

What Was The Best Show On Cartoon Network? (From Back In It's Start Up Until Today)

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Cartoon Network has been a staple of childhood entertainment for millions around the world since its inception in 1992. Over the decades, the network has evolved, introducing countless iconic shows that have left a lasting impact on fans of all ages. But amidst the vast array of animated series, one question persists: what was the best show on Cartoon Network? Was it the early classics that shaped the network's identity, or the modern hits that continue to captivate new generations? In this comprehensive exploration, we'll look back at the history of Cartoon Network, analyze the most influential and beloved shows, and ultimately determine which series stands out as the best of all time.

The Rise of Cartoon Network: A Brief History

Before diving into specific shows, understanding the origins of Cartoon Network provides valuable context. Launched on October 1, 1992, as a cable channel dedicated solely to animation, it was initially a joint venture between Turner Broadcasting System and Warner Communications.

Early Years and the Launch of Classic Cartoons

In its early days, Cartoon Network primarily aired classic animated shorts, including Looney Tunes, Tom and Jerry, and Hanna-Barbera classics like The Flintstones and The Jetsons. This foundation helped establish the channel's identity as a hub for timeless animation.

The 1990s: The Birth of Original Programming

The mid-90s marked a turning point with the introduction of original programming, beginning with shows like The Moxy Show and What's New, Scooby-Doo?. However, the true revolution came with the launch of innovative series that redefined what cartoons could be.

Iconic Shows That Shaped Cartoon Network

Over the years, Cartoon Network has been home to numerous groundbreaking series. Some have become cultural phenomena, influencing generations and shaping the network's legacy.

Classic Hits of the 1990s and Early 2000s

- **Dexter's Laboratory** (1996): Created by Genndy Tartakovsky, this show about a boy genius and his secret laboratory became an instant hit, showcasing sharp humor and unique animation style.
- **The Powerpuff Girls** (1998): This superhero parody featuring Blossom, Bubbles, and Buttercup combined action, comedy, and girl power, becoming a defining show of the era.
- **Johnny Bravo** (1997): Known for its slapstick humor and Elvis Presley-inspired protagonist, Johnny Bravo exemplified the network's edgy comedic style.
- **Ed, Edd n Eddy** (1999): Focusing on a trio of pre-teen friends and their schemes, this series was praised for its unique animation and humor.

The 2000s: A New Wave of Creativity

This decade introduced a wave of innovative shows that pushed boundaries and garnered critical acclaim.

- **Samurai Jack** (2001): Created by Genndy Tartakovsky, this series was lauded for its cinematic style, minimal dialogue, and compelling storytelling.
- **Foster's Home for Imaginary Friends** (2004): A heartwarming series about imaginary friends and their creator, showcasing creative character design and humor.
- **Codename: Kids Next Door** (2002): An imaginative series about kids fighting against adult tyranny, appealing to a sense of adventure and rebellion.
- **Teen Titans** (2003): This animated adaptation of the comic book series combined superhero action with complex character development, attracting a broad audience.

The 2010s and Beyond: Modern Classics and New Favorites

As animation technology advanced, so did the creativity on Cartoon Network.

- **Adventure Time** (2010): Often cited as one of the greatest animated series of all time, it blended surreal humor, emotional depth, and inventive storytelling.
- **Regular Show** (2010): Known for its quirky humor and nostalgic references, this show became a staple for older kids and teens.
- **Steven Universe** (2013): Praised for its mature themes, diverse representation, and musical episodes, it redefined what animated series could accomplish emotionally.
- **Teen Titans Go!** (2013): A comedic reboot of the original Teen Titans, it achieved massive popularity with its humor and fast-paced style.

What Makes a Show the “Best”? Criteria and Considerations

Determining the best show on Cartoon Network isn't solely about ratings or popularity. Several factors contribute to a series' enduring legacy.

Cultural Impact

Shows like The Powerpuff Girls and Adventure Time have influenced fashion, memes, and even other media, cementing their place in pop culture.

Innovation and Creativity

Series that introduced new animation styles, storytelling techniques, or thematic depth—like Samurai Jack and Steven Universe—are often considered top-tier.

Longevity and Fanbase

Long-running shows with dedicated fan communities, such as Dexter's Laboratory or Regular Show, demonstrate lasting appeal.

Critical Acclaim and Awards

Recognition from critics and awards, including Emmys and Annie Awards, can also indicate a show's quality.

The Contenders for the Title of "Best Show"

While opinions vary, certain shows frequently emerge as frontrunners in discussions about the best Cartoon Network series.

Adventure Time

Often hailed as a groundbreaking series, Adventure Time expanded what could be achieved in animated storytelling. Its innovative world-building, emotional storytelling, and memorable characters like Finn and Jake have made it a fan favorite and critical darling. Its influence extends beyond animation, inspiring art, music, and even academic analyses.

