

**2021 PRELIMINARY EXAMINATION  
GENERAL PAPER  
Paper 2 Suggested Answers**

**From Passage 1**

**1. What is the author's purpose in asking the question at the end of paragraph 1? [1]**

From the passage	Suggested rephrase
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Sounds like a good thing, right? (l.8)</li> <li>At the same time, I cannot help but be dismayed by the toxic by-products generated by increasingly prominent strains of wokeism (l.14–15)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The author wants the readers think more deeply/ ponder on whether woke culture is really beneficial. OR</li> <li>The rhetorical question is used to plant doubt in the readers' mind as to whether woke culture is really beneficial. OR</li> <li>The question sets the scene for/ foreshadows his answer/ argument/ belief/ view in paragraph 2 in which he disputes the benefits of woke culture when taken to extremes.</li> </ul>

**2. What are the benefits 'wokeism purports to achieve' (line 10) and what does the author suggest is the outcome by using the word 'purports'? Use your own words as far as possible. [3]**

From the passage	Suggested rephrase
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Wokeism purports to achieve ... a society that is <b>respectful of individual differences</b> and <b>offers equal opportunity to all</b> (l.10–11)</li> <li>At the same time, I cannot help but be dismayed by the toxic by-products generated by increasingly <b>prominent strains</b> of wokeism (l. 14–15)</li> </ul>	<p>The benefits are</p> <p><b>A</b> a society which does not put down/ values unique traits or beliefs// where unique traits and beliefs are held in high regard/esteem/ venerated [1]</p> <p><b>B</b> and every person will have access to the same advantages/ same chances to succeed/ a level playing field [1]</p> <p><b>Ci</b> He uses the word 'purports' to suggest (his doubt/ reservation) that these benefits are unlikely to materialise in reality/ that wokeism will be harmful to society</p> <p><b>Cii</b> when it becomes very strident/ excessive/ is taken to extremes/ [1]</p> <p><i>* Both Ci + Cii needed get 1 mark</i></p>

**3. Using material from paragraphs 3–5, summarise the author's concerns about woke culture when taken too far.**

**Write your summary in no more than 120 words, not counting the opening words which are printed below. Use your own words as far as possible. [8]**

When taken too far, woke culture can lead to .....

From the passage		Suggested rephrase
• <b>bullying</b> (l.18)	<b>A1</b>	• harassment/ persecution/ intimidation
• and <b>ostracisation</b> (l.18)	<b>A2</b>	• which marginalises/ alienates/ shuns others
• especially when behind the <b>veil</b> of Internet <b>anonymity</b> (l.18–19)	<b>A3</b>	• by people who assume fake/ false identities // whose identities are hidden/ undisclosed/ unseen behind the screen.
• <b>cancel</b> culture ... an <b>extension</b> of woke mindsets ... <b>denying money, attention or support</b> for companies or people that are perceived to have offended others through what they say or do. (l.19–21)	<b>A4</b>	• This leads to alleged offenders being boycotted// stripped of/ denied their revenue/ income/ notice/ recognition/ backing <i>*livelihood = BOD</i>
• <b>assumption</b> is that if you <b>disagree with what someone has said</b> , you have <b>the right to punish them</b> (l.21–22) ... <b>punishing</b> people for (l.28)	<b>A5</b>	• as a punitive consequence of/ as a penalty/ retribution for their different views, <i>*if student just capture 'punish' or just 'views', can still give BOD</i>
• <b>innocuous remarks taken out of context</b> (l.28)	<b>A6</b>	• even for seemingly harmless comments/ views without the situation being explained/ considered// words seen in the wrong light/ misconstrued <i>*'seemingly harmless' without 'taken out of context' explained = 0</i>
• Not sure ... can <b>count as a victory</b> of any kind (l.28–29)	<b>A7</b>	• This is hardly a win/ triumph.
• <b>nothing to be gained from hyper-vigilantly policing other people's words and thoughts</b> (l.30–31)	<b>A8</b>	• It is not beneficial to zealously monitor others' views
• <b>waiting to pounce on their 'mistakes'</b> (l.31)	<b>A9</b>	• just to jump on/ attack (perceived) erroneous views
• a <b>smug sense of moral superiority</b> (l.32)	<b>A10</b>	• so one can feel righteous/ virtuous/ above others ( <i>more correct = BOD</i> )
• used to <b>boost one's ego</b> (l.32)	<b>A11</b>	• feel self-important/ superior/ good about oneself <i>*(boost one's pride = BOD)</i> <i>*to raise one's morale/ self-esteem = 0 (wrong tone)</i>
• <b>salve one's conscience</b> (l.32–33)	<b>A12</b>	• or to assuage/ reduce/ mollify one's guilt// feel less guilty.

