

**ANGLO-CHINESE JUNIOR COLLEGE
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GENERAL PAPER

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Paper 2

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INSERT

1 hour 30 minutes

READ THESE INSTRUCTIONS FIRST

This insert contains the passages for Paper 2.

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



Passage 1: Matt Frei writes about the Noughties.

- 1 As the first decade of the 21st Century clatters to a close, some of us have been wondering how best to sum up the Noughties¹. The name is unfortunate because 'naughty' is probably one adjective that doesn't spring to mind unless you see everything through the prism of one particular golfer. Time magazine has called the 00s 'The Decade from Hell'. That seems a little unkind. After all, it hasn't been that bad for China, India or TV personality Simon Cowell. Perhaps we should just call the decade 'unnerving' or 'unsettling' or even 'unhinged'. 5
- 2 9/11 was THE event that set the tone. But I don't buy the idea that the signature phenomenon of this decade has been the conflict between Lady Liberty and the forces of extremism. I think the biggest impact of the decade, the one that has set the tone and defined the era, has come from YOU! Time magazine nailed it in 2006 when it made YOU 'Person of the Year' by putting a mirror on its front cover. Even Barack Obama kept saying it during an election campaign in which he used the web to recruit 13 million foot-soldiers and fundraisers: "It's all about you!" I still remember the first personal e-mail I got from him. "Dear Matt," it started. An e-mail just for me ... and a few million others. At one stage of the campaign, I was on first-name terms with virtually every Presidential candidate. The Internet has been largely responsible. From Googlesmania to Wikipedia to MySpace, Facebook and YouTube, YOU have become the star. 10 15
- 3 And when it wasn't about YOU, it was about ME. First came the iPod. Then the iPhone. What's next? The iWife or iHusband? Whether it's voting on American Idol or bargaining on eBay, you have grasped the power of the mouse and the text message. You have done so in the world of entertainment and politics. In Iran, you students and housewives used your mobile phones and computers to record and broadcast footage that almost toppled the government after disputed elections. In China, you have overcome rural isolation and poverty thanks to the Internet. You may have lost your job in the garment factory in Guangdong, but you returned to your village armed with a web address and expectations. In Botswana, mobile phones are now doing what landlines could never do. And an undersea cable has just brought faster-than-fast broadband to Kenya. 20 25
- 4 But the power of you hasn't just been enhanced and underpinned by mobile phone technology or by the Internet. Greater connectivity has gone hand-in-hand with a greater sense of entitlement, especially the entitlement to information. Remember how the British MPs' expenses scandal was first uncovered by an American researcher who was incensed that authorities were denying her access to public information about what MPs spent on their second homes? 30
- 5 The decade also spawned a sense of entitlement to prosperity, lubricated for much of the decade in much of the world by easy credit. Even if we were pay cheque paupers, so many of us could pretend to live like millionaires. We all know how that has ended. And this is where we get to the fundamental conflict of the unnerving Noughties. You have increasingly locked horns with the institutions that are supposed to represent you or act in your interest. You have lost faith in the banks to which you have entrusted your money, in the politicians to whom you have pledged your votes and the companies that have put food on your table. You have become inquisitive, suspicious and picky. And when you can do something about it on Twitter or your own blog, you have flourished. 35
- 6 But there are some things over which you have no control: like how your garbage is collected, how wars are fought on your behalf or how politicians govern in your name. And that has made you frustrated. The biggest conflict in the past decade has been between You and Your expectations. If the Noughties have been unnerving, what can we expect from the next decade? They will after all be called 'The Teens'. 40

¹Noughties: A proposed, slightly humorous, name for the decade from 2000 to 2009.

Passage 2: Bridget Delaney writes on "Ah, the Noughties, the decade when we cast off reality."

- 1 The past 10 years were the 'decade from hell', according to Time magazine; Martin Amis dubbed it the age of horrorism and The New York Times said Tiger Woods personified the sordid reality of the Noughties. But for me, the plastic, malleable Barbie doll is the symbol of our age. She doesn't look or act real, yet we can project any number of desires and scenarios onto her. In the Noughties, we wanted to be her. 5
- 2 The narrative of this decade has lacked authenticity. We have stopped prizing things of enduring value, things that might be perceived as natural and flawed, yet are still substantial - and swapped them for inauthentic things: a beauty ideal that is more plastic than fantastic and 'reality TV' celebrities whose rise and fall is based on constructed personas. Our houses have come to resemble Barbie houses - with more bedrooms than we need, his 'n' hers matching four-wheel- drives, heavy "it" handbags and statement heels - all of which led people to record personal credit card debt in recent years. We wanted to look like Barbie too. Women's magazines and entertainment blogs maintained an almost Taliban-like policing of women's bodies, except that these gatekeepers were monitoring flaws. A starlet who showed a bit of dimpled thigh, or unwaxed leg or, heaven forbid, a belly or double chin, would wear the scarlet letter of a magazine spread with the offending body part circled in red with the legend: "Britney (or substitute name) fat." Nothing less than perfection would do. Botox was normalised, hair extensions were fitted and spray tans became a sort of de facto national complexion. 10 15
- 3 At the fag-end of this decade, some actors looked more youthful than they did in the '90s. But their performances were less real, their foreheads immobile, their lineage curious (if she is playing the mother, why does she look younger than the daughter?) and they had disabled their ability to emote, surely an essential part of their craft. Dominating the art of inauthenticity was reality TV which was the most contrived and predictable genre of television. There was always a 'bad girl', the "good listener", the alpha-male, the peace-maker, the girl with the ridiculous boob job. People became characters, their real selves edited out or turned into an exaggeration or a caricature that would play well in the half-hour package at night. The boring boy always won. When the audience occasionally voted for someone authentic, it seemed to throw this new order. Casey Donovan, the Australian Idol winner who was not the blonde, skinny Barbie ideal of pop stars had the best voice, yet in the world of record companies, photo shoots and glossy magazines, she sank quickly. 20 25
- 4 Producers may have sensed our desire for something real, so they gave us Susan Boyle - the middle-aged Scot; unworldly and unadorned, living with her cat in her village and, so the legend goes, 'never been kissed'. But even then, watching her perform on a reality TV show, gave a sense that something had been staged, that this claim of being authentic was not as real as we were being told. Maybe our cynicism too is a by-product of the age. 30
- 5 This was an age when even the news event of the decade was relayed and remembered in a form that seemed inauthentic. The destruction of the World Trade Centre by terrorists who had hijacked commercial aircraft provided the most startling, original and previously unimaginable footage beamed around the world. Soon enough this event became rendered with a sort of unreality. We borrowed our descriptions from Hollywood: "Just like Die Hard 2", or "like that Tom Cruise movie with the giant insects". There seemed to be nothing rich in our culture, no allegory or collective tale or wisdom that we could reach for. Our collective jewellery box, our store of stories and culture and wisdom, is now filled with tat. 35 40
- 6 The past decade has seen to that. We have collected costume jewellery for our Barbie lives - plastic, disposable and ultimately worthless. But a new decade is a new beginning. Let's throw away our toys from the Noughties and start acting like grown-ups. 45

