N5

X824/75/11

English
Reading for Understanding, Analysis and Evaluation

Duration — 1 hour

Total marks — 30

Attempt ALL questions.

Write your answers clearly in the answer booklet provided. In the answer booklet you must clearly identify the question number you are attempting.

Use **blue** or **black** ink.

Before leaving the examination room you must give your answer booklet to the Invigilator; if you do not, you may lose all the marks for this paper.

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What did we do before the internet?

'Which would you rather be — extremely poor with loads of friends or super rich with no friends at all?' This question was put to me recently out of nowhere by my 12-year-old stepson. For me, the answer was easy. 'Poor with friends,' I said. 'In the long run, loneliness would be worse than poverty.'

5 My stepson disagreed. 'Defo rich with no friends. I'd just stay in my mansion and play Fortnite and watch YouTube and hang out with people online.' He's a popular kid and part of a close-knit group of boys who've been friends since starting school. When offered the choice of whether they'd like to watch a movie together or spend two hours playing Fortnite and interfacing remotely on headsets, the lads don't miss a beat in choosing the latter. This is because, for digital natives like

10 my stepson and his mates, who grew up with the internet, socialising online is the same as — at times even preferable to — socialising in person.

For his 12th birthday he was given his first smartphone and it was as if we'd handed him the keys to an idealised parallel universe. I suppose in a way we had. Just as puberty had begun to set in, we gave him a comfort people of my generation had never known as alienated adolescents: the

15 feeling of being with friends all the time. The absence of loneliness.

In moments of digital anxiety, I find myself thinking of my father's desk. Dad was a travelling furniture salesman in the 1980s. He was on the road a lot, but when he worked from home he sat in his office, a small windowless study dominated by a large wooden desk. There wasn't much on it — fabric samples, a mug of pens, a lamp, a phone. And yet every day Dad spent hours there:

20 making notes, drinking coffee and chatting affably to small-town retailers about shipments of sofas and dining sets. This is what I find so amazing. That my father — like most professionals of his generation and generations before him — was able to earn a salary and support our family with little more than a phone and a stack of papers. Just thinking of his desk, the emptiness of it, induces a strange disorientation and loneliness. How did he sit there all day, I wonder, without the

25 internet to keep him company?

I'd always assumed that not being digitally connected as a child had been a handicap — surely it explained why I'm hopeless at figuring out the smart TV remote or programming the central heating thermostat. Like most kids, I spent idle summer days drifting around our garden spying faces in the clouds, but my childhood (like most kids in the 80s) was also awash in cultural trash. I

30 had way more weekly screen time than my own kids, most of it spent zoning out on bad sitcom reruns and mind-numbing hours playing Pac-Man on our Commodore 64 so our mum could get the next meal on the table. Surely bingeing on the brilliance of Pixar films and the architectural complexities of Minecraft today is a superior way for a child to spend a rainy afternoon?

I began to investigate what it was that marked my generation out. I was surprised to discover that

35 many experts have come to believe that there is something special in my generation, and the recollection of our shared non-digital past. When I mentioned to one expert that I grew up entirely without the internet — having sent my first e-mail on the first day of first year at university in 1994 — her eyes brightened. 'Ah ha!' she said. 'So you're one of the Last of the Innocents.'

40 What she meant by this is that I am one of the last generation of humans on the planet to have grown up prior to the popularisation of digital culture. It's not that we are smarter or more talented than the digital natives that came after us. Our uniqueness, it seems, lies in the fact that we are the last of a dying breed who have experienced empty, yawning hours and days of doing nothing much at all.

45 In his book *The End of Absence*, Michael Harris explores the idea of regaining solitude. 'Go for a long walk without your phone. Spend an afternoon writing in a diary. Read 150 pages of a book.' Simple in theory, but strangely terrifying in practice.

Harris told me that he doesn't consider himself anti-technology so much as a critical observer of its effects. He points out that all human inventions, even those we consider beneficial, such as

50 cars or television, hijack our brains and disrupt our thinking. What we risk losing to the internet is the richness of our imagination and the depth of our intellect.

'The experience of empty spaces allows for the growth of creativity and independent thought — the ability to form ideas without being swayed by mass opinion or bot armies,' he said. 'Moreover, virtual connection limits our ability to communicate meaningfully and to empathise. When you
55 are bombarded with online connectivity, it's increasingly difficult to devote your attention to the people you are actually with.'

By resigning themselves to the frantic distractions of the internet, digital natives like my children risk losing touch with the experience of what it is to be truly alone with their thoughts. Yes, their entertainment is more sophisticated than what we grew up with (what sane person would trade
60 the wealth of Netflix for the limited number of channels we used to have?), but it's those empty, restless, vaguely melancholic hours, spent staring at clouds and lounging in trees, they'll miss. Not that they'll long for what they don't know.

But we will. We, the innocents, the ones who recall the emptiness and boredom. For it's in those lost hours that we unwittingly got to know ourselves; our unbridled imaginations were free to play
65 and laze and wander. And while it was dull and uneventful at times, it's also true that all humanity's wonders — including the internet itself — have arisen from one simple source: a person, a thought, a daydream.

Leah McLaren, The Observer

Attempt ALL questions

1. Look at lines 1–4.

    Using your own words as far as possible, explain what impression we are given of the writer.

    You should make **two** key points in your answer.

    2

2. Look at lines 5–15.

    Using your own words as far as possible, identify **four** things we learn about the writer's stepson.

    4

3. Look at lines 16–25.

    By referring to **two** examples of language, explain how the writer suggests that she admires her father's way of working.

    4

4. Look at lines 26–33.

    By referring to **two** examples of language, explain how the writer emphasises the negative aspects of her childhood.

    4

5. Look at lines 34–44.

    Summarise, **using your own words** as far as possible, what we learn about the writer's generation.

    You should make **four** key points in your answer.

    4

6. Look at lines 45–47.

    By referring to **one** example of sentence structure, explain how it is made clear that Michael Harris is giving advice.

    2

7. Look at lines 48–56.

    Using your own words as far as possible, identify **six** points made here about the effects of technology.

    6

8. Look at lines 57–62.

    Using your own words as far as possible, explain the writer's concerns for children.

    You should make **two** key points in your answer.

    2

9. Look at lines 63–67.

    Select any expression from these lines and explain how it contributes to the passage's effective conclusion.

    2

[END OF QUESTION PAPER]

OPEN OUT FOR QUESTIONS

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