The Powerpuff Girls

As one of the earliest hits, The Powerpuff Girls helped define Cartoon Network's identity in the late 1990s. Its unique blend of superhero tropes, humor, and empowering themes for young girls made it a cultural icon.

Steven Universe

With its mature themes of love, identity, and acceptance, Steven Universe challenged traditional notions of children's programming. Its musical episodes and inclusive storytelling have earned it widespread praise and a dedicated fanbase.

Regular Show

Known for its quirky humor and nostalgic references, Regular Show appealed to

both kids and adults. Its surreal scenarios and relatable characters set it apart from other animated series.

Conclusion: The Verdict

Ultimately, choosing the "best" show on Cartoon Network depends on personal preferences and criteria. However, if we consider impact, innovation, critical acclaim, and lasting popularity, Adventure Time frequently emerges as the top contender. It revolutionized the landscape of animated television, appealing to audiences of all ages with its depth, humor, and artistry. Its influence can be seen in countless subsequent shows and in the broader animation industry.

That said, shows like The Powerpuff Girls, Steven Universe, and Regular Show have also left indelible marks, each excelling in different aspects. The rich history of Cartoon Network is a testament to its ability to produce diverse and memorable series that resonate across generations.

In the end, the best show on Cartoon Network is a matter of personal nostalgia and taste. Whether it's the nostalgic charm of Dexter's Laboratory, the innovative storytelling of Samurai Jack, or the emotional depth of Steven Universe, the network's legacy is built on a tapestry of exceptional programming—each contributing to its status as a pioneer in animated entertainment.

So, what was the best show on Cartoon Network? Perhaps it's the one that left the deepest impression on you. For many, that answer might be Adventure Time, but for others, it could be The Powerpuff Girls, Samurai Jack, or Steven Universe. Whatever your choice, one thing is clear: Cartoon Network's influence on animation and pop culture remains unparalleled.

Frequently Asked Questions

What was considered the flagship show during Cartoon Network's early years?

In its early years, 'Dexter's Laboratory' and 'The Powerpuff Girls' were considered flagship shows, helping define the network's creative identity and popularity.

Which Cartoon Network show has achieved the most lasting popularity over the years?

'Adventure Time' is often regarded as one of the most iconic and influential shows, maintaining popularity from its debut in 2010 through years of

critical acclaim and a dedicated fanbase.

How did 'Teen Titans Go!' impact Cartoon Network's programming lineup?

'Teen Titans Go!' became a hugely popular show after its debut in 2013, revitalizing the Teen Titans franchise and boosting ratings, though it also sparked some debate among fans about its humor and style.

Has 'Regular Show' been considered one of the best shows on Cartoon Network?

Yes, 'Regular Show' has been highly praised for its unique humor, surreal storytelling, and nostalgic appeal, earning a strong fanbase and critical acclaim during its run from 2010 to 2017.

What recent Cartoon Network shows are considered some of the best today?

Recent standout shows include 'Craig of the Creek' and 'Infinity Train,' both praised for their inventive storytelling, engaging characters, and appeal to both kids and adults.

Additional Resources

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Since its inception in 1992, Cartoon Network has become a cornerstone of childhood entertainment for millions of viewers worldwide. Known for pioneering innovative animation, embracing diverse storytelling styles, and fostering a community of devoted fans, the network's programming has evolved dramatically over the decades. Amidst this rich history, one question often arises among fans and critics alike: What was the best show on Cartoon Network? This inquiry invites a deep dive into the network's vast catalog, examining shows that not only defined eras but also left lasting cultural impacts.

Origins and Early Programming: Setting the Foundation

When Cartoon Network launched in 1992, it was primarily a channel dedicated to classic animation, showcasing beloved cartoons like Tom and Jerry, The

Flintstones, and Scooby-Doo. However, its true potential was realized with the introduction of original programming, which would eventually define its identity.

The Birth of Original Content

In the mid-1990s, Cartoon Network began investing heavily in original programming, seeking to carve out a unique niche. The first significant hit was *The Moxy Show* (1993), which, despite mixed reviews, demonstrated the network's willingness to experiment. However, it was *Dexter's Laboratory* (1996) that truly marked a turning point. Created by Genndy Tartakovsky, the show combined smart humor with inventive animation, appealing to both children and adults.

Early Classics That Laid the Groundwork

Other influential shows from this era include:

- *Cow and Chicken* (1995): Known for its surreal humor and distinctive animation style.
- *The Powerpuff Girls* (1998): A blend of superhero action and comedy, with a strong female protagonist lineup.
- *Samurai Jack* (2001): An epic tale of a samurai in a dystopian future, recognized for its cinematic quality and storytelling.

