it into a new 8 P.M. time slot , previously occupied by SpongeBob SquarePants . In an interview , Cyma Zarghami , then @-@ general manager and executive vice president of Nickelodeon , said , " Are we banking on the fact that Fairly OddParents will be the next SpongeBob ? ... We are hoping . But SpongeBob is so unique , it 's hard to say if it will ever be repeated " .

However , in 2012 , it was reported that the series ' ratings were declining . The average number of viewers aged 2 to 11 watching SpongeBob at any given time dropped 29 % in the first quarter from a year earlier , according to Nielsen . Wall Street Journal business writer John Jannarone suggested that the age of the series and oversaturation of the series might be contributing to the decline of the series ' ratings , and might also be directly responsible for the decline in Nickelodeon 's overall ratings . Media analyst Todd Juenger directly attributes the decline in Nickelodeon 's ratings to the availability of streaming video content on services like Netflix , a provider of on @-@ demand Internet streaming media .

Philippe Dauman , the president and CEO of Viacom , contradicted the notion , saying he did not think " the limited amount of Nick library content on Netflix ... has had a significant impact " . A Nickelodeon spokesman said SpongeBob is performing consistently well and remains the number one rated animated series in all of children 's television . He added , " There is nothing that we have seen that points to SpongeBob as a problem " . Dauman blamed the drop on " some ratings systemic issues " at Nielsen , citing extensive set @-@ top @-@ box data that " does in no way reflect " the Nielsen data .

Juenger noted that SpongeBob could affect the ratings of other Nickelodeon programming because children often change channels to find their favorite programs , then stay tuned into that network . Nickelodeon recently reduced its exposure in television . In the first quarter of 2012 , the network cut back on the number of episodes it aired by 16 % compared with a year earlier .

On April 22 , 2013 , Netflix CEO Reed Hastings announced their intentions not to renew their existing deal with Viacom . Since then , Viacom 's deal with Netflix expired , and shows such as SpongeBob and Dora the Explorer were removed . On June 4 , 2013 , Viacom announced a multi @-@ year licensing agreement which would move its programs , such as SpongeBob and Dora the

Explorer , to Amazon.com , Netflix 's top competitor . Amazon agreed to pay more than \$ 200 million to Viacom for the license , its largest subscription streaming transaction ever .

SpongeBob SquarePants is one of the longest @-@ running series on Nickelodeon . It became the Nickelodeon series with the most episodes , during its eighth season , surpassing the 172 episodes of Rugrats with 178 . In its ninth season , a total of 26 episodes pushed the series over the 200th episode mark , reaching 204 produced episodes . In a statement , Brown Johnson , animation president for Nickelodeon , said , " SpongeBob 's success in reaching over 200 episodes is a testament to creator Stephen Hillenburg 's vision , comedic sensibility and his dynamic , lovable characters . The series now joins the club of contemporary classic Nicktoons that have hit this benchmark , so we 're incredibly proud " .

= = = Critical reception = = =

SpongeBob SquarePants has received generally positive reviews from critics , and it has been noted for its appeal towards different age groups . James Poniewozik of Time magazine described the title 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 " . According to Laura Fries of Variety magazine , the series is " a thoughtful and inventive cartoon about a hopelessly optimistic and resilient sea sponge ... Devoid of the double entendres rife in today 's animated TV shows , this is purely kid 's stuff ... However , that 's not to say that SpongeBob is simplistic or even juvenile . It 's charming and whimsical , but clever enough to appeal to teens and college @-@ aged kids , as well " . The New York Times critic Joyce Millman said SpongeBob " is clever without being impenetrable to young viewers and goofy without boring grown @-@ ups to tears . It 's the most charming toon on television , and one of the weirdest . And it 's also good , clean fun , which makes sense because it is , after all , about a sponge " . Millman wrote , " 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 , Barack Obama named SpongeBob his favorite TV character and admitted that SpongeBob SquarePants is " the show I watch with my daughters " . British Prime Minister Gordon Brown has also said he watches the series with his children .

