



Who We Are

Invention of the Adolescent

Just like the steam engine, adolescence is a modern invention. Before the 19th century there were teenagers but no adolescents. Few people even conceived of the idea.

Adolescence is the period between childhood and adulthood. Before the late 1800s, however, this period did not exist. Nearly all people went directly from childhood to adulthood with no stops along the way.

“Adolescents are especially conscious of what is exciting and what is bad. In their minds...it is better to be seen as bad than to be seen as a nonentity, that is, to not exist at all.”

Dr. Theresa Aiello, *Child and Adolescent Treatment for Social Work Practice*, N.Y.: The Free Press, 1999



Boy working in textile plant during 1800s

Before the Industrial Revolution, most people lived, worked and died on the farm. They didn't go to school. They didn't have to. Everything they needed to know, they could learn from older family members. Children were put to work as soon as they could be productive. On the farm, that was very early in life. By the time a child reached puberty, he or she was considered a full adult and expected to act as one.

It was common for people in their early teens to begin their own families. Having children early was important; in 1850 the average lifespan in Canada was around 45 years old. Today, for someone born recently, it's over 78 years old. Life on the farm in the early 1800s was hard, but for many, life was about to get a lot harder.



Even in wealthy families, children were thought of as being little more than small adults with limited skills. Here, in this family portrait by John Michael Wright, painted in 1673, you can see that the children were dressed exactly like their parents. This was not just for the picture; but it reflects how they were considered.

Industrial Revolution: From Farm to Factory

The Industrial Revolution began in the mid-1800s and hasn't stopped since. By the 1850s, factories were all over Europe and starting to grow in Canada. There was a great need for workers. Poor families flooded the cities looking for work. Many were forced off of the land and into the cities in order to meet the new need for industrial labour. Just as they had worked on the farm, children began working in the factories – sometimes as young as age six or seven. A common practice of the day was to chain children to machines so they wouldn't wander. The work day was often twelve hours, seven days a week.

The Industrial Revolution hit first and hardest in Great Britain. By 1850, life for many in Britain's overcrowded cities was unbearable. Starvation was common; diseases such as cholera and typhoid fever were rampant. The average lifespan was twenty years old – and every one of those years were hard. Many children were abandoned by their parents who could not afford to feed them. The parents of others died from industrial accidents, giving birth, and disease. Hundreds of thousands of children were forced to live either on the streets or in orphanages.

“Home Children” Arrive in Canada



In order to relieve the overcrowded orphanages and help the children, Britain began sending orphaned children to Canada. Between 1868 and 1925, over 80,000 children were sent across the Atlantic. Most were settled in rural farming villages in Eastern Canada. Many children were adopted by loving families. Many others were treated as cheap labour, often living in conditions no better than the farm animals they cared for.

That so many children were allowed to be mistreated for so long is partly because they lived in remote rural areas. It is also because as a society, Canada had not yet come to accept the social responsibility for children. Parents owned their children as they owned their horses and could do pretty much what they wanted with them with little intervention from the community.

Animal Rights Awarded to Children

A landmark case in 1875 illustrates this point. A young girl, Mary Ellen, living in New York City was regularly beaten and neglected by a couple with whom she had lived since she was a baby. People who knew of her situation tried to get the police to stop her torment. But there were no laws protecting children at the time. However, since there were laws protecting animals from abuse, the Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals was able to bring a complaint. Mary Ellen was granted protection and her guardians were sent to prison.

By the beginning of the 20th century, children in all of the industrialize countries were gaining rights. Many organizations had been formed to protect children from abuse, provide foster care, and prevent them from being exploited in workplaces. And most children then had access to some schooling. The idea of schooling for all was new to the world. Formerly, education and literacy were limited to a privileged few.

Public Education Comes to BC

However, in 1851, Governor James Douglas recommended that schools be established for “the children of the labouring and poorer classes” on the colony of Vancouver Island. The Public School Act of 1872 established a structure for providing education to children in British Columbia from age 5 to 16. By 1890, BC adopted a Course of Study for Common Schools which consisted of reading, writing, spelling, English grammar, composition and letter writing, mental and written arithmetic, geography, English and Canadian history, anatomy, physiology and hygiene.

Adolescence Comes of Age

As children began attending school until age 16, their admission into the adult world was delayed. Teenagers were no longer children but they could not yet be adults. The term “adolescent” was adopted to describe



this new period in the human condition.

A landmark publication by G. Stanley Hall in 1904 stated that adolescence was “...**a phase of upheaval and trauma, stress and storm, corresponding to mankind’s evolutionary progress from savagery to civilization.**”¹



Hall’s view of adolescence as a period of internal turmoil remains with us today. This is true not only in scientific thought but popular culture as well. In 1955 James Dean was the model for restless youth in the movie “Rebel Without a Cause.” By 2001, Vin Diesel held court as Dominic Toretto, the alienated anti-hero pushing the boundaries of technological and personal limits on the streets of Los Angeles – the modern Mecca for alienated youth.

