

# Hit TV Shows Spawn Summer Camps for Couch Potatoes

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## What's Cooler Than Capture the Flag? Solving Murders, 'CSI'-Style

By NATHAN KOPPEL

On a summer morning in southern New Jersey, a team of crime-scene investigators gathered around a body lying face-down in a small pool of blood. They surveyed the nearby evidence: a party hat, a stray earring, push pins, cashew nuts.

"Oooh, cool," said Asia Cadet, a 13-year old investigator, as she crouched low to study the face of the deceased dummy corpse. "His nose is crushed."

It is day one at Stockton CSI, a summer camp for students with a passion for forensic science and crime shows like "CSI." "I've always been interested in blood analysis," says Ms. Cadet.

Hoping to capitalize on America's littlest TV addicts, the latest crop of summer camps are borrowing themes from popular shows. In place of kayaking,

swimming and capturing the flag, campers are solving crimes, playing with polymers and honing their kitchen-knife

skills.

When they weren't examining bodies, the campers at Stockton CSI spent time at a county jail, where they saw a "weapons board" of shivs and other lethal objects crafted by inmates, including a dental-floss rope intended for strangulations. There are CSI camps in at least a half dozen other states.

At Busted! Myth Meets Science!, a camp based at Penn State University and modeled after the Discovery Channel's "MythBusters" series, kids use science to suss out myths from facts. Among the experiments: Mixing Mentos candies with a

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carbonated beverage to create an exploding geyser, and testing snowboarding helmets by stuffing them with canteloupes, stand-ins for real human heads, and dropping them from a height of 25 feet. On Polymer Day, they see if it's really possible to walk on water—or at least, a mixture of water and corn starch. (Yes, you can, but you have to go fast.)

In Maine, *Outdoor Survivor Camp* plays off "Survivor," with campers making fires, building huts and racing to make homemade rafts. Materials for the raft include driftwood, rope, milk jugs, shoe laces and T-shirts (for sails). Unlike the TV show, "campers are not voted off the island," says Susan Jennings, an educator at the camp.

Florida chef John Lewis says his cooking camp was inspired by Food Network shows, including Emeril Lagasse's. Kids learn knife skills, the preparation of "mise en place," a French phrase describing a chef's set-up, and how to cook dishes like pan-crusted chicken with soy-ginger glaze. Because kids have to be tall enough to get a pan on a hot stove, the minimum age is eight. But, says Mr. Lewis, "I have taken some unusually tall seven-year-olds."

Camper John Bookman, now in his third week, says after a few early missteps, he has mastered crêpes stuffed with smoked chicken and vegetables. His first attempt was awash in béchamel sauce: "It was too liquidy and gushy."

It was "The Apprentice" that spurred Gayle Reaume to open the Money Academy Camp in Austin, Texas.

"I watched the Trump Show and realized how many people don't know diddy about money,"



The scene of the crime: At Stockton CSI summer camp, teen investigators John Graziano and Bina Patel, and right, Olivia Weitowicz and Holly Szukis, look for clues to a murder.



she says. The camp's motto: "Tell your money where to go, don't wonder where it went. Have a plan to make it grow, before it all gets spent."

A one-week session starts at \$300, and begins with a loan of up to \$100 from Ms. Reaume which campers use to create a product and take it to market. If sales are brisk, they can afford to pay back the loan, with interest, and take home a profit.

The prospect of profits hung in the air one Friday morning as the kids at Money camp gathered for their daily "acknowledgment circle" to congratulate each other on their recent success. This time, it was the launch of two products: gift bags and streamers. The campers thought streamers would be a hit during the Fourth of July, but they hadn't sold as well as the gift

bags.

"We've had a great week and have paid off our loan," Curtis, a 10-year-old counselor, told the group. "Today's all profit. So let's finish off with great sales!"

"Donald Trump without the comb over," said Ms. Reaume. Another difference: At camp, no one gets fired.

Later that morning at the assembly line, quality control was starting to slip. At a table strewn with crayons, ribbons, scissors and cardboard, a camper had picked up a glue stick and was pretending to Taser fellow campers.

"Stop acting crazy. This is a business," Jade, age 8, said, adding, "Why does it smell like feet?"

Palmer, an 8-year-old camper, admitted he had taken off his clogs. "My feet sweat," he said.

"It doesn't help people in your business if you take your shoes off," Jade said.

Sophia, the day's CEO, ambled over. "Can we start selling in 15 minutes?" she asked.

The group snapped to attention. In short order, gift bags were flying off the production table and into the hands of sales specialists, who took them to an adjoining pizza parlor and video arcade. There, they sold people \$49 worth of merchandise. The total profit for the week: \$67.

At CSI camp in Stockton, the mood was more somber. Hours into their investigation of the dead body, the campers seemed daunted. There wasn't enough blood at the crime scene to suggest a blunt force trauma. Could the victim have been poisoned?

Camp co-director Joshua

Duntley pulled some campers aside. "You need to go through a level of meta-cognition," said Mr. Duntley, a psychology professor at The Richard Stockton College of New Jersey, which hosts the camp. "Put yourself in the mind of the killer. That will help you organize the crime scene."

A group of investigators huddled to discuss more theories about the crime.

Someone had spotted "2012" carved into a wooden chair in the room where the body was found. Could the crime have been the work of an apocalyptic cult? The suggestion was met with eye rolls.

"I just want to graduate before that happens," Erica Judka, 15, said, referring to the apocalypse. "This was some weirdo guy who likes cashews and push

pins."

Later in the week, after they had finished their investigation, the campers were shown a video of actors staging the crime.

The deceased? A woman, as was the killer. The manner of death? Strangulation, after being pushed down stairs (hence, the blood). And the party hat and push pins? Irrelevant objects dropped by an innocent passerby.

Ms. Cadet said the camp had taught her a valuable lesson. "On the CSI shows every piece of evidence is relevant," she said. "But not in real life."

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