

Stella and Sam

Stella and Sam (Disney Junior, Canada) is an animated series about siblings Stella and Sam. In this 12-minute episode they plan an overnight camping trip in their own backyard (cf. screenshot 1). Joining them on their adventure is their dog Fred, Sam's friend Owen, and Macaroni – Owen's toy monkey (cf. screenshot 2).

Stella, who is gifted at creating fanciful answers for all of Sam's questions, tells a story about the friendship of the sun and the moon (cf. screenshot 3), then leads them all on a make-believe trip to the moon – using a tree trunk as a rocket ship (cf. screenshot 4). They practice moonwalking, and meet a visiting alien – in the form of a neighbor's cat (cf. screenshot 5). When they come "back home", they discover Macaroni is missing, but Fred returns to the moon to rescue him (cf. screenshot 6). Later, as they prepare to go to bed, Owen finds Fred curled up with Macaroni, fast asleep (cf. screenshot 7). As the program ends, Stella tells a bedtime story to the moon, about three campers who went to the moon (cf. screenshot 8). *Stella and Sam* is all about taking what the characters see and experience, and creating a story with it.

Stella and Sam was one of the PRIX JEUNESSE INTERNATIONAL 2012 finalists in the Up to 6 Fiction category.

International experts' opinions

International experts shared their opinions about *Stella and Sam* during the discussion sessions at the PRIX JEUNESSE INTERNATIONAL 2012. Many enjoyed watching this program as it was considered highly imaginative, high on action, and well suited for its target ages. The program was easy to follow, and served as a wonderful role model in showing children in this age group the joys of imagination. They also saw each of the characters, particularly Stella and Fred the dog, as strong and real.

"Stella as a character is very strong, very good. And there is so much laughter in the program." (male expert, UK)

Noting the lack of adult figures in the program, many experts said that Stella had filled the leadership role well. There was also a consensus that this program would be very well received by children who would find it very easy to relate to, due to the genuine humor, and voice actors who were children themselves. Most experts appreciated the realistic childhood interactions and voices.

"There were no adults in this program, but Stella took on that role herself. It was exciting to see that they went on this amazing adventure that you could imagine in your backyard. It was so exciting in a lovely, realistic way." (female expert, Germany)

"The voices were wonderful, and children will identify with them, as well. The humor was very natural, and so was the dialogue." (female expert, Germany)

"The program showed very strongly the use of child voices. That feeling of peer-to-peer communication was very well done." (male expert, Netherlands)



Ill. 1: Stella, Sam and Fred go camping in the backyard



Ill. 2: Owen comes along with his stuffed monkey, Macaroni



Ill. 3: Stella tells Sam and Owen a story about the sun and the moon



Ill. 4: They imagine a rocket ship ride to meet the man in the moon

The beautiful animation style, and the details in the story were also commented on by many of the experts, who also noted that even the dog, Fred, showed a great deal of personality in his rescue and subsequent cuddling with Macaroni.

“The animation reminded me of *Charlie Brown*. The dog character was amazing, and the whole story of the man in the moon was charming.” (female expert, Macedonia)

“It was the details in the script that were so lovely. It was small things that fit so well.” (male expert, Norway)



Ill. 5: They meet an alien on the moon

Stella’s talent for storytelling was remarked on by many of the experts, who also noted that the program acknowledged children’s need for fantasy play. The story contained a simple, attractive narrative that told a story through the imaginative eyes of a child.

“Seeing them having fun with imagination, and Stella’s encouragement of the two young ones – it was charming.” (male expert, UK)

“It’s pretty perfect.” (female expert, USA)



Ill. 6: Owen realizes they left Macaroni “on the moon”

Another point discussed was that at the end of the program it was obvious that in spite of their imaginative wanderings, the children were close to home the whole time. There was a sense of comfort and safety, and assurance that the things children depend on were close by the whole time.

“I liked the way they showed in the end a wide shot where you could see the proximity of the house about 10 feet away. You had this feeling you’re off in the whole world, all independent, but you’re actually just next to the picnic table!” (female expert, USA)

“*Stella and Sam* is a good example of imagination because what they are doing is attractive fun. It’s a role model of what ‘pretend play’ is like. It makes you want to go out and do it.” (female expert, USA)

Experts agreed that *Stella and Sam* was an attractive program that would appeal to children in this age group as well as their parents.



Ill. 7: Fred “rescues” Macaroni from the moon

Margaret Lundberg (University of Washington, Tacoma, USA)



Ill. 8: Stella tells a story about three campers to the moon

Screenshots from *Stella and Sam* © Disney Junior, Canada

Target Audience 7.98	Idea 7.50	Script 7.75	Realization 7.88
Average Score per Category by experts’ voters at PRIX JEUNESSE INTERNATIONALE 2012			