



Getting Down and Dirty

Dirtgirlworld offers little kids a funky rockin' organic alternative to talking machines and consumer-oriented TV.

LIVING IN THE US, I'm a bit CBC-deprived. Cross-border online content is limited, and fussier than just flicking on the TV or radio. Some US cable providers actually carry the CBC, though not ours. Otherwise, we'd subscribe. So, when I travel, I always see if my hotel is hip to Strombo, Mansbridge and the 22 Minutes crew.

While recently in Bangor, Maine, "Canada lives here" included my hotel room. One morning, a CBC TV program stopped me mid-sock-pull. Not only was it visually and aurally compelling, it seemed to be a bright green sprout in mainstream media.

If you've raised kids recently and done so without a TV in your home, I salute you. Like most working parents, my partner and I just try to navigate today's problematic media landscape as best we can. It's a world cluttered with violent imagery and commercial come-ons disguised as entertainment and even education.

As Juliet Schor writes in her disturbing book *Born to Buy*, "Children's social worlds are increasingly constructed around consuming, as brands and products have come to determine who is 'in' or 'out,' who is hot or not, who deserves to have friends, or social status." All of this, of course, further entrenches the consumerist ideology. As Schor learned

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in her work, the movement to downshift away from consumerism includes very few parents who are in the throes of raising their kids.

Over the years, our boys have watched many hours of human-eyes'd machinery on shows such as *Bob the Builder* and *Thomas the Tank Engine*, and along the way acquired the toys with which to reenact the stories. Now they've moved on to *Star Wars*, the franchise that never gives up the fight. We share our house with several squads of LEGO clone troopers and their accompanying weaponry and vehicles, and episodes of *The Clone Wars* are readily available online.

Anyway, what had me glued to the tube in Bangor was *Dirtgirlworld*, a relatively new show aimed at four- to seven-year-olds. Created by Australian permaculture farmers Cate McQuillen and Hewey Eustace (with help from Canada's DECODE Entertainment), it's a fantastical world of gardens, forests, wildlife, anthropomorphic bugs, and two kids, Scrapboy and Dirtgirl.

The show brims with creativity, colour, groovy vibes and nature-friendly messages. Its innovative visual style, with dynamic photos and art montages, mix with live action. And then there's the music. The show was inspired by the popularity of Eustace's award-winning 2002 *Dirtgirlworld* album, so the program is music-centered. The soundtrack is not just meaningful; it's lively and even edgy, nothing like the pap on most kids' shows.

Most importantly, the show's messages and themes are neither sappy, nor preachy. Dirtgirl is strong and sensitive with a can-do attitude and a charming manner. She and Scrapboy just get on with self-sufficient and sustainable living, taking time to wonder at the magic and mystery of nature, and to celebrate and love the life around them.

Dirtgirlworld exemplifies playful and positive green living, with nary a hint of environmental doom. That's what kids need: to have the chance to love nature before they have to worry about it disappearing. Caring for the world around us is just the natural way to grow up, and this show encourages kids to get outside, get grubby and dig the Earth. ♻️

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