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>enabling the <b>weaponisation of these identities</b> (l.35)</li> <li><b>aggressively thrusting said viewpoints</b> (l.38)</li> <li>each <b>virulently hostile</b> to all others for the <b>simple crime of being different</b> (l.41)</li> </ul>	<b>B1</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Woke culture is used to attack others/ people are belligerent against others with dissimilar ideas/ perspectives</li> <li><i>*Both parts 'attack/ weapon' + 'different views' required to get this point</i></li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><b>accentuating the differences between people instead</b> (l.35–36)</li> </ul>	<b>B2</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>exacerbating the distinctions/ disparities between people</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><b>in the face of people who may not even be out to offend you</b> (l.38–39)</li> </ul>	<b>B3</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Attacking people who did not intend/ mean to hurt/ slight/ upset others</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><b>self-indulgent</b> (l.39)</li> </ul>	<b>B4</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>is just being self-absorbed</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><b>and entitled</b> (l.39)</li> </ul>	<b>B5</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>in exercising one's privilege/ right.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>What we will end up with, in the worst case scenario, is a society <b>carved into thousands of pockets of micro-identities</b> (l.40)</li> </ul>	<b>B6</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>This can result in a <u>highly</u> disparate/ fractured/ fragmented/ <u>extremely</u> disharmonious society</li> <li><i>*if degree is not captured = 0 mark</i></li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>the <b>strong emotions aroused</b> by wokeism can ... be <b>exploited</b> (l.42–43)</li> </ul>	<b>C1</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The intense feelings can be taken advantage of</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>to <b>serve the agenda of malicious, opportunistic</b> individuals ... (l.43) a <b>sufficiently powerful and unscrupulous</b> person (l.45–46)</li> </ul>	<b>C2</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>by the unethical/ the ill-intentioned/ those with ulterior motives/ who meant harm</li> <li><i>*'those out to exploit' = 0 (lifted from l.43)</i></li> <li><i>*just 'those with authority' = 0 (negative tone not captured)</i></li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><i>inferred from</i> the <b>Capitol Hill riots</b> in the United States <b>demonstrated just how much damage an emotional mob can do to a hallowed societal institution</b> (l.44–45)</li> </ul>	<b>C3</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>and can even undermine democracy.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Young people attracted to woke ideas must be <b>alert to the possibility that their good intentions can turn rancid</b> (l.46–47)</li> </ul>	<b>C4</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Well-meaning objectives can become bad/ unpleasant/ harmful// turn sour</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>wokeism can become ... an <b>ideological sledgehammer that brooks no dissent</b> and (l.48–49)</li> </ul>	<b>C5</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>when it results in intolerance for opposing/ different ideas</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><b>creates a new in-group and out-group</b> (l.58) (l.49)</li> <li><b>demand that others come on board the journey immediately, or leave the vessel</b> (l.50 – 51)</li> </ul>	<b>C6</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>forcing people to choose/ pick sides// resulting in an us versus them mentality</li> <li><i>*polarising/ dividing society = BOD</i></li> </ul>

**Mark Scheme (24 points)**

1 point	1 mark	5–6 points	4 marks	11–12 points	7 marks
2 points	2 marks	7–8 points	5 marks	≥ 13 points	8 marks
3–4 points	3 marks	9–10 points	6 marks		

**4. In what two ways is the final sentence of Passage 1 an effective conclusion to the author's argument? [2]**

From the passage	Suggested rephrase
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>And if that is what being woke means, then I would much rather <b>stay asleep</b> (l.56–57)</li> </ul>	<p><b>A</b> It is a clever use of a pun to contrast the literal meaning of 'woke' with 'stay asleep.' [1] OR He used 'stay asleep' to contrast with (the literal meaning of) 'woke' in the opening sentence of the passage, bringing the argument full circle.</p> <p><b>B</b> He effectively sums up his argument by stating he would rather 'stay asleep' i.e. reject/ not be part of/ not be involved/ participate in/ be party to woke culture which only pursues a single-minded agenda without being open to other views/ has become toxic/ harmful/ dangerous [1]</p> <p><i>*It effectively sums up/ emphasises/ reinforces his argument that woke culture can be toxic/ harmful/ dangerous = BOD</i></p>

**From Passage 2**

**5. From paragraph 1, explain one way the author uses language to criticise the far-right or right-wing conservatives in the United States. [1]**

From the passage	Suggested rephrase
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>the term has also been hijacked by far-right or right-wing conservatives (l.3)</li> <li>this right-wing narrative frames people who are woke as oppressors ... (l.7–11)</li> <li><i>inferred from all the extreme words the right wing groups use to describe people who are woke e.g. irrational, intolerant leftist mobs, prowling around ... in search of unwitting targets to shame and</i></li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>She uses the word 'hijacked' to criticise the right-wingers as unlawfully or unfairly seizing control of the term 'woke culture', twisting/ warping/ distorting/ skewing its original meaning (to undermine the liberals) OR</li> <li>By using the word 'frames' she criticises the right wingers as falsely accusing the 'woke' people as criminals out to violate people's rights. OR</li> <li>By saying that right-wingers describe liberals in extreme, exaggerated terms such as 'intolerant', 'irrational', 'mercilessly cancelling' others etc, she</li> </ul>

<i>harass ... mercilessly cancelling people ... (l.4–11)</i>	criticises the right wingers as maliciously going all out to discredit the liberals// as having jaundiced and unreasonable views themselves. <i>(or any acceptable answer)</i>
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6. In paragraph 2, how does the author support her claim that 'Singaporeans who are woke do not wield significant amounts of influence' (lines 12–13)? Use your own words as far as possible. [3]