= = = Awards and accolades = = =

SpongeBob SquarePants has received many awards and nominations ; among these are two Emmy Awards (" Outstanding Special Class Animated Program " in 2010 and " Outstanding Sound Editing ? Animation " in 2014) ; six Annie Awards ; and two BAFTA Children 's Awards . In 2006 , IGN ranked SpongeBob SquarePants 15th on its list , " Top 25 Animated Series of All Time " , and in 2013 , it ranked the series 12th on its list , " The Top 25 Animated Series for Adults " . Additionally , the website 's UK division ran a " Top 100 Animated Series " list , and like its US counterpart , ranked SpongeBob SquarePants 15th .

The series is among the " All @-@ TIME 100 TV Shows " as chosen by Time television critic James Poniewozik in 2007 . He said , " It 's the most funny , surreal , inventive example of the explosion in creative kids ' (and adult) entertainment that Nick , Cartoon Network and their ilk made possible " . Viewers of the UK television network Channel 4 voted SpongeBob SquarePants the 28th " Greatest

Cartoon " in a 2004 poll . TV Guide listed the character of SpongeBob SquarePants at No. 9 for its " 50 Greatest Cartoon Characters of All Time " . In 2013 , the publication ranked SpongeBob SquarePants the eighth " Greatest TV Cartoon of All Time " . In June 2010 , Entertainment Weekly named SpongeBob one of the " 100 Greatest Characters of the Last 20 Years " .

= = = Legacy = = =

In July 2009 , Madame Tussauds wax museum in New York launched a wax sculpture of SpongeBob in celebration of the series ' 10th anniversary . This made SpongeBob the first animated character to ever receive a statue made entirely out of wax . In May 2011 , a new species of mushroom , *Spongiforma squarepantsii* , was described , named after the series ' title character .

The character has also become a trend in Egypt at Cairo '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 . Although The Guardian and Vice have asserted that the trend has little to no political significance , " joke " presidential campaigns have been undertaken for SpongeBob in Egypt and Syria .

A clip was posted to YouTube in February 2013 that features soldiers in the Russian army and navy singing the SpongeBob SquarePants theme song as they march . According to the website that uploaded the video , this is one of the " most popular marching songs " in the Russian military . The video garnered nearly 50 @, @ 000 views within its first week .

= = = Criticism and controversy = = =

In 2005 , a promotional video which showed SpongeBob and other characters from children 's shows singing together to promote diversity and tolerance was attacked by an evangelical group in the United States because they saw SpongeBob as being used to " advocate homosexuality " . James Dobson of Focus on the Family accused the video of promoting homosexuality , due to it being sponsored by a pro @-@ tolerance group . The incident accentuated questions as to whether or not SpongeBob is gay . Although the character has enjoyed popularity with gay viewers , series creator Stephen Hillenburg had already denied the issue three years earlier , clarifying at the time that he considers the character to be " somewhat asexual " . After Dobson 's comments , Hillenburg reasserted his position , stating that sexual preference does not play a part in what they are " trying to do " with the series . Tom Kenny and other production members were distraught 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 , the video , or any of the characters in the video , but rather with the organization that sponsored the video , the We Are Family Foundation . Dobson indicated that the We Are Family Foundation posted pro @-@ gay material on their 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 " .

Jeffery P. Dennis , author of the journal article " Queertoons " , 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 " . Martin Goodman of Animation World Magazine described Dennis ' comments regarding SpongeBob and Patrick as " interesting " . Ukrainian website Family Under the Protection of the Holy Virgin , which has been described as a " fringe Catholic " group by The Wall Street Journal , levied criticism against SpongeBob SquarePants for its alleged " promotion of

homosexuality ". The group sought to have the series banned , along with several other popular children 's properties . The National Expert Commission of Ukraine on the Protection of Public Morality took up the matter for review in August 2012 .

On April 2009 , Burger King released a SpongeBob @-@ themed advertisement featuring a parody of Sir Mix @-@ a @-@ Lot 's song " Baby Got Back " . The Campaign for a Commercial @-@ Free Childhood protested the ad for being sexist and inappropriately sexual , especially contemplating that SpongeBob 's fan base includes young children . In official statements released by Burger King and Nickelodeon , both companies claimed that the campaign was aimed at parents .

