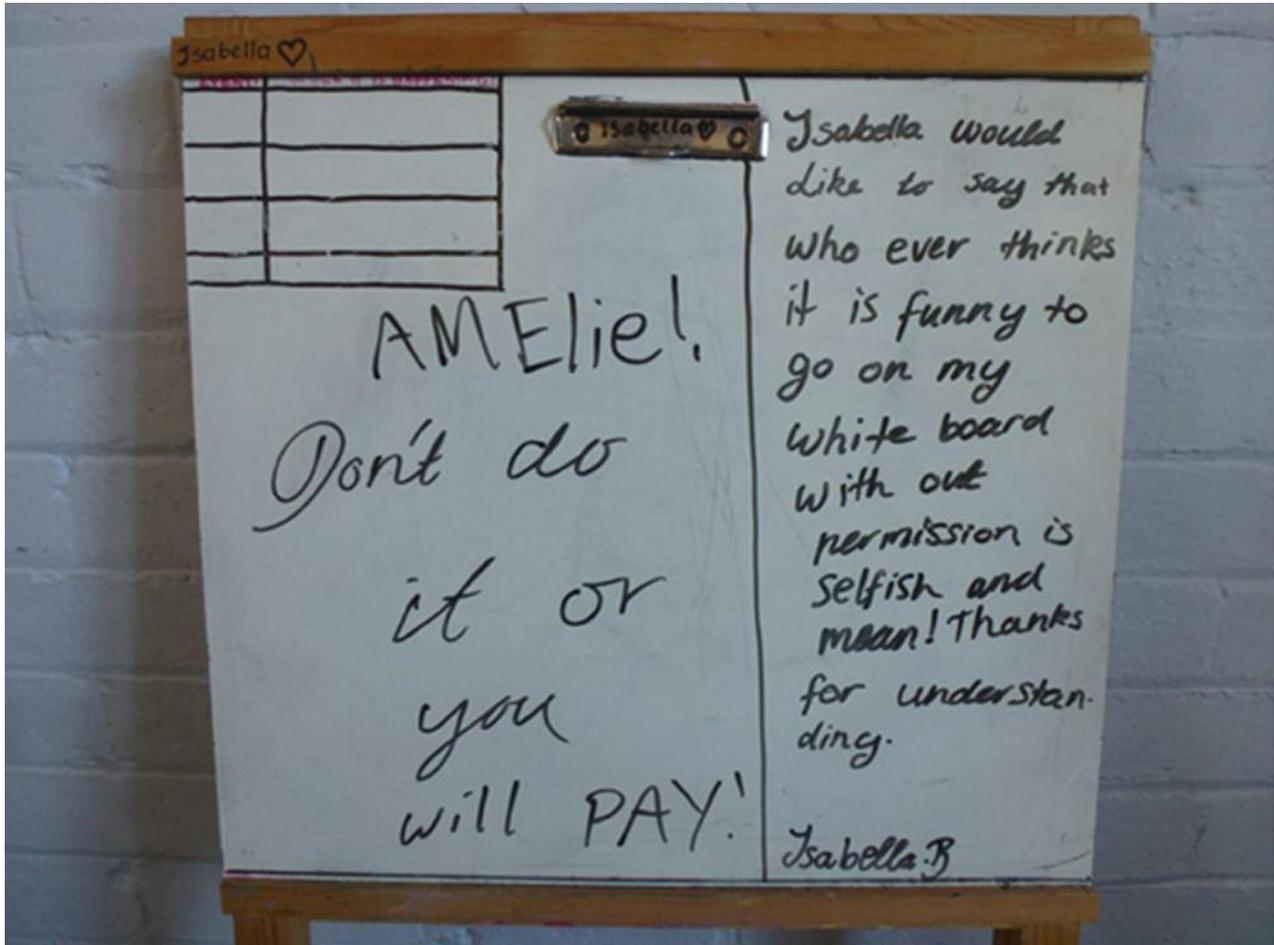


extra fingers

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Irony lost

Words written on Isabella's whiteboard:

"Isabella would like to say that whoever thinks it is funny to go on my whiteboard without permission is selfish and mean! Thanks for understanding. Isabella B. Amelie! Don't do it or you will PAY!"

