Years ago grandparents often shared the same household with their children and grandchildren. Aunts and uncles may not have been far away. Today, because of economics and easy mobility, many young people do not have the opportunity to live with or even interact on a regular basis with older people. This interest project provides a series of activities that will help you to bridge the “generation gap” as you get to know older people.

1. Investigate your heritage. Talk with family members and friends to get information about your family’s history. Go back as many generations as you can. Ask about special family traditions, names, and foods. Make a heritage book for your family.

2. Interview at least five people who lived in your community over the past 25 to 50 years. Complete an oral history and/or pictorial record focusing on their experiences when they were your age. How is your life the same as or different from a girl of 50 years ago?

3. Complete a project with members or residents of a senior center or home. The project could be a musical performance or a dance workshop, low-impact aerobics class or another fun physical activity.

4. Team up with a group of senior citizens to complete a civic project such as a voter registration drive or a community celebration.

5. Invite retirees from a variety of professional fields to lend their expertise to a project you or your group are planning. Suggested projects are a health fair or career workshop.

6. Contact your local high school and get the names of graduates from the 1930s, 1940s, or 1950s and help them organize a class reunion.

7. Invite a senior citizen or older relative to accompany you to an outing she or he would enjoy—a baseball game, movie, play, or zoo. Plan a second outing based on your evaluation of your first.

8. Find out about the elderly in different societies and cultures. What are their roles? How are they treated? Create an artwork that reflects what you have learned.

Technology

The average life span of Americans today is longer than ever before. Find out about the factors that have contributed to this increase in longevity and the ability to stay active. Find out what the expected life span of someone your age is. Compare it with the life span of girls your age in other countries.

1. After getting permission, work with an animal shelter and your Girl Scout troop or group to bring pets to a local nursing home on a regular basis.

2. Set up a program for girls to read to or write letters for the visually impaired.

3. Set up a telephone network with a religious group or organization to have the homebound contacted once a day.

4. Field trips can be arranged to nursing homes and assisted living facilities.

Youth and Beyond

Service Projects

1. Develop a service project that will help an elderly person. Here are some ideas:

   • Make a quilt
   • Create a scrapbook
   • Help with a special project

2. Recruit volunteers to participate in a food-delivery program or a senior center that was not in existence 50 years ago, like open-heart surgery, laser treatments, hepatitis vaccines, etc. Talk with someone who has benefited from these services or procedures. Discuss their impact.

3. Teach an introductory lesson on the use of computers, including CD-ROMs, fax machines, and voice mail, to an older person who would like to keep up with the latest technology.

4. Work with a senior citizen to provide assistance to children in need. For example, visit children in a hospital or emergency day-care center.

5. Compile a list of community organizations and services for the elderly. Distribute the list to senior centers, nursing homes, or individuals. Post the list for young people to view, so they can volunteer their time, too.

Career Exploration

1. Hold a career-day workshop with retired professionals. Topics could include resume writing, interviewing, interpersonal skills in the workplace, and business etiquette. Find out who might be available for consultation and develop a list of consultants.

2. Talk to a retired person about her volunteer work. Find out whether her volunteer work relates to a previous career or whether it represents a recently acquired interest.

3. Learn about the field of geriatrics. How have advances in gerontology careers enhanced the quality of life of the elderly?

4. Find out about career opportunities in fields offering goods and services to retired people. Write to an organization that represents people over age 50—for example, the American Association of Retired People (AARP)—or refer to a magazine or newsletter written to this audience. Make a list of the advertisers and announcements and identify career opportunities suggested to them.