

Horrible Histories

Horrible Histories was produced by Lion Television based in England. *Horrible Histories* punches way above its weight as a children’s sketch show, combining brilliantly written comedy with genuine factual information to create a new comedy genre. Inspired by Terry Deary’s books covering every era from the Stone Age to World War II, this show is original, ambitious and was an instant audience/critical hit.

Horrible Histories was one of the PRIX JEUNESSE INTERNATIONAL 2010 finalists in the 7-11 Non-fiction category.

International experts’ opinions

Many international experts liked the program a lot. “I like the *Horrible Histories*, but it was not true what they said – (*Laughter*) – I like very much programs in which people propose to us historical topics. It is so difficult to make it interesting for children. It was a funny way to do that” (female expert, Germany). They admired the theme of the program. “I think for the *Horrible Histories*, it was well done; because normally when we learn history at school we just have the facts, names. I think, because I also like history, it is very true. All these people of these events were sometimes crazy. If we go deep – like Caligula. I think it is well done” (male expert, Poland). They appreciated the combination of history and humour. “It totally works; it makes you laugh with history, and you learn because you like what you are watching” (female expert, Brazil). They liked the way it educated children: “They selected these straight facts – and you never heard about it- or even as an adult you don’t know about these facts. But, because they are also acted out, you can remember them. You have the feeling that you have learned a lot. You also feel entertained. This is really what I like about it” (female expert, Germany). Some even wanted to go back to their childhood to learn more from the history. “I wish I was in this history class when I was younger, because you knew that a lot of these people were so terrible, but it was a good way of absorbing all of this knowledge instead of – it was entertaining and within reach” (female expert, Jamaica). “It was very educational, because of this little rat: ‘It is true’- Maybe it makes you keen to go deeper into detail: to take a book and to read about these” (male expert, Poland).

There was an explanation about the books on which this program was based. “It is sort of the style of the books. It is based on these books, a series of books. That cartooning style, mixing things up, and



Figure 1: **Horrible Histories**.



Figure 2: **Horrible Histories** is a series of short historical stories.



Figure 3: Experts appreciated the use of humor in the program.



Figure 4: The program highlighted anecdotes from different eras in Europe.



Figure 5: Alexander the Great.

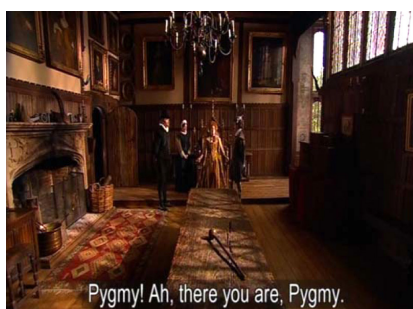


Figure 6: Queen Elizabeth and her idiosyncrasies.

mixing up facts is sort of what the books are like. It was about an adaptation. I like the books. I love the series. There are books, *Horrible Histories*, but it is pure comedy. It is by comedy writers and everything” (female expert, UK). They appreciated the humour depicted in the books and translated into the program. “They have captured the whole feeling of the books in this – very well, I think. I just seem to like this kind of humour. You know the stupid little things with the little – because they are cartoony” (male expert, Argentina).



Figure 7: Eccentric Victorians.



Figure 8: Dr. Hippocrates.

There were discussions about the cultural context of the program.

“Last night I was talking with Korean people, and they said that they liked it, but they couldn’t air it in Korea, because they are told to respect the old people. In Japan, maybe we can do it, but in a different way” (female expert, Japan). There was an explanation provided by a female expert from Israel. “I think it is a question really of a sense of humour of this culture – maybe I am wrong, because there is a certain specific British sense of humour – I think. It is a different mentality from other cultures. For us, with all our wars and so many soldiers – I don’t know; it depends on the atmosphere or the sense of humour of a specific culture – but I loved it – as an

adult.” There were diverse perspectives about the cultural context of the program. “I think it was really from the point of view from adults – it was perfect. Also, I don’t know, but maybe it is also a conflict of cultures or something like that, I am sure it is definitely accepted more in the UK than in other cultures, maybe from this age range. The other thing that I just realised was if it should be – I work in animation – animated, we don’t have this feeling – when you see a reality. This stylisation enables you to see the heavy situation and how it is. But, if it would be drawn in the right way, it should not be a problem” (female expert, Slovakia). The program was specific to the cultural traditions of the UK. “The company that made it – I don’t think that they have made much in children’s programs before. Yes, it follows the great British tradition of sketch shows. Interestingly, if you want another trend, there are very few sketch shows out there anymore” (male expert, UK).

However few international experts had different perspective. “I think in this case – too much information on the information parts. Because, if you have to read and to listen to this and all the pace at the same time, I think it is a little bit fast” (male expert, Germany).

*Prof. Dr. Dafna Lemish and Namrata Bansal
(Southern Illinois University, Carbondale, USA)*