

# Bookaboo

**Bookaboo** was produced by Happy Films and broadcasted on CTV/ITV based in England. Bookaboo is a live action and animation series about a famous drum playing rock puppy who cannot perform his solo unless he's been read a story. This series was created to highlight the pleasure in sharing picture books. **Bookaboo** is an engaging and entertaining character and the celebrity guests encourage adults to pick up a book and share these warm and funny stories with children. The series aims to highlight the fun that can be had when adults and children share a book.

**Bookaboo**, the famous rock puppy, is getting ready to go on stage, but yikes he has lost his bojo and cannot perform! Eagerly waiting for the concert to start is rock legend Meatloaf, who goes back stage to find out what the holdup is. Finding out **Bookaboo** has lost his bojo, Meatloaf jumps into action like a bat out of hell and brings out the Bookabag and *The Lamb Who Came for Dinner* by Steve Smallman and Joelle Dreidemy. Can Meatloaf help **Bookaboo** ...?

**Bookaboo** was one of the PRIX JEUNESSE INTERNATIONALE 2010 finalists in the "up to 6: Non-fiction" category.

## International experts' opinions

All the international experts were excited about the program. "It was great; it was good" (female expert, Japan). "It shows a good story, too. I really liked it a lot" (male expert, Canada). The international experts loved the quality of the program. "It is nice; it is modern, like with the band – it is something very up-to-date, I think. But, what I wondered, they also put a lot of money – usually these programs are cheap programs. Then they make animation from the book, so they put a lot in it" (female expert, Israel). They also admired the script of the program. "This little **Bookaboo** had to have a little rest in being creative and wild – and being a drummer. So he went to this one who reads a book to him, and after this he was strong again, and he was really freed. It was also a very nice idea to have a rest and read a book. The idea behind it was really good – very fresh – in a fresh way" (female expert, Germany).

The production of the program also received a lot of praise from the international experts. "I thought it was amazingly shot, the effects, everything. This is the kind of show that goes into very competitive blocks of television. Actually you get a greater message: the animation was really good; the story was amazing; the acting was top-class" (male expert, Chile).



Figure 1: Meatloaf told Bookaboo the story of *The Lamb Who Came for Dinner*.



Figure 2: A wolf decided to eat a lamb that asked for shelter in his cottage.



Figure 3: The lamb began hiccupping after eating a carrot.

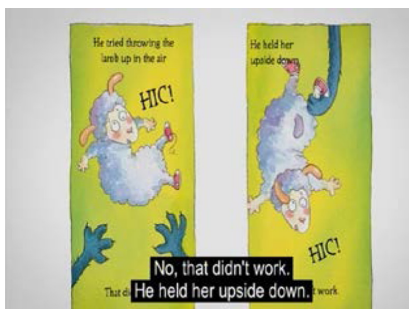


Figure 4: The wolf tried to stop the lamb's hiccupping but failed.

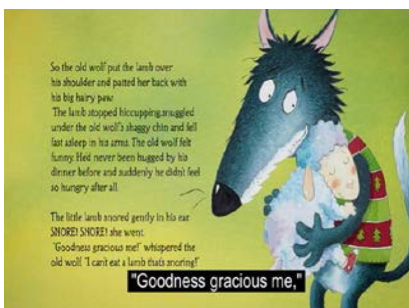


Figure 5: The wolf finally stopped the lamb's hiccupping by cuddling him into sleep.



Figure 6: The wolf was unable to eat the lamb and send it away.

The female expert from UK shed more light on the broadcast-context of the production of the program. “There are thirteen shows with thirteen different celebrities, thirteen different stories. It just happens to be transmitted daily, because it goes out on the CITV channel. That is a channel show. So one celebrity was invited to make one show. It used to have a lot of children’s programs, and now it has very few. This show was like the first live action type show that they are pushing for a long, long time. I think it has been very popular, so I am sure that they will go again with it. There used to be almost as much in terms as hours on ITV for children as there was on BBC. Now there is very, very little there, so it is sad. It was great that this one came through. They did very well with the money that they had, brilliant. They really did not have that much. It was very fast, but very neat animation of the picture book. It has done really well in England. It has won about a dozen awards and things for the producer. She is a new producer. That was her first breakthrough”

The international experts loved the relationship that was shown between the storyteller and the puppets that hooked the audience to the program. “It was very engaging. I thought it was great. There is a show on, that has been on many years in the US, called *Reading Rainbow*. It is the same idea, where there is a host and he reads a book. Then you have children’s reactions, and there is very little animation – they are from the pages of the book. This was a really nice spin on that, I thought. There was a lot of energy and enthusiasm from the puppet and the guy reading it. The animation had little links there that were cute. I thought it’s full of life; it was good” (female expert, USA).

There were discussions among the international experts about the role played by a popular and successful storyteller like Meatloaf in making the program engaging and effective. “I think it all depends on the performer. I would love to see another episode with somebody else who has a different reading style, because so much of it was based on his performance. It would be great to see somebody else who might be a well-known personality, but might not be quite as effective reading a book” (female expert, USA). The female expert from UK explained the importance of engaging celebrities in the program. “There is a big tradition of getting celebrities to read children’s stories. Hopefully the parents will also, but some of them just cannot do it.” Some also discussed the effectiveness of using a rock star in a program for preschoolers. “I have a nephew that is really crazy about rock music, and he has this little drumstick. He is three years old. He is banging it all the time” (male expert, Chile). Since the program was targeted at preschoolers the international experts were curious if the preschoolers actually knew the celebrity status of Meatloaf. “I wonder if preschoolers have any idea of who



Figure 7: The wolf was worried about the lamb and went out to look for him.



