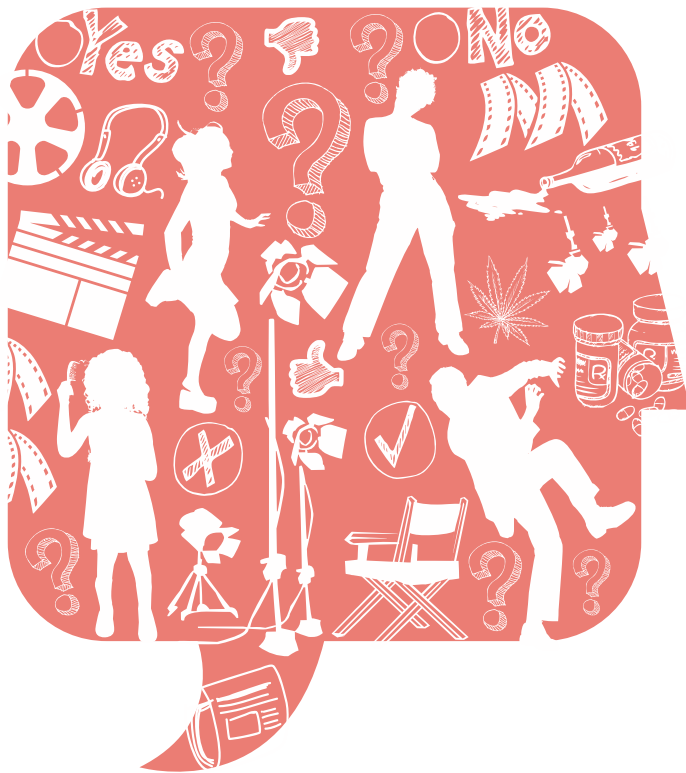


## This week's issue:

# SHOULD CHILDREN BE PROHIBITED FROM BECOMING ACTORS AT AN EARLY AGE?



Some child actors become successful adults, but many end up **confronting** drug and alcohol addictions, eating disorders, and criminal behavior. As they grow older, child actors are judged by the media and by people they've never met, a problem made worse by the anonymity the internet offers. Perez Hilton, who has a website devoted to insulting celebrities, mercilessly attacked child actors like Lindsey Lohan, Justin Bieber, and Amanda Bynes, all of whom have had problems with managing fame and fortune. **Furthermore**, Hilton's scathing observations often bring on hundreds more negative and distressing comments about the celebrities he targets. Internet "trolls" often compete to see who can leave the meanest and most hurtful criticisms. Stardom can bring money and fame, but all too often physical, mental, and emotional problems **emerge** as well. What explains these negative effects of early celebrity?

Some experts say that becoming a celebrity at an early age can **interfere** with a young person's normal emotional and physical growth. Many children who are pushed into acting or modeling or appearing in pageants at a very early age are being **exploited** by their parents. The children may have little control over their careers. Young celebrities often don't develop the skills needed to become successful adults. Many never learn to do everyday things like make their beds or cook their own meals or interact with others as equals. Young celebrities make huge amounts of money, get lots of attention, and are exposed to drugs, alcohol, and sex at an early age. This combination, some experts argue, is potentially disastrous for a developing child.

But some child actors turn out just fine. Joseph Gordon-Levitt, Natalie Portman, and Emma Watson seem to be happy and well-adjusted adults. They acted as children, and continued acting while going to college. Now they are successful adults with flourishing careers. Sometimes child actors develop insights about Hollywood that help them emerge as leaders of the industry. For example, Ron Howard, the director of *The Da Vinci Code* and many other box office hits, started off as a child actor.

So what do you think? Should children be prohibited from modeling, acting, and participating in pageants until they are old enough to make their own decisions about their careers? Should their parents be allowed to make the decision about whether their children perform?

# SHOULD CHILDREN BE PROHIBITED FROM BECOMING ACTORS AT AN EARLY AGE?



emerge | exploit | furthermore | confront | interfere

## USE THE FOCUS WORDS \*and alternate parts of speech

**emerge** (*verb*) to become known; to come into view

➡ **Sample Sentence:** Alana, or Honey Boo Boo, **emerged** as an audience favorite in the hit show *Toddlers & Tiaras*, a reality TV show about beauty pageants for young girls.

