

Entertainment WEEKLY

KIDS' CORNER

A Wonderful 'World'

Teaching reading skills with humor and imagination, two PBS shows – “Super WHY!” and “Word World” – demonstrate that television can still be a valuable learning tool. Plus: CD's, a DVD and books.

By Gail Schiller

TV

Super WHY!

Word World

PBS Kids, check local listings

There was much hoopla last month in the wake of a study in which researchers determined that letting your wee ones watch Baby Einstein videos actually did them more harm than good, and while the jury is still out on that issue, it'd be silly to ignore the incontestable positives that some TV shows can offer. After all, this season PBS has a lineup that aims to encourage preschoolers not only to recognize letters, but to get them forming words and thinking about solutions to problems. It should be pointed out that these shows are helping pave the way to literacy using a medium that's often criticized for ruining it – and reaching the countless kids out there who don't get taken to the library or have books at home.

With Super WHY!, four gadget-savvy fairytale characters (Whyatt Beanstalk, Red, Littlest Pig, and Princess Pea) use their powers to find letters and resolve situations – Pig, for example, must find a way to discourage Jill from knocking down his block buildings. Made by Blues Clues co-creator Angela Santomero, there's lots of call-and-response type questions in SW! – so many that the original quest may be hard to remember – but the kids will have fun when they're asked to turn a big, bad wolf into a small, good one.

In Word World, set in a lush landscape filled with funny barnyard animals, the messages are clearer: because each animal is graphically spelled out, kids can watch as the letters P-I-G form that porcine creature. Even the scenery gets in on the act – a barn, a tree, a splash in the lake. When the animals take time to build a word (always a moment of great expectation and jubilation), you can actually witness the little wheels working in viewers' heads. After just one viewing, a 4-year-old who's always struggled with her letters volunteered to spell a new word: B-O-X. Presents don't get any better than that.



Super WHY!: **B**; Word World: **A-**

Recommended Ages: 3-5