

CONTINUOUS WRITING

I. Narrative Writing

The purpose is to tell a story or recount an event. The narrative shows characters' motivations, thoughts and feelings, and what has happened to them. In personal recounts, personal experiences are retold in the first person. In stories, the setting, characters and plot are developed to convey different points of view about a fictional world.

- A Personal Recounts
- B Stories

II. Descriptive Writing

The focus is on describing a place, a person, a situation or an event in detail. Close attention is given to specific details, such as information obtained through the five senses. The objective is to give the reader a vivid mental picture of the subject.

III. Expository Writing

The purpose is to inform or explain. The writer may give information about a topic, investigate an idea or analyse an issue. Examples may be used to elaborate on key points.

IV. Argumentative Writing

The aim is to persuade the reader to accept the writer's position on an issue. Arguments are presented and supported by relevant examples and evidence. The writer's position is often restated in the conclusion.

1 Describe some memorable things that happened to you recently. Why were they meaningful to you?

The last few weeks had been a whirlwind of activity and emotional ups-and-downs. Both my academic results and sporting achievements were a source of tremendous joy and pride to me. Of course, the road to such accomplishments was not without stumbling blocks.

The first thing that had happened was my school team's participation in the National Schools' Hockey Championship. I was part of the team which trained very hard in anticipation of our final clash with traditional rival Greencrest Secondary School. We knew from the start that it would be a difficult match. Our rivals boasted at least six state representatives in the game and we were understandably daunted. Yet, we trained consistently for long stretches every day, hoping that the standard we reached would be sufficient to defeat Greencrest.

On the much-anticipated day, we stepped onto the pitch with great trepidation. Initially, our performance suffered due to our nervousness and anxiety. Luckily for us, we managed to shake them off and play at the standard we were capable of. The match eventually ended in a 3-0 win for us. We were jubilant! Overwhelmed with emotion, I had gone down on my knees in tears. My team-mates were jumping onto each other on the pitch, yelling hysterically. Hoisting the trophy above us on the winners' rostrum was a fine moment of pride and exhilaration. It was a moment I would never forget.

The next few days saw me going through the motions of school in a dreamlike state. I could not help but feel a wonderful sense of well-being. The delirium was further buoyed up when my teacher-in-charge of hockey came to me and informed me that I had been selected to train with the national team. I was thrilled to bits! Imagine being told that you are good enough to play for the country! I was in seventh heaven, my active imagination already creating scenarios of me weaving my way past defenders of traditional powerhouses in hockey to score the all-too-crucial winning goal. However, when training actually started a week later, my illusions were laid to permanent rest. Training with the national team meant a first-hand acquaintance with the superior skills and fitness level of experienced players. I was daunted, but not defeated. I resolved to put in more effort to polish up my skills so as to don the national colours one day. Instead of being demoralised, I was motivated. It felt very good to know that I would have a hand in carving out my own destiny in hockey.

However, as a result of my eagerness to prove myself in hockey, I ended up neglecting my studies. Instead of being one of the top three scorers in the midyear examinations as usual, I barely clinched the second-last spot. When I saw my name so far down on the list, my body convulsed with horror. How could this be? I had expected a slide in the results, but certainly not a plunge! My face was flushed with embarrassment and my hands shook as I read my report book.

After school, I ran all the way home and threw myself onto my bed. It took four whole hours for me to cry all that anguish and humiliation out of my system. After that catharsis, I got up and resolved to rectify matters. I sat at my desk and proceeded to work out a timetable for revising my school work. The next week before the re-examination was gruelling. But I could stand tall at the end of it because I had not only managed to regain my previous academic standard but also improved on my ranking. I was now second in class!

In the space of a mere few weeks, I found myself in the heights of glory and euphoria as well as in the depths of despair and fatigue. Looking back, I feel that it had all been worth it. I proved to myself that I was able to muster the courage and determination to overcome obstacles. This confidence that I gained would stand me in good stead in the future.

2

Write about an incident in which you were a victim of unfairness. What did you learn from this incident?

It was one of those sunny mornings when I was in a particularly good mood. My mother had just given me \$400 for my daily expenses for the week that she would be away in China with my father visiting her ailing grandaunt. I was in seventh heaven just contemplating the things I could do with the \$400. If I survived on bread and butter the whole week, I would have a windfall of \$300 to buy the latest computer games! It was certainly a great way to begin the day.

The physical education lesson was, as usual, a gruelling session of endless running and weight training. I could hardly catch my breath as I trudged back wearily to the classroom. As I neared the classroom, I heard a loud commotion coming from it and quickly rushed in. My classmates were gathered around Tommy's table as the latter ransacked through books, stationery as well as some personal effects. He was in obvious distress. Tommy had always been a popular boy in class. Not only was he bright and well-mannered, he also came from a wealthy family that provided him with all he could ask for. Yet, he chose to share everything he had with us, never minding the fact that he always provided while we received.

As such, upon seeing his anxiety, I rushed immediately to his side. My classmates quickly told me that Tommy had lost the money he had brought as a donation to the welfare home that we were supposed to visit that afternoon. Understanding the situation, I proposed that we organise a search around the classroom and inform the class teacher as soon as possible. Taking my suggestions seriously, the class immediately took action. In no time at all, Miss Soh rushed to the classroom to take control of the situation. She decided to run a search through everyone's bag. We quickly stood by our tables and emptied the contents of our bags onto the table. When it came to my turn, I diligently took out all my possessions for inspection. My wallet was the last item to be checked and as Miss Soh took out the \$400 from it, the class fell into a hushed shock.

Up till then, I had no idea that the amount lost was exactly \$400. Had I not been aware of my own innocence, even I would have agreed that the evidence was incriminating enough to indict me. Everyone stared at me in horror. Miss Soh was triumphant — pleased that her efforts at flushing out the thief had borne fruit. In a loud and harsh voice, she demanded to know where the money had come from. I told her the truth, which obviously fell on deaf ears. She appeared not to have heard anything that I had said, choosing instead to dwell on the 'facts' of the matter. She proclaimed loudly that I had been caught red-handed, dismissing my story as ludicrous in view of the fact that my family was not well-off and could not possibly afford to give me \$400. She also went on to elaborate on the evils of envy, implying that I had stolen from Tommy because I was envious of him. All this while, I was struck dumb by her words, amazed at the conjectures that she had come up with based on the \$400 found in my wallet. The situation was worsened by the unfortunate fact that my parents were en route to China and could not come forward to corroborate my story.

By this time, the whole class was staring incredulously at me, obviously in full accord with the teacher's allegations. I was appalled and terrified. I could feel the jaws of misguided justice closing around my neck and struggled against it. I kept protesting my innocence, trying to drown out their accusations with the sheer volume of my voice. But it was to no avail.

The principal was called in to handle the situation. He promptly decided that the evidence against me was damning enough to warrant an immediate suspension or expulsion once my parents returned from their trip. I was devastated. How could they decide on my guilt without even trying to verify my story? Even a phone call to my parents was considered too much trouble for the school. Instead, they chose to concentrate on consoling Tommy and placating his parents. I knew then that my average background was the reason why my words carried less weight than Tommy's distress. It was a sobering experience, educating me on the realities of life.

The entire week was spent in a state of confusion. My parents were unfortunately uncontactable. I kept to myself a lot, choosing not to leave the house at all. I lost a great deal of weight, since I was subsisting only on bread and butter. The \$400 had been confiscated by the school as 'evidence', leaving me only the loose change around the house to buy things with. Humiliation and anger were my constant companions during that week. None of my classmates contacted me, not even those who were my buddies. Obviously, the stink of being a thief was too potent for any friendship to overcome.

My parents finally returned a week later. They rushed to clarify matters with the school once they realised what had happened. The school authorities, instead of feeling apologetic, chose instead to place the blame squarely on what they called my "inability to put the situation across clearly". My parents were infuriated. They lodged a complaint against the school with the Ministry of Education. The matter was finally resolved when the principal and Miss Soh were chastised for their mishandling of the situation and I was officially cleared of all charges. But to this day, it still hurts to know that to certain people, wealth speaks louder than the truth.

3

Describe an amusing incident that happened in your family.

It arrived in a nondescript-looking brown box, strangely out of place in our well-equipped and modern kitchen. We were all curious, wondering what could be in it. Our mother refused to open it until our father was home from work. According to her, it was a gift from our father and should not be unveiled unless he was present. Itching with curiosity and almost crying out in frustration, my siblings and I spent our time sitting in front of the box and surreptitiously poking at it whenever our mother was not looking. The clock ticked away, so slowly it seemed, until it finally reached 5.45 pm. We whooped with delight because our father was usually home by then. Almost immediately, the door opened and the long-awaited person walked in. He saw our eager faces and laughed.

“Well, let’s open it, shall we?” Our father said with a glint in his eye. We swarmed around the box and proceeded to tear away the brown wrapping. Our eager efforts revealed a metal white box within a cardboard one with colourful pictures of cooked food pasted all over it. Our father then proudly explained that it was an oven that cooked food in the shortest time possible. All we had to do was to put the food in and hit some buttons for the delicious-looking dishes pictured on the box to materialise. We were overawed. How could a little box like that do all that? Our mother had to slave for hours over the stove before all that could be done. It was truly magic!

Pleased that he had our undivided attention, our father then proceeded to demonstrate the ‘magic’ of the machine. He took out some pieces of raw meat from the refrigerator and poured some sauce over them. Putting them in a microwave-safe container (which he proudly produced with a flourish), he placed it squarely on the turntable in the machine, closed the door shut and pressed a button. Fascinated by the confidence with which he did all that, we stood stock-still and waited with bated breath. The machine was amazingly silent, I thought. It was surely a wondrous machine. After a mere three minutes, our father took out the container and proudly laid it on the table for all to see. In great eagerness, we clamoured to be the first ones to get the first look.

Swimming in a sea of dark-coloured gravy, the pieces of raw meat stared back defiantly at us. We could feel the air of anticipation disintegrating into palpable disappointment. Our father’s face flushed crimson as he spluttered to explain away the inconvenient embarrassment. Suddenly, a hoot of laughter escaped our usually stoical mother. We turned to her, shocked to see her collapsing in hysterical giggles as she gestured at first towards our father and then the machine. One by one, the rest of us succumbed to the irony of the situation (even our father). The house rocked with our unrestrained laughter.

Some time later, we sat down and tried to decipher the technical jargon found on the instruction sheet. At the end of the valiant hour, we decided collectively that the machine was definitely not worth the grief that we were putting ourselves through. Our mother got up quietly and quickly lowered the machine into its box, taking care to close it securely. Then, our father took the box and stored it neatly into the furthest corner of the storeroom. There the box remained until we moved to a new house many years later.

At the new house, we gathered together and opened the box. As soon as the microwave oven came into sight, the memory of that day so many years ago came back to us. In no time at all, we were once again collapsing over each other in laughter. We decided there and then that the microwave oven would never be thrown away; it had too much sentimental value.

4 Write about an occasion when you felt embarrassed. What changed after this incident?

I had always thought that Jamie hated me because I was everything that he was not. While he was the basketball captain and star player on the school team, I could only lay claim to the dubious honour of being the only one in the class to fail the annual fitness test. As a result, everyone saw me as the resident nerd. Jamie, who used to be my childhood friend, took to ignoring me although we were in the same class. There were times when I would reminisce about the happy times we spent together wrestling and playing cops-and-robbers in the backyard of our homes. However, these happy memories were always erased by the realisation that we were now alien to each other. But this was all to change.

I was always the bookish one, and enjoyed going to the local bookstore to browse through the latest publications and paperbacks. It was always my habit to sit at a quiet corner of the crowded bookstore and enjoy a tranquil afternoon reading. Even the store attendants were used to my presence in the store.

I was again at my cosy corner in the store one day when a young and good-looking girl came up and flopped down onto the seat beside me. I was not particularly disturbed by her presence, being totally engrossed in the exciting sci-fi paperback that I was reading. But after a while, it was getting difficult to ignore her because she kept making clearly audible sounds and disturbing my peace. If she was not sighing loudly over the magazine that she was poring over, she was munching noisily on a huge packet of crisps. I tried gesturing to her to show her that she was disturbing me but to no avail. Either she was too insensitive or she preferred to ignore me. Frustrated, I finally resorted to spelling out my dissatisfaction clearly to her.

"Excuse me. Could you please not make so much noise? I'm trying to read here," I said in as amiable a tone as I could. But my efforts at being pleasant backfired. Clearly incensed at my audacity, she started railing loudly at me for what she saw as my unreasonable behaviour. I was astounded. Never did I expect to be so embarrassed over such a civil request. Her shouts eventually drew a small crowd who, unaware of the true circumstances, began pointing their fingers at me in undisguised disapproval. After all, it did sound as if we were having a lovers' spat! Totally flabbergasted by her behaviour and increasingly embarrassed by the awkward situation I was in, I looked around for some avenue of escape.

It came in the most unexpected form. Jamie's voice drowned out the girl's railing and had the effect of shutting her up immediately. What he said was only one sentence, "Stop shouting at him when it's your fault for being so noisy in a bookstore." It must have been the icy tone with which he said it that shocked her. Or maybe it was simply the grim look that he shot in her direction. But whatever it was, he succeeded in making her feel embarrassed and she quickly left the bookstore. When there was nothing else to gawk at, the crowd dispersed. I turned to Jamie, grateful for his help. But all he said to me was, "No problem. I've always had to rescue you, right?" With that, he grinned and left the store. I was left speechless.

But since then, Jamie and I have enjoyed the same friendship that we used to have when we were mere boys.

5

Describe an occasion when something went missing at home. How did you and your family members feel?

When Granny realised that it was missing, she turned the entire house upside down in her frenzy to locate it. Everyone in the family caught on to her mood and also frantically turned out drawers to help her. But it was to no avail. It was truly missing. Like any self-respecting matron in a traditional Chinese household, Granny immediately started wailing her heart out to make her feelings clear.

'It' was actually a beautiful gold hairpin of the antique variety, so exquisitely crafted that it looked good enough to have adorned the empresses of centuries past. Inlaid with pearls of a rare luminosity, the hairpin was a much-treasured heirloom that represented, particularly for Granny, our family's aristocratic lineage. Its loss was akin to a slur on the family's impressive heritage, which we could not allow. It was not so much that we minded its physical loss; it was Granny's obvious trauma that prompted us not to cause her any distress. We resolved to search the whole house for it.

Three hours and fourteen willing helpers later, we still had not found the hairpin. Dispirited by our failure, we trooped back to the living room to report the bad news to Granny. Her pale face almost stilled our tongues but Father was incredibly brave. He went forward and took her limp hands in his, coaxing in a low whisper, which we could not hear. But the effect of his words was clear to all — Granny began wailing afresh and wringing her hands in earnest. We were so distraught that someone suggested that we redouble our efforts to find the hairpin.

Suddenly, Ah Siew, who was Granny's bondmaid since she was only two, rushed into the room to tell us that the family dog, Georgie, was seen burying something in the garden a few days back. As Georgie had free access to the entire house, it was likely that he had hidden the hairpin. What lent this conclusion weight was the fact that he was fond of dragging stuff out of the house to bury them in the garden. Father took control of the situation and assigned us to dig up the spots where Ah Siew vaguely thought she remembered Georgie digging at. Although her dim memory meant that there were a total of fourteen spots that we had to work on, we were nonetheless grateful to her for offering this clue. We set to work immediately, secretly glad to get away from Granny's hysteria.

We kept digging for the rest of the afternoon. The work was hard but everyone was exceptionally cheerful at the thought of finding the missing hairpin. If our enthusiasm was all it needed to locate the hairpin, we would definitely have found it hours ago. But obviously it was not enough. Even when darkness threatened to overwhelm us as dusk approached, we kept on digging, no longer doing so out of enthusiasm but frustration instead. Finally, we were forced to give up when we could not even clearly make out the ground that we were churning up.

However, the house was no refuge from our frustration. Granny's wails had given way to a cold sullenness. My sister, Jenny, finally started storming over to Granny to talk some sense into her. Before she could cross the distance to her, Jenny slipped on the carpet which sent her sprawling over the rest of the distance.

Suddenly, a yelp escaped her as she excitedly pointed at Granny's shawl. "The pin! The pin!" she shouted almost hysterically. We all stared at what she was pointing at. To our surprise, the hairpin was hooked onto the threads of Granny's shawl! We were so happy that we practically danced around Granny, who was herself almost delirious with joy. No one thought of chiding Granny for her carelessness — we were too happy that the near tragedy had come to an end.

6

Write about an occasion when you were defeated in a competition. What lesson did you learn?

I had always prided myself on my sharp tongue and witty retorts whether in class debates or casual arguments. Thus, when I was selected to represent the school in the national debate series, I was naturally supremely confident of my readiness for the task. Little did I know that this would turn out to be one of the most important lessons in my life.

The run-up to the finals was a breeze for my team. We were all good speakers who had the benefit of an experienced teacher who trained us well. But in the team, I was undoubtedly the most outstanding speaker. In each of the rounds that I debated in, the judges had unanimously selected me as the best speaker. This meant that my confidence was at an all-time high by the time we found ourselves with one week to train before the finals. I had no reason to even think that I would not be voted the overall best speaker for the debate series. Unfortunately, this meant that I began to get arrogant and started putting on airs in front of my teammates. I would scoff at what I saw as their pathetic rebuttals and poor debating style. I saw myself as the natural debater who would be let down by their bad performance. As the finals drew near, I became more and more dissatisfied with my team. I began missing practices, much to the panic of my teammates and the frustration of my teacher. They had no choice but to rely on me to pull through on the day of the finals.

The day of the finals dawned bright and fine. I practically skipped to the venue, feeling the exhilaration of being able to finally show off my debating prowess. But the reality was not something that I had ever imagined. My absence from the practices had created a rift within my team. We could not seem to work seamlessly like we did in the previous rounds. Instead, our coordination was so bad that even our school supporters were shamed into silence. When it was my turn to conclude as the last speaker of the team, an expectant hush fell over the hall. Everyone knew that I was touted the one most likely to win the coveted overall best speaker for the series.

As I launched into my speech, I knew that things were very wrong. I was hesitant in my elucidation of the issue, realising too late that what I was saying sounded incoherent as it did not follow logically from my other team speakers' points. The puzzled looks on the faces of the judges almost drove me to tears. I had to struggle on with my speech, trying to hold back the hot tears that threatened to overflow. I saw immediately the stupid and arrogant oaf that I had been. I realised too late that I could have been a really good speaker if only I had not been over-confident. As I sat down after speaking my piece, the tears broke their banks and scalded my cheeks. I knew that we had lost the title. Never before had I ever felt so alone, or so rightly so.

Suddenly, a reassuring hand clasped mine. I looked up into the kindly face of my teammate, the one whom I had earlier condemned as a moron to her face. She gestured that it was all right and that I should not feel bad. That made me feel even worse. Feeling like a scum, the tears now came unabashed. My other two teammates came over and hugged me. Together, they hoped to stem my feelings of regret and pain even though I had rightfully deserved everything and more. In fact, I had cost them the title. I sobbed, "I'm sorry" was all I could say in my quavering voice. It felt worst as they had repaid my irresponsibility and haughtiness with kind words and comforting gestures. Even my teacher came over to give me a tight squeeze on the shoulder to say that all was forgiven. When we were called to receive the prize for the first runner-up position, we went up together as a team and bravely lifted the trophy to salute the cheers of our supporters. I finally realised what it was like to be a team.

Till today, I will never forget the trauma of defeat fashioned by my own hands or the sheer joy of knowing that I had support in my lowest moment. I went on to the next debate series and eventually clinched the title with the same team in the following year. I had learnt that no man is an island.

7

Who is the most ill-tempered person you know? Recount two incidents to show what he or she is like.

Sally has been my best friend since I was only five years old. She has the sweetest face in the world and the best manners any one has ever seen. Everyone who sees her is usually attracted by her demure figure. Little do they know that her appearance belies her true nature.

Sally is the product of the tough neighbourhood that she grew up in. The slums were certainly not the best place to spend her formative years, a truth that I saw for myself the first time she punched me in the face for refusing to give up my ice cream to her. I still remember that painful first encounter with her. I was five years old then and a pupil at Grace Nursery School — a rather prestigious playschool for young children. She was wandering about the neighbourhood and saw me buying an ice cream. She swaggered up to me and demanded that I gave up my ice cream. Of course I refused, receiving nothing less than a stinging punch. After that, she actually felt sorry when I started bawling right there and then. She took my hand and kept saying ‘sorry’ to me, which eventually succeeded in calming me down. In the end, we shared the ice cream and became fast friends.

I realised how different her family background was from mine when I visited her at the orphanage. She was one out of a few hundred children there, forced from young to use her fists to get enough food and clothing. While I had new clothes every so often, she had to make do with tattered sets since she was three. My parents saw that I was lonely and would welcome someone to play with. After much consideration, they adopted Sally and gave her all the advantages that money could buy. Sally was thrilled and very appreciative. She was especially keen on learning good manners, which she found very attractive. In the end, she grew up a charming and cultured young lady. But when she was riled, she would still forget herself and lose her temper.

I remember an incident in primary school when she actually started shouting vulgarities at a classmate because the latter had taken a pencil from my pencil case without permission. I had only one pencil and needed it for the writing practice that I had to do. Being rather spoilt, I started crying when I could not find the pencil. Sally was so distraught by my tears that she stormed around the classroom looking for my missing pencil. When she found it on Linda’s table, all hell broke loose. She started shouting at Linda, banging on the table and kicking her bag at the same time in her fury. The teacher came in just in time to witness Linda being slapped by Sally while the rest of us cowered in fear under our desks. It was only after my parents’ reassurance that they would ensure that Sally’s temper was kept in check, was Sally allowed to stay on in the school. Although I knew that Sally’s behaviour was wrong, I was grateful to her. She was looking out for me in her own way.

Since then, her temper has erupted a few other times, each time striking much fear into the hearts of her hapless targets. But she has always been easily forgiven after the storm has subsided because no one can resist her angelic face for long!

8

Describe how you felt during some incidents of bullying or harassment.

They were now laughing happily. Erased from their memory were the weeping and anguish they had gone through a few days before. I was shocked at the transformation. Was this what it meant to give in to the tyranny of the school gang led by Tom? Tom's gang had operated for as long as I could remember. They were always using their superior numbers to terrorise the other students into paying extortion money, giving up their seats, doing their homework for them and even buying food for them during recess.

The group I was watching had been Tom's victims just a few days ago. They were new students who had transferred from another school. Initially, I had thought that they would hold out against Tom's gang, seeing that they numbered seven as a group. I was sure that I had found kindred mates when I saw that they were determined not to be cowed. Each time Tom's group harassed them, they banded together even tighter and staved off the attacks. I was proud of them, as they made my resolve to hold out against the gang even stronger. I had been in their situation when I first came to the school two years ago. But up till now, I still resisted their attempts to cow me into joining their gang. I thought that this group of students would succeed as well, and rooted for them quietly.

But I was wrong. The frequent harassment by the gang proved too much for them. It was intolerable really, the taunts and physical bullying that the gang dished out in such intensity. The group finally caved in after a particularly terrifying encounter. Tom's gang had surrounded them at a back alley and proceeded to throw rotten fruit at them. Coupled with loud taunts and threats, the group finally capitulated and joined the gang. Now they were in high spirits, bullying the other students and feeling good being on the other side. It was sickening the way they were enjoying their 'power' over the other students, and I was overwhelmed with disappointment.

From then on, I had to sit by and watch them bask in the glory of their triumph over the other students, bullying them in the same way that they had been treated before. It was disgusting. I could not understand how they could bear to put others through the same experience that they had suffered. But they were not to enjoy such bullying for long. During a gang fight, they learnt the error of their ways. The fighting was particularly horrific, with a few of them seriously maimed by steel pipes and knives, while one member lost his life. I felt sorry that they had to learn their lesson in such a tragic way. In the end, the gang broke up, much to the joy of the other students. But it was a bitter way to know that I was right all along.

9

'A single decision can change someone's life.' Write about an occasion when you have found this to be true.

I knew that I had done the right thing, but it gave me no pleasure. I could tell myself a thousand times that I had warned him of the consequences and he had refused to listen, but to no avail. The terrible guilt that I felt did not tell me that I was right. I could not look him in the eye, not after I had told the teacher that my best friend had cheated in the examination.

Benjamin had been my best friend since we were in kindergarten. We shared the most wonderful memories of playing in the mud and learning the alphabet. If I erased him from my memories, there would be a huge void that cannot be filled. Yet, I had single-handedly destroyed his future.

Benjamin had always been an outstanding student and athlete. In fact, he was in the running this year for a scholarship awarded only to the best all-rounder. It was an honour that would ensure the awardee's entry into an elite college as well as an all-expenses-paid education. Although Benjamin's family was relatively well-to-do, he still coveted the scholarship because it was a prestigious way to cover his secondary school education.

But all his dreams were destroyed in one fell stroke when his father was killed in a tragic hit-and-run accident. His entire future was thrown into jeopardy as his father had been the sole breadwinner. His anguished mother fell gravely ill as she could not cope with the loss and few relatives were willing to help. With no income forthcoming, Benjamin had to find a job after school to keep the family going. He was the oldest child and in between school and work, he also found himself the guardian of his two younger siblings. As a result of this debilitating schedule, Benjamin had no time for his studies. Gradually, he found it difficult to even find time to revise his work.

In the end, Benjamin realised that winning the scholarship was more than just a matter of prestige; it became an issue of survival. If he won it, he would be given \$1200 a month to cover his expenses. This would go a long way towards helping the family survive. He resolved to work hard. However, fatigue overwhelmed him every night after his tiring job at the fast food outlet. He did manage to keep his family afloat but his dream of getting the scholarship seemed out of reach.

He confided in me just before the examination that he planned to cheat. It was a difficult decision for him, as by nature, he was a very honest person with a strong integrity. But this time, he felt that he was left with no choice. I knew that he was right; if he had the time and energy to study for the examination, he would certainly have excelled. Unfortunately, all the odds were stacked against him. But I could not condone his intention to cheat. I warned him that I would report him if he did that, but to no avail.

I agonised and fretted, but in the end, I made my decision. When I saw him surreptitiously copying from notes that he had written on the sleeve of his jacket, I reported him immediately. He was caught red-handed. The last time I saw my best friend, he had looked at me with unshed tears glistening in his eyes. I could not say anything. When he walked away, out of the life he had always known, my heart splintered into a thousand pieces. The path for him to excel academically was forever closed. The look of pure sorrow that he gave me then would haunt me for the rest of my life.

10

Describe an occasion when you explored unfamiliar grounds away from home. How did you feel?

In the highly-urbanised country I live in, the closest places to natural lushness are the small patches of man-made greenery decorating the many high-rise flats and office skyscrapers that dominate the landscape. Thus, it was quite an exciting prospect for me when my school organised a trip for the Boy Scouts to the Forest Research Institute of Malaysia during the June holidays.

The work at the institute focusses on the conservation of one of the last stretches of primary forest left in the world. In fact, the trees could be as old as a few hundred years! We were to spend a day there to learn about the work done and its implication on our lives in a world where resources are rapidly depleting. Once we reached the Institute, the natural surroundings held us spellbound. I had never seen such tall trees in my life or such a dense canopy above me. It was really awesome. I felt like a stranger to the land, unable to reconcile the experience with what I was used to back home.

We started the day at the institute by trekking through the dense forest. The trails were sometimes overgrown by roots and creepers, making it difficult for us to confidently cross the unknown terrain. We were obviously used to concrete slabs guiding our footsteps and road signs directing our way. Here, we could not tell one tree from another, or even distinguish if we had been through that path. Even the insects and little animals native to the forest were alien to us. In fact, we felt a strange mixture of confusion and excitement.

As we walked through the forest, we came upon some native tribes of Malaysia who still practised their traditional lifestyles in the forest. This was an opportunity to learn about various cultures that were peculiar to Malaysia. We were allowed to watch them cook their midday meal and witness how they made some of their traditional hunting weapons. It was an interesting experience.

The last highlight of the trek was the canopy walk, which meant crossing a distance of 300 metres on a thick rope bridge suspended more than 100 metres above ground level. It was really thrilling! I had a terrible fear of heights and the prospect of walking literally on air sent shivers up and down my back. I could feel myself shaking with fear and breaking out in cold sweat. In the end, I was forced to walk on the rope bridge as the alternative was walking back the way we came, which was a full two hours' walk! When I was suspended on the bridge, my exhilaration came as a surprise. Instead of being scared out of my wits, I actually felt a high. This was compounded by the sense of achievement I felt when I completed the walk.

The day at the institute was indeed a wonderful experience, despite the fact that the surroundings were strange to me. I had learnt a great deal about nature conservation and the way of life of the natives. At the end of the trek, a more valuable insight that I had gained was the self-knowledge that I could conquer my fears no matter how frightened I might have been.

11

Write about an occasion when you were offered good advice. What was your reaction to it?

When I was in Secondary 3, I was the pride of my school's football team. Not only was I lauded as an intelligent team player, I was also the undisputed top scorer in the schools' national tournament. As a result, I grew too big for my shoes and my inflated ego eventually caused my downfall as a rising football star.

At that time, I had an English Language teacher, Miss Soh, an elderly and rather dowdy lady. None of us took her seriously, but she certainly took her job seriously. In fact, she was so serious about her role as an educator that she took it upon herself to 'save' me. My results had always been among the top in the class, but this soon changed when I became 'addicted' to my morale-boosting victories on the football field and began neglecting my studies. Miss Soh was immediately alerted and began detaining me in school for extra lessons to ensure that I caught up with the rest of the class. But things did not change.

Finally, she sat me down one day and seriously spoke to me about my future. Her argument was that good results were necessary even if I was an undisputed star player on the school team. She advised me to work out my priorities and concentrate on passing the year instead of spending all my waking hours training on the field. While she talked to me seriously, I was secretly sneering at her ignorance. After all, what could she possibly know about playing football? I was not even doing my GCE 'O' Levels this year, so why was she making a big fuss. But to her, I was a model of contrition, nodding my head at the right times to allay her worries when I was actually trying to get her off my back. In the end, she was contented with my supposed remorse and decided that the detentions were no longer necessary.

After that session with Miss Soh, I went right back to my usual routine — trainings, trainings and more trainings. Each time I saw her along the corridors, I would run like a bullet to avoid her lecturing me on my poor performance in class. I still lived under the delusion that everything would turn out well because I was a star player. After all, surely they would take into consideration the fact that I had brought the school glory in football and promote me despite my poor results. In all my worst fears, I had never imagined that I would even come close to failing. But I did.

I was so preoccupied with my training that I totally neglected my studies. When the midyear exam results were released, I had failed all my subjects. It was a terrible blow to me, for I had never thought such a situation would happen to me. My problems were worsened when I was immediately suspended from the football team. In my fury at being treated so unfairly after all my contributions to the sport, I gloated over the fact that they would surely miss my presence on the field. Unfortunately, I was proven wrong when the school won the national championship, testifying to the fact that I was not indispensable after all.

After this incident, I worked hard at pulling my grades up and eventually managed to pass the exams. I also won back my place in the football team and swallowed my pride to approach Miss Soh with a sincere apology for my bad conduct. I had by now realised her kind intentions and my own foolishness. Her good advice had been ignored to my own detriment, but at least I could now say with pride that I had overcome my own weaknesses and come out stronger.

12

What do you consider to be your greatest success? Why does it mean a lot to you?

Many people my age would think of their greatest success as having topped the class in an examination or even winning a national sporting title. This is probably due to the fact that we have very little opportunity to explore other challenges since we are in a competitive education system. I was, however, lucky to have had the chance to do something meaningful by helping a classmate reform his ways. His success in overcoming his past is also my greatest success.

Since he became my classmate in Secondary One, Charles was known to all as the 'little terror of Palmsville Secondary'. Even years later when his skinny frame filled out to make him an imposing 6-footer, he was still known in awed whispers as the 'little terror'. Besides generating fear in us, Charles went on to bully and extort money from the rest of us. Soon, he became a member of the local street gang, which meant that his misdeeds simply became more audacious. His name alone struck terror in our hearts.

But where he was the 'king' in all the areas outside the classroom, in the classroom itself he was merely the dunce. Charles' academic studies suffered due to his frequent gang activities. It was not unusual to see him listless and yawning in class after having spent the entire night and early morning on the streets or at a coffee shop with his gang. At times like this, everyone kept out of his way for he was bound to be really hot-tempered.

But one day, the police rounded up Charles' gang after they had taken part in a gang fight. A member of the rival gang was seriously injured and it was discovered that Charles was one of those who had beaten him up. He was thrown into the lock-up for a few days while awaiting trial. Those were sobering days for him. For the first time, he felt real fear and regret. After the trial, he was released but was put on probation. This meant observing curfews and doing well in school or he would be put into a boys' home. Charles resolved to reform himself.

But it was easier said than done. His former gang cajoled and sometimes threatened him into joining them again. No one in school wanted to associate themselves with him due to his terrible reputation. But one day, I saw him in the toilet, tears brimming in his eyes as he stared at his test paper. He had failed the test again. I could hear him mumbling to himself that he had really tried to study hard but to no avail. My heart went out to him then and I saw him for the vulnerable child that he was. That was the beginning of our friendship.

I literally took him under my wing. Initially, people thought that I was probably coerced into hanging out with him, but my tenacity in initiating him into my circle of friends soon put those rumours to rest. For the first time, Charles could enjoy the simple pleasures of real friendship. He no longer needed to 'act tough' with his friends; with us, he could be the normal sixteen-year-old that he was. He began to feel confident about himself.

We also studied together after school, which resulted in a slow but steady improvement in his results. His former gang members would often come around to jeer at him for being a 'useless bookworm' but Charles withstood all their taunts. He was determined not to make a mess of his life again. When the year-end results were released, Charles' joy was immeasurable as he realised that he had finally achieved decent results for once. Instead of always hovering at the bottom of the rankings, he was now a respectable 25th in a class of 40. When he reached for my hand in a firm handshake to say 'thank you', I was the proudest of all. Helping someone else was so much more meaningful than merely getting good grades. Charles' improvement was really my greatest success.

13

Looking back over the past year, what was the most memorable event you witnessed, and why?

In the past year, many things happened to me which were memorable. I had scored very good results in school and had even been selected as a trainee for the national junior tennis team. But the one event that had indelibly imprinted itself on my memory was what happened after the death of David's father.

David and I had been best friends since we were in primary school. We shared the same interests and played the same games. In secondary school, we both tried out for the tennis team and were successful. In fact, he was the superior player and made it into the first team on the first try. I was a slow learner and made it into the same team only after several tries. David was also an excellent scholar and scored distinctions in his exams all the time. Although I was always in his shadow, I never felt a tinge of envy. I felt that he deserved to achieve the successes he had for he was a really talented person.

But just eight months ago, David's father passed away suddenly after a heart attack. The family was left destitute, as the father had been the sole breadwinner. Luckily for David, he was an only child and thus had to care only for his mother and himself. With the resolve and resourcefulness that I had always known him to have, David launched into a cycle of work, school and tennis that would have daunted anyone else.

He found a part-time job at a factory that required him to work from eight at night till three in the morning. To him, the mundane work of operating machines was a godsend as it provided him with the money to supplement his mother's meagre income as a factory operator in the day and office cleaner at night. After a few hours of sleep, he would be off to school where he kept himself awake purely with steely determination and discipline. His homework was done in between training hours, after which he would go home to prepare dinner for his weary mother before catching an hour of sleep. Then it was off to work at the factory.

All of us at school were worried about him. He was a good friend and we did not relish the thought of him collapsing from overwork. Even the teachers helped him. They paid extra attention to him and helped him whenever he was too tired to absorb what they taught in class. It was not unusual to see the teachers staying back after school to re-teach certain topics to him. Through it all, David remained the optimistic and responsible boy that we knew him to be.

In the end, he graduated from secondary school with results good enough to enter one of the top colleges on a scholarship. He also made it to the national team to represent Singapore in the Asian Games. His 'never say die' attitude impressed me greatly as I saw for myself that he had made it despite overwhelming odds. Above it all, he was not embittered or discouraged but made it his responsibility to provide well for his mother after his father's demise.

I was proud of being David's friend, as was everyone who knew him. I could not have survived the ordeal of losing a parent, and the responsibility of providing for the family as well as he did. David showed me a valuable lesson in resilience, and that is why witnessing his resolve to overcome challenges was the most memorable experience of the year for me.

14 Describe how you changed your mind about someone you initially disliked. How did this person make an impact on your life?

As an ordinary student, I used to go through each day aimlessly. Without Miss Kulip who injected the spark that I needed to push myself to make something of my life, I would never have been able to say that writing is my forte. She was immeasurably pertinent to my development as a writer.

I had always been an apathetic student in school. School was nothing but a daily grind of boring lectures, mundane relationships and fruitless homework. I could never understand how knowing logarithms would enhance the quality of my life, or how learning the workings of a weather station was going to make me a more scintillating person socially. In all, I felt that school life was merely a stage of interminable monotony that everyone had to go through to justify the existence of the Education Department.

But this was to change with the arrival of Miss Kulip, my form teacher who also taught English. She practically bulldozed her way into my consciousness with her booming voice and intolerable sarcasm. I was merely an average achiever in my tests and examinations, which to her was nothing short of a cardinal sin. With each essay that she returned to me, she taunted me loudly with comments like 'Looks like your usual miserable marks' and 'What a terrible waste of paper and ink'. Everyone in school knew her to be an unhappy lady who found tremendous pleasure in pulverising our self-esteem. Gradually, her jeering tone and snide remarks penetrated my lackadaisical attitude. I began to feel particularly irked by her very presence and resolved to show her that I was definitely worth more than the slug that she had compared me to once in her tirade. When I started doing better in tests, Miss Kulip showed even greater displeasure. Her remarks grew more derisive, even though I obviously deserved praise for having done better. Soon, I found that I was getting to her merely by doing well in my studies. It was sweet victory!

After she had left the school, I realised that I actually enjoyed doing well in school. It was a revelation that spurred me on to greater heights of achievement in my examinations. I began to top the class consistently and made my family very proud. Now that my ego was boosted, I found school a delight!

One day, the entire school was called into the auditorium for an assembly. At the assembly, the school principal announced that I had won the prestigious 'Loh Swie Han Writer of the Year' award, which was given annually to outstanding young writers. He said that Miss Kulip had been impressed by the quality and depth of my essays and had sent them in for the competition before she left. He then called me to go on stage to receive the award!

I was elated! I had never thought of myself as a good writer as I was only enjoying the outlet to express myself after my skirmishes with Miss Kulip. In fact, many of my essays were hilariously biting anecdotes about a fictitious Miss K who was obviously modelled on her! I went up to the stage to shake the principal's hand amidst thunderous applause. He looked at me with a straight face and then said, "May you find other sources of inspiration just as sidesplitting as the inimitable Miss Kulip!"

Imagine my surprise at the principal's joke! But I recovered in no time, pleasantly warmed by the realisation that even the usually laconic principal had a sense of humour. Miss Kulip's efforts in trying to spur me on started coming home to me. Behind her sarcasm was heartfelt generosity and deep concern for a student whom she probably saw as a diamond in the rough. She sparked my interest in writing and I would always be grateful to her for that.

15

Recount a time when you felt dispirited.

I looked at myself in the mirror, going through the same routine that I forced myself to endure each day before the Big Day came. My mouth curled itself into the appropriate contortions to produce the unfamiliar words, but beauty was not high on my list now. I had to pass the oral test or I would be the laughing stock of all my friends.

When I first toyed with the idea of learning French as a third language in school, everyone I knew laughed. After all, a third language was ludicrous when I did not even succeed in learning my second language, Chinese, well. But I felt that I could not be blamed for my pitiful grades in Chinese. After all, it did not appeal to me like French did. There was something romantic and classy about French, which appealed to the aspiring Europhile in me. The more I was derided for trying to bite off more than I could chew, the greater my determination to prove my detractors wrong.

But I lived long enough through the arduous task of learning French to finally see the error of my ways. I was not cut out for languages. When I tried to roll the French words off my tongue, all the romance that I had envisaged was gone. In its place was a comical enunciation that made even the stoical French teacher laugh. Needless to say, I was demoralised. When I told my friends of my progress, or rather the lack of it, they roared with laughter as they reminded me of their dire forecasts before I signed up for the class. My pride was naturally hurt. While the thought of how little faith they had in me was discouraging, I was determined to carry on with the lessons.

The day of the test arrived and I strode to the exam hall, belying the nervousness I felt. When I sat before the grumpy examiner, my spirits sank. She looked monstrous with a pince-nez on her bulbous nose and was obviously disgruntled about having to test my oral competence on such a hot day. She asked the first question in fluent French and leaned back to await my torrent of French. But it never came. I had anticipated the question and practised saying it a hundred times, but when the time came, I just could not open my mouth!

The situation became worse when the examiner glared at me as I stewed in my own juice. She rattled off several French phrases alluding to my disgrace as a student of the beautiful French language and then sat back, waiting for my reaction. Nothing. I felt so defeated by now that I could not have said a thing to save my life. Miserably, I sat there waiting for her to dismiss me. That she did after a few more minutes of glowering. She waved me out of her presence with an imperious gesture.

I practically crawled out of the room into the bright sunshine and the laughter of my friends as they saw my woebegone expression. I felt so dispirited that I no longer had the energy to defend myself from their teasing.

16

Relate what happened when you had to replace someone at the last minute. What were your thoughts and feelings?

It was the most important occasion for the Boy Scouts in Singapore. They would be gathered at the Victoria Concert Hall to witness the award ceremony for the senior scouts. Receiving an award on such a day was the most prestigious honour for any scout, and all would aspire to be the scout selected to give the summary of the year's activities for the association. I was not the one selected to give the summary and for that, I was grateful. I could never stand in front of a large crowd to make a speech, but Sean could. Sean was the one selected to do the honour because he was the President of the Boy Scouts for schools.

My job was much simpler. Being the Vice-President, I was very much behind the scenes, content to ensure that everything was in smooth running order. It was an hour to go before the ceremony began, and I had put the final touches to the stage. Walking down the stage, I saw the ushers in a state of panic. When they saw me, they ran to me to tell me that Sean was caught in a traffic jam and would not be able to make it on time. Someone else had to give the summary. All of them looked meaningfully at me, and I could feel my knees beginning to buckle.

All their arguments against my reluctance were valid. I had a copy of the speech as well as the benefit of having seen Sean rehearse it. I was the Vice-President and therefore should rightly take his place. Finally, when I had exhausted all my excuses, I was firmly told not to decline any longer and they left then, content that I would do the right thing. Once alone, I sank onto the floor, totally devastated by the situation.

I could not do it, I knew. I was not a confident speaker, and the thought of presenting a summary in front of so many distinguished guests horrified me. I would definitely shame all scouts, as I could not even come close to Sean's effective and eloquent style. To think that the prestige of the scouts would take a beating because of me! The burden of responsibility troubled me greatly.

But there was really no way out of the situation. In the end, I quickly rehearsed the speech and got ready to go on stage for the presentation. I looked calm and collected but inside, I was a trembling mass of jelly. I felt faint and unable to think straight. I could not remember what I was supposed to say, and then, the realisation that I was going to fail caused me to break out in cold sweat. I held the wall tightly and tried to move my leaden feet forward.

Suddenly, I recalled that Sean and I always encouraged each other to have fortitude in the face of all difficulties. We met with many obstacles over the past year, but working together, we had always come through. I realised that the purpose of the speech was to share with the audience what the scouts had achieved together. Due to my silly bout of stage fright, I had been too self-absorbed to see that.

Taking a deep breath, I stepped on stage and gave the speech. It was not perfect but I think I conveyed the spirit of who we were as scouts. Sean had come in and stayed at the back of the hall, grinning and giving me the thumbs up.

17

Write an account of the time you tried to please someone. Why did it turn out to be impossible to do so?

My mother is one of the most difficult people to please. She is as changeable as the weather, and can really confuse you when you are trying to second-guess her. I remember a time when I enraged her by taking on a job at a club to earn some pocket money during the holidays.

She had never seemed to me a conservative person. In fact, she was always dressed fashionably with hair immaculately coiffured. She knew that I was an avid dancer and enjoyed nights out at the club. So I thought that it would be all right with her if I found a job as a waitress at a local club.

But when she realised what I had got myself into, she literally blew her top. I had never seen her hair look so untidy before! She raged and ranted over how good girls would never work at such places where unsavoury characters hung out. It was on the tip of my tongue to remind her that I too hung out at such places, but prudence guarded my tongue. However, it was already too late for me to change my mind as I had signed the contract to work for a month.

The next month was a virtual hell for me. My mother refused to talk to me or even acknowledge my presence in her life. She took to going out with her friends every day so that I would feel adequately snubbed. That I certainly was. We had always been the best of friends and this cold war really upset me. Finally, I decided that I would buy her a beautiful present with my salary so that she would see how sorry I was for causing her such distress.

When I received the \$800 at the end of the contract, I dashed down to Orchard Road to buy her a present. I soon found what I was looking for — a beautiful opal-encrusted brooch that would go perfectly with her favourite shawl. Pleased with myself, I went to the counter to pay for it. At the counter, a harassed-looking lady was rummaging in her bags for her wallet. When she finally found it and paid for her purchase, she remained at the counter packing her things into her bag while I was paying for the brooch. The cashier put the brooch into a bag and placed it next to the one belonging to the other lady. The latter swept one bag off the counter and rushed off. I picked up the remaining bag and sauntered home.

That night, I made a big show of giving my mother the present before the rest of the family, and saw that she was slightly mollified by my sincerity. She opened the bag enthusiastically and suddenly shrieked in horror. Pulling out some pieces of satin from the bag, she kept shouting, “What is this? What is this?”

‘This’ was a piece of the skimpiest lingerie I had ever seen. My mother was outraged. She was furious that I had degenerated to such poor taste and morals, and then proceeded to lecture me on how right she was that the job would have an unhealthy influence on me. With that, she stormed into her room and the next phase of the cold war began.

18

Write about a time when an illness resulted in drawing the people around you closer.

The Ngs had been our next-door neighbours for as long as I could remember. They had always been close to us as my family often invited them for meals and our parents would sit down in the evenings and chat. Their two children, Joey and Roy, and I were also childhood playmates who scraped our knees rolling down the slope behind our flats and picked mangoes off the trees in the garden.

Thus, when Uncle Ng fell ill with kidney trouble, we felt the impact as much as his family did. He was the sole breadwinner in the family, with Auntie Ng staying home to take care of the family. Uncle Ng was always a responsible husband and father, ensuring that they were well-provided for. But he had only a basic diploma in electronics and could not put aside much each month as savings. As a result, his family was cash-strapped when Uncle Ng was admitted to hospital in serious condition.

Auntie Ng had not worked for the past twenty years and going back into the job market now was a harrowing experience. It was tough finding a job with her lack of experience. So when she finally found a low-paying job as a factory operator, she took it immediately. But going to work was difficult. She had to rush home at lunchtime to cook for Joey and Roy and then go back to work. After that, she rushed back again to cook dinner, following which she reported for work as an office-cleaner in the business district. In the midst of this busy schedule, she still found time to visit Uncle Ng in the hospital.

Whenever we could, my family helped out. My mother would offer to cook for Joey and Roy and watch them after school so that Auntie Ng would not have to dash about. Yet, she grew increasingly haggard and thin, worn out by her commitments. Uncle Ng showed little signs of recovering, and this added to her problems. Roy was also faring badly in school as he was too immersed in his misery to concentrate on his studies. The siblings missed both their mother and father. Somehow, they could feel that things were only going to get worse.

To support them, I made it a point to spend more time with Joey and Roy after school. We would chat about the things we could do to improve the situation. We would also do our homework together and encourage Roy so that he would not fall behind. When Auntie Ng was too busy at work, the three of us would do the marketing together. Soon, our bond grew stronger and we were inseparable.

Six months after Uncle Ng was hospitalised, his kidneys failed completely and he passed away after much complications. His family was devastated and so was mine. We were united in our grief, sitting together each night reminiscing about the good old days when Uncle Ng's booming voice and hearty laugh was still with us. In the end, Auntie Ng emerged a new person, stronger and more determined to raise her children well in spite of the difficulties. All this time, our families grew closer, and vowed to support each other in the tough days ahead.

19

Write about an occasion when you were given an item for safekeeping. Why did it make you feel uneasy?

When Michael came to see me a few days ago, I should have suspected something was wrong. After all, we had moved in different circles ever since he joined the local street gang a few years back. He hardly acknowledged my presence in school, so his visit came as a big surprise. When he asked me to keep a small parcel safe for him for a while, I did so without hesitation. Perhaps it was the fear of his connections that made me do so unquestioningly. But when he did not turn up in school the next day, my suspicions were aroused. I tried calling him a few times but there was no answer. Feeling uneasy, I decided to open the parcel once I returned home.

I unwrapped the box and opened it gingerly. A small collection of shiny gold jewellery stared up at me. I was shocked. Why was there so much jewellery in the box? I could not understand how Michael could come into possession of enough jewellery to keep us both in the lap of luxury for a lifetime. Just then, one of the pieces caught my attention. I had seen the jewellery on television in a report on a robbery. The owner's son had even been badly hurt in the robbery. I was aghast. I was holding on to stolen property!

In the end, I decided to go to the police with the parcel. On my way to the nearest police post, I chanced upon Michael loitering at the void deck. He came up to me quickly and asked where I was going with the parcel. He looked so menacing that at first I thought of lying to him. But in the end, my indignation won out. After all, why should I be afraid when I was merely doing the right thing? He had implicated me and I would never forgive him.

When I told him calmly what I was going to do, he spat out threats to kill me if I did that. He tried to snatch the parcel from me but I stood firm. That was until he whipped out a lethal-looking knife and threatened me with it. I found myself capitulating; I handed the parcel over meekly and then hurried home without turning back.

For that act of cowardice, I earned myself the burden of shame forever. Even after Michael was caught and sent to the reformatory, I could not forgive myself for not having the nerve to stand up to him.

20

Relate what happened when you took a friend's advice. Why did you regret doing so?

Hayden sounded so sure of himself that I was beginning to believe him. After all, he was an ardent fan of gangster movies and should know how they operated. In any case, I was at my wits' end and could think of no better idea. I decided to take his advice to get another street gang to resolve the problem I was facing Tom's gang. When the latter had come up to me to extort money, I foolishly said 'no'. That was the beginning of all my problems.

Every day in school, I would see the members of Tom's gang everywhere I went. They would stare at me with meaningful nods and gestures, silently intimidating me into complying with their demand for a protection fee. I thought it ludicrous that I had to pay them to protect me from them! So I resisted them until the day I came back to class from recess to find my bag and books missing. After a frantic search, I found them soaked through in the dirty drain outside the school. I knew then that they meant business.

I had then gone to Hayden for advice. He was a good friend, always full of ideas. His advice was that we were unlikely to convince the gang of anything. Only another gang could speak their 'language'. I decided to heed his advice and approached the Dragon Scar gang for help. Their leader, Simon, was a familiar figure in the neighbourhood. He was always swaggering about and everyone who had heard of his reputation gave him a wide berth. I almost trembled when I sputtered out my request. To my surprise, he was congenial and even patted me on my back to reassure me of his help. I was elated. Hayden was right!

Soon after, the two gangs really did meet and Tom's group agreed to back off. I was walking on air for the next two weeks, proud about being able to remain untouched by the gang. But my problems were only just starting. Simon's gang soon came to me to demand payment for their 'services'. They claimed that it had taken quite a bit of effort on their part to warn Tom's group and therefore, they should be compensated accordingly. To my horror, what they asked for was three times what I was initially extorted for.

My back was against the wall. I realised how foolish it was to think that gangs would be kind enough to help me without any strings attached. In the end, I gave Simon's gang whatever they asked me for, thoroughly regretting that I had listened to Hayden but relieved to be left alone finally.

21

Write about an occasion when the resentment you felt towards someone turned to sorrow.

The blistering heat scorched through the flimsy material of my blouse, a choice as naive as the one that now saw me traipsing along the sandy back lanes of the little Mexican town. I had thought that it was a brilliant idea to spend the day as an intrepid explorer, rising to the challenge of conquering the confusing maze of streets that crisscrossed the sleepy town we had arrived in days ago. But it seemed that a conspiracy was underfoot to thwart my conquest.

Slowly, frustration mounted in me as I began to curse the reason why I was virtually trapped in this poor town. If Marie had not developed a fever so suddenly, we would be enjoying the beautiful sights of Acapulco instead of wallowing in this heat trap. My bitterness at being inconvenienced by my best friend's fever soon escalated into a galling fury. I felt victimised and was aggrieved.

The proximity of the squalid houses around me seemed to suffocate me. White-hot anger simmered in me as I fed the growing resentment at Marie for having inconvenienced me time and again. I recalled the time when I had planned to go trekking in Nepal but was persuaded by her to wait till the June holidays. But when the time came, she fell ill with chicken pox. My twenty-first birthday celebration at a famous seafood restaurant was totally destroyed by her developing ugly red rashes. I had to spend the most important birthday of my life in hospital with her. And now, her fever had forced our trip to revolve around the terribly unexciting prospect of trying to discover a place that was largely unworthy of any such effort. As I indulged in these angry thoughts, my indignation rose to such a feverish pitch that I simply had to run or I would burst. My feet started moving towards the dilapidated hotel that we were staying at.

I looked up to the window of our room, trying to harden myself to storm in and pack my things. I would carry on with the trip without Marie. "Why should I curtail my plans just because she could not come along? She should just stay in this godforsaken place and recuperate," I said out loud, trying to convince myself that I was right. Finally, I gathered up enough steam and rushed in.

Suddenly, a heavy hand on my shoulder halted me. I turned around and looked into the face of the hotel-keeper. He looked at me sadly and uttered only four words in his gravelly voice: "She is no more." I was paralysed on the spot. A knot of fear tightened in my stomach as I fought to quell the scream that was building up in me. I was not aware of how I had gathered my legs to thunder into the room upstairs, but I did. When I entered the room, the foul stench of death seemed to cling to everything, even the curtains. Marie was lying on the bed, in a still repose that chilled me. Hot tears scalded my eyes as I moved closer.

Through the mist of my tears, I saw Marie's unadulterated joy when she found out that I had won a prestigious scholarship years ago. Her unswerving friendship had been my constant companion through twelve years of our lives, and now it was lost to me forever. Deep sorrow overwhelmed me. My strength ebbed away and I crumpled slowly to the floor.

22

Recount an incident that happened in school. What lesson did you learn from this incident?

The incessant din in the confines of the classroom was unbearable. Yet, it was the same day in and day out, and we had borne it all along. It had to be a reflection of our increased levels of tolerance, I thought as I started to clear my books from the table. Suddenly, an ear-piercing scream sliced through the noisy atmosphere, stunning everyone into silence.

John's hands were clasped over his ears, his face contorted into a mask of agony as his rounded mouth emitted the continuous scream. His chest was heaving, as if he had just expended a great deal of effort. It was not so much that he had shouted so grotesquely that appalled us; rather, it was the fact that he had actually forced himself into our consciousness that was galling.

John was considered an outcast in class. Nobody liked him or wanted to have anything to do with him, not after we had found out from a reliable source that he was a brat. He was an arrogant person who insisted on displaying his intelligence in class and humiliating the rest of us. For that transgression, John was excluded from all class activities and camaraderie. Initially, he was oblivious to our frosty reactions to his overtures. When he finally realised how much we despised him, he retreated into his shell in defeat.

But now, his frustration had broken through that resignation and asserted itself. We were upset at his audacity. John looked around him, hoping to find some sympathy but found only reproving stares and tightly-pursed lips. His voice came out as a croak, "I'll like to read, please." We turned away from him, sealing the impression that we did not care. But our stony hearts could not shut out the smothered sobs that came from his corner. Seeing that we were angry with him, Tim's wickedness went to work and he produced a tin of glue, which he flourished in front of us. We did not like Tim either, for he was a bully and played awful tricks on other people. He ranked on the same level as John in our minds, and we were not bothered by his tin of glue.

Suddenly, Tim ran over to John and poured the glue on him. It trickled down his cheeks and mouth. Tim laughed merrily and announced, "Now he can't scream anymore! Isn't it great?" The deathly silence that greeted his triumphant announcement was broken only by the muffled cries of pain that came from John. His cheeks were an angry red now, looking like they were blistering. His mouth was slightly glued at the sides and with each moan, his lips tore a little and became bloody. We sprang into action. Someone rushed out to call the teacher while the rest of us tried to calm him down by telling him that it was not too bad. We had to stop him from crying as it only split his flesh further. When the ambulance arrived, I decided to accompany him to the hospital. I was aggrieved by how much unnecessary pain our silly pride had caused him.

At the hospital, the doctor attended to John and fortunately, he recovered soon after the doctor injected him with painkillers, although the marks from the glue were still discernible. We were amazed at how lucky John had been when the doctor told us that he would be blind had the glue got into his eyes. By now, a few others from the class had joined me at the hospital. We rushed to see him at the ward, relieved to be able to tell him how lucky he had been. But he only smiled and said that he was truly lucky because he finally felt our concern for him.

The hard knot of pride that kept us from being his friend melted away with the tears that we now shed when we realised how cruel we had been. Our unkindness had almost lost us the chance of having a true friend. It was a lesson that I would never forget.

23

Describe an occasion when the suspense of waiting became intolerable to you. What were your thoughts and feelings?

The weeks leading up to Pierre's arrival were nerve-racking. We had been friends online for the last three years, and we were finally going to see each other face to face. The strange thing about our relationship was that we never revealed pictures of ourselves to each other and hence, had no knowledge of how the other person looked like. Part of the reason was that I did not want him to know that the descriptions I had written of myself were actually overrated!

I reached the airport bright and early to avoid the possibility of the plane landing early. This was Pierre's first time in Singapore and I did not want to be a bad hostess. But my early arrival at the airport only added to the anxiety of waiting for him to arrive. All the while, I kept thinking of how Pierre would react when he finally saw me. My impression of a Frenchman was one who was suave and dashing — every schoolgirl's dream of a Prince Charming. Furthermore, his letters were always charming and humorous.

But how would he view me? I was an average-looking schoolgirl with no outstanding physical features. I began to perspire at the thought of being exposed as a fraud despite the cold air blasting in the airport. The plane was to arrive in an hour's time, and that left me little time to do anything to improve my appearance. I started to panic.

Yet, a part of me was excited about finally meeting Pierre. This was due, in no small part, to his exceptional good looks. Suddenly, I realised that he could have exaggerated his physical appearance as well. Then, I began to worry about how he could actually be quite monstrous-looking. How would I be able to show him off at all the activities that I had arranged for him then? My friends would laugh at me!

