

**RAFFLES JUNIOR COLLEGE
2008 PRELIMINARY EXAMINATION**

Level: JC2

**General Paper 2
8005/02**

Time: 1 hr 30 min

INSERT

READ THESE INSTRUCTIONS FIRST

This insert contains the passage for Paper 2.

This insert consists of 3 printed pages, including this page.

Passage

In this article, Professor X discusses whether higher education should be for all.

- 1 Adult education, nontraditional education, education for returning students—whatever you want to call it—is a substantial profit center for many colleges. Like factory owners, school administrators are delighted with this idea of mounting a second shift of learning in their classrooms, in the evenings, when the full-time students are busy with regular extracurricular pursuits of higher education, such as reading Facebook and playing beer pong. If colleges could find a way to mount a third, graveyard shift, as Henry Ford’s Willow Run did at the height of the Second World War, I believe that they would. 5
- 2 There is a sense that the American workforce needs to be more professional at every level. Many jobs that never before required college now call for at least some post-secondary course work. School custodians, those who run the boilers and spread synthetic sawdust on vomit, may not need college—but the people who supervise them, who decide which brand of synthetic sawdust to procure, probably do. There is a sense that our bank tellers should be college educated, and so should our medical-billing techs, and our child-welfare officers, and our sheriffs and federal marshals. We want the police officer who stops the car with the broken taillight to have a nodding acquaintance with great literature. And when all is said and done, my personal economic interest in booming college enrollments aside, I don’t think that’s such a boneheaded idea. Reading literature at the college level is a route to spacious thinking, to an acquaintance with certain profound ideas, that is of value to anyone. Some pragmatists may ask, will having read *Invisible Man* make a police officer less likely to indulge in racial profiling? Will a familiarity with Steinbeck make him more sympathetic to the plight of the poor, so that he might understand the lives of those who simply *cannot* get their taillights fixed? Will it benefit the correctional officer to have read *The Autobiography of Malcolm X*? The health-care worker *Arrowsmith*? Should the child-welfare officer read Plath’s “Daddy”? Such one-to-one correspondences probably don’t hold. But although I may be biased, being an English instructor and all, I can’t shake the sense that reading literature is informative and broadening and ultimately good for you. If I should fall ill, I suppose I would rather the hospital billing staff had read *The Pickwick Papers*, particularly the parts set in debtors’ prison. 10 15 20 25
- 3 America, ever-idealistic, seems wary of the vocational-education track. We are not comfortable limiting anyone’s options. Telling someone that college is not for him seems harsh and classist and British, as though we were sentencing him to a life in the coal mines. I sympathize with this stance; I subscribe to the American ideal. Unfortunately, it is with me and my red pen that that ideal crashes and burns. Sending everyone under the sun to college is a noble initiative. Academia is all for it, naturally. Industry is all for it; some companies even help with tuition costs. Government is all for it; the truly needy have lots of opportunities for financial aid. The media applauds it—try to imagine someone speaking out against the idea. To oppose such a scheme of inclusion would be positively churlish. But one piece of the puzzle hasn’t been figured into the equation, to use the sort of phrase I encounter in the papers submitted by my English 101 students. The zeitgeist of academic possibility is a great inverted pyramid, and its rather sharp point is poking, uncomfortably, a spot just about midway between my shoulder blades. 30 35 40
- 4 For I, who teach these low-level, must-pass, no-multiple-choice-test classes, am the one

- who ultimately delivers the news to those unfit for college: that they lack the most-basic skills and have no sense of the volume of work required; that they are in some cases barely literate; that they are so bereft of schemata, so dispossessed of contexts in which to place newly acquired knowledge, that every bit of information simply raises more questions. They are not ready for high school, some of them, much less for college. 45
- 5 I am the man who has to lower the hammer. 50
- 6 We may look mild-mannered, we adjunct instructors, but we are academic button men. I roam the halls of academe like a modern Coriolanus bearing sword and grade book, “a thing of blood, whose every motion / Was timed with dying cries.”
- 7 I knew that Ms. L.’s paper would fail. I knew it that first night in the library. But I couldn’t tell her that she wasn’t ready for an introductory English class. I wouldn’t be saving her from the humiliation of defeat by a class she simply couldn’t handle. I’d be a sexist, ageist, intellectual snob. 55
- 8 In her own mind, Ms. L. had triumphed over adversity. In her own mind, she was a feel-good segment on *Oprah*. Everyone wants to triumph. But not everyone can—in fact, most can’t. If they could, it wouldn’t be any kind of a triumph at all. Never would I want to cheapen the accomplishments of those who really have conquered college, who were able to get past their deficits and earn a diploma, maybe even climbing onto the college honor roll. That is truly something. 60
- 9 One of the things I try to do on the first night of English 102 is relate the literary techniques we will study to novels that the students have already read. I try to find books familiar to everyone. This has so far proven impossible. My students don’t read much, as a rule, and though I think of them monolithically, they don’t really share a culture. *To Kill a Mockingbird*? Nope. (And I thought everyone had read that!) *Animal Farm*? No. If they have read it, they don’t remember it. *The Outsiders*? *The Chocolate War*? No and no. *Charlotte’s Web*? You’d think so, but no. So then I expand the exercise to general works of narrative art, meaning movies, but that doesn’t work much better. Oddly, there are no movies that they all have seen—well, except for one. They’ve all seen *The Wizard of Oz*. Some have caught it multiple times. So we work with the old warhorse of a *quest narrative*. The farmhands’ early conversation illustrates *foreshadowing*. The witch melts at the *climax*. *Theme*? Hands fly up. Everybody knows that one—perhaps all too well. Dorothy learns that she can do anything she puts her mind to and that all the tools she needs to succeed are already within her. I skip the *denouement*: the intellectually ambitious scarecrow proudly mangles the Pythagorean theorem and is awarded a questionable diploma in a dreamland far removed from reality. That’s art holding up a mirror all too closely to our own poignant scholarly endeavors. 65 70 75 80

Adapted from “In the Basement of the Ivory Tower” in The Atlantic