Lisa Simpson

Lisa Marie Simpson[1] is a fictional character in the animated television series The Simpsons. She is the middle child and most intelligent of the Simpson family. Voiced by Yeardley Smith, Lisa was born as a character in The Tracey Ullman Show short "Good Night" on April 19, 1987. Cartoonist Matt Groening created and designed her while waiting to meet James L. Brooks. Groening had been invited to pitch a series of shorts based on his comic Life in Hell, but instead decided to create a new set of characters. He named the elder Simpson daughter after his younger sister Lisa Groening Bartlett. After appearing on The Tracey Ullman Show for three years, the Simpson family were moved to their own series on Fox, which debuted on December 17, 1989.

Intelligent, passionate, and the moral center of the family, Lisa Simpson, at eight years old, is the second child of Homer and Marge, younger sister of Bart, and older sister of Maggie. Lisa's high intellect and liberal political stance creates a barrier between her and other children her age, therefore she is a bit of a loner and social outcast. Lisa is a vegetarian, a strong environmentalist, a feminist, and a Buddhist. Lisa's character develops many times over the course of the show: she becomes a vegetarian in season 7 and converts to Buddhism in season 13. A strong liberal, Lisa advocates for a variety of political causes (e.g. standing with the Tibetan independence movement) which usually sets her against most of the people in Springfield. However, she can also be somewhat intolerant of opinions that differ from her own, often refusing to consider alternative perspectives. In her free time, Lisa enjoys many hobbies such as reading and playing the baritone saxophone, despite her father's annoyance regarding the latter. She has appeared in other media relating to The Simpsons – including video games, The Simpsons Movie, The Simpsons Ride, commercials and comic books – and inspired a line of merchandise.

Yeardley Smith originally tried out for the role of Bart, while Nancy Cartwright (who was later cast as the voice for Bart) tried out for Lisa. Producers considered Smith's voice too high for a boy, so she was given the role of Lisa. In the Tracey Ullman Show shorts, Lisa was something of a "female Bart" who mirrored her brother's mischief, but as the series progressed she became a liberal voice of reason which has drawn both praise and criticism from fans of the show. Because of her unusual pointed hair style, many animators consider Lisa the most difficult Simpsons character to draw.

TV Guide ranked her 11th (tied with Bart) on their list of the "Top 50 Greatest Cartoon Characters of All Time". Her environmentalism has been especially well received; several episodes featuring her have won Genesis and Environmental Media Awards, including a special "Board of Directors Ongoing Commitment Award" in 2001. People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals included Lisa on their list of the "Most Animal-Friendly TV Characters of All Time". Yeardley Smith won a Primetime Emmy Award for Outstanding Voice-Over Performance in 1992 and Lisa and her family were awarded a star on the Hollywood Walk of Fame in 2000.

Role in The Simpsons

The Simpsons uses a floating timeline in which the characters do not have physical ages;[2] as such, Lisa is always depicted as 7–8 years old.[3] The show itself is perpetually set in the year of broadcast (except for occasional flashbacks and flashforwards). In several episodes, events
Lisa is the most intellectual member of the Simpson family (she has an IQ of 159), and many episodes of the series focus on her fighting for various causes. Lisa is often the focus of episodes with “a real moral or philosophical point”, which according to former writer David S. Cohen is because “you really buy her as caring about it.” Lisa’s political convictions are generally liberal and she often contests other’s views. She is a vegetarian, feminist, environmentalist and a supporter of gay rights and the Free Tibet movement. In a special Christmas message for the UK in 2004 Lisa showed her support for Cornish nationalism, even speaking the Cornish language to get her message across. While supportive of the general ideals of the Christian church in which she was raised, Lisa became a practicing Buddhist in the episode “She of Little Faith” (season 13, 2001) after she learned about the Noble Eightfold Path. An “End Apartheid Now” poster can be seen on her bedroom door during earlier seasons. She is extremely controlled by her ideals and noble, and she undergoes drastic changes when she or anyone else is immoral, such as renouncing Homer’s last name and taking Marge’s when she discovers that Homer bet against the Summer Olympics.

Lisa has been friendly with several boys, including Ralph Wiggum in “I Love Lisa” (season 4, 1993), Nelson Muntz in “Lisa’s Date with Density” (season 8, 1996) and Colin in The Simpsons Movie (2007). Bart’s best friend Milhouse Van Houten has a crush on her, but despite dropping unsubtle hints about his feelings, he has been unsuccessful in winning her affection.

