

Advice to Little Girls

By Mark Twain

Good little girls ought not to make mouths at their teachers for every trifling offence. This retaliation should only be resorted to under peculiarly aggravated circumstances.

If you have nothing but a rag-doll stuffed with sawdust, while one of your more fortunate little play-mates has a costly China one, you should treat her with a show of kindness nevertheless. And you ought not to attempt to make a forcible swap with her unless your conscience would justify you in it, and you know you are able to do it.

You ought never to take your little brother's "chewing-gum" away from him by main force; it is better to rope him in with the promise of the first two dollars and a half you find floating down the river on a grindstone. In the artless simplicity natural to his time of life, he will regard it as a perfectly fair transaction. In all ages of the world this eminently plausible fiction has lured the obtuse infant to financial ruin and disaster.

If at any time you find it necessary to correct your brother, do not correct him with mud—never, on any account, throw mud at him, because it will spoil his clothes. It is better to scold him a little, for then you obtain desirable results. You secure his immediate attention to the lessons you are inculcating, and at the same time your hot water will have a tendency to move impurities from his person, and possibly the skin, in spots.

If your mother tells you to do a thing, it is wrong to reply that you won't. It is better and more becoming to intimate that you will do as she bids you, and then afterwards act quietly in the matter according to the dictates of your best judgment.

You should ever bear in mind that it is to your kind parents that you are indebted for your food, and your nice bed, and for your beautiful clothes, and for the privilege of staying home from school when you let on that you are sick. Therefore you ought to respect their little prejudices, and humor their little whims, and put up with their little foibles until they get to crowding you too much.

Good little girls always show marked deference for the aged. You ought never to "sass" old people unless they "sass" you first.

Questions to Discuss:

1. Should a young girl take the advice of Mark Twain? How do you know?
2. This short story was written around 1865-1867. How does it relate to current fiction for girls?

Discussion Protocol:

1. Read the short story silently.
2. Underline what the author says you should not do.
3. Circle what the author says you should do instead.
4. Appoint one person in your group to read the short story aloud.
5. Each person is allowed 1 minute to discuss the questions.
6. Each person must begin by paraphrasing the comments of the previous speaker.
7. Each person, in all comments, must try to show how his or her remarks agree/disagree with the comments of the previous speaker.
8. After each speaker has had an opportunity to speak, the floor is open for general reactions.
9. Remember to be polite when agreeing and disagreeing with your partners.