

The student-teacher gap

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Each generation seems to create their own language, their own way of communication that deems the previous generation out of fashion and the current one king. Viral dance trends and new slang transform communication seemingly overnight, leaving students in the loop and teachers confused.

The same sort of generation gap exists in PHS today within the student culture at the school. "The obvious one is that cell phones have become an addictive instrument. It started out as a tool that was used sometimes. Now it is basically a body part of most students," said Peter Martens, a physics and engineering teacher at PHS. That same sentiment can be seen through the stricter phone restrictions in class, such as the upcoming phone ban as teachers and administrators are beginning to notice more students communicating through their phones rather than in person.

As for the communication gap between students and teachers, some do not seem to feel a struggle in bridging that separation. "Part of it is that I have daughters that are only a little older than you are, so I see it from all angles," said Martens, suggesting that this communication gap extends beyond school.

There are also certain techniques that teachers use to stay in touch and be able to relate to their students.

"Up until recently I was on TikTok just so I could keep up with trends and understand the vernacular," said Robert Dutches, an AP World History teacher.

Having a teacher relate to students in ways like this can bridge the difference between generations and help them find common ground. "I think there are and help them find common ground. I worked in theater as a high schooler, and having similar experiences means you can share certain similarities," said Dutches.

For some teachers, connecting with students isn't the only thing they focus on, and it isn't a huge gesture. "I think [creating that bond] is in the little moments that you don't really think about or you don't plan for, like, when students come into class or in the hallways, or when you see someone who might look like they're having some issues, going up to them and chatting," said Heather Serverson, a gym teacher at PHS.

Communication between students and teachers is also about the students being comfortable enough to talk about their issues with teachers.

"I've had students talk about mental health struggles, possibly harming themselves and trying to get help," said Serverson.

No matter how a teacher approaches the communication and age difference between teachers and students, it is certain that it takes a lot of work, but it is rewarding because it makes the students feel comfortable and heard and it makes the teachers feel closer and supportive of their students.

Vanguard Presents... GENERATION GAP

Events that defined a generation

Atharva Desai and Jaisel Iyer, CONTRIBUTING WRITERS

The Lost Generation (1880-1900)

Event: World War I

The Lost Generation was a group of young people who grew up during World War I and felt disillusioned by the world after the war. Many writers in this generation, like Ernest Hemingway and F. Scott Fitzgerald, describe feeling disconnected, not sure of their purpose in life, and frustrated with the society. They are called the "Lost" Generation because their values, like patriotism, faith, and optimism fully collapsed, leaving them aimless, and "lost".

Baby Boomers (1946-1964)

Events: The Civil Rights Movement & Vietnam War

The Boomers grew up in an era of surprising economic prosperity but also came with a lot of social disruptions. The Civil Rights Movement and Vietnam War shaped the generation to question authority and challenge traditional institutions. This led to them becoming highly political and socially conscious. Overall, these events turned the Boomers into a generation that prioritized individual expression, justice, and skepticism towards those in power.

Millennials (1981-1996)

Event: 9/11

For Millennials, the terrorist attacks on September 11, 2001, marked an end to the hope and optimism that was generated in the 1990s and the advent of a new era full of global anxiety. 9/11, along with the subsequent War on Terror, reshaped the way this generation saw the world and interconnectedness. Additionally, the beginning of the Digital Age made them very adaptable and concerned with social responsibility toward who they support.

The Greatest Generation (1901-1927)

Events: The Great Depression & World War II

The Greatest Generation was defined by economic hardships and sacrifice. Growing up in the Great Depression, many individuals faced extreme poverty and joblessness, which created a lifelong sense of frugality and financial problems. This era of struggle was followed by their service in WWII, creating a generation that had a strong work ethic and a sense of duty.

The Silent Generation (1928-1945)

Events: The Cold War & McCarthyism

During the rise of the Cold War and the Red Scare, the Silent Generation earned its name by learning that speaking out could lead them into trouble. The overall feeling of McCarthyism encouraged unity and caution as it was safer to not speak and work together to rebel. This shaped the generation into a group that valued security, unity, and loyalty.

