

Small Potatoes

Creative storytelling through music and songs

Small Potatoes (Little Airplane Productions, USA) is a short animation series. The “Small Potatoes” are a band of 4 singing potatoes (cf. screenshot 1) traveling the world making music (cf. screenshot 2) and making friends. Each song in the series celebrates a different musical genre, from Classical to Reggae, and from Hip Hop to Flamenco. The main characters of the series are Olaf, Nate, Chip and Ruby (cf. screenshot 3). They are 4 singing potatoes created to represent the honesty and humanity of preschool children everywhere. In their own words,

“Short Potato,
Tall Potato,
Light or dark,
We’re all potatoes at heart.”

In this episode, the “Small Potatoes” explore the concept of imagination (cf. screenshot 4). They sing about imagination in a gentle pop song accompanied by sitar sounds (cf. screenshot 5), discuss imagination (cf. screenshot 6) and all the while imagine through travel, song and music (cf. screenshot 7).

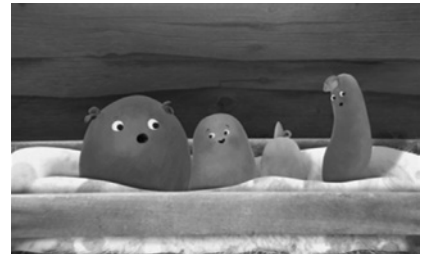
Small Potatoes was one of the PRIX JEUNESSE INTERNATIONAL 2012 finalists in the Up to 6 Fiction category.

International experts’ opinions

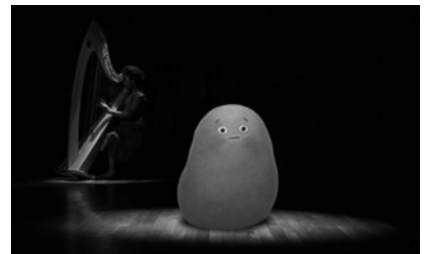
International experts shared their opinions about *Small Potatoes* during the discussion sessions at the PRIX JEUNESSE INTERNATIONAL 2012. Many of the international experts liked *Small Potatoes* very much, pointing out especially the music and songs. Some experts thought the music and songs were the best in the “up to 6” age category. One expert described it as “beautifully touching, lovely ... great fun ... totally brilliant” (male expert, UK).

Many experts also agreed that the program was fun and sweet, had great visuals, and that the use of music was appropriate for this age group. Some of the experts liked the use of potatoes as main characters of a show. One of the experts found the potatoes to be “emotionally touching” (female expert, Korea). Another expert thought it was “just nice to make such characters” with vegetables, which are “no beauties at all”, saying that she found it to be “very charming” (female expert, Germany).

One of the most discussed aspects of *Small Potatoes*, which the experts praised, was the use of children’s voices in the program. One expert said he likes “peer-to-peer communication” and that in this case “the standard was very high” (male expert, Netherlands). Another expert from Canada pointed out the use of children’s voices in the music.



Ill. 1: “Small Potatoes” sing their theme song



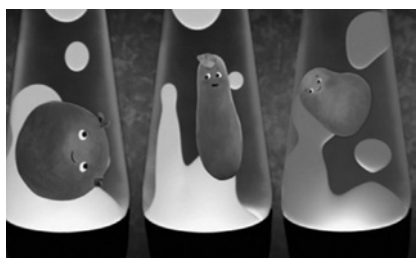
Ill. 2: Potato singing with background music



Ill. 3: “Small Potatoes” take a bath



Ill. 4: A small potato talking about imagination



Ill. 5: Singing about imagination



Ill. 6: "You can create things in your mind"



Ill. 7: Imagining through song

Screenshots from *Small Potatoes* © Little Airplane Productions, USA

A female expert from the UK wondered whether the children in the program, discussing the episode's theme of imagination, were really children. "Was this really them? Their opinions?" she asked, mentioning their level of articulation and vocabulary, but also added that "it was lovely to hear that language" as it may help to develop language skills in young viewers.

The use of humor in *Small Potatoes* was also discussed. One of the experts thought *Small Potatoes* has "a fantastic sense of humor". While he pointed out that it is easy in humor for preschoolers "to concentrate on gags and getting a laugh", that is not "the full story". The potatoes, he continued, "they're going 'I'm a potato'", and that is a "wonderful sense of humor ... kids can watch that and feel that without necessarily having to roll around the floor laughing" (male expert, UK). Another expert reacted to this comment saying "there were some lovely moments where you just smiled ... you didn't do a belly laugh, you just smiled" (male expert, UK).

Lastly, there was some discussion among the experts on the theme of imagination. Some thought the program was not very "imaginative", in the sense that there was much talking about imagination. "Obviously, the people who made the animation were very creative ... but the things they were talking about weren't very imaginative." (female expert, Germany) "It's really hard talking about imagination ... it's one of those things you can do but you can't really talk about doing." (female expert, USA)

Erga Lemish (Southern Illinois University, Carbondale, USA)

"It's a great privilege to make content for this audience"

A conversation with Josh Selig*

What inspired you to create the musical short series *Small Potatoes*?

I just thought there was something inherently funny about a band of singing potatoes. I wanted them to be unlike any existing preschool band so I borrowed loosely from great bands like the Beatles and the Rolling Stones.

Is it a typical preschool program?

Happily, no. It's very unusual. And though it was designed to appeal to preschoolers, we have discovered that we have a big following among teenage girls from around the world.

Being a classical TV series, do you make use of other media outlets?

We have a very active international Facebook page with over 1.6 million "likes". We are also on Instagram, Pinterest, Twitter and Vine, and we create new content for all of the social media sites on a daily basis. Our new feature film is called *Meet the Small Potatoes* and it's a rock "mocumentary" about the history of the band. The film premiered on the big screen at the New York International Children's Film Festival and a version of the film airs on Disney Junior in the US. The DVD will be released in North America in April 2013.

What is important for you in storytelling for preschoolers?

For me, it's important not to talk down to children in any way. Kids are able to appreciate great writing, great music and great comedy. Actually, I believe that human beings peak at age 4. At age 4, we are more creative, more emotional, more honest, and more compassionate than most 40-year-olds. It's a great privilege to make content for this audience. ■

* A short conversation with Josh Selig, Founder and President of Little Airplane Productions, New York, USA.

