

Q1: What is your idea of excellence?

Excellence—we often ask ourselves, “What are the qualities which embody such a virtue?” Is it courage to stand up for our cause? Is it merely being the best in what we do, to be the apex of society? Or is it the complete encapsulation of humanity and humanity’s melange of values in one body? Personally, I am in favour with all.

Firstly, the courage to be at ease with ourselves and all our little flaws is tantamount to having excellence. The moral courage and determination to stand up for what you believe in—even when the odds are against you—is excellence. In the past, The Earth was believed to be the centre of the universe: that all things revolved around us. When Galileo debunked the belief set up for years by philosophers and polymaths, he was met with ridicule and imprisonment. Despite the odds, he never stopped trusting his judgement. It is his observation that brought all of mankind out from the dark and brought humanity forward into the bright light of knowledge. Only with courage to stand up for your cause can one be seen to possess true excellence.

Next, brilliance and excellence are mutually inclusive, as I see it. One cannot propagate while the other dies; they are intertwined. The very root word ‘excel’ means ‘to do well above the pack’. It is such a quality that one cannot replace. The greatest scientific mind of the 20th century — Albert Einstein — is the epitome of brilliance. Without his intellect, the world would not be where it is today: sending shuttles into space and understanding the miracles of science in our world. His contribution to humanity is what makes him excellent. He possessed intelligence way above the average, he excelled above us and that is excellence.

Lastly, the most abstract idea of ‘excellence’ is to just be human, or like how some Christians I know would say: “To live in the image of God and do good to humanity.” It entails allowing the best in our human qualities to shine through the darkness of life and to fulfil one’s life. This is what actually completes Maslow’s hierarchy of needs: self-fulfilment. It is my belief that excellence is doing what you love and concurrently feeling self-fulfilled and complete at the end of each day. Having a strong purpose to wake up every morning and to be a blessing to someone is in its way ‘excellence’. At the end of the day, it matters most what you think of yourself and when you live life to the fullest in serving the needs of others, you would feel excellent.

Excellence is what gives posterity a better life. It is also our duty to ensure posterity understands the truest meaning of the word. My idea of excellence is: to dare to be different and to be self-fulfilled.

(475 words)

Qn 2: "I can't be myself!" is a cry among some teenagers. What can be done to deal with this situation?

Ever since men started to cluster together and form communities, they have been expected to conform to social norms. However, as society becomes more civilised and world culture more **homogeneous**, we cannot help but wonder if we have indeed lost our distinct individuality. The **impressionable** teenagers are especially **besotted** with this identity crisis. *To combat this state of affair, teenagers are encouraged to develop a personal interest and to exercise more independence and maturity of thought. Governments are also encouraged to invest in the arts for the **disenfranchised** youths.*

Firstly, to express their individuality, teenagers should take up a sport or hobby that matches their personal interests. In this way, it will help them develop a passion for what they love and to have a stronger will to overcome obstacles; they will not then merely conform to societal expectations. They will instead have a clear goal and it will steer them towards a certain future they have created for themselves. Developing an interest would also help some teenagers – especially females – to overcome the '**glass ceiling effect**' that society places on women. The late British Prime Minister, Margaret Thatcher, was such an example. She left behind a **legacy** despite growing up in a male-dominated British post-war society that **frowned upon** female leadership. Thus, teenagers must pursue an interest that will drive them through the **vagaries of life** with focus and convictions in order not to get sucked in by the **vacuum of conformity**.

Next, parents can help their children develop independence and maturity from a young age. They can start by slowly allowing their children to make **informed decisions** of their own. It can progress from a micro-level of choosing what pens to buy for school to something more macro like enabling their children to choose their desired tertiary education path. As a result, teenagers – already busy **navigating the shoal of adolescence** – will feel less **constricted** and trapped by the wishes of their parents. By **harnessing** the skill to make informed choices at a young age, teenagers will feel more in control of their own destinies in the **vicissitudes of life**.

Moving on to societal level, governments should invest more in the arts that will cater to youths. "Arts," as someone once proclaimed, "cleanses the soul from the dust of day-to-day living." Arts empowers its practitioners to creatively express their individuality. Through painting, sculptures or drama, teenagers will be able to harness an **unbridled** and **unrestricted** form of creative expressions to let off steam or stamp their identity. As a result, teenagers will have a shared cultural identity that will add to the **vibrancy** of their very own personalities, thus allowing them to be who they are.

In conclusion, teenagers should continuously seek to explore new possibilities through creativity and innovation, which will help create their unique legacies. Adults should stop insisting teenagers be **square pegs in a round hole**, lest society risks losing its distinct characteristics. That is a travesty. (490 words)

Written by: Chong Fu Shan (4SA), Edited by: LSF

- Good use of hook and thesis statement (*italicised* here for effect) in Intro
- Apt and wide vocab
- Use of metaphor and imagery
- Good use of a clear topic sentence with elaborations in each body paragraph

Question 3: "Everyone has a part to play in saving our world." Do you agree?

Just as you have finished reading this sentence, another child in Africa has just lost his life due to hunger. The media has informed us of the dying Earth that is suffering from different problems: poverty, global warming, and extinction of species. The responsibility to rescue planet Earth lies in the hands of everybody. As the saying goes, "Today's wastage is tomorrow's shortage." Hence, it is imperative for us to start making a difference to prevent future generations from inheriting the consequences of our selfish acts. The responsibility of this lies in the hands of international organisations, individual countries and private individuals.

