

Nine-Year-Olds

"My ninth year was certainly more exciting than any of the others. But not all of it was exactly what you would call fun."

Danny, the Champion of the World | by Roald Dahl

I hate living in Greenfield! It is so boring! It isn't a city town. It isn't a country town either. It isn't a suburb town and it isn't the kind of town you'd visit your Aunt Mabel in. It is a medium sized town with a few country back roads, a few corner stores, a few movie theaters, some restaurants and many houses. It doesn't sound too bad you say? It is. The trouble is there's nothing to do! The most exciting thing that's ever happened to me in Greenfield was a train derailment. And it turned out o.k. You see, if you go to Boston you have the swan boats, you go to California, you have the beach, you go to Greenfield you have ... um-um ... see what I mean. That's why I wish Greenfield were better."

I've never forgotten this essay from Kate Arsenault, now an adult. With its exclamation marks and sardonic humor, it's a perfect expression of the often confused and troubled age of nine. The enthusiasm of eight often turns into dark brooding and worrying at nine—worrying about world events, about the health of parents, about moving away, about losing best friends, about changing schools. Teachers notice these thinly veiled themes again and again

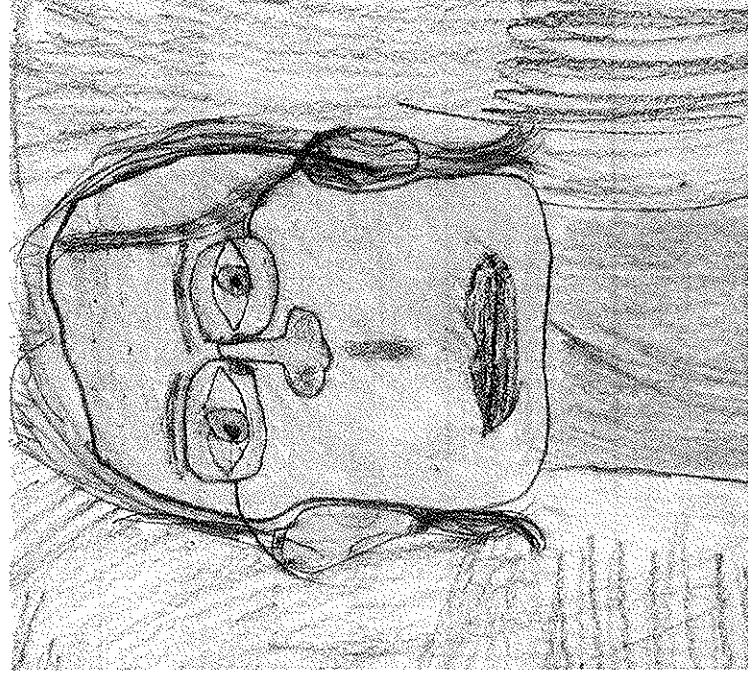


in children's fiction writing. Sometimes the deep seriousness of these social concerns can bring a twinkle to the adult eye. One nine-year-old worked diligently on her protest poster on a Saturday morning: "Save the Elephants—Ban Ivory Soap."

Fourth grade now tends to be a "benchmark" grade for state tests in at least two subject areas. But test-taking is a difficult task for nine-year-olds; in fact, it can be a disaster. It's easy to see how the well-known dip in fourth grade test scores could relate to the anxiousness of nines. The best test takers in the world are the risk takers; nines are anything but good risk takers. Teachers at this level see children finish their tests early simply because they put down any answer, rather than think through what they know. Others get only halfway through because they get stuck trying to figure out one right answer, refusing to be wrong. Nines need many opportunities to practice test-taking before it's time for the real thing. Modeling and role-playing can defuse the anxiety that tests create.

Compared with younger and older schoolmates, nines tend to learn better on their own as they gain mastery of basic skills. They're gaining a more solid understanding of key cognitive concepts such as multiplication, spelling patterns, and the scientific process. Younger children enjoy experimenting with these processes, but nines now take care with the final product. They will work hard on a science report on butterflies and study for weekly spelling tests or a chapter test in math.

Nothing is fair to the nine-year-old, who is struggling with the cognitive task of understanding ethical behavior at a new level. Why do children die? Why is there AIDS? Why are there poor people? How come a few people have all the money? Nines often feel they are singled out for unfair treatment by a teacher, parent, or sports coach. Sometimes these complaints are a way for nines to express a growing sense of peer importance and group solidarity: "You're never fair to us ... we never get to do anything." This growing peer solidarity of nines can be channeled into wonderful



club activities. Children enjoy gathering to play chess or to share their collections of rocks or stamps.

Nines complain about their aches and pains, their cuts and bruises, and their hurt feelings. Nail biting, hair twisting, and other outlets for tension are common. Teachers of nine-year-olds in third and fourth grade need a sense of humor and a determined lightness to challenge the sometimes deadly seriousness of the age. Positive language is also essential for children's growth. An ounce of negative criticism is greatly magnified by the nine-year-old. So is an ounce of encouragement.

Nine-Year-Olds: Growth Patterns

PHYSICAL

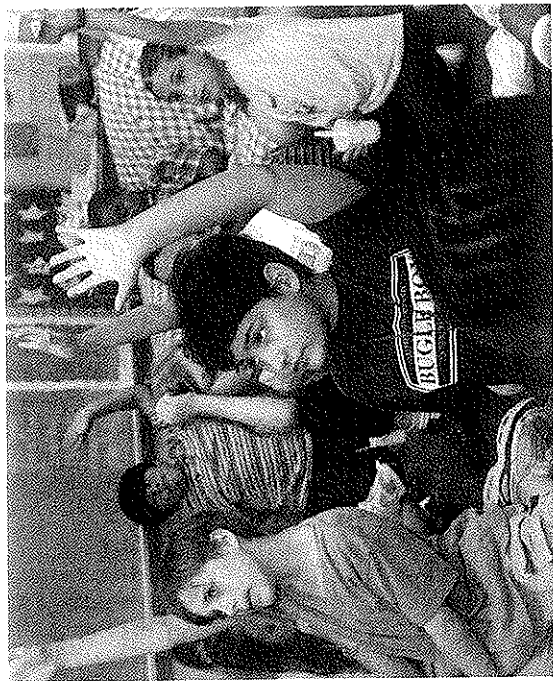
- Better coordinated
- Like to push their physical limits; tire easily
- Complain about aches, pains, injuries, and hurt feelings
- May twist hair, bite nails, or purse lips to relieve tension

SOCIAL-EMOTIONAL

- More individualistic
- Often feel worried or anxious
- Impatient
- Often complain about fairness issues
- Critical of self and others (including adults)
- Can be sullen, moody, aloof, and negative; often say "I hate it," "It's boring," etc.

