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The Animated Phenomenon: Impact Beyond Childhood

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Abstract

This paper responds to the stigma that animated shows are “just for kids,” and that animated cartoons and films have as much importance as shows which star live actors. I analyze several American cartoons from the 2000s and 2010s, such as *Phineas and Ferb*, *Steven Universe*, *Gravity Falls*, and *Over the Garden Wall*, which contain themes that are accessible by multiple age groups, including adults. Some of the themes include: the intelligence of cartoons; representation and the fight against stereotyping; family structures and dynamics; and foreboding themes of insecurities, growing up, and death. Many cartoons have become impactful for older audiences and I draw on firsthand responses from fans, interviews with the shows’ creators, and the episodes themselves to convey the significance of cartoons.