

The wisdom of seventh graders: What it means to be an adult

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I was out of town for the grading of the seventh grade essays, so I pitched in with the sixth grade essays instead. The students were asked to think of an adult and describe the qualities that make that person an adult. This topic was not very well received by the students, who deemed it uncreative and boring. While I understand their lack of enthusiasm, it's also true that for most of your life, you're going to have to write on topics that are uncreative and boring (and the stakes are going to be higher), so you'd better get good at it. The difference in writing skill between sixth and seventh graders (between eleven year olds and twelve year olds) is quite noticeable. Many of sixth graders could not get past the literal definition of the word *adult*, describing the qualities that make an adult purely in terms of biology: Age, height, strength, puberty, armpit hair. Many others focused on accomplishments or privileges that distinguish adults from children: Advanced education, having a job, knowing how to drive a car, and being able to stay up late without getting yelled at. Remember, these are just the funny sentences/excerpts. Do not assume that all students write like this. The assignment is given under standardized test conditions: 90 minutes with nothing but pencil and paper, with one additional hour available upon request.

The easy life

- After collage, you could just go home and relax for the rest of your life. *And you wonder why scrapbooking is so popular? It's because everybody goes to collage!*
- Adults go on vacation to international countries and play golf. *Gosh, I wonder if this student comes from a wealthy family.*
- My dad is a big fan of football. Who's not?

Check your fun at the door

- Adults don't like to do anything fun 60% of the time. *I think I'm getting shortchanged on the other 40%, too.*
- They talk and talk and talk, that's all they do.
- When an adult takes you somewhere it is usually to a department store.
- My mom was so busy she had to step up her gear to get it all done.

- My mom is nice, she likes to get new kitchen supplies and carpet.
- Just like kids, adults still make mistakes and just want to have fun.
- Being an adult means living above the influence.
- Adults don't do stupid things like throwing wild house parties 24/7.
- Mature people order off the adult menu at Red Robin and do not order jumbo sundaes with extra cherries.

Responsible behavior

- My mom is responsible because she cleans the house before anybody tells her to.
- My dad is good sport. If he wins something, he doesn't say, "nanny nanny boo boo."
- Being mature is one big part about being an adult because if no one was mature then we would be at war all the time. *Instead, adults just talk and talk and talk.*
- My mom cleans the house because my dad doesn't. *Are you suggesting that your dad isn't an adult?*
- Being a civilized adult is simple, and all adults have it just not all the time.

Let me tell you about my parents

- She's now a mail woman.
- My dad is an adult because of his hair. He is losing his hair, and I hope he will not be bald soon.
- He has a wife (my mom). *Thanks for clearing that up.*
- My dad is really smart. He's been married three times. *Most people are satisfied to be only one third as smart as him.*
- A good dad makes his own meals, and who doesn't like a guy that knows a thing or two about the stove?
- My dad is tough. He is not easily scared by spiders, lightening, or the dark. *I'm assuming that lightening was a spelling error, but who knows?*
- My mom helps me appreciate that I don't live in a third world country. *For example, she frequently reminds me that there are starving children in Africa.*
- I hope one day my mom will live longer than ever before. *"Hey Mom, have you ever been this old before?" "How about now?"*
- My mom is the first adult I ever met.
- My parents are not overly protective. They let me eat raw cookie dough.
- When I saw my Uncle Mike in Texas, I knew he was an adult.
- Sarah has many personalities that make her an adult.

Assorted commentary

- Adults can't whine unless their car gets totaled, or their house burns down.
- But I think of you more as an adult when you have to shave your back hair.
- My dad is one of the most manly adults I know. *Must be the back hair.*

- Eight-teen is a huge age!
- OK, you've survived the first paragraph. Good, because here comes the second one.
- Most adults I know are pretty smart. Not Albert Einstein smart, but common sense smart.
- Adults are great people unless they aren't what they shouldn't be.
- Every single adult has gone through puberty or at least half way. *I believe the ones that went through only halfway are known as 'Frat boys'.*
- *Best opening sentence:* When you grow up to be an adult, you get armpit hair.

Concluding thoughts

- I also think I'm going to have a hard time when I be an adult.
- And those are just some snidbits from my brain.

Misspelling corner. I've included more context; that may make the game a bit easier.

- He doesn't goof around when he is so post to be doing work.
- Responsibility is when you have to make the right desigin.
- Being grown up is never goffing up.
- All the school gets the money from us for fiead hips and fun razors and the suplise. *I'm trying to imagine what a fun razor is.*
- Less mature human beans are not very keen and when doing extensive work they throw tantrums.
- They should be aloud to drive. *Speak up! I can't hear you driving.*
- When you become an adult you get fatiol hair.
- She doesn't wine like a baby. *Hey, baby, how about another glass of chardonnay?*
- My dad also plays motable instruments.

Other remarks on student writing:

- Most essays followed the standard introduction formula "There are three qualities that make a person an adult. Those qualities are A, B, and C." It's a treat to find an essay that opens more creatively, but alas, the essays with excellent introductions failed to maintain the quality level for the rest of the essay.
- You can't just write "And that's why X" to conclude your paragraph if you never actually explained why X. I read many paragraphs that took the form "Adults have quality Q. Quality Q means that XYZ. That's why adults should have quality Q." The paragraph did nothing to explain why quality Q is an important one for adults to have; it merely stated and defined it. One teacher explained to me that this isn't a conscious writing choice but is rather simply a bad habit. "I've written a bunch on topic X. Now I need to wrap it up. And the way you wrap it up is to write, 'And that's why X.'"

And that's why I read student essays.

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