



ZENITH 2013

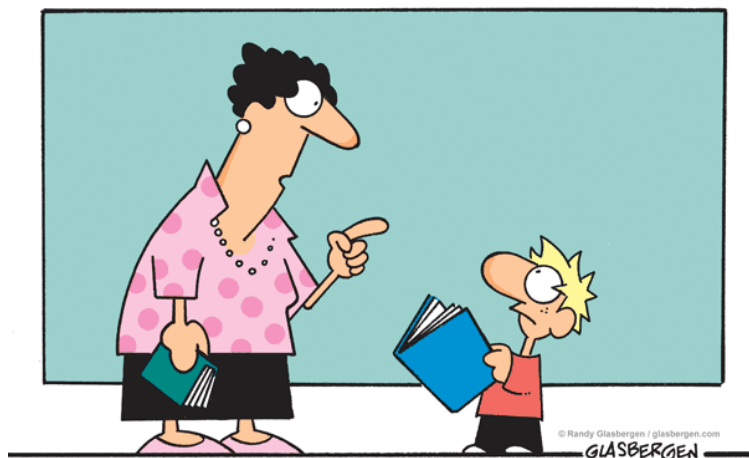
ZENITH's first issue for 2013 brings you an exciting spread of the old and new! Look out for a collection of students' essays, one of our favourite staple sections. J2s, still uncertain of how to improve on P2 reading skills? Then don't miss our ever-handly skills section. Watch out for the Abstract section this issue, which features an issue close to our stomachs – food! Other useful sections include selected book reviews, as well as What's in this Month.

Congratulations to the J3s on their outstanding results, some of whose essays are featured here! In the meantime, J2s, all the best for your upcoming March Block Tests!

You are most welcome to send feedback and suggestions in enhancing future issues of ZENITH.

Editorial Team

Mrs Janice Lok
Mr Conrad Lee
Ms Belinda Lin
Ms Davina Lim



"It's called 'reading'. It's how people
install new software into their brains"



...in ZENITH

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ZENITH Essay Selection

Editor's advice to students:

While you may find the examples and points in these essays useful in answering other questions, please be judicious in using such information in a manner that is relevant to the POC of the question you are answering.

Does the use of technology really help businesses? (MJC2012JC2PEQ2)

Technology has become an integral part of our lives today and its presence cannot be ignored for it has indeed brought about great changes to our society. The use of technology in various business industries is no longer uncommon. In fact, the ability to use technology appropriately seems to be the main determinant of growth for firms nowadays. Technology can help businesses in many ways, for example, via advertising, through innovation, increasing efficiency of production, as well as by increasing profits through decreasing their overheads. However, it is also important to note that the use of technology does have some limitations that cannot be overlooked. Thus, the use of technology only helps businesses when certain conditions are met.

Technology has enabled the proliferation of the Internet which in turn gives rise to the growth of social media, a powerful tool in today's advertising world. Many big companies are turning to social media platforms such as Facebook and Twitter to improve the communication with their customers, by responding to their feedback directly and also keeping their customers informed of the launch of new products via these platforms. The improved communication would build trust between the corporations and consumers which in turn promotes consumer loyalty towards the brand. Furthermore, advertising on these platforms has a great influence and outreach as research has shown that people are more willing to trust recommendations of products by their

friends than complete strangers. Hence, the 'likes' on Facebook of friends will likely be far more persuasive than reviews by other customers on other sites. This shows that technology does not merely bring awareness of a business' products, but also gives credibility to the brand and firm, thus driving the consumerist culture to the advantage of the businesses. However, the increased connectivity that technology has brought along with has a dark side. Businesses have to be careful with the use of social media and not underestimate its power. For example, Qantas, the Australian air carrier company started their Twitter account and encouraged their passengers to share about their dream Qantas experience. However, this campaign of theirs has resulted in many disgruntled passengers complaining about the breakdown incidences and ruining the reputation of Qantas as a safe and quality air carrier service. From this example, it can be seen that social media is a double-edged sword that has the power to not only improve one's reputation, but also ruin it within hours. Thus, it is evident that technology, like all other things, has its merits and demerits. Businesses would only benefit from it if they can make use of its merits to their advantage and prevent its demerits from bringing about its downfall.

Technology has also enabled businesses to engage in product innovation so as to keep its products and services in line with the market trends to stay competitive. Technology, especially in the electronic gadgets industry, is very crucial in determining a business' survival. After all, it is the innovative and fresh features





brought about by product innovation that drive consumers to upgrade their equipment and buy new products. Big companies like Apple and Samsung launch new products regularly and are consistently able to attract large pre-orders before its release and also long queues on the day of the launch. This is because such businesses invest heavily on research and development in technology, unlike small companies without such deep pockets and many patents. This goes to show that technology does really play an important role in business because small companies which are thus limited in their funds and therefore ability to tap on technology to innovate often find it difficult to compete with the larger corporations. On a separate note, it is also important to recognize that other than the latest technology, the ability to innovate products in line with consumers' demands is also crucial in determining the level of success a firm can attain. A firm can have all the resources and technology to come out with new products frequently but if these products are not attuned to the needs of consumers, then it would be deemed as useless and a mere wastage of resources. Hence the use of technology only helps a business to survive the stiff competition if technology is employed appropriately to satisfy the needs and wants of the consumers.

Furthermore, advancements in technology have allowed for increased efficiency in production, enabling businesses to increase the amount and quality of goods and services they can supply, so as to possibly increase their market share and revenue. This can be seen across various sectors. Perhaps most significantly in the manufacturing sector, automation and mechanization in production methods have not also increased the amount of goods produced, but also ensured standardization in the quality of the goods produced. This certainly benefits most businesses in the production sector, but perhaps not for firms that produce traditional craft that needs to be handmade. For these firms, indiscriminate use of technology would instead backfire, causing the businesses to lose their unique identities and selling points. However, this is really a minority in the modern world, as

technology benefits most firms. Even for businesses in the service sector, technological advancements have also enabled firms to provide better service while maximizing their efficiency. For instance, many international couriers such as DHL and UPS offer instantaneous tracking for their packages, notify recipients when the item is out for delivery and also allow customers to reschedule another delivery in the case of a failed delivery attempt. Leveraging on technology not only improves the quality of the service rendered, but also improves their efficiency in ensuring the delivery of the items, as the recipients would have some notice of the item being delivered and thus could cut down on the need for redelivery, freeing up the deliverymen to make more deliveries. This shows that technology indeed benefits most businesses, provided it is used in a way that suits the nature of the business.

Lastly, technology has also helped businesses increase their profits by reducing costs. This can be achieved through many means. Improvements and availability of communication technology have allowed many companies to reduce overheads and thus increase their profits. With the increased prevalence of telecommuting, which is a direct result of the availability of technology such as GoToMeeting which allow employees to collaborate virtually, employers can reduce their overheads significantly. Companies can not only cut down on physical infrastructure required, thus cutting down on rent and utilities' bills, a study commissioned by a collaboration software company Wrike indicated that over a third of employees are willing to take a pay cut in exchange for the option to work from home, further reducing the overheads for the firms in the long run and thus justifying the cost of the software and technology needed to employ such a strategy. In addition, technology with respect to energy-saving has helped many corporations save energy costs, which make up a significant amount of the costs. Simple inventions like the LED lights last much longer and are more energy-efficient as compared to many of the incandescent light bulbs used today. A simple act of replacing these light bulbs in

the entire factory would seem expensive in the short run, but is greatly beneficial in the long-run because it does not only minimize electricity usage which reduces utility bills further but also has the impact of protecting the environment by consuming less energy and contributing less to carbon emissions. In this way, the use of technology could help a business to establish itself as a 'green corporation', which is especially important given the current emphasis on environmental issues. The image of being 'green' may help companies attract consumers and employees that share similar values and this would help the business flourish. Hence, technology has the ability to not only reduce costs incurred but also promote the corporate image, thus helping businesses generally.

In conclusion, technology has a largely positive impact in helping businesses in multiple ways, such as trim costs, innovate, increase productivity and reach out to customers. However, this is only possible if businesses are cognizant of how best to harness technology appropriately, while preventing it from causing any harm to them. After all, technology is only but a tool.

Goh Huey Shyuan 11S415



Review

This writer addresses the PoC clearly and insightfully through adopting a very intelligent way of evaluating each argument using 'conditions'. The examples used are appropriate and interesting. Well-done!

'It is now more crucial than ever for a sense of community to be reinforced in your society.'
Do you agree?
(MJC2012JC2PEQ8)

From a small fishing village to a vibrant and cosmopolitan garden city, Singapore has seen a magnificent change in its development. As people moved into urban homes and attained

greater affluence, our inter-personal ties have grown weaker of late. Yet, this is something we can ill afford in a small multi-racial nation like ours that is open to the forces of globalization. As such, I agree that it is now more crucial than ever for a sense of community to be reinforced in my society.

As a result of globalisation, the greater mobility of labour has allowed people of different countries to live and work abroad. With a greater inflow of foreigners into Singapore, our population has indeed become more diverse. However, this influx of foreigners may put our society into disequilibrium, in which the clash of different ideals and cultures may threaten the peace and stability of our nation. It should be noted that of Singapore's population, only 60% of it is made up of locals and permanent residents. The remaining 40% is made up of foreign talents and labourers who have chosen to work on our shores. By reinforcing a sense of community, we can all get to know one another better and develop greater understanding in this diverse society, helping to integrate in particular those who are new to our society and unused to our diverse ways and habits. A relevant example was of a family who newly moved from China and complained about the foul smell of curry cooked by their neighbour, an Indian family. This led to an uproar in Singapore, and eventually the 'Cook a Pot of Curry Day' campaign, where many families intentionally cooked curry on the same day in order to make a statement against such intolerance. As evidenced, such occurrences only put a strain on the community and the social fabric. Hence to address this greater inflow of foreigners, it is definitely important to help them assimilate into our society so as to strengthen the sense of community.





Furthermore, as a young nation with a nascent national identity, living in the age of globalisation only makes it harder to retain the hearts and minds of our citizens. Should we ignore the importance of building a sense of community, there is little to tie our best and brightest to their Singaporean roots, who may then choose to make their homes permanently elsewhere. Brain drain is certainly not something that Singapore, a nation with only 3.26 million citizens out of a total population of 5.2 million, can afford. As it is, our replacement rates hover at 1.2, one of the lowest in the entire world and we already have turned to attracting migrants to ameliorate the impact of an ageing population in the future. As such, building a sense of community is more imperative than ever before in the age of globalization to breed a people who will stay for the nation.

Another reason for reinforcing a sense of community is the rise of terrorism. Since September 11 2001, the world has seen a spike in terror activities. It is not uncommon to hear of suicide bombings and threats to national security. As a small country, Singapore is also vulnerable to such attacks. Our current peace and stability should never be taken for granted. By promoting cooperation and vigilance in the community, we can stand up to terrorism and help prevent acts of terror. A strong sense of community would also allow the community to quickly get back on its feet after a blow. Victims can receive help unconditionally from total strangers. A strong sense of community would also make it very difficult for terrorists to operate in our society, and perhaps even make it nearly impossible for terror groups to gain a foothold in Singapore. Of course, this can also be applied to crimes in Singapore. Neighbourhood police watch-groups, consisting of residents, are now commonplace in many districts here. On a completely voluntary basis, these groups serve to safe-keep the peace in the area. It is a way of giving back to the community. This sense of community should be enhanced as it is critical to maintain order and stability in the face of adversity.

Lastly, it has become imperative to reinforce a sense of community as we face an ageing population. Singapore's life expectancy is 83 years according to a CIA 2012 Fact Book estimate. With improving healthcare and lifestyles, this number is set to increase. More people are getting older with a meagre replacement rate of only 1.2. With old age, the elderly become less mobile and impediments to their motor skills arise. Having a sense of community allows us to extend our care to the ones who need it most. It may seem a simple task for youth to climb the stairs, but it is definitely an arduous one for the aged. Furthermore, it should be noted that these frail people were once part of our rapid development. To be ignorant of their needs would be appalling and morally wrong. As such, a greater sense of community would encourage us to befriend those in need, and to reach out to them.

