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.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>PERFORMANCE INFORMATION</strong></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Project Title</strong></td>
<td>Sesame Street: The Brighter Side of Trauma</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Student Name(s)</strong></td>
<td>Madison Harris</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Division/Category</strong></td>
<td>Junior Individual Performance</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Performance Runtime</strong></td>
<td>9:55</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Performance Companion Worksheet Word Count</strong> (starting with the performance overall scenario box; should not exceed 1,270 words)</td>
<td>376</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Thesis</strong></td>
<td>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.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Performance Recording Link</strong></td>
<td><a href="https://drive.google.com/file/d/1ZnlMMFgeEhjUzroaoeVnz_lorjM112f3/view?usp=sharing">https://drive.google.com/file/d/1ZnlMMFgeEhjUzroaoeVnz_lorjM112f3/view?usp=sharing</a></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
**PERFORMANCE OVERALL SCENARIO**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Story Setting(s) - 60 Word Limit</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Where does the performance take place?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Character Name</th>
<th>Actor</th>
<th>Description/background for the character</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Maddie</td>
<td>Madison Harris</td>
<td>The puppeteer and worker of Sesame Street.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chowder</td>
<td>Madison Harris</td>
<td>Puppet played on the show.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
# PERFORMANCE BACKGROUND

## BACKGROUND BY SCENE

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>All scenes</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Photo</strong></td>
<td><em>What is the purpose of the background in this scene?</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Photo Size should be 3x3 maximum</em></td>
<td><em>50 Word Limit</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><img src="image-url" alt="Background Image" /></td>
<td>This is just a blank background. It is used to put the attention on me and my puppet instead of the background.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>All scenes</td>
<td>Description</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>------------</td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| Photo      | **What is the purpose of the costume in this scene?**  
Photo Size should be 3x3 maximum  
50 Word Limit |
| ![Sesame Street T-shirt](image) | 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

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Photo</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| ![Puppet](image1.png) | **What is the purpose of the props?**
| Photo Size should be 3x3 maximum | 50 Word Limit |
| | This is the puppet that should resemble a puppet on the show. (Chowder is not based on any characters from the show). |

### Last scene

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Photo</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| ![Paper](image2.png) | **What is the purpose of the props?**
| Photo Size should be 3x3 maximum | 50 Word Limit |
| | 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](https://www.sesameworkshop.org/who-we-are/our-history) |
Primary Sources


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.


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.


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.


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,”.


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.


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.


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


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.

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.


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.


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.


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.


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.

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.


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.


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


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).


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


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.


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.

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 Julia and more about her purpose on the show.


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.


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.


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.


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.

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.


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.


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.


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.


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.

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.


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.


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.