

Teaching The Emmys (Revised)

This blogpost originally ran on MiddleWeb and has been revised.

Use the Emmy Awards as a Versatile Teaching Tool

BY [FRANK BAKER](#) · 09/17/2019

Does television still matter? You bet it does! Millions of eyeballs and dollars are at stake.

Many of us, and our students, still follow television programs and series, whether they're broadcast on TV, cable, or streamed via the internet on any of the dozens of established and emerging entertainment services.

The fall [network TV season](#) was announced in May and will begin for the most part in September. But do we really even have TV seasons anymore?

Cable channels may start new series and continue old ones anytime during the year. And the streaming services, increasingly, just drop an entire season onto their platforms at once (with great or little fanfare) allowing us to set our own viewing pace – or to binge-watch every episode in a weekend of epic video consumption.

Whatever we might say about TV seasons, summer is definitely part of the Emmys season, as the television industry launches a multi-month promotion of the annual [Emmy Awards](#), recognizing the best programming from the previous year. This year, the awards telecast will be broadcast LIVE on the FOX-TV Network at **8pm ET, Sunday, September 22**. [NOTE: Last year's broadcast resulted in some of the lowest ratings (audience) in years. Will this year be different?]

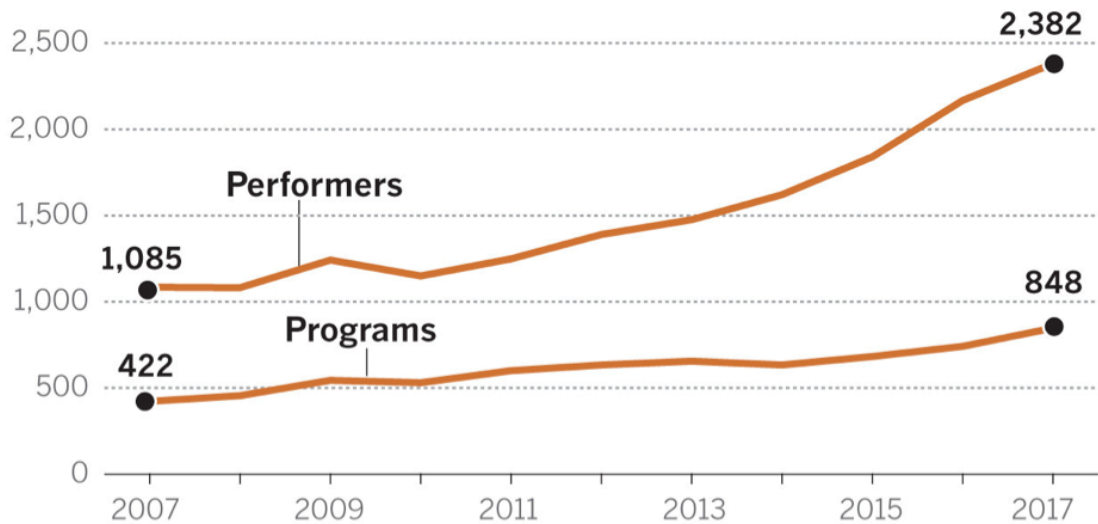


The Emmys provide educators with yet another teachable moment and opportunity to engage students in those shows they watch and discuss. The broadcast is another one of those pop culture events (like [the Super Bowl](#) and [the Academy Awards](#)) that generate lots of buzz and have implications both outside and inside the classroom.

Emmys and the Evolution of Television

Today, there are more programs eligible for Emmy awards than any other time in the past. Some critics maintain we are in the midst of the “Second Golden Age of Television” – referencing the quality of material airing today. (The first [Golden Age of TV](#) occurred between the late 1940s and the early 1960s.)

A jump in Emmy contenders



Source: Academy of Television Arts & Sciences

@latimesgraphics

[Source](#)

Many attribute this second golden age to the eagerness of cable channels and the new streaming platforms to establish blockbuster “signature” programs that establish or restore their brands as leading entertainment resources.

