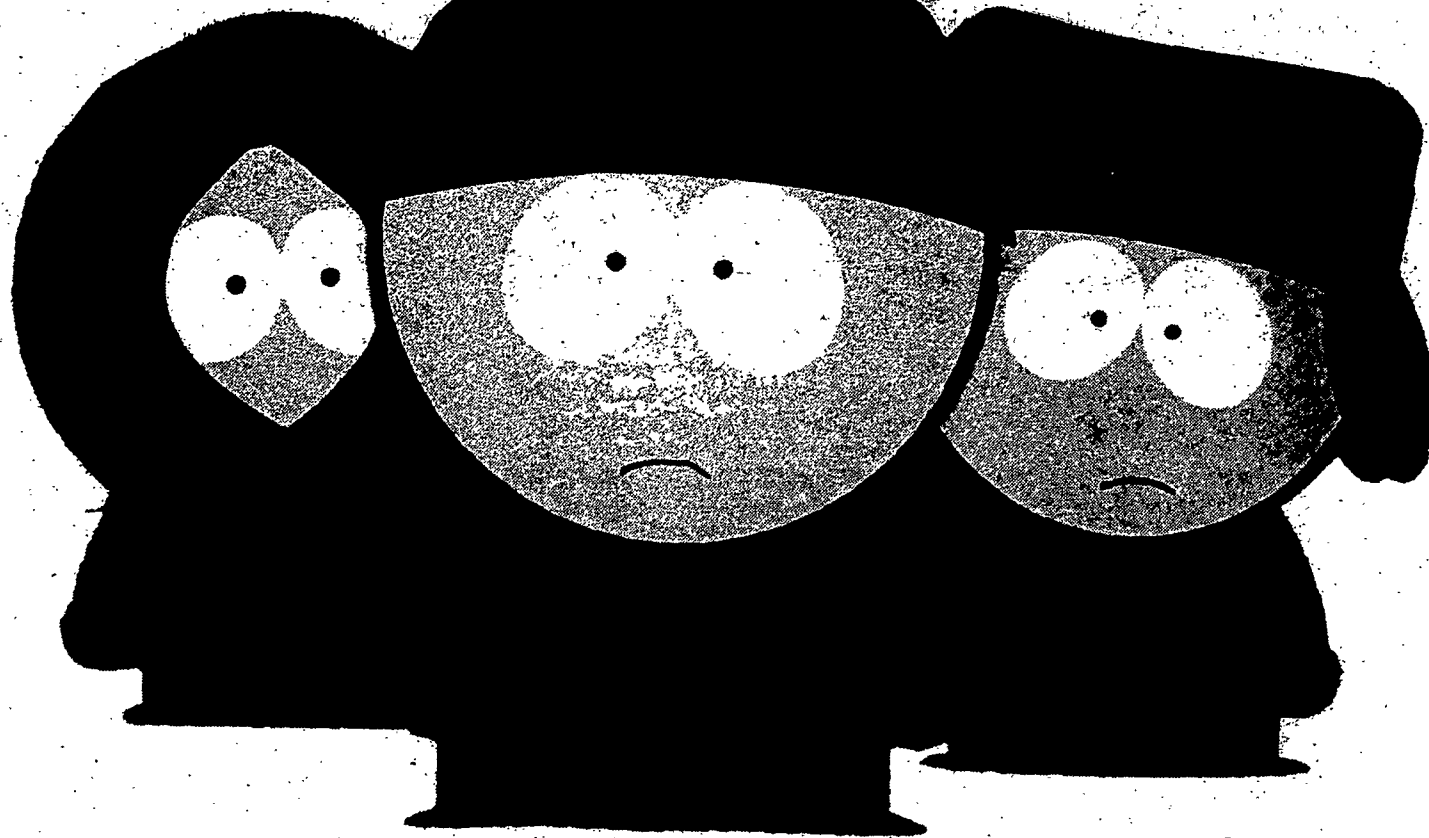


Story by
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Coming Next Week:
ADVICE



Comedy Central Network

South Park characters Kenny, Stan and Kyle, from left.

Great humor or gross-out?

When was the last time you saw a cartoon show about a circumcision?

Or that featured a piece of human excrement, "Mr. Hanky the Christmas Poo," as a character?

