

Paper 1 Practices

2022 SAJC FE P1 Questions

Answer **one** question from this Paper.

Answers should be between 500 and 800 words in length.

1. Youth today have more opportunities than challenges. Is this true of your society?
2. 'The media today has placed children in greater danger than ever before.' How far do you agree?
3. 'Education is our best chance at solving environmental problems.' Discuss.
4. 'Women will never be truly equal with men.' What is your view?
5. How far do you agree that your society has a culture its people can be proud of?
6. Can the Arts be an effective force for change?
7. To what extent is consumerism to blame for the ills we face in the modern world?
8. Has society sacrificed too much for the sake of progress?

2022 SAJC FE P1 Answer Scheme

Q1: 'Youth today have more opportunities than challenges.' Is this true of your society?

Question Analysis

The world today is very different than what it used to be, even when compared to just one generation ago. On one hand, the rapid advancements of technology have opened up almost endless possibilities for the digital natives to thrive. On the other hand, the existential doomsday threats of global warming and increased in complexity of other global problems have caused youth today to become more skeptical of their future. This question then examines and weighs the prospects and contests that today's youth face.

Clarifications of Terms

Today – A context that the students ought to unpack by using its characteristics to generate and/or support their arguments.

Opportunities – This refers to the chances that are available for youth to fulfill their dreams and goals in life or to lead a more meaningful and successful life, although "success" is up to the individual to define. To avoid being example driven by listing the different types of opportunities, one more effective way is to apply SPECTRAL to frame "opportunities".

Challenges – A problem or difficult situation that requires great mental or physical effort to be carried out successfully. Challenges also test a person's ability. Similar to "opportunities", it would be more expedient to use SPECTRAL to relevantly and clearly unpack "challenges".

Than – "Than" indicates that this is a comparison question on whether Singaporean youth find living in Singapore allows them to grow and ultimately achieve their Singaporean dreams, thus enabling them to lead a meaningful and worthwhile life or not.

Your society – A personal/local context in terms of where the writer is from. This requires students to cite contextualised characteristics of their countries of origin to engage the question contention.

Possible Approaches

1. **Yes, there are more opportunities than challenges for young Singaporeans.**
2. **No, there are more challenges than opportunities for Singaporean youth.**

Yes, there are more opportunities than challenges.

1. **Educationally, although Singaporean youth are under a lot of pressure to excel academically, they are in good stead as Singapore stands tall – despite being a puny state – among the giants in the education world, which presents countless opportunities than challenges for our young.** Singapore is well-known for its high quality of education in the world, ranking higher than many countries like Canada and Switzerland. In fact, Singapore ranks top five in the world in PISA, a ranking based on tests taken by 15-year-olds all across the world. While its stellar quality is unquestionable, this success comes at a price: stress, which could be a major problem. Nevertheless, schools provide many levels of help to ameliorate this problem, ranging from close monitoring by teachers to professional counselling by trained staff. In addition, there are the multiple pathways that allow students to harness their strengths and maximise their potential. Those who are less academically inclined have the option of going to vocational schools to learn relevant and useful skills, and due to the emphasis on nurturing 21st century competencies, like critical thinking, entrepreneur spirit, innovative mindset, etc. As a result., even those who are in vocational training have been known to still make it to universities. The Ministry of Education constantly reviews its curriculum and syllabus to ensure that young people graduate with relevant skills that are in demand. Teachers attend the National Institute of Education to be

professionally trained. While its neighbouring countries produce graduates of poor and even questionable qualities, Singapore's young graduates literally have the world as their oysters as they are even highly demanded overseas and by multinational companies with headquarters in this tiny Red Dot. These graduates could often find employment within several months upon graduation, and if not, they could be snapped up by companies even before graduation. So young Singaporeans have it among the best in education which presents many opportunities for them rather than challenges.

2. Today, despite the bleak economic outlook in the world, Singaporean youth still have more than enough resources at their disposal to make lifestyle choices to secure comfortable lives for themselves. Economic opportunities and challenges in the context of this question boils down to mostly bread-and-butter issues. With Singapore facing economic headwinds that result from both the Covid-19 pandemic and Russia's invasion of Ukraine which disrupt distribution challenges to add on to the pricing woes of essential food items, it is no wonder that young Singaporeans bemoan if they would earn enough to provide comfortably for their families and ultimately still save enough for their retirement when they no longer have a regular income. In the past, working hard meant that breadwinners would be rewarded amply enough to not only put food on the table, but also go on occasional overseas trips for leisure with their families. However, in the current context, even when the young work hard, it does not guarantee they could succeed in life.

v To begin, when the young get married, it is not cheap, what with the wedding banquet and dowry to save for.

v Then there is the cost of public housing, with some resale flats going for more than \$1million, which could cause the young to be indebted for most of their adult lives.

v This is followed by raising a child, which according to NUS economists in 2018, would easily cost between \$280,000 and \$560,000 per child, depending on the household income.

While the above may challenge the notion that young Singaporeans would be able to save enough to raise their families and retire, truth be told that the lifestyle and standard of living are really personal choices, and economic opportunities do present themselves for young people to choose what they could afford and still be able to live comfortably in this economically uncertain time. If young Singaporeans are willing to live within their means, weddings need not be exorbitantly lavish and HDB flats are reasonably subsidised and priced less in non-mature estates, not to mention that a young couple could choose to live simply and not over indulge.

Ø Flats in new estates, like Tengah, are cheaper compared to matured estates like Queenstown and Toa Payoh, plus there is a government subsidy of up to \$80,000 for first-time flat buyers. Young couples could also have opportunity to choose to live near their parents to get the Proximity Housing Grant of another \$30,000. With the balance being paid for using one's CPF money, any flat is really quite affordable.

Ø Similarly for raising a child, do Singaporean young couples really need expensive tuition for their children, branded clothing and constantly eating out? To begin with, there is the baby bonus to help alleviate the financial burden of raising children in Singapore where up to \$10,000 baby bonus could be claimed. Young parents could also claim up to \$15,000 under the Child Development Account. There are many opportunities to save by having the younger children wear hand-me-downs or buying second hand necessities like toys, bags and even shoes.

Ø Upon schooling, there are different MOE financial schemes for children from low income households where young couples may be low wage earners, e.g. MOE Financial Assistance Scheme, MOE Independent School Bursary, etc., to ensure that their children could continue studying up to tertiary institution levels without financial worry.

Ø In reality, young people need not be as worried about their future retirement as much. There is the different CPF retirement schemes that ensure that all basic needs could be met, and it provides a monthly sum for the rest of the retirees' life. Additionally, if the retiree is prepared to downsize to a smaller flat, he may be eligible for a Silver Housing Bonus of \$60,000, not to mention downsizing could earn him more money due to the differences in values between the bigger flat and smaller one that he will move into. Alternatively, retirees could also sell back part of his flat's lease to HDB to get a reasonable sum and continue living in the same flat until the lease is up, beyond which he could rent a small flat from HDB too at affordable prices.

For poor Singaporeans who are young, on top of government welfare schemes, there are also grants from private institutions to help support them financially. All these savings opportunities do add up substantially to ensure that young Singaporeans could sustain themselves realistically and their financial challenge is indeed manageable.

3. From a technology perspective, Singaporean youth are blessed with more opportunities than challenges, and these opportunities have the potential of creating a new world that is exciting to anticipate. While technology has its challenges for young Singaporeans, such as online addictions, unnecessary exposure to cyber violence, self-radicalisation on the Internet, cyberbullying, crimes targeting youth in the Dark Web, etc., Singaporean youth are wise to these threats due to a strong curriculum that educates them about the wiles of such menaces and crimes. There are also many sources of help they could seek to overcome their unhealthy indulgences, such as Counselling and Care Centre and Singapore Association for Mental Health. Otherwise, opportunities abound to help young Singaporeans to obtain the right qualifications for jobs, for instance, the YouthTech Programme, under the National Youth Council, was launched to provide young graduates and working adults with full-time traineeship opportunities in technology and digitalisation. At the Cyber Defenders Discovery Camp organised by the Defence Science and Technology Agency, youth delved deep into cyber security topics, such as cryptography, network security and Web security. The aim of this is to pique their interest and provide them with stepping stones to ease into the technology industry. New and exciting jobs that did not exist even just five years ago are now available too. MOE also highly supports STEM educational pursuits, pumping in many resources to train young people in infocomm technology, artificial intelligence, cyber security, mobile development, robotics, nanotechnology and many more specialisations. Armed with the right qualifications, even the world beckons to these young local talents. In 2021, asiaone reported on young Singaporeans who made it to the “Forbes 30 Under 30 Asia” list. The young Singaporean recipients included Chong Voon Foo, 23 years old, and Daryl Lim, 26 years old, who co-founded AI robotics software company, Augmentus. They use proprietary technologies to simplify programming of industrial robots, eliminating the need for the massive amounts of code typically required to programme robots to perform even simple tasks. They have partnered with some of the world’s largest robotic companies, including ABB, Universal Robots and Nach. Technology is the new frontier for Singaporean youth as the opportunities offered by technological developments outweigh the challenges, especially when these digital natives are better educated and equipped to handle the challenges head on and seize the almost endless technological opportunities to outpace their counterparts in other countries, including more developed nations.

No, there are more challenges than opportunities

1. We live in world that is in constant flux, one that is volatile, uncertain, complex and ambiguous world, and Singaporean youth are caught in such a disruptive world that present more challenges than opportunities. Things and issues in the past were a lot more predictable, and any uncertainty was often within a reasonable and acceptable threshold and therefore easier to manage. However, today, the tumultuous uncertainty could be overwhelming, for instance, the more violent weather is both unpredictable and very capricious to the extent that it poses an existential danger for Singaporean youth. This global warming issue remains a threat to this small Red Dot which is a low-lying island, and this is despite millions of dollars being ploughed in to find plausible solutions, but with no end in sight, causing Singaporean youth to worry about their future in a major way - not only for themselves but also for their young families. The Covid-19 pandemic has turned their lives upside down. The pandemic has also accentuated social inequalities in this rich nation state. Even before this Covid-19 could become endemic, scientists are already predicting the next novel virus attack. And the sudden ban by Malaysia to export chickens to Singapore exposes Singapore’s vulnerability to the food security problem as Singapore imports about 90 per cent of our food. So it does not come as a surprise that about one in three young people in Singapore has mental health symptoms, such as depression, anxiety and loneliness. The youth here find that they have to constantly be on their toes which puts perpetual pressure on them to adapt to survive. In such a depressing state of relentless fluidity and instability, it is not surprising that Singaporean youth face too many challenges that it all seem devastatingly insurmountable to them.

2. Economically challenged, young Singaporeans today are worrying if they would earn enough to provide comfortably for their families and ultimately save enough for their retirement when they no longer have a regular income. It is true that there are numerous subsidy schemes, literally from cradle to grave to help young Singaporeans to survive financially – from baby bonus to HDB subsidies, educational financial assistance and even different retirement schemes. However, one cannot deny that the cost of living is constantly rising and at a fast rate to boot. It is indeed very expensive to survive in Singapore. Singapore has been constantly ranked as one of the cities with a high cost of

living. While some may wonder if such statistics is true, especially when \$3-4 meals still exist in some hawker centres, it is undeniable that other necessities of living in Singapore are much higher than in other developed countries, making it tough for young Singaporeans to be able to save much. The average inflation rate in Singapore is much higher than the interest rate that an average bank savings account gives to Singaporeans, and therefore money left in the bank devalues over time. As inflation is also affected by external factors, Singapore, which is very largely dependent on other countries for natural resources, is left vulnerable to the vagaries of price increases in certain essential goods and services, and this is definitely not within the youth's control. This will in turn increase the cost of living, as already experienced by our helpless youth. It is a well known fact that property prices are extremely high in Singapore compared to other developed countries, with the exception of Hong Kong. Even some public housing flats are now selling beyond \$1million which are priced beyond the reach of young couples who are just starting out to work and build their families. Singapore is also the most expensive place in the world to own a private car, and some of the more expensive brands could even be more expensive than a small HDB flat! Young couples who take bank loans often spend half their lifetime to pay their housing and vehicle loans, thus adversely impacting their retirement plans and savings. Even the cost of education – considered an essential social leveller – has increased by 76.1% from 2001 to 2021! The healthcare inflation rate is estimated at 10% in 2019 and 2020, which does not abode well for a growing ageing population, with life expectancy increasing some more. Premiums for even MediShield Life, a government health insurance scheme, have increased by up to 35.4% since 2021, due to a more comprehensive coverage being provided. As for Singapore's CPF retirement scheme, the monthly payouts drawn down from the retirees' CPF accounts would end up to be for basic sustenance only, especially when its value is eroded by annual inflation; there may not be enough for even any indulgences. In addition, not all young Singaporeans may be able to save up to the full retirement sum to obtain a decent monthly retirement drawdown from their own CPF accounts. So, only certain people could keep pace with these financial conundrums and not young Singaporeans at large. It is no wonder that the economic challenges faced by young Singaporeans are much more severe than the opportunities available.

3. From a technology perspective, Singaporean youth face more challenges than opportunities, and that could possibly create a pessimism and even a sense of doom that discourage them. The advent of the Internet and social media brought much excitement and anticipation of benefits, what with connections to both families and friends and the potential of almost endless opportunities to improve the lives of young Singaporeans, be it professionally or economically. However, all these come with untold drawbacks as the cyberworld could be very complex and confusing to navigate, retaining considerable risks. Younger Singaporeans who first navigate the Internet might be exposed to upsetting and even inappropriate content that they are unprepared for. Adult sexual predators are known to trawl cyberspace hunting for naïve, gullible and vulnerable children to groom. Teenagers and even young adults who randomly surf TikTok and Instagram could end up suffering from self-esteem problems and body image anxieties when they constantly follow influencers who carefully curate and even photoshopped their imperfections into picture-perfect faces and bodies. Then there are serious addictions to undesirable issues like online gambling and porn that result in social isolation and even crimes committed by Singaporean youth. The ease with which technology is available and its accessibility feed such unhealthy habits and crimes, which youth unfortunately are more prone to cultivate due to their immaturity and perhaps weaker dispositions to resist such temptations. According to a 2019 TNP news report, 85 per cent of Singaporean children polled have social media accounts. More worrying, 54 per cent of them were exposed to at least one cyber risk, with 43 per cent victims of cyberbullying, 16 per cent involved in online sexual behaviours and 12 per cent had chatted with strangers and even meeting them. So while there are technological opportunities which Singaporean youth could seize to progress, but the dangers through the same use of technology are more ubiquitous due to the fact that they are digital natives who cannot live without their tech gadgets. This unfortunately exposes them to cyber hazards that present more challenges than opportunities, all of which prove harder to navigate and even tougher to monitor and regulate.

Q2: 'The media today has placed children in greater danger than ever before.' How far do you agree?

Analysis of question

The potential dangers the media poses to adults are well documented, but with the ever more pervasive reach of the media in our lives due to technology, it is worth considering how it puts some of its most active and vulnerable users – children – in harm's way. A stronger script would be able to link the specific characteristics and constraints that children have with the specific characteristics of the media landscape today, explaining how there is greater harm to children as a result. While there are overlaps with the impacts of technology, i.e. the platforms on which we view media today, responses should deal mainly with the effects of the media and avoid straying into a critique of platforms like smartphones or the Internet.

Clarification of terms

- **The media today:** both traditional media and new media; overlaps with technology.
- **Children:** before the age of 18.
- **in greater danger:** more in danger of harm to their physical, emotional and mental well-being; can be direct or indirect threats.
- **than ever before:** more so than at any point in history; danger is at its peak. Reference characteristics of today's world.

Possible approaches

- A. The media today has placed children in greater danger than ever before.
- B. The media today has not placed children in greater danger than ever before.

More nuanced approaches

- C. While there are some safeguards in place to protect them, children are largely in greater danger because of the media today.
- D. While one cannot deny the presence of dangers in the media today, it is inaccurate to say that children are in greater danger than ever before because of them.

(A) The media today has placed children in greater danger than ever before.

1. Influential media content places immense peer pressure on children to the extent that they would endanger themselves to fit in. Many of them are no match for the bombardment of unhealthy media images that they are exposed to on a daily basis. From body dysmorphia to thoughtless, sometimes even fatal pranks, children today are put in harm's way simply for the sake of staying 'in trend'. This is arguably because, relative to adults, children lack the cognitive and executive ability to properly understand the implications of the media content they view, regulate their emotions and manage their use of the media in a healthy way. Teenagers in particular have higher risk appetites, seeking the rush of the thrills they see on the media without due consideration of the consequences.

- TikTok's fatal challenges: (1) The 2021 'blackout challenge' that left two children dead in the United States – dangerous algorithm that cause the challenge to trend on the girls' pages, incentivising them to take part; and (2) The 2020 'Benadryl challenge' that killed a 15-year-old girl – users took a large number of antihistamines in an attempt to produce hallucinogenic effects.
- Disney princesses: The absurdity of the body representations of Disney princesses, e.g., Elsa and Anna, Cinderella, with extremely small waist-to-hip ratios that are nearly impossible to achieve naturally are still patently evident in children's media today. Researchers argue that these princesses, who are so ubiquitous in young children's lives,

perpetuate extreme and unrealistic ideals of beauty and body image and potentially contribute to body dysmorphia down the road.

2. The pervasiveness of media content that is unsuitable for children, coupled with a lack of supervision from parents today, form a lethal mix that puts children at risk. More often than not, children have access to personal Internet-enabled devices, and this has made it more difficult than ever for parents to monitor their online lives. Bad actors have also exploited technological loopholes on media platforms to inject extremely crude and inappropriate content within easy reach of children, making it easier for them to stumble on pornography, images of self-harm or violence.

- Propensity for children to use social media: Children as young as eight years old are using social media more than ever, with a 17% increase in screen usage among teens and tweens in the last two years, and this is more than four years prior.
- Sexualisation of young girls: Researchers at the University of Kentucky found that in just one year, grade school-age children could take in as many as 80,000 “sexy girl” portrayals just watching kid-targeted TV programming. In popular children’s TV shows, female characters were much more likely to be sexualised – e.g., wearing clothing that reveals or exposes body parts, being in a performance-related occupation where appearance is emphasised, subject of unwanted touching, kissing or hugging – than male characters. Researchers have found that this kind of exposure can predict intercourse initiations and dating violence victimisations in young people later in life.
- Media violence and children: The rising incidences of violence of television see the average child witnessing 12,000 violent acts on TV annually. This has been confirmed by studies to increase aggressive behaviour and at the same time decrease prosocial behaviour, empathy and moral engagement, particularly in boys. Heavy doses of this content desensitise children who lack the self-regulation to shield themselves from such excessive exposure.

3. In an increasingly diffused media landscape, the other users of media platforms can endanger children both directly and indirectly. More than just big media conglomerates, the rise of the new media has incorporated many more players in the production and spread of media. Worryingly, the anonymous nature of these online social media platforms can easily conceal predators and those seeking to do harm to children.

- Online sexual grooming: It has been found that while using social media, 40% of children remove privacy settings in order to attract more friends or followers. This opens them up to a wide range of adult predators looking to groom children online through the use of fake profile pictures, pretending to share similar interests, by offering gifts to the child or by complimenting the child. It is easier than ever for strangers to befriend children online, opening them up to a terrifying spectre of harm.
- ‘Over-sharenting’: Parents are realising the dangers of publicising sensitive content of their children, e.g., photos and videos, on social media platforms as they expose their children to privacy violations and even worse, being sexualised by predators. In 2022, an extremely popular TikTok account, with four million followers, featuring toddler Wren Eleanor came under fire for the types of inappropriate comments it was attracting from grown adult men. Her mother faced significant backlash for continuing to produce videos loaded with innuendos just to maintain their viewership.

B) The media today has not placed children in greater danger than before.

1. More safeguards are in place than ever by social media companies and governments to crack down on the elements that endanger children. These are comprehensive laws that are intended not just to regulate the platforms but also more aggressively prosecute offenders.

- Media and tech companies: TikTok, Instagram and YouTube have taken the lead in enacting global changes to their regulations aimed at protecting children online. For instance, TikTok has turned off notifications for children past bedtime, Instagram has disabled targeted advertisements for under-18s entirely and YouTube has turned off auto-play for teen users. These moves work together to limit children’s exposure to both harmful content and compulsive usage habits.
- Singapore: In 2022 Singapore’s Ministry of Communications and Information (MCI) unveiled new codes of practice aimed to raise the standard of online safety and protect children. Under the new codes, platforms will have to

ensure robust systems are in place to minimise the exposure of children to harmful content, e.g., through the use of content filters for child accounts, and ways for parents to supervise their children online. Additionally, the Children and Young Persons Act (CYPA) extends identity protection to minors below 18 from the publishing of their information in the media, safeguarding their privacy and digital rights.

2. Furthermore, the traditional gatekeepers of children's media use, namely parents and educators, are also now more aware of potential threats and thus more vigilant in monitoring the dangers that are posed to children in the media.

Knowledge about cyber-wellness and threats on online media platforms are easily accessible online with a plethora of articles to equip parents with the ability to protect their children. Technology has also greatly augmented parents' abilities to monitor their children's media use, preemptively avoid threats to their wellbeing, and counteract the negative influences from the media.

- Media literacy curriculum: One of the most prominent media literacy organisations is Common Sense Media, which rates movies, TV shows, podcasts and books to flag potential inappropriate content, such as violent or sexual themes. This provides parents with a wide-ranging library of independent age-based ratings and reviews that empower them to make the best-informed choices to protect their children. In addition, Common Sense Education provides educators with resources and training, such as their Digital Citizenship Curriculum, to empower the next generation of digital citizens.
- Parental control apps/software: Popular parental control apps, like Kidlogger, mySpy and NetNanny, offer a host of features that allow parents to track their children's media use. Examples include being able to immediately see the types of content their children are watching on their phones, with real-time alerts on content involving weapons, drugs, suicide and pornography; records of programmes used and screen grabs that were taken; filters to exclude sites with inappropriate content.

3. The media is increasingly filled with more positive and empowering messages that help children embrace being themselves and in the long-term resist harmful stereotypes. Progressive content creators have initiated a sea of changes in the way aspirational figures in children's media are portrayed in terms of their appearances, potential and talents. Instead of endangering children, these bolster self-esteem and help them resist negative or discriminatory attitudes from society later in life.

- Disney/cartoon characters: Disney's portrayals of their aspirational females have moved far beyond the antiquated images of helpless, waifish damsels in distress, like Sleeping Beauty and Snow White. Today, children are greeted by characters, like Moana and Raya, accompanied by stories full of adventure and devoid of romance. The male characters are also more typically found in supporting roles, modelling more empathetic and egalitarian behaviours. In fact, research has found that the princess culture propagated by these movies gave girls key storylines where they were the main protagonists, making them more likely to view educational opportunities, relationships and careers as being equally important for women and men. The increasing cultural diversity, e.g., Mulan, presents in these representations also bode well for teaching children to celebrate their own cultures and resist prejudice.

Q3: 'Education is our best chance at solving environmental problems.' Discuss.

Analysis of Question:

"Some say I should be in school. But why should any young person be made to study for a future when no one is doing enough to save that future? What is the point of learning facts when the most important facts given by the finest scientists are ignored by our politicians?" – Greta Thunberg

With rising urbanisation, deforestation, emission of industrial waste, mining activities and agriculture, educational efforts and increasing public awareness has become extremely important in mitigating and preventing these environmental problems. The question's absolute contention – **best** chance – posits that education is the most effective platform in driving such changes. In answering this question, candidates will thus have to consider the benefits and limitations of education – which can encompass both formal and informal modes of learning– in addressing environmental problems. A common error for this question is for students to merely describe OTHER factors that affect the solving of environmental problems WITHOUT referring to or comparing with education, which is the topic of this question – this is called hijacking the question or even changing the question topic, which could lead to an extremely poor grade.