Almost-forgotten cable channels, reduced to running endless repetitions of popular network shows from decades past, are now reviving themselves with original series praised by critics. And, in an effort to capitalize on [the streaming phenomenon](#) birthed by Netflix, me-too channels like Hulu, Prime Video, and other up-and-comers are collectively producing original quality content at a bewildering rate.

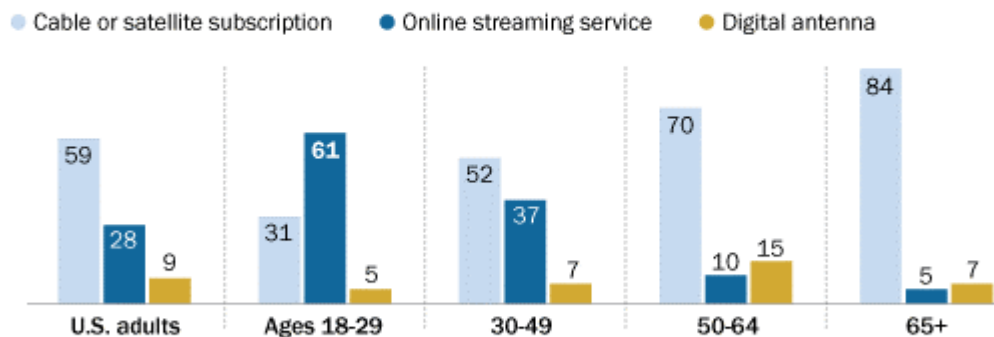
Original content drives people to pay streaming video services, while the rest of the stuff in the library keeps people around.” – David Marino-Nachison in [an article at Barron’s Next](#).

For the past several years, broadcast outlets (NBC, CBS, CW, ABC, FOX) have been overshadowed by the explosion in news series and programs available via streaming services like NETFLIX, HULU, AMAZON PRIME and the like. (Apple, Disney, Comcast, AT&T and Warner Media are expected to join this group

soon and will likely impact subscriptions)

Young adults use streaming services most to watch TV

% of U.S. adults who say ___ is the primary way they watch television



Source: Survey conducted Aug. 15-21, 2017.

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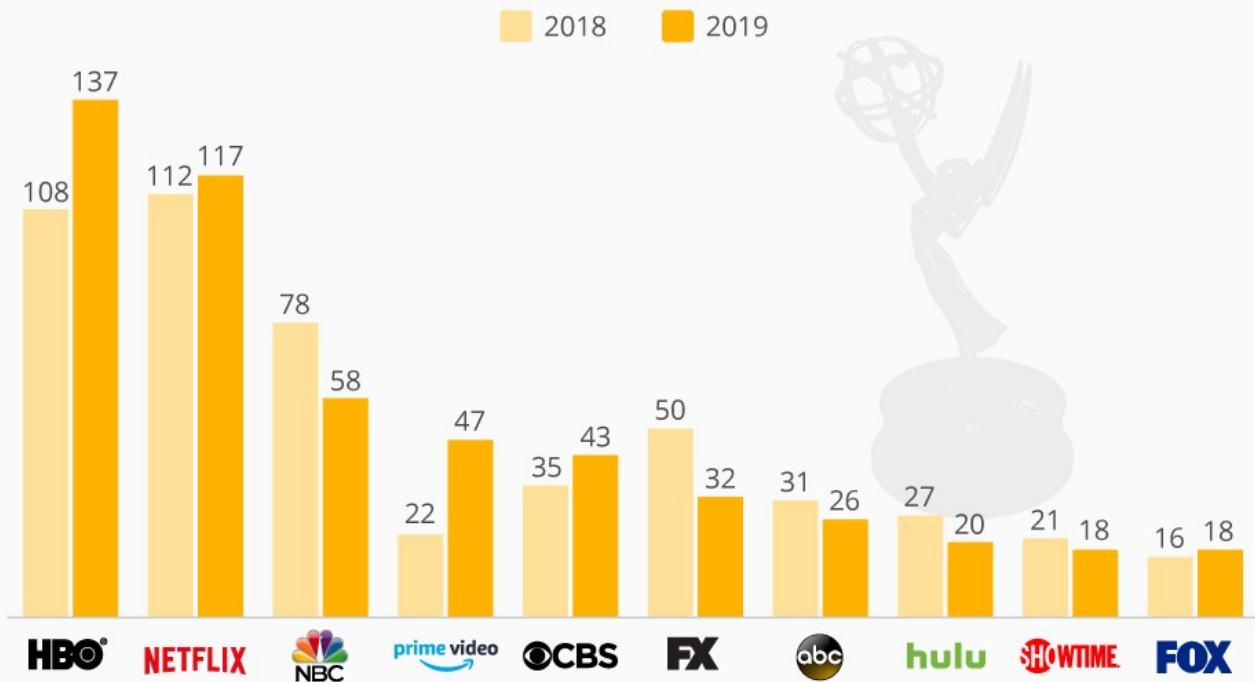
[Source](#)