Detractors to my point of view may point out that it has always been crucial to reinforce a sense of community. After all, a country cannot function when her people are segregated and hostile towards one another. They may bring up the past where people in Singapore used to live in racially segregated kampongs (villages) and frequent racial riots such as those in the 1960's threatened to prevent Singapore from ever moving forward. Clearly, a sense of community seems more needed then than now. Yet, these detractors would be blind if they do not see that deep-seated racial prejudices still exist amongst some locals today, as evidenced by the recent expletive-filled and racist post on Facebook by a senior NTUC executive on Malay weddings and divorce rates. This senior executive, Ms Amy Cheong, has since been deservedly dismissed by NTUC for her deplorable actions but more importantly, as Law Minister K Shanmugan points out, this incident confirms that 'there are deep fault lines in our society, based on race/religion.' Furthermore, times have changed in today's fast paced society, fierce competition and extremely high costs of living have forced residents to turn cold towards one another as they place more emphasis on personal well-being rather than care about the bigger needs

NTUC fires exec over online racist remarks

She apologises after posts go viral; ministers speak out against her actions

By JENNANI DURAI

THE labour movement moved quickly yesterday to sack an employee who made racist remarks on her Facebook page to staffers of five political leaders, including the Prime Minister, stepped into the fray.

Ms Amy Cheong, 37, was fired from her job as assistant director in the membership department of the National Trades Union Congress (NTUC) less than half a day after the offensive posts went viral on the Internet.

"The explosive-laden posts late on Sunday night insulted Malays by disparaging what she perceived to be the low-cost and overly lengthy nature of cold-deck weddings. They also mocked the Malay community's divorce rate."

A couple of hours after she posted the remarks, Ms Cheong seemed to regret her action and started apologising on Twitter for what she dubbed a "rilly comment".

But it was too late, as screen shots of her original post had gone viral by morning. NTUC Membership's Facebook page was inundated with thousands of comments, and there were two online petitions to get her fired.

NTUC's first response was that it was investigating an "inappropriate comment allegedly made by an employee" but just after noon, a terse

statement from NTUC secretary-general Lim Swee Say announced that Ms Cheong's employment had been terminated with immediate effect.

The NTUC takes a serious view on racial harmony in Singapore," he said. "We will not accept and have zero tolerance towards any words used or actions taken by our staff that are racially offensive."

"Her comments have upset members of the public, including many union members," he added. "We would like to reiterate that in-house racism remains at the heart of the labour movement."

Writing on Facebook from New Zealand, where he is on an official visit, Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong said he was shocked to hear of the incident. "The comments were just wrong and totally unacceptable," he said.

Several other Cabinet ministers also weighed in. Law Minister K. Shanmugam called Ms Cheong's remarks "shameful and unacceptable, adding lines in our society based on race and religion".

Deputy Prime Minister Tharman Shanmugaratnam said that Ms Cheong's comments were "offensive not only to Malays-Muslims, but all the rest of us who value Singapore's multicultural spirit and who want to take it further", while Acting Manpower Minister Tan Chuan-Jin said the reaction of some individuals does not reflect the values that the rest of us hold on to.

Ms Cheong, who could not be contacted yesterday, later issued a statement online saying that she was aware of the hurt she had caused through her remarks.

"There was no racism intended in my post," she wrote. "As soon as I realised how it had affected Singaporeans, I promptly took



Ms Cheong later issued a statement online saying she was aware of the hurt she had caused. PHOTO: FACEBOOK

down my post and issued my apology.

"I hope you can find it in your heart to forgive me for my mistake."

But while she may have paid the price of her folly with her job, Ms Cheong may not be out of trouble yet.

Writing on Facebook from Grassroots leader Lionel de Souza, who is the secretary of the Inter-Racial and Religious Confidence Circle in Hong Kong, filed a police report against her yesterday.

He said he wanted to send a signal that racist remarks should not be tolerated. The police said they are looking into the matter.

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PM Lee: Remarks totally unacceptable

"SEVERAL of you wrote to me through Facebook about the person who posted offensive comments about Malay weddings on her Facebook page. I was shocked to hear about this. The comments were just wrong and totally unacceptable."

Just last week, I shared a WSJ Asia article on why people say nasty things never say face-to-face. I reminded nations that we needed to be extra careful and watch ourselves. I did not expect to see such a dramatic example so soon. Fortunately, the person has promptly apologised for her gross remarks."

But the damage has been done, and NTUC did the right thing in terminating her services.

Let us treat this incident for what it is: An isolated case that does not reflect the strength of race relations in Singapore. But it sharply reminds us how easily a few thoughtless words can cause grave offence to many, and undermine our racial and religious harmony. Let us be more mindful of what we say, online and in person, and always uphold the mutual respect and sensitivity that binds our society together."

— Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong, in a posting on Facebook

TOP OF THE NEWS, AS

■ Who is Amy Cheong?

■ Reactions to race question

Review

The reasoning could have been stronger and better developed at some parts, however, the essay was largely clearly written and well-supported with examples.

'A good leader must always look beyond the needs of his or her own country.' Do you agree? (2003AlvsQ2)

Some names are inscribed in history with golden letters: religious icons, fathers of nations, people who changed the way we lived – people who were termed as 'good leaders'. What is more important to be examined is what these people did to be labelled in such glorious terms. Did they live and die surrounded by the thoughts of their own nation, meticulously improving upon their own little corner of the universe? Or did they set upon a more onerous task – that of looking beyond their nation's needs and leaving a legacy for an entire world to ponder upon? While both paths have been well-trodden, I believe that a good leader is one who is grand in his or her ideals and perspective and can consider more than just the needs of his or her country.

In this age of globalization, this quality in a leader is all but a necessity. Gone are the days when the aphorism 'what happens in Vegas stays in Vegas' can be thought of as a realistic motto. Today, each and every country is so interlinked by ties of trade, politics, research or even tourism that truly enough, a butterfly's wing flap in one corner can stir up a storm in another. A good leader for our times must realize this fact and work not only for one's designated areas of space but rather for everyone who touches, or is touched by, one's country, which in our age refers to the entire world. For example, the Eurozone and its current financial crisis gravely highlights the importance of collective action on the part of countries and a leader looking beyond one's own country – even sacrificing some benefits –

of society. To illustrate my point, let us take a look at recent government plans to address the problem of an ageing population by building nursing homes close to public housing estates. Instead of receiving the support of the nation, it has received strong opposition from residents. Coined the 'Not In My Backyard' syndrome, this shows how people have turned cold, and are only concerned with their self-interest. This truly is a worrying trend. There is thus a greater need to reinforce a sense of community since the rise in affluence has diluted our community spirit. In our progress, it would be wise to not lose sight of the importance of fostering a sense of community in our country.

To sum up, I believe that a sense of community should be reinforced in my society. Times have changed such that threats and challenges, both new and old, assail us year after year. There is no other way to deal with these threats and challenges but to build a sense of community; only then can we ensure the survival of the 'little red dot' for many years to come.

Lian Jun Jie 11S203



for the sake of the greater good. As it is, Angela Merkel has not only emerged as Germany's Chancellor but also as the European leader, working feverishly behind the scenes to stabilize the European economy. It is painfully clear that in this global village, we prosper together, or conversely, fail together. A good leader will ensure that it is the former and thus looking beyond the need of one's own country is important for this cause.

Looking at the needs of other nations also aids the leader in establishing good ties with other nations. This can be mutually beneficial, leading to cultural, technological and political benefits from forming multiple cooperative links. For a small nation, helping other nations meet their needs can buy goodwill and allies, ever so useful in times of trouble. This is what Singapore, once termed a 'little red dot' by a former President of Indonesia has done in the ASEAN region, contributing financial aid and disaster relief generously to her neighbours when they are stricken with the occasional natural disasters, for example helping the Indonesian government with post-tsunami building efforts in Aceh. However, how about larger nations then? Surely they would not need goodwill and allies when it is other nations that need their assistance instead? It is without a doubt that the leaders of large nations too benefit from looking beyond their nations' needs as they build their stature in the region and the world, and can further the causes of their countries on a global scale instead. The leaders of China, for instance, have increased her presence in several African nations, pledging US\$20 billion to these states for infrastructure and agriculture in the next three years, also offering training, scholarships and medical aid. It is not coincidental that China's aid to Africa has expanded rapidly in the last decade as the continent has become a major source of natural resources, such as oil from Sudan and Angola, and copper from Zambia and the Democratic Republic of Congo. China's aid packages are part of a larger effort to ensure her energy security as the nations of the world compete for increasingly scarce natural resources. While much can be said about Singapore and China's pragmatic approaches to

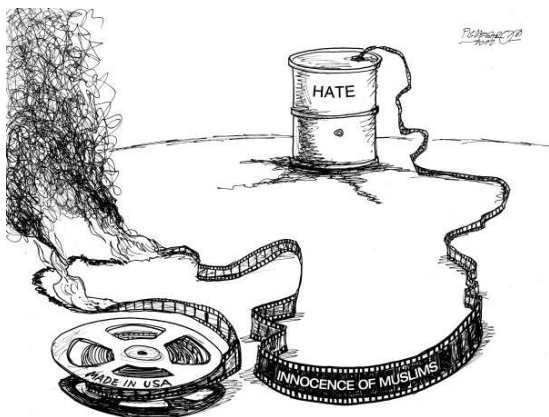
diplomacy, it is nevertheless undeniable that prudent leaders can appreciate that looking into others' needs will be reciprocated on the international stage.

A good leader must also work towards furthering humanitarian and liberating causes beyond one's own country. In the world of perfect information – where we know exactly how many children are hungry in Africa and how many people are being martyred for freedom in the Middle East – a leader who merely sits and cites these as 'somebody else's problem' is not a leader at all. The United Nations Charter and almost all constitutions of the world place the responsibility of ensuring happiness, justice and equality on the broad shoulders of such leaders and they must rise up to the occasion. True enough, world leaders have stepped forward whenever the situation called for it. A notable example in world history is how the UN General Assembly passed resolutions condemning South African apartheid policies, leading to international sanctions and sporting boycotts against the nation, which eventually isolated her. After decades of fighting such sanctions, South Africa eventually ended apartheid policies in 1990. More recently, at the call of the suppressed people of Libya, NATO leaders stepped forward to end the authoritative regime in the country with military intervention. They also provided good offices for a smooth transition for the country into a democracy after the capture and death of dictation Muammar Gaddafi. It is important for every good leader to aid such causes that ensure the betterment of humanity regardless of whether such causes take place in one's backyard or others'. After all, such is the moral obligation of one man towards another, not to mention those who have greater authoritative influence, and therefore a greater responsibility to act in the best interests of humanity.

Some political realists might point out that the endeavour to look beyond the needs of one's own country holds little personal reward for the leader as one is mostly supported by the local populace and therefore should only cater to people's needs. I find this view somewhat myopic, if not selfish. A good leader will leave his or

her mark via the policies implemented and ideologies adopted, which will stand against the test of both time and space. For example, the non-violence of Mahatma Gandhi worked well in India – his own country – but he also urged other countries, particularly Germany, to follow the same in his many letters to Hitler. His interests in the needs of Jews from the other countries established him as a respected figure in Europe. Similarly, Karl Marx's historical materialism was developed in Europe in the backdrop of many revolutions but he also appealed for the well-being of workers in other countries in Asia. Therefore his ideologies live on and he remains a revered leader in socialist countries. True leaders have long-lasting and impactful influence through their ideologies and beliefs, only then can they be remembered as good leaders long after their time.

