

= Judaism in Rugrats =

The animated television series Rugrats has been noted for its portrayal of Judaism , a dynamic rarely portrayed in American animated programming during the series ' broadcast run (1991 ? 2004) . Two episodes of the series are devoted to Jewish holidays and explaining their history , and the Pickles family is shown to be part @-@ Jewish .

The first Rugrats Jewish holiday special was suggested to the production staff in 1992 by Nickelodeon executives as a special devoted to Hanukkah . Germain instead refashioned it into a Passover episode and the series did not explore a Hanukkah special until 1996 . Critical reaction to Jewish themes in Rugrats was largely positive . Each holiday special achieved high viewing numbers according to Nielsen Media Research and received positive reviews . However , Jewish character Grandpa Boris ' portrayal in a 1998 Rugrats comic strip was criticized by the Anti @-@ Defamation League for apparent antisemitism .

= = Jewish themes = =

In Rugrats , the root of Jewish themes stem from Boris and Minka Kropotkin , the maternal grandparents of infant Tommy Pickles . Boris and Minka follow traditional Jewish practices and speak in heavy Yiddish accents . Tommy and the Pickles family therefore partake in several Jewish activities throughout the series , particularly through holidays .

The first occurrence of this is in the episode " A Rugrats Passover , " which originally aired in the United States on April 13 , 1995 . In the episode , Tommy and the rest of the Rugrats , accompanied by their respective parents , attend a Passover seder hosted by Boris and Minka . Boris and Minka have an argument and Boris storms off to the attic , where the Rugrats find him and discover they are now locked in . To pass time , Boris recites the story of Passover . The Rugrats imagine that they are the characters in the story , including Tommy as Moses and his mean @-@ spirited cousin Angelica as the Pharaoh of Egypt .

In " A Rugrats Chanukah , " which originally aired on December 4 , 1996 , Minka regales the Rugrats with the tale of Hanukkah 's origins , and once more the infants cast themselves as the characters in their imagination . Meanwhile , Boris is outraged at being recast as Judah Maccabee in a Hanukkah pageant and even more so that his old rival Schlomo will be playing the Greek king .

More subtle Jewish references are also included in other aspects of the Rugrats franchise . In The Rugrats Movie , the 1998 film based on the series , Tommy is prepared to pour banana baby food on his infant brother Dil , which would attract a group of vicious monkeys who would likely harm the young baby ; the scene parallels the Sacrifice of Isaac , a primal covenant in Jewish studies .

= = Background = =

Boris and Minka were based on the Eastern European great aunts and uncles of Rugrats co @-@ creator Arlene Klasky , who herself is Jewish . Including Jewish themes in the series was deemed essential by Klasky ; in particular , she believed that making Didi Jewish and Tommy 's father Stu a Christian was a crucial dynamic , as " it was important to show that difference between family . " Klasky herself grew up with a Jewish mother and a non @-@ Jewish father .

Boris and Minka first appeared in the series ' first episode , " Tommy 's First Birthday " . Melanie Chartoff , voice of Minka and Jewish herself , had already been cast to play Didi when she was called by her agent to try out for a second voice role on the series as Minka . When given the description of the character , Chartoff felt she was incredibly cliched , but still wanted to try out for the role . When reading her lines , she found it difficult to grasp the character 's personality , as " Although the show had been created by Jews , this script had clearly not been written by them ; " so she took a break so she could do research into her family memorabilia and conceive a personality to reflect in the character 's voice .

In 1992 , Nickelodeon executives pitched the idea of making a Chanukah special to the Rugrats production team . Germain , however , responded with a Passover special instead , as he

considered it to be a " funny idea " and of " historical interest " . While scripting the episode , now entitled " A Rugrats Passover " , the writers were forced to audit many elements of the portrayal of the Ten Plagues , particularly the last one , so that the episode would remain accessible to children and not too frightening . Due to the overall success of " A Rugrats Passover , " the Rugrats staff decided to revisit the Hanukkah special and created " A Rugrats Chanukah . " One of the co @-@ writers of the episode , David Weiss , had converted from Christianity to Judaism shortly before penning the teleplay .