The announcement that Pierre's flight was delayed shifted my thoughts to more pertinent ones. I wondered at the delay; he was arriving on a carrier that was normally trustworthy. What could possibly delay it? I began to entertain thoughts of the plane being in trouble, and soon, I was frightening myself with thoughts of Pierre's plane crashing as a result of engine trouble. I tried to stop such unwholesome thoughts, but failed miserably as my hyperactive imagination took control.

Things got worse in my imagination as the hours dragged on. I could not understand the delay and the airline counter was not helpful either. They merely said that the plane was due soon and there was nothing to worry about. I was reaching the end of my patience with their politeness when it was announced that the plane had landed. I rushed to the arrival hall. Once the passengers started streaming out, I tried to make out which of them was Pierre. But it was in vain. Everyone and no one looked like Pierre to me. It was extremely frustrating. Suddenly, I heard a smooth and clear voice behind me saying, "You must be Clare. Every bit as lovely as I had imagined."

I turned around to look at Pierre. I grinned as I realised that Mr Prince Charming had arrived.

24

Describe an incident that served as a wake-up call for you. How did it change your life?

Uncle Lee came into my life in 2010. I was then studying in the normal stream in Secondary One in a neighbourhood school. Although labelled as a slow learner by teachers and a non-achiever by relatives, I remained unconcerned. It suited my indolent nature. "Let my over-achieving big sister garner all the laurels and praise," I thought.

Uncle had come from Ipoh, Malaysia. He was a layabout like me and a luckless gambler. Auntie Mabel, his wife, had left him. When Uncle came to live with us, we hit it off famously.

I followed him as often as I could after school. He would regale me with stories of his bravery during his adventures overseas. Sometimes he would talk about his gambling exploits. Uncle had no job, and no steady sources of income except for his wins once in a while at mahjong sessions. Whenever he won, we would fritter our time away at McDonald's. Naturally, my school grades deteriorated even further.

However on 31st December, 2011, I received a telephone call which changed my life. I was about to retire to bed on New Year's Eve when the phone rang harshly. It was a call from Uncle. He was gasping in a drunken voice, "Matthew... in Pearlee pub... I think this is it for me. I'm sorry... do... do not follow my way." His voice trailed off brokenly. Heart beating and cold with fear and panic, I informed my family. We rushed over to Uncle's favourite pub but it was of no use. He was stone dead when we arrived.

Besides us, Uncle had no relatives or friends to mourn his passing. But I remembered his parting words to me very vividly. His advice was a wake-up call for me to change my ways. I reviewed my wasted life in the past... how I frittered my time away in unhealthy and unproductive pleasures and pursuits. There and then, I decided to heed Uncle's advice and be a person that everyone would be proud of. I would not follow Uncle's ways.

From then on, my family and friends detected a marked change in my character. I applied myself faithfully to my studies. In no time, I was promoted to the express stream and by the end of the following year, was commended as the most improved student.

My parents also noted a marked change in my discipline. I no longer frittered away my time after school. I became an active Boy Scout and also a youth leader at the local boys' club. My neighbours sang praises about the changes they saw in me and I made new friends who were good role models.

What gratified me the most, however, were the happy looks of my parents who praised me and my teachers who commended me. On the first anniversary of Uncle's death, I was chosen to give a speech. What I said moved those present to tears. I commended Uncle for his generous nature and love for me, but most of all, I noted that Uncle regretted his bad ways and gave me the best present I ever had — his parting words of regret and advice to me to mend my ways.

25

'Sweet revenge is not sweet after all.' Write about an occasion when you found this to be true.

Whenever 15 November approaches, I feel a twinge of remorse and guilt with some considerable sadness, for it is on this date that I failed to celebrate the birthday of my best friend, Mary. We had been together since primary school. Our tastes and interests were similar and we were as inseparable as two peas in a pod.

On 14 November 2014, the eve of Mary's birthday, we had our first major quarrel. She had gone to a friend's party without informing me. The party she had gone to was one that I had been hankering to attend. To add insult to injury, she knew the organiser and had been invited to bring along a friend. "Why did she not invite me?" I kept on brooding over it. Then the truth dawned on me. She knew that I was interested in a boy called Kelvin who was attending the party. I immediately assumed that Mary was interested in him too and did not want any competition from me. How selfish of her! I decided it would be an eye for an eye. The next day would be her birthday. I decided not to attend her celebrations but to visit Johore Bahru with my mum instead.

Mary's birthday saw me in Johore Bahru shopping with my mum. It seemed like I had my sweet revenge. However, halfway through lunch, I regretted my decision not to attend her birthday celebration. I knew that her birthday was very important to her. I had always been around on this day as her parents were no longer around. Mine was the shoulder on which she sobbed whenever she remembered her parents.

After a lengthy explanation to my mum, we decided to terminate our visit to Johore Bahru and return to Singapore. To our dismay, there was a massive jam at the causeway. Initially, I thought I would be held up by an hour. However, it was a two-hour wait before we reached the immigration checkpoint. At that point, I realised that my bag containing my passport was missing. My heart sank, but after I collected myself, I thought back and knew that, barring a theft, it must have been left at the restaurant in Johore Bahru. To our relief, the items were there and we collected them gratefully from the staff.

By that time, it was 5 pm. Driving back to the causeway, my spirits sank again. The traffic jam was even worse than before. I knew that I would never make it on time to watch Mary blow the candles on her birthday cake. Having no next of kin, I was always the one who acted on behalf of her parents to preside over her birthday party which she held yearly without fail.

Mum offered me the use of her mobile phone to call Mary but it was to no avail. We could not reach her as the phone line was perpetually busy. I was overwhelmed with remorse. How would she feel about my absence and the betrayal of our friendship? No doubt she had done me wrong the day before but this was a major slight on my part which I was certain she would not forget.

Suffice it to say that I made it to her party at 9.30 pm. Belatedly, I handed her the teddy bear which she had hinted she wanted as a birthday present. She seemed composed, thanked me graciously and then... totally IGNORED me! How could she? After all the trouble I took to reach her place! But when I thought it over, I knew that she felt that I had betrayed her. Moreover, she might have had no inkling about the hurt when I found out that she had not invited me to the party the day before.

I never saw Mary after that party. Till today, my attempts at contacting Mary and explaining to her have been rebuffed. Truly, in the case of an eye for an eye, the outcome is bitter rather than sweet.

26

Write about an occasion when there was a disagreement between you and your friends. How did you feel?

“Zach, let’s buy a birthday present for Janet,” William suggested. He was thrilled to have received an invitation from Jane. Everyone knew how rich and snobbish Jane was. To have received an invitation meant Jane did not look down on us.

After asking around, we found that only two other boys, Khan and Peter, had received similar invitations to her classy home in Holland Grove. We decided to look for a present together.

At the mall, Peter and Khan were drawn to the numerous shops selling the latest in sports fashion and gear. However, I reminded them of our objective and after some window-shopping, we made our choices. Peter wanted to buy her a mammoth jigsaw puzzle, Khan a Barbie doll, William a jacket and as for me, a crystal figure of a swan. It was then that the problem started.

William started teasing Peter, “Why would a girl want a jigsaw puzzle?” Peter replied angrily, “Same to you, ‘no brains’. Why would a rich girl like her don such a cheap sports jacket?” I tried to get them to make peace with each other but by then, they had turned on Khan. “Use your head, Khan,” they chortled. “Do you think she would want a Barbie doll? It’s so childish.”

Our group carried on bickering, our voices reaching a crescendo. Seeing the curious stares of a few passers-by, I urged my friends to settle their differences along the corridor outside. After some discussion, they decided to pool their resources to buy an expensive present for her. But what present were we to give her? A few minutes of silent pondering led my three friends to turn and look at me. “Let’s go with Zach’s suggestion. We’ll get the swan. It’s classy and not too expensive.”

At once, we headed to Uncle Ali’s crystal shop. However, as we gazed at the figurine behind the shop window, we noticed the price tag. It was much too expensive even if we had pooled our money together.

It was then that they turned on me, blaming me for choosing the swan. Shocked and hurt, I spluttered, “I made an honest mistake.” I went on to explain that I had not seen the last figure ‘8’ and had thought the price was \$62.

By this time, we had spent a considerable amount of time looking for suitable gifts. Then, to my horror, Peter and William proposed that we drew lots to see who the unlucky one was who would bear the full cost of the gift. They stared down at Khan, who meekly accepted the decision. Mine was the only dissenting voice. Very unwillingly, I watched them prepare the lots. I drew my lot and as luck would have it, I had to bear the cost. Infuriated and disappointed with my friends’ behaviour, I stormed off.

That was the end of our unsuccessful shopping trip. I learnt that the boys felt ashamed about the whole incident and had departed from the place not long after me, without buying anything. They apologised to me the next day. We attended Jane’s party. What they gave her individually, I did not know. All I knew was that the unsuccessful shopping trip had left a sour taste in my mouth.

27

'Kindness begets kindness.' Recount an experience to show whether this is the case.

When I was younger, I lived in a small village in Singapore. The spirit of neighbourliness was very strong then. Doors were never locked whether day or night.

The village had a variety of trades to serve the needs of the villagers. There was a barber, a tailor, a coffee shop owner, a grocer, a baker, an electrician and a plumber. All of us were quite poor by today's standards but we got by. However, one family which could be considered as living a marginal existence was the Lim family living in the bicycle shop opposite our dwelling.

Mr Lim, the bicycle mechanic, had a large brood of children — twelve to be exact. The joke amongst the neighbours was that he was aiming to form a football team among his children. However, on a serious note, it was a challenge for him to feed his growing children.

My mother was a kind-hearted soul. Often, she would remark that the children were dressed in ragged clothes and looked malnourished. My family was relatively better off in the village and my father was the headman. My mother would bring over whatever food we could spare to these neighbours. On occasions when there was leftover food from village weddings or festivals, my father would direct me to bring these to my neighbour. I did not mind visiting the Lim's bicycle shop as I had an interest in bicycles.

I remember one particular year when times were very hard. Even my family had to make do with two meals a day. Lunch was dispensed with. We stopped the practice of giving food to Mr Lim. One day, I noticed my mother looking troubled. She had learnt that the Lim family had not been eating for the past two days. She decided to sacrifice a portion of our meals to the family. Despite the protests from my brothers and sisters that we too were hungry, she continued giving our neighbour a portion of our food every day. Fortunately, the lean spell did not last long, and the children in our family resumed our three meals a day.

I shared a room with my brothers overlooking the bicycle shop. I was interested in the repair of bicycles and would often stare out of the window to see Mr Lim hard at work. As time went on, I noticed Mr Lim looking more cheerful. The number of customers at his shop had increased steadily. Soon, he was selling many shiny new bicycles.

Mr Lim's eldest son was the head prefect of our primary school. He often helped his father in his bicycle shop. Tim was very good with his hands and proved very popular with his customers. He soon dropped out of school to help his father with his expanding bicycle business. Later, Tim started a motorcycle repair service to add on to his father's trade. Business took off as Japanese motorcycles, a useful form of transport, were the rage then.

It was at this time that my father's business took a turn for the worse. My father was a provision shop owner and he trusted many people readily. One day, his assistant ran off with a substantial amount of the shop's money. During that time, my father's health was also deteriorating. We were at our wits' end, perplexed by the mysterious illness he was suffering from. My father even sold our family car to pay off the mounting bills.

They say that one good turn deserves another. Mr Lim, our neighbour, came to learn of our plight. In spite of my father's protests, he stepped in to help. He stated simply that it was his turn to repay the kindness that my father and his family had shown to him in the past.

Through his connections, Mr Lim arranged for my father to consult a famous Chinese physician in Chinatown. Not only was the physician's diagnosis of my father's medical condition accurate, he was able to cure my father. My father's health steadily improved. However, by then the provision shop was floundering.

Again Mr Lim became our good Samaritan. He arranged for a loan for my father's business. When he also learnt that my brother and I had stopped schooling because we could not afford the fees, he arranged to finance our education. He told us that we should not give up our education as we were among the top students in the school.

Fortunately, my father's business recovered the following year. My father is now the proud owner of the village mini-mart. Mr Lim has expanded his business too. He now has a car showroom in town. Whenever I meet up with Mr Lim, I would thank him for his help in the past. He would just shrug off my thanks and say that he was merely repaying my mother's kindness.

28

Write an account to show why you regretted telling someone your secret.

My name is Theresa. I am a Eurasian. My mother married a man with Scottish, Indian and Chinese blood. My father was a Japanese soldier. My parents had met during the Japanese Occupation of Singapore. After the war, my mother married a man she met at work. My foster father accepts me and loves me as his own child.

I had a childhood friend, Jeanette. We had known each other since our days in the kampung (village). Being next-door neighbours for twenty years and classmates throughout our primary and secondary school lives, we had gone through thick and thin together.

However, when Jeanette moved to another neighbourhood, we drifted apart even though we were in the same college. However, one day, I found her on my doorstep after school. She did not bother to greet me. Instead, she glared at me. "Is it true that you are dating Jim?" she asked accusingly.

I was surprised and baffled at her tone. Who was she to appear out of the blue and confront me like that? Jim was a popular and likeable student in my college. We were friends. That was all. "We are not dating," I replied. "And anyway, even if we are, it's none of your business." I was riled up. We were such close friends before so how could she speak to me so curtly?

Jeanette shot me a look of hatred that I would never forget. "Stay away from Jim," she hissed before storming off.

I was in a whirl of emotions. I was furious at her outburst. I did not regard Jim as someone special. Jeanette was welcome to make him her boyfriend. Instead, I was fearful of what she might say about me to our other friends. I had revealed to her who my father was and being the daughter of someone whom everyone feared and disliked would surely draw a lot of taunts from others.

I went back to college the next day and met Jim in the passageway. Before I could say anything, he said that Jeanette had told him I had called him terrible names. Jeanette also revealed to him that my father was a Japanese soldier during the Japanese occupation. Jim said with a sneer that he was in a relationship with Jeanette and he no longer wanted to be friends with me. I retreated to the toilet and cried my heart out. I regretted telling Jeanette about my past, something my mother had always cautioned me about. Jeanette was now a far cry from the sweet young friend of my childhood days.

In the next few days, I heard whispers behind my back and there were cold, hard glances at me from some college mates. I knew that Jim was popular but I did not know how popular he was until then. He had influenced many of my friends to go against me. Jeanette had used him to spread my secret to my classmates.

One day, a few of my classmates who had noticed how downcast I was, consoled me, telling me not to let the vicious gossip affect me. The next morning, on entering the classroom, I heard spontaneous clapping from my classmates. My eyes were drawn to the board. On it was written, 'She's a jolly good fellow and that's all that matters.'

There were tears of relief in my eyes. I regretted telling Jeanette my secret, but I knew then that my parents' past could no longer hurt me.

29

What did you do to help someone? Write an account to show how you made a difference.

Her name was Ranee. This much I gathered in a somewhat rambling conversation one day. Everyone in my neighbourhood, however, called her the 'Mad Woman'. She lived alone in a one-room flat in the block opposite mine. Once in a while, I could see her in the corridor outside her flat. She would invariably point at the sky and chant the same refrain, "Shanti, you cheat. I curse you." She would repeat this again and again. No one knew who she was — not even the neighbours. Some of the residents would see her frequently scrounging for leftovers at food centres or searching in the rubbish bins nearby.

Once in a while, some of the residents would pity her and bring her some food. However, she would immediately fling the food out onto the corridor, shouting to all and sundry that she was not a beggar.

One Saturday, my friend Mary and I decided to visit Madam Ranee. After we knocked on the door, we waited in trepidation, expecting to be hurled abuses. To our astonishment, we heard a sweet voice welcoming us in. Madam Ranee thanked us for the food we brought her and in the conversation that followed, we felt as though we were speaking to a different person. However, after ten minutes had elapsed, she started shouting at us and chased us out of her flat.

However, some information about her past could be gleaned from our brief conversation. It seemed that Madam Ranee had an only daughter, Shanti, who had run away with her life savings. Madam Ranee was forced to move without being able to contact Shanti when their old house was torn down. Mary, and I were wondering how to help her when suddenly Mary asked, "Didn't Madam Ranee mention that Shanti was in Kay Tee Secondary School before?"

I nodded. It was then that we realised that Shanti, her daughter, had studied in the same secondary school we were now in. We decided to try to find Shanti. To do this, we paid a visit to Mrs Low, a teacher, who had taught in our school for decades. When Mrs Low was briefed by us on the situation, she tried her best to help.

From Madam Ranee, we had gathered that Shanti would be thirty-six years old by now. Mrs Low decided to look through some old school magazines from about twenty years ago, around the year that Shanti would have left school after her 'O' level examination. As she was flipping through some old, musty pages, our teacher suddenly shrieked, "There she is!" We stared at the page and saw a class photo. Mrs Low was pointing at a name below it: 'Shantimani d/o Rajah'.

"So where do we go to from here?" we wondered aloud. Suddenly, I had a brainwave. "Why not look up Shanti's name on social media to see if we can locate her?" It did not seem promising but we got down to it eagerly. We could not believe our luck when we came across Shanti's profile on a social media post. As she owned a boutique, her contact details were also available.

With beating hearts, we waited for a response when Mrs Low called the number. When we saw Mrs Low's face brighten up, we knew that we had succeeded in contacting Shanti. Mrs Low spoke to her at some length.

Later, we learnt from Mrs Low of Shanti's joy in being able to contact her mother. She had realised the enormity of her actions and had tried in vain to contact her mother. Shanti was now a successful businesswoman and wanted to take care of her mother. She wanted to provide for her mother to make up for all the wrong she had done.

Shanti was soon reunited with her mother. The joy of seeing her long-lost daughter changed Madam Ranee completely. As for Mary and me, we were commended by our principal when she learnt what we had done to change Madam Ranee's life. Shanti donated a sum of money to our school and later brought Mary and me out for a special treat. It felt good to know that we had reached out to Madam Ranee and made a difference to her well-being.

30

Relate what happened when a friend tried to hide something and ended up causing trouble to others. How did you react?

Siti was my best friend. Together with Lauren, they were my classroom buddies. The end of November saw us brimming with excitement and relief. Relief because we had just finished our examinations and excitement because we had planned to embark on a trekking trip in Northern Thailand.

Siti had been to Thailand before. She always waxed lyrical about the fabulous hawker food there and the endless shopping bargains. We were planning to indulge in the food and to visit the famous Chiang Mai night market. But most of all, we were looking forward to trekking in Thailand's mountains and visiting the hill tribes there. All three of us loved the outdoors and had gone on expeditions in Malaysia before.

Lauren and I were busy packing the night before the trip. Little did we know that Siti had got herself involved in a physical fracas that night. We did not know this until much later when the troubles were over.

As it was late, Siti had gone down to the void deck to escort her sister up to her flat after her tuition. While Siti was there, she noticed a group of girls staring at her. When she bravely approached them to ask them what the matter was, they set upon her without warning and Siti was punched hard in the chest. It was fortunate that a passer-by appeared and the girls fled from the scene.

Siti managed to stand up on her own. She seemed all right and a cursory check showed no bruises or cuts. It was Siti's nature not to worry others. Hence, we embarked on our expedition with her, not knowing about the incident.

Soon we were caught in the joys of our trip. The shopping done and the food savoured, we embarked on our third objective — trekking Thailand's famous forested mountains.

The morning air was fresh as we placed one energetic foot after the other up the slopes. Every interesting flower, plant or animal life was an occasion for stopping and observing. As usual, Siti led the way. However, halfway up the hill, we noticed her panting and looking visibly tired.

"What's wrong, Siti?" we asked. "Are you all right?" She replied in the affirmative but five minutes later, she stumbled and suddenly fell. We rushed towards her. She was pale but what horrified us was the dark blood that had covered her lips.

Siti needed help quickly. But how were we to obtain medical assistance in such an isolated area? There was no other option but to bring her down the slopes to the nearest village. It was a tortuous descent, in contrast to the earlier climb. In addition, hordes of pesky mosquitoes decided then to feast on our blood. At one stage, I stumbled and sprawled onto the ground, bringing the hapless Siti onto the ground with me.

Words cannot describe our relief when we finally bore down on the village and found that there was medical help there. An assessment by the local doctor confirmed that Siti had internal injuries. Through his help, we were able to summon a helicopter to ferry Siti to a hospital in Chiang Mai. Siti was unconscious as the craft took off into the air. I was terribly worried about her condition, but there was little I could do.

We tried our best to reach Chiang Mai Hospital in a hired jeep as quickly as possible. When we arrived, we learnt that her condition was critical and she had to be operated on. After informing Siti's parents, we paced the wards, praying for her recovery.

The operation went smoothly and Siti survived. Her parents arrived just in time to learn of its success! Filled with relief, they thanked Lauren and me profusely for doing our best to get medical aid for Siti.

We stayed in Chiang Mai until Siti was better. Later, Siti revealed to everyone the events of that fateful night. Her parents scolded her for keeping it a secret and remarked that she had caused much trouble to us. However, we defended Siti by saying that it was typical of her selfless nature. We made a vow to return to Chiang Mai with Siti to complete the climb up the hills once she had fully recovered.

31

'Mothers know best.' Drawing on your experiences with your mother, discuss whether this is true.

Mothers are precious blessings whom we should cherish. They are the anchors in the family, holding the members together. We owe them a great debt. Not only do they bring us into the world, they are our emotional confidantes when we face problems.

I have a small family. My elder brother and I are close to our mother. We love our Dad but we seldom see him. When he is with us, he advises us to study hard and to be good people. However, it is Mum who saw me through my childhood to where I am now. I was a naughty hyperactive child who was prone to illnesses. Mum looked after my health, and advised me about my studies, friends and money.

Now that I am a teenager, I see Mum less often and spend more time with my friends. However, unlike some of my friends who drift apart from their parents when they grow older, my relationship with Mum is still very close. She gives useful advice that always comes in handy!

I am quite an overachiever. Since I was in primary school, I have had many activities. Today, I am also a prefect and an athlete. Consequently, Mum is a bit concerned about my busy schedule. When I am feeling down, I seek Mum's consoling words for she is always the one who asks me to slow down, rest more often, sleep earlier and drink more water. True enough, I perform better whenever I get more rest.

There was a time when I skipped meals owing to my heavy schedule. Consequently, I developed gastric problems. Mum read up about this ailment and gave me advice when I experienced discomfort.

Like typical teenagers, my friends and I are followers of fashion. However, I am wise enough to consult Mum who advises me on the basics of coordinating my dressing, yet knows when to hold back and allow me room to experiment. However, when I asked her if I could dye my hair or have facials, she would put her foot down. She felt that these were unnecessary expenses. However, my taste in fashion has since grown increasingly dissimilar from Mum's. I have, on a number of occasions, not taken her advice regarding fashion. There was once when I bought a dress although my mum did not think it suited me. I had to admit later that she was right. I had bought it on impulse and the style was indeed too gaudy for my taste.

Like most teenagers, my friends are important to me. I always consult Mum about relationship problems with friends. Once, I found my friend Rita's words and actions bewildering. Rita would talk enthusiastically about going for tuition and dance lessons, taking part in a chess competition and attending debate training. Yet when the time came to do these things, she would give excuses to avoid them. I consulted Mum, who suggested that Rita could be feeling the pressure from having to do too much. She advised that I broached the subject gently. When I did so, Rita confided in me that she was highly stressed. Thanks to Mum's insight, I was able to support Rita through the difficult period.

The holidays are looming ahead. Should I take a part-time job? Guess whom I will consult for advice? I have found that Mum's advice is often well thought-out and fair. I really believe that Mum knows best!

32

Write about a time when you wanted something badly. Recount the experience in which you did your best to get it.

Our old television set which had served us faithfully for years had broken down. First, it was the sound fading off. At first, a few knocks on the box would restore the volume. However, one night, I personally witnessed its demise. While I was switching channels, I saw the light on the screen slowly flicker and die off. My brother, the DIY expert, when summoned, could not restore the image.

This set had held many fond memories for my family. We had watched numerous drama series on it and viewed many National Day Parades together. We were thus determined to obtain a set of the same brand and size, with the hope that the new one would look just like our current one.

However, as dad had recently lost his job, we had to be careful with our spending. My sister and I surveyed the shops and sadly concluded that we could not afford one of our original size and brand for less than one thousand dollars.

So it was with surprise and mounting excitement when I heard from my brother that Paradise Parade Centre was celebrating its tenth anniversary, with a whole host of special offers. After scanning the items in their brochure, I found a television set at half its original price. As luck would have it, the set was exactly what we wanted.

At 1.30 pm on Saturday, the deejay (stationed in the basement of the centre) would announce the name of the shop where the offer was to take place. I knew that there were only three shops selling electrical goods in that centre.

On Friday afternoon after school, I reconnoitred the centre. From the deejay stand, I made a mental map of the nearest route to each electrical store, taking note of the nearest stairs, lifts and escalators.

Saturday morning dawned bright and clear. However, when I woke up, I received a call from my classmate that there would be extra athletic practice that afternoon. My heart sank and I was just about to ask my brother to take on the task of securing the offer when another call came. My classmate informed me that our coach was indisposed and the practice was called off.

Whew! I then decided to go early to queue up and survey the territory. At 1 pm sharp, I approached the deejay stand. You could not miss the place because of the loud booming voice of the deejay who was rattling off the day's offers to a growing crowd around him, greedy for the best buys.

My heart sank when I approached the stand and noticed the massive crowd. Suddenly, there was a commotion. It was not, however, about the television offer but an announcement of free goodie bags on the second floor. Half the crowd made a beeline for that. I thanked my lucky stars for the organiser's foresight. This would mean less of a crowd at the electrical store and better security and order.

Sure enough, when the crowds had thinned out, the deejay uttered the words I was waiting for at the exact time. "Our best offer of the day, the Samkrung television set will be at Har..." Before he could finish his announcement, I was off in a flash.

Heart pumping and adrenaline coursing through my veins, I steered my body into a 'flying' missile. I knew that the store was on the third floor. The lift was further away and the escalator would be crowded. The stairs to my left would offer the best route. I ran pell-mell with bewildered shoppers making way for 'this crazy boy'.

Suffice it to say, I was panting and exhausted when I reached the entrance of the store. I was greeted with loud applause by the manager and his sales staff. I was the first to reach the store and the set was mine!

Need I say more? My family was jubilant that night watching our favourite programmes again. My dad had not looked so pleased since he lost his job. All the preparations were really worth the while.

33

When a task that you thought was easy turned out to be difficult, what did you do?

I have a neighbour, Mrs Lim. She has just had a baby and has been juggling work and childcare. With her husband frequently overseas, she has to rely on domestic helpers to care for her child.

One day she called for me. “Nina”, she smiled in her sweetest manner. “Can you do me a favour? Please look after my baby. My domestic helper has left and I am waiting for a new one. I need to go to office.”

How could I reject a request couched in such a sweet cajoling manner? I agreed to try looking after Dave until her return. It couldn’t be that difficult. Anyway, I was on holiday. I always had a fondness for babies. I used to play with baby dolls when I was young. Now, I would have a real, live one! It would be cute and fun. Mrs Lim gave me some instructions on feeding the baby and burping him. Then she left in a hurry. I was now the guardian of a plump little baby.

Dave, the ‘cutie’, however turned out to be a pesky ‘monster’. His wails were heard from his room shortly after his mother left. I tried my best to cradle him comfortably but his wails did not cease. Thinking that he needed a change of environment, I walked around the house and even ventured into the garden. However, it was to no avail. Mrs Chan, another neighbour, saw me and gave me a disapproving stare. Finally, she blurted out, “The baby might be hungry, you know?”

“Milk! Why didn’t I think of that?” I thought. Putting Dave in his cot, I mixed some milk powder with hot water and eagerly gave the little one his bottle. However, the baby took a few hungry sips before he rejected it and started wailing again. At my wits’ end, I called his mother but her line was busy. In desperation, I tried to remember my Home Economics lessons and suspected that the milk powder was not enough. True enough it wasn’t! The baby stopped crying after I had put in more scoops of the milk powder.

The next two hours were the happiest hours of my childcare experience. Dave smiled and chortled as I sang lullabies or acted silly poses for him. Then, as he started crying again, I took him in my arms. Moments later, he yawned, nodded sleepily and fell asleep. After depositing him in his cot, I trudged wearily to the kitchen to fix myself a meal. However, this was not to be. While I was sipping on a cup of hot tea, the familiar wails started again. When I entered Dave’s room, I realised that he was wet and had soiled himself. Yucks! It took me ages to clean him up and change his diapers. What a chore!

Dave slept after this and I lay down on the floor next to him to have a nap. Before I could nod off to sleep, I was awakened by the tyrant’s screaming again. I carried him out of the house when his wailing did not stop. I noticed Mrs Chan in her garden. This time, she came over to my side. After examining him, she pronounced “Colic!” It seemed that the baby was not burped properly and now he had a stomach discomfort. Mrs Chan offered to look after him until his mother came back. I could assist her.

When Mrs Lim came home, Mrs Chan briefed her on my misfortunes. The two of them had a good laugh at my expense as I glowered at them.

To thank me, Mrs Lim gave me a pair of tickets to a concert that I badly wanted to attend. She thanked me and mentioned casually that she could make me her permanent babysitter. I turned down her offer politely, knowing very well now that I should not underestimate this challenging job.

34 Is waiting a time of joyous anticipation or painful anxiety? Using your own experience, show which is a more accurate description.

There was only one month to go before the release of my examination results. I might have taken the examination a month ago, but the feelings of insecurity and anxiety had not diminished with time. After the examination, I had initially felt relief that it was all over and even told myself that it did not really matter how I did since I had done my best.

However, that conviction soon disappeared as I began to reflect on my performance during the examination. Time stretched interminably before me as I waited for the results. I began to berate myself for not having started the revision earlier as I thought about all the mistakes that I had made. As I recalled my inaccurate answers on the now seemingly straightforward questions, I was tormented by despair and regret.

Of course, there were also times when I was more positive and felt that I had actually done well. I would think of all the right answers that I had given, especially for the challenging questions. At such times, I would applaud my own cleverness and presence of mind. Still, these times did not last long. My darker moods would move in to eclipse the happier moments and I would plunge once more into hopelessness. These fluctuations in my mood certainly kept me waiting in painful anxiety.

On the day when the results were to be released, I made my way to the school with trepidation. I measured each step scrupulously, hoping to prolong the inevitable. Then, I played a ridiculous game with myself. I would tell myself that if the next car to pass me on my left was red, I would have done well. If it was not, it would be failure that I was looking at. All the way, I varied the terms of the game and made myself exhausted with the seesawing of emotions whenever a car passed.

Finally, I made it to school without any mishap. My friends were all in the hall, waiting anxiously for their turn to receive their result slip. All around me, students were either trying to conceal their fears by putting on a brave front or openly displaying their uncertainty. I stood in the queue and saw my friends either screaming with joy or slinking away in shock and shame. I could feel my heart beating faster as the queue shortened to bring me closer to the inevitable. The pain of my wait was almost over.

Just before me was Janet. When she saw her result slip, a whoop of joy escaped her and she started jumping around. She grabbed everyone in sight and hugged them, evidently delirious with joy. I began to feel my heart sinking. Surely after such excellent results, mine would be poor, no? What was the probability of two sets of excellent results being given out in a row? I trembled with fear as the teacher handed me my result slip. Her face betrayed nothing that would give me a clue. I took the slip. The wait was finally over.

35

Write about an occasion when a disaster seemed inevitable in spite of your preparations. How did you feel?

My name is Hazel. I am a student in a school where Chinese Literature is offered as a subject. Being interested in all things Chinese, I was thrilled to pieces when I learnt that my school had nominated me for a one-year immersion study course in Beijing to learn about China's history, culture and its language. The trip would be sponsored by the Chinese Chamber of Commerce. A week later, my school's nomination was accepted and my departure on 5th November was confirmed. I would leave a week after my examination and arrive before the school term started to acclimatise myself to Beijing.

The morning of 5th November dawned bright and clear. This was the day I had been waiting for. Yet, I felt more than a tinge of regret on leaving my loved ones, especially my beloved Mum.

Mum and I had spent the day before in a flurry of activities doing last-minute preparations. Her worries and nagging about my preparation for the trip were still fresh on my mind as I woke up at 8.30 am. The flight was on SQ 518 at 12.15 pm from Changi Airport to Beijing. I was to meet my teachers, friends and relatives at 10.00 am before I checked in.

Since there was plenty of time to spare and my bags were all packed, I took a leisurely breakfast. At 9.00 am, Mum started asking me to get ready.

"Dear, are you ready?"

"Yes, Mum", I replied gaily.

"Don't forget your passport", she reminded me.

I was at the door, carrying two of my bags when a niggling thought manifested in my mind. "Did I pack the passport last night?" I had an uneasy feeling that I had not and turned to Mum.

"Mum, did you put my passport in my pouch?"

"Yes, dear," she replied.

I then unzipped my waist pouch to confirm this. To my consternation, it was empty except for some Chinese currency. I then asked Mum where it was. Flabbergasted, Mum checked and then scratched her head. She was quite certain that she had put my passport in the pouch the night before. The next thirty minutes saw Mum and me rifling through the luggage and combing my room. We emptied drawers, and even looked under the bed! But it was to no avail. Frantically, we then searched the rest of the house. By 10.00 am, we sank onto the sofa, admitting defeat. I felt so helpless that I could not think clearly.

Mum then made a decision. I was to go to the airport now as we could not keep our well-wishers waiting. She would remain behind and try to recall where she had placed my passport.

Fighting back my tears, I left for the airport. The mood was sombre as I met and told my well-wishers at the airport about my situation. The minutes crawled by and yet there was no ringing from my mobile phone. At 11.30 am, there was a last call to check-in for my flight. Reluctantly, I faced the fact that my passport might not be found and went to the airline counter to explain my situation. Then Sarah, my best friend, who was guarding my bags, gestured to me excitedly. "Your mobile phone is ringing!" she said.

With a pounding heart, I answered the call and heard the sweetest news. "I remember now. It is in the secret compartment in your red bag." Swiftly, I unlocked my bag and unzipped the compartment at the bottom. My red passport was unveiled in all its glory. I heaved a sigh of relief.

There were spontaneous cheers from everyone. I was then sent off hurriedly but warmly. At 12.30 pm, I was on the plane, winging over Singapore, on my way to Beijing.

Later, I learnt from Mum what had happened. It seemed that she had a nightmare the night before my flight that my pouch containing my passport was stolen. Therefore, she had woken up and transferred my passport to the red bag. In the morning, she had forgotten about the transfer.

I therefore departed from Singapore, feeling greatly relieved and looking forward to my stay in Beijing. However, I was sad that Mum could not bid farewell to me at the airport. Fortunately, on the first night in the school hostel in Beijing where I was staying, the telephone rang. Mum was flying over to spend some time in Beijing. My happiness was thus complete.

36

Describe a heated argument. What were the feelings of those involved?

The crashing sounds of wine glasses followed soon after the shattering of the expensive Ming vase. Emily crouched even further into her corner, willing her mind to stop taking in the sounds of her parents arguing again. She could not remember exactly when these arguments first started, but she always knew how they invariably ended. Mummy would send the bedroom door banging as she retreated in anger to that refuge. Daddy would come by and hug her before leaving the house for the next few days.

Emily thought back to the first argument. It had started soon after Mummy had come back from the hospital. She had looked wan then, such a far cry from her usual radiant and beautiful self. The first thing she did was to take Emily into her arms and squeeze her hard. Emily remembered wriggling irritably, making little noises to show Mummy her discomfort. But she could not break free. Suddenly, she felt a strange dampness on the collar of her dress and struggled free to look at Mummy's face. Her make-up had streaked all over her face, obviously ruined by her tears. At that moment, Daddy had walked in and started speaking to her. She kept shaking her head and refusing to listen. In the end, Daddy was so angry that he stormed out of the house.

From then on, increasingly, Mummy would smash things around the house whenever they argued while Daddy would seethe with impotent fury. Later on, Emily had learnt that Mummy had lost the baby she was carrying.

Now, she was awakened from her thoughts when a missile shot past her face. Emily looked at the pieces of porcelain on the floor next to her and squeezed her eyes shut tight. The sounds of her parents' controlled fury and biting words persisted in driving themselves into her consciousness. She opened her eyes and looked up timidly at her parents. She saw the anger palpable in their stances — Daddy's hands were clenched tight around a photo frame while his mouth was forming words that were obviously hurting Mummy, who had buried her face in her hands and was sobbing uncontrollably.

Suddenly, Emily realised what Daddy was holding onto so tightly. It was the framed photograph of their family on her fifth birthday party just last year. She recalled that it was taken a mere few weeks before Mummy lost the baby. In the midst of her recollection, she heard her Mummy saying something about not wanting the baby to die and how she had suffered all this time. Daddy was implacable. He stared at her angrily and asked her, "What about Emily?" Emily's blood froze in her veins as she heard Mummy's reply, "I don't care." The coldness with which that was said sliced right through Emily's heart. In a flash, she realised what the problem was. She was obviously the reason why her parents were arguing all the time.

Hot tears scalded her eyes as she felt the shame enshrouding her. She was unwanted. Suddenly, the piercing sound of glass shattering filled the air. Emily looked up. Mummy's voice shrieked the unforgettable words, "Let it break! Let it break! Let it all go to pieces!" The words resounded in Emily's ears. Even Mummy did not want her now, the same loving Mummy who used to rock her to sleep gently every night. Daddy looked so shocked that he was speechless. In the end, only seven words escaped him, "Yes, let it all go to pieces."

Emily felt a wave of fear. Daddy was giving up too. He did not want her either. They both did not want her. Overwhelmed by the knowledge, Emily turned from the room and ran towards the front door. She heard her parents shouting her name but she did not look back. Suddenly, glaring lights blinded her and she stopped. She only had time to say "Mummy!" before the impact sent her reeling across the porch.

37

Describe an incident that caused you to regret your boastfulness.

Right from the beginning, I had already known how clever I was. Everyone I met never failed to praise me for the bright ideas I always had and the quickness I always exhibited in coming up with resourceful plans. I grew up supremely confident in my brilliant future in the medical field, which was the area that I was particularly talented in. In fact, I had recently developed a technique that could bond parts of the human body together without causing any tissue scarring or tissue incompatibility. It was a breakthrough that would ensure my place in the history of medicine. I was that confident.

That was why I now felt terribly incensed that my capabilities were called into question. The strangers before me stood solid and smug, looking as if they were about to burst out in hilarity over what they called my 'sci-fi imagination'. I had been boasting about my bonding technique in the local coffee shop. Surrounded by the admiring attention of the usual lunch crowd, I had gone on to detail the possibilities of the technique in healing the human body using spare body parts. Of course, most of the claims were exaggerated, fuelled by my vanity and eagerness to maintain attention on myself. But little had I known that these strangers would take such a keen interest in what I was saying — they had made me repeat several times what I claimed I was capable of.

In the end, they left the coffee shop and the lunch crowd dispersed to their respective offices. I felt immeasurably relieved. "Why had they rattled me so?" I wondered. I was usually more audacious than that in handling difficult people, but this time, I had felt the need to constantly push the limits of reality by claiming abilities that were yet to be tested. I had even risen to the bait when they asked if I could bond a frozen head on to an alien body without causing any malfunctioning of the bonded body. My answer was an unblinking 'yes'. Thank goodness they had left after that, I thought. I was worn down by the encounter, and wanted nothing more than to return to my laboratory to immerse myself in the final testing of the bonding technique.

Squinting at the brightness of the afternoon sun, I started to make my way to the bus stop. But before long, the group of strangers in the coffee shop blocked my path. This time, they looked rather cold and menacing than patronising and amused, as they had earlier. Even the way their bodies moved had an air of steely control that I had not noticed earlier. Gesturing with precise movements, they indicated that I was to follow them. Cowed by their bulky stature, I cowardly did as they indicated.

Despite my fear and misgivings, I kept pace with them. Soon, I found myself in a hi-tech laboratory, which was massive in comparison to mine. Everywhere I looked, I saw the latest medical equipment and sophisticated computer technology. Even though fear overwhelmed me, I did feel a sense of awe.

Suddenly, a well-dressed man in his sixties approached me, flanked by four well-built young men. He had a commanding presence, which seemed to dwarf all the rest in the room. His words were articulated in a heavily accented voice that I could not immediately identify.

"Welcome, Dr Tan. It's my pleasure to meet you finally. I have long been fascinated by your success in bonding human parts. I wonder if you'll be able to bond a frozen head to an alien body without any problem. Mind you, it's an important head!" The strange man chuckled mirthlessly.

I was frightened, to say the least. A heavy feeling of doom hung in the air, unnerving me to the core. The man waved his hand and, out of nowhere, a trolley with a glass case on it was wheeled in by a nondescript-looking man. I stared intently at the glass case, fascinated by the bloated head floating in it. Suddenly, realisation hit me with a jolt. It was Malcolm Corra, the dictator of a neighbouring country who had disappeared during a rebellion by the masses in the early 1970s. The atrocities that he had

committed were beyond human comprehension, from corruption to plunder to genocide. The world had heaved a collective sigh of relief when it was finally established that he had perished in the chaos that followed the rebellion.

I was terrified. These had to be the loyal supporters of Corra, people who were willing to go to great lengths to restore their ruler, even if it meant freezing his head and bonding it to the body of a younger man! The implications of bringing him back to life with fully functioning capabilities horrified me. How could I even agree? I looked around again, seeing only the hard faces of the strangers. At a loss, I began searching my brain frantically for a clever idea...

Suffice it to say that my idea worked. I shall not burden the reader with the gory details of my struggle. All I can say is that I was taught a sharp lesson. I shall never boast about my cleverness again.

38

You searched for someone and finally met him or her. Explain whether this person met your expectations.

Cries of distress and moans of pain filled the air. I looked around at the almost surreal setting, stunned by the confusion around me. The entire area was still reeling from the shock of the bomb blast just minutes ago. I knew I was coming to a war-torn country, but even that knowledge could not prepare me for the horror of the actual event. I could not imagine what I was going to suffer in the days ahead in my search for the child prodigy.

My company had sent me to the location to search for a child who had demonstrated signs of being a musical genius at an international competition. Unfortunately, before the boy could unveil his talent to the world, rebels in his country had overrun the government and seized control. The upheaval in the days that followed had also seemed to swallow up any signs of the boy. My company directors were ardent admirers of musical talent, especially when such discoveries would bring lots of publicity to their recording company. Hence, I was despatched with unceremonious haste to the country to search for the boy despite the reports of civil unrest in the region.

I resolved to locate the boy quickly before I became merely a statistic on the casualty list. I pushed my way past the dazed crowd in the area, trying to get to the next street where I had been told the boy was last seen. When I got there, the same scene of devastation greeted me. I was demoralised. What if the boy had been killed in the blast? Quickly, I rushed to the fourth house down the street, trying to keep my flagging spirits up despite the sight of the smouldering house. The heat was so great that I could not get into the house at all. All I could do was stand outside, calling out the boy's name, hoping against hope that he would answer. But it was futile. No longed-for voice answered my desperate calls.

Finally, I decided to make my way back to the hotel. As I neared it, I suddenly became aware of footsteps behind me. Fear prickled down my back as I quickened my footsteps, hoping to outpace the pursuer. But try as I might, the footsteps remained steady behind me. At last, my stamina fell flat, and I whirled around to confront my pursuer. To my surprise, it was a bedraggled little boy. Hope soared in my heart as I realised that underneath all that soot was the face of the prodigy I was seeking! My search was over! Almost delirious, I picked him up and asked if he was Nikolai Nostri. He nodded grimly, a lifetime of fear and agony imprinted on his every feature. His tired and frightened face fanned the embers of pity in me. I led him back to the hotel, holding his tiny hand tightly.

Luckily, the hotel was not greatly affected by the blast and could still function. I telephoned my company to tell them the good news. After dinner, I took Nikolai to the grand piano proudly displayed in the hotel lobby. Nikolai was a genius who could allegedly coax heavenly music out of the most cantankerous instrument. And he had absolutely no formal training! I told him my wish to hear him play and seated him gently before the piano. He reached out tentatively to touch the keys, and after a long while, he began to play. The beautiful music that filled the room quietened everyone. He was every bit the prodigy that I had hoped he would be.

Suddenly, the music stopped and Nikolai's head slumped loudly onto the keys. I rushed to him. Mutely questioning, I wiped the tears from his eyes. In a quavering voice, Nikolai answered my unspoken question, "I'm no good. If I were, all this wouldn't have happened. Papa would not have died. It's a punishment!" The awful words hit me like a pail of ice-cold water. I had never met anyone with so much talent, and yet so little confidence. How was he to face the demands of the company directors who would insist he produced music, whether he liked it or not? The joy of the evening suddenly turned to ashes for me.

39

Describe how a seemingly perfect life fell apart all of a sudden.

May was the happy-go-lucky type, never seen without her Duchenne smile. Everyone thought that she was the luckiest person in the world, always surrounded by joy and laughter. When she started going out with Josh, everyone thought the relationship completed the already beautiful picture. Josh was good-looking and considerate, always warm and caring towards people he knew. Everyone agreed that they were the perfect couple. But good things certainly had a way of falling apart.

It came as a bolt from the blue. Just the day before, May was still her usual bubbly self. She had completed her latest project and was in a very good mood. When May was in a good mood, it meant that she would go round the office spreading goodwill and happiness with her effervescent personality. But today, everything changed. I had never seen her so depressed. Tears were running down her face and her eyes looked lost and sorrowful. Nobody had ever seen May unhappy for long, so what I saw came as a terrible shock to me.

I managed to pull May aside to a private corner, hoping to comfort her. However, she merely sat quietly, biting her lips as she tried to hold back her sobs. The tears flowing down her cheeks seemed like an endless river. To tell the truth, I was frightened. I did not know how to comfort a person who had always been on the giving end. May was always the one consoling us, so the situation now was terribly unfamiliar. I was at a loss.

Eventually, she poured out her story. Apparently, Josh had told her that he wanted to break up without giving her much warning or even a reason. She had stumbled away from the scene of her heartbreak and back into the office in a state of shock. She kept mumbling something to herself, but I could not make out what she was saying. I sat silently next to her, my hands clasping hers.

Soon, she looked ready to face the rigours of the working afternoon, and we returned to our desks. She sat at her desk quietly, making very little noise and hardly any movement. I quickly warned everyone else about her situation and we all agreed that she should not be disturbed. But our hearts ached for the once happy girl who had brought so much sunshine into our drab office life.

Suddenly, someone shouted out and we rushed over. Mrs Loon was at May's place, crouched on the floor over May's prostrate figure. Someone had the presence of mind to call the ambulance. None of us could react helpfully. May's pale face was a shock to us. It seemed to us, in our grief, a sign of eventual doom. The ambulance arrived soon after and took her away.

Josh arrived too late at the hospital. May had passed away from a ruptured vessel in her brain. No one knew if the breakup had anything to do with her death. Perhaps, she had already been ill and the incident had been the final trigger. Someone said that the fire of her being seemed extinguished that day. Maybe that was when she stopped striving to live.

40

Write an account of how a person's dream of a better life was crushed.

Andy was hungry again. This was not surprising, for he had only half a bun to eat since morning. It was already late afternoon, and sleeping was not going to help him stave off the hunger any more. He slowly lowered himself from the ledge he was on and made his way home.

Home was a dilapidated mud shack with so many holes puncturing its walls and roof that the wind practically whistled through it when the rainy season approached. Andy loved the music of the wind though; it helped him forget the chill that permeated his emaciated body. Though his house was in a pathetic condition, Andy still smiled as he thought of his mother's face. She was a wonderful woman who never forgot to make him feel treasured. They were alone in this remote part of China, his father having died in the war. She made a meagre living washing clothes for other families, while Andy did his part by eating little. But in the evenings, she would tell him the loveliest stories of courage and adventure. Andy loved his mother and he would do all he could to make his mother happy.

Suddenly, the loud din of cymbals clashing and trumpets playing a merry tune cut through the air. Andy swung around to where the sound was coming from. He saw a procession of people coming down the road, heralding the brightly-coloured sedan chair that was carried by four burly men. The children of the village were all dancing around the sedan chair, delirious with joy. Andy's curiosity was piqued. The children were usually dour and listless. Why were they so chirpy now? He rushed after the procession.

He finally found out that the man in the sedan chair was an important man in the capital, someone who wielded great power and was back in the village to find a successor. He was a native of the village who had left many years ago to eke out a living somewhere else. Now that he was close to retirement, he needed to find an intelligent young boy who could carry on his work. Andy felt a glimmer of hope. He could do it, he was sure. After all, his mother had always said that he was smart. Andy found out that the rich man was leaving the next day and would bring the chosen boy with him. His heart surged with hope as he went home.

His mother was appalled at his intention, which surprised Andy. Did she not understand that he wanted a better life for both of them? He would love to see his mother luxuriating in silk instead of having her skin roughened by the coarse cotton that she now wore. He would make sure that she partook of the finest delicacies once he was rich. He wanted her to be happy, not suffering. But his mother cried hopelessly, pleading with him not to go to such lengths for wealth. He simply could not understand why she was against this.

Suddenly, he realised why she was crying. She did not want him to leave her! Of course he would not! Andy laughed and assured her that he would definitely bring her along to the capital. He loved his mother too much to even leave her for a day. But his words did not reassure her. She merely cried louder. Andy tossed and turned in bed that night, uncertain of what he should do.

Andy woke up with a start the next morning. The day was unusually bright. Something was amiss. Suddenly, he realised what it was that troubled him. He was late! He had to get to the rich man's house for a chance to be selected as his successor. Andy rushed out of the house, tugging at his clothes while trying to slip his feet into his shoes. When he arrived, all he could see was an empty courtyard. All the trumpeters and musicians were gone. There was no sign of the feasting and celebration that had taken place the day before. Andy sank to his knees in tears. He was too late. He would not be able to give his mother a better life or buy her silk and delicacies. Eunuch Pang was already gone.

41

Explain what happened when the people in your community suffered from a serious disease.

We had been working on it for so long that sometimes I wondered if it would ever be finished. The cure for the deadly Crotyn Fever was at hand, but somehow evaded completion. The Crotyn Fever was named after the first area it had broken out in — Crotyn. The population of five thousand was wiped out in a week when the deadly virus descended on them like a plague. The helpless authorities could only order the torching of the area to prevent the virus from spreading to the neighbouring areas. But this was only partially successful in stemming the spread. Other towns perished similarly in the wake of Crotyn.

Just as suddenly as it had appeared, the Crotyn virus seemed to disappear overnight. Traces of it could only be found in the bodies of those who had died from it. The world rejoiced, but the scientists at Diseases Control Incorporated knew that its disappearance did not mean its destruction. Without a doubt, the Crotyn virus would be back.

I had joined the scientists in their search for a cure after having seen the damage it had caused. The town that I had known all my life had been ravaged by the fever. None in my family survived, and I often wondered why I was so blessed, or cursed, to be the sole survivor. I never forgot the spasms of agony that wracked my family or the ubiquitous bleeding from the orifices that I tried to stop. I was forced to watch them die. Now, I was going to fight back. The vaccine would be completed, and I would be one of its creators.

I was extremely weary, having worked on the vaccine nonstop since I came to the town of Seng Po to join the team. I trudged back to the guesthouse that Mrs Chang kept in such good order, thinking of the kindly old lady and her delicious steaming soups. But the sound of wailing was the only sound I heard as I entered the doorway. I rushed to the living room and what greeted my eyes was a shock. Mrs Chang lay on the couch, obviously in great pain. Her family was gathered around her, helplessly wringing their hands. I rushed to her side as they proceeded to tell me that she had suddenly collapsed in the morning with a high fever. She had fallen into unconsciousness around midday and had started bleeding from her nostrils.

I was stunned. The Crotyn was back. I recognised all the signs, for I had seen them in my own family. Her family members were so distraught that they became incoherent. I thought of the rosy-cheeked elderly woman who had been like a mother to me since I came, and knew that I could not let her die. I dashed out of the house, blindly finding my way through the film of tears.

When I reached the laboratory and told them what had happened, everyone was stunned by the resurgence of the virus even before we had perfected the cure. But the head of the team knew that we had to arrest the virus before it spread further. Mrs Chang would be used to test the vaccine now. With that, we rushed to the guesthouse and immediately injected it into her ailing body. The appearance of so many doctors reassured Mrs Chang's family members. They settled down to wait for the fever to subside.

At exactly six the next morning, Mrs Chang's fever broke. She appeared to be recovering and we all heaved a sigh of relief. We made our way back to the laboratory, eager to prepare move of the vaccine. Suddenly, the telephone rang. I reached for it. As I listened intently, my heart sank into an abyss of misery. I faced my colleagues stoically, trying not to betray my shock.

"Mrs Chang has just passed away. She was bleeding from her ears and eyes as well. Looks like the virus has mutated since Crotyn."

42

'Guilt has a way of guiding our actions.' Describe an instance when this proved to be the case.

Tom read the news report with great interest. He mused over the key sentences — 'The traveller had a large sum of money but no passport. He seemed to be suffering from a loss of memory.' A plan began to form in his cunning mind. Tom was never one to let a good chance to make money go without doing anything about it. He rubbed his hands with glee, thinking up ways to relieve the poor traveller of his money. Finally, he decided on the best plan for his greed, and sat back relishing the thought of the things he could do with the money.

The next day, Tom made his way to the hospital where the traveller was recuperating after the car accident that robbed him of his memory. He found the sad-looking man sitting up on his bed, looking ruefully out of the window. For a moment, Tom was struck by the sorrow that emanated from the man, but caught himself just in time. In his plan, there was no room for any soft-heartedness. He had to be cruel in order to get what he wanted. With that, he stiffened his back and walked into the room.

With a loud chuckle, Tom approached the man with great confidence and said, "Hello, Mark! I'm so glad you're all right. I came as soon as I heard." He reached out and grasped the man's hand in his with great sincerity, obviously taking the man by surprise. The man swallowed visibly and stared at Tom.

"Mark? My name is Mark?" he asked, almost disbelievingly.

Tom was ready for this. He quickly launched into the story that he had fabricated the night before and gave the man not only a name but an address, history and purpose as well. He reminded 'Mark' that they had come to Singapore together to invest in a company with the money in the suitcase and that if the money was not brought to the lawyer's office by 5 pm that very day, they would lose a great deal of money. By this time, Tom's confident manner and urgent tone had obviously succeeded in convincing the man. He nodded agreeably and told Tom that he would get him the money.

Tom was ecstatic. It had gone so much easier than he had expected. The man was as innocent as a baby, never even questioning Tom to verify his assertions. In fact, he looked so grateful that he had an identity that he was ready to give him anything. Tom felt a sudden unfamiliar tightening in his chest then, as the man's trusting eyes gazed happily at him. Tom found himself looking away, unable to quell the sense of discomfort that suddenly enveloped him. After he had received the suitcase, he quickly left on the pretext of needing to rush to the lawyer's office.

Once outside the room, he breathed much more easily. But the feeling of guilt did not leave him. Instead, he kept visualising the look of trust and gratitude on the man's face. He tried to dismiss the image but could not. He was almost beside himself with agony when he approached the exit of the hospital.

At the exit, Tom paused. The traveller's grateful and trusting face came to his mind again. He took a deep breath and turned back.

43

Write about a time when you were misunderstood by others. How did you feel?

It was one of the few events in my life that I felt totally compelled to attend. When David and I had broken up two years ago, it was an acrimonious parting. We were both too young then to value the relationship and in the end, decided that it was better to just go our separate ways. It took us about a year before we could eventually talk to each other in a civil manner. Now he was going to be married to someone else, and I was invited.

I knew that most people were expecting me to turn down the invitation, which made me even more determined to attend the ceremony. I felt that I was mature enough to handle such an event and wanted to lay to rest the rumours about me still hurting after all this time. It was certainly an important event for me as it was a golden opportunity to prove my strength once and for all.

On the day of the wedding, I woke up bright and early, determined not to be late. I had laid out all my clothes and accessories which had been picked out the week before. I was going to look good and be gracious at the wedding. When I left the house, there was still a good two hours before the wedding. I decided to do some window shopping at the shopping centre a stone's throw from the church so as to be sure that I would be at the event on time.

The shopping centre was particularly crowded. I wandered aimlessly on the ground floor of the huge complex, waiting idly for time to pass. Suddenly, I heard a loud shout coming from the direction of the jewellery shop. The next thing I knew, a man sprinting away from it came precariously close to me. As he was hotly pursued by some uniformed men, he did not see where he was going and dashed straight into me. The impact caused me to stumble and fall violently backwards, finally landing unceremoniously on a puddle of dirty water outside a fast food restaurant.

I was appalled. My carefully chosen outfit was ruined a mere thirty minutes before the wedding. I could not believe my bad luck. Angrily, I picked myself up and stormed into the nearest boutique to buy a new suit of clothes.

By the time, I was able to buy a respectable-looking suit and rush to the wedding, I was an hour late. When I entered the reception, the guests were already toasting the happy couple. My arrival was immediately noticed, as guests started whispering to each other and watching for my next move. I held my breath and walked up to the couple. It was the longest two minutes of my life. I wished them a happy life together and explained my lateness. Their kind words brought tears to my eyes after such a nasty incident. However, the glistening tears sparked off another round of whispering.

I did not stay long at the reception. But throughout the time that I was there, I was miserable and alone. I could feel the sneers of the people around me, congratulating themselves at how accurate they had been in thinking that I had not recovered from being 'spurned'. They probably came to the conclusion that I had arrived late to spite the couple — particularly David. The bride was trying her very best to convince everyone that I had a valid reason to be late and that she was not offended at all.

Thinking back on the occasion, I felt that I was very unfortunate. I had tried my best to attend the wedding on time to wish the couple well, but was misunderstood by the other guests. My only consolation was that the bride and groom were gracious and understanding towards me.

44

Describe what happened when what was thought to be a harmless prank went awry.

John had trudged across the entire length of the field but still, no one had asked him to join their team. The physical education teacher was exasperated. He needed the class to get into five teams to play the game but no one would take John in as a team member. As the minutes ticked away, the teacher started berating the class for not cooperating. Standing in the blistering hot sun with the teacher's harsh words raining on them, the students felt their dislike for John even more intensely. John was left with no choice but to stand apart from the class, as he always had, and subject himself to the humiliation of their burning hatred.

Back in the classroom an hour later, angry voices filled the air as they were raised in condemnation of the boy they sneeringly called 'the tortoise'. It had never been clear why they disliked John so much, but his pudgy body and stuttering voice had been enough to turn the class off from the very first day he was introduced to them. Yet, John had never stopped trying to fit in, whether it was trying to play the games well or crack the same kind of jokes, but it was all to no avail. He was an outsider and would always remain so. Suddenly, the excited voice of Jim, the class prankster, rang out above the din. He had a plan to punish John! The class began clustering excitedly around him.