LANGUAGE

- Love descriptive language, word play, and new vocabulary
- Sometimes revert to baby talk
- Enjoy exaggeration, "dirty" jokes, and graffiti



COGNITIVE

- Industrious and intellectually curious, but less imaginative than at eight
- Beginning to see the "bigger world," including issues of fairness and justice
- Able to manage more than one concept at a time, such as "long ago and far away"
- Have trouble understanding abstractions, such as large numbers, long periods of time, or vast areas of space

Nine-Year-Olds in the Classroom

VISION AND FINE MOTOR ABILITY

- With better coordination and control, show more interest in details
- Can fully master cursive handwriting, although they may need help relaxing their overly tight pencil grasp
- Benefit from practice with a variety of fine motor tools and tasks (weaving, knitting, carving, drawing, etc.)
- Able to copy from the board, recopy assignments, and produce beautiful final drafts

GROSS MOTOR ABILITY

- Like to push their physical limits, whether challenging themselves, racing each other, or trying to beat the clock
- Still learning physical control; have trouble staying within boundaries
- Boys love to roughhouse, tumbling and wrestling like puppies
- Complain of and sometimes exaggerate physical hurts
- Restless; can't sit still for long

COGNITIVE GROWTH

- Need homework related specifically to the next day's work; often ask the teacher, "Why do we have to do this?"

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COGNITIVE GROWTH

- Looking hard (often anxiously) for explanations of facts, how things work, why things happen as they do; a good age for scientific exploration
- Reading to learn, instead of learning to read: If reading ability has kept pace with grade level expectations, they can read for information in books and newspapers and on websites
- Take pride in attention to detail and finished work, but may jump quickly between interests

SOCIAL-EMOTIONAL BEHAVIOR

- Like to work with a partner of their choice—usually of the same gender; may begin to form cliques
- Can work in groups but may spend more time arguing about facts, rules, and directions than doing the actual activity
- Very competitive; need their teacher's sense of lightness and fun to help them relax in class and on the playground
- Like to negotiate—this is the age of "Let's make a deal!"
- Generally worried and anxious; need adult patience and clarity when giving directions or setting expectations
- Very self-critical; sarcastic humor from adults can be very hurtful
- Tend to give up on tasks; encouragement to try again builds up their fragile sense of competence
- Exasperation on their teacher's part leads to more complaints, whining, or moodiness; laughing with nines is the best medicine

Nine-Year-Olds: Curriculum

READING

Provide opportunities for children this age to:

- Continue working in reading groups
- Tackle assignments that involve beginning research tasks and use of related reading material
- Intensively develop dictionary skills introduced at earlier ages
- Volunteer to read orally during read-aloud
- Explore poetry seriously throughout the year

WRITING

Expect from these children:

- *Writing:* Readiness for emphasis on first draft and revision process; ability to absorb teaching about descriptive writing, character development, plot, cohesiveness and believability; frequent episodes of "writer's block"
- *Spelling:* Improving use of dictionary; improving first-draft spelling; fewer mistakes with spelling in journals and subject writing; readiness for weekly spelling tests; mastery of basic capitalization and punctuation
- *Writing Themes:* Moving away, divorce, death, disease, and other worries; world issues; poetry about feelings and darker themes
- *Handwriting:* Increasingly fluent cursive; beginning use of cursive in day-to-day assignments and spontaneous writing; much neater writing than at eight

THEMATIC UNITS

(Social Studies, Science, Current Events)

Favorite themes for children this age:

- Our country and the world
- Long ago and far away
- History of cultures
- Racial and ethnic diversity
- Environmental concerns in the immediate environment (for example, air or water pollution)
- Literary characters or a theme emerging from a particular book

MATH

Provide opportunities for children this age to:

- Practice division by measuring, working with fractions, doing surveys, and graphing as well as through experimenting with standard algorithms
- Work extensively with word problems
- Compute with money and begin learning about decimals
- Practice multiplication tables

A Final Thought on Nine-Year-Olds

The internal emotional roller coaster that some children experience when they are nine is poignantly captured in the following poem by Billy Collins.

On Turning Ten

by Billy Collins

The whole idea of it makes me feel
like I'm coming down with something,
something worse than any stomach ache
or the headaches I get from reading in bad light—
a kind of measles of the spirit,
a mumps of the psyche,
a disfiguring chicken pox of the soul.

You tell me it is too early to be looking back,
but that is because you have forgotten
the perfect simplicity of being one
and the beautiful complexity introduced by two.
But I can lie on my bed and remember every digit.
At four I was an Arabian wizard.
I could make myself invisible
by drinking a glass of milk a certain way.
At seven I was a soldier, at nine a prince.

But now I am mostly at the window
watching the late afternoon light.
Back then it never fell so solemnly
against the side of my tree house,
and my bicycle never leaned against the garage
as it does today,
all the dark blue speed drained out of it.

This is the beginning of sadness, I say to myself,
as I walk through the universe in my sneakers.
It is time to say good-bye to my imaginary friends,
time to turn the first big number.

It seems only yesterday I used to believe
there was nothing under my skin but light.
If you cut me I would shine.
But now when I fall upon the sidewalks of life,
I skin my knees. I bleed.

"On Turning Ten" is from *The Art of Drowning*, by Billy Collins, © 1995.
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Ten-Year-Olds

"Mrs. Hanson told Diane and me to get our folders and place them on our desks. I made a pretty semicircle with mine. I was glad I had only good papers for my parents to see."

Nothing's Fair in Fifth Grade | by Barthe DeClements

"Can we stay in today and finish the book? Please!"

