

Short of early mid-season replacements, I think this week brings us that last of the fall premieres. We also have a PBS mini-series that is pretty amazing.

"The Mysterious Human Heart" starts at 9 p.m. Monday on PBS. It will air in two parts on Monday night, with the third part on Oct. 22. The show focuses on the heart and its diseases and the amazing ways this muscle keeps pumping, not to mention all the science that can keep it pumping - or failing that, replacing it.

The science bits were fascinating, including a graphic that literally shows how blood pumps through the heart and into the body. But what gave all that science - you should pardon the pun - heart were the real life stories of the patients, in particular two in the opening episode.

In both cases, the patients have had heart pumps implanted to keep their damaged hearts going while they wait for heart transplants. It's very moving, and one of the stories is left hanging, although you can check the pbs.org Web site to get updates on everyone.

While this is stuff we, as adults, need and want to know, what I think makes this show a good bet on the family side is the inspiration factor. We need to get our kids interested in science, and shows like this can get kids thinking along those lines. Now, the surgery scenes during the one heart transplant can be pretty graphic - we are in the operating room and things do not go smoothly - even I was able to watch when they first zapped the new heart



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to get it beating. But before that, it was pretty gross.

But the gross factor can work in your favor if you've got the odd 11-year-old hanging around. Gross, is after all, cool at that age. And it's a good age for kids to be thinking about what they want to do with their lives. But if they can't handle the blood in the surgery, maybe they'll be interested watching the harvest team getting on the plane and riding through the streets with the siren wailing to get the new heart to the patient in time.

Changing gears entirely, next up is ABC's new comedy "Samantha Who?," about a young woman who wakes up from a coma with complete amnesia, premiering Monday at 9:30 p.m. She has no idea who she is, and the comedy centers on her finding out that she's an insanely shallow witch with a really nice boyfriend. There's the usual sex humor though nothing terribly graphic. Jean Smart as the dysfunctional mother is wonderful. But ultimately, it's only an OK show. Approach with caution, if at all.

And last up, "Viva Laughlin," will actually run on Sundays at 8 p.m., but Thursday, CBS is airing the premiere as a special event at 10 p.m. The thing that's going to be tricky with this show is that I'm not sure how to rate it on the family-safety front.

Let me explain. Usually, with pilots (which almost always be-



Christina Applegate stars in the new ABC comedy "Samantha Who?" The series premieres on Monday night.

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come the series' first episode), the idea is to make them stand out - so that's when you get a lot of the shock stuff. You know, couples engaging in physical

relations, naked bodies, extra blood and guts. When you know your audience is a bored television executive, you're going to play to that audience. So what

happens is that there will be some questionable behavior in the first episode, but the rest of the series is more toned down. Except that with "Viva

Laughlin," the questionable stuff wasn't that questionable - the worst on the sex front was one of the characters pulling another onto a bed, but the other promptly pulled himself off, although things were on the seductive side. As far as violence is concerned, the worst is a bloodied body. But there's a lot of room for things to go further, and it's hard to say if they will.

What is the show? It's basically a murder mystery set in Laughlin, Nev., which is pretty much a third-rate Las Vegas. It centers on Ripley Holden, a maverick businessman trying to build a new luxury casino, except that the body of his business partner is found shot in his office. The thing with Ripley is that he's also a family man, even if his methods are questionable, at times.

What makes it different is that the characters will sing along with the rock 'n' roll soundtrack and do various production numbers, making it kind of like a musical. It works better than you might think - the British version, "Blackpool," did very well in England. But I would definitely approach it with caution.

Finally, GSN is gearing up for the National Vocabulary Championship, which will air in spring. But in the meantime, if your kids are more than a little glib, have them check out winwithwords.com and see if they want to take the qualifying test.

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