



Curriculum Units by Fellows of the Yale-New Haven Teachers Institute
1984 Volume V: American Adolescents in the Public Eye

Television and Teens

Curriculum Unit 84.05.03
by Sheila H. Troppe

It sits in the livingroom—an unpretentious-looking box that has the power to hold individuals in a hypnotic state with their eyes glued to a screen of rapidly moving images. Parents have a visitor in their home. One that exerts its influences in all areas of their life. Television colors our attitudes, opinions, values, buying habits, and even our sense of time (“I’ll do my homework during *The A-Team* ”; “I’ll go to bed after *Dynasty* ”). It’s a constant companion in our life. Even when people are not actively engaged in watching TV, they report turning it on for companionship.

The idea for this unit was born when I heard and was amazed by the statistic that most American children will have spent, by the time they graduate school, 20,000 hours in front of the television set compared to 15,000 in the classroom. It recalled to me an informal survey I had conducted in my classroom this spring. I teach sixth through eighth grade computer science classes in an urban junior high school. The children are approximately seventy percent minority and range in abilities from very high scholastically to very low. Almost regardless of ability, all the kids had the same experience in common; they were allowed to watch unrestricted hours of television. They watched whatever they wanted in almost unlimited quantities. Out of about 150 students I polled, only a handful said that their parents monitored what they could view. Only one student did not have a television in his house. His parents were opposed to television and he had to depend upon his friends when he wanted to see a particular program. Invariably my students chose action shows, sitcoms, and late evening soaps as their favorite viewing. The advent of cable and MTV has also altered their habits. They no longer exclusively listen to the radio for their music; they now watch the accompanying videos. Subsequent research made me realize that my students conformed to the national norms. Because television is so much a part of my student’s lives, there is a serious need for guidance in what they view and how it influences them.

Most adults over the age of thirty still remember a time before television, but for our young children and adolescents, life without TV is unthinkable. According to a study done in Boston back in 1959, it was the blue collar worker and his family who were the most dependent on TV. ¹ Not so today. Television has cut through economic, racial, and religious lines; it is a common denominator.

Television was very different during its early years; it was live, there was a stronger code of programming ethics, the black and white sets were less realistic and less riveting, and most importantly, there were fewer programs and channels available. Programming hours were considerably less than today and so we spent less time in front of the set and more pursuing other interests.

Given the fact that 98 percent of all American homes now have television (a greater percentage than those that have indoor toilets), that millions of homes are now wired for cable, and still others have been experimentally hooked up to two-way systems known as interactive television, the following statistics should not shock anyone. Americans spend 2,300 hours in front of a television set every year. Television viewing ranks second only to sleeping as the nation's number one pastime for children. What's more, according to Roger Fransecky, a psychologist and consultant for CBS, children in this country are estimated to have watched between 5-and 8,000 hours of television before they enter kindergarten. Television has slowly worked its way into the social fabric of the nation, resulting in silence replacing conversation, sitcoms replacing bedtime stories, and staring at the TV replacing sitting by the hearth. ²

Researchers report that the average family member now spends more than seven hours a day tethered to the tube and just 14 minutes a day conversing with others in the house. ³ Kids of all ages watch not only by day, but also by night; 18 million children are still in the viewing audience between 8 and 9 P.M. and no fewer than 1 million are still watching at midnight. ⁴

A survey conducted by Joan Wilkins, author of *Breaking the TV Habit*, revealed the following facts about television and the middle-class household: (1) most families own a minimum of three and a maximum of five televisions; (2) at least one set in each home is in color; (3) the sets are situated in vital living areas such as the living room, kitchen, bedrooms, and family room, (4) families seldom watch television together; (5) often parents do not know what their children watch; and (6) three-quarters of the people polled in the survey would be unwilling to go without television for a week even as an experiment. These simple facts lend themselves to some general assumptions: (1) TV is a lonely recreation. Children don't have to pick and choose programs, sharing the set with parents and siblings. With several sets in the house, a child finds one that isn't being used and turns it on; (2) many parents, therefore, fail to monitor their children's television intake; and (3) probably the set is on during family mealtimes. Apparently even parents who take great pains to research school districts before purchasing a house and who monitor the daily activities in their child's classroom display a peculiar apathy when it comes to censoring or limiting television.