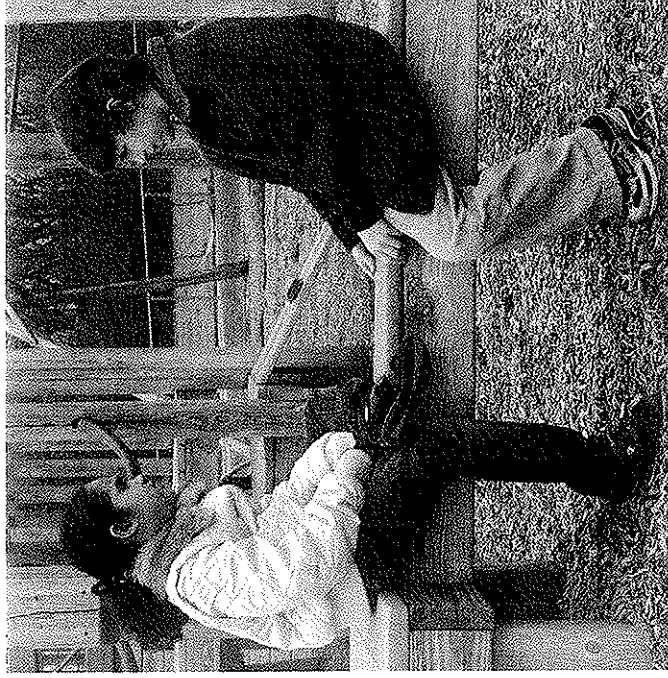
"Will you read more this afternoon, Mrs. Goodwin? We promise to do our math for homework if you would. This story is so awesome!"

"Yeah," comes the chorus of hushed voices.

"Well ... all right, children ... but just one more chapter," yields Mrs. Goodwin, silently delighting in one of those magic moments of teaching, one she will always treasure about this class.

The children settle back in, sprawling on the carpet, or chins on hands at their desks; two girls lean against Mrs. Goodwin as she reads from her comfy chair. The story continues.

Such scenes are repeated often when children are ten. To exaggerate a little, here is the golden end of childhood. At ten, children find comfort in themselves, their teachers, their parents, and even their siblings. They relax in their childhood, gathering strength for the



impending storm of adolescence and consolidating their gains from their early years. You can see this clearly in the cognitive choices that children make in school. Tens concentrate on, even relish, producing tangible products that display their competence—book reports, theme reports, beginning research writing, and scientific documentation.

These industrious children are also able to easily share their knowledge with their classmates and work well on group projects. This is the ideal age for the class play or trip, and tens can often help elevens and even twelves in cooperative pursuits because of their relative calmness and instinct for cooperation.

At ten, children seem to be at their most actively receptive as learners of factual information. This is usually a good time to master the multiplication tables that have been such a struggle until now. It's an age for state capitals, presidents, principal products of major nations, exports and imports, and poetry and speech memorization. Education about the human body, sex, childbirth, and child rearing (as determined by the school's curriculum policy) can be more effective now than a year or two later when children are more self-conscious about their bodies. The facts are more easily taught and remembered, and boys and girls tend to work well together.

Children know all the rules at ten, thanks to their facile memories. Board games and games of strategy are great favorites, and tens are likely to be in mutual agreement about how to play, rather than endlessly arguing about rules. It's a wonderful age at which to teach or reteach mediation, to introduce or reintroduce problem-solving formats in class meetings, to teach governmental structures and scientific principles. All these will be challenged at eleven, argued with at twelve, and rebelled against at thirteen. But ten is a great time for initial introduction and general acceptance, which plant the seeds for the more formal and more abstract cognitive challenges ahead.



Just as children at every chronological age will vary somewhat from the typical developmental picture for that age, not all ten-year-olds will perfectly fit this generally happy picture all of the time. Some children at ten will have issues with friendships, homework, or subjects that are hard for them, or they will struggle with difficult medical or family dilemmas. But there is a sturdiness about ten that can help the children get through these situations. That sturdiness is observable in many fifth grade classrooms.



Outdoor play is as critical for preadolescent children as it is for children in early childhood (see "Exercise" in the "Developmental Considerations" section). Schools that have eliminated recess have taken away children's inalienable right and undeniable need to play. Breaks are especially important to these industrious ten-year-olds, allowing them to bounce back from fatigue and do even more school work.

Tens especially love group games outdoors. They can learn, and usually enjoy, cooperative and noncompetitive activities as well as more traditional and competitive games like kickball, tag, and dodgeball. Boys and girls play well together in either kind of activity. Group initiatives and challenges have great success at this age, so it's a good time for formal outdoor education like a ropes course challenge or overnight camping. Children often have their fondest memories of weeks at summer camp when they were ten.

Ordering their world is central to ten-year-olds. Enjoy the clean bedroom, the orderly classroom, and the relative absence of arguments. Observe and capitalize on children's interest in classification and seriation: they love rock collections, sets of baseball and superhero cards, doll and teddy bear and unicorn collections, jewelry boxes, secret compartments. Teach about phylum and genus and other ways of organizing the world. Teach beginning genetics, the value of repeating experiments and testing variables. Teach tens about attributes and combinations of attributes to describe different phenomena. The world is theirs to organize.

Ten-Year-Olds: Growth Patterns

PHYSICAL

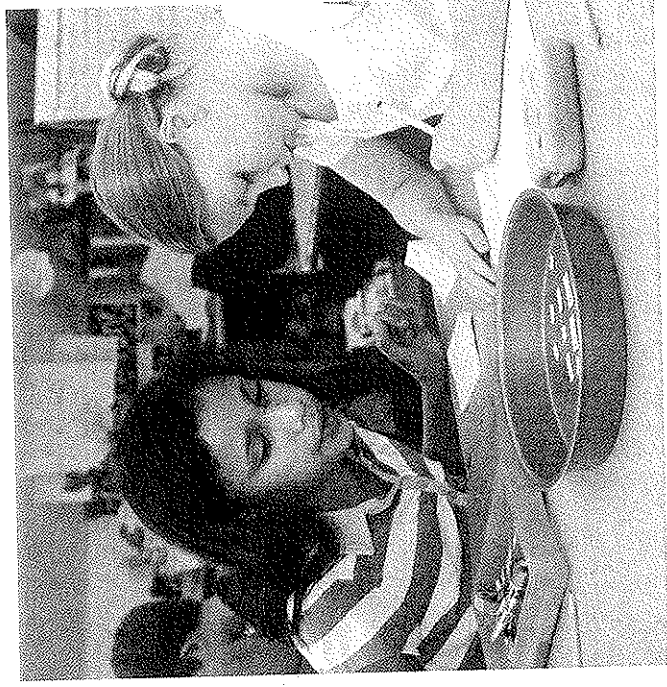
- Large muscles are developing quickly
- Desperately need outdoor time and physical challenge
- Often write more sloppily than at nine
- Snacks and rest periods benefit their rapidly growing bodies