It is also said that such endeavours hold little rewards for the leader's country, to which his first obligation lies. Therefore looking at the needs of other countries may be done in leisure time but should have relatively lesser importance for the leader. In the light of recent events, this is a naïve viewpoint, as can be seen through the examples of two different policies taken by the same country – USA. USA ignored the consideration and needs of many Middle-Eastern nations and inspired much ill-will through incidents like not censoring incendiary media, for example the recent short movie "the innocence of Muslims", or allowing the heretical defacing of the Koran in their military camps in Afghanistan. As a result, anti-Americanism is rampant in this region



and populations are reported to have been largely polarized in favour of the extremist forces that have caused much grief in US itself. On the other hand, USA also furthered the cause of democracy in Myanmar at the call of the people. Today when the country has finally transitioned into elected governance, American firms have been rewarded with the first-mover advantage in Myanmar for mutual benefit of both parties. This proves the fact that the needs of the other countries and responses to them are important for a country's own sake as well. A good leader will be able to have the long-sightedness to predict rapidly shifting realities and move in ways to maximise the benefits for everyone involved in the situation, including their own countries.

In the end, the question is simple: who is a good leader? It is someone who works for the betterment of people – leading them to a more just and equal society. He is someone who understands the value of collective action and can foresee the consequences of any actions or inactions towards others. He is someone who understands the changing nature of our world and the roles that individuals and countries play in it. All of these points to a singular quality: he must be someone who must always look beyond the needs of his own country.

Navya Sinha 12S103.

Review

Well-stocked with examples, this essay demonstrates the importance of reading widely in order to write cogently. While some arguments may sound a little repetitive and heavy on the examples at parts, the arguments are nevertheless very sound and insightful.

Examine the claim that the world is too dependent on oil. (2005A/1sQ7)

It is often said that "money makes the world go round". In this day and age where manufacturing industries of all kinds of products make up the bulk of the driving force for economic growth, this



common belief may very well change soon. As oil serves as a necessary lubricant for the gears of global development and progress, its importance is increasingly equated with that of money in the lives of individuals, corporations and the government. Our over-reliance on oil and its various forms has manifested in its high prices and conflicts between and within countries owing to oil-related disagreements. Although there exist countries who are turning to alternative sources of energy to ease their dependence on oil, and developing countries that are seemingly 'less reliant' on oil compared to developed countries, the majority of the world is largely dependent on oil and the hands of time are unlikely to change the circumstances for the better anytime soon.

A clear indicator of our over-reliance on oil is one which is observable by many, and in many areas of our daily lives – the escalating price of oil. Economic theory suggests that when there is a shortage of a good whereby the quantity demanded for a good exceeds the quantity supplied, there will be an upward pressure on price as consumers are more willing to pay to express their greater need for the good. In other words, when applied to the context of oil, more oil is needed in the world than there is to go around, and this has indeed resulted in increasingly high prices, skyrocketing to as high as US\$140 per barrel in 2008. This heightened need for oil is primarily due to the emerging industrializing economies importing increasing amounts of oil from oil-rich states to fuel industrial and commercial activities such as manufacturing and public transport. China, for example, has had a 30% increase in oil imports from African states and Venezuela in the past two years. If the supply of oil ran out globally, the global economy would virtually grind to a halt. This was most evidently seen in the 1973 oil crisis, when the world plunged into deep recession due to a low supply caused by the oil embargo imposed by the Organisation of Arab Petroleum Exporting Countries and hence high prices of oil. In this way, our over-reliance on oil is demonstrated by the rapidly rising prices of oil.

Besides the rising oil prices, the need of oil in many countries has even translated into conflicts and violence between nation states. These conflicts did not arise owing to the defence of national sovereignty, and not because one nation waged war on another, but arose due to unhappiness between countries regarding the allocation of oil. In the 1991 Gulf War, Iraq attempted to invade Kuwait for its oil resources, but was expelled by American coalition forces after a short-lived three months. During the US invasion of Iraq in 2003, the United States justified their invasion and occupation of Iraq as an operation to find weapons of mass destruction and to stop the oppressive regime in Iraq. However, many experts and conspiracy theorists believe that this was more of an insecurity issue the US had with Iraq as an oil-rich nation, even giving the ill-fated Iraqi occupation a nickname – Operation Iraqi Liberation – OIL for short. China is currently in dispute with Vietnam, Philippines, Brunei, Malaysia and Taiwan over claims to the oil-rich Spratlys Islands in the South China Sea. All these examples only illustrate one point – our willingness to kill our own kind for oil is more than enough to prove that we are over-reliant on it.

Thirdly, the apparent impacts of global warming serve as poignant reminders for us that we are indeed over-reliant on oil as a resource. Statistics show that emissions from the burning of oil constitute two-fifths of global warming emissions from fossil fuels. Extremities in weather worldwide have risen rapidly in terms of frequency, from massive heat waves in countries near the equator to dreaded monsoon rains and massive thunderstorms in temperate countries. Natural disasters have increased in occurrence and their damage and cost to states massive, exemplified by Hurricane Katrina in 2005 at US\$108 billion, Hurricane Irene in 2011 at US\$19 billion and Hurricane Ike in 2008 at US\$37 billion. Global warming has also led to an ostensibly insignificant rise in the global surface temperature of a further 1.1 to 2.9 °C during the 21st century, but severe in the long run. These 'symptoms' of global warming demonstrate how much emissions from the consumption of oil has contributed to global warming in the last decade, hence

even more so showing the extent of our excessive reliance on oil.

While it is irrevocable that the world is heavily dependent on oil, we must not forget that there exist countries who acknowledge their over-reliance on oil and are slowly but gradually reducing the need. Currently, alternative sources of energy such as hydroelectric energy, wind and solar energy are used by some countries to cut emission rates from the combustion of oil. In Canada and some parts of America, hydroelectric and wind-generated power is used as a source of power. UK has built the world's largest wind farm off the Cumbrian coast in the Irish Sea – the Walney offshore wind farm which will generate enough electricity for 320,000 homes. These technologies and the fact that countries are in the pursuit of alternative sources of energy goes to show that some parts of the world are trying to reduce their reliance on oil. However, let us not be too optimistic, for only a minority of the countries which have the financial reserves can undertake research or build the infrastructure needed to harness alternative sources of energy. Most of the time, developing countries lack the technology and money for such projects and continue to deplete the limited supply of oil. Even some developed countries that are able to do so are unwilling, either due to the extensive effort and time required for the country to change and adapt to use these cleaner sources, or the large

opportunity costs of carrying out research, namely the potential development in infrastructure in the country and research into other areas of science which exceed the benefits cleaner sources of energy could bring.

Optimists suggest that in addition to finding alternatives to oil as sources of energy, governments in the world have tried to reduce the need for oil locally by encouraging citizens to take public transportation or buy only what they need, in the long run resulting in lesser consumption of oil to manufacture lesser goods and provide less services that are not needed. In this way, governments have reduced their society's dependence on oil, and at the same time saved on costs to research and develop alternative sources of energy. Nevertheless, these are but minute efforts and one wonders how much impact efforts like 'Earth Hour' can have given how a sea change in attitudes is needed, yet far from coming. In short, it would be naïve to believe that things will change in the short term, instead, it will take generations before a paradigm shift can occur; hopefully in time before global warming obliterates us all.

In conclusion, oil is quickly becoming a universal commodity, its importance likened to that of the basic necessities of human survival – food, water and shelter. As oil has been accumulated over the Earth's millions of years in history, at the rate human beings are depleting this limited and unsustainable supply of oil, it is only a matter of time before the lubricant to the engine of global economic growth runs out, causing the latter to come to a grinding halt.

Jonathan Ang Yik Ming 12S101



Review

This is a commendable attempt to address the PoC, with close attention paid to how the world's level of reliance on oil has gone to excessive levels. The essay is also strongly substantiated with important statistics and case studies, making for a highly informative piece of writing.



'A picture is always more powerful than mere words.' What is your view?

(2006 Alvs Q2)

From Mankind's inception, pictures have always played a pivotal role in communication. Early cavemen drew pictures on cave walls to tell a story, a precursor to the written novels and articles we see and appreciate today. Even in today's society, one that makes significant use of verbal communication and written reports, pictures have been indispensable. The question stands, then, whether a picture is always more powerful than mere words, having lasted from the dawn of civilization, even before words came about and became language. I believe that, while pictures are universally understood, and are capable of sending an instantaneous message when needed, it is incorrect to say that pictures are always more powerful as there are times where words are just as efficacious or even better at translating the message intended. I also believe that words are more effective as a communication medium for ideas and instructions, and that it is a more efficient tool for conveying emotions.

Firstly, I will concede that in reaching out to a global audience, pictures are the undisputed king of communication. The reason for this unanimous claim is that pictures transcend the language barrier. This is evidenced by our most famous and universal symbols – the male and female icons representing the male and female toilets or the fork and the knife representing food. In many shopping malls in various countries, countries that speak different languages, the symbols for toilets and food places are always the same, and it often needs no translation for the foreign tourist to decipher its intended meaning. We realise that the reason why pictures are so powerful in communication is that it presents a visual representation of the user's intended meaning, and these pictures do not require much effort to get its message through. Furthermore, it also works the other way around, people

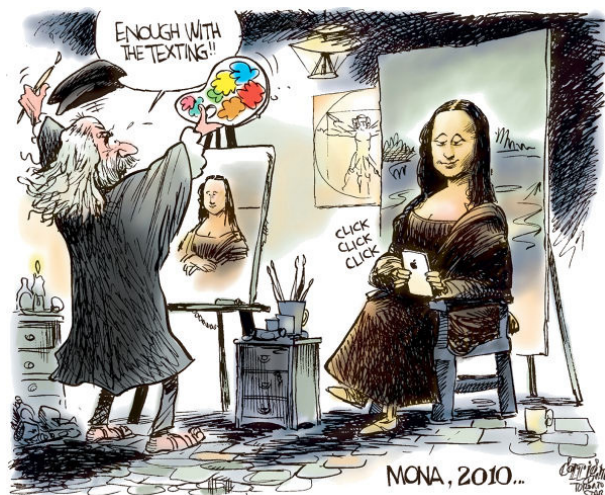
visualize words to decipher its intended meaning. If one was asked to imagine how a deer would look like in English, one would most likely picture a brown deer in the forest. If the same question is posed in Chinese to a Chinese-speaker, the latter would conjure the same image. This is the power of pictures – the same, constant message being translated into many languages based on just one image, just like how the thumbs-up sign represents approval and excellence in different languages – “Hao” in Chinese, “Bagus” in Malay, “Sugoi” in Japanese and “Excellent” in English.

I will also acknowledge that pictures, to a certain degree, have the ability to send a short, sharp message, such that it would be faster processed in the mind compared to words. A picture, as the cliché goes, does after all speak a thousand words. This is best illustrated through examining the graphic health warnings on cigarette packs. In Singapore, as well as a plethora of other countries, a picture of mouth ulcers, tumours or other grotesque aberrations of the human body caused by smoking is placed right on the front cover of each cigarette box. Its message is simple – to warn people about the dire ramifications of smoking. The message is sent out very efficiently indeed. A single picture of such horrifying anomalies is meant to leave a deep impression on the smoker's mind. He cannot, and will not, be able to avoid the pictures and one glance at the picture is enough to warn him of the long-term health consequences of his actions. Conversely, a description of the same conditions using words instead of pictures would be much less useful in accomplishing this aim. Because words take a longer time to be processed in the brain, it is easier to ignore words, especially when the font is small enough to fit on the cigarette box cover, and one can very often choose not to make the effort to read and process a string of words, whereas the effect of pictures is often, and definitely in this case, instantaneous and rather unavoidable. However, pictures cannot be said to *always* be more powerful than words as there are also cases where words can send a stronger message than pictures. The use of words and verbal language has evolved to a

sophisticated level, such that various emphases and expressions can be conveyed in various ways due to appearances, including font, colour, upper case or lower case letters, and also due to linguistic systems like punctuation. For this, let us imagine a signboard at the entrance of a deep, dense forest. Very often, two simple words are used: "Keep out!" Very rarely do we see a picture of a palm (indicating 'stop'). Why is this so? It could be due to the use of punctuation that accompanies words. In such cases, pictures alone are insufficient to describe the urgency and gravity of the situation. Words, along with the magic of punctuation and capitalization, since capital letters often represent urgency as well, are adept enough to project a sense of the desired urgency. In this case, we can see that if pictures are clear enough, they are capable of sending out an impactful message, but this is not always the case, as sometimes, pictures alone cannot bring out the urgency and seriousness of the message the user so desires to convey.

