**Why Are Cartoons That Are Widely Regarded as Landmarks in Animation History**

**Generally Canceled?**

**Researched Argument Essay**

**Introduction**

Cartoons are one of the most popular and widespread forms of entertainment today.

Many television networks specialize in airing solely cartoons, such as Nickelodeon and Cartoon

Network. These episodic animations have been present in the lives of almost every American,

including mine. I distinctly remember sprinting home after school to catch the latest episode of

*Arthur* or *Cyberchase*, or staying up late to re-watch some *Scooby-Doo*. I became enveloped in

the characters and worlds of these shows, completely tuning out reality. Cartoons are a brilliant

medium, as they have this ability to capture their viewers and engross them in their universe, like

they do with me. While they have your attention, they can then impart a unique message or

moral that the audience easily remember far after the credits. I can recall exactly, to this day, a

variety of episodes from my favorite cartoons and the specific impact they each had on me. I am

confident that my experience is not unique. Nearly everybody can remember a certain episode of

one of their childhood cartoons, and how it shaped their worldview as a kid.

One may scoff at the seemingly trivial and childish topic of animated television shows.

However, when analyzing their artistic value, worldwide influence, and the hard work that is

poured into their creation, it is easy to see how cartoons could be considered invaluable to our

society. Sadly, many cartoons today are facing severe threats that could unjustly cut their lives

short. *My Life as a Teenage Robot* was canceled on October 17th, 2005 due to poor ratings

(Wichobot, 2005). I was personally devastated when *Wander Over Yonder* ended March 5th,

2016 due to the executives refusing the writers to create an overarching plot (Amidi, 2016). *Sym-Bionic Titan* was hung up to dry because Cartoon Network was unable to acquire a toy license (Moore, 2011). Network executives, money, and many more issues are at play in the plague of unceremonious cartoon cancelations. This, especially to one as passionate about cartoons as I, is serious cause for alarm.

This is why cartoons matter. This is why they need discussion. The cartoons you know and love are in dire straits. They could be canceled at the drop of a hat. This is the reality. A reality we cannot afford to avoid any longer. They appear childish, but cartoons often represent themes or morals that impact anyone that watches them. They have significant monetary value. Cartoons are also an art form, and a considerably beautiful one. Cartoons, aside from their economic value, influence us as well as the future generations. Everyone has a stake in this discussion, whether you are a casual fan, or an avid viewer. Cartoons should not be cut short for the sole purpose of money or monetary gain, but should be given a chance to grow and develop.

**Body**

Setting aside my obvious bias for cartoons, we can analyze the reasoning behind my

claim. Besides the beauty of animation and character design, cartoons have the unique trait of

imparting life lessons and touching on difficult topics in a way that viewers will understand and

remember. *Teenage Robot*, a personal favorite, taught me that there’s more to someone than just

their outside appearance; they are their own unique person with their own unique experience.

Sara Goodwin of The Mary Sue, and holder of two Bachelor’s degrees, agrees wholeheartedly. In her article, “Not Just for Kids: Important Life Lessons Learned From Cartoon Characters”,

Goodwin addresses the big variety of morals and life lessons that anyone can take away from

cartoon shows, not just younger demographics. She starts off by levying the claim that cartoons

are not, in fact, just for children (Goodwin, 2017). Goodwin the proceeds to take well-known

cartoons and lift morals found within their episodes and overarching themes, thereby proving

that cartoons are an important medium to everyone, from children to adults.

This article is considerably reliable. It is extremely recent, and Goodwin is a highly

educated writer. She isn’t, however, an official on animation or cartoons. She undercuts her

arguments somewhat by the fact that there is a lack of a thorough counter-argument, aside from

her criticism of *Scooby-Doo*, in which she admits that the gang’s recurring decision to split up

could send the wrong message to children (Goodwin, 2017).

Goodwin is one of the sole authors that realizes the power that cartoons hold, and wields many convincing examples to support her claims. Goodwin selects many of my, and many others’, beloved shows to convey her message. For example, Cartoon Network’s *Steven Universe*, a bildungsroman style show about the titular Steven, teaches that “[f]amilies come in all different shapes and sizes, and that’s cool” (Goodwin, 2017). She then proceeds to list the astoundingly diverse lineup of families found within the show. Goodwin (2017) notes how *Voltron: Legendary Defender* champions the idea that “different people can make a difference.” This smattering of examples reveals that there is more to cartoons than just distracting your child for monetary gain. They shouldn’t be ignored or canceled for shallow monetary reasons.

