“**Advice to Youth” by Mark Twain**

“Advice to Youth” by Mark Twain (1882) Being told I would be expected to talk here, I inquired what sort of talk I ought to make. They said it should be something suitable to youth--something didactic, instructive, or something in the nature of good advice. Very well. I have a few things in my mind which I have often longed to say for the instruction of the young; for it is in one’s tender early years that such things will best take root and be most enduring and most valuable. First, then. I will say to you my young friends--and I say it beseechingly, urgingly—

Always obey your parents, when they are present. This is the best policy in the long run, because if you don’t, they will make you. Most parents think they know better than you do, and you can generally make more by humoring that superstition than you can by acting on your own better judgment.

Be respectful to your superiors, if you have any, also to strangers, and sometimes to others. If a person offend you, and you are in doubt as to whether it was intentional or not, do not resort to extreme measures; simply watch your chance and hit him with a brick. That will be sufficient. If you shall find that he had not intended any offense, come out frankly and confess yourself in the wrong when you struck him; acknowledge it like a man and say you didn’t mean to. Yes, always avoid violence; in this age of charity and kindliness, the time has gone by for such things. Leave dynamite to the low and unrefined.

Go to bed early, get up early--this is wise. Some authorities say get up with the sun; some say get up with one thing, others with another. But a lark is really the best thing to get up with. It gives you a splendid reputation with everybody to know that you get up with the lark; and if you get the right kind of lark, and work at him right, you can easily train him to get up at half past nine, every time--it’s no trick at all.

Now as to the matter of lying. You want to be very careful about lying; otherwise you are nearly sure to get caught. Once caught, you can never again be in the eyes to the good and the pure, what you were before. Many a young person has injured himself permanently through a single clumsy and ill finished lie, the result of carelessness born of incomplete training. Some authorities hold that the young ought not to lie at all. That of course, is putting it rather stronger than necessary; still while I cannot go quite so far as that, I do maintain, and I believe I am right, that the young ought to be temperate in the use of this great art until practice and experience shall give them that confidence, elegance, and precision which alone can make the accomplishment graceful and profitable. Patience, diligence, painstaking attention to detail--these are requirements; these in time, will make the student perfect; upon these only, may he rely as the sure foundation for future eminence. Think what tedious years of study, thought, practice, experience, went to the equipment of that peerless old master who was able to impose upon the whole world the lofty and sounding maxim that “Truth is mighty and will prevail”- -the most majestic compound fracture of fact which any of woman born has yet achieved. For the history of our race, and each individual’s experience, are sewn thick with evidences that a truth is not hard to kill, and that a lie well told is immortal. There is in Boston a monument of the man who discovered anesthesia; many people are aware, in these latter days, that that man didn’t discover it at all, but stole the discovery from another man. Is this truth mighty, and will it prevail? Ah no, my hearers, the monument is made of hardy material, but the lie it tells will outlast it a million years. An awkward, feeble, leaky lie is a thing which you ought to make it your unceasing study to avoid; such a lie as that has no more real permanence than an average truth. Why, you might as well tell the truth at once and be done with it. A feeble, stupid, preposterous lie will not live two years-- except it be a slander upon somebody. It is indestructible, then of course, but that is no merit of yours. A final word: begin your practice of this gracious and beautiful art early--begin now. If I had begun earlier, I could have learned how.

Never handle firearms carelessly. The sorrow and suffering that have been caused through the innocent but heedless handling of firearms by the young! Only four days ago, right in the next farm house to the one where I am spending the summer, a grandmother, old and gray and sweet, one of the loveliest spirits in the land, was sitting at her work, when her young grandson crept in and got down an old, battered, rusty gun which had not been touched for many years and was supposed not to be loaded, and pointed it at her, laughing and threatening to shoot. In her fright she ran screaming and pleading toward the door on the other side of the room; but as she passed him he placed the gun almost against her very breast and pulled the trigger! He had supposed it was not loaded. And he was right--it wasn’t. So there wasn’t any harm done. It is the only case of that kind I ever heard of. Therefore, just the same, don’t you meddle with old unloaded firearms; they are the most deadly and unerring things that have ever been created by man. You don’t have to take any pains at all with them; you don’t have to have a rest, you don’t have to have any sights on the gun, you don’t have to take aim, even. No, you just pick out a relative and bang away, and you are sure to get him. A youth who can’t hit a cathedral at thirty yards with a Gatling gun in three quarters of an hour, can take up an old empty musket and bag his grandmother every time, at a hundred. Think what Waterloo would have been if one of the armies had been boys armed with old muskets supposed not to be loaded, and the other army had been composed of their female relations. The very thought of it make one shudder.

There are many sorts of books; but good ones are the sort for the young to read. Remember that. They are a great, an inestimable, and unspeakable means of improvement. Therefore be careful in your selection, my young friends; be very careful; confine yourselves exclusively to Robertson’s Sermons, Baxter’s Saint’s Rest, The Innocents Abroad, and works of that kind.

But I have said enough. I hope you will treasure up the instructions which I have given you, and make them a guide to your feet and a light to your understanding. Build your character thoughtfully and painstakingly upon these precepts, and by and by, when you have got it built, you will be surprised and gratified to see how nicely and sharply it resembles everybody else’s. (1882)

**ADVICE TO YOUTH**

**Mark Twain**

**SUMMARY**

Advice to Youth by Writer Mark Twain Mr. Mark Twain was an American author and humorist born in 1835. His birth name was Samuel Langhorn Clemens. He was responsible for such literary masterpieces as The Adventures of Tom Sawyer, and The Adventures of Huckleberry Fin, which became known as the Great American Novel. He was admired by many of the great novelists of the era, including William Faulkner, Earnest Hemingway, and Norman Mailer. Before his death in 1910, he had penned over thirty books. He then had two more books publish after his death. In 1907, he received and honorary doctorate from Oxford University. He is known as one of the greatest American writers of all time.