There is also a word in the question that I would like to deal with, the word "always", and in doing so, I reiterate that pictures are not always more powerful than words, especially when it comes to the accurate interpretations of an idea or concept. Let me begin with a famous ambiguity, the Mona Lisa. For that case, the smile of the Mona Lisa has been debated with respect to its emotion – is it a smile of pure bliss or satisfaction? Here, it is apparent that the

smile of the Mona Lisa is indeed ambiguous, that it is still not decided upon a single, correct interpretation. Similarly, books and novels had had fewer issues with varying interpretations, because words often tend to be more definitive in nature than pictures are, as pictures tend to be more open to interpretation. Yes, there may be unfinished, ambiguous endings, or slightly ambiguous chapters, and one can argue that a literature buff can read into various interpretations of single text. Nonetheless, it would be hard to dispute that in more precise settings such as textbooks or any academic article, adjectives, verbs and concrete nouns are used over pictures to articulate a clear idea of what exactly the intended meaning and interpretation are to the reader. For example, one would hardly expect descriptions of processes in medical textbooks to take place purely in the form of pictures, even though pictures are better at helping the medical student to visualise the exact body part. Words still have to come into play to explain precisely the significance of these pictures, as well as the various procedures, processes and prescriptions that are required. In this case, it is apparent that words are more powerful as interpretive tools. However, the converse can happen too, with many possible examples to showcase, but the main point is simply that it really depends on the context, which shows that pictures may not *always* be more powerful than words as an accurate interpretive tool.



Furthermore, words are better suited to describe thought processes and complex concepts than pictures can. A very relatable example is the instance of you reading my essay now. Why is it that I did not choose to argue my point in pictures, but instead in words? Other than the fact that writing in words is one of the basic requirements of this academic exercise, the true reason is this: words have the ability to signal and describe what is going on in the thinker's mind far more efficiently and accurately than pictures do. Because we think in a fluid flow of thoughts, using pictures alone to represent the flow of thoughts is often insufficient because of the very nature of pictures – they are still,



instantaneous snapshots of precise moments as these moments unfold. This could be true of paintings, drawings, and photographs. Words, however, are not restricted by the shackles of single moments in time. Words can be used to describe a progression of ideas by using time references and signposts to narrate the sequence of events. When Martin Luther King made his famous speech "I have a dream", he imparted his flow of ideas, his vision and his hopes to us via well-chosen words, "I have a dream, that one day, my children will live in a nation where they are not judged by their skin colour but by their character." How could we replicate that sentence, an excerpt from the speech, with all its past allusions to pain, present indications of struggle, and future implications of hope in pictorial form? Words transcend the barriers of time the way a picture would hard pressed to, and the essence, the power of the words chosen, would likely be lost. In this case, words are more powerful than pictures.

Of course, the extreme proposition that pictures are always more powerful than words also does not ring true when one considers that very often in life, pictures and words have to work together in order to accomplish the greatest effect. This is why so many publications like magazines, newspapers and even novels these days, include the use of illustrations in addition to words. No newspaper would be complete without punchy headlines, nor without evocative photographs; no magazine would be saleable without glossy, colour-printed images that accompany interesting text. Pictures and words often serve to reinforce each other, be it in terms of explanation and clarity, or in terms of interest and engagement. To posit one against the other would be a false dichotomy, and a failure to recognize that different platforms serve different purposes, and there is actually nothing wrong with that. One does not necessarily have to be superior to the other if the most powerful effect is attained by the use of both entities together. Take for example the extremely powerful cover page of the New York Times on 12 September 2001, one day after the fateful and now famous September 11 attacks. The headline screamed "US Attacked: Hijacked Jets

Destroy Twin Towers in Day of Terror", and the large picture that accompanied the headline was of two identical, flaming buildings from which billows of black smoke was emanating. Till this day, the picture seen together with the headline still evokes tremendous emotions. The picture without the text would simply have no context and anchor, and the text without the picture would have less impact in conveying the seriousness of the situation. Therefore, both pictures and words together is often what create the most powerful statement.

Pictures have always had a colourful history, having been used since the beginning of Mankind. However, there is a reason why languages and words have been invented, the reason being not to replace pictures as a means of communication but to complement and enhance it. Both are indispensable to each other: life without pictures is hardly colourful, while life without words would be impractical. The notion that pictures are always more powerful than words is myopic because it ignores the power that words can hold. Thus, I conclude that the picture is not always more powerful than "mere" words.

Jorden Seet Shi Yuan 12S413



Review

Written very competently, this essay demonstrates the successful juxtaposition of variables in a comparative question to address the PoC. The use of examples from a wide variety of areas gives the essay much-needed breadth.

Should crimes that were committed many years ago simply be forgotten? (2006AlvlsQ5)

Kaing Kek Lev, or better known as Comrade Duch, was sentenced to life imprisonment in 2010 by a special Cambodian court set up to prosecute war criminals from the horrific Khmer Rouge era. The head of the infamous Tuol Sleng (S-21) prison camp, where thousands were systematically tortured and executed, he had fled Cambodia in 1979, and was only discovered only two decades later, living under the guise of a different name. From this example, we ask ourselves whether it is right for crimes that were committed many years ago to be erased entirely from our memories and amnesty be granted to those implicated, after the passage of a designated period of time. Yet, as some may raise their hands meekly in support of forgiveness in order to allow the perpetrators to move on, many more would still cry out for the tenets of justice to be upheld and criminals to be brought to justice. I, for one, firmly believe that crimes that were committed many years ago should not simply be forgotten as it would be erroneous to disregard the injustice dealt to victims and allow the likes of murderers to walk away scot-free as if they had done no wrong.

Not all crimes committed are as serious as the war crimes committed by Comrade Duch of course, which may lead some to argue that it is unwise to harp on petty crimes that have occurred many years ago as the efforts and resources used to bring the relevant perpetrators to justice could be better utilized elsewhere. Instead of dealing with a theft case after more than a decade, the judicial system could be put to better use by dealing with more current cases since there is a greater chance of apprehending those responsible, especially if such crimes are of a greater magnitude and concern a larger number of victims. It would also be harder for courts to determine the severity of the crimes after a long period of time has lapsed, considering that social values in a society vary over time and it would be unfair for criminals to be subject to punishments that are reflective of a time very much different from the one in which he committed his crime. However, I beg to differ. By deliberately ignoring petty crimes that have occurred many years ago, we would be sending out a wrong message that dilatory tactics can be used to absolve a criminal of all blame. Consequently, this would attract more criminals to be more daring in their unlawful endeavors since they are now confident that if they evade arrest for a sufficient period of time, they would be granted immunity against the law. This is as good as giving the criminal a license to commit crime, so long as they do not get caught for a minimum period of time. And parallel to that, forgetting crimes that were committed many years ago, in whatever form such forgetfulness may take, would simply encourage criminals to reoffend, and a greater number of crimes would occur, undoubtedly costing the state even more in resources over the long term.



Some people would also argue that crimes that were committed many years ago should be forgotten and not rehashed or held against the criminals because some of them have already paid the price for their acts. These convicts have served their jail terms and it would be unfair to continue discriminating against them and faulting them for something that they have done in the past but are now deeply



repentant of, such detractors argue. Doing so often deprives them of a job or a chance to find a solid footing in society again, which very likely drives them back to their familiar habits of transgression out of a sense of hopelessness or of being abandoned by society. Therefore, these more generous members of society even feel that it would be of no great consequence for old criminal records to be wiped clean or not brought up at all. However, on this point too, I beg to differ. Criminal records exist for the purpose of allowing the state to keep track of past offences for the protection of the rest of society. There is no certainty or guarantee that someone who has paid his dues in prison is definitely rehabilitated and repentant, and it is a well-known fact that those who have committed crime before are more likely to reoffend than the average person. Therefore, in the interest and security of the rest of society, it would be foolish to allow old criminal records to be wiped clean. For example, while the USA allows for the expungement of criminal records not only for youth offenders but of misdemeanor offenders (crimes that are considered less serious than actual felonies) through the Second Chance Act, this is hardly something practised by many other countries around the world, suggesting that few other countries in the world see wisdom and value in doing so. The possible cost imposed on the rest of society should the criminal go on to commit more crimes and the inability of the state to then have greater information on the criminal is too great to bear. In fact, there are other ways for criminals to be reintegrated into society without having the rest of society's safety threatened by the expunging of criminal records, as shown by Singapore's Yellow Ribbon Project, which helps to raise awareness amongst society of the need to give ex-convicts a second chance, while helping these ex-convicts to find employment and providing them with counselling. Thus, even as these criminals have paid the price for their crime, such payment does not warrant the erasure of their records, and reintegration into society can be done in other less risky ways.

Some may also argue that crimes committed many years ago should be

forgotten in the interest of the victims, because continually recalling the crimes would disallow the victims and their families from moving on and result in the continuation of tension between opposing parties. It can be argued that by forgetting crimes committed many years ago, victims would not be reminded of the injustice dealt to them and ensure that they would be able to continue on with their lives. The grudges borne against others will result in them experiencing bitter relationships, especially if the crimes in questions are those committed on a large scale against a whole community, or even a whole country. For this matter, I concede that forgetting some crimes committed many years ago would make it easier for criminals to be forgiven and for societies to move on. For example, in South Africa, the younger generations are encouraged by the government to forget about the misdeeds and grievances of the Apartheid era, when racial discrimination was institutionalised. This has allowed the current South African population to live in relative harmony, as compared to decades ago, and this was marked by the successful hosting of the 2010 FIFA World Cup, a global footballing spectacle that heralded a complete re-integration for South Africa into the international community. Thus, in view of the greater need to move on, I do acknowledge that forgetting crimes of the past may be advisable. On a side note however, it is worthy to note that while one can choose to forgive, forgetfulness is not quite something within one's control but is part of the way the human brain processes and stores information. One cannot deliberately forget; one who claims he has 'forgotten the past' has merely repressed these memories.

Granted that the horror of such crimes that were committed many years ago should be forgotten and let go of by the individual victims and their families, I am of the opinion that it is still beneficial nonetheless for society to remember the lessons learnt from past crimes, especially those that were committed on a larger scale against entire communities, because doing so has value to the guidance of policies and relationships in the present day. A famous example would be the

systematic attempted extermination of the Jews by Hitler during World War II. While few would condone the family members of the Jews whose lives were taken clinging on to a decades-old grudge against anyone who is German, there are valuable lessons that have been learnt from the Nazis' crimes, such as that of not giving in to bullies and dictators on the international stage, and the value of moderate politics, as opposed to extremist ones. Such values strongly govern the world, its politics and its international relations to this day, showing how there is reason to remember constructive and hard lessons learnt from crimes that were committed many years ago. In another example, in South Africa, the Truth and Reconciliation Commission was established to invite perpetrators of violence to give testimonies and request amnesties from civil and criminal prosecution. The decision to not completely forget the serious crimes committed against the majority of the population was a huge step taken by the government to help heal the nation of South Africa and begin the process of putting aside the hatred that has been accumulated over centuries. Ironically, making the effort to remember such crimes and dealing with such memories appropriately in a restitutive manner is what allows entire communities and countries to move on and grow. Therefore, ultimately, I still firmly believe that crimes that were committed many years ago should not simply be forgotten, and the memories should in fact be used to good and restorative effect.

