

Sesame Street Goes Green at 40--But Warming "Too Scary"

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Sesame Street celebrates its 40th anniversary tomorrow, and thanks to a multiday parade of **Sesame Street Google** images, it'll be anything but a surprise party.



Still, with a little help from U.S. First Lady Michelle Obama, the show looks to be joining what you might call the green party: Tuesday's 40th-anniversary season premiere kicks off a two-year, environmental "curriculum" called "My World is Green and Growing." But don't look for hot-button issues such as global warming on preschooler-oriented *Sesame Street*—no matter how many [sunny days may be sweeping the clouds away](#).

"[Global warming](#) and [deforestation](#)—those are really adult concepts, and it's just too scary for children," said Rosemarie Truglio, vice president of research and education at [Sesame Workshop](#), the New York City-based nonprofit that produces *Sesame Street*.

"The place we're coming from is, 'Let's love and care for the [Earth](#), because it's so beautiful, and we appreciate its awe and wonder, and we're going to respect it.'"

Sesame Street's producers hope that children who learn to love and respect nature early on will grow up to become passionate advocates for our planet. "When you love something," Truglio said, "you want to take care of it."

Michelle Obama Greens *Sesame Street*, But Will Big Bird Fly the Coop?

The curriculum for *Sesame Street* changes every two years. The previous curriculum focused on literacy. The season before that revolved around healthy eating and had [Cookie Monster](#) gobbling fruits and vegetables for the first time.

Sesame Street's 40th season aims to educate children about the wonders of the natural world and teach them about concepts such as [habitats](#), hibernation, and migration. No matter where they live, "we want kids to know there's nature in their neighborhoods," Truglio said. In tomorrow's premiere episode, Michelle Obama—fresh from harvesting the White House's new organic garden in the heart of Washington, D.C.—will help [Elmo](#) and [Big Bird](#) plant vegetables in the ersatz inner city of *Sesame Street*.

In addition to Obama's gardening lesson, tomorrow's premiere sees Big Bird pondering flying south from *Sesame Street's* chilly New York City setting. And in another episode, [Baby Bear](#) has trouble hibernating and calls in a "hibernation consultant" to help.

The next *Sesame Street* season, which is currently being written and will air in 2010, will use nature to teach kids the scientific method and encourage them to ask questions, make observations, and test hypotheses about the world around them.

"We try to start from the vantage point of the child's everyday world," said Emily Kingsley, who's written for *Sesame Street* for 39 years.

"We want to let them know that it's OK to say, I don't know—let's find out."

Promoting environmental awareness is old hat for *Sesame Street*, said Michael Davis, author of *Street Gang: The Complete History of Sesame Street*. As far back as the 1970s, *Sesame Street* included lessons about nature and animals, Davis said. And a recent *Sesame Street* DVD had fire engine-red Elmo literally turn green while co-hosting "Earth-a-thon"—not to mention *Elmo's Green Thumb*, a *Sesame Street* Live production currently touring the United States.

"I think it's been in their soul since the very beginning," Davis added.

"*Sesame Street* has always been about kindness, if you think about it—kindness in how we treat each other as neighbors and citizens of the same planet," Davis noted. "So it's not at all surprising to me that they're trying to teach kindness to the Earth and our environment."

***Sesame Street* Turning Kids Into Bird Brains**

But in seasons 40 and 41, *Sesame Street*'s lessons about nature will be more numerous and more prominent. *Sesame Street* writer Kingsley said: "We've had episodes that touched on environmental aspects in the past, but we're going to make sure that every show does it over the next [two] years."

Kingsley is responsible for an episode in season 40 that will have kids practice being scientists for a day. In the episode, Bert—a pigeon fanatic—is on a mission to find a blue bar pigeon. "Elmo and Abby decide to help Bert find this pigeon, and in their search they run into all these other kinds of birds," Kingsley explained.

"After kids watch this show, they'll be able to identify chickadees, blue jays, robins, and blue bar pigeons by their shape, size, and birdcall."

Kingsley said that before any writing occurs for a new *Sesame Street* season, writers must participate in seminars run by experts on the chosen curriculum.

"When the curriculum push is reading, we have literacy experts. When it's numeracy, we have math people come in," Kingsley said.

To write her pigeon episode, Kingsley researched the different types of birds and consulted at length with ornithologists at Cornell University in Ithaca, New York.

"People think we just do letters and numbers," Kingsley said. "They have no idea how much hard work goes into writing an episode."

*Disclosure: The president and CEO of Sesame Workshop serves on the board of the [Education Foundation of the National Geographic Society](#). The Society owns *National Geographic News*.*