Lisa's year of birth is given in “Lisa's First Word” (season 4, 1992) as 1984, during the Summer Olympics. The episode “That ‘90s Show” (season 19, 2008), however, contradicts much of the established backstory; for example, it presents Homer and Marge as being childless in the late 1990s. Lisa is a lover of music, with jazz as her favorite genre. She enjoys and excels at playing the saxophone and became friends with jazz musician Bleeding Gums Murphy, whom she regards as an idol. Murphy helps pull Lisa out of her depression in " Moaning Lisa" (season 1, 1990). She is later deeply saddened by Murphy's death in "'Round Springfield" (season 6, 1995).

Lisa made her debut with the rest of the Simpson family on April 19, 1987, in The Tracey Ullman Show. When he realized that animating Life in Hell would require him to rescind publication rights, Groening went in another direction, hurriedly sketching his version of a dysfunctional family, named after members of his own family. Lisa was named after Groening’s younger sister, but little else was based on her. In The Tracey Ullman Show shorts, Lisa displayed little of the intelligence for which she later became known. She was more of a “female Bart” and was originally described as simply the “middle child”, without much personality.

Lisa made her debut with the rest of the Simpson family on April 19, 1987, in The Tracey Ullman Show short "Good Night". In 1989, the shorts were adapted into The Simpsons, a half-hour series on the Fox Broadcasting Company.

The entire Simpson family was designed to be easily recognized in silhouette. Because Groening had submitted basic sketches to the animators, assuming they would clean them up; instead, they just traced over his drawings. Lisa’s physical features are generally unique. In some early episodes, minor background characters occasionally had a similar hairline. However, in the later seasons, no character other than Maggie shares her hairline. While designing Lisa, Groening “couldn’t be bothered to even think about girls’ hair styles”. At the time, Groening was primarily drawing in black and white; when designing Lisa and Maggie, he “just gave them this kind of spiky starfish hair style, not thinking that they would eventually be drawn in color”.

To draw Lisa’s head and hair, most of the show’s animators use what they call the “three-three-two arrangement”. It begins with a circle, with two curving lines (one vertical, one horizontal) intersecting in the middle to indicate her eyeline. The vertical line continues outside of the circle to create one hair point, with two more added towards the back of her head. Three more points are then added in front (in the direction Lisa is facing), with two more behind it. Several Simpsons animators, including Pete Michels and David Silverman, consider Lisa the most difficult Simpsons character to draw. Silverman explains that “her head is so abstract” due to her hairstyle.
Smith and the show’s writers worked to give Lisa a more defined personality, and she has developed greatly during the series. In her 2000 memoir My Life as a 10-Year-Old Boy, Cartwright wrote: “with the brilliant wit of the writers and the wry, in-your-eye, honest-to-a-fault interpretation, Yeardley Smith has made Lisa a bright light of leadership, full of compassion and competence beyond her years. Lisa Simpson is the kind of child we not only want our children to be, but also the kind of child we want all children to be. But, at the time, on The Tracey Ullman Show, she was just an animated eight-year-old kid who had no personality.”

Lisa is the only regular character voiced by Smith, who raises the pitch of her voice slightly for the role. In some earlier episodes she provided some of Maggie’s squeaks and occasional speaking parts, and has voiced other characters on very rare occasions. Usually they are derivative of Lisa, such as Lisa Bella in "Last Tap Dance in Springfield" (season 11, 2000) and Lisa, Jr. in "Missionary: Impossible". (season 11, 2000)

Despite the fame of Lisa Simpson, Smith is rarely recognized in public, which she does not mind. She said, “It’s wonderful to be in the midst of all this hype about the show, and people enjoying the show so much, and to be totally a fly on the wall; people never recognise me solely from my voice.” In a 2009 interview with The Guardian she commented that “It’s the best job ever. I have nothing but gratitude for the amount of freedom The Simpsons has bought me in my life.” Although Smith received a Primetime Emmy Award for Outstanding Voice-Over Performance in 1992, she considers it unimportant, saying “there's part of me that feels it wasn't even a real Emmy.” The award is a Creative Arts prize not awarded during the primetime telecast and, at the time, a juried award without nominations. Still, Smith considers her work on the show a success. “If I had to be associated with one character in fiction,” she said, “I will always be thrilled that it was Lisa Simpson.”

Matt Groening has described Smith as being very similar to Lisa: “Yeardley has strong moral views about her character. There are lines that are written for Lisa that Yeardley reads and says, ‘No, I wouldn’t say that.’”

