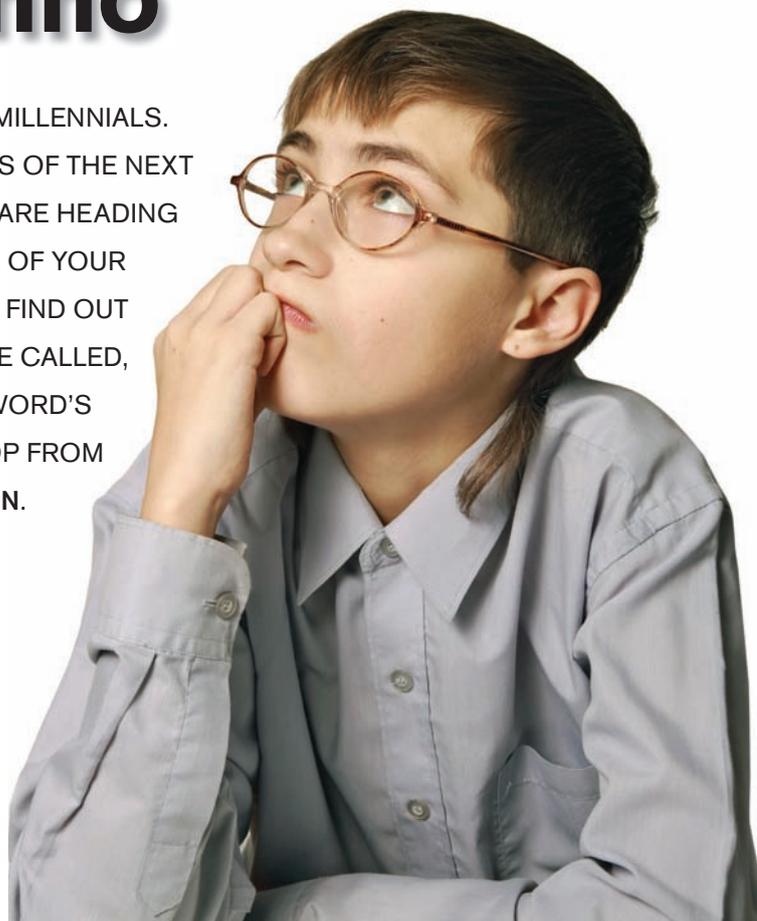


The last word

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FORGET THE MILLENNIALS. THE STUDENTS OF THE NEXT GENERATION ARE HEADING TO THE DOOR OF YOUR CLASSROOM. FIND OUT WHAT THEY'RE CALLED, IN THE LAST WORD'S LATEST SCOOP FROM STEVE HOLDEN.



Hooray. It's time for all those Gen Y Millennial students, those youngsters born between 1975 and 1995, to move over. They are no longer the generation of interest.

There's a new school-age generation coming through and, no, it's not called Gen Z, because that's just boring. It's called iGen, but don't worry about reading up on it too much, because the one after that, iGen 2.0, is right behind it, with iYour-Brand-Here coming through fast. Leastways, that's what the podcasts say.

Time once was that these generation thingys lasted roughly 20 years – like the Babyboomers.

No longer.

Nowadays, we're generating generations at the rate of about one a year. It's a 21st-

century thing, but it's 20th-century folks who started it. Before that, people just got born, lived and then died.

Blame Gertrude Stein, who came up with the Lost Generation to describe anyone who fought in the First World War. The idea was that post-war young folk all felt some kind of moral loss, alienation or aimlessness. Everyone liked Stein's generation idea so much they generated the Interbellum Generation, for all those folks who were born between the First and Second World Wars.

New York Post columnist Sylvia Porter did the real damage, though, when she wrote her famous 'Babies equal boom' article in 1951: 'Take the 3,548,000 babies born in 1950. Bundle them into a batch, bounce them all over the bountiful land

that is America. What do you get? Boom. The biggest, boomiest boom ever known in history.'

The biggest, boomiest boom took over the whole generation thing until Charles Hamblett and Jane Deverson published *Generation X* in 1965, although Douglas Coupland popularised it in his 1991 *Generation X: Tales for an accelerated culture*, and that's where this whole generational generating thing gets wobbly. People start identifying generations simply because they like the idea.

NBC journalist Tom Brokaw, for instance, did a little retrospective coining, coming up with the Greatest Generation for folk who grew up in the Great Depression, although the fact that he only got the idea out there in 1998 when he published *The Greatest Generation* meant all those folk living through the 1930s had no idea they were so great. How *did* they cope?

Then there's the Silent Generation, for those who were kids during the Second World War, but no one knows who coined the term, probably because they were from the, um, generation of the same name.

Since Gens X and Y came barrelling through, though, it's obvious that generation generating has become too rapid, and it's fair to say that Hamblett and Deverson have a lot to answer for. Where do you go after Gen X, Y and Z? There is a solution. These things are like car registration plates so we can just loop back to Gen A, or maybe Gen AAA001.

Whatever you want to call it, the main thing to remember is it's just a description, a category, somebody's label. So as the next cohort of kids comes through your classroom door, remember this: whatever label you put on them, they're people. **T**

This month's Last Word was written by Steve Holden, a putative member of Generation X, Editor of Teacher, and the 2008 highly commended winner in the Best Columnist category of the Melbourne Press Club Quill Awards for the Last Word.