The irony of Isabella's warning is obviously completely lost on her because it fills her entire whiteboard so no one has been able to use it including Isabella.

Problem solved

With eye-rolling predictability I caught Isabella and Holly rolling their eyes at me because, yet again apparently, I was going on and on too much about how wonderful it is to ride a bike somewhere instead of going by car. In our house, I'm known for my enthusiasm for talking about such 'commonplace' things as how a breeze feels when it hits your face, or how a slightly stronger wind can collect unevenly in your clothes whilst you're out riding on a stormy

day and parachute you backwards, or how the winter sun can warm your body if you're out in it. In other words, I thought I'd again try to extol the virtues of the great outdoors. All I got in response was two pairs of rolling eyeballs. Clearly, there was no point in going on about how working your leg muscles was good for your body or how being out in nature while you did that was much better for your mind than being cooped up inside a car. You have to respect two sets of eyes when they begin to roll on you, especially if there's a yawn or two as well – although on this occasion at least Holly did proffer some sort of compromise, which she believed held some promise.

HOLLY: "Dad, I know what we can do."

DAD: "Do you?"

HOLLY: "Hmm-hmm. I know what can make everyone happy. You want us to feel what the wind feels like in our face, right?"

DAD: "Yes."

HOLLY: "And we just want to go places only in the car, right?"

DAD: "It would seem so."

HOLLY: "Alright then. I know what we can do. Issy and I can just wind down our windows. See what I mean? Now the problem's solved."

50/50 chance

Holly, Isabella, Amelie and I were looking at a Google Earth photograph of Alcatraz that had some people in it that were difficult to make out. I mentioned to the girls that I'd once visited Alcatraz almost thirty years ago.

HOLLY: "Hey, one of those people could be you, Dad."

ISABELLA: "Yeah. They could be, Dad. It's a 50/50 chance."

What about if you just got hit by a wheel?

DAD, one afternoon, warning Isabella and Amelie to be careful crossing any roads should it be raining when they were due to get off the bus from school: "If it's raining really hard when you get off it's okay to run but be extra careful when crossing roads, okay? You can recover from getting soaked, but you might not be able to recover if you get hit by a bus or car. Do you understand what I'm saying?"

ISABELLA: "Yes, Dad. Don't worry. I already know to be careful in the rain."

AMELIE: "But what about if you just got hit by a wheel? You wouldn't get that hurt if you just got hit by a wheel. That wouldn't be too bad I don't think."

DAD: "Yes, it would be. Wheels are connected to cars and buses remember."

AMELIE: "Yes, I know, Dad. But I'm just talking about the wheel only. Just the wheel bit."

Wrinkles

AMELIE: "Dad, are you able to keep your face straight? Or does it have to wrinkle?"

The most boring thing

ISABELLA, as she and Amelie, in the absence of having a ball to play with, were gently tossing back and forth Isabella's school hat to fill in time while they waited for Holly to come out of class: "This is easily the most boring thing I've ever done in my life."

DAD: "Is it?"

ISABELLA, grumpily: "Yes!"

DAD: "Well then why do you do it?"

ISABELLA: "Because, Dad, what I was doing before – just waiting for Holly – was even more boring."

You're so lucky

AMELIE, as she had an ear to my throat listening to a potato chip descend it: "Oh, you're so lucky, Dad. You get to have good things in your throat whenever you want."

Twenty-first century groupthink

DAD: "Hols, do you know what Gracie wants to do when she leaves school?"

HOLLY: "No."

DAD: "Oh. I just thought you might have known."

HOLLY: "Nope. She's not in my group."

DAD: "Yeah, so? What difference does that make? Do you only talk to people who are in your group, do you?"

HOLLY: "Yeah, pretty much. You don't want too many friends, Dad."

DAD: "What?"

HOLLY: "Unless they only want a pencil or something. Then I might say something to them."

KARIN: "What? We were never like that when I was at school."

ISABELLA, interrupting: "Mum, this is the twenty-first century, not the first century."

