

**ANGLO-CHINESE JUNIOR COLLEGE**  
**JC2 PRELIMINARY EXAMINATION 2013**

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**GENERAL PAPER**

**8807/02**

Paper 2

**1 hour 30 minutes**

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**READ THESE INSTRUCTIONS FIRST**

This Insert contains the passages for Paper 2.

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This document consists of **3** printed pages.



## Passage 1

*Katherine Boyce writes about the culture of futile complaining.*

- 1 A tragic phenomenon has swept the modern world. Every day, miserable souls feel themselves the victims of great injustices. The world is simply not as it should be, and the only way to adequately cope with that reality is...constant whining. "I'm so hungry. I'm so full. I overslept today. I never get enough sleep. I'm bored. I have too much to do. I have no control at work. I have too much responsibility at work." Whatever the circumstance, there's something wrong with it, and when there is, you can be quite sure we will complain about it. Perhaps the most useless of all our favourite complaints are those directed at the weather. How dare it rain? We feel ourselves the gods of our own private universe, entitled to the exact conditions we desire – gods who happen to spend the bulk of each day griping about things over which we have absolutely no control. There is truly nothing sillier than complaining about what we can't change. 5  
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- 2 Now wait just a minute, you say. The purpose of these complaints is not to change anything at all, but simply to vent. It acts as a cathartic outlet for the pent-up strain and anxiety that characterise the urban working lifestyle. Sometimes our complaints just serve to add a little dramatic effect to our mundane, pedestrian days. And sometimes they become a pitiful kind of competition, where the person with the most trying set of complaints wins, and gets the satisfaction of having proven that his situation is the hardest to deal with. Bravo. 15
- 3 I suppose it is all in where you stand. Presumably, each of us has at some point been rebuked with the classic trump card of all complaints: "There are starving children in Africa, eat your [insert undesirably-healthy-foodstuff here]." We're taught from a young age that contentment is a matter of relativity. You should never measure your lot against what you wish it was, but consider instead what a horror it could have been, and luckily isn't. And yet, despite knowing that our "first world problems" pale in comparison to those experienced by people living in abject poverty or a constant state of war, a grey drizzle of discontent seems to be the default attitude of so many in the affluent world. The tragedy is not the things we face, but the fact that we seem so unable to just face them. 20
- 4 Maybe it is human nature to complain. A simple Google search of the term "whining" produces page after page of How-To instructions and cures for desperate parents trying to stem the perpetual flow of needs and demands that their children produce every few seconds. The countless similar search results are at least enough to indicate that if you are the frazzled parent of a pocket-sized dictator, you are far from alone. But just because we all know it is inevitable and human, doesn't mean anyone is willing to tolerate it for long. For parents, the clear problem is whining, and the desired outcome, silence. The bizarre thing is that we seem perfectly happy to tolerate the same bellyaching tendencies among adults. In fact, we relish them. Just after the exhausted parent tries and fails to get her whiny child to pipe down, she logs onto Facebook and posts her complaints about the situation, where she receives commiseration and affirmation from her social network of fellow complainers. It seems we do not grow out of our penchant for whining. 25  
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- 5 It would be naive to pretend that people in the developed world never have serious concerns to deal with, never experience genuine personal heartbreak and loss, or never struggle through anything truly difficult. At the root of it though, it is not a question of whether the complaints are real and the problems tangible; it isn't that the circumstances are never trying, and we're all just blind to how good life is; it is that no matter the circumstances, we will complain. Therein lies the problem: by speaking our discontent so readily, we turn our grievances into self-fulfilling prophecies. We give them power over us, and they shape our beliefs about our realities, causing us to grouse all the more. The resulting depression and anxiety come not from outside of us, but from within. 40
- 6 But therein also lies the solution. If we admit that our happiness has little to do with our circumstances, then perhaps we can be freed from their effect on us. Perhaps joy is not a feeling at all, but a response and a mind-set. Such a stable attitude equips us with an appetite for the realities of life just as they come, instead of how we feel they should be. We need not escape our circumstances, if we can only learn to escape the dissatisfied psychology that disproportionately magnifies them, and learn instead to steadily and resiliently take things just as they are. 45

## Passage 2

*Julian Baggini writes about the true purpose of complaint.*

- 1 Think of the word 'complaint' and you are likely to conjure images of moaning, whining rants about mainly trivial matters: the trains don't run on time, people are so rude these days, there's nowhere to park, there's nothing on the television. Complaining has become a pastime of the resigned and the nostalgic. It has even become something of a leisure activity. Even indie rock bands have discovered that being world-weary is cooler than getting angry, with Blur releasing an album called *Modern Life Is Rubbish* and The Kaiser Chiefs scoring a hit with their song 'Everything Is Average Nowadays.' Complaining has become synonymous with moaning. 5
- 2 It needn't be this way. At the root of every complaint is a sense that things are not as they ought to be. To complain is to speak out against this, and we can do so petulantly, aggressively, calmly, pointlessly or constructively. It does not even matter whether we are truly upset by what we perceive to be wrong. Many people are never happier than when they get the opportunity to complain, while others are deeply unhappy with how things are, but just accept it. Complaint occurs when we refuse to accept that things are wrong and try to do something about it, even if that something is no more than articulating the fault. 10
- 3 Although the precondition for complaint is a belief that things are not as they should be, the mere recognition and expression of this fact are not enough for a fully formed complaint to be born. For example, a stoic may believe that it is important to accept the imperfection of the world, and so to recognise that things are not as they ought to be, would for her, be not to complain but simply to describe. Likewise, a committed pessimist may also like frequently to comment on what's wrong with everything, but again this is not really complaint because it lacks a *non-acceptance* of what is wrong. 15 20
- 4 There is an additional final component of complaint which is hard to pin down. Complaint is doubly transitive: you don't just complain *about* something, you complain to someone or something. However, as a criterion for identifying genuine complaints, this is hard to apply, because often what we direct our complaints to is entirely abstract: God, the fates, fortunes or just the universe. Such generalised directedness can be hard to identify, but I think we can tell, in our own cases at least, the difference between merely thinking that something is wrong and hurling our rage about it into the empty air, as though someone should be listening and taking note. 25
- 5 All major social advances have started with a complaint. Emmeline Pankhurst and the suffragettes, Martin Luther King and the civil rights campaign, Nelson Mandela and the anti-apartheid movement: the changes they brought about all began with a complaint that the status quo was wrong and needed to be changed. The act of complaining is hence not what is fundamental to complaint: it is a symptom, not the disease itself. Just as the severity of a medical complaint should be measured not by how loudly it draws attention to itself but by the extent to which the body really is damaged, so we should not mistake the loudness of a complaint for its seriousness. 30
- 6 Complaint has a noble history. It has driven human society forward and led to the abolition of systemic injustice. That it is now primarily associated with inconsequential moans and frivolous litigation is a travesty. For instance, the grievance culture that infects America and Britain is just the latest and most striking example of how complaint can go wrong. 35
- 7 What I'm offering is a kind of meta-complaint: that people tend to complain about the wrong things for the wrong reasons and that, as a result, complaining has been debased. But in so doing, I hope to demonstrate that complaint can be constructive. Indeed, our ability to complain is part and parcel of what makes us human. 40