Mark Twain's Advice to Youth is an interestingly contradictory speech with a comedic approach aimed toward the teenage audience. His intent is not to undermine the common family values, but to provide an honest real-life approach to those values so as to be better understood by the less developed teen mind. In this paper I will be discussing the main points of Mr. Twain's speech and analyzing the meaning behind those points. Mr. Twain begins with the common parental argument of “listen to what I tell you”. His statement, “Always obey your parents, when they are present.”(Twain,1882) does not necessarily say to the young to disobey their parents, but rather to use the time when their parents are absent to make their own decisions and mistakes. Teenagers are destined to disobey their parents in an attempt to create their own identity. Mr. Twain seems to understand this and therefore, rather than condemn teens for this, he encourages them to carve their own path while still giving their parents a sense of complete control. As a teen, I recall my parents always “harping” on me about who my friends were, speak eloquently, and sit up straight. Had I read Mr. Twain's speech back then, perhaps I wouldn't have been in as much trouble with my parents so frequently.

Next, he discusses the subject of respect. In this, Mr. Twain's intention is not to mock the value of respecting others, but rather to remind that sometimes revenge is necessary. He uses the example of if someone has wronged you simply watch your chance and hit him with a brick(Twain,1882) as a means to relate to the teenage common practice of engaging in altercations to solve their disputes. I recall myself as a teen resorting to violence to rectify majority of my petty conflicts. Mr. Twain does, however, remind his audience that if indeed the retaliation was ill thought out and undeserving, to take responsibility for ones actions and apologize. Mr. Twain then goes on to discuss the importance of getting plenty of rest. He suggests “Getting up with the lark”(Twain,1882) as the best possible method. His meaning behind his rhetoric with regards to this matter is to ensure your reputation remains a pleasant one by allowing others to believe you are an early riser, whilst still getting the required sleep to be at your best in your endeavors. I as a child as well as a young adult often had a very hard time getting to sleep at a decent hour or waking in time to complete most of my required tasks for the day. This advice would have come well in handy.

Perhaps his best advice to his audience is to refrain from the recreational use of firearms. He points out that although the weapon may be perceived to be unloaded, there is always a chance that is not the case. He goes on to describe an incident of child antics that, although it did not, might have resulted in a tragic death. I can relate completely with this advice, as I myself have lost many loved ones to gun violence, both accidental and malicious. He then goes on to make light of the situation by making the comment, “A youth who can't hit a cathedral at thirty yards with a Gatling gun in three quarters of an hour, can take up an old empty musket and bag his grandmother every time, at a hundred.(Twain,1882) He also makes what some readers today may consider a crude and distasteful anecdote concerning the outcome of Waterloo if the opposing army had been composed of the defending army's female descendants. According to Mr. Twain, The very thought of it makes one shudder. (Twain, 1882) I personally find this statement humorous. It makes a point while also keeping the mood light and happy in nature. In short, Mr. Mark Twain's speech “Advice to Youth” is a comedy filled view on moral values for the teenage mind. I feel this speech should be a requirement in all academic institutions. Perhaps the youth of tomorrow will take his words to heart and make this world a better place for the future.

**A Bunch of Advice**

The text is Twain’s address to the young minds and bodies who are at the cusp (point) of facing the world and instructional blueprint to tackle what it puts in front of them.

It is blatantly clear that the write has been urged to share his wisdom and had taken the opportunity to pen a unique strategy for the youth of follow.

He believes youth is the stage where the people are like clay and start to cement their habits, values, and character that would last for their entire lives.

## Obedience to Parents

The first pearl of wisdom is to be obedient to one’s parents but only when they can observe you. It helps in keeping them satiated and serves well for the future. He asks them to be respectful to others, to a point.

Also, if someone hurts or insults you, then bide your time for the most opportune moment to hit back. He advises against extreme and quick reactions.

He clarifies that being explosive and belligerent is outdated and primitive so use guile and subtly to exact revenge with people.

## Punctuality

Next, he advises to get into a good routine in terms of sleep and develop a habit of waking up early. But, he finds it even more impressive if one can train a bird to give a wakeup call as late as possible in the morning.

That way one can sleep longer and still be considered disciplined. He goes on to instruct young people to develop the art and skills of lying with immaculate proficiency.

He informs that lies are immortal and outlive even truths of the age. However, if a lie is told without perfection it results in irreparable damage to an individual’s reputation especially a young person. He does not ask youth to stick with honesty always but only in cases when they cannot lie flawlessly.

## Guns and Ammunition

Next, he moves to the issue of using guns and ammunition. He asks youth to stay clear of such dangerous weapons which in hands of the untrained tyro can wreak more havoc than witnessed in wars.

He also advises young people to delve into books and add to their reservoir of knowledge. However, he warns them against choosing books without careful deliberation and thought. He encourages them to read works on religion, spirituality, morality, etc like Robertson’s sermons, etc.

## Ending

He ends the text on a sarcastic note. He envisages that once young people have completely developed their personalities and characters according to his advice, they will be shocked to see how similar they end up becoming to the rest of the people.

He hits at the lack of originality and uniqueness that is a function of how society works and every individual conforms to a fixed set of expected standards.​

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