Clarification of Key Terms:

- **Education:** directed at achieving certain aims, such as transmitting knowledge or fostering skills. This need not be limited to formal education, but can also be informal modes of instruction
- **Best chance:** an opportunity that is most effective / extremely useful / most ideal
- **Environmental problems:** deforestation, various kinds of pollution, global warming, climate change, etc.

Possible Approaches:

A. Yes, education is our best chance at solving environmental problems.

B. No, education is not our best chance at solving environmental problems.

Yes, education is our best chance

1. When actively enforced, education allows the message of environmental conservation to be internalised, facilitating effective behavioural changes. It helps people understand and address the impacts of climate changes, encourage positive changes in attitudes and behaviour that lead to sustainable lifestyles, and adapt to the impact(s) of various environmental problems. This is best exemplified in environmental education, which consistently integrates academic disciplines with environmental conservation. Such intentionality of the education curriculum can foster good environmental habits and knowledge that serve as a critical impetus for further positive and concrete climate actions to become a reality.

- As a national and global leader in marine science, ocean-related teaching has been an essential part of UK's core curriculum since 2020. Its 'Connect us with our Ocean' project aims to foster the passion for marine conservation in students. Instead of oceanic discussions being confined to the biology classroom, core subjects like literacy and math have marine themes, so students are fully immersed in the context of conservation.
- Environmental education is also integrated into multiple subjects taught at the various levels in Singapore. At the primary level, students learn in Science about conservation, and the negative impact of pollution, global warming and deforestation on the environment. In Social Studies, they learn about Singapore's physical environment and the importance of using resources responsibly. At the secondary level, the Geography, Science and Social Studies syllabi extend that learning to deeper issues like natural resource depletion, as well as the environmental impact of rising global temperatures and waste disposal.
- At both prefectural and national levels, Japan is promoting environmental education through government mandates and innovative programmes. Japan's national policy seeks to promote environmental conservation activities through environmental education and civic engagement.

2. Education empowers people with the necessary values and skills that can catalyse the development of innovative solutions to tackle environmental problems. Any progress that mankind hopes to make will increasingly depend upon the products of educated minds – research, invention and adaptation. By raising awareness about alternative courses of action that can enhance problem-solving and ecological protection, the education sector imparts crucial training that can stimulate innovation and solutions for collective action. This is especially the case when people can utilise data to analyse and inform decision-making and harness the commitment and ownership to sustainable solutions.

- According to the UN Environment Programme’s Global Guidance for Education on Green Jobs Report (2021), the transition to a green economy will add an estimated 60 million new jobs to the market by 2030. This shift is being driven by government policy, climate change and technologies which when combined, fuel a growing consumer market for green products and services. This will inevitably necessitate employees to be reskilled or upskilled to meet the needs of the future.
- In the Maldives, several islands are promoting community engagement for waste solutions and developing educational courses for “waste to wealth” skills. The Maldives Authentic Crafts Cooperative Society is working to help women’s development and island waste committees define community processes to sort waste, promote kitchen composting, pilot a plastic bottle return scheme and teach new skills to convert old clothes into reusable bags.

3. Education, in allowing for the depth of critical thinking and evaluation, will best allow us to clear misconceptions surrounding environmental problems and take better actions to solve them.

- Greenwashing is when an organisation spends more time and money on marketing itself as environmentally friendly than on actually minimising its negative environmental impact. It is a deceitful marketing gimmick intended to mislead consumers who prefer to buy goods and services from environmentally conscious brands, and heavily rely on the use of vague language and claims without proper substantiations. An educated consumer will be able to better fact-check and spot these outright lies to make better choices in his consumption patterns.
- Campaign group, Stop Funding Heat, working together with the Institute for Strategic Dialogue, had found far more misinformation on social media platforms like Facebook which undermine the existence or impacts of climate change, the human influence and the need for urgent actions. In an analysis of 48,700 posts between January and August 2021, the group found just 3.6% posts containing climate misinformation that included a fact-checking label. Readers who are not discerning will be victims of such fake news, and this testifies to the urgent need for education.

No, education is not our best chance

1. Education ultimately does little in re-shaping deeply engrained mindsets and habits that have, for the longest time, been contributing to environmental problems. There has been a major disconnect between raising awareness about the environment and taking action to reduce environmental degradation. Any effective education must be one that is able to both teach and convince people about the need to control and change consumption patterns. However, these efforts are often futile when people, even those in positions of power, fail to make the link between – or worse, remain indifferent to – their actions and its impact on the environment.

- The rise of eco-activism, fueled by social media and increasingly vocal Gen Z and millennials, has seen prominent figures such as Greta Thunberg and groups like Sunrise Movement and Extinction Rebellion urging increased attention to climate change actions. While there have been persistent efforts to shed light on such issues, spread awareness and challenge the power of entrenched interests, the scope of influence in re-shaping environmental legislation remains weak.
- Recent figures released by the Brazilian government show that in the past three years, deforestation levels in the Amazon have averaged above 25,000 square km per year. It represents a failure of environmental protection policy in favour of lucrative soy and cattle farming, and sorely undermines the several decades of worldwide efforts to stem the trend of deforestation through education, public awareness and the implementation of sustainable development strategies.

2. In most education systems, the emphasis on the environment remains either sidelined and/or secondary, thus failing to provoke actions in tackling environmental problems. While there are international environmental education goals and standards put in place by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO), topics related to environmental issues are taught in very few classrooms globally. Pedagogical resources are either not used nor disseminated properly, mainly due to barriers, such as constraints in the school programme, lack of confidence by teachers, or a limited number of local examples. Even in rare cases where these are overcome, it is too optimistic to expect that the pace of education can catch up with environmental degradation.

- In September 2019, the global climate strike movement gathered a total of 6 million people globally, of which about 2 million were students who walked out of schools. Such momentum undermines education's role in the fight against climate change and exposes a sore lack in existing educational systems that remain unable to make environmental issues more visible. In addition, according to a Eurobarometer survey, 41% of EU youth respondents believed that climate change, environment and eco-friendly behaviours were not sufficiently taught in schools, ranking second in the list of priorities.
- Many environmental social enterprises like Terra SG and non-profit organisations like Ground-Up Initiative have customisable workshops to get communities of different ages involved in the sustainability movement. Plenty of learning journeys have also been designed for students to expose them to conservation efforts on a first-hand basis. However, such experiential learning and even eco-volunteerism efforts remain largely one-off in nature and lack the momentum to propel sustainable actions.

3. With persistent roadblocks, such as media censorship and misinformation, educational efforts aimed at raising public awareness will merely be delayed, forestalling progress in solving environmental problems. Even though governments and the scientific community have the duty to report science-based information to the public in a fair, robust and accessible manner, it remains a fact that transparency is often lacking due to hidden political agendas. Changes to the language, content, or access to such content that advocate for the environment can directly affect and skew public knowledge/awareness on the severity of environmental issues.

- From 2017 to 2021, the Trump administration removed science-based information on agency websites relating to various environmental issues, such as water pollution, climate change and endangered species. They issued *de facto* gag orders to government science agencies, like the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) and US Department of Agriculture, and ordered that the EPA takes down its climate webpage. In doing so, Trump's administration deprived the public of the ability to be fully informed of the science behind important environmental rulemaking procedures.
- In a 2018 to 2019 survey organised by the Ecological Society of Australia, one-third of government respondents and 30% of industry employees reported that their employers or managers had modified their work to downplay or mislead the public on the environmental impacts of activities, such as logging and mining. Most scientists felt the main consequences of being blocked or refraining from speaking about their work was that vested interest groups then dominated public debates and could mislead people, and that relevant data were not used to inform policies.

Q4: 'Women will never be truly equal with men.' What is your view?

Question Analysis

Topic: Inequality, social issues, Human rights

Issue: Gender equality

Contention: Women WILL NEVER be truly equal with men in society vs Women WILL be truly equal with men in society.

Context: modern societies (trend of greater equality between genders; trend of pushback/ skepticism towards equal gender movements, etc.).

Keywords: will (assumption of current inequality, requirement to make evaluations about future conditions/ situations in society); never (absolute term); truly (requirement to analyse and evaluate situations by contrasting their intended/ expected vs actual outcomes); in society (global perspective).

Analysis:

This question requires students to focus on the issue of gender equality and whether it can eventually be achieved in societies around the world, given the apparent trend towards greater gender equality seen currently. While discussions that revolve around the possibilities of gender equality are acceptable, it is the more perceptive and insightful responses that pay close attention to the word 'truly' that will discuss the alignment or misalignment of current hopes of gender equality with the actual eventuality of gender outcome, given inherent contextual features that contribute to or hinder gender equality.

Clarification of Terms:

- 1· **will:** assumption of current inequality, requirement to make evaluations about future conditions/ situations in society.
- 2· **never:** an absolute term. Implies an unrealistic ideal that cannot be made into reality under any circumstance in the future.
- 3· **truly:** requirement to analyse and evaluate situations by contrasting their intended/ expected vs actual outcomes.

Possible Approaches

- Women WILL NEVER be truly equal with men in society despite the progress that has been made in striving for gender equality.
- Despite the challenges from prevailing beliefs and practices, Women WILL be truly equal with men in society one day.

Possible Points and Examples

Women will be truly equal with men in society one day

1. With **more laws guaranteeing women equality in many areas of life**, arising from more democratic and inclusive governments, there is hope that in the future women will be truly equal with men in society.

- a. EU Charter of Fundamental Rights, Article 23: Equality between women and men must be ensured in all areas, including employment, work and pay. The principle of equality shall not prevent the maintenance or adoption of

measures providing for specific advantages in favour of the under-represented sex. This law in Europe ensures that women are legally entitled to a status that is equal to men, and they can seek legal recourse should they face any discrimination arising from being women.

b. In the early 1990s, significant changes in South Korean family law went into effect as a result of three decades of intensive lobbying by women's rights advocates. The revised law guarantees unprecedented rights for women in the areas of marriage, divorce, child custody and property inheritance. Although social attitudes have not caught up with the changes instituted in favour of equal rights for women, there has been greater recognition of equality of women in society, with the recent persecution of males for sexual harassment arising from the MeToo movement in South Korea, using the laws that were reformed from the 90s.

c. A royal decree in September 2017 granted women in Saudi Arabia the right to drive and obtain driving licences. On June 24, 2018, Saudi women took to the road for the first time in 30 years, giving them greater equality in a country that is notorious for its repressive policies towards women.

2. There are increasing **grassroots movements pushing for greater gender equality**, arising from citizens who are more aware of gender disparities and who want to improve the situation. This, coupled with the changes in policy, will ensure that there will be concrete changes made.

a. There have been an increasing number of social activist groups like AWWA (Asian Women's Welfare Association) in Singapore, AWAM (All Women's Action Society) in Malaysia, Rights for Women and London Feminist Network in England that are advocating for and raising awareness in society to the persisting inequality in society, despite the top-down efforts to equalise the genders in many areas of life, e.g. plight of female domestic workers, greater equity in workplaces for women employees, etc.

b. Social media has also become an effective platform for advocates to push for greater gender equality. #MeToo movement started on Twitter in 2017 to raise awareness of sexual harassment by established celebrities with impunity and the calls to bring them to justice gradually grew in virality, spreading to other platforms like Facebook and TikTok. Likewise #HeForShe supporters declare their commitment to end gender discrimination and to invite others to join the movement using the hashtag.

3. Women will one day be truly equal with men because they are **no longer as disadvantaged by gender-specific roles**, assisted by changing mindsets and recent developments.

a. Technological advancements have negated the biological differences that used to perpetuate gender roles, e.g. breastfeeding can be substituted by bottle feeding, domestic chores and child-rearing can be outsourced to domestic helpers, nannies or child care centres. Thus, women are no longer confined to the role of home maker due to their biological affinity/ advantage for them.

b. Similarly many roles in the economy rely less on characteristics possessed by a specific gender and more on attributes/ character traits that either gender can be good in, e.g. no longer are cabin crew or nurses only women and the military and gaming industry are no longer exclusively for men, as the traits required for these industries are not physical ones, i.e. brute strength or high stamina/ endurance.

Women will never be truly equal with men in society, as there will be forces in society that perpetuate the thinking that one gender is always superior to the other.

1. **Social expectations of gender roles have also created glass ceilings for women**, especially in workplaces or certain industries that prevent women from going beyond a certain level of achievement or appointment.

a. Executive positions are sometimes out of reach of women, despite their qualifications and experience, simply because of the belief that women are not able to lead as well as men, e.g. positions of Prime Ministers in many countries are rarely filled by women, despite the slight uptick in women prime ministers, especially recently (28 out of 195, or 14.4%).

- b. CEOs of Fortune 500 companies also show a skewed representation favouring males. The total number of women leading Fortune 500 companies is now 44, up from 41 in 2021, which means women only lead 8.8% of Fortune 500 companies.
- c. Certain industries, like console and computer game sectors, are notorious for their toxic attitude towards women: of 144 executives in the Top 14 companies, 121 are men and only 23 are women. Of the 23 women, the majority (57%) are in line roles, responsible for operational business areas (rather than more traditionally female staff roles).

2. **Pop culture also perpetuates stereotypes about men and women that entrench the inequality** among genders.

- a. There is an abundance of shows and movies that often perpetuate the image of women as caretakers of children and homemakers, and portray women being able to juggle work and child rearing/ household commitments in a very good/ positive light, while chastising women who simply focus on their careers. However, this does not hold true for their portrayal of men.
- b. Many shows also depict women struggling to juggle their motherly duties and work as if that is the default role, with very few portraying equal parenting duties for both husband and wife.

3. **Prevailing religious beliefs and practices** foist strict gender inequalities on their adherents, which stymies any attempts to equalise genders in religions and in so doing dashing any hopes of achieving true gender equality in society.

- a. Many leadership roles in religions have been prohibited to women, e.g. Roman Catholic and Orthodox beliefs, only men may serve as priests; similarly in Islam as well only males may become *imams* to lead a prayer congregation.
- b. Religions also teach that God created men and women to serve different roles in religion and the home, i.e. that men are leaders of the household while women perform the caregiver/ custodian duties, and that women should be subservient to their male counterparts, etc.

4. **Prevailing cultural beliefs and practices** dictate strict gender hierarchies for members of their cultural group, which prevents gender equality from being truly successful in society.

- a. Many patriarchal societies all over the world prioritise men and position them as superior to women, for example in Saudi Arabia and in Taliban-occupied areas of Afghanistan, women are seen less as people and more like objects, being required to be chaperoned by a male relative when outdoors, and always having to defer to the males in the family. In India, women are also seen as inferior to men, with many cases of sexual harassment and rape not being followed up, as they are seen as mere complaints, or the alleged victims in those cases were asking for it by dressing provocatively.
- b. Many cultures also perpetuate gender hierarchies in family structures, e.g. superiority of male siblings over females in family decisions or inheritance matters in many Asian cultural groups like Javanese or Bawean or Peranakans, which deprive women of opportunities to become equals with males in their communities.

5. **Prevailing social norms** create rigid expectations of gender statuses, which results in skepticism or pushback in society whenever there are attempts to create a gender equal society, which makes a future of a gender equal society seem improbable.

- a. Discussions of equal participation in National Service conscription reached a dead end when ministers cited how enlisting women would be an extra burden, in Goh Keng Swee's words in the 60s, and recently Ng Eng Hen said, "The primary reason for enlistment into the SAF must remain to train a soldier who is able to defend Singapore; and to repel if not defeat an enemy who wants to invade our home. Likewise enlistment into the Police and SCDF must be based on the national need for homeland security and emergency services. This stark *raison d'être* of NS, to fight and defend our country, and to ensure its security, is the foremost consideration that must undergird the mandatory enlistment of all national servicemen. It is very far off from the proposals to conscript women to serve in roles such as caregivers and healthcare workers, or to send a powerful signal of gender equality.", showing how governments have rigid expectations of what women can (caregiving, healthcare roles) and cannot (be a soldier, fight and kill enemies) do.

b. In 2018, 100 French women signed an open letter criticising the #MeToo social-media campaign and related drives to expose sexual harassment in France and elsewhere, arguing that the freedom of men to pester was "essential to sexual freedom", testament to the rigid social expectations of men and women in French society at the time.

5: How far do you agree that your society has a culture its people can be proud of?

Analysis of question

Singapore boasts a host of feats, achievements and opportunities that are consistently lauded on the world stage and that are a source of pride at home. At the same time, it is worth debating whether the culture that has enabled these amazing accomplishments is something that we can be proud of or not. A potential pitfall in this question is to lose focus on the idea of 'culture' and evaluate strengths and weaknesses of various cultures in a generic way. A stronger script will ground the arguments in an examination of the values, beliefs and ethos that form the Singapore psyche instead of general pros and cons about Singapore's culture, providing clear evaluations of how positive they are.

Clarification of terms

- **Your society:** Singapore and its relevant characteristics / structures
- **Culture:** values, ethos, ideas, customs and social behaviours
- **Its people can be proud of:** A feeling of deep satisfaction and delight at, being happy to show it off to others, being worthy of esteem and value, a source of patriotism, especially on the world stage.

Possible approaches

- A) Singapore certainly has a culture that its people can be proud of.
- B) Singapore does not have a culture its people can be proud of.

A) Singapore has a culture its people can be proud of

1) Our society can certainly be proud of the uniquely Singaporean culture that has been created in the face of the homogenising forces of globalisation. In a world filled with increasingly westernised societies due to the pressures that participating in the global economy introduce, Singapore has managed to maintain a distinctly Asian culture and ethos. The catchphrase of being 'uniquely Singapore' is more than just a marketing gimmick for tourists but is something that locals are proud of. This is especially significant when we consider the very short span of time in which this distinct Singapore identity has evolved.

- **National pride and identity:** These are manifest in surveys on national pride and identity. 85% of respondents in a 2020 Ipsos survey indicated that they were proud to be a Singapore citizen/PR, with about half saying that they were very proud to be so. 74% agreed that being a Singaporean was an important part of their identity
- **Food:** Distinct cultural icons of our country like local food and delicacies, world-class services and Singlish are dominant aspects of daily life for Singaporeans. Our culinary scene is world-renowned, with Singaporeans being proud of both older heritage foods and newer fine-dining restaurants alike. Notably, both types of restaurants have been lauded on the international food scene, with the traditional hawker stall Hill Street Tai Hwa Pork Noodle and established restaurants like Les Amis and Odette both receiving Michelin accolades in 2022.
- **Singlish:** There is also an increasing sense of local pride in Singlish, which has evolved from being deemed a 'low-class' pidgin language to something that is flaunted as a marker of belonging and camaraderie. It is commonly used in daily life with gusto, there are entire dictionaries compiled with Singlish phrase uses and origins, and it has even found its way into university modules at the National University of Singapore.

2) Singaporeans can also take pride in our society's ethos of equality which makes it a standard-bearer among diverse societies around the world. The unwavering dedication to ensuring that all races, religions and languages are equally recognised is enshrined in our National Pledge and is actively sought after in laws and policies today. Despite having a dominant ethnic group, Singapore has successfully made way for every single cultural group to contribute equally to its development, engendering a sense of shared ownership. Given that this very commitment to equality was so deeply held that it was in fact a big reason why Singapore separated from Malaysia upon independence, its centrality to our culture is difficult to dispute. As many countries around the world struggle to ensure all citizens are equally protected, Singaporeans can be proud of the value that our country places on it.

- Racial and religious harmony: Singapore takes a strong stance on maintaining racial and religious harmony. The Maintenance of Racial Harmony Act and the Maintenance of Religious Harmony Act provide the government with instruments to punish those who commit offences against others on racial or religious grounds, and it has not hesitated to enforce them. This can be seen in the cases brought against individuals like Amos Yee and Benjamin Koh.
- Gender equality: Singapore's government has also made concerted efforts to protect the rights of women and ensure their seamless integration in society. In Singapore, more women enrol in local universities than men. They are also entitled to four months of paid maternity leave – something not even guaranteed in the United States – and since 1969 have had the right to terminate unwanted pregnancies. The number of elected women in Parliament has steadily increased over the years, with female lawmakers now accounting for almost 30% of the House. On a number of the UN gender-specific SDG indicators such as 'Good Health and Wellbeing', 'Decent Work to Economic Growth' and 'Peace, Justice and Strong Institutions', Singapore outperforms the rest of Asia.

3) While some might criticise it as an obsession, Singapore's culture of excellence is still nonetheless admirable as it consistently puts Singapore on the map. The Singaporean work ethic and pragmatism have burnished our reputation as a country that can be counted on for high quality skills and services, enhancing our survival in the global economy. This also translates to a soft power that very few other nations of our size have.

- Economic competitiveness: Much has been made of Singapore's small but mighty dynamism and exceptional sustained economic performances, for instance in achieving the top ranking in the IMD World Competitiveness Yearbook in 2019. Digging deeper, one could posit that it is its culture of relentless pragmatism and willingness to engage in a continuous process of self-examination that keeps us on the map. One prominent example is found in the way Singapore strategically positioned itself as a leading biomedical sciences hub in Asia, starting all the way back in 1995. It developed a 'Master Plan' to ensure that the industry was targeted as an area for priority treatment and development, and consequently managed to attract a host of leading firms like GlaxoSmithKline, Pfizer and Roche setting up commercial and manufacturing operations here.
- Education system: Singapore's education system has achieved somewhat cult status with Singapore Math being adopted around the world. The techniques that focused on problem solving and developing thinking skills were lauded for their role in helping Singapore achieve consistently top-tier rankings in international education surveys. The pursuit of excellence and proficiency by our education system has translated, many years later, into contributing to the soft power of the 'Singapore brand'.

4) Our society also boasts a culture of care for the more vulnerable in our society, which is undoubtedly worthy of praise in a competitive, dog-eat-dog world. In the face of an aging population and increasing inequality, Singapore certainly does not subscribe to the notion of 'every man for himself'. Our meritocratic system is evolving to become a 'compassionate meritocracy', a direction outlined in the 2022 Forward Singapore conversations. Our modern social compact is anchored in individual and family responsibilities, and support from the community and the government (e.g., through education, subsidies, wage relief etc.) to ensure that even the weakest members of our society do not fall through the cracks.

- Government subsidies and policies: The Government actively invests resources for targeted assistance to the lower income, the vulnerable, and those with specific needs. For instance, lower-income families are supported by the Community Care Endowment Fund (ComCare), which is a key part of our social safety net, alongside other schemes such as the Public Rental Scheme, MediFund, and the MOE Financial Assistance Scheme.
- Grassroots support: There are also active ground-up efforts to ensure that vulnerable persons in our society are cared for. For instance, blue-collar migrant workers in Singapore are supported by a network of organisations like HOME and Transient Workers Count Too (TWC2) that design programmes and provide resources for them to navigate the perils of employer exploitation and mental health challenges. These organisations draw strong support from the local community in terms of volunteering and funding.

B) Singapore does not have a culture its people can be proud of

1) Singapore's culture is not as distinctive, organic or special as one might be led to believe, given how curated it is by the specific efforts and even mandates of the government. Our culture and identity have in large part been created by nation-building efforts in a top-down fashion rather than allowed to thrive in a more natural way. This leads to a rather narrow conception of what it means to be a Singaporean and leads to minority voices or cultures being erased. Furthermore, with increasing diversity around the world, there is actually little that sets us apart from other cosmopolitan cities or countries.

- Erasure of dialects: In the rapid push towards development in Singapore's early years of nation-building, the government pushed its Chinese population to embrace the more "economically valuable" standard Mandarin instead of their native dialects like Hokkien, Teochew and Cantonese. The Speak Mandarin Campaign and media censorship of dialect use resulted in the erasure of many of these topolects from public life and homogenised the previously incredibly rich cultural landscape of our immigrant society. It is arguable that the 'multiculturalism' we seem to be proud of in Singapore today is a watered down, non-representative version of what it was meant to be.
- National campaigns: Singaporeans have often been criticised for needing the government to tell them how to behave or needing penalties to ensure gracious civic behaviour. From courtesy ('National Courtesy Campaign' and 'Singapore Kindness Movement') to cleanliness ('Keep Singapore Clean' and 'Keep Public Toilets Clean' campaigns), Singaporean culture is often reduced to these public awareness maxims rather than being a true product of good social consciousness. Can we really be proud of that?

