



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

## PBS KIDS' *Between the Lions*® Roars into The Magnolia State with New Episodes and a New Production Partner

Mississippi Public Broadcasting Joins WGBH, Sirius Thinking, Ltd. to Produce New  
Episodes of PBS KIDS Flagship Ready To Learn Series

BOSTON, JULY 28, 2004 -- WGBH Boston, Sirius Thinking, Ltd. and Mississippi Public Broadcasting (MPB) announced today a collaboration to produce new seasons of the six-time Emmy® Award-winning PBS KIDS series, *Between the Lions*. Production will begin in Jackson, Mississippi this fall, with new episodes anticipated to begin airing in spring, 2005. Major funding for new episodes of seasons five and six is provided by PBS Ready To Learn, with additional funding towards season six to be raised by MPB.

The new production partner, Mississippi Public Broadcasting, serves all 82 counties of Mississippi. MPB has consistently produced award-winning, quality early childhood education programs, and is well positioned to provide solid support to this strong, educational series.

“The collaboration with MPB dates back to 2001 when we launched a unique literacy and research initiative based on the series in two Mississippi communities,” said Brigid Sullivan, Vice President for WGBH Children’s, Educational, and Interactive Programming and Media Access. “This work not only proved the value of *Between the Lions* among low-literate populations and in rural communities, but helped forge a strong working relationship with MPB. They share our vision and commitment to

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***Between the Lions* is a co-production of WGBH and Sirius Thinking, Ltd. in association with Mississippi Public Broadcasting.**

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Ready To Learn



producing excellent instructional programming, and we know that their professional production values will ensure a high level of quality as we go forward.”

Marie Antoon, MPB executive director, added, “This is a win-win for everyone. A signature PBS KIDS program brings its production to Mississippi, MPB continues its history of quality educational programming production, and children in Mississippi – indeed the country – will have one of the best curriculums to help master reading.”

*Between the Lions*, which launched in 2000 on PBS KIDS to critical acclaim and the delight of young viewers, parents and educators, has proven that it is successful in its mission to help children learn how to read.\* The series showcases the power and pleasure of reading and includes segments that foster language development and early literacy skills. Each episode addresses the five key areas of reading instruction: phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary, and text comprehension.

Judith Stoia, executive producer of *Between the Lions* said, “We are excited to be working on new production and expanding the educational value and content of the series. The new seasons will build on the foundational layer of the series for preschool viewers, while also expanding coverage of the kindergarten and first grade curriculum content. Reflecting feedback from educators, parents and children, seasons five and six will feature more animation, stories, live-action films, and music. The beloved Lions -- Theo and Cleo and their cubs Lionel and Leona -- will still be featured prominently and remain central to the program.”

In addition, the *Between the Lions* team has begun research into adapting episodes for the fast-growing audience of English Language Learners. Chris Cerf, co-creator and creative producer of *Between the Lions* and president of Sirius Thinking, Ltd., said, “Early research on a version of a modified version of the program to help Spanish-speaking children and their families develop proficiency in English language literacy is showing great promise. We’re thrilled at the prospect of reaching new audiences, both with our Spanish-modified programs, and with the new regionally-produced *Between the Lions* segments we’ll be shooting in Mississippi.”

Developed in consultation with the nation’s top reading and literacy experts, *Between the Lions* offers a comprehensive, evidence-based approach to reading instruction. The program is the centerpiece of a multimedia literacy initiative that includes a Web site ([pbskids.org/lions](http://pbskids.org/lions)), books, videos, parent workshops, teachers’ guides, and other outreach materials. *Between the Lions* is a co-production of WGBH and Sirius Thinking, Ltd. in association with Mississippi Public Broadcasting. Executive producer for the series is Judith Stoia. Chris Cerf and Norman Stiles are executive producers for Sirius Thinking.

*Between the Lions* is funded in part by a Ready To Learn Television Cooperative Agreement from the U.S. Department of Education through the Public Broadcasting Service. National corporate sponsorship is provided by Chick-fil-A. Additional funding is provided by the Krueger Charitable Foundation. *Between the Lions* can be found online at [pbskids.org/lions](http://pbskids.org/lions). The *Between the Lions* team is committed to making quality television available to all children. Each episode is accessible to blind and visually impaired viewers through WGBH Boston’s innovative, Emmy Award-winning Descriptive Video Service (DVS). The series also is closed captioned by the Caption Center at WGBH for viewers who are deaf or hard-of-hearing.

#### **Partner Information:**

**WGBH Boston** is the producer of award-winning children’s series such as *Arthur*, *Between the Lions*, and *ZOOM*, airing on PBS. Under the leadership of vice president Brigid Sullivan, the WGBH

children's lineup leads the field in educational multimedia (including the Web, broadband, and interactive television) and in technologies and services that make media accessible for people with disabilities. WGBH's current children's series have been recognized with some of the world's most prestigious awards, including 11 Emmys, the George Foster Peabody award, three Prix Jeunesse awards, a BAFTA, and more than half a dozen Parents' Choice awards.

Sirius Thinking, Ltd., is a children's educational entertainment media company based in New York City. Its co-founding partners, Christopher Cerf and Norman Stiles, have played a major creative and production role in such acclaimed educational television programs as *Sesame Street*, *The Electric Company*, and numerous Jim Henson productions. Sirius Thinking's creative team has won a host of honors including multiple Emmy and Grammy awards, most recently a 2004 Emmy for their writing contributions to *Between the Lions*.

**Mississippi Public Broadcasting (MPB)** operates an eight-station public television network, an eight-station public radio network, and the Radio Reading Service of Mississippi. MPB serves all 82 counties of the state of Mississippi providing quality instructional and public programming. Since its first broadcast in 1970, MPB has won over 350 awards for its local productions including numerous regional Emmys for early childhood instructional programs, and a national Emmy and Parents' Choice Award for Ticktock Minutes.

PBS KIDS is committed to providing the highest quality commercial-free content and multimedia learning environment for children across the country. Providing age-appropriate, diverse programming for kids, PBS children's programs consistently earn more prestigious awards than any other broadcast or cable network. Only PBS has earned the unanimous endorsement of parents, children, industry leaders and teachers. With additional PBS resources to complement its programming, including [pbskids.org](http://pbskids.org), PBS Parents ([pbsparents.org](http://pbsparents.org)), PBS KIDS Share a Story, TeacherSource and Ready To Learn services, PBS is providing the tools necessary for positive child development. PBS is a nonprofit media enterprise owned and operated by the nation's 349 public television stations, serving nearly 90 million people each week and reaching 99% of American homes.

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\*Research conducted with children in Mississippi (2001/2002) through the Mississippi State University Early Childhood Institute and the University of Kansas (2000) confirms that children can improve their reading skills by watching *Between the Lions*. These two evidence-based studies show that viewing *Between the Lions* boosts children's early reading skills in key areas, such as phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, and vocabulary.

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