

# Max & Ruby

**Max & Ruby** was produced by 9 Story Entertainment for Treehouse TV based in Canada. Based on the books of internationally acclaimed children's author and illustrator Rosemary Wells, Max & Ruby is a preschool program that celebrates being little. The series follows the adventures of two bunny siblings, the irrepressible and feisty Max and his sometimes bossy older sister Ruby. Max and Ruby cannot seem to find common ground and their plans almost always collide with hilarious results. Despite their differences, they are neither greedy nor selfish, and it is this quality of generosity in their relationship that makes them, and the series so distinctive. **Max & Ruby** encourages children to pursue their goals with enthusiasm and promotes the enjoyment of working and playing together.

Ruby is collecting stories from members of the community for her Good Neighbor Badge. Max has his "fire truck", which ends up helping him come to the rescue during each of Ruby's interviews. In the end, Ruby's report is about her brother the Good Neighbour, and his "fire truck!"

**Max & Ruby** was one of the PRIX JEUNESSE INTERNATIONAL 2010 finalists in the "up to 6 fiction" category.

## INTERNATIONAL EXPERTS' OPINIONS



Figure 1: Ruby asks who is the best bunny neighbor.

The international experts had mixed reaction to the program. A male expert from US introduced the show and explained the success of the show in the US market. "This show is one of the highest rated shows in the United States after many, many years. It is such a simple show. I really have tried to get my mind around what exactly kids love about this. I think it is the brother-sister relationship." Some found the program true to the emotions as expressed by the children in the program. "And that is genuine. It nails it, and he is in and out. It just comes across as sincere and real, I think" (male expert, Canada).



Figure 2: Mr. Huffington thought a good neighbor should watch over their friends.

However, some were very disappointed at the lack of emotions shown in the program as compared to the book. Books by Rosemary Wells are known for portraying the various emotions as expressed by the children and the program could not do justice to that depth. "I do think that the books show more emotion. This to me, the resolution wasn't natural – in that I think that in the sibling relationship she would have been a little bit more annoyed with him. There was none of that at all" (female expert, USA). Another male expert from Canada who was involved with the making of the program in its initial stages also expressed his disappointment. "There was no tension between them because of what was going on. There is no real emotional development." Some other experts, too, felt that

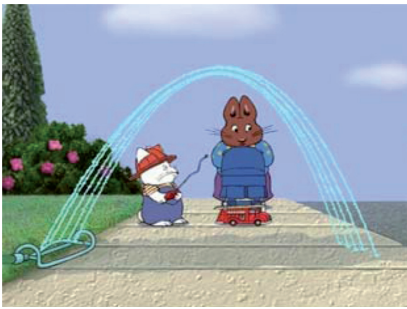


Figure 3: Max's fire truck stopped Mrs. Hufington from getting wet.



Figure 4: Mr. Piazza considered helpful bunnies as good neighbors.



Figure 5: Max used his hat to catch falling fruit.



Figure 6: Katy thought a good neighbor helped others in an emergency.

the program could not portray the emotional complexity which the main protagonists in the program ideally could have experienced at various places in the program. "One thing I said when watching it was: *I cannot believe that that girl wouldn't be incredibly jealous and angry at her little brother*. She is not human. Then how do you resolve that kind of love? That was one of the things that I thought was missing" (male expert, Canada).

A female expert from the USA reinforced the previous observations on the lack of emotional relationship in the program. "I was sort of making jokes at the end when they were singing. I was like: *God, she is really dim! You know? But apart from that, I just thought that even really young kids might get frustrated with her: doesn't she get it; it is Max!*"

They also discussed various reasons for lack of emotions expressed by children in the program. Some thought that the pressure of being commercially viable could be an issue for the producers. "You have to have 104 episodes or something like that. But the story is only, let's say, for 13 – you have 13 excellent ones, and the rest – you feel the construction too much; it feels very constructed after that" (female expert, Germany). They discussed various external factors like partners, finances and distributors that add to the pressure in creating a project of this nature and its ability to be true to its content. For example, a male expert from Canada explained: "It feels to me that they are so overloaded there, and what we really need is more of the imaginative content, the storytelling, and things that are not quite as utilitarian as (this is my personal opinion about those things) – so I think they are kind of related to that – that also flattens the storytelling."

A male expert from the US added another dimension to the discussion in bringing up issues of curriculum: "My gut feeling about shows like **Max & Ruby** is that the problem isn't curriculum, although I



Figure 7: Max's truck prevented Katy from falling down.



Figure 8: Ruby realized that Max was the greatest bunny neighbor.

think that there is a lot of problem with curriculum in a lot of shows. It is this bizarre notion of social-emotional curriculum. So, it is not about academic content. It is this idea that you can somehow define a social-emotional curriculum and build it into the show. Social-emotional curriculum tends to be very, very restricted in terms of what legitimate responses to behaviours are. That is where you kind of lose the complexity. I think the word 'imagination' – I think imagination is exactly what turns out to be missing, because that is where emotional complexity comes from. As long as we think about emotional matters as curricular, I think you end up with without stuff that can really grab a kid.”

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