Another development in TV is the trend of ditching cable and satellite. As a result, many cable subscribers have “cut the cord,” electing to go with bundling services provided by Apple TV, Roku, SLING, YouTube TV and others. This results in consumers having few options (e.g. fewer channels) and a less costly bill. This move may also make it more difficult for new or unique programs, on less popular networks, to be seen.

Last year, 2018, it was NETFLIX that received the most nominations but this year cable network HBO jumped ahead.

HBO Strikes Back Against Netflix at the Emmys

Networks/platforms with the most nominations at the 71st Emmy Awards



@StatistaCharts Source: Academy Of Television Arts & Sciences



Source



HBO snagged the most Primetime Emmy nominations with 137, up from 108 in 2018, and its flagship drama series [Game of Thrones](#) also topped all networks and streaming services with 32.

[Netflix](#) followed with 117 total noms, followed by NBC with 58, Amazon Prime Video with 47 and CBS and FX Networks with 43 and 32, respectively, among networks and streaming services.

Following *Game of Thrones* with the top program nominations are *The Marvelous Mrs. Maisel* with 20, *Chernobyl* with 19, *Saturday Night Live* with 18 and *Barry* and *Fosse/Verdon* tied with 17 each. *The Handmaid's Tale* received 11 nominations.

Emmy Noms by Program

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| Show | Noms |
|----------------------------------|------|
| <i>Game of Thrones</i> | 32 |
| <i>The Marvelous Mrs. Maisel</i> | 20 |
| <i>Chernobyl</i> | 19 |
| <i>Saturday Night Live</i> | 18 |
| <i>Barry</i> | 17 |
| <i>Fosse/Verdon</i> | 17 |
| <i>When They See Us</i> | 16 |
| <i>Russian Doll</i> | 13 |
| <i>Escape At Dannemora</i> | 12 |
| <i>Fleabag</i> | 11 |

Emmy Noms by Network 2018 vs. 2019

| Network | 2018 | 2019 |
|-------------|------|------|
| HBO | 108 | 137 |
| Netflix | 112 | 117 |
| NBC | 78 | 58 |
| Prime Video | 22 | 47 |
| CBS | 35 | 43 |
| FX Networks | 50 | 32 |
| ABC | 31 | 26 |
| Hulu | 27 | 20 |
| Fox | 16 | 18 |
| Showtime | 21 | 18 |

Source

Will the 2019 Emmy Award voters again prefer the streaming series? Will the TV networks see their share of Emmy Awards continue to dwindle? These are great questions to pursue with

students, not only in the context of media literacy but as fodder for close reading activities, argumentative writing assignments, cultural history lessons, and more.

The Emmys Frenzy

With the competition greater and the stakes higher than ever, for the past several months the Emmy fanfare and the campaigning have reached epic proportions. In an effort to sway decisions, studios sent DVD packages to eligible voters and sponsored lavish parties. [USA Today recently reported](#) on the lengths that production studios and stars are going through in order to get recognized.



