

The Electric Company

The Electric Company was produced by Sesame Workshop to be telecast on PBS based in the United States. **The Electric Company** is a musical comedy adventure series shot on the streets of NYC. In each episode, there is a narrative storyline with interludes of shorter pieces. In the narrative, a group of 4 friends are called upon to solve a problem created by a mischievous group of neighborhood Pranksters. In every instance the Company prevails with the power of their words. This structure supports the underlying goal of the program, which is to tackle the literacy crisis the United States faces. The intention is to overtly entertain while covertly educating and to inspire and ignite a love for reading in children everywhere.

“Skills” is the pilot episode of **The Electric Company**. Keith is invited to join **The Electric Company** as its’ newest member but before he can take the oath, Francine, one of the infamous pranksters, swoops in and steals his special skill. Will **The Electric Company** be able to use their superpowers to help Keith get his power back?

The Electric Company was one of the PRIX JEUNESSE INTERNATIONALE 2010 finalists in the “7-11 Fiction” category.

International experts’ opinions

On the whole the international experts had mixed reviews about the program. Many experts compared the program with its earlier version produced in the 70s which they remembered fondly: “The original Electric Company was ahead of its time in terms of diversity – so it was very funny” (female expert, Jamaica). They believed that it will carry on the original mission: “I found it very exciting. It was one of my favorite shows growing up. Younger ones will learn from it and those who sort of missed the boat in school might be helped out by it as well – those who passed the age. It will have a broad reach” (female expert, Jamaica).

However, some criticized the current producers for not staying close enough to the original “Electric Company.” They felt that the program was not meant for the target audience of 7-11 children. They argued that the children of this age group would not be interested in a program like this, which seemed to them to be more appropriate for younger audience. “I think they are way off of what we broadcast – they watch something else” (male expert, Germany). “In Australia this would go out for the 4 to 7-year-olds rather than the 7 to 11” (female expert, Australia). “It is hitting a very narrow target of kids who are learning to read and learning to read a little bit more than just simple words. It is not really meant for 9, 10, or 11” (female expert, USA).



Figure 1: Keith has a magic skill.



Figure 2: Keith’s friends can envision things and make them real.

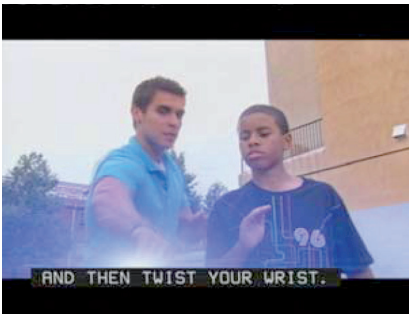


Figure 3: Keith got this skill all of a sudden when playing basketball.



Figure 4: The electric company initiates Keith into the group.



Figure 5: But Francine suddenly jumps in and steals Keith's magic skill.



Figure 6: Keith and his electric company friends think up a plan to get the magic power back from Francine.

Other experts did not find the program genuine and original. “Trying to create this fantasy world in a very artificial performance way. It is not a criticism. I just think that they really jarred up against where it was for me. It just felt ingenuous” (female expert, Australia). “I think it was just very false and kind of crammed in. I don’t think it actually works for the target audience” (male expert, USA).

Some experts were critical of using more adults than children in the program which they did not find appropriate. “I didn’t understand who it was for – for adults or older kids because this was weird” (female expert, Chile). “I think the adults were too much in front of the camera and the kids were behind. When we are going to educate like this I don’t want to see the adults in front” (female expert, Denmark). “I think the program is very long. I think the program can go up with more adult audience that are more international” (male expert, Lebanon).

In addition to the issue of the age of the target audience, the international experts also discussed the profile of the target audience of the program. Some experts, for example, thought that the program was geared toward Latin population who migrated into the United States and lacked English language skills.

However, some felt that the program was actually quite useful for certain sectors of the population in the United States. They argued that it should not be assumed that everyone in the United States is literate given the heterogeneity of the population. “I work with the underprivileged in the means of education. For them it would be great to have such a show because they have a lot of big problems in spelling in primary schools” (female expert, Germany). “I think the whole show was very educational” (female expert, Denmark).

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Figure 7: Keith makes Francine believe he has all the magic powers of the electric company and she decides to exchange the stolen powers with Keith.



Figure 8: Finally, Keith retakes the oath and joins the electric company formally.