SOCIAL-EMOTIONAL

- Generally content; enjoy family, peers, and teachers
- Friendly, generally happy; quick to anger and quick to forgive
- Work very well in groups; enjoy clubs, activities, and team sports
- Usually truthful; developing more mature sense of right and wrong
- Highly sensitive to and able to resolve questions of fairness and other social issues
- Able to enjoy cooperative and competitive activities

LANGUAGE

- Listen well
- Read voraciously
- Expressive and talkative; like to explain things



COGNITIVE

- Very good at memorizing facts
- Increasingly able to think abstractly; enjoy rules and logic; good at solving problems
- Enjoy collecting, classifying, and organizing
- Can concentrate for long periods
- Take pride in school work

Ten-Year-Olds in the Classroom

VISION AND FINE MOTOR ABILITY

- Able to focus well on both the board and close-up written work
- Can pay attention to spelling, dictation, and penmanship all at once, but work may be somewhat sloppy as they learn to integrate these skills
- Particularly enjoy tracing and copying as fine motor skills strengthen; making maps and drawing cartoons provide excellent fine motor practice
- Ready to start using tools such as compasses, protractors, rulers, and templates; need plenty of practice time

GROSS MOTOR ABILITY

- Need a great deal of physical activity; large muscles for jumping, running, and other big movements are developing quickly, although upper body strength is generally undeveloped
- Extra recess and play time are a must, or their energy may spill over into acting out in the classroom
- Love group games, relays, group initiatives, class outings, ropes courses, double Dutch jump rope clubs, team sports, and other organized activities

COGNITIVE GROWTH

- Highly productive with school work; usually conscientious with homework; pay close attention to form, structure, directions, and organization

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COGNITIVE GROWTH

- Receptive learners; very good at memorization; love geography, world records, facts about sports and TV programs, and activities requiring memory skills (such as spelling, math, and certain computer and electronic games)
- Enjoy choral reading, singing, poetry, and plays
- With concrete organizational skills at their peak, enjoy classification, seriation, and exactness; enjoy and learn much from working on collections and science and math projects

SOCIAL-EMOTIONAL BEHAVIOR

- Basically cooperative nature is conducive to group activity, whole class cohesion, and collaborative learning; ten is a good age for learning peer mediation and conflict resolution
- Quite concerned with friendship and fairness issues; teams, groups, games, and competitions help them practice social interaction
- Generally satisfied with their own abilities; happy and flexible
- Eager to reach out to others, such as through community service or tutoring younger children
- Enjoy being noticed and rewarded for their efforts; respond well to the teacher's "noticing" language; for example, "Claire, I noticed that you were frustrated with that math problem at first, but you kept trying different strategies until you got it!"
- Quick tempers may lead to physical outbursts and tears, but problems are usually quickly and easily solved

Ten-Year-Olds: Curriculum

READING

Provide opportunities for children this age to:

- Read, memorize, and recite poetry, do choral readings, and put on plays
- Read trade books centered on themes
- Read independently and indulge their desire to devour one book after another; read more and do fewer book projects
- Enjoy comic books

WRITING

Expect from these children:

- *Writing:* Readiness to write lengthy chapter books, longer poems, first research papers, pieces about famous people—all usually filled with light and descriptive language; more frequent use of humor; more use of dialogue; description of realistic interaction between characters
- *Spelling:* Enjoy memorizing how to spell difficult words and using the words, properly spelled, in day-to-day writing
- *Writing Themes:* Friends, friends, and more friends in many adventures; time travel; writing letters to request information; writing notes to friends; writing reports
- *Handwriting:* Fluent cursive (keyboarding helps those having great difficulty)

THEMATIC UNITS

(Social Studies, Science, Current Events)

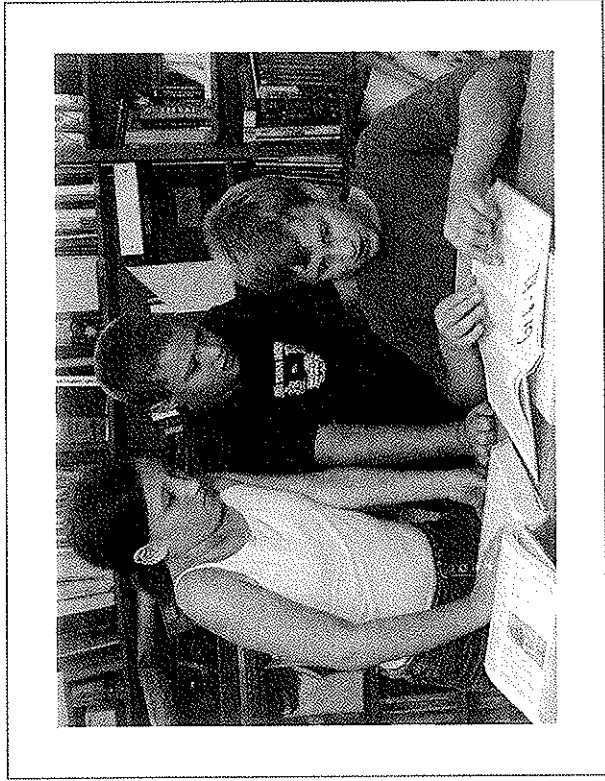
Favorite themes for children this age:

- Geography
- Immigration
- History
- How things work
- Geology, land formations, and weather
- Industry (for example, research on the source of a particular product)

MATH

Provide opportunities for children this age to:

- Master multiplication tables
- Work extensively with decimals
- Compute extensively with fractions
- Use maps to measure and compute
- Do double-digit division
- Solve word problems



Eleven-Year-Olds

"Phillip nodded. 'For a girl, you take jokes better than anybody.' Suddenly he pointed down the road and this time the yellow bus was really on its way. He smiled a dimpled smile and I remembered why he's the cutest boy in the J. T. Williams School."

Phillip Hall Likes Me, I Reckon Maybe | by Bette Greene

It's near the end of the morning's math lesson. The children are growing fidgety, but the teacher presses on.

