

1. Jean Piaget's early interest in nature study, and what we would now call ecology, greatly affected his work. His work was in no small measure about human adaptation, which he thought was largely intellectual. Other species have had to physically adapt themselves to new environments through changes in physical characteristics; humans' adaptations have been intellectual ones. This is most developed in his later book *Behavior and Evolution*. Can your students see human intellect as an adaptation device?
2. The influence of young Piaget's nature studies to his later work can be compared to Skinner's use of his love of building things, or Erikson's early interest in non-Western people. All of these early "hobbies" came to be important components of their life's work. Are there other examples in psychology that you can think of? Students can be challenged to discuss how they might incorporate their interests into their future work.
3. As is well known, Piaget's first important work grew out of his careful observations of his own children as infants. Do your students have the opportunity to observe a young child at some length, carefully noting all of the behaviors and utterances?
4. The structured interview that Piaget developed to test his suppositions about children's intellectual growth has many interesting aspects:
 - His ingenious use of simple materials suggests an amazing ability to move his thought beyond mere observations of daily behavior to structured ones.
 - He did not use sophisticated statistical methods.
 - His structured interviews were adapted by many subsequent researchers, Elkind among them. An interesting discussion could be had about what is "scientific" about the social sciences and what separates them from other scientific inquiry.
5. Lev Vygotsky disagreed with Piaget about early egocentrism: that children's thought becomes more egocentric as they grow beyond early childhood, rather than less as Piaget thought. (This difference is more discussed in the Davidson Films video *Growing Minds*.) What is your take on Piaget's view of early egocentrism? Does the child, Bridget, present a compelling example of Piaget's contention?
6. The two processes of accommodation and assimilation are basic to Piaget's work: they have links to his understanding of biological processes. Sometimes using biological examples help students remember the terms better. Taking in food is a basic biological operation. The body accommodates the food by grinding it with teeth, moving muscles to swallow, emitting acids to break it down, etc. **Accommodation** is about changing in response to environmental demands. The body assimilates nutrients from the food. **Assimilation** is about dealing with an environmental event in terms of current structures. What examples can your students come up with for these two parts of adaptation?
7. Like other 20th century psychologists, Piaget tended to put his concepts into stages of development. One could argue that this came out of the technological and scientific changes of the 19th century that analyzed the steps necessary for manufacturing, and of the influence of Darwin's theory of evolution. Or does man naturally need steps/stages to deal with illusory concepts like cognitive growth? After

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all, Shakespeare wrote of the seven ages of man, and most religious traditions have sacraments marking the stages in human lives. Discuss.

8. Piaget's discussion of memory in a speech in Kyoto, Japan raises many interesting questions. In a part of the speech not included here, he relates an episode from his life in which he has a vivid recollection of a dramatic event that never occurred, but that he had been told about when he was a child. This relates to the whole field of "recovered memories" such as people remembering abuse that may or may not have occurred. [This speech is available from Davidson Films, titled *Jean Piaget: Memory and Intelligence*].

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