While these shows were groundbreaking, the debate about the “best” often centers on later, more influential series.

The Rise of Iconic Series: The 2000s and Early 2010s

The new millennium brought a wave of shows that would cement Cartoon Network's reputation for innovative and influential animation.

Emergence of Cult Classics

1. Adventure Time

Premiering in 2010, *Adventure Time* is frequently heralded as one of the greatest cartoons ever made. Created by Pendleton Ward, it combined whimsical storytelling, complex characters, and layered humor. Its ability to appeal to

both children and adults set it apart, fostering a dedicated fanbase and critical acclaim. The show's influence extended beyond animation, inspiring comics, merchandise, and even academic discussions about storytelling.

2. Regular Show

Debuting in 2010, Regular Show offered a nostalgic take on youth, blending surreal humor with relatable themes. Its unique art style and absurd storylines made it a standout during its run, earning multiple awards and a loyal following.

3. Foster's Home for Imaginary Friends

Premiering in 2004, this show combined heartwarming storytelling with imaginative characters, setting a high standard for creative animation.

Impact on Animation and Popular Culture

These shows showcased Cartoon Network's willingness to push boundaries—integrating mature themes, experimental animation techniques, and complex character development. They also helped redefine what a “kids’ show” could be, appealing to a broader demographic.

The Golden Era: The 2010s and Critical Acclaim

The 2010s marked a golden era for Cartoon Network, with a lineup that would influence the industry for years.

Adventure Time: A Cultural Phenomenon

As mentioned earlier, Adventure Time is often ranked as the best show in Cartoon Network history. Its storytelling depth, layered humor, and innovative animation techniques elevated it beyond typical children's programming. The series tackled themes like friendship, loss, and identity, resonating deeply with viewers of all ages.

Key aspects that make Adventure Time the best include:

- Narrative Complexity: The series employed serialized storytelling, with overarching plots and character arcs rarely seen in children's animation.
- Creative World-Building: The Land of Ooo was an expansive universe filled with unique characters, lore, and mythology.
- Artistic Innovation: The show's vibrant, expressive art style broke away from traditional cartoon aesthetics, influencing subsequent animation projects.

Steven Universe and Its Cultural Significance

Premiering in 2013, Steven Universe by Rebecca Sugar became a groundbreaking series that focused on themes of love, acceptance, and self-discovery. Its emphasis on LGBTQ+ representation and emotional storytelling earned widespread praise, making it a landmark series for diversity in animation.

Other Noteworthy Shows of the Era

- Teen Titans Go! (2013): A comedic reinterpretation of the popular superhero team.
- The Amazing World of Gumball (2011): Known for its meta-humor and eclectic animation styles.

Contemporary Era and Ongoing Series

In recent years, Cartoon Network continues to evolve, balancing nostalgia with fresh content.

Recent Hits and Their Contributions

- Craig of the Creek (2018): Celebrated for its relatable storytelling and depiction of childhood adventures.
- Infinity Train (2019): Lauded for its complex narratives and mature themes, garnering critical praise.
- Hilda (2018, co-produced with Netflix): An animated fantasy series with rich storytelling and beautiful animation.

While these shows are highly regarded, many fans and critics still consider Adventure Time as the pinnacle of Cartoon Network's creative output.

What Makes a Show the "Best"? An Analytical Perspective

Determining the "best" show involves multiple criteria:

- Cultural Impact: How the show influences popular culture, inspires other

creators, and resonates with audiences.

- Critical Acclaim: Awards, reviews, and scholarly recognition.
- Longevity and Popularity: Enduring fanbases and continued relevance.
- Innovation: Pushing animation boundaries, storytelling techniques, and thematic depth.
- Representation and Diversity: How well the show reflects diverse experiences and promotes inclusivity.

Applying these criteria, Adventure Time consistently ranks at the top due to its innovation, influence, and broad appeal.

Conclusion: The Verdict on the Best Cartoon Network Show

While opinions vary, the consensus among fans, critics, and industry insiders leans heavily toward Adventure Time as the best show in Cartoon Network's history. Its groundbreaking storytelling, artistic innovation, and cultural resonance have set a standard for animated series worldwide. However, it's essential to acknowledge the network's broader legacy—its ability to nurture a diverse array of influential shows like The Powerpuff Girls, Samurai Jack, Steven Universe, and Regular Show.

Ultimately, the "best" show is subjective, often reflecting personal nostalgia, thematic resonance, or artistic admiration. Nevertheless, Adventure Time's profound impact cements its place as the defining series of Cartoon Network's storied history, representing the network's capacity to entertain, innovate, and inspire across generations.

In summary, Cartoon Network's legacy is built on a spectrum of exceptional shows, but Adventure Time stands out as the most influential, innovative, and beloved—making it, arguably, the best show in the network's history.

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