

# What Kids Can Learn From American Idol

**By Lori Barrett, Thinkertots Founder**

I have fond memories of watching television programs with my family as a child. We laughed, shed tears, and cheered for our heroes. Those were cherished times, and valuable because of the things we learned and shared together. Unfortunately, opportunities to bring the whole family together for “TV time” are much harder to find today. With hundreds of channels to choose from, it seems hard to fathom.

That's why I enjoy American Idol. While some may quibble about the sarcasm and mean-spirited comments of the judges, particularly Simon Cowell, it truly is a show enjoyed by people of all ages. In fact, I believe American Idol can be a good teaching tool for parents when it comes to imparting some important life lessons to their children.

**Hard Work Pays** – While many people are born with natural talents like singing, that talent will only get you so far in life. However, through hours of practice, a good singer can often become a great one. There are several current contestants on American Idol who were rejected in previous years. All have indicated that their hard work had paid off in helping them reach the finals of this year's competition.

**Be Adaptable** – Singers on American Idol who are standouts in one musical genre often have trouble performing in styles outside of their comfort zone. The demands of the competition, much like life, favor individuals who can adapt to the situation at hand. While you may prefer one specific style, one activity or one skill over others, it pays to be able to do a competent job in many areas without losing focus on that in which you excel.

**Be Well-Rounded** - Yes, American Idol is a singing competition. However, contestants who are good dancers, display a sense of humor or simply stand out because they speak very well during their interviews, have had an edge because they display a greater range of talents and skills. The reality is the best singer doesn't always win. In life, and on American Idol, it is one's entire presentation that counts.

**Be a Team Player** – Over the years, many American Idol contestants who seemed to be among the best singers in their auditions failed miserably during the group performances in Hollywood. The ability to work cooperatively with others, even during a competition like American Idol, is a positive attribute that will translate well to other aspects of life.

**Be a Gracious Winner** ... From swaggering end zone dances in football to chest thumping and grandstanding by winners of other events, what ever happened to being humble and respectful to fellow competitors? The reality is that no one

wins all of the time, so it pays to behave in a responsible manner during the times when we come out on top.

And a Good Loser ... It can be incredibly difficult to teach children how to handle their disappointment, sorrow, even anger when faced with being on the losing side. The competitive drive that often leads to victory can betray the best of us in defeat. However, the ability to cope with life's inevitable losses is an equally important statement about growing up.

Take Constructive Criticism – I have never been sure that American Idol contestants really understand when Randy Jackson tells them their performances are “pitchy.” At least when Simon Cowell says they sound like a bad karaoke performer, his message is pretty clear. Comments that provide constructive criticism, whether you are an American Idol contestant or not, can be important and valuable in reaching your full potential. Learning how to acknowledge and make constructive use of another person's perspective demonstrates a willingness to improve. While the unconditional love and praise of parents can instill confidence in their children, sometimes the world is less inclined to be so supportive. No one is perfect, and we all can grow by taking criticism in a positive way.

There is always something to be learned if we look at life's experiences with an eye towards being a better person. As parents, it is our job to help our children make the most of what they see and hear each day, whether they are future American Idols or just great kids in their own individual and unique ways.