

Some kids, including motocross racer Eric Burdell, 12, of Quartz Hill, California, have been doing extreme sports for years.



## Should Kids Be Allowed to Do Extreme Sports?

FOR 15-YEAR-OLD snowboarder Chloe Kim, nothing beats the thrill of zooming down a ramp at top speed and pulling off new tricks. This month, the teen from California will go for her second gold medal at the Winter X Games, a competition that showcases extreme sports. Last year, Chloe won first place in the women's snowboard SuperPipe, becoming the competition's youngest gold medalist ever.



Chloe Kim, age 15

Chloe is hardly alone in her love of extreme sports. In recent years, big-thrill activities like snowboarding, rock climbing, and skateboarding have skyrocketed in popularity—and more athletes, including kids, are taking part. According to a report from PHIT America, a company that promotes physical fitness, activities like BMX racing and windsurfing are among the fastest-growing sports in the U.S.

Some people say that participating in extreme sports keeps teens active and helps them learn to take age-appropriate risks, overcome their fears, and push their limits.

But critics say extreme sports are too dangerous for teens. They point out that young thrill seekers often attempt stunts that are too advanced for them, which can lead to serious injuries—or even death.

Should kids take part in extreme sports? Two experts weigh in.



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LEKON BILSCOWICZ/ISTOCK BY GETTY IMAGES; ERIC BURDELLI/IMOTUM; SATO/AE/CONIPPO NEWS/CORBIS; CHLOE KIM

**YES** It's well-known that physical activity has many health benefits. Unfortunately, many kids today have lost interest in traditional sports. But activities such as snowboarding, mountain biking, and motocross are steadily becoming more popular. And that's a good thing.

Although some extreme sports are associated with a higher potential for injury, it may be this very risk that helps get—and keep—teens involved. If kids believe that they aren't challenged by an activity, they might lose interest.

It's important that young people learn to take chances and push their boundaries. Doing so is crucial to figuring out when to take risks—and when not to. Risk-free activities deprive kids of the opportunity to test themselves and overcome their fears.

Risk is a fact of life. Consider something as simple as driving to school or work. Daily commuting is associated with a large number of car accidents. But we wouldn't suggest that kids never get in a car. Instead, we tell people that they can protect themselves by wearing a seat belt.

To avoid serious injuries when taking part in extreme sports, kids should be honest with themselves about their skill level. Athletes who compete in the X Games or the Olympics spend years working their way up to the gravity-defying stunts they perform on TV. Kids who are new to action sports should avoid the most dangerous tricks until they're ready. And they should always wear a helmet.

Teens may lack the ability to judge risks and the consequences of failure. That's why it's important for them to have guidance from a coach or parent. Nevertheless, extreme sports can still be part of a healthy, balanced life.

—JAMIE BURR

**Professor of Exercise Physiology  
University of Guelph, Canada**

**Participating in  
extreme sports  
helps kids  
learn when to  
take risks.**

**NO** Sports that include flying through the air on a motorcycle or doing flips before landing on an icy mountainside are extremely dangerous. They involve a level of risk that's far greater than soccer, basketball, or baseball.

With extreme sports, we're not just talking about the possibility of a broken leg. I have treated several motocross riders who suffered broken bones that left them disabled. One of my patients lost his leg in an ATV accident. Massive head trauma that can cause permanent brain damage and even death is a very real possibility.

Last year, I was part of a team that studied injuries related to extreme sports. We found that more than 4 million injuries resulting from these activities occurred between 2000 and 2011. About 40,000 of those involved the head or neck. Such injuries can be very serious and can lead to lifelong disabilities.

Even the most advanced protective equipment can't prevent all injuries. Helmets aren't made to withstand the high-level impact of these sports. And because children grow so fast, it's hard to fit protective gear correctly. Not to mention that research shows kids' brains are more vulnerable to the effects of injuries and take longer to recover.

Kids don't have the tools they need to make good choices about whether participating in extreme sports is worth the risk. It's not just a matter of emotional maturity. It's a matter of brain development. Scientists have found that the part of the brain that guides impulse control and weighs risks isn't fully mature in teens.

That's why adults need to step in and tell kids that they have to wait to participate in these very dangerous sports—at least until they're old enough to be responsible for their own decisions.

