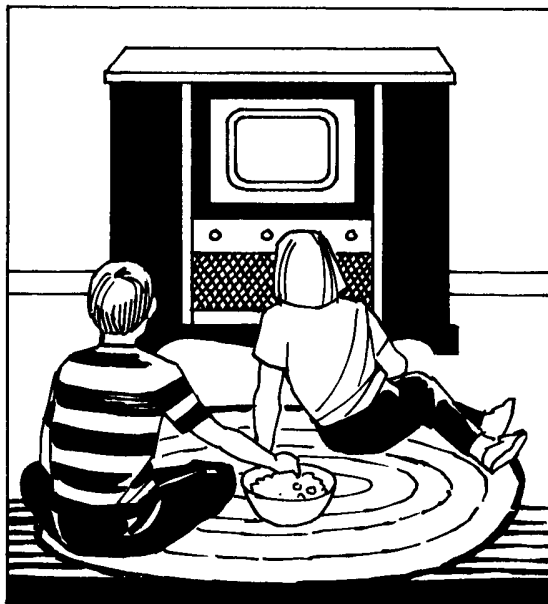


The TV Generation

Children born in the late 1940s were the first generation to grow up with television. The full impact of this phenomenon would not be seen for many years. On this page you will read about the beginnings of television.

History During the late 1940s some television programs debuted, but they reached relatively small audiences. In 1948, there were fewer than 17,000 TV sets in the whole United States. By the end of the 1950s Americans owned an estimated 50 million sets.

Criticisms Criticism of the new industry came quickly. Some called the TV an “idiot box” or the “boob tube,” claiming that many programs had little value. Educators were concerned about the impact of TV on their students and worried that students might skip their homework to watch shows. The amount of violence and sex depicted in some programs was also worrisome to many.



Lifestyle Changes Almost overnight the lifestyles of millions of Americans changed as people stayed up later to watch shows. Some people stayed inside their homes more, leaving their houses infrequently. With the invention of the TV dinner in 1954, some families even began eating in front of the television set.

Impact One important impact of television was the business of TV commercials which brought in over 1.5 billion dollars in advertising money in the early 1950s. Another way television impacted America was in the coast-to-coast programs which allowed people to view firsthand historical events such as political conventions and presidential inaugurations.

A Scandal Quiz shows were popular during the 50s, but *Twenty-One* created the scandal of the decade. Players answered questions, and if they were correct they could choose to keep going. As the questions grew more and more difficult, the prize money grew larger. One contestant, college instructor Charles Van Doren, amassed \$129,000 in prize money. In 1958, however, a Congressional investigation revealed that the show was fraudulent and had given questions to Van Doren and others in advance.

Suggested Activities

Movie View the 1995 movie *Quiz Show* for an indepth look at the quiz show scandal of the fifties.

Response Ask for students' responses to this question: What problems facing television viewers are the same today as they were in the 50s?

Debate Choose two groups to debate this question: Who should be responsible for censoring TV programming, individuals (parents) or the government?

Contrast Contrast the current criticisms of TV viewing with criticisms of TV viewing in the fifties.

Survey Have the students keep a survey of their own or their families' television viewing for one week. Tally and compare the results and discuss them in whole group.