

We are Boys

We are boys was produced by Halal, a dutch production company based in Amsterdam. *We are boys* is a story about growing up and what it means to be a boy. Jim and Sam are best friends. They have known each other forever and spend their days pestering their neighbours, sailing their boat and catching frogs. But in a year's time, Jim – the older of the pair – will leave the village to go to secondary school and Sam will stay behind. As the story unfolds, it becomes clear that this could be the last summer the two best friends will spend together.

We are boys was one of the PRIX JEUNESSE INTERNATIONAL 2010 finalists in the 7-11 Non-Fiction category.

International experts' opinions

The international experts praised the program lavishly. "It was very artistic; it was very beautiful. The credits were beautiful at the end, the music; it was really nice" (female expert, USA). "I find, it is brilliantly directed. You see everything there in the right place" (female expert, Brazil). They appreciated that the program was about the story of the boys. "But, it was very good that it was just a few stories about the boys. I think that was very good. But, it is fun to see the boys and what they are wondering about and everything they do. I liked that part of it" (male expert, Norway).

The international experts admired the theme of the program, presenting the young boys' process of growing up. "This whole show was about the fact that growing up also means losing things. For me, that was this whole thing. I just cannot forget everything. Just thinking about that line; it was like – wow – yes, it is true. I wonder how teenagers take that, or do they really understand? But, for me, it was really moving and kind of shocking, because it touched the heart" (male expert, Columbia). They liked the varied emotions displayed by the boys in the program. "I think it was an interesting aspect of their friendship and the moment where one says to the other one: 'we are growing apart.' He is like ok with it; he knows that that is going to happen, but he is ok with it. The other boy is like: 'I've been hurt – I still cannot face it'; that was a very interesting moment, because I think that every child accepts those things differently – growing apart and losing things. So, the one was stronger maybe, and the other one was not prepared for the growing apart" (female expert, Macedonia).

Some experts were more curious about the program and suggested to have one made for a girl audience as well. "I would like to find out about a girl-audience reaction. This is about boys, and how about the girl-audience reaction? Girls and the boys at this age are



Figure 1: Two friends: Sam and Jim.



Figure 2: Four friends enjoying.



Figure 3: Many experts admired the beautiful shots of the program.



Figure 4: The two friends enjoying their time together.



Figure 5: The program is about the growing-up stage of the boys.



Figure 6: The boys are shown discussing their fantasies.

feeling very differently, I think. Especially in Japan, at this age, girls and boys audiences their reaction – yes – is totally different” (female expert, Japan).

Few international experts questioned the fact that the program might not reveal a true image of the way boys are at that age. “I think it is too poetic and too beautiful to express the reality of these boys this way, because I thought that boys in this age are rougher” (female expert, Japan). Few however questioned whether the program was true to the actual growing up process of the boys. “I think it showed not quite the typical stereotype pictures of being a boy. It was a documentary, but I reacted to that” (female expert, Sweden). Few questioned if boys would actually watch the program. “I am not sure how much boys or girls want to hear boys discussing their existential questions – certainly not 7- to 11-year-olds. I just don’t think, especially boys, will be interested in it. It veers towards being a film for adults about childhood, to me. I am not saying that it is, because I am sure that there is also a lot about it that boys would love to see: stuff about boys. But, there is a lot about it that boys would just find they don’t want to talk about – just want to get on with being boys” (male expert, UK). In spite of this, some international experts liked the way the program was directed. “I thought it was very interesting, very close to the boys. They were very reflective about the situation, which I thought was amazing. I was wondering whether boys would like to watch something like that, because it is very close to their inner feelings. Sometimes one doesn’t really know whether boys really want to see something like that. But, I thought it was beautifully made” (female expert, Germany).

There were conflicting opinions among the international experts about how the program was directed. Some admired the creative production of the program. “For me it was like a dream of the summer, going out in the country, and you have these weeks with your friends, which are apart from this city life. So, you don’t need the computers or television. I think this can work even nowadays” (female expert, Sweden). Some, however, felt that the program was more of a movie than a documentary. They also thought that it was too perfect to be called a documentary. “I found it to be fiction” (female expert, Germany). Few also felt that the program did not give the impression of being real. “It felt staged to me, and I felt a bit manipulated – as an adult viewer. I am not sure about kids feeling manipulated. But, it felt very staged, and I thought there were scenes in there that put those particular children in a difficult position, especially with the boy who brought out the book. I just thought to myself that that felt staged. I don’t think that a child would sort of open himself up that way” (female expert, Canada). Some liked the program in spite of it being staged. “I thought it was a drama.

It was like a film. But, it was very different in the way that it was a documentary program” (female expert, Japan).

However, few international experts did not approve of the end of the program. “I felt that it was at the end a bit cold. You could not feel emotion” (female expert, Brazil). Some also suggested few inaccuracies during the production of the program. The perfect script and smooth direction were subjects of discussion among the international experts. “But, I don’t know; personally, I prefer something that is a bit rough around the edges – where you see those moments of truth glimpsed – maybe not shot the best way, but you think: yeah, I really see something there” (female expert, USA).

Few international experts thought that the program was not appropriate for the 7-11 category. “I thought it would have been good for 15 plus – in our situation – because for the 16-year-olds, that you had and the stuff about women. It was full of obscenities, and I was uncomfortable with it for 7- to 11-year-olds” (female expert, Ghana). Many international experts thought that the program was shown from an adult perspective. “It was too structured. I thought it was all controlled by the filmmakers, and not really from the kids’ world ” (male expert, Germany).

This program led to a discussion among the international experts about the responsibilities of a director of a children’s program. “I think it is a problem if we are not true within children’s television. If we put something on as a documentary, and the children trust us, we mislead them. I think it is our responsibility to make them aware of what a documentary is, what is news, what is fiction. If we betray them with such programs that are staged, I think that is not responsible acting for children” (female expert, Austria).

Some suggested the relevance of media literacy workshops for the directors of children’s programming. “Now kids have access to so much information of such varied quality online; they need to be able to discern. If the broadcasters aren’t taking that responsibility, at least at being clear and honest, then it does get to that thing: ‘well, I believe what I like to believe’, which, coming from the United States, has terrible consequences. (Laughter) But, I think that is a real responsibility to be able to discern in that level of media literacy, otherwise I think it is a real social betrayal as well as betrayal of the kids in particular” (female expert, USA).

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Figure 7: Jim and Sam are proud of their strong bond.



Figure 8: The boys know that they will grow up one day and lose certain things.