

Banet-Wiser, S. (2007). Is Nick for kids? Irony, camp, and animation in the Nickelodeon brand. *Kids rule! : Nickelodeon and consumer citizenship*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.

### Synopsis

Banet-Wiser demonstrated the way Nickelodeon's "us vs. them" brand identity was also its marketing strategy; she used *The Ren and Stimpy show*, *SpongeBob SquarePants*, and *The Fairly Odd Parents* to demonstrate this idea. She noted that Nickelodeon was unique in that it was the only channel exclusively dedicated to children's programming and in that it seemed rebellious in its use of creator-driven animated shows that utilized double-coding, camp, and irony, which contrasted to the toy-based cartoons of the previous era. She noted that Nickelodeon's use of double coding helped to draw transgenerational audiences while still maintaining the "Nick is for kids" rebellious feel. Banet-Wiser demonstrated how irony and camp functioned both as a marketing strategy and a means to further the "us vs. them" brand by separating Nickelodeon from other kids' networks for its critique of kids programming. She used *The Ren and Stimpy Show* to show how Nickelodeon's self-reflexive quality could be overdone and destroy the consumer citizenship they had been trying to create. She contrasts that with *Spongebob Squarepants*, which used camp and irony to comment on kids' television without criticizing it and play with the boundary between social norms like male and female or child and adult.

### Key Concepts

- **Theory of Double-Coding:** "a program has at least two levels of 'code' to its logic so that it appeals to different audiences" (p. 181).
- **Empowered Consumer Citizen:** "those who are defined by power relations within the confines of consumer culture" (p. 189).
- **Camp:** "a style that is predominantly about artifice and exaggeration; two, camp exists in tension, not in agreement, with consumer (or mainstream) culture; three, people who interpret things as campy are people outside the mainstream; and four, camp is affiliated with homosexual culture" (p. 191).

### Key Quotes

- "Because of the flexibility of form of animation, where creators are not bound to the physical boundaries of human representation, the fantasy and imaginative worlds of animated programs routinely provided a social critique of the reality of life" (p. 183).
- "Nicktoons stand out in the television landscape because they are double-edged in meaning, appealing to different generations by employing social commentary. Yet the critical edge of this commentary needs to be read against the context of the postmodern media economy, where a kind of cool subversion is not so much social critique as a crucial part of a dominant market address" (p. 180).
- "To locate a camp style in children's programming is not to empty camp of its political and/or erotic meaning but to resituate it within a particular kind of consumer context" (p. 192).

### Essential Question

- How can Nickelodeon continue to use double-coding to include larger segments of the population in its target audience while maintaining their "us vs. them" branding?