That'll teach 'em!



Is life too easy for today's schoolkids? A TV series takes teenagers back to the 1950s and 1960s to find out.

Do you think education is better now than it was in your grandparents' time? Many older people in the UK believe the opposite. 'Schools were better in our day,' they complain. 'There isn't enough discipline these days. Kids don't work as hard as we did, either. The syllabus isn't as challenging, so clever students aren't being stretched enough. They need to study things in greater depth. Exams are much, much easier now as well!'

Were schools better years ago? To answer that question, some British teenagers travelled back in time to a 1950s boarding school. They got a big surprise! The first shock came when the teenagers met their new teachers. Dressed in traditional black gowns, they looked so frosty and uncaring! They were really authoritarian too, so anyone caught breaking the rules – talking in class, mucking about in the playground or playing truant – was in big trouble! Punishments included writing 'lines' or staying after class to do detention. The naughtiest kids were expelled.

Things were just as bad after class. At meal times the students had to endure a diet of plain, no-nonsense, healthy food. Homework was obligatory and it took ages! Copying essays off the Internet wasn't an option, as personal computers didn't exist in the 1950s! And when bedtime came, the teenagers had to sleep in dormitories, on hard, uncomfortable beds!

At the end of 'term' everyone sat 1950s-style exams. The old exams were much longer than their twenty-first century equivalents and involved learning huge amounts of facts by heart. History papers were all dates and battles. Maths papers were trickier, too; calculators weren't around in the 1950s, so the students had to memorise multiplication tables and master long division. Our candidates found this really difficult. Well, wouldn't you?

The exam results surprised a lot of people. Students predicted to do well in their real-life, twenty-first century exams often got low grades in the 1950s exams. Does this prove modern exams are too easy? Do twenty-first century kids rely too much on modern technology, like calculators and computers? What do you think?

The second series of *That'll teach 'em!* focused on a 1960s vocational school. UK schoolkids study a range of academic subjects these days. But back in the '60s, children judged to be less 'able' went to vocational schools. These helped them to learn a trade. Boys studied subjects like metalwork, woodwork or gardening. In some classes, they even learned how to milk goats! The girls' timetable included secretarial skills, like typing. They also learned to cook, clean and sew, in preparation for their future role as housewives – probably not much fun for most girls! But do we need more schools like these? Are they a good idea?

The final series of *That'll teach 'em!* examined the teaching of science. The subject is less popular nowadays, especially with boys. But why? In science classes, students work with computers and do fewer practical experiments than in the past. Back in the 1950s, science classes were full of bangs and explosions. Our *That'll teach 'em!* boys found that the more explosions there were, the more they enjoyed their class. So should science classes be more practical? Not for the girls, it seems. They weren't nearly as keen as the boys on this 'hands-on' approach. When a teacher made them dissect a frog in class and examine its heart for a biology experiment, it made some of them sick! Maybe boys' brains work differently from those of girls. Would schoolkids learn better if girls and boys were taught separately?

LIVEWORKSHEETS

3 **Read the article and choose the best answer, A, B, C or D.**

1 What criticism is sometimes made about modern education in the first paragraph?
- **A** The syllabus is out of date.
- **B** The teaching methods are not good enough.
- **C** There's too much stress on exams.
- **D** Teachers aren't strict enough.

2 What does 'authoritarian' in line 14 mean?
- **A** strict
- **B** experienced
- **C** rude
- **D** unreasonable

3 What does the writer suggest about the food the students ate?
- **A** There wasn't much of it.
- **B** It wasn't cooked properly.
- **C** It wasn't tasty.
- **D** It wasn't nutritious.

4 According to the author, how did exams in the 1950s differ from now?
- **A** They covered more subjects.
- **B** They took less time to sit.
- **C** There was more to remember.
- **D** They were less challenging.

5 What was surprising about the *That'll teach 'em!* students' results?
- **A** All the students found the exams difficult.
- **B** Students didn't do as well as expected.
- **C** Students who were predicted to fail did rather well.
- **D** Students did better in twenty-first century exams.

6 According to the writer, vocational schools
- **A** provided poorer children with equipment.
- **B** took children who were good at studying.
- **C** prepared students for employment.
- **D** were a complete waste of time.

7 What is the writer's attitude towards the curriculum girls were offered in the 1960s?
- **A** He thinks the subjects the girls studied were useful.
- **B** He believes the girls were pleased to study these subjects.
- **C** He feels schools should go back to offering similar subjects.
- **D** He doubts whether the girls enjoyed what they were learning.

8 What does 'it' refer to in line 59?
- **A** the experience
- **B** the frog
- **C** the biology class
- **D** the heart

4 **Find words or phrases in the article that match these meanings.**

1 difficult in an interesting way (para 1)
2 behaving in a silly way (para 2)
3 the most badly behaved (para 2)
4 put up with, without complaining (para 3)
5 more difficult (para 4)
6 expected (para 5)
7 a practical way of doing something (para 7)
8 a small green animal that lives near water (para 7)



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