Today’s powerful media reflects and invents what it means to be an adolescent. But, whether it’s James or Vin, Gidget or Elle, Elvis or Eminem, the reality is that most young people live lives very different from those portrayed on the stage and screen. Adolescence is a time of self-discovery, experimentation, and – to some extent – self-invention. It’s a challenge for which young people and the world in general have little experience.



¹ G. Stanley Hall, Adolescence: Its Psychology, and its Relations to Anthropology, Sex, Crime, Religion, and Education, Hall, 1904

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Vocabulary

Nonentity	Insignificant person; someone with no importance or influence; something that does not exist.
Adolescence	The period between childhood and adulthood; usually considered to be the teen years.
Industrial Revolution	Beginning in the mid 1800s in Great Britain, the period of rapid growth of manufacturing due to new technologies, primarily energy driven machines. It resulted in the mass production of goods, rather than from small crafts shops, and in the movement of many people from the countryside to the cities.
Puberty	Stage in the development of humans and other animals that marks the ability to reproduce. Puberty usually occurs in males between the ages of 13 and 16, and in females between the ages of 11 and 14.
Cholera	Severe infectious disease often found in tropical climates but occasionally found in more temperate climates. Generally caused by bacteria in the water supply. While no longer a concern in Europe or North America, cholera remains a threat in many parts of the world. In 1999 more than 254,000 people were diagnosed with cholera and there were over 9,100 cholera-related deaths reported.
Typhoid Fever	Acute infectious disease caused by typhoid bacillus transmitted by milk, water, or solid food that is contaminated by human waste.
Physiology	The study of physical and chemical processes occurring in the basic life processes of organisms; concerned with reproduction, growth, metabolism, cells, tissues, and organ systems in the body.
Landmark	Something prominent that is an important new development; also indicates something that indicates a location.
Trauma	An extremely distressing experience causing severe emotional shock and long-lasting effects; also used to describe physical injury.
Alienated	A feeling of isolation; being cut off from society at large.

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Vocabulary Match

Write the following words next to their matching definitions.

- Puberty
- Physiology
- Adolescence
- Trauma
- Industrial revolution
- Landmark
- Alienated
- Nonentity
- Cholera
- Typhoid fever

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The study of physical and chemical processes occurring in the basic life processes of organisms; concerned with reproduction, growth, metabolism, cells, tissues, and organ systems in the body.

Insignificant person; someone with no importance or influence; something that does not exist.

Something prominent that is an important new development; also indicates something that indicates a location.

A feeling of isolation; being cut off from society at large.

Beginning in the mid 1800s in Great Britain, the period of rapid growth of manufacturing due to new technologies, primarily energy driven machines. It resulted in the mass production of goods, rather than from small crafts shops, and in the movement of many people from the countryside to the cities.

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Who We Are Invention of the Adolescent Review

Name _____ Date _____

1. The article states that adolescence is a modern invention. Explain why this is so.

2. Where did most people live and work prior to the Industrial Revolution?

3. What was the approximate average life span in Canada in 1850? ____ Today? ____ On average, how many years longer do we live today compared with 1850? ____
4. What are some of the reasons there were so many orphans in Great Britain during the 1800s?

5. Who were the Home Children?

6. What happened to the Home Children after coming to Canada?

7. Who had more rights in New York City in 1875? children animals
8. G. Stanley Hall once stated that adolescence was "...a phase of upheaval and trauma, stress and storm, corresponding to mankind's evolutionary progress from savagery to civilization." Do you think this statement is right or wrong? State the reasons for your opinion.

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Web Activity: Home Children

Name _____ Date _____

From 1869 to 1948, over 100,000 children aged 4-15 were separated from their families and sent from England to Canada. Their parents had either died or were too poor to take care of them. They were referred to as the “home children” because they came from institutional “homes” for orphaned or unwanted children.

In Canada, they were taken in by families where they had to work as farm labourers or domestic servants until they were 18 years old. The children were often separated their brothers and sisters and lost contact with other members of their families in England. In Canada, many were mistreated by the families that took them in.

Many children ran away from their homes in Canada to the United States. It is estimated that there are 4-5 million descendents of the home children in Canada and the United States. Most never knew their grandparents and have little if any connection to their families' history.

Most of the children sent to Canada during the 1930s and 1940s are still alive today. They would be in the fifties, sixties and seventies. They have interesting and important stories to tell about what their lives were like as teenagers.

Your assignment is to prepare to interview one of these home children. Your job is to prepare three probing questions that might be of interest to today's teenagers. But first it's important to research your subject so you can ask “informed” questions. To do this, go to the Web sites listed below, read about the home children, and then prepare your questions. Your work will be assessed based on whether your questions are indeed interesting to teenagers and whether they show you know something about the subject.

Web Sites:

Short history of home children: <http://www.homechildren.ca/photos.html>

Basic facts on home children: <http://freepages.genealogy.rootsweb.com/~britishhomechildren/>

Story of Teresa Fisher: <http://freepages.genealogy.rootsweb.com/~hero/teresa.html>

Questions:

1. _____

2. _____

3. _____
