## Networks' educational programming questioned

Associated Press Writer

WASHINGTON, D.C. - Which of the following TV shows are educational?

a) "NBA Inside Stuff," a behind-the-scenes look at NBA players and coaches.

b) "Free Willy," an animated series about a 12-year-old named Jesse and his friend, a threeton whale named Willy.

c) "Beakman's World," in which an actor and two sidekicks explain scientific concepts.

d) "The Magic Adventures of Mumfie," about a lonely animated elephant who sets out to find

Answer: All of the above, according to the major broadcast networks. ABC airs "Free Willy," CBS has "Beakman's World," NBC does "NBA Inside Stuff" and Fox offers "The Magic Adventures of Mumfie."

The shows, network executives say, satisfy their obligations under a 1990 law to put on programs that serve the educational and informational needs of children. But Kathryn Montgomery, president of the

Center for Media Education, and other critics don't think programs like "NBA Inside Stuff" and "Free Willy" meet those needs.

As federal regulators consider adopting tougher rules, the debate over children's televi-

sion has largely centered on whether the government should require TV stations to air a minimum amount of educational shows.

But what is educational?

The Federal Communications Commission, which is responsible for making sure broadcasters comply with the law, says educational and informational programs are shows that further "the positive development of children 16 years of age and under in any respect, including the child's intellectual/cognitive or social/emotional

That definition, the FCC admits, is vague and has resulted in confusion and some creative interpretations. Some stations have counted reruns of "The Jetsons" and "Leave it to Beaver" as fulfilling their educational obligations. And a study released last week by Dale Kunkel, a communications professor at the University of California, Santa Barbara, found some stations classifying "America's Funniest Home Videos," "Mighty Morphin Power Rangers" and even "Yogi Bear" as educational.

"The FCC has failed to provide a definition to give guidance to broadcasters," FCC Chairman Reed Hundt admits.

But the agency is considering adopting a clearer and tighter definition of what constitutes an educational program.

Industry and public comments on this and Janice Gretemeyer.

other proposals are due to the FCC today.

"Unless the FCC adopts tougher rules, you are going to see more shows move into prosocial themes, what I call 'lite educational programs' - they qualify but they are not really educational," Montgomery said.

**CBS President Peter Lund agrees** 

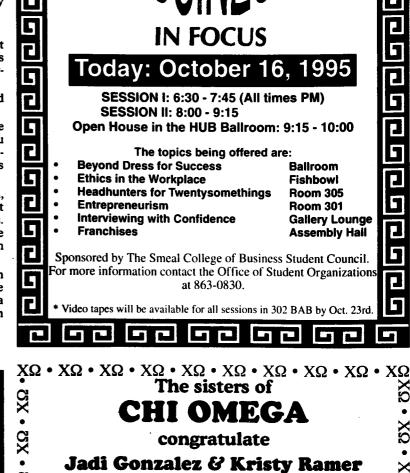
"You need a clearer definition because look at the disparate number of programs classified as educational . . . that are not educational or informational," he said in an interview.

However, other network chiefs interviewed saw no need for a clearer definition.

NBC President Robert Wright: "I think the definition is broad enough today. . . . When you get a definition too tight, too narrow, what generally happens is you get a show that parents love and kids aren't interested in."

Chase Carey, chairman of Fox Television, said, "I can't figure out how you'd say it - what is educational — to put it in a set of definitions. The risk with a formula like 'here are the five tests and I comply' is that you end up with something that kids probably won't watch."

Children who watch "Free Willy" can learn about environmental concerns, which under the FCC's existing definition would be furthering a child's social needs, says ABC spokeswoman

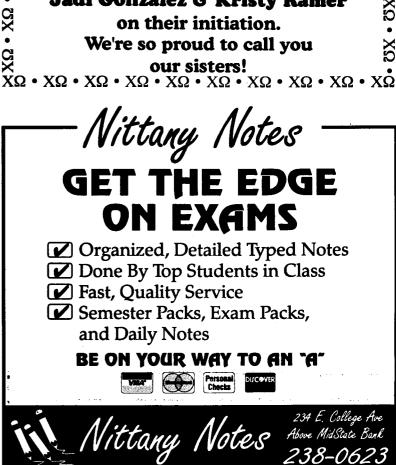












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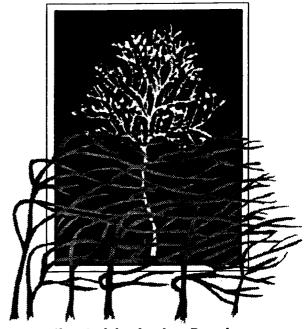
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