

Children's TV has questionable political themes, study shows

December 8 2009

Most parents know to screen television shows for sex, violence or other negative messaging—but what about children's shows themselves?

Research by the University of Alberta's Augustana Campus contends that children's programming can carry underlying political themes that may surprise parents. After analyzing 23 episodes of *Thomas and Friends*, a show about a train, his friends and their adventures on a fictional island, political scientist Shauna Wilton was able to identify themes that didn't seem constructive for youngsters.

"While the show conveys a number of positive political values such as tolerance, listening, communicating with others and contributing to the community, it also represents a conservative political ideology that punishes individual initiative, opposes critique and change, and relegates females to supportive roles," said Wilton, an assistant professor in the Department of Social Sciences at Augustana Campus.

The *Thomas and Friends* TV series is shown in 130 countries around the world. Wilton noted storylines in several episodes that divided the characters into different social classes and punished those who tried to gain individual power. "Any change is seen as disrupting the natural order of things." As well, of 49 main characters listed in the show, only eight were female, reflecting a general trend among children's programming, Wilton said.

Parents, teachers and other experts such as political scientists would be

wise to give children's shows a closer look, she added.

"We tend to think of children's TV shows as neutral and safe, but they still carry messages. Eventually these children will attain full political citizenship, and the opinions and world outlook they develop now, partially influenced by shows like Thomas and Friends, are part of that process."

Wilton presented her research findings earlier this year at a conference of the Canadian Political Science Association.

Source: University of Alberta ([news](#) : [web](#))

Citation: Children's TV has questionable political themes, study shows (2009, December 8)
retrieved 26 April 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2009-12-children-tv-political-themes.html>

This document is subject to copyright. Apart from any fair dealing for the purpose of private study or research, no part may be reproduced without the written permission. The content is provided for information purposes only.