



## DID YOU KNOW?

PBS® grants educators the right to tape any of its programs and use them for up to a year free of charge.

*Edutainment Guide.*

A biannual publication based in Encinitas, Calif., the magazine and its online companion, *FundandEdutain EZine*, provide information and inspiration to educators nationwide who want to enhance their educational

programs. Their goal is to integrate entertainment with education for maximum impact in the classroom.

"People in schools today were born after television," Sims said, "and unless you come from a strict family that doesn't allow TV, kids expect to be entertained because of it."

### The Rise of 'Edutainment'

In 1993, the word "edutainment" made its debut in *The American Heritage College Dictionary*, Third Edition. Its definition—"the act of learning through a medium that both educates and entertains"—suggests a fresh approach to learning whereby educators don't just teach, they play.

"One person's entertainment can be another person's edutainment," McCallum said.

Edutainment can be high-tech, with DVDs and computers, or it can be low-tech, with storybooks and hand puppets. The key, McCallum said, is fun. And few companies understand the relationship between fun and learning like PBS®.

Based in Alexandria, Va., PBS is available to 99 percent of American homes with televisions and serves nearly 90 million people every week. The nonprofit media enterprise is responsible for the meteoric rise over the decades of educational children's programming such as *Sesame Street*, which debuted on the channel in 1969 when it was known as National Educational Television, and *Mister Rogers' Neighborhood*, which launched a year earlier.

"We've always been a pioneer and a leader," Lesli Rotenberg, senior vice president of brand management and promotion at PBS, said of her network's children's programming. "We set a high bar that others tend to follow in terms of providing resources and content that help kids succeed in school and in life."

Rotenberg is at the helm of a new five-year initiative entitled PBS KIDS® Next Generation Media, which officially launches in September and aims to reposition early childhood education within a changing digital media landscape. Under the initiative, PBS KIDS will debut a two-hour block

# Entertain as You Educate

**Make teaching more effective when you make it more fun.** By Matt Alderton

ALETA MCCALLUM SAID HER SON STRUGGLED WITH A FINITE ATTENTION span when he was growing up. In the classroom, he often faltered, and only when the curriculum directly involved him did he flourish.

"If it was something he wasn't interested in, he did very poorly," McCallum said. "It was a very basic thing: My son performed better when he was more engaged and entertained."

Inspired by her son's struggles, McCallum partnered in 1997 with Cathy Sims of Neptune City, N.J., to publish *Everybody's Fundraising &*



of morning programming especially for preschoolers that includes a live host to spell out with discussion and activities the educational lessons within entertaining television shows.

### Edutainment in Action

Of course, edutainment isn't just letting the television babysit the kids. It's using media and entertainment as a starting point for interactive learning—and it works.

As proof, Rotenberg cited extensive research on *Between the Lions*, an award-winning PBS KIDS program created specifically to help children learn to read. In one study, conducted by the University of Kansas in 2000, kindergarten and first-grade students in Kansas City watched 17 half-hour episodes of *Between the Lions* during a four-week period, without discussion or instruction from their teachers. Those students outperformed their peers who did not watch the show by a ratio of 4-to-1 on skills emphasized in the show, such as matching letters with sounds and identifying letters of the alphabet.

In a second study, conducted in 2002 by Mississippi State University, researchers tested the effectiveness of *Between the Lions* in two communities with historically low literacy rates. They found that children who regularly watched the show and participated in follow-up activities with their teachers significantly outperformed students who didn't watch the show on standardized reading tests; they understood more about the concept of print, learned literacy skills at a faster rate and were better able to match words and letters with sounds.

### How to Be an Edutainer

Integrating entertainment into your own classroom is as easy as pressing 'Play.' Consider these four tips for making learning fun:

**1. Extend the learning.** PBS KIDS doesn't just create television shows, it also publishes lesson plans, activities and more designed to further learning in a number of ways. Its philosophy is "view, read, do," and it's designed to help educators contextualize media in the classroom.


Consider following the PBS model—having students view a program, read a book and then do an activity—to maximize the educational benefits of entertainment. "Media can be a great tool for learning," Rotenberg said, "but it's just the beginning."

**2. Make learning relevant.** For edutainment to be effective, it also must be relatable. "You have to find out from students what's going on in their personal lives and then bring things in that will interest them," Sims said.

Also important in making lessons relevant is making them appropriate. "It's really about understanding the developmental stage where the kids are at," Rotenberg said.

**3. Be creative.** Edutainment doesn't require a huge investment. While DVDs, computers and televisions in the classroom are great, all that educators need to make their classrooms fun is creativity. Sims

suggested using more songs in your curriculum while McCallum said that magic tricks, storytelling and sports all can be used inexpensively within the classroom to make everyday lessons more entertaining. "You retain more information if you're being taught in a more interesting and fun way," McCallum said.

**4. Don't forget the fun.** Above all else, remember that for children, everything—even school—comes back to pleasure. "The important thing to say about entertainment is that if they don't like it, there's nothing to be learned," Rotenberg said. 

Matt Alderton is a Chicago-based writer and editor.

## Entertain and Educate with a...

### Reference Book Set

The award-winning *Children's Dictionary* contains more than 13,000 main entries and more than 1,000 full-color photographs and drawings. The *Children's Thesaurus* has 4,000 words with more than 36,000 synonyms.

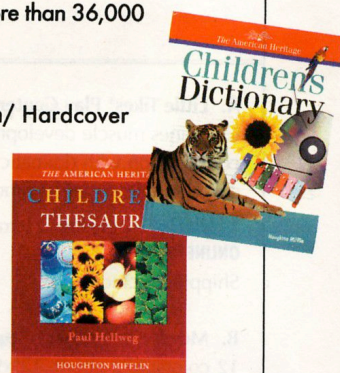
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