2) There is a lack of graciousness and tolerance in our culture that many Singaporeans find difficult to be proud of. The fast pace of life in Singapore, coupled with the sense of each person's survival being 'every man for himself' have contributed to the 'kiasu' culture that we all embrace in some form. Yet, it is not necessarily something to be proud of as it gives rise to negative tendencies like impatience, a lack of social graces and an intolerance for mistakes that harm our relationships with others. Even when we are gracious it might be because of a fear of reprisal rather than a true care for others. Furthermore, technology has not helped this situation, with online platforms becoming new arenas for ugly Singaporean behaviour to be displayed.

- Online vitriol: Insensitivity and a lack of consideration for others are rife on the online space, where Singaporeans who are shrouded in anonymity indulge in nasty comments and harsh judgments of others. A tragic road accident in Tanjong Pagar in 2021 drew outrage and harsh accusations of fault online, with netizens being quick to throw comments such as 'they deserved it', or 'serves them right'. Regardless of whether they were right, these unnecessary comments served to deepen the emotional pain felt by the loved ones of the deceased. These incidents seem to paint a picture of Singaporeans being devoid of compassion and being unable to meet one another with grace.
- Ugly Singaporean behaviour: Singaporeans have often been criticised for being entitled and lacking social graces in a range of contexts, from driving, interacting with service and healthcare staff and even in the education sector. Stories of ugly Singapore behaviour abound, such as of 'Haircut Mum' Serene Ong who in 2015 filed a police report against her son's school for cutting his hair despite repeated warnings that it was too long, or a parent volunteer who accused a school of misappropriating funds when her child did not receive a packet drink that had been donated by another parent. Road rage by entitled drivers is also often in the spotlight in Singapore, with platforms like SG Vigilante documenting everyday instances of drivers cutting into lanes, tailgating and parking in inconsiderate ways.

3) Singapore's obsession with excellence and systems of meritocracy couple together to create a cut-throat competitive culture that puts an incessant strain on our people, especially the young. Even though this aspect of our culture leads to our eventual success, it is not exactly something to be proud of as the human costs it exacts are too great. It has also created an unhealthy elitist culture that permeates many aspects of life.

- Mental health statistics: In Singapore's hyper-competitive, hyper-speed society, it is no surprise that the complexities, desires and pressures of our lives can result in poorer mental health. Many reports have indicated an increase in stress in recent years, with \$3.1 billion being spent annually on stress-related illnesses, including mental health conditions such as depression and anxiety. Rates of employee burnout in Singapore are among the highest in the world, with a 2022 Mercer study finding that one in five Singaporeans feel de-energized at work (twice as high as the Asia average) and a staggering 85% admitting that they feel at risk of extreme burnout.
- Elitism: While Singapore's educational policies have successfully nurtured a large pool of talent, these policies have also bred unhealthy competition and elitism. Increasing studies have shown how Singapore society is cut across class divides, and schools are platforms where such deep social inequalities are experienced, and even engineered as students of a similar socio-economic status mingle together. A report by the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) has listed Singapore as having the largest gap in students' sense of belonging at school, going by their socio-economic status (SES). These also breed a stigma against alternative pathways to success such as attending a polytechnic rather than a junior college or attending a 'neighbourhood' school rather than a brand name school, that can have detrimental outcomes on an individual's sense of self-worth in the future. More than this, our hyper-competitive culture has also been found to breed severe test anxiety in many students, corroding their mental health over time.

Q6: Can the Arts be an effective force for change?

Analysis of Question:

The Arts serve, amongst many other purposes, as an expression of our common humanity, challenging assumptions, inspiring emotions and conversations, and connecting diverse people to enable new ideas and action. To assume that it “can” be an “effective force” for change is thus an absolute claim that positions the Arts as a potent platform/tool that can make a significant difference to society, be it in the present and/or future. Candidates should consider the advantages and limitations of the Arts to generate arguments for the question, recognize that change can manifest in different forms (SPECTRAL) and nature (direct vs. indirect, positive vs. negative etc.) and impact people differently across time and space.

Clarification of Key Terms:

- **the Arts:** covers diverse genres - theatre, dance, music, traditional arts, visual arts, and literary arts etc
- **most effective:** successful, powerful, constructive
- **change:** different forms (SPECTRAL) and nature (direct vs. indirect, positive vs. negative etc.)

Approaches:

- A. Yes, the Arts can be an effective force for change
- B. No, the Arts can hardly be an effective force for change

Yes, the Arts can be an effective force for change.

1. The Arts wield significant momentum in inspiring and catalysing social actions by deepening the audience’s engagement with controversial and taboo topics. With the fluidity of diverse genres and various techniques of expression, the Arts transcend language barriers and taps into symbolism and imagery etc. to safely allow for difficult topics to be raised. It has the emotive power to challenge people to revise their ways of thinking and to question the status quo, which can be very crucial modes of resistance against larger forces of inequality and oppression. Where the Arts can promote deeper understanding and inspire empathy, it can be a significant call to action.

- *A Girl in the River*, a 2014 film from Young Global Leader Sharmeen Obaid-Chinoy, tells the story of a Pakistani woman who survived an attempted murder at the hands of her father, for having eloped with a man she loved. The film won an Oscars and spurred Pakistan’s Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif to take a tougher line on honour killings, and Parliament passed a new law that made it much harder for such perpetrators to walk free.
- ‘That Lady Thing’, a 2018 pop-up art exhibition in San Francisco, featured content relating to several active political movements relating to gender inequality. Its main aims were to raise awareness surrounding issues such as wage inequality, objectification of women and lack of diversity in business management whilst also raising funds for The National Women’s Law Centre. Over 5 days the event was seen by over 116 million people and raised over \$10,000 for its chosen cause.

2. The Arts, with its therapeutic properties and cathartic effect, is a significant coping mechanism that positively shapes the way we respond to pressing socio-emotional challenges in our daily lives. People have been relying on the Arts for communication, self-expression, and healing for thousands of years. This practice is rooted in the belief that creative expression can foster mental well-being by helping individuals manage their behaviours and feelings, gain personal insight and develop new coping skills.

- Art therapy is a distinct mental health discipline that draws on the traditions, theory and practices of art and psychology. According to the Art Therapist’s Association of Singapore, demand for such therapy has gained much traction since the pandemic, especially during the circuit breaker period in 2020. Collection Cares programme (organised by the National Heritage Board in partnership with Red Balloon Therapy): these art therapy sessions for seniors have been so successful in alleviating feelings of isolation and improving their well-being that after the

pilot run in December 2020, the programme returned for a second edition in September 2021. Other outstanding projects include FoundSpace's Project Memory, #art4SGMW, and Montfort Care's Tapestries of Grief: Witnessing Through Art Therapy project and exhibition.

- Recent international research is also focusing on non-pharmacological interventions like music therapy which can benefit people with dementia. Researchers are utilising a 12-week intervention called musical bridges to memory (MBM). This uses both perceptive and expressive forms of music-based intervention, administered in a group setting, to mediate neuropsychiatric symptoms and improve social interaction between dementia patients and their caregivers.

3. As essential soft power and cultural currency, the Arts is a significant industry with huge potential to revitalise economies and drive further growth. Industries in this creative sector include fine arts, film, television, music, design, publishing, and fashion etc. Such art can attract both regional and international tourism, often encouraging individuals and businesses to move to, or remain, in the area. The growing interest within the international community on the potential of the cultural and creative industries to spur sustainable development and create inclusive job opportunities is also testament to the effectiveness of the Arts in steering such economic change.

- According to Cultural Times, the cultural and creative industries generate an estimated US\$250 billion in revenue a year, creating 29.5 million jobs globally. In 2016, the United States ran a \$25 billion trade surplus for artistic and cultural goods and services, driven by its exports of movies, television programs, video games, and more. That is more than 10 times the amount from 2006, where the trade surplus in the arts was just \$2 billion.
- In Singapore, the visual arts sector has also grown steadily over the years, with the growth in the exhibition and museum scene, as well as art businesses (auction houses, art logistics providers etc.) setting up base in Singapore to serve the Asia Pacific market. This is supported by diverse platforms such as Singapore Art Week and the Singapore Biennale that draw many visitors.
- K-pop, fueled by the Hallyu, has sought to expand influence since the late 1990s. The success of K-pop is part of a Korean overhaul of the arts and entertainment sectors to explicitly project cultural power. In the same year that BTS reached the summit of the Billboard Hot 100, Bong Joon-ho's "Parasite" won the 2020 Oscar for best picture and K-pop girl groups Blackpink and Twice cracked the Billboard Global 100 for the first time. As of 2021, Korean content dominated even U.S.-produced content for streaming viewers in the East Asian region. In 2022, Disney+ secured the rights to stream Korean content.

No, the arts can hardly be an effective force for change.

1. The Arts is ultimately a passive tool because it provokes merely emotional response in its viewers rather than inciting concrete action with any tangible or sustainable change. In the realm of political art, messages of propaganda, allegories, or calls to action are not themselves action, and such art can only go as far as representing ideas of change or resistance rather than enforcing them. Often, these works also simply aestheticize or romanticise notions of protest or resistance and have the empty effect of moral licensing – instilling in its viewers a false sense of having accomplished something, but ultimately signifying nothing.

- Ai Weiwei's 1995 art piece 'Dropping a Han Dynasty Urn': Represented in three black-and-white photos that feature the artist holding a 2,000-year-old-ceremonial vase and shattering it on the floor, Ai's intention was to symbolise the crippling of an ancient object's monetary and cultural value, as well as the larger rejection of the legacies of the Han dynasty. While Ai managed to provoke viewers to consider who determines cultural and monetary values alike, this all played out only on the level of representation - no political or social system was impeded.
- Norman Rockwell's 1964 painting 'The Problem We All Live With': Aimed to directly address racism in America and the universality of the people being affected with these harmful politics. Racist graffiti, limited freedom of movement, racial segregation at schools were the reality of the American south in 1960s, and while Rockwell has raised these issues in his political artwork, these issues persist after more than 6 decades on.

- Guillermo Vargas Jiménez is an artist best known for the controversy caused when he exhibited an emaciated dog in a gallery in Nicaragua in 2007. Artists like him and Damien Hirst who create such sensationalist works seem to suggest that art is merely regarded for its shock value.

2. With a consumer base that is increasingly preoccupied with Arts as pleasure, the pursuit of facile entertainment has stripped the Arts of its deeper message(s), and it is hardly able to provoke or inspire change. This is primarily the result of the ubiquitous nature of social media that turns today's exhibitions into spots that obsess over Instagram opportunities, and a spectacle that is devoid of, and detached from, actual cognitive engagement with the art and what it expresses. Unless the Arts can actively involve people and communities in collaboration or social interaction to raise awareness and encourage actual debate, then its value in evoking change will remain within the shallow frames of a photograph, rather than challenging larger societal frameworks.

- Claiming to offer multi-sensory experiences with immersive art installations, the rise of self-christened museums such as The Museum of Pizza and The Museum of Ice Cream etc. pushes the boundary of what art really is. These spaces merely promote Insta-worthy spots and are barely thought-provoking or stimulating without a worthy takeaway/message for its visitors.
- While Yayoi Kusama's participatory-art exhibit '*Life is the Heart of a Rainbow*' was intentionally catered to the social media crowd and seen as a collaborative art experience where anyone could be a content creator, it is arguable that Kusama's main message (on the existential experience of infinity and the human condition of loneliness) was significantly sidelined in contrast to the pursuit of selfie opportunities.

3. The Arts can hardly be a force for change when it remains subjected to harsh censorship laws, especially in countries with a highly restrictive legal and regulatory regime. In such contexts, artists are often silenced for questioning social and religious norms or expressing political views that oppose dominant narratives. Even if such efforts do not suppress particular types of expression, they cast a shadow of fear which can lead to self-censorship by those who seek to avoid controversy. On top of the growing global trend of underfunding creative pursuits to weaken its influence, the expressive power of the Arts is heavily muted under this climate of fear and unable to re-shape dominant narratives within society.

- In May 2015, the National Arts Council withdrew an S\$8,000 publishing grant from Liew's publisher Epigram Books for the award-winning graphic novel '*The Art of Charlie Chan Hock Chye*' due to its perceived sensitive content, claiming that it undermines the authority or legitimacy of the government.
- '*The Kashmir Files*', a 2022 Bollywood movie on the exodus of Hindus from the Muslim-majority Kashmir Valley, was banned in multi-racial Singapore as the film has been assessed to be 'beyond; the city-state's film classification guidelines. According to the Infocomm Media Development Authority in a joint statement with other ministries, the film was refused classification for its provocative and one-sided portrayal of Muslims and the depictions of Hindus being persecuted in the on-going conflict in Kashmir. These representations were feared to have the potential to cause enmity between different and multi-religious society.

4. Stereotypically seen as highbrow and too abstruse for comprehension, the arts have limited scope of influence in reaching out to audiences, let alone be able to effect any change on a large scale. With abstract art that literally seeks to distance the portrayal from any literal or immediately recognizable reference point, the meaning is either often lost on viewers, or only understood by a small group of elites who can grasp its message. On top of the fact that artworks are subject to multiple interpretations, this can significantly dilute the crux of the artist's intended message, and sorely obscure any call to action. **[Note: Similar to Point 2, and should not be used in the same essay]**

Q7: To what extent is consumerism to blame for the ills we face in the modern world?

Question Analysis

Topic: Social issues, env issues, general

Issue: impact of consumerism on society

Contention: Consumerism is ALWAYS to blame for the ills we face in the modern world vs Consumerism is NEVER to blame for the ills we face in the modern world

Context: modern societies (trends of consumerism, eg. materialism vs trends of anti-consumerism, eg. thrifting, upcycling, minimalism)

Keywords: extent (responses to show nuancing; absolutes are possible though not recommended); consumerism

Analysis:

This is a question that requires students to focus on the ills societies face in the modern world, which can be social (inequality, materialism, resource depletion, env degradation, conflicts, etc) and evaluate the extent to which consumerism is RESPONSIBLE for them. While discussions can initially elaborate the ills faced in the modern world, students must show awareness that the focus of the points discussed should be on the degree to which consumerism contributes to or does not contribute to them (which can involve a comparison with other factors that may contribute to these ills)

Clarification of Terms:

1. **consumerism:** preoccupation of people with the acquisition of consumer goods
2. **to blame:** assumption that consumerism actively contributes to, or is responsible for
3. **ills we face in the modern world:** undesirable situations we face currently in societies, e.g. inequality, materialism, resource depletion, env degradation, conflicts, etc.

Possible Approaches

Consumerism is mostly to blame for the ills we face in the modern world.

Consumerism is seldom to blame for the ills we face in the modern world.

Possible Points and Examples

Consumerism is MOSTLY to blame for the ills we face in the modern world

- _1. Consumerism fuels the demand for goods and services, as individuals desire to buy and own the latest, which accelerates depletion of finite resources and exacerbates the degradation of our environment.
 - a. Fast fashion and consequent env degradation: The fashion industry is responsible for 10% of humanity's carbon emissions, and up to 85% of textiles go into landfills each year. Aral Sea has vastly retreated due to over-irrigation of cotton crops in Uzbekistan. (From Env lecture)
 - b. Burgeoning demand for digital devices like smartphones and laptops, which rely on Lithium Ion batteries leads to serious env damage. According to a report by Friends of the Earth, lithium extraction inevitably harms the soil and causes air contamination[i]. Lithium batteries also contain potentially toxic nickel, copper, and lead materials. When disposed of improperly, used batteries can lead to an environmental disaster, and if stored uncontrolled, they become explosive[ii].

- c. Influencers like those that own MKBHD, Unbox Therapy, LinusTechTips, SuperSaf, MrWhoseTheBoss produce content that promotes acquiring the latest in tech devices like laptops, smartphones and their accessories, which influences viewers to follow their lead, fuelling demand for these goods
2. Consumerism creates a social hierarchy based on the accumulation of consumer goods, which worsens the problem of inequality in society.
 - a. Ostentatious goods have led to greater stratification in society, with the status boost derived from owning and showing off these products to others, e.g. luxury cars like Ferraris and Bugattis, Supreme brand goods, limited edition sneakers like Nike X Dior Air Jordan 1[iii], etc.
 - b. Influencers like Bader Al Safar and @white.niccur_ produce content that further inflate the hype and status of these goods, which increases the perception of inequality in society between the haves and have-nots.
 - c. Brands like Supreme artificially engineer scarcity of their products, which greatly inflates the demand and hence the price, putting it out of reach for many and further fuelling the inequality in society
 3. Consumerism encourages a self-centric mindset, which hampers the growth of a gracious society.
 - a. A Singaporean man, when frustrated by the apparent failure of police to control the crowd surging to buy the \$3000 watch that was a collaboration between Swatch and Omega, shouted at police to shoot him in defiance of his rude behavior towards them.
 - b. United States has recorded many cases of Black Friday stampedes as hordes of people literally fight each other for their perceived bargain purchases, disregarding personal safety and that of other customers.
 - c. Recently, the term “Karen” has gained popularity in societies around the world, referring to self-entitled women who cause a scene at establishments, whether retail or dining, due to perceived grievances or alleged discrimination by staff. There was one TikTok video about an old lady who was caught stealing Amazon parcels from her neighbour and when confronted and the parcel was snatched out of her hands, she immediately went to the ground and started screaming, claiming she had been assaulted. Many onlookers and commenters observed how her self-entitled behavior stemmed from her selfish need to acquire the parcels, despite not knowing what was inside; she knew she had to have the Amazon parcels.

Consumerism is seldom to blame for the ills we face in the modern world (look also for points that argue for mitigation of consumerism through policies, campaigns, CSR, conscious consumption, etc)

1. Consumerism drives the demand for goods and services, which is necessary for economic growth and sustainability of businesses and jobs.
 - a. Many modern businesses provide goods and services to consumers, and survive only through the demand generated for these products. These businesses in turn provide jobs to people to earn a living. Thus consumerism is necessary to keep the economy going. Average level of consumption as percentage of GDP is about 40% across countries both developed and undeveloped, with a low of 19% (Qatar) and a high of 98% (Palestine)[iv], showing that consumption is quite integral to economic sustainability.
 - b. Consumerism can fuel growth of new industries eg silver industries to cater to needs of aged/ elderly
2. Consumerism motivates individuals to be economically productive to have enough income to sustain their demand for purchasing consumer goods and improve standards of living.
 - a. Capitalist societies are motivated to attain higher standards of living, often marked by possession of certain consumer goods that not only improve one’s quality of living but also increase one’s social status. They would have to become economically productive to do so, which helps to boost economic growth
 - b. There is a strong correlation between strong economic growth and capitalistic, consumerist societies, e.g. China, Singapore, Australia, Germany, Switzerland.

3. Consumerism fuels demand for innovative, cutting-edge products, which drives businesses to compete with one another to fulfil this demand, which leads to availability of more innovative and productive consumer goods in society, which can mitigate the ills we face, especially the environmental ones.
 - a. Electric cars and bicycles
 - b. Energy efficient electrical devices that are longer lasting and better performing, e.g. LED lighting, fuzzy logic in washing machines that can reduce water consumption, etc.

Q8: Has society sacrificed too much for the sake of progress?

Analysis:

This question requires candidates to examine past and current realities to identify aspects of modern society that have been overlooked, sidelined or undermined in the pursuit of progress. Thereafter, candidates need to determine if the extent of these sacrifices are justifiable or worthwhile based on their effects on society.

Clarification of Terms:

- sacrificed: to give up / trade-off
- too much: to an excessive degree, resulting in negative consequences / implications that are undesirable despite the benefits gained from progress
- progress: advancement / development / growth of different domains of society (economic, social, political, etc.)

Possible Approaches:

1. **Yes, society has sacrificed too much for the sake of progress.**
2. **No, the extent of sacrifice made is justifiable / necessary.**

Possible Points and Examples:

Yes, society has sacrificed too much for the sake of progress.

1. **The unbridled pursuit of economic progress has resulted in an excessively competitive environment which has come at too high a cost to the more intangible, emotional dimensions of our lives.** Our obsession with outperforming other individuals, corporations or even countries has caused us to become fixated on tangible results like attaining the next promotion, achieving higher profit margins or topping global rankings.
 - a. This has been detrimental to our sense of civic-mindedness and our social interactions as we often prioritise personal interests over that of others, creating an impatient and less tolerant society.
 - b. Such progress has also come at the expense of our mental health and well-being. Japanese salarymen are known to work excessively long hours, with many suffering from depression caused by overwork, sleep deprivation and stress. The Japanese term “karoshi”, or death by overwork, even gained prominence as many Japanese salarymen died from heart attack or stroke due to long working hours. This parallels the brutal “996 work culture” in China where employees are expected to work from 9am to 9pm, six days a week. This work ethic has been credited as the driver of success for the country’s most acclaimed companies despite the physical, emotional and psychological toll it has taken on workers.
 - c. Sweatshops – low-wage factories notorious for their dangerous and exploitative working conditions – are even deemed a necessary evil in the development of economies. Child labour, hazardous working conditions, long hours and human rights abuses are tolerated for the sake of progress.
2. **The relentless march towards progress has caused many traditional cultures to be eroded or foregone, leading to untold losses for communities.** Countless heritage and cultural sites have been destroyed as countries prioritise pragmatic needs to make way for development. This has led to the loss of collective memory and the dilution of heritage and traditions, dampening national identity in the long run.
 - a. The Three Gorges Dam along the Yangtze River in China’s Hubei province, the largest hydroelectric project ever constructed, generates hydroelectric power and provides protection from floods. However, its construction led to the displacement of nearly 1.3 million people and the destruction of rare architectural and archaeological sites. Given Singapore’s limited land space, the decision to create land for building projects has resulted in the demolition of historical sites such as the old National Library while cemeteries such as Bukit Brown and Bidadari have been exhumed.
 - b. The Singapore government launched the “Speak Mandarin Campaign” in 1979 in a bid to forge a single Chinese identity and bring about greater social cohesion which is key to progress. Mandarin was

promoted as the second language of the Chinese population while traditional dialects such as Hokkien, Cantonese and Hakka were disparaged. Consequently, the use of dialects at home collapsed from 76% of Chinese households in 1980 to a mere 16% in 2015, and with it, the dilution of certain traditional values such as having respect for one's elders. Intergenerational bonds between elderly speakers of dialects and their grandchildren were also sacrificed as both groups no longer spoke a common language.

- 3. Our pursuit of progress and development has exerted environmental costs that cannot be reversed. In developed countries, the excessive overconsumption of natural resources to satiate our desire for goods and services has dire consequences on the environment.** Corporations continue to exploit the environment in the name of profit maximisation, resulting in widespread degradation.
 - a. The extraction of processing of materials, fuels and food contribute to half of greenhouse gas emissions and over 90 percent of biodiversity loss. Particularly, the global automobile industry requires huge amounts of mined metals and natural resources such as rubber. Though the switch to electric vehicles will curb air pollution and greenhouse gas emissions, it brings about adverse environmental consequences as the production of batteries to run these vehicles is reliant on large-scale lithium mining. Global warming caused by carbon emissions is effectively irreversible, and has accelerated the rise of sea levels as ice sheets and glaciers melt at an unprecedented rate.
 - b. Rapid industrial growth and economic activity accounts for the severe air pollution in cities worldwide. Beijing, the embodiment of a city besieged by air pollution, has been hit by episodes of extreme smog, dubbed the "airpocalypse". In March 2021, the concentration of PM2.5, an especially harmful particulate that can enter the bloodstream, peaked at 655, when anything above 300 is considered hazardous. From 2017-2018, there were only eight days when pollution levels in Delhi, India, met the World Health Organisation's safety standards, and even then, the higher levels of air pollution were detected in four other Indian cities.
- 4. The pursuit of personal rights and freedoms has come at the expense of the collective good, resulting in an individualistic culture which has led to greater polarisation and division in society.**
 - a. In the fight against COVID-19, the effectiveness of measures hinged on the willingness of citizens to adhere to restrictive rules which impinge on their individual freedoms. In the United States, where scientific evidence is often viewed through a partisan lens, mask-wearing has become a "culture war". Most Democrats supported wearing masks in public to limit the spread of the virus while many Republicans passionately fought against mask mandates, claiming they impair individual freedom. In comparison, societies in Asia where collectivist values are upheld fared much better in their response to the pandemic, calling into question the supremacy of liberal values.