A song's not going to help

AMELIE, responding to an announcement on ABC Classic FM that the previous piece of music the station had played was 'Let Thy Hand Be Strengthened' by Handel: "But that's so easy. You just need some weights. A song's not going to help."

Hangman

One of the first spelling games a child ever learns how to play is Hangman. I remember

playing it with Holly when she was in about Year Two and I also remember playing it with Isabella when she was around the same age. I suppose, then, it wasn't much of a surprise when Amelie wanted to play the game with me.

AMELIE, excitedly: "Dad, I've got this really great game to play!"

DAD: "Have you?"

AMELIE: "Yes. It's called Hangman. Have you heard of it?"

DAD, pretending not to know the game: "No."

AMELIE: "Okay. Well, I'll show you it then. It's really easy to learn."

Amelie made four small dashes across the bottom of a sheet of paper to indicate to me that the word she wanted me to try to guess had four letters and quickly apprised me of the game's basic rules and how if it was my job to try and guess the word I could win the game by guessing it before my opponent had drawn me 'strung up' and swinging from a scaffold.

After volunteering to take on the role of the one doing the guessing, in no time at all Amelie was off to a terrific start when my first few speculations as to what one of the letters might be drew blanks.

AMELIE: "No, Dad. There are no 'b's', no 's's', no 'a's', no 't's', no 'u's', no 'm's', no 'k's', and no 'e's'."

She almost had me strung up before I'd even guessed one letter. Then, finally, I got one: the letter 'i'. There was one 'i'. I had some way to go though to win the game – or more to the point, I was in serious trouble of being defeated within the next few goes if I couldn't guess the next three letters almost immediately – so I asked Amelie for a clue.

AMELIE, after thinking for a bit whether she should accede to my request: "Oh, alright,

Dad. One clue. I'll give you one clue and that's all."

DAD: "Yes, alright. One clue's all I want."

AMELIE: "Good. Now let me see. What clue can I give you? Um . . . oh, I know. It has 'ing' in it. I-n-g, Dad."

And just like that I was back in the game. 'I-n-g' is a hell of a clue when the word is only four letters long. I highly recommend playing Hangman with a seven-year-old.

She doesn't quite know about marketing yet

ISABELLA, discussing with Amelie what Schleich animals they'd like to get next for their respective birthdays: "The trouble with Schleich animals is they keep updating them all the time. You think you've got them all but you never have."

A Dad would-you-rather

DAD: "What would you rather? To have been given a really good education, or for someone to have given you a hundred thousand dollars?"

AMELIE: "A good education."

ISABELLA: "Same."

DAD: "What about a million dollars?"

AMELIE: "Same. I would go with the, um, education. Definitely."

DAD: "Why?"

ISABELLA: "Because you need it more than money."

AMELIE: "Yeah, because you need to really learn. If you get, like, a hundred dollars, what are you going to do with it? You won't even know. (*Suddenly, in a loud and excited voice*) No, actually, I would take the million dollars and pay for the education!"

DAD: "Oh, that's a smart answer."

The phantasmagorical world of a seven-year-old

from a Questions and Answers game I played with Amelie and Isabella one night as they were going to bed

AMELIE: "Dad, can I ask you a question?"

DAD: "Yes."

AMELIE: "Um . . . this is going to be a really hard one. How many spots does a giraffe have?"

DAD: "I don't know."

AMELIE: "It's so hard, isn't it? Well, the easiest way to do it is to do eight fours. What's eight fours?"

DAD: "Thirty-two. But why do you do eight fours for?"

AMELIE: "And then you add three more."

DAD, a little exasperated: "Oh, thirty-five. But why would you do that for?"

AMELIE, clearly making it up as she goes along: "You do that because there's thirty-five spots."

DAD: "You don't know that. You've just made that up."

AMELIE, after having recovered from laughing somewhat fitfully for a few seconds: "Well, alright then. The best way to do it is to get a giraffe and count all its spots. And the-e-e-n . . . you hug it and say thanks."

LAST WORD

You might as well not have them

HOLLY, after I'd told her that I'd not had a dream the night before: "That's what you always say, Dad. You never remember your dreams. You might as well not even have them."