"What's another name for a parallelogram? ... Yes, Max?"

"It's past time for recess. We're missing our recess!"

A chorus of agreement greets the teacher.

Finally out at recess, the fifth and sixth graders mill around on the kickball field.

"Same teams as yesterday!" yells one girl.

"No way!" screams another, "You smushed us yesterday."

“Yeah, but Jamal isn’t here today, so that makes it even,” says the first girl.

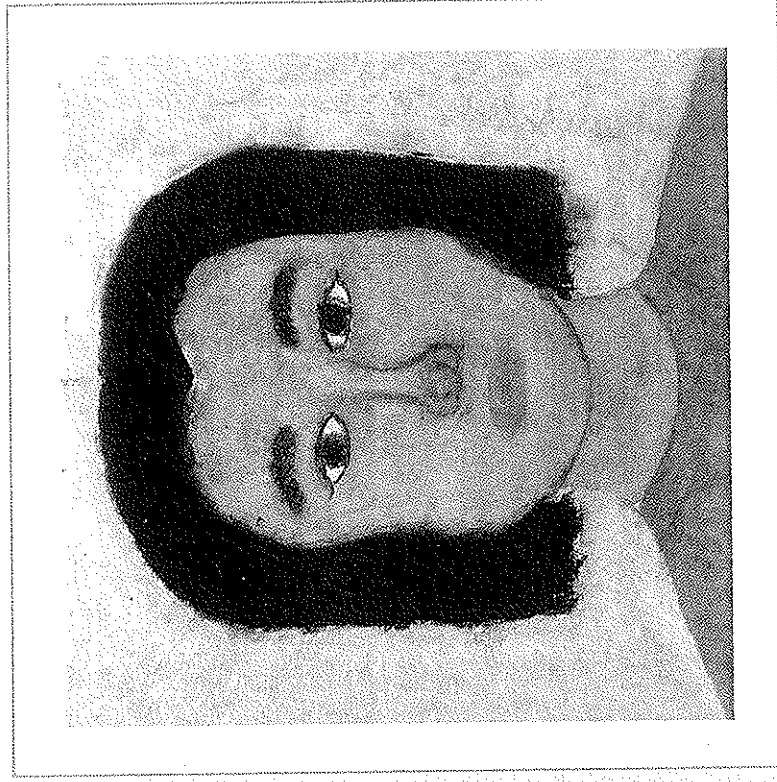
“Yeah, but look who you got today,” says the other. The arguments continue. They use up ten full minutes of their precious recess time making up teams. No one seems to mind.

As children move from ten to eleven, major changes begin to take place. In their cognitive growth, children seem to be challenging all their assumptions about the world. Cognitive structures in the brain seem to be rearranging themselves at the same speed with which the body is beginning to transform.

Eleven, of course, marks the beginning of adolescence, especially for girls, whose physical growth is generally way ahead of the boys’. The onset of menstruation is common at eleven, the average being at twelve. As the girls’ bodies change, emotional sensitivity and volatility increase. The clear physical difference between boys and girls leads to natural separation between them in the classroom and on the playground.

Although mixed-gender activity still happens and should certainly still be encouraged, it is not as spontaneously attractive for children as it was when they were ten. Watch how children come to the meeting circle or to a game, the boys on one side, the girls on another. Boys are watching the girls change and wondering when they themselves will begin to change. Both genders are interested in knowledge about sex and changing bodies, and this education should continue for both (as determined by the school’s curriculum policy).

It’s common for eleven-year-olds to question many of the adult judgments they have previously accepted. Teachers may face challenges on nearly every topic: assignments; homework; rules in the classroom; interpretations of literature, history, and governmental policy; adult authority in general. Although not always polite or



on target, these challenges should be seen and addressed as signs of cognitive as well as social-emotional growth.

Elevens are engaged in significant changes in their learning approaches and strategies. Their awkwardness and sometimes apparent rudeness commonly cause conflict between parents and children as well as teachers and children unless the developmental issues are understood. Elevens are often genuinely surprised that adults take offense at their challenges, and they are easily hurt. Parents and teachers also struggle because just a little while ago, at ten, these children were so easy to get along with, such delightful and reasonable friends to have around.

"Saving face" is very important for the easily embarrassed eleven-year-old, even in seemingly innocuous situations. It's especially important to try to avoid correcting the eleven-year-old in front of peers. Instead, find a time and place away from the group. When possible, waiting awhile after the incident itself also helps.

The growing cognitive strength of the eleven-year-old is fed by learning new and demanding skills in research, such as footnoting, bibliography, and scientific notation. It's also a good age for learning on the computer. Elevens are especially turned off by traditional workbooks, ditto sheets, and other packaged programs that claim to teach "skills used in real life." Instead, they need the opportunity to interview the fire chief, take notes at a local meeting, or write a letter to a map company or local corporation.

Although their new skills in these more adult realms may be crude and tentative at first, elevens are motivated by the opportunity to try out brand new arenas of knowledge. Foreign language, music, and new forms of artistic expression are also attractive. These challenges aren't met without complaint. Easily frustrated, the eleven-year-old may fuss to their teacher that some school work is too hard, while telling their parents how cool the new subject is, or vice versa. For example, something as hard as written dictation can be outwardly hated but inwardly cherished as a delicious intellectual challenge.

Girls at eleven are at the height of forming cliques, which can result in a great deal of cruelty as well as wonderful friendships. A teacher's role in dealing with cliques is a delicate balance between letting girls work things out for themselves and providing direct mediation. My experience is that if three girls can't solve a problem within a ten-minute time limit, teacher intervention is necessary.

Sports and outdoor activity are important to elevens but often include arguments about team effort and the interpretation of rules. Elevens often focus on their own personal skill development in a

sport and constantly compare themselves with the best athletes. Some will drop out of competitive sports around this age as competition gets increasingly serious and the skills more difficult. Teachers and coaches can encourage continued participation by focusing on effort rather than perfection. Trying hard needs to be rewarded as much as scoring.

Changing bodies also affect some girls' willingness to continue in individual activities such as dance, gymnastics, or swimming. Boys struggle with clumsiness in athletics at this age (as well as at twelve and thirteen) as they begin experiencing marked growth spurts. For both boys and girls, muscles don't keep pace with bones, and aches and pains at night and complaints on the playground and in the classroom are common.