The next day dawned bright and early as the class boarded the bus for the field trip to the Memorial Park. Everyone was in high spirits as they harboured the secret that they had planned right down to the last detail. The park was a beautiful stretch of green, peppered by the numerous tombstones dedicated to the war heroes. John was visibly moved by the serenity of the place as he wandered from tombstone to tombstone, imagining the courageous acts of the dead heroes. He was so lost in his own thoughts that he failed to notice the sudden ceasing of his classmates' usual chatter.

Some time later, John made his way back to the bus. What greeted him was a lonely bus standing on the asphalt parking lot, with not a single person in sight. He found it very odd. After all, only the teacher had said that he would be away for a while to attend to some arrangements at the park office. Where were his classmates? A sudden shiver of fear overwhelmed him. The engine was running and his classmates' belongings were there. Panic gripped John and he began running about in the park, shouting for his classmates.

All this time, hidden behind some shrubs a hundred metres away, were his delighted classmates. They were so overwhelmed by the success of their prank that they almost fell over with laughter. Some even congratulated Jim for remembering that John had a terrible fear of loneliness ever since his parents passed away.

John was running helter-skelter in the direction of the road some 800 metres away. It was obvious that he was out of control. The unbridled laughter of the class now gave way to a shocked silence. Someone shouted, "Stop running, John! We're here!" In his extreme panic, John heard nothing. All of a sudden, the class could see that John had collapsed. They rushed towards him and found him in the throes of an epileptic attack. The teacher arrived and immediately called for an ambulance. It was almost fifteen minutes later before the paramedics arrived and took over.

As the ambulance drove off, feelings of anxiety and guilt overwhelmed the class. How could a harmless prank go so wrong?

45

Write an account about a promise that was not kept.

The wind ripped through the trees, its howling causing the skin on her neck to prickle. Cassie stared at the block of stone before her, trying to unravel the knot of anger within.

They had been the best of friends — two young girls who shared all their secret dreams, thoughts and feelings. Ever since they had first sat next to each other in Primary One, Sara and Cassie had found in each other the love and care that their wealthy but busy parents could not provide. Both girls spent all their available time together, doing homework and working in the gardens to discover the pleasures of simple gardening. Suddenly, they did not mind so much that their parents gave them no more than a cursory glance each night at bedtime. The weekends, when the two girls were left to their own devices, were not so daunting after all now that they had each other to talk to. Together, they even adopted a stray dog, which they affectionately named Tiger. The three of them formed an inseparable trio.

But things were not to stay that way. The girls had only a glorious period of six years together before Sara's parents decided that a divorce was the only way to settle their differences. Without any consideration at all for Sara's preferences or feelings on the matter, they went ahead with the arrangements, leaving a devastated Sara to be consoled by her best friend. There was very little Cassie could do except to provide Sara with the only source of stability she could hope for. Sara knew that their friendship went beyond mere friends to that of a closeness that only sisters could boast of, and it anchored her in these times of distress and trauma.

But this was not to be the end of Sara's problems. Before her wounds from the divorce could heal, her mother (who had custody over her) decided that a change of scenery would be welcome. She did not think at all about how the change would affect Sara. Sara was left to pack up amidst tears and a breaking heart. She could not understand why her mother would be so cruel as to force her to leave Singapore.

On the day of her departure, Sara hugged Cassie and Tiger, unwilling to let go of the two who formed the foundation of her young life. But the time came for her to let it all go. The last words Sara said were, "I'll come back and see you. Wait for me!" Cassie had held on to Tiger and sobbed her heart out. She clung on to Sara's words. She knew that Sara would definitely return.

The years passed and Cassie grew up to be an independent and confident girl. She and Sara carried on their friendship through emails. In the years that they were apart, the two girls relied on this correspondence to sustain them. Sara had still not come back to see Cassie, bogged down by college activities and growing disenchantment with her mother's neglect of the house. But she resolved to return to Singapore to see her best friend. It was a promise she was determined to keep.

The weather had still not cleared. Cassie stood still, mesmerised by the brown leaves being flung relentlessly against the cold hard stone. Sara was supposed to return last week, but had not. Cassie could feel the familiar pang of disappointment hardening into a knot of anger and hatred. Sara had not kept her word. Clinging on to that, Cassie refused to entertain the memory of the message that had arrived a week ago, even if it had explained why Sara would never return. Even if it was because Sara had died in a car accident on the way to the airport.

Suddenly, Cassie screamed in defiance at the tombstone before her, "But you promised! I will never trust you again." Tears flowed as an indescribable pain tore through her heart.

46

Explain what happened when a group of people became blinded by greed.

The squatters in the village stood on rotting refuse and human neglect, yet the spirit of camaraderie in the community was obvious even to the casual observer. Young children were running around, high in spirits as they enjoyed the simple game of 'catching'. Their tattered clothes were by no means a deterrent to their ebullience. Finn was the leader of this community, and he watched the children in their game with much envy as he thought of how their innocence shielded them from the harsh realities of survival that plagued their parents.

He recognised what many would have missed when first seeing the squatters. They were a family, bonded by years of common suffering. Where there was no one to care about their lives, they had each other. Even in the face of the rightful owners coming to claim this piece of barren land, their solidarity had stood strong to ward off the rich and greedy landowners. Finally, the latter had given up trying to force them off the land and turned their attention to more profitable ventures. Finn was sure that the community would not be disturbed and the place would soon belong to them.

However, a report appearing in the local newspapers the following week threw the once congenial village into a stagnant pool of suspicion and hate. Some geologists had discovered that the village was sitting on a wealth of oil, one of the last few natural oilfields hitherto unexploited. The news shook the equanimity of the villagers and crumbled the once solid feelings of amity they had for each other. Overwhelmed by the thought of being rich, each began planning his future, a future suddenly cushioned by real money.

The weeks following the news report saw hostility erupting in the once amiable village. Neighbours who had once shared meals with one another now became combative as worry over the fair allocation of wealth loomed. The villagers were unsure over how the money would be distributed. Those with a brood of children claimed a share for their offspring, while those with none or few decried such allocation. Finn was in despair. Blinded by greed, the villagers were hurling accusations and displaying hatred towards one another, even before anyone came to confirm the existence of the oilfield. Almost overnight, the village was sundered by the prospect of wealth.

In no time at all, the prospect of wealth disappeared as quickly as it had come. The landowners were quick to reclaim what was legally theirs, sending survey teams to plan the construction of oil wells on the now precious land. The hue and cry raised by the villagers were to no avail as the landowners refused to be thwarted by such inconveniences. Within a month, the villagers found themselves tossed out of their 'homes'. There was no more land, no more village, no more family homes. For the first time since they became ensnared by the obsession with wealth, they saw clearly the foolishness of their actions. By hankering after an illusion, they had destroyed their only source of real wealth.

47

Write about a time when a substitution was made but the situation became worse.

When she first entered our classroom, all of us thought that we had had it made. After all, the famous dragon lady of the school teaching staff, Miss Koh, was now replaced by a petite lady who looked as if she had walked out of a Victorian novel. Everything about the new teacher Miss Govin showed that she was a demure and genteel lady. From her horn-rimmed glasses to her shy manner, she was the epitome of the 'bully-able' teacher. We grinned as we thought of the good time that we were going to have in class.

The principal introduced Miss Govin as a fresh graduate from the teachers' training college, a fact which further established her in our minds as a pushover. The former warned us against playing any pranks on her, to which we all exhibited slight shock at such a possibility. Inwardly, we were laughing at how gullible all teachers were. But we were not to have the last laugh.

Once the principal had left the room, Miss Govin literally stripped off her mask of civility and turned a cold eye on us. She listed class rules that she expected us to follow—all 64 of them! We were stunned. No one had ever done that on the first day of school. Before we had even caught our breath from her long list of dos and don'ts, she launched straight into the lesson. History, which used to be an interesting subject, began to weigh heavily on us as she lectured in an expressionless manner. Even Miss Koh's usually strict style of management was tempered by her lively discussions of historical events with us. Our arms began to ache from the endless notes that she insisted we copy during the lesson. When the bell rang, we all heaved a collective sigh of relief.

This was only the beginning of a traumatic term. Only the classes with the misfortune of dealing with her knew her for the bad-tempered teacher she was. Every other person in school thought that we were exaggerating the situation as she always looked the perfect picture of equanimity. All found it hard to believe that she enjoyed throwing books at us when she was displeased. Reasons for such displeasure ranged from our having used a lighter shade of pencil lead to the margins being drawn too wide or narrow. When she thought that we were nodding off to sleep during her interminable lectures, she would viciously throw the whiteboard marker at us to wake us up. There was no room for any explanation. As long as she was angry, punishments were dealt out swiftly and mercilessly. Once, the whole class had to stand under the blazing sun for two hours without a break because a hapless girl had the audacity to sneeze loudly and incessantly in class. We could not wait for the end of the term to get a respite from her endless tyranny.

When the new term began, we waited with dread for Miss Govin to come to class when it was time for history. But it was our principal who strode into the classroom and berated us for the tough time that we had given Miss Govin. Apparently, Miss Govin had suffered so much under our terrible behaviour and laziness that she had resigned from her position. The principal expressed her disappointment with us and said that Miss Koh would be back to teach us with immediate effect. The cheers that greeted her ears must have puzzled her, for Miss Koh's reputation as a slave driver in the school was well-known. But we did not care. No tyranny could ever be as bad as Miss Govin's.

48

Narrate an account to show what happened when a joke went wrong.

The wailing of the ambulance siren insistently penetrated her confused mind. Lily was frightened, so frightened that the tissue paper she was holding had been torn into shreds and floated ignominiously onto the floor of the ambulance. She stared at the pale face of the boy lying motionless on the stretcher. He was her best friend. "If only you would wake up," she sobbed, "I could explain everything." Anguished tears wracked her body again as a fresh spasm of pain overwhelmed her.

The day had started like any other. Lily had arranged to meet Bobby at the school gate before entering the school to get their exam results. The results were important to all the students, but more so to Bobby, for he was on a scholarship and needed to do well in it to have it extended. Bobby came from a single-parent family, with his mother taking on three jobs a day and into the night to make ends meet. He was very close to her and was hoping that the scholarship would see him through school without further burdening her. Everyone was very certain that Bobby would excel in the exam, for he was definitely a cut above the rest and to cap it off, he was also the most diligent among his peers. In fact, Lily had sneaked a look at the results since she was early and saw that Bobby had again topped the school.

Lily liked her best friend very much, but wished that he could lighten up instead of being so serious all the time. She felt that he did not enjoy life enough, always thinking about how he could further improve his results so that he could get a good job in the future. Lily had no such concerns. She came from an affluent family and need not worry about where her next meal would come from. As she stood idly kicking a stone on the pavement, an idea began to take shape in her mischievous mind. She would play a joke on Bobby! She would tell him that he had not done as well as he wanted to! When he finally saw his results, he would be so elated that he would clap with joy! Lily beamed happily at the thought of having fun with her friend.

When Bobby's thin frame was discernible in the distance, Lily schooled her features into a mask of sadness. Bobby saw it and ran to her, worried about his friend. "What's wrong, Lily? Are you all right?" His face was lined with great concern as he peered at her. "It's not me, Bobby. It's... er... your results..." Lily stammered. Bobby's face clouded with shock. He looked as if he was going to faint for he had turned pale. As Lily began to realise that perhaps her joke was not such a good idea after all, Bobby suddenly passed out and fell, hitting his head on the pavement. In a panic, Lily reached out and shook Bobby hard. He remained unconscious. Her heart sinking, she held on to her friend and called desperately for an ambulance.

When Bobby finally woke up at the hospital, a flood of relief rushed over Lily. She apologised and tried to explain herself. Bobby laughed and said, "Don't feel bad. I was the silly one! I took things too seriously! Come to think of it, how did we actually do in the exam?"

"Oh! You topped the school and I came in second!" Lily burst out laughing.

49

Describe someone's struggle to turn over a new leaf. Why was it such a challenge to do so?

They were there again, always lurking in the background, knowing that Shawn could see them. The gang was insistent on making their presence felt. Even though they had stopped accosting him in the streets, this strategy was far more insidious and frustrating. No one dared to go near him when they were around. Shawn saw this as an even greater motivation to leave the gang. He had to, or he would never pass the test that he had set for himself.

He could still recall vividly the unsavoury past that he tried to leave behind. The gang clashes, bullying of the weak, extortion of money and drug-pushing all merged into a kaleidoscope of garish images that caused him pain every time he thought about them. He could hardly withstand the onslaught of guilt that twisted up inside him each time he remembered the anguish and pain he had caused to so many others.

He looked at his hands and thought he saw blood stains on them, blood that he had spilt so wilfully when beating up his 'enemies'. He saw once again the bruised face of Andrew, the young son of the fishmonger, as he lay on the hard asphalt ground after being beaten up by the gang. He could still remember vividly his frail body bloodied and cut, crumpled in a pathetic heap. Shawn shut his eyes tightly, trying to force the images away, but he could not. He wanted to start afresh. His determination to leave the gang was the test that he had set for himself. "If I do not succeed, then I might as well be dead. I must pass this test if I am to prove to myself that I am still human."

But it was difficult. Shawn had been a good fighter in the gang, and to lose him would severely cripple the gang's strength. They were determined to get him back. They knew that Shawn came from a broken home and it was the gang's camaraderie that had attracted him to join them. Shawn's reputation as a gang member was well-known and few people were willing to befriend him. They either feared the gang's reprisal or Shawn himself.

Day after day, Shawn knew that it would be easier to stay with the gang than to leave. Yet, one thing always stopped him from going back to his old ways — images of his crimes. One day, Shawn realised that he had managed to stay away for three months! It was certainly a feather in his cap. He knew he could now pass the test he had set for himself and he continued to stay away from the gang. For a moment, he allowed himself to indulge in his dream of a promising future.

He closed his eyes and the darkness offered a brief respite from his struggle. Behind him, shadows of armed men loomed menacingly.

50

Write an account of how someone managed to overcome a nightmare that had haunted him or her for a long time.

The trail stretched on endlessly before him. He could feel his heart beating faster and the beads of perspiration forming on his forehead. Lenny was more frightened than he had ever been. Going into the deep forest was revisiting a nightmare he had wanted to forget all these years. He could still remember the first and last time he had walked this trail. His father had been killed by a tiger that prowled the area. It had been over ten years ago, but the terror that he felt still held him in its icy grip. In his sleep, dreams of the terrible scene haunted him.

But now, he had to walk the trail again to search for Emma. Emma was his pride and joy, the only thing remaining from a marriage that was unfortunately short-lived. After Sara's death, all that comforted him in his barren existence was Emma's cheerful nature and loving ways. She had wandered off into the forest while playing by herself in the backyard. That was where her footsteps imprinted on the soft mud led. It indicated that she had gone on the dreaded trail.

Taking a deep breath, Lenny plunged into the forest taking the dreaded trail and calling out for Emma as he walked. But all he heard were the wild shriekings of forest insects and creatures. He ploughed on, determined to hold the terror that threatened to overwhelm him at bay. Yet he could feel once again the familiar fear that gave him nightmares each time he recalled the horrific spectacle of the tiger tearing his father apart. His father had pushed him aside before the tiger had pounced, leaving him safe from the physical attack but not hidden from the sight of his courageous father being brought down by the beast. Lenny saw it all, heard clearly the hoarse cries of pain as he was torn apart by the mighty jaws of the tiger. But he had to shut out these thoughts; they were only impeding him in his search. He pushed on into the dark forest.

Suddenly, he heard Emma's high-pitched scream. Without a thought for his own safety, Lenny lunged in the direction of the scream, concerned only with getting to his precious Emma. He came into a clearing and saw Emma huddled in a corner, crying fearfully. He rushed to her side immediately. Suddenly, he heard a low growl behind him. Frozen in his tracks, he finally turned around slowly, only to face the tiger of his nightmares. The latter even bore the scars inflicted by his late father's hunting knife. Slowly, he lifted his gun, his mind whirling. If he failed, Emma would die. He did not want to even entertain such a thought.

The tiger fixed its eyes on Lenny. It gave him a deadly glare, but Lenny continued to take aim. Almost as if it could sense what he was going to do, the tiger snarled and leapt into the air at him. The gun exploded and caught the beast just before it landed. Writhing in pain, it rolled over and over until it finally lay dead, mere metres away from the shaking Lenny.

Emma ran to Lenny and threw her arms around his neck. He felt her warm little body and hugged her tight. His Emma was alive and the nightmare was gone. He inhaled the sweet scent of the forest, noticed for the first time the beauty of the flowers around him. Life would be different now.

51

'Sometimes, we have to treat people unkindly for their own good.' Write an account to show why doing this could backfire.

Jerry looked at Simon with a sneer. The latter was bent over his lunch tray, trying to be as unobtrusive as possible in the crowded canteen. Jerry felt triumphant, clearly pleased with his year-long efforts at ensuring that Simon remained unwelcome in the prominent social cliques. After all, he thought, Simon had the advantage of coming from a rich family and so should be taught a lesson about how the less well-off people had to really work hard for themselves. Jerry's familiar refrain to all his friends whenever he sought to discredit Simon was: "Sometimes, we have to treat people unkindly for their own good."

In fact, both boys were in the same class. This made it even more convenient for Jerry to carry out his exclusionary policy on Simon. Whenever the class had to form groups to carry out research projects, Simon was inadvertently left out. The teachers were puzzled at the students' antipathy towards the quiet and thoughtful boy. But the class remained hostile to Simon. Jerry was acknowledged as the leader in class. The other students looked up to him.

He had known about Simon even before the latter was transferred to the school. After all, his mother worked as the housekeeper in the large mansion where Simon lived. Since young, Jerry had looked at all that Simon had with envy and anger. Why should Simon be so privileged and he so poor? Jerry seethed each time he remembered how he had to bow his head whenever Simon or his family walked by. Jerry's mother ensured that Jerry treated them with a great deal of subservience, unaware that each time she made him do so, her young son's hatred intensified.

When Simon was transferred to Jerry's school, Jerry knew that it was payback time. He would show Simon that even without all the trappings of wealth he was the superior one. Jerry leant back and thought of how he had accomplished his revenge so easily, even managing to convince the other students that he was doing it all for Simon's good. His lips curved into a tight smile as he remembered his success.

Suddenly, his teammate Lionel ran to him with the message that his form teacher and football coach wanted to see him. With a sense of foreboding prickling his skin, Jerry ran to the staff room. The grim expressions on the faces of his teachers worried him. He sat down quietly, hoping that the worst was not to happen. He knew that he had not managed to achieve the minimum academic score required for a school athlete to remain on the school team. But he was certain that his superb performance in the school tournament would overcome his poor results. The looks on the faces of his teachers now showed that he was mistaken.

After the interview, Jerry was depressed. How was he to achieve the results required by the school before they would let him play in the tournament due to start in a month's time? To catch up on all his schoolwork in a month was clearly impossible. His mother would never be able to afford a private tutor for him and he did not know of anyone who was capable of helping him.

Just then, Simon walked by, his eyes downcast. Jerry brightened up. Simon was the top student in the class and would surely be able to help him. How grateful Simon would be to be given a chance to help a popular boy in school! Jerry strode quickly over to Simon and outlined his proposal. Simon was to stay back in school after lessons every day to help Jerry achieve the required results. In return, Jerry would bring Simon into the 'in' group. Jerry smiled as he thought of how clever he was to have come up with an irresistible offer.

A strange expression crossed Simon's face. After a long pause, Simon's voice rang out clearly.

"Thank you for your kind offer, Jerry. But I'm afraid I cannot do it. I have other things to do. You may think that I'm unkind, but sometimes, we have to treat people unkindly for their own good."

With that, he turned around and walked away, leaving a shocked Jerry at the corridor.

52

Describe the thoughts and feelings of a person trying to beat the clock.

The surroundings were like all else that she had experienced in the last two days — strange and ominous. For the millionth time since she arrived in this dusty little town, she cursed herself for being a fool. She could have been at home, comfortably ensconced in her favourite chair and reading a good book instead of suffering now at the hands of uncertainty.

The project had offered an exciting change from her pampered life. Born into a wealthy family, Chris had never needed to lift a finger to do anything for herself. She had never suffered anything more traumatic than a broken nail or a pimple, so the idea of putting herself to the test was a wonderful idea. When she read the posters announcing Project Survival, she felt that she had found the adventure of a lifetime. She told herself that she was tired of her comfortable existence, and wanted to prove to herself that she could survive in a strange town with only an apple. That was what the project offered — a week in a strange town with nothing but the clothes on your back and an apple. You had to find your way back to the city within a week or be left stranded as the group would leave regardless of your presence. This was something that only the toughest could undertake. Chris had felt that she was up to it.

Now she was not so sure. She had gobbled up the apple ravenously within the first hour after she was left in the town. When she saw the truck of laughing teenagers driving off into the distance to deposit the next person in the following town, Chris felt a sudden pang of loneliness and fear. But she shrugged it off thinking that food had never been a problem for her. It would not be any different this time too. But it soon became a very real problem.

No one in the town trusted a stranger or had enough for themselves to think of feeding a stranger. Chris had to work at cleaning plates and even toilets when she needed a meal. Even then, it was a meagre payment, failing to satisfy even a tenth of her hunger. She ended up having to work harder than she ever did in her life to merely clamber above the level of starvation.

Her only ticket out of the town to the city was a ride on the rickety truck owned by the pig farmer. But he was a big bully, agreeing to take her there only if she cleaned the pigs for the trip and stocked the troughs with slop. Chris was naturally appalled. In her first encounter with the pigs in the farm, she had almost keeled over with nausea at their foul smell. But she had no choice. She had only four days left to go before being left behind by the project group. She had signed an indemnity form absolving the group of any responsibility for her safety should she fail to meet the one-week deadline. They would not wait for her should she fail. If the farmer changed his mind about driving her into the city, she would be stranded in the town.

The next day came and the farmer was in uncharacteristically high spirits. Chris was so thankful that she almost dropped to her knees in joy. Even the fact that she had to share the pigs' pen in the truck failed to dampen her ebullience. She started humming a merry tune, almost lulled to sleep by the gentle rocking of the truck. Suddenly, she heard a loud sound and the truck stopped. Hurriedly, she peered over the side, only to see the bottom part of the rear tyre of the truck flat on the muddy road. The farmer was already out of the truck examining the damage.

Chris leapt out of the truck and rushed to his side. Without a word, she got out the spare tyre and helped him change the punctured one. All this while, she worked grimly, her face a mask of determination. She had only two and a half days to go before the deadline expired. Even without the burst tyre, meeting the deadline would have been difficult. She would not allow a punctured tyre to delay her any longer. She would get there in time. Soon, she was back on the truck, counting the minutes as they ticked by. Time had never seemed as precious as it did then.

When the city finally came into sight, Chris had only forty-five minutes to get to the meeting place. Once the truck stopped, she ran as fast as she could towards the clock tower. The minute hand moved closer to the five o'clock deadline. Real fear now surged inside her as she willed her legs not to give in to fatigue. Soon the clock tower seemed closer. It was only five minutes before the deadline expired. She had to make it! Finally, she saw the group gathered at the foot of the tower. So delirious with joy was she that she screamed hysterically to them that she had made it. As their faces turned to look at her, relief finally broke the will of her legs and they buckled under her. She went, sprawling to the ground, a terribly undignified heap on the ground. However, she did not care. She had finally beaten the clock.

53

Write about occasions when a person's selfishness affected others.

Ben was well-known in the neighbourhood for being a cocky person. Although he had lived in the same poor part of town as the rest of us, he developed a superior attitude once his father won the lottery and the family moved to an upscale neighbourhood. However, not wanting to cause any disruptions to his school life, his parents insisted that he remain in the school.

Each day, Ben taunted us as he found us pitiful. From the worn-out shoes and clothes that we had to the meagre lunches that we bought, he would find new ways to emphasise how terribly disadvantaged we all were compared to him. He had forgotten that he had been just like us not too long ago.

If there was one thing that Ben could not beat us in, it was our studies. Most of us were close friends, understanding the need to help one another if we were to make the most of our lives. So we shared notes that were made from researching materials in the library. This certainly saved us time and enabled us to stay ahead in class. No one shared their notes with Ben and he felt his own inadequacy in keeping up with our progress.

One day, Jane went to the library for it was her day for doing the research and met Ben lounging insouciantly outside. He had a queer smile on his face and leered triumphantly at her. When she brushed him aside in annoyance, he jeered at her, saying, "I'm sure there will be a lot of research to be done." With that, he strolled away laughing loudly. Jane was puzzled but walked in quickly to begin her work. She soon found out why Ben was so triumphant. Every required section from the books on their reading list had been torn out!

When the rest of the students in the neighbourhood found out what had happened, they were outraged. They knew Ben was selfish and proud but what he had done was vandalism, punishable by law. Obviously Ben had thought he could get away with it. Someone suggested reporting him to the library authorities but it was voted down. After all, they could not imagine being so disloyal even though Ben was so selfish. In the end, they decided not to pursue the matter.

However, things got progressively worse. Ben started borrowing all the books required by the students and refused to return them. Instead, he kept extending the loan until the other students no longer needed the books. Periodically, he would go back to his book-tearing ways. The other students were in despair over Ben's selfishness.

Finally, Ben got his comeuppance when he was caught by the librarian during one of his book-tearing sprees. Even then, he blamed the other students, sure that one of them must have reported him. His parents were similarly enraged and hurled abuse at the other students and their parents. In the end, everyone ended up unhappy, driven to misery by one boy's jealousy and selfishness.

54

Describe what it was like in a neighbourhood enveloped by a sense of dread and unease.

Wah Heng Supplies Shop had been such an institution in the neighbourhood that when it suddenly closed, all the residents were caught by surprise. They all knew the friendly shopkeeper Henry who supplied their cooking ingredients. His wife was also a genial lady who had a way with plants and usually gave customers tips on how to manage their greenery. They had no idea that the couple was in trouble over money; they always kept up a cheerful demeanour.

Rumours of Henry's son owing financial companies a great sum of money spread quickly. After being threatened continually, the family went into hiding to avoid further harassment. Everyone gaped at the drama that unfolded and gossips were rife. But little did they know that soon, they too would be involved.

One morning, the loud screams of Sophia, a young executive whose habit was to jog around the neighbourhood in the early morning, woke everyone up. Rushing to see what had happened, they were greeted by a horrifying sight. The head of a doll dripping with blood hung at the entrance of the closed supplies store; its menacing stare was impossible to ignore. Sophia sat limply by the side of the road as some of the residents hurried to remove the grotesque object.

But there was more to come. The next day, the residents woke up to find the store covered in a dreadful coat of obscene graffiti. The threats that were sprayed all over the front of the shop were grim in their warnings: if Henry failed to pay, human blood would be shed next. The residents were now truly alarmed. It seemed like no one was safe from the financial companies. After all, no one knew where Henry was. Even the increased police patrol's did not seem to deter the perpetrators.

The next few days grew even more tense as groups of rough-looking men began to loiter outside the store for hours on end. They smoked, cursed loudly and even leered at the young girls passing by. Everyone felt their presence like a thorn in their flesh, and dreaded when the worst would come. It came sooner than expected.

One night, the sirens of police cars and ambulances driving into the neighbourhood drew the residents out from their houses. What they saw was the shocking sight of the prostrate body of a little boy lying on the ground, blood still flowing from a deep gash on his back. Some of the gangsters were handcuffed; they sat on the kerb in a daze. The residents soon found out that the boy was chased by the gangsters, mistaken for Henry's grandson. The boy had tripped and fallen on his back, and was pierced by a protruding rock.

The entire episode drew to a tragic close when the men were arrested. It took the blood of an innocent boy to end the tyranny of the financial company over the neighbourhood.

55

Write an account to show how a person lost his or her entire fortune. What was this person's reaction to the situation?

There was no one that the neighbours respected more than Mr Tay. He was a quiet and unassuming man in his forties who lived alone in a modest house. But his simple lifestyle belied the fact that he was the richest man in their neighbourhood. Yet, Mr Tay never once lorded it over them because of his wealth. He always took care of them whenever they needed help. Even the bridge over the busy expressway nearby was built by him for the residents, so that they would no longer have to walk a long way around to get to the other side. Everyone saw Mr Tay as the guardian of the estate.

One day, a young shifty-looking man moved into Mr Tay's house. Mr Tay's housekeeper revealed that the young man was Mr Tay's nephew. The latter was recently retrenched by his company and had come to his uncle for help. Being the kind soul that he was, Mr Tay had welcomed him with open arms. But the neighbours thought otherwise. They noticed the young man's lazy ways and sly eyes, distrusting him. They were right for he was always doing nothing but flaunting the fact that he was Mr Tay's nephew. By doing so, he thought everyone would look up to him.

After some time, the neighbours heard that Mr Tay had decided to invest all his money in a business venture with his nephew. Everyone became worried. The young man was obviously not to be trusted, they thought. Many of them advised Mr Tay against doing so but he merely smiled. In their hearts, they understood that if he could do what he had done for them, he would definitely not begrudge his nephew. They sighed and left his house sadly.

But the day they expected to come did not materialise. They had thought that the venture would be a bogus one, created to drain Mr Tay's money, but it was an investment that raked in the profits within a few months. Slowly, the residents began to feel better about the whole affair, convinced that Mr Tay was safe from any conniving nephew. But one day, they came home from work to see Mr Tay's housekeeper sobbing piteously outside his house, which was in the process of being locked up by some strangers. They learnt that Mr Tay's nephew had tricked him into signing over all his assets; Mr Tay was now penniless.

Everyone was outraged. After all that his kind uncle had done for him, the young man had been ungrateful and scheming. Neighbours rushed to see Mr Tay, who had just finished clearing out his things from the car. Instead of being despondent, he greeted them with a smile. Mr Tay consoled them, saying that he never really needed that much money. A simple life was enough for him. In the end, Mr Tay made his home among these poor neighbours, content to lose his fortune but gain many true friends.

56

Describe an occasion when a person did not get what he or she badly wanted.

Tom saw the trip as the perfect opportunity to cap a year of hard work on his research. He had read so much about the volcanic activity of Mount Kilisaro in Indonesia on the Internet that he could not wait to see it for himself. Furthermore, the subsidies from the university where he worked as a research student was the only way he could afford the trip. The state-of-the-art equipment that would be brought along by the university team would also allow him to carry out his research at the site.

Being selected for this trip would be a feather in his cap. His family would be so pleased with his progress in the university and he would also come closer to realising his dream of being a geophysicist upon his graduation. He wanted so much to work alongside experts in studying how the earth came about and the physical processes that continue to affect it. Tom thought about his family still living in a one-room flat, eking out a miserable living each day. He resolved to be a success so that they would be able to afford better meals. Brushing away tears of optimism and determination, Tom proceeded to fill out the application form.

A week later, Tom strode quickly to the notice board outside the hall where the list of successful applicants would be put up. He knew that he had a very good chance of getting into the team. After all, he was consistently getting good grades in his studies and had been working hard with Professor Lam on various projects. He was also physically fit and would be able to handle the steep ascent of the mountain. In fact, he met all the criteria required for the trip.

The shock that he felt as he searched frantically for his name on the list numbed him. He could not believe it. Even the usually frivolous and lazy Mary had made it to the team. Tom could not understand what had happened. Why was he not selected? He ran down the corridors to Professor Lam's office. Once there, he saw the wizened old man bent over some rock samples. Tom's heart constricted tightly in affection for the fatherly professor. Professor Lam had been a wonderful mentor to him since he joined the university. He had imparted crucial knowledge regarding geophysics and treated him like the son he never had.

Suddenly, it struck him that the list of people selected for the trip had one thing in common — they were all wealthy! Resentment and anger at the unfairness of it all gripped him and he punched the wall with his clenched fist. Professor Lam turned around and looked at him. Quietly, he told Tom, "I'm not going either." With that, he smiled and went back to his work. But the feeling of great disappointment still tore at him, making him rail inwardly against the unfairness of the situation. Why did they not make the selection based on merit?

The day of the trip came and went. Tom walked around the campus like an apparition, oblivious to everything around him. The disappointment still gnawed at him like an ulcerous sore refusing to heal. Suddenly, he realised the commotion around him. People were running hastily towards the student's lounge. He quickly followed. There, all eyes were focussed on the news bulletin blaring from the television set. The shock at what he saw rooted him to the ground. A thought grew in his mind, gradually becoming louder. "Thank goodness I'm here! Thank goodness I'm here!" He would never forget the sight of the research team sprawled all over the mountainside as rescuers worked to free their bodies from the landslide that left no survivors.

59

Explain why a person wanted to do his or her best to achieve something.

“You have just one more chance to prove that you can do it,” the swimming coach bellowed at Warren, his patience obviously and dangerously teetering at its end. Warren gritted his teeth and stared down at the aquamarine water. He was exhausted from the earlier two tries, but he just could not give it up. He had to make it to the swimming team. It had been his dream since first watching his brother swim in the national meet.

Warren adored his brother. His brother loved him intensely in return, always taking Warren with him to his training sessions. He never let Warren feel inadequate even though the latter was asthmatic. Instead, he went all out to make sure his younger brother was a happy and confident youngster. Warren was proud of his brother, especially when the latter won the national championship. But the halcyon days did not last. His brother passed away suddenly after a blood vessel ruptured in his brain.

Warren was determined to continue his brother’s dream and make his brother proud of him. His brother had always told him that the only obstacle he faced was himself, not his asthmatic condition. Motivated by this, Warren began to spend his days training at the pool. Initially, it was tough. He had to take long breaks, and a breakthrough in his performance seemed distant. But his determination finally paid off. Warren made it to the school training squad and was in line for the last twenty places to represent the school in the national championship.

Now that he was in the national trials, Warren was not producing the times required to be in the school team. He felt his heart constrict with fear as he faced the real possibility of failure. The water beckoned to him again, urging him to keep trying. Warren saw his brother in his mind, poised on the starting block before he dived in to start the race and freeze the clocks at a new championship record. Warren knew that he had to make it; there was no other alternative.

Warren gave it his all, swimming the race of his life. When he finally completed the lap and touched the electronic board, he hauled himself up with great difficulty. He had really exhausted himself. It was his third try; if he failed again he would be out of the team. Warren gazed up at the coach, willing him to nod approvingly. But he did not. Instead, the coach merely said, “Try again next year.” before walking away. Warren collapsed in a heap on the floor, exhaustion and disappointment reducing him to a limp crying heap on the ground.

60

Write about an occasion when a person's bias created an unfair situation.

Sally hated going to school, especially on Mondays. She did not have the Monday blues like most people had; rather, she did not want to have to face the detestable Miss Menon whose lesson with her class was early every Monday morning. Miss Menon was not a boring teacher; neither was she a tyrant. She just had a very bad habit of favouring certain students in class while ignoring the others. Unfortunately, Sally was not one of her favourites.

That morning, Sally was in an unusually foul mood as she had woken up late and missed her breakfast. By the time she got to school, the class had already gone for their physical education lesson. After putting her school bag under her desk, Sally changed into her sports attire quickly and rushed out to join the rest of the class. The exhausting workout passed without a hitch and everyone trooped back to class for Miss Menon's lesson.

They were all getting their books out when a loud scream shocked everyone. Megan was crying in despair as she was unable to find her wallet. She was frantically looking through all the compartments in her bag but to no avail. Megan sank onto her chair and buried her face in her hands. The next moment, Miss Menon came in. Seeing her favourite student in tears, she hurried over to find out what had happened. Miss Menon then decided to conduct an investigation.

She first asked if anyone had left the physical education lesson to come back to class. When the answer was negative, she told the class to think of anyone who was not with them all the time. Suddenly, Megan stood up and pointed at Sally, saying that she had gone for class late. Sally was speechless. Miss Menon insisted then that she was the prime suspect. Ordering her to stand up, Miss Menon questioned her relentlessly. Upon Megan's insistence that Sally was the only one who was away from the rest of them for a short while, Miss Menon was convinced that she had found the thief. She wanted Sally to surrender the wallet. However, she was not able to do so since she did not take it. Taking her non-compliance as evidence of a rebellious nature, Miss Menon made Sally stand outside the classroom in full view of anyone passing by. Sally would not be allowed in class until she surrendered the wallet. As Sally left the class, Miss Menon muttered that Sally was not worthy of being among the rest of the students.

The half hour that Sally had to stand outside in humiliation was the longest moment in her life. All the while, she kept thinking of how unfair it was to punish her when she was innocent. Sally knew that Megan was Miss Menon's favourite in class, but that did not make Sally guilty. The other students walking along the corridor stared at Sally curiously, well aware that she was in trouble. All these made her rail inwardly at the terrible injustice that she was suffering.

Finally, Miss Menon came out of the classroom to call Sally in. She told her that Megan had found her wallet among her books and that everyone now knew that Sally was innocent. Yet, no apology was made. Sally was appalled. Even Megan looked sagely innocent, not bothering to even show signs of being sorry. Sally fumed in anger, thinking that they had to be punished for this. She thought about the large jar of superglue that her carpenter uncle had given to her, and a smile lit up her face.

61

Describe an occasion when someone decided to take a huge risk. What was the price that he or she paid?

Hunger gnawed at Bill again, giving him no respite on this cold night. He pulled his rags tightly around him, but they failed to keep out the biting wind. He remembered warm beds and hot food in days long past and willed himself to forget these memories. Perhaps his mind could convince his body into thinking that it really was warm and well-fed. But it did not work. Bill got up and decided to take a stroll. Perhaps he could stave off his hunger pangs. Maybe he would even find some food along the way.

The night was still young for those who had the means to enjoy themselves. The streets were lit in strange iridescent colours from clubs and bars. Bill trudged wearily down the streets, despairing of ever finding food. Suddenly, he found himself caught in a car's headlights. A well-dressed figure came out of the car and walked towards him. Bill blinked to see the person clearly. But it was the stack of dollar notes clipped between the man's fingers that arrested his attention.

The man's voice was low and even, asking a question that Bill could hardly make out. When he gestured that he could not hear, the man spoke louder. "Are you interested in earning some money? We have a game that's still lacking some participants." Bill was intrigued. They were going to pay him \$1000 just to play a game. He wondered what the game was, his skin prickling at the premonition of danger. Yet the temptation was too great for him to resist. Bill nodded quickly and was told to meet at a specified location in thirty minutes.

Bill made his way to the appointed rendezvous. Along the way, he racked his brains for some answers to the questions that were whirling in his mind. But he could find none. When he arrived at a deserted part of the expressway, he saw three more cars besides the one he had encountered earlier. There was a group of men standing around, their lighted cigarettes looking like tiny lights in the dark. When he got closer, Bill saw that they were armed. He began to panic. But the man who had spoken to him came forward and explained the game to him. If Bill could escape unscathed to the riverside with the men hunting him down, he would be allowed to keep the \$1000 that they were giving him now. Bill felt a strange fear in his bones, but could not help thinking how the money would change his life. He had been dirty, hungry and without hope. Now there was a chance for a new life. Yet, he doubted he could make it to the riverside in his weak condition. In the end, he decided to take on the challenge. He had nothing to lose.

Bill was given a ten-minute headstart, and he made the most of it. He ran like he had never done before. Falling over stones and stumbling as his joints gave way, Bill came close to the riverside. In fact, he could hear the gurgling of the river on its way downstream. A smile broke his face as he realised that he was going to make it. Suddenly, a sharp pain exploded in his chest and he fell. Touching his chest, he saw an arrow protruding from it. Blood was flowing rapidly and he could hear the footsteps of the hunters behind him. He tried to pull himself to the riverside but could not. As blood streamed out of him, Bill realised that he was going to die a rich man. Smiling, he patted the money in his pocket and closed his eyes.

62

'It may be too late, but we should at least try.' Write an account to show why someone thought this way.

Samuel wanted so much to be a part of the group. They always had so much fun playing and laughing together, something that he had never experienced because he had no one of his age to play with. His parents were always busy working and Samuel was often left alone at home. On the rare occasions when he was allowed out of the house, he saw the joy that the children's camaraderie created and wanted to be part of it.

But he was never welcomed. The children taunted him and sneered at him, calling him names that he could not understand. Samuel could not understand a lot of things. He wondered why the people around him avoided him like the plague. Their sideways glance unnerved him.

Children, being candid than adults, had no qualms about calling him names. The imperfections on his face as he was born with Down's Syndrome, irked them. They did not want strange-looking Samuel in their lives.

But Samuel, in his innocence, did not sense the extent of their hostility and continued to linger nearby, often standing in the shadows. Finally, the children were so frustrated that they came with a plan to get him to leave them alone permanently. They knew that he would follow them wherever they went and so they deliberately walked deep into the forest, moving quickly out of sight when they were certain that they were in the densest part. When they were convinced that Samuel had walked into their trap, they sneaked out of the place as quickly as they could. Poor Samuel was abandoned in a forest that he was unfamiliar with.

The day passed by quickly as the children resumed their games. But a nagging doubt gnawed at them. What if Samuel could not get out of the forest? After all, the forest trails were overgrown with creepers and it was frightening to be in there when night fell. Pangs of guilt now overwhelmed them. However, it was getting very dark and they were worried about venturing into the forest themselves. John, one of the children, finally echoed their sentiments when he said, "It's probably too late, but we should at least try to look for him." They agreed and returned to the forest to look for Samuel. But he was nowhere to be found. They called out for him until their throats were hoarse, but there was still no response. Finally, someone suggested shouting out an apology. Perhaps Samuel was annoyed with them for being so mean. In desperation, the children knelt on the ground and shouted out their apologies to Samuel. In their hearts, they hoped that, even if he were dead, his spirit would be appeased by their contrition.

Unknown to them, Samuel was sitting on a tree branch above them, smiling as tears rolled down his cheeks. "They do love me after all!"

63

Explain how a surprising incident changed a relationship for the better.

Terry could not shut out his wife's relentless grumbling any more. He was tired of hearing her launch into a tirade against him, frustrated by her vitriolic outbursts about what a lousy husband he was. Lauren was never satisfied with anything that he did. If he brought home \$3000, she would taunt him with stories of how her colleagues' husbands earned much more. If he bought her flowers, she would invariably grumble about how other people received diamonds instead. She was impossible to please.

He decided to take a walk along the tranquil banks of the reservoir. It was always a balm to his frazzled nerves after his wife's outbursts. As he walked towards the bus stop, he mulled over his life. Sometimes, he wondered where their happy days had gone.

As he approached the shelter, he spotted a white bundle on the seat. Curious, he walked closer to take a look. To his surprise, it was a kitten wrapped up in a rough white towel. As he reached out to touch the kitten, it gave a feeble mew and opened one of its eyes. Terry gazed at the kitten. He had come across many stray kittens, but somehow, this tiny ball of brown and white fur seemed different from the rest. As it struggled to open its other eye, a hint of its feisty character emerged as it lay vulnerably on the seat. Terry was drawn to it immediately. As there was no indication of it belonging to someone, Terry decided to take it home.

Lauren was startled to see the kitten and she reminded Terry that she disliked animals. However, the kitten seemed to like Lauren. It crawled out of its cocoon and made its way to Lauren's lap where it lay contentedly. Lauren grinned and ran her hands over the tiny creature. Perhaps it was not a bad idea to keep the kitten. Almost immediately, she ordered Terry to buy supplies from the nearby pet store. Terry chuckled. Although Lauren sounded demanding and bossy as always, this time Terry could sense the love emanating from her and he warmed to her the way he had when they first met.

Even though caring for a feisty kitten that later grew into a rather large cat was tiring, the couple grew closer. It was not so much about having a kitten, but rather, allowing their love to overcome any resentment for each other. Terry never had to go to the reservoir again.

64 Describe a situation in which various people approached the same task with vastly different intentions.

The day dawned bright and sunny, with a slight wind blowing in from the coast. Everyone was in high spirits, especially the four new volunteers who had arrived the night before. The locals were pleased by the way these youngsters worked—all four exhibited dedication, working on their task with such fervour that the locals had to tell them several times to rest or risk getting a heatstroke. But it was a sip of water and then back to work for them. The locals were impressed by the selflessness of the young men.

Tom was determined to distinguish himself as a good worker. The supervisor on this project would be coming round any time now, and Tom wanted to show how diligent he was. After all, he did not want to waste his holiday on a silly project for nothing. Whether the villagers were able to cross the river was of no concern to him. However, the supervisor was the teacher-in-charge of the Student Council. Tom definitely wanted this teacher to give him a good testimonial next month during his bid for the post of Council President. He wondered when the supervisor would appear.

Ben was oblivious to the heat beating down on his back. He relished the freedom that he finally felt after years of being in an oppressive family. He was tired of being told what to do and how to do it. He was not slow as his family was always making him out to be. He would show them that he could do something good without their interference. He would return a new person, a proven hero. He had to show his independence and capability if he hoped to escape from his family.

Melvin glanced around the site. He could see the grateful looks of the locals who were overjoyed that the bridge across the river would finally be built. They would not have to go around the river anymore. He was delighted that he could finally bring a smile to someone's face. Melvin was extremely unpopular in school, the reason for which still remained unknown to him. He wanted to come on this volunteer mission to feel part of something, to bask in the significance of completing a meaningful task. He was glad he had come. He felt better about himself by the minute.

Paul hated participating in such missions. He always ended up dirty and hot and there was inadequate food and drinks never have deigned in the village. Had it not been for the fact that he needed some hours of community service to be recorded on his application form for the 'Outstanding Youth of the Year' award, he would never have deigned to come to such a remote place. He would have been spending his holiday in a picturesque country where there would be exotic cuisine to be savoured. Here, he could only taste the salty sweat trickling down his face. It was disgusting.

The villagers decided to hold a cookout that night. They wanted to reward the young men for their selflessness. Only those who were truly kind-hearted would help them like they were, or so they thought.

65

Write about a situation that involved an act of exploitation.

Sophia looked at the lady in gratitude. Finally, someone was going to help her obtain medical treatment for her father. She was only ten years old, but Sophia understood that \$10000 was a large sum of money. It was beyond her ability to ever earn such a large amount of money. No matter how many cardboard pieces she picked up to sell to the rag-and-bone man, she would never earn even a quarter of that amount. Her beloved father lay on the rough bedding of old newspapers and other items salvaged from the rubbish dumps. His fever was raging as high as ever, with the infection slowly but surely spreading in his body.

The woman smiled at the little girl. She was adorable. She almost felt sorry for exploiting the girl's innocence, but she had no choice. Someone had to plant the bomb, and sacrifices in the course of the revolution were inevitable. The lady clasped Sophia's hands in her well-manicured ones and solemnly agreed to get her father the best treatment possible if she succeeded in delivering the package safely. Sophia was only too happy to agree.

The next morning, Sophia was handed a large parcel. Her job was to place it by the first table in the popular restaurant downtown. After that, the lady promised that she would send her father to the best hospital where he would be treated for his infection. Sophia skipped almost gaily to her destination. She thought about her kindly father who had struggled to bring her up. He never let her beg or do so himself. All that they earned came from their hard work. Tears brimmed in her eyes as she thought of how much she loved him. With renewed determination, she trudged quickly to the restaurant.

Her presence in the restaurant was not noticed by anyone. After all, she was too small to catch the attention of the busy waiters. She left the parcel and then ran quickly back to the shelter where her father was. Sophia was so excited that she had managed to earn the money to save her father. She would tell him proudly when he awoke that she did not beg for it. Sitting by her father as he groaned in his semi-conscious state, she waited patiently.

Night came and then morning approached, but still the lady did not show up. Sophia went outside to see if she was coming. She tried to tell herself that perhaps the lady could not remember where the shelter was. But it was of no use. She had to face what she had refused to acknowledge. It was obvious that the lady had never intended to keep her promise. Finally, Sophia's forced optimism crumbled and she sat down on the gutter outside the shelter, her sobs mixed with her father's groans in the still of the night.

66

Describe the thoughts and feelings of someone who was caught in a dangerous situation.

His fingers were numb from waiting to detonate the bomb. As the sounds of gunfire and shouting whirled in a cacophony around him, insidious fear crept slowly into him. He felt like he had been waiting for an eternity, when the truth was that it had only been twenty minutes since the last skirmish erupted. He held the lives of his comrades literally in his hands, as his role was to detonate the bomb that would blow up the enemies' escape back into the dense jungle. But the signal had still not come.

All around him, the strangled cries of men forced themselves into his unwilling consciousness. He wondered how long it would be before it all finally died down. But it was unlikely that he would see that end; he knew that the war had only just started. As he thought about all that he had had to leave behind to defend his country, hot tears rolled down his cheeks.

He remembered the warm and loving faces of his family and those halcyon days that were now so far away as he ploughed deeper into the smoke and death that was undeniably war. When he had gone home one day, full of resolution and enthusiasm to fight for his country, his parents were stunned. After all, he was only fourteen, an age when boys were still exploring the hills and caves behind the village. But he was adamant. He had listened to the stirring speech by the war recruitment officer, who had won over the hearts of the young men and boys by talking about the valour of men and the honour of defending the country. Nothing was going to stand between him and his devotion to his country, he had decided.

The day he left the village to board the rickety truck which would bring them to the barracks dawned bright and fine. What a good sign, he had thought then, trying hard to ignore the tear-stained faces of his family. He had felt a pang of fear and regret, suddenly realising that he did not really know what he was getting himself into. But he was determined to keep up a brave front.

Even now, he found himself having to maintain a stoical front. The war had none of the romance that he had thought it entailed. There was nothing even remotely resembling the beauty of camaraderie, the songs around the campfire, the triumph of the human spirit or even the glory of victory. It had only been an extended experience of brutality, fear, death and fatigue.

Now, when the enemies pressed on to capture the town, many comrades were dropping like flies. He wondered why the signal had still not come. Taking the risk to peer out of his reinforced position, he looked for the captain who was to give the signal. He froze. The sandbags that protected the captain's position had been blown up and the captain lay slumped on the ground. The fear that he had managed to stem now rushed forward unabated. What was he to do now? The signal was never going to come. He stared with irresolution at the detonator. Finally, he made a decision. Grinning for the first time since he stepped onto this battlefield, he put his hands on the lever. Suddenly he felt the first heat of an explosion from a grenade that had landed mere centimetres from him.

67

'I wish I knew better.' Write an account to show why someone felt this way.

Carrie was always trying to get me to bail her out of trouble. It had started since we were in kindergarten and did not look like it was going to stop. I stared at her as she pleaded, "Please, May! They will never allow me to go to the party. I have to say that I'll be at your house studying. Please help me!" It always amazed me how angelic she could look when she was actually telling a barrel of lies.

Yet I could not say 'no' to her. We had been best friends since kindergarten and she knew that I would help her, no matter what. Her parents were extremely strict and would never allow her to attend a party. Knowing Carrie, she would sneak out even if I did not help her. Well, I would rather go against my principles and lie for her sake than for her to be punished by her father if he caught her leaving the house so late at night.

However, this time, I felt a strange sense of uneasiness. I was not sure if I was doing the right thing, but in the end, I suppressed my gnawing doubts. She would be at the party for an hour and then return to my house to spend the night. The arrangement was not unusual as we did sleep over at each other's homes. But I had to warn her sternly, "I will not do this for you again. This is the last time." I should have known that she would smile beatifically at anything I said at that moment. Sighing, I went home with her to tell her parents that she would be staying with me that night.

Despite having kept me up worrying all night because she broke the curfew that I had imposed on her, Carrie came back safely in one piece, delirious with her night of fun. I was grumpy about her irresponsibility, but secretly glad that she was safe. In fact, she did not ask me to lie for her in the following months and I began to think that she had truly reformed. But I was in for the shock of my life.

Carrie's parents came over to my house a few days later to look for her. I was surprised. I had not seen her for a few days and had thought that she was at home nursing an illness. But her parents retorted that she had stayed over at my house two nights ago and had not gone home since. I was stunned. The reason why she did not need me to lie for her anymore was because her parents had been convinced that she was with me. Their accusing and hostile eyes chilled me to the bone as I realised that I had opened the floodgates for her to lie flagrantly.

When her lifeless body was found the next day, I was almost beside myself with hysteria. My best friend was dead because I had condoned her lies. I wish I had known better.

68

How did someone react when a loved one changed into a completely different person? Write an account to explain.

Sara looked at the woman in the wheelchair, stunned by the stinging slap that left its flaming imprint on her cheek. Hot tears scalded her eyes as shock caused her body to shake uncontrollably. The woman looked incensed and not at all remorseful about what she had done. Sara was confused. Her mother would never have hit her in the past. Why had she changed so much and become a totally different person?

Sara ran to her room before the tears overwhelmed her. She knew that the woman did not like tears. In fact, she had taken to caning Sara for what she saw as ‘unnecessary tears’. Sara did not relish a repeat of the powerful lashes on her body. Once safe in her room, she gazed at the photograph in its place of importance beside her bed and ran to pick it up. Staring at the photograph of the happy family, she wondered why things had changed so much that the joy captured in the silver frame seemed like a lifetime away.

She remembered the days before the accident. Her mother was a warm and cheerful person, always ready to shower Sara with love and kisses. Sara was her pride and joy as she had said so often. There was nothing that could light up Sara’s day so much as her mother at the school gates waiting to bring her home. Bedtime was a glorious escape into the world of princesses, castles and dragons as her mother would read to her from the big book of fairy tales. Even her father would join them sometimes, adding his low voice to the re-enactment of the story. Then, Sara had felt herself to be the happiest girl alive.

Then a terrible accident took away her father’s life and her mother’s mobility. Her mother had to live with the paralysis of her limbs, even as she adjusted to the loss of the husband she had loved so much. Fortunately for them, he had left them enough money to live comfortably. However, money could not replace the man who had once brightened the house with his smiles or the use of her mother’s legs. In the days that followed, Sara had to bear the brunt of her mother’s frustrations and grief as her usual good temper deteriorated into pent-up hostility and anger. To Sara, her mother seemed to be a completely different person after the accident.

However, Sara was certain that the sombre moods were temporary. Things would be fine soon. She had thought of a way to reunite them with her father in a world where her mother’s handicap would not matter. Sara smiled, pleased that she had found the solution to their problems. She began to methodically seal off all the windows and doors in the house, whistling as she went along. Sara decided not to tell her mother so that she would be pleasantly surprised when her father appeared.

After securing the windows and doors, she went into the kitchen and turned on the stove. As soon as she had blown out the flame but left the gas on, Sara tiptoed into the room where her mother was sleeping. Quietly putting her head on her mother’s lap, Sara closed her eyes and whispered, “We’re going home, Mummy. We’re going home.”

69

Write about a shocking situation and describe the feelings of the people involved.

The turn of events left her speechless with shock. Was she not known by her friends as the luckiest person of all? How could things have turned out so terribly wrong then? She looked down at the beautiful ivory gown that she was wearing, and in a sudden fit of anger, started tearing it from her body. Friends who stood around her tried to restrain her physically as her heartrending sobs filled the room. They felt helpless, wishing they had the words to comfort her.

It was supposed to be the wedding of the year, or at least, it was to her family and friends. After all, the culmination of a courtship that spanned seven years deserved a grand celebration for its enduring love and commitment. Gary was the person whom she had thought was the answer to her prayers. They had been a couple since college. Gary was an important part of her future. He had become the gauge by which she measured everything else. In a nutshell, Gary was everything.

When he finally proposed a year ago, it felt so natural. Her days were soon taken up by the massive preparations for a traditional Chinese wedding. There was such a whirlwind of activities that occupied her days that she failed to notice Gary's growing restlessness with the entire affair. In fact, he seemed to grow more and more distant. Everyone else put it down to the jitters of 'getting hitched'. Phrases like 'totally expected', were thrown about. However, there was nothing ordinary about Gary's growing disenchantment.

In the months leading up to the wedding, he began to disappear for long hours at a stretch. She was initially apprehensive, but his denials of anything being wrong appeased her fears. But today was the day they were supposed to have their bridal photographs taken. Gary had not turned up. Instead, a worried-looking best man had delivered Gary's terse message about his realisation that the marriage was not right for him and that he had changed his mind about it. The message ended with an abrupt apology.

But she could not understand it at all. Whatever happened to all the promises that he had made to her in the course of their courtship? Whatever happened to the shared dreams of a life together? Whatever happened to love? She was flung immediately into the deepest abyss of despair. All that surrounded her — the wedding gown, the auspicious couplets pasted on the walls and doors of the matrimonial home, the wedding invitations — seemed to mock her. But she was determined to see Gary face to face to clarify the matter. A part of her secretly wanted it all to be mere jitters on his part.

She found herself at Gary's door. Her heart pounding, she knocked, almost wishing that he would not answer. That would allow her to prolong her fantasy of being united with him. The door swung open and Gary's empty eyes looked towards her. Those were no longer the same eyes that she recognised. She had come to clarify the situation, but now she knew that no words were needed.

70

Describe what someone did to handle a difficult situation.

Gordon was not sure if he could really do it again. He had defied them once, and to even contemplate doing so again sent shivers down his spine. But they would be there, waiting as they did every other day, except that it would be with a terrible vengeance this time. After all, Gordon had the audacity to report the gang's attempts to extort money from him to the teachers. Gordon hugged his bag closer to his chest, trying to ride out the hours after school when the gang would congregate outside the school gates until the gang had left. He knew that escape would not be easy now.

Gordon had grown up surrounded by the gang's activities. They were always extorting 'protection' money from the hawkers and terrorising the children into joining the gang. Gang clashes with other groups were also a common sight. Yet, his puny and unimpressive frame had always escaped the notice of the gang until this year when he became the only person holding out against the gang. Everyone else he knew had capitulated to the gang's bullying.

When they first approached him for two dollars per week, Gordon was determined not to give in. He did not believe that the school authorities were ineffective against the gang. With great courage, he had told the teachers what was happening and they duly reported the matter to the police. But when the police came, none of the other students dared to come forward to corroborate Gordon's story. Without their input, there was little the police could do. In the end, they stopped their investigations and the teachers merely told him that they would keep a lookout for his safety.

Gordon was aware that he had become the main target of the gang and that each day they waited at the school gates for him to appear after school. Yet, each time he had been lucky for they got tired of waiting fruitlessly for him and left. But such luck would run out, Gordon knew. He only hoped that when the time came, his legs would carry him to safety. Even then, he did not see himself as being that unfortunate.

Suddenly, Gordon felt a hand on his shoulder. He turned around to see the teacher looking at him questioningly. She asked him why he had not gone home, and Gordon told her that he needed to avoid the gang. With a smile that showed she thought him to be exaggerating the gang's intent, the teacher gently nudged him in the direction of the school gate. Left with no choice, Gordon crept out of the school gate to face the inevitable.

He did not manage to complete his tenth step when he felt a blow from a blunt object on his head. The shouting and the relentless blows all merged to become one great blur of noise and pain as he slowly sank onto the ground.