Although television is not taken very seriously, it should be. Five hours a day, sixty hours a week for millions, television is merging with the environment. After all, the average 16 year old has clocked more hours with the tube than he has spent in school. The *TV Guide* outsells every other magazine in the nation. It would seem that television which grew up to be what it is today by accident, without long-range planning, has done something in the process, also by accident, to the nation. Just as our car culture, our restless motoring, required drive-in restaurants and fast food franchises . . . filling stations of the stomach . . . so our developing TV culture requires fast food distraction, junk entertainment, psychic beef patties. The living room has been converted into a kind of car: the TV screen is its windshield; every home is mobile; everybody is in the driver's seat; and we are all seeing the same sights simultaneously. I would strongly agree with the words of critic John Leonard, "Television isn't just in the environment. It is the environment." ⁵

Television fascinates most children. They will sit passively for hours absorbing whatever images move across the screen and the jumble of music, words, programs, and ads that make up the TV soundtrack. I have always been amazed by children who could not conquer the multiplication tables or remember state capitals yet, were able to parrot back word for word, current advertising jingles and slogans. Most professionals who work with children daily—teachers, pediatricians, child psychiatrists are concerned about the daily effects of sitting passively for long periods of time. Television represses children's innate tendencies because it requires passive rather than active involvement. Teachers have reported strong resistance among children, not only to reading, but to exerting any kind of effort. We now have evidence that habitual viewing can affect a young person's basic outlook and sensibilities, predisposition to violence and hyperactivity, IQ, reading ability, imagination, play, language patterns, critical thinking, self-image, perception of others and values in general. Further, habitual TV viewing can affect the physical self as it can alter brain waves, reduce critical eye movements, immobilize the hands and body, and undermine nutrition and eating habits. Teachers must

contend not only with years of cartoons and actions shows, but *Sesame Street* and *the Electric Company* . These programs may often create an unrealistic attitude among kids; that learning must be continually fun and entertaining and is not the serious, often repetitious business it is. One classroom teacher admitted to resorting to teaching a lesson using puppets behind a cardboard television screen to command her student's attention.

We are losing contact with one another. Parents, for one reason or another, often use television as a substitute for themselves. Children need people most of all. Children cannot become human if they relate heavily to an image of an image, or at best, to a nonresponding, nontouchable image of a person. Television is no better or worse than the rest of society, but it is the major instrument by which, at present, we hasten the process of alienation in our young, interfere with the processes of ego strengthening which grow primarily through contact with reality, not images, through participation and interaction with people and things, not through passivity and imitation.

Adolescence is particularly a time of turmoil and change. In early adolescence, as never before, the child is aware of tremendous bodily changes and emotional stress. There is a search for identity; a quest for role models. Increasingly teenagers turn to TV for answers and often come away more confused and with more distorted perceptions than ever. There is an obvious need to teach our children to look at TV with a discriminating eye; to question reality as portrayed by TV. Television is not going to disappear and our kids are not going to be more critical in their viewing habits without some concrete guidance. Television has the potential to teach, to challenge, and to entertain without being either abused or abusive. It is the intention of this unit to examine two critical aspects of television and then to offer suggestions for countering their negative effects. We will examine some of the viewing habits of Americans, and then suggest ways to help our students cut back on their viewing time. In conclusion, we will look at some ways in which we can utilize TV to our advantage.

The unit has been divided into four separate lessons: (1) Violence on TV, (2) Stereotyping on TV, (3) Cutting Back, and (4) Utilizing TV. The first two lessons contain background material which should be helpful to the teacher. There are lists of suggestions and activities for the teacher to choose from, utilizing as many or as few as necessary to obtain the objective. The third lesson has a specific time frame. It is meant to be presented for a minimum of four weeks and can be utilized throughout the semester. The fourth lesson can be used whenever the teacher feels it is appropriate and applicable to the subject area.

Violence on TV

Objective: Students will be able to recognize the excessive amounts of violence shown on TV.

