



OPINION

THE CANADIAN CHAMPION

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Looking Back ...



Hundreds of worshippers crowded into Boston Presbyterian Church in December, 1975 to celebrate the church's 23rd annual Nativity service. Blue-robed choir members held candles. From left to right are Nancy McKenzie, Norm Anderson, Grace Anderson, Joyce Head, Marj Clement and Marj Anderson.

Kids need help using noodle

We are doing a lousy job of teaching our children to think.

A symposium on critical thinking at the annual convention of the American Psychological Association last summer makes for some pretty scary reading.

If you have a child in first or second grade, ask them the following riddle: "There are 26 goats and 10 sheep on a ship. How old is the captain?" Most children of this age answered 36. More advanced riddles were designed through fifth grade with similar results.

The general pattern is that most students failed to recognize when crucial information is missing, which information is relevant (and irrelevant), and how to operate on the information given.

Children are capable of learning to think critically. It's just that some other things get in the way, according to researchers. In particular, our kids tend to be:

- **Impulsive** -- They respond before they have thought it through;

- **Narrow** -- They look only at limited information or have only one approach to solving a problem;

- **Hazy** -- They tend to act before they fully understand the problem;

- **Sprawling** -- They tend to flit about in their thinking without a plan or strategy.

What is a critical thinker? A critical thinker seeks a deeper level of understanding about a subject. If it's a math problem, he wants to know several ways of solving the problem. If she's reading a newspaper, she's weighing the assumptions and arguments, checking for bias, playing devil's advocate to see if that can make more sense.

As the world becomes more complex - socially, technologically and politically - critical thinking becomes more important. It is a skill that will serve a child well in virtually any profession or relationship.

How are you going to teach your child to think critically? I thought you'd never ask. The researchers describe eight main ingredients in the teaching of critical thinking:



Psychology in the '90s

with DR. ARNOLD RINCOVER

- **Open-mindedness** -- Kids must be encouraged to explore options and alternatives before they draw any conclusions. It doesn't matter whether it is Canadian history, health care or interpreting a facial expression of a friend. We should explore how others interpret and critique it before we act on our impression.

- **Intellectual curiosity** -- Kids should be encouraged to wonder about things around them, probe further, ask questions, look for inconsistencies, conduct research on things of interest to them. It must be prompted, guided and praised, and it must be done often.

- **Understanding** -- Kids should learn how to draw inferences to identify broader concepts. They must understand the conceptual bases of rules, whether they be math or moral rules.

- **Planning/strategy** -- Since most jobs in the 21st century will involve being

part of a team, it will be more important than ever to learn how to organize and strategize. Kids can practice by developing strategies for beating the other soccer team, organizing a skit or preparing a debate -- each involving a problem to solve, utilization of available resources and strategies for problem solving.

- **Intellectual carefulness** -- Our kids are not as a rule very thorough, careful or concerned for accuracy. We need to teach them to check their facts, edit their own work and be precise in their statements.

These components of critical thinking are like muscles. They need to be practiced and nourished regularly in order to grow and flourish.

"Children are capable of learning to think critically. It's just that some other things get in the way."

DR. ARNOLD RINCOVER

Another Christmas at cottage

Are you ready for the cottage Christmas rehash?

Most wondrous Christmas tree -- Despite snide comments from our more traditional relatives and neighbours, we do love our tall, spindly cedar tree. Together as a family, we traipsed through the woods on Christmas Eve morning in search of our festive tree and settled on one growing out of a low, rocky cliff overlooking our cottage. Simply decorated, it rises majestically to the cathedral ceiling on our living-room.

Most welcome Christmas wrapper -- Our 11-year-old relishes the novelty of wrapping presents, so apart from his stocking gifts, we handed all the bundles over to him this year.

Most unexpected Christmas departure -- Our son, the university student, who apparently is no longer drawn to the hub of the family, dutifully spent Christmas Eve at his grandmother's for the first gift-opening session then part of Christmas morning doing likewise at our cottage before announcing his decision to forego the family dinner and leave a day earlier than expected to head for points west to join his girlfriend for the holiday. So much for holiday ties. He'll eventually be back, but only to drop off hubby's car.

Most unexpected Christmas arrival -- On Christmas Day in the afternoon, two cold, wet and bedraggled dogs appeared out of nowhere. Hubby invited them into his heated workshop



On the Homefront

with ESTHER CALDWELL

where they seemed content to rest. He called the number on their tags. No one was at home so he left a message to call us at his mom's where we would be eating Christmas dinner. Around 8 that night, a relieved owner phoned back and said he was on his way. We drove back to our cottage so we could witness the happy reunion of dogs and master. The father/son combo had been on the loose for three days wandering many miles cross-country.

Most temporary Christmas guest -- Unable to keep her kitten at my mother-in-law's because of a most inhospitable cat who rules the roost in that house, my sister-in-law dropped off her 11-week-old, black furball at our cottage to entertain us and terrorize our grown cats who either kept their distance or paid the price. Satan was her name, but we tried out other names too: Satan (hubby's perverse choice), Scooter, Nefertiti and Yoda. She responded to nothing but her inner manic voices. She went absolutely berserk Christmas morning, attacking every single scrap of wrapping paper.

Most appreciated Christmas guest -- My sister willingly waltzed into the kitchen and cooked our dinners. Even though she is a vegetarian, she didn't complain about frying up meat for us carnivores. She moved beyond our usual bill of fare -- pasta -- and spent hours whipping up chocolate truffles.

Most memorable Christmas walk -- Crunching through the snow on the frozen lake and gazing up at the star-filled sky.



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by
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