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English IV

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Tomatoes

“Grandpa, why do you keep talking about wisdom?”

The teenage boy sprawled across the backseat and looked out the smeared window while his grandfather drove the ancient sedan.

Grandpa sighed for several long seconds. “Do you wish to continue debating this? We’ve talked about this topic at least three times in the past hour.”

“Eh, I guess not. There’s just nothing to do in this car except look out the window at cows chewing their cud.”

“You could always talk to me.”

The teenager grunted and scowled at his dead phone. “It’s too bad this junky car doesn’t have any outlets for my phone cord. I wouldn’t have to talk to you if it did.”

Another long sigh. “Y’know William…”

“I’ve told you a million times *not* to call me William! My name is *Billy*.”

“Okay, *Billy*, to answer your question about my philosophical tendencies, I believe that imparting wisdom to younger generations is the primary purpose of the elderly.”

“Then you don’t have any purpose.”

“I don’t follow your reasoning.”

“Wisdom is obsolete. Today, people only get anywhere in life because they have knowledge.”

“I don’t believe that is true.”

“Yes, it is. When all the *wise* philosophers were thinking about stupid stuff, most people were starving.” His fingers scratched at a pimple on his chin. “People are richer and happier and smarter than ever today. Tell me there’s no correlation *there*, Grandpa.”

“There is no correlation.”

“Then you’re stupid.”

“You did ask me to say it.”

“Say what?”

“That there is no correlation.”

“Errrrgh, you’re so frustrating! I never get a straight answer from you.” Billy tried swatting at a fly to release his anger.

“Do you want to know what I really think?”

Billy muttered something under his breath.

“Would you please repeat that? I was not able to catch it.”

“I said, ‘If you don’t bore me to death first.’”

Grandpa paused and frowned. “I will pretend I didn’t hear that comment. For starters, it was those *wise* philosophers that made us rich. They--”

“They didn’t make medicine or the machines that make humans so rich and happy.”

“I was getting there, but you did not let me finish.”

“Fine then. Continue.”

Another frown. “As I was saying before you so rudely interrupted, those philosophers gave us the ideas needed to encourage innovation and entrepreneurship, which were the main factors in those inventions you mentioned.”

“That’s a bunch of B.S.”

“Ok, William--”

“It’s *Billy,* not--”

“I will call you William whether you like or not!” Grandpa’s patience had expired. “You are a spoiled, self-centered brat who only cares about money and how many followers you have on Twitter and Instagram and Snap-who-gives-a-damn. You don’t listen to your elders. You don’t like any idea that is not your own. You are lazy and foolish. Sooner or later, you will suffer greatly because of these enormous character flaws.”

Billy opened and closed his mouth like a fish out of water, speechless.

After several seconds that seemed like years, Grandpa calmly spoke again. “That is what I really think.”

The car was filled with the sounds of the tires rolling and the wind blowing for several minutes.

“Sheesh, Grandpa. I didn’t mean to trigger you.”

“What does that mean?”

“What? Trigger?”

“Yes.”

“Well, it means, uh, I don’t know really know.” He scratched his chin again. “Everyone knows that triggered means triggered.” He snickered at his own cleverness.

“You cannot define a word by using it in its own definition. Don’t they teach you anything in school?”

“If sex ed and the history of feminism are topics, then yes.”

“They don’t teach you about logic?”

“Nope.”

Grandpa grunted in disapproval.

“I’ll make you a deal, Grandpa.”

“What?”

“If you manage to persuade me that wisdom is more important than knowledge, I won’t be rude to you.”

“What if I am unsuccessful?”

“Then you have to stop at the next gas station, buy me a phone charger, and stop talking about wisdom until we get to my mom’s house.”

Grandpa turned his head to gaze at his belligerent passenger and grinned widely, showing several gold teeth. “Are you sure you want to do this?”

“Of course. Why do you think I offered it?”

“Oh, nothing. I just thought it’s a pretty easy bet to win.”

“Ha ha, Grandpa. You’re gonna eat your own words soon.”

The rumble strips vibrated the car. Grandpa quickly looked back at the road and adjusted the drifting car.

“Ok, I’ll do it.”

“Good. I look forward to having some real entertainment again.”

“And I look forward to having a real conversation with you.”

“If I can stay awake.”

Grandpa’s eyes narrowed for a second, but he ignored the snide comment. “I have three scenarios for you. First, would you consider yourself literate?”

“Duh.” Billy rolled his eyes and looked back at the endless fields of cows.

“I’ll assume that means yes. Do you know where all the letters are on your keyboard on your phone?”

“Double duh.” Bored again, he sunk lower in his seat.

“Any toddler can be taught how to find each letter on the keyboard and even how to depress a key. They can also be taught how to read various combinations of these letters. This is knowledge. However, you are not that simple. You know how to combine all these skills to send texts to your friends. This ability of application makes you wise, does it not?”

“Uhhhh, I guess so.” Billy turned his gaze from the cows to Grandpa.

“Second scenario. Football. Anyone can catch a ball and figure out that the other guys in the same color jersey are on his team. Again, this is knowledge. But, when you strategize plays based on research, you use wisdom to utilize this knowledge to win each game.”

“Ohhh, I get it.”

“Good. And which would you rather have: the ability to poke random keys or send texts?”

“The ability to send texts, of course.”

“Would you rather catch a ball or win the championship?”

“Win the championship.”

“That’s what I thought.”

“You said there was a third scenario.”

Grandpa grinned. “I thought that I already convinced you that wisdom is more important.”

“Ok, old man. I guess it is better.” He sighed in resignation. “You aren’t obsolete after all.”

Grandpa was silent but his weathered face crinkled into a smile. The car was silent once again.

After several miles of counting cows, Billy broke the silence. “Will you still tell me the third one?”

“Of course. It’s my favorite example.” He cleared his throat dramatically. “Knowledge is knowing a tomato is a fruit. Wisdom is knowing that it does *not* belong in a fruit salad.”

Billy chuckled for the first time, but his smile quickly turned thoughtful. “Wait, Grandpa. If a tomato is a fruit, does that mean ketchup is a smoothie?”

Grandpa’s gold teeth flashed in the rearview mirror. “You’re wiser than I thought, Billy.”