

## Right Now

telling stories, showing charts, and leading hands-on activities—to engage different intelligences.

Gardner admits that he's most excited by "the intimate aspects of mind-changing" in one-on-one relationships, such as that between a therapist and patient, an employer and employee, or two old friends. Here again, resonance—the ability to create a bond with another person and take the temperature of that connection—plays a key role. Gardner had been wondering if resonance could be built across a deep divide when he came upon the case of Thomas Jefferson and John Adams, who were bitter political rivals in the decades after the American Revolution. In their seventies, the two men famously changed their minds and reconciled, largely, he notes, by emphasizing their shared experiences.

The most intimate mind-changes may be those that occur in our own heads.

Here Gardner focused on monumental shifts, as when a government leader announces a major policy alteration. "People get emotionally attached to certain ideas, or publicly committed to certain ideas, and that makes self-mind-change especially difficult," he notes. He was particularly fascinated by the case of anthropologist Lucien Levy-Bruhl, who argued when he was young that the minds of primitive humans differed substantially from those of modern humans. During the next 50 years, however, Levy-Bruhl examined his arguments and in his private journals made an honest accounting of his errors and shifts in opinion—significant changes that occurred thanks to the lever Gardner calls reason.

He notes one additional factor—birth order—that may play a role in the ability to change one's mind. Some research suggests that, throughout history, first-born children have been slow to accept new

ideas, Gardner says (see "Born to Rebel," July-August 1995, page 10). "You find that later-borns are much more likely to embrace radically new ideas in science like Darwinism, radically new ideas in religion, like Protestantism, or radically new ideas in politics, like communism."

If you're stuck trying to win over a group of first-borns, you have all the more reason to think about which levers will be most convincing. Even in the best circumstances, Gardner reiterates, mind-change isn't a simple, or swift, proposition. He summons up the example of the New Testament figure who converted to Christianity only after a sudden bout of blindness. "For every Saul on the way to Damascus who has a real change of mind," he says, "there are hundreds of people who don't." ~ERIN O'DONNELL

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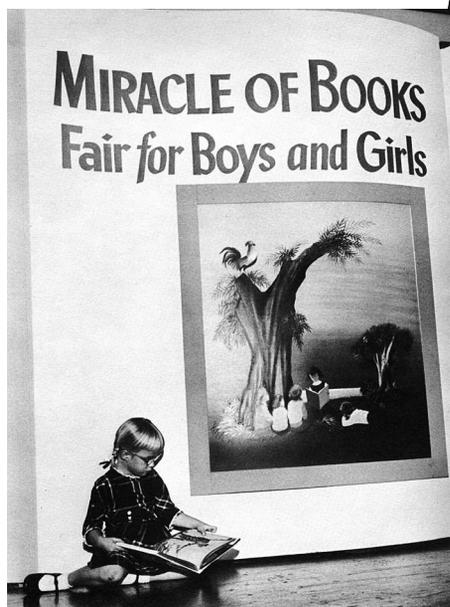
I'M, LIKE, READING

## Kids Turn New Pages

**P**ARENTS in the 1960s generally expected their children to be passive observers who did as they were told.

Today's parents are more likely to encourage kids to participate in the world around them, express their ideas, and render judgments. Evidence of this sea change turns up in an unexpected and largely unexamined medium: children's nonfiction books, reports Jay Gabler, Ed.M.'98, M.A.'00, a sociology graduate student whose doctoral dissertation examines various trends in the subject matter of children's nonfiction books between 1960 and 2000.

Children's books, he explains, have always "both explicitly and implicitly embodied social views regarding the world generally and childhood specifically. In the views of parents and publishers, childhood, over the past several decades, has come to be increasingly



associated with an autonomous, thinking individual who can and should make decisions of his or her own—as opposed to having his or her actions dictated by tradition and authority."



Both photographs are from a souvenir guide to the 1966 "Miracle of Books" fair in Chicago.

receiver of knowledge," Gabler writes in a paper he presented at the Third World Congress of the International Toy Research Association in 2002. "They explicitly *tell the child what to do.*" Nowadays, books on ethics (*It's Up to You...What Do You Do?*) have sup-

Using the R.R. Bowker Company's *Subject Guide to Books in Print* (a comprehensive reference that codes each title by subject), Gabler found that juvenile nonfiction subjects have expanded since 1960 to include topics that cast the child as an autonomous and empathetic individual. Conversely, subjects that contradict the idea of childhood autonomy, such as social customs and manners, have waned. "These [latter] books treat the child as a

furniture - jackets - golfballs - snowglobes - frames - watches tankards - bowls and more...

