

= Plaza Sésamo =

Plaza Sésamo (Spanish : Sesame Square) , is one of the first international co @-@ productions of the American children 's television program Sesame Street . Its first season premiered in Mexico in 1972 , and was immediately a ratings hit . It also aired throughout Latin America , to a potential audience of 25 million children in 34 countries . Unlike some of the earliest co @-@ productions , which consisted of dubbed versions of Sesame Street with local language voice @-@ overs , Plaza Sésamo was a true co @-@ production . Half of the show was adapted from the American show , and half was original material , created in Mexico by Mexican writers , performers , and producers . The first season consisted of 130 half @-@ hour episodes . The show 's goals , similar to the process begun in the U.S. , were developed by local experts in television , child development , and early education during curriculum seminars in Caracas , Venezuela . Plaza Sésamo 's goals emphasized problem solving and reasoning , and also included perception , symbolic representation , human diversity , and the child 's environment . Other goals included community cooperation , family life , nutrition , health , safety , self @-@ esteem , and expressing emotions . Early reading skills were taught through the whole language method . The show 's budget for the first and second seasons was approximately US \$ 1 @.@ 6 million .

The show 's set consisted of a typical neighborhood square (or plaza) found throughout the region . New Muppets and human characters were created . In all , four seasons of Plaza Sésamo were filmed . The first season resulted in some of the highest ratings in Mexico . The fourth season , filmed in 1995 , was broadcast in the U.S. , making it the first foreign @-@ language co @-@ production shown in the U.S. Studies conducted after the first season of Plaza Sésamo showed that it had a demonstrable impact on the educational achievement levels of its young audience . Highly significant difference were found in tests about general knowledge , letters , and numbers after children were exposed to the show . Significant gains were made in several cognitive and perceptual areas by regular viewers , even in subjects that were not taught by the show . Characters from the show participated in campaigns promoting health and nutrition ; in 2009 , the Sesame Workshop , the organization responsible for the American show , was awarded the " Champion of Health " award by the Pan American Health Organization (PAHO) for its efforts .

Sesame Workshop recently produced Sesame Amigos for Spanish @-@ speakers from the United States .

= = Background = =

A few months after the 1969 debut of Sesame Street on PBS in the US , producers from several countries all around the world approached the Children 's Television Workshop (CTW , later the Sesame Workshop , or " the Workshop ") , the organization responsible for the show 's production , to create and produce versions of Sesame Street in their countries . Co @-@ creator Joan Ganz Cooney was approached by German public television officials about a year after the US version debuted . Many years later , Cooney recalled , " To be frank , I was really surprised , because we thought we were creating the quintessential American show . We thought the Muppets were quintessentially American , and it turns out they 're the most international characters ever created " . She hired former CBS executive Mike Dann , who left commercial television to become her assistant , as a CTW vice @-@ president . One of Dann 's tasks was to field offers to produce versions of Sesame Street in other countries . By summer 1970 , he had made the first international agreements for what the CTW came to call " co @-@ productions " .

As of 2006 , there were 20 active co @-@ productions . In 2001 , CTW vice @-@ president Charlotte Cole estimated that there were over 120 million viewers of all international versions of Sesame Street , and by the show 's 40th anniversary in 2009 , they were seen in more than 140 countries . Doreen Carvajal of The New York Times reported that income from the co @-@ productions accounted for US \$ 96 million in 1994 . Cole stated , " Children 's Television Workshop (CTW) can be regarded as the single largest informal educator of young children in the world " . Most of the early international versions were what Cole called " fairly simple " , consisting of dubbed

versions of the show with local language voice @-@ overs and instructional cutaways . Studies conducted on the effects of several co @-@ productions found that viewers of these shows gain basic skills from watching them .

