

Sesame Street: The Brighter Side of Trauma

Madison Harris
Junior Division
Individual Performance
Process Paper:
498 words

I have an interest in child psychology and puppets. When this year's theme was announced, I knew that I wanted to focus on children's television shows, specifically Sesame Street. I decided on Sesame Street communicating trauma through a child's perspective. I choose this topic because I am interested in the child's brain. Even though I am a child. I love how it grows and takes in things in some cases like a sponge and other times like a rock. Sesame Street is a mass media television show used to communicate to children.

I started my research by exploring the Sesame Street websites. These websites contained footage from the show as well as original research used to evaluate its effectiveness. In addition, I examined information from affiliated organizations like the IRC, PBS that have worked with Sesame Street to develop programming and curriculum. I reviewed shows such as "60 minutes" and watched documentaries i.e. "The World According to Sesame Street". These sources were helpful because they contained interviews with people who worked on the show. I read articles about the effectiveness of the show (New York Times, Washington Post, Smithsonian Magazine). Finally, I read books and reports, such as "G is for Growing: Thirty Years of Research on Children and Sesame Street ". These resources provided the short term and long term effects of Sesame Street.

I decided on the performance category because I like to express myself theatrically. The performance category allows me to present the results of my research in a more engaging way. I decided that since Sesame Street relies on puppets to communicate to children that I would use Chowder to communicate how the show helps children cope with trauma. It was challenging because I have never done puppetry before but it was something new that I wanted to try. Since the contest was virtual this year and I had to record the performance, I decided to pretend to be interviewed on Zoom.

My historical argument is that Sesame Street uses the show to help children process, communicate, and cope with trauma. Everything is from a child's perspective; the show communicates to children in a language they can understand. Sesame Street is the key to understanding because it helps parents to recognize how their children are feeling and provide them with the tools necessary to discuss them. Sesame Street wants children to feel that they are not alone and they can talk about these experiences. This effect was very successful so Sesame Street branched out to help other countries.

This topic is significant because when a child goes through or witnesses a traumatic experience, either they don't have the skills to communicate. According to the National Survey of Children's Health, one out of three children under the age of 18 experience an adverse childhood experience. It can damage their mental, physical, and social health. Sesame Street provides children and their parents with the tools to help them to get on the brighter side of trauma.

COMPANION WORKSHEET

PERFORMANCE INFORMATION	
Project Title	Sesame Street: The Brighter Side of Trauma
Student Name(s)	Madison Harris
Division/Category	Junior Individual Performance
Performance Runtime	9:55
Performance Companion Worksheet Word Count (starting with the performance overall scenario box; should not exceed 1,270 words)	376
Thesis	Sesame Street was created in 1969 in New York for preschoolers. In 1982 Mr. Hooper, a long term cast member, died and the writers decided not to replace him or take him off the show but wanted to help children process his death by putting the traumatic experience of death in a child's perspective. Now 38 years later the show has tackled many traumatic experiences from divorce to racism and helped children to communicate about their traumatic experiences and provided them with the key to understanding on how to cope.
Performance Recording Link	https://drive.google.com/file/d/1ZnlMMFgeEhjUzroaoeVnz_lorjM112f3/view?usp=sharing

PERFORMANCE OVERALL SCENARIO

Story Setting(s)- 60 *Word Limit*

Where does the performance take place?

It takes place at the home of the puppeteer (via Zoom). My topic still runs to the present day so if I was to have an interview it would be on Zoom. So I would be in my house and just join an online Zoom session for the interview.

Timeframe- 60 *Word Limit*

When does the performance take place?

It takes place at midday. So around 1:00 pm. There is no specific day this takes place.

Story Synopsis - 100 *Word Limit*

In all, my performance is an interview with a puppeteer for Sesame Street. Throughout the interview, we stay on one topic: traumatic experiences. And we want the interviewer to understand the importance of an adult figure in a child's world. We discuss brief information about some of the things we have done and some things that we use on the show that involve traumatic experiences.

