

YOU DON'T GET IT: PARENTS AND CHILDREN

“Fie, how my bones ache! What a jaunce have I had!” —Nurse
“I would thou hadst my bones, and I thy news.” —Juliet, Act 2, sc. 5

The “generation gap” refers to the differences in experience that people of different ages have had which shape their point of view and attitudes.

Students today are part of the “Millennial” generation. Your experiences with technology, world events, and American society will continue to shape your cultural understanding in different ways than the generation before you. This will lead to inevitable misunderstandings, even if they are not intended.

In Shakespeare’s Time:

Children at the beginning of the Renaissance generally were treated as little adults, expected to act, dress, and work just as if they were grown up. Children had no rights and were absolutely subject to the decisions of their parents, including who and when to marry. In wealthier families such as the Capulets and Montagues, boys were sent to school and girls trained in domestic accomplishments such as needlework, music, and drawing. Later in Renaissance times, children of the wealthy began to be treated more in accordance with their abilities, and playtime was considered as important as studies, but absolute rule of the parents remained.

In Modern Times: Try this!

Interview an older family member about how they were supposed to act when they were children and teenagers. Ideally this person should be at least 30 years older than you. Sample questions could be:

What did your parents expect from you in terms of marriage or a career? Did you have to fight them to get your own way or did you agree?

How was a child supposed to act at a grown-up party?

Were children expected to work or go to school? What did you study?

What were the clothes like?

How were teenagers supposed to go about dating? Was there a certain period of time that had to be observed before “going steady”? What was “going steady”?

See ORAL HISTORY PROJECT on page 36.