At eleven, the awkwardness of adolescence is just beginning, both physically and emotionally. It's a time when feelings and relationships are seldom clear or simple. Teachers and parents need to see through children's language, facial expressions, moods, and intentions and understand that behind them is the child's beginning quest to establish independence and identity—the chief task of adolescence.

Eleven-Year-Olds: Growth Patterns

PHYSICAL	▪ Restless and very energetic ▪ Need lots of food, physical activity, and sleep ▪ Experience more colds, flu, ear infections, etc. ▪ Many girls experience an early adolescent growth spurt and sexual maturation; some boys begin rapidly growing taller	LANGUAGE	▪ Enjoy arguing and debating ▪ Appreciate humor ▪ Imitate adult language
	SOCIAL-EMOTIONAL		COGNITIVE
▪ Moody, self-absorbed, and sensitive ▪ Like to challenge rules, argue, and test limits; may be cruel; sometimes physically aggressive ▪ Worry more about who's "in" and who's "out" than when they were younger ▪ Need lots of time to talk with peers; heavy users of the phone, cell phone, instant messaging, and email ▪ Impulsive—often talk before thinking ▪ Often behave best when away from home ▪ Have trouble making decisions ▪ Need adult empathy, humor, and sensitivity to help them cope with their rapidly changing minds and bodies		▪ Would rather learn new skills than review or improve previous work ▪ Becoming more adept at abstract thinking—for example, they can understand ideas such as "justice" ▪ With improving reasoning skills, they can establish and modify rules and develop hypotheses ▪ Increasingly able to see the world from various perspectives	

Eleven-Year-Olds in the Classroom

VISION AND FINE MOTOR ABILITY

- Highly improved fine motor skills lead to more confidence in exploring delicate work (for example, calligraphy, linoleum block printing, and Japanese brush painting); art is an important vehicle to greater focus in reading and math
- May complain of headaches and read only for short periods of time; music may aid their concentration
- Often enjoy handwork (weaving, braiding, sewing; etc.), which may aid concentration and serve as an outlet for stress
- Love computer games and being on the computer in general, sometimes as a stress reducer or, in the case of email and text messaging, a social outlet; adults should help make sure that social use of the computer does not contribute to problems with cliques, bullying, or other inappropriate behaviors or put children at risk in any way

GROSS MOTOR ABILITY

- Motor skills (such as throwing, catching, and kicking) improve rapidly; they like to measure their individual best
- "Quiet time" in school day gives needed physical rest, as well as a break from academics and intense social-emotional dynamics

COGNITIVE GROWTH

- Developing new abilities in deductive reasoning, making this a good age for scientific study, mathematical problem solving, invention, and debate, but hands-on learning is still critical for most
- Learn well in collaborative groups

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COGNITIVE GROWTH

- Self-absorbed and interested in imagining themselves in adult roles; this makes history, biography, and current events exciting
- Like "adult" academic tasks such as researching, interviewing, footnoting, and creating a bibliography
- Enjoy board games, intellectual puzzles, brain teasers, and even tests
- Usually challenged rather than defeated by reasonably hard work; need help with time-management and homework skills
- May show interest in and facility for languages, music, or mechanics; need time to explore these areas
- Interested in learning about older and very young people

SOCIAL-EMOTIONAL BEHAVIOR

- Desire to test limits and rules is an important developmental milestone, not a personal attack on the teacher; class meetings, peer mediation, student councils, and cross-age tutoring can be highly effective in resolving issues
- Love the challenge of competition; prefer team sports and getting better at playing as a team
- Teachers can help with inclusion/exclusion issues by changing learning groups to adjust the social mix
- "Saving face" is important; not necessary for the teacher to "win" arguments; giving children private, physical space to think things over helps resolve problems peacefully
- Teacher empathy, a light attitude, and a sense of humor help elevers take themselves less seriously

Eleven-Year-Olds: Curriculum

READING

Provide opportunities for children this age to:

- Take on week-long reading assignments, still using trade books
- Do more nonfiction reading tied to subjects that interest them
- Read biographies
- Read to children in younger grades

WRITING

Expect from these children:

- *Writing:* Willingness to practice, although revision can be a struggle; writing that incorporates personal interests and is more adult-like in plot, character development, and style; very rudimentary research reports; much enjoyment of poetry writing, cartooning, and journaling
- *Spelling:* Ease and accuracy for some children, with most enjoying the challenge of spelling difficult words; readiness to learn more dictionary skills
- *Writing Themes:* For most, blood and gore, fantasy, science fiction, love and romance; for advanced writers, experimentation with a variety of personally compelling themes
- *Handwriting:* Functional cursive for most

THEMATIC UNITS

General Studies, Science, Civics, History

Favorite themes for children this age:

- Games
- History
- Biography
- Government
- Community service
- Physical development and body systems
- Plant growth and other forms of measurable, systematic development

MATH

Provide opportunities for children this age to:

- Solve complicated word problems
- Study probability and statistics through real-world problems
- Use calculators and computers
- Work on speed and accuracy in computations
- Work with percentages

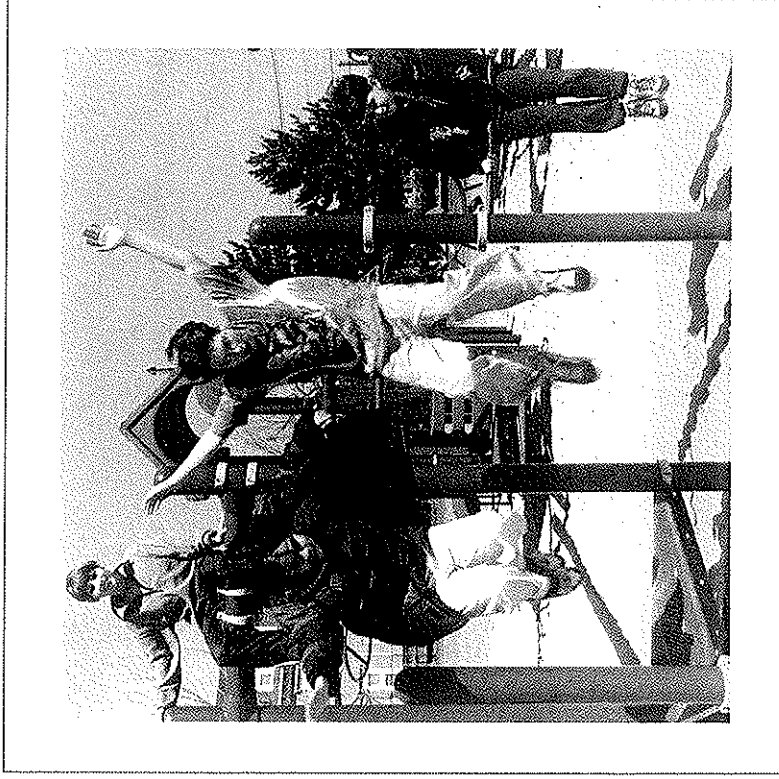
Twelve-Year-Olds

"I am not a nut. I am a pioneer."