Or a character named "Jesus," drawn in the popular image of Christ, engaging in fisticuffs with Satan?

Or a boy who gets so nervous when a girl attempts to kiss him, he vomits all over her?

That adorable-looking boy with the queasy stomach, Stan, is pictured with his friends on this page. You may have also noticed this crew on bumper stickers and T-shirts.

But don't be misled by these characters' cute looks. If you've never visited *South Park* on the Comedy Central cable network, it's a trip you — and your parents — may want to take with caution.

By the time the show is over, you may be holding your sides from laughing, or shaking your head in disgust — or doing both.

The show depicts a cast of 8-year-old children who struggle with life in the '90s in fictitious South Park, Colo. Each 30-minute episode contains humor based, in part, on vulgar language and references to bodily functions.

But *South Park* is also popular with several students at Geneva DeSales High School, according to Aaron Passalacqua, a DeSales senior. Aaron, 18, said he's a big fan of the show and displays a *South Park* sticker on the back window of his car.

"People draw the (*South Park*) characters in art class," said Aaron, a parishioner at St. Stephen's Church in Geneva. He also noted that students enjoy mimicking the characters' voices.

Those voices in the cartoon often emit language that cannot be printed in this newspaper. Frederika Eilers said she hadn't been aware of this fact when she invited a few friends over recently to watch a tape of a *South Park* episode.

"I was like, 'Let's turn the TV down because I don't want my mom to hear what they're saying,'" said Frederika, 14, from Church of the Good Shepherd in Henrietta.

As it turned out, Frederika said her mom didn't overhear the show. Rather, she "thought it was cute we were watching a cartoon."

Critics of the show wouldn't call it cute. In fact, Dominic Giancona said he becomes upset when he hears second- and third-grade students repeat profane language from the show.

"It kind of gets me angry. This is, like, the coolest thing for them to talk about," said Dominic, 14, an eighth-grader at Ss. Peter and Paul Church in Auburn. He attends St. Francis of Assisi Church.

South Park is apparently the "coolest" show on cable TV, according to Tony Fox, a spokesman for Comedy Central. Fox said that it's currently the highest-rated show on any cable network.

However, Fox added, Comedy Central did not envision that little children would be mouthing the lines from *South Park* when the show was launched in August 1997.

"This was never intended to be watched by children," Fox said. "We recognized this was a provocative show. It comes with a disclaimer, TV-MA, which is the strictest rating a show can receive."

TV-MA, Fox explained, means that a show is not recommended for viewers under the age of 17. He added that *South Park* is not unique because other cartoons containing adult themes, such as *The Simpsons* and *King of the Hill*, preceded *South Park*.

Fox also said that Comedy Central does not promote *South Park* during daytime hours and doesn't target children in its merchandising. He has also become aware of teachers — usually at the junior high school level — who issue letters of warning about *South Park* to parents. Fox said he "absolutely" supports that action.

However, the fact that *South Park* is intended for adults is precisely why youths flock to the TV set, Stacy Liberati asserted.

"Everyone tells them not to watch it — so they do," said Liberati, a junior high teacher in Canaseraga, Allegany County, and counselor at Camp Stella Maris in Livonia.

Amid all the debate, is the show funny?

"It's hilarious," Aaron commented.

Dominic said he finds a few parts of the show to be humorous, but gets turned off when *South Park* lampoons the "Jesus" character — such as in the episode insinuating that Jesus had had sexual relations with the mother of a main character, Cartman.

"They're kind of mocking him; you know that wouldn't happen in real life. I don't think it's very appropriate," Dominic said.

Fox claimed that Jesus "is basically portrayed as a good guy" in *South Park*. But when asked if Jesus having illicit sex reflects a "good guy" image, Fox paused and said, "I'm sure it was done with comedic intent."

Liberati said she doesn't believe pre-teens should be allowed to watch *South Park*, and that teens should view it with their parents.

"If there are questions, then they can be answered in a logical, adult way," Liberati said.

Liberati asserted that *South Park's* main attraction is its ability to shock. Therefore, she predicted, viewers' interest in the show will fade once the shock value wears off.

"They'll be like, 'Is that it?'" Liberati commented.

"Everyone tells them not to watch it — so they do,"

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