= = Reception = =

Rugrats was unusual among contemporary animations in its attention to Jewish ritual and tradition . " A Rugrats Passover " ' s portrayal of a Seder dinner received press attention as a rare occurrence in children 's programming . The episode also marked the first Passover special Nickelodeon had broadcast , while " A Rugrats Chanukah " marked the first televised animated Hanukkah program .

Fan reaction to Jewish themes in Rugrats have been overwhelmingly positive . " A Rugrats Passover " and " A Rugrats Chanukah " are two of the most popular episodes in the series broadcast run . The Passover special achieved a Nielsen Rating of 3 @.@ 1 with a 4 @.@ 8 % share of American viewers , making it the sixth most watched American telecast that week . The Hanukkah special , meanwhile , received a 7 @.@ 9 Nielsen rating in Kids 2 ? 11 , the show 's key demographic . Chartoff received an abundance of fan letters praising the series for detailing Judaism in sensitive fashion . She only received one complaint , from her mother , who claimed that the characterizations of Boris and Minka were anti @-@ Semitic .

Critically , Rugrats ' treatment of Judaism has also been acclaimed . Danny Goldberg wrote in his book *How The Left Lost Teen Spirit* : " I cannot think of any other TV show , animated or otherwise , in which Jewish traditions were so clearly expressed in the context of a mass appeal entertainment [than in Rugrats] . " Authors Michael Atkinson and Laurel Shifrin , in their book *Flickipedia : Perfect Films for Every Occasion , Holiday , Mood , Ordeal , and Whim* praised the series for celebrating " secular Jewishness in the wisest and most entertaining fashion " . TV Guide listed " A Rugrats Chanukah " number 5 in their 1999 " 10 Best Classic Family Holiday Specials " list , opining that with the episode , " Nickelodeon 's Rugrats secured its place in television history . " Jewish online magazine *Schmooze* listed Tommy as the number 1 fictional Jewish character of all time . They also wrote that if someone had yet to see either one of the holiday specials , their " Jewish education is incomplete . "

The series has received several accolades for its Jewish themes . In 2001 , Rugrats won a Jewish Image Award for " Outstanding Achievement . " " A Rugrats Passover " itself received three nominations from different television award programs . It was nominated for a Primetime Emmy Award in the category " Primetime Emmy Award for Outstanding Animated Program (for Programming Less Than One Hour) , " but lost to The Simpsons episode " Lisa 's Wedding . " At the 23rd Annual Annie Awards it was nominated in the category " Best Individual Achievement for Writing in the Field of Animation , " but was beaten by the episode " The Tick vs. Arthur ? s Band Account " from Fox Kids ' animated series The Tick . In 1995 , it was Rugrats ' submission for a CableACE award ; it received a nomination but did not win . In 2007 the Sherwin Miller Museum of Jewish Art in Tulsa , Oklahoma opened an exhibition of Biblical images in art and pop culture , including a poster for *Let My Babies Go ! : A Passover Story* , the picture book based on " A Rugrats Passover " .

However , the Anti @-@ Defamation League (ADL) criticized the design of Grandpa Boris and charged it with being anti @-@ Semitic . The controversy erupted when a 1998 Rugrats comic strip was published , featuring Boris in a synagogue reciting the Mourner 's Kaddish . The ADL issued a statement saying that the design resembled Nazi @-@ era depictions of Jews , and the fact that the character was reciting the sacred prayer perverted its solemnity . The Washington Post , the newspaper who published the strip , issued a similar statement in their Editor 's Note section , criticizing Nickelodeon for not showing better judgment in editing the strip .

Though former Nickelodeon president Albie Hecht , a Jew himself , was dumbfounded by the

accusation and deemed it absurd , Herb Scannell , president of the company in 1998 , responded to the complaints and apologized to ADL . Scannell issued a statement promising that neither the strip nor the character would ever be published again . In the statement , he also noted , " Unfortunately , the creators of the strip made an error in judgment by referencing the Kaddish . I agree with you that , however well @-@ meaning , the use of the Kaddish in the comic strip was inappropriate . " Abraham H. Foxman , ADL National Director , responded via a press release in which they thanked Scannell for his speedy response and commended the company in general for understanding the issue at hand ; Foxman concluded by saying , " We appreciate Nickelodeon ? s long record of creative and quality programming and understand that it was not their intention to offend . "