—DR. VANI SABESAN

**Associate Professor  
Wayne State University School of Medicine, Michigan**

**Taking part in  
extreme sports  
puts kids at risk of  
serious injuries.**

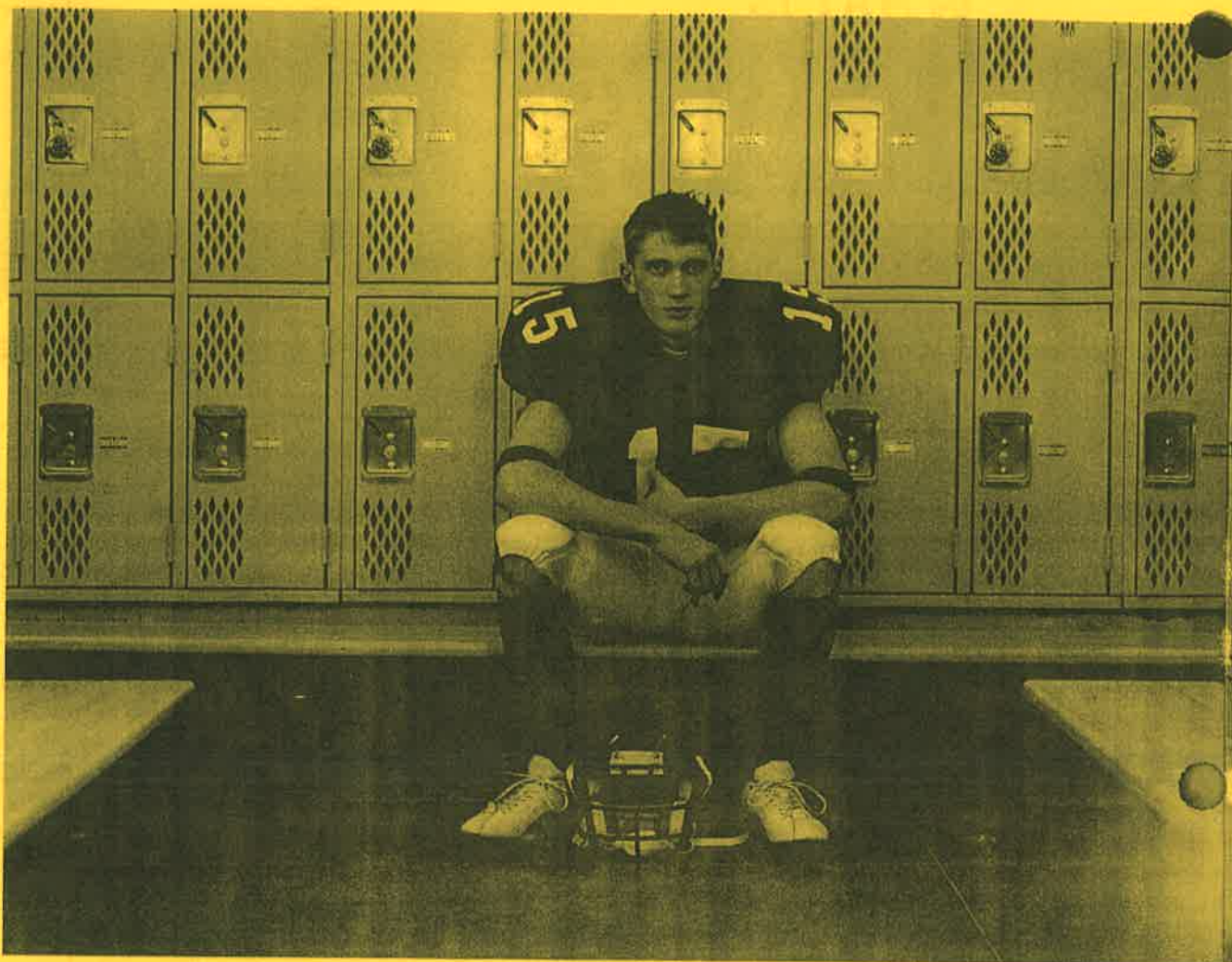
**YOUR  
TURN**

Who do you think makes the stronger argument? Why?



Watch a video. Then **vote** yes or no: Should kids be allowed to do extreme sports? Visit [scholastic.com/js](http://scholastic.com/js).





## Should Schools Eliminate Sports Teams?

SPORTS ARE A HUGE PART of the American school experience. Last year, almost 8 million high school students participated in organized athletics.

But some schools are considering cutting back or even eliminating their sports programs. One reason is increasingly tight school budgets. Team sports can be a major expense for a school, especially sports that require a lot of equipment, like football.

Another factor is the nationwide push to raise academic standards. The more time and attention faculty and students give to classwork, the less there is for extracurricular activities. Safety concerns—such as injuries to student athletes—are also leading some schools to take a closer look at their sports programs.

Yet enthusiasm for athletics is strong and growing. According to the National Federation of State

High School Associations, participation in school sports has increased by about 34 percent over the past 20 years. Experts point to the important role that physical activity plays in kids' ability to focus in school as well as in their overall health and well-being—including boosting their self-confidence.

Should schools eliminate sports teams? Read what two experts on the subject have to say.

**YES** In the world's smartest countries, such as Finland and South Korea, school is about learning. Kids play sports outside of school, at recreation centers, on club teams, or in pickup games on dirt fields with no adults in sight.

When kids from these countries come to the U.S. to live or study, they're surprised by what they encounter in our high schools. School in the U.S. is about learning,

of course, but it's also about pep rallies, booster clubs, trophy cases, and cheerleaders.

Those messages shape kids' priorities. When I surveyed former exchange students about their impressions of the U.S., 9 out of 10 said that

American teenagers cared more about sports than their peers back home did. "Doing well at sports was, in the U.S., just as important as having good grades," observed one German student.

