

Paving the Way for Educational Media:

Sesame Street's Learning Legacy

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Individual Documentary

Process Paper: 500

## Process Paper

During my life, I have seen the importance of education and the media. As a teenager, media and television appealed to me so I chose to explore media and television for a project. While looking for barriers broken, I found Sesame Street, which I remember watching when I was younger and being intrigued by the peculiar things Mr. Noodle and Grover did. After researching more about Sesame Street and its impact, I discovered the positive impact the characters have on children living in poverty. Children living in poverty face stress, which in large amounts, can prevent neuron connections from developing to their full potential. Because childhood is one of the most important and fragile times of learning, children who face massive amounts of stress are in danger of detrimental setbacks. This helped me realize how Sesame Street gives foundational learning tools and helps prepare socioeconomically disadvantaged children for school, thus improving their lives.

To begin my research, I found a website from Sesame Workshop promoting its mission. Then, I received an email from Sesame Workshop about their impact on children throughout the world. After reading through these primary sources, I looked for journal articles on the media's effect on children, and how poverty affects children who grew up in it. For contextual information, I found articles and a video on President Johnson's War on poverty in the 1960s to better understand what efforts were being made by the government to address poverty. Within Newspapers.com, I found articles on the 25th, 30th, and 40th year anniversaries of Sesame Street. These showed its

advancement and what it wanted to accomplish. Later, I used Libraries Linking Idaho's databases to look for journal articles. With this foundation, I dug deeper into personal accounts of how Sesame Street affected lives. Here, I found Bobbi Dempsey's story about how Sesame Street improved the quality of her life.

As Sesame Street is a television show, a documentary seemed like a good fit for my project. To create my project, I wrote and revised my script and gathered pictures and videos. After I recorded my script, I used iMovie to connect the pictures, videos, audio, background music, and credits. After editing, I published my complete documentary.

Throughout the world, many who live in poverty do not have equal access to educational resources. Poverty and socio-economic disparity prevent children from having equal opportunities to succeed. This barrier for education prevents many from reaching their full potential, in turn, stunts the human capital of our world. With the development of Sesame Street, children were provided with a way to learn at home regardless of their socio-economic situation. Expanding to continually help, Sesame Workshop has influenced children in over 150 countries and has created many initiatives to help children and families in the developing world. By targeting early childhood education, Sesame Street has overcome the barrier of unequal early childhood educational services by providing a service accessible by all to teach children around the world, despite socio-economic differences and poverty.

## Annotated Bibliography

### Primary Sources:

Chira, Susan. "'Sesame Street' debate reflects issue of TV's Impact." *Great Falls Tribune*. 19 Nov. 1989, p. 17 F. Newspapers.com, 17 Nov. 2019.

This newspaper article was written twenty years after Sesame Street made its way into the world, and focuses on debates circling Sesame Street at the time.

This resource helped me understand the effect of what happened soon after Sesame Street debuted, and how people were reacting to Sesame Street.

Cooney, Joan Ganz. "*The Potential Uses of Television in Preschool Education*."

<https://joanganzcooneycenter.org/>, 1967,

[https://joanganzcooneycenter.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/11/jgcc\\_1966report.pdf](https://joanganzcooneycenter.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/11/jgcc_1966report.pdf) pages 4, 8, 18, 20, 43. Accessed 12 December 2019.

This study, done by Joan Ganz Cooney, was based on how media and television affect young children and improve the process of learning in a younger age group, especially children living in poverty. Joan Ganz Cooney was one of the founders of Sesame Street, and this study was vital in the creation of Sesame Street because it gave Cooney the idea of using media to teach children.

"Learning Through Play." *Sesame Workshop*, Sesame Workshop, 2019,

<https://www.sesameworkshop.org/learning-through-play>.

By reading this website, I was able to understand that children learn more when they are younger. They are always learning and playing at a young age, and, "...it lays the foundation for children to become creative and engaged learners for life" (Learning Through Play). This website is a primary resource because the Yellow Feather Fund is the funding behind Sesame Street. It includes information on what Sesame Street has done, and its continued plans to improve early childhood education.

