



ANDERSON JUNIOR COLLEGE

JC 2 Preliminary Examination 2016

GENERAL PAPER

8807/02

PAPER 2

13 September 2016

INSERT

1 hour 30 minutes

READ THESE INSTRUCTIONS FIRST

This Insert contains the passage for Paper 2.

Claire Choi writes about issues to do with similarities and differences in the world.

- 1 Human civilisation is made up of communities, which, as the term suggests, are formed based on commonalities. Some communities form due to a common language or locality; others grow out of a need to fight a common cause or enemy. The earliest human communities grew out of survival instincts – out in the wild, one was either the predator or the prey. It is thus unsurprising that they quickly grasped the concept of safety in numbers and banded together for mutual protection. The flip side of this was that an outsider would be treated with suspicion at best and aggression at worst. Such distinctions between “us” and “them”, born out of our natural differences, have to be negotiated carefully in order for humanity to continue to progress collectively. 5
- 2 Before we identify ourselves as a part of bigger communities defined by aspects such as race, religion and nation, the first community many of us belong to is our family, where we are typically linked by blood, physical appearance, or name. In many cultures, family names are commonly used, which are passed down to descendants or bestowed on those who marry or are adopted into a family. The family name is so fundamental that, in some communities, entire clans have grown out of that one connection. For centuries, Scottish clans, formed based on family names, were essential for one’s sustenance and safety, and chieftains led their clans in skirmishes against rival clans. Yet, despite such enmity, the clans rebelled against the English several times over a few centuries, united by national pride and religion (albeit only while the rebellions lasted). As society progresses, this coming together as bigger communities has become a recurring pattern as the enemies we encounter are seemingly more formidable and varied. The root of this behaviour is our basic human instinct to identify those who are different as possible threats and to therefore be on our guard against them. This instinct is but one of the many motivations for our often less than desirable conduct towards people unlike us. 10 15 20
- 3 Psychologists offer several explanations as to why we behave poorly towards people who are different. One of the most commonly cited reasons is prejudice, which has led us to think that those unlike us are inferior. We also fear that they may fragment society with their beliefs or bring physical harm upon us. In the wake of mass migration from African and Middle Eastern countries, many European communities have experienced tension over conflicting cultural beliefs. In some cases, we are afraid we have to make allowances, or worse, sacrifices for others, which we see as a precursor to them taking our power away. Even when our actions are well-intentioned, they may be harmful nonetheless. These actions could be due to our inquisitiveness about how others differ from us or our overzealousness in attempts to include them in our community. 25 30
- 4 These reasons manifest themselves in varied and deleterious ways. Our prejudice may lead us to avoid those we deem different. If this is not possible, we interact with them only when necessary and often in a condescending manner. We tend to taunt them and even stoop to finger-pointing, especially when things go wrong. There are also times when our naivety unwittingly causes offence through tactless questions on the aspects in which others are different from us. We also cause them distress by thrusting them into the spotlight and highlighting these differences in public. Furthermore, when we give them special treatment, we may end up embarrassing them instead. For instance, many disabled people have expressed dismay at being treated like they constantly need additional attention or help to get things done. Regardless of our intentions, it seems that no matter what we do, we can do no right. Additionally, on a systemic level, we may deprive them of opportunities to progress and more abjectly, deny them their rights. Government-led discrimination is actually more common than we would care to admit. We have seen this with Apartheid in South Africa, where there was outright deprivation of certain groups’ rights. Sometimes, government-led discrimination can even come under the guise of noble intentions, as in the case of the Stolen Generations of Aboriginal and Islander children in Australia, where the children were forcefully removed from their families for supposedly better opportunities. Such ‘kindness’ ultimately gave rise to and justified many instances of neglect and abuse. What is worse, some of us are not only complicit in such deplorable behaviour, we may also choose to condone and even encourage blatant acts of discrimination that we observe in society. 35 40 45 50

- 5 Still, it will be unfair to assume that everyone is callous towards those who are different: inasmuch as our history records acts of discrimination, it is also full of records of altruism towards those unlike us and of us combating the subjugation of those who are different from us. Often, when we have overcome our initial mutual apprehension, we will find that we are not very different in essence, and in fact have the same needs and desires. Many of us learn to accept the differences, sometimes even redefining our communities to be more inclusive. We have seen formerly gender-specific occupations become gender neutral. Even royalty have descended from their plush ivory tower to work side by side with the average citizen, while previously homogeneous societies have turned multicultural. These trends have been observed in countries such as the Netherlands, Denmark and Sweden, which pride themselves on their increasing inclusivity. Embracing diversity is now the zeitgeist for some.

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- 6 Such a shift to greater inclusivity is made possible by global mobility, which gives us firsthand encounters with a wider range of cultures. Concurrently, the ubiquitous nature of the Internet broadens our perspectives through the spread of diverse views. Global businesses further encourage greater inclusivity by allowing people from all around the world to enjoy similar products. As such, you probably just watched the same online video using the same smartphone model as someone halfway across the globe, while munching on the same brand of chocolate and wearing a jersey of the same football team. These days, it is not just cities but entire countries where people engage in similar activities as the rest of the world. In many places, you are likely to find sushi bars next to pizza parlours, yoga classes offered alongside Zumba lessons, and people discussing the latest Hollywood blockbuster and Korean drama. These similarities not only encourage integration of different communities within the same locality, but also help newcomers feel at ease in a new yet familiar environment. Even our problems have become similar, with climate change, flagging economies, and poverty being among the most urgent of our global concerns. It seems we are not so different after all and our similar experiences could meaningfully enhance mutual empathy.

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- 7 Lamentably, our increasing homogeneity has not necessarily led to decreasing discrimination but has instead intensified the need to set ourselves apart from others in some cases. If our lifestyles are so uniform that our identities are not distinct from others', it really is not much of an identity at all. As such, some find themselves reasserting distinguishable traits, which may be the cause of the renewed emphasis on nationality and race in many parts of the world, perpetuating widespread discrimination. In the United States, for instance, there was significant objection to President Obama's proposal to offer citizenship to Latin American immigrants, even though they had lived in and contributed to the country for decades. Ironically, for all the great strides America has made, it remains stuck in its battle with discrimination.

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- 8 The human race prides itself on its many stellar achievements, yet we have hardly advanced in our treatment of people who are different. Granted, some of us are more progressive, revelling in the kaleidoscopic possibilities of differences and embracing one and all. Yet, too many of us remain regressive, wallowing in the expected doom arising from differences and persecuting those who are unlike us. If we still behave like the earliest humans, we cannot in all honesty claim to be civilised. Differences will continue to exist among us, and as John F. Kennedy said, "If we cannot end now our differences, at least we can help make the world safe for diversity."

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