No, society has not sacrificed too much for the sake of progress. The extent of sacrifice made in the pursuit of progress is justifiable / necessary.

- 1. It is narrow to argue that certain sacrifices are too great because they may be necessary to ensure the overall welfare and social cohesion of society.**
 - a. In Singapore, the pursuit of economic progress has often been blamed for an overly competitive, stressful environment. However, it has provided us with adequate resources to have a relatively comfortable standard of living and ensure basic necessities such as healthcare and education are kept affordable. Measures can be implemented to address social issues such as inequality, while we have been able to draw on our national reserves to tide through crises like the Covid-19 pandemic.
 - b. China's one child policy / social credit policy
- 2. Not everything is worth preserving in our journey towards progress – there are certain things that we should continue chipping away at, especially if they lead to oppression and the erosion of human rights.**
 - a. Despite being recognised internationally as a violation of human rights, the harmful, even fatal, practice of female genital mutilation (FGM) continues in at least 92 countries around the world, but only 51

countries have specific legislation against it. FGM is considered a cultural tradition, often motivated by beliefs on acceptable sexual behaviour. However, the practice reflects deep-rooted inequality, and constitutes an extreme form of discrimination against girls and females which ought to be eliminated. Efforts to change traditional cultural views that underpin violence against women need to be scaled up.

3. Sacrificing individual rights and freedoms are justifiable for the sake of the greater good of preserving national security and social cohesion.

- a. In Singapore, policies have been implemented to preserve the nation's delicate social fabric and maintain social cohesion. The presence of out-of-bounds (OB) markers which denote topics that are permissible for public discussion restricts political discourse, while the Maintenance of Religious Harmony Act makes it a crime to promote feelings of ill-will and hostility between different religious groups. Oftentimes, racial and religious tensions are used to justify such restrictions on freedom of expression, which is considered a worthwhile trade-off for the peace and stability we experience.
- b. Most individuals recognise that there is a trade-off between security needs and personal privacy, and accept that the loss of civil liberties due to government surveillance is necessary to protect citizens against crimes and terrorism.

2021 SAJC FE P1 Questions

Answer **one** question.

Answers should be between 500 and 800 words in length

- 1 Should your country continue to prioritise economic development?
- 2 'Competition is an essential part of success.' How far do you agree?
- 3 Can sustainable living be a realistic goal?
- 4 Consider the view that technology has made schools irrelevant.
- 5 Is social media to blame for a more troubled world?
- 6 Do Singaporeans really have a voice?
- 7 Is it justifiable to favour the young over the old?
- 8 'Equality is impossible to achieve in modern society.' Do you agree?

Q1. Should your country continue to prioritise economic development?

Analysis:

With the phrase “continue to”, students must recognise that economic development is not a new priority but that it has always been their country’s goal. Consequently, they should realise that there have been trade-offs that are undesirable and hence the question. Students have to evaluate the needs of their country currently (and perhaps the world’s too), and weigh the cons against the pros of economic development to determine how essential it is to still have economic development at the fore of all government goals.

Clarification of Terms:

- **Should...continue to prioritise:** “Prioritise” means to place economic development above many other country goals that are important too, like social welfare, human rights, community levels of happiness and equality. Paired with the phrase “should...continue to”, the phrase implies that there have been trends and outcomes for the country or in the world that have rendered this focus a bane rather than a boon, thus placing the desirability in question.
- **Economic development:** Specifically referring to the growth of the nation’s GDP, boosting of production, jobs and/or production, and the plans and investments to enable these. Concurrently, there is also the building of positive trading and political relationships that would enhance the growth of revenue for the country.
- **Your country:** While students are encouraged to use Singapore as the context, non-Singaporeans can also use their countries of origin as the basis for this essay. Whichever country of origin chosen, students must make conscious effort to reference the country’s characteristics to explore the advantages against the disadvantages for their country to continue on their development of the economy. Essays that explore the question generically or descriptively would have missed the required evaluation in this question.

Stand / Possible Points and Examples

Stand 1: Singapore should continue to prioritise economic development. (APPROACH 1: CA-R, A)

CA: By and large, our country’s economic priorities have allowed our competitive spirit to overrun society. Other nations see us as relentless in pursuing economic gains and that has been the reason we are drawing unneeded attention from the world.

E.g. Singapore ranks 31st globally in terms of the happiness index in 2020, 37th in terms of social support provision and 57th in terms of perception of generosity, even as we come in top ten on economic indicators, like GDP per capita and our attractiveness to foreign investments. Our poor regard for the welfare of foreign labour and the wide rich-poor gap continue to draw unnecessary attention on how our government pushes past the less able or the less fortunate to pursue economic goals.

R: However, as the world moves ahead, Singapore cannot rest on its laurels and expect its world class status in various industries and sectors to be maintained without a laser sharp focus on economic goals.

E.g. Singapore’s unique space in maritime industry, her role as a vital partner in manufacturing, logistics services and electronics production, and her constant pursuit to be a medical and pharmaceuticals hub – all these are attained and maintained by Singapore’s ceaseless chase to be at the top and to retain that top position in the world.

A: Moreover, our economic achievements are the precise reason why we can tide through difficult times and achieve other important national goals as well.

E.g. Our deep national reserves are the reason why our nation stayed afloat through the Covid-19 pandemic, when business and trade got severely reduced to only necessary activities. Concurrently, several companies like FJ Benjamin, Spic & Span and Zouk could move quickly to switch and adapt to the new pandemic conditions to prevent their businesses from folding. Outside of the pandemic times, the Singapore government has also been able to finance the development of efficient and smart green technologies via research and development. Without our affluence, it would have been tough to achieve our education technology goals in schools; tech-assisted learning and smart classrooms would have only been pipe dreams.

Stand 2: Singapore should reduce its focus on economic development. (Note: this is a challenging stand that requires strong justification) (APPROACH 2: A1, A2, CONCESSION)

A1: Firstly, the view of Singaporeans as mere economic digits is no longer relevant in today's multifaceted world where the definitions of success are more varied. As such, there is no longer a narrow pursuit of economic success.

E.g. The changes in the education system – subject-based banding, discussions over the PSLE – are strong indicators that our society no longer has a single and unwavering confidence in having a degree and pursuing high-paying careers in successful economic sectors. The shift in popularity of university courses towards the creative industry as well as the arts and social sciences is also helpful for us to see that our definition of success is broadening.

A2: In addition, Singaporeans are gradually redefining what it means to have “a good life”, which is how strong our social capital is. This can only come about by shifting our focus away from economic pursuits and looking at social outcomes instead.

E.g. Singaporeans are more willing to voice up on policies and participate in forums to provide feedback to the government on key national directions. There are more and more programmes to integrate the less fortunate, the differently-abled and the ones with special needs. In a survey to understand Singaporeans' top concerns in 2020, while jobs and employment remain important priorities, poverty and social inequality are also concerns that rank highly. It is not hard to notice how we are no longer just concerned about how well our own families would do, but that the larger society is able to do well enough and live well too.

Concession: Granted, Singaporeans have come to live such comfortable lives due to today's greater economic gains that certain ways of life have become expectations. Therefore, Singaporeans recognise we can, to some extent, cut back on our stressful pace of life that prioritising economic outcomes will entail.

E.g. The long working hours in Singapore is not news to others from abroad. Even young children nowadays are inundated by enrichment lessons and remedial lessons even at preschool ages. However, with our transition to building a knowledge economy, it is now obvious we need to build in “more times for rest, recuperation, introspection and even developing personal interests” in order to raise our people's productivity. Cutting back from building busy workers to creating more work-life balance is believed to enable a larger pool of collaborative and innovative workforce as well.

2. 'Competition is an essential part of success.' How far do you agree?

Analysis:

In recent years, as global attention has shifted towards social justice issues, people have become more wary of the repercussions that competition has on individuals and society. There has been greater pushback against competition, and institutions and policymakers have responded by enacting changes to reduce emphasis on competition to give everyone, regardless of their background, a fair chance. However, it is undeniable that competition still plays a key role in bringing about success in a modern capitalist society.

Clarification of Terms:

- **Competition:** striving to gain or win something by defeating others [More discerning students will be able to recognise that when competition becomes excessive (degree), it negatively impacts individual and societal well-being, hindering progress.]
- **Essential:** extremely important, necessary
- **Success:** to win, accomplish one's goals, to make progress; being better than you were; [Students would need to unpack the term 'success'; expanding their definitions of 'success' would enable them to come up with a wider range of arguments]

Stand / Possible Points and Examples

Stand: Competition is often an essential element of success. (APPROACH: A1, A2, BALANCING PARA)

A1. Competition can be a potent driver of innovation, leading to progress. In today's global economy, competition is no longer confined to geographical boundaries. Individuals and societies need to maintain their competitive edge on the world stage to remain successful and prosperous. Innovation is essential to get – and stay – ahead in the global economy. The more companies within an industry working on a particular problem, the more likely it is for a solution to be found. Society benefits from more competition as there will be more jobs created, better products and services, and lower prices for consumers.

E.g. Competition forces countries to be forward-thinking and prepare their citizens for future challenges to stay ahead of the game. This is especially true in countries like Singapore who constantly reposition themselves and upskill their workforce to ensure they have a competitive advantage over their neighbours.

E.g. In China, the government recognised the importance of allowing more competition in the economy and dramatically shortened the process for forming a new company in recent economic reforms.

E.g. The race for COVID-19 vaccines has highlighted how effective competition can be in driving innovation. Vaccines such as Pfizer-Biontech, Moderna and AstraZeneca all vied to be the first to successfully complete clinical trials and secure government WHO approval for emergency use, with some even venturing into breakthrough technology, namely, mRNA vaccines. Ultimately, it was the competition between pharmaceutical companies that led to the successful discovery of the COVID-19 vaccine.

A2. Competition can be a powerful force in motivating individuals and building character, which are key to success. It makes individuals work hard and adds pressure to keep them focused on their goals. It also gives individuals the impetus to overcome obstacles and persevere. A healthy amount of competitive pressure is necessary to develop more resilient and disciplined individuals.

E.g. The Olympic Games' motto "Citius, Altius, Fortius" ('faster', 'higher', 'stronger') best exemplifies this as athletes push themselves to outdo their competition and achieve athletic prowess. It is also widely acknowledged that competition brings out the best in athletes, driving athletes who are already at the pinnacle of their sport to excel even further. A case in point would be the rivalry between Cristiano Ronaldo and Lionel Messi- two of the greatest footballers of all time. After Ronaldo left Spanish giants Real Madrid, Messi commented that his competition with Ronaldo made him a better player and also strengthened the Spanish league as a whole because teams had to raise their game to beat Ronaldo's Real Madrid.

E.g. Sports programmes have been used to as a tool to combat social ills like drug addiction and poverty. Nestle's MILO School Competition in Indonesia is the only school-level badminton tournament which teaches children important life values such as team work and confidence. Competition motivates one to maintain discipline and build resilience- both of which are vital ingredients for success.

BP. [Transition] While competition is often a critical element to achieving success, it cannot be denied that excessive competition can sometimes end up undermining success. [See A1 and A2 under 'Stand: I largely disagree that competition is an essential part of success.' below for possible BP points]

Stand 2: Competition is not the main contributor to success. (APPROACH: A1, A2, BALANCING PARA)

A1. From an economic point of view, excessive competition could actually end up hampering success. This is unfortunately more often the case today, due to the increasing income disparity in many developed nations. Excessive competition in turn exacerbates inequalities in society, hindering progress.

E.g. Covid-19 heightened such inequalities – the bar to succeed remains the same but circumstances differ significantly, placing those with limited access to resources and support under immense pressure to keep up in the rat race. Schools worldwide have reported growing gaps between students of different socio-economic status due to physical school closures: students from low-income families and less developed countries with poor education systems have suffered a “lost year” in education. In contrast, those with resources were able to continue with their education remotely, climbing ahead of the competition. The pressure to meet the same benchmarks – national examinations – have caused a lot of stress and strain on those who did not have resources to keep up.

A2. Furthermore, in today’s global economy, intense competition on the broader international stage has raised public health alarm bells. Competition rears its ugly head when individuals push themselves to the brink of exhaustion, in extreme cases even death, just to outdo the competition.

E.g. From the *hagwon* (cram schools) culture in South Korea, stories of Japanese workers dying from *karoshi* (overwork) and the verbal and physical abuse aspiring Olympian gymnasts endure, it is evident that competition has dire consequences on individuals’ physical and mental well-being. The fact that governments and non-governmental organisations have rallied together to lobby against these issues, raising awareness in areas such as mental health, is proof that the success derived from harmful competition cannot truly be considered success at all.

E.g. While emerging victorious from competition may be widely perceived as the marker of success, many individuals may perceive success in other ways e.g. Simone Biles, widely considered one of the greatest gymnasts of all time, pulled out of the 2021 Tokyo Olympics, citing mental health as the reason for her withdrawal. In defence of her decision, Biles said that “we also have to focus on ourselves, because at the end of the day, we’re human, too. So, we have to protect our mind and our body, rather than just go out there and do what the world wants us to do.” This is an equally valid formulation of success and it is a view that emphasises holistic well-being rather than conventional “success” in the form of fame and accolades gained from beating the competition.

BP. [Transition] While excessive competition often gets in the way of true success, it cannot be denied that under certain circumstances, a healthy level of competition could contribute to success. [See A1 and A2 under ‘Stand: I largely agree that competition is an essential part of success.’ above for possible BP points]

3. Can sustainable living be a realistic goal?

Analysis:

We all know that climate change, global warming, depletion of the ozone layer, and resource depletion are real and their impact on human and animal lives can be devastating. In recent years, there have been calls and movements advocating sustainable living – actions to reduce our carbon footprint or environmental impact by altering our lifestyle choices in transportation, energy consumption and diet (etc). This is certainly desirable and commendable, however the question requires students to question whether sustainable living is realistic. Students who merely espouse the benefits of sustainable living are not tackling the main contention, which is to see if it is truly possible to embark on a more mindful and sustainable way of life. Students need to consider the limitations and barriers that stand in the way of sustainable living, and to evaluate why they are insurmountable or slowly breaking down. The easier response for this question would be to say that it's unrealistic, however students can adopt the more hopeful stance as long as they have sound reasoning to support their optimism.

Clarification of Terms:

- **Sustainable living:** Sustainable living is the practice of reducing your demand for natural resources by making sure that you replace what you use to the best of your ability. Sometimes that can mean not choosing to consume a product that is made using practices that don't promote sustainability, and sometimes it means changing how you do things so that you start becoming more of an active part of the cycle of life. It is not an interchangeable term with 'sustainable development', which is more about national or international goals.
- **Realistic goal:** Something achievable and attainable.

Stand / Possible Points and Examples

Stand 1: Sustainable living is realistic. (APPROACH 1: A, CA-R)

A: Sustainable movements all over the world are gaining traction. Their growth and noteworthy advances give hope that sustainable living is a realistic goal. (Community/ Corporation)

E.g. Cradle to Cradle Design, The Upcycle, and the Circular Economy: Architect William McDonough and chemist Michael Braungart disrupted the way we make things with their 2002 book *Cradle to Cradle* that was memorably not printed on trees. And, their 2013 book *The Upcycle* reinforced the notion that waste does not occur in natural systems. The duo articulate a clear vision for society — “a delightfully diverse, safe, healthy, and just world with clean air, water, soil, and power, economically, equitably, ecologically, and elegantly enjoyed.” Their vision continues to spread with the creation of the Cradle to Cradle Products Innovation Institute founded in 2010 and conversations around the circular economy have blossomed all over the world.

E.g. Green Buildings: According to the Alliance to Save Energy, “Buildings — including offices, homes, and stores — use 40% of our energy and 70% of our electricity. Buildings also emit over one-third of U.S. greenhouse gas emissions, which is more than any other sector of the economy.” So, it makes sense that so many have decided to focus on our built environment. The built environment is also ideal as there are many building owners and stakeholders that can pursue the low-hanging fruit of energy conservation projects in many ways.

E.g. Plant-based Diets — The World Resources Institute (WRI) has focused significantly on the impact of animal agriculture on global emissions. The WRI website states, “the U.N. Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) estimated that total annual emissions from animal agriculture (production emissions plus land-use change) were about 14.5 percent of all human emissions, of which beef contributed 41 percent.” So, there is a significant need for us to reduce the amount of meat we eat. If we were to get to 100% electricity produced by renewables and found a way to achieve a neutral carbon footprint in every sector but agriculture, we'd still be 14.5% away from having a completely greenhouse gas neutral economy. Impossible Burger and Beyond Meat, two companies that Bill Gates has invested in, are just two of what will likely be many plant-based meat alternative companies that carve into the GHG emissions of animal agriculture.

CA: Skeptics might argue that in spite of these movements, many individuals still remain apathetic and unwilling to change their own consumption patterns. If there is no buy-in from individuals, then sustainable living is merely an ideal. They would then pessimistically argue that while awareness is on the rise, following through with an actual sustainable lifestyle is another issue altogether. (Government vs Individual)

E.g. By encouraging the adoption of innovative architectural design and energy-saving technologies, Singapore has emerged as a model of green building in Asia. However, at the same time, Singapore uses at least 1.76 billion plastic items a year - or almost one plastic item per person per day - but less than 20 per cent is recycled. These were the startling survey results announced by the Singapore Environment Council (SEC) in 2018. In a survey of more than 1,000 people

online, the non-governmental organisation found that people in Singapore take 820 million plastic bags yearly from supermarkets.

E.g. “It has been an incremental awareness in Singapore the last few years, however the conversion rate has not been high. There’s still much effort which consumers can take to reduce waste,” observed Florence Tay, founder of UnPackt, the country’s first zero-waste grocery store, which opened a year ago. The biggest challenge for their store, which encourages people to bring their own jars or bags when they shop, has been convenience. “Bulk shopping requires some planning to be done prior to shopping.” she said. Unfortunately, the culture of convenience and mindless consumption often overrides this.

R: However, such a view is overly critical and does not take into account the fact that consumption patterns and behaviours take time to change. It is a gradual process, but one that has already begun and seeing success.

E.g. Consumers are becoming aware of terms like food waste and security “and even talking about how to avoid discriminating against ‘ugly foods’. From free-range meat to vegan skincare products, millennials are regularly considered to be the ones driving the sustainable movement with their lifestyle and behavioral changes.

E.g. Often coined the “Green Generation”, many brands are starting to see the appeal and opportunity in these changes. UK sandwich chain Pret A Manger now has three all-vegetarian outlets, for example, while L’Oréal has unveiled its first vegan hair color range.

E.g. Global sales of electric cars accelerated fast in 2020, rising by 43% to more than 3m, despite overall car sales slumping by a fifth during the coronavirus pandemic.

Stand 2: Sustainable living is not a realistic goal. (APPROACH 2: CONCESSION, A1, A2)

Concession: It cannot be denied that there is greater awareness now about the importance of sustainable living that has led to some positive action by consumers across the world. (Individual)

E.g. 913 people in America and Australia were part of a cross-generational study led by Southern Cross University to investigate how engaged citizens in both nations were regarding the environment, and just how far they were willing to go to protect the planet. Results indicated that 93% of all surveyed indicated a general concern for the environment. They also indicated that they were ready to act on them, with 77% of individuals wanting to learn more about sustainable lifestyles. Most citizens have already taken steps to become more green - 83.4% of them recycle, 57.5% use reusable bags and 45.2% avoid single-use plastics.

A1: However, we need to be mindful that an individual’s intention to be more sustainable, even if that is indeed the intention that all of us have, is limited by the power and massive impact that corporations have. Furthermore, there are many barriers to action where even if we did want to live sustainably, we cannot because it is not an option.

E.g. CGS, a global provider of business applications, enterprise learning and outsourcing services, announced the findings from its 2019 Retail and Sustainability Survey, revealing that only 100 companies are responsible for 71% of global emissions. It found that more than half of global industrial emissions since 1988 — the year the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change was established — can be traced to just 25 corporate and state-owned entities. Sustainable living then, even if every single person in the world adopts it, is not realistic as profit-oriented companies are the world’s largest polluters and history shows us that they would definitely prioritise capital gain rather than environmental sustainability.

E.g. The oil and gas industry continues to be the main source of energy in the world, and is one of the most important parameters that have left an impact on the growth of the global economy. Oil and gas industries supply more than 50% of global fuel consumption, and hydrocarbons are expected to remain the superior source of energy in 2035 (BP, 2017b). Daily production of oil was around 96.3 million barrels in 2016 which yields 2 liters per day per each person in the world. It is simply unrealistic to expect them to implement sustainable development policies as the production of every barrel of crude oil causes contamination and pollution.

A2: Furthermore, when we scrutinize sustainable living, it makes one wonder whether or not the “sustainable” choices we make are really all that sustainable. After all, the economic systems we operate within are overwhelmingly unsustainable. (Community)

E.g. One must realise that the heightened desire for “conscious consumption” still perpetuates consumption! In fact, it has driven companies to take advantage of the trend and capitalize on revenue from marketing the eco-friendliness of their products. Some of these efforts are genuine, while others are blatant greenwashing. And in our modern, consumption-driven society, we seem to equate purchasing sustainable products to living sustainably, when in fact we are still leaving behind massive environmental footprints — perhaps even larger ones now that the guilt associated with consumption has been assuaged. (The U.S. sustainability market is projected to reach \$150 billion in sales by 2021.)

E.g. Dr. Matt Johnson, professor at Hult International Business School and founder of [neuromarketing blog](#) Pop Neuro, says, "There is accumulating evidence that consumers are impacted by the perceived sustainability of [a] brand, and further, that consumers are willing to pay a premium for products from a sustainable brand over a non-sustainable competitor brand."

4. Consider the view that technology has made schools irrelevant.

Analysis:

Advancements in technology have revolutionised the way we live and learn. Some argue that it has opened doors for individuals to acquire skills and knowledge, making traditional schools redundant. The prominent role technology plays in education has been accelerated by the Covid-19 pandemic as remotely learning has been normalised. In this question, students will need to identify the function of schools, and examine the impact technological advancements have on the age old institution. Better scripts will be able to put forth convincing arguments on why these functions are either all the more essential now, or have simply been outmoded, drawing from a range of examples to support their stand.

Clarification of Terms:

- **technology:** digital devices or applications that serve the purpose of teaching, learning and creative inquiry; typically innovative and fast evolving
- **schools:** institutions of formal education with physical infrastructure and faculty
- **irrelevant:** (an absolute term) no longer necessary, obsolete, outmoded, backward

Stand / Possible Points and Examples

Stand 1: No, schools serve essential functions that cannot be replaced by technology. (APPROACH 1: CA-R, A)

CA: It is argued that the availability of structured online courses and learning platforms have made it unnecessary to go to physical schools in order to acquire information.

E.g. Massive Online Open Course (MOOC) platforms such as Coursera, Khan Academy and Codecademy allow teaching professionals to pre-record lectures or lessons for learners to watch in their own time. These online lectures can even be accompanied by quizzes and tests for learners to attempt.

R: This argument assumes that all students are self-directed learners. The truth of the matter is that learners are a diverse bunch. For every highly-motivated student, there is a student who may requires monitoring to be disciplined with their focus in learning.

E.g. Self-directed learning assumes intrinsically-motivated students who will pursue their own education and learning through whatever means, materials and platforms available. However, for students who are lacking in such drive, being in a dedicated physical space that is designed to be conducive for learning can help students to get themselves in the mindset to learn. Having authority figures such as teachers who can provide extrinsic motivation and enforce discipline can also be very helpful, if not necessary, in helping unwilling learners to be ready and engaged to learn.

