



**Raffles Institution**  
**2025 Year 6 Term 1 Paper 2 Assignment**  
**Adapted from 2008 Cambridge Paper 2**  
**General Certificate of Education Advanced Level**  
**Higher 1**

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**GENERAL PAPER**

**8881/02**

Paper 2

INSERT

**1 hour 30 minutes**

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**READ THESE INSTRUCTIONS FIRST**

This Insert contains the passages for comprehension.

## THE PAST

**Passage 1.** *Lee Min Yen takes the view that the study of the past is pointless.*

- 1 Most people know two things about Henry Ford. He built the first mass-produced popular car and famously wrote in 1916: 'History is more or less bunk...we want to live in the present...'. Though they would probably say 'rubbish' instead of the slang word of Ford's time, his sentiments would be echoed by generations of bored schoolchildren stuffed with dates and 'sources' and 'consider-the-causes-and-effects-of' essays. 5
- 2 Historians often claim that they look backward in order to show the rest of us the way forward. Bunk! Paradoxically, the only lesson to be learnt from history is that there are no lessons to be learnt from history. The daily interactions of the billions of people on our planet – not to speak of the equally unpredictable natural happenings on and over its surface – produce an infinitely complex web of causes and effects which are wholly unrepeatable. You often hear it said that we should keep alive the memory of former conflicts and atrocities to prevent them happening again. I don't think so. The descendants of former aggressors and victims happily visit each other's countries with no feelings of guilt or resentment about their ancestors' history. As someone said: 'The past is a foreign country; they do things differently there.' 10 15
- 3 The history of the very word 'history' is revealing. It originally referred to myths and legends but it gradually changed to refer to a person's perspective of actual happenings. However, if the intention is to refer solely to fiction in today's context, the word 'story' will be more apt. But is there really any difference? The further we get from the past, the more historians have to speculate and fill the gaps with probabilities, theories, rhetoric and pure invention. It's entertaining stuff but let's not pretend that history is anything more than stories based on facts. Even the details of events occurring within living memory, such as the tragic deaths of Princess Diana and President Kennedy, are still hotly disputed, despite the mass of evidence that has accumulated around them, and these facts are subject to different interpretations according to the prejudice of the commentator. 20 25
- 4 All history is biased. Every age, every country, rewrites history to suit its needs – at worst by falsifying the record, as in the fictional world of Orwell's book *1984* or the reality of the Nanjing Massacre, or by selection and omission to justify current policies and suit the prevailing climate of ideas. This is harmless enough, but it becomes dangerous when distorted and partial history becomes the basis of propaganda to whip up nationalist or religious hatreds. 30
- 5 Yesterday has happened – it's a safe place to be. If you are a timid, cautious, unadventurous sort of person, take up history. You can meander round museums, or ruminate in ruins, and you won't get mugged or blown up. But life is not for the fainthearted. We don't know what will happen tomorrow: it may bring something dreadful, it may offer something exciting and wonderful. But whatever it is, history won't help us to cope with it. In this extraordinary century, which will be quite unlike anything that has gone before, we need to focus all our faculties on the way ahead. 35

**Passage 2.** *Anna Banatvala thinks everyone should take an interest in the past.*

- 1 Everything that has ever happened is history – the past. It begins with the origins of our solar system, the birth and physical changes of our planet and the evolution of life forms on its surface, and extends to the headlines in this morning's newspaper. Perhaps it would be a little presumptuous for historians to claim all this 'past' as their field of study. In fact, we are happy to leave whole areas of it to the likes of astronomers, geologists and zoologists who investigate what is sometimes called 'natural' history while we confine our attention to 'human' history. Not everyone is fortunate enough to be able to devote their lives to this study. But I firmly believe that everyone should have some knowledge of the past, as members of a family, as citizens in a community or as 21<sup>st</sup> century inhabitants of planet Earth. 5 10
- 2 There has never been a better time, and never a more urgent need, to explore our past than exists today. Technologies such as aerial mapping, carbon dating, thermal imaging and deep-sea submersibles afford historians far greater opportunities to recover the distant past than the crude shovels and diving bells of their predecessors. Furthermore, the use of advanced technology to store, catalogue and disseminate archival evidence more efficiently is stimulating new interpretations of the history of our planet. 15
- 3 'Interpreting' the past is, in fact, the essential business of the historian, who is responding to one of the most fundamental of human instincts: the desire to discover – or indeed impose – some kind of order on the seemingly haphazard ebb and flow of happening. Is there a discernible movement towards an ever-improving condition of the human race, which may be divinely planned or simply the inevitable outcome of a material process of evolution? Has the course of world events been primarily influenced by the acts of gifted individuals, be they ruthless conquerors or saintly visionaries, whose words and deeds have changed the world map and inspired the beliefs and daily lives of succeeding generations? Is our history determined for us by climatic, topographical and economic forces which dictate what we do and what we are? Or is history an endless cycle of recurring – and therefore predictable – events according to the dominance of negative, feminine, dark Yin or its Yang opposite? 20 25
- 4 Whether or not we find a satisfying explanation of the past, our study satisfies another basic need – curiosity. It is present in our desire to find out about our 'family and the place where we live. According to how we spend our leisure, we might be interested in the histories of jazz, or of football, or of food. Always we ask, "What came before this?" Put together, these various stories amount to the cultural history of the particular society we live in, and this shared knowledge of what our predecessors thought and did in their everyday lives is essential if we are to have a sense of common identity. 30 35
- 5 Reassuringly, we discover that underneath superficial differences earlier generations were very like ourselves, and it is this continuity of human experience which is the basis of another of the benefits of history: given that similar causes produce similar results, it can teach us how to avoid their mistakes and inspire us to emulate their triumphs. For the beneficial changes they brought about teach us that we do not have to put up with things as they are, and this gives us the humility to recognize that our greater knowledge does not make us any wiser than our ancestors. 40
- 6 Technology is rapidly knitting the earth's inhabitants together more intricately, but they remain far from united politically. We are still strangers to each other in our local ways of life established before the annihilation of distance. We must grow into something like a single family or we will annihilate ourselves, and it is only by understanding our various 'family' histories that we can learn to live together in tolerance and mutual respect. 45

Passage 3. *An academic writes about History.*

- 1 We seek to understand the past by determining and ordering ‘facts’; and from these narratives we hope to explain the decisions and processes which shape our existence. History is so compelling a subject because it encapsulates themes that expose the human condition in all of its guises and that resonate throughout time.
- 2 History can be a powerful tool; it has shaped identities, particularly at the national level. 5 Moreover, it grants those who control the narrative the ability to legitimise or discredit actions, events and individuals in the present. Yet to marshal history and send it into battle merely to serve the needs of the present is misuse and abuse. History should never be a weapon at the heart of culture wars. Sadly, once again, it is. History is clumsily wielded by those who deliberately seek to impose a clear ideological agenda. 10 This only promotes poor, one-dimensional understandings of the past and continually diminishes the utility of the field.
- 3 Today, we no longer study ‘the past for the past’s sake’. Instead, history is often seen as a problem-solving discipline that might even distil patterns and lessons to guide – but never to determine – our responses to the challenges faced. History is useful in telling 15 us how we got ‘here’. We look to the past to better understand the myriad, complicated ways in which our present world came to exist. In fact, historical knowledge emancipates us, opening up spaces of critical and imaginative possibility for our future.