CHARACTERS

Character Name	Actor	Description/background for the character <i>10 Word Limit per Character</i>
Maddie	Madison Harris	The puppeteer and worker of Sesame Street.
Chowder	Madison Harris	Puppet played on the show.

PERFORMANCE BACKGROUND

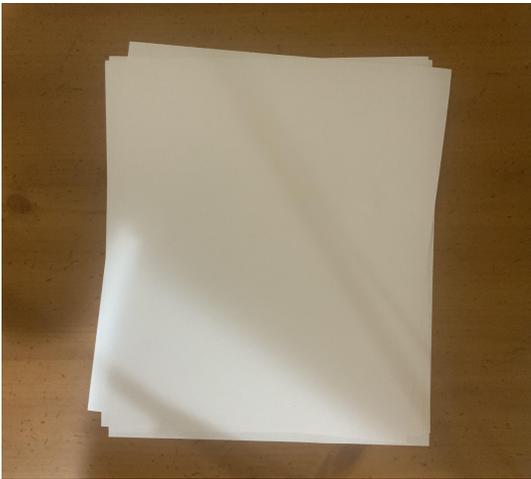
BACKGROUND BY SCENE	
All scenes	
Photo <i>Photo Size should be 3x3 maximum</i>	Description <i>What is the purpose of the background in this scene?</i> <i>50 Word Limit</i>
	This is just a blank background. It is used to put the attention on me and my puppet instead of the background.

PERFORMANCE COSTUMES

COSTUME(S) BY SCENE	
All scenes	
Photo	Description
<i>Photo Size should be 3x3 maximum</i>	<i>What is the purpose of the costume in this scene?</i> <i>50 Word Limit</i>
	This is supposed to show that I work for Sesame Street. Such as a group tee that a club would give.

PERFORMANCE PROPS

KEY PROP(S) BY SCENE	
All scenes	
Photo <i>Photo Size should be 3x3 maximum</i>	Description <i>What is the purpose of the props? 50 Word Limit</i>
	This is the puppet that should resemble a puppet on the show. (Chowder is not based on any characters from the show).

KEY PROP(S) BY SCENE	
Last scene	
Photo <i>Photo Size should be 3x3 maximum</i>	Description <i>What is the purpose of the props? 50 Word Limit</i>
	Most of the time children don't explain things in chronological order. Therefore, Chowder did most of the talking with that part and I based those scenes off of that. I could not print this out so here is the link: https://www.sesameworkshop.org/who-we-are/our-history

Annotated Bibliography

Primary Sources

Data Resource Center for Child & Adolescent. “National Survey of Children’s Health - Data Resource Center for Child and Adolescent Health.” *CAHMI - Data Resource Center for Child and Adolescent Health*, <https://www.childhealthdata.org/learn-about-the-nsch/NSCH>. Accessed 14 May 2021.

This article was very useful because it talks about all of the National Surveys of Children’s Health and how many years they have done it. This helped me understand what the survey was and its purpose.

“HIV-Positive Muppet Appointed as ‘Champion for Children.’” *UNICEF*, www.unicef.org/media/media_16631.html#:~:text=HIV%2Dpositive%20Muppet%20appointed%20as%20%22Champion%20for%20Children%22&text=Kami%20%E2%80%93%20a%20furry%2C%20five%2D,co%2Dproduction%20of%20Sesame%20Street. Accessed 11 Feb. 2021.

This article was useful because it gave me information about the international side of Sesame Street. This helped me understand the crisis in South Africa and how Sesame Street is helping.

“How ‘Sesame Street’ Is Still Supporting Families, 50 Years After Its Debut.” *YouTube*, uploaded by PBS NewsHour, 11 Oct. 2019, www.youtube.com/watch?v=nxBKcMjPmdI.

This video was useful because it discussed many of the traumatic experiences Sesame Street has taught throughout the show very briefly. This helped me understand the gist of Sesame Streets’ legacy with this topic.