Furthermore, remembering crimes that were committed many years ago is in itself a way of showing respect and regard for those who were harmed by the crimes. Erasing all traces of the crime from individual or collective memory can be seen as desecrating the memory of those who have suffered in the hands of society's deviants. Remembering that such crimes were committed, even if nothing can be done in this day and age to right the wrong, can give significance to the victims and comfort to the families who have had to suffer as well. This is the very reason behind commemorative sculptures that are erected in the name of victims of



large-scale crime, similar to how Ground Zero, where the Twin Towers of the New York City World Trade Centre once stood, has been set aside solely for the purpose of remembering, and is also the lesser known and acknowledged reason behind why old newspaper reports and records of crime are kept. Remembering crimes that were committed long ago is sometimes the more uncomfortable but human thing to do, and I believe that it is not right nor fitting to do the opposite.

In conclusion, I believe that crimes committed many years ago should not simply be forgotten, especially those of a greater severity. It would be unfair to the victims if criminals are not punished duly and that they would suffer for nothing. Also, it would be better for the criminals as they would be reminded constantly of the need to toe the line and abide by the law. Most people would not feel safe and secure ever again if crimes committed in the past are simply forgotten. Would anyone be able to accept the likes of Hitler and Gaddafi walking with their heads held high on the streets of Germany and Libya, as though they had never committed a single crime or killed a single person? Would anyone feel comfortable living in a society that is able to discard memories of tragedies and traumatic incidences as if they never happened? I certainly would not.

Terence Yeo 12A101

Review

The essay brings up several interesting and complex arguments with a number of appropriate examples given too. The writing displays a strong personal voice but can be



presented in a more succinct and focused manner.

'There is no such thing as luck. People determine their own lives.' Do you agree? (2005A1vsQ2)

Luck is regarded by many to be a decisive factor in people's lives. When events are in people's favour, they joyously hail it as 'good luck'; when things just simply do not go people's way, bad luck bears the blame. However, is luck truly a force that exists or is it prescribed by the user according to one's whims and fancies? On the other hand, the power of self-determination is also a popular belief, glamourized by the many self-help books 'gurus' tout today. However, do people really have any vestige of control over their lives? In my opinion, luck simply does not exist; however, people also do determine their own lives only to a small extent, with luck not having a role in that.

Before anything is said, this question must be answered: what is luck? According to numerous lexicons, luck is chance, something that people accord the outcome of an event to when they cannot find another explanation. The path luck takes is considered to be utterly desultory: if something happens and it benefits the person involved, people say 'good luck' has made an appearance in that person's fortune. However, if that particular event just went the other way and brought harm onto the person, it is considered as plain and simple 'bad luck'. Thus, luck is merely defined to be a random throw-up between good and bad.

Some people who subscribe to a belief in luck earnestly affirm that in an event whose outcome lies in the hands of probability, luck definitely exists as the force that guides the result, whether to the joy or chagrin of the people involved. Probability is ubiquitous in one's life and the world: a rolling dice, when any number can show up on the face, the speed and direction of the wind in a game of tennis which would affect the ball's trajectory,

when a person participates in a lucky draw with thousands of outcomes, one of which awaits him. Therefore, when all of these events, being out of one's control, and with so many possible outcomes and results, if the turnout is to a person's delight, what else, these people say, could it be but pure, unadulterated luck? However, this view is easily contestable as it is too narrow a perception. In the bigger picture of things, when one uses a telescope instead of a microscope to look at his situation, it need not be luck that perpetuated this outcome. The force of luck need not have participated; instead, the outcome, out of millions of others, happened to be the one that people selected. The result would be far too random to be attributed to luck; if something good happened, voila, it was good luck; if not, it was bad luck. A more rational explanation would be the haphazard weaving of possibilities and chances, rather than something that could go either way. Thus, luck is likely to be non-existent.

Luck does not exist because the whole concept is a contradiction in terms: if people prayed to Lady Luck for a showering of blessings, they would be going against the fundamental tenet of luck. As aforementioned, luck is chance, with a path that divides into two and a resultant outcome based on whim and fancy. A person who puts his faith in luck is then allowing it to make his decision for him which then ironically goes against the very definition of luck. Supposedly luck is a deity, and if it determined the outcome of events, then luck would no longer be 'chance', but instead 'a supernatural being' that dictates the fates and destinies of people to unfold the way 'it laid them out to be'. Then, the results of many things in people's lives would be attributed to the god or goddess Luck rather than mere luck, which is the context of the discussion. One apt case study is the religion of Hinduism, when pious devout pray to the god of fortune, Lakshmi, for good luck. They do not depend on luck per se, but rather, they place their hope in Lakshmi. As a result, it can be said that luck does not exist since deifying it goes against its very definition.



Additionally, luck is not taken into account when people make decisions or carry out activities. It does not make an impact on the outcomes of occurrences. For example, if a person meets an old friend on his way to his workplace, he may throw up his hands and relate this to good luck. However, did luck truly play a part? The person had to go to work and thus was on his everyday route to his workplace. His friend, similarly, had a purpose in the vicinity, and thus made an appearance there, and thus perpetuated the meeting. It is unlikely that luck has any role in people's lives, as people make decisions, which intertwine to result in specific outcomes. Luck does not determine the outcome, rather, it was the various disparate decisions of people that bonded together and delivered the resultant occurrence. In the 1960s, NASA engineers were venturing to launch the probe Ranger 7 to crash land on Mars and take a few thousand photographs of the Red Planet to beam home: a simple task. However, six probes before it had unfortunately failed to reach Mars. Bad luck? That is unlikely, as it could well-nigh be erroneous calculations made on the engineers' part that led to the failures of these initial six probes. This time, Ranger 7 exceeded expectations by successfully making it onto Mars. Engineers could not comprehend the sudden triumph, and decided to accord the success to an engineer who happened to be chewing peanuts at the time of the launch. Ever since, peanuts have been the lucky symbol among NASA engineers. However, anyone with the use of their rational faculties can clearly see that peanuts will not impact the landing of the probe; it can be said that the two events were entirely

unrelated. The success of Ranger 7 could be because engineers had located previous errors and corrected and improved upon them accordingly, culminating in their eventual victory over their past failures. That seems more logical than peanuts. Thus, it is evident that luck does not exist, because many of what people consider to be lucky does not have a sensible link with events; at most, a very tenuous one, which, still, hardly can be 'luck'.

If luck does not exist, then can it be that people are the captains of their own destinies as the decisions they make will definitely have an incisive impact on themselves? When one chooses an option, he is ultimately carving out the path for himself directly, and rarely considers the impact of their choices on others' lives. This is readily depicted in numerous religions and beliefs, such as Christianity and Buddhism. In the sphere of Christianity, God offers people a choice to accept him or not, whether to follow his doctrines and allows people to decide how they want their lives to proceed. This can also be seen in Buddhism, where over two hundred laws have been stipulated for believers, who have been given the jurisdiction over their own lives and can decide if they will abide by these laws or not. Thus, it does seem that people do determine their own lives.

However, it is inevitable that one's decisions will tie in with those of others. Even if people consider only their self-interest and make their decisions in this narrow light, it will indubitably impact others, for everyone lives in the same world and context. One decision will lead to another, a domino effect that will affect all those who have any remote connection in the burgeoning mountain of consequences. In the famous short story, 'A Sound of Thunder', the hunter Eckels travel back in Time to gun down dinosaurs and, in his cowardice, accidentally steps upon a small, delicate butterfly in the distant past. Upon travelling back to the Present, he realizes to his dismay that it has been almost completely altered, with things being horribly different from what he had left behind. All of these happened



with the death of a frail butterfly, and from this stemmed an inexorable concatenation of events that involved so many others, changing the face of mankind. It is thus evident that one's decision, no matter how small or seemingly insignificant, will snowball into something that has the potential to affect more than one can ever expect. Thus, people's lives are subject to the many decisions of others, showing that the extent to which they have full determination over their lives is actually very little.

Furthermore, how can one control probability? Probability is the one aspect of nature that people cannot control, for that is its very idiosyncrasy. Being beyond people's control, probability can lead to a slew of outcomes that will force people to make decisions according to what it dictates. People's lives are determined by the outcomes of chance, which plays a much more momentous role than any other, for probability is present in almost every situation, when one simply cannot mould the outcome in accordance to his will. This is clearly evident in cases such as the Moors murders in Britain in the 1960s, when ruthless psychopaths Ian Brady and Myra Hindley decided to kill whoever they

saw walking down the street. During the tragic Black September massacre during the 1972 Olympics held in West Germany, numerous policemen had been shot and injured when police snipers could not find their targets in the inky darkness. Therefore, it can be seen that people do not have full control over their lives.

In summation, people control their lives to a small extent. Some may attribute this to the existence of luck. In the end, its existence will really boil down to a discussion between secular science and religious faith, which is in all essence a tough one, and better left for another day.

Lee Hui Ying 12S101



Review

The writer adopts a unique approach to address this abstract question, bringing in thought-provoking perspectives and examples that are out of the ordinary. This is not the typical response to an essay question but has been artfully written due to the writer's writing flair and ability for abstract thought. An essay of very high quality.



ZENITH Brush Up!

Reading Comprehension

Done numerous comprehensions but still doing badly? The key to doing well in P2 lies in your ability to comprehend the passage thoroughly and deeply.

Here are four simple tried and tested strategies to better understand a text:

1. Look out for SIGNPOSTING clues.

Signposts are used by every good writer to guide readers along. They prepare the mind of the readers for what to expect in a particular paragraph or sentence.

2. Use STRUCTURAL clues. Most well-written texts have a structure that is easy to follow.

Knowing that a passage has an introduction, some body paragraphs and a conclusion, as well as understanding the general purpose of these paragraphs can help readers understand the text better.

Knowing the structure of a paragraph also helps. For instance, most body paragraphs would have a topic sentence, examples, elaboration and end with a warrant or a link. Understanding these components can help in overall comprehension.

3. Be AWARE of sections you do not understand.

This is the first step in repairing understanding. If you do not even know which parts you do not understand, then how would you know they need repairing?

4. Know how to REPAIR understanding.

- a. Read the section again. Sometimes this is all it takes.
- b. Read around the section to look for clues. Readers can try reading a previous section again or a further section to see if there are clues that help in understanding.
- c. Re-phrase the difficult section in your own words to try to understand it.

Ultimately, if you still do not understand what you are reading, then the problem could be more deep-rooted. For instance, you may not have the language ability (eg. vocabulary) needed to understand the text. There is no shortcut here, unfortunately, and only wide-reading and exposure to texts and words will help you develop into really good readers. Meanwhile, you can try reading the following passage to see if employing any of the above strategies works.

Take a look at the following text and see if you can apply any of the above strategies to understand what you are reading. Make annotations on the side of the passage as you apply the strategies. There is an answer key provided behind but **do NOT turn to the answer key first!**



Text	Strategy
<p>How can I be a better reader?</p> <p>How do we make better readers out of our students? This question has been the focus of many academics, educators and students over the years, and a huge amount of literature has been written about this. Courses have been conducted, strategies have been explored and hypotheses have been tested. Out of the hundreds of strategies developed, a few key ideas stand out. Many English language educators find these ideas highly effective in helping students to become better readers.</p> <p>Educational researchers suggest some strategies employed by good readers. They believe that good readers take note of the structure of the text they are reading, make predictions about what is to come, and read actively, meaning that they construct, revise and question the meanings they make as they read.</p> <p>Furthermore, strong readers try to determine the meaning of unfamiliar words and concepts in the text, and deal with gaps as needed. They draw from, compare and integrate their own schema (prior knowledge) with material in the text. On top of that, it definitely helps if readers monitor their understanding of the text, making adjustments in their reading as necessary. They could re-read a section or read a further section in order to better understand what they are reading. Looking at the bigger picture, we know that employing reading strategies alone cannot help readers to improve their reading ability. What is the solution, then?</p> <p>To solve this issue, we need to understand some theories. Stephen Krashen, an educational researcher, postulated some hypotheses about language development and developing the ability to understand what is being read, namely, comprehension. First, there is the <i>input hypothesis</i>, which states that learners progress in their knowledge of the language when they comprehend language input that is slightly more advanced than their current level. He called this level of input "i+1", where "i" is the language input and "+1" is the next stage of language acquisition. This implies that learners can only improve their ability to comprehend if they are exposed to texts of increasing difficulty. In other words, read more!</p> <p>Secondly, Krashen proposed the <i>affective filter hypothesis</i>. This states that learners' ability to acquire language is constrained if they are experiencing negative states such as fear or boredom. At such times the affective filter is said to be "up". This means that learners must read texts which are interesting to them, in order to lower this affective filter. Best-selling novels would be a good starting point, with authors like Jeffrey Archer, John Grisham, Dan Brown and Jodi Picoult leading a list of great story-tellers.</p> <p>Since research clearly shows that learners can become good readers by consciously applying reading strategies as well as by reading interesting texts, well, then what are we waiting for? Let's read!</p>	



Strategies Applied

How can I be a better reader?