71

'Addiction leads to a wasted life.' Describe an experience to show that this was true.

Ben and Jamil were close friends. Their friendship started from the days they had spent their childhood in a kampong. Now they had been resettled in flats in Eastville and were still as inseparable as ever, attending the same class in the same secondary school.

Both of them helped their parents who were manning hawker stalls at Eastville Food Centre. Business had been poor lately because of the recession. It was the school holidays and the boys had little work to do. They had been playing games on their phones for several hours and were getting bored.

"Hey, James, what are you doing here?" Jamil suddenly called. Ben looked up. An old school friend, whom they had not seen for a long time was smoking idly at a nearby stall. James was a dropout. He was well-known as a troublemaker and had been expelled from school for his bad habits like smoking, truancy and outright defiance towards teachers.

"Just relaxing," James replied nonchalantly. "Want to try one?" He offered a cigarette to Jamil. To Ben's dismay, Jamil accepted it readily. Jamil took a puff and offered it to Ben. "Come on, it's free and tastes good," he coaxed. Ben accepted it reluctantly, feeling guilty about going against his teachers' advice not to smoke.

This sparked the beginning of the boys' troubles. In no time, the duo were hooked on cigarettes. To support the expensive habit, they agreed to be runners for James. They would receive a commission for every cigarette pack they sold to teenage smokers. From there, it was a downhill path for the boys. They agreed to join James' gang and engage in petty theft and extortion. Their parents and teachers noted with concern their worsening grades and warned them about their increasingly rude behaviour in school.

One day, James asked to meet Ben and Jamil at his hideout. He showed the boys several small white pills. These were a type of drug called Ecstasy and he promised the boys they would always be happy and energetic after taking them. Moreover, for every pill they sold, they would receive five dollars. The boys readily agreed. It was an easy way to earn a living.

From that day onwards, the boys' lives spiralled downwards. They became addicted to drugs and switched from Ecstasy to heroin. Soon, they were hard-core gangsters dropping out of school and severing all ties with their anguished parents. Once in a while, they tried to kick their expensive drug habit but would soon cave in to their needs. To feed their addiction, they continued their illegal activities.

One day, they were arrested and thrown into jail after a gangland fight. They were transferred to the Drug Rehabilitation Centre, where they experienced the horrors of going cold turkey.

After a tormentous period of screaming, shivering and nightmares, the boys began to realise the consequences of their wasted lives and felt ashamed of themselves. During the counselling sessions, the boys resolved to kick their habits. A meeting was arranged with their respective parents. It was an emotional and heartwarming scene.

"Forgive us, father and mother," they begged their parents. "We did not see the danger of joining James' gang until it was too late. Please forgive us."

Their parents readily agreed, much to everyone's relief and joy. The boys resolved to work hard and lead meaningful lives. Finally, all had ended well.

72

Write an account of how two families came together to resolve a difficult situation.

James Lee and Joyce Tan had known each other from young. They had attended the same kindergarten and primary school. They got along very well and were inseparable.

In secondary school, everyone knew they were a couple and their ebullience was apparent whenever they were in each other's company. However, sometimes a relationship can go wrong and so it was with this pair. One day, Madam Chow, Joyce's grandmother, noticed that her granddaughter was not her normal self. She seemed very troubled. Her years as a teacher, counselling teenagers, told her instinctively that something was bothering Joyce.

"What's wrong, dear?" she gently asked Joyce, who was slightly startled. With a furrowed face, Joyce shook her head and mumbled 'nothing'. However, the manner in which she answered betrayed the fact that something was wrong. However, seeing that her granddaughter was unwilling to say anything, she simply advised her that no burden was too hard to bear and be borne alone.

However, the girl's sad disposition was noticed by her friends, students and teachers. One day, the Tan family received a call from Mrs Devi, her form teacher. Mia, Joyce's classmate, had informed Mrs Devi that she had seen Joyce leaving a women's clinic.

The cat was out of the bag. On close questioning by her father, Joyce was forced to reveal the truth. She was two months pregnant and James was the father. Both teenagers had been in a quandary. They thought they could solve the problem by having a secret abortion without informing their parents.

The day that Joyce was spotted leaving the clinic was the day she went for a consultation. Upon receiving this shocking piece of news, the Tan family swung into action. James' parents were informed. The two families decided wisely that recriminations would burden their children's already guilty conscience. The pressing need was to plan what to do for the future.

A meeting involving both families was held the next day. After the young lovers were strongly chided, they were forgiven by all family members. Everyone then turned their attention to the issue of planning for the young couple's future.

In an atmosphere of goodwill, the Tan family proposed the following after the discussion:

- 1) There would be no abortion. Joyce was to leave school when her pregnancy became visible. She would return to school some time after she had delivered the baby if the school allowed her to do so. Otherwise, she would prepare for her O-Level examinations as a private candidate.
- 2) Joyce would marry James in a quiet ceremony after completing the examinations.
- 3) The Tan family would bring up their daughter and her child until James reached adulthood and had completed his National Service.
- 4) At the age of 21, Joyce and James would decide whether they wanted to stay in either family's household or live on their own.

The Lee family readily agreed to the proposal. Everyone was relieved that the issue had been addressed and practical solutions had been found. The couple, relieved that they did not have to deal with the situation on their own, were determined to work hard for their future.

73

'It is a bad idea to run away from your problems.' Write an account that shows this to be true.

Betty was feeling down as usual, a feeling she had not been able to shake off. Her mother had succumbed to a terminal illness a year ago. Her father, depressed after the loss of his wife, was often drunk. He seemed to be on the verge of a nervous breakdown. Many a night he would come back crying out, "Why, why did she leave me?" At times, when he spied Betty cowering in a corner, he would march towards her. Soon, her body would be covered with welts and bruises.

Betty's school grades deteriorated. It was unfortunate that the teachers who taught her were only interested in her test results. They nagged at her about her work, certain that she was indolent, and oblivious to her problems. Betty knew that she could not confide in them about her plans.

On a particularly dismal day when her father had been extremely harsh, her patience gave way and her will to see the miserable day through wavered. She made up her mind to leave home. "Where?" she wondered. She did not know. All she knew was that she had to get away from everything. Packing some necessary documents and her personal belongings, she fled.

The next few days passed in a blur. There was confusion, uncertainty and suffering. In her heart, she knew that running away would not solve her problems but she had to do something. The first night saw her sleeping in the void deck of a block near her home. The hunger pangs she had expected, never came. Perhaps she was keeping a wary eye on the strange surroundings; perhaps, she was feeling too miserable. Fortunately, she passed the night undisturbed.

The second day, however, brought on fully the realisation that running away was a bad idea. After a skimpy breakfast (she had to stinge on her scant savings), she was still hungry. In the afternoon, she walked about aimlessly in shopping malls to pass the time. By nightfall, she had actually begun to long for the familiar surroundings of her home. However, passing the second night peacefully on the void deck was something to be thankful for.

Meanwhile, Betty's father had discovered her absence. After checking with teachers, friends and relatives, his initial anger subsided. It now turned to panic and then to remorse and worry. She was after all his own flesh and blood. She was merely an innocent victim of his hatred at how the family had fallen apart after his wife's death. The police were alerted. The once depressed and inebriated man had become fully aware of the seriousness of his past actions.

On the fourth day of Betty's absence and after a sleepless night, he awoke to heavy knocking on his door and excited shouts from his neighbour. "Wake up! Wake up! Your daughter has been found!" With trembling hands and a pounding heart, he reached for the newspaper his neighbour had thrust out to him. The title of the article read: 'Runaway escapes robbers'.

Betty was washing up at a public toilet when two robbers attacked her. Fortunately, her cries for help were heard by a group of passers-by. The robbers fled but were apprehended later by the police. Betty was then held in police custody.

Betty's father rushed to the police station where his daughter was held. He asked for her forgiveness and she embraced him tearfully.

Betty finally learnt that running away only made her life worse. She decided to work with her father to resolve their issues.

74

Write about someone who did not deserve the complaints about him or her.

Johnson Tan was the new bus driver on Star Bus Service 31 from Jordan Estate to Sunville Estate. Right from the start, he made a positive impact on us. He was poles apart from the other bus drivers.

Every passenger boarding his bus would invariably be greeted with a cheery 'good morning'. I was quite amused to note the startled reactions or strange expressions that some passengers gave to this unexpected greeting. The majority, however, responded warmly and greeted him in return. His greeting was appreciated by sleepy-eyed or moody passengers boarding the bus who were about to begin a long day at work or in school.

Johnson was small built and seemed dwarfed by his driver's seat and all the automated equipment around him. But his voice was warm and pleasant and he had a cheery smile when he greeted us. I always wondered how he could sustain the cheerfulness and energy to greet each and every passenger.

So one hot afternoon, I decided to check this out. At 1.25 pm, I boarded bus 31 when I saw his familiar face at the wheel. On a hot, humid day, he did not disappoint me. Not only did he greet me but he did so unfailingly to all passengers. Some schoolgirls giggled, some shy schoolboys were tongue-tied, but everyone was glad that he was at the controls of the bus. I decided to ride the bus with him to the terminal.

I was impressed by his driving skills. Unlike typical bus rides, the journey was smooth, devoid of the sudden jolts and lurches.

At the bus terminal, I was approached by a bus driver who asked me for my views on Johnson Tan, the new bus driver. While I was in the middle of singing praises of Johnson, he cut me off. It seemed, according to him, that Johnson was unpopular with his colleagues. The management had heard positive feedback about him and had asked other bus drivers to follow his example. He ended the conversation saying that Johnson was a hard act to follow. I replied that the other bus drivers should buck up as some were either rude or had poor driving skills.

A month after Johnson started work, a letter appeared in the local newspaper. The writer complained that Johnson was delaying the passengers' time with his frequent greetings. He also referred to an incident when Johnson delayed the bus for a few minutes just to wait for an old lady who was hurrying to catch it.

The next day, a flurry of letters appeared in the press. All defended Johnson and lauded the new bus driver for his good attitude. They also stated that the management should look into improving its customer service for it had some rude and inefficient bus drivers.

I am happy to report that a year later, Johnson is still plying the bus 31 route and that I am still one of his many satisfied passengers. Johnson also received the Exemplary Service Award this year from the bus company.

75

Write about someone who managed to prove everyone wrong.

Ahmad was a weakling. He was all skin and bones. To add to his woes, he had a severe acne problem. It was no surprise that he was unpopular with the girls in class. Added to his problems was the fact that he stuttered when he was shy or nervous.

There was one advantage Ahmad had, however. He had a beautiful voice. It was a clear, high and steady tenor. However, none of his friends knew about it as he practised singing only in the bathroom. Once, he was caught unawares by his classmates singing in the corridor. The moment he saw them, he denied that the beautiful song they had heard came from him. They were convinced when his voice went to a characteristic stutter. "I...I...real-ly did-didn't s-sing ..."

One day, the class of Secondary 4B, which Ahmad was studying in, heard about a singing competition that was to be held in the nearby community centre. A prize would be awarded for the best student singer. It was a well-known yearly competition and many students supported Ali, their classmate. He had a nice baritone voice and good showmanship. So it was really a surprise for the students to see Ahmad's name beside Ali's on the list of participants in the audition on 15th May.

'You can sing, Ahmad? Get real! Don't make me laugh!' was the essence of the unkind remarks directed at him when they saw Ahmad before he entered the audition room. Ahmad felt awkward and sad. It was enough that they did not support him but ridiculing him was too much.

When the results were announced, class 4B could not believe their ears. Ali had of course qualified for the finals but so did Ahmad. How on earth did the stutterer do it, they wondered.

A few of Ali's friends accosted Ahmad in the toilet. They forced him to sing a well-known song. Of course, under such disbelieving eyes and prejudice from his classmates, poor Ahmad could not sing. He could only stutter!

"I will show them like I did at the audition," Ahmad vowed to himself. In the week before the finals, he was fortunate to have the guidance of Mr Chan, a former singing instructor, who helped Ahmad to polish up his delivery and improve on his expression when singing.

On the day of the finals, Ali's supporters arrived in full force. Mr Mok, the principal, and some teachers caused quite a stir among the students when they turned up to support the two finalists from their school.

The crowd was delighted with Ali's performance. It looked like he was the clear favourite. His resonant and melodious voice, together with his good showmanship, endeared him to the audience.

Ahmad was next. There was a hushed silence before he began. The claps were few, coming from the principal, teachers and his only friend. Some subdued boos came from a few disbelieving schoolmates who felt that he was not fit to be a finalist. Quite a number of people in the audience had heard of his stuttering defect and had come to see for themselves whether the judges had made a wrong decision to have Ahmad in the finals.

When Ahmad mounted the stairs to get on the stage, he was determined to prove everyone wrong. Mr Chan, his singing instructor, had told him to focus on himself and the song. To the encouraging smile of his instructor, Ahmad sang his heart out. His song was 'Climb Every Mountain'. His pitch was perfect and his rendition was more beautiful than anyone had imagined. His voice never wavered. "Where was

the stutter?" his detractors wondered. Furthermore, his delivery and showmanship resembled that of a professional. He executed the song well and his movements were appropriate and well-coordinated.

When he finished singing, there were few dry eyes. Then there was tense anticipation from the audience as the judges decided on the winner. In spite of Ahmad's outstanding performance, almost everyone felt that Ali would be the winner. They were wrong. When the chief judge announced Ahmad as the winner by a narrow margin, the audience sat in stunned silence. Suddenly everyone cheered and rose to give him a standing ovation. The winner had finally dared to climb his own mountain.

76

Describe your visit to an amusement park. Which parts of the experience were more enjoyable than others?

I heard the eagerly anticipated news. We were going to Genting Highlands! My sister and I had heard so much about the Theme Park there that we were raring to go and try out its attractions.

We arrived after a long and tiring journey by coach. Wisps of clouds were scudding nearby, only metres above our heads. After enjoying a buffet lunch, we had much energy to expend. My sister had retrieved a sketch plan of the amusement complex — it was massive.

We were intent on fully experiencing all that the park had to offer. After much cajoling, we managed to wheedle the money from our parents for the entrance tickets to the indoor theme park.

The first thing we headed for was the gigantic rollercoaster. We had read about it rising like a gigantic steel super structure as our coach inched up the mountain passes. The superb ride was well worth the ticket price. We screamed and cried from the excitement, thoroughly enjoying ourselves.

Noticing just a short queue, we made a dash for the choo-choo train ride. Its path went round the outdoor park and we had a fantastic overview of the attractions. There was a pond with a few paddle boats. As the sky was overcast and the pond water had a dirty slimy-green appearance, we decided to give it a miss. Instead, we decided to try the 'Giant Octopus'. This was a contraption which had box-like seats at the ends of its tentacle-like arms. We strapped ourselves securely in our seats. All of a sudden, we were lifted by its arms to a height of about ten metres. We had a view of a fair number of the park's attractions, as well as the dark, bobbing heads of the jostling crowd below. Then we were swinging round. Just as I was feeling dizzy, the Octopus let out a sigh and suddenly deposited us at ground level. This was fun and I would be happy to come back and enjoy this ride again.

My sister and I decided to try our luck at some game stalls. After garnering a few miserable packets of crackers, we decided that our money would be better spent on the Bumper Cars. What a time we had! We rammied our own and other cars silly. Having emerged from these vehicles feeling slightly dizzy and winded, we decided to take a break. It was a relief to slake our thirst with delicious icy sodas.

Next, we visited the hotel complex. We nearly got lost manoeuvring along the numerous passageways. We found a manmade waterfall and scores of arcade machines, operated by eager young people. Amidst the flashing lights and electronic sounds, we made our way to a queue forming beside the entrance to a room. The sign outside proclaimed 'Journey to the Stars — have a thrilling space experience you will never forget.' After a half hour wait, our patience was wearing thin and our nerves were frazzled by the din. Just when we were nearing the head of the queue, we realised that the entrance tickets were higher than we had expected. We decided to forgo the show and meet up with Mum and Dad for a meal instead.

We headed to a pizza outlet, where Mum and Dad were waiting. So far, the experience was mostly enjoyable, and we could not wait to see what was in store for us the next day.

77

Describe an accident that took place in a restaurant.

The school was well-known in the neighbourhood as it boasted of many eminent graduates. Some were ministers, businessmen or scientists. There was a strong parent support group which organised activities to help the school. However, the person the school felt the most indebted to was Mr Lee Kim Zew, the famous philanthropist.

On the evening of 12 June, 2017, the school staff was gathered in the Imperial Restaurant. They had come to attend a dinner to honour Mr Lee for his generous donation. The teachers and representatives comprising of parents and students were at their tables awaiting the arrival of the philanthropist himself.

The majority of philanthropists are humble people and they shun the limelight. Mr Lee, however, was an exception. He was a businessman and liked publicity. It was therefore gratifying for him that his arrival at the restaurant was greeted with much applause. A few reporters were present and lights flashed as his pictures were taken. He was ceremoniously escorted to the VIP dining table which was covered in a resplendent red. A plate of cold appetisers promptly appeared on the table for the distinguished guests.

The Chairman of the night's proceedings, Mr Tan, went on stage. He lauded the distinguished guest's generosity and help to society. Then he invited Mr Lee on stage to make a speech. Just as Mr Lee rose from his chair, an inexperienced waiter moved forward with a bottle of red wine. The waiter knocked into Mr Lee. The contents of the wine bottle spilt all over the visibly shocked guest. There was a bright red stain on his spotless white shirt. Everyone at the table was momentarily stunned. Then, as though on cue, they surged forward to help the guest.

It was then that Mr Lee showed his indignation. Face flushed red with irritation and embarrassment, he brushed aside all attempts at helping him wipe his shirt. It was clear that his pride had been hurt and he was trying to recover his lost dignity. The Chairman wisely left him alone beyond the act of offering a clean dry cloth for him to wipe his shirt. Directing a baleful stare at the cowering and unfortunate waiter, Mr Lee made his way to the stage in as dignified a manner as he could. The guests tried to recover from their embarrassment at seeing the sorry spectacle and warmly applauded him.

Mr Lee mounted the steps, pleased that he was on top of the situation. But as he faced the microphone and reached into the breast pocket of his coat, he frowned. His notes for his speech were soggy and limp because of the spilt wine. Mr Lee flushed again, but only for an instant. Then he regained his composure and showed why he was such a great businessman. With dignity and charm, he declared, "Only I can make a speech in such wet weather." When everyone clapped and cheered, he knew that he had carried the day with him. He had saved himself and the organisers from a potentially embarrassing situation.

Mr Lee carried on with his impromptu speech, punctuated by spontaneous clapping and cheering by the guests. At the end of his ten-minute speech, the audience gave him a standing ovation.

The next day, the press carried an article on the dinner. Mr Lee was praised for his courage and dignity in carrying out his speech despite the accident. Mr Lee must have felt very pleased that he had got the better of the incident. The next year, he increased his donation to the school. As for the unfortunate waiter, he was spared any recrimination as everyone recognised that it was not his fault and his remorse was punishment enough.

78

Using your five senses, describe an evening scene after a day's work.

The same bustle greets me as I step out from the swinging doors of the office building. Each day, I notice the same hurried footsteps and frazzled looks as I make my way to the bus stop where I board the bus to the train station. The tramping of shoes on the concrete pavement reminds one of marching boots, the bearing of their owners resembling the stiff posture of fatigued soldiers. All of them are in a hurry, heading towards their respite for the night. I join the crowd, as remote as them and wrapped up in my own thoughts.

The bus stop is crowded with anxious commuters who peer eagerly at each bus that makes its appearance in the distance. Each time a bus stops at the bus bay, a horde of commuters will throng forward to engage in the jostling and pushing that will hopefully get them a seat in the already crowded vehicle. When the bus becomes too full for any more commuters to board, the unlucky ones walk away from the departing vehicle in disappointment.

The air by this time is thick with the stench of exhaust fumes as the roads throb with life. Vehicles of all types pack the roads to create the usual evening congestion. Impatient honking now fills the evening air. On the whole, the sense of irritation is palpable. When I am finally on board the packed bus to the train station, I am uncomfortably squashed in it, forced to breathe in the putrid smell of faded perfume and stale sweat. It is an overpowering mixture that causes my head to throb with pain.

The journey back by train is definitely less unpleasant. The air-conditioned comfort is a welcome relief from the earlier heat and stench. Watching the passengers on the train is even amusing. Some betray their exhaustion by nodding their heads while sleeping, others try very hard to avoid looking at the other commuters. At the popular shopping stops, some teenagers on a night out board the train noisily. The train compartment is soon filled with their raucous laughter and irreverent remarks. The other commuters look distinctly annoyed as their 'sanctuary' is shattered by their noise.

When the train finally brings me to my station, I step out of the doors into the balmy night. The coffee shops nearby are crowded with young couples and families having their dinner. The aroma of freshly-cooked food pervades the air, making my hunger pangs sharper than ever. I start to salivate in a Pavlovian fashion. The soft sounds of laughter and conversation combine with the relaxed atmosphere to give an aura of warmth and hospitality. Mothers and domestic helpers walking their children home from school also join the line of pedestrians now. Little groups of people chatting dot the landscape.

Such is the familiar evening scene at the end of a day's work.

79

Describe the annoying behaviour of other people.

It is strange how the little things that some people do can totally irritate you. I am particularly annoyed by people who lie, have unhygienic habits, display uncouth behaviour and tell tales.

Telling lies, even if they are about insignificant matters, is something that I find difficult to tolerate. This is because my personal conviction is that if it is difficult to tell the truth, then the next best thing is always to avoid having to say anything at all. I remember once when my friend's boyfriend wanted a clean break. Instead of telling her outright that he had found a new love, he chose to lie to her and say that he was doing it for her sake. The poor girl was misled into thinking that she was entirely at fault, and moped about it for almost a year. In the end, when she found out the truth, she was devastated. Surely in this case, he could have been more honest.

Another thing that irritates me is the unhygienic habits that some people insist on displaying in public. An example of this is the furious nose-picking on public transportation like buses. People who do that are usually blissfully oblivious to the discomfort of other commuters. It is even worse when they choose to stick their pickings on the backs of their seats, the seats before them and even on their own seats! Such disgusting behaviour certainly annoys me. Another thing that annoys me is spitting in public. Those guilty ones normally do not bother about the pedestrians who are unfortunate enough to be in the way when bits of the shooting spittle fly everywhere. It is a terribly nauseating habit!

People who insist on displaying uncouth behaviour in public are also annoying. Such behaviour includes the indiscriminate use of vulgarities especially when there are many children around. Not only is it contrary to being educational for the little ones, it also creates an uncomfortable atmosphere for all those in the vicinity. Other examples of uncouth behaviour include talking very loudly in public, frequently showing vulgar signs at the slightest provocation and peppering conversations with lewd suggestions. These types of behaviour are not only annoying but they are also signs of a lack of consideration for others.

A particularly irksome thing to me is the telling of tales, especially when it is done out of spite. When people need to go to such underhanded means to discredit other people for their own selfish ends, it is deplorable. One such incident was when a classmate of mine was selected to vie with ten others in the school for the 'Most Outstanding Student Of The Year' award. This was a prestigious award given only to those who distinguished themselves in both their academic achievements and sporting abilities. But a jealous classmate reported him as having had a hand in a harmless prank three years ago. The school board had no choice but to disqualify him. It was traumatic for the boy involved, who had needed the recognition to be considered for a scholarship. It was a sad day for him indeed.

These are some things that I hope people will realise are causing discomfort or even harm to others around them. If they can correct such behaviour, surely the world will be a much happier place to live in.

80

Describe the qualities that you would like to see in your future spouse. Why are these qualities important?

Although it is impossible to foretell what is going to happen in the future, there are some areas in which we can lay the foundation for happiness. A good example of this is marriage. A Chinese saying states that the worst thing a woman fears is marrying the wrong man. This is certainly very true. Thus, it is important to ensure that we know what we are looking for in our future spouse.

The first quality that I would look for is definitely dependability. If I were to share my life with a person, I would definitely want to be sure that he is a trustworthy man whom I can always turn to. If he were irresponsible, it would be near impossible to try to build a life together.

I remember my neighbours in the last place my family lived in. Mrs Tan was a sweet and wonderful lady who juggled three jobs in the day to give her four children a decent life. Yet, she was ever burdened by a husband who was a drunkard. He not only failed to keep a job but also shamelessly turned to her for money. In such a case, I cannot help but think that my future husband must be someone I can depend on both financially and emotionally.

It is also imperative that my future husband is an honest man. Honesty is especially vital in a relationship because both parties must be sure that they are trusted and can trust the other person. Imagine a situation where both parties are suspicious of each other and are constantly trying to spy on the other person. It would certainly be a miserable relationship! After all, the social obligations and activities that we have can necessitate both the husband and wife having to spend time away from each other. If one party feels that the other is doing something to hurt him or her, a lot of unpleasantness can result. It would be terrible to live in a marriage where honesty does not exist.

By nature, I am a happy-go-lucky person who enjoys a good laugh once in a while. If I have to spend the rest of my life with a man who finds it difficult to see any joy in life, then I would feel like a bird in an extremely small cage being unable to unfurl my wings to fly. When I think of my future husband, I think of someone with a quirky sense of humour and a ready laugh. It will be someone who will see the bright side of matters instead of getting unnecessarily bogged down by problems. To me, a good sense of humour is an essential ingredient in the recipe for a lasting marriage.

Of course, it must be noted that these criteria may change with time as I mature with the myriad of experiences that are sure to come my way. In time to come, I am sure a more complete picture of my ideal husband will emerge.

81

Describe an unusual person in your neighbourhood.

Uncle Song is very much a part of the landscape of my neighbourhood. He has been a ubiquitous sight since I first moved into the neighbourhood. Every one knows Uncle Song, or has heard of him. Many have laughingly said that the neighbourhood should be called 'Song's Town'.

Uncle Song is not much of an impressive sight physically. His build is ordinary, a lanky frame that is usually loosely covered by a singlet and a pair of loose black pants. What is unusual is his strict adherence to traditional apparel at a time when Singapore was increasingly westernised. He is usually clad in clothes found only in history books or movies set in ancient China. Even his shoes are black in colour and are made of cloth. At a distance, he looks like an actor from a Chinese gongfu movie. One can always pick him out from among a crowd.

Even his mannerisms are decidedly archaic. He speaks with his hands clasped behind him in a stance that reads 'wisdom'. His gestures are always deliberate and understated, never betraying any emotion. He seems like one of those characters from the Chinese gongfu classics where good and evil were clearly polarised and chivalry a much prized commodity. Uncle Song is definitely a 'good guy'. He speaks in archaic Mandarin, spouting classical witticisms that pepper even his most ordinary conversation. It is always interesting to hear him speak.

Uncle Song is also every bit a hero. He is the only person in the neighbourhood who voluntarily patrols the area to keep it safe from crime. If households are slack about locking their doors or windows, he sees nothing wrong with knocking on their doors to alert them, even if it is late at night! He has been known to chase a petty thief down four blocks before the latter was so worn out that he gave up. No one else would do that but Uncle Song. Single-handedly, he keeps our neighbourhood safe.

Everyone loves his quirky habits and mannerisms. He is like a fatherly character who watches over his family with fierce pride and protectiveness. Many who have left the neighbourhood for newer ones have always found themselves back again to visit him and Uncle Song remembers every single one of them.

82

Describe the best and worst sides of the people you love.

I have always been very proud of my family, both as a unit as well as individual personalities. Since young, our parents have always encouraged their four daughters to pursue their own interests as well as develop our sibling relationship into one that can withstand hardship. It is thus that my family is a potent combination of fraternity as well as individuality.

When my sisters and I are together at social gatherings, we never fail to have a good time. This is us at our best — adept at social interaction and making people feel at home. Whether it is a party at our own house or one thrown by a friend or relative, we are always able to enliven the atmosphere with our unique brand of humour. Thus, it is not surprising that each sister has an active social life.

Another instance of my family members at their best is during discussions of political or social issues. Being interested in current affairs, both regionally as well as internationally, we are keen to have active and informed discussions at home. Our discussions are usually sharp and rapid, a testimony to our debating skills developed while at school.

But the one thing that my sisters are poor at is the planning of logistics for family outings. My eldest sister tends to be the one trying her level best to figure out the necessary logistics for the outing. But this usually ends in terrible chaos as we would find ourselves without things that we need for a barbecue or picnic. I remember once during a barbecue when we found ourselves with everything that we needed but the all-important charcoal! It was one hilarious party as we tried to figure out what to do without a fire.

When my sisters and I are tired, we are probably at our grumpiest. Once this happens, we are unable to summon our usual good temper and gregarious personality. This situation creates real monsters out of us. We become terribly bad-tempered and sullen ogres whom our parents maintain a wide berth from. Once, my younger sister had woken up late after a friend's pyjamas party and was in such a foul mood that she practically radiated animosity the entire day! None of us dared to even cross her path in that situation.

However, whether we are at our best or worst, we still remain the tightly-knit family that keeps me feeling comforted and happy no matter what I encounter in my life.

83

What is your daily journey to school like? Describe the experience.

Each morning, I would wake up at a time when the sky is still dark. The time is only 5 o'clock but it signals the moment when I begin my daily ritual before going to school. After doing the necessary washing up and changing into my school uniform, I would trudge out wearily to the lift to begin the eleven-floor descent to the ground floor. When I walk along the pavement to catch the first bus that comes to the bus stop, there are usually few vehicles around. It is a long and lonely walk indeed.

At the usual time of 5.45 am, the feeder bus would rumble up the road to stop at the bus stop for me to drag my half-asleep body onto. The bus is usually empty, which means there would be an entire selection of empty seats for me to choose from. I suppose I should be spoiled for choice, but what I would do is just flop onto the nearest seat and promptly catch a few minutes of shut-eye. As the bus picks up more passengers along the way, the noise level in the bus increases. Once the bus nears the Mass Rapid Transit station, my internal alarm would wake me to alight from the bus and begin the next stage of my journey. The good thing is that I would usually be more awake now.

At precisely 6.30 am, the train will sweep into the station, fully loaded with sleepy commuters. Unfortunately, the bane of my morning journey would also be on the same train. A group of chatty and giggly schoolgirls would station themselves in the centre of the train compartment to create a nuisance of themselves. It is near impossible then to fall asleep, even if I am lucky enough to get a seat.

As the train stops at more stations, it gets terribly crowded. Gone are the hopes of catching forty winks now! At my stop, I would quicken my footsteps towards the turnstiles because my good friend would be there to meet me for the last leg to school. On the way, we would discuss everything under the sun, from homework to the latest gossip. The day always begins to look a little better.

84

Describe how the loss of something important caused changes in a community.

Heng's Convenience Store was a well-known landmark of the estate. Started by Mr Heng in the early 1970s, it had grown from a little corner shop selling necessities to today's mini-supermarket catering to the needs of the neighbourhood that had grown around it. Mr Heng still worked in the shop, although it was now more a place for him to pass the time than to earn a living. His sons were not interested in the business and Mr Heng ran it with the help of hired manpower.

Each evening, he would sit outside the store and watch the little children playing at the playground he had built almost ten years ago. The children loved Uncle Heng who laughed at their antics and often gave them sweets as well as hugs. The adults always felt safe letting their children play there while they went about their business. In fact, Mr Heng's store was like a huge childcare centre; children would be well taken care of as long as Mr Heng was around. He was indeed a well-loved institution in the area.

But things changed after Mr Heng suffered a stroke and became bedridden. His sons sold the land on which the store stood to a large corporation with plans to demolish the store and build two bungalows on it. It was a sad day for all in the neighbourhood when the familiar sight of the store was gone. The residents were disheartened by the huge vacuum left in their lives by Mr Heng's absence.

It was no longer convenient to buy groceries as the nearest store was now more than two kilometres away. The efficient and pragmatic manner of the staff at the other store contrasted sharply with the friendly atmosphere at Heng's Convenience Store. No longer did the residents linger for chats at the convenience store. Everything became businesslike now: one simply purchased what was needed and left.

The residents in the new homes did not make things better. They were largely affluent professionals who had no time for friendly smiles and well-wishes. Gradually, the neighbourhood felt like a strange place as people passed each other without a word or smile. Everyone was always in a hurry and avoided any form of contact with others. The neighbourhood became an unfriendly place.

But the greatest loss that was felt was Mr Heng's presence itself. No longer were children able to play at the playground that he had built for them. Even if the playground had not been demolished along with the store, everyone would have missed the comforting presence of Mr Heng on the bench every evening outside the store. The streets were now deserted, streets that in the past had been filled with the laughing voices of children and friendly chatter of adults. No one could get used to the change and gradually, many moved away from the neighbourhood to start a life elsewhere where there were no painful memories of a lost community.

85

What is your idea of beauty? Give examples of people, places or things to elaborate.

Beauty is the quality of being pleasing. It is truly in the eye of the beholder. Many people cite famous models, picturesque tourist spots and exquisitely crafted items to show their idea of beauty, but I prefer to use people or things that are more natural and understated as examples of beauty.

To me, beautiful people are not those who are well-endowed or glamorous. Rather, they are people who are beautiful because of their personalities. I know of a lady whom everyone considers beautiful not because she has delicate features but because she is kind and caring. When one talks to her, one is never in doubt over her sincerity. Once, I was all torn up over a family problem and she was the first to come and offer aid, both emotional and material. She is always ready to give of herself to those around her, and that makes her one of the most beautiful people I have ever known.

Another person whom I find beautiful is my friend, Sally. She is not beautiful by conventional standards, but has such a warm and bubbly nature that everyone is immediately attracted to her. She has a wonderful and quirky sense of humour, which is really entertaining. Everyone enjoys her company and her ready peal of laughter is always heard. Few have seen her daunted by anything at all and in fact, her high-spirited greetings every morning are greatly looked forward to.

Places that are beautiful to me are not those that are perfectly captured on postcards, but rather, those with a sense of serenity and charm. I enjoy the countryside of Europe tremendously not because they are wonderful works of nature, but because the very pleasing sights give me a sense of tranquility that I do not find in Singapore. Europe is so steeped in culture that even just walking along the cobblestone paths is enough to conjure images of a romantic world long past. Coupled with this old-world charm is the sense of history that one feels in the places. Europe provides an awesome experience that makes one want to go back again.

In all, beauty is a state of mind, for no one who is negative about experiences and life would find anything attractive. To use a line from the famous poet William Blake, beauty comes when you can 'see a world in a grain of sand'. When we are in a positive state of mind, we can appreciate the beauty in small and ordinary things.

86

Describe a popular teenager that you know. How does this person affect others around him or her?

Whenever one watches television, the impression received is that the popular people are always the ones who are beautiful or wealthy. Yet, my experience has told me otherwise. Among my peers in school, the most popular girl is not the prettiest or the richest, but actually the one who exudes charm solely by being optimistic and sincere.

Susan is not considered pretty by even the most generous standards. Yet, she has an attractive personality that draws people to her like a magnet. Although she is not beautiful, she seems to be striking in appearance with her fair skin and light brown eyes. She has a ready laugh that is highly infectious and is always the first to see the humour in any situation. Furthermore, she sees the positive side in everything, which makes her an extremely optimistic friend to have.

Every morning, her cheery 'good morning' greets the rest of us lethargic souls. While we look and behave as if we are suffering from a hangover, Susan is unfailingly bright and cheerful. Her energy perks everyone up. Even having known her for the past four years, I still wonder at her irrepressible ebullience and good nature. Nothing ever daunts her for long.

She is also a sincere friend who is always ready to lend a helping hand. Once, a classmate's father was involved in a car accident which left the family impoverished. Susan was the one who swept into action, gathering classmates to take turns at helping the girl with her homework and at the same time starting a fundraising project to help the family financially. She started baking cookies to sell in the school canteen. They tasted terrible, but we still bought them because she was so sincere about the task. In the end, the rest of us who could bake reasonably well got down to work to provide more appetising food for sale. Even though she knew how much of a joke her cookies became, Susan remained buoyant about the whole affair. To her, being able to help was all that mattered.

It is someone like Susan who makes me feel that school is such a nice place to be in. Once, she was absent from school due to chicken pox and we felt her absence acutely. There was little cheeriness and good humour as we slogged through our schoolwork each day. It was a huge gap that was filled only when she breezed back into the classroom two weeks later.

87

Describe some religious activities that take place in multicultural Singapore.

A multicultural country is home to different religions and customs. It is very interesting to live in such a society as one will get to learn about different practices and festive celebrations.

The religious institutions here are usually involved in fundraising the whole year round. These activities range from concerts performed by popular artistes to dinners with rousing auctions. They also invite eminent leaders of the faith to grace seminars and talks during which people strengthen their own commitment. Similarly, the devotees spend time praying to their gods and go around to spread the word.

One interesting activity of Buddhists is the observance of the first and fifteenth days in the lunar calendar as religious days to offer prayers and flowers to the Buddha. They go to the temples as early as five in the morning to show their dedication to the faith. The temples at this time are usually crowded with devotees holding burning joss sticks. The entire atmosphere will be so clouded by smoke that the haze envelops everything.

Whenever a Hindu devotee makes a wish at the temple, he has to go through the ritual of praying and then breaking a coconut on the ground. This is interesting as it is considered the only way to have your prayers heard. Each day, the Hindus also light a lamp at the altar of the gods as part of the ritual.

The Muslims attend prayers at the mosque on Fridays without exception. On other days, they pray five times a day facing the direction of the holy city of Mecca. Every year, the Muslims fast for an entire month to cleanse their bodies and devote themselves to prayers. This strengthens their faith and also the communal bond. A lot of fundraising for the mosques and less fortunate is held at this time. It is a time of much sharing and congeniality.

The Christians and Catholics attend church on the weekends and hold their Bible classes there as well. An interesting addition to such activities was the screening of the World Cup finals at a church to demonstrate the strength of the Christian faith. A famous footballer had testified to the importance of the religion in his life via a video-recording. This attracted much attention and garnered many praises for the innovative way of spreading the religion.

Despite the different religious activities, all the religious people in Singapore share a common trait: they have the community spirit, and are devoted to and proud of their faith.



What do you think is an ideal learning place for all students?

A school is an important place to develop the minds and bodies of the young as they take their first steps in broadening their understanding of the world and of themselves. As the primary 'clients' of schools are the students, emphasis should be placed on their development as productive people capable of being worthy citizens in society.

To produce such people, it would be ideal if the school provides a conducive environment for learning. The surroundings should not be a busy thoroughfare, but rather, peaceful and green. This environment will relax the mind and encourage introspection. Also, the climate in the school should be one that encourages learning. If park benches with tables are placed in cool shady spots so that students can quietly concentrate on their work or discuss their work, the school will become an inviting place to those who are reluctant to study.

A school is ineffective if it does not have dedicated teachers who put in the effort to make learning an enjoyable yet thought-provoking experience. The ideal school has teachers who are thoughtful in planning lessons that can achieve the aims outlined and unafraid of being different in their pedagogy. Lessons become more interesting as they stimulate creativity and independent thinking. Teachers are 'friends' to their students, that is, the students see them as approachable and deserving of respect. This also helps to bridge the gap between teachers and students, allowing the former to act as counsellors whenever the need arises.

The curriculum taught in the ideal school would focus on the students' learning rather than the teachers' teaching. By this, I mean that effort would be made in ensuring that the curriculum provides challenges for the students and stimulates them to pursue the subjects with interest. This is in contrast to the current syllabus in school where the teachers merely lecture and cram information down the students' throats. Instead of giving the students the information, more should be done to allow exploratory learning, like giving projects to the students. Even with projects, assessing the process by which the students arrive at the conclusions rather than just grading the finished product is ideal.

Opportunities would be given for individualised learning in the ideal school. This means that there are enough different co-curricular and extra-curricular activities in the school to meet the different needs of the students. Instead of the teachers telling the students how to run the activities, students would be trusted to do the job. This will lead to them testing out their organisational skills as well as problem-solving abilities. Even if the activity is not well-received, the students will be able to learn from their mistakes and move on to greater awareness. This is important for the growth of the student as an individual as well as a team player.

An ideal school is one that allows the students to discover their strengths and minimise their weaknesses. It is one that makes learning enjoyable and interesting.

89

'Time only moves two ways — too slowly or too quickly.' What are your experiences?

Someone once told me that time is elastic; it can be as long or as short as you want it to be. I thought then how true it was, for a lot can be done in the given time if you want it so. But another way of seeing time is also that it taunts you with that same flexibility. When you want it to drag so that you can enjoy yourself, it passes by in the blink of an eye. But when you want it to pass quickly, it insists on prolonging itself.

A good example of the latter was when I was waiting for the doctor last week. I had an appointment with the doctor at eleven in the morning, but ended up waiting a full two hours for him. He had apparently been called away to perform an operation and would be back soon. Well, time certainly seemed flexible then, for 'soon' meant no less than two hours! In the time taken to wait for my turn to see him, I finished reading all the magazines in the clinic and even had time to have a meal. It was terrible because time seemed to crawl ever so slowly.

Another experience with time moving too slowly was when I was walking home alone late one night. After a day of fun with my friends, I realised too late that I had no money to take a bus home. I had to walk the full four kilometres home from where I was. It was then close to midnight and walking home from there meant having to pass relatively deserted stretches of undeveloped land. It was horrifying, with the wind howling softly through the trees and my frazzled mind imagining strange shadows at every turn. The usual hour that I would have taken on that route seemed never to end. I felt like it was an eternity before I got home.

On the other hand, when something exciting or happy occurs, time has a nasty habit of practically flying past. When I am out with my friends, whether it is just sitting around and chatting or singing our hearts out at a karaoke session, time goes by far too quickly. In no time at all, it would be time to go. This is the same for my physical education lessons where we are usually given time to play soccer. At such times, we seem to have just started the game not too long ago and then the bell would ring for the next change in period. But when we are bored in class, time seems to taunt us, moving forward slowly and watching us suffer.

In the end, what makes time go by quickly or slowly is merely our perception of it. It is natural to want to prolong the happy times and pass the mundane ones quickly.

90

Describe an elderly couple to show how they lead fulfilling lives.

The sight of Mr and Mrs Lau is a familiar one in my neighbourhood. Both in their late sixties, they are a living testimony to how one can live a long and rewarding life. Unlike other elderly folk who spend their time either sitting at the void deck of their flat or watching television at home, Mr and Mrs Lau fill their lives with activities aimed at creating a better world for others.

Having spent many years working as an accountant, Mr Lau has accumulated quite a tidy sum of money for his old age. Both of them have no children and are contented living in their three-room flat. They have enough money each month from their savings to live comfortably. But they are not content to just rest on their nest egg. Instead, they offer their services to the home for the elderly nearby, doing simple chores like cooking and taking those who are ill to the doctor. Each day, they devote almost eight hours at the home, bringing cheer and comfort to those who are either without family or have been abandoned by them.

Once a year, the couple will also travel overseas to exotic destinations. They come back with many gifts for their friends at the home, but the most wonderful gift is the effort they put into making travel videos for the elderly who do not have the chance to see the places for themselves. The beautiful scenery captured on video is usually thoughtfully put together with music accompaniment to make the entire viewing experience a wonderful one.

Both Mr and Mrs Lau are also avid collectors of insect specimens. Whenever they have the time, they would take long walks through parks and conservation areas to observe the insects in their natural environment. They also enjoy reading up on the different insects and cataloguing the information collected. According to them, they hope to one day pass down all the specimens and information to someone who will find it useful.

In an age when people are becoming increasingly suspicious of one another and are basically quite selfish, it is indeed refreshing to know Mr and Mrs Lau. They give of themselves unreservedly to those who need them without expecting anything in return. They are always smiling and contented with their life. Indeed, it would do us good to learn how to live a happy and fulfilling life from their example.

91

Write about the first hour of a day at school. What sights and sounds do you observe?

The day at school begins at exactly 7.25 am, when all the students sport sleepy faces and bleary eyes. Movements made by everyone are extremely slow, as the mind struggles to comprehend instructions and then relay them to the sluggish body. It takes quite a while before everyone is in position for the morning assembly.

This is Monday, a day when we are still trying to get over the late mornings of the weekend. The national anthem is sung with little gusto as everyone hopes that the others will make up for his low enthusiasm. Luckily, the music is always blaring at top volume, almost as if it knows it has to drown out the pathetic singing. The prefect on duty steps forward proudly to lead the school in taking the pledge and then, we are allowed to stand at ease. Soon after, the science head-of-department, Mr Koh, steps forward to make the morning announcements. We do not seem to be paying much attention, as the level of restlessness amongst the students rises. Irrked by our lack of attention, Mr Koh stops in the middle of an announcement and glares at us. His reputation as a creative disciplinarian silences us. He goes on with much gusto after that.

Each morning, we go through fifteen minutes of silent reading. We sit down at the assembly square and read a book approved by the teachers. Everyone reads, even the principal and teachers. The entire school settles down and begins the programme. As usual, the majority are bent over their books, relishing this time of quiet with their favourite stories. An unfortunate few obviously cannot sit still and are fidgeting about. They start to make faces at each other and gesture silent messages. Today, they are unlucky, for Mr Liew, the discipline master, sees them and stomps over. He notes their names and classes and puts them down for detention. A dead quiet settles over us after this.

When the bell rings, we get up like clockwork and promptly troop back to class for our first lesson. On Mondays, we attend the physical education lesson at this time. The classroom becomes abuzz with excitement as we change quickly, trying not to waste too much time getting to the field. Once we get there, we see Mr Toh, the instructor, grinning widely at us. Mr Toh enjoys inventing new ways to help us warm up. He has us contorted into various poses, all in the name of stretching. Actually, the only thing he was stretching was our imagination in trying to figure out the point of these contortions. But we do not mind, for he is a very nice man. After the hilarious warming-up exercises, we break into teams to play street soccer. This is obviously the highlight of the day as we shout and shove our way into the opponents' goalmouth.

But all too soon, the bell rings for the change in period. The first hour of school has just flown by. We trudge back wearily to meet our doom — science lesson with Mr Koh.

92

Write about the times when you felt bored.

Boredom is an extremely difficult feeling to tolerate or overcome as it dulls the senses and agitates the mind. I can recall a few occasions when I was so bored that I almost literally tore my hair out!

One such occasion was during a long and tedious lecture by one of the most boring teachers in school. It was bad enough that we had to spend a glorious afternoon cooped up in the classroom, listening to theories on physics that bore little relevance to my life, her monotonous voice made it impossible to absorb what she was saying. My mind was on my friends who were out on the field kicking a football around and having fun. That afternoon, Miss Wang droned on longer than usual. My eyelids grew heavy and before I knew it, I hit my forehead so hard on the desk that the sound resounded throughout the silent classroom. A deathly silence reigned for a minute before hilarious laughter broke out. Even Miss Wang could not resist a smile. That was probably the highlight of the day for the class.

Another really boring time I had to endure was a trip with my mother to China. It was not a visit to any picturesque destination like the Great Wall or Imperial Palace, but rather, a return to the backwaters of Xiamen. By car, the journey from the airport to the village took a full five hours! Once we neared the village, I knew that I would not enjoy the six days I was to spend there. There were no scenic places to visit or interesting sights to see. In the end, I spent most of my time cooped up in my relatives' house, unable to understand the fluent dialect they spoke and unwilling to stomach the strange food they cooked. It was six days of unrelenting stasis, relieved only by the thought that the days were passing by and I would be able to go home soon.

About a month ago, I was struck down by chicken pox and became a mass of unsightly spots. Two weeks away from school would have been a godsend except that it was the school holidays! I was so miserable at home, unable to go out to enjoy the break and irked by the itchy spots. I lay around day and night, feeling listless and bored. It was a terrible way to spend two weeks of the holidays.

Actually, such times only serve to sharpen the pleasures of exciting or interesting moments. In retrospect, these occasions of boredom seem rather hilarious, but at those times when I had to endure them, life was really difficult.

93

Describe an enjoyable journey you took. What were some interesting things you saw and did on the journey?

I once took a bus journey from Singapore to Penang during my school holidays. I was on my way to meet my family who had already gone there ahead of me. Gathering in Penang during the December holidays was a yearly ritual for my family, as my grandparents were natives of the island before moving to Singapore in the early 1950s. However, this was the first time that I was travelling on my own and I was a little apprehensive.

But the different scenery that I was treated to along the way silenced my fears. On the way to the Causeway, I noted the modern and bustling city with a myriad of skyscrapers. The architects had certainly ensured that each estate had a different identity. Then, the landscape changed as the bus drove into Malaysia and we passed rubber plantations. The air of serenity and the endless stretch of green were unbelievable. I usually travelled by air to Penang with my parents, and now knew what I had missed all this time. I was also treated to neatly planted rows of coconut trees swaying gracefully in the wind, as well as the heavy red fruit of the oil palms neatly placed along the road for collection by the lorries.

The bus soon passed a stretch of sea as it travelled along the coast. The sight of the sun's rays bouncing on the waves forming a glittering bed of blue and green was stunning. I was enjoying myself so much just watching the scenery that I did not realise that my stomach was protesting in hunger. The bus stopped at a little market square where hawkers had set up little stalls to sell their wares. I alighted from the bus and treated myself to a juicy Ramly burger, legendary for its delicious taste. Had my mother been with me, I would never have been allowed to buy it. I smiled gleefully as I downed the last of my burger.

By this time, I had made friends with two other boys who were travelling to Butterworth for the holidays. We conversed easily once we realised that we had a lot in common. Together, we went round the square looking at the wares on sale and eating all the oily but tasty food that were cooked on the spot for us. We had a really interesting but unhealthy time!

When the bus finally reached the depot where I was to take a ferry across to Penang, I had the pleasure of knowing that I had benefited greatly from the journey. I had made two new friends, while feasting both physically as well as visually. It was really an enjoyable trip!

94

Describe a popular eating place. What would the experience of customers be like?

Tasty Treats Eating House is always crowded from late afternoons to midnight. As you approach it, you will see many people standing around the tables that are already packed with hungry customers busily gulping down food. These people who are standing around will be on the alert for the table most likely to be vacated. Once there is even the slightest indication that the people are leaving their table, you will see at least three different people swooping down on it. The victor will stand at the table triumphantly waving his relatives or friends over, while the losers will promptly look elsewhere for another table.

But having found a place to sit at is not the end of the wait. You next have to get the attention of the busy waiters rushing about to attend to the customers. You will usually hear the words 'hot water' being shouted out as they pass, even if they are not holding any hot water! This is in fact their ingenious way of clearing the way. In between trying to catch the attention of the waiters and looking through the menu, you will hear customers grumbling about the slow service. But strangely, they fall silent suddenly whenever a waiter comes by to take their orders.

Once the waiter comes to take your orders, he is brusque and impatient. It would do well for customers to plan their orders in advance instead of asking him too many questions. Sometimes, these waiters would just walk away from indecisive customers and the latter would have to work hard at getting a waiter's attention again. Usually, fast and furious orders are bandied around loudly, as the waiters shout the orders out to the cooks, even though the latter are located deep in the kitchen and out of sight. But such shouting certainly adds to the ambience. Many regular customers enjoy the buzz of activity here.

Whenever the crowd gets too thick, the waiters will resort to asking customers to share their tables with those standing so that the eating house will not become impassable to human traffic. When the tables are shared by two different groups of people, the cacophony becomes incredibly deafening. Amidst the din of plates clanking and people talking loudly, you need to shout to be heard. Dinner could become an extremely chaotic and tense affair.

Only when the hands of the clock approaches midnight does the crowd begin to thin while the noise dies down. The flustered waiters can finally sit down for a chat. This lull in activity is momentary for soon, the workers will have to clean up the place and close for the night.

95

Describe a scene during the morning or evening rush hour. Provide details to show whether the scene is pleasant or unpleasant.

This is the worst hour of the day. At around five-thirty in the evening, the exodus of people from their offices never fails to fill everyone with dread. They stream out of the office buildings in the business district and crowd around the bus stops that are now dwarfed by their presence. The sidewalks are so congested with human traffic that one is hard pressed to find a decent space to walk on. In the end, many frustrated pedestrians begin to invade the roads.

Such an invasion obviously irks the drivers, who now not only have to be alert to errant vehicles but pedestrians as well. They honk impatiently at pedestrians who try to cram themselves along the sides of the roads as well as those who jaywalk to get to the opposite side in the shortest time. The evening air hangs heavy with the incredible cacophony of horns blaring, vehicles moving and people talking.

By now, the bus stops are packed to the hilt, with people squashed like sardines. But they do not seem to mind. Perhaps they are used to the smell of stale sweat that permeates the air every evening. Others who are not immune to it move a distance away from the crowd to try to inhale some fresh air. But it is a futile effort, for the heavy traffic is emitting nauseous fumes as well.

Once the buses glide into the bus bay, the crowd moves as one towards the tiny entrances, with people shoving one another in an effort to get the coveted seats or even standing space. But many are not in luck. They find themselves standing uncomfortably close to one another as the driver allows more and more commuters on. The voice of the bus driver can often be heard above the din, urging those standing at the back of the bus to move further in.

The traffic congestion now gets worse as the buses find themselves hemmed in by other cars. The incredible heat generated by the crowding as well as the rising frustration of the drivers is not at all conducive to those forced to wait at close proximity to one another. But the descending cool air of the evening now wafts in and indicates the easing of the traffic congestion. Soon, the vehicles move out of the business district and fewer commuters are seen crowding the area. Peace will soon reign here after the rush hour.

96

Write about an event which took place in a park. Include details to show why it was impactful to you.

When the Experimental Theatre Company in Singapore held their performance of 'Medea' at West Coast Park, it was an event that took Singapore by storm as it was a hitherto an untried venue for a serious play. My friends and I were avid theatregoers and decided to attend it even though it was rather costly.

We turned up for the event at about six in the evening and were shocked at the vast number of people who had already gathered. As it was to be a performance that capitalised on natural light, the evening was the best time to begin the play. We had to pick our way carefully through the crowd of people who had come fully armed with picnic mats, baskets of food and even binoculars. Energised by the enthusiasm of the people around us, we settled down quickly under a tree.

The opening of the play was spectacular. Using the colourful palette of the setting sun in the distance, the play opened with a dance sequence that was breathtaking. We were so engrossed in the dance that when the actors and actresses streamed in from around us, we were visibly stunned. Never before had we experienced actors and actresses moving among us instead of being on a clearly-defined stage. But it was a novel experience as the intensity of the drama was driven home for the audience.

But a hilarious interruption to the unfolding drama took place when an errant child tottered forward to one of the actresses and insisted on being carried. When the professional actress ignored the child, the latter started bawling loudly, earning some titters from the audience. With the child refusing to budge, one of the actors finally picked the child up and deposited him safely out of their way. It was really amusing watching the actor trying to quell the petulant child while carrying on with the performance.

We watched the tragedy of Medea powerfully enacted by a highly experienced actress. Torches that were strategically placed now lighted the set and the entire spectacle of shadows and blazing light was stunning. Safe for the earlier interruption, the play progressed at a pace that was invigorating yet heart rending. I was enthralled by it, and was sure that the drama would stay in my mind for many years to come.

When the play finally ended, we all rose as one body to give the performers a standing ovation. The actors and actresses took their bows and the audience started to pack up. We were so exhilarated by the power of the play that we decided to talk more about it over supper. It was certainly a wonderful experience.

97

Describe your experience at a shopping mall during a holiday. How did it change your mind about shopping?

Shopping malls hold a special place in the hearts of Singaporeans. They are the places where Singaporeans head to for their needs and wants. Increasingly, they are seen as places to gather, to cool off on a hot day or to relieve stress. I remember one particular day when my favourite shopping mall was unusually crowded. It was a public holiday and the start of the school holidays.

Walking towards Star Shopping Mall, I could see a long line of vehicles at the carpark entrance. The drivers looked frustrated and when I spied a 'Car Park Full' sign, I knew that the mall was going to be extremely crowded. Cars were turning back amidst the sound of impatient horns. Chattering groups of eager-eyed pedestrians, especially housewives and children, were purposefully heading towards the building. It suddenly dawned on me why the mall was exceptionally crowded — it was the start of the annual sale. Despite the massive crowd, my excitement grew and I was keen to secure a few good deals.

On entering the building, I felt a palpable sense of excitement. Throngs of people were heading for the supermarket and the toy store. I did not feel the usual relief of cool air conditioning in the building. Instead, I smelt the dank sweat of warm bodies pushing ahead in the crowded passageways. Every shop seemed to be experiencing good business. "Singaporeans are real suckers for a sale." I heard from a disgruntled man who was trying to get inside a crowded jewellery shop. Lines were forming at the cashiers' counters, especially at the fast food outlet and toy store. Salesgirls and cashiers especially, had the harried looks of people serving too many customers.

Originally, I had intended to buy a special issue of a 'Star Wars' toy which was on offer. However, seeing the long queues, I abandoned that thought and instead decided to survey the scene. Shoppers, arms burdened with multiple shopping bags, were milling around the lifts so I decided to take the escalators. But many people also had the same idea. I could not believe that there would be a snaking queue at the escalator. I decided to take the stairs instead. Pushing the heavy doors aside, I thought I would find some relief from the continuous chatter of eager shoppers and the cries of harassed mothers and excited children. However, to my dismay, the scene before me was the same. Groups of mothers, fathers or children with domestic helpers in tow were determinedly mounting the stairs to realise their shopping goals.

On reaching the fifth floor, I looked over the railings of the circular balcony to four decks of shopping madness below. All I could see was a sea of bobbing heads and colourful merchandise. It was as crowded as a packed crowd at the stadium. This particular level I was on housed the amusement arcades and the multiplexes. You could hear the muffled sounds of films in progress or the subdued din of electronic games. This was a sweet relief to the noise generated by the shuffling and pushing of eager shoppers down below.

The food court on the fourth level was another scene of chaos. The pungent smells, the heat from the cooking and the impatient queues of hungry people quelled my hunger pangs.

"One last try," I vowed to myself and elbowed my way to the basement to the supermarket to buy my favourite drink. It was not to be. I could barely make my way past the entrance.

Viewing the crowds with distaste, I fled from the mall, vowing to return only when the crowd had died down.

98

Write about a holiday that did not turn out the way you expected it to.

It was a public holiday. My family decided to break the usual routine of spending the day at a mall. Instead, Dad suggested visiting Batam, which was just a mere half hour ferry ride away. On that day, we all woke up feeling fresh and keyed up, fully expecting to enjoy ourselves.

However, we got off to a disappointing start. No taxis could be hailed within sight and the few taxi drivers who responded were not too keen to take us to the ferry terminal. They explained that the terminal was too remote and they might not be able to pick up passengers for the return journey. Still keyed up about our holiday, we waited patiently until a taxi driver finally agreed to take us there.

On reaching the terminal, we rushed in, flustered and worried about missing the ferry. We were relieved to find out that the departure time had been delayed. However, our relief was short-lived. There was a long frustrating queue as the immigration staff could not cope with the unexpected crowd.

