

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY: FETCH FORMATIVE EVALUATION

In 2005, WGBH began production of a new science television series for children called FETCH. FETCH is a competition-based game/reality show for 6-10 year old children that consists of both animation and live action footage. The show is hosted by a cartoon dog named Ruff Ruffman.

Each week Ruff assigns competitors from a cast of real kids to leave the studio and go out into the world and complete challenges. There are typically two challenges assigned in each show. One challenge per episode requires its contestants to learn about and understand science concepts and to use scientific process skills to successfully complete their challenge.

Science concepts and skills are reinforced further as contestants who remain in the studio compete in the Half Time Trivia Show, a 90-second trivia game in which the contestants answer questions about what has happened in the challenges thus far.

In each episode, contestants sent out of the studio win points for completing the challenges assigned to them. Trivia Show contestants also receive points for the number of questions they answer correctly. Points are used to determine the winner of each individual episode. Points also accumulate throughout the season as the cast competes to become the ultimate FETCH champion.

Goodman Research Group, Inc. (GRG), a research firm specializing in the evaluation of educational programs, materials, and services, was contracted by WGBH to conduct formative evaluation of FETCH through the use of focus groups. The purpose of the evaluation was to:

- Gather data on the appeal of the show to children,
- Learn children's impressions of Ruff,
- Determine the extent to which children understand the science presented in the episode, and
- Determine the extent to which children recognize the scientific process skills featured in the episode.

GRG conducted four focus groups with 10 to 13 children each in the Fall of 2005. All focus group participants were between the ages of 10 to 12 years old. As part of the focus group, children watched one episode of FETCH and then participated in a group discussion moderated by GRG. Key findings and recommendations from the evaluation are presented below.

KEY FINDINGS

FETCH is appealing to its target audience.

Children provided positive ratings of FETCH, with 85% indicating that they *liked* the show or *liked it a lot*. Children responded positively to the concept of a

challenge-based show for kids and provided quite positive feedback about Ruff, with the majority reporting that they wanted more Ruff in the show. Focus group participants also reported that they would watch FETCH when it airs next summer, with 88% indicating that they will tune in.

The science concepts included in the Kite Challenge were clear to the audience.

In discussing the Kite Challenge, children recalled each of the science concepts covered in this portion of the show. They discussed that lift is needed to keep a kite up in the air, that gravity is a key concept in kite flying, and that wind direction is a key factor to consider when flying a kite. They also recalled the vocabulary presented to describe the different parts of a kite, with all groups mentioning both the spine and spars.

Children recognized the use of scientific process in the Kite Challenge.

Children recognized that Noah and Brian had to think like scientists during their challenge. They listed several different variables that the boys had to consider in order to successfully design, build, and fly their kite, including the kite's weight, shape, strength, and the angle at which it flew in the air.

Children were interested in both the Kite Challenge and the Cat Challenge, and were motivated to try the activities after viewing.

Children were able to accurately describe both the Kite Challenge and the Cat Challenge. They were attentive to the outcomes of the challenges, and were appreciative of Ruff's role in the process. After viewing, approximately two-thirds of children thought it would be fun to try to design a kite or train a cat on their own.

Children related to the personal information provided throughout the show.

Throughout the discussion, children mentioned the personal information included in the show about Ruff and the cast. All groups mentioned that Ruff wanted a girlfriend and enjoyed the impact this had on Noah and Brian's challenge. They also enjoyed his relationship with his boss and the fact that Ruff's cousin was in the show. Further, children recalled that Noah had never flown a kite before and indicated they liked the trivia portion of the show because it showed the kids' personalities.

Children would prefer the show to include enough challenges for all contestants to compete in each show.

The only consistent recommendation for changing the show involved the number of challenges included in each episode. Children indicated that they would prefer

three challenges per show so that all contestants had the chance to go out and compete. Children, however, did not want this addition to replace the trivia portion of the show.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The results from this evaluation indicate that FETCH appeals to children and that they particularly enjoyed the challenges included in the episode. Similarly, children reacted positively to Ruff. The science concepts covered in the episode translated well to viewers and children recognized the science process skills included in the show. Given these positive results, we have few recommendations for FETCH producers.

In discussing the preliminary findings from the focus groups with the production team, Kate Taylor, Executive Producer of FETCH, suggested that Ruff's presence in the show could be extended through additional voiceovers in which he references how children are using the scientific process to complete their challenges. We recommend that the FETCH team move forward with this idea. In GRG's early work with ZOOM, we found that the more explicitly scientific process information was presented, the better children understood it. Adding process-based comments would be a great way to reinforce further the science process included in the show while building off of Ruff's popularity and the fact that children want to see more of him.

We also recommend that the FETCH team consider adding a third challenge to each show or exploring ways to make the number of points that contestants receive for The Half Time Trivia Show equal to the number of points contestants receive for completing challenges outside of the studio.