In the seventh-season episode “Lisa the Vegetarian” (1995), Lisa permanently becomes a vegetarian, distinguishing her as one of the first primetime television characters to make such a choice. The episode was written by David S. Cohen (in his first solo writing credit) who jotted down the idea one day while eating...
Lisa, despite being a child prodigy, often sees herself as a misfit within the Simpson family and other children due to possessing an unusually high level of intelligence. She shows characteristics rarely seen in Springfield, including spirituality and commitment to peaceful ways,[2] and is notably more concerned with world affairs than her life in Springfield,[55] with her rebellion against social norms being depicted as constructive and heroic, yet she can be self-righteous at times.[56] In "Lisa the Vegetarian", an increasing sense of moral righteousness leads her to disrupt her father's roast-pig barbecue, an act for which she later apologizes.[57] Episodes often take shots at Lisa's idealism and virtue signalling.[58] In "Bart Star", (season nine, 1997) Lisa, departs from her typically more genuine nature and apparently looking for a new cause to crusade over,[59] defiantly declares that she, a girl, would like to join the football team. In the 1990s, it was considered odd to allow a girl to play football. However, when coach Ned Flanders reveals that several girls already play for the team, she hesitates and claims football is "not really [her] thing". She then expresses distaste about a ball made of pig's skin, but one of the girls informs her that their footballs are made of synthetic and that proceeds are donated to Amnesty International. Upset by being unable to gain moral superiority, Lisa runs off.[60]

Lisa is said to have an IQ of 159.[61] and in "They Saved Lisa's Brain" (season ten, 1999) she becomes a member of the Springfield chapter of Mensa.[62] When unable to attend school due to a teachers' strike in "The PTA Disbands", (season six, 1995) she suffers withdrawal symptoms because of the sudden lack of praise.[63] She even demands that her mother grade her for no obvious reason.[64] In Planet Simpson, Chris Turner writes that these traits make Lisa more realistic because "No character can aspire to realism without a few all-too-human flaws."[63]

Although she is wise beyond her years, Lisa has typical childhood issues, sometimes requiring adult intervention.[65] For example, in "Lost Our Lisa" (season nine, 1998), she tricks Homer into allowing her to ride the bus alone, only to become hopelessly lost and in need of aid from her father.[66] Chris Turner writes in Planet Simpson that incidents like this illustrate that "Even when Lisa's lecturing like a college professor or menacingly declaring that the session musicians who perform her solos do not try to play at the second grade level and instead "think of Lisa as a really good baritone saxophone", and some episodes use that as a plot device. According to Matt Groening, the baritone saxophone was chosen because he found the thought of an eight-year-old girl playing it amusing. He added, "But she doesn't always play a baritone saxophone because the animators don't know what it looks like, so it changes shape and color from show to show."

One of the hallmarks of the show's opening sequence is a brief solo Lisa plays on her saxophone after being thrown out of music class. The Simpsons composer Alf Clausen said that the session musicians who perform her solos do not try to play at the second grade level and instead "think of Lisa as a really good baritone player.

Personality

Lisa is a good soul. I love that she is so compassionate. She is wise beyond her years. She has remarkable optimism, despite the fact that she's disappointed so often.

— Yeardley Smith[32]
Lisa has been romantically linked to a number of other characters on the show, including Nelson Muntz, which voice actor Yeardley Smith says would make a good match for Lisa.

Reception

Commendations

See also: List of awards won by The Simpsons

Lisa has been a popular character since the show's inception. She was listed at number 11 (tied with Bart) in TV Guide's "Top 50 Greatest Cartoon Characters of All Time." She appeared in Comcast's list of TV's Most Intriguing Characters and was also included in AfterEllen.com's Top 50 Favorite Female TV Characters.

On a less positive note, she was ranked third in AskMen's top 10 of the most irritating '90s cartoon characters. Yeardley Smith has won several awards for voicing Lisa, including a Primetime Emmy Award for "Outstanding Voice-Over Performance" in 1992 for "Lisa the Greek." Various episodes in which Lisa stars have won Emmy Awards for Outstanding Animated Program, including "Homer vs. Lisa and the 8th Commandment" in 1991, "Lisa's Wedding" in 1995 and "HOMR" in 2001. In 2000, Lisa and the rest of the Simpson family were awarded a star on the Hollywood Walk of Fame at 7021 Hollywood Boulevard.

Lisa's environmentalism has been especially well received. In 2001, Lisa received a special "Board of Directors Ongoing Commitment Award" at the Environmental Media Awards. Lisa the Vegetarian won both an Environmental Media Award for "Best Television Episodic Comedy" and a Genesis Award for "Best Television Comedy Series, Ongoing Commitment." Several other episodes that feature Lisa speaking out in favor of animal rights have won Genesis Awards, including "Whacking Day" in 1994, "Bart Gets an Elephant" in 1995, "Million Dollar Abie" in 2007 and "Apocalypse Cow" in 2009.