This mash-up of sports and academics makes school more fun. The problem is the dishonesty. By mixing the two, we lead kids into believing that it's OK if they don't like math or writing—that there is another path to success. It's not lost on kids that their local newspapers devote an entire section to high school sports and say nothing about the travails of 10th-grade English class. This hypocrisy eats away at the focus and integrity of our schools.

Imagine if medical schools dedicated hours each day (and a chunk of their budgets and staff) to the culinary arts—to perfecting elegant wedding cakes and fancy breads. We could argue that this approach would make medical school more fun and keep students from dropping out, but that would be insane.

If we want to build school spirit and teach kids about grit, hold a pep rally for the debate team. Those kids are training to rule the real world.

*Amanda Ripley*

*Author, The Smartest Kids in the World*

**Mixing sports and academics can give kids the wrong idea about what's needed to succeed.**

**NO** Most college students can't remember what they had for lunch three days ago. But ask them for memories of competitive sports they played in high school, and suddenly you'll hear stories about when they pitched for their school baseball or softball team, scored a winning goal in soccer, or made a three-point shot for their basketball squad. That's because sports offer formative lessons that stick with people forever.

Research shows that people who played for a varsity high school team tend to donate more time to community service and more money to charities. They also tend to get better jobs, with better pay.

Hiring managers expect former student-athletes to have more self-confidence, more self-respect, and better leadership skills than people who participated in other high school extracurriculars. A study of people who graduated from high school more than five decades earlier showed that those expectations are valid.

While it's certainly true that there's not necessarily a relationship between youth sports and education, eliminating sports from high schools would have serious consequences on and off the playing field. For young people whose families can't afford the cost of participating in private sports programs, it would limit access to an important set of opportunities that schools

currently provide. It also would make it harder for them to gain the kinds of experiences that appear to be rewarded later on in the workplace.

Team sports in schools provide clear and robust long-term benefits—to both the individuals who participate and society as a whole. Keeping competitive sports programs in schools is the best way to make sure that they're widely available to all American youth.

*Kevin M. Kniffin*

*Assistant Professor and Sports Researcher,  
Cornell University, Ithaca, New York*

**Playing team sports can lead to opportunities that pay off later.**

**YOUR TURN**

What additional reasons can you think of to support each side?



Vote yes or no: Should schools eliminate sports teams? Visit [scholastic.com/js](http://scholastic.com/js).





# Should Voting Be Mandatory in the U.S.?

HILLARY CLINTON and Donald Trump are all over the news, but that doesn't mean Americans will vote for either of them next fall—or for any candidate for that matter. Only 54 percent of eligible voters cast ballots in the 2012 presidential election, including 41 percent of 18- to 24-year-olds. Voter turnout for the 2014 midterm election was even lower—about 36 percent, the lowest for a national election in 72 years.

Having millions of eligible voters stay home on Election Day is a major problem, says Barry C. Burden, a professor of political science at the University of Wisconsin-Madison. "Voting is how politicians hear from their **constituents**," he explains. "If only 40 percent of people are participating, it means politicians will be listening more to some people than others."

Some people say that requiring citizens to vote would make

more Americans' voices heard. (Voting is already **compulsory** in more than 25 countries, including Australia, Belgium, Mexico, and Thailand.) Plus, supporters of that idea say, voting is one of our civic responsibilities. But many other people contend that forcing citizens to vote would be un-American.

Should voting be mandatory in the United States? Here's what two professors have to say.





BRIAN CASSELL/ISTOCKPHOTO.COM (TOP); JIM SPELLMAN/ISTOCKPHOTO.COM (MIDDLE); MARIO TAMARIT/ISTOCKPHOTO.COM (BOTTOM LEFT); PATRICK HERRERA/ISTOCKPHOTO.COM (BOTTOM MIDDLE)

**YES** Everyone should be required by law to vote. Democracy doesn't work if a large portion of the population doesn't participate.

Mandatory voting is the best way to encourage politicians to focus their attention on *all* Americans, not just the middle and upper classes. Because wealthier Americans are more likely to vote, government policies are disproportionately geared toward their interests. Unfortunately, the people who most often fail to vote are the ones who are already left behind—the poor, the unemployed, the less educated, and the homeless.

If voting were mandatory in the U.S., people would be inspired to pay more attention to campaigns—and current events. Compulsory voting would also allow candidates to spend less time and money on getting voters to the polls, and more on explaining where they stand on key issues.

Australia has had mandatory voting for federal elections since 1924. People who don't cast ballots have to pay a fine of about \$20. As a result, about 94 percent of eligible voters turn out. On top of that, perhaps because more people are involved in choosing their representatives, Australians report high levels of trust in government and satisfaction with the way democracy works. By comparison, a recent poll by the Pew Research Center found that just 24 percent of Americans trust the federal government.

Voting is more than a right—it's a responsibility. If Americans want their government to truly be of the people, by the people, and for the people, everyone has to go to the polls on Election Day.

—LISA HILL

**Professor of Politics and International Studies,  
University of Adelaide, Australia**

**NO** The government shouldn't force people to vote. Doing so would flood the polls with millions of uninformed voters. Some Americans know a lot about politics, economics, foreign affairs, and current events. Others know hardly anything. Requiring uninformed people to vote would be like forcing them to fly an airplane or perform surgery without training.