"Social Impact Initiatives." *Sesame Workshop*, Sesame Workshop, 2019,

<https://www.sesameworkshop.org/what-we-do/social-impact-initiatives>.

Social impact initiatives helped me learn about all of the projects the Yellow Feather Fund produces that benefit young children and their learning experiences. The Yellow Feather Fund is a non-profit organization that provided the funding behind Sesame Street. It also helps others learn about their mission and what they have accomplished. For example, they help children learn about hygiene and gender equity to help young girls have big goals in life and reduce the number of deaths and illnesses within poverty-stricken regions. This website is a primary source because it is Sesame Street's current impact on society, and what they are doing to continue their mission.

Yellow Feather Fund. "Sesame's Impact By the Numbers." Sesame Street, Message to Laci Chandler. 4 Nov. 2019, email.

Through this email, I learned how the Yellow Feather Fund impacts children around the world. The email gave me information on how they impacted children by using percentages, for example, "Young Children who watch Sesame Street have 16% higher GPAs in high school" (Yellow Feather Fund). These percentages helped me realize the broad reach of Sesame Street and how they have beneficially impacted children's learning and futures. This is a primary resource because it was an email I received from the Yellow Feather Fund and informed me of their current status and their goals.

### **Secondary Sources:**

Allen, Steve, and Robert J. Thompson. "Television in the United States." *Encyclopædia Britannica*, Encyclopædia Britannica, Inc., 1 July 2019, [www.britannica.com/art/television-in-the-United-States#ref283601](http://www.britannica.com/art/television-in-the-United-States#ref283601).

This website gave me preliminary information on the introduction of television. It helped me understand how and when television was accepted and how it became a commonality in the home.

CBS News. "How 'Sesame Street' Has Made Kids Smarter, Stronger and Kinder for 50 Years." *CBS News*, CBS Interactive, 16 Nov. 2019,

<https://www.cbsnews.com/news/sesame-street-50th-anniversary-how-the-series-has-made-kids-smarter-stronger-and-kinder/>.

This website has part of an interview with Rosemarie Truglio, who is in charge of the content and curriculum for Sesame Street. The interview detailed information on how Sesame Street is different from other teachers, the new additions to the show, and how by watching Sesame Street, elementary school students scored 16% higher in school and had a better view of learning.

Christison, Sandra. "Kindergartens: A History (1886)." *Social Welfare History Project*, 4 Oct. 2017,

[socialwelfare.library.vcu.edu/programs/education/kindergartens-a-history-1886/](http://socialwelfare.library.vcu.edu/programs/education/kindergartens-a-history-1886/).

This website helped me learn about the introduction of kindergarten to the United States in the 1870s. This helped me understand the historical context of my project and was a vital source of information about kindergarten before Sesame Street and the development of television.

Dempsey, Bobbi. "Sesame Street Changed My Life. We Must Protect It So It Can Mold More Kids' Lives." EHRP, EHRP, 7 Sept. 2019,

<http://economichardship.org/archive/protecting-sesame-street-public-broadcasting>.

This website helped me learn about one woman's experience from watching Sesame Street and how it has greatly improved her quality of life. Bobbi

Dempsey helped me realize how Sesame Street impacts children in similar situations like hers.

"Early Experiences Shape the Brain." *Invest in Kids Now*,

<http://investinkidsnow.rtscustomer.com/uploads/FileLinks/7f1c6eb803034a479bc275dd86f5be59/ffyf-brain%20science.pdf>.

This document was very helpful in understanding how stress can impact the neuron connections in the brain. It helped me understand how very stressful experiences can prevent neuron connections from connecting to their full potential.

"Effects of Poverty on Society: Why We Should All Care." RSS, 7 Mar. 2011,

<https://www.poverties.org/blog/effects-of-poverty>.

This website gave me information on the effects of poverty and what can be caused because of it. This website also helps the reader understand why the war against poverty was important in 1965 and now.

Gelbrich, Judy. "Section II - American Education." *American Education*, 1999,

[oregonstate.edu/instruct/ed416/ae8.html](http://oregonstate.edu/instruct/ed416/ae8.html).