There was a mad scramble for seats when we finally boarded our vessel. The mild weather had changed and the day became unbearably hot. It was stuffy in the ferry and many felt seasick.

Upon arrival, we waited for our coach. However, once on board the coach, another disappointment awaited us. Groans from the passengers greeted the guide's announcement that the watersports centre we were scheduled to visit was closed. We would visit a Go-Kart centre instead. Located in the remotest part of the island, the centre suddenly sprang to life with the arrival of our tour bus. We spent a mindless two hours watching the kids queuing and then squealing in delight at the limited turns they got. My family and I were not go-kart enthusiasts so Dad offered to pay for any souvenirs we wanted. However, these were outrageously priced.

Lunch was the only bright spot in the trip. The seafood dishes were varied and delicious. We tried sucking edible snail meat from the famous 'kong kong' snails. It was a nice change from our usual meals. We finally relaxed amidst the breezy and tranquil seaside surroundings.

Batam city was dirty and rather squalid. It had just rained and there were mud puddles everywhere. We had to walk through the mud just to get to the shopping centres. The shops invariably sold the same souvenirs. The rather dull shopping scene actually made us miss the vibrant shops back home!

We had not dared to try eating the many interesting roadside snacks or drink colourful syrupy beverages sold by vendors because of the constant presence of flies. Fear of dengue fever also reduced us to paranoid tourists slapping at mosquitoes.

Our tour guide blithely ignored our requests to visit a popular shopping centre. We learnt later that the place would not pay him a commission for taking us there. Instead, the brazen man kept pushing us to buy his homemade cookies.

Thankfully, we did not have to wait for the ferry on the journey back. We arrived safely but realised to our dismay that we were at another ferry terminal that was, a considerable distance from our home. There were no taxis in sight as the roads leading to the terminal were closed for a parade. We whiled away our time at a coffee shop and waited restlessly for the roads to be opened.

It was a relief to be back home! We decided not to go on day trips during a public holiday again!

99

Describe how people celebrate an important occasion.

New Year's Day will be just around the corner. It will be an event eagerly anticipated by everyone around the world as it marks the end of an eventful year and the start of a promising one.

At the stroke of midnight, people all over the world will cheer and celebrate. Undoubtedly, fireworks will explode and champagne bottles will be uncorked in many places. Cheers and well wishers abound with strangers uniting as everyone ushers in the new year.

Celebrations in the United States at Times Square in New York are often broadcast around the world. Confetti rains on the crowd as the clock strikes midnight. The Big Ben, the faithful clock, will ring in the new year in London. China and Hongkong will line up cultural performances, from both Eastern and Western cultures. A fleet of ships passes in the famous Sydney Harbour outside the Opera House to commemorate the new year as well. In major cities around the world, parties will be held and merrymaking will abound on the eve of the new year. In my country, there will be a street party in the popular tourist shopping belt. Elsewhere, companies will toast the occasion by hosting major events such as concerts.

While the festive buzz can be felt in many city centres, the majority of the population will celebrate the new year quietly. After a long hectic year, many will welcome the public holiday on New Year's Day as a respite from their busy working lives. Gathering a small group of family and friends to mark the occasion over a cozy meal at home is also a way to have a good time. Rather than mingling with the crowds and putting up with the noise, many people instead enjoy watching the celebratory proceedings broadcast live on television.

Other than merrymaking, New Year's Day is also a time of reflection for many people. In the days leading up to the actual day, there will often be commentary in the media reflecting on the past events of the year. People will assess the ills that occurred, such as disputes, wars, diseases or environmental damage. On the other hand, people will also remember to celebrate the achievements and progress of humankind, such as advances in science, technology, peacekeeping efforts and environmental conservation. Individuals will also reflect on their own lives and make personal resolutions for the new year.

The new year is always ushered in warmly by everyone. Whether it is merrymaking or quiet reflection that one does, most people feel the significance of being alive to welcome another year of opportunities. This makes them celebrate New Year's Day with a lot of gratitude and hope.

100

Which household tasks are you ready to take on and which do you avoid?

The mention of 'household' gives me an impression of domesticity (to be tamed and trained to do housework). 'Tasks' is a negative word to me — it reminds me of unpleasant chores, in this case, those done in the house.

Being an only child, Mum dotes on me. But Dad would have none of Mum spoiling me. He always asks Mum to delegate household chores to me, the more unpleasant the better, so that, as he phrases it, "I will respect those who work with their hands." I have seen the truth of what he says, especially when I see the poor attitude of some of my friends who behave like spoiled brats, leave dirty, unpleasant tasks to the adults.

However, even though I know it is my responsibility to help lighten Mum's duties in the household, I have certain preferences. For instance, I like to cook, vacuum and mop the floor. The tasks that I hate to do are sweeping, ironing or throwing the rubbish down the chute. I will give my reasons for my likes and dislikes.

By nature, I am a very clean and fastidious person. That is why I am very averse to have anything to do with dirt. Hence when I sweep the floor, I tend to take ages to do it as I search for dust and dirt in every nook and cranny of my flat. Mum nags at me for being slow while I hate being rushed and that is also why I dislike doing this.

Taking out the household rubbish and disposing of it is another task I dislike immensely. The sour smell of leftovers and swill is revolting. Dad always laughs when he sees me trying to get rid of a bag of rubbish as fast as possible. I simply dread having to carry it to the common corridor outside to dispose of it down the chute!

Another task I always try to avoid doing is ironing. I can never remove all the creases and after a while, do not put in much effort to straighten the clothes. The end result is that the clothes are not always properly ironed, and Dad will insist I have to iron them again.

However, I like using machines. Hence, I am always the first one to start the washing machine and vacuum cleaner. I love the mechanical clanging and wringing of the washing machine as it thoroughly cleans the clothes. When I move my vacuum cleaner across the floor, I pretend that I am a monster and the dust and dirt are ugly humans, being sucked up by me.

There is one task which I thoroughly like and that is cooking. Others may regard it as a chore but it is a stress-relieving activity for me. Mum is an average cook and Dad cannot cook. I am definitely the best cook in the house and Mum and Dad are ever willing to let me prepare the meals.

When I am given the task of preparing the weekend meal, I will spend the day before thinking about the dishes to prepare, how to cook them and how to obtain the best and freshest ingredients. I really take pains to cook the dishes and the contented expressions of those who partake of my dishes bring great satisfaction.

I am sure everyone has his or her own preferences when doing household chores. Regardless of how one feels about doing chores, they have become an integral part of our lives.

101

Describe the scene outside a sports stadium just before an important match.

The long-awaited match was finally taking place — the culmination of the Malaysia Cup Competition. Two equally matched football teams from Johor and Selangor were playing for the trophy.

The match was to kick off at 7.30 pm, and to be graced by the Chief Minister, a diehard football fan himself. Brilliant decorations of flags, and banners bearing the names of the players and logos of the contesting teams decorated the stadium. There was an air of anticipated excitement. In fact, busloads of fervent supporters had been arriving at the stadium grounds throughout the evening.

At 7.25 pm, the scene outside the stadium was a hive of activity and a mix of sounds and colours. The reverberating sounds of kompangs (Malay drums) could be heard as fans tried to boost the morale of the players and crowds.

Long queues of impatient fans were waiting in line to be allowed into the stadium or to buy last minute tickets. Ticket touts moved around them quietly, offering tickets on the black market at marked up prices. A few fans, impatient with the long queues, were willing to part with their money for the coveted tickets. Moreover, it had been a long, tiring wait in the hot weather outside and these were tickets for the covered stands.

Hawkers outside the stadium were doing a roaring trade. Brightly coloured pinkish drinks clashed with the sounds of sizzling Ramly hamburgers which were sold from pushcarts. There were even vendors selling brightly-coloured balloons for the children. A stall somewhere proclaimed branded football jerseys at a discount but on closer inspection, would reveal them as fakes. Business was brisk though, as the spectators snapped them up before proceeding into the stadium.

Meanwhile, as the time approached 7.30 pm, those outside who had not gained entry to the stadium began to resign themselves to watching the game outside on a giant television screen. The crowd jostled for the best vantage points to view the match.

Groups of boys were moving around, bearing rattan baskets containing pies and drinks and shouting out a continual refrain of “Drinks, curry puffs, 50 sen, 1 ringgit.” They stopped frequently to hand out the food and drinks; dropping the coins collected into their pockets.

An observer would, if he had looked up, seen a giant helium balloon bobbing in the air outside the stadium. It bore the words of its sponsor, ‘Jusco Batteries’. The sight of the balloons fascinated the children and added to the vibrant atmosphere.

The crowd itself was a motley group of people. There was a sprinkling of Chinese and Indian fans amidst the mostly Malay fans. They were mostly youths, with some middle-aged men. Children and women were also present. One could spy some families having a picnic on the grounds outside. Most people were dressed casually but others were decked in traditional wear.

There was suddenly a silence. The minister had just finished his speech. Then there was a tremendous roar inside the stadium. The match had begun! The people outside the stadium joined in the welcome shouts as the long-awaited finals began.

102

What is a skill that you wish to acquire? How would you use it?

I was born to a lower middle-class family. By nature, I am an introvert. I do not mix much with my school friends, preferring reading to games. However, to prevent myself from being called a 'sissy', I play badminton. But one skill I yearn to acquire is to play a musical instrument.

When I was in primary school, I was so interested in music that I would stay outside the music room just to listen to the melodious sounds of the instruments. However, my mother would not entertain my wish to take up piano lessons. She felt that wanting to learn how to play the piano was just a whim. She cited instances of expensive pianos sitting idly in relatives' houses because their children had lost interest. When I later became enchanted by the melodious sounds from the violin and begged to take lessons, I was told that all violin lessons were conducted privately and were too expensive.

Nowadays, my interest in music is only confined to listening to classical and pop music. However, I do have a dream of becoming a very good pianist.

I love piano music. If I were really a competent pianist with admirable technical and expressive skills, I would breeze through all my music examinations. Then I would hope to win a scholarship awarded by a prestigious music academy overseas. As I love the music of Mozart, I would find a suitable mentor who specialises in this. He would put me under his tutelage and I would repay his faith in me by playing Mozart's music with such artistry and verve that the media and public would be full of praise for this musical prodigy.

When I emerge from the shadows of my famous teacher, my talents and skills in piano playing would have already equalled his. All I would need is to gain the experience from playing before an audience. I would have a full slate of concert performances all over the world. It would be up to me to pick and choose which cities I would like to perform in and which famous orchestras I would like to work with. Performing with the famous New York Philharmonic Orchestra is a must.

I would like to use my prodigious talent to benefit my country, the world and the underprivileged. I would have many concerts for charity. These concerts would raise funds for the poor, especially the children and the sick. I believe that music is a universal language and a salve for these troubled times. I hope to preach about peace and understanding among the nations through the universal medium of music.

Lastly, I hope to perform to a ripe old age and pass on my skills and experience to promising and disciplined students of mine. When I pass away, I would hope to have livened people's lives and brought joy to them with my music.

103

What do you look forward to at the end of a school day?

The end of a school day! This definitely strikes a welcome chord in the hearts of many a harried and stressed student in our demanding education system. I am no exception, as there are many relaxing activities that I look forward to enjoying after school.

The first thing that takes the load off my mind would be the welcome news of the postponement of any activities in the afternoon, whether it is a co-curricular activity, a remedial lesson or extra tuition. These activities do nothing more than extend the tiring school day that I have already had.

If there are no urgent matters at home and the homework given is of an average load, I usually head to the Purple Cafe with my friends. There we will relax in air-conditioned comfort, enjoying our cup of coffee or tea and snacking on some pies or sandwiches. We spend an hour or so gossiping about our friends or teachers, or cracking jokes to relieve stress after our weary school day.

I usually reach home at around 4 pm. The first place I head for would be my bathroom. There I would run a bath and luxuriate in a nice, long and warm bath, as I listen to my favourite songs. By the time I emerge from my bathroom, I am energised. I would feel cleaner, lighter and more relaxed.

With my renewed energy, I would plough through my homework or revise the day's lessons. If I have any queries, I will send text messages to my friends to ask for help. After completing my work, it would be close to dinner time.

Evenings are spent relaxing in front of the television (or what is most commonly known as the idiot box!). It is relaxing to simply mindlessly watch any variety show or action movie just to take a break. Sometimes, I would eagerly follow the unfolding of my favourite drama serial.

If my mum allows me to, the activity I look forward to the most would be to indulge in some surfing on the Internet. I would spend my time chatting with friends, playing games or reading the latest information on my favourite websites. Time would simply fly and mum would have to call me repeatedly to retire to bed.

These are what I look forward to at the end of a hectic school day. They make me feel relaxed and they lift my mood, helping me to forget any worries I might have.

104

Describe a significant public building in your country.

This building stands adjacent to the train station. Not only is it easily accessible by train, it can also be accessed by buses. Getting to the building is simple and convenient.

There are many public buildings in my country. The iconic colonial architecture of some make them recognisable structures in the country. However, not everyone frequents all the buildings. One rather nondescript building is the Immigration and Checkpoints Authority (ICA) building. Both locals and foreigners frequent this place and there is often a steady stream of visitors throughout the day.

The building itself has several levels catering to the various needs of visitors. Here, people come to apply, renew or collect their passports. They also come to the building for issues related to residency, immigration or citizenship.

With improvements in technology, most of the visitors at the ICA building would already have made an appointment. Hence, many would proceed to the respective levels to obtain a queue number from a machine. Those who have not, would join queues to obtain the forms they need, often filling them up on the spot. Despite the large numbers of people, the well laid out signs and clear instructions ensure that the place is efficient and organised.

The Immigration Officers work behind closed doors in their office booths. Occasionally, he or she will emerge to clarify something or hand over some papers to the clerks. When people are ushered into the offices, they are to be interviewed. The merits of their case will be considered according to rules that have been laid out.

The crowds swell just before lunch time. However, the efficiency of the place remains and few are dissatisfied with the waiting time.

The ICA building is not just sterile efficiency. On the first floor is a canteen where both the staff and visitors can fill their stomachs. A gallery on the first floor also reveals a history of the building.

By 4 pm, the crowds will thin out. More people will be seen leaving than entering the building. The doors of the building will close promptly at 5 pm.

When dusk settles and the evening shadows become longer, the place becomes silent and empty. The building and its staff will rest and recharge for the next day will be another busy day when the doors open again.

105

Describe what you see and hear during the daily midday break in your school.

Spring Avenue Secondary School is situated in the heart of a public housing estate in my country. It is not one of the better known schools, having a history of just four years since its inception. I have been a student there ever since its founding and will have fond memories of it when I leave.

The midday break, or recess time, as it is popularly known in Singapore schools, is indeed a welcome break. Schooling in Singapore starts at about 7.30 in the morning and sleepy-eyed students have a hurried breakfast or no breakfast at all before they go to school. Hence, the break is a time to fill up the students' hungry stomachs. There are healthy appetites, hunger pangs and thirsty throats at this time. Also, it is a welcome rest from the morning's academic load as most of the 'heavy' study subjects like mathematics, science or history are conducted before the break.

There are two recess times. The first is at 10.10 am. This is for the students in the junior sections, the secondary one and two classes. The second, half an hour later, is for the senior students. At the welcome ringing of the bells signalling the first break, there is a purposeful march of many hurried footsteps zeroing in to the food haven on the ground floor. Wearing green shirts and khaki pants, the uniformed students will break the morning silence with their footsteps and their constant chatter which will reach its peak after their stomachs are full.

There will be some students who will stay behind in class, detained by last minute work or those who skip recess. The majority, however, will form long queues themselves in front of the foodstalls they fancy on that day.

The most popular stall is Auntie Lindy's. Her mixed rice dishes include favourites such as fried fish and golden brown chicken wings. However, the School Health Board has limited these dishes to being sold only two days a week. The food at Auntie Lindy's is tasty and the students with hearty appetites gorge themselves on white rice smothered with brown soya sauce or curry gravy.

Uncle Ali's *mee siam* and *mee rebus* noodle dishes also attract patient but long queues of eager students. Those who order piping hot noodle soup dishes from the Malay or Chinese stalls can be seen carrying these bowls of food gingerly to the seats to avoid spilling anything.

Recently, healthier dishes have been introduced in the canteen. Brightly-coloured orange slices and dried pineapple snacks are displayed by the vendors while yoghurt-based ice cream have replaced the dairy ones.

The drinks stall is another popular place in the canteen. We used to order fizzy drinks. However, recently, we have been encouraged to partake of healthy drinks like barley or fresh fruit juices which are now often seen next to the brown malt drinks on the tables.

The students will congregate in their favourite places when they eat. The boys will usually occupy the back of the canteen while the girls will sit on the front benches. An observer would note that the students would sit with their friends or classmate. This is the only time an observer will hear chatter in Mandarin, Tamil or Malay. For the rest of the day, the pupils converse in English, as encouraged by the school.

The canteen is the noisiest spot in school at this time. Giggles and shrieks are occasionally heard from some junior girls while loud shouts can be heard from some exuberant boys. This is the only time when loud noises are tolerated.

Eagle-eyed prefects sporting smart red ties and supervised by the teacher on duty will be hovering about, keeping watch on students who do not return their trays and utensils.

Some of the junior boys will gobble down their snacks. They will then head for the open play areas in the school. The white cemented basketball courts will resound with the hollow sound of balls hitting the boards and the green fields will see boys wildly chasing after footballs.

There will also be groups of chattering students seated at the benches around the school. Some are making plans for the hours after school while some are catching up on the latest gossips.

When the bell sounds for the end of the break, the junior students will return reluctantly to their classes while the seniors descend on the canteen. The scenes will then be repeated again.

These are the sights and sounds at the midday break in my school and I will carry fond memories of these when I leave school.

106

Write about some of the disappointments in your life.

I am a typical Singapore student. Like all girls, I have my share of disappointments in life.

To begin with, I must confess I was disappointed with my financial background. Right from the very first day in school, I was made conscious of my family's poverty. My father had lost his job as a labourer the day before I was due to enrol in Primary One. In desperation, my father actually thought of not enrolling me in school. I cannot blame him as he had to feed his growing brood of children. To add insult to injury, he felt that as I was a girl, I could not contribute much to the family income as I would 'marry out of the family'. I would be better off looking after my younger siblings. It was my mother's pleading that I was allowed to be enrolled in a school. To prove my worth, I applied myself wholeheartedly to my studies and did well. However, throughout my youth, I had to carry the burden of an uncertain financial status, which could result in me having to leave school and look for a job.

I had yearned to be a prefect since I was in primary school but I was passed over in favour of more outgoing and exuberant students. This wish of mine was only realised in Secondary Three. However, I was not as excited then because of my increased responsibilities at home. A year before, my mum's health deteriorated and I had to do the bulk of the household chores like cooking, washing and ironing. I was the only girl in the family and the burden of doing household chores fell unfairly on me. Sometimes I wished that I were a boy!

In Secondary One, I wanted to select swimming as my co-curricular activity. To my bitter disappointment, I was not chosen to be on the team because I had a history of asthmatic attacks. The coach told me that I would never be selected no matter how good I was because of my medical history.

What were the other disappointments that marred my school days? Oh yes! I remember I had a crush on Marcus, a cute classmate. At first, he showed some interest in me. But he later left me for my best friend, Betty, who looked as plain as I did but was much wealthier.

These moments in my life were times of immense disappointment. As I look back, I understand now that some of the negative feelings have been largely exaggerated due to my immaturity. However, I know that those same experiences made me what I am today — a determined and confident person.

107

Describe the scene in school on the first morning of a new school year. What are the sights and sounds?

Tanjong Merah Secondary School is situated in a quiet lane in a residential area. It is an average neighbourhood school and the students are mainly from the surrounding residential area.

On the first day of school, there is inevitably a traffic jam before school starts at 7.30 am. Parents drive their cars near the school's main and side gates to drop off their children or attempt to get into the adjoining car park. Taxis are also seen as the school is situated some kilometres from the main road.

The air is still fresh at this time and the cries of birds and the early rays of warm sunshine signal the start of the new day. The older teenage students of the Secondary Three and Four classes can be distinguished by their taller frames and the fact that the boys sport long pants while the younger ones are dressed in shorts. Uniforms are white and a red tie is spotted once in a while, worn by prefects on duty.

The senior boys and girls can also be distinguished by their familiarity with the school. They do not have an air of nervousness, which the Secondary One boys and girls do, being in an unfamiliar and new environment. The seniors look right at home. The older girls huddle in groups around shady corridors while the boys are seen around the car porch. The girls are making small talk, keeping up to date with what their friends did in the holidays. The older boys would be more inclined to discuss games or the latest fad. Quite a few boys are casting glances at the shiny new cars which belong to some teachers.

Confidence is also seen in the behaviour of the Secondary Two students. In fact, some of the boys can be seen playing on the field while some of the girls can be spotted playing tag along the corridors.

It is easy to spot the newcomers in school. The Secondary One boys and girls are gathered together with some parents in the canteen. You can tell from the anxious and curious looks on their faces that they are unfamiliar with the school. Most of these students are also carrying heavy school bags as they are uncertain about what to bring.

The canteen itself is stirring to life. Food stallholders are busy preparing ingredients to cook the food for the students when they have their midday break. Some already have food ready for those who want breakfast.

The teachers are gathered in the staff room, busily assembling their lesson materials or catching up with colleagues about what they did in the holidays. The office is a hive of activity and some anxious parents are waiting outside to discuss admission matters with the heads.

At 7.30 am, the school bell rings. Promptly, the older students fall into place in neat rows at the school quadrangle and the teachers stand behind them. The new students are escorted to the hall on the first floor by some teachers and prefects.

As the sun beats down on the quadrangle, the principal mounts the podium, greets the teachers and students and turns around to face the flag post. Then the National Anthem is played and the flag of Singapore is raised. Everyone sings the familiar strains of the song which they know by heart. After this, the Vice-Principal makes the announcements and reminds the students to exert discipline and obey the school rules. The assembly is then dismissed and the students file quietly to their respective classes. This signals the beginning of a new school year.

108

Describe your greatest achievement. Why does it mean so much to you?

I am a sixteen-year-old boy studying for my O-Level Examinations at the end of this year. What can I count as my achievements so far?

I find studying a breeze and have consistently scored A's in my subjects. There was a year in which I topped my cohort in the final examinations.

Another achievement and memory I fondly retain is how I managed to foster a better relationship between my Mum and Dad. Dad is a successful businessman but is seldom at home. Mum is a homemaker who often nags at him to allow her to work. Their frequent bickering depressed me and one day I poured out my grievances to them. I managed to convince Dad that Mum would be better off with a part-time job. He agreed and since then, their relationship has improved.

However, the one achievement I am proudest of is my successful work in the local home for the elderly. From young, I had been brought up by my grandparents. When they passed away, I decided to do my part to help the elderly. I have developed a fondness for elderly people. It means a lot to me to be able to understand their concerns and appreciate their good points just like I did for my grandparents.

I participated in my school's Community Service Club when it was first set up. Our members made numerous trips to the local home for the elderly. Pretty soon my enthusiasm and hard work led me to being unanimously elected as President of the club.

Unlike many of my fellow students, I do not do community work to earn points. I really love the work and feel I am doing something worthwhile. Hence, while some of my peers have stopped visiting the home, I indefatigably spend many satisfying weekend afternoons there. Many of my fellow students are put off by the smell of the place. It is a fact that some old people are bedridden and some are not particular about their personal hygiene. There is also a shortage of nurses and caregivers there. Also, some of my friends complain that many old folks are grumpy and suspicious. However, none of these irk me.

During my visits, I chat with the elderly, help them with their daily tasks and listen to their problems. They like to tell me about their glorious days in the past and their suffering during the Japanese Occupation in Singapore. Initially, my attempts at helping them were regarded with suspicion. I cannot blame them as many of them do not like to be viewed as abandoned old people whom reluctant students visit once a year.

However, my sincerity and keenness won them over. I did not mind cutting their fingernails or changing adult diapers. Now, many of my elderly friends regard me as a friend or foster son and I call them 'uncle' or 'aunty'.

My club organised a successful Christmas party last year. The able-bodied elderly took part in the concert. Many of them told me they looked forward to another party next year.

Hence, looking back at my achievements, I consider my work with the elderly to be my greatest contribution. It is important for me to be able to help other people meaningfully. I am very proud of my community work. In the future, I hope to study social work at the university and become a social worker. I find great satisfaction in helping the less fortunate.

109**A couple lost their child in a crowded shopping mall. Describe what happened.**

Tracy Lim, a five-year-old girl, went missing during a shopping trip. Efforts to locate her were in vain but it was the help of a kind stranger that eventually reunited Tracy and her parents.

Tracy was shopping with her parents in Orchard. As it was a public holiday, the store was exceptionally crowded. Mrs Lim, her mother, later told the police that as she was coming out from the store, she discovered that Tracy was not by her side. She searched the entire store, even walking frantically along the stretch of road outside, but to no avail.

Unlike his wife, Mr Lim went immediately to the information counter, requesting that an announcement be made. Even if Tracy did not hear the announcement, someone who saw Tracy could bring her to the counter.

'A five-year-old Chinese girl with a pony tail, about 1 metre tall, chubby and wearing a red pants suit with a Mickey Mouse logo is missing. She is carrying a small yellow sling bag. She speaks only English. We appeal to anyone who sees her to bring her to the information counter.'

However, the attempts by the security guards to locate the child drew a blank and the parents made a police report. After a sleepless night, the Lims heard their doorbell ring early next morning. They found a tall, slim European man with their daughter by his side. He explained that he was jogging along the Central Expressway near the Oxley Road flyover, when he saw a young girl crying by the side of the busy road. Occasionally, she attempted to cross the busy road but was always startled by the horns from the speeding cars. She appeared confused and tired. When he approached her to help, she ran away, dashing helter-skelter along the expressway towards a side road. Fortunately, he caught up with her. He learnt that she had lost her parents the night before at the shopping mall. In her haste to look for them, she had wandered out of the mall. She dared not approach strangers for help as her mother had told her to beware of them. The man explained that he had comforted her and brought her home after she had showed him her address printed on a card in her sling bag.

The Lims thanked him effusively. It was much later that they realised they did not know his name. They took to social media and also contacted the local newspaper to place a notice to locate him. They hoped that the kind-hearted stranger would read the notice and identify himself so that they could express their gratitude properly.

110

Describe a popular shopping mall found in your country.

My country is a well developed island city-state with a population of about 6 million. Little pockets of green (parks and protected nature reserves) surround the ubiquitous housing estates of high-rise flats which house the majority of the population. Workers toil in offices and factories while students study in the numerous educational institutes scattered around the island. There is a limited number of indoor pursuits but one common leisure activity for most people is to spend their time in the shopping malls found throughout the island.

Shopping malls are frequented by people of all ages at different times of the day for different purposes. Some relax by window shopping after work or school, while others go there to replenish their provisions or be entertained.

A typical example of such a shopping mall is Eastern Mall. Constructed next to a train station and a bus interchange, it serves not only the needs of the residents in the housing estate which is one of the largest estates in the country, but also the neighbouring estates. Once one alights from the trains and buses, one cannot fail to locate it. It seems that half the commuters who alight make a beeline for the mall.

The mall offers five levels of retail shops. At the basement, which also provides parking space for cars, there is a large supermarket with its blue, red and white logo cheerfully emblazoned at its entrance. The supermarket covers half the available commercial space at the basement. A wide variety of groceries and household necessities are available here, ranging from imported food to household cleaning supplies. With its affordable prices and wide selection of items, it never fails to attract a crowd. On weekends, hordes of shoppers descend on it and leave with trolleys brimming with a week's supply of groceries.

Occupying the other half of the basement are fast food outlets, restaurants, snack shops, pharmacies and stores providing services like photodeveloping. These stores are just as popular and the narrow aisles are often packed with shoppers.

The first floor of most shopping malls invariably has a central atrium where various goods are sold at a discount by the major retailers. In Eastern Mall, Halls, a major department store and the anchor tenant, holds regular events here. At other times, this space is the scene for travel, computer or medical fairs. Occupying prime retail space on the periphery of this floor is a plethora of jewellery, shoe, watch or fashion outlets. Business is brisk, especially during prime shopping hours. There are bread and pastry outlets tucked in a corner at the two entrances to the mall. There, customers can have delightful afternoon tea or order takeaway.

Visitors can get a complete view of the shopping mall from the atrium. Looking up, they can get a glimpse of the colourful signboards of the shops on every floor. Gleaming escalators on either side convey the continuous flow of shoppers as they move up the three floors of retail outlets.

The second floor is an eclectic mix of shops. Popular phone service providers are found on this level. Just when one thinks that there cannot possibly be more eating outlets, some popular restaurants can be found on this floor. At mealtimes, snaking queues are formed outside the restaurants with hungry customers already holding on to order forms in which their food has been selected. Boutiques and optical shops make up the rest of the shops on this floor.

The third floor houses a mixture of outlets serving various needs. There is a mobile communications shop and shops selling the latest funky fashion for the young. There is also a well known bookstore and a popular toy store. This is the level which is most frequented by the young.

After all the shopping, there is always a need to slake one's thirst, ease one's hunger pangs or rest one's tired body. The third floor houses a clean, modern, air-conditioned food court which serves a colourful variety of appetising dishes. Finding a seat during peak hours is always a challenge.

Finally, there is a complex of mini-cinemas on the fourth floor. Here, the latest in cinematic fare can be enjoyed. A music school is also located here. A steady stream of children enter its doors and head for the studios on weekday evenings and on weekends. In addition, there is also a popular outdoor children's play area.

Eastern Mall has given pleasant experiences to those living in the area. Be it the sights and sounds of the shopping environment or the smells of the food outlets, each shopper will have his or her own fond memories of the place.

111

You were in a hospital when a fire broke out. Describe the scene you witnessed.

I was on the third floor of the West Wing of Tan Tock Seng Hospital when I heard someone shouting hysterically along the corridor. I ran towards the sound and saw a man in white shrieking that a fire had broken out. He was also in the process of breaking the glass panel of the alarm to sound the device. In a few minutes, people began to throng the corridor, streaming out continuously from the opened doors. I saw many doctors and nurses helping patients out of the rooms. Other patients who were more mobile were stumbling out into the corridor and making their way out of the hospital on their own.

Pandemonium soon followed. Many patients were demanding to know what was happening. A number of visitors tried to shove others aside to push their way out. I also heard children crying. Luckily, an elderly doctor came along and told the crowd not to panic as the fire was isolated in one of the rooms. His calm manner and confident voice managed to quell the rising anxieties of the crowd, who then evacuated in an orderly manner.

In the next ten minutes, the police arrived with firefighters in tow. They launched into action almost immediately, ensuring the evacuation of people from the affected floor as well as controlling the blazing fire. With their efficiency, the people were evacuated safely.

One of the service lifts near the affected area had stopped working, trapping some patients and a doctor in it. Fortunately, the rescuers managed to free the people before the smoke that was filtering into the trapped lift suffocated them.

Many stretchers were seen ferrying unconscious patients away from the building. On a lawn a safe distance away, harried nurses and doctors were seen attending to the people who had been injured in their rush for safety. I myself managed to get out of the affected floor unharmed by climbing out of a window and shinning down a refuse pipe. Eventually, the tireless efforts of the firefighters kept the fire under control and many of the survivors praised the courage of those who had got them to safety. In fact, one doctor was commended by several people for having carried them out of the building at his own risk.

The fire had caused enough damage to affect an entire floor. The once pristine walls of the hospital were covered with black patches. Although most of the people escaped unscathed, the fire caused massive damage to the operation theatres where expensive equipment was found.

112

Write about the sounds you like. Why do these sounds mean so much to you?

Pleasant and unpleasant sounds fill our day and we cannot avoid them. Ideally we would like to live in a world of pleasant sounds, like the tinkling of bells or the sweet songs of birds. But such is reality and we have to accept the unpleasant together with the pleasant.

When I was a baby, I liked to listen to the cooing sounds made by my grandmother. She always made these to stop me from crying or to lull me to sleep. Even until now, whenever I hear grandmothers doing this to babies, I like to listen to these sounds and am swept in a wave of nostalgia for my grandmother who has passed away.

There are other sounds associated with my childhood that I would like to fondly dwell on. Who could not welcome the urgent ringing of the school bell, signalling the end of a lesson? Especially welcoming to the ears is the signal for the start of recess. Hungry stomachs craving for warm, delicious food and an end to boring lessons welcomed these sounds.

The sounds from the playground — children playing football or a game of tag — these sounds are still considered pleasurable to me now that I am in secondary school. The merry cries of children in carefree play are especially meaningful to me now that school life is quite stressful. Even the tinkling bells of the ice cream man still making his rounds in my estate, as he did during my childhood days, will lighten my mood. I can take a break from my schoolwork and indulge in savouring an icy cold ice cream, especially on hot sultry afternoons.

To break the tedium of my studies, I especially like to listen to the sounds of nature. Since young, my parents have annually booked a chalet in the east coast of Singapore. There I can find peace in the soothing sounds of nature. I will go to the seaside to hear the waves lapping on the shore on a calm day or crashing against the rocky walls of the breakwaters on a windy one. These sounds are important to me for they help me to relax and unwind after working so hard in school.

I always like to visit bird sanctuaries to hear the cooing of birds like cuckoos or the twittering of small birds like sparrows. Occasionally, I am rewarded by some unusual sounds. One day, I was thrilled to hear the sharp, harsh guffaws of some parrots in the nearby trees of a market I was visiting. These sounds remind me of the wonder of the natural world and how we are actually living alongside a myriad of interesting creatures.

Life goes on and we grow older each year. Festivals and holidays come and go. There are some particular sounds I look forward to each year. These are the sounds associated with happy occasions that I spend together with my family. They remind me of the importance of the warmth and love of a family. ‘Merry Christmas!’ and ‘Happy New Year!’ are some of the greetings I like hearing. Rendered in any language, these greetings are music to my ears.

I could go on and on to describe the sounds I like and the reasons why I like them. Right now, I would like to hear the announcement of ‘Time’s up!’ from the invigilator as it would signal the end of this English exam!

113

Why might a teenager not look forward to becoming an adult?

It is not uncommon to hear children talking about how eager they are to grow up. Yet, as I approach adulthood, I shudder to think of what I will encounter.

This is especially so in the area of responsibilities. As a student now, all I need to ensure is that I make the most of my education so as to have a good foundation for my career in the future. Other responsibilities include being a filial child by respecting my parents and living up to their expectations. Should I fail to carry out these responsibilities, I might at most be punished by my parents or teachers. As an adult, I will have to be a responsible employee, spouse, parent and provider. The consequences of not carrying out these responsibilities adequately would be dire.

An attendant reality of growing up is getting a job to support my family and myself. If I am lucky, I might escape with just a berating. Having ambitions and aspirations will not guarantee success in one's career. Furthermore, the importance of a job as a tool to support myself and my family financially could lead to great disillusionment. A job becomes a means to an end and not an end in itself.

With increasing age comes a host of health problems as one is forced to handle greater work-related stress. Watching my parents spend long hours at work with little leisure time has created an aversion in me towards working life. Work has taken a toll on their health and any leisure time they have is spent resting at home. The active lifestyle teenagers lead now will become a thing of the past once adulthood arrives.

Even as I am writing now, the world is changing. In this rapidly moving world, the ability to adapt to frequent changes is crucial to survival. Those who are unable to handle such changes will find it difficult to live a happy and healthy life. Teenagers always seem to be aware of the latest fad and are always at the top of the game in the area of technology, but with age brings the inability to adapt to changes as quickly as before. It is seen in the older generation today who are set in their ways and are unable to keep up with societal changes. I would not want to be left behind one day.

Yet, the future holds unlimited promise of a radiant adulthood, as long as I prepare for the challenges that I may face. As I am fully aware of what I fear, I would like to think that they might not come to pass. Even if they do, I know that I am expecting them. That itself should be half the battle won.

116

Why is food an important part of people's lives?

Food is an integral part of everyone's life. Although food might carry different meanings for different groups of people, everyone will attest to the importance of food, with some attaching more importance to food than others. This essay will describe the different ways in which people view food and why food is essential in everyone's life.

Food is a basic necessity that is essential for survival. It gives us the energy and nutrients that we need to function. Different cultures rely on different types of food to obtain the energy they need but everyone will need food to carry out his daily activities. Whether one eats the bare minimum or indulges in copious amounts of food, one cannot deny the importance of food. Fortunate ones can make deliberate food choices to ensure that the right nutritional content is present in the food consumed. Those who are less fortunate look forward to having sufficient food to stave off hunger and prevent malnutrition.

For those who are working in food related industries, food is significant in yet another area. The farmer, whose means of survival is to grow crops, is able to earn a living by producing food that is exported worldwide. With the increasing population, there is an increasing need for food and this would contribute to the farmer's source of income. There is also an increasing number of people who are food sellers. Some are hawkers selling street food, whereas some own cafes or restaurants. As more food is processed in factories today, food related companies that produce processed food continue to benefit, together with shipping companies that ensure produce reaches the consumers. All these groups of people view food not just as an important way to stay alive but also a way to earn a living.

Food is an integral part of many cultures. A culture is made up not just of rituals, languages and attire, it is also made up of food. Certain types of food are synonymous with certain cultures. For example, *mee siam* and *mee rebus* are part of the Malay culture. Without food, there will be a void in cultures and some people might even feel a loss of identity. Today, to reduce the chasm between cultures, fusion food exists where food from one culture is mixed with food from another culture to form a new type.

Food is an important part of our social landscape and is essentially the base upon which relationships are built. For many people, food is an important way of strengthening ties with friends and family. Families and loved ones often gather for a meal on important occasions. Such meals are even more crucial for those who only see their extended family members on such occasions. There is nothing more heartwarming than enjoying a hearty meal with loved ones whether homecooked or otherwise. It is also over a meal that family members talk to one another about their day's activities.

From needing food for survival to relying on food to enhance one's social life, everyone needs food. Although some might consider a specific reason for needing food over another, everyone is cognisant of the importance of food.

117

What are some benefits and problems when it comes to having friends?

Friendship is definitely one of the most indispensable experiences in life. If you ask anyone around you if they have friends, surely their response will be one of shocked incredulity. The truth is, everyone has friends, whether or not all of them fall into the 'close friend' category, but certainly everyone will have at least a few friendly acquaintances.

Friends are important for several reasons. Firstly, they provide the kind of emotional support that a family cannot give during our turbulent growing-up years. During this time, we often feel that the family cannot fully understand what we are going through. Friends of our age are the usual recourse that we have when encountering problems in our love lives or studies. Even after we have developed into adulthood, friends still prove to be powerful sources of emotional support. They listen to our angst and laugh with us at the little foibles we have. They are important supports in our lives, whether we are young and impressionable or experienced and wise.

Secondly, friendships, from as young as childhood, help kick-start our learning process. We learn and practise important life skills such as sharing, tolerance, empathy and many others. Furthermore, friends are the first people we practise our social interaction skills with and most certainly they help us refine such abilities.

It is precisely because making friends is such a prevalent activity in life that it is important to take note of certain problems. Some people become our friends merely because we are useful to them in some way. For example, I had a friend who was deeply hurt when she realised that someone had made her acquaintance only because the latter had wanted to tap into her knowledge on a difficult subject before the examinations. After the examinations, the person completely broke off the friendship without a word. It was a sobering experience for us all. We learnt that people can have ulterior motives when courting our friendship.

Another important issue is our compatibility with our friends. After all, it is important that we share common interests rather than force ourselves to adopt attitudes or preferences that are not our own. If a friendship becomes far too contrived, it is unlikely to last. Trying to befriend someone just to fit in with the crowd despite our discomfort will not benefit us in the long term. We might either be annoyed or inhibited by the supposed friends that we have. As such, it is essential that we are honest in dealing with ourselves and other people when making friends.

Making friends can be one of the most rewarding experiences in life. But too rosy an expectation of friendship can be dangerous as it may cause disillusionment and great unhappiness. Like every other experience in life, one must always be ready to take the good with the bad.

118

What are the consequences of landing oneself in debt?

Being in debt is becoming more and more of a modern condition as credit facilities become more widely available. Furthermore, years of economic boom globally have encouraged many to spend beyond their earnings. This has resulted in severe problems for those individuals who are in debt.

The greatest problem of being in debt is that the repayment of the debt never seems to be at hand. The more you pay off, the more the debt remains looming. This is because the interest charged on the debt can be staggering, particularly if the principal amount is a large one. Furthermore, the rolling interest on credit card charges can be devastating to one's finances if one is not careful with its usage. Being in debt can mean being tied down by large financial obligations for long periods if one is not prudent.

Being in debt can also be terrible for one's self-esteem. There is a debilitating erosion of confidence and independence because one is practically harnessed to your creditor. You find yourself working non-stop to pay off the debt. You are not free to do what you want as the income earned is always to pay off the loan.

Sometimes, if the debt is too staggering, a change in lifestyle becomes imperative. After all, one has to stop indulging in an extravagant lifestyle if the debt is to be repaid. Living quarters may have to be downsized. The luxury of a private car may have to give way to public transport. Little extravagances like dinners at restaurants and overseas trips may also be a thing of the past. Such changes may be difficult to handle and accept, especially if others begin to shun you because of your changing circumstances.

Another consequence of being in debt is the loss of confidence that other people have in you. Being in debt is usually associated with irresponsibility or lack of foresight that can effectively cripple someone's trust in your competence. This would be worse if you are in business, as indebtedness would be taken as a sign of poor financial management in the business world. Investors' confidence might plummet and this could be dire.

Thus, it is never wise to land yourself in debt as it will create a host of problems that you would never have expected. Furthermore, the possibility of being trapped in a cycle of debt is high. The first step is to practise prudence in the management of your funds. Such careful handling will go a long way in ensuring your future happiness.

119**Write about the customs and laws in your country that you consider most important.**

Customs are important for the identity of any country. They ensure the continuity of history and lock in the uniqueness of its people. Similarly, laws are essential for the smooth running of a country, for they spell clearly the boundaries of responsibility for every citizen and non-citizen alike. In my country, some of the most important customs are the showing of respect for the elderly and the special rites for weddings, births and deaths. The most important laws to me are those dealing with the protection of citizens and unfair discrimination.

Having a good relationship with the elderly is certainly a crucial custom that must be upheld. The young are increasingly self-centred and stubborn, thinking that asserting their independence means not having to listen to anyone else. This results in them resenting any sort of advice from the elderly, whom they see as old-fashioned and therefore irrelevant and unimportant in modern society. However, the elderly do have a wealth of experience that they can share with the younger generation. Maintaining a good relationship will not only show respect for the elderly but will also benefit the young.

Rites are a way of lending importance to ceremonies and nowhere is this more essential than in the dealings with birth, marriage and death. Such rites are replete with tradition and symbolism that people still ensure that these important occasions are carried out properly today. Thus, auspicious dates are selected while births are celebrated with much ceremony. Deaths are handled in a respectful and dignified manner to reflect the importance of the deceased. These customs will continue to be observed.

In terms of laws, I must say that one of the most important ones is the protection of the citizens. This refers to laws enacted to ensure that citizens are safe from physical and mental harassment, as well as threats to life. Such laws assure the citizens that the police are ever vigilant and crimes are dealt with harshly. For example, robbers, murderers and the like face severe consequences. As such, many are deterred from committing these acts because of the severity of punishment.

Discrimination is an area in which the law ensures that offenders are dealt with promptly and severely. This can be discrimination in terms of age, gender and race. Being the multiracial society that we are, it is important that the law is impartial so that everyone is assured of fair treatment. Laws that legislate against discrimination go a long way to making sure every citizen is fairly treated regardless of his background.

Laws are important as they regulate the lives of people living in the same society. Without laws, society will degenerate into chaos, which could spell its eventual disintegration. Similarly, customs are usually symbols of the heritage and tradition that define a people and their identity. It is important to recognise the richness of the culture that all customs originate from.

120

Write about a well-known and bustling shopping area.

Orchard Road surely ranks as one of the busiest areas in Singapore. Even though malls have sprung up in the various housing estates, hordes of people can be seen strolling along its boulevards or thronging its many shopping malls. The most popular shopping malls can be found there, ranging from the huge Japanese departmental store, Takashimaya, catering to popular tastes, to the expensive speciality stores, which cater to the well-heeled, in Palais Renaissance.

The kind of shopping that is offered in the busy Orchard Road area is diverse. One can find practically anything there, ranging from the usual fashionable apparel to a wide range of second-hand clothes. Orchard Road is truly a shoppers' paradise. However, not all merchandise is affordable to everyone as prices there can be steep. It is, therefore, common to see many people window shopping.

However, Orchard Road is more than just a shopping area. It is actually considered the hippest place to be seen at. Parties of friends meet there for a drink at fashionable cafes just to while the afternoon away. Teenagers converge in large groups at shopping malls just to hang out. There have also been large groups of teenagers sporting fashionable clothes strolling about. Despite its distance from most housing estates, convenient transportation and an eagerness to be seen in the area have motivated many to travel to Orchard Road.

Many tourists from all over the world also make it a point to visit Orchard Road at least once during their time in Singapore. As Orchard Road is an area where many international brands are featured, most tourists appreciate the one-stop convenience that is offered for all their retail needs. Another attraction for tourists is the wide variety of cuisines on offer in numerous restaurants. Tourists, many of them carrying colourful shopping bags, certainly add to the buzz in the area.

Trains, buses and taxis converge in the area. There are massive traffic jams on busy weekends and festive occasions. However, many still throng the place, eager to be among the crowd, undeterred by the long queues and congested roads and pathways.

Orchard Road remains the most popular place for both the lunchtime and weekend crowds. Buying something from Orchard Road stamps an undeniable mark of glamour on the purchase for many. It is certainly a place worth visiting.

121

How do temptations affect people's lives?

Temptation is a strong desire to have or do something even though you know you should not. The word connotes the taste of forbidden fruit. Yielding to temptation could lead to disastrous consequences on one's life.

One type of temptation refers to yielding to activities that might damage one's health. For example, one might be tempted to smoke or indulge in excessive drinking. This could be due to peer pressure or simply a desperate attempt to forget one's worries or to relieve stress. Yielding to such activities would be detrimental to one's health. Smoking and drinking addictions could result and succumbing to illnesses like lung cancer and liver failure could be relatively higher.

When one gives in to temptations, it could also result in a downward spiral and a cycle of negative effects. Other than negative physical effects, there could also be emotional and social effects. For example, when one gives in to excessive drinking and smoking or takes drugs, one might lose friends who dislike such a lifestyle. The effects extend beyond one's own life to that of loved ones as one might end up becoming a burden to them, relying on them financially to feed one's habits.

Another type of temptation is related to greed. A worker who yields to the temptation of siphoning off company funds will face the odium of social disgrace once the crime is discovered. Those in public office who succumb to corruption and accept bribes will not just be disgraced by society but in the process, will also have harmed the public with his schemes, eroding the moral fabric of society. In other words, those who do not yield to temptation will be respected by the public and will ensure that society is well run.

As many different types of temptations exist, the magnitude of each type differs with some having less impact than others. For example, as children, some might be tempted to cheat during examinations or tell white lies to get out of trouble. These might be considered harmless actions that are part of growing up but if these occur continuously and go unchecked, they might develop into more serious acts of deceit when the children grow older. These acts could ultimately land them in jail.

Temptations must therefore be recognised for what they are – attractive alternatives to ways of doing things that could ultimately lead to disastrous consequences.

122

To a fresh school-leaver, what are the pitfalls to avoid in the working world?

The prospect of leaving school is certainly an exciting one. This is a time when a lot of important changes such as exercising independence, decision-making and risk-taking occur, as an integral part of learning to deal with working life. As such, it is important to watch out for pitfalls that could plague a bright-eyed first-timer in the real world.

The first danger to watch out for is definitely that of unrealistic expectations. Many people who enter the workforce for the first time do not do so cautiously but plunge headlong into it with high expectations. Few are prepared for the mismatch between expectations and reality. For example, many think that armed with a university degree or other equivalent qualifications, the world is their oyster and hence they are assured of a well-paying job with excellent benefits. But they fail to realise that these qualifications are merely the passports to the respective jobs they desire. To do well takes effort and experience takes time to accumulate. Many young people fail to understand this and they end up disillusioned by their jobs. Many resort to job-hopping to find that ideal job, unable to see that the ideal job is not found but created.

Another danger to watch out for is the tendency to overspend. Young people who have their first taste of working life see the need to present a good image of themselves. This means dressing up in appropriate clothes, which they have had little contact with when in school. Proper suits, jackets or shirts, as well as leather shoes are certainly not de rigueur apparel for a student. As such, the young person would find the need to deck himself out in presentable outfits so as to create a good impression. This could mean that he would have to rely on his parents' generosity or even the many credit facilities that are targeted at him. Coupled with the busier social life that he is sure to get caught up in, the young school-leaver may spend more than he can make. Such a danger can be blurred by his natural optimism that he is still young and will be able to repay all debts. Unfortunately, that may not be the case and it may be far too late when this is eventually realised.

The working world is certainly not a safe harbour. Instead, there are many dangers, another of them being the ill intentions of people who are out to prey on unsuspecting people. These may be people who aim to lure the naive school-leaver into the seedy underworld of vice and drugs by offering him a great deal of money. Others may deceive him into believing that they are able to offer him a job with a high salary and good opportunities for a fee. These may be obvious ploys, but may still escape the unsuspecting school-leaver. Thus, it is important that one checks all offers and contracts carefully before signing on the dotted line.

Entry into the working world is definitely worth planning cautiously for. As it determines the future of the young person, it is always advisable that one consults those who are more experienced. In this way, it will ease the way into the next stage of life.

123

How do you view darkness?

Darkness is always associated with chilling situations like vengeful spirits and serial murderers. Even in movies, night is always depicted as a time when nasty supernatural forces are at full play. It is, therefore, not surprising that many people are afraid of the dark and find it more oppressive than exciting.

To me, darkness is a mysterious blanket of ink that conceals and makes a situation highly exciting. It is a time when my imagination runs wild. I think of the romantic lovers Heathcliff and Catherine in *Wuthering Heights* wandering on the moors eternally united, a picture which lends credence to my romantic notions of love. It is a time when I see Peter Pan flitting about the dark corners with Tinkerbell, ready to whisk me off to their world of adventure and magic.

However, darkness is transformed into an ominous entity in a horror movie on a stormy night, or when I am alone on a deserted street. Then I would see it as a threatening presence with demons and evil men at corners waiting to pounce on me. Images from movies where young girls are stalked by crazed murderers or are the unwitting targets of ghostly apparitions crowd my mind to create fear and tension in me. Even a long corridor that is unlit conjures up familiar scenes of girls and boys running desperately to escape a maniacal killer.

At other times when I am just too tired after a hard day at school, the dark is a welcome signal for me to take my rest. At times like this, the still of the night becomes reassuringly familiar to me and lulls me into a restful sleep. In fact, many a time I have actually looked forward to the dark as a justification for my desire to sleep!

When I was young, I remember being so afraid of the dark after watching a particularly gruesome horror movie that I simply refused to sleep with the lights off. My poor parents had to slowly ease me into accepting the darkness as a natural condition. Over time, I felt braver and consequently was able to overcome my childhood fear of the dark. Now, I am glad that darkness has come to mean so many different things to me and has made my life a more exciting and imaginative playground.

Darkness, therefore, has highly varied meanings for me depending on the situation that I am in. There is no specific meaning for me and my thoughts can range from feeling terrified to feeling consoled.

124

What examples of dishonesty have you encountered in your life?

One would think that a learning institution would be the last place that dishonesty occurs. Unfortunately, in the ten years that I have been in school, what I have seen is the creativity of students in redefining the boundaries of dishonesty.

An incident that has remained firmly etched in my mind is that of a classmate keeping excess change that was given to him by the harried vendor for his purchase of a bowl of noodles. We were only in Primary Three then and surely keeping the extra change would not have crossed any innocent mind, but that was not the case for my friend. He not only kept the excess change of \$2.00 gleefully, but also went on to proudly declare to the rest of us how clever he was to have made the extra cash. Needless to say, we were speechless at his dishonesty.

Getting parents to sign test papers was implemented by the school authorities when I was in primary school to ensure that parents were kept in the know about their child's performance. However, I have seen many cases of students forging their parents' signatures to get away with not having studied for a test. In fact, one such forgery case involved a close friend of mine who diligently copied his father's signature on a test paper that he had failed badly. It did not pay at all because his actions were eventually discovered by the suspicious teacher who wondered at his father's lack of response on the matter. It seemed that the teacher and his father were always contacting each other regarding his academic performance. In the end, the matter came to light and my friend was given demerit points as well as detention for two whole terms!

Another kind of dishonesty that I have witnessed in school is that of students lying about their homework. Every time the teacher pressed for the missing assignments, the reply from one of the students would inevitably be that it had been handed up. Even though it was obvious that the student was at fault, he would stick to his story come hell or high water. This meant that the teacher could hardly punish the student for an assignment that had gone missing, especially when the hapless teacher was alleged to be at fault for losing it. Given the fact that teachers had a multitude of things to remember, it was not surprising that he or she would be thrown into self-doubt over this matter. Thus, the student who pulled this trick would invariably get away with it.

Perhaps it is because the school is a microcosm of the real world that these acts of dishonesty also occur, despite it being a place to educate the future leaders of the country. Yet it is still sad that students as young as nine years old can be guilty of such dishonesty.

125

Discuss the unpleasant act of threatening others.

A threat made by someone, whether written or spoken, is an intentional way to augur harm to the threatened party. They might have slight impact on the victim or a devastating impact, but no threat, however small, is innocuous.

The party making such statements or signals of harm obviously means ill will to the party receiving the threat. Obviously, he or she must be feeling animosity towards the other party or body to resort to such intimidation. The objective of a threat is to make the threatened party comply with some action or request or unfortunate results may occur. For example, a simple threat by person A to person B may be: "I will beat you up." In another form of a threat, he may say: "I will beat you if you do not give me your money."

Threats can come in different forms. In a simple form, a bully may threaten to beat up a small boy. It may also take the form of a nation threatening another nation. A mighty country may threaten other countries by virtue of its military might. If the other country refuses to comply with its demands, it may be invaded. Countries commanding valuable resources such as water may threaten to cut off the supply to the other countries who depend on it if their political demands are not met.

Threats may come in written forms such as letters, or the telephone or through the Internet. Terrorists or gangsters have been known to broadcast their threats live over the Internet, threatening damage to institutions (such as blowing up a bank) or killing hostages.

Beyond inflicting bodily harm on a person, a threat will also cause mental stress and duress to the victim. Terrorists may threaten governments stating that they would detonate bombs in public places if the latter does not comply with their demands. Criminals may threaten to harm a kidnapped child if the parents do not pay the ransom demanded for the child's release.

With technological advancement, the world is getting more vulnerable to threats of a more insidious kind on a wider scale. Criminal can learn how to make bombs from the Internet. There are more poisonous chemicals and gases which can be easily purchased online by anyone who wants to harm a city's water supplies or transport network.

The impact of threats are on a much larger scale today than it ever was. For example, a man poisoned a well-known brand of snacks and threatened to extend the act to all its other products if its demand for a large sum of money was not met. The company not only had to comply with his demands but had to recall all the affected items from supermarkets everywhere, incurring great financial costs. Such is the power of a few individuals who can easily hold large companies to ransom. It is no longer a simple case of a businessman threatening to sue another party if contractual demands are not met.

In the case of two parties involved in a personal dispute, it is not for us to judge who is at fault, especially if we do not know the facts. However, when one party issues a threat to the other, then the former is going against the law and against the grain of an orderly society. Threats are unpleasant and underhanded ways of getting what someone wants. They cause harm and culprits should be firmly dealt with for the sake of everyone's safety and well-being.

127

Compare traditional dress and modern dress. What are the issues associated with wearing each type of clothing?

All around the world, traditional dress has become the attire used only during special festivals or occasions. Modern dress, however, has become the norm because its design and fabric are adaptable to different climates. Despite this, I am of the opinion that traditional dress also has an important place in our world.

Traditional dress, as its name suggests, provides a link to one's cultural heritage. It tells the wearer a little of the history that surrounds its design, fabric and even colour. For example, in Japan, the kimono is worn in different styles for people of different status. The colour also sets the people apart in terms of social importance. It conjures up images of a time long past when valiant warriors used to do battle for honour and pride while the women themselves were testimony to the grace and beauty of the oriental lady. Thus, understanding the traditional costume of a culture is tantamount to learning its history.

Furthermore, the traditional dress is unique in its depiction of the genders. For example, the Peranakan attire boasts delicate sewing and a filmy hug of the figure. These flatter the feminine figure, thus making the female form a delight to behold. In the same way, traditional dress for men is normally cut to present a stoic and masculine figure. It is obvious that the traditional dress across all cultures basically serves to clearly delineate gender roles. Whether we agree on these gender roles, there is no doubt that traditional dress is a symbol of culture, heritage and identity.

However, a traditional dress can be uncomfortably fussy and difficult to wear. The beautifully flattering Indian sari can take a lot of time and skill to tie as it involves sometimes up to twelve yards of soft textile! In the same way, the kimono requires one other person to tie the sash properly or it will look terribly untidy. Even the heaviness of the traditional dress can make wearing it cumbersome as it is usually an outfit consisting of many different layers. Obviously, ease was not the top priority in days gone by, at least not for those with higher status and could afford to wear elaborate clothing. Across the cultures, the attire for those in the upper classes was always more elaborate than those in the lower classes.

A modern dress is far more comfortable as it is usually made of lightweight material and simple styles. Gone are the time-consuming sashes and yards of cloth that marked the traditional dress. In their place are comfortable cuts which serve functional needs. In fact, the modern dress can be so androgynous that they are unisex. This further makes the selection of attire more convenient.

However, therein also lies the problem with modern dress. There is little identity associated with the attire. They are mass-produced and hence one can run the risk of encountering similarly clad people. But the good thing is that one's personal style then comes into play if looking like one of the crowd is to be avoided. The simplicity of the dress allows far more room for individuality than the traditional dress would. Without any cultural specific dress codes, making changes to reflect one's individual needs are possible.

Whether it is the traditional or modern dress, the comfort of the wearer is of utmost importance. A person can be clad in a fussy traditional kimono and still feel comfortable and look good while someone in a cyber-punk outfit may be decidedly uncomfortable with its figure-hugging cut. Both traditional and modern dress are still relevant today whether as sources of history or simply as daily attire.

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How is your country affected by other countries in the world?

Singapore is an extremely small country with limited resources. As a result, we are very much in contact with the external world as we find ourselves needing to trade for services, food and even water. As a result, the development of our country has been shaped by other nations.

