

Helpful koalas make a cool show for kids

From the snappy music at the start of *The Koala Brothers* to "The Helping Song" that closes the program, a helping hand reaches out from Australia to America's little viewers.

This latest preschooler program in Disney's weekday morning shows offers characters with hearts as big as the Australian Outback. And their little traumas and travails seem appropriate anywhere on the globe.

During last week's premiere episodes, koala kids Frank and Buster (pronounced in the decidedly down-under manner of "Bostah") help Archie the crocodile find friends and Ned the wombat sail a boat. (Tell the kids a wombat is a burrowing marsupial native to Australia. Marsupials,

KIDS' TV



JEANNE SPREIER

The Koala Brothers

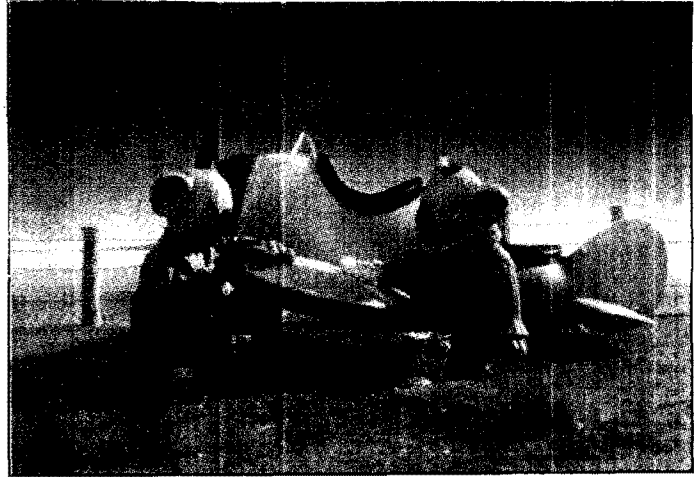
A 11 a.m. weekdays, Disney Channel. 30 mins.

such as kangaroos, have pouches for their young.)

Frank and Buster, who fly around the Outback in a two-seater plane, exhibit the kindest manners and sweetest intents.

When Buster sets off to fix up Archie's new home, an abandoned cabin near the water hole, his optimistic plans are waylaid by a squeaky front door that scares him.

Archie arrives with a different perspective. To him, the door makes a funny noise and he rocks the door back and forth, pointing out to Buster and Frank that the sound is amusing. But other visitors find the door and cabin scary and stay away, leaving Archie lonely. Frank and Buster decide that cleaning up Archie's new home, giving it a fresh coat of paint and oiling the squeaky door hinges will solve the problem. Sure enough, animal friends who see the nice, redone abode, decide its occupant must be nice, too.



Disney

Frank and Buster fly around the Outback looking for ways to be of help on the Disney Channel's *The Koala Brothers*.

Each episode (two make up the half-hour program) starts with Frank and Buster flying around looking for someone to help. This Friday, the koalas will help Archie deal with his loose tooth, finally persuading him that baby teeth are designed to be lost. The brothers gently guide Archie from despair to acceptance of the loss.

They also greet Penny the penguin, offering her a restful vacation on the Outback. Buster makes all sorts of plans to help Penny relax, including serving her a huge plate of fish paste sandwiches. (Maybe it's an Australian treat.) But Buster learns that Penny finds it more relaxing to help out with chores at the koalas' homestead instead of soaking in the ice-cold tub of water that Buster prepared for his polar guest.

Sometimes it is the friend who learns from the koalas' assistance; sometimes it is one of the koalas, usually Buster, who learn something. As "The Helping Song" points out to viewers, the helper might get just as much out of the experience as the helpee.

The colorful stop-action animation is endearing; the set is a perfect caricature of the Australian landscape. It's sand as far as the eye can see, a rather spare-looking small town and the koalas' tree-studded homestead, all covered by a brilliant blue sky. The program comes from the same brain (but not the same company) as *Bob the Builder* and *Rubbidubbers*. Producer Peter Curtis clearly has a way with preschool television and its viewers.