Elections have high stakes. Our votes help influence matters of war and peace, poverty and prosperity, justice and injustice—not just in the U.S., but all over the world. Bad decisions at the polls can result in devastating wars, damaging laws, and disastrous economic policies.

Some people argue that voting is a civic responsibility. In my view, Americans who choose not to vote can exercise their civic duties in other ways, such as volunteering to help their communities or serving on a jury. But if they *do* vote, they owe it to themselves—and others—to be informed about the issues on the ballot.

Furthermore, having a right to do something doesn't mean you should be *required* to do it. For instance, we have the right to write novels or do science experiments, but it would be a violation of our individual freedom if the government forced us to do those things. Why should voting be any different?

There are better ways to fix low voter turnout in the U.S. One option is to make it easier for people to register to vote.

We could also lengthen the hours the polls are open or have Election Day on a weekend instead of a Tuesday. Such changes would be more effective—and more democratic—than forcing people to vote whether they want to or not.

—JASON BRENNAN

**Professor of Strategy, Economics, Ethics and Public Policy, Georgetown University, Washington, D.C.**

**Mandatory voting is the best way to ensure that elected officials represent the interests of all Americans.**

**Forcing Americans to vote would flood the polls with millions of uninformed voters.**

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Who do you think makes the stronger argument? Why?



Vote yes or no: Should voting be mandatory in the U.S.? Visit [scholastic.com/js](http://scholastic.com/js).





Tens of millions of coins are made at the U.S. Mint in Philadelphia each day.

## Should the U.S. Get Rid of the Penny?

THE U.S. TREASURY is considering a big move that could result in less small change. The government department, which oversees the production of all American coins and currency, recently announced that it's debating whether to stop making pennies. Why?

Thanks to the rising price of zinc—the main component of pennies—it costs more to make a penny than the coin is worth. (The price of producing one

penny is now about 1.7 cents.) In 2014, the U.S. spent more than \$130 million to make and distribute nearly 8 billion pennies.

In addition to the cost, supporters of ditching pennies point out that many Americans just don't value them. Instead of being used to buy goods, the coins often end up lying around—on sidewalks or between couch cushions.

But many people say that a low-denomination coin helps

keep prices lower. Without it, businesses might round prices up. In addition, polls by Americans for Common Cents, a group funded by the zinc industry, show that the majority of the nation wants to keep the penny.

In recent years, several countries, including Australia, Brazil, Canada, and New Zealand, have done away with their one-cent coins. Should the U.S. follow suit? Two experts weigh in.



**YES** In the 1920s, a few pennies could buy you a handful of candy, a bottle of soda, or a newspaper. These days, many people don't even bother picking up pennies off the street.

The sad fact is that a century of **inflation** has eroded the value of the penny to the point that it's no longer useful as a currency. Indeed, continuing to use the penny actually slows down cash transactions.

What's more, the Treasury Department calculates that it costs more than a penny to make a penny. At a time when the federal budget is under increasing stress, the government shouldn't be wasting valuable resources to produce a coin that many people don't even want.

If pennies aren't useful as a currency, why are we still making them? One reason is that some businesses, such as zinc suppliers, continue to lobby to prevent their elimination.

Several countries have recently gotten rid of their one-cent coins. Canada, which has a monetary system very similar to that of the United States, retired its penny in 2012. As one member of the Canadian Parliament's Senate Finance Committee noted at the time, the penny "slows down the line at grocery stores and ends up under our couches."

Remarkably, the penny has been the lowest-denomination coin in the U.S. for more than 150 years. (The half-penny was discontinued in 1857.) A simple way to retire the penny would be to round cash transactions up or down to the nearest nickel. That's how pricing is already done on U.S. military bases overseas.

It's about time for the country to follow this no-nonsense approach and retire the penny once and for all.

—JEFF GORE

**Founder, Citizens to Retire the U.S. Penny**

**NO** More and more purchases are being made with credit and debit cards. At the same time, the cost of producing coins is increasing. So does it still make sense to keep the penny in circulation? The answer, for a number of reasons, is a resounding **yes**.

First and foremost, consumers benefit from having the penny. A low-denomination coin helps keep prices in check. If we get rid of the penny, cash transactions would be rounded to the nearest nickel. That would make goods and services more expensive: Since the objective of any business is to maximize profits, most prices would be rounded up, not down. Spending a few extra pennies here and there may not sound like a lot, but it can really add up over time.

There's also strong public support for keeping the penny. A recent poll found that 68 percent of Americans want the coin to stay in circulation.

It's wrong to suggest that halting production of the penny would save the government money. Without pennies, we'll need to make more nickels. But it costs more than 8 cents to produce a nickel—much more than it costs to make a penny.

Eliminating the one-cent coin would also hurt certain charities, such as the Salvation Army and Ronald McDonald House, which raise millions of dollars through penny drives. The Leukemia & Lymphoma Society has collected more than 1.5 billion pennies (\$15 million) for their Pennies for Patients program. That's not small change.

