

CIVICS & CITIZENSHIP: PRACTICAL WORK

OBJECTIVE:

To explore factors that have brought about change to the education system over time, through compiling, conducting and analysing surveys with different generational groups.

FROM THE SCRIPT

ACT 1, SCENE 1

Conflicting ideas concerning conformity and work ethic affected families in the 1950s and 1960s just as they do today. The teenagers in *Hairspray* begin to think that hard work and staying in school is not necessarily their only option, and certainly not the most glamorous answer to life. In this excerpt, we see Tracy's growing interest in leaving school and auditioning for *The Corny Collins Show*, and what it might mean for her family.

TRACY: Mother, you are so fifties. Even our first lady, Jackie B. Kennedy, rats her hair.

EDNA: Yeah? Well, you ain't no first lady, are ya? She's a hair hopper – that's what got her put in detention again.

(taking Wilbur aside)

Wilbur, talk to her. Girls like Tracy... People like us... You know what I'm saying. They don't put people like us on TV – except to be laughed at.

WILBUR: (to Tracy) This TV thing... You really want it?

TRACY: It's my dream, Daddy.

WILBUR: Then you go for it. This is America, babe. You gotta think big to be big.

EDNA: Being big enough is not the problem, Wilbur.

WILBUR: When I was your age my parents begged me to run away with the circus, but I said, "No. That's what you want. I have dreams of my own." I dreamt of opening a chain of joke shops worldwide. So, okay, I've still only got one, but some day, if I can figure out how to keep the air from leaking out of my sofa-sized Whoopee Cushion, I'm going to make a noise heard 'round the world!

(Edna screams with delight!)

You follow your dream, baby. I'm grabbin' an Orange Crush and heading back down to the Har-Dee-Har Hut. I've got my dream... And I wuv it!

EDNA: (laughing again) You're not helping, Wilbur!

(Wilbur exits and Tracy follows.)

TRACY: Thanks, Daddy.

EDNA: Tracy, come back up here. I've got hampers of laundry and my diet pill is wearing off!

TRACY: But, Mama I want to be famous.

EDNA: You want to be famous? Learn how to get blood out of car upholstery. Now there's a skill you could take to the bank. You think I wanted to spend my life washing and ironing other people's unmentionables? No, I wanted to design them. I thought I would be the biggest thing in brassieres. Well, you deal with what life gives you. Now start folding.

TRACY: Ugh.

EXERCISE

- As a class, discuss the role school plays in your future plans and expectations. Does school play a large part, or is it insignificant? Do your ambitions determine the choices you make in school?

Working as a team, develop a survey to explore the attitude of people in your parents' generation concerning school. Possible survey topics could include:

- What courses they took
- How seriously they took their lessons
- How their culture and family ethnicity effected their education
- What their families thought of education
- How their education path may or may not have changed as they grew older
- The consequences of their education on their lives

Once the survey questions have been determined, each student should conduct the survey at home with friends or family members.

- In the following lesson, discuss the answers you have obtained in groups of three or four, and reach a consensus about the meaning of education for the interviewees. Finally, reconvene as a class to compare the role of education for students both now and then.

