

■ **PHONICS 4 BABIES:  
COLORS & COUNTING**

Prebook 1/24; Street 2/26

Starz, Childrens, \$14.98 DVD, NR.

Stars Mallory Lewis.

**G**rowing up with a mom such as famous puppeteer Shari Lewis can teach a kid a thing or two, and daughter Mallory is putting those skills to good use in the "Phonics 4 Babies" series of DVDs. The second and latest outing focuses on colors and numbers.

The Emmy-winning Lewis is accompanied by a cast of five Tummy Tots, little bug puppets that act as a chorus with the precocious Giggles in the lead. With an audience of babies and toddlers, the action is appropriately quick. While the DVD clocks in at about 40 minutes, each segment is just a minute or two. Songs about colors, families and imagination are interspersed among the color and number lessons.

Repetition is key, along with giving young viewers audio and visual cues. For example, when repeating the colors, kids will hear the name of the color, see an object of that color and see the word spelled out in that same color.

Lewis also takes time to point out objects on the screen, giving children lessons on the things that surround them. Manners and relationships are taught through the actions of Lewis and the puppets, rather than overemphasized through heavy-handed lessons. The animations, drawings and sets are adequate, the puppets are adorable and Lewis is very good in her scenes with Giggles, multitasking as a puppeteer, singer and host.

Producers Joe and Cassandra Giangrasso developed the series after facing frustrations teaching their own daughter to speak. They brought in advisors, a clinical psychologist and a speech pathologist to assist with the product, an assurance for parents who may be unsure about plopping their tiny tots in front of the tube.

Between "Phonics 4 Babies" and a plain old cartoon, parents who want to get their kids on the learning track will go for "Phonics" anytime.



- Laura Tiffany

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