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**ST ANDREW'S JUNIOR COLLEGE**  
**JC2 Preliminary Examination**



Name: \_\_\_\_\_ (    )

Civics Group: \_\_\_\_\_

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**GENERAL PAPER**

**8807/02**

Paper 2

**27 August 2021, Friday**

**INSERT**

**1 hour 30 minutes**

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**READ THESE INSTRUCTIONS FIRST**

This Insert contains the passages for Paper 2.

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**Passage 1.** *Clinton West questions the value of individualism in society.*

- 1 The lone ranger. The mysterious cowboy. The reclusive, billionaire crime-fighting superhero. Americans have long romanticised those who reject the system and take matters into their own hands, and these sentiments have spread insidiously, through Hollywood, into the popular culture of a global world. The hero — a symbol of ‘rugged individualism’ — is both cinematic subject and alluring myth. Yet, this enduring celebration of the ‘last man standing’ obscures the truth: ‘heroic’ individualism is a relic of the past that has no place in dealing with the complex problems of the world today. 5
- 2 One depressing observation from historians is that only large-scale violence or other catastrophes (including pandemics) have ever made us realise how critical it is to place the needs of society above the interests of the individual. As nations deal with a devastating avalanche of coronavirus deaths that has yet to run its course, or the ‘infodemic’ of fake news that has ripped at the guts of democracy, the value placed on individual rights is proving to be increasingly counter-productive. *My choice! My beliefs! My freedom!* These shrill cries for the liberty to do whatever we want and believe any falsehood that validates us have never sounded more hollow. 10
- 3 The respect for individualism that we have enshrined in democracies across the world has, in fact, been used as mere cover for selfish behaviour. The ‘right to decide’ exercised by healthy, ‘vaccine-hesitant’ citizens is an elaborate excuse to be free-riders — people who benefit from the public good, yet do not have to pay or sacrifice anything for it. They enjoy lower virus transmission rates and eventual herd protection when other people get vaccinated, but refuse to take that tiny risk and get vaccinated themselves. There are also those who spread fake news and call for extreme action, while the majority keeps society from descending into total chaos by sticking to facts and reasoned discourse. These types of toxic individualism only work when a small minority indulges in them. The greater challenge for governments arises, of course, when lots of people realise they can be selfish and get away with it. 15 20
- 4 In fact, the vocal individualists who refuse to abide by rules that govern the collective good (pandemic lockdowns, mask-wearing mandates, vaccination protocols) are endangering not just others, but also themselves. There is nothing sentimental about placing society before self. It means mutual help in cases of calamity. It is a commitment to collective survival: an understanding that we must assist one another or die. A common, deadly affliction demonstrates that the freedom of individualism is illusory, and that we are all in it together. When individual freedoms are held above collective needs, the common good is destroyed, and even free-riders may have nothing left to ride on. 25 30
- 5 What is more important now than ever before is for us to see through the fog of fake individualism. We need to realise that interdependence is the foundation of society, and that collective approaches, when undergirded by strong infrastructure, can save lives. The looming environmental crisis also calls for individual sacrifice: our petrol-guzzling sports utility vehicles; our taste for juicy steaks; exotic holiday locales. Not surprisingly, forgoing these luxuries is far easier when we give them up together. 35
- 6 There is no better time than now to correct this imbalance between individual freedom and societal needs. It may be just the thing to save us all, and bring us back from the brink of disaster. In fact, seen from a different angle, there is no better time for us to be heroes. After all, the greatest cinematic heroes are heroes precisely because of sacrifice — giving up everything for the benefit of society. 40

**Passage 2.** *R. S. Vikram argues the case for individualism in today's world.*

- 1 Our criticism of individualism has gone far enough. Look into history, and it cannot be denied that the story of humanity has been shaped by individuals who have stood out from the faceless crowds to mould our collective destiny. Say what you will, the men and women with the greatest contributions to human civilisation — Socrates or Gandhi, Mother Teresa or Marie Curie — have never conformed to the societal norms of their day. They challenged conventions, defied laws, swam against the tide of public opinion. Socrates was even sentenced to death by poison to protect the public good from the supposed 'moral corruption' of his philosophical questioning. 5
- 2 What has made us turn our backs on individualism today? Fear. We compare pandemic mortality rates and celebrate the 'selfless' collectivist cultures that have delivered lower infection numbers, while railing against the 'senseless' individualism of the United States that has led to more than half a million COVID-19 deaths. A simple question of governance has exploded into a greater debate of philosophical significance. 10
- 3 But individualism has been maligned. Critics praise the herd mentality of conformist societies as enlightened and unselfish. Yet they do not recognise that the most radical individuals can be just as altruistic, if not more so. Consider Jesus Christ, who founded a whole new religion by dying for the sins of others. Is there anything more selfless than sacrificing oneself to challenge the dominant religious beliefs of the day in order to bring a message of salvation? Individualism prizes independence and autonomy, which can represent the power to do good in spite of prevailing beliefs. Instead of focusing on Hitler, consider what really made the scale of the Holocaust possible: legions of obedient, conformist Nazi officers who 'just followed orders' in carrying out the systematic execution of more than six million Jews. This is a surprisingly common defence trotted out by war criminals. It should stand as an enduring warning against a mindless obedience to authority. 15 20
- 4 Arguably, collectivist thinking is what made such horrors possible — the uncritical acceptance of the 'needs' of society, defined by authority. Rather than following our own moral compass, we give up our power to define the 'greater good' and just follow the herd. *If everyone else is going along, how could it be wrong?* Everything, it turns out. Thinking individuals debate and disagree. Independent minds do not willingly submit to authority nor become unthinking cogs in a machine. If everyone thought for themselves, the greater diversity in opinions would at least allow evil and immoral ideas to be challenged. There would still be depraved people, but the array of different perspectives within individualistic societies acts as a defence against great systemic evil. 25 30
- 5 Finally, where would we be today without the creative genius of Thomas Edison, Steve Jobs or Elon Musk? It is no surprise that it is the United States of America, a nation that upholds individual freedom and expression as a matter of principle, that has allowed the scientific and technological innovation of these entrepreneurs to lead us into a whole new world of bright lights, smartphones and electric cars. A culture celebrating divergent individuals has allowed these geniuses to challenge conventional beliefs and achieve the seemingly impossible. Time and time again, individualism has improved our lives. 35
- 6 It is easy to seek the comforts of a herd mentality, giving into fear in an age of uncertainty and constant surveillance. But it would be far braver, and far more necessary, to make room for individualism still. As individuals, we have to step out of our comfort zone and fight our fears in order to forge ahead as a society of diverse, independent thinkers, rather than a mindless mass of soulless puppets. 40