

LESSON 23



Freeze My TV

Background

**Review with students the difference between educational and recreational screen time. Educational, or instructional, screen time includes the use of computers and other devices for learning during school, learning during out-of-school programs, and completing homework. Recreational screen time is all screen activities that children engage in for fun.*

In the United States, children watch about four hours of TV every day. And this is in addition to other recreational* screen time, such as text messaging, playing video games, and spending time online or on social networks for fun. When added up, TV and other screen activities have basically become a full-time job!

And our children are suffering because of it. On average, American youths spend more time watching television each year than they spend in school. This tendency toward an inactive, or sedentary, lifestyle is a contributing factor to more and more children being overweight. The more television a child watches, the more likely he will be to be overweight. The increase in television viewing has also been associated with elevated cholesterol levels and poor cardiorespiratory fitness in youths, as well as less time spent reading, doing homework, and getting the recommended amount of sleep (10 hours each day for elementary school-aged children).

To combat inactivity, young people should be encouraged to consider healthy alternatives to television viewing and other screen activities, particularly those that involve physical activity. Children should limit television and other screen time to no more than two hours per day; less is better.

Estimated Teaching Time and Related Subject Areas

Estimated teaching time: 1 hour, 15 minutes

Related subject areas: math, language arts, art, social studies

Objectives

- Analyze their leisure time to identify hours spent watching television as well as participating in other screen activities such as surfing the web, text messaging, and playing video games.
- Create a list of alternative activities to consider instead of watching television.

Materials

- Overhead 23.1, Couch Potato
- Overhead 23.2, Instead of Watching TV, I Could
- TV guide or online TV listings
- Worksheet 23.1, Time to Get Active
- Worksheet 23.2, Television Blackout Tracking
- Colored stick-on dots (optional)
- Worksheet 23.3, Tell Your Friend About TV Blackout Time
- Worksheet 23.4, What Did You Do Instead of Watching TV?

3. Have students comment on their television habits by identifying shows they frequently watch.
4. Ask students whether they believe they can be called a couch potato. Have them explain why or why not.

Part II: Concept Development

As the list is compiled, help students add to it by recalling programs that may have been left out.

This activity may be lengthy. You may initiate it in class but then have the students finish it independently when they have completed other assigned work. Be certain that students have identified their three to five favorites for at least day 1 and day 2.

1. Display a television guide, and have students brainstorm a list of their favorite weekday and weeknight television programs.
2. Record the student responses on a blackboard chart with columns for each of the seven days of the week. Be certain to list shows under the appropriate day of the week.
3. Have students review the list of programs and write down their three to five favorites for each day. Have them rate the shows, placing a number 1 next to their favorite show and a number 5 next to their fifth favorite show, and so on.
4. After days 1 and 2 have been completed, have students circle the numbers indicating the two shows (one per day) they would have the least difficulty giving up. (These will probably be the shows they ranked as their fourth or fifth favorites.)
5. Briefly discuss why watching less TV and participating more in active alternatives might benefit students' health. Encourage them to consider that when they watch TV, they are inactive and may tend to snack more than usual. Watching TV also results in having less time to socialize with friends or family.

Part III: Application

1. Display Overhead 23.2, *Instead of Watching TV, I Could*. Ask the students to brainstorm a list of alternative activities they could do if they were not watching television. Encourage them to include all sorts of alternatives, such as hobbies, games, music, sports, reading, and exercising. Let them know that other recreational screen activities (watching movies, text messaging, playing video games, and spending time online or on social networks for fun) do not count as TV alternatives and, in fact, should be limited (see the bonus activity in part IV). Video games that involve moderate to vigorous physical activity, such as Wii Fit and Dance, Dance Revolution (DDR), do count as an alternative to television. DDR is also a heart-healthy activity.
2. Write the student suggestions on Overhead 23.2. Have the students indicate whether each alternative involves physical activity (such as dancing, running, or playing basketball) or no physical activity (such as reading, playing a board game, or sleeping).
3. After the students have evaluated and described each activity, discuss the activities in terms of whether they are heart healthy (exercise the heart).
4. Distribute Worksheet 23.1, *Time to Get Active*. Have the students estimate the number of waking hours in their day that could be classified as active and how many could be classified as inactive. (Have a student explain the meaning of *inactive*.) Have students make bar graphs to compare their inactive waking hours to their active waking hours. Ask them to estimate the amount of time they have spent watching television and participating in other screen activities in their lifetimes, and have them explain how they came up with their answers. These graphs or charts and lifetime estimates can be used to emphasize the need to increase physical activity.

Part IV: Television Blackout Tracking

1. Refer the students to the list of their favorite three to five shows for each day, and have them write the names of the shows on Worksheet 23.2, *Television Blackout*

Tracking. Instruct them to circle the name of at least one show that they agree to give up each day.

2. Have the students review the list they made for Overhead 23.2, *Instead of Watching TV, I Could*, and select activities they would like to try instead of watching television during one of their blackout times. Have them write the alternative activities in the Alternatives spaces that follow the shows they choose to miss (on Worksheet 23.2).
3. Ask the students to give up at least one 30-minute TV program each day. This is their TV blackout time. Explain that the following day, each student will share with the class what she did as an alternative to watching TV. As a bonus activity, students can also give up 30 minutes of other recreational screen activities such as spending time online for fun, text messaging, and playing video games.
4. If you like, students may place a red sticker over the blackout selection on the tracking sheet if they successfully give up at least one 30-minute show per night. Give the students one sticker for every 30 minutes of TV they give up. You can give an additional sticker for each day a student gives up another screen activity.

Students who are not successful should be encouraged to try again the next day.

Part V: Follow-Up

1. Discuss the Freeze My TV promotion (see lesson 29).
2. Have the students create a poster that illustrates their involvement in an alternative activity during a TV blackout time and that encourages others to try similar activities instead of watching TV.
3. Distribute Worksheet 23.3, *Tell Your Friend About TV Blackout Time*. Have the students write a letter to a friend discussing their self-selected alternatives to watching television and how changing their television habits could affect their lives.
4. Have the students interview older relatives or neighbors about what they did as children to entertain themselves instead of watching television. As a class, have the students generate five questions to ask their older relatives or neighbors. Students can record the interview questions and the interviewees' answers on Worksheet 23.4, *What Did You Do Instead of Watching TV?* When students have gathered this information, have them work in small groups or as a class to organize the information into relevant categories and compile a catalog of activities. For example, the activities could be organized by time period in which the person grew up (e.g., 1940s, 1950s, 1960s, 1970s) or location (city, state, or even country); by type of entertainment (hobbies, games, sports, reading, and so on); by whether the entertainment is active or inactive; or by whether the entertainment is something that students today would or would not enjoy.

For an extension to this activity, have students do additional research about children's television-free pastimes throughout history.

