

BACKGROUND

GIRLSCOOUTS AND LITERACY

Why It Matters

The ability to read, write, communicate, and understand has never been more crucial. After all, ours is an information and knowledge-based society. At the same time, disturbing statistics reveal that some 30% of all 17-year-olds in the U.S. are functionally illiterate.

If girls and young women are to thrive in this information age, they must become lifelong learners, so they will have the ability to build their knowledge and skills.

Girl Scout program activities reinforce literacy skills through fun, dynamic, and interactive activities. In the process, girls and young women learn how to access rich and varied resources available to them not only in their communities, but also worldwide via cyberspace. Most importantly, literacy program activities offered in Girl Scouting help girls grow strong by encouraging them to develop communications skills that can expand their horizons and opportunities.

Program Activities

- Read to Lead is a national literacy initiative that features age-specific activity booklets for girls emphasizing the importance of reading. Included are recommended reading lists and a guide for adults.
- Girl Scouts is partnered with the U.S. Department of Education in several national initiatives, including:

The America Reads Challenge encourages girls to read and write for at least 30 minutes a day, five days a week, to read with an adult partner for at least one of those days, and to learn one new word per week.

Read*Write*Now! teaches girls to build their language and literacy skills, especially during summer months through exciting and innovative activities in Summer Tutoring Institutes and Nature Reading Camps.

Did you know . . .

- ➔ Research shows that girls who are reading at or above age level are less likely to engage in risky behaviors?
- ➔ Girls with enriched literacy skills — like those provided in Girl Scouting — attain higher levels of education, as well as higher-paying and more satisfying jobs, and are more likely to be in leadership positions in their communities?
- ➔ Studies show that literacy is a critical predictor of children's success in school?

History

Juliette Gordon Low, who founded Girl Scouts in the United States in 1912, placed a high priority on developing good reading skills from an early age. “Wherever you go, you will have the choice of good reading or bad reading,” she wrote in 1913 in the first Girl Scout handbook, “and since what you read has such a lasting effect on your mind, try to read the good and skip the bad.”

In the 88 years since then, literacy has been fundamental to — and embedded in — all of Girl Scouting’s informal education program activities. From instructions on how to build a nature trail, to stories about girls growing up in other countries, to learning how to read to younger children, Girl Scouting continues to help girls and young women at every age to enhance their literacy skills.

Who We Are

Girl Scouts is the world’s preeminent organization dedicated solely to girls — all girls — where, in an accepting and nurturing environment, girls build character and skills for success in the real world. In partnerships with committed adults, girls develop qualities that will serve them all their lives — like strong values, a social conscience, and a conviction about their own potential and self-worth. In Girl Scouts, girls discover the fun, friendship, and power of girls together. Through the many enriching experiences provided by Girl Scouting, they grow courageous and strong.

Girl Scouts. Where Girls Grow Strong.

Additional Resources

Girl Scouts can earn a wide variety of age-specific, literacy-related awards and participation patches, including “Books,” “Communication Arts,” “Women’s Stories,” “Writing for Real,” “The Lure of Language,” “Reading,” “Once Upon a Story,” “Desktop Publishing,” “Computers in Everyday Life,” “Do You Get the Message?,” “Exploring the Net,” “The Play’s the Thing,” and “Read to Lead.”

Other resources: *Octavia’s Girl Scout Journey*, a marvelous book for girls that traces the history of Girl Scouting through the eyes of a young girl in 1916 Savannah, Ga.

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