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SERANGOON JUNIOR COLLEGE
JC2 Preliminary Examination 2016

GENERAL PAPER

Paper 2
INSERT

8807/02

29 August 2016
1 hour 30 minutes

READ THESE INSTRUCTIONS FIRST

This Insert contains the passage for Paper 2.

Write your **name** and **CG** in the spaces at the top of this page.

Submit the insert together with your answer booklet at the end of the examination.

Vani Bahl writes about the importance of both old and new buildings to cities.

- 1 Nearly everyone will say that certain songs, scents or tastes bring it all back. A distinctive smell can immediately and powerfully make us recall an experience. The songs of one's adolescence can immediately transport one back to a time and a series of feelings long forgotten. To taste the food of one's childhood or homeland can cause people to have sudden and sometimes quite unexpected memories. The same can be said for cities. A city without old buildings is like a man without memory. 5
- 2 Among the admirable and enjoyable sights to be found along the sidewalks of big cities, the ingenious adaptations of old buildings for new uses is the most enduring one. A glance on the patina of the old walls of these buildings evokes nostalgia. For a moment, the stone whispers the stories of the days long gone, the life stories of the generations of people who have lived in and around it. These buildings give a character to the neighbourhood and are visually pleasing and cohesive. It is in this context that old buildings play an irreplaceable role in creating an image of the city: a sense of place, a sense of belonging. 10
- 3 How would it be to wake up one morning to find that your neighbourhood has been replaced by modern buildings? The familiar old building that you walked past every day and got accustomed to is no longer there to offer solace. You feel you have lost a friend; you feel you have been alienated in your own home. What surround you now are the new high-tech buildings, which are like babies - charming but nothing to tell. Old buildings have two basic qualities, aesthetic and historical, both linked to durable cultural symbols. The district must mingle buildings that vary in age and condition, including a good proportion of old ones. This mingling must be fairly close grained. 15 20
- 4 Jane Jacobs, in "Life and Death of American Cities", has listed the need for aged buildings as one of the four conditions to "Generators of Diversity". Old buildings do not necessarily imply museum pieces or old buildings in an excellent and expensive state of rehabilitation - although these make fine ingredients - but also a good lot of plain, ordinary, low-value old buildings, including run down old buildings. The 1950s saw America start a massive campaign of urban renewal to obliterate old buildings. The planning utopians were enchanted by the idea of "socially meaningful communities". Real communities were bulldozed to make way for the virtual. Some of the finest buildings were lost. These had high ceilings, thick sound proofing, spacious halls, beautiful marble as well as wood and metal ornamentation delights that new buildings cease to provide. Across the country from New York City's Penn Station to Detroit's Neo- French Renaissance city hall to hundreds of Victorian frame houses in San Francisco, the old buildings continued to fall. However, the 1970s saw change. New catchwords were preserve, conserve, recycle and rehabilitate. With the passing of the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966, old buildings got much awaited recognition. Today, Boston's market place revival attracts over a million people and more than \$80 million annually. San Francisco's pioneering Ghirardelli Square, an old chocolate factory, has become an internationally famous shopping centre. 25 30 35
- 5 It's all about balance. A city with nothing but modern skyscrapers would surely lose its aesthetic charm, its creative energy and its urban vitality. However, a city with no new construction risks turning into a museum: a beautiful but stuffy repository of artwork by dead people, frequented only by the rich and tourists. Take another look at Georgetown to see what I mean. It's commercially vibrant because it has old fancy restaurants, not new interesting ones. No one remotely cool lives in Georgetown anymore. It's too expensive, and consequently too overrun with well-heeled graduates from private colleges with connections in high places. 40 45
- 6 Neighbourhoods with more new buildings are a lot more diverse and creatively energetic. It's certainly true that row houses with steps leading to the front door draw people onto the street while skyscrapers with their own gyms, eateries, and underground parking lots can suck life away from the streets. However, filling in empty lots — or replacing the occasional architecturally undistinguished low-rise building — with taller new apartment buildings and 50

ground-floor retail does not necessarily do any harm. Washington, D.C. has done just that in gentrifying locales such as Logan Circle, Columbia Heights and U Street in recent years. Their pedestrian and commercial vitality has also simultaneously grown by leaps and bounds.

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- 7 Neighbourhoods with well-preserved old buildings can indeed be aesthetically charming, but their real estate is astronomical. The high prices and their inevitable result — which is that the neighbourhoods become richer, less diverse, and more conservative over time — is the price we pay for preserving their architecture. At least writers and other regular folks exiled far away can walk around those neighbourhoods and marvel at their beauty. But if we are to maintain the affordability that nurtures creativity and diversity in a city like Washington, San Francisco, or New York, we need more supply of housing and office space to meet demand. 60
- 8 Tall buildings are not just luxury condos. They are middle-income and low-income housing. They are also office buildings. When the cool new media companies incubated in little old buildings succeed and grow, they need big enough spaces to house all their employees. In other words, they need skyscrapers. The much-maligned skyscraper has enabled cities to add vast amounts of floor space using the same amount of ground area. Given the rising demand for centre-city real estate, the skyscraper seemed like a godsend. The problem was that many city centres already had existing buildings in them. Cities needed to tear down in order to build up. With the addition of skyscrapers, New York grew economically and industries expanded. They gave factory owners and workers space that was both more humane and more efficient. Hence, it is wrong to deny that majestic skyscrapers are part of our architectural heritage, helping to make our cities vital and beautiful places. New ones, when done well, can be an exhilarating addition to their surroundings. 65 70
- 9 In championing the preservation of old buildings, a group of activists tried to showcase the benefits of low-rise housing with a photograph of the Manhattan skyline from a Brooklyn roof. But it's a view of skyscrapers! Yes, you need development restrictions in Brooklyn to achieve it, but what is Manhattan without some skyscrapers to look at? Historic preservation and low-rise zoning are wise in some situations and some areas, but not merely as an abstract principle to apply without discretion. Preservationists should absolutely stand up for that which is worth preserving. Not all buildings that are old and small are better than ones that are new and big. A healthy city needs a healthy mix and more critically, a healthy city needs freedom to grow. 75 80
- 10 Cities change. It is their nature. Those which stop changing stop being cities. Cities that change entirely, though, cease to be themselves. Let us not forget that destruction is permanent. If in the name of efficiency we condemn the old today, what will be the fate of tomorrow? 85

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