Article of the Week #1: Why Using the Word “Retard” is Retarding Progress
By Tim O’Donoghue in Millennials, Values, July 2012

1 My younger brother Aidan started high school this year, and unlike his male predecessors, he loves it. He has friends, he’s involved, and he loves his teachers. Aidan has been anxiously waiting for this juncture of his life for years, which was probably fueled by all those Nick-at-Nite TV shows. (Unfortunately, high school isn’t quite Drake and Josh or that pre-pregnancy Jamie Lynn Spears show.) Aidan wasn’t the only anxious one though. All those years Aidan spent in excitement, I spent in fear. I spent my freshman year in the same halls as Aidan, overwhelmed by the sheer size of the school. The whole social thing just wasn’t for me. My friend Ben likes to tell me it’s a confidence thing and I think he’s right. Round two was different though — Aidan is a completely different competitor. Still, I had no confidence. I had no confidence that his peers would treat him with the respect that he deserves, or even worse, simply as an equal. Aidan has Down syndrome, and it can be hard to see past that label.

2 I’m going to take a minute and diverge from Aidan’s story. I need to rationalize my fear. My entire life I’ve played witness to the continuous (and usually subconscious) relegation of people with disabilities. It’s an unfortunate habit passed down by our parents, and spread among millennials. It’s as simple as saying “Wasn’t that class retarded?” I bet if Aidan hadn’t been a part of my life, or had been born without Down syndrome, I’d be throwing the term retarded around like a baseball. So when I hear “retarded,” is my first reaction, “Hey you! You’re systemically oppressing persons with cognitive disabilities through your language!”? Of course not, because I don’t think most people realize that that is what they’re doing. It’s a word that has become so ingrained in our vocabulary that we think it’s disassociated with its roots.

3 Often, when I ask someone not to say retarded, they’ll come back and say that it just means “stupid,” or “it’s a medical term!” or “I didn’t use it in that context.” To put it gently, any response in the negative simply shows ignorance. Stupid?

4 Well, that’s simply not the definition of “retarded.” Use the word stupid. Medical term? Not anymore. The term “retard” has been removed from both government and medical texts. You used it out of context? That works. If I were to use a racial slur out of context, that’d be ok too, right? “But there’s a history attached to racial slurs!” There’s a history attached to people of disabilities, too. People with disabilities were for all intents and purposes institutionalized anyone who looked or acted differently.

5 And it’s not only the classroom that has held back disabled individuals. People with disabilities were subject to Nazi eugenics and murdered en masse. This wasn’t the first instance of eugenics in the history of persons with disabilities. Before that, Americans practiced their own eugenics on people with disabilities, and frequently isolated and institutionalized anyone who looked or acted differently.

6 So, back to Aidan. Aidan loves public school, and I attest much of that to his peers that I feared so much. Aidan, through his vivacious, charismatic, and loving nature, has surrounded himself with an amazing group of friends. He joined the track and wrestling team, was in a school play, read a poem at the poetry slam, and sang “Soul Man” at the school talent show, fedora and all (big props to his Best Buddy Andrew on that one — someone needed to be John Belushi, and it sure wasn’t me). All of this is to say that we’re getting there, but we haven’t gotten there yet. The “r” word is still commonplace in our vocabulary. Like I said, Aidan is a happy kid. But if you say “retard,” or mention his disability, he goes straight to thumb sucking. His life-long sign for “I’m uncomfortable.” What does that tell you?

7 It has to stop. “Retard” is retarding our progress towards true acceptance. Spread the word to end the word.

From http://www.policymic.com/articles/9899/my-brother-s-keeper-why-it-s-not-ok-to-use-the-word-retard
AOW Why Using the word “Retard” is Retarding progress

1. **BEFORE YOU READ:** Read the *title*. In a complete sentence, predict what you think this article will be about.
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________

2. Read through the article *slowly* and *carefully* using these symbols to annotate (mark) the text:

✔️ I already know about this.  
➕ This is new to me.  
❓ I don’t understand the meaning of…

❗️ I think that…  
😊 I’d like to know more about this.  
⭐️ This is important!

✗ I disagree with…  
?? I have NO clue what this passage is about.

3. **Skim through the article again.** HIGHLIGHT 2 unfamiliar words. Read the sentences around the word and use context clues to determine the meaning. Write the three words and their possible meanings here:

Word #1: _______________  *What do you think this word means?*

Word #2: _______________  *What do you think this word means?*

4. Reread lines 31 & 32. Copy the sentence here:
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
What type of figurative language does the author use?

5. Reread lines 60-68. What types of books would you look in for more information about the topic in this paragraph?

6. Was the author of this article convincing in his arguments to stop using “retarded” to label those with disabilities?  *Yes* or *no*? *Why* or *why not*?
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