

(Note To Editors: Gordon L. Berry is a noted child development specialist, a counseling psychologist and a professor in the Graduate School of Education at UCLA, who has written extensively on his special interest: the effects of media on young children)

"RAINBOW BRITE AND THE STAR STEALER"

EXPANDING THE IMAGINATIONS OF CHILDREN

THROUGH FANTASY AND ENTERTAINMENT:

A CHILD DEVELOPMENT PERSPECTIVE

by Dr. Gordon L. Berry

Filmmaking in the United States has been one of our country's many contributions to the world of the creative arts. Motion pictures have entertained, informed and taken their audiences on real and imaginary journeys through time and space. The films created for adult audiences have an especially long history of providing for them opportunities to relax and be entertained.

Children too deserve to have quality motion pictures that are uniquely created to meet their special viewing needs. These films should challenge their imaginations and entertain them. Young viewers also need strong and sensitive leading characters with whom they can identify; an interesting and diverse story concept that includes appropriate levels of action, creative adventure, and positive prosocial messages woven into the storyline; and, finally, a technical presentation that shows a high quality of professionalism.

Unfortunately, there recently has been a decreasing number of good films created for children. That is why as a professor

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interested in studying the development of children, as well as a parent concerned with how various media influence their behavior, I want to bring to your attention the new motion picture, "Rainbow Brite and the Star Stealer." This is an animated film based on the adventures of Rainbow Brite, a brave little girl who lives in the magical kingdom of Rainbow Land, and is responsible for bringing joy and color to the world. The adventure begins when a spoiled princess attempts to appropriate the planet Spectra, the galaxy's largest diamond and its sole source of light.

With the diamond gone, the earth will go dark, children will stop playing, and general hope will vanish all over the universe. One should not despair, however, because Rainbow Brite, accompanied by her white stallion, Starlite, a boy named Kryz from the planet Spectra, and a great many other characters, meet the forces of the Dark Princess with bravery, imagination and skill.

I was personally attracted to the screenplay of "Rainbow Brite and the Star Stealer" because it has many of the positive qualities that child development specialists look for when they are studying films that are suitable for children. Some of these qualities are: (1) it is a film that stretches the child's imagination through a fairy-tale-type fantasy and adventure, while at the same time, the storyline follows themes of friendship, hope and peace; (2) it is a film that shows young people those important qualities of responsibility and loyalty to oneself and others; (3) it is a film that has the special feature of a leading character portrayed by a small girl who is brave, intelligent, and

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shows sensitive behavior as she moves through her many adventures; (4) it is a film that provides an opportunity for the family to attend as a unit, or for the child to attend without an adult; and (5) it is a film that simply provides the opportunity for children to relax, and to be entertained by the wonder of the color, sound, mystery and fun of the story. Each of these qualities is important when considering films for young viewers, and I would like to discuss these features in greater detail.

A Film That Stretches The Imagination

Films designed for children that provide them with an opportunity to enter a world of make-believe can be an enriching experience. "Rainbow Brite and the Star Stealer" has in it those elements that complement the natural tendency that children have to engage in "make-believe." The child's own flights of fantasy can help him or her travel to distant lands as they pretend to explore new worlds. Somewhat like the fairy tales read to children, "Rainbow Brite and the Star Stealer" is designed to be very clear about what are the "good" and "bad" acts and deeds in the story, as well as to distinguish between the selfish and unselfish behavior on the part of its characters. It is a film of strange castles, animals that are faithful to their friends, and the magical powers of special and unique characters that the viewer will meet during the development of the story.

Throughout the fantasy and adventure, the film has admirably interwoven a number of prosocial messages for the younger and older viewer. For example, without being preachy, the film shows

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that selfishness, thievery and greed are not rewarded in life. On the other hand, loyalty, friendship, and good people working together are qualities that will bring peace and light to the world.

Significantly, the film manages to advance many of its ideas, fun, and story-telling through an action-adventure format that should not frighten the young people in the audience. Even the scenes in which the evil-doers finally learn their lesson are handled in a way that does not imply that they have met a violent end. Such an approach to the action and adventure in the film is especially significant to child specialists and parents because of the great concern for violent behavior found in various media presentations.

A Film About Responsibility And Loyalty

"Rainbow Brite and the Star Stealer" features throughout its storyline a leading character and others who show by their behavior what it means to be responsible and loyal friends. I especially liked the many scenes where Rainbow Brite and her friends realized that they could depend on each other for help even when there was a threatening situation. The film also has examples of characters giving their "second best effort" in order to help a friend or solve a problem. Because both of these elements of responsibility and loyalty emerged naturally within the context of the motion picture, they become important qualities for children to see in a film made especially for them.

A Film With A Special Leading Character

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A special positive quality of this movie is that it has a leading character known as Rainbow Brite. Children growing up today frequently see movies and television programs where the leading characters are boys. Rainbow Brite portrays to girls as well as boys that she can be sensitive, brave, intelligent, and also possess leadership qualities.

Those of us who study the effects of film and other media on young people do not always understand just what having a boy or girl in a leadership role teaches young children. Even without a clear understanding of the effects of having one type of character as opposed to another, it seems reasonable to assume that it is important to both sexes that films show a diversity of skills and talents exhibited by a girl in a leading role.

A Film For Family Viewing

Child development specialists and parent social action groups have always complained that too few films are designed for families, and even for children to see on their own. A special quality of "Rainbow Brite and the Star Stealer" is that it is uniquely designed for family viewing, or for a child to see without an adult present.

Another feature that makes the film special for families is that it is the type of story similar to those read or told to children by an adult. In addition, this film is written so that the child and adult can discuss the story long after it has been viewed.

I also feel that children of a variety of age groups can see

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this film and appreciate the story. In this sense, it is a story that should appeal to the very young child, the adolescent, and to the entire family.

A Film That Entertains Children

Children have the right and need to be entertained. I am convinced that adults are not aware of the need for young people to have periods when they can simply relax from the pressures of school, peer groups and those demands associated with the family.

"Rainbow Brite and the Star Stealer" should be a fine fantasy-adventure form of relaxation for children because of the number of "positive" qualities of the story itself. As a university professor, I would want parents and adults to encourage young people to read books, write creative stories, paint pictures, and play out-of-doors as their major forms of relaxation. I also feel that a good film and other forms of media, when appropriately monitored, can also be an excellent way for young people to relax and enjoy themselves.

Good motion pictures that are made to entertain and to stimulate in a positive way the imaginations of boys and girls can be an enriching experience for them. "Rainbow Brite and the Star Stealer" is a good feature film that is very entertaining, because it is full of fun, mystery, magic, adventure and positive values. For all of the film's special qualities, I highly recommend it for children and the "child" in every adult.

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