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I Brake for Moms



Helping families and kids nurture a love of learning

Jenny Bardsley | teachingmybabytoread@gmail.com

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Time to pony up, parents

By **Jenny Bardsley**

I'm Generation X, which means I'm old. I guess that's why I never heard of Bronies until the documentary "Bronies: The Extremely Unexpected Adult Fans of My Little Pony" popped up on my Netflix screen.

For the uninitiated, Bronies are tween, teen and adult males who LOVE the television series "My Little Pony: Friendship is Magic" created by Lauren Faust, (NOT the previous shows from the 1980s.)

I'm not a Millennial, so my first reaction was "What the heck?" But then the third grade teacher in me had an epiphany. Social Emotional Learning — how to get along with our fellow human beings — is one of the hardest things to teach. For some reason, young men who have previously felt excluded from typical boy society are connecting with this show.

They are learning social skills, making friends online and through conventions, and expressing themselves through art, music and charity. Their lives are better, and all because of a cartoon.

I wanted to find out why...

To be honest, I've overheard "My Little Pony: Friendship is Magic" dozens of times while I'm making dinner, but I had never sat down with my four-year-old daughter and watched it with her in its entirety until last week, when she was home sick.

From the very first episode, I can see the appeal. The series starts out with Twilight Sparkles being her own worst enemy. She is so lost in books and learning, that she ignores all of the conventional steps needed to make and keep friends. It's hard to tell if she doesn't know how to make friends, or just doesn't care. Any parent who has struggled to teach kids social skills can



Photo by Jenny Bardsley



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relate. "When somebody hands you a book, say 'thank you'. When you ask someone for a favor, say 'please'." Some kids come out of the womb already knowing these things, and others need to be taught explicitly. Honestly, I think it's easier to teach a child to read than to be charming.

As "My Little Pony: Friendship is Magic" moves along, the episodes sprinkle social emotional learning lessons with other aspects that hold an adult's attention. There are huge vocabulary words, alliteration, and creatures pulled from ancient mythology. It's not all rainbows and sunshine, although there's a lot of that too.

On my blog "Teaching My Baby to Read" I write about Afterschooling, which is when parents provide meaningful, structured instruction to their children at home to help shore up learning gaps, or provide extra enrichment. Sometimes, for certain children, learning deficits are social. Maybe "My Little Pony: Friendship is Magic" could help.

So pony up, Moms and Dads. This is something to neigh about.

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