The bottom line is that the penny remains popular with the public and important to our monetary system. If we want to protect America's hardworking families and continue to help charities raise money, we need to keep making the penny.

—MARK WELLER

**Executive Director, Americans for Common Cents**

**Eliminating the penny would save the government millions of dollars.**

**The penny benefits consumers by saving them money.**

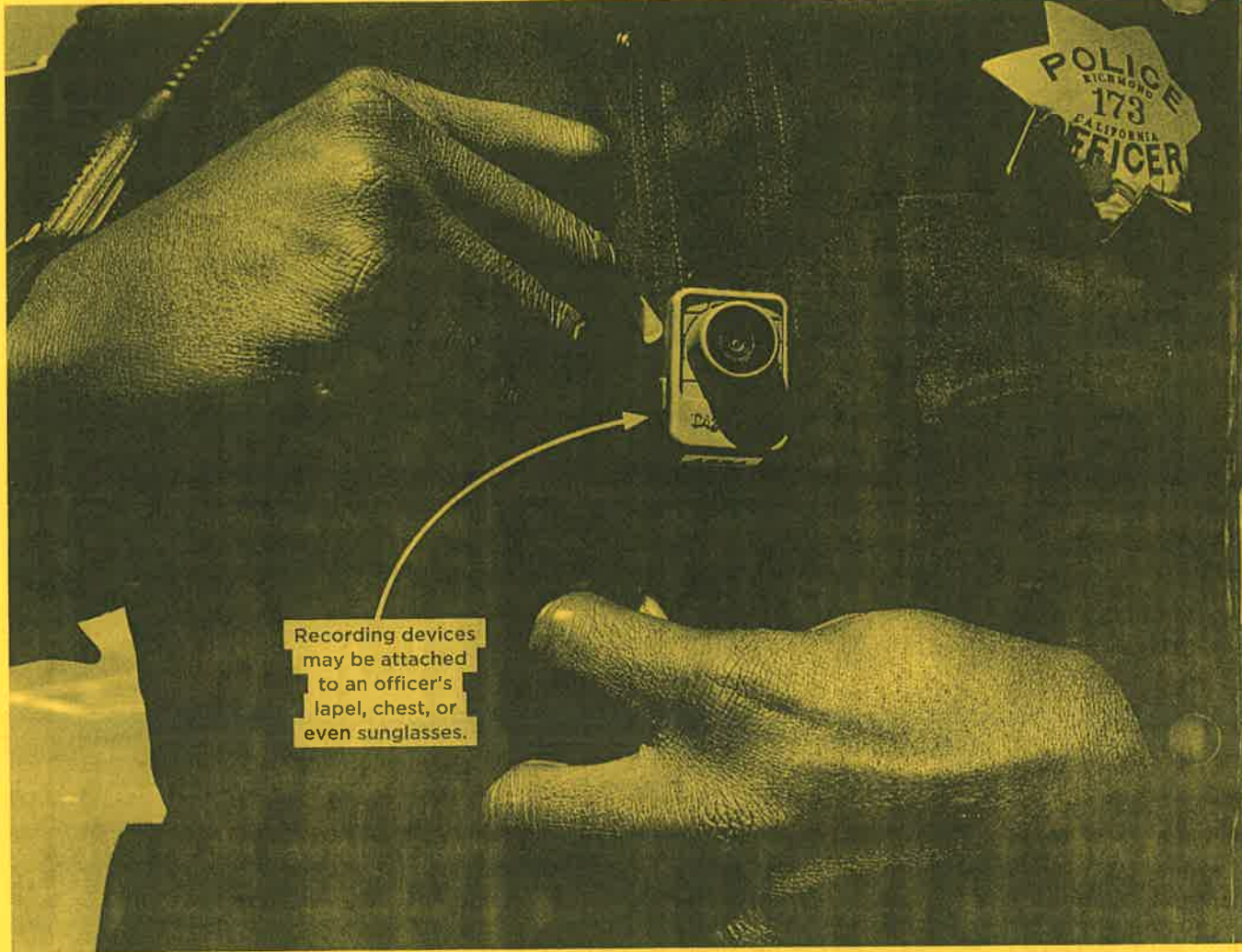
**YOUR TURN**

What are two facts and two opinions from each expert?



Vote yes or no: Should the United States get rid of the penny? Visit [scholastic.com/js](http://scholastic.com/js) to cast your ballot.





Recording devices may be attached to an officer's lapel, chest, or even sunglasses.

## Should Police Officers Wear Body Cameras?

BY LAURA ANASTASIA, WITH ADDITIONAL REPORTING BY VERONICA MAJEROL

**I**n August 2014, Michael Brown, an unarmed black teenager, was fatally shot by a police officer in Ferguson, Missouri. Some witnesses confirmed the officer's account that he shot Brown in self-defense. Others said Brown had posed no threat and that the shooting was unjustified. The officer wasn't charged with a crime.

But what if he'd been wearing a camera that had taped the encoun-

ter? Perhaps our understanding of the interaction would be clearer—and the outcome different.