Columnist Erma Bombeck was prompted to write an angry letter to the television networks that went like this: "During a single evening I saw twelve people shot, two tortured, one dumped into a swimming pool, two cars explode, a rape, and a man who crawled two blocks with a knife in his stomach. Do you know something? I didn't feel anger or shock or horror or excitement or repugnance. The truth is that I didn't feel. Through repeated assaults of one violent act after another, you have taken from me something I valued—something that contributed to my compassion and caring—the instinct to feel."

The subject of television violence has long been a topic for study and controversy. Congressional studies were carried out in 1954, 1962, 1964, and 1970. The intense interest becomes understandable in light of the following fact: the number of juveniles arrested for serious and violent crimes increased 1600 percent between the years of 1952 and 1972 according to FBI figures. ⁶This is precisely when television became a

fixture in the American home and a part of our daily diet. It is no wonder experts searched for a link.

In 1982, the National Institute of Mental Health issued a 94-page report that said there was “overwhelming” scientific evidence that violence on the air spills over into the playground and the streets. The question is no longer whether TV directly causes aggressive behavior in children and adolescents, but how. Basing its case on approximately 2,500 studies published since the early 1970’s the NIMH concluded that tale-violence leaves a lasting—not just a temporary—imprint on young minds. Although the report stresses the mediums’s potential to teach everything from good manners to proper eating habits, it points out that violence is a staple of modern TV; the percentage of programs containing violent episodes has remained the same since 1967 while the number of episodes per show has increased. ⁷

By age 5, the typical child in the U.S. has logged over 200 hours of violent images, and the average fourteen year old has witnessed the killing of 13,000 human beings; usually without pain, funeral, or grieving relatives. Studies in the late 1960’s showed six times more violence in Saturday morning children’s programming as in adult prime time. In the fall of 1978, after more than a decade of public concern about violence, the rate of violent incidents on weekend network children’s programming actually rose to a near record level of 25 incidents per hour. ⁸

To what extent does violence, when depicted so vividly and on such a scale, induce violence in children and adolescents?

A study by the Singers of the Yale University Family Television Research and Consultation Center supports findings concerning the deleterious effect of TV on children. Children who are heavy television viewers and who were the most aggressive in the sample watch action-detective shows, cartoons, news, and game shows. They found the hours spent in front of television and the program content are significant. For example, heavy viewers of educational programs do not exhibit as much aggressive behavior as viewers of action-detective shows.

In addition to the television viewing patterns of children, family interaction and behavior also influence a child’s capacity for aggression. They found that an aggressive child is more likely to be part of a family that uses television as its main socializing force. They spend little time visiting zoos, parks, relatives, or libraries. The focus of entertainment is television. Meals are even spent in front of the set, inhibiting communication. There is little to protect the child against the powerful effect of the television characters, especially those who present the models for aggression and violence. ⁹

Extensive research by a group of investigators in an upstate N.Y. county found that boys who had been watching a great many violent TV shows at age eight were rated as more aggressive by their friends and neighbors ten years later when they were eighteen. By careful statistical methods, the researchers showed that other factors (such as a preference by already aggressive children to watch violent programming, family background, or social class) could not explain away this relationship. The results were clear: the heavy viewing of action shows influenced these children toward becoming more aggressive as they grew up. ¹⁰

Even more recently, another researcher directed a study in Illinois which corroborated the earlier results, except that now girls as well as boys are showing similar effects of viewing heavy violence, a finding perhaps explained by the number of tough, fighting women on shows today. ¹¹

Violence in American shows was not always so. Between 1954 and 1961, the percentage of prime time

programming devoted to action adventures featuring violence went from 17 to 60 percent of all programming. By 1964, almost 200 hours a week were devoted to crime scenes with over 500 killings committed on the screen. This reflects a 20 percent increase of violence on television over 1958 programming and a 90 percent increase since 1952. ¹²

TV violence is most dangerous. TV is present in most homes and most children have unregulated access to it. Not only does the combination of sight and sound have particularly potent influence, but TV does not have the benefit of a box office barrier. You must have a ticket in order to view the images on a movie screen and recent movie codes were designed to limit the damaging effects of some movies to children and adolescents. You must have a book in your hand and indulge in a scholarly pursuit—reading—in order to have access to violent passages in a book.