From the passage	Suggested rephrase
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Singaporeans who are woke <b>do not wield significant amounts of influence over the national agenda, policy-making, or public discourse</b> (l.12–14) / Many woke Singaporeans are still <b>young</b>, and might be <b>studying</b> ... have less <b>power</b> (l.18–19)</li> <li>Issues that would be associated with being woke mainly exist only on the <b>margins</b> of Singaporean <b>national discourse</b> (l.20–21)</li> <li>They are <b>not given much airtime</b> in the mainstream media (l.14) / <b>occasional appearances</b> in the local media (l.23)/ <b>once in a while recognition</b> (l.24)</li> <li>Some of these communities and causes are <b>actively censored or excluded from national platforms</b> (l.14–15)</li> </ul>	<p><b>A</b> Singaporeans, especially young Singaporeans still in school, do not have the authority to change policies. [1]</p> <p><b>B</b> 'Woke' causes are not widely discussed by the government or the public</p> <p><b>C</b> and not given much attention in the local media. [1]</p> <p><b>D</b> Worse, the activists and the issues they raise are banned from or intentionally left out from official channels. [1]</p> <p><i>*Any 3 points</i></p>

7. Explain the author's use of the phrase 'lip service' (lines 23–24). [1]

From the passage	Suggested rephrase
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><i>Inferred from</i> lip service paid by politicians (l.23 – 24)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>This means politicians cursorily/ superficially raise/ talk about these issues/ give the façade/ impression of raising these causes/ issues but nothing much is being done/ no action is taken. [1]</li> </ul> <p><i>*Answer must include 'no action taken' to get 1 mark</i></p>

8. In lines 26–30, what are three concerns raised by the author about the 'careless use of woke as a label? Use your own words as far as possible. [3]

From the passage	Suggested rephrase
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>it is the trendy thing to do (l.27) ...</li> </ul>	<p><b>A</b> One concern is that people take up a cause as a fad/ to be popular/ fashionable/ are merely jumping on the bandwagon [1]</p>

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>possibly <b>'just a phase' and not to be taken seriously</b> (l.30)</li> <li>and not because of <b>personal conviction</b> or <b>belief</b> (l.27–28)</li> <li>or because there are <b>serious ethical and moral reasons</b> for taking these positions (l.28–29)</li> <li>It makes these issues sound like the new-fangled, <b>irrational posturing</b> of <b>impressionable youth</b> (l.29–30)</li> </ul>	<p><b>B</b> for a while/ a short-term// but this will soon be forgotten/ abandoned // but will soon lose interest. [1]</p> <p>OR</p> <p>causing the cause to be trivialised/ taken lightly/ seen as something not worth noting/ be given attention to. [1]</p> <p><b>C</b> Another concern is that people do not truly believe in/ subscribe to/ are sincere/ genuine in pursuing these causes.[1]</p> <p><b>D</b> Their motivation is not based on principles or values.[1]</p> <p><b>E</b> This is just a novel idea taken up by the young Singaporeans who are easily influenced/ manipulated/ swayed/ gullible/ naïve/ who are not thinking logically/ reasonably. [1]</p> <p><i>*Give one mark as long as 'irrational' or 'impressionable' is explained</i></p> <p><i>*Any 3 points</i></p>
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9. Explain the 'conceptual skew' mentioned by the author in line 31. Use your own words as far as possible. [2]

From the passage	Suggested rephrase
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>while the <b>government's positions</b> are always framed as <b>sensible conclusions drawn from sensible deliberations</b> (l.31–32)</li> <li>progressive arguments <b>for reform</b> can be <b>brushed off</b> as the <b>delusions</b> of the 'woke movement' (l.32–33),</li> <li>possibly <b>imported from abroad</b> (l.33)</li> <li>because our young people are <b>consuming too much American content on Instagram and TikTok</b> (l.34)</li> </ul>	<p>This means</p> <p><b>A</b> there is a bias in favour of the government, which is seen as rational and objective in its decisions,  <i>*An incomplete answer such as 'the government is always right' = 0 mark because the explanation is not given.</i></p> <p><b>B</b> while liberal voices/ views/ ideas for change are dismissed as based on faulty judgement/ false reality  <i>*An incomplete answer such as 'liberal ideas are dismissed' = 0 mark because the reason 'delusions' is not captured</i></p> <p><b>C</b> brought in from overseas  OR</p>

	by young people fed on American ideas on social media.  <i>*1–2 points = 1 mark</i> <i>3 points = 2 marks</i>
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10. According to the author, why is it important that ‘we collectively resist this sort of lazy framing’ (lines 40–41)? Use your own words as far as possible. [1]

From the passage	Suggested rephrase
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>erases differences in power, influence, and responsibility (l.41)</li> <li>it only dumbs down discourse (l.42)</li> <li>and hinders us from engaging with analysis that will help us learn and grow (l.42–43)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>This is because such ‘lazy framing’ makes it seem as if every citizen has equal authority and obligations when this is not the case // dismisses/ glosses over the degree of authority and obligation</li> <li>OR</li> <li>It lowers the quality of/ results in simplistic discussions/ conversations/ debate/ dialogue</li> <li>OR</li> <li>It prevents/ denies us from giving more thought to/ thinking more deeply/ pondering/ evaluating the issues to develop further/ for society to advance.</li> </ul> <p><i>*If ‘learn and grow’ not captured, can still give 1 mark</i>  <i>**‘It is not beneficial for society’ = 0 mark (vague)</i></p>

11. Lester Wong argues that woke culture can be dangerous while Kirsten Han argues that the dangers are exaggerated.

How far do you agree or disagree with both authors’ observations, relating your arguments to your own experience and that of your society?

