

# Should 4-Year-Olds Be Beauty Queens?

MILLIONS OF YOUNG CHILDREN COMPETE IN PAGEANTS ACROSS AMERICA. DO THESE CONTESTS GO TOO FAR? **BY JUSTIN O'NEILL**

**F**our-year-old Karley stands in her family's kitchen, dressed in a bikini. She screams in terror as her mom approaches with a spray can. There is no escape for Karley. The dreaded moment has arrived.

The instant the cold mist hits her bare shoulders, Karley squirms, cries out, and stomps her feet. She shakes like she has been electrocuted.

"Look at your white legs!" Karley's mom scolds, while covering her daughter head to toe with fake tanner.

Welcome to the strange world of child beauty pageants.

## In the Name of Beauty

Some 3 million kids—most of them girls—between the ages of 6 months and 16 years compete in American pageants each year. They face off locally and nationally in categories such as swimsuits, talent, evening wear, and themed costumes. This is a world where



A 6-year-old is transformed into a beauty queen.

toddlers sport fake fingernails, a mother feeds her daughter 10 Pixy Stix as a prepageant energy boost,

and parents routinely drop five grand on a child's pageant outfit.

You can see it all on TLC's controversial reality show *Toddlers & Tiaras*. Young contestants like Karley endure a lot in the name of

"beauty": eyebrow waxes, wigs, heavy makeup, manicures, and partial dentures called "flippers" that fill in gaps left by missing front teeth.

This can't possibly be good for kids, can it?

Pageant fans say it's harmless fun. They say that pageants can even

benefit children by building their confidence and public-speaking skills.

Plus, pageant winners earn college scholarships, cash—and those cherished sparkly tiaras, of course.

Others think child beauty



contests are downright ugly. For one thing, pageants are costly. Besides buying a closet full of pricey dresses, families spend fortunes on entry fees, travel, hotel rooms, makeup, and coaches.

### Damaging Message?

Perhaps more seriously, some believe that beauty pageants send the damaging message that appearance is the most important thing about a person. Critics also worry that instead of celebrating individuality, pageants encourage girls to change their looks to fit narrow, invented standards of beauty. There is concern as well over the way contestants imitate the fashions and behaviors of adult celebrities, strutting across the stage in short skirts and revealing dresses. Is it appropriate for children to dress and act in such a mature way?

Despite the opposition, pageant parents insist that competing in beauty contests is no different from playing a sport, which also requires time and money and puts intense pressure on young competitors. Like young athletes, little beauty queens learn discipline, feel great pride in their accomplishments, and form lasting friendships.

Yet where but on *Toddlers & Tiaras* can you watch a mother convince her 8-year-old daughter to have her eyelashes dyed? For some, this kind of thing is cute fun. It's enough to make others want to scream.

Just like Karley. ●

# What Do You Think?

## Should toddlers participate in pageants?

Go back to the article to find arguments that support each side of this debate. Write the information on the lines below.



## YES

AREN'T THOSE KIDS CUTE?

1 Contestants can earn money for college.

2 \_\_\_\_\_

3 \_\_\_\_\_

## NO

IT'S TOTALLY DISTURBING.

1 \_\_\_\_\_

2 \_\_\_\_\_

3 \_\_\_\_\_

**EXAMINE POINTS ON BOTH SIDES OF THE DEBATE—AS WELL AS YOUR OWN BELIEFS**—and decide what you think about this issue. State your opinion in one sentence below. This can become a thesis statement for an essay on this topic.

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