Most behaviors are acquired through imitation or observational learning, and some violent behavior may be copied from television. Examples of crime copied from TV have included a nine year old's efforts to slip his teacher a box of poisoned chocolates, a seven year old's use of ground glass in the family stew, a seventeen year old's re-enactment of a televised rape and murder by bludgeoning the victim's head and slashing her throat, and a fifteen year old's real life rerun of a rape with a broomstick televised in a movie. The legal argument in a Florida murder case hinged on the argument that the teenage murderer "couldn't help it" because he had been under the influence of television. ¹³ A study of 100 juvenile offenders commissioned by ABC found that no fewer than 22 confessed to having copied criminal techniques from television.

TV violence makes children more willing to harm others, more aggressive in their play, and more likely to select aggression as the preferred response to conflict situations. Children harness native aggression and use it to play, to learn, to dream, to care, to compete, to work. Although aggression is a fact of life, violent destructiveness is not a part of all human life. In some countries, we learn to be destructive.

Research has demonstrated that older children learn more about aggression from viewing than do younger children, who are more sensitive to constructive, prosocial programming. Children emulate undesirable attitudes as well as behaviors from watching violent TV. Many youngsters don't grasp the cause-effect relationship that lead to fights, and they come to believe that violence is a nice, quick way of resolving problems. The pressure on writers to wind up a complex story in a half hour or sixty minutes leads them to resort frequently to a shoot-out or punch-out solution. Producers also believe that such rapid fire activities as fights and car chases will hold viewers' attention on the screen so that they will notice the commercials which continually interrupt the story. Older children and adults may not be as impressionable as young children but even they begin to develop false assumptions about the amount of crime and violence in the world. There is a consistent relationship between fear and the amount of television watched. Heavy viewers perceive the world as much more violent and fearful than do light viewers. Another disturbing possibility exists that the television experience has not merely blurred the distinctions between the real and the unreal for steady viewers, but that by doing so it has dulled their sensitivities to real events. For when the reality of a situation is diminished, people are able to react to it less emotionally, more as spectators. American television doesn't often show the consequences of fighting or shooting. Characters are shot, fall down, and simply disappear from the plot and the screen. The physical consequences, mental anguish, and legal ramifications from such actions are rarely explored.

Children learn to accept violence. We learn to watch brutalities on the news and in our shows and to see them on the streets without responding. Some of the following exercises and discussion questions should prove useful in helping students to realize to what extent violence has invaded our homes and how it influences our

thinking.

Suggested Activities

Discussion questions:

1. Why are there so many violent shows on TV?
2. Are most of these shows an accurate portrayal of real life?
3. Do these shows ever demonstrate the consequences of violent actions?
4. Do the stars who portray these characters actually suffer any ill effects when they are “hurt”?
5. What are other ways in which people can resolve difficulties without resorting to violence?
6. How do you feel after watching a particularly violent show?
7. Has a TV show ever affected the way you reacted to a situation?

Activities

1. Count the number of prime time shows that are chiefly action shows.
2. Count the number of violent episodes in a show. Construct a worksheet or chart that graphically shows the number of killings, crimes, physical assaults, car crashes, and disasters that appeared on the show.
3. Display pictures of people in threatening or frustrating circumstances and discuss different methods of solving the problems.
4. Write a short story in which someone solves a problem with violence. Rewrite the story using a peaceful alternative.
5. View a popular series like the *A-Team* and contrast it with real life.
6. Compare today’s viewing schedule with TV programming twenty years ago. What are some of the differences?
7. Watch a cartoon program and count the number of violent episodes. What effects do you think this kind of show has on young children?
8. Write and illustrate a cartoon for children that doesn’t contain any violence.
9. Pretend that you are the head of children’s programming on a major TV network. Design a schedule of more positive programming than now exists.
10. Interview a policeman/woman. Contrast the reality of the interviewee with the fictionalized portrait usually painted on TV.

Stereotyping on TV

Objective: To recognize and identify stereotyping as portrayed on TV.

Television is an unrealistic world inhabited by young, healthy, middle-class, white people. While it is true that Blacks, the elderly, foreigners, the handicapped, and teens appear on television more than ever before, they are often cast in stereotypic and negative roles. These misrepresentations create problems because most children assume that TV depicts life as it is or as it should be.