## QUESTION ANALYSIS

### woke culture

- Identify with social justice causes, such as xenophobia and racial discrimination, gender and LGBT issues, exploitation of migrant workers etc.
- Prepared to take a stand and raise awareness on these issues.

### woke culture can be dangerous

- When taken to extremes, woke culture can be harmful to society and individuals who do not agree with woke ideas.

- Such extremes can result in a ‘call out’ culture, bullying, marginalization of individuals, cancel culture and polarization of society.

**Dangers are exaggerated**

- The adverse impact of woke culture is over-hyped and not as serious or detrimental to society as the right-wing conservatives make them out to be.

**how far would you agree or disagree with her observations**

- Students should ensure that they answer the command phrase of the question clearly.
- Do not merely agree or disagree – the degree of agreement/ disagreement should be clearly stated, using appropriate qualifiers.
- Students should state their stand in relation to each observation.
- Students should also consider balance in their response.

**relating your arguments to your own experiences and that of your society**

- The society discussed in the script must be clearly stated in the introduction and discussed throughout the response.
- Students should not engage in generic discussions on woke culture without contextualising their arguments to a particular society.
- To ensure that the discussion is clearly related to their society, students should refer to the traits of people in that society –
  - their lifestyles, mindsets, attitudes, behavior e.g. pragmatic, conservative vs liberal
  - the experiences that the society and its people have gone through, historical or recent
  - circumstances that are prevalent in the society, e.g. globalised, high internet penetration rate, fair albeit authoritarian government, strict laws and regulations, multi-racial society that values racial and religious harmony etc ...
  - different groups of people in the society – different groups will exhibit different traits, have different experiences and as a result, the same observation is true to different degrees for different groups.

**USING THE SUGGESTED APPROACH WISELY**

- You will notice that the suggested approach below provides many examples and different angles of evaluation/ argument.
- In the examination, you are not expected to write an AQ response at such length. You are reasonably expected to provide some perceptive evaluation/ argument and at least one well-evaluated example per body paragraph.
- However, you should still carefully examine the various angles of evaluation/ argument presented below to see how the author’s opinions can be evaluated in the context of Singapore.
- The numerous examples are there to show you that examples are in abundance and not so difficult to cite. You should also familiarise yourself with these examples because they can be used in a different context, by looking at them from a different angle.

**SUGGESTED APPROACH**

**R:** The extent to which you agree with the authors’ arguments on the impact of woke culture in your society

**OBs:** Observations made by the authors to support their stand (with relevant quotes from the passage). State your chosen observation clearly with paragraph/ line reference



at the start of each body paragraph. You should identify and discuss at least one observation from each author in your AQ.

**From Passage 1: Lester Wong provides about 3 main reasons to support his stand that woke culture can be dangerous when taken too far.**

<p><b>Argument A:</b> Woke culture degenerates into online vigilantism.</p>	<p><b>OB1</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Self-righteous bullying and ostracisation (l.18) ...</li> <li>hyper-vigilantly policing other people's words and thoughts, waiting to pounce on their 'mistakes' ((l.30–31), punishing people for innocuous remarks taken out of context (l.28–29)</li> </ul> <p><b>OB2</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>resulting in 'cancel culture' (l.19)</li> </ul>
<p><b>Argument B:</b> Woke ideas can be weaponized resulting in a polarized and fragmented society. as people are forced to choose sides</p>	<p><b>OB3</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>enabling the weaponisation of these identities and accentuating the differences (l.35) resulting in a 'society carved into thousands of pockets of micro-identities, each virulently hostile to all others for the simple crime of being different.' (l.40–41)</li> </ul> <p><b>OB4</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>ideological sledgehammer that brooks no dissent, creating a new in-group and out-group (l.48–49)</li> </ul>
<p><b>Argument C:</b> Woke culture can be hijacked/ exploited by people with ulterior motives to undermine the government/ democracy</p>	<p><b>OB5</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>strong emotions aroused by wokeism can .... be exploited to serve the agenda of malicious, opportunistic individuals ... damage to a hallowed institution (l.42–45)</li> </ul>

**From Passage 2: Kirsten Han gives about 2 main reasons why woke culture is unlikely to be taken to extremes in Singapore and, as such, its dangers are exaggerated. She also argues for more engagement of woke ideas.**