An area in which we have been affected is in our evolving culture. Although we are primarily a multiracial society firmly rooted in Asian culture, our practices and beliefs are today very much influenced by the West. Through the influence from popular American television programmes, the younger generation is increasingly westernised in their thinking as well as dressing. Gone are the beliefs of the older generation when the girls were supposed to stay at home and not go out in the company of young men unless they were chaperoned or engaged. Today, we see an independent generation of youths who find their niche in society and dare to be different.

My country is also highly dependent on its neighbouring countries for primary resources like food and raw materials. As Singapore earns a large portion of its income from value-added services, this would mean that we require the continuous supply of materials from our hinterland or other countries. As a result, our exports are largely influenced by what is available to us. For example, we have no natural water supply sufficient to provide for our large population and need to buy raw water from Malaysia. We then apportion the amount required for domestic purposes and treat the rest for sale either in the harbour for ships or back to Malaysia. Thus, what we have to work on is greatly affected by what is made possible to us by our hinterland and other countries.

Due to the fact that Singapore was once colonised, we have inherited certain systems that are still in use today. The legal system that we operate with is modelled on the British one. Even our education system is 'borrowed' from our past colonial masters. As a result, we are still very much influenced by the precedents set by Britain in these areas.

Singapore is not averse to learning from other nations' successes. A good example is the efficient transportation system in Japan. In fact, the Mass Rapid Transit in Singapore is inspired by Japan's triumph in overcoming time and space in a world where efficiency is measured in terms of dollars and cents. Thus, we now enjoy the luxury of regular travelling time as we labour each day to get the most out of our schedules.

However, it must be noted that although Singapore has been largely affected by other nations, it still remains its own sovereign country. We absorb what is proven to be effective and efficient without compromising on our own identity. In the end, we learn from others but become inimitably our own masters as we modify various ideas to suit our unique culture.

129

What are the threats to road safety?

The number of casualties arising from encounters on the road is staggering. Each year, hundreds die as a result of traffic accidents. Many a time, these accidents could have been prevented if both the drivers and pedestrians had taken more care on the road.

One of the greatest threats to road safety has to be irresponsible drivers. Whether they are intoxicated or in a hurry, they show little consideration for other vehicles and pedestrians whose safety is in peril just because drivers refuse to be more thoughtful. The greatest threat comes from intoxicated drivers. After all, it is not unknown that alcohol dulls one's reactions as well as vision. Without both in good working condition, choosing to drive is an act of terrible wilfulness. Many fatal accidents have occurred during festive seasons. The traffic police have taken pains to plant roadblocks to ensure that drivers with high levels of alcohol in their blood are prevented from driving. They also put up posters and advertisements to warn against drink driving. Yet, irresponsible driving continues as drivers obstinately continue to drive under the influence of alcohol.

Drivers who are in a hurry also show little care for the safety of others. They swerve in and out of traffic lanes to get ahead of everyone else, oblivious to the menace that they are. This could result in fatal accidents as the drivers have little time and inclination to react to flaws in their judgement, which could be something as simple as assuming that the road ahead is clear in the next lane. When an obstruction suddenly appears before them, they instinctively swerve the car away, sometimes into the car next to them or onto the pavement where innocent pedestrians are. When they are finally contrite for their carelessness, it is almost always too late.

The use of mobile phones while driving is another cause of accidents. Despite the severe penalties, drivers still continue with their errant ways. Being distracted while driving is a cause of many road accidents. Drivers must be alert to their surroundings at all times so focussing on their mobile phones is detrimental to road safety.

Faulty traffic lights are also a hazard on the road. When green lights flash simultaneously at a cross-junction, accidents can occur as drivers are confused by them and end up in a messy pile-up. Also, drivers who are cautious tend to adopt a wait-and-see attitude because they are unsure if the lights are working. As a result, the drivers behind in the congestion become impatient and angry, which could lead to lots of honking and shouting. This could result in unpleasant flare-ups and quarrels.

Pedestrians themselves can be hazardous to safety on the road. Many of them do not obey traffic signs and signals, choosing to cross roads haphazardly. Rather than walking 50 metres to the pedestrian crossing, many prefer to dash across the road. They fail to realise that the pedestrian crossing was put there for the sole purpose of ensuring their safety. Some weave between heavy traffic to cross the roads. Others choose not to walk on the designated pavements but on the roads instead. This causes problems to drivers who find themselves having to 'invade' the next lane temporarily or even stop hastily. Many accidents have been caused by such inconsiderate pedestrians.

Thus, it is clear that road accidents are caused more often than not by human errors. It is important that both the drivers and pedestrians take care to ensure their own safety as well as that of others. By being more careful and considerate, we can minimise the dangers on the 'highway of death', as roads are commonly dubbed.

130

What role do parents play in their children's lives?

Today, more and more young people are going astray as we hear of them joining street gangs, taking drugs as well as indulging in sexual activities from a very young age. Such behaviour certainly appears to be more prevalent today than in the past. Why has this phenomenon arisen? In the past, the strong and positive presence of parents in the lives of young children went a long way in curbing such unhealthy activities. Parents are essential in the role they play in their children's lives.

Parents are the providers of their children's needs. They should ensure that the family has a roof over their heads, enough food to eat, as well as adequate clothes to shield them against the natural elements. By doing so, they play the role of caretakers for the future generations. Besides the physical needs, parents also need to provide the emotional support and love that children need in order to grow up as well-adjusted individuals. As long as the children are assured of their parents' care and concern, they will respond far better to the challenges of life. Instead of feeling alone against the tide of change, they know that they can rely on the family to be their pillar of strength.

Parents should also be role models for their children. The role of a parent is highly influential and a child tends to turn to his parents as the models for his own evolving behaviour. A good example is the recent study that isolated a common ground for children starting smoking at a young age — their parents are themselves smokers. It is obvious that children learn what is right and wrong from their parents' examples. As a result, one must be sure that one is not leading the children astray by one's own actions.

However, it is precisely because parents play important roles that the type of love given is important. There are parents who drive their children to rebel because of their over-protectiveness. The children may require love and care, but overdoing it becomes harmful. Some parents, ever busy working, think erroneously that showering their children with an extra powerful dose of love fulfils their duty as loving parents. In fact, this may backfire. Their children could react negatively by either becoming spoilt brats or rebels who seek to flee the stronghold of such smothering love. Furthermore, being overprotective, also known as helicopter parenting, can also be detrimental to the children's development. Constantly being protected could mean that children will not know how to fend for themselves when they are older. Knowing the type of love to show their children can benefit or be detrimental to them.

No matter how parents may be over-enthusiastic in their expression of love, it is important to always remember that parents ultimately want the best for their children. Unless the parents do not show any shred of concern or responsibility for their children, all parents are deserving of our filial piety. No matter how much we see them as inadequate for our needs, it must be noted that in all relationships, expectations are not easily met. A lot of friction occurs when one expects something but does not get what is expected. This leads to disillusionment but may also aid in one's personal growth if viewed positively. Thus, it is important to appreciate the difficult role that parents play and always see them in a good light.

133

Discuss how advertising affects our lives.

Advertising is the business of making something well-known for the purpose of selling it. As such, it is usually motivated more by profit than anything else. Today, advertisements are brought to our attention via different media, like the TV, magazines, Internet, billboards, newspapers as well as flyers stuffed into mailboxes. Just what impact does advertising have on our lives?

Advertising assaults all our senses in different ways. It screams at us from huge billboards and insidiously creeps up on us in between songs played over the radio. In all areas of life, advertisements 'tell' us what to buy and why. They define for us good taste and fashion. Such exposure causes us to develop certain opinions about things, which may not be informed. In fact, they merely reflect what the advertisers want us to feel. This influence may be undesirable but it is unfortunately powerful.

Advertising also creates in us the desire to acquire things. We are constantly told by advertisements to purchase the latest products because they are better than the ones in the past. When we are constantly shown attractive things, newer and seemingly better than what we have, we are attracted to them. We are so drawn into the lifestyle connected to owning the object that we forget the advertisements may have exaggerated the features of the product. With glossy images and enticing words, the print advertisements we are constantly bombarded with influence us to buy the things that we do not need.

However, we do have control over how much we allow advertising to practically take over our common sense. Instead of being blind disciples of what businesses preach in the glossy advertisements, we can scrutinise carefully the features of the product and see if they meet our requirements. More often than not, advertising plays up images of desired lifestyles rather than product capabilities. We should thus ensure that we are not fooled by the beautiful pictures or the emotive language used to persuade us to buy the products.

While many forms of advertising are designed to entice us into purchasing goods and services, there are some which serve to give us knowledge to help us make informed decisions. For example, governments and organisations may create public service advertisements to warn us about the dangers of smoking, drug abuse, unhealthy diets or drink driving. In such cases, the information could be useful in helping us make decisions about our habits and behaviour.

We, too, advertise ourselves through the clothes we wear, the things we do as well as the attitudes and values we embrace. We present the image that we want others to see, to attract the kind of attention, friends and recognition we desire. As such, we can reinvent ourselves time and time again to suit different occasions. Advertising certainly has a powerful influence on our lives.

134

Why is it important to keep fit and what are some ways of doing so?

Keeping fit has become a great concern of the government's in recent years. From encouraging the working population to live a healthy life through advertisements in the mass media to giving schools recognition for keeping the obesity level of their students down, the catchphrase is now 'healthy living and keeping fit'.

It is important to keep fit as a healthy body allows one to live more comfortably. In fact, much of the money earned will be spent on doctor visits and medication. For example, an unhealthy person might have a lower immunity than someone who is fit, causing the former to be unable to enjoy the benefits of being fit and living life to the fullest. Being wealthy but plagued by ill health does not allow us to enjoy the comfortable life money can bring.

A person who is healthy is also more cheerful. Exercising, one way of being fit, allows the body to secrete chemicals that will improve one's mood and lift one's spirits. Cheerfulness promotes a sense of well-being that is important in lubricating human relationships.

Keeping fit also does wonders for the mind. It keeps the mind razor-sharp, making it easier to remember things as well as solve problems quickly. A person who exercises regularly has a better memory and can solve problems more effectively than one who is not fit.

Keeping fit can be done by exercising regularly. For people who like to do so alone, there are so many possible ways to keep fit. From brisk walking to running to playing squash, the loner has a good variety of exercises to choose from. For those who prefer the company of family or friends, they can choose from a wide array of games like badminton, soccer or even just taking a long walk. This adds the social element into an otherwise tedious and strenuous activity. It also makes it far more enjoyable as one has a friend or family member to talk to while exercising.

Food and lifestyle also play a big part. It is no point exercising so assiduously when you persist in bad habits like smoking, drinking or drug abuse. When one smokes, the harm done cannot be reversed by exercising. In fact, the optimum performance of the body cannot be reached if the lungs are choked by cigarette smoke all the time. Also, if one insists on a high-cholesterol and fatty diet all the time, exercise will only delay the inevitable heart trouble.

Keeping fit requires a great deal of discipline and willpower. After all, when it is a choice between relaxing at home playing an online game and putting on one's running shoes to pound on the track, the former is certainly more attractive. But one must remember that the benefits of keeping fit will far outweigh the transient pleasures of being glued to the computer!

139

What difficulties do parents face when they have to divide their time between work and family?

It is certainly not new to hear of children who have gone astray and committed heinous crimes these days. In fact, most studies show that these children usually come from broken homes or homes where the parents are so busy that they have no time for them. The media has been making a big issue of the irresponsibility of parents who subject their children to such neglect. But why is it that no one actually spares a thought for parents who are torn between the need to make a living and to take care of their children? After all, there are many difficulties that they face in trying to juggle two such different but equally difficult roles.

Working parents need to spend time building their careers or they will not be able to provide adequately for their children in this age of rising costs. If they want to ensure that their children get a good start in life, they will need to earn more so that they can send their children to the best schools. Yet, if they work hard at their jobs, they end up not having the time to spend with their children. Even though quality time is a good idea, it still requires time and effort. But what if parents are too tired after work? How can they spend any quality time with their children then? Thus, parents often find themselves in conflicting roles that are not easily resolved.

As a result of having to give their best to both their work and their family, parents may not have time left for themselves. Everyone needs to have some private time to himself or herself to rejuvenate their flagging spirits and exhausted bodies. But it is impossible to apportion such time when all that is available to them has to be divided between work and family. This can have an adverse impact on their well-being.

Furthermore, with such unhappiness and stress bottled up in a parent, he is likely to become hostile and unbearable to live with. In fact, there is the likelihood that he would be violent and bad-tempered. There could be ill feeling between the couple as each feels that the other person is not understanding or contributing enough to the family. Such stress bodes ill for the marriage. The impact might even trickle down to the children as couples in such situations might see that the root cause of their problem is their children.

Thus, even if working parents ultimately affect children's behaviour, we must understand that putting all the blame on working parents is inaccurate and unfair. These parents face tremendous pressure on all fronts, and are actually most deserving of our sympathy.

140

What are wasted opportunities? Provide some examples.

How often have we heard someone say that they have wasted an opportunity? There is a mixture of regret and wistfulness. In fact, there could even be pure frustration. For example, a businessman could have been given an attractive proposition but he did not take up the offer. Later on, he lived to regret it.

What exactly is an opportunity? It is a chance to have or to do something which one thinks would be beneficial. For example, a student may be offered a scholarship to study overseas. Everyone tells him that this is a good opportunity for him to further his lot in life as an overseas degree is deemed prestigious and augurs well for his future career. However, he may not take it up if he feels that he is not interested in the scholarship. Some might feel that this once in a lifetime opportunity has been wasted.

Opportunities must be recognised in order to seize them. They will then lead to certain desired outcomes. For example, a man may be a secret admirer of a girl. One day, he finds himself with a chance to ask the girl out for a date. If he does not seize the chance to ask her out, he may not know whether she would have accepted his request. Others would then say that he has wasted his opportunity.

Opportunities arise as one goes through life, whether at home, in studies or later on at work. Those who are born in a wealthy family may have a head start in life. Someone with wealthy parents can enter a better school and an educated parent can give informed advice to his children. It is up to these fortunate people to seize the opportunities presented to them or these would be wasted.

Wasted opportunities could also occur when chances for development are passed up because of a person's character and personality. For example, an introvert with an amazing voice could pass up an opportunity to be part of the music scene because it would require excessive socialising and interaction with others. Any chances presented would be ignored — wasted opportunities to a successful career.

Thus, opportunities should be taken whenever they appear. There is a saying that goes, 'Fortune favours the brave'. Rather than waiting for a stroke of luck or complaining that nothing good happens, one should take the initiative to work hard and prepare by learning the necessary skills. This is so that when the right opportunity comes along, one is ready to seize it rather than let it go to waste.

141

Discuss why grandparents deserve to be appreciated.

My grandparents are the loveliest people in the world. They can conjure up images of an era long past through their interesting recollections of their lives. They also can understand instinctively how I feel when I am in conflict with my parents. Thus, it has always amazed me when I hear that my friends are not just distant from their grandparents, but secretly dislike them as well for being slow and traditional.

We must understand that grandparents are a valuable resource for transmitting values and culture to the next generation. Without their experiences, we would not be where we are today. They have a treasure trove of memories within them, which lends credence to the values that they are trying to teach the younger generation. The generation gap comes about only when we are too impatient to try to understand them or communicate with them. With parents so busy, grandparents are the best avenues for passing down the oral history and family tradition.

Furthermore, grandparents are worthy of our respect because they are living testimonies to the values they uphold. Having lived such a long time, they would have gone through many hardships, experienced changes in the socio-political climate as well as the changing fortunes of the world. In fact, many of them would have had first-hand experience of the last World War! Such experiences are invaluable because they attest to our grandparents' success in having come out on top of the situation.

Also, grandparents are good at taking care of children. Traditionally, all grandparents wait anxiously for the arrival of their grandchildren, as many of them would have retired and would be pleased to occupy their time in a meaningful way. Grandparents are very proud of their grandchildren, and often do a good job of taking care of them. In fact, they have such a wealth of experience bringing up children that one should not be in doubt over their suitability as caregivers. Although some might feel that grandparents have traditional and ineffective ways of taking care of grand children as their methods are irrelevant in modern society, it must be remembered that they do have their grandchildren's welfare in mind.

It is inevitable that, grandparents are vulnerable to illnesses that debilitate them. Yet, they should be taken care of for all that they did previously. Their contributions are never insignificant and they deserve to be appreciated by being given the best care during their twilight years.

Grandparents are important people in every family's life. They must be appreciated, whether out of filial piety, to show gratitude or to obtain from them experiences and knowledge that only they have.

142

Would you consider fire as a friend or an enemy? Give some reasons.

Fire is the heat and light that comes from the burning of something. It can be a boon or bane for people depending on its effects.

One of the best uses of fire is the production of light. Early man, who retreated to caves at night, was in constant fear of wild animals which could harm him. Under the cover of darkness, they could spring on him and attack him. Fire allowed him to see the environment more clearly. Fire injured and burnt the animals. In fact, animals retreated when man brought his flame torches forward.

With the light which emanated from fire, man could turn his night into day. He no longer had to depend only on daylight to work. He could be more productive and efficient, thus letting him survive better in a harsh environment and making him superior to other animals.

Fire can be used to cook food. Although meat and vegetables may be eaten raw, no one can deny the tasty delights of cooked vegetables or roasted meat. More types of food could also be made palatable to early man.

Man also learnt to fashion weapons (especially metallic ones) and tools with fire. With improved technology, man has learnt to better his employment of fire which provides the energy for machines in industry. Fire generates electricity and provides the power to drive our transport vessels like planes, ships and trains. It incinerates metals, and its heat melts metals for separation from ores. Metals are bent and shaped into useful products. Hence, fire used by man and properly controlled by him has been the boon of mankind.

However, fires which are uncontrolled can destroy and kill. The bush fires in countries like Australia consume valuable forest and farmland. In Indonesia, uncontrolled burning by some companies to achieve their own ends causes a yearly haze over neighbouring countries. This has caused health problems, decreased visibility for people, vehicles and aircraft, and has led to decreased productivity.

Throughout history, fires which have broken out without control have caused enormous losses of life and property. For example, fires erased large parts of the city of London (1666) and Tokyo (1923). No doubt, the modern cities which rose from the ashes of destruction are better planned now and there are fewer slums. But no one can deny the enormous suffering the fires had caused.

Fire — friend or enemy? It all depends.

143

Discuss your views on discipline.

Many people equate discipline with harsh rules and punishments. When one thinks of discipline, it is always associated with schools, the army and prisons. Hence, it is a word that is greatly detested by the younger people. But this is a very narrow view of what discipline is. In fact, discipline is a concept that distinguishes the strong from the weak. But the strength mentioned here is by no means a physical one. Instead, this strength refers to control, both over our actions and emotions. This is certainly not negative; it is the means by which we are able to complete tasks and live harmoniously with others.

Discipline is necessary as long as we want to achieve our objectives. How many times did you tell yourself to complete an assignment but found it hard to get down to it because there are so many other distractions around you? Your friends could be going to the mall for an afternoon of fun and food, which makes you even more restless. However, if you are disciplined, you will be able to shut out these distractions and concentrate on getting your work done. This discipline will go a long way in establishing the correct work ethics that will come in handy regardless of whether you are a student or a worker.

Furthermore, discipline also helps you to manage your time efficiently. It makes you prioritise your commitments properly and helps you to objectively decide where your time should be spent. This is important as there are so many things that compete for your attention that you may end up making the wrong decisions based on personal likes and dislikes rather than their relative importance. Thus, you may choose to go out and watch a movie first instead of studying for a test. Due to the fact that you will probably be too exhausted or in too high spirits when you return from the outing, the likelihood of studying well for the test is dangerously low. In this way, you may end up failing the test. Such a price is surely too high to pay for a lack of discipline.

Being able to control our negative emotions is also an asset that we should develop. Thus, instead of flaring up over the slightest provocation, discipline enables us to assess situations carefully so that we do not give in to our initial negative reactions. This will help lubricate relationships and build our interpersonal skills. Hence, emotional discipline is an important feature in a successful person.

Discipline should thus not be associated with negative thoughts. Self-discipline is necessary to allow us to meet our objectives, manage our time well and control our emotions. Without discipline, we could be engaging in unproductive and potentially damaging behaviour.

144

What are the things that make you proud of your country?

Even if I had the choice to make any country in the world my place of residence, Singapore would still be the country that I want to live in. In view of all the bad press that we have suffered about our strict laws, I find it necessary to emphasise that Singapore is green, safe and stable. I am proud to call myself a Singaporean.

When I look at our surroundings, it never fails to amaze me how we have actually managed to strike a balance between providing enough greenery and maximising limited land space for human use. It is no mystery why Singapore is called a 'Garden City'. Our parks are integrated into the natural surroundings. Every where I go, I can see attempts that were made to beautify the surroundings. Even if people comment sarcastically that we are a 'fine' country for having so many rules and fines implemented, I am glad that we have managed to keep the country clean and green. The threat of a fine is immaterial.

Our low crime rate is also something that I am immensely proud of. I have never felt safer than I do in Singapore. Walking home alone in the early hours of the morning does not terrify me because the streets are well lit while police officers on bicycles or in patrol cars are a constant reassuring sight. There are so many police posts all over the island that there is really no reason to feel at risk. Furthermore, crimes committed have been successfully solved and many more prevented because of our efficient police force. In a world racked by waves of crimes, I am pleased to live here in Singapore.

Singapore's political and economic stability are also features that make me proud. In a time of political upheaval in Asia as governments are plagued by scandal or corruption charges, Singapore stands strong as having a capable and sound government. The government practises transparency, that is, we are always privy to what is going on. This allows us to have a say in what is happening as well as feel confident in the integrity of those we elect to run the country.

Despite our size, we have come out a giant in all areas. We have an excellent track record in our port facilities, airport efficiency, economic stability as well as tourism. To be able to maintain such high standards throughout the years is an amazing feat. Singapore managed it, and that is why she remains an amazing country in my opinion.

145

Why is it important for young people to know the history of their country?

The history of a country is the collection of memories of a group of people. It serves as a series of lessons to the people as well as a record of the events that have led them thus far. The study of a country's history is important for its citizens, but more so for the younger people. This is because the future of the country is in the hands of the young.

An understanding of the past helps the young people of a society to better appreciate the experiences of their ancestors. They will be able to see the difficulties of keeping the country strong and united, as well as the problems encountered in the development of any society. As a result of this, they will forge a stronger bond with their country, which is important for political and social cohesion.

Furthermore, an awareness of the country's achievements in the face of upheavals and troubles will instil a sense of pride in the young for their country. They will come to understand how the country has managed to steer itself successfully in a sea of troubles. Thus, they will feel the sense of ownership necessary to build on the existing foundation to bring the country to greater heights. A good example is Singapore today as it faces a generation that has never had to go through economic hardships or political turmoil. They become apathetic towards the country, confident that it will prevail without them. As a result, fewer are willing to stay and protect the country in times of trouble. This can be overcome if they are taught the history of the nation, so that they can see that success is not a privilege to be taken for granted, but rather, the result of pain and tears.

Also, the history of a country shows the reasons for its present relationships with other countries. Once the young people can see this, they are less likely to view their country in an unfavourable light when the international media descends upon the country with vituperative comments on its handling of both domestic and international relations. It is easy to be swayed by such strong emotions from an external source, but it must be remembered that the policies implemented to ensure amiable relations with other countries are put in place to avert problems previously experienced.

Hence, a country's history is the legacy that each generation hands down to the next and must never be trivialised. Only when a generation is united in a bond of belonging can the country remain strong. That is why the further a generation moves away from the events, the more necessary is an understanding of history.

146

Do you prefer to spend your time alone or with a group of people?

The adage 'no man is an island' presupposes that an individual cannot possibly live on his or her own. To a large extent, this is true. However, the merits of privacy should not be underestimated as it allows for the recharging of one's energy. My personal preference is a healthy mixture of both, depending on the situation.

I enjoy the company of others when I am in high spirits and want to share my joy. Trying to keep my joy to myself will only dissipate it, which will render my happiness null and void. Thus, I will prefer to have my friends around when I am high-spirited. The company of my friends will result in the trading of jokes, experiences and stories which enhances the sense of camaraderie that I enjoy. Such company certainly adds to my joy. Also, when I am depressed, the concern of my friends will naturally lift my spirits. Their presence will go a long way towards helping me get over the unhappy circumstances that plague me. At times like these, I can fully understand the meaning of 'friendship'.

When I take my meals at public places like the food centres or fast food restaurants, I dislike eating alone. It is very awkward to try to avoid looking at people around you and usually, I will end up trying very hard to finish my meal quickly. Eating alone seems to be a sign of loneliness, especially when everyone else around me is happily interacting in groups. Thus, I will always rather have my meals packed and brought home to be eaten in front of the TV set than to sit alone at a public place.

However when I am shopping, I like being alone. Having people with me at such times serves only to distract me, as I will always feel obliged to devote my attention to the people I am with. This will mean that I may not be able to concentrate on the business of shopping. Also, having company while shopping will mean having to compromise on the places to go. This will undoubtedly cramp my style as my taste in clothes and accessories may clash with my friend's. Thus, I will prefer to be alone when shopping.

When I feel exhausted by my schoolwork or family problems, I prefer to be left alone. This is because such occasions require time for reflection, which will help me to sort out my problems and begin to recuperate from the stress. Thus, such times will be better spent on my own. I will not be disturbed by the opinions of other people, who might affect the decisions that I need to make. Furthermore, when alone, I will be best able to judge the situation without the need for bias or defensiveness.

Thus, I am not a person who totally enjoys the company of others or my own solitude. Like all things, different responses are needed for different situations. When I need to be alone, I will enjoy the time by myself. But when I feel the need for company, I will certainly not deprive myself of that.

147

What do you enjoy doing during your free time?

Free time is when I am able to do whatever I want. I will not be tied down by a schedule or demands. With the workload from school and co-curricula activities, I do not have much free time. The little that I have is very precious.

For me, there are so many activities to be pursued during this time. I can indulge in indoor hobbies like playing computer games or watching online videos or going outdoors to watch a game.

The computer has been a blessing for many introverts like myself. I like to surf the Internet for interesting websites for articles on historical attractions. My friends and I know the latest on Atlantis City (the undersea city), the Bermuda triangle or the pyramids of ancient Egypt. Being shy, I also like chatting online rather than in person. Here I chat with others, posing under an alias and assuming any identity I like. It is fun to voice my opinions, exchange views and get to know the other party. The beauty of it all is that the other party cannot see me or know my real identity.

However, the one indulgence I have is playing computer games. Many games are accessible on my computer and I can buy many more games. Immediately after my tests are over, I would head directly to my computer. My father always shakes his head and wonders how I can de-stress through such fast-paced first person games. Talk about a generation gap indeed!

Another of my hobbies is watching online videos. I watch documentaries on nature or television serials. The latter can easily get me hooked on them night after night. By subscribing to video streaming services on the Internet, I have access to a host of programmes from all over the world. I can even watch an action movie every night. I also enjoy short videos created by teenagers like myself as they give their take on everyday events.

When I yearn for the outdoors and am tired of using the computer, I cycle to the nearby playing field. I can relax and watch any game in progress — be it football, basketball or Sepak Takraw.

These activities are what I enjoy doing when I am free. They help me to relieve stress, rejuvenate and recharge to carry on with my daily activities.

148

What are the negative consequences of an increased use of motor vehicles?

When motor vehicles were first available to the masses, not everyone was able to own them. Over time, more are able to afford these vehicles and the number of vehicles on the roads has increased. Although these indicate prosperity in the country, there are many consequences to an increased use of motor vehicles.

An increased use of motor vehicles indicates an increased development and prosperity in the country. Consumers and companies would have an increased preference to buy and use these vehicles because of higher incomes or revenues. Consumers want the increased mobility and convenience that cars can bring while businesses need vehicles to deliver goods, services and clients.

However, with increased vehicle use comes attendant problems. The first and most visible effect will be clogged streets with traffic jams. Unless the government moves quickly, the infrastructure will not be able to cope with the increased number of vehicles on the roads. There will be a need for more roads, highways, traffic police officers and controls like traffic lights.

Traffic jams will negate the very mobility which vehicles are supposed to provide. There will be decreased productivity in the form of wasted hours of people waiting in stalled vehicles. People will have to leave for work or school earlier and come home later. There will also be the psychological impact of citizens' frustration over traffic jams and air and noise pollution. Politicians and authorities will have to consider remedial measures like improved transport systems (like the light rail system) to improve the traffic conditions.

With the increased use of vehicles, there will also be the problem of air pollution. Vehicles emitting fumes and waste products will foul up the atmosphere. Large cities like Mexico City and Los Angeles sometimes have a permanent smog (smoke and fog) in the air. Oxygen levels will decrease. Traffic police officers in Mexico City and Bangkok wear face masks to protect their lungs. Increasing levels of CFCs (chlorofluorocarbons) emitted harm the ozone layer, and in turn create the greenhouse effect, causing innumerable problems to the environment.

Governments have recognised this and have taken measures to restrict the growth of vehicles which hamper the very economic growth which they are supposed to engender. Increased vehicle taxes, restricted traffic zones and controlled vehicle licences are some of the measures which the authorities have undertaken. All these measures can be seen in our very island of Singapore which implements firm measures to ensure a smoother traffic flow and cleaner atmosphere.

On the plus side for increased traffic growth, governments have benefited from the revenue derived from taxes on motor vehicles. Some countries which export vehicles see the automobile industry as a vital engine of growth. Sometimes, however, the very people who export these vehicles to overseas markets may not be fond of visiting certain cities with heavy traffic. An example is Bangkok, which some tourists may be deterred from visiting because of the massive traffic jams.

Thus, these are some consequences of the increased use of motor vehicles. These consequences must be managed to ensure a balance between progress and harmful effects.

149

'Television plays a major role in influencing society.' Elaborate on this statement.

I would say that the influence of television varies across the world, depending on whether the majority of the population in each country can access television programmes. Some people from developing countries do not have television sets. Watching television is, therefore, a luxury to them. It is in these areas that the statement does not apply at all.

In many developed countries such as America, however, television viewing is the most popular pastime for the average citizen. An average of two hours per day, and more on weekends, is spent in front of the set. It is in this country and other developed countries like Japan that we may see its influence. However, in Singapore, where the average person spends an average of an hour or so a day passively being entertained by this medium, the influence is less felt.

There are other competing demands on one's time in this fast paced, modern world. Even in poor countries, work takes up a lot of a person's time as he engages in the harsh struggle to eke out a daily living. Often, children are also roped in to work part or full time to help their families survive. In many developing countries like China and developed ones like Singapore, the middle classes spend much of their time working to pay their bills like utilities, housing mortgages and provisions. The children too are caught in the rat race. School is a continuous struggle to keep up with studies, homework and parental expectations. Television viewing is consigned to what spare time people have — usually not more than an hour a day except during weekends.

Yet, in spite of the limited time left for television viewing, whatever is transmitted from the box is influential. This is especially so for young, impressionable minds. For these children, the messages may have a negative influence on them. Advertisers try to persuade them to buy snacks and toys which may be undesirable or beyond the parents' budget. They may also like to imitate the actions and antics of make-believe heroes, which could sometimes harm them.

Using persuasive power, advertisers try to influence the viewers to buy merchandise or services, or to subscribe to certain lifestyles. This fuels the demand for fashionable goods and services. Television may greatly promote the consumer culture but the values associated with this culture may be undesirable. Dubious values like extravagance and violence will have adverse effects on young, impressionable minds. Thankfully, more young people today are rather discerning and can tell when information has been exaggerated.

In the face of these insidious influences, parents, teachers and lawmakers try to counter them. There is limited time for television viewing but its influence can be substantial. Parents and teachers will try to channel children's appetite for television viewing to watching more educational programmes. With the wide variety of entertaining educational programmes, many children pick up essential skills watching these programmes.

Most people in this world will have access to television. However, they will be caught in many other pursuits like work or alternative leisure activities which will mitigate the negative influence of television. Television is a significant influence but it need not be harmful if we exercise discipline when watching programmes on television.

150

Write about the advantages and disadvantages of studying overseas.

In the past, travelling overseas was a luxury for the majority of students. Studying overseas was an even greater luxury, beyond the reach of everyone except for the scholarship holders and the wealthy. Nowadays, however, there are more students going overseas to study. Higher education is seen as essential to securing a good job and students with an overseas education without a scholarship might also come from middle income families.

Those who are fortunate usually head for western countries like the United States or the United Kingdom which have established institutions of learning. Australia and New Zealand are also increasingly favoured. Graduating from these universities would usually mean an edge over their local counterparts who have not had the exposure from an overseas education.

Many of these institutions and those which conduct courses for secondary or primary levels, have a less regimented study culture. Unlike Asian countries which assess students heavily on the grades obtained from the important examination and tests, western institutions encourage team and project work and a climate of creativity and open discussion. Teachers are seen more as collaborators of learning rather than authority figures and transmitters of knowledge. Students, in such a liberated atmosphere are free to air their views. Also, they are free to set their own timetables on when they intend to graduate. They are allowed to postpone their courses to go to work and then resume their studies at a later date.

The responsibility is placed on students to plan their studies. Free from the mollycoddling and interference of well-meaning parents, many students, who are hardworking, have obtained a degree within a shorter period faster than they would have done in their homelands. My cousin obtained a Masters in Engineering in four years of studying. He was working as a cashier in a supermarket and even had time to backpack across America. All these accomplishments would not have been possible to achieve in his hometown in Singapore. He was constantly annoyed by the restrictive classroom methods that he found stressful and stifling.

The freedom to work, study and pursue what one enjoys comes with a sense of independence. Like most overseas students, my cousin had to learn to rely on himself for his daily household needs, meals and budgeting. He learnt to be responsible for his own time and to prioritise his activities. Like many students, he realised that it was a privilege to study overseas. It was his responsibility to study and to spend his time wisely so as to repay his parents for the faith they placed in him.

Many overseas students learn the cultures of their host nations. Learning about different cultures widens their knowledge of the world around them, gives them opportunities to appreciate differences among people and lets them find ways to empathise with others and tolerate differences.

However, studying overseas has its disadvantages. It involves considerable expenses and many families have to scrimp and save to finance their loved one's education. Often, working part time is a necessity to pay one's school fees and some students might feel drained by this.

A less sociable student may also be homesick. It is not easy to adapt and live in a foreign country, abruptly torn away from the comforting network of family, relatives and friends. Some lonely students who are under stress to perform well in their studies may develop mental disorders. Recently, there was a case of an overseas student who felt ridiculed by his peers and teachers. He was lonely and lashed out by shooting several of his peers and teachers.

Having an increased sense of freedom might result in a lack of moral guidance. Left alone, students studying overseas may mix with the wrong crowd. There have been cases of students partying, taking drugs, neglecting their studies and exceeding their budgets. Given these distractions, some of these students may not complete their studies successfully.

Ultimately, whether students benefit from their overseas studies depends very much on their character and how they use their new-found independence. Like many of the matters in life, there are always pros and cons to an issue.

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What are your thoughts about saying goodbye?

There is a popular song I remember from my childhood which begins this way: 'love means never having to say goodbye.' But that is only in the make-believe world of songs. In real life, 'saying goodbye' means bidding farewell to people, things or places and it means not seeing them for some time.

When we part with something, we sometimes say goodbye to it. Of course, said in jest to a hated subject or person, it refers to a farewell we are happy to have. I remember when I was having art lessons in school. I really hated them. I was glad to say 'goodbye' to art when I was in Secondary Three and embrace a new subject called Biology which is still my pet subject.

More often than not, when we bid goodbye, we bid farewell to something we have grown familiar with or grown fond of. For example, lovers part reluctantly after a date. Parents part reluctantly with their sons or daughters when they leave for overseas studies, or enter into a marriage, or declare their independence by having homes of their own.

I suppose the most painful goodbyes are when we bid farewell to our loved ones who pass away owing to old age or illnesses. I remember burying my pet dog and sobbing away at his grave. It was heartbreaking. Saying goodbye was really difficult. Great sadness overcomes people who suffer the departure of their parents or children. Imagine a parent's grief when his child is taken away suddenly by an illness or a tragic accident. There is no time even to say goodbye.

We have to say goodbye to familiar places we have grown fond of. I remember the last days at my old primary school. My friends and I treasured those last days with our classmates, teachers and our school. But I suppose farewells are part and parcel of life. I dread the time next month when my friends and I will bid farewell to each other and to our secondary school after we have completed our final examinations.

Of course, saying goodbye does not mean that one will part forever. Lovers say goodbye after a date in anticipation of the next meeting, and bidding farewell to your old schoolmates does not mean an end to the friendships. You may meet each other again later in life.

After leaving school, there will be more heartaches to come. There will be partings between friends and colleagues when I go to work and switch jobs and companies. Again, I dread the future when my parents and siblings grow old and our mortal bodies expire. Hopefully, when I say my final farewells to my children in the future, they will not be gleefully saying, "Good riddance to the old man."

In many cases, goodbyes are inevitable. In the meantime, I will simply focus on contributing my talents to society and maintaining meaningful relationships. When I say my final goodbyes to my family and loved ones, I hope I would be saying goodbye to a satisfying and productive life.

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Agriculture or manufacturing — which benefits your country more? State your reasons.

Singapore is a country limited by its small geographical space and lack of natural resources. Even its population of over 5 million people is not enough to create a large workforce or a market sufficient to avoid being vulnerable to international trends and market forces.

Agriculture is a land intensive industry. Large parcels of land would have to be set aside for growing crops. To develop the agricultural industries would then mean using up valuable and limited land which would otherwise be needed for residential, commercial and recreational purposes. As much as fifty percent of the total land area would have to be used for agriculture if food production is to be sufficient for the ever-growing population! Clearly, this is not viable for Singapore. Furthermore, with the highly competitive agricultural industry, finding affordable produce from around the world is possible. It is also unnecessary to depend on just one country for food.

Of course, one can argue that the flatted farms common in many countries today would prove a good alternative. But this argument neglects the fact that the amount of resources required by these farms would far outstrip the harvests. In fact, it has been shown to be economically more viable to import foodstuff from other countries than to invest in these farms.

In agricultural industries, the rewards reaped are seasonal. This is definitely not viable for Singapore, a tiny island, trying to remain competitive all year round. If much land is set aside for agriculture at the expense of manufacturing, it will be difficult to sustain the returns the country needs.

Instead, manufacturing industries are ideally suited to Singapore. With its population being its only resource, Singapore has placed great emphasis on education and training. Thus, our manufacturing industry would be ably assisted by a local population well-versed in the latest technology. Its employment in the manufacturing industry would ensure high productivity and thus greater competitiveness. In fact, Singapore's hard-working population has attracted a tremendous amount of investments from multinational companies. This has led to Singapore's growing affluence and influence in the Asia-Pacific region.

In a world moving on the wheels of technology, it is all the more feasible to invest in the manufacturing sectors. After all, it is increasingly apparent that whoever owns the technology owns the world. Countries which are technologically backward have found themselves severely disadvantaged in the international arena. Thus, it would be more viable for Singapore to concentrate on the manufacturing industry.

The returns from selling a manufactured product is also greater than the returns from selling an agricultural produce. The better returns will boost the country's economy, providing the country with the resources to maintain and upgrade its infrastructure.

It is important for any country to maximise its potential, using its resources efficiently. The interdependency of countries as a result of trade has allowed Singapore to strengthen itself in the manufacturing industry and soften its dependence on food from other countries as it can source from different countries at competitive prices. Developing the manufacturing industry in Singapore is therefore more beneficial than the agricultural industry.

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To what extent is the preservation of wildlife important in your country?

The preservation of wildlife has gained increasing attention in the last decade when people started to realise that our attempts at making better lives for ourselves have robbed these animals of their homes. In Singapore, there is very little wildlife to speak of. With the exception of several species of birds and aquatic creatures, attention has been largely focused on the conservation of the environment.

This is not to say that wildlife has been ignored. The government has apportioned pockets of land for the preservation of wildlife. Visitors to the East Coast can see tracts of land along the beach set aside as bird sanctuaries. Bird lovers can catch glimpses of unusual birds and insects that make these places a regular haunt. In the northwest of Singapore, the Sungei Buloh Nature Reserve has been set aside as a sanctuary for migratory birds. It is hoped that these pockets of land set aside to protect wildlife will balance the rapid industrialisation and urbanisation of Singapore.

The government has also placed a lot of emphasis on protecting wildlife through its support of the local zoo. The zoo boasts a design that incorporates as much of the natural surroundings as possible into the creation of space for the animals to roam around. As a result, the animals are made to feel right at home instead of being cooped up in the barrenness of the usual cages. The animals are thus not exposed to an alien environment, but are given the best care possible by the experienced zoo-keepers. Furthermore, a lot of research and effort have gone into ensuring the perpetuation of wildlife species now in protection at the zoo. Preserving wildlife is clearly the main objective of the zoo.

However, it is important to realise that Singapore has very limited land space for use in the preservation of wildlife. The concern has always been the citizens' welfare above all else. Thus, priority is always given to the development of housing and industries so as to provide adequately for the people. But wherever possible, land areas have been specified as conservation areas to protect the resident species. A good example is the modification of plans to develop a piece of land in the western region of Singapore. When it was discovered that a species of rare crabs had made their home on the land, a decision was made to preserve their habitat. Although this did not mean a cancellation of the plans, the modification of the plans did indicate the importance of wildlife conservation.

Clearly, to a large extent the preservation of wildlife is important. Whenever possible, efforts will be made to ensure the survival of different wildlife species, as shown by the examples I have discussed. However, the primary concern is still for the overall development of Singapore to give the citizens a life compatible with that of the rest of the developed world.

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'People are selfish rather than helpful.' How far do you agree with this statement?

The usual comment that we hear today is that people are selfish. All around us, we hear of the degeneration of society with people caring only about themselves. But is this a fair judgement? After all, to say that there is nothing positive about people today seems rather extreme. In my essay, I will show that although the assertion in the question has some validity, it cannot possibly be accepted as the whole picture.

One cannot deny that people today are less likely to want to reach out to others in amity and goodwill. For example, stories about how urban dwellers are more likely to shut their doors on their neighbours in times of trouble have long been in circulation. Many neighbourhoods live in fear of covetous people and hence, prefer the measure of self-preservation over community help. Yet, this cannot be seen solely as selfishness. Rather, it is a desperate attempt to safeguard their lives against an increasingly violent society. In America, even a family fast food joint can become the scene of more than a few shootings by angry and unstable individuals. Can you really blame these people for barricading themselves in?

Even in hallowed learning institutions like the universities, selfishness has played a major part in creating tension. A good example is the local university where recommended books for subjects have been known to have crucial pages torn out to prevent others from sharing the same knowledge. This sense of extreme selfishness can be pinned squarely on the 'rat race', that is, the competition to get the best paper qualifications so as to get a better head start in their career. Due to the fact that there is no balance achieved through a focus on the effective inculcation of moral values and ethics, many graduates come into the working world with a lot of practical money-making ideas but few scruples. Their concern is merely to make as much money as possible. This is the sad reality about many people today.

But one cannot deny that the world has also seen some examples of helpfulness in the recent years. When the plight of a foreign worker who had been dumped in a drain by his heartless employer and left to die was reported extensively in the Singapore newspapers, many people came forward to offer comfort, encouragement and material gifts. Although he was consequently paralysed, the worker never stopped highlighting his gratitude towards Singaporeans for their generosity and willingness to help a stranger. Such acts of kindness have been beacons of hope in a callous world. There are still acts of goodness being carried out, so it cannot be said that everyone is selfish rather than helpful.

Thus, to say that people are selfish is to make a sweeping statement that is not applicable in all cases. The need to protect oneself whether from harm or from being defeated in the rat race has led to selfish behaviour. However, this does not negate one's ability to show concern for others should the need arise.

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'By reaching out to others in need, we are only adding to our own burdens.'
Do you agree?

Each day, we learn of many catastrophes that have struck, from the severe floods plaguing China, the famines in African countries to the sufferings of the terminally ill. Much public sympathy has flowed to these victims in the form of monetary and personal aid. But there are still others who feel that such help only exacerbates the problems as they divert attention from the immediate problems at home. How valid is this view?

Of course, one must admit that it is always important to solve our own problems first. After all, if we are not strong ourselves, how much help can we realistically offer to other people? It is only when we have obtained a minimum standard of living, can we help others who are less fortunate.

Furthermore, the problems faced by the less fortunate may not be easily comprehended by others. We may think that giving monetary aid is good enough, but sometimes, money cannot solve the root of the problem. After all, we might end up encouraging them to become overly-dependent on charity. This could turn out to be even more damaging than the crisis itself.

However, it offends the very definition of humanity if we allow the sufferings to go on while we carry on with our comfortable lives. After all, our humanity is the greatest bond that we share with people from all cultures. Furthermore, no person's problem is ever solely his or her own. What happens to other people today may very well happen to us tomorrow. By not helping others, we are actually exacerbating the problems in the world. Thus, as long as we are able to, it is only morally right that we extend a helping hand.

There are different ways we can reach out to others. Some prefer to visit the people and places where help is needed; some prefer to donate money or food; some want to raise awareness of the issues by getting involved in campaigns. As long as everyone contributes in the way that he feels is appropriate, he will not feel that helping others is a burden.

Thus, I disagree that helping others is a burden. We should not think only of ourselves, for no man is an island. Increasingly, we are becoming more interdependent as a global economy. It is only right that we extend help to others when possible. If we are apathetic and callous, we will eventually harm ourselves.

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'We experience enjoyment only from leisure and not from work.' How far do you agree with this statement?

The usual perception of a worker is that of a person who is harassed by the need to earn a living. His motivation for work is more a matter of necessity than interest. This is further corroborated by the media displaying pictures of workers at busy commercial hubs, usually taciturn and in a hurry. However, this may not be the complete picture of a worker in Singapore.

It is without doubt that everyone enjoys his or her leisure time which is clearly delineated from work. After all, if you are constantly pressurised working at a stressful job from nine to five, leisure in the form of a relaxing dinner, a sport or even a karaoke session can be truly welcoming. Leisure allows for one to reduce the pressure experienced when one is inundated with deadlines and endless projects. Thus, unwinding after a hard day's work would definitely be appreciated and greatly enjoyed.

Furthermore, leisure is enjoyable because it can also be a time for friends and relatives to gather. Such time not only allows you to keep in touch with the important people in your life, but also reaffirms ties that are crucial to maintaining satisfying relationships. Self-esteem is then boosted when you feel the warmth and love encircling you at such gatherings.

Even if you prefer to spend time alone instead such as by reading a book or doing handiwork, it is still a change from the monotony of working life. That in itself is a welcome change from the hassle of balancing work schedules and adapting to the different temperaments of colleagues. Thus, it is definitely true that enjoyment does come from leisure. However, this does not mean that we do not derive enjoyment from our work.

After all, there are people who have jobs that they truly enjoy. This could range from exciting activities like scuba diving to conventional ones like banking. Thus, people could enjoy their work because they have chosen to pursue their interests as working adults. A sporting enthusiast could go into the promotion of sports in a state or country and truly enjoy doing it as a job.

Furthermore, work also involves group dynamics. Thus, if you have built up good relationships with your colleagues, it is akin to having social gatherings with friends and family. In fact, many people have formed lasting relationships with colleagues who go on to become strong family friends. They look forward to work, find it enjoyable and do not regard work as dreary.

Work can be enjoyable because it gives one a sense of achievement. At work, we are constantly challenged to perform our best. Many of us enjoy the challenge and are pleased to overcome the problems we face, regarding them as wonderful accomplishments.

Thus, I do not wholly agree with the view that we do not enjoy our work, but only our leisure. In fact, human beings are extremely resilient and flexible. Thus, we will find enjoyment in what we do, be it at work or leisure.

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Who has more problems to deal with — young people or adults?

Different groups of people face different types of problems with some problems affecting more than one group of people. In this essay, young people will refer to those who are still studying full time in school and adults refer to those who are working full time in the working world,

A significant problem that young people face today is surviving in the competitive academic world. From a young age, students are expected to commit much of their time to their studies, ensuring that they do not fall behind in their work. At the end of their formal education journey, they are expected to graduate with a good university degree. Many students face great difficulties catching up with their peers and lead highly stressful lives trying to ensure that they get the best results.

Another problem young people face is the uncertainty of who they are. Many are searching for their identity and often feel lost and vulnerable as they search for ways to find out who they are. This problem is exacerbated if they unwittingly mix with people whom they later feel uncomfortable with but find themselves unable to leave such groups of people.

Adults, on the other hand, have their own share of problems. Many of them are forced to work at highly stressful jobs or jobs they dislike in order to take care of their families. The burden of taking care of a family's financial needs can cause substantial problems for adults. Furthermore, they are unable to freely leave their jobs as their actions will have repercussions not just on themselves but their families as well.

However, it can be argued that young people are not spared from such problems as well. Today, many young people do not rely solely on their parents for pocket money. Many choose to earn their own income either to lighten their parents' load or to finance their own material needs. Young people, therefore, will be thrust into the working world and will have to learn to adapt to working life while ensuring that they do not fall behind in their studies. Being a carefree group of people is not what young people should be labelled. Instead, they face the many problems linked to schools as well as problems associated with the embryonic stage of the working world.

Most importantly, young people might not have the resources required to solve the problems they face. Adults might face a myriad of problems with greater repercussions should those fail to be solved but it can be argued that adults might also have the experience and resources they need to solve the problems they face. Young people, on the other hand, who are unable to get the help they need, will face tremendous problems in solving their problems.

In conclusion, although both adults and young people face different problems, I would argue that young people face more problems than adults. Many of their problems might seem trivial but to a young person with little experience and resources, these problems might be too great to overcome.

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'Professionals in sports are more interested in making money than playing the game.' Do you agree?

It is not unusual to hear of sportspeople who are earning copious amounts of money with endorsement contracts. Even before they have truly proven their worth, sportspeople deemed to be endowed with potential are already signing contracts involving large sums of money. Today, the value of a sportsperson is less likely to be measured by performance than his contractual amount.

Of course, one cannot underestimate the lure of money. Sports have become careers instead of just interests as they were in the past. Sportspeople employ agents who work out deals with sponsors as well as the clubs to ensure that they are well paid for their performances. In fact, each superlative performance seems to fuel speculation over whether the salary paid out in the existing contract will be increased by the club to keep the sportsperson in its fold. It is not unusual to hear of sportspeople who refuse to renew their contracts until they get more money and perks or those who search for greener pastures, where they will be paid higher salaries. Thus, sports appear to have become a business in which money is of priority.

Furthermore, the use of performance-enhancing drugs and match-fixing in the world of sports are increasingly reported. This could be due to the fact that a gold medal in an international sporting event is a guarantee of wealth since sponsorship and advertising deals are always worked out with the winners. To win at all costs thus becomes an obsession. Even in regional tournaments like the Malaysia Cup, match-fixing was rampant as players took bribes to lose games. As a result, the real thrill of sports is lost since results are predetermined. This bodes ill for the sport as it means that sports will no longer be played out of passion but as the means to an end.

We can argue that sportspeople do play purely because of their love for the game. Should they be able to provide for themselves and their family, many will be able to play purely because of their passion without being overly concerned about monetary rewards. However, with large amounts of money being allocated to professional athletes, the chances of losing sight of the original aim of playing sports professionally might be lost.

Furthermore, with the increasing influence of advertisements in sports, the 'marketing' of sports is becoming more prevalent. Money has inevitably become very much a part of sports. With this, the ability to hold on to the primary motivation which is the love for the game might be lost.

In conclusion, professional sportspeople are more interested in making money than playing the game. There would still be groups of people whose primary aim of playing sports is the love for the sports but these might diminish in the years to come.

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'It is better to be an only child than to have siblings.' Do you agree?

An only child certainly appears to be the norm with modern families as both parents find themselves caught up in the bustle of working life. Furthermore, in view of the fact that the cost of living has risen tremendously in recent years, it does seem to make sense to concentrate financial and emotional resources on one child rather than spread them thinly over several.

Being an only child has undeniable advantages. One is assured of undivided attention and love from the parents. There will be no sibling rivalry to create unnecessary ill feelings within the family. As one grows up to meet the challenges of first adolescence and then adulthood, it is imperative that there is the reassurance of a circle of love surrounding the child. Being an only child will ensure that the parents can attend to the child's needs, whether physically, emotionally or spiritually, with undivided attention. In this way, the child will grow up unhampered by any uncertainties or anxieties.

Furthermore, an only child has the advantage of having his material needs catered to. In a world where things are becoming so expensive, an only child can be sure that his parents' financial abilities will give him all that he needs. Thus, instead of the parents' income having to be divided over providing for a few children, it can go towards giving one child the best. This will go a long way in ensuring that the child is not disadvantaged.

However, an only child is also a lonely child. He may be the happy recipient of his parents' unconditional love and care, but he will also face the emptiness of having no companions his age until he goes to school. In the early formative years, this could be damaging, as he may become withdrawn and unhappy, having found something lacking in his life. Even in school he might not be able to find friends who could be as close to him as siblings could.

As a result of being the only child, he may also become spoilt and selfish. After all, he is unlikely to have his demands rejected since he will be doted on. Thus, he might become possessive of his belongings and find it difficult to adapt to a lifestyle that promotes community spirit. He may then become highly unpopular and friendless. This would probably exacerbate his already lonely existence.

In the end, it seems more sensible to have more than one child if finances permit. This is because siblings are best able to moderate each other's social and emotional responses. Siblings can also provide companionship when a child experiences the potentially traumatic growing-up phase.

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Should students be free to choose school subjects and activities?

Choice has become the catchphrase of a generation reared on the rallying cry of freedom. As such, the common perception today is that the individual must be allowed to develop his potential and interest in all areas in order for him to truly become a wholly-developed person. But is this choice something that should be encouraged in the area of school education?

Choice in school subjects and activities is good because it allows students to explore and expand personal interests and strengths. In education systems like the ones in Asia which have been attacked for producing students only to plug the gaps in the economy, allowing the students to select their areas of interest can plant the seeds for a more diverse and vibrant society where the development of different abilities is encouraged. This will give each person the self-esteem that comes from having his capabilities and interests recognised rather than being forced to conform to a prescriptive education.

Furthermore, allowing students to choose a few subjects or activities of specialisation can foster depth in knowledge rather than breadth. Thus, students will be masters in their chosen areas of study or activities rather than merely possessing superficial knowledge of a wide range of subjects. A student of the latter type could end up knowing 'an infinite amount of nothing'.

A student who has to choose his subjects and activities is made to go through the process of studying each choice carefully and evaluating his own needs and interest. Thus, he has to learn how to make informed choices, as well as to take the responsibility for his choice, whether flawed or otherwise. This is something that every child has to learn if he is to be a success in his own right.

However, a broad-based education with grounding in a wide repertoire of subjects has its advantages. After all, it will ensure that each child has a taste of each subject, allowing him to fully understand his own talents. If he has no real idea of what each subject is about, he may develop an opinion of each based merely on peer influence or hearsay. This is not healthy at all. Furthermore, if he does only a few subjects or immerses himself in a few activities, he may not be able to handle real problems and challenges in the world which are, more often than not, interdisciplinary and multifaceted.

Also, subjects that are compulsory at the early stage of education allow the child to discover his real interests and abilities. Activities that are compulsory for all students will also expose them to a wider range of experiences that will enrich them. In their later school years, there should be choices made available in both areas as by then they will be able to choose wisely.

Hence, it is not a case of either choosing to make all school subjects and activities compulsory or that all should be given up to the students' free choice. The school should undertake to expose the students to a range of subjects and experiences by subjecting them to the full repertoire of school life before allowing them to specialise later on when they are more mature. This will ensure a good balance in their education.

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'Enjoying your job is more important than earning a lot of money.' Do you agree?

Today, most people equate a job with the material comforts that it would bring rather than with the satisfaction that makes life experiences meaningful. It does appear that most people would look for a job that pays well, even if it means sacrificing their interests in the process. Just how important is it to enjoy your job?

If one enjoys one's work, doing your best in it is no longer a tedious task that requires backbreaking effort. In such a situation, there will always be the motivation to go to work and enjoy what there is to do. Take the example of a marine enthusiast who has a job in the Underwater World. Going to work to care for marine life would be the draw itself. Thus, one will be keen on one's job rather than be a clockwatcher all the time in a job that does not appeal. If one selects a job purely because it pays very well, it will be the money at the end of the month that one enjoys, rather than the work. In such a situation, one looks forward to only one day in a month, rather than every day.

But the reality of life is that money does make the world go round. How can one truly have a good life when one is constantly worrying over unpaid bills? It is important to enjoy work, but not at the expense of making a living. Only when one's basic necessities are met can one truly look to the other aspects of life. In most cases, enjoying your job is a luxury open to only a select few. For the rest of us, it is the money that counts more.

Furthermore, earning a lot of money allows one to enjoy life beyond the job. The woes and joys of life are then well-balanced since the job that you do not enjoy is giving you the chance to enjoy your leisure. For many of us, this is a good trade-off. So one only works at a mundane or highly unenjoyable job for the sake of making a living, and then goes off to relax after work or over the weekends. This is also an acceptable state of affairs since most people do not equate a job with enjoyment.

If one enjoys one's job, then it is not work at all. The line between leisure and work could be blurred as a result. Such a situation may not be positive as it means that there are no clear demarcations in terms of time allocation. On the other hand, keeping work and play separate allows for one to leave either of the two behind when necessary so that one will have a better work-life balance.

I would not say that enjoying the job is more important, since we do need to earn enough money to sustain a decently comfortable lifestyle. The best compromise is to find a job that pays comfortably and is not detested by you. As such, you can grow to like your job or find meaning in it (even if you do not necessarily enjoy it), and still be able to live well. This will indeed be an ideal situation!

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Do you think that marriage is a permanent institution?

Marriage is an important institution of society, whether in the past or today. It is a contract between two people to live their lives together as well as share weal and woe. Such a relationship can be likened to the characteristics of glue. It keeps families together and sustains people's sense of well-being. If people get married without the commitment of living together permanently, the marriage will be a mockery.

When people decide to get married, they are doing so with the belief that they will stay together permanently. But when problems loom in the marriage, the couple sometimes find it easier to break up rather than work hard at keeping the marriage alive. However, the real test of a marriage is the level of commitment that the couple brings to it. If they resolve to work hard at it, the marriage will become stronger than before. It is thus important that once married, people should stay together permanently.

Furthermore, in a marriage with children, a divorce tends to affect these helpless youngsters, who may not adjust to the change at all. In fact, many juvenile delinquents are found to have come from broken homes. The impact of separated parents on young impressionable minds is not to be underestimated. Thus, for the sake of the innocent children, parents must make careful choices that are not just focussed on themselves. Due consideration must be given to others who may also be affected. Marriage is an important matter and should be viewed with the seriousness that it deserves.