= = Production = =

Plaza Sésamo debuted in Mexico on the Televisa network in 1972 . According to Sesame Street producer Gregory J. Gettas , Plazo Sésamo was one of Sesame Street 's first true co @-@ productions , programs that were developed using a variant of a flexible model , called the CTW model , created by the producers and creators of the American show , in the countries they aired . Like the American show in the late 1960s , the producers and researchers in Mexico conducted a curriculum seminar in Caracas , Venezuela . The goals they developed , however , were significantly different than the goals developed in the U.S. For example , the Plaza Sésamo team emphasized problem solving and reasoning . Their educational goals included perception , symbolic representation , human diversity , and the child 's environment . Other goals included community cooperation , family life , nutrition , health , safety , self @-@ esteem , and expressing emotions . The show was designed to address the educational needs of the region 's 25 million children in 34 countries , including its target audience of 7 million children between the ages of 3 and 6 in Mexico alone . Despite their common language , the show 's Latin American viewers had a wide variety of customs and lifestyles . The show 's budget for the first and second seasons was approximately US \$ 1 @.@ 6 million .

The American @-@ produced and dubbed segments were analyzed for cultural appropriateness . If any segments were considered " too American " , meaning that they contained English writing on the screen , showed the American flag , or overtly referred to American history , they were removed . The board was responsible for choosing content from the CTW 's inventory , and it had to satisfy the curriculum goals chosen by the Latin American researchers . They chose to teach reading through the whole language method , which emphasizes teaching children to recognize entire words or phrases , as opposed to phonetics , the way the American show taught reading . The Mexican producers and writers designed a distinctive set that appeared different than the American set and consisted of a typical neighborhood square (or plaza) found throughout the region . The set included a background of mountains , a vacant lot with playground equipment , houses , a combination repair shop and store @-@ cafe , and the plaza 's central fountain and benches . New music , written and performed by Latin American artists , was recorded , and writers and performers from Mexico , Argentina , Chile , and Venezuela , were hired .

New Muppet characters were created and performed by puppeteers trained in Mexico City . Abelardo , a giant parrot , was modeled after the American show 's Big Bird , and like Big Bird , was a full @-@ body puppet that was controlled by the puppeteer from inside the costume . Paco , a grouchy green parrot , was based on Oscar the Grouch . Abelardo and Paco were both played by Justo Martinez . The Muppets Beto and Enrique , who were based upon Bert and Ernie of the American show , were called " national favorites " by the UPI less than three years after the show 's premiere . In 1975 , Enrique and Beto were used to promote Mexico 's nationwide free vaccination campaign .

130 half @-@ hour episodes of the show 's first season were shot in Mexico City entirely in Spanish , under the control of a Mexican research and production team . About half the show 's material was adapted from the American show and dubbed into Spanish , while the other half was produced in Mexico and included animation , live @-@ action films , and studio sequences with human actors and Muppets . A Mexican board of advisers , who set curriculum goals for the show , approved all content , both Mexican and American , something that followed the newly established policies of the CTW . Mexican psychologist Rogelio Diaz @-@ Guerrero was the first chair of the show 's advisory board , which was later expanded to include child @-@ development and educators from other Latin American countries , so that Plazo Sésamo could be broadcast throughout Central and South America , including the Dominican Republic and Puerto Rico .

The third season , which was filmed in 1983 and consisted of 130 half @-@ hour episodes , had

different goals than the previous seasons . One of its goals was instructing its viewers and their families about basic hygiene , " a matter of critical importance in an area of the world where gastrointestinal diseases abound and infant mortality rates are high " . The third season of the show included characters created to " expose young Latin American children to both traditional and nontraditional role models " . The producers created characters that demonstrated family diversity , in order to fulfill their curriculum goal of presenting more egalitarian lifestyles by modeling overcoming stereotypes , demonstrating different career options for both men and women , and exhibiting the sharing of household responsibilities . They cast performers in two different families . The first family was more traditional and consisted of a middle @-@ aged couple named Tono , a mechanic (played by Maurico Herrera) , and Alicia , a public health nurse (Alicia de Bari) , who had two children . The adults in the second family were young working professionals ; the wife was a veterinarian and the husband was a music teacher who worked from home . Other human characters included : Jose , a shopkeeper and his young assistant , a student named Mercedes (Xochiti Vigil) : a truck driver played by Tony Diaz ; and a pilot (Fernando Balzaretti) , who travelled throughout Latin American and came home to tell his adventures to his friends on the plaza . As of 1990 , the third season was still airing in reruns .