Parents are a child's first role model for developing a sense of identity. The process of identification and a search for self begins in early childhood, continues through adolescence, and as some psychologists believe, goes on throughout one's life. Erik Erikson, a prominent psychologist, suggests that most children go through two stages of identification: one when they are about four to six years old and another during adolescence. During adolescence, young people must not only reaffirm their sexual identities, but begin to form mature sexual relationships and think about questions relating to ideologies, ethics, and occupational choices.

Television suggests different occupational models for children and certainly the heroes and heroines in any program offer a young person physical and psychological models beyond the immediate family. In order to finally achieve a sense of self, a child must be aware of his own physical make-up, his strong points as well as his inadequacies; and he must develop a feeling of consistency in lifestyle which would include his own particular way of growing, thinking, dressing, acting, and achieving. The search for self-identity is frequently impeded by the profusion of supermen and superwomen who race across the screen, performing humanly impossible feats in a way that causes young people to feel inadequate. The result is a lower self-esteem, which sets the stage for the ingestion of mindless commercials showing all the latest methods for becoming beautiful, smart, and popular by eating and drinking particular products and engaging in exciting activities while dressing in just the right clothes.

Experiments have been designed to test the sex-role impact of TV advertising portrayals. One researcher looked at advertisements that are intended to influence sex-role attitudes: commercials featuring beauty products using sex appeal or physical attractiveness themes. Teenage girls in an experimental group were shown fifteen such commercials and a control group was exposed to neutral commercials. When asked what characteristics a woman should have to be popular with men, the exposed girls were significantly more likely to cite sex appeal, youthful appearance, glamour, and a slim body. ¹⁴

TV also distorts reality by selecting certain kinds of images and omitting others. Black children see mostly whites on TV; Jewish children see only Christmas on TV and never a Jewish holiday; the handicapped child sees mainly very active, attractive children, and the elderly see youth.

Exposure to stereotyped representations can easily influence viewers' behavior toward unfamiliar people. The child in the suburb, the small midwestern town, the urban ghetto exists within his own limited reality. His experience with social problems or people of different races, religions, or nationalities is probably somewhat limited. To the extent that television exposes him to diversity of people and ideas, it surely expands the boundary of his world.

A quartet of researchers video-taped and analyzed 1,600 prime time programs involving more than 15,000 characters. They then drew up multiple choice questionnaires that offered correct answers about the world at large along with answers that reflected the biases and misrepresentations of the world according to TV. In every survey, the scientists discovered heavy viewers (those who watched more than four hours a day) who

account for thirty percent of the population almost invariably chose the TV—influenced answers while the light viewers (less than two hours a day) selected the answers more corresponding to real life.

TV has replaced the socializing role of the church and family. It creates a “cultural mythology” that establishes the norms of approved behavior and belief.

According to TV, this is how the world looks:

Race: Even though a tiny percentage of Black characters come across the screen as unrealistically romanticized, the majority of Black characters are in subservient roles. Nonwhite characters are more likely to be victims or criminals than white characters. Although there are now more programs than ever with Black characters, shows very often perpetuate harmful stereotypes of Black people as fun-loving, lazy, and unsuccessful. Very few are depicted as serious, intelligent, or hard-working because most Blacks on television are in comedy programs. There are no American Indians, Asians, or Hispanics in starring or major roles on TV.

Women: Male prime time characters outnumber female three to one. Less than twenty percent of TV’s married women work outside the home as compared with fifty percent in real life. The research on female TV characters has shown that there have been improvements in recent years. Women on TV are no longer limited exclusively to lower status tasks and silly or incompetent behavior. However, new stereotypes are developing. The new, more liberated female television character is usually young, beautiful, and competent. She is almost never married and has an exciting life and glamorous job. Ads featuring young, slender, attractive young women reflect the idea that beauty and youth are the most important characteristics women can possess. TV does depict working women, but rarely are they either mothers with families or older women.

Elderly: People over sixty-five (who represent a large share of the viewing audience) are grossly underrepresented. Again, there have been recent changes, but in general, the elderly are cast as silly, stubborn, sickly, sexually inactive, and often eccentric. No retired people are shown as main characters or as living full and interesting lives.

Handicapped: According to TV, there are no handicapped.