However, there is something to be said for not dragging out an unhappy situation that will not resolve itself. Take the example of an abusive parent who causes his spouse and children terrible pain and suffering. If it is allowed to go on indefinitely, the harm to the family may be irreparable. In such a case, living permanently together may be the wrong choice. A separation or divorce would be far more merciful.

Today, there are many alternative lifestyles replacing traditional marriage. Couples who are legally registered in a marriage may live miles apart. They live their own lives, separated from each other and may not be a couple in the strictest sense of the word. Commitment to a life together seems less important than having their own independence. This arrangement may avoid the problem of divorce but the marriage could be an empty shell if the couple does not put in any effort to sustain the relationship.

In conclusion, I think that marriage is and should continue to be a permanent institution. It is only when extenuating circumstances arise should this permanency be dissolved.

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Can war ever be justified?

Whether in films or real-life accounts of war experiences, we are well exposed to the horrors of crimes, sufferings and destruction that war brings. Many feel that such depictions are usually sensationalised in order to attract an audience, but in my opinion, war in films can never be as cruel as they are in real life.

The tremendous suffering that results from war is unimaginable. Innocent civilians are maimed or killed while soldiers face irreparable physical and mental damage even years after the war. A recent news article revealed that the effects of Agent Orange used in the Vietnam War decades ago are still felt today by the victims who inhaled the gas. The kind of destructive rampage that soldiers, excited by blood lust, inflicted on the people during the infamous Nanking massacre is testimony to how much suffering is unleashed during wars. How then can war ever be justified?

Furthermore, the effects of war are far-reaching. The Gulf War might have liberated Kuwait from the occupation by Iraq, but the damage done to the environment and economy took months to subside. When the Iraqis set fire to the oilfields in an attempt to create difficult conditions for the Allied forces to manoeuvre in, they also inadvertently created one of the worst ecological disasters of the century. Thousands of wild animals died from the pollution of their habitats and the air remained black and foul for many months thereafter. Kuwait had to struggle to rebuild its economy from scratch. Once an affluent country, it was barely able to support its people after the war.

In a war, there are no winners. How then can one say that it is justified since it does nothing but condones violence in trying to solve the problems? The amount of resources and lives that are lost by both sides does not convince anyone that it is good to wage a war. During the World Wars, both victors and losers spent years trying to recover from the devastation. This could have been avoided if other peaceful means such as talks or sanctions had been employed to forestall the problem instead of letting it balloon to a stage where nothing else save war would do.

The only possible justification for going to war is to defend one's liberty. The very basic right of every human being is the right to freedom. If that is taken away from you, all else pales in comparison. When you are enslaved by another country's tyranny, the primal urge to free yourself and survive is understandable. Only in such a case, when you are truly threatened, should war ever be a consideration. Yet, what is the price of freedom if so much is destroyed in the process? In the same way, what is life if one has to live in shame and slavery? It is an unfortunate fact of modern times that this is a Gordian knot that has yet to be untied.

I feel that war should not be justified. The ease at which millions of lives can be lost and the far-reaching effects of an attack are too overwhelming for any country to overcome. War should therefore be avoided and more peaceful means used to solve problems.

164**Do you think the computer is a blessing? Elaborate on your views.**

The computer is a ubiquitous feature of modern life. Whether it is at a restaurant paying the bill or going to the Automated Teller Machine (ATM) to withdraw money, we see the presence of computers. Yet there are many who warn that our increasing dependence on computers bodes ill for the world. On the other hand, the benefits of the computer cannot be disputed.

The computer is useful because it offers us a window to the world. Unlike the television that merely offers passive programmes, the computer allows authentic communication with people around the world. The Internet offers us the chance to experience the lives of so many people of different ages, nationalities and occupations. We build relationships through the Internet, which is more immediate and affordable than any other forms of communication.

Also, the computer is a real blessing when it comes to the storage and retrieval of information. Gone are the days when records had to be retrieved from dusty storerooms and moth-bitten files. Instead, the computer stores so much information and is so user-friendly that space and time are saved. This is especially useful for law enforcement as data can be easily matched to identify suspects. Thus, we have at our fingertips a wealth of information, which is of great importance in today's knowledge explosion.

However, the computer breaks down at the most inconvenient times. When that happens, we find that we are really handicapped because everything is contained in it. There is no other recourse to working on the data because we either did not make hard copies or have grown so dependent on the computer that we find ourselves stranded.

Another problem is that the computer is an easy machine to get addicted to. There are many complaints from parents and teachers that students are so addicted to computer games, social media and Internet surfing that they neglect their schoolwork and even meals. This is a very unhealthy trend that must be stopped before it gets worse.

The difficulty in policing what is available on the Internet makes the computer a dangerous riot of information. If there are no effective controls, young people could have access to unhealthy materials like pornography and excessive violence, which could in turn create social problems.

On the whole, the computer, however, has many advantages that make living our lives more convenient and efficient, so I would say that it has largely been a blessing. The problems can be controlled if we enforce self-discipline and refrain from being excessively dependent on it or being carried away by it.

165

'A country's population should be actively controlled.' Do you agree?

The population explosion has come to portend disaster for the world. At a time when the earth's resources are dwindling, the number of people to feed has grown exponentially, much to the concern of governments all over the world. But is an active population control policy truly necessary?

When the population increases to a stage where resources for each person falls below the minimum standard of living, it becomes imperative that some form of population control must take place. After all, even living just at the minimum level is not a desirable state. If controlling the population will release more resources like food, shelter, education, medical care and jobs for the people, then it is well justified. Otherwise, the country runs the risk of depleting its resources.

Furthermore, overpopulation can also lead to serious social problems in the country. Without enough housing for the people, or if the people are not able to afford the housing since jobs are scarce, shanty towns will mushroom all over the country. These makeshift towns are notorious for being breeding grounds of crime and diseases. Such towns will only create more problems for a country already buckling under the weight of having to adequately provide for a burgeoning population.

A country that is plagued by overpopulation is not likely to be able to rise above its problems to bring itself back on track again. Overpopulation leading to poverty leads to overpopulation again, as the people have no means of obtaining the means for birth control. This becomes a vicious cycle that is hard to break out of.

However, in certain labour intensive agricultural countries, it is necessary to allow the population to increase as human labour is required for sustaining the economy. Richer countries can afford to rely on machines and other high-tech equipment but poorer ones can only go back to the primitive ways of farming. Thus, they will require more children in the family to share in the usual backbreaking work on the farm or plantation. Furthermore, in such poor countries, infant mortality is a very real threat. Having more children merely means that at least some will survive.

Population control infringes on human rights as it interferes with the very intimate issue of procreation for the individual. A personal matter that should be decided by the couple is cast into the public arena and enforced in the form of legislation. The adverse effects of such control can lead to a greying population, like the case of Singapore whose population control policy has been so effective that we are now facing a greying population with too few births each year to sustain the economy.

In my opinion, we must remember that history and statistics have shown that poverty and overpopulation are constant bedfellows. A price must be paid if there is to be no population control in a world where rapid depletion of its resources is taking place. As we may not be willing to pay the price, I would suggest that the government should actively monitor and control the country's population.

166

Which of the following is the main reason for a student's progress in school — good teaching, the student's ability or luck?

There are many factors that play a role in a student's progress in school. Of these, the three factors – good teaching, the student's ability and luck are usually regarded as the contributing factors for a student's progress. In this essay, I will argue that a student's progress cannot be attributed to just one of these factors. Instead, it is a combination of good teaching and the student's ability.

Having good teachers is crucial for every student for it is the teachers whom students should be able to turn to for help in their studies. However, good teaching is not just about being well versed in the topic being taught but also being a good motivator. A teacher who drones on at each lesson will soon lose the interest of the students and without any interest in the subject, the students might not be willing to study hard.

A student's ability is also very important. Some students are fortunate to be quick in understanding concepts that are taught to them. They might also have a good memory. Such qualities would help the students to progress in school. However, we should not dismiss the importance of hard work. Conscientious students who are not endowed with a good memory or a quick and alert mind, could still overcome these and develop the abilities required of them to progress in school.

On the other hand, I feel that luck is not a factor in progressing well in school. If one were to do well in a test because one had guessed the answers correctly or one had been lucky to study the correct topics tested, then this good test score cannot be sustained. Once one's luck wears out, one will do badly in the test. Furthermore, the good test score will not be an accurate sign of how good the student's progress is in school for the student might actually be clueless about what he is learning.

In conclusion, I feel that progress in school is dependent on a combination of good teaching and the student's ability. With these in place, students will be better assured of progressing in school.

167

Should all young people go through a period of compulsory military or community service?

Service to the nation, whether military or community, has always evoked a great deal of controversy as to whether it is necessary. Many boys who face the inevitable military service often grumble about how girls have been spared such 'labour'. As a result, the idea of making girls undergo compulsory civil defence or community work was mooted to balance the fact that the boys are disadvantaged by the two years that they spend serving the country. However, it is not a matter of trying to be fair to both boys and girls that military or community service to the country should be implemented.

One important reason for implementing compulsory service, either military or community, is that it encourages the young to learn to serve society. When they realise how they are a part of society and have a stake in whether it flourishes or flounders, they will come to appreciate what has been given to them by the country in terms of security, education and other privileges as citizens. Thus, it is essential that the young serve society so that they will not take the life they enjoy for granted.

Furthermore, a short stint in serving the country will instil a sense of belonging in the young. They will feel a sense of ownership in the land they call home, which is important to foster a strong generation of responsible people. When the young experience the need for defence or participation in the community, they will see that they have a stake in society and have much to offer.

Qualities that are important in the young can also be developed while doing military or community service. In the course of military training, they will develop camaraderie, responsibility and discipline. These are qualities that will continue to stand one in good stead in the future. While doing community work, the young will learn compassion, patience and the joy of giving. Thus, such services will be beneficial in the long run.

However, a major problem that will arise in the implementation of such compulsory service is the pressure on time that it will exert on the young people's already packed schedules. Schooling has never been as busy as it is now. The emphasis on school achievement imposes a tremendous strain on young people, leaving them little time to pursue the activities that are important to their development, like sports and social interaction. To have to put aside time for service to the country will necessitate the easing of such demands on their time.

Thus, it is a good idea for the young to undergo military or community service for their outlook in life would then be anchored in society. However, such service will take time away from other pursuits and should therefore be at no undue cost to the healthy development of the other aspects of their lives.

168

'Children from rich families are happier than those from poor families.'
What are your views.

The statement seems to assume that wealth is a determining factor in happiness. Children, thus, seek happiness from things that can be bought with money. In this essay, I will argue that even if wealth is important, it is not necessary for all forms of happiness.

With money, children have easy access to their basic needs like food, shelter and clothes and can also indulge in them. Those from wealthier families can live in luxurious houses, be able to eat whatever they want without worrying about the cost and be able to keep up with the latest fashion. Having all these, will generate happiness.

Furthermore, every child wants to be looked upon with favour by their peers. Peer acceptance is very important to the development of their self-esteem. But if they come from a poor family, and often use hand-me-down items, they could feel humiliated in front of their peers and be ostracised. Such fear may be groundless but this does not deny its existence. A child who feels inferior to his friends will not grow up with a healthy self-image.

With wealth comes a host of advantages that the poorer child will not get to enjoy. An affluent family can afford costly enrichment classes. In today's knowledge-based society, such access and exposure go a long way towards giving the child the requisite foundation for doing well in school. Children interested in music, art or dance could likewise further their interests. This could mean better achievements in school and beyond school, giving these children greater confidence.

However, it does not mean that poorer children are necessarily unhappy in comparison with those from richer families. Wealth does not determine happiness; relationships do. If a child lives in a beautiful house with the latest technology in place but hardly gets to see his parents, he is no better than a captive bird in a gilded cage. Children need love and companionship to grow up happy. Thus, if a child comes from a poor family but has parents who are constantly there for him to provide care and support, he will be happier than a rich but neglected child.

Furthermore, a child from a poor family could feel a sense of achievement that is denied to the rich one who has all the advantages of wealth. The latter's success could be the product of external privileges but the poorer child's achievement will definitely be a result of hard work and ability. Thus, his success will come to mean more because it was achieved at great cost and effort. Those who have everything handed to them on a silver platter will not be able to experience such joy.

In addition, parents with the means to pay for enrichment classes might compel their children to take up lessons they dislike. This could lead to great unhappiness.

Thus, it is not always the case that children from rich families are happier. A child's happiness is not contingent on wealth, but rather, his own personality and surroundings. The happiest child could well be the one with the least material possessions but a windfall of love and support.

169

'Grandparents play the most important role in society.' Do you agree?

Grandparents are just as prominent today in every family as they were in the past. They take on a myriad of responsibilities that allow society in general and families in particular to function effectively. In this essay, I will argue that grandparents do play an important role in society but it is not the most important role.

Most grandparents today are retired and often have time to spare. They are the ideal people to fulfil the role of caregivers and moral advisors to their grandchildren. Despite the plethora of childcare centres available, many parents still prefer to rely on grandparents to take care of their children as this will reduce the cost of childcare. If a family has many children, having grandparents look after the young ones will definitely reduce childcare costs significantly. Grandparents can also play the nurturing role that parents might be too busy to fulfil. For example, they can provide a listening ear to their grandchildren's problems, ensure that they have proper nutrition and rest and cultivate good habits. Having gone through hardships in life, they can also transmit moral values to their grandchildren. With the grandchildren under the care of the grandparents, parents can then go to work with their mind at ease.

Having grandparents as the caregiver will also help foster good relations between the older generation (the grandparents) and the younger generation (the grandchildren). Often, the generation gap prevents grandchildren from communicating well with the older generation. If they are given opportunities for frequent interaction, both generations will be better able to understand each other and be more tolerant towards differences. This translates to the wider society as these children will then be better able to get along with the older generation when they interact with others around them.

However, it is important to note that even though grandparents play an important role in society, this does not negate the important role that parents play. Although parents work hard to earn a living and support the family, they must also spend quality time with their children. Their role complements that of the grandparents and must not be ignored. Parents have an important role to play as well when it comes to transmitting values to their children. They should not avoid this task and leave it solely to the grandparents.

Another group of people who play an important role in society is the political leader. Without good political leadership, society will be unstable and unable to flourish. Without a stable society, families will not be able to function effectively and no amount of effort on the part of grandparents will allow children to grow and develop effectively in the society.

In conclusion, grandparents play an important role in society. They can contribute greatly to the care of their grandchildren, helping to ease the worries of parents when they are unable to spend time with their children. However, without the foundation of a stable society which can only be obtained by having good political leaders, grandparents will not be able to carry out their roles effectively.

170

'Entertainers and sports stars deserve to be paid large sums of money for their work.' What are your views?

The public needs entertainment. This is without a doubt. It needs entertainment daily especially when work becomes more difficult and people's lives become harder, more harried and stressful with the daily battle for survival. Entertainers in the form of singers, musicians, film stars and sports superheroes supply this entertainment. However, fans and followers of sports and other forms of entertainment are increasingly demanding and sophisticated in their requirements for entertainment. The stars who are able to command their fan's loyalty and following will therefore command higher fees than entertainers who cannot pull in the numbers.

It is the market that decides how much a product is worth. Entertainers who have better skills or talents will be paid more. Let us take the case of the famous basketball legend, Michael Jordan. He was not only a good shooter but he was a man of many talents. He was also a charismatic entertainer. In many cases, his presence on the court ensured the success of the team he played for. This was the reason for the Chicago Bulls' successes in the NBA Championship. Jordan was not only a rare sports talent but he also had a respectable public image. He not only ensured a large following in America by his mere presence but also had legions of fans abroad. The NBA matches were telecast in many countries. Jordan's image as a famous sports personality could be used to market numerous consumer products. Despite Johnson commanding hefty fees for his appearances, he made substantial profits for his management. Even though he was paid excessively (in the opinion of some critics), he ensured prosperity for his backers.

The same thing could be said of David Beckham, the famous football player from Manchester United who later switched to other clubs. He had to be paid millions of pounds to renew his contract. However, the Beckham star with his famous bending kick ensured revenues for his club and attracted scores of screaming fans. In Japan, he is the most recognisable figure on consumer advertisements and people are even willing to pay to sleep in the rooms he last occupied in the hotels he stayed in.

Therefore, fan base and skills are used by agents to justify the fees they pay to famous sports figures. Some can be leading sports figures in their countries but only a few can be sports heroes. The same arguments can be used to justify the astronomical sums paid to leading public entertainers like famous musicians, film stars and singers. Madonna, the pop singer, sells millions of records worldwide. However she fares less well when she acts. Her fees are substantially higher as a singer than as an actress. Pavarotti, the famous tenor and his fellow singers like Dominigo can command sell-out performances when they tour globally. Hence, their concerts can command high ticket prices and fans are prepared to queue up and pay for these tickets. Some cast members of hit American shows which are syndicated globally are paid six-figure sums per episode.

The arguments against paying large sums to these stars are that the sums are too uncomfortably excessive, and that the audience will have to fork out more for entertainment. Paying excessive sums to these stars increases the costs of their performance. Even some football stars like David Beckham admit that they are overpaid excessively. The salary of Leonardo DiCaprio, who starred in the hit film 'Titanic', increased after the film attained cult status. Hence, high ticket prices may have to be borne by the average cinemagoer. Producers may think twice before hiring such actors who require superstar salaries and there may be fewer performances from them, to the loss of the public.

Again, the sums paid to these people seem astronomical compared to the paltry wages of ordinary workers. A night's performance earned by a superstar may be a lifetime's income to the poor. "Where is the fairness?", critics will ask regarding these excessive fees.

Some shows, like television shows and sports matches, may not be held if superstars do not obtain the fees they demand. However, I am glad that a move has been made to water down the increasing tendency to raise the fees of star performers in order to obtain their services. The recent global recession has also lowered the high fees. My view is that many superstars should not be paid the excessive amounts they are given presently.

To conclude, I would say that highly popular and competent stars deserve to be paid high fees, provided that their work truly adds significant value to the industry. However, the sums should not be unreasonably excessive, such that the cost of entertainment becomes too high for the average consumer.

171

Do you think animals and birds are meant to be free rather than be confined to enclosed spaces?

On the surface, a kind observer would agree with the view that animals and birds are meant to be free. Who, among us, would not want to enjoy the freedom and independence to move about? Why should we deprive animals and birds of the right to do so?

Animals should not be confined purely to train them to perform. Recently, I went on a trip to Genting Highlands in Malaysia. While I was there, I saw a chained elephant pacing up and down dully and fretfully. It was sad to see such a magnificent, fully grown creature with its long beautiful white tusks in captivity. It was kept there after a circus performance. I really pitied the elephant as it had lost its freedom and independence. Furthermore, what it was being trained to do was not instinctive and could actually be harming them.

However, as we look deeper, we will see that there are some instances where animals need to be kept in cages.

We have to acknowledge that animals provide food. Animals are raised for their meat. As a source of protein and fat, they supply our nutritional needs. The breeding of cows in cowsheds for milk and fowl in cages is a necessary evil especially where increasingly, farming land is getting scarcer.

Again, some animals are kept as pets. Dogs may have their ancestry in the wild wolf but they have been domesticated. Even the fierce Alsatian police dog has lost much of its aggressive instincts. Pets like dogs, rabbits and cats are used to a life under the care of their masters. In return for their companionship and affection, they lead a sheltered life with their meals provided for. In this case, I do not see much cruelty, for these animals are kept in cages only at times when their masters are not with them.

A recent article in the Straits Times touches on this topic, stating that animal lovers and birdwatchers are always eager to discuss the ethics of confining birds in cages and breeding them for mass markets. It quoted Dr Quek, an animal expert and breeder, as saying, "It is true that wild birds should never be caged. But the birds bred by humans are a different matter." A tame parrot released into the wild would find it difficult to survive in a hostile environment.

Scientists are constantly researching ways to cure diseases. Some animals are quite akin to human in their biological make-up. Therefore, rats, hamsters or frogs may be confined in containers for experiments. For this use, I feel that it is a necessity for the advancement of science.

Humans have destroyed a great part of the natural environment. In the process, some wild animals like lions, snakes and birds may have their environment threatened. They may find it hard to survive after losing their natural habitats. In these cases, I feel that if a wild animal like a lion is left to roam and threaten humans, it should be kept in zoos not only for public education but for its own survival. Also, certain birds like the hornbill and animals like the polar bears are now propagating their own kind in animal enclosures. Left on their own, these species may become extinct under the predatory actions of poachers.

Summing up, I feel that wherever possible, living creatures should not be confined but should be left to roam freely. The exceptions are the examples I have outlined.

172

To what extent are young people influenced by television and films?

The young can be defined as those below twenty-one years old – the official age of adulthood. This is a diverse group consisting of preschoolers, students in primary and secondary schools or young working adults. Television and films play an important role in young people's lives but as this essay will show, there are also other important influences in young people's lives.

Some young people watch television and films during their free time. Younger children watch cartoons or children's films while older ones might watch reality shows or films. Young children pick up words and phrases from the cartoons and films they watch, often mimicking what they see. Older ones might try to model their lives after the reality shows and some might even imitate their idols by wearing similar outfits.

The fact that shows often come with a warning to viewers, advising them on the nature of the programme and its suitability for younger children, is an indication that those who watch the shows might be affected by what they watch. At the extreme, viewers could be led to imitate the violence that they see in the shows, thinking that such violence is fun, exciting and cool.

The fact that young people are influenced by television and film has led to the authorities turning to programmes that will imbue the young with good values. For example, shows that are centred around family values are often shown during prime time. These shows are not just for entertainment but also to encourage viewers to adopt the values portrayed in the shows. Even advertisements have been extended to resemble short clips, informing viewers of the dangers of certain bad habits such as drinking and smoking.

However, besides television and films, young people are increasingly influenced by what they find on the Internet. This seems to be taking up a larger proportion of their time than television and films. These are easily accessed and can be watched even when they are on the move. Whether it is from various websites, blogs or online videos, young people pick up information on the latest trends around the world with regards to habits and food. With the ease at which these can be available everywhere, young people will change their lifestyles according to what they see online.

In addition, video games also have a significant influence on young people. There have been reports of violent behaviour after playing particularly violent video games for long periods of time. Some young people get ideas on how crime can be committed by playing games.

In conclusion, although young people watch films and television, they spend less time on them and will hence be less influenced by them. As they spend more time on the Internet and on video games, these are what young people are influenced by more so than television and films.

173

'Both parents should continue working even if their children are very young.' Do you agree?

Having both parents working outside the home while their children are very young has always been a contentious issue. Young children, here, would refer to those below the age of formal schooling, which is below the age of seven. In this essay, I will argue that this statement holds true only under certain circumstances.

Children at a young age require the guidance of a caregiver, not just for their physical needs but their emotional needs as well. Some rely on grandparents or domestic helpers to care for their children. Some place their children in infant care or childcare centres. However, these options might not provide the children with the best care. For example, domestic helpers are often preoccupied with domestic chores and will be too distracted to care properly for the child. They might then ensure that they feed the child when he or she is hungry and will then leave the child alone without showing the emotional care that the child might need. There are usually too many children at childcare centres and each child might not get the attention that he or she requires.

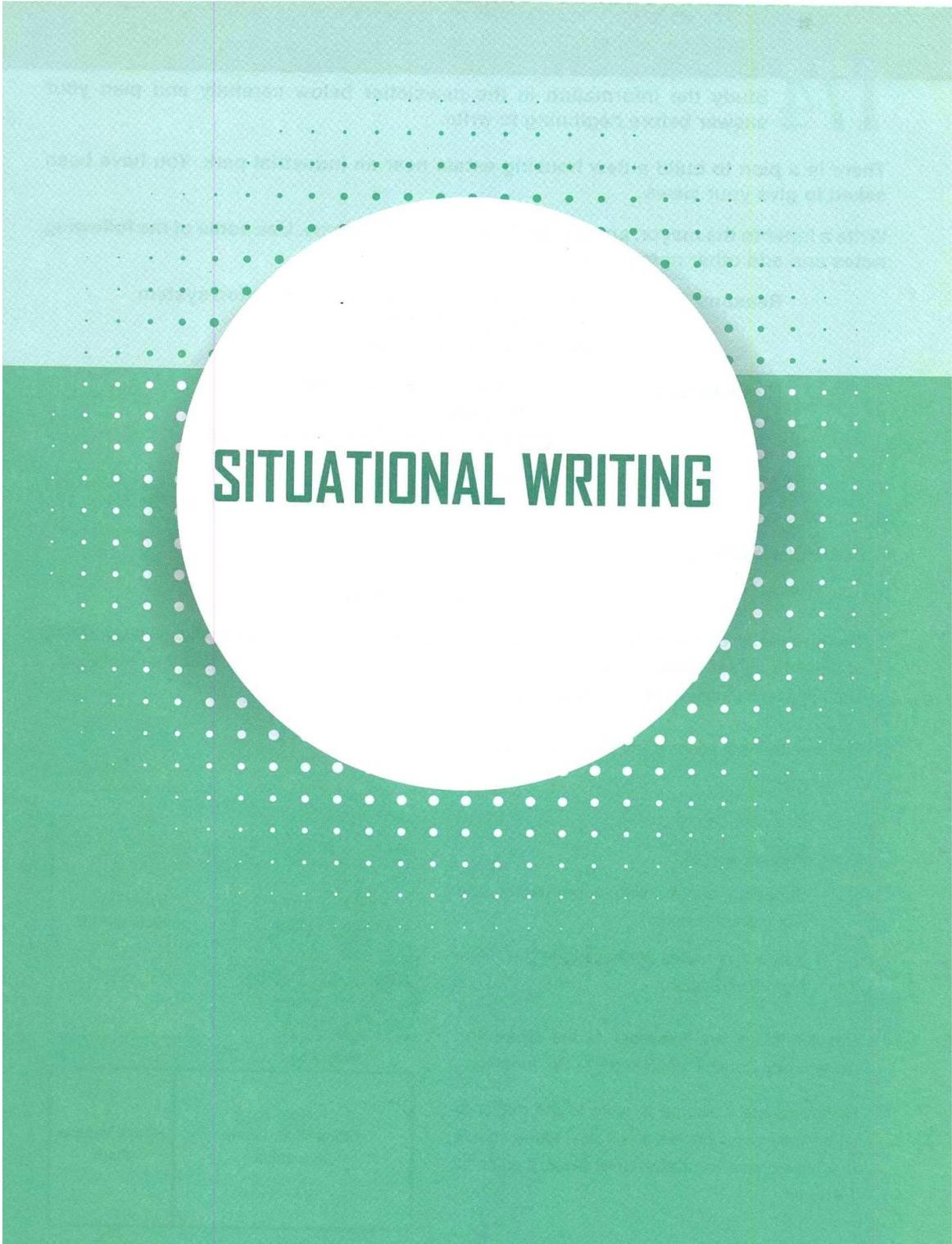
Therefore, not everyone feels that such care giving options are suitable for a child to grow up in. At this age, it is important for parents to develop a bond with their children. They should not miss their children's milestones and should always be around to nurture them.

Hence, only one parent should work outside the home. Traditionally, this was the mother's responsibility. Today, the father plays an increasingly important role. Therefore, if either of the parents is at home, he or she would be able to play the role of caregiver which is crucial to the child's development.

However, having only just one working parent might not be a suitable option for some families. Those who are burdened with the expenses of maintaining a car, servicing a house mortgage or providing for elderly parents would need to have a dual income. These families would then have to work outside the home even though their children are very young.

Nonetheless, with the option of flexible working hours and work-from-home options, having both parents working, yet being able to care for the child might be possible – a situation that was not possible in the past. Although this is not a widespread working arrangement, families that are fortunate enough to have such a working arrangement will be able to get the best of both worlds, whereby they would be able to obtain a dual income, yet watch their children grow up.

In conclusion, it is important for at least one parent to be around for a child when he or she is very young. Parents who have flexible work arrangements will not have to compromise on their children's growing years or their income. However, not many families are fortunate enough to have such an arrangement and those who need a dual income for added expenses will have to work outside the home and miss their young children's early years.





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Study the information in the newsletter below carefully and plan your answer before beginning to write.

There is a plan to build a new housing estate near an industrial park. You have been asked to give your views.

Write a letter to the mayor, arguing *for* or *against* the scheme. Use some of the following notes and add other points if you wish.

Reasons for: improved amenities and transportation system
proximity to workplace
good for local businesses

Reasons against: site too close to industrial park
congested roads
increased prices of goods and services

Swee Tao Community News Vol. 31

COMMUNITY UPDATES

Proposed New Housing Estate

The Swee Tao Community Council is proposing the building of a new housing estate at the junction of Simei Road and Swee Tao Lane. When completed in 4 years' time, there will be an additional 1000 residential units available in this area.

Facilities that will accompany the housing estate include:

- Clinic
- Day care centre
- Primary school
- Shopping centre, with supermarket and wet market included
- 3 new bus routes connecting to the Simei Light Rail System

Detailed plans are available at the Swee Tao Community Council office from 1 – 30 June.

Residents are welcome to write to the mayor to share their views on this proposal. Letters should reach the Swee Tao Community Council office by 1 August.

The map shows a grid of roads. Simei Road runs horizontally across the bottom. Swee Tao Lane runs vertically through the center. At the junction of Simei Road and Swee Tao Lane, there is a green-shaded area labeled 'Proposed New Housing Estate'. To the right of Swee Tao Lane, there is a white-shaded area labeled 'Swee Tao Industrial Park'. Below Simei Road, there are two white-shaded areas: 'Ching Yuan Green Industries' on the left and 'Heavy Vehicle Park' on the right.

13 Park Avenue
Singapore 310513

12 July 2018

Mayor
Swee Tao Community Council
72 Swee Tao Lane
#01-10
Singapore 721001

Dear Sir,

Proposed new housing estate

Thank you for inviting me to express my views on the proposed plan to build a new housing estate at the junction of Simei Road and Swee Tao Lane. I have reviewed the plans and have surveyed the site. The following are my opinions on the issue.

I feel that such a proposal is a laudable one in view of the facilities that will accompany the housing estate. The idea to build a new clinic and day care centre will not only cater to the residents, but also the industrial estate and the workforce just a street away. At present, there are no clinics or schools in the estate which is a terrible inconvenience as the nearest school is 8 kilometres away while the nearest clinic is even further.

The provision of three new bus services for the new housing estate will also make transportation more accessible in the area. As in the case with the clinic and day care centre, the bus services will benefit all the workers in the area. This will also buoy property prices, which will in turn make this an attractive neighbourhood.

The plan to build a new shopping centre, providing both the supermarket and the more traditional wet market is certainly a good idea. It is an interesting idea to incorporate the two, giving more options than are usually available. The shopping centre will also be a good place for families to spend their evenings or weekends instead of having to travel a distance just to find a place to do some shopping.

One of the conveniences that accompany the new housing estate will be an increased pool of workers who will be more than willing to work so close to home. Having a ready supply of workers will benefit the businesses.

Furthermore, the new housing estate will provide a fresh pool of customers for the local businesses. At present, the businesses suffer from declining patronage, and the bus plying the route is not frequent or consistent. Thus, the new estate would inject new life into the area with its many households.

All in all, I feel that the proposal is a good one, even though there are detractors emphasising the issues of close proximity to the industrial park, increased prices and road congestion. However, these are not enough to outweigh the benefits that the residents, businesses and workers stand to gain from such a development.

Thank you for your attention.

Yours faithfully,

Tan Wee Yaw

Mr Tan Wee Yaw

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The printout below of the webpage from *Tourism Malacca*, online magazine, focusses on promoting tourism in Malacca. Study the information carefully and plan your answer before beginning to write.

You arrived in Malacca on a vacation but realised that you had the wrong travelling bag.

Write an account of what happened, using some or all of the details below, and adding other ideas of your own. Your account will be published in the *Tourism Malacca* magazine.

- What your feelings were
- Who else was involved
- How your stay was affected
- What finally happened

Write your account with relevant explanations and details to show your goodwill towards Malacca and the people you met there.

<http://www.tourismm.org/sharing>

Why do you enjoy Malacca?

Share your favourite experience!



Thousands of visitors come to Malacca each month, and each of them has a favourite memory. What is yours?

Beautiful sights?

Great food?

Good friends?

Send us an account of your favourite experience in Malacca. Tell us what happened and show why you enjoyed yourself here.

We will publish it in the next issue and share it with the rest of the world!

I had travelled for about five hours from Singapore to Malacca where I was to stay with relatives and vacation for a few days. After I arrived, I started to unlock my travelling bag using the combination number that I had set earlier but it failed to open. To my surprise, I discovered that this bag was actually midnight blue instead of black.

My relatives helped me to open the bag so that we could ascertain its owner's identity. In the end, we discovered that it contained some official documents in files and some personal effects. My bag was filled with clothes and toiletries but not documents. I was stunned by this, unable to comprehend how I was to get my bag back. I was also confused as to how I was going to pass the next few days without my clothes and personal toiletries.

Our search finally turned up the name of the owner of the bag and his telephone number. This was a Mr Lee who was a local business owner in Malacca. He sounded very relieved that his documents were found. He told us that he had an important meeting the next morning and needed his bag immediately. Luckily for him, my relatives' house was only a short drive from his home. He arranged for a taxi to drive him over to claim his bag. This he did as promised. We then thought that it was the end of the matter, but apparently it was not. Mr Lee was so grateful that he sent over many gifts the next day and even came over after his meeting to buy us dinner. In the end, he became good friends with us. His favourite spots in Malacca have become mine as well. His warm and friendly companionship made Malacca so much more interesting and enjoyable for me. My stay in Malacca turned out to be more interesting than I had expected. Mr Lee is an epitome of the hospitality of the locals and he made my stay more enjoyable than I had expected.

What I had thought was to be a restful holiday became an endless round of feasting and sightseeing in Malacca. In addition, I made a good friend and enjoyed my stay in Malacca thoroughly. Now, I make it a point to come back every year!

176

The post below is taken from a social media platform that your family uses to keep in touch. Study the information carefully and plan your answer before beginning to write.

A relative of yours is returning home after being overseas for a long time. You intend to throw a party to welcome him.

Write an account of the preparations that were made and of the party itself, using some of the points below and adding other ideas of your own. Your account will be published on the family blog for the whole family to enjoy.

- Refreshments
- Roles and responsibilities of helpers
- Activities

Write your account in a friendly tone, with interesting details for your audience to enjoy.

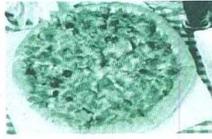
<http://www.familyshare/mypeople/event1>

Welcome Party for Jonathan (Surprise for Jonathan – DO NOT Leak!)



Reminder: Jonathan's plane will touch down on Saturday at 4.30 pm.

Michael and Amy
Calling the caterer tomorrow to confirm the menu
We'll make the sure the food is good! (Must have PIZZA)



Lisa and Siew Lay
What to do about presents?
What will he like? URGENT!!! Leave some suggestions here please!!

Sam and Joe
We'll keep everyone entertained!
There'll be Snakes and Ladders, Karaoke, Truth-or-Dare (Uh-oh, Jonathan's in trouble!!) and more. There'll be prizes too. Should we ask Grandpa and Auntie Sally to make a speech?

Sara
I'll ask as many relatives as possible!
I have an invitation list and have bought the cards. I'll send them out by Friday.

The first thing I did to welcome Jonathan back was to plan a party for him with a group of cousins. We decided that the party should not be held too long after his arrival, as it would not create the impact we wanted. At last, it was decided that it would be a surprise party for him on the very day he arrived. We would pick him up from the airport and drive him over to the party from there. All of us were so excited!

Once that was decided, we divided the various tasks among the seven of us — all young cousins who had grown up together. Isn't it nice that we're still close? Sara was in charge of coming up with an invitation list, buying the cards and sending them out. We decided that as many relatives as possible were to be invited because Jonathan had been away for almost eight years and would certainly appreciate seeing everyone at the party. Jonathan would arrive home from the airport in the early evening, so we thought that the meal provided should be akin to a dinner. Michael and Amy were responsible for engaging a reputable caterer to provide a sumptuous meal that included Jonathan's favourite pizza. These two greedy ones got the right job! The dinner turned out to be fantastic, didn't it?

Of course, there would be welcome gifts for Jonathan. To ensure that the presents were not repeated, Lisa and Siew Lay were to compile a list of presents that our relatives could pledge to buy for Jonathan. This was circulated immediately. The only thing left was to plan for some games for entertainment during the party. Sam and I were in charge of it. We devised some variations of old games that we had played in the past to add a nostalgic flavour to the party.

Finally, everything was ready for the big day. When Jonathan arrived at the party, he was pleasantly surprised. He was so moved that he shed happy tears, prompting a round of speeches from the elderly relatives present. They spoke of how pleased they were that he had returned to the family fold, how proud they were that he had graduated with honours from a reputable university, and how much they looked forward to his contributions in the future. The kids voted and thought Grandpa's speech was the best! We enjoyed ourselves tremendously, much more so because we were really one whole family again.

177

Study the information in the newspaper advertisement below carefully and plan your answer before beginning to write.

A local entrepreneur has offered to finance students on a month-long visit to another country, provided the students are well-qualified and will benefit from the experience.

Write a letter to apply for the travel scholarship and include the following points.

- Your special qualifications and interests
- The country you have chosen and why
- What you intend to do there
- What you hope to gain from the visit

Write your letter in a persuasive tone that will convince the sponsor of your interest.

The Pacific Times, 13 June 2018

Travel Scholarships for Secondary School Students

Applications are now open

Miranda Sharma, best known for starting the successful educational chain ThinkBig, is pleased to announce the launch of travel scholarships for secondary school students.

Successful students will go on a month-long trip to any country of their choice. All expenses are covered. Upon returning, students will have the opportunity to share their experiences at workshops organised by ThinkBig.

We welcome students with open minds and big dreams. Students should be keenly interested in other cultures and demonstrate a willingness to promote inter-cultural friendships.



Please write to us by 2 September. All shortlisted candidates will be invited to an interview on 20 September. Send your applications to 322 Old Fort Town Singapore 223120.

Block 76A Crescent Street
#21-62
Singapore 761262

15 June 2018

Ms Miranda Sharma
Director
Think Big
322 Old Fort Town
Singapore 223120

Dear Ms Miranda Sharma,

Application for travel scholarship

I would like to apply for the travel scholarship that was advertised in The Pacific Times on 13 June 2018. I have always been interested in travelling to experience the different cultures of the world. Thus I see this scholarship as an opportunity to do just that.

I am a Secondary 4 student at St. Martin's Secondary School. I am the President of the History and Culture Club in school, which focuses its attention on the study of indigenous cultures in the world. As part of my co-curricular activity, I have done research on the culture and beliefs of the hill tribes in Thailand as their history and tradition have been strong influences on their social and economic development. Hence, I would appreciate the opportunity to experience the culture of these hill tribes in Thailand, many of which are undergoing modernisation. It would be interesting to find out first-hand their way of life and traditional practices.

Hence, my choice of destination is Thailand, preferably where I can live with the tribes and document their lifestyles so that we can benefit from a greater understanding of such a rich culture. Once there, I will undertake to record their rituals on important occasions like births, marriages and deaths. I understand that they also hold interesting rites of passage for their young. Till now, no detailed study has been done on these aspects of their lives. I hope to be able to bring the beauty of their rituals to Singapore via my report. The hills, where the tribes live, are also famous for their wildlife. In Singapore, we only see them on television. I would love the opportunity to see them close up.

Of course, I will not neglect the fact that I will be an ambassador of my country. Thus, I will bring with me our own unique culture and practices to share with them. Our customs of respecting the elderly, celebrating National Day and various cultural festivals, and our way of life in HDB estates will be interesting to them as well. I will also share with them our diverse local cuisine, which should surprise and interest them.

I hope to bring back to Singapore a deeper understanding of another culture as well as the friendship of a people steeped in tradition. All these can only be achieved with your generosity and positive appraisal of my application.

I look forward to your favourable reply.

Thank you.

Yours sincerely,

Sheryl Lee

Sheryl Lee

178

Study the information in the police notice below carefully and plan your answer before beginning to write.

You assisted a neighbour in the search for her child who was lost in the neighbourhood. Write an account of the incident to help the police in their investigations. Include the following information.

- Location
- What you saw and heard
- Your role in the incident
- What could have happened

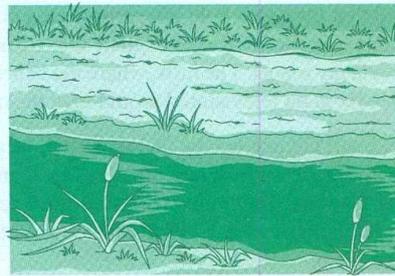
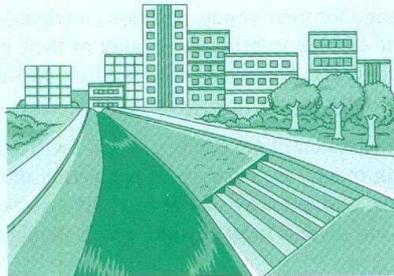
Write your account clearly, with relevant details that will come in useful in the investigations.

Paya Lebar Neighbourhood Police Post (PLNPP)

Request for information

On 4 July 2018, between 2 to 3 pm in Paya Lebar New Town, a 5-year-old girl left her mother's sight and could not be found for the next 1 hour. A search was launched and the child was eventually found in a ditch on the field near the Paya Lebar Monsoon Drain. She is being treated for serious injuries on her legs.

Investigations are on-going to rule out foul-play. PLNPP is appealing to witnesses and anyone with information to come forward to assist with the investigations.



The identities of all witnesses and informants will be kept confidential. Please email PLNPP if you have any information on this case:

publicinfo@plnpp4.gov.sg

To: The Inspector
Paya Lebar Neighbourhood Police Post

From: Tom Clayton

Date: 15 July 2018

Searching for a lost child

I was walking home from school when I heard a woman crying near the monsoon drain that spanned one side of my neighbourhood. Coming closer, I realised that it was Mrs Soon, my neighbour. I rushed up to her, thinking that she was hurt. Between her sobs, she told me that her little daughter, Sarah, was missing.

According to Mrs Soon, she had left, Sarah alone at the playground next to the monsoon drain while she went to the nearby provision shop to purchase some canned food. When she came back, Sarah was nowhere to be found. Upon hearing what had happened, I quickly raised the alarm and eventually, a few other neighbours also came to help. We organised ourselves into three search parties to comb the surrounding area. We were worried that we would miss her if she were hidden among the tall bushes.

After an hour of searching, we finally heard faint cries coming from the surrounding bushes at the other end of the field. We had to hack through the thick bushes to get to the sound. Finally, we located Sarah who was trapped in a narrow ditch that was obscured by the thick undergrowth. She was bleeding and both legs could have been fractured or broken. Apparently, she had wandered off from the playground after feeling bored at being left alone by her mother. When she found herself in strange surroundings, she had panicked and tried to run out. Unfortunately, she fell into the ditch and could not free herself. She had remained there until we found her.

179

Study the information in the notice below carefully and plan your answer before beginning to write.

You spotted two strangers within the school compound. Later, you discovered that things had been stolen from your school.

Give an account of the incident using some or all of the following points. Your account will be used by the school safety committee to enhance crime prevention measures in school.

- Description of the strangers
- Where and when they were seen
- How they were behaving
- What they were doing

Write your account clearly, with relevant details that will be helpful to your reader.

Marine Parade Secondary School

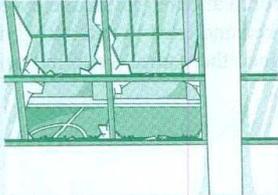
• **School Safety Committee**

In view of the recent cases of theft, the school safety committee is working on crime prevention measures that can be implemented school-wide.

We welcome all students to write to us to give detailed accounts of incidents where the safety of school property had been compromised. This information will help us plug the loopholes in our current safety policies.

Please send the information to:
schoolsafety@mpss.edu.sg

Thank you.



22 August 2017: a break-in at the school gym



24 October 2017: 4 sets of Deeson E332 notebooks were among the items stolen from Computer Lab 3

To: Miss Marie Thomson
President, School Safety Committee

From: Jordan Lee

Date: 25 October 2017

Incident involving two strangers within the school compound

At around 5 pm on 24 October 2017, I was walking to the computer labs when I saw two strangers loitering around the staircase next to Computer Lab 3. I noticed them particularly because both of them were behaving furtively, obviously trying not to be noticed.

They were plainly dressed, in muted pastel shades and dark-coloured pants. One of them was tall and thin, while the other was heavier in build but of similar height. Even after I had made my round around the entire school compound, they were still at the same place. I became curious and started to observe them from a distant corner. They were speaking in low tones. Both of them kept glancing at the parking lot nearby. Soon after, a small van drove into the lot. I remember wondering whether the driver had reported at the guardpost before coming into the lot. Then, my phone rang and I attended to an urgent matter.

At this point, the strangers were left alone in the secluded area. There were no prefects or teachers patrolling nearby.

About half an hour later, there was a flurry of activity in the corridor, after which an announcement over the public address system informed the school that some computers had been stolen from Computer Lab 3. The simple locks on the doors were easily broken. The security bars on the windows were also sawn off. A total of \$20 000 worth of school equipment was reported stolen. Even the technician's personal items like his wallet, smart phone and tennis racquet were missing. I ran to the office to report what I had witnessed to the principal.

As a result, the principal was able to give the police officers a fairly accurate description of the robbers as well as the van they had probably escaped in. Eventually, the police traced the robbers to a shop at an industrial park nearby. They were caught red-handed trying to remodel the computers for export.

180

Study the information in the printout of the webpage below carefully and plan your answer before beginning to write.

Recently, you witnessed an argument between your classmate John and another student in school. The prefectorial board is investigating the incident to establish whether there was any wrongdoing. Write a report of the incident you witnessed to help with the investigation.

Write your report in an objective tone, with relevant details to clarify John's role in the incident.

<http://www.oldtownsec.edu/prefects/prefectelections/Eric>

34th Prefect Elections (1 August – 10 September)

John Gnomes *Perfect Prefect*



Hi everyone! I'm John, your perfect prefect!

I am from Secondary 2A, and I hope to serve the school as a prefect for the next two years. I have served as a class monitor and I am now the junior captain of the tennis team. I strive to be courageous and fair, and will lend anyone a listening ear. I will also uphold our school motto – Courage, Integrity, Love – and do my best to be your voice.

Vote for me and you'll have a perfect prefect on your side!

LEAVE A COMMENT

Liu Bihan: John was our monitor last year. He did an awesome job! We're so proud of him.
4 Aug 3.32 pm

Sharmini P: Not sure about John...Heard him raise his voice at someone near the hall last week. It could have been a quarrel.
4 Aug 3.55 pm

Aisen Wang: What happened? Oh no. The prefect board should investigate and clarify. We don't want a candidate who has issues with his behaviour.
4 Aug 5.45 pm

Sharmini P: Don't know what happened. Quite a big argument. But yes, the prefect board should let us know if there's any issue with him.
4 Aug 5.50 pm

M. Yusof: Get your facts right, not his fault. I know John – there's no issue with him.
4 Aug 7.02 pm

© Old Town Secondary School Prefectorial Board
Send all inquiries to info@prefects.oldtown.edu

To: Mr Ben Cooper
Teacher-in-charge
The Prefectorial Board

From: Megan Lim

Date: 6 August 2018

Argument between two boys in school

Last Friday (3 Aug) at about 2 pm, I was walking past the hall when I saw my classmates John Gnomes and Eric Tan in a heated argument. John was telling Eric that he had to go to the AVA room for a history retest, but the latter seemed furious at the suggestion that he had failed the earlier test. He refused to go and John warned him that the history teacher, Miss Tan, had specifically asked for Eric to be at the room.

By this time, their loud voices had attracted a huge crowd of curious students. Eric became even more agitated with the crowd around him. He shouted that John was deliberately doing it to humiliate him. John was vehement in his denial of such nefarious intentions. While John did raise his voice slightly, he remained calm while clarifying his intentions.

At this time, Miss Tan came along and saw them arguing. She asked them what the matter was and both took turns to explain it to her. She smiled after she had heard the story and explained that she had asked for Eric to be present at the test, as she needed his help in administering the retest. She admitted having asked John to be sure that Eric be told about her wishes. But she had neglected to tell him that he was to be the invigilator, not the one to be tested. John, being unaware of the reason for Eric to be in the room, had thought that Eric had to retake the test. John quickly apologised to Eric for his mistake. The latter also admitted to being too rash in thinking that John was out to humiliate him after he had beaten John in the last test.

The incident arose purely out of a misunderstanding. John did not say anything that might suggest that he was trying to hurt Eric. The teacher was pleased that both of them were quick to admit their mistakes, and further extended her apologies to both students for not making the matter clear. In the end, both of them agreed to help Miss Tan in administering the test. The crowd dispersed soon after.

181

Study the information in the notice below carefully and plan your answer before beginning to write.

You were in a store when you witnessed a person shoplifting.

Write an eyewitness report to assist in the police investigations. In your report, explain what had taken place based on the questions below. Elaborate further on important details.

- What did the person look like?
- What items were taken?
- What was your role in the incident?
- How did the person get away with the items?

Write your report in an objective tone, with relevant details to help the police understand the roles of the people involved.

Appeal for witnesses



On 14 December 2018 between 4 and 4.30 pm, a shoplifting incident occurred at Enggah Store. The items under investigation are electronic goods, including a pair of Bluetooth headphones.

We are appealing for witnesses to come forward to help us establish the identity of the suspect.

Please call the hotline or email a detailed report to us. We appreciate any information that may assist in the investigation.

Marine Parade Police Post
Hotline: 6799 1001
Email: info@marineparadepp.gov.sg

To: The Inspector
Marine Parade Police Post

From: Alan Johnson

Date: 16 December 2018

Shoplifting at Enggah Store

I was in Enggah Store at about four o'clock on 14 December when I saw a middle-aged Chinese man behaving furtively at the dried goods section. He was slim with a gaunt face and shifty eyes. The only obvious feature was a tattoo of a dragon that he spotted on his left arm. He was dressed in a simple black T-shirt and dark blue jeans.

Curious about his behaviour, I followed him as he made his way to the electronic goods section. There, I saw him taking a pair of Bluetooth headphones from one of the shelves and then putting it quickly into the brown haversack that he was carrying. He did the same thing with a power bank and a portable speaker. He then made his way casually to the exit. No one else in the store seemed to have paid attention to him.

At this time, I quickly alerted the security guard who was nearby and he called out to the man to stop. The other shoppers were obviously surprised at the commotion and thronged forward to see what was happening. In the confusion, the man ran for the exit. The security guard also broke into a run but could not get past the curious crowd who had gathered at the exit. No one else made an attempt to stop the man. In fact, all the shoppers merely stood by and watched.

I kept shouting to them to stop the man but to no avail. By the time the security guard pushed his way out of the store, the man was already nowhere in sight. The man appeared to be working alone in this incident as I do not recall seeing him communicate with anyone. I left before the police arrived as I was late for my music class.

182

Study the information in the printout of the webpage below carefully and plan your answer before beginning to write.

You are presently in hospital but your parents are overseas. You need help with some matters. Write a letter to a classmate to ask for help. Include the following points.

- Updates about yourself
- Details of interest about school
- What you need help with

Write your letter in a friendly and appreciative tone, showing concern for your classmate and making an appeal for help.

<http://www.stpaulshospital.com/facilities>

ST PAUL'S HOSPITAL

Facilities and Services

Either single or twin rooms are offered to all patients. Patients will benefit from the peaceful and private environment.

All rooms come with attached bathrooms for maximum privacy, convenience and comfort.

A television set is available in each room, and patients may enjoy Channels 1 and 2.

Nurses are on-call at all hours to assist patients. Regular checks and monitoring are also carried out to ensure that patients are responding well to treatment.

Patients will enjoy healthy meals designed by doctors and nutritionists. The menu is rotated every other day.

All inquiries are welcome.

Admissions hotline: 6999 1020

Email: info@stpaulshospital.com



Block 502, Sims Drive
#12 – 123
Singapore 605502

14 April 2018

Dear Jerry,

How are you? I certainly hope you are well, especially after that recent nasty bout of flu that you had. On my part, I am certainly feeling under the weather. I have just gone through an operation to have my appendix removed. I am now recovering at St Paul's Hospital. The appendix was inflamed and I collapsed in pain during a football training session. The coach sent me to the hospital and I was operated on almost immediately.

My family is now away in Hong Kong on a holiday. They received news about my condition yesterday and will only return a week later. I am really bored here with nothing to do. I read and re-read the same magazines. My room has a television set but the channels are really limited. Although I am in a twin room, no one else is occupying the other bed. Thus, I do not have anyone to talk to. Can you imagine that I even welcome the nurse with her frequent monitoring and dreaded injections because at least there is someone to talk to? It is really such a sad situation.

How are things at school? I did not get to see you when you came back to school after your illness as I was already admitted in hospital. Are you back in training for the football tournament now? I am rather disappointed that I may have to miss the first few games because I will still be convalescing then. What about Tommy and the rest of the gang? They came to see me yesterday but I was asleep and missed them. How are lessons? Are they as boring as ever? I must say that not having to attend classes must be the only plus point about being in the hospital.

I hope you will not find it too presumptuous of me to ask you for some help. You see, I need to get shampoo and a disposable razor as no one has brought me any. Could you buy them for me, please? Also, I thought I might as well study for the midyear exam that is coming up soon. So, could you also bring me the textbooks and notes that are under my desk in class? During the last training session, Gary lent me his new football magazine and computer game. I had better return them now as he has been reminding me. They are also under my desk. Could you pass them to Gary please? I will really appreciate your help.

I hope that you will come and see me soon. Thanks again for your help.

Your friend,

Choon Tong

183

Study the information in the brochure below carefully and plan your answer before beginning to write.

You are one of a few students chosen to host a small group of teenage visitors from another country for a day. Write an account to share your experience with your classmates. Your account will be posted on the classroom noticeboard. Include the following details.

- How initial introductions were made
- What activities were carried out
- The response of your guest

Give a clear and informative account. Provide interesting details to help your classmates understand your role in this programme.

Congratulations

You must be excited to be selected as a student host! We know you'll enjoy the experience!

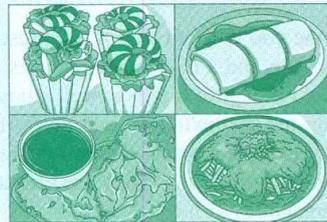
The visitors will meet you in school on 12 July in the morning. Do get to know your new friends and make them feel comfortable.



Tips for student hosts

The International Student Committee has planned some activities in school, including a Welcome Tea, school tour and cultural games. Do participate in these before you make your own plans for the guest you have been assigned to host. Not quite sure what you can do? Here are some tips.

- Try local food at a food centre or coffee shop
- Take public transport and enjoy local sights
- Visit a museum to learn about Singapore history
- Visit a shopping mall or neighbourhood shops for souvenirs
- Have a karaoke session
- Meet the family at home and have some home-cooked food



The visitors will return to the hostel by 9 pm. Have fun and stay in touch!

© Redview Secondary School International Student Committee

The day started with a welcome tea for the visiting French students. All the students who were selected to host them took places among them to facilitate introductions later during the tea. The principal addressed us with a welcome speech, followed by the leader of the visiting students thanking us for having them here. Even though his English was halting, we sensed the sincerity of his words. After that, formal introductions were made and then each host had to bring his guest for a tour around the school.

I took my guest, Pierre, on the route designated by our school's International Student Committee and introduced him to some aspects of our school life. He was receptive and even asked a few questions about our co-curricular activities and school subjects. Later, we played a series of traditional games that were planned for them. One of the games we taught them was the 'chaptah', a traditional Malay game, which was simply using the flat side of the ankle to kick a feathered object into the air. The greater the number of times one keeps it in the air, the more one was likely to win the game.

After that, a few of us took the guests out of the school for a first-hand experience of local life. They were shown the local wet market, some local food stalls as well as the nearby shopping mall. They even had a chance to taste the local cuisine.

We also took our guests to Serangoon Road to watch the Thaipusam procession, whereby the Hindu devotees pierced themselves with needles while carrying other contraptions. After that, each host took the guest he was paired with home for dinner.

I took Pierre to my house where he was treated to a sumptuous Hokkien-style dinner. He particularly enjoyed the sweet and sour meatballs as well as the prawn noodles. I then introduced him to karaoke. He warmed up to it so fast that soon he was belting out English pop songs. He was so comfortable with the friends whom I invited over to meet him that they were soon exchanging email addresses. Pierre was sorry that he had to leave to go back to the hostel. He told me that he had enjoyed himself tremendously and would come back in his personal capacity to visit us when he had his next school holiday. My father then drove him back to the hostel.

184

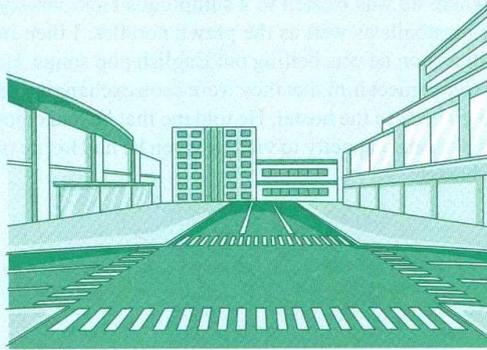
Study the information in the notice below carefully and plan your answer before beginning to write.

You witnessed an accident involving a motorcycle and a girl in a shopping area. Write an eyewitness account of the incident to assist the police in the investigation. You should include the following points as well as any other important details.

- Position and behaviour of pedestrians
- Speed of the motorcycle
- Actions taken by the motorcyclist

Write your account clearly and in an objective tone. Provide relevant details to help the police establish the facts of this case.

Traffic Police Department
Important Notice: Serious Accident
 21 February (Wed) 7 pm
 Road Junction Opposite Canopy Shopping Centre



A motorcyclist and a female pedestrian were involved in a serious road accident.

All witnesses and anyone with information are requested to come forward to assist with the investigation.

Please contact the Traffic Police Department if you have any information on this case.

Email: info@trafficpolice.sg
 Hotline: 69991010

To: The Inspector
Traffic Police Department

From: Sandra Yeo

Date: 24 February 2018

Road Accident opposite Canopy Shopping Centre

I was waiting to cross at the junction of Canopy Shopping Centre at around 7 pm on Wednesday when an accident involving a motorcyclist and a girl occurred. Before the accident happened, I had already noticed a group of male students on the other side of the road. The girl was standing on her own some distance away.

The male students were dressed in light grey school uniforms and were making a lot of noise. Obviously they were joking about someone in the group as they kept pointing at a short boy who looked annoyed. Suddenly, the short boy became angry and started shouting loudly at another boy. An argument broke out between the two as the rest of the boys tried to pacify them. They began shoving each other roughly. During the commotion, the short boy fell onto the road. At that moment, a motorcycle was coming down the road at a rather high speed. When the rider noticed the short boy still scrambling to get up, he swerved the motorcycle but in the process lost control of it. The motorcycle ploughed right into the girl as she did not have enough time to react.

