

How *The Flintstones* set the stage for the adult animation boom

Level 2 • Upper intermediate

1 Warmer

Here are six of the 20 highest-earning animated films of all time. Put them in order from 1 (the highest earning) to 6 (the least highest earning).

- | | |
|----------|--|
| 1. _____ | a. <i>Finding Nemo</i> (2003) |
| 2. _____ | b. <i>Zootropolis</i> (<i>Zootopia</i>) (2016) |
| 3. _____ | c. <i>Shrek 2</i> (2004) |
| 4. _____ | d. <i>Frozen 2</i> (2019) |
| 5. _____ | e. <i>The Lion King</i> (1994) |
| 6. _____ | f. <i>Toy Story 4</i> (2019) |

2 Key words

Complete the sentences using these key words from the text. The paragraph numbers are given to help you.

custody
manipulative

addiction
boom

prime time
gamble

animation
prehistoric

ancestor
pun

1. If something is _____, it is from the period of time before history was first written down. (para 1)
2. An _____ is an earlier form from which something modern has developed. (para 1)
3. _____ is the process of making cartoons. (para 1)
4. _____ is the most popular time for watching television, which is in the middle of the evening. (para 2)
5. A _____ is an action or plan that involves risks but will bring important benefits if it is successful. (para 3)
6. A _____ is a time when the economy of a country is particularly successful. (para 4)
7. A _____ is a humorous use of a word that has two meanings, or of words with the same sound but different meanings. (para 5)
8. _____ is the legal right to look after a child. (para 5)
9. An _____ is a strong need or wish to spend as much time as possible doing a particular activity. (para 6)
10. If you are _____, you make people do what you want by influencing them in a clever or dishonest way. (para 6)

3 Find the information

Find the following information in the text as quickly as possible.

1. When did *The Flintstones* first appear on television?
2. At what time of day was *The Flintstones* first shown on TV?
3. What did *The Flintstones*' use of the phrase 'Charge it' refer to?
4. Which animated series is described as the nuclear family of the 1980s?
5. What was the average number of children in a 'nuclear family'?
6. What was the first animated series to be produced by Netflix?

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Yabba dabba do! How *The Flintstones* set the stage for the adult animation boom

David Barnett

8 October, 2020

- 1 Anyone who was a child in the 1970s probably remembers *The Flintstones* as a Saturday-morning cartoon full of prehistoric jokes and dinosaurs. But when it was first shown in 1960, the adventures of Fred and Wilma, the Stone Age family of the title, were aimed at adults. They are the direct ancestors of the golden age of animation for adults we enjoy today.
- 2 When it was first broadcast on 30 September, 1960, it was shown at 8.30pm, after bedtime for most kids. It was the first prime-time show from the studio set up by the creators of *Tom and Jerry*. They had spent months trying to convince the networks that an animation aimed at an adult audience could work.
- 3 It was certainly a gamble to show a cartoon at 8.30pm, but it worked, and *The Flintstones* proved amazingly popular. While we might now think it is just another children's cartoon series from the 60s, it dealt with very adult subject matter. It was only after its initial run that repeats became a regular part of children's television.
- 4 "We watch *The Flintstones* today, and you can see the lifestyle is clearly based on the post-war boom," says Dr Steve Henderson, the director of the Manchester Animation Festival. "Wilma and Betty are constantly saying, 'Charge it!', which was a reference to the rise of credit cards in the 1960s. And although there are all these Stone Age jokes, they are actually a very modern family."
- 5 As well as the puns and jokes, serious – and sometimes dark – topics were explored. Henderson says: "*The Flintstones* was the first series to show married couples sharing a bed, which wasn't normal for TV at the time. And there are episodes where Barney and Betty discuss not being able to have kids, and when they eventually get baby Bamm-Bamm, they have to enter a custody battle.
- 6 "Fred has a gambling addiction and can be a horribly manipulative individual who will do anything to be able to go bowling." Henderson says, too, that there was even an episode where Barney was going to kill himself. "He stood on a bridge with a rock tied to him and had to be persuaded to come down. And when you look at all that, you realize that this was not at all a kids' show."
- 7 While never as popular as *The Flintstones*, more prime-time shows followed, notably *Top Cat* and *The Jetsons*. It could even be argued that without Fred, Barney and co, we might not have had *The Simpsons* almost 30 years later and, from there, the adult animation that is so common today.
- 8 "While *The Flintstones* were the post-war boom family of the 1960s, *The Simpsons* were the nuclear, 2.4-children family of the late 1980s," says Henderson. "And the success of that caused the networks to start asking for more shows based on family life, and so we get *Family Guy*, *American Dad!* and *Bob's Burgers*."
- 9 These days, animation is ruled by shows such as *Rick and Morty*, the dysfunctional spy *Archer* and *BoJack Horseman*, in which a former TV star with a horse's head lives a life of drink, drugs and sex.
- 10 *BoJack Horseman* was the first animated series from Netflix, and the rise of streaming services has raised the game in adult animation once again. There could be an even steeper rise in the quality and number of shows thanks, in part, to Covid. Henderson says: "Obviously, after *The Flintstones* and *The Simpsons*, everyone wants that success, but they have to do something differently, which is why we are seeing so much inventiveness. We are definitely living in a golden age for adult TV animation, and I think that's going to increase. Coronavirus has changed the entertainment industry. While animated series and films have always been seen as inferior to live action, now people are seeing that you can make animation with several people sitting at home and you don't need to get lots of people into a studio to make a show. So I think we're going to be seeing a lot more quality animation coming out of this period."
- 11 If Henderson is right, animation fans will definitely owe a debt to the cartoon series from 1960 on which the current growth was built.

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4 Comprehension check

Are these statements true (T) or false (F) according to the text?

1. When *The Flintstones* was first shown on television, it was aimed at children.
2. The TV company took a risk when it decided to show a cartoon at 8.30 in the evening.
3. There were no jokes in *The Flintstones*, and it only dealt with serious topics.
4. Other cartoons, such as *Top Cat* and *The Jetsons*, were more popular than *The Flintstones*.
5. Covid might lead to an increase in the quality and number of animated film series.
6. To make an animated film, you need to have a lot of people in a film studio.

5 Find the word

Find the following words and phrases in the text. The paragraph numbers are given to help you.

1. an adverb meaning *very surprisingly* (para 3)
2. a noun meaning *a period of time when a television programme is shown regularly* (para 3)
3. a noun meaning *a television series that is shown again* (para 3)
4. a verb meaning *examine or discuss an idea, subject etc in detail* (para 5)
5. an adverb meaning *especially* (para 7)
6. an adjective meaning *not working normally and not happy or successful* (para 9)
7. a three-word verb phrase meaning *improve the quality of something* (para 10)
8. a noun meaning *the ability to think of new or original ideas or methods* (para 10)

6 Two-word phrases

Match the words in the left-hand column with those in the right-hand column to make expressions from the text.

- | | |
|------------|-----------|
| 1. live | a. war |
| 2. subject | b. couple |
| 3. post- | c. action |
| 4. nuclear | d. age |
| 5. golden | e. matter |
| 6. married | f. family |

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7 Phrases with prepositions

Complete the phrases from the text using these prepositions.

with

on

in

for

at

to

- _____ the 1970s
- aimed _____ an adult audience
- it dealt _____ adult subject matter
- based _____ family life
- thanks _____ Covid
- after bedtime _____ most kids

8 Discussion

Discuss the following statements.

- Live-action films are much better than animated films.
- *The Simpsons* is the greatest TV series ever made.