Teenagers/Families: Most teens have been placed in silly, frivolous roles that bear little relevance to real life. Almost all are attractive, slim, and athletic. Most of the family situations depicted are unrealistic showing family situations that are either ideal or wracked with problems.

Work: According to television, the majority of Americans are employed as physicians, attorneys, athletes, entertainers, or involved in some sort of law enforcement. Only about 6 to 10 percent of all television characters hold blue collar jobs or service related occupations versus about 60 percent in the real world. TV glamorizes and distorts the occupations that are shown and ignores jobs that most teenagers will have to enter.

There are some fine programs on television; shows that depict real-life people, complete with flaws and assets, facing real-life situations. Problems, heretofore hidden from public viewing, such as alcoholism, child abuse, and incest, have been aired and examined. Unfortunately, these programs are not the general fare and so we must teach our students to evaluate what is presented with a critical eye. We must develop an awareness of stereotyping effects, so we can develop a new consciousness about justice and fairness in TV portrayals.

Suggested Activities

Define the following words:

1. stereotype
2. prejudice
3. misrepresentation
4. minority

Discuss

1. How do we recognize a stereotype on TV?
2. What are some of the TV characteristics of the following:
 - a. women
 - b. teens
 - c. men
 - d. Blacks
 - e. Jews
 - f. Italians
 - g. Hispanics
 - h. the elderly
 - i. handicapped

Activities

1. Count the number of Blacks, Hispanics, or Asians featured in prime time programs. In what

kinds of shows are they featured?

2. Count the number of women featured in prime time programs. Make a composite of the typical woman.

3. Count the number of males featured on prime time shows. Make a composite of the typical male.

4. Compare the number of featured women and minorities to the number of males on prime time shows.

5. Find examples of the following on TV:

- a. a working mother
- b. handicapped person living a normal life
- c. Hispanic
- d. Oriental
- e. poor people
- f. elderly person living an exciting life
- g. unattractive-looking teen
- h. factory or blue collar worker
- i. man doing housework

6. Find some typical stereotypes on TV and list them.

7. View a family-type series such as *The Brady Bunch* or *Family Ties*. Are these people like your family? In what ways are they different?

8. Research the definition of beauty through the ages and among other cultures. Discuss and present pictures of the wide variance of our ideas of "beauty".

9. Contact a chapter of the Grey Panthers. Report on their aims and activities.

10. Report on the Senior Olympics. What are the events and who participates? Find out some vital statistics.

11. Report on the Special Olympics. What are the events and who participates? Where is a local one held?

12. Choose a pen pal in another locale and from another background.

13. Research advertising techniques and propaganda.

14. List occupations that are not represented on TV.

15. Read and report on a handicapped person that is living a normal life.

16. Design a bulletin board featuring successful Blacks and Hispanics. Concentrate on people other than athletes and entertainers.

17. If you wanted to stereotype the following, what characteristics would you use to make them fit the stereotype? (use clothes, speech, behavior, etc.)

- a. smart teen
- b. successful businesswoman
- c. football player
- d. dumb blonde
- e. Italian
- f. Jew
- g. older person

18. View and discuss some of the excellent stories that are regularly featured on some of the after school specials. Visit the library and read books that relate. A fine list is available in *Teaching Television* by Dorothy Singer, Jerome Singer, D. Zuckerman.

19. Write a letter of protest when you find a stereotype that is insulting or objectionable.

20. Write a letter of praise when you feel a show has outstanding merit.
21. Research and present customs and holidays of different ethnic groups and religions. If possible, invite visitors from different cultures to speak. Sample foods from other countries.

Resources:

The Television Criti-Kit (middle school)

WNET/Thirteen

Critical Viewing Skills Project

356 West 56th Street

New York, N.Y. 10019

Getting the Most Out of Television

Yale University Family Television

Research and Consultation Center

405 Temple Street

New Haven, Ct. 06511

Cutting Back

Objectives To have heavy viewers reduce their TV viewing time.

To guide students in selecting worthwhile programs.

To interest students in pursuing activities other than TV.

The United States is a nation filled with TV addicts. It has been calculated that we will have spent an average of nine years of our life watching television. Women and children watch the most TV; an average of 54 hours per week. Even though teens view the least amount of television, it is still a significant average of 23 hours per week.

