

In this article, the writer discusses *Bluey*, the Australian animated TV series.

Bluey is the best show on television, but nothing about it would suggest that this is the case. It's a simple animation, designed for pre-schoolers, about the adventures of a family of Australian Blue Heeler dogs, made up of Bluey, a six-year-old, her four-year-old sister, Bingo, and her parents. Imagine *The Simpsons* if everybody liked each other, or *Peppa Pig* if the father was a functional member of society, and that's *Bluey*.

On every level it is unbeatable — charm, perceptiveness, ambition, execution and cross-generational appeal. In six years of parenting, *Bluey* remains the only programme to have caused all four members of my household to laugh to the point of breathlessness at the exact same time.

Such a range of qualities perhaps goes some way to explaining its rapid growth in popularity. When it launched in Australia in 2018, *Bluey* quickly became the most downloaded show in the history of ABC's on-demand service and has now racked up around half a billion views. When it debuted on CBeebies in the UK, it immediately became the most-watched show of the day. It even won an Emmy award. It is so successful that Hollywood A-listers are lining up for roles. People cannot stop watching *Bluey*.

'Obviously I wanted it to be rewatchable,' says *Bluey*'s creator Joe Brumm from his home in Queensland, with a mixture of modesty and pride. 'But kids have really put it to the rewatching test.'

Brumm lived in London for 10 years, animating pre-school shows, which gave him a starting point for *Bluey*. Although Brumm credits many shows as giving him these initial ideas, he says the main two are British. 'I really love *Peppa Pig*,' he says. 'I loved how quintessentially English it was, and I felt like I'd love to do a universal kids' show that had an Australian feel.' And *Bluey* is a distinctly Australian show: from the setting to the language to the hiring of the son of Steve Irwin, the naturalist and TV presenter, as a guest star.

Brumm's other British influence, *Gavin & Stacey*, was intended for an older audience. 'I loved that show,' he says. 'My wife loved that show. My parents loved that show. It was genuine co-viewing, where two generations weren't laughing at each other's exclusion, but were starting to understand how each generation sees the other. I always thought: "I'd like to try that, but let's get four-year-olds and 40-year-olds watching together." That felt fairly bold.'

And yet, in *Bluey*, it is so deftly done. My three-year-old's favourite episode is Featherwand, where Bluey's younger sister plays a game that makes anything she points at too heavy to carry. The kids get a kick out of the children calling the shots; the adults can relate to how hard it is to get anything done around the house when a four-year-old is determined to play. 'I'm not a big fan of that thing where you tell jokes for the parents that the kids just won't get,' says Brumm. 'I try to avoid that, and find the spot where you're laughing at each other.'

Bluey's secret weapon is Bandit, arguably the best screen dad of all time. Unlike, say, *Peppa Pig*'s Daddy Pig — a stereotypically blundering, bumbling fool — Bandit is playful and engaged and patient, no matter how tired and crotchety he gets. I ask the question all *Bluey*-watching parents have asked themselves at some point: is Bandit based on you? 'Well, on an extremely, extremely good day, I would say I get close to Bandit,' Brumm defers. 'But no.'

I ask Brumm whether the series is rooted in any particular philosophy about parenting. 'No, there are no set parenting strategies here,' he says. 'But I do read a lot about play. I really nerd out about play, and what that does for kids, and how that helps them socialise. If I'm proud of anything with *Bluey*, it's the fact that I think it might teach adults about how effective play is in a kid's life.'

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As well as portraying parents in their best light, it can also leave them heartbroken, with some episodes hitting grown-ups hard. My favourite episode, for example, is *Camping*. Bluey and her family visit a campsite, and Bluey befriends a French puppy. They bond, despite the language barrier, and plant a seed in the dirt together. One day, she wakes up to see that the French family have left. Bluey is upset, but her mother counsels her with an unexpectedly profound speech on the nature of loss. Then there's an update: five years have passed, and Bluey returns to the campsite. The seed they planted is now a tree — and she hears a familiar French accent behind her. It is a memorable and ambitious piece of television that has reduced many a parent to tears.

A third season of *Bluey* is in production, and looks set to elevate the show to even greater heights. Nevertheless, each new season sounds like an absolute production marathon. There are 52 episodes per season, and each episode takes five months to create. As such, Brumm's day is split into tiny chunks, where he has to oversee a number of episodes in any of their 14 stages of production while simultaneously writing the bulk of the episodes.

Generating new stories is becoming an uphill struggle. Brumm has two daughters, who were the age of Bluey and Bingo when the show was conceived, and formed the basis of the characters. But they are older now, and their day-to-day lives are getting further and further from Bluey's. 'It is getting harder to write, because four and six-year-olds are so different from eight and ten-year-olds,' he says. 'It's harder for me to see through their eyes. I feel like every time I start to understand a new phase, my kid's already left it and is starting a new stage. I feel like, if I had a kid now, I could just sort that kid right out.'

Is this his way of saying that he wants another kid? 'No. Zero chance!' Instead, as evidenced by the army of mums and dads who scour each episode for parenting tips, he will have to make do with sorting our kids out instead.

Adapted from an article in The Guardian by Stuart Heritage

Total marks — 30
Attempt ALL questions

MARKS

1. Look at lines 1–5.
Using your own words as far as possible, explain what impression the writer gives of the TV show *Bluey*.
You should make **two** key points in your answer. 2

2. Look at lines 6–8.
By referring to **two** examples of language, explain how the writer makes clear his admiration for the show. 4

3. Look at line 9 ‘Such a range of . . . growth in popularity.’
By referring to any part of this sentence, explain how it helps to provide a link between the writer’s ideas at this point in the passage. 2

4. Look at lines 18–28.
Using your own words as far as possible, summarise how the ideas for the show *Bluey* developed.
You should make **five** key points in your answer. 5

5. Look at lines 29–34.
Using your own words as far as possible, explain why *Bluey* appeals to people of different ages.
You should make **two** key points in your answer. 2

6. Look at lines 35–39.
By referring to **two** examples of language, explain how the writer makes it clear that he admires the character of Bandit. 4

7. Look at lines 40–52.
Using your own words as far as possible, explain the effects *Bluey* can have on its viewers.
You should make **four** key points in your answer. 4

8. Look at lines 53–64.
Using your own words as far as possible, identify the challenges Brumm faces when making a new series of *Bluey*.
You should make **five** key points in your answer. 5

9. Look at lines 65–67.
Select any expression from these lines and explain how it contributes to the passage’s effective conclusion. 2