“How Sesame Workshop’s Muppets Are Teaching Emotional Coping Tactics to Children.” *YouTube*, uploaded by 60 Minutes, 18 Nov. 2019, www.youtube.com/watch?v=LdXP8_beBA8.

This video was useful because it gave me more information about the co-production “Welcome Sesame,” and the interview 60 minutes did. This video helped me understand

how Sesame Street is teaching many coping mechanisms yet also about the co-production “Welcome Sesame,”.

“The IRC and Sesame Street, Rescuing Children’s Futures.” *International Rescue Committee (IRC)*, www.rescue.org/sesame. Accessed 6 Feb. 2021.

This article was useful because it gave me great primary evidence of the Syrian Refugee crisis and how it made it all happen. This helped me understand what Sesame Street and the IRC did to help with this situation.

Merrill, Stephen. “How Sesame Street’s Muppets Became Revolutionaries.” *George Lucas Educational Foundation*, 8 Nov. 2019, <https://www.edutopia.org/article/how-sesame-streets-muppets-became-revolutionaries>.

This documented interview was useful because it discussed what Sesame’s curriculum is as well as it’s impact. This helped me understand the impact of certain episodes, what the Sesame Effect is, and the impact of certain characters.

The New York Times. “Mississippi Agency Votes for a TV Ban On ‘Sesame Street.’” *The New York Times*, 3 May 1970, www.nytimes.com/1970/05/03/archives/mississippi-agency-votes-for-a-tv-ban-on-sesame-street.html.

This newspaper was useful because it gave the perspective of Mississippi on the show back then. This helped me understand some of the controversy behind Sesame Street integrating races.

“New HRSA Data Show One in Three US Children Have Suffered an Adverse Childhood Experience.” *Official Web Site of the U.S. Health Resources & Services Administration*, 4 Oct. 2019, <https://www.hrsa.gov/about/news/press-releases/hrsa-data-national-survey-children-health>.

This article was useful because it talked about the National Children’s Health Survey done in 2018. This helped me understand what the outcome of the survey as well as what an Adverse Childhood Experience is, and the estimated number of children experiencing an adverse childhood experience.

“Our History | Sesame Workshop.” *Sesame Workshop*, Sesame Street Workshop, www.sesameworkshop.org/who-we-are/our-history. Accessed 8 Feb. 2021.

This was the most useful article. This was so useful because it pointed out all the milestones in the production with the years and great detail. This helped me understand the gist of what Sesame Street has done from its beginning till now.

“Our Impact | Sesame Workshop.” *Sesame Workshop*, Sesame Street Workshop, www.sesameworkshop.org/who-we-are/our-impact. Accessed 11 Feb. 2021.

This was one of my favorite articles by far. This is a primary source that includes testimonials from children and how Sesame Street helped them cope with traumatic experiences. This helped me understand what Sesame Streets’ impact was to them and what they have accomplished in their eyes.

Sesame Street in Communities. “A Child’s Perspective of a Traumatic Experience.” *Sesame Street in Communities*, sesamestreetincommunities.org/activities/responses-trauma-age-age-video. Accessed 6 Feb. 2021.

This was the most heartbreaking article. This source was useful because it gave me the perspective of a child on traumatic experiences. And this source helped me understand why it is so crucial for a child to have an adult that is there for them.

Stahl, Lesley. “Sesame Street and the International Rescue Committee Help Syrian Refugee Children - 60 Minutes.” *CBS News*, CBS Interactive Inc., 12 Oct. 2020, www.cbsnews.com/news/sesame-street-international-rescue-committee-help-syria-refugee-children-60-minutes-2020-10-11.

This was very useful with the video from 60 minutes. This video was useful because it gave a thorough explanation of how the IRC and Sesame Street are helping Syrian refugees cope with the trauma.

“Traumatic Experiences | Sesame Workshop.” *Sesame Workshop*, Sesame Street Workshop, www.sesameworkshop.org/what-we-do/traumatic-experiences. Accessed 8 Feb. 2021.