To put the nail in the coffin, consider a certain state of mind the majority of the world was living in around in the eighties and nineties. There was a much more rampant sexism permeating the collective consciousness then there is today, and this terrible mindset was, for the most part, accepted. While the subject of a gender pay gap is controversial today, there is no doubt that it was much worse before the turn of the century. In 1980, for example, the U.S. Bureau of the Census, among others, determined that women in the workforce, aged twenty-five to forty-four, were barely earning over sixty cents for every dollar a man made (Goldin, 2008). And jobs were not alone in this prejudice. Many cartoons, even ones intended for young viewers, in these eras depict over-sexualized and severely stereotyped women. Professor Katia Perea, who has a PhD in Sociology, thoroughly studied this phenomenon. Cartoons like *Wonder Woman* and *She-Ra* presented beautiful, shapely women with questionable choices in clothing (Perea, 2014). Earlier versions of *Scooby-Doo* defined Daphne by her waistline and attraction to her boyfriend, Fred. These cartoons, unfortunately, tried to reinforce the necessity of trying to achieve the arbitrary ideal of feminine beauty set by society, and that they should only evaluate themselves through the eyes of a man, constantly relying on him for support and validation. Despite the negative messages, these cartoons obviously sent a message, and spoke the mind of the general populace in these eras. We can see that these cartoons had a huge and irrefutable impact on the young women that watched them, as sexism continued for a long time afterward, and arguably, still do today.

In pushing the argument that cartoons have a positive, lasting impact on their viewers, it is important that cartoons like these did and do exist. Cartoons have the potential to teach bad morals and mindsets. However, we need to remember that these cartoons, while already in a slim minority, are from the past. They are overwhelmed today by the many cartoons destroying these stereotypes and empowering girls through strong characters and good writing. In fact, cartoons were already starting to take down the stereotyped version of women in the nineties. Cartoons like *The Powerpuff Girls* and *My Little Pony* depicted powerful female leads, capable of thinking on their own and solving their own problems, often without a boy in sight (Perea, 2014). They held positions of power, fought sexist ideas, and prevailed against all odds. These shows were effective at empowering girls and depicting women more accurately because they weren’t heavy-handed in their message. They simply ignored stereotypes in favor of more realistic representations of females, which served to make their cartoons more enjoyable and palatable to girls and boys. “[Cartoons] of the 1990s did not need girls to identify global sexism, it asked girls to be confident, pretty and sexy” (Perea, 2014). You’d be hard-pressed to find another form of media that can so effectively fight prejudice, empower a demographic, and be entertaining simultaneously. This is why we should protect cartoons from being arbitrarily canceled just because they “aren’t popular enough,” or “they aren’t selling enough toys.” These cartoons can not only entertain and look good, they can inspire good morals and practices in any demographic, not just women.

Despite my ragging on the monetary and business motivations of network executives,

there is some validity to the reasons they cancel cartoons. That is why I, as a novice animator,

decided to delve into the process of cartoon production. Sean Russel explores this topic in “How

TV Animation Works.” Russell goes through the production process for an episode of a cartoon

show. Russell points out that it is much more difficult it is to make a cartoon, and how many

people are involved in its making.

The author isn’t an official on the subject, but uses advanced animation and cartoon vocabulary that I can verify. It is limited by its relevancy, as it is an older article. Furthermore, it does not cite any official sources on the topic. Russell has a very neat perspective, showing how ridiculously hard it is to make a cartoon, especially when compared to a live-action show. He uses this to imply an argument for canceling cartoons. However, I think I can make up for the article’s lack of outside credibility through my own experience. I have been faithfully following cartoons since childhood. I animate regularly at home for my own pleasure, and I have conversed with animation veterans about the industry, including Tony Bancroft, the director of Disney’s Mulan. Reading through Russell’s stages of cartoon production reveal how grueling it is to make

even just one episode. Television animation is traditionally produced at 24 frames per second.