<p><b>Argument D:</b> Woke culture does not have much influence nor resulted in any change in policy</p>	<p><b>OB6</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Singaporeans who are woke do not wield significant amounts of influence over the national agenda, policy-making, or public discourse. They are not given much airtime in the mainstream media. Some of these communities and causes are actively censored or excluded from national platforms. (l.12–16)</li> <li>Many woke Singaporeans are still young, and might be studying in institutions where they have less power (l.18–19)</li> <li>once-in-awhile recognition does not translate to actual power or change (l.24–25)</li> </ul>
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<p><b>Argument E:</b>  <b>Merely dismissing woke ideas as unimportant, short-lived trends is a lost opportunity to hold hard discussions necessary for the progress of society</b></p>	<p><b>OB7</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Careless use of woke as a label makes it sound as if ... (it is) the trendy thing to do, and not because of personal conviction or belief, or because there are serious ethical and moral reasons for taking these positions (l.27–29)</li> <li>• makes these issues sound like the new-fangled, irrational posturing of impressionable youth, possibly ‘just a phase’ and not to be taken seriously. (l. 29–30)</li> <li>• progressive arguments for reform can be brushed off as the delusions of the ‘woke movement’, possibly imported from abroad (l.32–33)</li> <li>• important that we collectively resist this sort of lazy framing that erases differences in power, influence, and responsibility. It does nothing for us; it only dumbs down discourse and hinders us from engaging with analysis that will help us learn and grow (l.41–43)</li> </ul>
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**EX, EV:** Explaining, developing and evaluating your arguments with reference to yourself and your own society, making the link clear to OB and R.

**EG:** Supporting ideas with relevant examples from your society, and making the link from the examples to OB, EX, EV and R.

**\*\* for the suggested answer below, ‘your society’ = Singapore.**

**\*\* since there are 2 passages, you should choose at least one observation from passage 1 and one observation from passage 2.**

## INTRODUCTION

- As a globalised and digitalised nation with a high internet penetration rate of 82.9% in 2021, Singaporeans have avidly followed the woke movement in the United States such as #Black Lives Matter, #MeToo Movement. Inspired by this, many Singaporeans are now taking to social media to raise woke ideas, from casual racism to sexual harassment and rights of the marginalised in our society.
- Based on the online vigilantism seen on Singapore’s social media, Wong’s argument about the dangers of the excesses of woke culture does strike a chord.
- However, I agree more with Han’s view that in the Singapore context, these dangers are exaggerated as these are not as rampant or extreme as what is happening in the United States (US) due to Singapore being more tightly regulated. In many cases, the causes raised by woke Singaporeans are often dismissed or shut down as attempts to upset Singapore’s fragile harmony.

## Passage 1

**\*\*For passage 1, you should choose either one of the 5 observations because the development for OB1 – OB5 overlap. The explanation and examples raised in one OB can easily be used**

across other OBs as well. However, should you want to do two OBs from passage 1 and one OB from passage 2, make sure the development for both OBs from passage 1 DO NOT OVERLAP.

**What can I acknowledge? – the possible dangers when woke culture is taken to extremes.**

**However, I largely disagree with Wong that the situation is likely to get out of hand in Singapore due to the unique characteristics of Singapore and her people.**

### Observation 1

- Wong argues that woke culture can be dangerous especially when it is taken to extreme leading to **'hyper-vigilantly policing of other people's words and thoughts, waiting to pounce on their 'mistakes' (Passage 1, l.30–31)** as well as **'self-righteous bullying and ostracisation (Passage 1, l.18)**
- This is particularly true with the advent of the internet and the new media where keyboard warriors are looking to make a name for themselves and the existence of a gullible army of followers who are not in the habit of fact-checking the things published online.
- For example, outraged netizens, after reading stories of how tearful Vietnamese tourist Pham Van Thoai was forced to kneel down on his knees and beg for a smartphone refund, have resorted to Internet vigilantism to shame its owner, Jover Chew. While the unscrupulous acts of Chew were worthy of exposure and condemnation, the 'public shaming' of his wife and subsequently family members certainly borders on bullying and ostracisation.
- **Nevertheless, while the online shaming was questionable, I do not agree with Wong that the situation has gotten out of hand unlike online vigilantism elsewhere.**
- This is because Singapore's paternalistic government has very strict laws against people who are seen as trying to undermine the security and safety of the tiny island state. Singaporeans are very much aware the rule of law and remain wary of getting on the wrong side of the law.
- There is a place for woke culture even in Singapore which prides itself for being a safe and clean city.
- When woke culture is carried out sensibly and not trying to take things into its own hands, it can indeed expose and bring justice for victims.
- For example, in 2017, a couple had gone to the hawker centre at Toa Payoh for dinner got into a dispute with a 76 year old senior over sharing of a table. The couple used vulgarities on the senior and pushed the senior's back forcefully. The couple's behaviour, filmed by a bystander, was posted on Facebook and the video went viral. An online petition calling for civil action led to the couple's arrest by the police. They were later fined after they pleaded guilty to their offences.
- **Hence, my society has indeed seen some online self-righteous bullying and ostracisation, but it is more exception than the norm as rational voices tend to prevail in my society, easing the concerns raised by Wong that woke culture has been taken too far, endangering society.**

