

High-Intermediate 2
Unit 8: Reading
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Do YOU REALLY ENJOY BEING A COUCH POTATO?

A husband and wife come home from work, exhausted and stressed out. They don't feel like preparing a real dinner, so they pop something in the microwave. Then they sit down on the couch for an evening of being mesmerized by the TV set. Hours later, after having fallen asleep, they wake up and stumble off to bed. Each day they continue to do the same thing: Get up, go to work, come home, grab a bite, then sit down and vegetate in front of the TV set. Does this sound like you? If so, are you satisfied with your existence? Isn't there more to life than being a couch potato?

couch potato = a person who just lies on the sofa and watches TV

exhausted = very tired, run-down, drained

feel like = enjoy

pop = throw

couch = sofa

mesmerize = attract someone's attention completely; fascinate

They were mesmerized by her performance.

stumble = walk with difficulty

stumble off = start to walk with difficulty

grab a bite = eat sth quickly

vegetate = spend your time doing nothing

sound like = look like, resemble

satisfied ≠ dissatisfied

existence = being

Some people apparently don't think so. In their recent book *Time for Life*, researchers John Robinson and Geoffrey Godbey state that the average amount of time that people in the United States have to devote to leisure activities is actually increasing. While this may sound unlikely, Robinson and Godbey claim that Americans now spend almost forty hours a week doing leisure-time activities, and something similar may be true all over the industrialized world. Here's what Robinson and Godbey say are the top five leisure activities among Americans: Watching television, at 15.0 hours a week, is by far the most popular. Number two on the list is socializing - 6.7 hours a week. Number three, at 4.4 hours weekly, is home communication. Reading, at 2.8 hours a week, ranks number four. And number five on the list, engaging in hobbies comes in at 2.7 hours a week. Judging from these statistics, we might conclude that many Americans seem to enjoy being couch potatoes. Now, if you want to spend your leisure time channel surfing, that's your choice. There are, how-ever, many rewarding pursuits out there. With all the extra leisure time that we supposedly have, it behooves us to know how to spend it interestingly. Here are three of the more unusual and interesting popular hobbies.

state = say something clearly

devote = give, dedicate, allocate

I could only devote two hours a day to the work.

The amount of time devoted to leisure is dropping.

unlikely = improbable

claim = say that something is apparently true

leisure = fun in your free time

channel surfing = watching different TV channels

rewarding = promising

pursuit = hobby, pastime

supposedly = seemingly, apparently

It behooves somebody to do something = It is necessary for somebody to do something

It behooves us to study these findings carefully.

Rollercoasting has become so popular that there's even an organization called ACE (American Coaster Enthusiasts) that is dedicated to preserving, appreciating, and enjoying roller coasters. The precursors of roller coasters originated in Russia as ice slides built high into the air, and the first actual mechanical roller coasters were also constructed in Russia. From there the idea migrated to Paris, where a kind of roller coaster with wheels was built in 1804. Eventually the roller coaster made its way to the United States, with more and more coasters being built until Depression times. Then they began to fall out of fashion, and many were torn down. It was not until the 1950s, with Walt Disney's opening of the first Disneyland, that roller coasters began to make a comeback. Now they're being built at breakneck speed. Marie Miller, a member of ACE now in her eighties, is a major enthusiast. She figures she's ridden on most of the roller coasters in the United States, saying. "There was a time when I rode every wooden coaster in the United States, Canada, and Mexico, but I can't keep up with them. One thing's certain: I'll never stop riding until I'm in my grave."

enthusiast = a person who is highly interested in sth

preserve = keep, protect

appreciate = admire

precursor = forerunner; early version

slide = a structure for children to play on which has a slope for them to slide down and usually a set of steps leading up to the slope

construct = build

migrate = go from one location to a remote location

eventually = finally

Depression Times = 1930's = the time of economic recession in the USA

recession = the shrinking of the economy

breakneck (adjective) = fast and dangerous

major = important, main ≠ minor

figure = think

keep up with sth = do sth regularly

Another fascinating pastime is orienteering, a combination of map reading and cross-country skiing or running. Orienteers are given a map that shows where a set of "control points" are located. They try to follow the map by interpreting it carefully and using a compass to plot their course. Each time they succeed in finding a control point, they stamp a card that validates their having completed that part of the game. The sport is competitive: Participants get a starting time and have a prescribed time period for locating all of the control points. Orienteering has become extremely popular. Why? There are several reasons. It's interesting

and healthy. You get the chance to enjoy the outdoors. Best of all, it taxes both your physical strength and your mental acumen.

pastime = hobby; pursuit

interpret = try to understand and explain sth

compass = a device which shows geographical directions

plot = plan

course = way

validate = approve of

tax = to need a great amount of physical or mental effort

The questions did not tax me.

The problem is currently taxing the brains of the nation's experts (= making them think very hard).

acumen = ability

He had demonstrated considerable business acumen.

commercial/financial acumen

She has an acumen for handling finances that far exceeds what one typically finds in our industry.

Then there's letterboxing, a hobby that is like a combination of orienteering and treasure hunting. It began in England in 1854, when an English gentleman put his calling card (a little like today's business card) into a bottle and left it on the bank of a pond. Someone else found it and contacted him, and from this the hobby sprang up. What happens is this: People put a notebook and a rubber stamp in a bottle (the letterbox) and they provide special clues for finding the bottle. Participants have to follow the clues by hiking in certain sections of the English countryside until they finally locate the letterbox and stamp their notebook. For some aficionados, letterboxing is so enjoyable that it's become a way of life.

pond = a small lake

spring up = originate

rubber stamp

clue = hint

aficionado = enthusiast

it's become = it has become

These are just three examples of captivating pastimes. Why are they all so popular? One principal reason is that they're basically active, not passive. Aficionados of these hobbies get out and act rather than passively sitting in front of the TV screen. Suppose that at some future time we start engraving, on our tombstones, not only the names and the dates of people's births and deaths but also their hobbies and accomplishments. Which would look better on a gravestone: JOHN L. DOE, COUCH POTATO, or JOHN L. DOE, ORIENTEER?

captivating = very interesting

principal = main

suppose = imagine, think

engrave = carve; cut sth in stone

accomplishment = achievement

R.I.P. = Rest in Peace

Source:

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