The Real Me | by Betty Miles

Junior highs that include grades seven, eight, and nine; middle schools with grades six, seven, and eight; schools that are K-8—we've tried them all during the past forty years, yet we're still trying to figure out how best to reach and teach the twelve-year-old child. Teachers and educators have yet to come up with the perfect environment and program for early adolescence. Twelves, caught up in the world of lockers and fifty-minute classes, are often lost and confused, scared and alone. But in self-contained classrooms, they can appear bored and aloof, disengaged and challenging to adult authority.

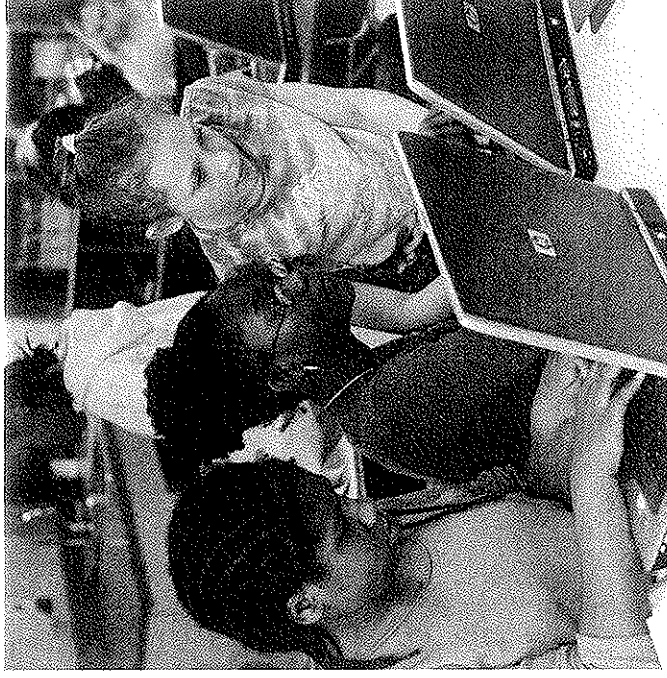
The truth may be that there is no perfect place for twelves. For most of my career, I have maintained that twelves (and thirteens and fourteens for that matter) probably do not belong in formal school environments at all, but in some kind of cross between summer camp and the Civilian Conservation Corps camps of the Great Depression—plenty of physical activity, structured groups, and time with peers, with a little formal education thrown in. Of course this will never happen, so success in the school world for children from twelve to fourteen depends on the flexibility of teachers and administrators in creating environments and curricula that can respond to the developmental chaos of these early adolescent years.



The primary developmental issue at twelve is the confusing struggle for identity: The child/not-child begins the search for solid, meaningful relationships. As the search intensifies, twelves' greatest need is to be with their friends. Teachers and parents take a back seat on the long ride toward the driver's license and the independent association with friends it represents. Minutes turn to hours on the telephone and computer and in front of the mirror. Twelves define themselves by jackets, hairstyles, shoes, CDs, iPods, movies, TV preferences, sports teams, the mall, the dance rage, what older kids are doing. School becomes the place to be, but not always for our intended purposes.

On the other hand, twelves can also become deeply invested with their peers in purposeful school work. Twelves are excited and challenged by lengthy homework assignments and projects that culminate in visible products: reports with beautiful covers or illustrations; skits about famous people in history, complete with elaborate costumes and props; topographical maps made in three dimensions with chicken wire, papier mâché, and paint; scientific models with working parts; computer programs that stump or amaze the class. Research projects, current events, environmental issues and causes, community service projects, scientific experiments, major art projects, and dramatic productions can attract and engage the twelve-year-old.

Emotionally, twelves are changeable, unpredictable, and often very hard to read. Sometimes, they want fervently to do their school work as part of a group; other times, they want just as fervently to pursue their learning individually. They often say "That's not what I meant at all!" when a teacher misreads a tone of voice or an off-hand, seemingly rude comment. At home, children may seem more introverted and moody, communicate in monosyllables and grunts, and withdraw as they sort out their feelings. Teachers can help by providing a view for parents of their children's competence. Sharing children's work with parents is just as important at this age as in kindergarten.



When twelve-year-olds are offered reasonable responsibilities at school, most will respond with pride. Twelves make excellent one-on-one tutors for younger children. With help, they can manage a school store or recycling program, raise money and collect goods for needy families, or put out a class or school newspaper. Twelves can participate in student councils, organize their first school dance, or plan the spring field trip.

But smaller and more mundane responsibilities, such as keeping their room clean, may elude them. (This, by the way, is not the battle to pick with twelves.) At school, keeping track of things like assignments, books, papers, and sweatshirts isn't a priority. Excuses are constant and often transparent and humorous. The oldest homework excuse in the world—"My dog ate it"—is still put forth by twelve-

year-olds. Along with other classics, such as "I couldn't find any paper in the house," "I left my book on the bus," and "You didn't tell us it was due today," teachers also now hear "The printer chewed up my paper," "My dad was using the computer," and "My baby sister erased all my files." And on and on ...

The twelve-year-old's ability to be totally responsible and totally irresponsible at the same time can be annoying, even infuriating, to adults. For the twelves, it is simply a matter of priorities. Teachers who hold class meetings and discussions of consequences will be more successful in getting twelves to accept responsibility for their behavior.

Twelves will have reasonable and unreasonable ideas for changing the way the classroom and the school operate. A dress code, chewing gum in school, or having a school dance can become major issues. Fairness and the process of making rules become more important. Twelves need opportunities to discuss and modify rules, but it's essential to keep rules consistent and to maintain ultimate adult authority clearly and calmly. Teachers must be fair and firm.