HBO's Chernobyl billboard in Los Angeles – "For Your Consideration"

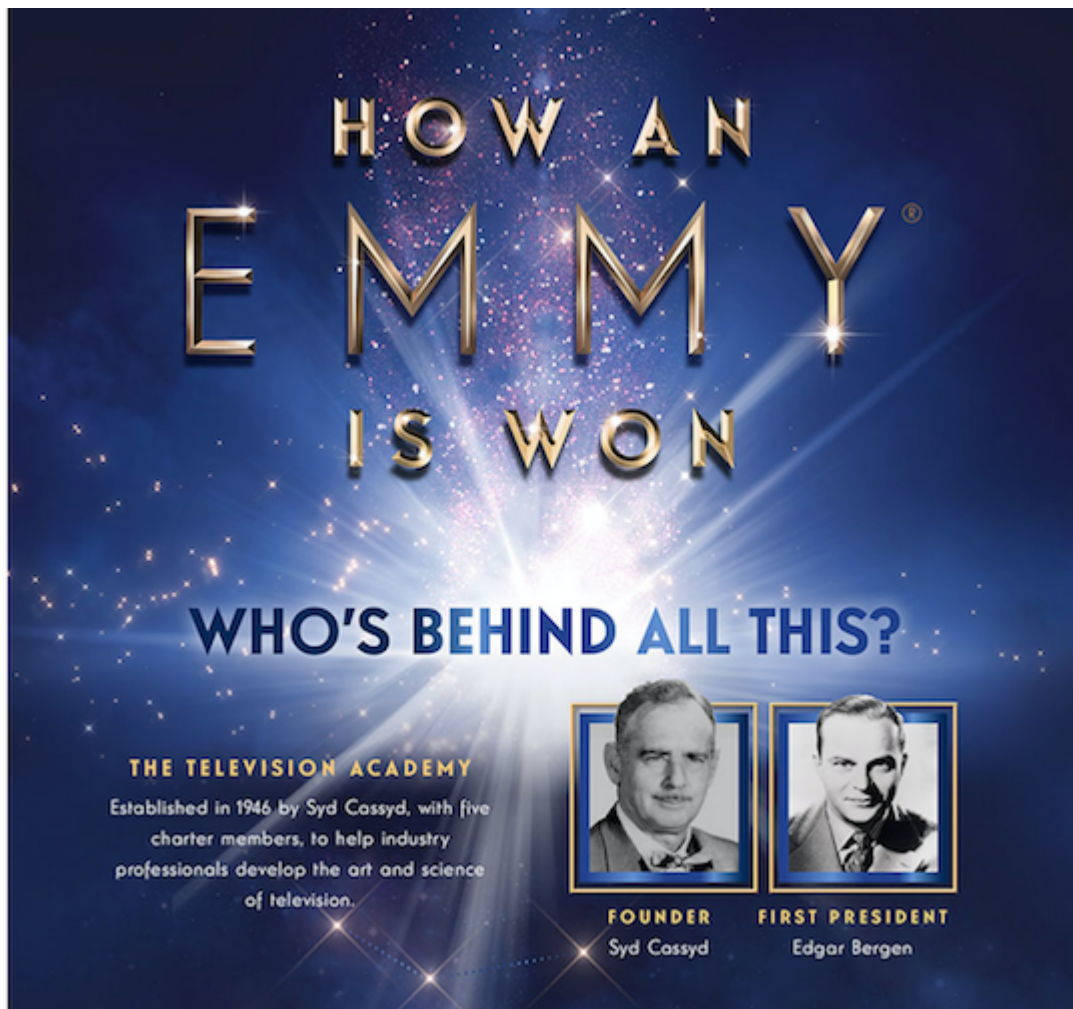
A Deadline Hollywood columnist also observed: "The (publicity) campaign is as important as getting the award itself." Emmy hopefuls, eager to call attention to themselves, have been featured in multi-page ads in trade publications such as [The](#)

[Hollywood Reporter](#), [VARIETY](#), and [EMMY](#). (These “For Your Consideration” ads also showed up in daily newspapers and on billboards in and around Los Angeles and New York City, where most of the voters reside.)

Who Are The Emmy Voters?