Comment [CLKC1]: Structural clue – the title is a big clue

How do we make better readers out of our students? This question has been the focus of many academics, educators and students over the years, and a huge amount of literature has been written about this. Courses have been conducted, strategies have been explored and hypotheses have been tested. Out of the hundreds of strategies developed, a few key ideas stand out. Many English language educators find these ideas highly effective in helping students to become better readers.

Comment [CLKC2]: This indicates the main topic.

Educational researchers suggest some strategies employed by good readers. They believe that good readers take note of the structure of the text they are reading, make predictions about what is to come, and read actively, meaning that they construct, revise and question the meanings they make as they read.

Comment [CLKC3]: Structural clue – the introduction discusses the main idea, which is that there are some important ideas for helping aspiring readers.

Comment [CLKC4]: Look out for topic sentences like this one, which indicate what the paragraph will deal with. How many do you see? Number them.

Comment [CLKC5]: If this sentence is so long, it may be difficult to understand upon first reading it. Try reading the section again slowly.

Furthermore, strong readers try to determine the meaning of unfamiliar words and concepts in the text, and deal with gaps as needed. They draw from, compare and integrate their own schema (prior knowledge) with material in the text. On top of that, it definitely helps if readers monitor their understanding of the text, making adjustments in their reading as necessary. They could re-read a section or read a further section in order to better understand what they are reading. Looking at the bigger picture, we know that employing reading strategies alone cannot help readers to improve their reading ability. What is the solution, then?

Comment [CLKC6]: Watch for signposts, this probably adds to the previous paragraph.

Comment [JLok7]: What is the difference between the three? Are they sequentially linked?

Comment [JLok8]: The difficult word 'schema' is explained by the words in parenthesis.

Comment [CLKC9]: Signpost, that there is another strategy.

Comment [CLKC10]: This indicates that the strategies mentioned before are simply not enough.

Comment [CLKC11]: Another transitioning signpost to introduce the next paragraph, which would be a solution to the question.

Comment [CLKC12]: Signpost for order. So this is the first theory.

Comment [CLKC13]: Check. Did you understand this complicated section? If not, then a slow-re-reading would help.

Comment [CLKC14]: A signpost indicating that what follows is an explanation of the previous section.

Comment [CLKC15]: Clearly, this order signpost indicates a second theory.

Comment [CLKC16]: Difficult technical section, perhaps a re-reading would be necessary.

Comment [CLKC17]: A logical connector – this signpost right at the end, in the conclusion, would indicate a wrap up of key ideas.

Comment [CLKC18]: Structural clue. In the conclusion, this is a summary of key ideas.

To solve this issue, we need to understand some theories. Stephen Krashen, an educational researcher, postulated some hypotheses about language development and developing the ability to understand what is being read, namely, comprehension. First, there is the *input hypothesis*, which states that learners progress in their knowledge of the language when they comprehend language input that is slightly more advanced than their current level. He called this level of input "i+1", where "i" is the language input and "+1" is the next stage of language acquisition. This implies that learners can only improve their ability to comprehend if they are exposed to texts of increasing difficulty. In other words, read more!

Secondly, Krashen proposed the *affective filter hypothesis*. This states that learners' ability to acquire language is constrained if they are experiencing negative states such as fear or boredom. At such times the affective filter is said to be "up". This means that learners must read texts which are interesting to them, in order to lower this affective filter. Best-selling novels would be a good starting point, with authors like Jeffrey Archer, John Grisham, Dan Brown and Jodi Picoult leading a list of great story-tellers.

Since research clearly shows that learners can become good readers by consciously applying reading strategies as well as by reading interesting texts, well, then what are we waiting for? Let's read!



ZENITH Abstract

The FOOD We Eat

Living in the city of Singapore, we are surrounded by scrumptious, multi-ethnic dishes around every corner. Our food culture is one that defines us as a nation, something that we are immensely proud of, and one that never fails to get us talking. Isn't it ironic, then, that most of us actually know very little about the food we eat apart from how it tastes? In fact, there is a whole host of issues regarding food that most of us would never even have considered, precisely because we live in Singapore—where farms are few, where our vegetation serves mostly aesthetic purposes, where almost all of our food is imported, and where extremely few of us are involved in the production of food itself.

Test your knowledge of food issues by considering these: Is there, and will there be, enough food to go around as the world population expands? Have you thought about the effects of your food on the quality of life of other human communities, on the animals themselves, and even on the environment? How crucial is technology in the production of food nowadays? What is the future of food and how are we ensuring that the food supply is sustainable?

While we in Singapore are very far removed from the food production process, that is no excuse for us not to think about the issues that affect a basic necessity so much, because forming an opinion on such issues allows us to get one step closer to being a responsible global citizen.

In this section, we are going to examine four issues related to the topic of food.

1. **Food Supply**—Why are so many people going hungry in this advanced day and age?
2. **Welfare & Food Safety**—What kind of problems are being created on other human communities and the animals even as we eat the way we do?
3. **The Environment**—What are the effects of food production and transportation on the environment and why should we care?
4. **Developments**—What is the future of food, and is it going to get better?

1 Food Supply

According to worldhunger.org, the world currently actually produces **enough food to**

feed every single person with 2720 kcal per person per day! That is actually more

than the recommended daily calorie intake for many of us. Why then are there still so many people who go hungry every day, and who are even dying of hunger?

Know your sources!



Hunger is the world's No.1 health risk.

It kills more people every year than **AIDS, malaria and tuberculosis** combined.

HUNGER

AIDS, MALARIA AND TB

One of the reasons is that while there is enough food, many people do not have the ability to afford to buy the food, and therefore do not have access to it. Many a time, those from the less-developed, more agricultural countries, are producing food on farms to sell to the developed world, who can obviously afford to pay higher prices.

While a bulk of the food that is produced in the world thus ends up in the developed world, The Guardian recently reported that as much as 30% of vegetable crops are not even harvested, much less consumed, because of the high aesthetic standards that supermarkets in the developed world impose on the farmers who supply them—perfectly edible produce that fails to meet strict standards of being the right colour, size, and shape end up getting trashed immediately, or remain unharvested, instead of being food.

Know your sources!

Since 1970, improvements in agricultural technology, including irrigation, fertilisers, pesticides, ever more sophisticated mechanization, and even genetic modification, have resulted in the Green Revolution, which has enabled our food supply to triple, which should have enabled us to feed the entire world's population, which has doubled in the same period. However, the uneven distribution of the world's food supply, together with various pressures and bad practices, mean that we seem to be headed for a food shortage by 2050, when the world's population is expected to hit 9 billion. Some of these pressures include the adverse climate conditions, which caused food prices to reach their highest ever in 2008, land degradation, as well as the large-scale use of viable land to farm biofuels instead of food.

Learn Your Facts & Examples!

- 870 million people in the world do not have enough to eat. This number has fallen by 130 million since 1990, but progress slowed after 2008.
- The vast majority of hungry people (98 percent) live in developing countries, where almost 15% of the population is undernourished.
- Undernutrition contributes to 2.6 million deaths of children under five each year - one third of the global total.
- One in four of the world's children are stunted. In developing countries the proportion can rise to one in three.

Know your sources!

Most recently, the UN Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO) has issued a warning of a looming worldwide food crisis in 2013 as grain reserves in several food-exporting countries like the USA have dwindled to an all-time low because we are consuming more than we are producing. A worldwide food shortage could have dire consequences as prices go up and cause millions more could go hungry.

2 Welfare & Food Safety

Many of us would have heard of the "Melamine Milk Scandal" that erupted in China in 2008, in which 6 babies were killed and 300,000 were sickened by ingesting milk powder that was tainted by the industrial chemical melamine. More recently, several meat suppliers in Europe were found to have adulterated beef with horse meat. Millions of beef burger patties, frozen lasagna meals and even Ikea's meatballs were found to have contained horse meat and were pulled off the shelves. Why do such food scandals increasingly take place?



One likely reason for the rise of food scandals is the fact that the production and supply of food have been globalised to the extent that most of us, and especially here in Singapore, are very far removed from the food production process, and have no way of participating in or monitoring it. When suppliers are so far away from their consumers, the lack of accountability is easier to get away with, as rules are difficult to enforce. We are not only isolated from food suppliers who may well be in other countries, but also from farms and food production facilities that are kept away from bustling and expensive urban areas, where people are increasingly flocking to. Most of us, in fact, have never witnessed where our meat or vegetables come from.

This has resulted in several bad effects, and the abovementioned melamine milk and horsemeat scandals are only two of many other scandals concerning contaminated food. Other problems with not knowing where our food comes from or what happens to it before it ends up on our dinner table include the overuse of antibiotics in raising animals in order to prevent them from being susceptible to bacteria or illnesses. This overuse, however, has contributed to the increasing problem of antibiotic-resistant bacteria in farm-raised animals, as well as in us, the humans who consume them. This problem has disastrous consequences of its own, as strains of bacteria learn to mutate and there are insufficient treatments for them.

Another problem with the way that our food is produced—quickly and out-of-sight—is the harm that it



Learn Your Facts & Examples!

- 80% of the antibiotics sold in the United States goes to chicken, pigs, cows and other animals that people eat, and 90% of these are administered to healthy animals to keep them from getting sick when they are confined in squalid conditions.
- Reports and photographs surfaced in 2011 showing pork that glowed an eerie, iridescent blue when the kitchen lights were turned off. Online users dubbed it "Avatar" meat and remained sceptical despite reassurances from the Shanghai Health Supervision Department which said the pork that has been contaminated by a phosphorescent bacteria and was still safe eat if well-cooked.
- An undercover investigation by a professor from Wuhan Polytechnic University in March 2010 estimated that one in 10 of all meals in China were cooked using recycled oil, often scavenged from the drains beneath restaurants. The State Food and Drug Administration issued a nationwide emergency ordering an investigation into the scandal of the so-called 'sewer' oil, which further dented public confidence in the food industry.
- A Chinese poultry supplier to fast food chain KFC was discovered to have accelerated the growth of chickens using the harmful "instant chicken" chemical feed, sparking food safety concerns, according to recent reports in Chinese newspapers. "The feed has been laced with chemicals and additives," a worker with the Shanxi Province-based Suhai Group told China Economic Net in a report last week. "We don't know exactly what it is, but it is definitely harmful. Even flies that buzzed around the toxic feed died."

causes to the animals themselves. In their attempt to be as profitable as possible in the shortest amount of time, farms administer growth hormones along with antibiotics, and this has resulted in "broiler chickens", chickens that are meant to be eaten, that grow unnaturally fast from egg to edible in 45 days, half the time it used to take chickens to do the same. These chickens are also kept in lit, cramped cages so that they stay awake longer and feed more. Because of their unnatural rate of growth, many of these broiler chickens cannot support their own weight and have deformed or broken legs.

Battery hens, those from which our eggs come, also kept in similarly inhumane conditions whereby "an automatic feeding cart that runs between the cages sometimes decapitates hens as they're eating...corpses are pulled out if they're easy to see, but sometimes remain for weeks in the cages, piling up until they have rotted into the wiring, and other hens have their heads stuck in the wire and are usually left to die," as quoted from a New York Times article.

Know your sources!