Brown's death, and other tragedies involving unarmed **civilians**, many of them black, and law enforcement over the past year, has sparked a national conversation about whether police should wear body cameras.

In May, the Obama administration launched a \$75 million

program to test their effectiveness. "The community wants to know what police are doing," Lindsay Miller, of the Police Executive Research Forum, notes. "Body cameras are a good way to show that."

Critics say the devices cost too much, invade people's privacy, and aren't properly regulated.

Should officers record their time on duty? Our experts weigh in.



**YES** Proponents of body cameras say that they help eliminate he-said, she-said situations. Their footage can provide valuable evidence in cases where police and civilian accounts of events differ. "In court, the jury can see what exactly happened," explains Richard Beary, president of the International Association of Chiefs of Police. "It's a very factual depiction of what transpired."

This can help to protect police officers and police departments from costly lawsuits. "There are a lot of false accusations, and the videos prove the officers right about 99 percent of the time," Beary says.

That's one reason Jason Parker, head of the police department in Dalton, Georgia (where some officers have been strapping on body cams for four years), believes the majority of law enforcement officials in the U.S. are in favor of body cameras. "They [want to] demonstrate to the public that they're doing things in a professional manner and that by and large, they are using a great deal of restraint."

Supporters of body cameras, including Tony Farrar, the chief of police in Rialto, California, also point to evidence that the devices may help positively influence officers' behavior. Farrar's 106-person force has been studying the effects of body-worn cameras for three years. Officers wearing the recording devices are 66 percent less likely to use force, the data show. Rialto also receives up to 88 percent fewer complaints about police conduct when officers clip on cameras.

Police officers aren't the only ones who are more mindful when they're being recorded, Farrar notes. The devices can also help civilians keep their cool. "We will tell them, 'Just so you know, you're being recorded,' and that tends to de-escalate some situations," he explains.

**The footage cameras provide can serve as valuable evidence when police and civilian accounts of events differ.**

**NO** Body cameras will record a lot more than controversial encounters between civilians and police, say critics. For instance, an officer walking down a busy city street could document thousands of people and interactions in just a single afternoon.

"Cops show up at a call for a domestic disturbance and little kids are running around in their underwear in the background," notes Jeff Roorda, business manager for the St. Louis Police Officers Association in Missouri. Such recordings raise huge privacy concerns, especially because in some states, anyone can access them.

Washington State citizens, for example, have the right to file a request for body camera recordings. But handling individual requests can be time-consuming and expensive. So in Seattle, where a dozen officers started wearing the devices in a pilot program last December, the department has come up with a cheap and easy way to share the videos with the public: It uploads them to a YouTube channel with no privacy protections.

The cost of the technology is another concern. "Just to equip the 100 largest police departments in the country would be well over a billion dollars," Roorda says. Departments would also have to pay for software updates, storage, and personnel to manage the recordings.

Also, critics say, the devices are being rushed into service without clear guidelines for their use. For instance, some people, like Trevor Timm, executive director of the Freedom of the Press Foundation, are concerned that many police departments lack regulations about when officers can press stop. "If [they] don't immediately get fired for turning off the camera" before they do something they don't want recorded, Timm says, "police officers are going to turn their camera off."

**Recordings raise huge privacy concerns. In some states, anyone can access the videos.**

**YOUR TURN**

What additional reasons can you think of to support each side?



Vote yes or no: Should police wear body cameras? Visit [scholastic.com/j5](http://scholastic.com/j5).





Should she earn less than her adult co-workers?

## Is It Fair to Pay Teens Less Than Adults?

**DO YOU OR AN OLDER SIBLING** have a part-time job? Maybe you serve drinks at a coffee shop or tutor the kids down the street. In the U.S., teens as young as 14 are allowed to hold most non-agricultural positions.

But getting that first job can be a major challenge. Young people today face the highest unemployment rate of all age groups in the country. The U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics estimates that more than 15 percent of teens ages 16 to 19 who are actively

looking for work can't find jobs.

Some lawmakers believe they've come up with a way to change that: lowering the **minimum wage** for teens, to encourage businesses to hire them. That would allow young people to gain work experience so they can find higher-paying jobs in the future, supporters of the idea say.

In the state of Washington, lawmakers are debating a bill that would lower the minimum wage for anyone under 20 to \$8.05 an hour. (Adults

in Washington must be paid at least \$9.47 an hour.) A similar measure is in effect in Michigan, and another is being considered in South Dakota.

But opponents of a lower minimum wage for teens say it's unfair. They point out that young people work just as hard as adults and shouldn't be paid less because of their age. Plus, critics note, many teens use their wages to help support their families.

Is it fair to pay teens less than adults? Two experts weigh in.



**YES** You need experience to get hired, but unless you get hired, you can't get experi-

ence. Many young people across the country face this dilemma. A lower minimum wage for teens would encourage businesses to hire them. That would give teens more opportunities to gain work experience and learn valuable life and career skills, such as the importance of showing up to work on time and how to be professional and reliable.