E.g. For individuals with learning disabilities, special needs schools have specialists who are able to tailor the curriculum to their needs and ability level. The milestones for these individuals are different from mainstream students, and only educators with expertise in this area will be able to manage their learning.

A: Technology does provide students with a means to acquiring knowledge, however, this is not the sole function of schools. Schools play an essential role in socialisation and character development, imbuing in students a sense of right and wrong to ensure they become responsible and active contributors to society. This role cannot be fulfilled by technology.

E.g. Schools function as a microcosm of society. Experiencing school spirit as you cheer on your peers in inter-school competitions helps one understand the importance of (a healthy dose of) patriotism and national pride. Participating in Student Council elections prepares students to fulfil their civic responsibility by voting responsibly. Can these experiences be created by technology?

E.g. Singapore's education system has been moving towards the 'Total Curriculum', which encompasses students' development in both academic and non-academic areas. While technology is an enabler, teachers still play a key role in developing students in these areas. During the Covid-19 pandemic, Singapore schools successfully transited to online learning, and schools harnessed technology to deliver programmes for students. Regardless of how effective these platforms were, they could not substitute in-person learning and interaction, which is key in student development.

Stand: Both are essential – technology complements the traditional function of schools, pushing the frontiers of education and learning. (APPROACH 2: CA-R, A)

CA: Critics argue that traditional sources of expert knowledge have been overtaken by the wealth of facts and information easily accessible on the Internet, rendering schools and teachers obsolete.

E.g. Instead of being restricted to the knowledge and opinions of a limited number of teachers, having access to the internet opens students up to a plethora of different sources, presenting them with a whole range of facts and opinions. There are also constant updates on new discoveries and information that students can receive first-hand.

E.g. The fast-pace that knowledge evolves today also means teachers have to work double time to stay abreast with the latest developments, or risk delivering outdated content.

E.g. In well-established education systems, syllabus reviews are a long and arduous process, which presents yet another hurdle to ensuring that the curriculum keeps in step with current trends.

R: This argument presumes that both technology and schools are mutually exclusive. In actual fact, technology complements the role of schools, empowering learners.

E.g. Students who customise their own learning with the use of technology are able to go far beyond the restrictions of the school or education system, and focus on growing their expertise in a particular area of interest.

E.g. Instead of being restricted to the assigned teacher or professor, students on online learning platforms can easily access a multitude of different courses, and learn from different experts even within a single field of study.

E.g. Several universities now also upload open courses learning packages on to their websites, which students can download and go through in their own time. In these examples, such educational technology platforms enhance students' learning, while still allowing students to benefit from in-person guidance from teachers, made possible due to the connectivity afforded to us by modern technology.

A: Harnessing the benefits of technology and in-person learning in schools have in fact augmented learning. The exchange of ideas now takes place in the physical classroom and over the virtual space, which develops communication and collaboration skills on both fronts.

E.g. A good part of learning happens in peer-to-peer discussions, but the exchange of ideas still happens over a virtual space through online learning platforms. Collaborative technological features such as Google Drive, with its host of Docs, Sheets, Slides and more, enable students to work together simultaneously to form a piece of work. This overcomes basic limitations of resources such as space and logistics when it comes to working together, while enabling them, as well as teachers, to review and provide peer-feedback in real time.

E.g. In the long-run, this better prepares students for the future of work where employees will need to hone communication and collaborative skills both in-person and on virtual platforms as countries progress towards a digital economy.

5. Is social media to blame for a more troubled world?

Analysis:

The question requires students to understand that social media is not just the internet but the websites and applications that allow users to create and share content or to participate in social networking. They will also need to identify and discuss a range of features of 'a more troubled world'. They should not just focus on a troubled world but show how it is more so now as a result of the social media. The word 'blame' requires the students to make a causal link between social media and the damage or problems that are seen in the world.

Clarification of Terms:

- **Social media:** Computer-based technology that facilitates electronic communication of content or the sharing of ideas, thoughts and information through the building of virtual networks and communities.
- **Blame:** Responsibility for a fault or wrong
- **A more troubled world:** A world fraught with anxiety, unease, insecurity, tension, unquiet, worries, conflict and problems

Stand / Possible Points and Examples

Stand 1: I believe that the social media is largely to blame for a more troubled world. (APPROACH 1: A1, A2, CONCESSION)

A1: Social media is largely to blame for the greater anxiety, self-doubt and other personal problems faced by the young today. The young today are digital natives who use it as the main source of communication. They form online communities but sadly, these communities are not necessarily the wholesome, healthy and positive ones that more traditional communities may have. **The anonymity, questionable contacts and predatory nature of the platforms they use can be dangerous to their developing self-esteem and confidence.** Pro-suicide sites, e.g. suicide pacts, can cause suicide ideation, normalising acts which would otherwise be discouraged. Studies find that teens who spend more time on electronic devices and social media are more prone to depression and suicide.

E.g. Local- In 2019, Minister Lawrence Wong, patron of SOS, said SG is not immune to global trends that social media shapes a person's self-worth, and that cyberbullying and FOMO amplifies negative emotions of insecurity and inferiority. A Talking Point survey in 2018 showed 3 in 4 youngsters (mostly 13-19, one as young as 8) had been bullied online. Led to 2014 POHA (Protection from Harassment Act).

E.g. Global- Young people with alternative sexual orientation and young girls are common targets of trolls, e.g. In 2010, 18-yo Tyler (USA) Clementi, whose roommate aired his sexual activities on social media; in 2019, 14-yo (UK) Molly Russell committed suicide after accessing hosted self-harm sites. Over the years, numerous South Korean stars in their 20s have succumbed to cyber-bullying and trolling and committed 'bullycide.'

A2: Social media is also largely responsible for the increasingly overwhelming flood of fake news that the world has had to deal with and fight against. Social media is a godsend for groups that are out to disseminate fake news and conspiracy theories. **There is no or little accountability and they are difficult to track, and basically do not care if you do track them.** Their agenda seem to offer nothing beyond the sowing of discord and conflict, This is typically done by 'noisy' protests (both on and offline) to show they have voice and power. They also raise funds in the millions from the vulnerable and susceptible. Countries also attempt to subvert their rival's domestic (especially political and economic) stability by influencing public sentiments and voting behaviour.

E.g. Local- The SG government has always been extremely cautious when it comes to alternative news sources being fed to its population. POFMA (Protection from Online Falsehoods and Manipulation Act) is one recent law (2019) to curb the problem of fake news, as well as what some critics consider to be politically legitimate dissenting voices.

E.g. Global- Cambridge Analytica and Facebook scandal; Russia's attempts to influence the 2016 US Elections through Facebook, etc., helping Donald Trump to win the US Elections; between 2017-Jan, 2021, QAnon recruited millions of members, dollars and support for its cult-like, far-right conspiracy theories. There are also countries with whole towns dedicated to inflammatory fake news production, making it a lucrative industry, e.g. North Macedonia's decaying town of Veles.

Concession: However, to blame the social media for the world's troubles is to ignore the good it can do and to make excuses for our own weaknesses and failings. It is easy to push the blame to someone or something else and not take responsibility for our own bias, ignorance and willingness to fall prey to questionable beliefs. As a community, we should educate and encourage each other, and especially the young, to think critically and rationally. It is our duty to each other

to ensure we are able to assess and evaluate what we are presented with in order to make the right judgments. If we do so, there will be little fear of social media. Unfortunately, society has not achieved sufficient media literacy to combat the problems that have emerged and as such social media continues to wreak havoc.

E.g. Local – national schools in Singapore teach Project Work where evaluation of sources of information is taught. Critical Thinking is infused into the curriculum in order to teach the young the practices and habits of good assessment.

E.g. Global- Many young people support international causes through the social media, e.g. Climate-change activist, 16-yo Greta Thunberg's scathing criticism of world leaders at the UN General Assembly in 2019; then 24-yo Emma Watson's 2014 HeForShe Gender Equality campaign; education for girls activist, 26-yo Malala Yousafzai who was shot by the Taliban in 2012 for attending school.

NOTE: Our own human propensity for addictive, social media habits, plain own nastiness of envy, jealousy and meanness in our relations with others, 'doomscrolling' and the related depression and other mental illnesses.

Stand 2: I believe that the social media is not to blame for our more troubled world (APPROACH 2: A, CA-R)

A: Social media is not the cause of the troubles we face in the world. The most troubled and traumatic conflicts include wars that were caused before it existed. **These conflicts were caused by the perpetual greed of power-hungry men** who fought over limited resources to expand their lands. Aggression is a trait that has existed since time began and the act of seizing by force what does not belong to them is an action that continues today. Since such horrendous acts of murder and massacre began long before there was social media, it would be absurd to put the blame of the more troubled world on it.

CA: That said, critics have argued that **the speed and viral impact of the social media can worsen any troubled situation there is in the world. Social media can worsen many situations of doubt and misunderstanding.** There are unfriendly governments out to destabilise their foes and to cause domestic problems that will help strengthen their own positions. The 2016 Russian interference in the US Elections, helping Donald Trump win, is one such example. Besides that, Facebook's dealings with Cambridge Analytica data harvesting scandal may have also affected the 2016 US Elections as well as the Brexit vote.

R: However, people with fraudulent intent will always be on the lookout for the best ways and means to achieve their goals and **it is not social media per se that has caused the world greater troubles but men. Moreover, social media can be a tool for good to counter and dispel lies** and untruths, clarify misunderstandings, correct misinterpretations and educate the wrong-minded. International Fact Checking Network is a journalism think tank effort that have journalists share information and false articles that are deliberately false. Snopes.com is a debunking site of urban legends that are commonly spread on social media platforms. 'Fake' tags on such stories negatively impact the story's score on some social media websites which means fewer people will get to see them in their feeds. Besides technical and professional solutions, digital literacy in schools also help to educate a community of social media users who can discern the reputation of different sources.

6. Do Singaporeans really have a voice?

Analysis:

The question requires students to question whether Singaporeans really have the freedom to express an opinion in the public in order to make a change in the political, private or in other spheres, due to strong and authoritative censorship laws. Stronger scripts should convincingly recognise and argue that in most cases, Singaporeans may have the liberty to express an opinion, but by and large, do not truly have the power to exact change. In other words, these scripts should convincingly recognise while Singaporeans may be given many opportunities to express an opinion in various fields, their powers to exact real change is largely curtailed due to the fairly controlled political and social climate. In addition, students should be able to recognise which areas and fields Singaporeans have more powers to express an informed opinions (like in business, on social media, in elections through votes) but these powers are largely limited, which is where the balance will come from. A keen understanding of the context and culture of Singapore (Asian outlook and sensibilities, an adherence to utilitarianism, multi-racial makeup) will be useful in answering this question.

Clarification of Terms:

- **Voice:** To be able to freely express an opinion/view about things that matter without fear of repercussions
- **Really:** doubt/ questioning the reality of the statement; are things as truly as stated or just seems as it is

Stand / Possible Points and Examples

Stand: Singaporeans do not really have a voice. (APPROACH 1: A, CA-R)

A: Singaporeans do not really have the power to express themselves as the government enacts very strict laws to curtail freedom of expression on all mediums, thereby effectively muffling Singaporeans from freely expressing themselves.

E.g. Under the Singapore's Protection from Online Falsehoods and Manipulation Act (POFMA), the government can issue a "correction notice" to an individual or organisation if it deems online content about a public institution to be false or misleading and amending it to be in the public interest. POFMA was targeted against website and historian demanding the website issue an immediate correction over the inferences and opinions made by Paul Tambyah over the government's handling of the pandemic.

E.g.2: Laws are also restrictive on social media

CA: However, sceptics argue Singaporeans do indeed have a voice to express our opinion and disagreements. Especially with the advancements of technology and the widespread use of social media, Singaporeans are no longer constrained in the way that they were when they were only accessing traditional media in the past.

E.g. In 2019, then NUS student Monica Baey took to social media to speak out about how she'd been filmed while showering in a university residence by another NUS student. She posted multiple Instagram Stories about her disappointment with both the NUS disciplinary process and the Singapore police, saying that Lim had been let off with a slap on the wrist despite the trauma and humiliation he'd caused her. Screenshots of her account went viral, not just on Instagram, but other social media platforms too. As a result of the public furore that followed, NUS and other universities also made changes to strengthen their disciplinary frameworks against those who commit sexual offences on campus and shore up support for victims of such offences.

Even without social media, more and more Singaporeans are voicing their opinions through protests and other vocal means. On 16 February 2013, a few thousand Singaporeans gathered at the Speakers' Corner in Hong Lim park to protest against the white paper which was approved by parliament 77 votes to 13, which stated a target population of 6.9 million in 2030 through the steady increase of foreigners.

R: However, this ability to express oneself has certainly widened with the ubiquitous use of social media, this voice is still heavily controlled by the government- both on and off social media. Hence Singaporeans' freedom to express themselves is still heavily restrained.

E.g. An activist Jolovan Wham was charged with unlawful assembly as he held the cardboard sign near to a police station for just a few seconds in order to take a photo. The protest was designed to show support for two climate activists who were apparently questioned by police over a similar protest.

E.g. Laws are also restrictive on the social media space: Preeti's incident Aug 2019'. Rapper Preeti's was issued a conditional warning over controversial rap music they produced. The video, which questioned the use of "brownface" in an E-Pay advertisement, featured her and her brother using vulgar language on the Chinese community. The rap video was an example of a Singaporean voice expression her point of view against the seedy racism that manifests under the surface of a carefully-manicured exterior. However, she was immediately muzzled by the government as she was using vulgarities to express

APPROACH 2: A1, A2, CONCESSION

A1: Firstly, Singaporeans' ability to express themselves in a form of a public protest is highly restricted because of the fear to the threat to the nation's national security and members of the public need to apply for a permit in order to protest at Hong Lim Park.

E.g. Using the example of the disorderly and violent Hong Kong protests in 2019 and 2020, law minister K Shanmugam said in order to maintain public order and harmony, protests cannot be allowed. He said "the actions of a disaffected few should not be allowed to threaten the rights of the majority to live in a stable, peaceful society. This is why Singapore has zero-tolerance approach to illegal demonstrations and protests, pointing to the Public Order Act that makes it an offence to organise or participate in a public assembly without a permit.

A2: Furthermore, Singaporeans are not fully at comfortable to speak up in the workplace because we are a naturally reticent and conservative lot.

E.g. In the recent debate asking the tough question of why there are so few Singapore CEOs, some mooted the point that at work, while Singaporeans are the world's most hardworking bunch, by and large, we are unable to speak up to make our voices and work known.

Concession: Of course, it is naïve for anyone to believe that Singaporeans are always quiet and never speak up for things that are important. While the majority of Singaporeans might prefer to keep silent, a growing number of younger and less-culturally restrained Singaporeans are starting to make their voices heard, especially when it comes to the social and environmental issues.

E.g: When news broke about the deplorable conditions in which the migrant workers were housed during the pandemic, which caused the virus to spread like wildfire in the dormitories. This caused public outrage who were quick to take their voices online which in turn encouraged the various NGOs to speak up and condemn the government for its failure to act earlier. As a result, the government admitted to its oversight and took several decisive and quick measures to fix the situation.

NOTE: It is much harder to support the stand that Singaporeans really do have a voice.

7. Is it justifiable to favour the young over the old?

Analysis:

The question requires students to first identify the areas where there are competing generational needs; then to compare these competing needs and to give reasons for prioritising youth over age. This question 'goes against the grain' and challenges the assumption most people have that it is right and ethical for a society to first and foremost consider the needs of the elderly. Stronger scripts would appreciate the tough and pragmatic considerations that sometimes have to be made due to limited resources or efficacy of policy implementation. It might not seem ideal to side-line the old but however we choose, there will always be a group whose needs are not met. The interesting task here is for the students to figure out how to come up with a resolution between the two options and to argue convincingly and reasonably that youth could be favoured over age, given some circumstances.

Clarification of Terms:

- **Justifiable:** give reasons to persuade and convince
- **Favour ... over:** Prioritise, support, prefer
- **Young / Old:** 0-35 / 60 and above

Stand / Possible Points and Examples

Stand 1: Under many/most circumstances, it is justifiable to favour the young over the old. (APPROACH 1: A1, A2, CONCESSION)

A1: Firstly, a country may face extenuating circumstances in the care of its children, and in particular their healthcare. This is especially so of less-developed countries which despite facing competing needs from different age groups, may not have the luxury of meeting all these needs. Urgent attention and money must be given to tackle the concerns of the most vulnerable group with the most critical needs. Infant mortality is likely to be high and if the problems of the very young are not looked into, there will be more serious repercussions in the future. The old are mature, independent and better equipped to take care of their own health. In such a situation, it is justifiable to favour the needs of the young over the old.

E.g. Local - The Ministry of Social and Family Development puts aside public funds to aid children in various programmes, like childcare, education, healthcare, etc. Charities such as Children's Charities Association, Singapore Children Society, Children's Wishing Well work in tandem with the government services to provide a wide range of services for children and youth from disadvantaged backgrounds.

E.g. Global - Apart from governments focusing on the needs of the young, charities and philanthropic organisations like the UNICEF, World Bank Group and Save the Children have worked in Africa for decades. The 2020 Global Childhood Report shows that Sub-Saharan Africa is still home to the 10 worst countries for children. Across the continent, 152 million children on 1 in 4 are living in a conflict zone. Nearly 59 million children suffer from stunting caused by malnutrition. In West Africa, the deadly Ebola outbreak had left tens and thousands without parents. The vulnerable children need access to healthcare, education, clean water, proper sanitation and a safe environment to survive.

A2: Furthermore, long-term economic planning may necessitate the prioritising of the young's care and education over the needs of the old. It is right to look at the care, educational and training needs of both its young and old but when we consider a country's future economy, it may be smarter to put aside a more sizeable portion of the country's budget into caring for and educating the young. A well-cared for and educated youth will lead to a more creative, innovative and competent workforce that can help maintain and drive the economy to greater heights. This is, of course, not to dismiss the importance of adult skills upgrading but the young hold the key to the future and to jumpstart or continue a country's progress, it is reasonable to favour the young over the old.

E.g. Local – About 28.84% of Singapore's budget goes to education which is among the highest in the world. In 2019, the country put aside \$12.88 billion; in 2020 it was 13.28 billion. The 2020 figure marks a 70% increase since 2007. The government considers this as an investment for the future and its citizens are supportive of the policy. Consistent public spending have led a to an excellent education system when measured by achievements in terms of standardised testing, job opportunities and a competitive economy.

E.g. Global - Although highly costly, the Scandinavian countries are well-known the world over for their generous childcare policies from the early days of pregnancy to school and beyond. The Nordic countries take the top 4 of 5 slots in the 2019 Best Countries for raising kids due to its state support and family-friendly culture. Finland provides free universal daycare

from eight months to the start of formal school. In Sweden, parents are allowed 16 months parental leave, with the first year paid at 80% of their salary.

Concession: There are, of course, some circumstances where side-lining the old for the young may not be justified. Many developed countries face the problem of an ageing population and it would not do to ignore the healthcare and other needs of the old while providing for the young. The old may not have had jobs like today's that have more solid savings or retirement plans and may face a harder time now making ends meet. They may face age-related medical ailments and have no means to pay for their treatment and living costs. One can, however, safely assume that the parents of the young will be responsible for their living expenses and healthcare. A society that values care and compassion would offer welfare to help support the old over the young.

E.g. Local - Singapore was well-known for its rather stringent rules in handing out welfare. It took a while for the country to eventually acknowledge the needs of the elderly who were left behind in the country's competitive climb to success. In 2014, a bill was launched to provide aid for the 450,000 Pioneer Generation elderly over 20 years. In 2019, it set aside \$6.1 billion to provide aid for the Merdeka Generation.

E.g. Global - In the US and Europe, there are the old who have fallen on hard times and who are unable to cope, especially during this Covid-related recession. Many require welfare from the state to survive, and are also given priority for Covid vaccination as they are among those who are most vulnerable, especially those who reside in nursing homes.

Note: There are some who think prioritising the very old and weak who do not have many years to live is a waste of resources and opportunity to protect others.

Stand 2: Under many/most circumstances, it is may be justifiable to favour the old over the young. (APPROACH 2: A1, CONCESSION, A2)

A1: It is not impossible for both the young and old to gain immense benefits even when society pays attention to the needs of the old. While we acknowledge the need to prioritise the education of the young, **it would be wrong to ignore the need to help the old upgrade or learn new skills.** People today are living longer in terms of many more years than the last generation. To ensure they survive or live a decent, if not quality life, money and other resources are essential. If they do not get sufficient attention and help from the government to upgrade their skills, they may find themselves unable to find work or continue working at workplaces where technology of various iterations is the norm. From the highest to the lowest levels of work, companies incorporate technology to facilitate the smooth functioning of their organisations. Whether an elderly cleaner in Singapore has to operate a robotic machine to help with the collection of plates at a food court or a senior MNC executive has to do online tracking of global currency fluctuations, the older generation will find they have little choice but to grapple with machines, device and apps. Not being digital natives, they are likely to flounder if left on their own and help is not forthcoming. In Singapore, SkillsFuture is a platform for both the young and old to upgrade or learn new skills in order to cope with the uncertain future and changing work place landscape. The old, especially, find such tech initiatives helpful and useful to keep up with the times. Often the young are co-opted to help with teaching the older generation. In South Korea, the government supports high-tech welfare programmes run by the young to teach the elderly how to use smart phones and other electronic devices to conveniently facilitate their home life and contact with the outside world. As one generation learns, the other teaches, and as both generations gain from the experience, it is obvious that prioritising the needs of different generations is not necessarily a zero sum game.

Concession link: Despite some of the factors that may justify prioritising the needs of the older generation, there are on the whole, more reasons why it might be better and more practical in the long term to focus on the needs of the young.

Concession: Even when funds and resources are in short supply and there are age-related competing needs, there may still be good reasons to favour the young over the old. For practical reasons, the positive effects of prioritising and helping the young are likely to have longer positive impact and effects on society. A BBC HARDtalk guest podcast concluded that investing in the young has a approximate return of 10% dividend, better than many stock market purchases. The old, even when they benefit from the help given, will face their maker sooner than the young. As such, the help given to the young will gain greater traction. The ripple effect that it may have will bring benefits to many more segments of society. For example, if vaccines are in short supply, prioritising the young will have more utility value than if it is given to 80 or 90 year old elderly. Indonesia is one such country that has prioritised the Covid-19 vaccination of the young over the old. The young form the bulk of the workforce and protecting them would benefit the country's economic re-opening and revival than vaccinating the old, many of whom may be in retirement or working in the less populous countryside rather than the busy and crowded cities.

A2: That said, however, **any civilised country that prides itself as a caring and compassionate society must do the necessary for the old.** In many developed countries, the needs of an increasingly ageing population cannot be ignored.

With an ageing population, there is an urgency to meet the challenge and manage well not just paediatric medicine but also geriatric medicine. The medical problems of the old may need immediate attention and intervention. It will cost the country money, time and energy to provide the facilities, treatment and services necessary to lessen their pain, worries and health concerns. But it must be done in recognition of their past contribution of bringing up the present generation and in building the nation that we inherit. In many countries in the world and Singapore, seniors have been given priority for vaccination during the Covid-19 pandemic. Moreover, a sizeable portion of the budget was put aside for the needs of Singapore's Pioneer and Merdeka Generations. In 2014, a bill was launched to provide aid for the 450,000 Pioneer Generation elderly over 20 years. In 2019, it set aside \$6.1 billion to provide aid for the Merdeka Generation. The Community Health Assist Scheme (CHAS) enables all Singapore citizens, and especially the old, to receive subsidies for medical and dental care, not just at public clinics but also at participating private clinics. As such, there is good reason to believe that many, if not most or even all societies will continue to provide for the old even as they do so for the young.

8. 'Equality is impossible to achieve in modern society.' Do you agree?

