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## **Ideas for Intergenerational Living**

*a series of articles devoted to promoting cooperation  
and exchange between the generations*

Article 8 (8/01):

### **WHAT DO RONALD REAGAN AND LIL' BOW WOW HAVE IN COMMON?**

An 8-year old boy and his grandfather stood toe-to-toe, holding pictures of their heroes behind their backs. The boy exclaimed, "Okay grandpa, you go first." As his grandfather held up the picture he chose, the boy looked long and hard and then replied in an uncertain tone, "Paul Bunyan?" With a feigned smile on his face, the child's grandfather said, "No, it's Ronald Reagan. He was president only a few presidents ago. Here you see him when he was an actor. That's why he's dressed up as a cowboy."

"Okay, now it's my turn," exclaimed the boy after nodding to his grandfather to show him that he now knows about Ronald Reagan. "Who's this?" "Oh my, I wouldn't have any idea," said the grandfather. "Okay, I'll tell you ... It's Lil' Bow Wow." (Big smiles). The grandfather replied, "Lil' who? ... Did you say 'Lil' Bow Bow'?" The boy quickly answered back, "Yeah, Lil' Bow Wow. Everybody knows who he is. He raps."

This exchange was one of many that took place between grandparents and grandchildren who played the "Stump Your Relative" game at the August 2001 "Ag Progress Days" event in Centre County, Pennsylvania. The activity was designed to give young people and their older adult relatives a chance to test each other's knowledge about the other's generation and to stimulate conversation.

People can also play "Stump Your Relative" at home. Just pair up with a family member who is from another generation. After both people gather a few items that are significant to their respective generations, take turns displaying the items to each other and guessing what they are. Give hints if needed. In the case above, for example, the grandfather might have said, "He was a president" or "His wife's name is "Nancy." After each item is determined, give time for broader discussion about what family members do with their time.

Some ideas for items to use in this game may be found from the activity conducted at the Ag Progress Days event. To "stump" their grandchildren, adults chose the following items: an 8-track tape, a flour sifter, a picture of Fred Astaire, and a dress-marking kit. Items selected by children and youth to "stump" their older relatives included: Pokémon figures, a glow-in-the-dark ball, finger bikes, and body glitter.

To return to the question posed in the title of this article, “What do Ronald Reagan and Lil’ Bow Wow Have in Common?” The answer is as follows. Both figures are *generational icons* or symbols. In other words, the degree to which people find meaning in these figures can almost be predicted based on their generational status.

The fact that a young person cannot recognize a recent ex-president and an older adult is out of touch with recent music fads might not draw much attention. Nobody gets hurt and no crimes are committed. Yet, when children and their grandparents begin losing touch with what each other knows and cares about, this does warrant concern. After all, how can a person be effective in providing support and care for an individual whom they do not really understand?

And this is what activities like “Stump Your Relative” do. They provide the “tools” which people of different generations can use to help them find out about each other’s life experiences and perspectives. There is more to this activity than just sharing facts about people and historical events. Participants also learn to see their own life experiences from other people’s eyes. It can be a profound milestone in the cognitive development of a young person for them to reach the stage where they ask themselves the question, “Why would I think that because I know who Lil’ Bow Wow is, so does everybody else?” At the same time, it can be a profound learning experience for an older adult to learn how their heroes and life experiences are viewed by today’s young people.

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