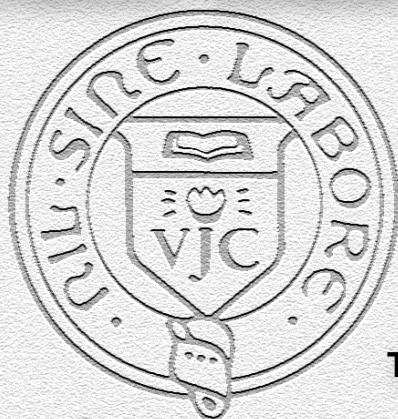


VICTORIA JUNIOR COLLEGE PRELIMINARY EXAMINATION

General Paper

8807/2

**Monday
2 September 2013**



TIME: 1 hour 30 minutes

INSTRUCTIONS TO CANDIDATES

Write your Name and Civics Class in the spaces provided in the answer paper.

Answer **all** questions.

If you need to use extra sheets of writing paper for a question, fasten them together with the answer booklet.

INFORMATION FOR CANDIDATES

The number of marks is given in brackets [] at the end of each question.

(Note that 15 marks out of 50 will be awarded for your use of language.)

This question paper consists of 10 printed pages including this page.

Passage 1: Ralph Antonio writes about moral courage in the modern world...

- 1 In one of the most vivid illustrations on the virtue of courage, the late Scottish poet Alice Swaim offered her ageless wisdom: "Courage is not the towering oak that sees storms come and go; it is the fragile blossom that opens in the snow." Quite in the same spirit and similar to the profound analogy on courage, Mark Twain also remarked that, "It is not the size of the dog in the fight; it is the size of the fight in the dog." Indeed, fundamental to the survival of Mankind and the continuity of our civilization is the sheer magnitude of human courage. At the risk of sounding clichéd, the history of Mankind is as much written in blood as it is wrought by courage, as courage is the perpetual engine of progress, the fulcrum on which our collective humanity is hinged. In short, while people are made up of flesh and bones, courage is that miracle fibre that sustains our humanity as it connects our hearts to actions. 5 10
- 2 For millennia, philosophers have been trying to fathom the virtue of courage. Aristotle, in his *Eudemian Ethics*, establishes a good working definition of courage. Courage, according to Aristotle, is the *mean* between fear and recklessness. Cowards are debilitated by disproportionate fear, especially of things that shouldn't be feared. Reckless men take unwarranted risk with inordinate confidence in the face of peril. The courageous man, however, perfects his balancing act between irrational fear and foolhardy recklessness. The courageous man fears that which should be feared, but he endures his fear with conviction for the moral reason that (he thinks) is right. Courage, simply put, is a willingness to personally *stand up* and *stand out* in defense of a principle, even when others *stand aside*. Such moral courage is a cornerstone and germinating seed of our physical courage, as it fuels and sustains our actions for our beliefs, even when no one is watching. Atticus Finch, the iconic character from Harper Lee's *To Kill A Mocking Bird*, is fondly remembered for his apt illustration on courage in this case – "Real courage is when you're licked before you begin, but you begin anyway and see it through no matter what." 15 20
- 3 As esoteric as this may sound, courage need not be such a romanticised ideal that is fossilised in the victorious acts of historical statesmen and mighty warriors in the ancient past. Our modern history and socio-political trends are replete with glorious anecdotes of moral courage illuminated by remarkable politicians, altruistic activists as well as unsung heroes who have left indelible marks on the annals of history. From Gandhi to Aung San Suu Kyi, we have witnessed how politicians have been guided by their moral compass in questioning the status quo and wrestling with the Powers That Be. From the Montgomery Bus Boycott of Rosa Parks during the U.S Civil Rights Movement, to the tidal waves of gay rights activists in denouncing the Californian *Proposition 8*, we have again seen how ordinary individuals have exercised their moral courage in clamouring for change. Awe-inspiring stories about the Tank Man of Tiananmen Square, as well as the self-immolation of Mohamed Bouazizi in the Arab Spring, still abound on the Internet till the present day. We have no government armed with power capable of contending with human passions unbridled by courage, and with courage, the power of people is much stronger than the people in power. 25 30 35
- 4 Indeed, we live in a modern era where individual courage is increasingly the pervasive and dominant zeitgeist of our time. In a world where many nations are going through a process of democratisation at varying speeds, the increasing importance of individual choice and liberty would ultimately mean that many of us will get to exercise our choices and make our stands on issues and policies that affect us. At times, democracy emboldens our choice to be courageous and the ever growing social media simply lend us the voice to express our moral courage in championing our choices. It is against the backdrop of the modern context that I foresee that the 21st century is likely to be one that is increasingly characterised by epic courage. 40 45

Passage 2: Elizabeth Kellerman takes a different view on moral courage...

- 1 We find it easier, in these confused times, to admire physical valour than moral courage. When a man in a cowboy hat vaults a fence to help Boston bomb victims while others flee the scene, we immediately salute his bravery, as we do that of servicemen returning from the battlefield, or testosterone-fuelled sportsmen overcoming the odds in the name of winning. Ironically, when an individual takes a moral stand against the abuses of power and dogma, we can be so indifferent, suspicious or even cynical towards these people who go against the grain of society. Indeed, it is increasingly harder for us to see morally courageous individuals these days. There are no Gandhis, no Lincolns anymore. As Mark Twain aptly lamented, "It is curious that physical courage should be so common in the world and moral courage so rare."
- 2 To acknowledge the withering of moral courage is to accept the fact that we, as a society, have become increasingly individualistic. In a modern world where material pursuits are prized and glorified above others, moral ideals and other intangible values are simply relegated to the back seat. Such an observation is undeniably resonated in many urban developed societies, where decades of good life and rich consumerism have literally emasculated the character of the younger generation. To have moral courage is to have the courage to be moral, and to be moral, one needs to have a clear moral compass. Our modern society is, regrettably, founded upon a morally derelict landscape, where values are constantly oscillating, waning, or worse, virtually absent from the hedonistic lifestyles of many. Young people today are akin to the unanchored ships in the tempestuous ocean - aimless, unopinionated and easily swayed by the values preached by the media and the powerful institutions rather than their own.
- 3 As a result, the youth of today succumb to a pervasive culture of conformity and herd mentality, where they fear the reproach and disenfranchisement of others for taking the road less travelled. Those who might, in other eras, have been celebrated for their originality and independence of mind, are now being told, "Sit down, you're rocking the boat." In Asian societies where group harmony and collective social order are still deeply honoured, those who exhibit moral courage to be different and unconventional risk being censured and demonised by others. It is a risk that is far too unimaginable for many young individuals. The majority is always right, and such is the mantra of the moral weaklings who submit to the collective wisdom of the crowd. Lest we forget, to be morally courageous is a choice to be made, too.
- 4 In a modern age defined by the sheer omnipresence of social media, we are so relentlessly cocooned by the cacophony of voices and grandiose opinions of others, that we have, at times, ignored or muffled our own in the course of conforming to normative influences. Our overwhelming conformist self eventually dulls and trumps our moral conscience, rendering us apathetic or incapable of taking a moral stand on issues that concern us in one way or another. These days, we see young netizens having the "courage" to trumpet their opinions on various platforms of social media. But at times, their so-called vocal opinions are nothing more than empty talk as they rarely act on their convictions. They are at best the modern-day scarecrows at their computer screens. Such moral cowardice raises serious questions about our ways of education in the pragmatic world, and the values (or its dearth?) that it imparts that guide their moral conduct. Indeed, I cannot help but bemoan the demise of moral courage in this generation.