### Observation 2

- **Wong argues that one of the dangers of woke culture taken too far is ‘cancel culture’ (Passage 1, l.19).**
- The view of right and wrong becomes an absolutist one, and the punishment has to be thorough for us to be satisfied that justice has been served. The ones in the wrong must get boycotted, ostracized, fired or, better still, all of the above.
- **Undeniably there have been some examples of Singaporeans being ‘cancelled’ for tone deaf racist comments.**
- In 2012, Amy Cheong’s expletive-filled racist Facebook post that disparaged Malays for their lengthy and noisy void-deck weddings and mocked their divorce rate drew a backlash and police attention, causing her to be fired from her assistant director post at the National Trades Union Congress (NTUC). After her, more Singaporeans have used cancel culture to impact individuals in positions of bigger power and influence. Clicknetwork TV dropped influencer Wendy Cheng, better known as Xiaxue, making it clear it over did not support the “divisive” way she conveyed her views. Cheng was flamed by the public and targeted by multiple police complaints, mostly for her decade-old racist and xenophobic tweets targeting ethnic groups. More recently, Ngee Ann Polytechnic senior lecturer, Tan Boon Lee, was sacked for accosting an inter-racial couple and berating them on how ‘Indian men prey on Chinese women’, and for Islamophobic content in one of his lessons.
- Using cancel culture to empower disenfranchised communities seems like a good thing, but some people are increasingly perceiving it as a threat to “unwelcome” opinion, or worse, mob justice.
- **While it is indeed unfortunate that some people have indeed lost their jobs, for their racist rants, and have been harassed online, this is not as prevalent in Singapore as in the US.** Ivan Lim who withdrew from the ruling political party’s candidate roster after several people accused him of elitist and abusive behavior, still retains his general manager post at Keppel Offshore & Marine.
- Arguably, it is necessary to hold popular entities accountable by society as in the Okletsgo June 2020 episode after Malay women rallied against the podcast hosts’ misogynistic content. The podcasters rejected their complaints until President Halimah Yacob stepped in to demand the trio issue a proper apology and promise to review their content – which they quickly did. But the podcast has hardly been cancelled. In August 2021, it ranks in the top 3 in the podcast charts.
- **Some of the posts that called out racist behavior** such as the Chinese man who shouted vulgarities to an Indian family in the park and telling them to ‘go back to India’ as well as the viral video of a Chinese woman who deliberately struck a gong loudly and repeatedly as her Hindu neighbour carried out his prayer routine, have stirred up much discussion and debate on the existence of casual racism in Singapore beneath the veneer of racial harmony, and **has led to much soul searching in the media and among many Singaporeans, which can be said to be a good thing.**
- Being ‘called out’ on social media has also led to much personal reflection on the part of the perpetrators. The former polytechnic lecturer has since apologised for cultural insensitivity. A man caught on video belligerently confronting the security guards at his condominium for a visitors’ parking fee imposed by the management, learnt the hard way that Singaporeans really dislike misbehaving, self-entitled bullies. He has since learnt the error of his ways and apologised to the security guards.
- On 1 Jan 2020, the government implemented the Criminal Law Reform Act and Protection from Harassment (Amendment) Act. This law also makes ‘doxxing’ – the publication of an

individual's personal information with intention to harass – a crime. This is to ensure that Singaporeans do not cross the fine line between a genuine intention to warn others and a nascent intention to harass or incite potential violence.

- **So, while cancel culture has made its mark in Singapore as well, most Singaporeans do not maliciously go all out to cancel every person who has made a 'mistake' and there are laws against online vigilantism. This means the dangers of woke culture are not as serious in Singapore as Wong fears.**

### Observation 3

- **I do understand why Wong argues that there is 'a slippery slope from carving out a space for all shades of identity to coexist, to enabling the weaponisation of these identities and accentuating the differences (Passage 1, l.35).**
- There is indeed but a very short 'slippery slope' from the civilised, rational approach to the 'self-indulgent', holier-than-thou, in-your-face, and vindictive behavior that is now poisoning wokeism in many societies.
- The ubiquity of social media platforms has greatly influenced the way millennials think, feel and behave. Whereas older adults may be more used to thinking through an issue over an extended period of time, millennials, including those in Singapore, tend to respond much more quickly to any stimuli. They tend to frame differences in opinion as an argument rather than a dialogue, and so may be less inclusive than they think themselves to be.
- The response of Preeti Nair (Preeti Nair) and her brother to the 'brownface' advertisement which they deemed racist is one example of this. The response was done in a way that was highly insulting to the Chinese population in Singapore. Instead of a civilised response that sought to bridge differences, they chose to exacerbate existing differences between the races.
- It is also reasonable to argue that respecting 'all shades of identity' is an innocent moral concept that needs to remain that way. 'Weaponising' it – like what Ms. Nair and her brother had done – in the name of making Singapore more 'inclusive' and harmonious will only lead to the fracturing of tiny, multi-ethnic Singapore into thousands of fragments of 'micro-identities' (l.40) that most of us will not even be aware of.
- **However, it is my belief that wokeism is not the 'weaponisation' of anything. This accusation is a deliberately false characterisation of social justice activism by right-wing fanatics like Wong who are keen on vilifying it to serve their own moral agenda.**
- Woke culture is about awakening the masses to the realities of institutionalised discrimination, and being woke is a commitment to a just and moral society for everyone. What Ms. Nair and her brother had done was deliberately characterised as aggressive and socially divisive by the press so that the majority of Singaporeans would end up wrongly believing they were rabble rousers out to disrupt Singapore's harmonious society.
- If anything, it is those who are most afraid of wokeism – those who hold strong racial prejudices within that the Nair siblings were trying to criticise – who are 'weaponising' wokeism to discredit it.
- There is no 'slippery slope' to anywhere. Staying woke requires us to stand up to the aggressions of entrenched racism in Singapore. There is no nice or rude version of wokeism. If social injustice rears its head, then woke culture must rise to it and make its voice heard clearly, loudly, unmistakably, albeit reasonably.

