

Candidate's Name

CT Group

GP Tutor

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## **HWA CHONG INSTITUTION JC2 PRELIMINARY EXAMINATION 2012**

**GENERAL PAPER**

**8806/2**

PAPER 2

Duration: 1 hour 30 minutes

Date: 29 August 2012

Time: 1015 – 1145 hrs

INSERT

### **READ THESE INSTRUCTIONS FIRST**

This insert contains the passages for Paper 2.

This insert consists of **3** printed pages.

**Passage 1.** Polly Panglin writes...

- 1 Mankind has always been morbidly fascinated with its own extinction. History is littered with apocalyptic scenarios often fired by religious zealotry (Armageddon springs to mind). The fanciful prophecies of ancient mystical seers such as Nostradamus continue to infest our airwaves creating doomsday cults. Within living memory, dire warnings have been uttered regarding a host of potentially cataclysmic events: nuclear holocaust; a new ice age; global famine; deadly new pandemics... As we step into the second decade of the 21st century, apocalyptic thinking is thriving. Today we don't just have the Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse but an entire cavalry regiment of doom-mongers. To be optimistic is to be an idiot. That seems to be the mood of the times. The end is nigh, we are endlessly told, so we had better get used to it. The trouble is that the end is very clearly not nigh. By any sensible measure – life expectancy, wealth, literacy rates, food supply, social freedoms, even the general state of the environment – we live in an era that far surpasses any previous one. Our best days are ahead of us. 5 10
- 2 First of all, the world we live in is profoundly at peace. The last 30 years have seen a substantial shift away from violent war towards non-violent people power. Since 2001, non-violent civil resistance has brought down repressive regimes all over the world and while guerrilla tactics are still employed in the fight for freedom, the general trend is toward Gandhi, not Guevara. Traditional interstate warfare is moving toward obsolescence, being rarer today than at any other point in modern history. The number of people who have died as a result of war and terrorism is down 50 percent this decade from the 1990s, 75 percent from the decades of the Cold War, and 99 percent from the decade of the two World Wars. We are living in the most non-violent time in human history as we witness a strong, albeit unsteady, march toward peace on a global scale. 15 20
- 3 Average standards of living have also surged over the past few centuries, first in Europe, the cradle of the Scientific and Industrial Revolutions, and then elsewhere, as a result of further innovations in science and technology. In developed countries, people live longer, healthier and wealthier lives than in the past. In the 20th century, advances in medicine and public health ranging from sterile surgery, vaccines and antibiotics to improved treatment of water and sewage have boosted average life spans around the world to almost 70 years. Today, exciting developments, particularly in genetic engineering and nanotechnology, herald a new age where utopian visions of a world free from hunger, poverty and disease no longer seem the stuff that dreams are made of. We have at our disposal an impressive technological magazine of magic bullets to dispatch the myriad problems we face – geo-engineering to eradicate global warming, molecular medicine to exterminate disease, nanobots to eliminate our resource shortages, and synthetic life forms to erase our energy problems. 25 30
- 4 If all this were not enough, the unparalleled connectivity we enjoy today opens up a whole new world of possibilities and opportunities. The internet not only serves as an invaluable repository of our collective knowledge, but also makes information universally accessible. More importantly, the exponential growth in one-to-many and many-to-many communication devices has nurtured creative and critical communities, facilitating the exchange of ideas and sparking meaningful discussions that replace prejudice and disdain with tolerance and respect. The use of these new media tools has empowered marginalised groups and even been a catalyst for political revolution, inspiring a generation of enthusiastic and enlightened netizens who are united in their common goal to make the world a better place. 35 40
- 5 Whilst mankind has faced daunting challenges over the last 100 years – a depression, two world wars, a Cold War and a global economic crisis – it has survived them all, arguably emerging both stronger and wiser as a result. The human brain is Nature's greatest marvel – it's seemingly infinite capacity for creation and creativity endowing our species with unlimited potential. At the risk of sounding clichéd, even more miraculous than the human brain is the human spirit – in all its indefatigable and indomitable glory. Given how far we have come and how much we have achieved, we will surely avoid the apocalyptic scenarios predicted by doomsayers. Our future is just beginning. 45

