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## Language of Today's Teens

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# The Language of Today's Teens \_\_\_\_\_

Lisa Singleton

Second Place Essay

When I first moved to Alabama, not knowing the job market here, I resorted to babysitting after a month of extensive job searching. I learned a great deal from that job. Perhaps the most profound lesson I learned was that nowadays teens purposely slaughter the English language.

One boy I babysat was a thirteen-year-old named Michael. Michael was in the eighth grade and at that age the most important things in his life were cool clothes, dark shades and cheerleaders. He bragged to me on several occasions about his uncanny ability to get his whole science class roaring with laughter whenever the teacher left the room. He told me that his weekly trips to the principal's office had become ritual. He explained, "The teacher blows up, I act upset to be sent to Mr. Kirkland's office (where there's a waiting list of six paddlings ahead of me), he comes out with his big old long glass paddle, looks at me as if I'm a criminal and then whacks my tail about four or five times. The whole time, the secretary is standing there watching me, trying to keep from cracking up with laughter. I don't know why my tail is any funnier than the six before me, but she laughs every time."

After Michael told me about this process he chose to go through weekly, I asked him what he had to say for himself. He said, "I ain't never heard of nobody else ever getting as many paddlings as me. They kinda add up after a year passes by."

I was so shocked by this boy's use of double negatives and his grammatical errors in general that I forgot what I asked him in the first place. I began to question Michael about his background in English education. He said he had taken English classes since the third grade and had always made A's. With that answer, I began questioning his school system in general. Were the teachers of his school giving the grade of "A" to children who did not know nouns from verbs? I ruled that out because Michael was otherwise very bright.

I finally realized that Michael was pulling the wool over someone's eyes. The more I babysat him, the more I realized that someone was me. One day I came right out and asked him, "Michael, how do you do so well in English if you speak so incorrectly?"

He replied, "It's 'cause the wronger I talk, the inner I am."

Since no interpreter was nearby, I asked him to explain. He said that speaking with double negatives and every other grammatical error was the "in" thing to do. "All the cool people talk badder than that," he continued.

I explained to Michael the dangers of this substandard usage. I told him that it would become habit, and that even though he knew better, it would become uncontrollable and his tongue would never again form sentences correctly. I even went as far as to tell him that no college would accept such a student who would not use the language grammatically. I thought Michael took my little lecture to heart. Instead, he took it to his mom.

*'... It's cause the wronger I talk, the inner I am.'*

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**Today's Teens...**  
**(continued)**

A few days later I was fired on the grounds of tongue lashing young Michael.

Today, Michael is a junior in high school. I see him occasionally and I always ask about his grades in English.

With a smirk on his face, the flippant Michael answers, "I don't see no reason why I won't get a 'A'. I don't never skip out on no homework or no other assignments. But if I don't make a 'A' that's alright too, 'cause like I told ya once before, the worser you talk the cooler you are—and I know for a fact that I talk the worstest."