Analysis:

In addressing this question, students must show awareness of the various kinds of inequality in existence, and why equality is much sought after in today's world. Rather than taking the extreme stand that equality is impossible to achieve, students should show a more nuanced perspective (e.g. that some kinds of inequality are gradually disappearing, but that some are still deeply entrenched). Weaker scripts would focus on only one type of equality (e.g. gender) or merely focus on equality on an individual level (e.g. anecdotal or isolated examples) or perhaps give a range of examples that merely prove the presence of inequality/ equality. Better scripts would be able to go beyond the individual level to show how and why opportunities and resources are not evenly distributed due to social, political, economic or even cultural constraints.

Clarification of Terms:

- **Equality:** The condition of being treated equally for all citizens without regard for status, class, race, religion or any other distinction or difference; having no disparity; the equal distribution of goods, wealth, opportunities, rewards, and punishments for everyone, equal access to services such as education and healthcare.
- **Impossible to achieve:** Students must address the absoluteness of this statement (impossible) to show why equality is not practical, too idealistic, merely a dream.
- **Modern society:** The context provided in the arguments must clearly show characteristics of modern society.

Stand / Possible Points and Examples

Stand 1: Equality is achievable in modern society. (APPROACH 1: A, CA-R)

A: The increasing focus on the sanctity of human rights may make the goal of equality achievable.

Over the years, people have become more civilised and human towards the less fortunate as growing civility is one of the founding principles of most humanising modern states. It is the basis of a free society where human beings seek fairness and ensure that they are protected and not disadvantaged. Members of society must be given an equal rights to basic liberties for discrimination to be eliminated. It is morally irresponsible of a society should it fail to ensure that discrimination is not eliminated. This is unacceptable in a civilised society where everyone has the right to be safe and treated equally.

E.g. #blacklivesmatter, #thisgirlcan, #heforshe

CA: Pessimists might argue that discrimination manifests itself through historical and religious development, and that inequality is a legacy passed down through generations that has become entrenched in various societies.

E.g. Indian gang rape stems not from a case of poor law enforcement and harsher punishment, but a natural lack of respect for women that many claim to be innate. Such general apathy towards female concerns is argued to stem from the roots of patriarchy, where men have the upper hand, where boys are preferred to girls, and there is a lack of respect for women.

E.g. The prescribed treatment of women in Islamic theology is a major detriment to women's status. Gender segregation is customary in the Islamic religion and this in turn increases mutual ignorance about the other gender, maintains and promotes inequality and reinforces gender discrimination.

R: The world is so inter-connected that it is impossible for countries or individuals to carry on the kind of lifestyle where inequalities are ignored/ persist. There is pressure on countries (by regional organisations and international organisations) to liberate their society from inequalities and align to international standards of human rights.

E.g. Internationally, the United Nations sets the precedence for global discrimination with its many human rights conventions. For example, International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination; the UN's International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination; International Criminal Court; ILO Declaration on Fundamental Principles and Rights at Work; amongst others. Furthermore, there are NGOs which take affirmative action should discrimination surface.

Stand 2: Equality is impossible to achieve in modern society (APPROACH 2: A1, A2, CONCESSION)

A1: Equality is an impossible dream as messages promoting inequality are continuously and insidiously propagated through the media in the form of stereotyping. The media constantly perpetuates demeaning images and stereotypes about assorted groups, such as ethnic minorities, women, gays and lesbians, the disabled, and the elderly.

E.g. In various mediums – news, drama, and gaming – ethnic minority groups are typically marginalized and overlooked. Very often, when they are represented, they are shown only in narrowly stereotyped roles, such as the model Asian migrant or the exotic Latina, or depicted negatively as the problematic “other,” disproportionately represented as violent or criminal, and “less than” dominant groups (i.e., less intelligent, less wealthy, less powerful).

E.g. The resulting pervasiveness of stereotyped representations across media formats and type is partly the outcome of complex media production processes, norms and values, commercial drivers, and a lack of ethnic minority media producers. Nonetheless, their impact, though hard to measure, is potentially significant. Mass media play a role in shaping collective identities and intergroup attitudes and, by typecasting certain groups, distort the picture that audiences see of different groups.

- Balance within the paragraph: While the share of female and nonwhite characters on-screen has risen quite steadily over the past few years, it is also quite slowly. Even though Asians, for example, make up more than half of the world's population, and just under 6 percent of the US population, only 3 percent of all roles in 2017 and 2018 were played by Asians.

A2: Furthermore, it is human nature to discriminate and as long as the nature remains the same, inequality will continue.

E.g. It is human to categorize things in a discriminatory manner. Humans use heuristics (rules of thumb) and it is difficult for people to break free of stereotypes and to be completely objective when encountering people or groups of people that we have previously stereotyped. For example, historically, race had always been revolved around the colour of one's skin and had certain characteristics attached to them. For example, ‘Black’ became a symbol of inferiority.

Concession: Of course, I have to concede that many governments have stepped up their efforts to keep irregularities in check.

E.g. Many states have anti-discrimination laws, with national human rights institutions to implement these laws and provide assistance to victims. Many governments have attempted to control discrimination through civil rights legislation, equal opportunity laws, institutionalised policies of affirmative action and strict legislation to protect abuses against freedom of religion. The absence of close monitoring by the state would result in inequality, oppression and unhappiness which may result in retribution. In modern societies, there are proper and legal channels for grievances to be resolved. One can be sued or jailed for discriminatory practices.

End of concession para/ start of Conclusion: However, in spite of these heightened efforts, the gaps in inequality are merely narrowing and can never be completely closed.

2020 SAJC FE P1 Questions

Answer **one** question.

Answers should be between 500 and 800 words in length

- 1 Is diversity always beneficial?
- 2 To what extent do you agree that lessons from the past are no longer relevant today?
- 3 Are the rich obliged to help the poor?
- 4 How far do you agree that people today believe everything the media presents?
- 5 Should people in your society read more fiction?
- 6 Can young people truly make a difference in society today?
- 7 'Eco-tourism is the worst solution to environmental problems.' Discuss.
- 8 'It does not pay to be kind.' How far is this true in your society?

1. Is diversity always beneficial?

Analysis

In answering this question, students must take note of the absolute 'always'. It would be foolhardy to take an approach, which agrees with this question. Instead, it would be wise to show that embracing diversity is mostly beneficial. They must also show balance by arguing that conflict may also arise in some cases but not always. We live in a world where billions of people exist together and have the advantage of technology today to be connected. The diversity of religion, race, gender, culture etc. are things that are bound to be different from person to person.

Clarification of Terms

Diversity – differences, which can be in race, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, socio-economic status, age, physical abilities, religious beliefs, political beliefs etc

Always - All the time without any exceptions.

Beneficial - resulting in good outcomes; favourable.

Possible points and examples

Diversity is mostly beneficial

A1 Embracing diversity is mostly beneficial because countries have increasingly made it a point to recognize the minority in society. This has led to greater familiarity with differences, which has altered perspectives, facilitated acceptance, and diminished the misconceptions and prejudices that fuel discrimination.

Sample Paragraph

Embracing diversity is mostly beneficial because countries have increasingly made it a point to recognize the minority in society. This has led to greater familiarity with differences, which has altered perspectives, facilitated acceptance, and diminished the misconceptions and prejudices that fuel discrimination. Racial minorities, women, members of the LGBT community and people with mental or physical disabilities have been fighting discrimination and oppression since time immemorial. We need to break this cycle of oppression. It is all about creating equal opportunities for everyone. After all, discrimination is a result of ignorance, and by engaging in meaningful conversations with those who are different from us, we reduce the chances of misunderstandings. Several countries have made a concerted effort to accept people of all races, colour and sex orientation. In Australia, America and the UK, the existence of equal opportunity laws prohibits anyone discriminating on the basis of race, religion, age, sex or disability. Singapore's inclusive political system for example, has seen a rising number of women in Parliament and ethnic representation in GRCs. Other laws such as Presidential Council for Minority Rights and the Sedition Act are commendable to minimize discrimination. In a recent case, Tangs had to bow to public pressure from Singaporeans to re-employ their Malay employee after they banned her for wearing a hijab to work. This shows that when a country is united in their principles, diversity is embraced and a country is far better for it. In this case, the public were united in highlighting the prejudice of the Tangs organization and helped to remove the prejudice the Malay woman faced.

A2 As the evidence overwhelmingly shows, diverse cultural perspectives can inspire creativity and drive innovation – making them more competitive and profitable. Embracing a diverse and inclusive culture is key for countries and companies to succeed. According to a study by Forbes (2019), countries and companies with diverse populations have prospered economically – given that a lot of talent is brought to the table. Bringing together people of various

backgrounds with different life experiences can generate more ideas and perspectives. Countries and companies that embrace diversity gain higher market share and a competitive edge in accessing new markets. If countries/ companies/organisations do not manage diversity properly, they will be left behind (Report by McKinsey & Company).

- Countries that were once homogenous like Japan, Korea, Saudi Arabia and United Arab Emirates are becoming more culturally diverse today resulting in stronger economies.
- US melting pot of Whites, Blacks, Orientals, Hispanics, Arabs etc – the country would not be economically progressive if it was not for the diversity of its population.
- In Singapore almost 1.5 million foreign talent makes this country highly profitable and competitive. From as far as Kazakhstan to Philippines; even people with alternative lifestyles can come and work here with their partners.
- According to a study by Credit Suisse Research Institute top 2000 global companies, firms are worth more when women hold top leadership positions (Google, Facebook, Apple, Instagram etc) It is also a proven fact that ethnically diverse companies tend to do better economically – where creativity and innovation is fostered (Sony, JP Morgan, Apple, BMW etc).

A3 Diversity is mostly beneficial because our differences make for a strong, beautiful enriched world community. It also heightens a global sense of identity and awareness. We unite our efforts to improve the world. Not only will you enhance your social development, but you will also increase your understanding of the world. This will prepare you to be part of a global society. Diversity shows itself peeking out from the corner in many ways: race, sexuality, culture, values, religion, gender, and an abundance of ways. Globally, we create space for beneficial alliances and mutual co-operating to take place. We can unite together to work on the common challenges that we face as members of the planet, such as controlling climate change, eradicating world hunger and promoting world peace. We can come together to create policies that propagate the advancement of science, such as funding space exploration missions, find cures for deadly diseases, and regulating food and agricultural practices.

- International efforts have increased to address climate change; combat human trafficking; combating poverty (the UN's Sustainable Development Goals of 2015 now aim to "end poverty and hunger everywhere" by 2030); fighting diseases. The recent Covid-19 virus saw countries coming together to find a vaccine. COP21 – to address climate change.
- In education, schools have also become more inclusive today (Pathlight, Northlight in Singapore for eg).
- International Space Station - space environment research laboratory in which crew members conduct experiments in biology, human biology, physics, astronomy, meteorology, and other fields.

Diversity is not always beneficial

A1 Ultimately, the supposed benefits are grossly exaggerated by political propaganda. Diversity has been known to create resentment amongst the locals, especially when the policies enacted seem to favour the new arrivals. Forced diversity never ends well. In the case of large scale immigration, governments would have to change their policies to cater to diverse groups of people or even give preferential treatment to certain groups.

- For example the differing views on slavery were one of the reasons for the American civil war.
- The horrific times include the Nazi holocaust, the apartheid movement in South Africa and even the recent tragedies fueled by terrorism or anti-immigrant sentiments in the Western World.
- Influx of mainly Muslim refugees pouring into Europe. Create resentment in France, Germany, etc. There is a fear of Islamisation sweeping across Europe.
- The English Defence League has been very violent against Muslims in the UK.
- Malaysia's Bumiputera policy which tends to favour the Malays. Indians and Chinese are largely marginalized in a predominantly Malay populace.
- HDB's Ethnic Quota Policy/CMIO – highlighting the racial and ethnic differences, a legacy passed down by the British – is not beneficial. It only goes on to highlight the racial differences amongst the populace – not very integrative.

A2 Not all people are accepting of change and conflict may arise which may go on to hurt a country's economy. The more ethnically diverse the people you live around are, the less you trust them. This can arise from cultural differences or heightened sense of ethnocentrism (the belief that your own culture is superior than others). Most people, are comfortable with those who are similar to them – in term of values, race, attitudes, beliefs and views (Newcomb's Theory of Social Attraction). Wars, genocides and other atrocities were committed because of lack of trust and understanding and an unwillingness to have conversations that bridge differences. This has all taken a toll on a country's economy. People from different ethnic or cultural backgrounds can have very varying opinions concerning religion, lifestyle and politics that can lead to tension and conflict. Different belief systems can lead to stigmatization of the LGBT community, women etc. Stereotyping is to be blamed.

- Trump's hardline stance towards immigrants from Muslim countries
- Saudi Arabia, Iran, Japan, India (Modi's radical stance towards Hindus) they do not want change
- Women account for 60% of college graduates but only 3% of leaders worldwide. Women and girls also represent 2/3 of the world's illiterate population. Some countries are not doing anything to help the plight of women worldwide.
- Some Singaporeans for eg are not very accepting of foreigners etc. Recent protests concerning the Population White Paper attests to this.
- Professionals from Asian countries such as Vietnam and Japan feel less comfortable speaking up or sharing ideas in a Western setting for fear of misunderstandings/conflict.
- In Australia for eg Vietnamese and African gangs wreak havoc and resort to crime to survive.
- Somalians in UK resort to crime because they are discriminated socially and economically.
- Pakistani grooming gangs in the UK.

2. To what extent do you agree that lessons from the past are no longer relevant today?

Analysis

The question asks us to look at history and what we have learnt from events, occasions, people's actions and so forth, which would be beneficial for the present and the future. Students should take note of the potential pitfall in the question. It is not about stating an event which happened in history and explaining it. It should be about why these lessons are relevant or not. Students should also look at who would learn from the lessons. For example, leaders? Citizens? Companies? The question assumes that the world today does not need to learn from the past. Why would the question assume that? Students should look at the lessons from the past in relation to the characteristics of the world and people today.

Clarification of Terms

Lessons from the past: What we have learnt from the past. These can refer to events, occasions, movements, people or anything which provided us with a significant perspective, understanding or knowledge.

No longer relevant: They are not applicable / important / appropriate for the current world we live in.

Possible points and examples

No, they are still relevant today

A1 Lessons from the past provide us with a sense of rootedness and provide a positive advocacy to understanding the changes and demands that are taking place in the modern, uncertain world.

Sample paragraph

Lessons from the past provide us with a sense of rootedness and a positive advocacy to understanding the changes and demands that are taking place in the modern, uncertain world. In today's uncertain world, it is essential to have some cultural data to fall back on to deal with changes and ambiguities. Understanding the past helps people to establish a secure footing within the unfolding saga of time, which by definition includes both duration and change. It is the ability to keep a firm footing within history's rollercoaster that is so important. Another way of putting it is to have secure foundations that will allow for continuity but also for growth and change. For example, The Civil Rights March that occurred in the mid-1900s reinforces the need for equality amongst people of different skin color in America. In another instance, the teaching of a series of past tragic incidences, such as the Maria Hertogh riots or the Hock Lee Bus Riots, to youth in Singapore echoes the need for her citizens to mutually respect one another and appreciate the current peace and harmony she possesses. That is why it is relevant for people to revisit lessons from the past in today's uncertain world as it offers people an opportunity to understand the changes and the demands of the modern world. It is exactly because of the ambiguous nature of the present that there is all the more a need to study history. People need to be appreciative with what they have now, and not take things for granted. By learning about the causes and effects of events in history, nations and people can be more rooted.

A2 Lessons from the past help to prevent people from repeating the same mistakes. If people do not know what they did wrong or why, and what aspects need to be improved, they will be more likely to repeat the same mistakes next time.

- Refugee Crisis - The rise of Muslim minorities in Europe serve as important lessons for India's Modi on how to manage relationships with Muslim minorities.
- Wars - Japanese Occupation, WWII, Vietnam War, teach us to be more mindful of international relationships and focus on the fragility of these relationships. In World War I Germany lost to France. In World War II Germany defeated France. These provide important lessons for leaders today to not take other countries for granted.
- Past individual relationships – teach us how to deal with the future ones so that we do not repeat the same mistakes. These can include divorces, death,

A3 Lessons from the past enable us to better prepare for future problems by learning from them so that we can live better quality lives. The world has seen lots of disasters and pandemics. These have caused major turmoil and upheaval in the lives of many. Many people have lost their lives, jobs and even homes. When done correctly, learning how to cope with these major upheavals will help us to achieve better quality lives.

- Epidemics like SARS, MERS, Wuhan Coronavirus, teach us how to deal with medical emergencies.
- Natural disasters – earthquakes, tsunamis, tornadoes, help us prepare for future disasters and plan beforehand.
- Minimalism – A lifestyle choice by a rising number of people who have learnt from the increasing impact we have on the environment.
- Wall Street collapse in 2008 and financial crisis of 2018???

A4 Lessons from the past (when seen objectively), can help to shape us into becoming better human beings, to be kind, considerate and loving towards other people around us and to be more understanding and accepting of differences.

- 911 – Firemen and various others who lost their lives in trying to save the victims. People today still refer to them to showcase humanity.
- Inequality – the fight against racism, bullying and hate crimes which have happened in the past serve as a reminder that all lives matter. Today, there is a plethora of examples to show the effect of these lessons learnt.
 - Movements - #Blacklivesmatter, He for She Movement, Women's March, #EndFGM, Poverty is Sexist, Times Up Now.
 - LGBTQ and those who stand up for gay rights - India decriminalizing gay sex, Taiwan legalizing gay marriages and Brunei overturning the gay laws.
 - Islamophobia – greater calls for equality for Muslims today, who have been discriminated and attacked in Europe, USA.
 - The media - Advertisers and advertisements today, show a lot more tolerance towards gays and movies are far more inclusive than ever before Eg: Burger King: "Proud Whopper: Inside and out", Tiffany & CO: "Will You", Lexus: #lexusinsideout, Doritos: "Rainbow Chips", Ray Ban: "Never Hide".
- Individuals - Gandhi and Mother Theresa are still looked up to as beacons of hope for kindness and compassion.

A5 The valuable experience and wisdom of ancestors give us priceless character building lessons which never stop being true even in this modern world.

- For example, we learned from Thomas Edison, one of the greatest inventors ever is that hard work and persistence are two most crucial factors leading to success. He had conducted thousands of experiments failed in many years before creating the first electronic light bulb, which positively did change the whole world.
- A country's struggle for independence teaches its citizens the importance of community and love for the nation. (Eg: Singapore)

A6 Lessons from the past help strengthen cultural identity in our modern world.

- Cultures and languages – vanished cultures and languages of the past serve as a reminder that we need to put more effort into preserving cultures in these modern times to prevent extinction (Latin, the Indian cultures of the Amazon and Andes).
- Cultures in Singapore– Efforts to maintain our cultures and reinforce them through celebrations and national publicity.

Yes, they are no longer relevant

A1 Lessons themselves are never analysed and viewed objectively, being seen through the lens of the victor. Historical information is deemed biased and the so-called 'Truth' that it espouses has been and still is a source of conflict today.

- The Holocaust and the atrocities committed by Japan and Israel-Palestinian conflict and the Sino-Jap war have prevented countries and societies from moving forward in their relations. Most of the lessons of the past have hindered the progression of societies and is more often than not, a cause of current global problems. It is better to address the current crises and be forward-looking instead of dredging up a past lesson that might complicate matters.
- Governments, leaders and people find different lessons out of the same set of historical facts, and continue to make mistakes over and over as individuals and nations as evidenced from the various societal, economic, political problems that we face today.

A2 Lessons have been learnt and yet narcissism and growing individualism in today's societies make it harder to people to learn from previous lessons. Some end up still making the same mistakes. In this way, there is no point in learning lessons from the past.

- Refugee Crisis – Europe is finding it harder to deal with the growing refugee crisis, Rohingya refugees are still nationless.
- 1947 Pakistan separation from India – Still hatred and animosity today. Since then, communal riots and constant contesting of religious sites have taken more than 10,000 lives.

A3 The rate at which technology has developed and is constantly changing today makes it almost impossible to have prior knowledge to assist us in learning to deal with things. With the current age of instant information and rapidly changing technologies, the wisdom of the past is not enough to help us succeed.

- Technology - Private data leaked easily, Cloud Hopper Attack, Operation Aurora, AI and Sophia, Designer babies – such issues have no prior lessons to learn from and the lessons learnt from these current issues are not necessarily applicable in a future where technology is constantly changing.

3. Are the rich obliged to help the poor?

Analysis

This question requires students to analyse the terms 'rich', 'poor' and 'obligation' closely. Such terms should be identified and better essays would show awareness of the relative nature of the words 'rich' and 'poor'. Better essays would also look into the term 'help' to assess the kind of help that can actually make a difference to the poor. Good essays should look beyond the community – for example the richer nations helping poorer ones. The question assumes that the poor can actually be helped and better essays would address this assumption in the introduction. This essay is not easy and should only be attempted by those who are confident to talk about world-wide poverty and wealth in great depth.

Clarification of Terms

Rich: Relative to a country. Generally, someone who has an abundance of money or assets and who has accumulated enough to purchase comfort of a luxurious nature above that of the average income holder in a country.

Poor: Relative to a country. Generally referring to a state not having basic necessities and / or starvation. Generally refers to those living below the international poverty line of USD1.90 a day. Poverty could also be assessed through the absolute poverty rate of each country (where the household income is below a necessary level to maintain basic living standards).

Obligated: A duty or commitment to a moral or legal act. One could feel committed by a moral sense of responsibility or be under a contract / deal from the government to share one's resources.

Help: Provide any form of benefit which will alleviate the situation of the poor. This could be in terms of actual cash, buying items, providing sponsorships, contributing to taxes... etc.

Possible points and examples

Yes, the rich are obliged to help the poor.

A1 The rich have a moral responsibility to help the poor.

Sample Paragraph:

From an ethical perspective, it cannot be denied that **the rich have a moral responsibility to help the poor**. One cannot claim to be a morally decent person unless one is doing far more than the typical comfortable person does. We have a duty to reduce poverty and death simply because we can. Minor financial sacrifices on the part of people of rich nations can prevent massive amounts of suffering and death from starvation. If it is in our power to prevent something bad from happening, without thereby sacrificing anything of comparable moral importance, we ought, morally, to do it. For example, the diarrhea disease and respiratory infections that claim the lives of 16,000 children every day could be prevented by 10 cent packets of oral rehydration salts or by antibiotics which, to the rich, will not be a huge dent in their pockets. Australian philosopher Peter Singer says that where world poverty is concerned 'giving to charity' is neither charitable nor generous; it is no more than our duty and not giving would be wrong. Hence, the failure of people in the rich nations to make any significant sacrifices in order to assist people who are dying from poverty-related causes is ethically indefensible.

A2 In a market economy, we are able to amass great wealth tapping on the resources of a country or opportunities that come our way. There are costs the society bore to enable that wealth, and it is only fair to give back. Justice demands that people be compensated for the harms and injustices suffered at the hands of others. Much of the poverty of developing nations is the result of unjust and exploitative policies of governments and corporations in wealthy countries.

- The protectionist trade policies of rich nations have driven down the price of exports of poor nations - the European Economic Community imposes a tariff four times as high against cloth imported from poor nations as from rich ones. Such trade barriers cost developing countries \$50 to \$100 billion a year in lost sales and depressed markets.
- Developed countries – take advantage of the unfair distribution of resources to help their citizens become very wealthy. Britain, became rich due to her colonial reign in Asia.

- Exploitation of poor labourers from Africa and South-east Asia – Steve Jobs with Apple, exploited Chinese workers, making them work for long hours at minimum wages to earn billions as profit.
- India – India's new billionaires (like Mallya, Ambani, and Modi), have a collective worth of \$440bm tapping on market forces. Yet, India's new wealth has been shared remarkably unevenly. 1 in 5 Indians live below the poverty level. Inequality is abundant. Sanitation, healthcare and water are scarce and in dire need of aid.
- An OECD survey of 22,000 people (2019) - The majority of people living in developed countries want their government to increase taxes on the rich in order to help the poorest in society.