In 1995 , a fourth season of Plaza Sésamo was produced . It featured a larger cast of children , more original music , and a new set designed by renowned Mexican architect Ricardo Legorreta . The season focused on a more innovative curriculum , developed by a board of Latin American educators and UNICEF , and included topics such as health , hygiene , safety issues , cooperation , counting , and the alphabet . The producers created outreach materials for Hispanic families , for the purpose of promoting media literacy and helping parents improve their roles as their children 's first teachers . The fourth season aired in the U.S. because of the large population of Spanish @-@ speakers in the country ; it was the first time an original co @-@ production was shown in the U.S. As Gary Knell , an executive at the CTW stated , " Our mission is to educate all kids . And the fact is , in the U.S. , especially in cities like Los Angeles , there 's an enormous number of Spanish @-@ speaking households " .

The fourth season was test @-@ marketed for American audiences in April on PBS and Univision stations in Miami , Dallas , and Los Angeles . The test @-@ run was successful , so PBS and Univision began airing it nationally in December ; it reached 92 % of the country 's Spanish @-@ speaking households . At first , Plaza Sésamo 's producers were concerned that the show would be attacked , but The Los Angeles Times reported that " even some staunch opponents of bilingual education concede that Plaza Sésamo has its merits " . The L.A. Times also stated that its broadcast in the U.S. was an acknowledgment that Spanish was a prominent language in the U.S. and that more children were bilingual . The show 's supporters believed that exposure to an educational program like Plaza Sésamo would result in the transfer of Spanish skills to English and increase literacy in both languages . Bilingual education opponents disagreed , but were not against the show 's entertainment value . According to Knell , the CTW found that watching the Spanish version did not draw children away from the English version .

In 2012 , Plaza Sésamo celebrated its 40th anniversary with the creation of a new website and a traveling photo exhibit . In December 2013 , the show 's 15th season premiered with 52 episodes . Segments were shot throughout Latin America ; it was the first time the show was filmed in Colombia . Its curriculum focused on math , literacy , diversity , and health . A stakeholders meeting was convened in Bogotá in October 2012 , consisting of interested parties from government and the private sector , and included officials from UNICEF .

= = Influence = =

When Plaza Sésamo 's first season premiered , it was the highest rated TV program ever broadcast in Mexico . The UPI reported that all three seasons of the show had some of the highest ratings in Mexico ; its second season , which premiered in 1975 , " had piled on ratings that only Mexico 's popular soap operas could rival " . Gettas claimed that Plaza Sésamo was " the model for all subsequent Sesame Street co @-@ productions throughout the world " . He also stated that the first

season " had a demonstrable impact on the educational achievement levels of its young audience " . In 1974 , a study was conducted by American and Mexican researchers that studied the effect of Plaza Sésamo on its viewers . Highly significant differences were found in tests about general knowledge , letters , and numbers after children were exposed to the show . Significant gains were made in several cognitive and perceptual areas by regular viewers , even in subjects that were not taught by the show .

In 1995 , Parque Plaza Sésamo , a 12 @-@ acre theme park based on the show , was opened in Monterrey , Mexico , within the gates of the theme park Parque Fundidora . It is the first theme park of its kind in Mexico . According to a press release announcing its opening , Parque Plaza Sésamo includes water rides , live entertainment , interactive , and educational elements . It is privately owned , with Mexican investments , and features the show 's characters , along with the American Sesame Street , via a licensing agreement with Sesame Workshop . The park 's focus audience is around northern Mexico and South Texas .

In 2003 , the Pan American Health Organization (PAHO) and the Sesame Workshop collaborated in a program promoting vaccinations . Their promotion reached over 147 million children and adults . In 2007 , the Workshop participated in an extensive health promotion in Mexico ; they put many of the characters of Plaza Sésamo on milk containers , which were given to schools , with positive messages about nutrition and exercise . Studies showed that the promotion was effective . Children choose healthy food associated with the show 's characters , and 68 percent of families exposed to the promotion reported positive changes in their children 's nutrition and hygiene habits . In 2009 , the Workshop was awarded the " Champion of Health " award by PAHO for its efforts . In response to a flu pandemic in Mexico , various national celebrities appeared in public service announcements with the Plaza Muppets , discussing flu prevention .

= = International broadcasting = =