This website article helped me learn about television and education after World War II. It also helped me understand why television was not very important or wanted when it first came out.

Kirkorian, Heather L., et al. "Media and Young Children's Learning." *The Future of Children*, vol. 18 no. 1, 2008, p. 39-61. Project MUSE, doi:10.1353/foc.0.0002.

To learn about how the media has affected children both in positive and negative ways, I found this page on media, children, and ECE. Within this book, the authors listed ways media has beneficially and negatively impacted children and their development and success.

Millman, Joyce. "'Sesame Street' at 25." *The San Francisco Examiner*. 21 Nov. 1993, pp. D1+. Newspapers.com, 17 Nov. 2019.

This newspaper article provided me with a mother's account of how her son watches "Sesame Street" and becomes engaged compared to other children's shows where he just watches. This helped me understand how different Sesame Street is compared to other television shows.

Nakao, Annie. "Big Bird and Pals Reminisce." *The San Francisco Examiner*. 21 Nov. 1993, pp. D1+. Newspapers.com, 17 Nov. 2019.

This newspaper article provided me with a mother's account of how her son watches "Sesame Street" and becomes engaged compared to other children's shows where he just watches. I learned how different Sesame Street was from everything else on television at the time. Sesame Street was an essential leader of educational media.

"National Television Penetration Trends; Total & TV Households." *The Nielsen Company*, [https://www.tvb.org/Portals/0/media/file/TV\\_Households.pdf](https://www.tvb.org/Portals/0/media/file/TV_Households.pdf).

Accessed 3 February 2020. This article helped me understand the jump of televisions as a household item in the 1900s. It provided me with the statistics of households with a television in their homes from 1950 until 2020.

Rokosa, Jennifer. "Fighting the War on Poverty with Early Childhood Education." *Center for American Progress*, 21 Oct. 2011, <https://www.americanprogress.org/issues/poverty/news/2011/10/20/10547/fighting-the-war-on-poverty-with-early-childhood-education/>.

This website helped me understand how many children live in poverty, how that affects their future, and how Early Childhood Education (ECE) can help them grow through learning.

“Sesame Street’ Debuts.” *History.com*, A&E Television Networks, 24 Nov. 2009,  
<https://www.history.com/this-day-in-history/sesame-street-debuts>.

I used this History.com website for preliminary information on the airing of Sesame Street and it informed me on the teaching focus of Sesame Street.

“TV Turns On.” *Rural America Turns On to TV in the 1940s*,  
[livinghistoryfarm.org/farminginthe40s/life\\_27.html](http://livinghistoryfarm.org/farminginthe40s/life_27.html).

This website article helped me understand why people at first were not purchasing television sets, and how television was soon purchased a few years later at an astonishing rate.

Walker, Theresa. "'Sesame Street' Celebrating 30 Years of Children's Television." *The Daily Herald*. Provo, UT., 6 Jan. 1999, pp. C1-2. [Newspapers.com](http://Newspapers.com), 17 Nov. 2019. This article from 1999 helped me learn and understand how people felt about Sesame Street, how people thought television would last, and how researchers agree that Sesame Street has left its mark by helping equalize the playing field with children in poverty and children well off.

Young, Mary Eming. “State of Early Child Development Research, Practice, and Policy for Most Vulnerable Children: A Global Perspective.” *New Directions for Child &*

Adolescent Development, vol. 2017, no. 158, Winter 2017, pp. 11–23.

EBSCOhost, doi:10.1002/cad.20221.

An essential part of understanding children born into poverty's ability in school and the effect of early childhood experiences on children was shared by this journal article. By reading this article, I was able to understand the impact of childhood learning within poverty and how it affects children's learning and success. Sesame Street targets younger children to help them learn and become prepared for school without regard to sex, race, or income.

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*[abcnews.go.com/Lifestyle/sesame-street-helping-kids-learn-cope-trauma/story?id=50309301](http://abcnews.go.com/Lifestyle/sesame-street-helping-kids-learn-cope-trauma/story?id=50309301).*

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