
Series Review

August 2013

Program: **On The Spot**
Episodes reviewed: **Episode 322 “Mystery Solved, Globetrotting, On the Menu”**
Episode 321 “Fact or Fiction, Oddities, Identify This”
Program length: **30 minutes**

Series Summary:

On The Spot is a series that draws engaging content from the broadly define subject areas of science, history, art, technology, geography, math, history, language, music, and sports. Culture, both American and global, is also tapped for rich visual content. The pace is fast, the content interesting and unusual, and the visuals are what expects from television: animations, HD photography, and a mix of world-sized and microscopic points of view. Very important for entertainment and information—and often overlooked—is the practice in **On The Spot** of citing sources for information. This not only gives the 21st century viewer a handle to check facts on a phone, it also makes the statement that citing sources is important. Because the series pulls in startling and odd facts and information, this is crucial. The episodes grab the viewer with challenges both informal and formal (timed challenges). Writer Peter McDonnell pulls from an astonishingly wide of content and consumes a huge number of informative bites in each episode. The warmly ironic narration of Pete Sepenuk, credited for voice-over, is a perfect foil for the fast moving visuals. Together, it all creates a program that satisfyingly informs and entertains the viewer.

Summary: Educational Value of “On The Spot”

From *Sesame Street* to *Where in the World is Carmen Sandiego*, the secret to making a great educational program is to take targeted educational content and make it interesting to adults. If a program engages its makers, it will stand a greater chance of engaging its education-age target audience. **On The Spot** does this. It taps content from geography, art, technology, science, math, history, language, music, and sports—all areas that are covered in classrooms, and makes it interesting to the general audience as well as the 13-16 year-old audience for whom it is providing educational and informational content. It proves that a great show for 13-16 year-olds can be a great for the television-consuming adult.

On The Spot contains several elements that serve the target audience. First, the fast paced quizzes will strike a competitive chord for 13-16 year olds. For that age group, just as important is nice attention to detail in role models and self-identification. The program features female as well as male physicians, basketball teams, and athletes. It offers shots of ‘real’ people in addition to the great, slick animations and beautiful world views. This opportunity for identification is very important for young viewers who take clues from onscreen images. The tone of the series is inquisitive, probing, but always positive—and avoids the snarky attitudes that power less enlightened programs. Each reviewed episode grabs the mind as well as the eyes of the viewer.

The topics that are drawn from in each episode cross across curricula support what students are exposed to in school. The fast pace and entertaining style deliver a rich mix of subject areas in a

remarkably short time. The editing and visual collage is what both young and older viewers have come to expect if programs want to hold their attention.

Episode 322: “Mystery Solved, Globetrotting, On the Menu”

In **On The Spot**, each episode lays out general threads from which a variety of content will spin. The central thread of this episode is mysteries: solved and unsolved. This premise allows the episode to take viewers thru the wide range of topics the series boldly intends to cover. In this episode topics include: the history of NASA explorations of Mars and a link to odd photographs of the badlands of earth to explain a famous mystery; a trip to a Nebraska zoo and asexual reproduction in sharks; early history of New England and the impact of Canadian forest fires; the solved mystery of the Bermuda triangle; Taos, New Mexico for an unsolved mystery; acoustics in ancient Greek amphitheaters; fairy rings of mushrooms; death valley rocks and runs; history and atmosphere in the Himalayas; the Appalachian Trail and its global equivalents; international marathons; edible insects; the number of people who (daily) eat bugs; the ratio of cattle food to edible beef; Japanese dirt diets. It is a half-hour of broad fascination.

Episode 321: “Fact or Fiction, Oddities, Identify This”

The learning threads of this episode are Fact or Fiction, Oddities, and Identify This. This leads to information on heights (only 70 basketball-age Americans are 7-footers), left-handed presidents since WWII (50%); political terms; Einstein’s brain, Napoleon’s height, Uncle Sam, sushi, mucus, milk, antigravity, tears in space, heartburn and sleep, brain-freeze, redheads and anesthesia, international city skylines, world cultural landmarks, and geological structures. While delivering on its goals, **On The Spot** manages to cover the breadth of human spirit from jobs to vacations to personal aspirations. It is challenging enough that no adult or 13-16 year-old will be able to go through an episode without checking at least one fact on their web-enabled device. Example of a mobile phone check: Can the Great Wall of China really be seen from space or not? The challenge to viewer minute-by-minute in this episode is exemplary.

