

# New Family TV Show to Focus on Health, Science

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*Pilot Created by Duquesne Professor to Premiere on Monday*

The pilot of a new TV show on health literacy, created by a Duquesne University professor, is slated to air on Pittsburgh's *PBS* affiliate *WQED-TV* this spring.



Dr. John Pollock, associate professor of biology at Duquesne University, who is known for creating health-oriented planetarium shows and CDs for patients, has produced the live-action, 30-minute *Scientastic!* pilot. The show intends to engage children and their parents as active participants in their own health and lifestyle choices.

Habiba (Habiba Hopson), left, and Leah (Lili Reinhart), in *Sticks and Stones*.

In the first episode, *Sticks and Stones*, Habiba, the best friend of the main character, 12-year-old Leah, breaks her arm at soccer practice because she is pushed by a group of mean girls. Leah springs into action, going to the library, doctors' offices and museums to learn about bones. With her little brother in tow, Leah learns how bones heal, and how nutrition and exercise affect bone strength and repair. The show also addresses bullying in a constructive way and offers practical steps to help stop bullying.

"There's such a great base of health-related resources in Pittsburgh, which is one of the reasons we decided to set the show here," said Pollock. He included orthopedic surgeons and pediatricians from Children's Hospital, the Carnegie Museum of Natural History, the McGowan Institute for Regenerative Medicine and the National Aviary in the pilot. Other filming locations were the Winchester Thurston School, Pittsburgh Indoor Sports Arena, Cheswick, and the Ice Rink at PPG Place.

Pollock pushes local libraries as an invaluable source of information and, as such, Leah uses Pittsburgh-area libraries as her home base.

Fun mixes with the lessons, and Pollock uses real doctors and scientists from the Pittsburgh area as information storehouses and as entertainment for the kids—in some episodes, the doctors sing and dance right alongside the actors. The show includes original songs, dance sequences and 3-D and 2-D animations created by Pollock's team at Duquesne.

*Scientastic!* is geared toward late elementary and middle school students and works in an interdisciplinary fashion on three levels: teaching basic science principles; tying those

basic principles to health; then addressing social issues pertinent to kids. The overall goal is to help people make decisions that lead to healthy lifestyles.

“Between 70 and 100 million adults in America have low health literacy skills,” explained Pollock. “That’s basically half the adult population. Health literacy has to be a family decision—kids aren’t buying the groceries.”

Pollock and his Partnership in Education team at Duquesne, along with his production partner, Planet Earth Television, have developed a list of over 100 topics for future shows, including diabetes, the flu and the immune system. Each show ties its particular topic to general science and health literacy and provides online resources for kids and their families.

“The hallmark of public media is education,” said Deborah L. Acklin, executive vice president and chief operating officer of WQED Multimedia. “More than 56 years ago, this unique and very profound concept of ‘educational television’ started right here in Pittsburgh and has grown to be one of the most respected entities in the country. We help young people by providing for them the educational tools ‘to think’ and to reason for themselves, and this partnership with Professor Pollock and his team is just another way we change lives in our community.”

On the show’s Web site, [www.ScientasticTV.com](http://www.ScientasticTV.com), kids can explore the basics and fundamentals of science, while parents and teachers can access teaching aids and lesson plans developed by students in Duquesne’s School of Education.

The show will be produced on DVD and made available for use in schools in the greater Pittsburgh area, along with companion teaching resources on the Web site.

Pollock’s latest project was funded with approximately \$205,000 from a number of sources, including UPMC Health Plan, National Center for Research Resources of the National Institutes of Health, The Pittsburgh Foundation, Duquesne University and congressional directed funding from the U.S. Department of Education.

#### ***Duquesne University***

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