A3 In an interconnected world, the rich have a social responsibility to reduce the high levels of inequality as it impacts security, stability and diplomacy.

- EU – Richer nations should help poorer ones like Bulgaria, Romania, Croatia, Poland and Hungary to create more economic growth for the region, as they are all tied together through their currency.
- Individual level – Rich individuals should provide more to combat illnesses and diseases which will enhance global welfare and safety. Warren Buffet, through The Giving Pledge, made a public call for billionaires to give away more than half their wealth to help others. More than 200 philanthropists have now joined the Giving Pledge. (2014 - Ebola outbreak in West Africa, the foundation pledged more than \$50 million to help fight the virus.)
- Bill and Melinda Gates donated \$2 billion to fight malaria, more than \$36 billion to fund programs related to global health, education, emergency relief, poverty, and \$38 million in grant money to a Japanese pharmaceutical company, which aimed to develop a low-cost polio vaccine.
- Poorer nations are breeding grounds for terrorism – (Afghanistan, Syria) – greater incentive to provide aid to reduce inequality and poverty so that they do not get lured as easily into terrorist traps.

A4 Some religions believe that it is an offence to amass so much wealth. Wealth should thus be given away to those who do not have it as it is an offense and obstacle to faith itself.

- According to historian Alan S. Kahan, there is a strand of Christianity that views the wealthy man as 'especially sinful'. In this strand of Christianity, Kahan asserts, the Day of Judgment is viewed as a time when "the social order will be turned upside down and ... the poor will turn out to be the ones truly blessed.
- According to the First Epistle of Paul to Timothy, "people who want to get rich fall into temptation and a trap and into many foolish and harmful desires that plunge men into ruin and destruction".
- Islam - Zakat is mandatory giving; all Muslims eligible to pay it must donate at least 2.5% of their accumulated wealth for the benefit of the poor, destitute and others. It is one of the largest forms of wealth transfer to the poor in existence.

No, the rich are not obliged to help the poor.

A1 In the long run, aiding the poor will place even greater demands on the world's limited food supply, which in turn will mean the rich have less.

- Providing aid to poor people or to people in extremely poor countries will only allow more of them to survive and reproduce.
- One report estimates that more than 90% of the world's total population growth between now and the year 2025 will occur in developing countries, placing constraints on marginal and environmentally fragile lands and limited food supply.
- Natural selection – Survival of the fittest means that the wealthiest can survive better and should not be obligated to offer money or aid to the poorer as this will make them a competition.

A2 All individuals have a basic right to freedom, which includes the right to use the resources they have legitimately acquired as they freely choose. To make wealthy people feel that they should give aid to poor nations violates this right. Aiding poor nations may be praiseworthy, but not obligatory.

A3 It is counter-productive to aid the poor as it creates dependency and prevents the poor from becoming independent, self-sufficient and empowered.

- Studies show the tendency for a poor drug addict or alcoholic, to more than likely spend money provided on drugs or alcohol rather than on arguably more important things like food or housing - enabling their habit rather than empowering them.
- Food aid depresses local food prices, discouraging local food production and agricultural development. Poor dairy farmers in El Salvador have found themselves competing against free milk from the U.S. As a result of aid, many countries, such as Haiti, Sudan, and Zaire, have become aid dependent.
- In welfare systems, like the UK, the rich can be taxed up to 45% of their income. This creates dependency and laziness amongst some of the poor, who live off the country's welfare.

A4 The rich are under no obligation to help the poor countries which are poorly governed and are corrupt as this would simply be a waste of their money.

- One of the clearest findings from recent research on development – aid works well only in countries that are reasonably well governed. Corruption, official incompetence, and the failure to protect basic property rights are capable of rendering aid not just useless but harmful, as when it enriches corrupt leaderships and strengthens their hold on power.
- Between 1978 and 1984, more than 80% of 596 million of food aid sent to Somalia went to the military rather than food and healthcare.
- In El Salvador, 80% of U.S. aid in dry milk ended up on the black market.
- Aide provided to the impoverished country of Cote D'Ivoire was used to construct a \$200 million air-conditioned cathedral.
- Deaton, an economist at Princeton University who studied poverty in India and South Africa, claimed that much of the \$135 billion that the world's most developed countries spent on official aid in 2014 may not have ended up helping the poor.

4. How far do you agree that people today believe everything the media presents?

Analysis

The assumption of the question is that people are ignorant, susceptible and easily influenced by what they see, read and hear in the media. It also suggests that the media does not always present information in a factual and objective way.

Clarification of terms

Believe: Accept or be persuaded as true, especially without proof or evidence

Presents: Content in visual, audio, written forms

Possible points and examples

Yes, I largely agree that people today believe everything the media presents

A1 This is because they are inundated by a massive amount of online information and often do not think it necessary to check its veracity.

Sample paragraph:

People today are inundated by a massive amount of online information and often do not think it necessary to check its veracity. We are overwhelmed by a flood of information every time they read or look up information. Many may not know how, have the time or sadly, the inclination to further research or ask the right questions to see if the sources are hoaxes or reliable ones. Furthermore, we are often the accomplices of tabloid journalism, spreading false information that we find on browsers, retweeting links without clicking on them and happily adding our contacts to pass on information that goes viral on social media platforms even when we have serious doubts about its accuracy. Some of these can be seen in questionable sources such as Blogs, Twitter, Facebook and Whatspps posts and news, which publish stories with unverifiable writers, sources and links. We become more gullible when we assume the information passed around by our contacts or ourselves is correct even when it is not. Even more established sources from aggregated news websites, like Feedly, Google News, Yahoo News, News360, Flipboard and Reddit, can simply flood news to us in their feeds. With the instantaneous nature of the internet, there is just too much online for people to verify and assess.

A2 Today, online information, especially fake ones, are designed to look legitimate so as to deceive people into accepting what is presented without questioning it is factual.

It is becoming increasingly hard for the average person to tell real news from fake news platforms and sources. They are often misled by glossy, professional looking websites that appear to be genuine, established communication platforms. However, there are many companies that are paid and pay to sell false information in order to drive web traffic and profit from readers' gullibility. And so, from clickbait to 'deep fakes', meddlers are intentionally trying to manipulate and spread disinformation, and many, including, professionals in education and business. These platforms are designed to attract attention and entice users to follow the links to information that is typically sensationalised or provocative. A diet of such views can only mean a desensitisation to what is legitimate and an inclination towards the exploitative.

- Stanford University's History Education experiment on why even the smartest people fall prey to the wild, wild web.
- ABCnews.com.co (defunct), mimics the URL, design and logo of ABC News; Bloomberg.ma (defunct) mimicked Bloomberg.com; Breaking-CNN.com mimicked CNN, featuring death hoaxes, e.g. Barbara Bush.
- Before It's News; InfoWars considered "unabashedly unhinged 'news' sites" that promoted conspiracy theories, e.g. MH17.
- In Singapore, there has been an increase in phishing scams where fraudulent emails purporting to be from reputable companies are sent to unsuspecting victim to trick them into revealing their personal information.

A3 Because they typically choose to read from a few favoured sources and the limited range may simply mean they read without much awareness of alternative sources.

Reading from a few sources and not recognising that news platforms may have its own socio-political sentiments and agenda is a problem for the uninformed reader. Such readers tend to accept rather than examine the curated news that they are exposed to. Media agencies today often pursue their own socio-political goals and pursue partisan politics. They may present content that is selected and organised carefully to sell a particular ideology or cause. This often limits the views of its readers and sways its less questioning readers to accept what is presented without properly examining the ideas. This does nothing to develop its readers' critical thinking ability who will then be caught up in an inescapable whirlpool of narrow thinking. Such readers are prone to bias, cherry picking and twisting the facts to fit or confirm their existing beliefs and set conclusions.

- News agencies that cater to right, left wing supporters, liberals, conservatives, etc.
- Fox News and Breitbart News, a far-right American syndicated news and opinion website have been accused of ideologically-driven journalism, with content that is misogynistic, xenophobic and racist. The conservative US public often accept the lies, conspiracy theories and intentionally misleading stories that are published as fact.
- In Singapore, readers of the Straits Times are seen as pro-government vs. the readers of alternative sources like The Real Singaporean and, The States Times Review.

No, I largely disagree that people today believe everything the media presents

A1 As they are aware they have the right to expect and receive solid and substantiated information from mainstream media companies that are responsible for maintaining high standards.

Media agencies have a professional business reputation to uphold and to attract a public audience big and loyal enough to keep its business going, it has to maintain proper standards of journalism. Its audience expects news of a high standard with due checks and verification of its sources for accuracy and reliability. Astute readers know they have the right to proper information and will call out shoddy research and improper reporting conduct on the part of the news agencies. They are unlikely to believe everything that the media presents even when it comes to tried and trusted agencies. This also means they will reject agencies with seriously doubtful or suspect agenda.

- The British Broadcasting Corporation had to apologise, e.g. Band Aid Trust & links to weapons claim in 2010; fake Primark's Bangalore child-labour footage in 2011; etc.
- Others: Top Gear's (British motoring TV programme) racist mockery of Mexico in 2011/of Romania in 2006; politically insensitive jabs at Argentina in 2014/at Germany in 2006.
- Closer to home, Channel News Asia reported prematurely on the passing of LKY in 2015.

A2 As the young are less ignorant, are more-well-educated, intellectually curious, and have a healthy skepticism of the information they receive.

More countries today are using education as an effective weapon to fight fake news or 'digital wildfires'. Younger people, especially, are becoming more resilient to disinformation. Many believe education and awareness are better options than legislation against fake news as it would protect free speech. Training a new generation of critical minds to doubt intelligently and to understand uncertainty can guard against fabricated information. Digital literacy programmes are increasingly being adopted in many European countries, and countries like France & Germany also use legislation to enforce the rules to ensure media companies do as they should to provide substantiated information.

- Finnish fact-checking organisation Faktabaari (Fact Bar) adapts professional methods for use in schools.
- Government-commissioned advertisements encouraging its people to choose independently, e.g. Nordic countries' European Policies at OSI-Sofia; The Open Society's and European Research Council's improved news literacy programme.
- In Singapore, Project Work teaches evaluation of information to ready the young for the real world.
- Young people are more likely to use fact-checking site like Snopes.com.

A3 As media companies are more proactive and understand their professional responsibility to provide accurate information, helping to create greater understanding among its readers of what constitutes real and fake news.

Many technology giants have educational programmes in tie-up's with school districts to help young people learn how to both use and safely navigate the web. These educational programmes are school-based for classroom use and are structured to teach digital literacy. Based on an industry code of ethics, it has helped a new generation of web-users to analyse, examine and assess news messages from any source for its accuracy and reliability. As such, the media literate audience today are more able to sieve out the fake information from the real and are less likely to believe everything they read, see or hear.

- Microsoft YouthSpark programme, IBM's KidSmart early learning & Google Classroom.
- Spain's Telefonica's EducaRed portal designed for the classroom.
- In 2014, The Onion, a satirical news website, launched ClickHole that parodied clickbait websites such as Upworthy and BuzzFeed.
- In 2014, Facebook adopted technical measures against clickbait.
- Google Ad blockers help weed out suspicious links and websites.
- Governments have also put pressure on tech companies to implement safeguards and barriers to sieve out fake news, e.g. Singapore's POFMA acts on Facebook

5. Should people in your society read more fiction?

Analysis:

In this answer scheme, 'your society' is Singapore. Foreign students may write about their own country. This question assumes that Singaporeans do not read enough fiction. It also assumes that there are benefits that be derived from reading fiction. Students can choose to agree with this by arguing the benefits of fiction in the context of Singapore, or choose to disagree by showing that Singaporeans already read enough (and reading fiction should not be taken to the extreme), or they can disagree by showing that fiction is redundant and useless in the Singapore context. Whichever stand they choose, they need to always juxtapose the characteristics of Singaporeans and the benefits/ problems associated with reading fiction.

Clarification of terms:

Fiction: Students can define this broadly and give examples from all genres – crime thrillers, romance, fantasy, science fiction, mysteries, etc. Do note that non-fiction (i.e. books based on fact and actual events such as autobiographies) are not accepted examples.

Possible points and examples

Yes, Singaporeans should read more fiction.

A1 In our highly stressful society, burrowing one's nose into fiction can help our minds relax.

Sample paragraph:

In our highly stressful society, burrowing one's nose into fiction can help our minds relax. Where the stakes and stress levels are high and more people often forsake fiction for more 'important' reading such as the news or work-related articles, we often forget that reading fiction is one of the most effective methods of resting our minds. Research at the University of Sussex shows that reading is the most effective way to overcome stress, beating out other methods like listening to music or taking a walk. Within 6 minutes of silent reading, participants' heart rates slowed and tension in their muscles eased up to 68%. Psychologists believe reading works so well because the mind's concentration creates a distraction that eases the body's stress. In the 2019 Cigna 360 Well-Being Survey, a whopping 92 per cent of working Singaporeans reported feeling stressed, higher than the global average of 84 per cent. Of this, 13 per cent said their stress was unmanageable, which is on par with the global average, according to the study which surveyed a total of 13,200 online interviews in 23 markets, including 502 residents in Singapore. Moreover, while reading programmes have been a mainstay in Singapore schools, the National Library Board has stepped up its efforts in making reading accessible to Singaporeans. The library's repository of fiction books are now available on-the-go on a reader-friendly mobile app, a convenient outlet for stress relief. Literary Art events such as Singapore's Writers Festival have gained prominence in recent years, even becoming a weekend outing option for book lovers. Hence, reading for pleasure is one of the most effective ways to sooth and pacify our stressful selves.

A2 Singapore is a melting pot of cultures and nationalities. Reading fiction helps develop empathy which is essential in maintaining social harmony. The growing fault lines and inability of Singaporeans to truly emphasise with others could be symptomatic of the lack of reading fiction in our daily lives. Putting yourself in a fictional character's shoes will help us to understand people in real life better because we have been exercising how to relate to people in our imagination as we read. That exercise is valuable and productive. In real life, in relationships, and in business, interpersonal communication is vital, and fiction helps us to navigate those waters more effectively by giving us valuable practice time.

- In a 2015 National Literary Reading and Writing Survey, it showed that only 44% of Singaporeans read at least one book in the past 12 months. In comparison, a 2014 survey by market research firm YouGov showed that 75 per cent of British adults aged 18 and above have read and finished a book for pleasure over the course of a year, while a study by American think tank the Pew Research Center in the same year showed that 76 per cent of Americans have read at least one book in a year.

- Multiple studies have shown that imagining stories helps activate the regions of your brain responsible for better understanding others and seeing the world from a new perspective. *"...In particular, interactions in which we're trying to figure out the thoughts and feelings of others. Scientists call this capacity of the brain to construct a map of other people's intentions 'theory of mind.' Narratives offer a unique opportunity to engage this capacity, as we identify with characters' longings and frustrations, guess at their hidden motives and track their encounters with friends and enemies, neighbours and lovers."*

A3 Singaporeans are often criticised as ignorant and apathetic individuals. Reading fiction helps us gain a better understanding of the world we live in. It is an important tool that enables us to shed our ignorance and apathy. In schools, Literature teachers specially curate book lists which feature a combination of local and foreign works.

- The Boy in Striped Pyjamas or The Diary of Anne Frank are essential in developing cultural literacy in students, helping them gain an understanding of significant world events such as World War 2 and The Holocaust in an accessible and relatable way. Though the historical context of these books may bear little semblance to our modern society, these books explore enduring social issues like discrimination.
- Books such as The Kite Runner explore familiar narratives and themes (father-son relationships, guilt and shame, etc.) while set against the backdrop of tumultuous political developments in regions of the world that are largely unfamiliar to Singaporeans. Reading gives us a glimpse into existing power structures and social issues around the world, revealing the state of our human condition.

A4 Reading fiction strengthens problem-solving skills and heightens creativity. These are important critical thinking skills that many Singaporeans lack. To succeed in today's innovation-driven economy, Singapore will need well-educated and technically proficient workers who possess the ability to think analytically and creatively – traits that are not widespread among Singaporeans. As such, we need to read more. Reading fiction is an immersive experience. Scientific studies tell us that our brains react the same way when we read a fictional experience as they would if we were going through that experience ourselves. Characters in a story are perpetually presented with problems and stories are developed around them exploring possibilities and discovering solutions. While reading, our brains are always looking ahead, trying to fill in gaps in knowledge with possibilities. We recall past events and details in stories, trying to formulate possible conclusions. This exercises our problem-solving skills, enhances our memory and strengthens our ability to form connections between related events in real-life.

- When Katniss Everdeen and Peeta Mellark (in The Hunger Games) are the only two tributes left at the end of The Hunger Games, and Katniss is faced with the prospect of having to kill someone she cares about to survive, your brain as a reader is already looking ahead, imagining scenarios of how she and Peeta could both get out of the arena alive.
- Writer Eileen Gunn suggests that reading science fiction, in particular, helps us accept change more readily: "What science fiction does, especially in those works that deal with the future, is help people understand that things change and that you can live through it. Change is all around us. Probably things change faster now than they did four or five hundred years ago, particularly in some parts of the world."

No, Singaporeans should not read more fiction.

A1 Singapore values pragmatism, and fiction, with its imaginary plots and characters, has very little relevance to the real world. We should thus not waste time reading fiction and focus on reading the news or technical books which can help us in our everyday lives. When the story hinges primarily upon a scenario that is created by the minds of an author, it is difficult to see its relevance in our everyday life. Sure, it allows us to explore the author's imagination, but purely fictional scenarios are not going to do anyone good in real life, where all problems are concrete and tangible.

- Beyond being a form of escapism, books such J.K. Rowling's Harry Potter series or J.R.R. Tolkien's Lord of The Rings lack any practical value. Using your imagination and employing creative thinking skills while reading would have little impact in, say entrepreneurship or just about any field of study.
- Furthermore, Singapore's economy heavily invests in the STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics) industries, and being well-versed in these fields gives one a way better shot at being successful in life. This sentiment is reflected in the popularity of the Science stream in schools, while the candidature of Literature students continues to dwindle. Fiction is merely a waste of valuable time that could be spent on something more productive.

A2 There is value in fiction, and what little we read is sufficient – we should not read more as time is limited. While the benefits of fiction are irrefutable, it cannot be denied that fiction is often flagrantly untrue and does not offer essential facts and information. In today's society, we are basically drowning in information. Having to sift through millions of books to find a well-written work of fiction is simply a waste of time – a precious commodity in our fast-paced country. Furthermore, the prevalence of fake news in our digital age has made it even more crucial for us identify reliable sources of information. Fiction blurs the line between what is real and what is not. Novels lack merit precisely because they can be written by any one. Spending time reading novels would mean that less time is spent reading biographies, historical narratives and political commentaries that are rooted in fact. Although they do give us greater insight into the human condition, they are ill-equipped to accurately inform us about our times and our history in a time when we desperately need to understand it.

A3 Novels and stories cause readers to feel dissatisfied with reality. Plotlines and characters are often cast in unrealistic settings – main characters often did not have real jobs while adventure-seekers always run off willy-nilly in search of exhilarating discovery. Such characterisation goes against what our society prizes – efficiency and productivity. Novels, especially romance novels, stoke the emotions and identifying with characters too strongly may cause readers to have idealistic expectations of partners and relationships. Relying on fiction as a means of escape from the daily grind may leave us with a sense of disenchantment. Even literary icons have stopped reading fiction. Philip Roth's statement made in the Financial Times in the 2011: "I've stopped reading fiction" (he's the author of "Portnoy's Complaint" and dozens of other novels). Roth is not alone; over the years, such writers as Cormac McCarthy, Will Self and William Gibson have made similar statements.

5. Can young people truly make a difference in society today?

Analysis

Young people have often been criticised by adults as being self-absorbed as well as being indifferent and ignorant about the community they live in or beyond, ie the world at large. However, it is important to note that there are positive qualities about the young, for example, their passion, idealism and optimism about their areas of interest. Bearing these in mind, this question requires candidates to consider whether young people are really able to take action that results in a positive consequence or whether they face limitations in their ability to do so. Candidates should provide arguments with different reasons why young people are able to make a difference and avoid being domain or example driven where they merely list instances of young people making a difference. Students should look at the community that the young people live in. Candidates should refer to different societies in general in their discussions and not just focus only on their or one society.

Clarification of Terms

Young people: students, adolescents and young adults

Truly: really / surely (denotes a level of scepticism)

Make a difference: to do something that is important or that helps people / to affect possible change that makes society a better place

Possible Points and Examples

Yes, young people can truly make a difference today:

A1 Young people tend to be highly passionate and enthusiastic about issues that interest them and are able to galvanise others to follow their causes. In addition, they are able to tap on the power of social media to further their causes.

Sample paragraph:

Young people tend to be highly passionate and enthusiastic about issues that interest them and are able to galvanise others to follow their causes. In addition, they are able to tap on the power of social media to further their causes. According to the BBC, Autumn Peltier, an Anishinaabe teen from Wikwemikong First Nation in Ontario, has been passionately advocating for clean drinking water and ending water pollution since she was about 8 years old. At the Assembly of First Nations in 2016, an 11-year old Peltier addressed Canada's Prime Minister, Justin Trudeau, about clean drinking water, protection of water, and support of pipelines. This not only led her to become renowned as an internationally recognized advocate for clean water but it also led to the Assembly of First Nations implementing the Niabi Odacidae fund which has the goal of protecting water for future generations. Of course, one cannot forget the ever famous Greta Thunberg, a Swedish climate youth activist, who received worldwide recognition for her passionate efforts in fighting climate change. Thanks to social media, her actions have spread and influenced millions of young people all over the world to organize and protest. Launching "Fridays For Future," Thunberg and other concerned youths throughout Europe have continued to pressure leaders and lawmakers to act on climate change through their regular walkouts. Locally, Singaporean Ang Zyn Yee, at the age of 17, convinced more than 20 F&B establishments to go straw-lite. Cho Ming Xiu, started Campus PSY with his friends to increase the awareness of mental health among undergraduates and went on to join forces with eight other organisations to collectively design solutions to address mental health issues among children and youth. Hence, these passionate young prove that with enthusiasm, the young can indeed make a change in society.

A2 Young people dare to be risk takers and challenge the status quo in the interest of making positive change. They are generally more flexible and open to change.

- In the past and even up till today, young people have dared to take risks by challenging existing political systems or question the status quo in society. For instance, as a student leader, Joshua Wong started a class boycott among Hong Kong's students in 2014 to send a pro-democracy message to Beijing, risking persecution from the Chinese government and the loss of freedom with imprisonment.

- Young people are also encouraged to be entrepreneurs as they are perceived to have more energy, have less to lose, are less adverse to risk taking and are able to bounce back more easily should their ventures fail. Organisations and governments worldwide are increasingly recognizing the potential of young people in this area and have launched various schemes to support young entrepreneurs and strengthen start-up culture. Eg Action Community for Entrepreneurship (ACE) Startups which aims to drive entrepreneurship and innovation in Singapore has a youth entrepreneurship branch that has different programmes and communities which youths can participate in and learn more about youth entrepreneurship outside their school curriculums.

A3 Many young people are idealistic and are optimistic that they can make a better world and these qualities drive them to make a real impact in society today. Many of today's greatest social, political and economic issues have a particular impact on young people in the future. Young are recognising that they have a part to play in their future and if they do not make a difference, they are stuck with and will have to bear the impact of current problems (eg poverty, gender equality, lack of opportunities in education or work, etc) in the future.

