

Chapter 14 The 'Generation Gap'



General Information

Topic

Respect for experience.

Content

- ▶ The value of elders.
- ▶ Don't judge by appearances.
- ▶ Our common humanity.

Objectives

Knowing

- ▶ Learning that experience is the best teacher.
- ▶ Understanding that old and experienced people can give excellent advice.

Accepting

- ▶ Realising the value of talking to trustworthy older, more experienced people.

Doing

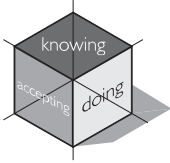
- ▶ Initiating conversations with known adults.

Areas of Human Development to be Emphasised

- ▶ Group maturity.

Class Plan

1 Knowing



Motivation

Story context:

Charlie dislikes old people, but a visiting Grandpa's love and wisdom win him over.

Introduction

The elderly may seem boring, but from long experience they teach and give much.

Presentation

Key Ideas

- ▶ The elderly are wise in life and love.
- ▶ Their advice can make young people's lives better.
- ▶ They should be respected and valued as rich sources of history and experience.

Topic Development

A The value of elders

In the story Charlie, Louis, and Giselle don't know why they should respect their elders, only that they've been told too many times.

"What's so important about this guy?" Charlie asked Giselle.

"Well, he is very old, and if no-one's there to meet him, he might get lost."

"Oh, this is going to be real fun," groaned Charlie.

Louis rolled his eyes, as if to agree with Charlie, but Giselle caught herself. "It's only for two weeks," she said.

"We need to respect the older generation."

"Why?" asked Louis.

"I don't know," said Giselle.

"Well, they're supposed to be wiser," Charlie said. "But, if that's true, why have they left us this crummy world to grow up in—full of poverty and crime and war and pollution?"

Charlie, in particular, has difficulty in respecting elders; in fact, he's downright hostile:

Charlie did not really like old people. Sometimes they smell, he thought, and they always want to hug and kiss you. They shout because they can't hear how loudly they are talking. And they cup their hands behind their ears and say, "What? What?" to everything you say. One or two drove him nuts at the shop—they were always in the way in the aisle, and they never seemed to know when there was someone behind them trying to get through. A lot of them have outlived their usefulness, he thought, and with getting sick all the time and having to be helped, you wonder if they wouldn't be better off just keeling over.

Both Charlie and the reader discover that 'Grandpa' knows much about life and love.

"You're troubled," Grandpa said.

Wow, those bright old eyes missed nothing. "No," Charlie replied. "Just tired."

"Oh," he said. "Nothing more?"

He seemed to know just what Charlie was thinking!. His eyes were twinkling, and his toothless mouth was twisted into a knowing smile. Charlie felt he could trust him—and suddenly wanted to tell him everything.

Charlie wants to know more about life from his Grandpa:

Charlie asked him if he would mind if he wrote to him and asked his advice on things sometimes. He said he'd be very pleased.

When Grandpa is gone, Charlie misses him sorely.

Grandpa had a special ability to make Charlie feel important. The others had felt it too. Where did he get that ability from?

"From a good long life," said Dad.

Charlie extends his feeling for his 'Grandpa' to old people in general:

From then on, Charlie found his attitude towards the old people in the shop and on the streets changed. He no longer saw them as has-beens who had nothing to offer. He saw them as a source of wisdom and experience, from whom he had a lot to learn.

Good family relationships help children project their love for family members onto society in general. They relate warmly, trustingly, and respectfully to older men and women, who remind them of their mothers and fathers. Aunts, uncles, grandparents, and great-grandparents all help children relate to others of similar age and position.

Encouraging students to respect and appreciate family members imbues them with the social facilities they will need to operate successfully and happily in society.

B A Crabby Old Woman

Consider the following poem. Perhaps it could be read aloud in class or copied for students to read. It is written by an elderly woman, explaining her life and begging those who deal with her in her old age to respect her as a person like themselves.

A Crabby Old Woman

*What do you see, nurses, what do you see?
Are you thinking when you're looking at me:
A crabby old woman, not very wise,
Uncertain of habit, with far-away eyes,
Who dribbles her food and makes no reply
When you say in a loud voice, "I do wish you'd try!"
Who seems not to notice the things that you do
And forever is losing a stocking or shoe—
Who unresisting or not lets you do as you will
With bathing and feeding, the long day to fill?
Is that what you're thinking? Is that what you see?
Then open your eyes, nurse, you're not looking at me.
I'll tell you who I am, as I sit here so still,
As I move at your bidding, as I eat at your will.
I'm a small child of ten with a father and mother,
Brothers and sisters who love one another;*

Unit III: My Family and My Future

*A young girl of sixteen with wings on her feet,
Dreaming that soon now, a young man she'll meet.
A bride soon at twenty: my heart gives a leap,
Remembering the vows that I promised to keep.
At twenty-five now I have young of my own
Who need me to build a secure happy home;
A woman of thirty—my young now grow fast,
Bound to each other with ties that should last.
At forty my young sons now grown will be gone,
But my man stays beside me to see I don't mourn.
At fifty once more babies play round my knee
Again we know children, my loved one and me.
Dark days are upon me, my husband is dead.
I look at the future; I shudder with dread.
For my young are all busy rearing young of their own,
And I think of the years and the love I have known.
I'm an old woman now and nature is cruel:
'Tis her jest to make old age look like a fool.
The body it crumbles, grace and vigour depart.
There is now a stone where once I had a heart.
But inside this old carcass a young girl still dwells,
And now and again my battered heart swells.
I remember the joys, I remember the pain,
And I'm loving and living life over again.
I think of the years, all too few, gone too fast,
And accept the stark fact that nothing can last.
So open your eyes nurses, open and see,
Not a crabby old woman. Look closer—see me.*

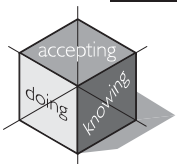
This poem was written by 'Kate'—an old woman in hospital in England who could no longer speak. When she died, this poem was among her belongings. It later appeared in the Christmas edition of *Beacon House News*, a magazine of the Northern Ireland Mental Health Association.

C Our common humanity

Because life is new to them, sometimes young people feel that no-one has ever before had their experiences or feelings, and that no-one understands—things were too different when their parents and grandparents were young. Emphasise that this is a fallacy. People have loved, become rich, lost everything, experienced troubles and joys, had hopes and dreams for as long as people have been on earth.

The old saying 'Let's not re-invent the wheel' could be put on the board and discussed. To ignore the wisdom and experience of elderly people is continually to re-invent the wheel. Those who have already experienced life and love can teach us much.

2 Accepting



Guided Work

Activity 1

Ask students to answer the questions from Activity 14 in their Student Books (p.228).

Activity 14

1. Have you ever prejudged an old person based on their physical weaknesses? Did you discover that there was more to the person than met the eye?
2. Has an old person ever played an important role in your life—giving you love and/ or advice?
3. How does Charlie's attitude toward old people change over the course of the story?

Activity 2

Empathy for those who have gone before can be encouraged through old photographs—perhaps of wedding couples, old film stars when young, historic photos, etc. This humanises people whose heyday is past. Point out their facial expressions, their likely emotions. What were this young bride's hopes when she married? Or this soldier's feelings at going to war? Excerpts of old diaries can also 'humanise' people of the past and help young people see that these people had similar feelings to theirs.

3 Doing



Evaluation

Activity 1

Hold a class discussion about their answers to questions in Activity 14. Encourage students to develop empathy for adults.

Activity 2

Assess students' reactions to the old photographs and stories.

Specific Resolutions

To respect and honour older people.

To learn from their wisdom and experience.