The impact of the crash threw the girl a few metres from where she was standing and she landed on a flowerbed with blood flowing out from her nostrils. She was barely conscious. The motorcyclist immediately went to her aid, even though he was limping from a deep gash on his thigh.

I quickly called the police using my mobile phone. Within ten minutes, the ambulance arrived and both the girl and the rider were taken to the hospital. The police interviewed a few onlookers, after which the male students were brought back to the police station for questioning.

185

Study the information in the printout of the blog post below carefully and plan your answer before beginning to write.

A blogger popular among the elderly recently wrote a post that has since generated a lot of public attention and discussion. Write a letter to the forum page of a local newspaper to share your views in response to the original blog post. You may include the following points.

- Why the issue concerns you
- Your own experience(s)
- Your suggestion(s)

Write your letter in a polite but confident tone, showing that it is important for everyone to be objective and constructive when trying to resolve this issue.

Wed 26/9

An unpleasant incident on the bus

Two days ago, while boarding a bus, a group of noisy teenagers, who were initially behind me, jumped the queue. Before I knew it, they had shoved me aside and got on before me.

When I finally boarded and was walking towards an empty seat, two boys from the same group were pushing each other along the aisle. I tried to avoid them but somehow couldn't react quickly enough — my 65-year-old body isn't agile anymore. They knocked me off balance, causing me to suffer a bad fall. They stared and laughed, but didn't come to help me get up. No apology at all, just continuous jeering. Their behaviour was completely disappointing.

Isn't it about time that parents and schools do something to arrest this problem of bad manners among all teenagers? They have too much freedom and spare time, making them a nuisance in public. Teach them manners, and give them something useful to do.

From the blog *Silver Lining* by Joanne B. Matthews



It has been two days and my arm is still quite badly bruised from the fall. There was no word of apology from the teenagers.

87 Seabreeze Rond
Singapore 192876

2 October 2018

The Editor
News Today
58 Dover Lane
Singapore 852855

I am writing in response to the issue raised by Ms Joanne B. Matthews in her blog post on 26/9. The issue of poorly-behaved teenagers is also a concern of mine. Young people are our country's future and it is important for them to develop good character and be disciplined.

I have also met teenagers who were unruly, rude and inconsiderate. They were hostile to advice and tended to substitute real speech with vulgarities. I had an unpleasant encounter with a group of them at a shopping centre. I was going towards the escalator when they roughly jostled me aside. There was no word of apology from them. In fact, they continued to stare at me in a hostile manner, as if daring me to tell them off. I decided not to provoke them.

Of course, one way to deal with this is to instil discipline in them. Such discipline must start at home where parents should inculcate the right values and behaviour. However, many parents are too busy with their jobs to deal with their children effectively. Schools may be the next best place to try to correct their poor behaviour, but schools are also handicapped by their many responsibilities. A teacher having to deal with forty students in a class will hardly have the time or energy to handle recalcitrant and rebellious students.

However, if something is not done to correct the situation, some young people may continue to abuse the freedom given to them and cause trouble for the general public. Some ways of dealing with this problem would be to give them constructive activities to participate in. Offering them counselling is another alternative. It would be good if schools or the community can organise community work for these teenagers to occupy their time. This would alienate them from street gangs and other unsavoury characters.

Nonetheless, I disagree with Ms Matthew's view that all young people have bad manners. The number of unruly young people is actually small. Just because we see the rebellious ones, we paint them all with the same tar brush. That is rather unfair. I have come across many teenagers who are kind and polite. Hence, it is important that we deal with the issue objectively by targeting only the individuals who need help with discipline.

I hope that more people will come forward to offer constructive ideas on how to help the younger generation.

Yours faithfully,

Allan Boon

Allan Boon

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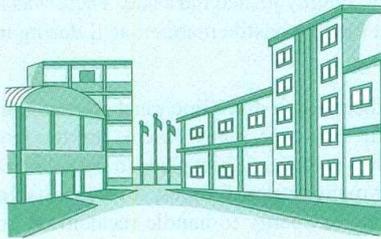
Study the information in the notice below carefully and plan your answer before beginning to write.

Your school will be the focus of an upcoming feature programme on television. Write a letter to the principal to suggest what the programme should feature. You should include the following details.

- The people and activities to be featured
- What these people and activities show about the school

Write your letter in a polite and persuasive tone, convincing the principal of the merits of your proposal.

Call for Proposals



Taman Indah Secondary School will be featured in an episode of *What's on in School?* Right Media Corporation is inviting the school to propose the people and activities to be featured.

Students are welcome to write to the Principal, Mr Han Soo Joe, with their suggestions.

The Media and Outreach Committee, headed by Mr Han, will select the best suggestions and work with Right Media Corporation on the script. Filming will take place in Term 3 this year.

Email your proposals to ideas@media.ti.edu by 30 March. Students with the best proposals will be invited to volunteer as part of the media crew during filming.



Dear Mr Han,

Ideas for the feature programme on our school

I am pleased to share my suggestions on the people and activities to be featured in the upcoming TV programme "What's on in School?" After careful deliberation, I have come up with the following suggestions.

One teacher who can be featured is the physical education teacher, Mr Low. This is because his ideas on keeping fit are always novel and enjoyable. He makes running around the track a great deal more fun than usual because of the games we play along the way, like 'catching' and 'tag'. This takes the monotony out of running, so much so that sometimes we find ourselves having run ten laps without realising it! His rapport with the students is also excellent, and thus he would be a good example of the close relationships our school teachers share with us. After all, it is such camaraderie that has seen the school results soaring in recent years and the school spirit stronger than ever.

Another person who can be featured is Mrs Ong, a physics teacher. She encourages discovery and exploratory learning instead of learning by rote. Thus, her classes are filled with interesting experiments to examine real-life problems, like how the pyramids at Giza can be built without any modern equipment. The students are always keen to learn, and even continue discussions with her after school. This is a good area to focus on during the programme, as it will attest to our conducive learning climate.

A good activity to feature will be the Drama Club rehearsals for the school production (in Term 4) that are going on right now. The entire play was conceptualised and written by our own students, and its production is entirely managed by the students. This should be interesting, as it is testimony to the school's faith in the students' abilities. Also, the community project set up by the Volunteers Club to promote awareness of the plight of the less fortunate can be highlighted. The ongoing exhibition of the club's visits to the welfare homes as well as the termly picnics and concerts that are held to entertain the people from these homes are also meaningful activities. Our school is reputed for having pioneered a comprehensive community service programme, and the Volunteers Club, as a spin-off from the school's community service programme, will give the audience an idea of our students' initiative and community spirit.

I hope that you will consider my suggestions.

Thank you.

Yours sincerely,

Yong Boon Keng

Yong Boon Keng

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Study the information in the printout of the webpage below carefully and plan your answer before beginning to write.

Your friend Joseph Lim is running in the Student Council election. Write a speech that you will deliver during assembly to support your friend. Use the details below and include other ideas of your own.

- Why your friend fulfils the requirements as a leader
- Your friend's contributions to the school

Write your speech in a confident and persuasive tone. Aim to convince the audience that your friend is a good choice as a leader.

<http://www.marinasec.edu.sg/scelections>

Student Council Elections

15 July Update: The selection committee has shortlisted 15 nominees who will stand for elections. Congratulations to all nominees. Please see the schedule and venues for debates here. Election Day is on 20 August and results will be announced on 22 August.

Each year, we welcome a new team of student leaders who will serve the student body as members of the Student Council.

Members of the Student Council are expected to:

- Be academically strong
- Have outstanding contributions to their CCAs
- Have a proven record of leadership and service to the community

Nominations are now closed. Students who wish to make speeches to support a nominee may register for time slots during assembly.



Good afternoon Principal, teachers and fellow students. Today, I am here to share with you about a person who has distinguished himself as a leader in the school. When we think of a leader, several qualities spring to mind — outstanding in both sports and studies, selfless, active, helpful and a good example to others. Joseph Lim is one person who possesses all these qualities and more.

Joseph is no stranger to all of us. He has not only brought the school glory in the sporting field, but has also won many academic awards in all his examinations. We all know of his outstanding performance in rugby, tennis and swimming. He is probably one of the few students who has played three distinctly different sports and excelled in every one of them. In the academic arena, he has also not disappointed. He has scored distinctions in all his subjects every year. Joseph embodies the qualities of discipline, determination and dedication. These are also the traits that will make him a good Student Councillor.

In addition, Joseph has always been interested and active in the various clubs that he is a member of. As the President of the Chess Society, he introduced a series of sparring matches to hone the skills of our chess players. This move resulted in our success at the chess championships. In his capacity as the Secretary of the Interact Club, he enthusiastically mooted the idea of adopting several welfare homes for which we can raise funds. As a result of his vision, we were able to donate no less than \$5000 to each of the adopted homes. Also, he was instrumental in planning the end-of-year party for the graduating class last year, which was hailed as innovative, spectacular and infinitely enjoyable.

To be a Councillor, one must be able to present oneself well in public. Joseph's eloquence has already been proven by his numerous victories in public speaking competitions held every year. Furthermore, he has shown a great deal of concern for the new students who joined the school at the beginning of the year. This is obvious from the effective orientation programmes that he conducted for them.

Joseph always has the welfare of others in mind. Vote for him and he will serve you to the best of his ability. There is no better choice than Joseph Lim.

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Study the information in the printout of the webpage below carefully and plan your answer before beginning to write.

You are a reporter covering the news of an expedition team returning to Singapore after an accident. One of the expedition members, Ken Ong, risked his life to save his team mate. Write a magazine article on the team's arrival at the airport where a press conference was held. Provide the following information.

- How Ken Ong was welcomed
- What was said during the press conference
- What was done to honour Ken Ong

Write your article in an objective and confident tone. Aim to help your reader understand Ken Ong's contributions and response to the reception.

<http://www.bignews.sg/breaking/liveupdates>

BREAKING: Accident on Mt Algers

Key points:

- Unexpected heavy thunderstorm and poor visibility since 07:10
- Singapore Mt Algers Expedition team trapped; 2 members injured from deep fall

Live reporting [page refreshes automatically]

10:49 Minister for Community and Sports: "We will bring everyone back safely."

The Ministry for Community and Sports is in contact with the Malaysian rescue team. Rescue team reports that the storm has eased. Route to rescue point is difficult but the team is making good progress. Minister Chan Bing Soo: "There are very strong winds, but they will be fine. We're worried about Ken Ong's injury. We will bring everyone back safely. We thank the Malaysian team."

10:44 Heavy thunderstorm unusual at this time of the year

This time of the year is actually optimal for climbing Mt Algers. Heavy thunderstorm is unusual, Andrew Sundram, veteran climber, has tweeted.

10:31 Robert Lau: "Ken Ong made a very difficult manoeuvre."

President of Climber Club (sponsor of this expedition), Robert Lau, told reporters outside his office: "Ken Ong made a very difficult manoeuvre – very clever, very brave and completely selfless. Thanks to him, James Tan is safe. I know these men – they will survive this."

10:26 Update: Singapore expedition team has been trapped for the past 3 hours on Mt Algers in heavy thunderstorm. A rescue team is on the way. 2 hikers are injured.

10:23 Climber Club says Mt Algers is challenging but one of the climbers' favourites.

Climber Club's video of Mt Algers on a clear day
[Click on image to play video.]



The Hero's Welcome

by Angela Lee

The hero of the recent Mt Algers expedition touched down on our soils yesterday evening. Ken Ong came home to a rousing welcome as over forty relatives and friends met him at the airport with banners screaming 'Our Hero, Ken!' The press was also out in full force to record the return of the man who risked his life during a heavy thunderstorm to save a fellow climber on the expedition.

Ong was ushered quickly into a room specially arranged for his reception and press conference. The president of the club that had sponsored the expedition, Mr Robert Lau, started the conference by making a speech about the valour and selflessness of heroes and how we had one in our midst. Mr Lau then went on to give an account of the events up on the blustery summit that had almost cost the life of the climber, James Tan. According to Mr Lau, Ken made a very clever but difficult manoeuvre to get James to safety. Due to Ken's courage, James escaped with only minor sprains while Ken himself had to be hospitalised for severe tearing of his muscle tissues. Following this, James, who owes his life to Ken's selfless actions, spoke of his gratitude to Ken.

By this time, Ken was almost in tears as he received the accolades from his team-mates and friends. When he was presented with a gift of \$50 000 from the club as a gesture of their appreciation of and pride in him, Ken stood up to say that it was what anyone else in his shoes would have done. After this modest declaration, he declined the cheque and requested for it to be donated to charity instead. Ken's last words before he left to go home with his family were, "I'll like to thank everyone for their kind words today. I really didn't deserve it at all."

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Study the information in the printout of the email below carefully and plan your answer before beginning to write.

Your principal received an email about a wallet that was found at a park. The wallet belongs to you. Write a statement to explain this incident to the principal. Address the following questions in your statement.

- What reasons did you have for being out of school during lessons?
- Who was the man involved?
- What were the papers that changed hands?
- Why did you need so much money?

Write your statement in a polite and objective tone, with the aim of helping the principal clarify the incident.

File	Edit	View	Tools	Message	Help
<p>To: principal@seashellsec.edu From: andrewho@nicemail.com Date: Tue 24 July 2018 11:10 am Subject: Wallet Found in Seashell Park</p>					

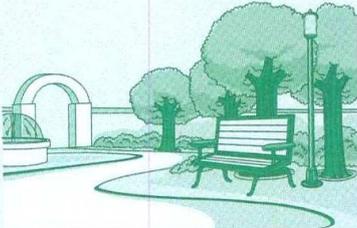
Dear Principal,

I was in Seashell Park today at around 8:30 am when I saw a student in uniform arguing with a man. Since the park is just opposite your school, I'm guessing that the student is from your school. Some papers changed hands between the student and the man. Feeling something amiss, I approached them. However, both of them ran off before I could speak to them. In a hurry, the student dropped a black wallet containing \$427.

I could not establish the wallet owner's identity. The enclosed images show the wallet as well as the location near the park entrance where the wallet was found. You may wish to use the information to identify the owner.

No doubt you will wish to investigate this incident. If the owner is indeed from your school, please let me know and I will deliver the wallet to the school. If the owner's identity cannot be established, I will send the wallet to Pasir Ris Police Post tomorrow evening.

Andrew Ho (Mobile: 9123 4433)

I was supposed to pay the fees for the educational trip to Malaysia on Tuesday, but in my hurry to get to school, I left the sum of \$427 on my study table. The forms to be handed in for my application to join the educational trip were also left behind. As the application forms had to be handed in before 10 am, I was left with no choice but to call my father before he left for work to deliver them to me.

My father told me to meet him at the park just opposite the school because it was more convenient for him to drive there than to make a turn into the school. He had to rush to work so that was a more efficient way for him to meet me.

He came soon after the phone call but was in a foul mood because I had inconvenienced him. He had to get to work early to prepare some documents and my forgetfulness would delay him. I was also upset with his tone and argued with him, telling him that it was not my fault since I had woken up late due to my late-night revision for my examination. Finally, he gave me the application forms as well as the money. I put the money into my wallet and checked the forms to make sure that they were all that I required for my application.

I rushed back to class. My father also needed to rush off or he would be late for work. We parted company then. When I got back to class, I discovered that I had lost my wallet. When I went back to the park to look for the wallet, it was nowhere to be found.

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Study the information in the leaflet below carefully and plan your answer before beginning to write.

You observed a member of the Association for the Hearing-Impaired selling handmade toys at a train station. He showed the leaflet printed below to his customers. Write a letter to the president of the association about your observations and suggestions. Include the following points.

- How did the seller encourage customers to buy the toys?
- What was the response of the customers?
- What could be done to improve sales?

Write your letter in a polite and confident tone, showing your interest in bringing about an improvement in the situation.

Dear Friend,

I am Marcus Lau and I am hearing-impaired. I lost my hearing when I was ten years old. I am a member of the Association for the Hearing-Impaired (AHI). I work with AHI to design programmes to help the hearing-impaired community become independent and self-sufficient.

Through the Craft for Life programme, our members learn to make stuffed toys by hand for sale. This helps us supplement our income. We hope you will support us by bringing one of these toys home.

You may also like to make a donation to AHI so that we can continue running our programmes.

You are welcome to contact us.

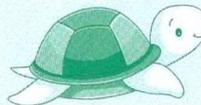
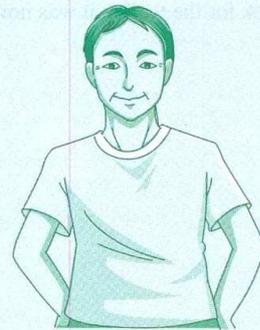
Association for the Hearing-Impaired (AHI)

44 Mayworth Road Singapore 233100

Email: info@ahi.org

Hotline: 6777 1029

Charity Registration No. TY2001289



Block 22 Bridges Avenue
#12-168
Singapore 220168

28 May 2018

The President
Association for the Hearing-Impaired (AHI)
44 Mayworth Road
Singapore 233100

Dear Sir,

Suggestions to improve the sales of AHI products

It is not unusual to see members of the Association for the Hearing-Impaired (AHI) hawking their handmade stuffed toys at the corners outside train stations. On Monday last week, I came upon one such member along the busy thoroughfare of the Orchard train station.

He was holding many stuffed toys and trying to capture the attention of the passers-by by showing a neatly-typed leaflet containing an introduction of himself as a member of the association. But this did not attract much attention as the people were all rushing to go to work. It was early in the morning and many were already late for work. The seller tried to accost people whom he thought would be more sympathetic to his cause, like young women and well-dressed executives. But each time, he did not get to finish his sales pitch using hand gestures. In fact, in the time that I was observing him, only three sales were made, all by young ladies who obviously found the stuffed toys adorable. The rest of the people clearly saw no use in a stuffed toy and were not interested.

The association should look into other products that could be sold to raise funds. Stuffed toys are not everyone's cup of tea. People would be more willing to buy things like tissue packs and even mint sweets. These will definitely sell better. Furthermore, it was obvious that the seller had difficulty persuading people to buy because many could not understand his gestures. It would be more effective if a volunteer could accompany each hearing-impaired seller. This way, the latter would be able to communicate better with the public. Also, the timing of the sale is not productive as many people were on their way to work. Lunchtime and after work hours would be a better alternative to try to target buyers. The hearing-impaired have problems raising funds, so the association could consider putting more thought into making such fund raising efforts more effective.

Thank you.

Yours faithfully,

Mong Lee

Mong Lee

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Study the information in the email below carefully and plan your answer before beginning to write.

You have received an email from a friend who recently transferred to another school. Your friend wishes to know what is happening at your school. Respond to her email to give her the news. Ensure that you cover the following points.

- News about friends and your form teacher
- News about the school's performance in sports
- An unusual situation about one of your friends

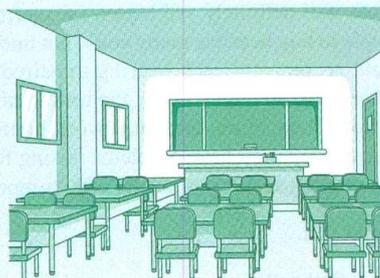
Write your email in a warm and friendly tone, conveying your pleasure to hear from your friend and your wish to meet her again.

File	Edit	View	Tools	Message	Help
To: Winnie Tan <berryweisi@littlemail.com> From: Susan Wong <susanxchoc22@littlemail.com> Date: Sat 24 Feb 2018 9:10 pm Subject: How are you?					

Dear Winnie,

Hi and how are you? I miss you and the rest of the class so much. As you know, the new school in my neighbourhood has opened and I have started classes there. Now I can reach school in ten minutes on foot! Can you believe I used to take two hours to travel to school?

My new classmates are really nice so it's made the adjustment much easier for me. We get along well, and many of them are fans of Ten Maniacs just like us! Here's a picture of my brand new classroom. Can you guess where my seat is? (Hint: Be envious!)



How is everyone doing? Over here, I haven't yet met a teacher as lovely as our dear Miss Wu. The teachers here look very serious all the time, not sure why. I wonder which class is lucky enough to get Miss Wu as its form teacher this year? Also, I have been thinking about Lina – I hope she is all right now?

I remember we were hoping that the school will do well in sports. We used to get an off day to celebrate excellent results in sports. What were the results of the recent tournaments?

Hope you are well and will be able to write to me soon.

Your friend,

Susan

Dear Susan,

It was indeed a pleasant surprise receiving news from you so soon. From what I hear, you seem to be doing really well. I am glad that you are now attending a school nearer to your house. I really cannot imagine how you survived travelling a full two hours to our school in the past. What a lovely classroom! I'm guessing you have a seat by the window? Lucky girl!

I am doing quite well in school and by the looks of things, my troubled knee should not be giving me any more problems.

Lina is also doing well in class. She has certainly got over that rascal of a boyfriend and is settling down to studying for the exams. For some time now, we were worried about her breakup; she used to wander about the school with tears glistening in her eyes! It was a little like some drama serial, wasn't it? But she is fine now, after our constant companionship and advice.

Miss Wu is again our form teacher this year, and we are certainly ecstatic about it. She is such a wonderful lady, isn't she? Remember how she used to laugh at our jokes instead of punishing us? We certainly learnt the error of our ways fast when we realised that she was hardly affected by our behaviour!

We are again the top girls' school in sports, being champions in tennis, netball and swimming. This is for the fifth year running and the principal was so happy that she gave us a day off last month. Isn't that great? Lina, Mary, Kavita and I had a great time on that day, watching a movie in the morning and then having a sumptuous lunch at a local restaurant. After that, we went for a karaoke session and sang to our hearts' content. We really wished that you were there; I'm sure you would have sung the loudest.

However, something tragic happened recently. Mary's mother passed away two weeks ago. She was devastated as they were very close. Mary herself fell seriously ill after that. She has lost so much weight that we are all really distressed. We are now taking turns to keep her company after school, but things have not improved. She is not the cheerful Mary you used to banter with. We hardly see her smile. Maybe you can spare some time to meet up with her. I'm sure she will like that.

Well, do write to me often. I hope we can meet up during the school holidays. Take care of yourself.

See you soon,

Wei Si

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Study the information in the news article below carefully and plan your answer before beginning to write.

During a school outing to Sembawang Nature Sanctuary, an argument broke out between an illegal drinks stall owner and a student. Your principal has asked you to write an eyewitness account to aid the school's investigation of the incident. Write a report to the principal. You should address the following questions.

- Who were the parties involved in the incident?
- What happened during the incident?
- How was the incident resolved?

Write your report in an objective tone, with the aim to help the school authorities understand the roles of the people involved.

<http://www.pacificnews.com/article229103>

Pacific News *Most trustworthy in Asia Pacific*

Thursday 20 Sep

Food and Health Agency issued warning to illegal stall at nature sanctuary

By James Chiang, Health Correspondent

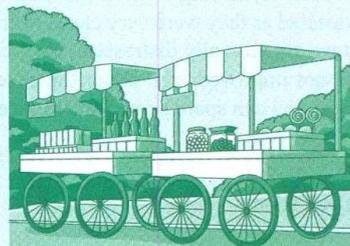
The Food and Health Agency of Singapore (FHA) has issued a warning to Aloysius Poh, 33, the operator of a drinks stall at Sembawang Nature Sanctuary.

Poh's licence to operate the drinks stall was suspended indefinitely last month for failing a food safety check. However, during an impromptu inspection by FHA today, Poh was found to have continued operating his stall despite the suspension.

To continue operations, Poh would need to reapply for the licence and provide evidence of improved safety standards.

Sembawang Nature Sanctuary is a popular venue for school excursions. Several food and souvenir stalls near the exit enjoy a steady stream of customers.

During the recent checks, a spokesperson from FHA said: "FHA will step up on checks to ensure that food safety standards are kept high. Visitors at the sanctuary are advised to patronise only licenced stalls."



Sale of drinks at Sembawang Nature Sanctuary (File photo)

To: Mrs Lewis, Principal
Pacific Secondary School

From: Ahmad Miajoot

Date: 25 September 2018

Incident during school excursion

On Saturday, the 20th of September, my class Sec 4B was on an excursion at the Sembawang Nature Sanctuary.

It was a hot afternoon but we thoroughly enjoyed our visit. We left the park at 4.30 pm. Feeling warm and thirsty, our teacher in charge, Mrs Hoi, had asked us to drink from our water bottles. Some boys did not bring their bottles. Some of them, including Tom, patronised an illegal drinks stall which was located just outside the exit. Due to the recent news about this illegal stall, Mrs Hoi had warned us against patronising it.

My attention was drawn to an argument between Tom and the drinks stallholder, a rather burly man. The stall was dirty but his colourful and ice-cold syrupy drinks were rather inviting. Tom was protesting that the drinks were rather expensive and that the change the man had given him was short of a dollar. The burly man harshly told him to leave and not to hold up the queues of eager customers. Tom bravely and repeatedly demanded his change.

At this moment, Mrs Hoi emerged from the exit gates. She had just attended to a student who was exhausted. One of the students who had overheard the argument had informed her of what was taking place.

Mrs Hoi immediately went up to the man. She heard his explanation but told him that she was not satisfied with his explanation and felt that he had been dishonest. She also warned him that he was plying an illegal trade. Upon hearing this, the stallholder blanched and closed his stall hurriedly. Mrs Hoi then turned her attention to Tom and the other students who had patronised the stall. She reprimanded them for patronising from an illegal and dirty drinks stall even though they had been warned not to. Sheepishly, the students apologised. After this, we then boarded our coach to head back to school.

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Study the information in the programme below carefully and plan your answer before beginning to write.

The Open House Organising Committee of your school has prepared a programme to be sent to parents of prospective students a week before the event. As a member of the committee, you have been asked to write to the parents to introduce the programme. Write a letter to provide details on each part of the programme.

Write your letter in a welcoming and persuasive tone to interest the reader in participating in the event.

Arcadia Secondary School

OPEN HOUSE

Saturday 8 September

8.30 am to 9.45 am *Arcadia Atrium (meeting point)*

Tour of school led by prefects

10.00 am *Arcadia Theatre*

Welcome speech by Mr Amos Tan, Principal

10.30 am *School Field*

March past and displays by uniformed groups

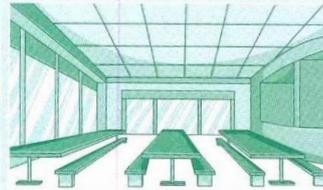
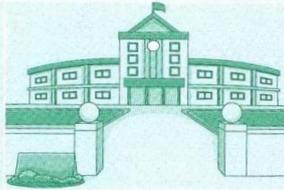
11.00 am *Main Hall*

Exhibition by the gymnastics team and building of rope bridge by the scouts

12 pm to 3 pm *Various Venues*

Display of student projects and live demonstrations in classrooms, laboratories and music rooms

Refreshments will be provided from 10.30 am to 3 pm at the canteen.



ARCADIA SECONDARY SCHOOL 221 Nutmeg Road Singapore 129121 Tel: 6881 2010

Dear Parents,

Open house at Arcadia Secondary School on 8 September

Welcome to our school! Enclosed is a programme for the Open House.

Between 8.30 am and 9.45 am, prefects will lead small groups of parents on a tour of the school. You will be able to view our state-of-the-art sporting facilities, cozy dining hall, creative arts centre and many other places.

Our principal, Mr Amos Tan, appreciates your visit. He will outline the school's academic and non-academic achievements. This is also a good opportunity to ask questions about our school programmes.

The march past and drill displays will demonstrate the skills, teamwork and discipline of the uniformed groups, namely:

- National Cadet Corps
- National Police Cadet Corps
- Red Cross
- Girl Guides

When you view the displays, you will understand why our uniformed groups won two coveted Gold awards at the Youth Competition this year!

We aim to show off the athletic prowess of our gymnasts who have benefited under an enrichment scheme coached by an Asian Games champion. Also, view how our scouts show bravery and perseverance in constructing a rope bridge as safely and speedily as possible.

From noon onwards, there will be demonstrations by teachers and students on what is being taught in the laboratories, music rooms and classrooms. Displays of their projects will be included. We are especially proud to be giving live demonstrations of 'Figo', our pet project dog, built by our Secondary 4 students. This project won first prize in the National Students Robotics Competition last year.

We hope we have interested you in our Open House! See you there.

Open House Organising Committee
Arcadia Secondary School

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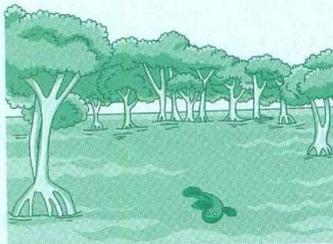
Study the information in the brochure below carefully and plan your answer before beginning to write.

You have been asked to coordinate a year-end outing for the classes in your level. Write a letter to the principal to propose Sungei Buloh Wetland Reserve as the venue. Include the following details.

- Why your proposed venue is suitable
- What students should prepare
- Cost and transportation

Write your letter in a polite and persuasive tone. Aim to convince the principal of the merits of your proposal.

Sungei Buloh Wetland Reserve



The Sungei Buloh Wetland Reserve is one of the few places in Singapore to get in touch with nature. It is an ecological wonder, teeming with rich biodiversity. Various kinds of flora and fauna reside here, including precious mangrove species. Do not miss this incredible opportunity to get to know life in the marshes.



The reserve is also an excellent place for bird watching in a natural habitat. There are numerous resident birds, such as woodpeckers and kingfishers. Additionally, many diverse types of migratory birds come through the area each year.

For an educational and rewarding tour, guides are available upon request. All guides are knowledgeable and engaging. Tours and specially-designed worksheets are suitable for all age groups.

Sungei Buloh Wetland Reserve

301 Neo Tiew Crescent Singapore 718925 Tel: 6794 1401

Opening hours: 7 am to 7 pm daily

Students from schools on the Parks Education Scheme enjoy free entry

To: Mr Edward Lee, Principal

Mayflower Spring Secondary School

Year-end outing for Secondary Four classes

I would like to offer my suggestions for the year-end outing on 15 November.

In considering the nature of the outing, I bore in mind the interests of the students and the educational value of such an outing.

As this is an end-of-year outing, students would prefer a break from the classroom. I would therefore suggest that the activities be held outdoors. As the classes are science classes, I would suggest a visit to the Sungei Buloh Wetland Reserve.

Students can learn about the biology of plants and animals in an educational and enjoyable manner in a natural environment. As you know, much of Singapore's environment is now man-made, so it would be useful for students to view creatures in their natural setting. This experience is a good chance for the students to apply what they have learnt in class.

Sungei Buloh has been developed as a nature reserve. Some migratory birds from the north are making their home here during this season. Life in the marshes can be viewed here. Moreover, there are guides who will offer educational tours to make our experience more rewarding.

Students should wear light clothing for walking around. Long-sleeved shorts or blouses and jeans are recommended to ward off mosquitoes. Walking shoes are recommended. Mosquito repellent, a hat and an umbrella would also come in useful. They should also bring along a pen to record their observations on the worksheets provided.

The centre supplies packet lunches with various diet options and there is a small canteen for refreshments. Water bottles should be brought along.

If you are agreeable, I will request our form teacher to book our school coaches. Students are to assemble in school but on the way back, they can be dropped off at convenient points.

I have calculated the expense. Our school is a member of the Parks Education Scheme, so entry is free for the students. They need to pay only two dollars for transport. This is certainly a good and affordable learning experience for all students.

I hope you will consider my suggestion.

Yours sincerely,

James Richmond

James Richmond

Sec 4A

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Study the information in the email below carefully and plan your answer before beginning to write.

You witnessed an incident in school involving a prank that centred on a mysterious black box. As the editor of the school magazine, write an article for the magazine to clarify the incident. Include the following details.

- Description of the people involved
- Conversation you overheard
- Outcome of the incident

Present the details clearly and objectively to help dispel the rumours about the incident.

File	Edit	View	Tools	Message	Help
<p>To: Trevor Leong <editor@bayviewsec.edu> From: Suresh M <HU1700129P@bayviewsec.edu> Date: Tue 25 Sep 2018 6:10 pm Subject: Letter to the Editor – Bomb Scare?</p>					
<p>Dear Editor,</p> <p>The atmosphere in school is quite unsettling. It seems that there was a bomb scare on campus recently. My classmates and I are worried, since there's a lack of reliable information on the incident. There's no comment from the staff. Neither has the school magazine published any updates. Meanwhile, rumours about the bomb scare are circulating on social media. I have some screen captures here to show you the examples.</p>					
<div style="border: 1px solid #ccc; padding: 5px; margin-bottom: 10px;"> <p>Chewchew99</p> <p>Wow wondering what's actually happening. Are we in danger? Should we avoid certain places in school? Probably a prank. But WHY? #bayviewbomb</p> <p>Mon 24 Sep 2018 9.10 am 88 70 </p> </div>					
<div style="border: 1px solid #ccc; padding: 5px; margin-bottom: 10px;"> <p>OneConnection</p> <p>Oh no #bayviewbomb please don't spoil anything in my beloved sch. (But you can shut down the exams LOL.)</p> <p>Mon 24 Sep 2018 2.15 pm 100 103 </p> </div>					
<p>What is more worrying is the fact that people are making wild speculations and personal attacks. This really has to stop.</p>					
<div style="border: 1px solid #ccc; padding: 5px; margin-bottom: 10px;"> <p>Rainbow Ling</p> <p>If anyone's the culprit that sent the #bayviewbomb it's probably a certain person on the rugby team. Repost if you know what I'm saying...</p> <p>Mon 24 Sep 2018 5.10 pm 13 20 </p> </div>					
<p>Can the school magazine investigate this matter and publish an accurate report to clear the air? Thank you.</p> <p>Suresh M (Sec 3B)</p>					

The Mystery of the Black Box

On 24th September, I was in our school library. My classmates and I were still in the midst of preparing for the end-of-year examinations. I was taking a break and glancing outside the window. My attention was drawn to a red Toyota Celica car which drove past the school gates into the school porch near the general office.

There were two boys and two middle-aged men inside. One was a swarthy, muscular and tall Indian. The other was a plump, short Chinese man. They got out of the car. I could see that one of them was carrying a box that was the size of a shoe box. It was wrapped in black paper.

There were very few people in school at that time. This was late afternoon and there were no after-school activities that day. Therefore, it was quite quiet. About ten minutes later, I heard a very loud conversation below to this effect:

Man's voice: Are you sure you placed the box properly?

First boy's voice: Don't worry!

Second boy's voice: That will teach them a lesson (laughing). I can imagine their reactions!

Men and boys: Ha! Ha! Ha!

Then I saw Samy, our caretaker. He was shouting at the men and the two boys and was in hot pursuit of them. However, the men and the boys got away in the car. They then sped out of the school.

Samy went into the general office and I heard the voice of an office staff member. Then there was silence.

I was curious to know what had happened and went downstairs. At the entrance to the office, I saw the Vice-Principal, Mr Lim. He was with the office staff. They were keeping their distance away from the black box, which was some five metres away from them in the corridor. They were eyeing it with suspicion and fear as smoke was coming out of the box. A foul smell was also coming from it. Everyone had the same idea on their minds: 'Was it a bomb?'

Then Samy did a very brave thing. He stepped on the box. There was a cracking sound. The box tore open. Some yellowish liquid matter flowed out from the box on to Samy's shoes. Samy then uttered in relief, "Rotten eggs."

Mr Lim, who was a trained chemistry teacher, examined some white powder in the box as smoke was still emanating from it. Immediately he blurted out, "Harmless stuff, not explosive. Relax."

We heaved a sigh of relief. The police were notified and I was one of those interviewed. I learnt that some time after, the two men and the two boys were taken to the police station for questioning.

I am writing this article at the school's request. The police and school authorities decided not to make the incident public as the students are in the midst of the examinations. However, due to the rumours of a bomb scare in school, the principal has asked me, as editor of the school magazine, to clarify the incident.

196

Study the information in the printout of the webpage below carefully and plan your answer before beginning to write.

You saw an accident take place on a field in school. Write a report of what happened to assist the principal in the investigation. Include the following points.

- Who were the people at the scene?
- What caused the accident?
- What assistance was given to the injured student?

Write a clear report with relevant details to help the principal understand the roles of the people involved in the incident.

<http://www.janinsecsch.edu/dailyupdates>

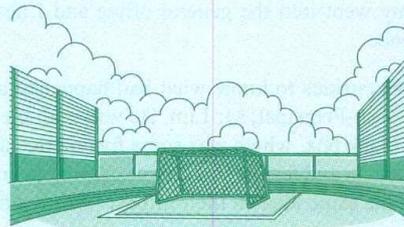
Daily Updates@Janins Sec

6 April 8:00

School Field Accident

An accident occurred on the school field yesterday (5 Apr) at around 3 pm. Three Lower Secondary boys were involved. One of the boys was injured and the goal post was damaged.

The school is conducting investigations. Eyewitnesses are requested to come forward with their accounts. Please email Mrs Nair, the principal (head@janinssec.edu).



Damages are being assessed and repairs will be carried out soon. The school field is out of bounds until further notice.

Students are reminded to take extra care when playing all sports and games. They should inform a member of the staff immediately when any injury or damage to school property has occurred.

To: Mr Jacob Peters, Principal
Janins Secondary School

From: Terrence Lim

Date: 9 April 2018

Incident at the school field

I am Terrence Lim, a school prefect from Secondary 4A. At 2.45 pm on 5 April, I was on duty at the school canteen. My responsibility was to ensure the discipline of the students taking their break. The canteen is adjacent to the field where there is a small goalpost for students to practise target shooting under a teacher's supervision.

At 3 pm, I noticed three Secondary One boys playing with a ball there. They were Amos Lim, Sandip Kumar and Calvin Tee from Sec 1C. I recognise them as I had met them during Orientation.

I saw Amos positioning himself between the goal posts while the other two boys tried to kick the ball past him into the goal. They were doing it quietly as they knew they were not allowed to use the goalposts. I was about to warn them when the following incident took place.

Calvin, a tall and well-built student, kicked the ball vigorously. It hit the goalpost. At the same time, Amos jumped quickly to the goal post on his right. His hands hit the post at the same time as the ball. Without warning, the goal posts teetered and the whole structure, including the horizontal beam, fell forward onto the ground. Unfortunately, Amos was caught under the beam. He let out a cry of distress as he too fell to the ground. Sandip and Calvin fled.

Immediately, I moved in to help Amos by lifting the beam. Then I noticed Mr Richard Lim, our form teacher. He had been alerted by some students who had seen the incident from the canteen. Mr Lim and I then checked on Amos. He felt the boy's pulse and then asked me to alert the office staff to call for medical assistance. This I did accordingly.

These are the details of the incident as far as I can remember. I will be glad to identify the two boys who ran off after the incident. They should have stayed to help.

197

You should look at the post below which is taken from a social media platform that your family uses to keep in touch. Study the information carefully and plan your answer before beginning to write.

You are told that your Uncle Heng is in hospital after an operation. Write him an email to express your concern. Include the following points.

- Show concern for his well-being
- Provide some light-hearted news about the family
- Explain your intention to visit after completing the last exam paper

Write your email in a warm and friendly tone. Aim to provide encouragement to your uncle while he recovers.

<http://www.familyshare/teofamily/updates>



Angela Teo

Heng had an inflamed appendix that gave him severe pain this afternoon. I rushed him to the hospital. I was at his place for lunch today when it happened. He underwent a 3-hour emergency operation and his condition is now stable. I'm now at the hospital with him. The doctors are monitoring. It will probably take 2 weeks before he is discharged.

Anyone who wants to visit, he is at [Changi Hospital Ward 77 Room 3](#). Visiting hours are 9 am to 8 pm daily.

8 November 6:00 pm

SHARE

Write a reply

Winnie Teo

Hey why didn't you call me? I'm coming right after work. Will reach by 7 pm.

8 November 6:11 pm

Angela Teo

He's fine now, still sleeping. Don't rush. Why don't you inform Auntie Jill and come with her tomorrow instead?

8 November 6:13 pm

Malcolm Fong

Hey Auntie Angela, you're our hero! Your skills as a nurse came in handy. Glad to know Uncle Heng is stable now. I'll drop by with Melvin tomorrow after school.

8 November 6:21 pm

Winnie Teo

OK I've called Auntie Jill. I'll come with her tomorrow. See you there. What about your kids? Is Jasmine still having the O-Level exams?

8 November 6:22 pm

Angela Teo

Malcolm Fong Thanks dear.

Winnie Teo Yes, exams are still on for Jasmine till Wed. But John and Jim can visit tomorrow. See you.

8 November 6:30 pm

Dear Uncle Heng,

How are you? I hope you are fine. I hear that you are now in Changi Hospital, recovering from an operation to remove your inflamed appendix.

You must have been in considerable pain when they rushed you to hospital. I am glad to hear that my mum was at your home at that time and that it occurred in the afternoon and not at night. It was fortunate that Mum, being a former nurse, not only diagnosed your condition quickly but had also rushed you to the hospital.

I am sorry that I was not with the family members who visited you yesterday. I am sitting for the O-Level Examinations and Mum told me to visit you this coming Wednesday, when I will have completed my last paper.

Uncle, I really miss your bright smile and your jokes. John is waiting eagerly for you to recover so that you can teach him body building. He has already bought some equipment. This silly brother of mine says he wants muscles to impress the girls in school and scare the bullies!

Auntie Jill has just graduated from her bakery course. It's a pity you missed her delicious scones. Oh yes! Dad has given Jim, my elder brother, his motorcycle since he has obtained his licence. Actually, I think Dad is waiting for an excuse to buy a new motorcycle for himself.

Uncle, you know that our family members love fun. I hear that you may be discharged in about two weeks' time. Can I organise a homecoming party for you? Please say yes and do try to persuade Auntie to agree to my idea. It is also an excuse for me to celebrate the end of my exams. Please rest and get well soon. We can all look forward to enjoying the party when you come home. Bye for now and I'll see you on Wednesday.

Your niece,

Pasmine

198

Study the information in the news article below carefully and plan your answer before beginning to write.

Recently, a local entrepreneur donated a sum of money to your school's physical fitness club. As the president of the club, write a letter to him to express your appreciation. Include the following points.

- Convey your thanks for the donation
- Explain how the money was spent and why
- Invite him to visit

Write your letter in a warm and sincere tone, assuring the donor that his gift is appreciated and has been put to good use.

SELETAR COMMUNITY NEWS

Giving back is the right thing for an old boy to do, says Luciendo

By Angel Koh

1 November 2018 Updated 12:00 pm

James Luciendo was 14 when his father passed away, leaving his mother as the sole breadwinner in a family of seven. Luciendo knew how hard it was for his mother to make ends meet, and never asked her for money to join the local gym.

Fortunately for the fitness aficionado, his school, Seletar Secondary, had a small gym where he could train. While facilities were lacking, Luciendo was grateful.

Today, Luciendo is the owner of Maxi Fitness, one of Singapore's most successful fitness chains with an annual turnover of \$7 million. "I will never forget that it was at Seletar Secondary where I started learning about fitness. Now I want to give the students access to the best facilities. As an old boy, giving back to the school is the right thing to do," said Luciendo.

Luciendo has made a gift of \$30,000 to the Seletar Secondary Physical Fitness Club, to be used as the club sees fit. At the appreciation ceremony today, Mr Angus Mao, the principal, asked whether Luciendo would be interested to coach members of the club. Luciendo expressed interest to train some students in weightlifting, his speciality.



Max Tan
Seletar Secondary School
1 Seletar Rd
Singapore 965218

Mr James Luciendo
22 Prosperity Road
Singapore 228125

10 November 2018

Dear Mr Luciendo,

I am writing this letter on behalf of the principal and the fifty members of my school's Physical Fitness Club in appreciation of your donation of \$30,000 to our club.

Our club is only a year old and although we have our principal's support, our funds are limited. You will be glad to know that we have bought a sofa for the members to relax after their training. We have also installed two water coolers in our club so that we do not need to compete with the other students for the water coolers in the corridors.

We have bought dumbbells, weights and two treadmills. Our members are keen to develop their fitness level and the additional equipment is appreciated. Being a former national body builder yourself, you will no doubt be pleased that your gift has helped encouraged interest in sports.

As an old boy and esteemed donor, we would like to welcome you to visit our club on 30 January next year as our Guest of Honour on our first anniversary.

You have also expressed your interest to coach some promising members of our club in weightlifting. We are very keen to take up this offer. Do let us know when you would be free for a discussion.

Yours sincerely,

Max Tan

President
Seletar Secondary Physical Fitness Club

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Study the information in the brochure below carefully and plan your answer before beginning to write.

To raise funds for your school's adopted charity (AWM School for the Disabled), your Community Club is organising a concert. Write a letter to invite an important guest to take part. Include the following points.

- Some information on the charity
- When and where the concert will take place
- What the guest can do to help
- How the funds raised will be used

Write your letter in a warm and persuasive tone, conveying your view that the guest's participation would be an honour to the school.

AWM School for the Disabled



AWM School for the Disabled was founded in 1996 by Brian Thaw, the current director. Brian's wish is to provide a safe and engaging environment for children with various challenges to learn and develop into confident and independent individuals, and this has been the mission of AWM ever since.

AWM follows a special curriculum for children from the ages of 6 to 16, and offers flexibility in terms of customised classes based on the interests and talents of each child.

Since 2010, we have worked with our partner school, Changi Secondary School, to organise various learning support and fundraising programmes.

AWM is a registered charity and is fully funded from donations. If you would like to support us, please email info@awmsch.org or call 6777 1212.

Richard Tan
Community Club
Changi Secondary School
20 Changi Road
Singapore 465110

Mr Januar De Souza
20 Lincoln Road
Singapore 915042

5 August 2018

Dear Mr De Souza,

I am writing this letter on behalf of Changi Secondary School's Community Club to invite you as our guest of honour at our charity concert.

The members of our school's Community Club have been volunteering their services at AWM School for the Disabled for the past few years. We also hold a major fundraising event each year.

This year, we intend to organise a concert featuring a musical performed by our students. The performance will be held on Friday, 14 December between 1400 – 1600 hours in our school hall.

Our school is proud of your illustrious musical career, which we follow closely. We would be honoured if you could accept our invitation to perform an item on the piano for this occasion.

After the concert, we will have a tea reception for the invited guests, where you'll get to meet some students from AWM. The money that we raise from the concert will be used to renovate the building of the AWM School for the Disabled, which badly needs a facelift. It will also buy a few wheelchairs for needy children. Your performance will go a long way towards helping the children in AWM.

Children with various disabilities may face challenges in a mainstream school. AWM offers these children a safe environment and a flexible curriculum, so that they may learn what interests them at their own pace.

Our students and teachers would be happy to have an illustrious alumnus like you grace this occasion and display your musical talent.

We await your favourable reply.

Thank you.

Yours sincerely,

Richard Tan

Richard Tan
President
Community Club
Changi Secondary School

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Study the information in the brochure below carefully and plan your answer before beginning to write.

During your December vacation, you will be visiting your uncle who lives in England. Your uncle has offered to pay for a four-week language course to help you improve your English. He has identified two schools for you to choose from. Write a letter to explain your choice to him. Include the following points.

- Your choice of school and reasons
- How your decision will address his concern for your happiness and safety

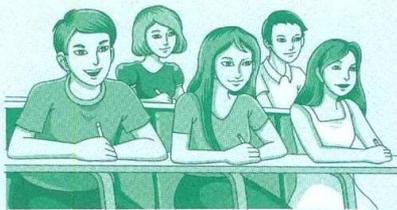
Write your letter in a warm and friendly tone, conveying the impression that you have considered the options carefully before making a decision.

Language Immersion Programme

International students are welcome

Blenheim School

- Location: London, the capital city
- Accommodation: Hostel
- Size of classes: 30-40
- Fees: GBP 7000
- Cost of Living: GBP 400-600 per week
- Issues certificate of attendance on completion of course
- International students
- Shopping and entertainment centres
- Historical sites



Hetford School

- Location: Small town in Northern England
- Accommodation: Family
- Size of classes: 15-20
- Fees: GBP 4500
- Cost of Living: GBP 250-300 per week
- Issues internationally recognised certificate on passing of exams
- Mainly European students
- Weekend flea market and local entertainment
- Near the sea and nature spots



116 Lakeview Lane
Singapore 661161

18 August 2018

Dear Uncle Jon,

How are things with you and Auntie Molly? How are my cousins, Don and Syd?

I thank you for your kind offer to sponsor me for a four-week language course as an early Christmas gift in England in December. I truly appreciate what you are doing for me and I aim to make the best of this wonderful opportunity.

Uncle, based on the synopsis of the two schools you have kindly sent to me, I have chosen the Hetford School.

Let me explain the reasons for my choice. The school is situated in a small town in the north of England. The population will be relatively small and I am told that practically everyone knows one another there as generations of families have resided there. I would feel much safer there than living in a big city like London.

I will also be boarding with a family. I hope to stay with a nice family and enjoy healthy and hearty, home-cooked meals. I would prefer a safe and cozy environment like this, rather than a large city full of strangers.

The Blenheim school, however, is in a metropolis. I prefer country to city living. Also, I would have to adjust to living in a hostel where there are strict rules to abide by! Ugh! You know how I hate school rules. I do not want my freedom curtailed in a large educational institution. I also hear that large classes are the norm in Blenheim School. No thanks! I prefer the more personal atmosphere of smaller classes at Hetford. Also, I hear that individual coaching is given to weaker overseas students. I feel I will need this coaching to clear any doubts I may have after the lessons.

Moreover, Hetford's students are mostly from Europe. As you know, Uncle, I am a Europhile, interested in anything European. Perhaps I can learn about Europe's cultures and languages from my European classmates.

Another two points in favour of the Hetford School are practical ones. The fees and cost of living are much lower than Blenheim's. Furthermore, at the end of the course, the examination I will be taking is recognised worldwide. Blenheim only issues a certificate of attendance.

The only factors in Blenheim's favour are that it is close to the famous historic sites of England and is a centre of shopping and entertainment.

However, I do not mind missing these as Hetford is near the sea and famous nature spots. There is a weekend flea market and it would be interesting to experience the local entertainment culture.

Based on these reasons, I prefer Hetford. Thank you once again for the information and your support for my course.

Hope to see you and your family soon when I arrive in December.

Your niece,

Samantha

LIST OF IDIOMS

	Idioms	Meanings
A	a baptism of fire	a difficult or violent introduction to a way of life, profession or new activity
	a big fish in the pond	somebody who is important but only in a small community
	a blind date	a social meeting arranged between two people of opposite sexes who have never met before
	a bone of contention	a cause/subject of dispute
	a burning question	an important question that needs to be answered; subject that is greatly discussed
	a case in point	somebody/something one mentions as a particular example to illustrate a general statement
	a chequered career/history/past	a lifetime or long record of ups and downs in fortune, or variety of experiences
	a clean bill of health	a statement that somebody is in a satisfactory, healthy or fit condition
	a clean slate	a record of work or conduct that contains nothing to discredit a person
	a conspiracy of silence	an agreement among people with certain information not to let it be publicly known
	a far cry (from)	very different from something
	a free hand	permission to make one's own arrangements in an undertaking
	a force to be reckoned with	somebody/something that must be treated seriously
	a foregone conclusion	a result, consequence or end that is completely predictable
	a hot potato	a matter that is considered too dangerous to tackle or become involved with
	a man of letters	a writer of essays, poetry, novels, etc.
	a poison pen letter	an anonymous letter that accuses, maligns or slanders (somebody)
	a ray of hope	a possibility of something good happening that will improve an unsatisfactory state of affairs
	a sitting duck	something that is easy to attack, criticize or exploit
	a slap in the face	a harsh rejection or refusal
	a slip of the tongue	something that one did not mean to say
	a snake in the grass	somebody who appears friendly but is harmful and dangerous
	a soft spot for (somebody)	a special fondness for (somebody)
	a square peg in a round hole	somebody whose abilities are not suited to his position or job
	a stepping stone	a way of reaching a higher professional, social or educational level
	afraid of one's shadow	extremely timid and nervous
	agree to differ	allow each other to keep different opinions about something
all in all	taking everything into consideration	
an open verdict	a decision of a jury that the cause of someone's death is not known	
as and when	whenever; at such times as	
at the crossroads	at a point where a decision has to be made	
at the eleventh hour	almost, but not quite too late to do something or for something to be avoided	
B	be (all) in the mind	be imaginary, not true or real
	be cruel to be kind	use harsh or painful methods to benefit somebody
	beat the drum	try to attract public attention to something
	beg to differ	claim the right to express an opposite or different opinion
	beyond the pale	socially unacceptable or beyond the limit of proper behaviour
	bide one's time	wait for a good opportunity or suitable occasion to do something
	bite off more than one can chew	try to agree to do more than one is able to
	bite the bullet	realise that a person cannot avoid an ordeal or unpleasant truth and accept it with resignation
bite the dust	be killed, defeated, ruined or finished	

Idioms		Meanings
J	jump out of one's skin	be very surprised
K	keep one's head keep somebody posted keep up appearances kick up a fuss	remain calm in a difficult situation continue to provide somebody with the latest news on something continue to present an unchanged appearance in public create a great noise and trouble
L	leave (somebody) out in the cold let the grass grow under one's feet lick one's wounds light at the end of the tunnel look down one's nose	be excluded from or neglected or ignored by a community, group or activity be inactive or waste time when there are things that need to be done try to comfort oneself after a defeat, injury or loss success, happiness, etc. after a long period of difficulty or hardship show that one feels superior
M	make a clean breast of (something) make somebody's hair stand on end meet one's Waterloo	confess in full to (something) cause somebody to feel extreme fear or horror suffer defeat or failure
N	no laughing matter not lose sleep over (something)	a subject which is serious and should not be treated lightly or with amusement not be very anxious about (something)
O	on one's last legs once and for all one's daily bread one's heart in one's mouth out of character	not likely to live, continue to function, etc. much longer at this one time and from this time forward one's means of (living) generally sudden fear, worry, or other emotion uncharacteristic of (somebody)
P	paint in glowing colours parrot fashion pave the way pay through the nose play for time play to the gallery preach to the converted pull the wool over somebody's eyes put out feelers put the clock back	describe in a flattering way without understanding the meaning prepare for or make the arrival easier have to pay too high a price for (something) try to delay a defeat, decision, etc. behave ostentatiously or disrespectfully in order to gain other people's attention talk to people who already hold the views and ideas being communicated hide one's real actions or intentions from somebody discover first thoughts and reactions to a plan return to the past, especially to traditional values
R	rest on one's laurels rise roughshod over rub shoulders with	pause to enjoy one's achievements treat in a harsh, unsympathetic way live, work or associate with closely
S	see eye to eye shoot one's mouth off spread like wildfire swallow one's pride	have the same viewpoint speak in a loud, indiscreet and boastful way travel with great speed humble oneself, as in admitting one's mistake or one's guilt
T	to be-all and end-all (of) the bottom line the brain drain the calm before the storm the concrete jungle the corridors of power the name of the game the other side of the coin the scum of the earth to all intents and purposes	the whole extent of; the supreme aim or interest of the important conclusion, judgement or result the considerable loss of a country's qualified professionals to another country a period of deceptive calm before a violent outburst a modern city, thought of as an unfriendly, bewildering or dangerous place the places where important decisions in government are made the real nature of something the contrasting aspect of a matter a group of people thought to be worthless or despicable in almost every way
W	weigh one's words when it comes to the crunch with one's eyes open worth one's salt	choose carefully the words one speaks or writes when trouble or a difficulty can no longer be avoided fully aware of what one is doing and what the results may be deserving what one earns

Idioms	Meanings
<p>bite the hand that feeds you blood and thunder blow hot and cold boil down to bow and scrape break even bring (something) to a head bring (somebody) to his knees bring (something) to the boil burn one's boats or bridges</p> <p>burn one's fingers burn the candle at both ends by all means by no means by the skin of one's teeth</p>	<p>show ingratitude, harm or abuse to somebody who has helped you sensational and melodramatic incidents in stories, plays or films alternate between approving of or wanting something and not doing so can be summarised as behave in an insincere, servile way that tries to gain favour make neither profit nor loss bring (a troubled or dangerous situation) to a critical or culminating stage force (somebody) to submit or to humble himself cause (something) to reach a climax or a high degree of intensity or excitement cut off one's means of escape or retreat; commit oneself so firmly to a course of action that one cannot reverse it suffer harm or financial loss through being too rash, trusting or optimistic exhaust one's energy by doing too much work of course; certainly of course not; certainly not narrowly; by a small margin</p>
<p>C</p> <p>clear the air clutch at straws cold comfort come hell or high water come into play come out of one's shell come to a head come to no good come to terms with cross the Rubicon curry favour with</p> <p>cut corners cut no ice</p>	<p>lessen or get rid of fears, worries, doubts or suspicions by talking or arguing about them frankly cling to any hope, however slight no or very little help, consolation or sympathy whatever the opposition or difficulties may be begin to operate or have an effect or influence lose or overcome one's shyness reach a critical or culminating stage meet with (deserved) failure or disgrace accept a situation or condition of life and adapt oneself to it as well as one can take an important and irrevocable step try to win somebody's approval by flattery or giving presents so that one may gain some advantage for oneself do something in the quickest, easiest, cheapest way not impress or influence a particular person or group</p>
<p>D</p> <p>down memory lane</p>	<p>thinking about the past in a fond way</p>
<p>E</p> <p>eat one's words elbow room</p>	<p>be forced to withdraw what one has previously said was true freedom to act or function, especially within certain limits</p>
<p>F</p> <p>fight a losing battle fit the bill food for thought from rags to riches from the cradle to the grave</p>	<p>struggle without success to achieve or prevent something be suitable something that emulates thought or needs to be carefully considered from great poverty to wealth from birth to death; throughout one's whole life</p>
<p>G</p> <p>gain the upper hand get down to business get out of hand give somebody a piece of one's mind go down in history go hand in hand go through the mill grease somebody's palm</p>	<p>gain a position of mastery, power or control start discussing (something) seriously becomes uncontrollable bluntly and angrily criticise somebody or his behaviour be remembered for a long time to come be closely connected undergo severe discipline, hard training, punishment, etc. give somebody money to get information from him or to influence his opinion</p>
<p>H</p> <p>have an axe to grind have one's cake and eat it hold sway</p>	<p>have an interest or purpose of one's own, usually a selfish one enjoy two benefits, one of which normally excludes the other be the ruling force</p>
<p>I</p> <p>in a class by itself in the lap of luxury in the raw</p>	<p>without the equal among things of the same kind in very comfortable surroundings unrefined; not made to appear more pleasant, acceptable, etc. than it really is</p>