This equates to each second of footage containing 24 separately drawn images. This process

results in “the make-up [of] a typical half-hour program consist[ing] of around 30,000 separate

frames” (Russell, 2003). Just the time – about 9 months – and cost it takes to create these frames

alone highlights the main point Russell makes at the start of his piece. That is: “[t]he production

process for a live action TV show is fairly straightforward. … Producing an animated television

program is a far more laborious process, involving dozens of people working hundreds of hours” (Russell, 2003). The process for creating these frames is laborious and complicated, and involves many steps and hard-working employees. Entire animation studios work constantly to push out a single episode. For example, before we arrive at the final product, the visuals must be storyboarded, put into an animatic, and outsourced to another animation studio, where they make in-betweens. Then, the animation must be inked, painted, and colored (Miracle Animation Studios, 2013). This is the main argument for canceling cartoons, and understandably so. Creating a cartoon episode comes with all the problems of creating a live-action show, but with the added problems of increased cost, time, and effort.

Again, this counter-argument is easily addressed. These cartoons are the fruits of many months of love and hard labor from many employees. The animators, writers, directors. These employees are putting their art out into the world, eager to show their creative prowess and to show engaging characters, stories and themes. To think that the hard work of these passionate artists could be so easily dismissed and shoved aside is deeply concerning. We shouldn’t suppress these creators’ creations just because the episodes aren’t making piles of money, or bringing in millions of viewers every episode. Yes, we can’t ignore these factors, as even the animators would rather prefer if their shows *did* make a profit and their characters *were* popular. However, I believe that they are more concerned with unleashing their artistic drive, and of telling a story, and of engaging viewers. They are passionate about cartoons and animations, and we should, at the very least, sympathize with their plight, and urge network executive to loosen the shackles of network television, and instead let cartoons have a chance to blossom.

Now, I admit the risk and cost of creating a cartoon is a valid consideration for stopping a

cartoon prematurely. However, I think that today’s executives are a bit too eager to pull out this

excuse to stop any cartoon, just so they can save a couple bucks. One of my favorite cartoons is

*Sym-Bionic Titan*, a high-octane action series that was canceled after one season for the sole

reason of the lack of a toy license so that the company could produce merchandise. Ben Moore,

who holds a Bachelor’s degree in Cinema and an MFA in Creative Writing, was as outraged as I

was in his article about this debacle.

In “Genndy Tartakovsky’s ‘*Sym-Bionic Titan*’ Canceled Due to Lack of Merchandise?”,

Moore contends Cartoon Network’s sudden decision to suddenly cancel one of their most

popular cartoons, *Sym-Bionic Titan*. He voices his disapproval of the announcement to cancel it

because they couldn’t produce toys for it. Afterward, the author references the displeasure of the

cartoon’s loyal audience and the creator himself, confirming that the cancelation upset a great number of viewers; the same viewers that gave the show aggregate scores of 8.2/10 on IMDb (IMDb.com) and 9.1/10 on TV.com (TV.com).

It came out exactly when the cartoon was canceled, so Moore portrays a genuine reaction to the cancelation. “Cartoon Network has made a massive mistake” Moore (2011) gripes. He even seems to read my mind. “So what if *Titan* doesn’t have enough toys for the merchandise-addled children of America to purchase? … Let it breathe! Let it grow!” (Moore, 2011). Here, we see the potential of a cartoon with an exciting story (an alien invasion) and intriguing, three-dimensional characters (a tough, intelligent princess and a loyal protector with a dark past) facing daunting obstacles (identity and prejudice). shoved aside because they couldn’t put a cheap plastic figure on the shelves of Target and Wal-Mart. We should avoid this type of thinking especially, as it is one of the most shallow reasons to end a cartoon.

**Conclusion**

While there are legitimate reasons to consider canceling a cartoon, like cost, risk, and

time, I think supporting cartoons and their staff despite these risks are far more important.

Executives have become too obsessed with monetary gain. They cancel cartoons for something

like a lack of merchandise without a second thought for their audience or the staff.

Cartoons are beautiful, from their writing and characters, to their stylized animation. The worlds and characters that these people create have endeared people for many years. They are the product of near-endless passion and work of their writers, directors, animators, everyone. Everyone should relate to the feeling of hope and accomplishment one gets from creating something from their heart and soul. At the very least, we need to support these creators, as we would surely be upset if our passion projects were so thoughtlessly tossed aside because our boss didn’t consider them “profitable,” or “marketable.”

I have been watching them my entire life, and they have undoubtedly shaped my personality and personal principles. They have taught me, and many others, about emotions and the human experience. They affect everyone, and could very literally change your life, or even the life of our children, the future generations. We should all be fighting to give cartoons the right to breathe and grow; to be free of the heavy shackles of network television.