

Couch Potato



Breakin' It Down

Watching TV can be a fun, educational activity, a way to de-stress and relax sometimes. Or it can be a very unhealthy way to pass the time. It all depends on how and what you watch. The "Couch Potato" Interest Project is a cool way to improve your TV viewing habits so your potato chip is "baked," not "fried."

HERstory

Girls in five troops from three cities around the Fremont, California, area created the Couch Potato Interest Project. They joked that since Girl Scouting is "for every girl, everywhere," there ought to be a badge for every girl to earn. They felt there weren't enough "fun" and "light-hearted" IPs that were also educational so they created the Couch Potato Interest Project.

You've Got MAD Skills

Girl Scouts of the USA has adapted the activities suggested by the five troops in California so that girls like you across the country can:

1. Analyze media representations of youth and women
2. Take action on representations you find to be unrealistic or unhealthy
3. Decide how much time is healthy for you to spend watching TV and which shows are worth your TV viewing time
4. Explore what it's like to work at a TV station
5. Investigate which foods make the best snacks for TV viewing

Helpful Links

There are several organizations and online resources that would be helpful for researching and doing the activities in this IP, like:

1. Mind on the Media's "Turn Beauty Inside Out" campaign (www.tbio.org)
2. The TV-Turnoff Network (www.tvturnoff.org)
3. The Kaiser Family Foundation (www.kff.org)
4. The National Institute on Media and the Family (www.mediafamily.org)
5. www.media-awareness.ca.

Important!

According to Riki Cavanaugh, the advisor of one of the troops who created this IP, "Couch Potato should be evaluated in the fun teenage manner in which it was written." Absolutely! Girl Scouts of the USA wants girls to have fun, too!

Need Help?

Want more info on IPs? No problem. Read the [Intro](#) before diving into "Couch Potato."

Just want a quick refresher on what to do? Okay, in order to earn any of these 10 Interest Projects, you must:

Do the one **REQUIRED** activity

Do **ONE** activity of your choice from each of the **THREE** categories (LEARN, DO, SHARE)

Design and do **ONE** activity of **YOUR OWN**

Create a short **REFLECTION** after you've completed **all of the activities**

Food for Thought! Often, an activity in the "LEARN" category will help you build a skill that you'll have the chance to try in the "DO" category and then share in the "SHARE" category. Make connections between the "steps" when planning which activities you'll do. For an example of a skill-building connection, check out the second activity of LEARN and SHARE in "Couch Potato."

Couch Potato



Required: How much of a couch potato are you? Evaluate how much of your life is spent in front of a television by keeping a log for one week, recording every time you watch TV. At the end of the week, calculate what percentage of your life is spent watching TV. Come up with a list of five things you could do instead of watching TV and try those things for one week. Continue keeping a log of when you watch TV that also records how you feel at the end of each day. At the end of the second week, re-calculate your TV-watching percentage, review the log, and evaluate how you feel. Do you feel better, healthier, happier?

LEARN

1. Watch two hours of TV on a channel of your choice (not a movie). Take notes about the women and girls you observe in shows and commercials. What do they look like? What are some words that best describe them? How does seeing them make you feel? Consider sharing what you have learned by writing an editorial/letter to a newspaper, TV station, network, or production company.
2. It can be hard to not eat while watching TV. Make a list of the foods you like to eat while watching TV. Now, evaluate how healthy these snacks are (or aren't). Find healthy snacks that you can eat while watching television. Stick to eating these snacks for one week. Check out the food pyramid at www.mypyramid.gov for personalized nutrition information made to fit you. View recommended foods, design your own food pyramid, and print sheets to track your daily food intake alongside the suggested intake for your body type.
3. Ever feel like there are more commercials on TV than shows? Are the commercials sometimes more interesting to watch than the shows? Watch TV for one hour and survey the commercials shown. Record how many commercials you see, the amount of time each commercial is, what the products are in each, who they are being sold to, and how effective the commercial is (do you want to go out and buy the product now?). Which were your favorites and least favorites? Share your findings with a group. Check out www.adbusters.org and www.commercialalert.org to see what others are doing to change the culture of commercialism and the nature of commercials in TV viewing.
4. Many TV networks and production companies target youth in their programming and movies because advertisers crave your disposable income and influence. Did you know you have such a powerful influence? Make a list of the shows now on TV that are directed at your market. Watch an episode of one show. Write a review of the show that addresses the "real" factor of the characters, plot lines, and dialogue. Are stereotypes perpetuated? Do the actors "look" real (age, appearance)? What kinds of products are being sold during commercial breaks? What did the show do well? What could it improve on? Consider sending your review to TV networks and/or to a newspaper (school, local) as an editorial or letter to the editor.

DO

1. Watch a cooking show and make one of the healthy recipes that they talk about. Share the dish with family and friends.
2. What's it like to be a television producer, director, or broadcast journalist? Partner with your advisor to organize a trip to a local TV station for your group. Ask questions about their educational background and job training. Find out if the TV station offers internships. If so, consider applying for one.
3. What's it like to be a couch potato without watching TV? <gasp!> Don't watch TV for one week. Keep a diary ("Day 1: starting to feel itchy...must...watch...TV!") of your feelings, observations, and activities. For an example, check out Dana's journal (www.media-awareness.ca/english/resources/articles/television/turning_off_tube.cfm) for an idea of what one teen experienced.
4. With the help of a fitness professional (gym teacher, personal trainer), create an exercise program (of at least three physical activities) you can do in your living room. Lead a "couch aerobics" class with your family, friends, or at your next group meeting.

SHARE

1. Watch two hours of educational television, such as a biography or a documentary ("Sesame Street" and "Blues Clues" don't count). Share what you learned with an audience of three or more people (e.g. Girl Scouts, classmates, family, friends).
2. Host a "TV Dinner" party for a group in or outside of Girl Scouts. The party's main activity is: watch and discuss a favorite show. Plan the "TV Dinner" based on the food pyramid at www.mypyramid.gov. In honor of the "Couch Potato" IP, the dinner will include one recipe that uses potatoes (keep it real; your potatoes can't be instant or microwavable).
3. "TV Turnoff Week" is an annual event that traditionally takes place in late April. Each year people from around the world make a conscious decision to turn off their television sets for the week. Organize a "Turn the TV Off Week" in your community (it's okay if it doesn't happen in late April). Consider making a contract and award for participants as well as a calendar containing events, ideas, and reading suggestions as alternatives to TV viewing. Your school, local community center, Girl Scout council, city hall, museums, and libraries might be helpful for coordinating this. Hint: remember to check out www.tvturnoff.org for activity ideas.
4. Many studies have connected the amount of time spent watching TV with weight gain, poor academic performance, violent behavior, drug abuse, and sexual misconduct. What do you think about the connection between TV and these things? Do you have any personal experience with or knowledge of these connections? Support your opinions with at least one research source (readily available in your library, local newspaper, or sites like www.kff.org/entmedia/index.cfm). Prepare a presentation based on your opinions and present it to a group in or outside of Girl Scouts. The American Academy of Pediatrics offers many excellent PowerPoint slides for general use by the public (www.aap.org/mm/2001slides.htm).