This article was useful because it gave me the perspective of a parent and how crucial it is to be there for a child. This helped me understand why it is so crucial.

“Using These Resources.” *Sesame Street in Communities*, sesamestreetincommunities.org/activities/using-resources-providers. Accessed 8 Feb. 2021.

This article was useful because it discussed what traumatic experiences are, how they affect children, and how they affect when unbothered. This helped me understand all of this and how Sesame Street is trying to prevent it.

“What Are Traumatic Experiences?” *Sesame Street in Communities*, sesamestreetincommunities.org/activities/what-are-traumatic-experiences-provider. Accessed 6 Feb. 2021.

This article was useful because it showed me what Sesame Street wants parents to do during a traumatic experience. This also helped me understand what Sesame Street’s drive was to teach children about these experiences so early.

“Why Sesame Street Tackles Big World Issues | 60 Minutes Australia.” *YouTube*, uploaded by 60 Minutes Australia, 19 Feb. 2019, www.youtube.com/watch?v=cwLsW4wTbME&authuser=0.

This video was useful because it gave me great information about both past and recent topics Sesame Street has talked about. This source helped me understand that Sesame Street has taught many topics and these all hit emotional chords with viewers.

Secondary Sources

ABC News. "How 'Sesame Street' Is Helping Kids Learn to Cope with Trauma." *ABC News*, ABC News Internet Ventures, 6 Oct. 2017, abcnews.go.com/lifestyle/sesame-street-helping-kids-learn-cope-trauma/story.

This was also one of my very useful articles. This source was useful because it showed the coping techniques and an explanation behind them. This helped me understand how kids and parents use these coping techniques and the meaning behind Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACES).

Betancourt, Jeanette Kristin Schubert. "Sesame Street Tools Help Build Resiliency." *RWJF*, Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, 17 Dec. 2019, www.rwjf.org/en/blog/2017/10/sesame_street_tools_build_resiliency.html.

This article was useful because it gave the most information about ACES. And helped me understand the effect on children and their childhood.

Chandler, Michael. "Sesame Street Launches Tools to Help Children Who Experience Trauma, from Hurricanes to Violence at Home." *Washington Post*, The Washington Post, 6 Oct. 2017, www.washingtonpost.com/news/inspired-life/wp/2017/10/07/sesame-street-launches-tools-to-teach-coping-skills-to-children-who-experience-trauma-of-all-kinds-from-natural-disasters-to-violence-at-home.

This article was useful because it showed me how Sesame Street is tackling these experiences. This helped me understand the factual information behind what Sesame Street is doing.

Cooney, Joan Ganz. "The Potential Uses of Television in Preschool Education." *Joan Ganz Cooney Center*, 3 Dec. 2019, <https://joanganzcooneycenter.org/publication/potential-uses-of-television-in-preschool-education/>.

This source was useful because it discussed and elaborated what the Sesame Effect is. This also helped me understand what being a disadvantaged child meant, how the show impacts adults, and how it impacts preschoolers.

Debczak, Michele. "The Family of Julia, the First Sesame Street Character With Autism, to Debut For Autism Awareness Month." *Mental Floss*, 2 Apr. 2019, www.mentalfloss.com/article/578637/first-muppet-autism-julias-family-on-sesame-street-autism-awareness-month.

This article was useful because it discussed more about Julia and was sort of an updated version of her appearance on the show. This source helped me understand Juila and more about her purpose on the show.

Fisch, Shalom, and Rosemarie Truglio. *G Is for Growing: Thirty Years of Research on Children and Sesame Street* (Lea's Communications Series). Routledge, 2000.

This book was useful because it gave the statistics on studies and gave many perspectives of the effectiveness of the show. This book helped me understand the challenges for Sesame Street as well as the impact on adults and children.

Goldstein, Knowlton L, and Linda H. Costigan. *The World According to Sesame Street*. New York, NY: Sony Wonder, 2006.

