

REVIEW: TV Critic Reviews... "Higglytown Heroes"

by: Kristin Johnson As aunt of a preschooler and an aspiring voiceover actress (I knew all those hours of watching Bugs Bunny would come in handy), I know all the kids' shows as well as every kids' DVD out there. My TV Critic column will be a regular family-fare guide to Kids' TV. In my opinion, there's no better way celebrities can recoup their outrageous salaries than entertaining and sometimes educating kids. And They Might Be Giants get the "cooler than Elvis" vote for singing the theme song to one of Playhouse Disney's newest hits, "Higglytown Heroes." For those of you not familiar with all things Higgly (an adjective used as much as "Smurfy" but not, thank Higgles, as a verb), the series centers on a small town and four tots named Eubie, Kip, and siblings Wayne and Twinkle. Think "South Park" with better art and no foul mouths. The strongest language is, "Aw, pickles," usually uttered by Twinkle (pinker than Trista Rehn Sutter!) after her fanciful ideas for solving the kids' dilemmas get gently punctured by Fran, a friendly squirrel voiced by Edie McClurg. In each two-episode half-hour show, the Higgly Kids experience common, innocent childhood events such as finding a caterpillar, hosting a television party for the Happy Hairy Higgly Monster Primetime Special, losing a tooth, Kip's Grandpa locked in the bathroom, or caring for an unhappy bird. The kids try to solve their problems, guided by Fran who is the voice of reason, helped by their loving families and the ever-enthusiastic oddly Bill and Ted-ish Pizza Guy...plus someone special. Then comes the inevitable song... "Someone special, who could it be?"

This job's too big for you and me.

We need some help!

But never fear-o,

It looks like a job for a...Higglytown Hero!

A Higglytown Hero!" Some of the heroes are natural choices, especially after September 11: Police Woman, Firefighter, etc. But how many of us think of sanitation workers, electricians, plumbers, gardeners, mail carriers (voiced by Kathie Lee Gifford) and farmers as heroes? Or a telephone operator (voiced by Cyndi Lauper)? Although the heroes have celebrity voices, the Higgly Kids discover that the real stars all around them are the people who solve problems every day. Some of the dilemmas get a little ridiculous from an adult perspective. For example, when Kip climbs a tree to save a beloved neighborhood cat and her kittens, his friends help him. Why, when he gets stuck, can't they help him back down? Ahem...when was the last time you tripped and panicked? You need help in your own life every day without thinking about it. The beauty of "Higglytown Heroes" is that it celebrates working together, "having fun together," and the Higgly Kids as well as their families never take for granted the Heroes in their lives. The Electrician (Lance Bass) gets invited to share in the "Higgly Monsters" TV party after repairing the circuitry for Kip's house. The Fire Fighter (Donald Faison) who gets Kip out of the tree shares in a birthday party for the neighborhood cat. How many of us go out of our way to thank the people who make our lives easier? Sometimes we forget to see them as people with needs and feelings. We even forget to see our own families as heroes. Kip's Grandmama (voice of Betty White) knits the kids sweaters. Kip's Mom acts like the soul of '50s domesticity, but gets rewarded when Kip and his friends make her a get-well card. Wayne's Mom shows the kids a caterpillar and drives them to the beach. Interestingly, Higgly families aren't always nuclear families, something Disney portrays as normal without calling attention to it. Kip's family is the closest, with twin sisters, a baby sister, a mom and dad (who operates a hot dog cart), and two grandparents who either live in Kip's large house or visit constantly. Twinkle and Wayne's mom seems to be a single parent (although all are African-American, no one has screamed racism yet), and Eubie is apparently being raised by his Southern-accented Aunt Millie and Uncle Zooter, with visits from his Southern-accented Grandpop (a farmer). In many ways, Higglytown is idealized. No one really seems to worry about jobs, money or status. People go to the library, and a Librarian is a Higglytown Hero! The kids "work real hard" and take responsibility (gasp) by thinking up ways to help themselves and their families, and in each episode there are little moral lessons and advice (take care of your pets, don't use too much electricity, make someone smile) to show the kids how they can grow up to be...Higglytown Heroes! Cynics and naysayers will deride this as kiddie pablum. I call it a refreshing dose of reality and a tribute to the heroes all around us. The Disney animators are Higglytown Heroes for creating this show.

About the Author

Copyright Kristin Johnson. Kristin Johnson is co-author of the "highly recommended" Midwest Book Review pick, Christmas Cookies Are For Giving: Stories, Recipes and Tips for Making Heartwarming Gifts (ISBN: 0-9723473-9-9). A downloadable media kit is available at our Web site, www.christmascookiesareforgiving.com, or e-mail the publisher (info@tyrpublishing.com) to receive a printed media kit and sample copy of the book. More articles available at <http://www.bakingchristmascookies.com>. kristin@poemsforyou.com

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