A 2011 study conducted at the University of Virginia and published in the journal Pediatrics suggested that allowing preschool @-@ aged audiences to watch the series caused short @-@ term disruptions in mental function and attention span due to frequent shot changes . A Nickelodeon executive responded in an interview that the series was not intended for an audience of that age and that the study used " questionable methodology and could not possibly provide the basis for any valid findings that parents could trust " .

= = = Criticism of declining quality = = =

Critics ' reviews of early SpongeBob episodes praised the show for its wit , clever humor , and " uncanny brilliance " . However , in 2007 , around the airing of season five , the tone and emphasis of the show began to change . Some fans " began to turn away from the show " , causing online fansites to " [become] deserted " . They pointed to a shift from clever humor to what they perceived as " boring , unfunny humor [...] geared too much towards children " .

Paul Tibbitt , showrunner from season four to the season 9 episode , " Spongebob , You 're Fired ! " has been the subject of criticism . While The SpongeBob SquarePants Movie was generally well received by fans of the show , it is also considered a turning point in the show 's history , as many fans believe the decline occurred after the film 's release , when Stephen Hillenburg resigned as showrunner and Tibbitt was appointed to replace him . Episodes produced since the movie have been variously categorized as " kid @-@ pandering attention @-@ waster [s] " , " tedious " , " boring " and " dreck " , a " depressing plateau of mediocrity " , and " laugh @-@ skimpy " .

Many believe the show 's ratings decline as of 2012 correlates with the alleged decline in quality , and " whatever fan support [the show] enjoys is not enough " to save it from its ratings slide .

Many fans claimed that show quality increased after Paul Tibbitt resigned as showrunner / supervising producer . Vincent Waller , creative director for season 4 to the first half of season 9 , and Marc Ceccareli , a writer and storyboard director for season 8 , have taken Tibbitt 's place as showrunner / supervising producers starting with the second half of season 9 .

= = Other media = =

= = = Home video = = =

= = = Comic books = = =

In February 2011 , creator Hillenburg first announced the release of the 32 @-@ page bimonthly comic book series , SpongeBob Comics , based on the show . The release marked the first time Hillenburg authored his own books . He said , " I 'm hoping that fans will enjoy finally having a SpongeBob comic book from me " . The comic book series is published by Hillenburg 's production company , United Plankton Pictures , and distributed by Bongo Comics Group . Although the characters of the series had previously appeared in Nickelodeon Magazine and in Cine @-@ Manga , the first issue of SpongeBob Comics marked the first time the characters have appeared in their own comic books in the United States . Hillenburg described the stories from the comic books as " original and always true to the humor , characters , and universe of the SpongeBob SquarePants

series " .

Chris Duffy , the former senior editor of Nickelodeon Magazine , serves as managing editor of SpongeBob Comics . Hillenburg and Duffy met with various comic book writers and artists ? including James Kochalka , Hilary Barta , Graham Annable , Gregg Schigiel , and Jacob Chabot ? to contribute to each issues . Retired horror comics writer and artist Stephen R. Bissette returned to write a special Halloween issue in 2012 , with Tony Millionaire and Al Jaffee . In an interview with Tom Spurgeon , Bissette said , " I 've even broken my retirement to do one work @-@ for @-@ hire gig [for SpongeBob Comics] so I could share everything about that kind of current job " .

In the United Kingdom , Titan Magazines publishes comics based on SpongeBob SquarePants every four weeks . These comics were first published on February 3 , 2005 . Titan Magazines teamed @-@ up with Lego to release a limited edition SpongeBob @-@ themed comic .

== = Films = = =

Paramount Pictures and Nickelodeon Movies produced The SpongeBob SquarePants Movie , an animated film adaptation of the series that was released on November 19 , 2004 . The film was directed by creator Stephen Hillenburg , and was written by long @-@ time series writers comprising Hillenburg , Derek Drymon , Tim Hill , Kent Osborne , Aaron Springer , and Paul Tibbitt . Hillenburg and Julia Pistor produced the film , while the film score was composed by Gregor Narholz . The film is about Plankton 's evil plan to steal King Neptune 's crown and send it to Shell City . SpongeBob and Patrick must retrieve it and save Mr. Krabs ' life from Neptune 's raft and their home , Bikini Bottom , from Plankton 's plan . The film features guest appearances by Jeffrey Tambor as King Neptune , Scarlett Johansson as the King 's daughter Mindy , Alec Baldwin as Dennis , and David Hasselhoff as himself . It received positive critical reception , and grossed over \$ 140 million worldwide .