**Passage 2.** Jeremy Finnister writes...

- 1 In the 500,000 years homo sapiens have roamed the Earth, we have built magnificent cities, sent state-of-the-art robotic scouts to other planets and even created new life forms. It is difficult to imagine it all coming to an end. Yet, the grim reality is that 99 percent of all species that ever lived, including every one of our hominid ancestors, are now extinct. Against the dismal backdrop of the war against terror, nuclear proliferation, the rampant march of menacing technology, and imminent environmental catastrophe, mankind's future looks bleak, to say the least. Add our willful, self-destructive actions and insatiable greed to the mix, and we have the perfect recipe for disaster. 5
- 2 A hard look at the economic and social condition of the world today reveals that capitalism has failed us. Of the world's seven billion people, half live on two dollars a day or less. In the cruelest of paradoxes, millions in the Third World are dying of malnutrition whilst people in developed nations succumb to diseases related to overeating. Even in developed industrialized countries, wealth is unequally distributed with millions struggling just to survive. Capitalism, with its 'markets first' mantra, essentially rewards avarice and encourages profligacy whilst simultaneously breeding corruption, exploitation and poverty. Such a system, pandering as it does to our materialistic and mercenary natures and squandering Earth's precious resources, does nothing but hasten our eventual demise. 10 15
- 3 Our most shameless sacrifice on the altar of capitalism has been Mother Nature. In the name of economic progress, we have breached one ecological threshold after another with breathtaking insolence, causing irreparable damage. We are living in the midst of one of the greatest mass extinctions in Earth's history – at least 30,000 species vanish every year as a result of our vicious assault on the environment. All the while, temperatures continue to soar, wreaking havoc on ecosystems everywhere. The socio-political consequences of climate change are equally terrifying. Land degradation has caused a crisis in agricultural production leading to mass starvation in many areas and more than half the world is afflicted by water shortages – both prime catalysts for conflict. 20
- 4 Meanwhile, our blind faith in science as a panacea to our problems is proving to be profoundly misplaced. Grim ironies abound – the widespread use of antibiotics has led to the emergence of untreatable superbugs; genetically engineered crops have spawned super pests and super weeds; and biofuels have turned out to be less environmentally friendly than coal. What we can count on, however, is mankind's immediate and automatic impulse to weaponise any new advancement in technology. Not satisfied with the mass destruction that nuclear, chemical and biological weapons can inflict, governments are now "investing" billions trying to find ways of employing nanotechnology to kill as many people as efficiently as possible (without, of course, damaging valuable property in the process). Meanwhile, the world watches and waits for the Middle East to explode, North Korea to implode, and Syria to do both. Failing any of the aforementioned apocalyptic scenarios, there is always the option of a fanatical terrorist group using information freely available on the internet to build a nuclear device and precipitate an alternative Armageddon. 25 30 35
- 5 But even if, to paraphrase T. S. Eliot, the world does not end with a bang, we can certainly rely on it to end with a whimper – courtesy of none other than 'Mother' Nature herself. The Black Plague killed one in four Europeans during the 14th century; influenza took at least 20 million lives after the First World War; AIDS has produced a similar death toll today and a vaccine is still nowhere in sight. Old diseases such as cholera and measles have developed new resistance to antibiotics. Factory farming is bringing humans closer to animal pathogens and international travel means mutated viruses can spread at supersonic speed. The recent H5N1 outbreak was just a dress rehearsal for a pandemic that will make Ebola look like the common cold. 40
- 6 There is a grisly game of chance called Russian roulette in which a player places a single round in a revolver, spins the cylinder, places the muzzle against his or her head, and pulls the trigger. Our entire species has been blithely playing the same game for millennia. It is only a matter of time before our luck runs out. 45