Physical energy drives twelve-year-olds. Both boys and girls are now in growth spurts, though puberty comes first to the girls. Both genders, however, require enormous amounts of sleep, food, and exercise. Schools don't commonly provide enough time for either food or exercise, yet twelves will thrive in a classroom where food is allowed. A midmorning snack is just as essential to a twelve-year-old's growing body as to a five-year-old's. A five-minute run around the building or a ten-minute game on the playground can rejuvenate the oxygen-hungry brain of an older child as well as that of a younger one.

Physical exercise not only helps twelves do better academically, but in the form of team sports, it can also provide some of the rites of passage twelves need as they enter the teen years. For those not athletically inclined, participating in groups and activities such as



computer and chess clubs, service organizations, Junior Achievement, and scouting can help build bridges into adult-like roles and participation in society.

Rituals and ceremonies can be deeply meaningful to twelve-year-olds as part of their rites of passage. Confirmation and bat or bar mitzvah ceremonies have profound meaning, and many children prepare for these events seriously, with a sense of importance and purpose. Schools can provide similar ceremonial experiences through graduations, honor assemblies, and service and athletic awards. Twelves and young teens need tangible recognition (from adults as well as peers) that they are changing and growing into responsible members of the adult community.

Twelve-Year-Olds: Growth Patterns

PHYSICAL

- Very energetic; need lots of sleep, exercise, and food (including in-school snacks)
- Enjoy physical education and sports
- Boys and girls both have growth spurts
- Girls show signs of puberty; most are menstruating

SOCIAL-EMOTIONAL

- Adult personality begins to emerge
- Capable of self-awareness, insight, and empathy; more reasonable and tolerant than at eleven
- Enthusiastic and uninhibited; appear to feel secure
- Care more about peer opinions than those of teachers and parents
- Will initiate their own activities without adult prompting

LANGUAGE

- Understand and enjoy sarcasm, double meanings, word play, and more sophisticated jokes
- Enjoy conversation with adults and peers
- Value peer vocabulary (slang)

COGNITIVE

- More able to think abstractly
- May begin to excel at a subject (such as science) or a skill (such as drawing)
- Can and will see both sides of an argument
- Very interested in civics, history, current events, politics, social justice, and environmental issues, as well as pop culture and the latest cool clothes, watches, etc.
- Increasingly able to organize their thoughts and their work

Twelve-Year-Olds in the Classroom

VISION AND FINE MOTOR ABILITY

- Increased fine motor ability, patience for practice, and self-confidence make all fine motor tasks more pleasurable
- With better visual concentration, will read for long periods and spend more time on the computer learning word processing and other skills
- Still enjoy handwork; interested in more complicated visual-motor tasks such as carpentry, mechanical repair, clothing design, and architecture

GROSS MOTOR ABILITY

- Many find team sports satisfying; also enjoy individual work in dance, drama, martial arts, and gymnastics
- Understand the idea of training and regular exercise as a means to improve physical ability
- Enjoy teaching physical skills to younger children

COGNITIVE GROWTH

- Find current events, civics, and history highly motivating when tied to issues of clear relevance to their lives
- More interested, and at greater depth, in drama, debate, and performance; increasingly understand and appreciate the need for rehearsal and revision (true in writing also)
- With their growing ability to set realistic short-term goals, more able to handle lengthy homework assignments due over longer periods, though these can be

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COGNITIVE GROWTH

- problematic if they extend over weekends; planning and organization of assignments improves
- Can help peers significantly with school work; will make good use of time allowed for peer conferencing, partner projects, working as science lab partners, etc.
 - Both playful and serious—love to play class games but can have a serious discussion a moment later
 - Can better integrate their learning when schools use collaborative, cross-disciplinary teaching models and self-contained classrooms (as opposed to isolated subject matter and distinct class periods)

SOCIAL-EMOTIONAL BEHAVIOR

- Leadership qualities abound; need many opportunities for activities such as cross-age tutoring, jobs at school, community service, hosting visitors, and providing child care during parent meetings
- Appreciate teachers who listen and respond to their suggestions for changes in routines, when realistic
- Benefit immensely from (and want to help plan) ceremonies and rituals to mark turning points on their way to adulthood
- Need access to significant adults, other than teachers and parents, who will listen to them and help them think about serious issues such as drugs, alcohol, sex, AIDS, violence, and family problems
- Want to make money from jobs at home or in their neighborhood

Twelve-Year-Olds: Curriculum

READING

Provide opportunities for children this age to:

- Continue reading trade books
- Begin reading newspapers and magazines for current events information, working with charts and graphs, and using books and other written sources for scientific information
- Read trilogies and book series; favorite topics include history, sports, science fiction, and fiction with themes tied to current events and social justice
- Recognize and discuss formal aspects of fiction—setting, character, etc.
- Complete research reports based on readings from several sources
- Learn library skills: work with an atlas, do computer searches, etc.

WRITING

Expect from these children:

- *Writing:* Increased facility with revision, particularly when changes result from peer conferences; interest in writing biographies and autobiographies, brief essays about world concerns such as racism, poverty, and environmental issues, and pieces linked to reading-program genres such as diaries, fantasies, and myths; interest in working on class or school newspaper
- *Spelling:* Functional for most; spell checkers and other computer interventions help those continuing to have trouble

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WRITING

- *Writing Themes:* Summarizing and writing briefly and clearly about teen issues (sex, drugs, music, cars); emotional poetry; “editorial” writing full of extreme positions; use of vernacular or slang in fiction; interesting dialogue
- *Handwriting:* Functional cursive for most; all are ready to use the computer to write; pleasure in practicing handwriting by writing letters, invitations, and thank-you notes; some interest in calligraphy

THEMATIC UNITS

Social Studies, Science, Current Events

Favorite themes for children this age:

- Politics (including student politics)
- Current events
- Community service projects
- Fundraising (as a theme to be studied)
- History
- Racism
- Elementary economics and statistics
- Computer simulations
- Scientific experimentation and the microscopic world

MATH

Provide opportunities for children this age to:

- Begin pre-algebra studies through extensive work with unknowns
- Use math as tool for understanding science
- Compute extensively with decimals, fractions, and percents
- Solve geometric problems