

## = Little Girl in the Big Ten =

" Little Girl in the Big Ten " is the twentieth episode of The Simpsons ' thirteenth season . It originally aired on the Fox network in the United States on May 12 , 2002 . In the episode , Lisa befriends two college students at a gym and attends college with them . Meanwhile , after being bitten by a mosquito from a Chinese @-@ made toy , Bart is infected with the " panda virus " and is placed in a plastic bubble to prevent others from infection .

" Little Girl in the Big Ten " was directed Lauren MacMullan and written by Jon Vitti . The episode 's main plot was pitched by Vitti , who suggested an episode in which Lisa meets girls who thought she was a college student . The subplot was pitched by the Simpsons writing staff , who wanted it to be completely different from the main story . The episode features former three @-@ time U.S. Poet Laureate Robert Pinsky as himself . In its original broadcast , the episode was seen by approximately 6 @.@ 8 million viewers and finished in 40th place in the ratings the week it aired . Following its home video release on August 24 , 2010 , the episode received mixed reviews from critics .

## = = Plot = =

Lisa finds herself unable to do any sports in PE class , taught by Brunella Pommelhorst , and finds herself failing physical education . She then signs up to do gymnastics with Coach Lugash . There , she receives encouragement from the ghost of John F. Kennedy in a vision . With boosted self @-@ confidence , and her large head which gives her perfect balance , Lisa passes with flying colors . Lisa also meets two girls and becomes friends with them , but with their fractals and parking permits , she realizes they are college students " with small gymnast bodies ! " They give Lisa a ride home , and she acts like a college student to keep their friendship . The two girls invite her to a poetry reading by Robert Pinsky soon after . Lisa begins to wear a beret to help her fit in better .

Meanwhile , Bart gets bitten by a Chinese mosquito that was in his Krusty @-@ saurus toy , and becomes infected with " Panda virus " . To prevent others from getting sick , Dr. Hibbert puts Bart in a plastic bubble . Bart has trouble adapting to life in the bubble even though Hibbert emphasized just how " normal " it would feel ; he has trouble eating and Homer gives him a bath by filling up the bubble with the hose and rolling Bart around outside of the house . Lisa is able to keep up her double life , attending a poetry reading by former Poet Laureate Robert Pinsky at night and attending her second grade class during the day . While going to Springfield University , she is tracked by Milhouse , Martin , and Database when Milhouse saw Lisa ride away . At a lecture about Itchy & Scratchy cartoons , Milhouse blows Lisa 's cover and she is no longer welcome by her college friends .

Lisa tries to convince Homer and Marge that college suits her , but they refuse to listen , saying that college is no place for her . Lisa is also ridiculed by Groundskeeper Willie and all of her friends at school , saying that she is too " college for them " . In the meantime , Bart gets used to his bubble , as it brings him a lot of popularity . Bart tells Lisa what she should do to get her friends back : she has to pull a prank on Principal Skinner . The next day , Chalmers is dedicating the Seymour Skinner parking annex . While Martin takes pictures of Skinner posing next to a giant chocolate cake in his dress polyester , Bart rolls Lisa ( inside his bubble ) to the edge of the school 's roof . He then pushes her over the edge , splattering the cake all over Skinner . Lisa gets her friends back , while Bart goes paranoid after being outside of his bubble for the first time in days . He stays in an air vent , but gets sucked in .

## = = Production = =

" Little Girl in the Big Ten " was written by producer Jon Vitti and directed by Lauren MacMullan . The idea for the episode was pitched by Vitti , who suggested an episode in which Lisa meets girls who thought she was a college student . It was first broadcast on the Fox network in the United States on May 12 , 2002 . Jean thought the idea was " brilliant " , and the subplot involving Bart in a

" germ @-@ free " plastic bubble was conceived by the writers wanting to make " the most different subplot from [ ... ] an intellectual college plot " they could think of . A scene in the episode shows Lisa talking to Bart on the branch of a tree in their garden . Bart says the line " You can 't believe what that sunset looks like to me " , to which Lisa replies " That 's not a sunset , that 's a bird on fire . " Originally , Lisa 's line read " [ ... ] that 's a plane on fire , " however , after the September 11 attacks , the line was considered offensive and was changed . " [ ... ] since we work so far ahead we usually do these things that are sort of timeless stories , " Jean said , " but every once in a while there 's something that turns out to be ironic in a bad way , then we have to change it . "

The Itchy & Scratchy cartoon " Butter Off Dead " was , according to Jean , " completely improv [ ise ] d " by director MacMullan . Usually , the episodes are too " narrow " for there to be any room for improvisation , but MacMullan was an exception , since her improvisations " always turned out great " . The writers came up with the cartoons title and its " template " , however " the way the death proceeded and the different digestion [ s ] " were " All Lauren [ MacMullan ] " . The sequence in which Pinsky is reading the poem was " very hard to do " , since the animators did not have access to computers at the time . One of the audience members in the scene was designed after staff writer Matt Warburton .

