

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:

In this chapter, the author explains the rise in popularity of Nickelodeon animation, and the mechanisms that developed its brand. The author points out that animation post WWII was deemed as a genre for kids, and therefore not for adults. This trend continued with toy-based programs through the 70s and 80s and didn't really start to change until the 90s. In the 90s Nickelodeon ventured into animation with shows like *Ren and Stimpy* and *SpongeBob SquarePants*. These shows used edgy styles like irony and camp with techniques like double coding to try to bridge the generational gap and appeal to both adults and kids. For example, *SpongeBob*, plays with very real topics such as masculinity and what masculinity means, by constantly depicting SpongeBob as campy or non-normative. The author noted that these shows provide a medium to critique American culture and values, while simultaneously appearing fun and playful. This aligns perfectly with what the author describes as Nickelodeon's brand. Nickelodeon is a kid's channel that addresses kids as consumer citizens and draws on the side of adults that wants to be a kid. The author argues that this transgenerational strategy is what has made Nickelodeon so successful.

### Key Concepts

- **Double-Coding:** “where a program has at least two levels of “code” to its logic so that it appeals to different audiences, such as adults and children, or heterosexuals and gay people” (p. 181).
- **Camp:** “a style that is predominantly about artifice and exaggeration;... in tension, not in agreement, with consumer culture;... people who interoperate things as campy are people outside the mainstream;... is affiliated with homosexual culture” (p. 191).
- **Postmodern Culture:** “continuous transgression and challenging of social and symbolic boundaries” (p. 203).

### Key Quotes

- “Because of the flexibility of the form of animation, where creators are not bound to the physical boundaries of human representation, the fantasy and imaginative worlds of animated programs routinely provide a social critique of the “reality” of material life” (p. 183).
- “Toy companies came to Cartoon Network and said if you don't run our shows we're not going to advertise on your network, and they bullied them into running *He-man* and *Transformers* and stuff like that. You couldn't do that with Nick-you couldn't walk in there and tell them that” (p. 185).
- “Nickelodeon attracts two audiences by appealing precisely to the divisions between them” (p. 188).

### Essential Question

- As Nickelodeon is continuously copied by other networks like Disney and Cartoon Network, how might the intended impact of this type of programming die off or get multiplied?