

A Flapper's Appeal to Parents

(1)

*In the 1920s, young women known as flappers rebelled against traditional ways of thinking and acting. Many older Americans were shocked by the behavior of flappers. In the following selection, published in "The Outlook" in 1922, flapper Ellen Welles Page asks older Americans to try to understand the **social revolution** that the young people of the 1920s were experiencing.*

(2)

If one judges by appearances, I suppose I am a flapper. I am within the age limit. I wear bobbed hair, the badge of flapperhood. (And, oh, what a comfort it is!) I powder my nose. I wear fringed skirts and bright-colored sweaters, and scarfs, and waists with Peter Pan collars, and low-heeled shoes. I adore dancing. I spend a large amount of time in automobiles. I attend hops, and proms, and ball-games, and crew races, and other affairs at men's colleges. But some of the most thoroughbred superflappers might blush to claim sistership or even remote relationship with such as I. I don't use rouge, or lipstick, or pluck my eyebrows. I don't smoke (I've tried it, and don't like it), or drink.

(3)

I want to beg all you parents, and grandparents, and friends, and teachers, and preachers—you who constitute the "older generation"—to overlook our shortcomings, at least for the present, and to appreciate our virtues. I wonder if it ever occurred to any of you that it required brains to become and remain a successful flapper? Indeed it does! It requires an enormous amount of cleverness and energy to keep going at the proper pace. It requires self-knowledge and self-analysis. We must know our capabilities and limitations. We must be constantly on the alert. Attainment of flapperhood is a big and serious undertaking!

What's going on?

(4)

"Brains?" you repeat, skeptically. "Then why aren't they used to better advantage?" That is exactly it! "The war!" you cry. "It is the effect of the war!" And then you blame prohibition. But this is my point: Instead of helping us work out our problems with constructive, sympathetic thinking and acting, you have muddled them for us more hopelessly with destructive public condemnation.

(5)

Think back to the time when you were struggling through the teens. Remember how spontaneous and deep were the joys, how serious and penetrating the sorrows. Most of us, under the present system of modern education, are further advanced and more thoroughly developed mentally, physically, and vocationally than were our parents at our age. We hold the infinite possibilities of new inventions within our grasp. We have learned to take for granted conveniences, and many luxuries, which not so many years ago were as yet undreamed of. We are in touch with the whole universe. We have a tremendous problem on our hands. You must help us. Give us confidence—not distrust. Give us practical aid and advice—not criticism. Praise us when praise is merited. Be patient and understanding when we make mistakes.

What’s going on?

How does this relate to what you have read already?

(6)

We are the Younger Generation. The war tore away our spiritual foundations and challenged our faith. The times have made us older and more experienced than you were at our age. It must be so with each succeeding generation if it is to keep pace with the rapidly advancing and mighty tide of civilization. Help us to put our knowledge to the best advantage. Work with us! That is the way! Outlets for this surplus knowledge and energy must be opened. Give us a helping hand.

(7)

Parents, study your children. Talk to them more intimately. Respect their right to a point of view. Remember that we are the parents of the future. Help us to be worthy of the sacred trust that will be ours. Make your lives such an inspiration to us that we in our turn will strive to become an inspiration to our children and to the ages! Is it too much to ask?

Adapted from Page, E.W. (1922). A flapper’s appeal to parents. *The Outlook*, 132, 607.

What’s going on?

How does this relate to what you have read already?

What is the overall message of the passage?

What questions do you have?