Education Information:

Target audience for tone, program content, and learning concepts:

Middle and high school (ages 13-16)

General Category of Learning:

Across all content areas, including geography, art, technology, science, math, history, language, music, and sports. Content presented is accurate and engaging—and often surprising.

Applicable Common Core Standards

As the majority of states have moved to adopt a common standard of educational content, known as the Common Core State Standards (CCSS), they are a good point of reference. The CCSS have been adopted by 45 states, the District of Columbia, and the schools of the Department of Defense. While not universal, they serve as a solid reference point even for non-adopting states.

There are only Common Core State Standards Initiatives for English Language Arts & Literacy and Mathematics, but there are specialized applications for a variety of subject matters (including History/Social Studies, Science, and technical Subjects) online at <http://www.corestandards.org/>, published in June 2010 by the National Governors Association and the Council of Chief State School Officers. Common Core ELA standards for History/Social Science are clearly applicable to **On The Spot**.

Reading Standards for Literacy in Science and Technical Subjects 6–12 (condensed) addressed by On The Spot.

Comprehension and Collaboration - Modeled by On The Spot:

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.SL.9-10.2 Integrate multiple sources of information presented in diverse media or formats (e.g., visually, quantitatively, orally) evaluating the credibility and accuracy of each source.

Presentation of Knowledge and Ideas – Integrated by On The Spot

SL.CCR.4 - Present information, findings, and supporting evidence such that listeners can follow the line of reasoning and the organization, development, and style are appropriate to task, purpose, and audience.

SL.CCR.5 - Make strategic use of digital media and visual displays of data to express information and enhance understanding of presentations.

SL.CCR.6 - Adapt speech to a variety of contexts and communicative tasks, demonstrating command of formal English when indicated or appropriate.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RH.11-12.9 Integrate information from diverse sources, both primary and secondary, into a coherent understanding of an idea or event, noting discrepancies among sources.

Also:

Students establish a base of knowledge across a wide range of subject matter by engaging with works of quality and substance.

3.A - Mathematically proficient students understand and use stated assumptions, definitions, and previously established results in constructing arguments. They make conjectures and build a logical progression of statements to explore the truth of their constructions.

1.A - Mathematically proficient students start by explaining to themselves the meaning of a problem and looking for entry points to its solution. They analyze givens, constraints, relationships, and goals. They make conjectures about the form and meaning

English Language Arts Standards>>History/Social Studies - Integrated by On The Spot

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RH.6-8.4 Determine the meaning of words and phrases as they are used in a text, including vocabulary specific to domains related to history/social studies.

English Language Arts Standards>>History/Social Studies – Modeled by On The Spot

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RH.6-8.7 Integrate visual information (e.g., in charts, graphs, photographs, videos, or maps) with other information in print and digital texts.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RH.9-10.1 Cite specific textual evidence to support analysis of primary and secondary sources, attending to such features as the date and origin of the information.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RH.9-10.8 Assess the extent to which the reasoning and evidence in a text support the author's claims.

English Language Arts Standards>>Science & Technical Subjects - Integrated by On The Spot

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RST.9-10.3 Follow precisely a complex multistep procedure when carrying out experiments, taking measurements, or performing technical tasks, attending to special cases or exceptions defined in the text

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RST.9-10.7 Translate quantitative or technical information expressed in words in a text into visual form (e.g., a table or chart) and translate information expressed visually or mathematically (e.g., in an equation) into words.

Mathematics Standards - Integrated by On The Spot
Mathematical Practices

1. Make sense of problems and persevere in solving them.
2. Reason abstractly and quantitatively.
3. Model with mathematics.
4. Use appropriate tools strategically.

Hall Davidson served as Director of Education Services at PBS station KOCE-TV for 15 years, where he also was executive director of the media consortium Telecommunications of Orange County (TOC) serving over 400,000 students. Prior to that, he worked in educational media at PBS station KLCS-TV in Los Angeles. He was president of Video-Using Educators and is currently chairman of the school site council at a public elementary school in Los Angeles. He is director of the nation's oldest student media festival, the California Student Media & Multimedia Festival, and served on the board of directors of California's largest technology user group, Computer-Using Educators (CUE). He is an Emmy-nominated producer of educational programs. He was classroom teacher in the public school system and began teaching on television at night on an Emmy-winning program before leaving the classroom for a position providing staff development for teachers on media use in the classroom.

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