



ASA Ageism Awareness Day: 100 Days of School

What's wrong with how we celebrate 100 Days of School?

From the [100th Day of School Celebration Curriculum Guide](#): From an early age, children are inundated with ageist messages through books, TV, and other sources. Children internalize those ideas without questioning the accuracy or [impact of such messages](#) (Milner et. al., 2012). Early childhood researchers indicate that [children as young as 3 use negative language about older people](#), and by preschool, they begin demonstrating negative attitudes toward aging (Seefeldt, 1977). [Changing negative and biased ideas in children is difficult after age 12](#) (McGuire, 1993, Siegler, 1998).

The 100th day of school is an opportunity for elementary schools (typically pre-K to second or third grade) to celebrate the achievements of students who have reached a significant milestone in their educational path—having spent 100 days engaged in learning activities. Many teachers and schools use this as an opportunity to reinforce academic content such as math (counting to 100, skip counting, gathering 100 items, etc.), physical activity (completing 10 iterations of 10 exercises), and more. Others seek to connect 100 days to 100 years and ask children and teachers to dress “like a 100-year-old” without providing context on centenarians or discussing the dangers of stereotyping.

Diana Rendina, a media specialist for a magnet school in Florida, [in 2016 questioned the practice](#); she noted that having children dress up in old-fashioned clothing, with gray hair, and walking stooped over with a cane teaches them “that ‘old’ people are something to be mocked, made fun of, and disrespected.”

Similarly, Kelly Papa, a nurse and the corporate director of Learning at Masonicare, [reflected on how appalled she was when her kindergartner was asked to “dress like a 100-year-old.”](#) She shared that it is important to educate children about assistive devices such as hearing aids and canes.

Papa also argued that, by making fun of such tools and the people who use them, “we have just stereotyped and been extremely insensitive to the challenges that [some] people are living with.”

More recently, Lisa Borrero, gerontology and health sciences faculty at the University of Indianapolis, [critiqued this activity as it continues unabated, despite repeated criticism](#). The “fun” activity of dressing like a 100-year-old teaches kids that it is okay to have fun at the expense of another segment of the population and that it is funny for older people to appear frail, weak, confused, and out of touch.

What can we do instead?

Teacher’s Toolkit

- “[100th Day of School Celebration](#): A PreK–Grade 2 Curriculum Guide for Cultivating Positive Views of Aging” (2023).

Supplemental resources from the Teacher’s Toolkit:

Children’s Literature

- Blog post with [Librarians’ reading recommendations](#)
- [Age, Aging, and Ageism](#) book recommendations
- A [list of books \(with a summary and review\)](#) that tackle ageism, intergenerational bonds, and Alzheimer’s disease.
- A curated [list of children’s books](#) that convey positive messages about aging and older adults, including summaries of each book and ISBN.
- [Awards](#)—Past recipients list of Best Children’s Literature on Aging award.

Websites

- “A is for Aging, B is for Books”: A blog by Lindsey McDivitt about [positive images of aging in children’s literature](#). McDivitt focuses on positive

representations of aging, her website includes a blog with reviews of books and a list of educational resources on aging.

- Compelling blog post by a [parent on their experience](#) of the 100th day of school dress-up activity, including how they advocated for older adults. Also includes positive examples of centenarians.
- [Post suggesting we reframe the 100th Day](#), on LinkedIn, it discusses the 100th day of school dress-up activity and gives a celebratory example of aging.
- [Call-to-action blog post](#) that brings awareness to the dress-like-a-100-year-old trend in schools, and encourages people to speak out against it. Includes a sample letter that can be sent to school administrators.
- [Old School!](#): a clearinghouse for all things anti-ageism.
- [ChairRocks Call to Action](#)—Short blog post describing why the 100th day of school dress-up activity is harmful, including a call-to-action letter and images of activities, including [graphics](#) for the campaign.
- [Journal article](#) describing the significance of positive representations of aging in children's literature and how they can prepare them for successful aging.
- [Transforming the Narrative about Aging](#), an Op-Ed regarding the 100th day of school by Lisa Borrero.

News articles

- [Tuskegee Airman Charles McGee dead at 102](#)—Video from 2019 celebrating one of the last living Tuskegee Airmen's 100th birthday (he died at 102 in 2022) and news story about his passing.
- A short [CNN story](#) about a 105-year-old woman setting a world record for the 100-meter dash at the Louisiana Senior Games.
- [Wellness Advice from Centenarians](#)—an article from the *Washington Post*.
- [The oldest living American veteran of World War II dies at 112](#)—NPR story about the oldest WWII veteran who died on 1/5/2022. Includes quotes from family, stories about his war experiences, and how his daughter is preserving his achievements.

Videos/films

- [Beverly Cleary](#) describes turning 100, in a video on her journey to becoming an author and her thoughts on becoming a centenarian (5 min).
- [Lives Well Lived](#)—a film by Sky Bergman, who was inspired by her 103-year-old Grandmother, who appears in the film (55 min).
- [Looking Forward at 100](#)—a film concentrated on interviews with centenarians telling stories of their lives, including life philosophies about being older than 100, and describing future plans (31 min).
- [Live to 100: Secrets of the Blue Zones](#) (must have Netflix account to access)—Netflix docuseries about the Blue Zones, narrated by Dan Buettner, who travels to these areas to learn about the lifestyle.