Federal law limits what teens can do while on the job. At grocery stores, for example, teens under 18 can bag goods, but they aren't allowed to operate a cardboard-box compactor. When young people can't do parts of the job, employers

have to hire someone else to do those tasks. If there are going to be legal restrictions on what teens can do, then it makes sense that their pay is lower as well.

Plus, your average teen doesn't have the same kinds of skills that workers in, say, their 20s have. When employers have to pay everyone the same starting wage, it often makes more sense for them to hire older, more-skilled workers instead of teens.

A high youth unemployment rate is bad for society. Research shows that unemployed teens are more likely to drop out of high school and become involved with the criminal justice system. Studies have also found that students with part-time jobs are more likely to earn higher wages in the future compared with their classmates who don't have jobs.

I appreciate the fact that some teens need to work to help support their families. But to do that, they need to land the job in the first place.

The bottom line is that lowering the minimum wage for teens makes it easier for them to find jobs. And putting *all* Americans back to work will ultimately help improve our nation's economy.

—BOB BATTLES

**General Counsel & Government Affairs Director,  
Association of Washington Business**

**NO** Why should workers get paid less simply because they happen to be teenagers? If a teen is performing the same tasks as a 20-year-old, he or she should earn the same amount of money.

Many teens have to work to help support their families. Others live on their own or are trying to save money for college. In recent years, the cost of higher education has skyrocketed. According to the College Board, average annual tuition and fees at four-year public colleges and universities have increased by 40 percent—or nearly \$3,000—since 2006. If teens are forced to accept lower wages, it will be even harder for them to afford a degree. And research shows that people who have graduated from college typically earn higher wages.

Young people aren't the only ones who would be affected by creating a lower teen wage. It could also displace older workers. Employers might prefer to hire a rotating series of teens because it would be cheaper.

A lot of pay inequality already exists in the United States. For example, the Bureau of Labor Statistics estimates that women earn about 78 cents for every dollar a man makes. We shouldn't pass laws that reinforce wage discrimination—especially when there's little evidence to suggest that businesses would be more likely to hire teens if they could pay them less than adults.

Not to mention, the U.S. economy depends heavily on consumer spending, and teens spend billions of

dollars every year. If young people earn less money, they won't spend as much. That's bad for the economy.

Every hardworking American deserves to receive fair compensation, and that includes teens. After all, isn't paying people an honest wage for honest work a fundamental American value?

—MARILYN WATKINS

**Policy Director,  
Economic Opportunity Institute**

## A lower minimum wage for teens would encourage businesses to hire them.

## It's unfair to pay teens less than adults are paid just because of their age.

**YOUR  
TURN**

What are two facts and two opinions from each expert?



Vote yes or no: Is it fair to pay teens less than adults? Visit [scholastic.com/js](http://scholastic.com/js) to cast your ballot.





## Are Smartphones Making Us Stupid?

SIXTY-FOUR PERCENT of Americans own smartphones, according to a recent survey. Among young people ages 18 to 29, the number is even higher: 85 percent. We carry them everywhere and use them for everything from keeping in touch with friends and family members to watching videos.

Many people say that smartphones have made our lives easier by giving us instant access to the latest news and information. With just the tap of a finger, we can find our way around an unfamiliar city, discover new music, or research stats about our favorite athletes.

But is that constant connection to our phones such a good thing? Some people say the devices are making us more obsessed with ourselves and less aware of the world around us.

Two technology experts face off on whether smartphones are having a negative effect on our lives.



**YES** The idea that smartphones are making us stupid might, at first, sound a little crazy. After all, that iPhone or Samsung Galaxy in your pocket is actually an incredibly sophisticated computer and camera with the power to immediately connect you with anyone in the world. You could write a novel, edit a movie, or solve a complex math problem on this magical device.

But, of course, most of us *aren't* writing novels, editing movies, or solving complex math problems with our smartphones. Instead, we're using our incredibly sophisticated pocket computers to tweet the details of what we ate for lunch, check updates on Facebook, and upload photos to Instagram and Snapchat. In 2014, more than 93 million selfies were posted every day worldwide.

So rather than transforming us into the next Albert Einstein or J. K. Rowling, our smartphones are making us more wrapped up in ourselves. In the end, we're left completely absorbed in our own lives and less knowledgeable about the world around us.

And that, I'm afraid, is why smartphones are making us stupid.

Technology is only as good as how we use it. Smartphones could, of course, make us smarter if we used them *smartly*. But most of us don't, because we're locked in our own lives. Our culture lends itself to instant gratification and, above all, narcissism (an unhealthy excessive interest in oneself).

Smartphones are both a cause and a consequence of our selfie-obsessed culture. Unfortunately, they're making us dumber and dumber.

—Andrew Keen, author of  
The Internet Is Not the Answer

### Smartphones are making us more wrapped up in ourselves.

**NO** Twenty-five years ago, before everyone knew about the Internet, if someone had advertised a "universal answers machine" that fits in your pocket, it would have been hailed as a miracle. If that machine also let you listen to music, take pictures, get directions, keep up with the news, and read books, it would have been called "a pocket university" that could usher in a new age of intelligence.

Now, of course, we take all that—and more—for granted. But we shouldn't.