Generation X (1965-1980)

Event: Fall of the Berlin Wall

Generation X grew up during a period where there were a lot of shifting societal norms. The fall of the Berlin Wall symbolized the end of Cold War tensions in many people's lives. This event combined with a lack of parental control, created independence, and self reliance. They learned how to navigate the world that was vastly unpredictable, leading to a generation that valued the idea of efficiency.

Generation Z (1997-2012)

Event: Covid-19 Pandemic

For Generation Z, the Covid-19 pandemic disrupted formative years and replaced personal milestones with instability. The crisis made them heavily reliant on digital and online spaces for community, which makes them the most adaptable to it. People of this generation had to switch learning styles quickly as in person school transitioned to online learning, with older Gen Z members having to adapt to their first jobs in this environment as well.

What is wrong with our generation?

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If you ask older generations what is wrong with today's youth, they usually have an answer ready before the question is completely asked. We are lazy, addicted to our phones, live in our rooms, incapable of conversation, and somehow personally responsible for the downfall of basic human values. It is truly an impressive list, especially considering that every generation before us was accused of almost the exact same thing.

Soon enough, the famous "back in my day" banter begins. Back in my day, I walked 10 miles to get to school. Back in my day, we went outside until the street lights came on. However, that is not to say that we are above it all either. Just as they ramble about phones being the end of the future, we hear younger kids saying "67" with complete seriousness and start thinking the exact thing.

It is practically a rule: every generation romanticizes itself and scrutinizes the ones around it.

Baby Boomers, known for valuing the workplace as a priority, have viewed Generation X as being "slackers" for straying away from traditional "9-to-5" jobs. Generation X often calls Millennials dependent on technology and too pampered. Generation Z is labeled as fragile, short-attention-spanned, and "stuck" on technological devices. Of course, none of these labels are defined concretely, but they are not rooted solely in falsehoods either. Baby Boomers did live in a "booming" post-war economy during the peak of their working years, and newer generations have used technology much more than previous generations.

That said, there is much more nuance to all of these perceptions. Data on how many hours different generations work, how long each generation is online daily and average median incomes are hard to decode, because statistics from different sources often contradict each other. Every generation is currently at a different point in their lives, so comparing them to one another is impossible. Furthermore, comparing current generations to the equivalent age of previous generations neglects the fact that the social environment surrounding these generations have changed.

On top of that, older generations condemn newer ones for much more abstract reasons. For example, Generation X often critiques modern music as being overproduced and fabricated, as they favor the MTV-era music of their time. Boomers disliked Gen X's music for lacking the melodic structure of their own classic rock and folk. The Silent Generation disliked the Beatle-led "British Invasion" of Boomer-era music due to being "too noisy" and not structured. These arguments are very similar to each other because they represent a cyclical pattern of generation conflict. Older generations, often blinded by nostalgia for their own trends, will dismiss the adaptations of newer generations. In reality, whether these newer adaptations are worse, better, or equal is all subjective to the individual.

These judgements are rarely limited to just work ethic, music, or phones. More often, they reflect discomfort with change itself. When newer generations speak differently, live differently, or value different things, older generations often interpret that difference as a decline, as a regression. A generation raised in a different world will inevitably turn into something different from the ones before it.

So, what is wrong with our generation? Probably the same thing that has been wrong with nearly every generation before it: we are shaped by our time, judged by the people who no longer live in it, and blamed for changes that are larger than ourselves. We all have our flaws, certainly, but so did everyone else. The difference is that ours are simply the newest ones on display.

Maybe the better question is not what is wrong with our generation, but why every generation is so determined to believe the next one is the beginning of the end.

graphics: Luna Xu

Overcoming Generational Gaps

Layla Krystofik and Laura Pepek, CONTRIBUTING WRITERS

We often find ourselves in situations where conversations with older relatives or friends stall out – not due to a lack of care, but simply because of a gap in shared references and life experiences. Bridging this generational gap doesn't require a history degree; rather, it requires a willingness to look for human overlap instead of age differences. While the divide is real, stemming from different cultural moments, tech habits, and life stages, the path to connection is much simpler than you think.

