

Youth Culture Lesson
Finding Teachable Moments in Culture
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Special Where It Counts:

Junior High Students Build Award-Winning Car

By Paul Asay

What Happened:

It might not look like much. The car is made of corrugated plastic. It's powered by a Robin/Subaru engine that generates 1.3 horsepower. It has no air conditioning, no radio and only seats one.

Still, for all its outward flaws, the car is pretty special. For one thing, it was built from scratch by a group of seventh and eighth graders from Aurora Junior High School in Aurora, Missouri. For another, it's a pretty shade of red. Oh, it also gets 358 miles per gallon.

The car took the checkered flag in the Missouri SuperMileage Challenge—a contest won not by the fastest vehicle, but the most fuel-efficient. The kids, participating in an industrial technology class led by instructor Marcus Reynolds, built the car for the contest and were competing against a bevy of other, older competitors.

In other words, these 13- and 14-year-olds made an award-winning car though they're not old enough to drive, which might make some of these kids a little like the car itself.

Middle school and junior high can be pretty weird. Anyone who's experienced this season knows it can be a tough time. Some kids grow super fast but don't gain any weight, so they look and feel like gangly scarecrows. Others don't grow much at all. Lots of middle schoolers feel awkward or ugly. Many wish they could skip the whole period of their lives and get on with high school.

Even if you aren't thrilled with what you see on the outside, the old cliché is true: It really is what's inside you that matters most. You've got a lot to offer your friends, your family and your world; and that's an important thing to remember.

Talk About It:

What sorts of gifts has God given you? What do you do well? Are there ways you could use those skills and talents to help those around you? Are there ways you're doing so already?

Are there times when you feel out of place? As if you're not as strong or smart as the people around you? That you just don't fit or belong? Do you have ways to combat those feelings?

Do you ever feel as if you have something to offer—maybe at home, school or church—but you’re not really given a chance to use your talents? Do you ever feel as if adults around you think of you and your friends as kids and don’t trust you to do what you know you’re capable of doing?

What the Bible Says:

Throughout the Bible, God uses many unlikely heroes—people who weren’t as rich, strong or as talented as some of the other folks around them—who made big differences in God’s plans. Perhaps the best example is David well before he faced Goliath.

Jesse, David’s father, had eight sons. David was the youngest, which in the culture of the day meant he was the least powerful, the least important. So when God told His prophet Samuel to visit Jesse’s house and anoint one of his sons to be the new king of Israel, Samuel assumed it’d be the eldest. In fact, he was all ready to anoint the guy when God spoke up.

“But the Lord said to Samuel, ‘Do not consider his appearance or his height, for I have rejected him. The Lord does not look at the things man looks at. Man looks at the outward appearance, but the Lord looks at the heart’” (1 Sam. 16:7).

Samuel met seven of Jesse’s sons. David was so unimportant that Jesse didn’t even bring him in to meet Samuel. Yet when Samuel refused to sit down until meeting Jesse’s youngest son, Jesse sent for him.

“Then the Lord said, ‘Rise and anoint him; he is the one.’ So Samuel took the horn of oil and anointed him in the presence of his brothers, and from that day on the Spirit of the Lord came upon David in power” (1 Sam. 16:12).