

Education and Children's Media

A Safe Place to Invent the Future

“Public media can play a powerful role in supporting educational achievement for all children, especially in at-risk families. We are directly aligning WGBH’s engaging popular media content with our resources used in formal education settings. This vastly increases the potential for educational impact at home and in school.”

—Terry Fitzpatrick, Vice President, Children’s Media and Education

Nothing hits closer to the core of WGBH’s mission than education. We are, after all, the WGBH *Educational* Foundation. The rise of fake news, the uneven quality and subsequent lack of trust in content, and ready access to inappropriate material challenge parents and teachers to make safe and smart choices for children’s media consumption. Increasingly, our young citizens are experiencing the world digitally *and* visually. In such a world, a trusted producer of transformational children’s media created in the public

interest plays a pivotal role in education across the United States.

Our children’s digital media experience is inextricably intertwined with learning. We owe it to this rising generation of digital natives to enrich their lives with powerful, positive media choices that inspire and entertain as they teach critical thinking skills, media literacy, and civic engagement. WGBH has always benefited from a culture that rewards bold, educationally sound programming, content that believes in kids and is as fun as it is fundamental.

This vision has earned the trust of millions of American families of all backgrounds and means in all parts of the country. We are positioning ourselves for continued leadership in the digital century.

The Good Business of High Risk

Highly original, risk-taking children's educational programs and productions from WGBH have a proven track record. Airing in 83 countries and averaging almost 10 million viewers weekly in the U.S., *Arthur* is one of the highest-rated programs on PBS Kids. Dealing with such issues as asthma, dyslexia, cancer, diabetes, and Asperger's syndrome, *Arthur* the anthropomorphized aardvark celebrates and models understanding, respect, and compassion. Reaching across virtually all socioeconomic groups, *Arthur*'s popularity as a trusted and safe friend to children everywhere continues to grow.

Zoom, another WGBH original, was an entirely new kind of program when it premiered on PBS in 1972. Created almost entirely by children, it was, for the most part, unscripted. The series for ages eight and up aired for six years. A remake followed from 1999 to 2005. Both versions featured games, plays, poems, recipes, jokes, songs, movies, science experiments, and informal chats on subjects such as hospitals, prejudice, and more, mostly suggested by young viewers.

These are but two examples of many groundbreaking programs and projects that have benefited from WGBH's open and experimental approach to developing children's media. WGBH also plays a leadership role in extending access to educational media as well. Captioning was invented at WGBH to make films and descriptive videos accessible to people with hearing loss. We created the first broadband re-source service offering segments from national broadcasts re-edited for classroom use to Massachusetts teachers. Now known as PBS LearningMedia, this vast collection of WGBH content is freely accessible everywhere. Some two million Pre K-12 educators nationwide subscribe, selecting from an extraordinary library of richly curated digital content, much of it with lesson plans and additional resources.

Growth spurts

Like all of WGBH, educational programming and children's media are undergoing dramatic change. Tablets, smartphones, and laptops have increasingly become the communication hub binding together families, teachers, and students. The vital importance of best-of-class digitally based learning media has become

urgently apparent. Equally important, for dual-income or single-parent families and at-risk children, safe and reliable media choices can become a key partner in successful upbringing.

Current projects at WGBH aim high and reach children where they are—in class, at home, on their devices. *Peep and the Big Wide World*, a half-hour science program for preschoolers, explores a range of scientific and math concepts in ways that are fun and engaging. Online, *Peep* provides free teaching and learning tools for parents and educators. Learning games and downloadable apps reach the inquisitive fingers of preschoolers. *Peep* is an immersive and developmentally appropriate world of discovery that taps the innate curiosity in every child—and every future scientist.

First 8 Labs is a research and development lab focused particularly on how media can help promote early childhood development for at-risk families. It's a research and development initiative "where we're experimenting with different types of media content to see what is the most effective from an educational outcome standpoint," says Terry Fitzpatrick, Vice President of Children's Media and Education. "It's iterative and participatory...and very unlike television."

Design Squad Global, another innovative WGBH educational multimedia offering, is an engineering-centric cross-platform learning experience primarily for tweens and young adolescents. Through videos, games, and hands-on lesson plans, *Design Squad Global* is built around the practice of science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) skills to inspire future scientists and engineers. The *Design Squad Global* YouTube channel alone boasts 43,000 subscribers. With more than 14 million views, it also features hundreds of videos as well as video blogs and playlists.

At a time of deep divisions in the United States, *Crossing the Divide* promises to satisfy a national hunger for greater civic engagement, media literacy, and trust in journalism. By leveraging the nation's trust in public media, it will help pierce the "filter bubble" created by social media, echo chambers, fake news, and growing distrust in traditional media. Bringing together state universities, high schools, public radio stations, newspapers, and media outlets, the project will create a tapestry of stories and events that shed light on the critical issues of our time from diverse perspectives and give voice and experience to the next generation of storytellers, journalists, and leaders.

In collaboration with NASA, WGBH Education is bringing the excitement and wonder of space discovery to classrooms across the country. Called *Bringing the Universe to America's Classrooms*, this innovative project uses data, images, and media resources from real space-science missions and investigations. An immersive STEM learning experience, it leverages a powerful partnership between science and media leaders.

Welcome to the Future

Given today's device-agnostic digitally native child, new educational media projects at WGBH must, from inception, incorporate multi-platform and multimedia applications. To reach these young citizens, we must reach them everywhere. We must reach them with topical subjects in familiar environments to capture their interest and spur curiosity.

Leveraging engagement to impart greater media literacy and awaken a deeper civic participation, we can expand young learners' appreciation of the world around them and connect them with interests they may never have even known they had. WGBH's beloved animated role models can be the stars of such an effort. According to Carol Greenwald, Senior Executive Producer and Director of Children's Media, "We're exploring how to use the *Arthur* platform to get kids talking about civic literacy and active citizenship."

We can expand access to engaging children's media if we expand access to the research and development funding that brings new ideas to fruition. For example, a new youth media project about food combines virtual technology, social media, and learning media to empower children to make informed food choices. Where will this project find funds to explore, to experiment, to create?

The Promise of Children's Media

All of these plans and priorities depend on research and development. They require the freedom to try an idea, refine it, and try it again. They demand research into best educational practices and the engagement of expert producers and rising talent. They depend on ready access to capital and flexibility to invest it where it is needed most. This is how we will continue to leverage our extraordinary culture and assets to create the next generation of transformative educational media in the public interest.