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# The New York Times

STUDENT OPINION (/COLUMN/LEARNING-STUDENT-OPINION)

## *What Good Can Come from Disagreements?*



Aurélie Guillerey

By Shannon Doyne (<http://learning.blogs.nytimes.com/author/shannon-doyne/>) Nov. 6, 2017

Read The New York Times headline that appears below. Did you initially misread “start” as “stop”? What do you think the Op-Ed will be about? Why would someone tell kids to start fighting?

In the op-ed “Kids, Would You Please Start Fighting?”

(<https://www.nytimes.com/2017/11/04/opinion/sunday/kids-would-you-please->



t-fighting.html),” Adam Grant writes:  
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Wilbur and Orville Wright came from a wobbly family. Their father, a preacher, never met a moral fight he wasn't willing to pick. They watched him clash with school authorities who weren't fond of his decision to let his kids miss a half-day of school from time to time to learn on their own. Their father believed so much in embracing arguments that despite being a bishop in the local church, he had multiple books by atheists in his library — and encouraged his children to read them.

If we rarely see a spat, we learn to shy away from the threat of conflict. Witnessing arguments — and participating in them — helps us grow a thicker skin. We develop the will to fight uphill battles and the skill to win those battles, and the resilience to lose a battle today without losing our resolve tomorrow. For the Wright brothers, argument was the family trade and a fierce one was something to be savored. Conflict was something to embrace and resolve. “I like scrapping with Orv,” Wilbur said.

The Wright brothers weren't alone. The Beatles fought over instruments and lyrics and melodies. Elizabeth Cady Stanton and Susan B. Anthony clashed over the right way to win the right to vote. Steve Jobs and Steve Wozniak argued incessantly while designing the first Apple computer. None of these people succeeded in spite of the drama — they flourished because of it. Brainstorming groups generate 16 percent more ideas when the members are encouraged to criticize one another. The most creative ideas in Chinese technology companies and the best decisions in American hospitals come from teams that have real disagreements early on. Breakthrough labs in microbiology aren't full of enthusiastic collaborators cheering one another on but of skeptical scientists challenging one another's interpretations.

If no one ever argues, you're not likely to give up on old ways of doing things, let alone try new ones. Disagreement is the antidote to groupthink. We're at our most imaginative when we're out of sync. There's no better time than childhood to learn how to dish it out — and to take it.

**Students:** Read the entire op-ed, then tell us:

— What are some good things not mentioned by the Op-Ed that can come from argument or disagreement? And some bad things?



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— How does your experience with your family compare with how Mr. Grant describes as many parents’ desire to keep any kind of conflict out of their homes?

— What is your response to Mr. Grant’s assertion that “we’re at our most imaginative when we’re out of sync.” Have you had an experience that supports this idea? What about an experience that contradicts it?

— How do you think people can best benefit from their disagreements? Can you think of any examples that compare to the Wright Brothers’ experiences?

*Students 13 and older are invited to comment. All comments are moderated by the Learning Network staff, but please keep in mind that once your comment is accepted, it will be made public.*

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Brian Harkin for The New York Times

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How does your sense of smell help, or hurt, you?

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Caitlin O'Hara for The New York Times

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