

Cattle Dog Gusto: How Bluey Conquered the United States

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For decades, the cultural phenomenon known as Americanisation has taken place with diffusing ease. Momentum was gained with the retreat of communism from Europe's eastern states with the end of the Cold War and the eventual termination of the Soviet Union in 1991. Global brands of Americana from fizzy drinks to Dallas became pervasive cultural presences. Not even children's programming was exempt.

Converts and devotees would mimic accents, adopt terms of reference, and emulate patterns of behaviour. In terms of children's programming, *Sesame Street*, the work of the non-profit organisation Sesame Workshop, has been the global standard bearer. Jenny Perlman Robinson and Daniela Petrova, [writing](#) for Brookings in 2015, delved into its significance as an informal educating tool, reaching millions of children across 150 countries. "What had started as an educational television program more than 40 years ago is now a multimedia platform that uses everything from radio, video, and books to the latest in interactive media and technology."

In 2018, Australia made its own contribution in the field. The Australian Broadcasting Corporation released an animated series that has since become a giddy global phenomenon. The US has not been spared, suggesting that Americanisation, at least in some areas, can also be given hearty doses of its own medicine. The series in question, *Bluey*, features an Australian dog of the Blue Heeler variety: one Bluey, a six-year-old cattle dog who lives in the Queensland city of Brisbane with sister Bingo, and parents Bandit and Chilli.

By the end of March 2020, the series had won an International Emmy in the children's preschool category, something no doubt helped by the enforced isolation brought on by the coronavirus pandemic. In 2023, *Bluey* became the [second most popular](#) streaming show in the US, logging 731 million hours. In 2024, the series became the most viewed show in the United States.

Such success was due, in no small part, to a distribution deal struck between the BBC and Disney in 2019.

"The warmth and authenticity of Bluey's family dynamic is what first captured our interest in the show," [explained](#) Jane Gould, senior vice president of Disney Channels Worldwide. "*Bluey* reminds us all of our own families, and it plays out in the small but emotionally epic dramas of day-to-day life in surprising, heartfelt and very funny ways that will engage children and parents alike."

The fascinating aspect about *Bluey* is its central premise: neither the viewing parents nor

their engaged children are treated like passive imbeciles. Both groups can partake in the themes of the series without feeling infantilised.

“It trusts,” [wrote](#) David Sim in *The Atlantic* in August last year, “that its young audience will be able to understand stories that are about the foibles and insecurities of parents too.”

The web traffic site, Similarweb.com, yields an [interesting statistic](#): the largest demographic of visitors to the official Bluey website (Bluey.tv) are those between 25-34, coming in at 28.86%.

Fantasy and imagination mingle with testing, even potentially contentious issues. There [are questions](#) about premature birth (“Early Baby”); the appearance of friends who proceed to vanish (“Camping”); even questions about the fine line between full blooded banter and unacceptable teasing. In a Father’s Day episode, Bluey’s dad, Bandit, openly wonders about the merits of getting a vasectomy.

Given such a format, it was bound to interest academics keen to tell us the obvious after generating the usual quantitative quarry of data. In a [survey](#) of 700 adults – part of a research project called Australian Children’s Television Cultures – we are told that *Bluey* was most keenly enjoyed by parents wishing to view a series with their children. Those behind the research project [were keen to note](#) the words of one of the respondents in describing the series. *Bluey* was “representative of an idealised Australian ethos – relaxed, curious, and hard-working.”

The influence of *Bluey* has also been noted in another respect. In 2022, a father in Massachusetts revealed that his child had begun using the term “dunny” instead of “toilet”. This brought much pleasure to ABC Sydney radio presenter, Richard Glover. “Finally,” [he chortled](#) in *The Washington Post*, “we have our revenge.”

According to Glover, US popular culture had ensured that Australians of his generation had “enrolled in a PhD program” on the subject. “We paid the price for our enthusiasm, regularly scolded by our parents for ‘using those terrible American words.’ These included ‘sidewalk’ instead of ‘footpath’ and ‘trash’ instead of ‘rubbish’.” Now, it was time for those in the US, notably children, to learn that breakfast could be called “brekkie”, a chicken a “chook”, and “tradie” a skilled tradesperson.

Little wonder that we can find a Master of Arts thesis [dedicated](#) to the adult fandom phenomenon around *Bluey*, including its appeal to those millennials who show “higher rates of anxiety, a greater distrust in the American government, and disbelief in American excellence than those of previous generations.” Anthropomorphised cattle dogs had become saviours of a sort.

Something else is at play here. If *Bluey* is naturalistic, touching on the raw end of life in parenting and children’s lives, it functions in a digital world that is less adult, increasingly infantile and increasingly disabling. Children and adults are becoming increasingly estranged from relations through technological parting and an addiction to the screen. Funny that it should fall to a family of animated Australian cattle dogs to tie parents and children in a gentle knot of play and accommodation.

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