

She-Ra and the Princesses of Power, Seasons 1-5

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SHE-RA AND THE PRINCESSES OF POWER. Seasons 1-5. DreamWorks Animation, Netflix, 2018-2020.

Riding the success of the He-Man and the Masters of the Universe show and toy line (1982–1988), the children’s toy company Mattel sought to capitalize on its sword and sorcery moment by introducing a female-focused toy line, Princess of Power, centered around He-Man’s sister—Adora in her human form, She-Ra in her empowered form. From 1985 to 1987, She-Ra fought the Evil Horde, its leader Hordak, and her nemesis Catra through twenty-two action figures, thirteen comics, several children’s books, and a two-season animated cartoon series created by J. Michael Straczynski and Larry DiTillio. Throughout the ensuing thirty years, Adora/She-Ra would appear numerous times in toy lines and cameos, but she would never be as popular—nor, one could say, as marketed—as her brother, Adam/He-Man.

In 2017, Netflix and DreamWorks Animation announced their plans to reboot the franchise as *She-Ra and the Princesses of Power*, with Noelle Stevenson, an award-winning author, helming the project as executive producer and showrunner. This move came as part of a series of repackaging of old intellectual property for new audiences (e.g., DreamWorks/Netflix’s *Voltron: Legendary Defender*). As showrunner, Stevenson chose to pay homage to the past show while inventing a new future for it and for animated fantasy children’s shows. Stevenson’s direction chose to focus on diversity and representation, reimagining all the characters to portray more LGBTQ+ characters and characters of color onscreen. Indeed, the reimagining even goes so far as to portray various body types and emotional and mental capabilities. This diversity breathed new life and vitality into the sword and sorcery franchise and created a show that crossed genre boundaries and pushed back against a television culture that consistently shies away from representation, especially queer representation, in shows created for a young audience.

She-Ra and the Princesses of Power has the same premise as *She-Ra: Princess of Power*: raised in the Horde, Adora abandons it to fight for the Rebellion after finding the sword that gives her the power of She-Ra. Although sharing the same premise, *She-Ra* diverges from its source material by changing age, gender, and complexity. Adora is joined by her new friends Glimmer, the princess of Bright Moon and a young woman with mother problems, and Bow, a young Black man and Glimmer’s best friend who believes that love and friendship can conquer any insurmountable obstacle. The team of friends sets out to reestablish the Princess Alliance so the Rebellion can defeat the evil Horde (Season One). However, defeating the Horde is not as simple as gathering a few superpowered friends. As the Horde and Rebellion battle back and forth, the show, through its five seasons, weaves together a story of magic and adventure with more sinister and galaxy-

wide intrigue. Seasons Two and Three introduce a long history of She-Ra connected to the ancient First Ones, beings who connected the She-Ra power to the magic of Eternia, the planet. As Adora learns more about her power and the true, ancient, intergalactic war that is being brought to Eternia's doorstep, she grapples with her identity and destiny, striving to be her own person as she is driven to a certain end goal by other forces. Indeed, Season Four introduces weapons of mass destruction and interdimensional travel, culminating in Adora shattering her destiny, and her connection to She-Ra, in order to save her planet and the rest of the galaxy. This event, though, brings Eternia back into a dimension of space controlled by an evil despot—a despot who wants Eternia's weapons to arrest full tyranny over the galaxy.

In Season Five, Adora must take to the stars to rescue Glimmer and Catra from the clutches of the true Horde, led by Horde Prime. Season Five is the culmination of four seasons that have woven seamlessly into each other, building up to the point where Adora must overcome her self-sacrificing nature or let the universe fall into the iron grip of Horde Prime and his army of clones. At the same time, Glimmer must come to grips with her mantle of leadership, having almost caused the destruction of the universe, and Catra must realize her love and adoration of Adora. Season Five presents a strong message of companionship, empowerment, and self-realization.

As a finale, Season Five touches on the themes that have been developed throughout the show. Delving into ideas of cowardice, bravery, honor, friendship, and agency, the fifth season is a heart-wrenching experience as the characters realize the culminations of their journeys of self-discovery. For example, one of the princesses, Entrapta, has been an enigma throughout the entire show. Beginning as a princess who joins the Princess Alliance, she is captured by the Horde, thought dead by her friends who leave her behind. Entrapta, lover of technology, thrives within the Horde, joining their side and building them weapons of destruction. In one of her culminating scenes, as she tries to obtain the tech that will save Glimmer and Catra, who are lost in space, Entrapta says, "I'm not good at people, but I am good at tech. I thought maybe if I could use tech to help you, you'd like me" (Season 5, Episode 2). Entrapta's growth is just one example of the growth of all the characters on the show—growth that compliments the gender and sexual diversity of the show. The fifth season delivers on the many plot threads, character arcs, and disparate secrets to which the show has been building.

She-Ra is able to take cultural touchpoints—like LGBTQ+ conversations, for example—and present them in ways that are both inclusive and metaphoric. For example, at the end of Season 2, Episode 7, the show introduces the viewer to Bow's parents, two male historians. The fact that his dads are the gay parents of thirteen children is accepted by everyone in the show. Instead of being a story about struggling with coming out or queer acceptance, the story shifts the focus to the dads. Bow's parents, who want Bow to become a historian like them, must overcome their former hopes and dreams for their child in order to love him as he is, a warrior in the Rebellion who loves adventure. Like much of the show, the expected tropes—like the unaccepting parents who must come to love their queer child for who they are—is refracted through a different lens. This refraction, present in much of the show, allows viewers and scholars alike to reapproach different