🗣️ **Turn and Talk:** What TV shows with child actors have **emerged** as hits over the last year?

**exploit** (*verb*) to make use of, often unfairly

➡ **Sample Sentence:** Some people argue that shows like *Here Comes Honey Boo Boo* and *Toddlers & Tiaras* **exploit** young children for the purpose of entertainment.

🗣️ **Turn and Talk:** In some countries, students have to clean their classrooms at the end of the day. Do you think these countries are **exploiting** students or teaching them a valuable lesson?

\***exploit** (*noun*) an exciting or daring act; an adventure

➡ **Sample Sentence:** Shania loved hearing about her mother's teenage **exploits**, which included a pie-eating contest.

🗣️ **Turn and Talk:** Describe your most recent **exploit**. Who was there and what happened?

**furthermore** (*adverb*) in addition to what came before

➡ **Sample Sentence:** Critics say that child actors are unprepared for fame, and **furthermore**, that they are unable to protect their own earnings.

🗣️ **Turn and Talk:** What is a book or movie that kept you interested from the beginning to the end? (Try this: The plot of \_\_\_\_\_ (title) was interesting because \_\_\_\_\_. **Furthermore**, the characters interested me because \_\_\_\_\_.)

**confront** (*verb*) to face, especially in challenge

➡ **Sample Sentence:** Some worry that these children will be **confronted** by viewers throughout their lives and reminded of embarrassing childhood behavior that they would rather forget.

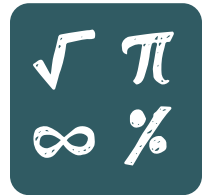
🗣️ **Turn and Talk:** How would you **confront** a friend who you suspected was saying bad things about you behind your back?

**interfere** (*verb*) to get in the way of; to prevent something from being done properly

➡ **Sample Sentence:** Some people also argue that participating in a reality TV show does not **interfere** with a child's ability to become a happy and productive adult.

🗣️ **Turn and Talk:** Do you think students should **interfere** when they see someone being bullied?

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## DO THE MATH

**Option 1:** In 2007, CBS aired a reality show called *Kid Nation*. On the show, 40 kids from 8 to 15 years old ran their own community without adult interference in a small town deserted since the late 1880s. As time went by, certain kids **emerged** as leaders and helped the group **confront** issues. **Furthermore**, the leaders were able to **exploit** opportunities to bring kids together, as when a girl named Morgan helped set up a no-pressure prayer time. Over the course of the season, Morgan was awarded two gold stars, worth a total of seventy thousand dollars.


Which of the following represents seventy thousand dollars?

- A. \$7,000
- B. \$70,000
- C. \$700,000
- D. \$70,000,000

**Option 2:** Some people accused CBS, the company that produced the TV show *Kid Nation*, of **exploiting** kids. These kids were put in situations designed to create conflicts that would make the TV show exciting. When kids got upset, their angry words or sad tears were broadcast to millions of people. The kids were on camera all the time, which would normally be a violation of rules about child labor hours. CBS said that the program was like summer camp, so the station did not have to follow child labor laws that protect kids who work. Parents had to sign a contract stating they would not sue the television network if anything bad happened to their kids.

On the other hand, if the kids chose to participate and their parents consented, why should anyone else **interfere**? Many of the kids wanted to be actors and they loved the attention. Some **emerged** as celebrities who appeared on talk shows and got acting roles. **Furthermore**, each participant was paid \$5,000 and some of the kids won bonus cash prizes of \$20,000 and \$50,000.

One \$20,000 cash prize was awarded to a new kid in each of the season's 13 episodes. Out of 40 contestants, what was the probability that any one kid would earn a \$20,000 cash prize?

 **Discussion Question:** Different observers tell conflicting stories of what happened on *Kid Nation*. Did adults **exploit** innocent kids to make money? Or did **emerging** young actors **exploit** an opportunity to become famous? **Furthermore**, who should decide if kids are being **exploited**, and who should **interfere** to protect them from exploitation?

