

Grade 8 Informational

Fads

Spiked hair, fanny packs, phone booth stuffing? What do these items have in common? Each was a fad, something extremely popular for a short period of time. Every generation creates its unique fads. Often they stem from a society's culture or current events.

American culture often seems drawn to quirky inventions. These unique items somehow pique our curiosity. That, in part, may explain the popularity of the 1960's Superball. When the bouncy balls made of synthetic rubber hit the market, they were an immediate success. Within months, millions were sold to eager buyers. Like its predecessor the Hula Hoop, the Superball was a short-lived phenomenon. Although neither is wildly popular today, they both still exist. Another oddball fad was Furby. Introduced in 1998, the furry battery-operated creature entered households. The six- inch creature spoke its own language and was voice activated, often surprising owners who had forgotten it was roosting on a nearby shelf. In 1975 Gary Dahl made a fortune when he marketed the pet rock. Apparently, while joking around with friends about the attributes of a perfect pet, Dahl had the idea for this low-maintenance pet. Yes, consumers put down hard-earned cash to purchase a rock that came with a quirky manual filled with tips for new owners.

Other fads are the result of aggressive marketing campaigns. When George Lucas's Star Wars came to theaters in the '80's, it was quickly followed by popular action figures from the film. Darth Vader, Luke Skywalker, and Han Solo competed with Barbie, Ken, and GI Joe for popularity. While Barbie and her pals are still on the market, the Star Wars figures have long been gone, replaced by new characters from current movies. Beanie Babies are also in this category. The creators of these wildly popular stuffed animals enjoyed tremendous success in the late 1990's. Each time a new animal was introduced, consumers lined up for a chance to buy what they believed to be a collector's item. Market promoters advertised that all stuffed animals had a limited supply. Consequently, consumers believed that supply would not keep pace with demand; thus buyers pictured skyrocketing values. The novelty of the fad eventually wore off. For many, the once prized possession became just another toy that soon found its way to the annual garage sale.

However, not all fads are about retail sales. Another popular fad of the '90s was the Macarena, a dance that almost anyone could learn in a matter of moments. This dance was inspired by the growing popularity of Latin-American music in the pop culture.

Probably the biggest fad of this decade is that of reality TV or unscripted television. Shows like Survivor and The Amazing Race spawned a host of imitations. During the Writer's Guild strike, when Hollywood writers refused to write until a new contract was negotiated, new

episodes of popular shows came to a halt. Reality TV was a way for the networks to offer new programming in order to satisfy viewers.

Today's fads are still at the height of their popularity. Whether it's text messaging or Ipods, people will flock to what's popular. From Pokemon to energy drinks, fads are a part of our culture. The future offers endless opportunities for a myriad of fads to emerge. What do you predict will be popular in the coming months?

Grade 8 Narrative

Sky's the Limit

Jordan lay flat on his back, clutching his skateboard to his chest, the board's wheels facing upward and spinning wildly. He thought to himself: Nothing hurts. I landed safely on the grass, and I'm OK. His heart raced with the adrenaline of exhilaration, instinctively revving, unable to detect the difference between survival mode and celebration. For one seemingly endless moment, Jordan's existence consisted of a deep, tranquil silence underscored by the rhythm of his heightened heartbeats. He gazed up at the sky overhead, absorbed by the great stillness of the clouds and the thought that how strange that such a sky would be called *altocumulus mackerel*.

Then his sister's voice reached up and snatched him from the clouds and the sky and the memories of the past, yanking him unceremoniously back to the present.

"You really think you're something, don't you?" were the words, but Julianna's tone conveyed an almost parental pride.

A multitude of faces stared down at him; he heard not only Julianna's voice, but a chorus of voices, all speaking at once, unintelligibly, words blending together and cresting like the roar of the waves crashing on the shore:

"He's in shock."

"Concussion."

"Oh, right, when did you become a doctor?"

"At least he didn't break anything."

"How would you know?"

"He's a doctor, remember? He diagnosed the concussion."

"Look, he's trying to get up."

As Jordan tentatively hoisted himself to a sitting position, the voices gradually stilled, the faces anxiously watching, the anxiety apparent and yet so strange to Jordan until he understood the silence stemmed from worry: they assumed he was hurt. "I'm fine," he said, but his words did nothing to reassure them; having seen the landing, they had made up their minds.

"Maybe you shouldn't get up," said a girl in a black T-shirt.

“How many fingers am I holding up?” asked the guy who thought he was a doctor. Undeterred by Jordan’s indifference, he continued. “Hey, that was some fall.”

“It wasn’t a fall,” corrected Julianna, who had observed him more closely than anyone. “He was in control the whole time.”

“Maybe he broke something,” offered someone else, one of those who was clearly and understandably enjoying the drama of the spectacle.

Jordan’s respiration and heart rate had returned to normal, or as close as could be expected under the circumstances. Standing up casually cost him both effort and concentration—the temptation was to stay there, in that place of *altocumulus mackerel* sky, soaring, exhilarated, and more alive than he had ever been. The endless hours of slowly rolling, painstakingly rehearsing on the ground what he longed to achieve in the air, stepping backward into a rotation, wheels clacking awkwardly on the pavement, had finally lifted him up to the sky. He managed to appear just the same as always, with no indication that anything unusual had happened, as he picked up his board. Jordan glanced back at the ramp, trying to recapture the moment, but the moment vanished, evanescent as the clouds now drifting away.

“He’s fine,” said Julianna dismissively.

“That was incredible,” he heard someone else say. “At least two complete rotations!”

“More like a McTwist,” said the girl in the black T-shirt.

“That was some landing,” said the guy, who, like many who watch too many television doctors, somehow had gained the illusion that he had medical credentials. “Lucky you ended up on the grass.”

Staring at the ramp, Jordan assembled fleeting snatches of memory as brief scenes appeared and then disappeared like pictures in an accelerated slideshow: checking his helmet straps, adjusting his kneepads, testing wheel bearings before rolling up to the vertical ramp, then assessing its curve and steepness, preparing as he had millions of times before for yet another attempt at a Caballeria—a backward 360-degree turn, a maneuver he’d been practicing for ages, ever since Julianna taught him how to do it.

At that moment, those countless repetitions of movements merged and coalesced; immediately before releasing himself to gravity, Jordan visualized the exuberant arc of a dolphin, the heartbreakingly graceful swoop of the hawk, and then he, too, was soaring, effortlessly spinning in what seemed to be slow motion. Then the downward spiral as he caught the board under his feet mid-air and landed, sure-footed and solid, only to collapse in sheer amazement and disbelief in the grass.

“That wasn’t luck; that was intentional,” countered Jordan absentmindedly.

“Good one,” said the girl in the black T-shirt, and Jordan nodded in acknowledgment, seemingly nonchalant, but grinning inwardly.

“What’s next?” asked Julianna, as they navigated their way through the crowd.

Jordan shrugged. “Sky’s the limit.”