The World Bank defines poverty as those who live with less than US\$1 per day. Currently, 63% of people in Central Africa suffer from poverty. This phenomenon branches out to uncountable consequences such as starvation, lack of access to clean water and even deaths. However, steps have been taken by international organisations to reduce the impacts of it. For example, the United Nations Millennium Development Programme (UNMDP) has 15 aims; one of which is to reduce the population of poor people by many means. For example, in Ahmedabad in India, the UNMDP helps to build a bridge linking a rural area and urban area. By doing so, the cumulative causation will render a spread effect that will enrich the lives of the people in the rural areas. For example, the rural folks can sell goods to the urban folks after the construction of the bridge. This would help reduce poverty.

Global warming is the phenomenon where temperatures have risen throughout the world. It is brought about by the greenhouse gases released into the atmosphere that trap heat on Earth's surface and thus cause warmer temperatures. Industrial activities, large-scale deforestation and agricultural activities have enhanced the greenhouse effect. To counter this, the Kyoto Protocol was initiated and signed by many countries. The contract gave countries five years to reduce carbon emission by 5%. Hence, as countries come together, they can make Earth less hot than it is now. Scaling down, individual countries can also play a role to combat global warming. The Ministry of Forests (MOF) in Kalimantan, Indonesia, has set out policies to combat deforestation by afforestation, the process of replanting trees. MOF has recovered 10 000 hectares of forest land to date. They also implemented laws and fines for illegal loggers. Selective cutting was also recommended. It is a process in which commercially valuable trees were selected and then logged.

Lastly, the private individuals can play an important role in preventing exploitation of resources. As a tourist, we can refuse to buy coral reefs that are sold as gifts. As each individual makes the decision to stop buying, demand for corals would go down. Hence, locals would not destroy coral reefs as it would not be beneficial. Another example would be shark's fin soup. It has led to the cruel deaths of sharks. Sharks are thrown back in the sea bed after having their fins chopped. By choosing not to order it at a restaurant, we will lower its demand and by doing so, save the sharks from extinction.

Alex Guhur once said, "The change in the world starts with the change in us." The United Nations, countries involved in the Kyoto Protocol, Ministry of Forests have played their part in saving the world. However, every one of their policies and programme have boiled down to the heart of the individual. Corruption found deep in the forests of Kalimantan while profit-minded factory managers emitting ridiculous amount of harmful gases have hindered the policies of the Ministry of Forest and Kyoto Protocol respectively. Once again, it boils down to our vision and passion towards saving earth. Today, the change does not start with the implementation of policies; it starts with us. *(634 words)*

Written by: Lucas Ng (4SA), Edited by: LSF

Q4: Abraham Lincoln: “You cannot escape the responsibility of tomorrow by evading it today.” Have you always been a responsible person?

I closed my eyes, the whirlwind of knowledge and facts scattered in my head. My fruitless attempt at organizing and memorizing only yielded a frustrated growl from my throat. I glanced at my watch: only 10 minutes until the test would begin for others but only 10 until doomsday for me.

By no means a good student, I had no flair for memorizing or studying; nor was I diligent or responsible by anyone’s standards. Now I would pay the prize. My irresponsibility would be my downfall. There was no way to escape my failure from this common test this time.

Or was there?

Out of the corner of my eye I saw John, one of my closer friends and a brilliant student. He was engrossed in his notes. Often his spectacles would slide down his nose, but John would hardly take notice of it. He seemed smart now -- very, very smart -- and also my only ladder out of the mess I was in.

Not blessed with many skills, fortunately I had smooth-talking as one of them. Not long after, I had convinced John to help a friend in need. “I only need a few answers, just enough to help me pass,” I reasoned. “Just write them on a paper, fold it, then slide it on the floor,” I assured him with my winning smile; but inside, I was really shaking. This was not one of the safest methods to cheat. There was a huge risk. But what else could I do?

As expected, the test was extraordinarily hard for me. Time for the plan: I tapped my fingers on the desk -- soft but loud enough just for John to hear. To any invigilator, I would look like I was thinking hard or frustrated. John cautiously surveyed the classroom. The invigilator was already in front of him. John quickly scribbled down some answers on the extra paper provided, but hesitated to slide to me. The fool! He was too slow. I glanced up, and panicked at what I did not see. The invigilator was not anywhere in front of the classroom, which would only mean...

Plan failed. Culprits caught. Mastermind identified.

John was banned from taking the test. He had to see the Discipline Master to answer for his actions. He tried to defend himself, but to no avail. He stood up dejectedly, as the eyes of the whole class followed him. He would be branded a traitor, a cheater -- all because of my irresponsibility. Before walking out of the door, John turned and looked at me straight in the eye: a look filled with hate, betrayal and sorrow. He was reduced from the crème-de-la-crème of the class to the scum of the earth in mere minutes.

I turned and stare at my exam paper; I could not meet John’s eyes anymore. I felt regret and shame. Of course I should! It was because of my irresponsibility that I had not studied for the test. It was my irresponsibility that had framed someone for cheating. It was my irresponsibility that cost me dearly: no one trusted me from then on. *(522 words)*

Written by: Joshua Kon (4S2); Edited by: LSF