Now, I want to start with a question: When was the last time you were called childish? For kids like me, being called childish can be a frequent occurrence. Every time we make irrational demands, exhibit irresponsible behavior, or display any other signs of being normal American citizens, we are called childish, which really bothers me. After all, take a look at these events: Imperialism and colonization, world wars, George W. Bush. Ask yourself: Who's responsible? Adults.

Now, what have kids done? Well, Anne Frank touched millions with her powerful account of the Holocaust, Ruby Bridges helped end segregation in the United States, and, most recently, Charlie Simpson helped to raise 120,000 pounds for Haiti on his little bike. So, as you can see evidenced by such examples, age has absolutely nothing to do with it. The traits the word childish addresses are seen so often in adults that we should abolish this age-discriminatory word when it comes to criticizing behavior associated with irresponsibility and irrational thinking.

(Applause)

Thank you.

Then again, who's to say that certain types of irrational thinking aren't exactly what the world needs? Maybe you've had grand plans before, but stopped yourself, thinking: That's impossible or that costs too much or that won't benefit me. For better or worse, we kids aren't hampered as much when it comes to thinking about reasons why not to do things. Kids can be full of inspiring aspirations and hopeful thinking, like my wish that no one went hungry or that everything were free kind of utopia. How many of you still dream like that and believe in the possibilities? Sometimes a knowledge of history and the past failures of utopian ideals can be a burden because you know that if everything were free, that the food stocks would become depleted, and scarce and lead to chaos. On the other hand, we kids still dream about perfection. And that's a good thing because in order to make anything a reality, you have to dream about it first.

In many ways, our audacity to imagine helps push the boundaries of possibility. For instance, the Museum of Glass in Tacoma, Washington, my home state -- yoohoo Washington -- (Applause) has a program called Kids Design Glass, and kids draw their own ideas for glass art. Now, the resident artist said they got some of their best ideas through the program because kids don't think about the limitations of how hard it can be to blow glass into certain shapes. They just think of good ideas. Now, when you think of glass, you might think of colorful Chihuly designs or maybe Italian vases, but kids challenge glass artists to go beyond that into the realm of broken-hearted snakes and bacon boys, who you can see has meat vision. (Laughter)

Now, our inherent wisdom doesn't have to be insiders' knowledge. Kids already do a lot of learning from adults, and we have a lot to share. I think that adults should start learning from kids. Now, I do most of my speaking in front of an education crowd, teachers and students, and I like this analogy. It shouldn't just be a teacher at the head of the classroom telling students do this, do that. The students should teach their teachers. Learning between grownups and kids should be reciprocal. The reality, unfortunately, is a little different, and it has a lot to do with trust, or a lack of it.

Now, if you don't trust someone, you place restrictions on them, right. If I doubt my older sister's ability to pay back the 10 percent interest I established on her last loan, I'm going to withhold her ability to get more money from me until she pays it back. (Laughter) True story, by the way. Now, adults seem to have a prevalently restrictive attitude towards kids from every "don't do that," "don't do this" in the school handbook, to restrictions on school internet use. As history points out, regimes become oppressive when they're fearful about keeping control. And, although adults may not be quite at the level of totalitarian regimes, kids have no, or very little, say in making the rules, when really the attitude should be reciprocal, meaning that the adult population should learn and take into account the wishes of the younger population.

Now, what's even worse than restriction is that adults often underestimate kids abilities. We love challenges, but when expectations are low, trust me, we will sink to them. My own parents had anything but low expectations for me and my sister. Okay, so they didn't tell us to become doctors or lawyers or anything like that, but my dad did read to us about Aristotle and pioneer germ fighters when lots of other kids were hearing "The Wheels on the Bus Go Round and Round." Well, we heard that one too, but "Pioneer Germ Fighters" totally rules. (Laughter)

I loved to write from the age of four, and when I was six my mom bought me my own laptop equipped with Microsoft Word. Thank you Bill Gates and thank you Ma. I wrote over 300 short stories on that little laptop, and I wanted to get published. Instead of just scoffing at this heresy that a kid wanted to get published, or saying wait until you're older, my parents were really supportive. Many publishers were not quite so encouraging. One large children's publisher ironically saying that they didn't work with children. Children's publisher not working with children? I don't know, you're kind of alienating a large client there. (Laughter) Now, one publisher, Action Publishing, was willing to take that leap and trust me, and to listen to what I had to say. They published my first book, "Flying Fingers," -- you see it here -- and from there on, it's gone to speaking at hundreds of schools, keynoting to thousands of educators, and finally, today, speaking to you.

I appreciate your attention today, because to show that you truly care, you listen. But there's a problem with this rosy picture of kids being so much better than adults. Kids grow up and become adults just like you. (Laughter) Or just like you, really? The goal is not to turn kids into your kind of adult, but rather better adults than you have been, which may be a little challenging considering your guys credentials, but the way progress happens is because new generations and new eras grow and develop and become better than the previous ones. It's the reason we're not in the Dark Ages anymore. No matter your position of place in life, it is imperative to create opportunities for children so that we can grow up to blow you away. (Laughter)

Adults and fellow TEDsters, you need to listen and learn from kids and trust us and expect more from us. You must lend an ear today, because we are the leaders of tomorrow, which means we're going to be taking care of you when you're old and senile. No, just kidding. No, really, we are going to be the next generation, the ones who will bring this world forward. And, in case you don't think that this really has meaning for you, remember that cloning is possible, and that involves going through childhood again, in which case, you'll want to be heard just like my generation. Now, the world needs opportunities for new leaders and new ideas. Kids need opportunities to lead and succeed. Are you ready to make the match? Because the world's problems shouldn't be the human family's heirloom.

Thank you. (Applause) Thank you. Thank you.