- **On the whole, woke culture is not as serious in Singapore, to the extent that it has led to the dangers that Wong has so alarmingly pointed out. Singapore is built on a foundation of pragmatism and consensus-building that is hardwired into our DNA. My society will not allow woke culture to rock the boat too much, and the government itself is definitely not going to allow it to divide multiracial and multicultural Singapore.**

#### Observation 4

- **Wong also warns that when taken too far, woke culture can be an ‘ideological sledgehammer that brooks no dissent, creating a new in-group and out-group (Passage 1, l.48–49) demanding those who do not ‘come on board the journey immediately’ to ‘leave the vessel.’ (Passage 1, l.50—51)**
- It is sadly, true that woke culture is, in some quarters, mutating into the very thing that it claims it is fighting – intolerance. This variant of wokeism assumes the moral high ground in all and any argument, and sees no need to listen to any opinion that differs from theirs.
- If one is genuinely interested in debating issues to do with gender equality or religion or gay rights, one is automatically part of the ‘out-group’ – a racist, or sexist, or homophobe etc. By accepting no other opinion other than their own, the self-proclaimed tolerance of wokeism is actually intolerance.
- Young woke activists like the Nair siblings produced an expletive-laden video that lambasted the entire Chinese majority in Singapore as racist bigots because of a single advertisement that was not even intentionally meant to instigate racism.
- On LGBT websites and forums, woke culture has generated much antagonism against Christianity in Singapore as a whole. Christians (who comprise almost 20% of the population) are often tarred with the same woke brush as homophobic, bible-thumping bigots and haters who condemn people they do not like to eternal hellfire.
- As such, all of wokeism is deemed to have become the ‘sledgehammer’ to end all debate, but debate is precisely what many woke and conservative Singaporeans need to learn to embrace in order to come to terms with new perspectives.
- **Such a characterisation of an intolerant woke culture ‘that brooks no dissent’ is again, unfortunately, the result of efforts by people like Wong. Woke Singaporeans are much more enlightened than the ones in other more liberal countries which he often refers to. They are, in general, capable of engaging different views in a calm and rational manner to make reforms for a better Singapore.**
- While they may disagree strongly with those who are ‘not woke’, they do not force the issue in order to make their grievances a public nuisance to society at large. Singaporeans have been well-schooled on the need to maintain a cohesive society. Despite our differences, our society is not deeply polarized as the US. There are no major ‘in’ or ‘out’ groups formed.
- Activists like the Nair siblings quickly apologised when their light-hearted take on racial issues became a matter of national concern. **This shows that the dangers of woke culture being taken too far as raised by Wong may not be as grave in Singapore.**

#### Observation 5

- Wong argues that **‘strong emotions aroused by wokeism’ can be ‘exploited to serve the agenda of malicious, opportunistic individuals’ (Passage 1, l.42–43).**
- **Indeed, my society has also witnessed such exploitation by some malicious opportunistic individuals.**
- For example, Ai Takagi and Yang Kaiheng, the couple behind now-defunct socio-political site TheRealSingapore.com (TRS) published an article about alleged police action to stop music playing during a Thaipusam procession, due to complaints by a Filipino family, leading to the arrest of the Indian musicians. Their allegation was proven to be unfounded, leading to them being arrested. Takagi and Yang later admitted to deliberately sowing discord between Singaporeans and foreigners through a series of articles on the website which had made A\$550,000 in advertising revenue.
- The motive was pure profiteering through misleading and sensationalising information.
- However, police action was swift and the judicial system sent out a clear message that such malicious exploitation would not be tolerated. The culprits were charged under the Sedition Act and faced fine and imprisonment.
- My society is multi-racial and have had brushes with racial riots in the past. We take any attempts to exploit race seriously as can be seen from laws such as the Racial Harmony Act. New laws such as the Protection from Online Falsehoods and Manipulation Act have also been enacted to combat ‘fake news’, especially those involving online hate speech.
- **Hence, I do not generally agree with Wong’s concerns about the dangers of woke culture taken to extremes, as this may not actually apply to my society.**

## Passage 2

**Reasons why I agree more with Han that the dangers are exaggerated, and that more attention need to be given to woke ideas being raised, instead. However, it is not entirely true that the efforts of woke activists do not translate into change.**

### Observation 6

- While Wong’s concerns about the dangers of excessive wokeism should not be entirely dismissed, **I agree more with Han that in Singapore these dangers are not so evident in the context of my society, as woke culture is relatively low-key here because those who are woke may not have as much power or influence (Passage 2, l.12–14) as those in the US.**
- **This is largely because woke activists in Singapore are not given free rein here to undermine the fragile social fabric of our nation.**
- For example, while the Singapore government may turn a blind eye to the Pink Dot rallies, these rallies are still tightly regulated, and can only be peacefully held at Hong Lim Park. Han is right here in saying that ‘this once-in-awhile recognition does not translate to actual power or change’ (Passage 2, l.24–25) as their efforts have not been successful in convincing the Singapore government to repeal Section 377A of the Penal Code.
- Being a largely conservative society, the government still has to consider the beliefs of religious groups such as the Wear White Movement that demands the government to protect the morality of the young from woke or liberal ideas ‘imported from abroad because

our young people are consuming too much American content on Instagram and TikTok' (Passage 2, l.33 – 34), and maintain the social balance.