Two television films were released . The two television films are SpongeBob 's Atlantis SquarePantis released in 2007 and SpongeBob 's Truth or Square released in 2009 .

A sequel to the 2004 film was released in theaters on February 6 , 2015 . The series ' main cast members are reprise their roles , and the underwater parts are traditionally animated in the manner of the series and the live @-@ action parts uses CGI animation with the SpongeBob characters . The film has a budget similar to the previous film and did not cost more than \$ 100 million to produce .

On April 30 , 2015 , Viacom announced a third movie was in development . On August 3 , 2015 , via Twitter , Vincent Waller confirmed that the sequel is in pre @-@ production and that Paul Tibbitt will once again direct .

== = Music = = =

Collections of original music featured in the series have been released on the albums SpongeBob SquarePants : Original Theme Highlights (2001) , SpongeBob 's Greatest Hits (2009) , and The Yellow Album (2005) . The first two charted on the US Billboard 200 , reaching number 171 and 122 , respectively . Several songs have been recorded with the purpose of a single or album release , and have not been featured on the show . For example , the song " My Tidy Whities " written by Tom Kenny and Andy Paley was released only for the album The Best Day Ever (2006) . Kenny 's inspiration for the song was " underwear humor " . Kenny said , " Underwear humor is always a surefire laugh @-@ getter with kids ... Just seeing a character that odd wearing really prosaic , normal , Kmart , three @-@ to @-@ a @-@ pack underwear is a funny drawing ... We thought it was funny to make a really lush , beautiful love song to his underwear " . The SpongeBob SquarePants Movie ? Music from the Movie and More ... , a soundtrack album featuring the score of The SpongeBob SquarePants Movie , was released along with the feature @-@ length film in November 2004 . Various artists including the Flaming Lips , Wilco , Ween , Motörhead , the Shins , and Avril Lavigne contributed to the soundtrack that reached number 76 on the US Billboard 200 .

== Theme park rides ==

SpongeBob SquarePants 4 @-@ D film and ride opened in various locations , including Six Flags Over Texas , Flamingo Land Resort , and the Shedd Aquarium . The ride features water squirts , real bubbles , and other sensory enhancements . In 2012 , Nickelodeon teamed up again with SimEx @-@ Iwerks Entertainment and Super 78 to produce SpongeBob SquarePants 4 @-@ D : The Great Jelly Rescue . The attraction opened in early 2013 at the Mystic Aquarium & Institute for Exploration . The attraction was also released at the Nickelodeon Suites Resort Orlando in Orlando , Florida . The seven @-@ minute film follows SpongeBob , Patrick and Sandy to their old hijinks while rescuing the jellyfish of Jellyfish Fields from Plankton 's evil clutches .

SpongeBob SquarePants appears at the Mall of America 's Nickelodeon theme park re @-@ branded from the Mall of America 's Park at MOA , formerly Camp Snoopy , to Nickelodeon Universe in the Minneapolis @-@ St. Paul suburb of Bloomington , Minnesota . The new theme park features a SpongeBob @-@ themed Gerstlauer Euro @-@ Fighter custom roller coaster , the SpongeBob SquarePants Rock Bottom Plunge , which has replaced the Mystery Mine Ride and Olde Time Photo store on the west end of the theme park , which opened March 15 , 2008 .

On May 23 , 2015 , an interactive 3D show titled " SpongeBob SubPants Adventure " opened in Texas at Moody Gardens . According to Moody Gardens President and CEO John Zendt , " Visitors will be able to interact with the Nickelodeon characters on a digital stage as they have never been able to do before . "

== Video games ==

Numerous video games based on the series have been produced . Some of the early games include Legend of the Lost Spatula (2001) and SpongeBob SquarePants : Battle for Bikini Bottom (2003) . The 2003 video game was added to the Greatest Hits by Sony . It also served as the engine basis for a video game based on the The SpongeBob SquarePants Movie . Heavy Iron Studios , the game 's developers , tweaked the graphics to give the game a sharper and more imaginative look than that of Battle for Bikini Bottom . They also increased the polygon count , added several racing levels , and incorporated many of the creatures seen in the film . In 2013 , Nickelodeon published and distributed SpongeBob Moves In , a freemium city @-@ building game app developed by Kung Fu Factory for iOS .