This was a very useful documentary because it talks about Sesame Street and its co-productions and stumbles with going around the world. This also helped me understand the problems with their co-productions and what it is like to work there.

Greene, Bryan. "The Unmistakable Black Roots of 'Sesame Street.'" *Smithsonian Magazine*, 7 Nov. 2019, <https://www.smithsonianmag.com/history/unmistakable-black-roots-sesame-street-180973490/>.

This source was useful because it discussed how Sesame Street involved race into Sesame Street ever since the start. This also helped me understand Sesame Street's goal for children.

Guernsey, Lisa. "How Sesame Street Changed the World." *Newsweek*, 22 May 2009, www.newsweek.com/how-sesame-street-changed-world-80067.

This article was very useful because it was a great reference for looking at the background. It helped me understand how Sesame Street's form of teaching was revolutionary.

Harman, Danna. "A Muppet Tackles AIDS Attitudes in South Africa." *The Christian Science Monitor*, 14 Jan. 2003, www.csmonitor.com/2003/0114/p01s04-woaf.html.

This article was useful because it gave me another perspective (in this case positive) on the muppet Kami. This also helped me understand Kami's impact on children in South Africa.

Higgins, Chris. "13 Sesame Street Characters Making a Difference in the World." *Mental Floss*, 16 Oct. 2013, www.mentalfloss.com/article/53165/13-sesame-street-muppets-make-difference.

This was also one of my more useful articles. This source was useful because it showcases brief information about what topics Sesame Street covered as well as which characters. This source helped me understand which topic some characters talked about on the show.

Higgins, Chris. "Sesame Street Introduces Julia, a New Muppet With Autism." *Mental Floss*, 20 Mar. 2017, www.mentalfloss.com/article/70209/sesame-street-introduces-julia-new-muppet-autism.

This article was useful because it gave me information about Julia and her point of being on the show. This helped me understand Julia and her backstory.

"How Sesame Street Helps Children Learn For Life." *PBS Education*, Public Broadcasting Service (PBS), 16 Feb. 2017, <https://www.pbs.org/education/blog/how-sesame-street-helps-children-learn-for-life>.

This source was useful because it gave me a lot of information about the Sesame Effect. This also helped me understand how Sesame taught children and their intent on education.

Kamenetz, Anya. "NPR Cookie Consent and Choices." *Npr*, 6 Oct. 2017, choice.npr.org/index.html?origin=https://www.npr.org/sections/ed/2017/10/06/555363108/for-traumatized-children-an-offer-of-help-from-the-muppets.

This article was useful because it discussed very analytical information about children and traumatic experiences. This course helped me understand more about how these experiences can affect them in the future.

Larned, Victoria Cnn. "How 'Sesame Street' Can Help Children Cope with Trauma." *CNN*, Cable News Network, 12 Oct. 2017, edition.cnn.com/2017/10/12/health/sesame-street-trauma/index.html.

This article is useful because it addresses the Sesame Workshop instead of the show. This source helped me understand how Sesame Workshop will reach more viewers.

Storyboard, Jessica Bennett/Tumblr, and Jessica Bennett. "'D' Is for 'Divorce': 'Sesame Street' Tackles Another Touchy Topic." *TIME.Com*, 10 Dec. 2012, [healthland.time.com/2012/12/10/d-is-for-divorce-sesame-street-tackles-another-touchy-to pic](http://healthland.time.com/2012/12/10/d-is-for-divorce-sesame-street-tackles-another-touchy-topic).

This was a great useful article because it provided great information about the topic both from many years ago and recently. This source helped me understand how and why divorce was a hard topic to put in a child's perspective.

Taylor, Derrick Bryson. "Karli on 'Sesame Street' Reveals Her Mother's Addiction Battle." *The New York Times*, 12 Oct. 2019, www.nytimes.com/2019/10/10/arts/sesame-street-karli-addiction.html.

This article was useful because it talked about how and why Sesame Street opened up to talking about parents battling addiction. This source helped me understand that Sesame Street is very successful when it comes to hard topics such as this one.