Finally, a big problem that is caused by the far separation of food suppliers from food consumers is the economic and health detriments that are caused to other human communities themselves. The global agricultural industry oftentimes contains the remnants of colonial relationships, and the crops that a community or country is able to grow nowadays was often determined for them decades or even centuries ago by their colonial masters. The international food supply is one that is fraught with political demands and sensitivities, and the prices that farmers in developing countries get for the crop they produce are often low and volatile, keeping many of these farmers below the poverty line, and barely able to support themselves. Not only that, but the stringent aesthetic standards, mentioned earlier, that are required for produce to be sold to the supermarkets, mean that farmers are pressured to use plenty of chemicals to keep pests and virus infections at bay. In the growing of bananas alone, more than 400 agrochemicals can be used at once, sometimes sprayed by high-tech helicopters that are controlled by satellite technology to prevent workers who live in the plantations or farms from being covered with chemicals, but they still often suffer the harmful effects of constant contact with these chemicals, which can include sterility, cancer, and even death. Here is what the Science Creative Quarterly has to say about the plight of farmers in the banana trade:

CONSIDER.....

Just think, if a bag of 5 shiny, perfect-looking apples costs S\$1.90 at your local supermarket even after the supermarket, wholesaler, freight company, and other middlemen have made a profit, how much would the apple farmer actually have been paid for them?

"Workers are forced to stay ten to twelve hours, even though they are only paid for eight. Transnational fruit corporations often do not respect labour codes nor workers' rights, but workers have little way to protest because they are often prohibited for joining trade unions. The work itself is physically demanding and workers may have to carry extremely heavy loads or stand for ten hours straight with their

unprotected hands dipped in a bath of chemicals (in order to wash the bananas). Bananas are grown using large amounts of toxic pesticides, and cancer or even death from exposure is a concern. Indeed, many of these chemicals are prohibited in North America and Europe, but are still used on banana plantations.

Accidents are also a common occurrence and there is no medical treatment or compensation for workers. Furthermore, plantation work offers very little job security. Laborers often migrate to find work, and then are only given a three to six month contract. Although housing is provided on the plantation, conditions are usually appalling. Child labor is common place, and a non-governmental organization in Ecuador found that children as young as eight were being recruited to work. Gender discrimination also exists: women face sexual harassment, and men often make three to four times more for similar work. Lastly, indigenous populations are driven out from their land in order to create space for the plantations.

The worst problem, however, is that the banana republics have become so dependent on the banana trade that if all of a sudden importers stop buying, these countries will immediately face severe economic shock, and the entire country will suffer."

Learn Your Facts & Examples!

- The overdependence of developing countries on a single agricultural produce was seen with the case of Jamaica, who traditionally exported bananas to the United Kingdom. When disease and other conditions harmed Jamaican banana production and made it more costly, the UK turned to Central America (where it was cheaper) for its banana imports, and the Jamaican economy greatly suffered.
- The Independent, a British newspaper, reported that a Kenyan farmer only receives 26 pence per kilo of green beans that retails at UK supermarkets for more than £5.
- Search and Watch! Youtube >> The Journey of Bananas: From Land to Your Hand (National Geographic)

③ The Environment

Have you ever stopped to appreciate and wonder at the fact that your local supermarket stocks what should originally be seasonal fruit and vegetables year round? You may not find it unusual to be able to buy cherries, strawberries or grapes at any time of the year, especially because you live in Singapore where almost all the food we eat is imported, but this was not always possible. Food now travels a great distance from the farm to the dinner table via land, sea or even air. This naturally translates into consumers paying a higher price for imported produce, simply because more labour, fuel and time goes into the process. However, other than the higher monetary costs of imported food, there are also environmental costs to consider. Have you ever heard of food miles, or thought about the amount of carbon emissions or greenhouse gases that your food choices could be adding to the environment?

The term "food miles" refers to the distance that your food travels from the producer to the consumer. You may wonder why this is a big deal, since Singapore cannot possibly produce all the food we need anyway. The reason why food miles is increasingly gaining attention as an issue, has to do with the increasingly undeniable fact that global warming is occurring due to human actions, and food takes up a large proportion of our overall consumption. The further your food travels, the more fuel and packaging it uses along the way for transport and refrigeration, and the more carbon emissions and greenhouse gases it adds to the environment. Air freight emits more greenhouse gases per food mile than any other mode of transport, and because food items are mostly perishable, especially fresh produce, much of it is air freighted to overseas destinations, especially to developed countries that can afford to pay for out-of-season produce in addition to expensive air transport costs.

This is why the "Eat Local" movement has come about in some communities in more environmentally conscious countries like the UK and the USA. This movement encourages consumers to buy fresh produce that is grown on farms that are located near them. This





movement claims that eating local is able to bring about a whole host of benefits to the local economy, the environment, and to health. This is because smaller farms are said to be more ethical in their processes, use less chemicals in the growing process, are more conservative with their use of packaging and resources, and also because fresh produce that is grown and harvested in season is claimed to be more tasty than that which is grown out of season and ripened with chemicals and artificial heat, which further add on to our consumption of energy and substances harmful to the environment. These claims are, of course, disputed by others who argue that eating local in fact does more harm than good to the environment, because local farmers may not have comparative advantage in growing certain crops or rearing certain animals, and end up incurring more costs to the environment throughout the animals' lives than imported meat does even after air transport costs are taken into consideration (see box for eg). Proponents of this argument claim that importing food can in fact be more energy efficient when all things are considered, and not just the costs involved in air freight.

Another reason why the environmental impact of our food consumption is becoming more apparent and highlighted nowadays, is the fact that as the world grows richer, people's diets are becoming more and more rich in meat. Compared to the farming of vegetables and grain, however, the farming of meat consumes a lot more resources and emits a lot more greenhouse gases. According to The Guardian, a UK newspaper, it takes 20-50 times the amount of water to produce 1kg of meat versus 1kg of vegetables, and our heavy consumption of meat could lead to water shortages around the world. According to a report by the UN, it takes 1,500 litres of water to produce a kilogram of cereal and 15,000 to produce one kilogram of meat.

Know your sources!

Learn Your Facts & Examples!

- The New York Times published an article arguing in favour of importing food from countries with the comparative advantage in farming certain types of produce. It was found that lamb raised on New Zealand's clover-choked pastures and shipped 11,000 miles by boat to Britain produced 1,520 pounds of carbon dioxide emissions per ton while British lamb produced 6,280 pounds of carbon dioxide per ton, in part because poorer British pastures force farmers to use feed. In other words, it is four times more energy-efficient for Londoners to buy lamb imported from the other side of the world than to buy it from a producer in their backyard. Similar figures were found for dairy products and fruit.
- The cattle industry has long been decried for its unsafe and unsanitary practices. As if that wasn't bad enough, the cattle industry is an incredible energy and water suck - it takes around 2,500 gallons of water to produce one pound of beef. And the farming of animals accounts for 18% of all man-made greenhouse gases. That's even more than is produced by cars.

The increasing demand for meat-rich diets around the world places ever greater stresses upon the earth's resources and the state of our environment, and if you have never thought about the costs that your eating choices and habits have on our world, now is a good time to start.

4 Developments

With all of the above concerns in mind and more, it would also be fascinating to learn about the progress that scientists have made with regard to increasing the world's food supply to keep pace with increasing demands, decreasing the vulnerability of produce to viral and bacterial attacks, and ensuring that farming remains or becomes sustainable.

Several factors determine whether land is suitable for agricultural purposes or not, and some of the basic ones are temperature, topography, climate and soil quality. The amount of arable land also constantly changes due to the increasing use of land for living space, and the encroachment of urban areas onto agricultural ones. Of course, the level of technology available can help to increase the amount of arable land by enabling crops and animals to thrive in harsher conditions. While it has long been the case throughout Man's history that food could only be grown on fertile soil, technological developments have recently started allowing even desert lands to produce edible produce. This constitutes a revolutionary development because if scalable, this development could help to solve many of the world's food supply problems without taxing the earth's limited resources.



Know your sources!

The Guardian recently reported that the company Sundrop Farms has appeared to pull off the impossible—farming something from nothing. Tomatoes, peppers and cucumbers have been grown in carefully climate-controlled greenhouses without a freshwater supply, soil or pesticides by using solar energy, which is abundant in the desert, to desalinate seawater for irrigation and to heat and cool the greenhouses as required. Pests are few because few insects can thrive in the desert, and the few that do can be removed fairly easily. The company is now experimenting with more types of crops and doing so on a larger scale, and there are hopes that even animals can be one day farmed in the desert!

In a rather different development, scientists are exploring how to produce food not on land but in the lab. While artificial steak is still some time away, pizza toppings and the first artificial hamburger made from lab-grown cells are in the works, and could be ready for consumption as early as end 2012. However, this scientific development poses its own problems: how far are people willing to go to satisfy their hunger? Would you be comfortable eating lab-grown meat rather than meat that has been farmed? What about eating a whole new kind of substance, that which is not grain, or vegetable, or meat? After all, some intellectuals believe that it is not what can be done, but what we can force ourselves to stomach. Calories can be found in newly created, previously unknown substances, but whether that can be considered and accepted as food is another matter.

CONSIDER...

Just think, the vegetables produced by this method of farming are pesticide-free, high quality, grown cheaply and year-round, and are able to meet the aesthetic standards set by supermarkets. Can you imagine how many of the above-mentioned problems this new development is able to solve, and how?

From a time when the amount of food we got came down to what we could grow, it now seems that the future of food is limited only by our imaginations and what we can get used to. Are you ready for it?

Because food is such a basic necessity, food issues continue to be a great concern to the entire human race. Even the A Levels considers this an important issue, as can be seen by the multiple Paper 1 questions that have been asked on it.

1. **Is effective farming possible without science?** GCE A Level 2005 Q1
2. **How far is it possible to ensure that all producers of food and goods are fairly rewarded?** GCE A Level 2008 Q11
3. **Can the transport of food over vast distances be justified?** GCE A Level 2009 Q10

You can use the information above as starting points to think about the food you eat, where it comes from, and the various kinds of costs and effort that are involved in producing it. You could even use the information and do even more research to tackle the A Level questions above. Keep on thinking about the food you eat, and make your food choices wisely!



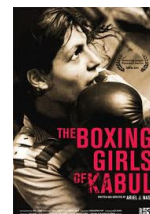
ZENITH Read & Review

In celebration of International Women's Day which took place on 11 March 2013, here are some reviews on books and documentaries related to gender issues.

The Boxing Girls of Kabul (Canada, 2012)

Directed by Ariel Nasr, produced by Annette Clark

The documentary follows a group of young Afghan women who strive to become world-class boxers and their coach, Sabir Sharifi at Afghanistan's female boxing academy. But this occurs in traditional and conservative Afghan society where women are not allowed out of their houses unchaperoned much less to compete in sports, aggressive or not. These women, though loyal to their country, dare to defy social norms. Inspired by their tenacious coach, these courageous female boxers openly dream about their future, training very bravely to qualify for the 2012 Olympic Games at Ghazi Stadium, Afghanistan's national stadium, which had previously been the site of executions by the Taliban.



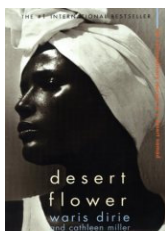
I enjoyed the short film tremendously as it reveals a compelling journey of both personal liberation and political transformation and also illustrates the power of fighting for one's belief. The fight for freedom (literally), progress and equality demonstrated by these young women demonstrates the strength women have, as opposed to society's perception of women as the weaker, more delicate sex. The documentary shows that if women can box as men do, the value of women should be equal to men and young women should be given a voice to speak up for themselves. From watching this, I believe society, not just Afghan society, should embrace and support women and allow them their own freedom to live their dreams; let them be given autonomy to do what they would like because women ought to be able to exercise their basic rights of freedom too.

Reviewed by: Melissa Toh Li Shi, 12A301

Rating: *****

Desert Flower: The Extraordinary Journey of a Desert Nomad

Written by Waris Dirie



The book is an autobiography of a Somali woman who suffered from the inhuman tradition of genital mutilation at the age of five. However, with resilience and perseverance, she struggled to live on until she was spotted by a photographer who brought her into the fashion industry and transformed her into an international model. Later on, she became a UN ambassador, which gave her courage and power to speak up against the Somali tradition of female circumcision.