- Akshay Makar works closely with India-based Handscart.com, an e-commerce platform where more than 1000 artisans and rural craftsmen from around the world sell their handmade crafts. His outreach in rural communities local groups and artisan cooperatives effectively use the online platform and helps create sustainable livelihoods for the poor by helping artisans join the online marketplace to sell their crafts online. Believing that he can make a difference in his community, his collaboration with Handscart has benefitted communities in six countries and India by reducing poverty and gender inequality and creating opportunity for sustainable livelihood.
- As a result of her own childhood experiences growing up in a patriarchal household, Kate Ekanem from Nigeria committed herself to elevating the prospects of Nigerian girls by starting the Kate Tales Foundation. This literary non-profit organisation promotes education for girls, the empowerment of women, and the development of emerging writers. Her goal is to ensure that girls in Nigeria's rural communities are able to gain access to quality education by providing them with scholarship and mentorship programmes. Since starting the foundation, she has organized more than 20 projects in promotion of girls' education and has successfully empowered thousands of girls and women across Nigeria to become independent and self-reliant as they can now gain entrepreneurial skills as well as job and education opportunities.

A4 Young people today are better educated and more technologically-savvy compared to older generations. These qualities aid young people to seek ways to solve these issues. Education opens their eyes to problems and injustices in their societies and in the world today. Young people become more informed as they develop a deeper awareness of issues. They are better able to harness the benefits of technology and/or the knowledge they receive through the internet as they realise that they can do something that results in actual change.

- Nobel Laureate Malala Yousafzai who champions the importance of education for girls co-founded the Malala Fund with her father to champion every girl's right to 12 years of free, safe, quality education. By supporting local advocates, as well as local girl advocates, her belief is that when they are empowered through quality education, change can be brought about in their societies.
- Bangladeshi-born Singaporean Sazzad Hossain started conducting English classes for migrant workers since his junior college days as he saw the difficulties non-English speaking migrant workers faced in their work when they lacked important language and communication skills. Besides providing quality education through SDI Academy (which was founded by Hossain), he aims to encourage Singaporeans to challenge negative stereotypes about migrant workers and create a more inclusive society.
- Akah Harvey Larry and his team of fellow engineers in Cameroon developed Traveler, an application that provides real-time insight on how well a car is being driven on the highway. Traveler uses big data to track users' journeys and contact emergency teams and family members if an accident occurs. In addition, it enables drivers to report difficulties along the roads and the information is passed along to appropriate authorities with the goal of making roads safer. The application seeks to improve driving habits on the road, especially in sub-Saharan Africa where

car accidents are a leading cause of death. The Ministry of Transport has plans to deploy the solution throughout Cameroon.

No, young people cannot truly make a difference today:

A1 Young people, especially teenagers, tend to lack wisdom and life experiences, so their ability to make an impactful difference in society is severely limited.

- Lacking wisdom: Various studies have found that as the prefrontal cortex, the decision-making part of a teenager's brain, is still developing, teenagers tend to rely on a part of the brain called the amygdala to make decisions and solve problems more than adults do. The amygdala is associated with emotions, impulses, aggression and instinctive behaviour so this is used to explain why teenagers tend to be more impulsive, rash and lack the ability to make rational and wise decisions. These qualities would limit their ability to really make a difference in society.
- Lacking life experiences: Due to their age, many are likely to be schooling and their life experiences tend to focus mainly around their school life or their own problems. In Singapore, many teenagers do not need to worry about the realities of various bread-and-butter issues that adults have to deal with, eg earning enough to raise a family or paying home or car loans and bills etc. Growing up in an increasingly affluent society makes it difficult for Singaporean teenagers to put themselves in the shoes of others and come up with insightful solutions or well-thought through plans that can make a real difference to benefit others (like the needy) in society.

A2 Young people tend to be too idealistic and believe that what they do can have an impact on their society or the world but in reality, this may not be the case. Often possessing a rose-tinted view of the world and an inflated belief in their abilities, they are unable to recognise reality and understand that the change they seek may not be uniformly accepted in every society.

- A survey published by the Fawcett Society in 2018 discovered that young people in Britain are more likely to speak out about inappropriate behaviour in the wake of the #MeToo movement by challenging inappropriate conduct such as lecherous remarks or unwanted advances. This shows the impact of #MeToo movements on young people are more clearly observed in liberal societies. However, in conservative patriarchal societies, even if young people want to make a difference it is very unlikely to make a significant impact. For example, in Afghanistan, the #MeToo hashtag initially spread there but was quickly silenced when those who shared their stories started fearing for their lives as it resulted in death threats to the victims and her family members.
- Another example could be how young people may push for democracy but it may not necessarily work or be accepted in all societies (eg China's resistance towards the pro-democracy Umbrella movement in Hong Kong).

A3 Young people often lack a keen understanding of issues and instead tend to jump on the bandwagon and follow movements which are trendy or popular at the moment. Without considering carefully the constraints that occur in reality, it cannot be said that they can truly make a difference today.

- In recent years, there is a growing environmental awareness of the young generation in many European countries and many have recognised the importance of and embraced the need for environmental protection. However, German youth researcher Klaus Hurrelmann from the Hertie School of Governance, who has spent years studying the changing values, attitudes and habits of Germany's youth commented, "Although the protection of the environment and the preservation of their future livelihoods take a very high priority, it's often difficult for young people to consistently implement this in their everyday lives..." For instance, recently young people have been campaigning against riding cars to school but sometimes, it is just a lot easier to take the car to school instead of riding a bicycle. Also, it may be possible to follow the straw-free movement and even adopt the trend of upcycling one's clothes but avoiding plastic packaging altogether and disregarding fast fashion are real challenges facing the young in today's world.
- Teenage climate activist, Greta Thunberg, refused to fly to New York to attend the UN talks in September 2019 because of the carbon emissions caused by planes. But she has been offered a lift on a Malizia II racing yacht,

and set off on August 15 along with her father Svante and a filmmaker to document the journey. However, a spokesman for German round-the-world sailor Boris Herrmann, the yacht's co-skipper, revealed that several people would fly into New York to help take the yacht back to Europe and Hermann himself will return by plane. So it was estimated that in fact Thunberg's boat trip would end up being more polluting than if she and her companions had just taken flights to New York themselves.

A4 It is often not difficult to try and make a difference in the short term but young people tend to lack the willpower and patience to see through their passions in the long term.

- Campaigns or causes started in their youth are often discontinued when they grow older and there are more responsibilities in the adult world that compete for their attention. Real change in society takes time and with other factors that demand their attention (like building a new career or starting a new family), young people are unable to make an enduring difference. For example, young Singaporeans often participate in volunteer work when they are in school to give back to the community or simply to help the needy in society but when they leave school, few continue doing so, often citing a lack of time and other commitments (like career and family).

A5 It is an over-rated notion that young people can truly make a difference when in reality, they often lack the means or are prevented from doing so. They lack resources (like money) and support from others in society, like their parents or political leaders. Also, organisational and/or institutional frameworks are too deeply entrenched and young adults especially face an uphill (and often, virtually impossible) task of changing the systemic frameworks. So even if today's young people are better educated and know in theory that changes have to be done that can bring about positive differences, they are unable to do so.

- In Singapore, the paper chase is such a priority that many parents encourage their children to focus solely on their studies. Anything extra (for example, advocating for a social cause) is often dismissed as a waste of time and energy and the young are discouraged from spending their efforts on it.
- In Japan, the hierarchical sempai-kohai (senior-junior) work culture is so deeply entrenched that there are specific social norms dictating how both parties should interact with one another. Even though in recent years, young Japanese workers have expressed that there are areas they would like to change, it is extremely difficult for them to do so.

7. 'Eco-tourism is the worst solution to environmental problems.' Discuss.

Analysis

*Tourism is bigger now than ever before. Since the 1980s, ecotourism has been considered a critical endeavor by environmentalists, so that future generations may experience destinations relatively untouched by human intervention. To most remote places, from the Amazon rainforest to ice-bound Antarctic, ecotourism have become leisure destinations. No corner of the earth remains untouched, and many countries rely on ecotourism for their income. This has prompted concerns about its impact on fragile ecosystems and tradition communities. Students have to tackle the contention of the question whether ecotourism is the worst solution to environmental problems (ie that ecotourism is the most dreadful solution to environmental problems). There is a danger that students might **hijack** this question and say no, ecotourism is not the worst solution and focus the essay on describing the other factors which are worse.*

Clarification of Terms

Ecotourism: The International Ecotourism Society (TIES) defines it as “responsible travel to natural areas, which conserves the environment and improves the welfare of the local people”.

Worst solution: of the poorest quality or the lowest standard answer; least good or desirable; most severely or seriously.

Environmental problems: defined as problems with the planet's systems (air, water, soil, etc.)

Possible points and examples

Yes, ecotourism is the worst solution to environmental problems.

A1 More than anything else, ecotourism takes a serious toll on surrounding wildlife and destroy our ecosystems. Ecotourism is just a façade – based on people’s false beliefs.

Sample paragraph:

More than anything else, ecotourism takes a serious toll on surrounding wildlife and destroy our ecosystems as it is just a façade based on people’s false beliefs. Although one of ecotourism’s main purposes is to conserve the environment, it has a detrimental effect instead. Highly visited ecotourism destinations will more likely see development and encroachment in and around the region, which can lead to habitat fragmentation and destruction, leading to loss of species that depend on their natural habitats. The animals are also harmed by highly toxic litter to forage around. Human visitors can disrupt wildlife, resulting in changes to their feeding and mating habits. In addition, many ecotourist destinations are in remote areas, requiring extensive air and vehicle travel that creates carbon footprints. Increased foot traffic an also affect soil quality and plant life in general, damaging the area’s overall ecosystems. As a destination’s popularity grows, resources sometimes become overtaxed, and natural attractions suffer from overuse. By creating the infrastructure necessary for ecotourism, we are actually altering the natural state of the environment. A case-in-point would be some of our ecotourism parks in Costa Rica, Nepal, Ecuador and the Galapagos Islands, which have seen increased human traffic. In fact, the United Nations Environment Programme’s (UNEP) estimates that most of tourism’s expansion is occurring in and around the world’s remaining natural areas. Take the Galapagos Islands for example. UNESCO deems these islands (a world heritage site) in danger due to increased cruise ship traffic and movement between the archipelagoes’ 19 islands. Travel to the Polar Regions has also expanded, increasing ship-borne tourists tremendously, causing oil spills. Hence, with increased travel, the environment is definitely harmed more by ecotourism, contrary to its ideals.

A2 There is far too much corruption going on where ecotourism is concerned. This is the primary reason why ecotourism takes a toll on the environment as compared to other factors. Firstly, by corrupt officials manning nature reserves. Instead of money being channeled to maintaining the nature parks, money is being siphoned off. Secondly, not all travel organisations that market themselves as ecotourist programs are actually environmentally friendly. Many advertise their tours deceptively using a lot of greenwashing, creating a sense of eco-friendliness to lure tourists. These organisations know ecotourism is growing in popularity and may take advantage of the fact by parading as ecotouristic

when in reality they ignore eco-friendly practices. External ecotourism agencies go on to establish tourist activities without the permission of the locals, leading to conflicts. Thirdly, international corporations and developers from outside the area flock to popular ecotourist parks. Their hotels and stores take money away from the local economy. In addition, the original residents have to pay the same inflated prices for food and water as tourists do, putting a greater financial burden on them. Hence, activities that come with ecotourism can become a problem for local communities. Finally, corrupt governments, frequently take a large cut of the profits from ecotourism, leaving little or none for local communities that are directly affected by the influx of visitors.

A3 Compared to other factors, ecotourism is the worst culprit in displacing indigenous groups and local people from their homelands, which not only damages the integrity of those local communities. Tourism inevitably leads to development – even in ecotourism efforts. When natural areas become popular in the travel industry, they usually become the site of hotels, excavations and other tourist industry activities. On the part of the agencies promoting ecotourism, there is no commitment to protecting the basic rights of local communities. Cultural exploitation and deterioration results from ecotourism. As towns grow to accommodate an influx of visitors, original residents often lose pasture and crop land. Instead of remaining in their traditional occupations, they are frequently forced to take low-paying service jobs in hotels, restaurants and shops. Their cultural practices can become fodder to tourists' entertainment, eroding their traditional importance and meaning.

- Take for eg what happened in Cordillera, Philippines – where the indigenous Kankanaeys' sacred community was violated with irresponsible ecotourists who vandalized their caves with graffiti and desecrated their traditional burial grounds. The community is also facing pollution concerns caused by littering and improper waste disposal at hotels.
- A more recent violent example is that of Ambolong village in Batangas Province, Philippines where 250 people were evicted from their homes by ecotourism developers.

No, ecotourism is not the worst solution to environmental problems.

A1 Ecotourism, more than anything else, brings more direct social and economic benefits to local people – it provides sustainable income for local communities. At the same time, ecotourism respects local cultures, supporting their human rights. Ecotourism today strives to support human rights, economic empowerment and democratic movements in host countries. Ecotourism allows countries and communities to build their economy without harming the environment. This means that local wildlife can thrive and visitors can enjoy untouched destinations. Ecotourism aims to reduce the environmental impact that comes with mass tourism. This includes using locally available, often traditional and at other times recycled materials and infrastructures that are environmentally friendly and that fit with traditions and sensibilities of local cultures. Many nature parks impose strict regulations in limiting the traffic and encourages acceptable behavior of tourists. Many ecotourism parks are now using renewable energy and to carefully dispose of waste. Culturally, ecotourism today more than anything else, respects local communities and traditions. Measures have been taken to alleviate the exploitative aspects of leisure travel and to benefit, rather than damage the local communities. Where regular tourism efforts return about 20 percent of revenue to local communities almost all the revenue generated by ecotourism programs goes back into those communities. Local indigenous population in these areas all support ecotourism and find it useful as a means of survival. Locals are also being employed in running the nature parks. As well as providing an income for staff who work at ecotourism sites, ecotourism allows them the opportunity to receive training in skills that can transfer to other areas of employment. All this can bring more substantial sources of revenue that locals can use to lift their communities out of poverty.

- In addition, many of the world's most beautiful natural sites also happen to exist in impoverished countries, such as Ecuador, the Philippines, Brazil, Guyana, Nepal, Sri Lanka and Madagascar. Ecotourism efforts in these countries help provide economic growth there – even more than typical tourism.

A2 Ecotourism really helps educate and bring awareness to people to save our natural wildlife habitats and ecosystems from disappearing. It is the best way. Ecotourism increases moral of the tourists to the environment and many of them begin to live an environmentally conscious lifestyle. Ecotourism does help protect natural habitats and pristine environments. Avoiding ecological degradation is a vital component of ecotourism. The main idea behind ecotourism is to educate tourists about conservation efforts in fragile natural areas, while also offering travelers a chance to experience those areas firsthand. People who once poached, felled and farmed or supported development of wilderness would instead become its ambassadors. Eco-tourists gain knowledge of ecosystems, biology and the geology of specific natural locations, which in turn informs them of conservation efforts. Through visiting nature reserves, seeing animals in their native habitats and meeting members of local communities, travelers can increase their awareness of the importance of conserving resources and avoiding waste. Respecting the native wildlife and vegetation, and refusing to purchase items made from endangered species, such as tortoise shell or ivory, supports natural resource sustainability. They are encouraged to live more sustainably and they can also increase their understanding of and sensitivity toward other cultures. When ecotourists return home, they spread the message to their families, friends and co-workers.

A3 Ecotourism is not the WORST solution to environmental problems as the negative effects of tourists activities on wildlife are over-reported and misrepresented. The real culprits to environmental problems are humans. Human irresponsibility and inaction is really the bigger problem. Individuals, societies and lack of responsibility on the part of governments is far worse.

- According to the United Nations, overall, the earth suffers from land degradation; biodiversity loss; air, land and water pollution; and the effects of climate change—and must prevent and manage further risks and disasters. Without changes on the part of humans, the situation looks bleak for all of its inhabitants. Biodiversity loss and land degradation can be stopped by changes in consumption, agricultural practices, and redistribution of food. Meeting carbon reduction goals also will reduce air pollution, which now prematurely kills between six and seven million people a year! (UN Report on the Environment, March 2019). Governments are also not doing much to tackle climate change. Despite the many protocols we have had in the past – not much is being done by richer countries to tackle environmental problems. The failure of the recent COP21 attests to this. The recent debacle on the part of the government to tackle the Australian bush fires also comes to mind. Australians are angry at the prime minister's handling of the crisis and failure to take action on climate change (Aljazeera, 20 Jan 2020).

8. 'It does not pay to be kind.' How far is this true in your society?

Analysis

The question assumes that there is no value in kindness – that showing kindness is somehow a weakness, crutch and something that is at odds with survival and success in the context of your society. Good scripts will look at the role of kindness in the context of society, with each paragraph having clear and distinct characteristics of society, considering the perspectives of different stakeholders. It is also important to go beyond proving the presence of kindness (i.e. that Singaporeans are kind/ not kind) and to focus the discussion on whether it is beneficial/ valuable.

In this answer scheme, 'your society' is Singapore. Foreign students may write about their own country.

Clarification of terms:

Does not pay: not beneficial, perhaps even damaging or detrimental to oneself

Kind: On an individual level, it could be little acts of kindness, and being nice/ thoughtful to those around you. On a societal level, this could be the culture of graciousness in society.

Possible points and examples

It does not pay to be kind in Singapore

A1 Career progression In our competitive and kiasu society, kindness is not a valued trait and may even be seen as a weakness.

Sample paragraph:

One could argue that in our competitive and kiasu society, kindness is not a valued trait and may even be seen as a weakness, especially where our career is concerned. Singaporeans are not only competitive, with a strong desire to succeed and trump others, we are also kiasu (singlish for fear of losing). This quintessential Singaporean trait involves comparing oneself with others, which adds unnecessary stress and pressure to do better than others. As such, in our result-oriented work culture which prizes efficiency above all else, success is tied to one's ability to be productive and efficient. Showing graciousness to colleagues has taken the back-seat, and could even make one seem like a push-over. After all, people are appraised based on their ability to successfully and competently complete their own work, and not on the way they relate to others or how much they have helped their colleagues. As said by Mike Bechtle, "People buy books on how to be healthy, wealthy, popular, and balanced. But few people are rushing out to buy books on how to be kind. In our competitive world, we seem to think kindness would keep us from achieving greatness." In fact, according to a 2016 'Working in Asia' survey conducted by Roffey Park, forty per cent of Singapore workers polled named office politics as a major stressor, clearly indicating that kindness is absent in the workplace. Hence, it seems that the ever-efficient Singapore workplace is a grim and stressful place, where kindness is absent and has no value.

A2 Personal loss to finances/ safety The gullible Singaporean is often a victim of fraud, and it clearly does not pay to be kind. Evidence shows that people in Singapore are not doing enough to help the needy – donations to charities in Singapore is only 0.6 percent of the nation's gross domestic product, compared with 2 percent in the United States. Even the wealthy can do more – only five of the Forbes 50 list of Singaporeans are known to have foundations. This is because those who are kind and donate to charity run the risk of being a victim of charity fraud.

- In 2005, in one of Singapore's largest charity scandals, the National Kidney Foundation's CEO TT Durai was found to have under-declared the amount of funds that the charity possessed, and exaggerated the number of patients under NKF's care to get more donations – all to fund his extravagant lifestyle (including the installation of a set of gold-plated taps in his toilet).
- In 2009, Founder and former chief executive of Ren Ci Hospital Shi Ming Yi was also found guilty of fraud and misappropriating funds.
- In 2013, a programme called "Singapore young Hearts charity" for TTSH was found to be a fund-raising scam.

- Recently in 2019, Crisis Centre (Singapore) received a charity suspension order as the charity's governance, record-keeping practices and accountability were suspicious. All these scandals clearly show that being kind and generous is synonymous to being gullible (easy to 'tio pian' in Singlish).
- In 2014, Yong Kiam Khim, who is medically certified with neurological conditions that gives him walking problems, molested a 16-year-old girl who helped him cross the road

It pays to be kind in Singapore

A1 Awards Policies and measures put in place in Singapore suggests that the government and society at large believe in the value of kindness in society, and that being kind has tangible benefits – the reputation of kindness is acknowledged and celebrated. Aside from being a salad bowl of cultures, Singapore is also a highly densely populated country. Were there to be fractious relations among people in Singapore, the impact on the rest of the country would likely result in a greater impact than if similar incidents had occurred elsewhere. Social harmony, therefore, has been recognised as a bedrock to the nation's continued success. This is why, at the national level, there is the Singapore Kindness Movement (SKM) to spread the positive influence of kindness. There are also annual National Kindness Awards, such as The National Kindness Award - Transport Gold which recognises service staff in the Transport Industry who had displayed exemplary service and gracious behaviour during their course of work.

- 1500 students recognised at Kindness Awards in 2017: example, Cadburina Ng and her fellow cadets from Red Cross Youth who initiated a five month-long campaign called The Silver project which debunked myths about dementia
- Kindness Badge Award: a mark of distinction awarded to students of Uniformed Groups who have completed tasks or projects that promote kindness and graciousness amongst their peers, within their schools, and to their families and communities.

A2 Socially accepted As there are increasing calls for Singapore to be a gracious society, people are shaming those who display ungracious behaviour. Thus, being kind is seen to be an expectation and, while one may not be socially rewarded for being kind, at least they will not be ostracised or criticised. Singaporeans who have reared their ugly heads to situations have been heavily criticised by society (especially the online community).

- E.g. the backlash when a young couple was caught by citizen journalists at a food establishment in Toa Payoh berating an apologetic elderly man for mistakenly taking their seats,
- E.g. Seat shaming of individuals for not giving up the priority seats in the trains/ buses on social media

A3 Benefits within the workplace Even the most successful companies today are recognising the benefits of kindness - improved work environment, enhanced employees' physical, mental and emotional health. Psychological studies show that people will be more willing to work with us, and are more likely to do us favours when we are in need if we are kind. A Harvard Business School study found that happy workers perform their jobs better in a team. The study also found that supervisors can improve employee happiness if they are fair, collaborative and open. Singaporean workers are traditionally known for being disengaged and so there is greater emphasis on advocating kindness within the workplace so that companies can have staff who are emotionally more invested in their work.

- In the Singapore workplace, initiatives such as Kindness@Work have taken root. They aim to create a happier and more gracious workplace, like in A*STAR, schools and the ITE's, charities like the Children's Cancer Foundation, hospitals like Khoo Teck Puat Hospital, hotels, and the list goes on.
- Big banks like DBS, OCBC and Standard Chartered Banks not only reward their employees financially when they reach milestone service years, but also experientially by arranging in-house wellness, exercise, mindfulness and other enrichment activities.
- Even smaller companies like the environmentally-friendly packaging company, Greenpac Singapore, generously reward their employees with annual overseas trips, and encourage community service, e.g., tie-ups with Lions' Befrienders projects, even during company time. Employees of such kind organisations report higher levels of

willingness to report to work, to meet with their colleagues, lower levels of tension and conflicts that can be solved through a kind word here and there. They also report higher levels of satisfaction and lower stress levels when they have more fun at work. It seems, then, that regardless of the line or nature of work, organisations in Singapore are starting to pay more attention to the value of kindness and its benefits.

A4 Personal benefits It is scientifically proven that being kind brings about astonishing personal benefits to one's health and emotional well-being. Research has found that kindness encourages increased health and increased emotional well-being in the following ways:

- *Increases Energy Levels.* Acts of kindness release a hormone called serotonin which generates a feeling of calmness and can even boost self-esteem. In one Berkeley study, almost 50 percent of participants reported feeling stronger and having more energy after helping others, with reports of greater feelings of calmness and enhanced self-esteem also predominant.
- *Increases Positive Perspectives.* Kindness also encourages the release of oxytocin which encourages optimism, lowers blood pressure, and promotes cardiovascular health.
- *Increases Well-Being.* When you are kind, serotonin is released into your system. Serotonin is the 'feel good' chemical in our brain that generates happiness.
- *Helps people live longer.* Christine Carter, author of Raising Happiness; In Pursuit of Joyful Kids and Happier Parents, writes: People 55 and older who volunteer for two or more organizations have an impressive 44 percent lower likelihood of dying early, and that's after sifting out every other contributing factor, including physical health, exercise, gender, habits like smoking, marital status and many more.