Obviously, very few of us are willing to entirely eliminate television from our lives, but a realistic appraisal of how much time we devote to it is necessary. We must learn to be critical viewers, selecting programs that merit our attention, not mindless slaves to the tube. Most importantly, we must not rely on the television set to provide us with our major source of entertainment and information.

This lesson has been designed with the above ideas in mind. It should run for a minimum of four weeks, and ideally could continue throughout the semester. Parental involvement is encouraged and the teacher might consider sending home a letter detailing the project and activities.

First Week:

During the first week, students will simply keep a concise diary of their television viewing. A sample is shown below:

My Television Diary _____

Sun. Mon. Tues. Wed. Thurs. Fri. Sat.

7 A.M.

8 A.M.

9 A.M.

10 A.M.

11 A.M.

12 P.M.

1 P.M.

2 P.M.

3 P.M.

4 P.M.

5 P.M.

6 P.M.

7 P.M.

8 P.M.

9 P.M.

10 P.M.

11 P.M.

12 A.M.

**Fill in the name of any programs you watch on TV this week in the correct time slot.

**I watched a total _____ of hours this week.

Second Week Activities:

1. The teacher will list the following major categories of television programs and give examples of each:

- a. adventure programs
- b. cartoons
- c. comedy programs
- d. dramas

- e. documentaries
- f. educational programs
- g. game shows
- h. news
- i. serials/soaps
- j. sports
- k. talk shows
- l. variety shows

2. The class, using a TV programming guide, will find samples for each of the categories they listed. They should then turn to their TV logs and categorize the shows they viewed the previous week. Were they able to determine their viewing preferences?
3. A discussion of alternative programming and networks other than the three major ones should ensue. Students should become acquainted with PBS, the Arts Channel, and Nickelodeon (if available). Mention should be made of quality documentaries, after-school specials, and programs for the coming week.
4. Students should attempt to plan their week's viewing schedule based on interest and quality of programs. They should avoid haphazard or mindless viewing. They must replace daily, at least one program from the first week's log with an alternative program.
5. Students should become acquainted with the following rating system: excellent, good, mediocre, poor. They will rate the programs they watch according to some of the following criteria: (1) quality of script, (2) quality of acting, (3) degree of stereotyping, (4) extent of violence, (5) entertainment value, (6) educational value.
6. Students will keep a second week diary similar to the sample below:

Sun. program: program:

category: category:

rating: rating:

Mon. program: program:

category: category:

rating: rating:

At the conclusion of this diary, students will be asked to count the number of programs appearing in each ratings category. They will be encouraged to drop any programs receiving a mediocre or poor rating.

An honest discussion of why students watched a particular show should now take place. Did they watch the show for (a) entertainment, (b) information, (c) relaxation, (d) or because you had nothing else to do? Students should understand why they watch TV and to brainstorm activities that they could be doing instead of watching TV. A sample list follows:

listen to the radio

word puzzles

knit

needlepoint

read a book or magazine

clean your room

rearrange your closet

cook

participate in a team sport

challenge a friend to a game

bicycle

take a walk

swim

make a collection

paint or draw

have friends visit

go to the library

make a scrapbook

volunteer

get a job

fish

write a letter

woodwork

bowl

sew

make a crafts project

learn a new skill

skate

fly a kite

improve your grades

play a board game

visit a museum

join a club
dance
exercise
photography
grow something

****add to the list****

Students will be asked to determine a personal TV viewing goal for the next two weeks. Heavier viewers will view no more than two hours daily (including their alternative program) and lighter viewers should attempt to halve their viewing time (if possible) or to select quality programming.

Students should realize that bad habits are hard to break and daily encouragement should be offered. Parents should be encouraged to participate in the experiment and family outings and activities should be planned. At the least, parents can offer encouragement by turning off the set during mealtimes. A sample of a third week diary follows:

Programs I Watched Time Alternative Activities

Sun.

Mon.

Tues.

There should be a concluding statement at the bottom of the diary which might read:

I met my goal ____

I went over my goal by ____ hours

Parent's signature ____

This part of the lesson should continue for a minimum of two weeks or as long as the teacher chooses.