Cultural influence

Jonathan Gray, author of the book Watching The Simpsons, feels that Lisa "is probably the best and certainly longest-running feminist character that television has had. She's the heart of the show and she quite often questions the gender politics." Christopher Borrelli of The Toledo Blade wrote, "Has there ever been a female TV character as complex, intelligent, and, ahem, as emotionally well-drawn as Lisa Simpson? Meet her once and she comes off priggish and one-note – a know-it-all. Get to know her and Lisa is as well-rounded as anyone you may ever meet in the real world."

According to PETA, Lisa was one of the first vegetarian characters on primetime television. In 2004 the organization included Lisa on its list of the "Most Animal-Friendly TV Characters of All Time." In 2008, environmentalist website The Daily Green honored Lisa's role in The Simpsons Movie with one of its inaugural "Heart of Green" awards, which "recognize those who have helped green go mainstream." They wrote "young Lisa Simpson has inspired a generation to wear their hearts on their sleeves and get educated, and involved, about global issues, from justice to feminism and the environment." Japanese broadcasters reversed viewer dislike of the series by focusing marketing of the show on Lisa. Lisa's well-intended but ill-fated struggles to be a voice of reason and a force of good in her family and community struck a chord with Japanese audiences. Mario D'Amato, a specialist in Buddhist studies at Rollins College in Florida, described Lisa as "open-minded, reflective, ethical, and interested in improving herself in various ways, while still preserving a childlike sense of innocence. These are all excellent qualities, ones which are espoused by many Buddhist traditions."

Lisa and the rest of the Simpsons have had a significant influence on English-language idioms. The dismissive term "Meh", used by Lisa and popularized by the show, entered the Collins English Dictionary in 2008. In 1996, The New York Times published an article saying that Lisa was inspiring children, especially young girls, to learn to play the saxophone.

Lisa Simpson was mentioned at the 2018 CPAC when Senator Ted Cruz called the Democratic Party "The Party of Lisa Simpson", as opposed to the Republican Party being the party of the rest of the family.

Merchandising
Lisa has been included in many The Simpsons publications, toys, and other merchandise. The Lisa Book, describing Lisa's personality and attributes, was released in 2006. Other merchandise includes dolls, posters, figurines, bobblehead dolls, mugs, and clothing such as slippers, T-shirts, baseball caps, and boxer shorts. Lisa has appeared in commercials for Burger King, C.C. Lemon, Church's Chicken, Domino's Pizza, Kentucky Fried Chicken, Ramada Inn, Ritz Crackers, Subway and Butterfinger.

On April 9, 2009, the United States Postal Service unveiled a series of five 44 cent stamps featuring Lisa and the four other members of the nuclear Simpson family. They are the first characters from a television series to receive this recognition while still in production. The stamps, designed by Matt Groening, went on sale in May 2009.

Lisa has also appeared in other media relating to The Simpsons. She has appeared in each Simpsons video game, including The Simpsons Game, released in 2007. In addition to the television series, Lisa regularly appears in issues of Simpsons Comics, first published on November 29, 1993 and published monthly. The comics focus on the sweeter, more naive incarnation from the early seasons. Lisa also plays a role in The Simpsons Ride, launched in 2008 at Universal Studios Florida and Hollywood.

References

2. ^b Turner 2004, p. 78.
3. ^c Jean, Al; Reiss, Mike; Moore, Rich (1991-09-19). "Stark Raving Dad". The Simpsons. Season 03. Episode 01. Event occurs at 1:12. Fox. "Bart, my birthday's in two days. I'm going to be eight years old. It's a big number, almost double digits."
8. ^g Jean, Al; Reiss, Mike; Archer, Wes (1990-02-11). "Moaning Lisa". The Simpsons. Season 01. Episode 06. Fox.
22. ^ Cartwright 2000, pp. 35–40
33. ^b Miranda, Charles (December 8, 2007). "She who laughs last". The Daily Telegraph. p. 8E.
91. Ortved 2009, p. 86
92. Borrelli, Christopher (March 11, 2001). "She's not even real and she's a feminist role model liberated Lisa". The Toledo Blade.
95. Pinsky 2007, p. 180

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Further reading

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Lisa Simpson is a fictional character on The Simpsons. Along with Lenny Leonard and Carl Carlson, Lisa Simpson is portrayed as a Buddhist on the show. Lisa is an extremely intelligent 8-year-old girl, one of the most intelligent characters on the show, with an I.Q. of either 156 or 159. She also plays the baritone saxophone. Another notable quality about her is that she is a vegetarian; she became one in the episode "Lisa the Vegetarian" in the seventh season.