Imagine the gap as two people who both speak English but use different slang. One says "That's lit," while the other says "That's swell." The words are different, but the meaning is the same. A generational gap works the same way: a dialect difference, more so than a full-on divide. The basic human language of joy, grief, excitement, fear, hope, and love hasn't changed. Once you stop translating every word and start listening for the emotion underneath, the divide shrinks dramatically.

For example, to start a genuine conversation, skip the weather. Instead, try asking, "What was your first job like?" or "If you could relive one day of your life, which would it be?" Questions like these open the door to storytelling and pride rather than one-word responses. From there, lean into universal themes – childhood memories, personal aspirations, family food traditions – because these emotional anchors can resonate across any era.

The key is simple: listen for the feeling, not the fact. You don't need to love vinyl records to appreciate the joy of anticipation. They don't need to master emojis to acknowledge the need for connection. While you may not understand each other in certain areas, you don't have to pretend to be interested in the same "stuff" to find common ground; you can simply recognize the emotion they are describing. The generational gap isn't a wall – it's just a different dialect of the same human language. If you ask with genuine curiosity and listen with an open heart, those stalled conversations just might turn into the ones you remember most.

Social Trends and Memes across Generations

Jacob Rogart, CO-HEAD COPY EDITOR

1940s-1960s: Early meme concepts and catchphrases

Ideas spread through posters, comics, and sayings that became part of everyday life. Catchphrases like "Kilroy was here" appeared around the world and even during wartime. These early cultural jokes worked the same way memes work today, ideas that spread person to person and influenced pop culture sayings and slang, like "Make love, not war" in the 1960s.

1980s: Digital culture

As computers became more common, people began making and sharing digital jokes. Early online communities used text art and graphics to entertain each other. Around this time, scientist Richard Dawkins introduced and coined the word "meme," showing how ideas spread almost like living things, while pop culture trends like MTV and video games began to start a new digital generation.

1990s: The Internet surge

When the internet became more popular, visual memes started to appear. The "Dancing Baby" or "Oogachacka Baby" animation became one of the first viral hits online. Forums and chat rooms helped new internet slang like "LOL" and "BRB" spread quickly. Memes became a part of how people express humor across the internet as culture shifted online through websites and fandoms.

2000s: Rise of viral media

Social sites and photo editing made it easy for anyone to create and share memes. Funny pictures with captions, like LOLcats or Advice Animals, took over websites like Reddit and 4chan. YouTube videos like "Rickrolling" showed how quickly jokes could go global in the age of internet sharing.

Early 2010: Social media boom

Social media turned memes into a major part of pop culture. Twitter, Instagram, and Vine made it easy to spread jokes, relatable posts, and short videos. Everyone started using memes for fun. Examples like "Grumpy Cat" and "Harlem Shake" went viral worldwide and people used platforms to share dance trends, reaction GIFs, and viral challenges. Memes started to become very intertwined into daily lives by becoming a common way for people to react and talk.

Late 2010: Political and reaction memes

During this time, memes took a stronger voice in politics and social issues. People started using memes to comment on elections, news, and world events, turning humor into a form of protest or support. Many political groups used memes to spread their opinions online, while other people saw this as a sign that memes had become too serious. Popular formats like "Distracted Boyfriend," "Mocking SpongeBob," and "OK Boomer" reflected not just jokes, but feelings about society, culture, and generations. Memes became a way to argue, persuade, and laugh during a time defined by social and online movements.

2020s: Short videos and Artificial Intelligence

Today, most memes appear as short videos on apps like TikTok, YouTube, and Instagram. A trend called "Italian Brainrot" showed how chaotic and random memes had become. AI tools can help generate images, captions, and music for memes, letting people create memes faster than ever before. Memes now spread across online in seconds, shaping the way people talk and express humor as short videos and internet trends dominate pop culture.

