



Kids These Days: YOLO, Generation Z

By Dr. David Rideout

I'm glad my days of marking school papers are behind me. If I were a teacher today, I'd be ROFL at what now passes for the written word! (Incidentally, that's "Rolling On the Floor Laughing" for those not familiar with the new social media lingo).

Of course, you can't blame today's youth for bending the rules of the English language. After all, they are the first generation to have lived their entire lives in the age of technology—the so-called "Generation Z," comprised of people now 18 or under. In their brave new tech-savvy world, communication is instantaneous and messages delivered at the speed of light. Why type an entire phrase like 'be right back,' or "see you later," when a simple "BRB" or "L8R" will do?

OMG, social media is re-shaping the dictionary, adding new words to the modern lexicon like hashtag, emoticon, and selfie. It's even changed the definition of words, adding a whole new meaning to "like" or "friend," thanks to Facebook.

Notwithstanding the perils of learning an abbreviated language, in many ways Generation Z has it better than the generations who came before. They live in a time where the touch of a computer key can bring them instantaneous access to information around the world. And gone are the days of pining for a faraway loved one; technology can put them right in the same room for a live "facetime" or "Skype" chat. That amazing technology is just one link in a chain of world-changing innovation that has been improving life ever since the first caveman struck a flint upon stone and made fire: the invention of the wheel, the printing press, the telephone, discovery of vaccines, anesthesia, x-rays, electricity, contraception, flight, and space travel, just to name a few.

It begs the question: What is left to discover now that all the great inventions or discoveries have already been made? Oh, the possibilities. This may be the generation that cures cancer, lands on Mars, creates cars that drive themselves or finds irrefutable proof of life elsewhere in the universe. Perhaps this tech-savvy generation can harness the exponential power of technology to do greater good. To influence the world so that tolerance and inclusion—not bigotry or racism—are the social norm.

The possibilities are endless for those youth, who were recently described by Macleans magazine as "smarter than Boomers and more ambitious than the Millennials." There are about 2 billion of them worldwide and they are informed, collaborative, industrious, accepting of diversity – and eager to build a better planet.

You Only Live Once, Generation Z. Make it good.

Dr. David Rideout is a former teacher, principal, and school board superintendent. He is a father of two adult sons and the Regional Director of North Central Alberta Child and Family Services. Feedback or comments are welcome and can be sent via email to david.rideout@gov.ab.ca.