Because our smartphones are always with us, we can find the answer to any question at any time. We can follow the news as it's unfolding. We can explore any topic simply by finding the right Web pages or podcasts.

Since these devices have GPS built into them, they can give us specific information about our location. This is convenient if we're looking for a restaurant or an ATM. But it also means our phones can lead us to places we otherwise would have missed, such as a nearby museum or historical site.

Want to take 20 books with you on a trip? Go ahead; they won't add an ounce to your bag or your phone. Even if you're not sure you're going to like a book, you might as well take it along and give it a try.

While many of us use our phones primarily to keep in touch with our friends, even that can feed our brains: Social networking is often how people share the ideas that matter to them. When we read the articles and watch the videos our friends and family members post, we learn more about the world.

More access to more information, ideas, and discussions? Sounds like an opportunity for smartness—but only if we choose to take it.

—David Weinberger, Berkman Center  
for Internet & Society, Harvard University

### Smartphones allow us easy access to information and ideas.

**YOUR  
TURN**

Summarize the main arguments on each side of the debate.



Vote yes or no: Are smartphones making us stupid? Visit [scholastic.com/js](http://scholastic.com/js).





# Is Regifting Rude?

IMAGINE OPENING your presents this holiday season and finding a sweater from your grandmother that you wouldn't ever dream of wearing. Is it appropriate to rewrap it and give it to a friend who you think would actually like it?

Opponents of regifting say it's tacky and inconsiderate. They argue that presents should be thoughtful and that unloading rejected items on friends or

family members is wrong. Regifting can also be hurtful to the original gift giver. (How would *you* feel if you knew your best friends had regifted the stuff you bought them?)

But many other people say regifting is perfectly acceptable. More than 40 percent of Americans admitted to regifting at least one item in 2013, according to a survey by American Express, a credit

card company. Regifting supporters point out that it's a great way to give new life to presents you don't want. (Just because you have no use for yet another picture frame doesn't mean someone else in your life won't value it.) Recycling unwanted items is also better for the environment—and your wallet.

Is regifting rude? Two etiquette experts weigh in.



**YES** Regifting is wrong. It's inconsiderate, and it takes the thought out of giving.

Most people take great care in choosing the perfect gift for their friends and family members—or at least they should. Presents are meant to be cherished, but regifters treat them as just stuff to get rid of. The gift wasn't good enough for them or they didn't need it, so back in the box it goes to be rewrapped and passed on to the next person.

Regifting can also be hurtful to the original gift giver. I once gave a friend a beautiful music box that played her favorite song. I was so happy when I found it and didn't care that it cost more than I had planned to spend. Later, I learned that she'd given it to someone else. It hurt my feelings, and it made me wonder how well we really knew each other.

Selecting the right present isn't about paying a lot of money. It's about the sentiment behind the act. It's easy to find thoughtful, inexpensive gifts if you take the time to look around.

If someone gives you something that you really don't want or need, ask them if it's OK for you to return it. Or if there's a gift receipt, simply exchange it for something else. Then let the gift giver know how much you appreciated the present and that you were able to get something just as special. If you can't return unwanted items, consider donating them to a charity, such as the American Red Cross, Goodwill, or Big Brothers Big Sisters. That way, the items are still being put to good use.

Regifting will probably be popular again this holiday season, but that doesn't mean it's the right thing to do. Instead, let's bring back the art of meaningful giving by presenting our loved ones with things that were intended for them in the first place.

—YVONNE DURANT

Etiquette Consultant, Yvonne & Yvettiquette

**NO** The quality of a gift has nothing to do with where it came from or whether you paid for it. What matters is the thought behind it.

Regifting gives purpose to items we don't need or ones that are simply better suited to someone else. Maybe you were given a necklace that looks more like something your friend might wear or a book you know a sibling would enjoy more than you. It's fine to wrap them up and give them as gifts. In fact, 76 percent of Americans think regifting is socially acceptable, according to a recent survey.

There's also a strong environmental argument for regifting. Americans generate more than 250 million tons of trash each year, and about 54 percent of that ends up in landfills, according to the Environmental Protection Agency. Regifting extends the lives of our unneeded gifts and keeps them out of the waste stream. Why go out and buy more products when we already have so much to give?

Regifting also makes financial sense. Many Americans are struggling this holiday season. Being unable to afford a new present for a friend or family member shouldn't prevent us from giving them something that shows how much we care.

Of course, the present must be worth giving in the first place: Just as it's inappropriate to give someone a piece of junk you bought, it's also wrong to regift something simply to unload it. That's how regifting got a bad name to begin with.

When done right, regifting is perfectly acceptable. Regardless of where the present originally came from, how could someone not cherish getting a gift that's been thoughtfully chosen for them?

—MINDY LOCKARD

Etiquette Consultant, The Gracious Girl

**Regifting can be hurtful to the original gift giver.**

**Regifting gives purpose to unneeded items that are better suited to someone else.**

**YOUR TURN**

Have you ever regifted? What do you think of the practice?



Vote yes or no: Is regifting rude? Visit [scholastic.com/js](http://scholastic.com/js) to cast your ballot.