

## Leon Botstein, "Let Teenagers Try Adulthood"

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### MULTIPLE CHOICE

#### Leon Botstein, *Let Teenagers Try Adulthood*

The national outpouring after the Littleton [Columbine High School] shootings has forced us to confront something we have suspected for a long time: the American high school is obsolete and should be abolished. In the . . . month [after the shootings] high school students present and past [came] forward with stories about cliques and the artificial intensity of a world defined by insiders and outsiders, in which the insiders hold sway because of superficial definitions of good looks and attractiveness, popularity and sports prowess.

The team sports of high school dominate more than student culture. A community's loyalty to the high school system is often based on the extent to which varsity teams succeed. High school administrators and faculty members are often former coaches, and the coaches themselves are placed in a separate, untouchable category. The result is that the culture of the inside elite is not contested by the adults in the school. Individuality and dissent are discouraged.

But the rules of high school turn out not to be the rules of life. Often the high school outsider becomes the more successful and admired adult. The definitions of masculinity and femininity go through sufficient transformation to make the game of popularity in high school an embarrassment. No other group of adults young or old is confined to an age-segregated environment, much like a gang in which individuals of the same age group define each other's world. In no workplace, not even in colleges or universities, is there such a narrow segmentation by chronology.

Given the poor quality of recruitment and training for high school teachers, it is no wonder that the curriculum and the enterprise of learning hold so little sway over young people. When puberty meets education and learning in modern America, the victory of puberty masquerading as popular culture and the tyranny of peer groups based on ludicrous values meet little resistance.

By the time those who graduate from high school go on to college and realize what really is at stake in becoming an adult, too many opportunities have been lost and too much time has been wasted. Most thoughtful young people suffer the high school environment in silence and in their junior and senior years mark time waiting for college to begin. The Littleton killers, above and beyond the psychological demons that drove them to violence, felt trapped in the artificiality of the high school world and believed it to be real. They engineered their moment of undivided attention and importance in the absence of any confidence that life after high school could have a different meaning.

Adults should face the fact that they don't like adolescents and that they have used high school to isolate the pubescent and hormonally active adolescent away from both the picture-book idealized innocence of childhood and the more accountable world of adulthood. But the primary reason high school doesn't work anymore, if it ever did, is that young people mature substantially earlier in the late 20th century than they did when the high school was invented. For example, the age of first menstruation has dropped at least two years since the beginning of this century, and not surprisingly, the onset of sexual activity has dropped in proportion. An institution intended for children in transition now holds young adults back well beyond the developmental point for which high school was originally designed.

Secondary education must be rethought. Elementary school should begin at age 4 or 5 and end with the sixth grade. We should entirely abandon the concept of the middle school and junior high school. Beginning with the seventh grade, there should be four years of secondary education that we may call high school. Young people

should graduate at 16 rather than 18. 49

They could then enter the real world, the world of work or national service, in 50  
 which they would take a place of responsibility alongside older adults in mixed com- 51  
 pany. They could stay at home and attend junior college, or they could go away to 52  
 college. 53

At 16, young Americans are prepared to be taken seriously and to develop the 54  
 motivations and interests that will serve them well in adult life. They need to enter a 55  
 world where they are not in a lunchroom with only their peers, estranged from other 56  
 age groups and cut off from the game of life as it is really played. There is nothing 57  
 utopian about this idea; it is immensely practical and efficient, and its implementa- 58  
 tion is long overdue. We need to face biological and cultural facts and not prolong the 49  
 life of a flawed institution that is out of date. 60

1. In line 22, the word “enterprise” is used to mean
  - a. a commercial organization
  - b. an energetic spirit
  - c. a difficult undertaking
  - d. a beginning
  - e. a fresh start
  
2. What is the rhetorical function of the clause “There is nothing utopian about this idea” in lines 57-58?
  - a. invective
  - b. rebuttal
  - c. concession
  - d. example
  - e. straw man argument
  
3. Which of the following words or phrases could NOT be used to describe the author’s view of American high schools?
  - a. segmented
  - b. artificial
  - c. anachronistic
  - d. low quality
  - e. expedient
  
4. The “ludicrous values” in line 25 most likely include
  - a. athleticism
  - b. intellectualism
  - c. creativity
  - d. individuality
  - e. reasoning
  
5. Which of the following pieces of evidence serves as the basis for the author’s claim that adults do not like adolescents?
  - a. Adults do not challenge the internal social hierarchy of high schools.
  - b. Adults have separated adolescents from the rest of the world by virtue of their chronological ages.
  - c. Adults are too busy playing “the game of life.”
  - d. Adults have already gone through puberty.
  - e. Adults are the subject of adolescents’ disdain.

6. The author's tone in the passage as a whole can best be described as
- a. assertive and critical
  - b. conciliatory and contrite
  - c. flustered and erratic
  - d. cynical and condescending
  - e. sympathetic and comforting
7. What is the main reason for the author's claim that high schools are outdated?
- a. High schools do not encourage individuality or dissent.
  - b. High schools segregate adolescents based on age.
  - c. Adolescents go through puberty at a younger age than they did when high schools were first created.
  - d. Adolescents are ready for "the game of life" earlier than adults believe they are.
  - e. Adolescents no longer enjoy high school.
8. Based on this passage, the author would agree that the "real world" (line 50) is characterized by which of the following?
- a. being around people of all ages
  - b. college
  - c. employment
  - d. advanced education or training in a technical field
  - e. all of the above