



Parents' Choice Awards : Television : Television



## Space Racers

*Spring 2015 Television*

**Ages:** 3 - 6 yrs.

**Producer:** Space Race, LLC

**Rating:** TV Y



### Review:

Presented by Maryland Public Television, this half-hour animated series is recommended for children ages 3 - 6. Stories focus on the adventures of Eagle, Robyn, Raven, Hawk, and Starling, elite students known as Space Racers at the Stardust Space Academy. According to the blurb on the distributor's website, plots are designed to "tap into children's curiosity and excitement about space and discovery" and are meant to reinforce STEM education (science, technology, engineering, and mathematics).

In the series' premiere episode, "Where Are We?", the cadets are eager to explore the solar system but solar flares force them to land on an unfamiliar planet. The script incorporates definitions of solar storms and talks about characteristics of various planets as the team analyzes geographical features and weather patterns in an attempt to figure out where they are and how to get home. In another episode, "Total Eclipse", a race to the moon sets the stage for plenty of conversation about solar eclipses - while also delivering a good message about character development, preparation, and confidence in the face of new challenges. Conflicts are well-drawn and also simple enough for young viewers to grasp the gist of the problem and the need for a solution.

In each of the stories, space definitions and science concepts are wrapped up in dialogue that sometimes flies by more quickly than very young viewers can grasp. There's also a nice element of sci-fantasy but it could confuse young viewers about what's real and what's not. The actual science concepts, however, do receive reinforcement in each episode, because the series also includes live-action interstitial segments, interesting and well-produced field packages that include a tour of NASA's Goddard Space Flight Center, exhibits at the Smithsonian's National Air and Space Museum, and the Maryland Space Center. The program also ends with another short feature, usually a quiz or music video. These segments are rich in visuals and engaging content and probably will have the most impact in helping to excite viewers about space exploration.

*Space Racers* is one of many kid programs these days to humanize vehicles or machines as a means to teach educational concepts *and* character development. It does a credible job at each and even though the pace is uneven, and some of the content could be tweaked to be more age-appropriate, it will satisfy young star-gazers by giving them a glimpse of what lies beyond our own planet.

Gina Catanzarite ©2015 Parents' Choice

Gina Catanzarite is an award-winning television producer, writer, teacher, mom and media consultant in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. She began her career in 1987 and counts eight Emmy awards, twenty-one Emmy nominations, a Matrix award, two Pennsylvania Broadcaster's Association Awards, seven Telly Awards, and a screenwriting grant from the Theatre Association of Pennsylvania, among her professional honors.

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