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## THINK SCIENTIFICALLY

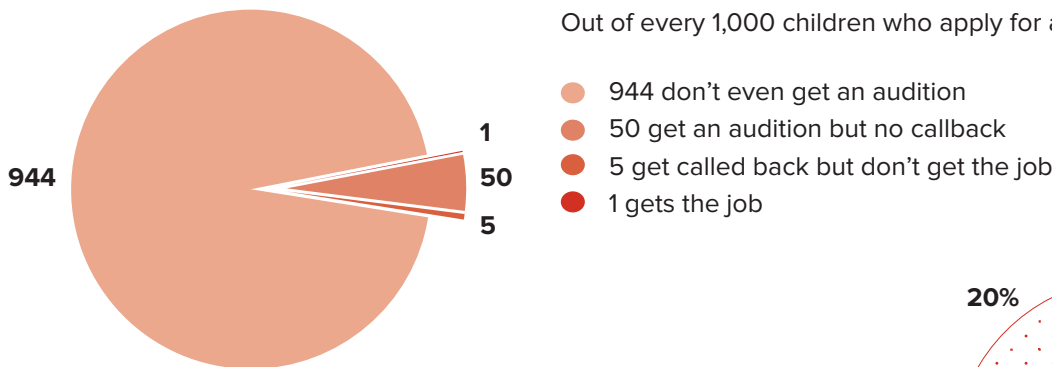
Mr. Seemy's students were talking about the history of cinema. Kyra, who was a movie buff, mentioned that child actors have been at risk of being **exploited** since the early days of film. "Jackie Coogan was about seven years old when he was in Charlie Chaplin's silent movie *The Kid* in 1921, and he played the title role in *Oliver Twist* in 1922. He kept working in show business as sound pictures began to **emerge**. He became the youngest person in history to earn over a million dollars. In fact, he earned about four million dollars by the time he turned 21. **Furthermore**, that's the equivalent of about 70 million of today's dollars! But a fat lot of good it did him: His mom and stepdad spent it all on cars, jewelry, and fancy clothes."

"That's right," said Mr. Seemy. "When a judge **confronted** them, Jackie's stepfather said, 'Every dollar a kid earns before he is 21 belongs to his parents.' It was too late for Jackie, but after Jackie's case the California legislature **interfered** with the ability of adults to **exploit** their children this way. They passed the Coogan Act, which says that 15 percent of the money a child actor earns must be put into a 'Coogan Account.' When the child turns 18, the Coogan Account money is theirs to keep."

Kyra and Anna were interested in whether child actors really make much money. Is a child actor likely to get a job? Are child actors financially exploited by the movie and television industry?

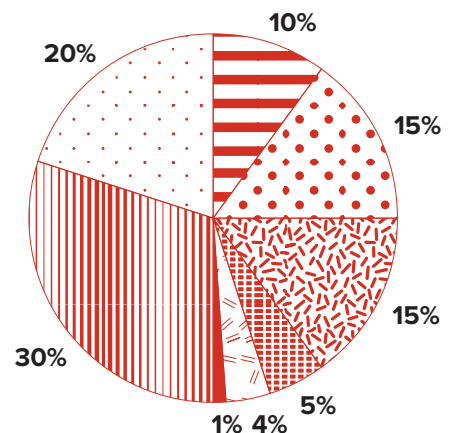
In California in 2010, about 21,000 work permits were issued to child actors between 8 and 16 years old. On average, 1,000 children apply for every new job in a film, TV show, or commercial. For those child actors able to find work, the average salary was \$52,000.

Out of every 1,000 children who apply for a particular job...



What is a typical breakdown of the average child actor's salary of \$52,000?

- To Agent: \$5,200
- To Manager: \$7,800
- To Coogan Account: \$7,800
- Photos and Portfolio: \$2,600
- Travel to filming locations: \$2,080
- Union Dues: \$520
- Taxes: \$15,600
- Take-Home Salary: \$10,400



Imagine for a moment that you want to be a child actor and appear in a candy commercial. Your talent agent sends your name to the company that is filming the commercial. What is the probability of you getting the job? What percent of aspiring child actors don't even get a first audition?

Based on the information about what happens to the money that child actors earn, do you think that they are **exploited** by adults and the film and TV industry?