Utilizing TV

Objective To use television as a positive medium

Obviously, television is a two-edged sword. There are excellent opportunities for parents and teachers to capitalize on entertaining and informational programs.

Ideally, children should watch TV with their parents. This allows parents to present their views on sensitive and confusing issues, and to some degree, mitigate the negative effects of TV and to a greater degree, extend the positive effects. When parents and teachers use TV as a springboard for greater communication and when they help children to make connections between ideas and images, they are participating creatively in education.

One parent, dismayed by the sight of his children immobilized in front of the television, hooked up a stationary bike to a 12-volt battery and the television set. Now the children must pedal to power the set. The suggestions below are somewhat less physical.

Activities

1. Encourage kids to find out how TV works. Visit a television station. A list of some helpful books:
 - a. Bendick, Jeanne *Television Works Like This*

- b. *Corbett, Scott* What Makes TV Work
 - c. *Polk, Lee* The Incredible Television Machine
 - d. *Unstead, R.J.* See Inside a Television Studio
2. Explore job possibilities in television. A helpful book is:
 - a. Lerner Publications *Television as a Profession*
 3. Write an original script for a favorite show or character.
 4. Design a set for a program.
 5. Listen to the background music on several different kinds of programs. See how it contributes to the mood of the show. Find suitable music to express different feelings (ex. happy, sad, suspenseful).
 6. Create your own slide show with appropriate music and sound effects.
 7. Research how make-up can alter a character. Design a new look for a favorite character. Create a realistic mask for another special effect.
 8. Research costuming. Design costumes for different time periods. Create special effect costuming (ex. circus, science-fiction, animals).
 9. If you have seen a program or special based on a book, read the book and then compare it to the program.
 10. Construct a television bulletin board advertising noteworthy programs and events.
 11. Define the following characters and find TV examples of each: real, fictional, realistic fictional. Make up your own stories for each of them.
 12. Create your own TV program. You can make a video tape and actually broadcast it on TV. For information and further details call: Storer Cable Company, New Haven, Ct.

Notes

1. Joan Anderson Wilkins. *Breakin g the TV Habit* , (N.Y. Charles Scribner's Sons, 1982), p. 52.
2. *Ibid.*, p. 12.
3. "Cable TV: Coming of Age" *Newsweek* , Aug. 24, 1981, p. 4.
4. Kate Moody. *Growing Up On Television* , (N.Y. Times Books, 1980), p. 5.
5. Wilkins, *Op. Cit.*, p. 10-11.
6. *Ibid.*, p. 6-7.
7. Marie Winn. *The Plug-In Drug* , (N.Y. Viking Press, 1977), p. 65.
8. "A New Indictment of TV Violence" *Newsweek* , May 17, 1982.
9. Moody, *Op. Cit.* , p. 82-83.
10. Singer, Dorothy. *Teaching Television* , (N.Y. The Dial Press, 1981), p. 19-20.
11. *Ibid.*, p. 138.
12. *Ibid.*, p. 139.
13. Winn, *Op. Cit.*, p. 67.
14. Moody, *Op. Cit.*, p. 86.

Bibliography

Arlen, Michael, *Thirty Seconds* . New York: Farrar Strauss and Giroux, 1979.

Barnouw, Erik, *Tube of Plenty* . New York: Oxford University Press, 1975.

Kaye, Evelyn, *The Family Guide to Children's Television*. New York: Pantheon Books, 1974.

Liebert, Robert, *The Early Window* . New York: Pergamon Press, 1973.

Moody, Kate, *Growing Up On Television* . New York: Times Books, 1980.

Morris, Norman, *Television's Child* . Boston. Little Brown and Co., 1971.

Postman, Neil, *The Disappearance of Childhood*. New York: Delacorte Press, 1982.

Schwarz, Meg, *TV and Teens* . Reading: Addison-Wesley Publishing Co., 1982.

Singer, Dorothy, *Teaching Television* . New York: Dial Press, 1981.

Wilkins, Joan, *Breaking the TV Habit* . New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1982.

Winn, Marie, *The Plug-In Drug* . New York: Viking Press, 1977.

<https://teachersinstitute.yale.edu>

©2019 by the Yale-New Haven Teachers Institute, Yale University

For terms of use visit <https://teachersinstitute.yale.edu/terms>