== SpongeBob SquareShorts ==

Nickelodeon launched the first global SpongeBob SquarePants @-@ themed short film competition , SpongeBob SquareShorts : Original Fan Tributes , in 2013 . The contest encourages fans and filmmakers around the world to create original short films inspired by SpongeBob for a chance to win a prize and a trip for four people to a screening event in Hollywood . The contest opened on May 6 and ran through June 28 , 2013 . On July 19 , 2013 , Nickelodeon announced the finalists for the competition , and , on August 13 , 2013 , the " under 18 years of age " category was won by David of the United States for his " The Krabby Commercial " , while the " Finally Home " short by Nicole of South Africa won the " 18 and over " category .

== Merchandise ==

The popularity of SpongeBob SquarePants inspired merchandise from T @-@ shirts to posters . It was reported that the franchise generated an estimated \$ 8 billion merchandising revenue for Nickelodeon . It is also the most distributed property of MTV Networks . SpongeBob is viewed in 170 countries speaking 24 languages , and has also become " a killer merchandising app " . The title character and his friends have been used as a theme for special editions of well @-@ known family board games , including Monopoly , Life , and Operation , as well as a SpongeBob SquarePants edition of Ants in the Pants , and Yahtzee .

In 2001 , SpongeBob SquarePants signed a marketing deal with Target Corporation and Burger King , expanding its merchandising . The popularity of SpongeBob has 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 . 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 . Ratings and merchandise sales showed SpongeBob SquarePants has caught on with parents and with college audiences . In a recent promotion , college @-@ oriented website Music.com gave away 80 @,@ 000 SpongeBob T @-@ shirts , four times more than during a similar promotion for Comedy Central 's South Park .

Kids ' meal tie @-@ ins have been released in snacks and fast food restaurants in many parts of the world , including Burger King in Europe and North America , as well as Wendy 's in North America , and Hungry Jack 's in Australia . A McDonald 's Happy Meal tie @-@ in with SpongeBob @-@ themed Happy Meal boxes and toys was released in Europe and other international markets in the summer of 2007 . In Australia , the advertisement for the McDonald 's SpongeBob Happy Meal won the Pester Power Award because the ads are entice young children to want its food because of the free toy . As a tie @-@ in beverage for the DVD release of The SpongeBob SquarePants Movie , 7 @-@ Eleven released the limited edition " Under @-@ the @-@ Sea Pineapple Slurpee " in March 2004 . Pirate 's Booty released limited edition SpongeBob SquarePants Pirate 's Booty snacks in 2013 .

In 2007 , high @-@ end SpongeBob @-@ themed electronics have been introduced by Imation Electronics Products under the Npower brand , including MP3 players , digital cameras , a DVD player , and a flatscreen television . Pictures of SpongeBob SquarePants also began to appear on the labels of 8 oz. cans of Green Giant cut green beans and frozen packages of Green Giant green beans and butter sauce , which featured free stickers in 2007 as part of an initiative to encourage kids to eat their vegetables . The Simmons Jewelry Co. released a \$ 75 @,@ 000 diamond pendant as part of a SpongeBob collection . In New Zealand , the UK @-@ based Beechdean Group unveiled the SpongeBob SquarePants Vanilla Ice Cream character product as part of a licence deal with Nickelodeon . NZ Drinks launched the SpongeBob SquarePants bottled water .

Build @-@ A @-@ Bear Workshop introduced the new SpongeBob SqaurePants collection in stores and online in North America on May 17 , 2013 . 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 .

On July 13 , 2013 , Toyota , with Nickelodeon , unveiled a SpongeBob @-@ inspired Toyota Highlander . The 2014 Toyota Highlander was launched on SpongeBob Day at the 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 .