Things Passed Down Through Generations

Kelly Cenci and Olivia Fan, CONTRIBUTING WRITERS



What we inherit from our families is never just physical or biological; it is also the traditions and quiet acts of resilience passed from one generation to the next. Every family has stories of struggle, hope, and perseverance that shape who future generations become. As we move forward, we continue to add our own chapters to that story, becoming the link between the past and the future. By passing down our stories, our values, and the strength we have gathered along the way, we ensure that the past does not fade but continues to guide.

Rudy's Catering

In 1930, an eight-year-old boy named Rudolph Cenci spent his mornings running down the streets of lower Manhattan, delivering newspapers. Growing up as the son of an orphaned Italian immigrant, Rudy didn't have it easy. Whether it was not making it past eighth grade or barely having enough money to get by, Rudy and his family had seen poverty and struggle first-hand.

Due to his lack of education, Rudy's skill set consisted mostly of his family's Italian recipes. So, utilizing these skills, Rudy decided to create his own business. He first found success on the northern tip of Staten Island, where he began "Rudy's Delicatessen." There, he spent a few years selling sandwiches, coffee, and newspapers, just like he had as a child.

After a while working there, Rudy took his business to the "Sons of Norway," who offered him some land and a place to set up his very own catering business. It was here that he began Rudy's Catering, what would become an acclaimed business and working opportunity for generations and generations of the Cenci family to come.

Rudy's Catering combined the classic New York-style cuisine with the traditional recipes from his father's original home in Florence. It was this blend of cultures that kept customers coming for years and years: the flavors of Italy brought to America's doorstep by a young man with a love for cooking.

And this passion was passed down in the Cenci family — my family. When Rudy got too old to run the business, it was passed down to my great-uncles, who brought the business to run completely on its own, no longer having to borrow land from the "Sons of Norway." The employees of Rudy's Catering were my family members. My great-grandparents, grandparents, parents, and everyone in between kept the business alive through the years, working and collaborating to make it the best it could be.

To this day, aspects of Rudy's Catering are passed down to my generation. Although the business itself is no longer around, the hard work and dedication of my great-grandfather and his family is not forgotten. Every year, my family gets together to make our time-honored Italian recipes. Every year, we retell stories from long ago, sharing and spreading the culture that shaped how our family is today. Every year, we keep Rudy and his history alive, story by story, generation by generation, bit by bit.

And when the time comes for the next generation to carry the legacy too, we'll share with them the history we've come to know so well: the tale of an eight-year-old boy selling newspapers in Manhattan.

Fans All Over the World

Unlike the majority of the world, I took my mother's surname, Fan. The surname Fan originated from a wealthy Chinese noble family with descendants of aristocrats, chancellors, and celebrities. Unfortunately, my grandparents never inherited the fame and fortune of our ancestors. Their lives were instead filled with famine, poverty, and labor.

Despite dropping out of school in the second grade to provide for her family, my grandmother was extremely capable. She learned how to sew, identify plants in the wild, and cook by simply observing her surroundings. My grandmother frequently reminisced about the potential she could have had if given the chance to study, and although she never received that opportunity, her longing for an education lived on through her children.

My mother was exceptionally gifted at mathematics. She would wake up at five in the morning just to study. When she was not studying, she was daydreaming about different theoretical dimensions. Her efforts brought her from the rural province of Jiang Xi to the capital city of Beijing to study at Tsinghua University.

While I inherited my mother's love for math, it was freeing to learn for fulfillment rather than survival, a freedom built on the quiet sacrifices each generation made to lift the next one higher.

The last name I inherited is not simply a title, but a symbol to honor what past generations have done. Carrying the name Fan means carrying their unfinished dreams and the unspoken promise that each generation would strive for something better.

As I carve out my own story, I do so knowing that I am not starting from nothing. I am standing on the shoulders of those who endured, those who dreamed, and those who refused to let their circumstances define the limits of what they could achieve. The surname Fan was passed down to me, not just as an identity but as a testament to the generations who built the path beneath my feet.