- **I also agree with Han that the voices of woke Singaporeans are very important to raise issues and alternative perspectives that Singapore politicians and the majority of the population may not see as a problem. However, I think Han may have overlooked the fact that some of these woke ideas have had tangible positive outcomes.**
- Some of the issues raised have led to conversations, albeit uncomfortable ones, taking baby steps to meaningful change in the future. In some cases, this has led to reforms in institutions and the law to better protect the rights of vulnerable Singaporeans.
- The issue of discrimination of discrimination against unwed and single mothers raised in 2015 by National Solidary Party's Kervyn Lim, a single mother herself; by the non-governmental organisation (NGO), Association of Women for Action & Research (AWARE); and the petition by Workers' Party Minister of Parliament, Louis Ng, in 2017 finally compelled the government to review some of its policies to make it fairer for single mothers who, ironically, need these benefits more than married mothers.
- Furthermore, while I do agree with Han that woke Singaporeans are 'still young' and in school (l.18–20), their voices still count as in the case of Monica Baey whose Instagram stories about being the victim of a voyeur not only went viral but sparked a national discussion, prompting local universities to tighten their disciplinary frameworks and stronger disciplinary measures against perpetrators of sexual harassment.
- Being more educated, many young Singaporeans are more aware of their rights and the rights of others and are leveraging on digital tools to raise awareness social injustice. This bodes well for the future leaders of Singapore who will hopefully be more enlightened to make more reforms for a better Singapore.
- This shows that the dangers of woke culture being taken too far as raised by Wong may not be as grave in Singapore. Even though those who are woke may not have as much power as politicians to make sweeping policy reforms in every area, their voices can still make a difference.
- **More importantly, these issues have been raised in a measured manner, without undermining the social fabric of Singapore society.**

**Reasons why I agree more with Han that the dangers of woke culture are exaggerated and there is, instead, a need for more discussion on woke ideas for the progress of Singapore society**

### Observation 7

- **I do agree with Han that we must be careful not to exaggerate the adverse impact or demonise woke culture, as this 'lazy framing' will only serve to 'dumb down discourse and hinder us from engaging with analysis that will help us learn and grow.'** (l.41–43)
- It is true that being a 'nanny' state, the Singapore government's authoritarian top down approach and its belief that only the government knows what is best for its citizens, often translates into its politicians or civil servants not being open to alternative views or woke



ideas which make them uncomfortable, thereby preventing in-depth discussions on the issue that can make a difference.

- For example, the People Association's (PA), and by default, the government's handling of an incident in which a couple's wedding photo was used as Hari Raya decorations standee in Tiong Bahru Orchid estate at Bukit Merah has raised much debate online. While the PA has apologised for its 'cultural insensitivity' for using the wedding photo without the couple's consent, its general attitude was defensive, using the mainstream media to accuse the couple of milking the situation as a 'racist' issue. In cancelling a dialogue with the couple, many Singaporeans see this as a missed opportunity by the PA to have a constructive dialogue about cultural insensitivity and building relationships.
- The Singapore government is more confident of handling issues about structural racism raised on social media by turning to the law to shut these down as inciting racial or religious disharmony instead of engaging in constructive discussions.
- Raeesah Khan's observation that rich Chinese and white people are treated differently under the law during the COVID-19 Circuit Breaker; and that minorities and mosque leaders were given harsher punishment compared with church leaders with regard to corruption were dismissed as attempts to incite racial division and conflict. Similarly, the rap video by Preeti and her brother parodying the apology of a brownface advertisement on NETS e-payment was condemned by many Singaporeans and the government as blatantly racist, warranting a police investigation.
- It is, of course, understandable why the government has to invoke the Maintenance of Religious Harmony Act in such cases to nip any potential for inter-racial and inter-religious discord in the bud. Being a small island with a multi-racial society, any conflict can have severe repercussions on the economy and society. It is definitely not easy to balance the feelings and values of the majority and the minority groups.
- Nevertheless, such high-handed methods against racial issues being raised gives only a one-dimensional perspective of the complex issues hidden beneath the veneer of racial harmony.
- So, in this respect, I do agree with Han that when the government dismisses woke ideas on minority issues as attempts to sow discord in society, it hinders society from engaging in a constructive analysis from which Singapore can learn and grow as a society.
- Since woke culture is tightly controlled by the government, it is unlikely that the dangers arising from the excesses of woke culture will severely impact my society as Wong fears.

## Conclusion

For now, I do agree with Han that the dangers of woke culture are over-stated and not as grave as Wong fears. Nevertheless, Singapore, needs to tread carefully when it comes to woke culture. While it is important for woke activists to raise social issues to force Singaporeans to do some soul searching so they can change their mindset, or for the Singapore government to reform some policies that may have discriminatory undertones, this must be done in a measured and responsible manner so as not to tear the fragile social and economic fabric to shreds.

***Marked and prepared by Mr Fang Nan-Siew, Ms Norsheha and Mr Peck Chee Siong***