



Learner's Name: George Jezek

Age: 16

Location: Ames, Iowa

How would you summarize your background?

My family is pretty well-off, especially for the rural area where we live. We're kind of king of the hill in our small town because my dad is president of one of the bigger local companies. He travels quite a bit, because he's working on developing biodegradable, corn-based packaging at different sites around the US and around the world.

We have a boat and I like to windsurf, although the weather patterns are less predictable than they used to be. My mom has worked here and there, but mostly she's stayed at home with me and my sister.

Tell me more about your experiences and your family's background.

My parents both grew up kind of vanilla white, knowing what fraction of heritage came from where but not keeping any of the cultural stuff. We've been kind of a poster family of upper-middle-class America—keeping up with the Joneses with all the latest 3-D devices and the new-fiber clothes that have become all the rage now that we can't afford to waste water by irrigating cotton or oil by making polyesters. We get to do lots of cool stuff too—I have loads of simulations and interactive movies, and sometimes I make my own, just for kick.

How do you like to learn?

I do better with numbers than with remembering all those complicated names in the classics they still make us read here. I've heard about how some schools do all sorts of cool stuff with geo-coded learning experiences instead of making us power down when we cross the threshold. In bigger cities, they even have walk-in clinics where you can get chips implanted so you don't have to wear nerdy glasses while you use them. I went to some summer camps when I was younger. We did cool stuff, like tinkering around with real tools and building bridges out of recycled materials, but my school is pretty traditional.

How would you describe your current learning experiences?

I do okay in school, but I'm not that interested in it. Yeah, we still have the old brick-and-mortar school approach here, although they built a swank LEED-silver certified building back in 2012. Everyone was really proud of it, but it's starting to show its age, and I can't see how they really integrated it with what we study.

I know that I could do better if school was more exciting. I get in trouble sometimes because my teachers can tell that I've been drinking, but there aren't ever really any consequences. Sure, my parents might block my online credits for a while or make me stay at home, but what's the big deal when I can keep up with my friends digitally as much as I want. It's not like there are that many places to go around here anyway. Like I said, we've geo-coded everything around.

When I was a little kid, my teachers wondered if I might have ADHD, but my parents were pretty resistant to the idea of putting me on medication. Funny how that turned out to be the right choice. Turned out that I was just stressed out by all the tension at home, and that if things got better there, I would do better at school. I can't say that's really happened, even though mom and dad got back together and I get nearly everything I ask for. I still have trouble concentrating, and I've kind of become the class clown just to make things more interesting.

Please provide an overview of your learning experiences so far.

I've always gone to good schools, and mostly it's been four walls, sometimes with bigger windows out there to the rest of the world. Like I said, we moved around a lot when I was little, as my dad was working his way up the corporate ladder, but my parents always made sure I got admitted, either by living in the right neighborhood or advocating with the right learning agent. They've pulled strings for me to get my content teachers and the assessment designers to recognize my potential even when I haven't really given it my all.

I've had personal education advisors, and I've taken some digital courses, but don't feel like any of it really matters, and I'm really not into being some other kid's learning partner. I'd like to be doing something real in the world, kind of like we did at that tinkering camp, but my school is so old-fashioned. They don't let us mess around with any of those cool 3-D printers or get credit for starting our own businesses. They stick to the academic core, lots of emphasis on that thing they call the canon and core knowledge, and say that we can do that more practical stuff when it comes time to figure out what we want to do for work, when we're older.

What do you find most motivating?

I'm just trying to get through high school with good enough grades to move on to the next stage, since I know I have to study more to do anything with my life. College is my ticket out of here. Yes, a real campus. Because I'm not going to be that equipped to invent my own learning journey or roll out my own business plan. But I do love the stars, all the legends and lore around them, even though that's kind of passé now. I don't have trouble remembering the names of the constellations, just all those dumb characters in the old books.

What you hope to do when you are older?

I want to have an exciting life—that's the most important thing. The money will work out. My parents started out with hardly anything, and it turned out okay for them. College will be fun, because I'll be able to go to a bigger place where there are more people to hang out with, and have cool experiences and party. I don't want to be just an average Joe who sucks up to the corporate bosses, even if they are all into what my amplified organization teacher called "shared leadership" now. I want to do something different with my life.

What worries you as you think about your future?

How can you catch my interest when school seems so boring and I have so much energy? How can you put me in touch with some of the cool things happening out there that haven't made their way to rural America, or connect the tools that my family can buy me with my education?