The Emmys, awarded by the Academy of Television Arts & Sciences, honor those who work in front of and behind the camera. The Academy, with more than 20,000 members, is divided into 28 peer groups of specialized fields. The members of each peer group vote on the nominees and winners for categories pertaining to their area of specialty. ([Source](#))

A separate awards ceremony, the Creative Arts Emmy Awards, honors the crafts people—those who work behind the scenes in production. The [winners of the Creative Arts Awards](#) were announced September 14 and 15. HBO’s *Game of Thrones* garnered 10 awards during the ceremonies. *Chernobyl* (HBO) was honored with 7 while *The Marvelous Mrs. Maisel* (Amazon Prime Video) received six.



Students will find this ["How An Emmy Is Won" infographic](#) easy to follow. Also see these resources: [Emmy Nominations](#) and [Interesting Facts about the Emmys](#). And for even deeper diving, [these press fact sheets for 2019](#).

Connecting TV to Teaching Standards

Studying television in the middle grades might seem inappropriate or frivolous. However, many ELA and social studies teachers know that when they take the time to engage students with popular culture texts, they're really meeting students where they are.

We know students watch television and discuss favorite plots, stars and genres. In their book [Falling in Love with Close Reading](#), authors Christopher Lehman and Kate Roberts recommend engaging students by having them compare some of the situation comedies they might be fond of watching.

(This [Read/Write/Think lesson plan](#) is somewhat dated, but you'll find ideas on studying TV in the middle grades.)

The Common Core ELA standards for middle grades specifically reference the importance of teaching students to understand media technique, connections to original texts, and choices made in production:

- ▶ *7th grade:* Compare and contrast a written story, drama, or poem to its audio, filmed, staged, or multimedia version, analyzing the effects of techniques unique to each medium (e.g., lighting, sound, color, or camera focus and angles in a film).
- ▶ *8th grade:* Analyze the extent to which a filmed or live production of a story or drama stays faithful to or departs from the text or script, evaluating the choices made by the director or actors.

See an example of comparing different versions of Horton Foote's play "A Trip to Bountiful" [in this article](#) I wrote in 2014 about the Emmy Awards. The ability to compare print and non-print forms of something requires students to have a similar understanding of each medium's key elements.

The nominated programs fall into one of many popular genres and sub-genres. In classrooms today students study genre and the formulas that comprise them. Popular TV genres include sit-coms, drama (police, legal, medical), action/adventure, sci-fi, animated, reality, game and comedy. Students could explore why they gravitate to certain genres and why they are appealing. ([The Television Genre Book](#) may offer you some solid suggestions on how to teach them.)

Lesson/Activity Suggestion

Let's say your students are fans of Netflix's *Stranger Things* which has been categorized as science/horror/supernatural fiction, and period drama. It

competes in the Emmys' drama category. Have your students investigate which other dramas are in competition with *Stranger Things*.



What similarities and differences do they see? What books or movies come to mind? You might task your students with conducting a “Who Should Win the Emmy” poll with other students at school and another with adults. Perhaps include both drama and comedy series. Have them present their poll findings. Did the students and adults agree on which series deserve Emmy awards?

Some intense discussion continues around race and Hollywood awards. Students might search Google Images for charts sharing data about representation. Here's an example from Medium, part of [a story on 2018 Emmy diversity](#):

The number of black actresses nominated as lead actress for a comedy or drama series had not changed much during the last decade.

Finally, teachers might want to apply some typical media literacy questions to the Emmy Awards. The following questions are suggestions to jump start your students' critical thinking skills:

More Recommended Resources

▶ [Infographic: How An Emmy Is Won](#)

[The Emmy Awards: Facts & Statistics](#)

▶ [Mourning the Lost Long TV Season](#)

▶ [7 Ways Technology Has Changed Television](#)

▶ [Streaming TV Isn't Just a New Way to Watch – It's a New Genre](#) (New York Times)

▶ [Archive of American Television](#) (streaming interviews and more)

▶ [Genre Studies In Mass Media – A Handbook](#) (by Art Silverblatt)

▶ [The Whole Crazy Process of Creating A TV Show – From Pitch to Pilot](#) (at Gizmodo)