

Question Two

Explain how **Text 2** works to convey ideas about people and technology. (10 marks)

Text Two is an excerpt of an article, 'The Winter of Their Discontent' by Susan Maushart about her family's experience with technology.

The winter of their disconnect – how Susan Maushart and her family lived without technology for six months

RAISING three teenagers as a single parent is no Contiki Cruise⁴ at the best of times. But when I decided we should all set sail for a six-month screen-free adventure, it suddenly came closer to *The Caine Mutiny*⁵, with me in the Bogart⁶ role.

There were lots of reasons why we pulled the plug on our electronic media... or, I should say, why I did, because heaven knows my children would have sooner volunteered to go without food, water or hair products. At ages 14, 15 and 18, my daughters and my son don't use media. They inhabit media. And they do so exactly as fish inhabit a pond. Gracefully. Unblinkingly. And utterly without consciousness or curiosity as to how they got there.

They don't remember a time before email, or instant messaging, or Google. Even the media of their own childhood – VHS and dial-up, Nintendo 64 and "cordful" phones – they regard as relics, as quaint as inkwells.

They collectively refer to civilisation pre-high definition flatscreen as "the black and white days".

My kids – like yours, I'm guessing – are part of a generation that cuts its teeth, literally and figuratively, on a keyboard, learning to say "puter" along with "mama", "juice" and "now!". They're kids who have had cellphones and wireless internet longer than they've had molars. Who multi-task their schoolwork alongside five or six other electronic inputs, to the syncopated beat of the Instant Messenger pulsing insistently like some distant tribal tom-tom.

Wait a minute. Did I say they do their schoolwork like that? Correction. They do their life like that.

When my children laugh, they don't say "ha ha", they say "LOL". In fact, they conjugate it. ("LOL as this picture before I Photoshopped your nose, Mum!")

They download movies and TV shows as casually as you or I might switch on the radio. And when I remind them piracy is a crime, they look at one another and go "LOL". These are kids who shrug when they lose their iPods, with all 5000 tunes and Lord-knows-what in the way of video clips, feature films and "TV" shows (like, who watches TV on a television anymore?). "There's plenty more where that came from," their attitude says.

And the most infuriating thing of all? They're right. The digital content that powers their world, like matter itself, can never truly be destroyed. Like the Magic Pudding of Australian legend, it's a dessert bar that never runs out of cheesecake.

There's so much that's wonderful, and at the same time nauseating, about that.

⁴ A cruise company aimed at young people having a good time

⁵ *The Caine Mutiny* is a 1954 American film – a fictional Navy drama set in the Pacific during World War II

⁶ Humphrey Bogart starred in *The Caine Mutiny*

*The Winter of Our Disconnect*⁷ – aka The Experiment (as we eventually came to call it) – was in some ways an accident waiting to happen. Over a period of years, I watched and worried as our media began to function as a force field separating my children from what my son, only half-ironically, called RL (Real Life). But, to be honest, the teenagers weren't the only ones with dependency issues.

Although a relatively recent arrival to the global village, I'd been known to abuse information too. (Sneaking my iPhone into the toilet? Did I have no self-respect?) As a journalist, it was easy to hide my habit, but deep down I knew I was hooked.

The Winter of Our Disconnect started out as a kind of purge. It ended up as so much more. Long story short: our digital detox messed with our heads, our hearts and our homework. It changed the way we ate and the way we slept, the way we "friended", fought, planned and played. It altered the very taste and texture of our family life. Hell, it even altered the mouthfeel. In the end, our family's self-imposed exile from the Information Age changed our lives indelibly – and infinitely for the better.

At the simplest level, *The Winter of Our Disconnect* is the story of how one highly idiosyncratic family survived six months of wandering through the desert, digitally speaking, and the lessons we learned about ourselves and our technology along the way. At the same time, our story is a channel to a wider view into the impact of new media on the lives of families, into the very heart of the meaning of home.

End of Text 2

⁷ *The Winter of Our Discontent* is John Steinbeck's last novel, published in 1961. The title comes from the first two lines of William Shakespeare's *Richard III*: "Now is the winter of our discontent.."