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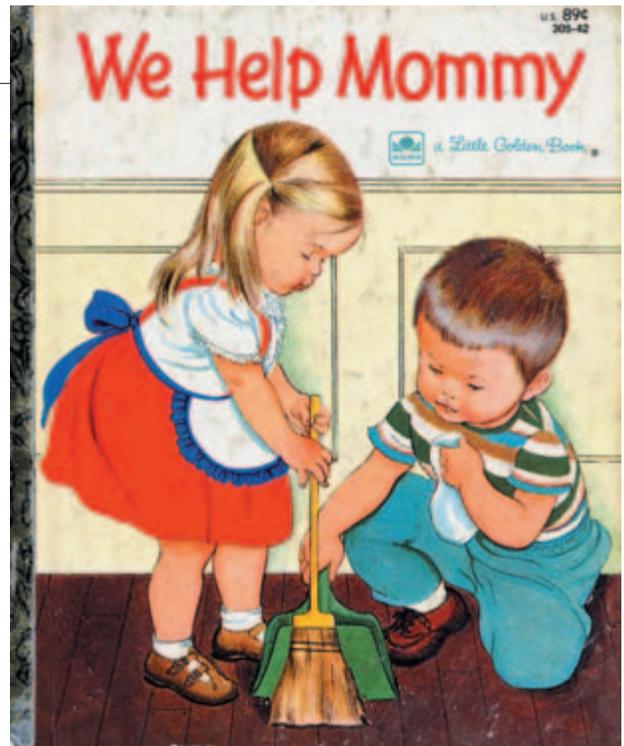
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planted those on manners, and books on painting have shouldered aside biographies of great artists. "The child is increasingly approached as an individual with an elaborate interior self capable of making independent and valid decisions about his or her own life," Gabler writes.

Dramatic increases appeared in the numbers of books published on topics traditionally reserved for adults. Psychology titles, for example, increased sharply from a mere eight in 1960 to 1,578 in 2000; ethics from one in 1960 to nearly 100 in 2000. And subjects entirely absent from children's bookshelves in 1960 have burgeoned, like Islam (220 books), Buddhism (25), and philosophy (37, including *Maybe Yes, Maybe No: A Guide for Young Skeptics*). Instead of preaching or instructing, these titles often try to involve the child directly. Philosophy books, for example, frequently encourage children to apply the subject to their own lives. "The focus is shifting," Gabler says, "from children's emulating great lives to children's creating great individual lives. To ask a child to emulate the life of say, Saint Francis, is to suggest to the child that the saint's life was somehow qualitatively better or more worthy than the child's own life."

Biographies of activists and educators (Mahatma Gandhi and Rachel Carson) now outnumber those of military or religious figures (Douglas MacArthur or Mary Baker Eddy). "The hero whom the child aspires to be now," Gabler says, "looks more like a force for social change and less like a traditional deity of the status quo—supporting the hypothesis that tradition is being radically de-emphasized for children." Lives of military figures, European geographies, and didactic volumes on etiquette and hygiene no longer dominate bookshelves as they did in 1960, perhaps reflecting a more general shift away from a hierarchical, Eurocentric world view.

Of course, adult views on children were changing long before 1960. A 1988 study by sociologist Duane F. Alwin compared the results of a 1924 survey of mothers in



The cover of a Little Golden Book from 1959

Muncie, Indiana, on desirable traits in children with those of a similar survey given to Muncie mothers in 1978. In 1924, "loyalty to the church," "strict obedience," and "good manners" were paramount. But by 1978, parents desired "independence," "tolerance," and "social mindedness" in their kids. Gabler's research shows that the same trends continue 25 years later in published form.

Because adults write, publish, and purchase children's books, their views definitively shape the books' content. But even though an increase in certain types of children's books, such as self-help texts, may reflect adults' own interests in those subjects, trends in children's nonfiction topics do not simply mirror those of the adult nonfiction market, Gabler explains. In fact, adults' opinions on what children should learn and read about (AIDS, Islam, and depression, for example), are more influential in determining content than what adults choose to read for themselves. Thus the relative growth of children's books on religion has exceeded by about threefold the relative growth of such titles for adults. "Obviously this suggests that we want our kids to learn about the subject—but we're not so likely to go to Barnes and Noble and pick up a book on church teachings for ourselves."

~CATHERINE DUPREE

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