The episode features former poet laureate Robert Pinsky as himself . Pinsky was chosen to guest star because the writers wanted an intellectual reference for Lisa , and because they knew that Pinsky was a fan of the show , having read an article of The Time in which Pinsky stated that he " admired the writing " of The Simpsons . In the DVD audio commentary for the episode , Pinsky stated that he flew to the Simpsons recording studios in Los Angeles on September 10 , 2001 , and , following the September 11 attacks , was " stranded " there for four days , since no planes were flying following the attacks . Pinsky enjoyed his stay however ; " Ian [ Maxtone @-@ Graham ] and The Simpsons people were very nice to me , " he said . " ... One of the things they did for me is they invited me to a table @-@ read of another episode [ ... ] Thursday the 13th [ ... ] I remember everybody laughed like hell [ ... ] It felt really good . People just went to work and everybody laughed a lot . "

Pinsky stated that he felt " really inept " when recording his dialogue . He said : " Amongst my friends I 'm funny . In that context of Dan Castellaneta ... I would say it was like a disaster movie , and I was that character played by Susan Hayward . " The poem Pinsky reads in the episode was picked by the Simpsons writing staff , " The poem has two jokes in it , " Pinsky said , " and when I say jokes I don 't mean witty remarks . It 's more like an optician , the pope and a zebra go into the bar and then there 's a punch line at the end . " He stated that the poem was " an elegy for a friend of mine who liked jokes " . He added that his appearance on the show gave him " a lot more prestige " when visiting high schools and colleges . The episode also features Karl Wiedergott as the professor at the Springfield University .

= = Cultural references = =

The episode 's subplot was based on the 1976 made @-@ for @-@ TV movie The Boy in the Plastic Bubble ( Lenny also addresses as Bart as Bubble Boy in one scene , which was the name of the film 's 2001 remake ) in which a boy born with an improperly functioning immune system lives out his life in incubator @-@ like conditions . In one of Lisa 's college courses , the students are watching an Itchy & Scratchy cartoon title " Butter Off Dead " . The lecture was a reference to college courses which include The Simpsons episodes in their teachings . The gate to Springfield University was based " loosely " on the ivy gate at Harvard University . The episode also parodies the British anarcho @-@ punk band Chumbawamba , with Homer singing his own version of their song " Tubthumping " .

= = Release = =

In its original American broadcast on May 12 , 2002 , " Little Girl in the Big Ten " received a 6 @.@ 4 rating , according to Nielsen Media Research , translating to approximately 6 @.@ 8 million

viewers . The episode finished in 40th place in the ratings for the week of May 6 ? 12 , 2002 , making it the most watched program of the network tied with Malcolm in the Middle and Boston Public . On August 24 , 2010 , " Little Girl in the Big Ten " was released as part of The Simpsons : The Complete Thirteenth Season DVD and Blu @-@ ray set . Al Jean , Ian Maxtone @-@ Graham , Matt Selmán , Tom Gammill , Max Pross and Robert Pinsky participated in the audio commentary of the episode .

Following its home video release , " Little Girl in the Big Ten " received mixed reviews from critics . Nate Boss of Project @-@ Blu called it " An average episode , for the series as a whole , making it a great one for this season , " praising " a superb Chumbawumba parody " which he thought was " way better than the R.E.M. lyrics gag earlier in the season . " Colin Jacobson of DVD Movie Guide wrote " Lisa @-@ based shows definitely fall into the hit or miss category , and ? Ten ? stays within those confines . " While he praised some of Homer 's scenes , including " his drunken versions of pop songs , " he maintained that " not much else connects . " He concluded his review by writing " Though we find the occasional laugh , the overall impact remains lackluster . " DVD Verdict 's Jennifer Malkowski gave the episode a B- , and wrote that " Homer 's answer to the rhetorical question about gymnastics ' Who wants to put on a leotard and get screamed at ? ' " was the episode 's " highlight " .

In March 2014 , The Simpsons writers picked " Butter Off Dead " from this episode as one of their nine favorite " Itchy & Stratchy " episodes of all time .