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Couch potatoes to activists Kids Off the Couch pairs films and outings to teach children about culture, life and values.

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How to get your children to see the latest exhibit at the Getty when all they want to do is vegetate in front of the TV?

Two local moms think they have an answer. Their website, Kids Off the Couch, links cultural activities — such as a trip to the Getty Center or the Griffith Observatory — to a related movie, allowing media-addicted youngsters to stay in front of the TV until their interest in the outing is piqued.

By the time they finish watching "The Hideaways," about a brother and sister who run away from home and spend a week hiding out in the Metropolitan Museum of Art, children just might be up for visiting the Getty — not only to see the art, but also to figure out where they would sleep and bathe if they were to take up residence there. (As one kid noted, that antique silver bowl would make a great repository for Cheerios.)

Every Tuesday, subscribers to the free Kids Off the Couch e-mail list get a suggested "Popcorn Adventure" in their inboxes. The site's founders, Sarah Bowman and Diane Phillips Shakin, draw from their eclectic film knowledge and extensive explorations of the Los Angeles area to create pairings that appeal to intellectually minded parents as well as finicky children.

Bowman and Shakin encourage parents to consider films and activities that are not obviously geared toward children. Civic involvement and volunteerism are part of the mix: The musical "Oliver!" is followed by Thanksgiving dinner at a soup kitchen and "Mr. Smith Goes to Washington" by a family outing to the polling place on Election Day.

Each "Popcorn Adventure" contains a lesson plan with questions to ask the kids, tips on age-appropriateness and factoids about the movie and the activity. Parking tips and links to ticket reservation websites make planning easier for harried parents. All the adventures are tested by at least one of the women and her children.

Want to teach your child about nutrition? Pop the documentary "Super Size Me" into the DVD player, then head to the nearest farmers market. The Japanese animated film "Spirited Away" serves as an introduction to the anime-themed stores and ramen restaurants of Sawtelle Boulevard. This week's adventure pairs the 1985 hit "Back to the Future," with its time-traveling DeLorean, and a trip to Sylmar to see the Nethercutt Collection of classic cars.

"When do you ever get to do anything cultural? How do you shoehorn it into your life?" said Bowman, a former film executive and screenwriter who has a 13-year-old daughter and an 11-year-old son. "As a parent, you're so busy shuttling the kids around and coordinating that you don't have the time to do those family things you remember from growing up."

Kids Off the Couch is of the moment, not just because of its use of computer technology but also because of its premise: that kids need to be dragged out of the house by some mixture of persuasion and coercion.

Where children might once have been eager to go on a family outing because there was nothing else to do, DVDs, computers and video games have transformed the average household into an entertainment arcade. In upper-middle-class families, a packed calendar of sports, music lessons and academics leaves everyone too tired to make it to the Magritte exhibit.

As tantalizing as Bowman and Shakin try to make their adventures, they recognize that some kids will still need to be convinced.

Their website contains a list of tips, including the "Fifteen Minute Rule" — promise the kids that they can switch off the movie or leave the museum in 15 minutes if they don't like it — and "Bribe them" (no explanation needed).

Launched a year ago, Kids Off the Couch has more than 2,000 subscribers, largely through word of mouth. Bowman and Shakin are planning a New York-specific site as well as a national version suggesting activities that can be found in most cities.

Some mothers who use the site say it is logistically difficult to do both the movie and the outing, and they often end up with just one or the other. But the Kids Off the Couch e-mails have become a vital part of their weekend planning. "It's like the Good Housekeeping seal of approval. Great, I'll go see whatever movie they suggest. Because it's psychically linked to a cultural outing, it's more palatable for me," said Liz Ondaatje, a public policy researcher at the Rand Corp. and the mother of four children ages 9 to 16.

Andrea Malin discussed ballot initiatives like Prop. 87, the proposed tax on oil producers, with her two daughters and took them with her to the polling place when she voted last November. Without Kids Off the Couch, she said, she never would have realized that children that age — her younger daughter is 6 — could learn something by participating in these adult activities.

"I thought it was really interesting to see how everyone just voted to make a change in the country," said Malin's 10-year-old daughter, Isabel DeBré. "I thought it was really great. I can't wait to do it when I'm older."

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Kids Off the Couch
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