The book portrayed the incredible power of a nomad woman who faced so many horrors which would have definitely crushed any less strong-willed human beings. As I read and witnessed the remarkable life journey of this Somali woman, I was awed by her sheer courage and determination to overcome her horrifying childhood experience of circumcision and the hardship of struggling to survive in a foreign country without any proper education, only to finally emerge as a successful international model. Besides filling me with admiration towards Ms Waris, the book also helped me to become more aware of the predicaments of Somali girls who are suffering from the practice of genital mutilation all around the world. I believe that the vicarious feeling of the pain and harshness of this traditional practice will propel many readers into supporting the campaign against circumcision of little girls and women.

Reviewed by: Hoang Hanh Thu 12S414

Rating: *****



ZENITH What's *in* this Month

February 20, 2013
The Straits Times

Why 6.9m was too much information

By Rachel Chang

SINGAPORE: In the wake of the parliamentary debate on the Population White Paper, People's Action Party (PAP) politicians probably feel like they have been hit by a truck. Some think that they had actually anticipated the national furore and therefore scheduled the White Paper for the Monday after the Punggol East by-election.

But the chain of events was so unfortunate that it is unlikely that it unfolded by design. It is hard to imagine any senior politician wanting to be caught on the backfoot, clarifying that the paper contained a "worst-case scenario" and beseeching the people to trust them. It is hard to imagine any government wanting to contain backbench backlash by accepting an amendment to a parliamentary motion, or, before a vote on the most important document in recent years, having to apologise for a footnote. It was all topped off with the Prime Minister, after being praised for not leaving the controversial issue to his successor, effectively leaving it to his successor by promising that the Government will not decide on a population size beyond 2020.

What happened over the last two weeks is a real pity, because the bulk of the document is worthy of praise. For starters, it is a policy roadmap that directly responds to, and embeds the lessons of, the difficulties of recent years.

The two key criticisms of the Government's population policy have been that the pace of economic growth - and consequently, the influx of foreigners - has been too intense, and that the infrastructure was not readied for the surge. This resulted in a myriad of problems, from high housing prices to wage stagnation, all of which took a toll on Singaporeans' lives and convinced them that high economic growth is not in their interests.

The White Paper marks policy shifts on both those fronts: first, the pace of growth and intake of foreigners will be substantially less - only a third - than that of the previous three decades. Second, the Government will now build infrastructure ahead of demand. The latter, especially, is a major political shift.

For years, PAP ministers have been pointing to the costs of "white elephant" infrastructure, and invoking the "ghost towns" of the late 1990s, when blocks of flats stood empty after demand disappeared overnight due to an economic crisis. Finally, the Government is acknowledging that the holding costs of empty flats and deserted train stations are more than compensated for by the benefits of slack in the infrastructure. Whatever is lost when blocks of flats stand empty is more than earned back in the flexibility to respond to population surges - and in the goodwill that accrues when Singaporeans feel peace of mind.

All of these should have been welcomed by critics and supporters alike - the former for being vindicated, the latter for the evidence that the ruling party is not hopelessly wedded to dogma. But instead, they were all but drowned out by the uproar over the 6.9 million figure.

In the interests of better and more fruitful political discourse, let us engage in a thought experiment. What would the Population White Paper experience have been like if the



population projections of 5.8 million to 6 million by 2020, and 6.5 million to 6.9 million by 2030, had not been included in the document? For those who have actually read the White Paper, that would mean taking out the three pages that comprise Chapter 4: Population Trajectories. I would argue that the document would have been essentially the same, minus the sound and fury over a number that succeeded in defining the debate without being real or particularly significant. Hear me out.

One of the points National Development Minister Khaw Boon Wan made during the past two weeks was that for the average person going about her day, there is little sense of the total population of which she is a part. One does not interact with 6.9 million people in one day, one interacts with at most 200 or 300. But when one cannot get into a crowded train, for example, it begins to feel like whatever the number, it's too many.

Importantly, this can arise in small populations or in big ones. This is a truism of urban planning and a key message that the Ministry of National Development tried to get across: Dense cities are not the same as unliveable ones. Government planners are confident that they can, through innovative urban solutions and more efficient use of land, cater comfortably to a population much larger than Singapore's current size. They may or may not succeed.

The point is that in the grand scheme of things, the overall population size is actually a tangential piece of information: 5.3 million could seem like too many, and 6.9 million could actually seem like a comfortable fit. But to give people a number millions more than what the population now is - at a moment of unanimity that it is currently "too many" - smacks of misjudgement.

I am not arguing for duplicity. It is imperative that the White Paper reveal the targets which the Government can control, and is working with. The growth of the foreign workforce, productivity and gross domestic product targets are all essential pieces of information. If these figures had been front-and-centre, then there could have been the same rigorous national and parliamentary debate over whether they are the right ones to aim for, minus the note of hysteria and anger.

These components do add up to an estimated population size, but with so many assumptions and variables along the way that the final figure should not be allowed to eclipse everything else. For example, the White Paper's calculations were based on the current total fertility rate of 1.2. But what if it goes up? What if it goes down? What if technological breakthroughs bring about a leap forward in productivity? What if labour force participation rates spike? What if life expectancy climbs, or drops? As any of these unforeseen and uncontrollable factors move, so lurches the population size.

This could have better illustrated if the White Paper had presented scenarios of a TFR of 1.2, a TFR of 1.5 (the Government's near-term goal), and a TFR of 2.1, which is the replacement rate. While the National Population and Talent Division did put out an occasional paper last April charting how the citizen population would change under various TFRs, the Population White Paper could have expanded on this by pairing these scenarios with a variety of productivity growth rates. The most optimistic of these scenarios would allow us to drastically tamp down on the growth of the foreign workforce. The various scenarios not only would have illustrated



just how contingent the population projections are, but also how important it is to get cracking on the twin national goals of economic restructuring and baby-making.

The key message from the Government should then have been that whatever the scenario, it is readying the infrastructure for many millions more than what we currently have - so that Singaporeans will never feel so under siege again. Perhaps this seems like a call to be dishonest with the people, or disingenuous with the figures.

A long-standing criticism of the Government is that it is tight-fisted and non-transparent with information, so shouldn't we welcome the fact that it was open about that 6.9 million figure, rather than squirrelling it away, or labelling it a scenario for "year X"? But I think that's a simplistic interpretation of how a mature electorate deals with its elected government. I am a proponent of more information - but the numbers we should desire are real ones, such as the number of employment passes we give out, how many prisoners we send to the gallows, or how much we have in the national reserves. The 6.9 million is simply not in the same category.

The Government should also refrain from telling itself that what happened with the White Paper was the necessary fallout from doing the "right" thing. The PAP likes to believe that it would rather go down in flames having governed well, than "pander" to populist pressures. Like martyrs, it will take the political hit for the long-term benefit of the country. Ironically, the Government actually was doing the popular thing in making those strategic planning shifts that many have been calling for for years. Yet, not only did it earn no extra goodwill, but also the political rancour actually grew. This was not inevitable and it's important to examine why it happened and how it could have been avoided.

On voters' part, they should appraise the Government not on its means - working estimates and projections - but whether it succeeds in achieving its ends. In this case, that is to deliver on the high quality of life that the PAP says it can achieve. In 2030, that should be the only yardstick by which the Population White Paper is judged. It's a shame that that "6.9 million" seems likely to be its legacy instead.

Think Tank:

- A. What are the reasons the author gives for saying that "the bulk of the document is worthy of praise" (paragraph 3)?
- B. What justifications does the author give for suggesting the exclusion of the population projections in the Population White Paper (paragraph 8)?
- C. The author suggests that the Population White Paper "would have been essentially the same" had the population projections not been included in it. How far do you agree with her views?



ZENITH Read Up!

Here are some useful facts and statistics collated from the Economist. For a more comprehensive compilation, please download from [MJC AsknLearn/General Paper Practice & Revision/Workbin/Statistics from the Economist \(2012\)](#).

Did you know that:

- America's military spending was US\$690 billion in 2011.
- Thailand's floods in 2011 cost her US\$40 billion in damages.
- Qatar has the biggest ecological footprint in the world with each Qatari accounting for 11.7 global hectares.
- The world's cities currently generate around 1.3 billion tons of solid waste a year, or 1.2kg per city-dweller per day, nearly half of which comes from OECD countries. That is predicted to rise to 2.2 billion tons by 2025, or 1.4kg per person.
- More than half the world's oil supply is used for transport, and three-quarters of the energy used in transport is spent on the road.
- The average American uses the paper equivalent of almost 6 12 metre trees a year.
- Much of the plastic swirling around the sea ends up in the North Pacific Gyre, where four great ocean currents meet to create a swirl of water moving clockwise that is twice the size of the United States. Its less polite name is the North Pacific Garbage Patch.
- The Arctic is warming roughly twice as fast as the rest of the planet. The loss of Arctic ice will probably increase faster because the ice is also thinning, which makes it easier to break up. At this rate the Arctic could be ice-free during the summer by 2016.
- Mongolia is the biggest source of rare earths in the world. The coal bed around Xilinhot, a Mongolian city, boasts 38% of global reserves of germanium, a rare earth used in the making of circuitry for solar cells and wind turbines.
- Almost 20% of the world's parliamentary seats are now occupied by women, up from 17.2% five years ago. Yet, just 3% of Fortune 500 CEOs are women.
- One is more likely to die of a non-communicable disease (NCD), like cancer or heart disease, than anything else. In 2008, this accounted for 63% of the 56m deaths worldwide.
- The global consumption of meat has risen over 50 years from 70m tons to 268m tons by 2007. This means a rise from 22kg per person in 1961 to 40kg per person in 2007.
- In 2010 over 3.3m plastic surgery procedures were done in America, more than anywhere else. But South Korea tops the list: one in five women in Seoul have gone under the knife.
- China has more than 1 billion mobile-phone subscriptions. India is not far behind with over 900m subscriptions. Together they account for more than 1/4 of the world total.
- For the first time ever, poverty—defined as the number and share of people living below \$1.25 a day (at 2005 prices)—fell in every region of the world in 2005-08.
- Asia Pacific is home to two-thirds of the developing world's poor. Thankfully however, the proportion of people living on less than \$1.25 a day has fallen from 50% in 1990 to 22% in 2009. In terms of warm bodies, this means a reduction from 1.57 billion people to 871m.
- The top 5 most competitive cities to live in, according to the Economist Intelligence Unit in 2012, are respectively: New York, London, Singapore, Hong Kong and Paris.
- SOME 52% of the world's population currently lives in urban areas; by 2025 this should increase to 58%. Over half of China's people now live in urban areas.
- Zurich has become the world's most expensive city to live in, overtaking Japan.
- The 5 biggest transnational companies in the world are General Electric (US), Toyota (Japan), Royal Dutch Shell (Netherlands/UK), BP (UK), Exxon Mobil (US).
- Edvard Munch's 'The Scream' has become the most expensive artwork sold at an auction at a price of US\$120 million. It looks comparatively a bargain, however, when private sales are taken into consideration. In 2011, a private buyer bought Paul Cezanne's 'The Card Players' for US\$250 million.



ZENITH Notices

Call for Contributions 2013

The ZENITH 2013 series is always looking out for interested writers to contribute their writing and reflections on issues and topics of relevance. The editorial team is calling for contributions for 2013:

Meridians Write

Both seniors and freshmen are welcome to submit entries on topics of current relevance, issues that interest you or even creative pieces of work, such as book reviews, poems, short stories or even cartoons or other illustrations relevant to GP or Literature. You may also select from your best pieces of writing from the work you engage in, both in and out of class. You can submit your writing through your GP tutors or directly to the editor.

Please submit all completed works to the Editor *any time* throughout the year. (NB: ZENITH is published in March, May & August yearly.)

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