Figure 8: The wolf returned home and found the lamb sitting inside. They decided to live together.



Figure 9: Bookaboo was now finally able to perform music again.

Screenshots from Bookaboo © CTV/ITV

he is? Not being British, I have no idea. But the preschoolers are thrilled, whoever he is – then he would become famous because he was the reader and not because he is a rock star” (female expert). The international experts were astounded at the performance of Meatloaf as a narrator. “He would not have needed to be a pop star at all! “He is absolutely brilliant in storytelling” (male expert, Germany) and “the perfect entertainer for this story” (female expert, Germany). They loved the enthusiasm he portrayed during the show. “What I liked about the way he was performing was that it sort of liberated, as an example for parents to read to their children. I thought that it liberated that process a little bit, because you can be pretty dull and uninteresting when you are reading, or you can sort of engage it and make it more theatrical. I thought it was as a model really good. Also that he is this kind of larger-than-life-out-of-control guy, and it is OK to bring him into a situation where he is reading children’s books. That is really a good message” (male expert, USA). “I recognise him as famous actor – *so first I think: oh he is a good actor*, because he reads a lot, energetic – so I loved this show” (female expert, Korea).

Since the international experts basically liked Meatloaf as a narrator, they had discussions on choice of celebrities in other episodes of the program. A female expert from Germany was curious to know, “is it always rock celebrities?” The female expert from UK elaborated, “Meatloaf is a musician, but they aren’t always musicians, the people that read the books. But they are always celebrities that the parents will know. It doesn’t matter to the kids. So they are really actively trying to bring the parents in to watch it, and hopefully to read with their children.”

There were further inputs on the choice of celebrities used in the program. “We haven’t produced it, but we did all the web for *Bookaboo*; so we know about the show. It is a different celebrity every time. I think that the producer has done a great job at getting celebrities – a wide range of celebrities to read and act. Every one of the reading portions is really well done. I think this episode with Meatloaf is a real surprise to everyone – just how good he is. He is very good. He even pushes how scary the story is, but personally, I

think it works. The other stories would not be scary. They are silly ones. There is a nice mix. I would say that Meatloaf does stand out, but the other ones are pretty good too – very good. Meatloaf stands out, head and shoulders, the most internationally recognised celebrity. The other ones tend to be – I think the celebrities targeted at the parents, because the whole focus of the show is to get parents to get children asking their parents for a book a day, and to get parents watching the show, joining in, and starting to read more with their children. A lot of them are more appropriate ‘C Class’ celebrities that might feature in the gossip magazines” (male expert, UK).

They also discussed the character of *Bookaboo*. “I liked the doll – he is very cute, and the facial expression, even if he is a doll, but very active and energetic; so I loved the doll. Most of the performance was very great also” (female expert, Korea). They loved the chemistry between *Bookaboo* and Meatloaf. “I really like *Bookaboo*, because Meatloaf is just a great reader. I like the combination with the little dog and how he reacts with Meatloaf” (female expert, Germany). “I liked it that this puppet did not have this screaming voice” (female expert, Sweden). “To play drums is full energy. This doll was very cute, I think. To be a drummer gave more dimension for this puppet” (female expert, Sweden).

The program also had another objective which was to encourage parents and kids to read. A male expert from Pakistan had similar suggestion. “This is a question: when there is a computer, and now children sit in front of the computer in Pakistan and then don’t read, so definitely it would work to encourage to improve the reading skills of the children.”

Many international experts believed that the program really was a right step in encouraging children to read books. “It envisions so much about the importance of books, and those little short cuts that got animated out of the book, it envisions so much of a possible fantasy moment that every kid has as you read to your child” (male expert, Germany). “I have seen a lot of programs like that – using the books. It is very good to encourage children to read and to like books. This is one very good example; it is a fresh and new one” (female expert, Israel).

The experts appreciated the use of animation to highlight the importance of written words to children. “I just wanted to say that there were these parallel actions: they were two universes. There was the story, this wolf and the lamb, and then there was *Bookaboo* and Meatloaf. There was this beautiful parallel existence in this intermeshing. The way the animation was alive a little bit, and the text was – “Aha” – the letters jumped out at you. For me, that marriage of fantasy and reality was just fluid. I thought it was really beautiful. I enjoyed it. It is very important to return to the written word and use animation to give some energy and life to the written word. It was almost incidental, so it gave life back – the story comes from the word, and it reflected right back. I thought it was well treated” (female expert, South Africa).

However, there were some issues raised by some experts. “My issue with that show, as a preschool show, is that it kind of really celebrated celebrity in a way that I personally dislike. I feel like this whole culture of: he’s a rock star dog, and he is going to be on a big stage, and he lives in a trailer for celebrities. If you read the story, then you get to be on the stage and be the famous one. To me, it was bringing that whole culture, which I always associate with the next age group up – down into preschools. I felt like I loved how it was made, but that basic premise of rock star, or preschool dog, and then a rock star celebrity guest: to me it kind of pushed our preschoolers up in a way that I would like to wait till later to do” (male expert).

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