

1. Martin Luther King: “I have a dream.” What are the dreams that young people have?

Dreams are fragile. In today’s modern society, many have experienced the sad and tragic affair of having our dreams crushed and ground into the sand. Many teenagers no longer hold on to their childhood dreams of being a famous basketballer, novelist or even an F1 driver. Instead, teenagers now have different dreams – dreams that are dimmed by the darkness of criticism and impossibility. On the bright side, there are those that refuse to be defeated. These are people whose sheer determination and willpower has allowed them to overcome all odds to illuminate a path for all to see, if not follow. I will expound on two dreams that young people have: those that pierce the darkness and those that fade into the darkness.

Dreams that fade into the darkness hold no challenge in achieving. Such dreams may include earning astronomical incomes or being the next Bill Gates. While some may say that these young people are ‘dreaming big’, such dreamers are comparable to just another brick in a colossal wall – too common and totally lacking the ambition to make a difference. But why do they end up this way? Young people today are too caught up in the vortex of materialism where they are expected to be better and reach higher goals in life or status. Hence, we hear of how many young people end up desiring to practise medicine not to help the sick and poor, but for the lucrative trade of aesthetics surgery to capitalise on the fantasies of the rich and famous. The physician’s oath has become no more than lip’s service for these young people.

Fortunately in the midst of this crumbling force are those that hold on to their ideals. This group anchor themselves on the fine foundation of their humanity, and the inclination to help others in need – may include animals – in society. They dare to make a difference; they dare to dream. These people also include those who pursue their passion, choosing to push against setbacks to be who they want to be. An example would be Bindy Irwin, daughter of the late ‘Crocodile Hunter’ Steve: zoo-keeper, animal lover and television host who was unfortunately killed by a stingray while filming. From a tender age, Bindy loved reptiles as much as her father; she wanted to be just like her father. Despite losing her father to an ironic twist of fate, she chooses to press on with her father’s love of the creatures, saying “my father would want me to continue”. Her love of her father and the animals prevents her from choosing the easy way out: revenge.

In conclusion, in life, we have the power to choose to anchor ourselves firmly and be like the beam of a lighthouse, guiding people out of their adversity and storm in life. Or we can just be a passive dreamer, choosing instead to blend in with the crowd and get faded away. Dreams are important weapons that fight against the monster that is materialism.

(500 words)

Written by: Wesley Quek (4S2, 2013)

Edited by: Mr Liang Sea Fong

Strengths:

1. Use of metaphors
2. Variety of sentence structures.
3. Wide range of apt vocabulary.
4. Paragraphs are coherent and cohesive.
5. Use of complex punctuation.

2. "I'm feeling lonely!" is a common cry among teenagers. What can be done to deal with this situation?

"I have no friends" and "No one cares about me". These are but two examples of raging thoughts running through a number of teenagers' heads. I can fully empathise with them since I was a "lonely teen" for a certain part of my life. There are three solutions I can propose: teenagers becoming more accepting of one another; parents making an effort to tighten the bonds of kinship; and getting schools to teach students the importance of lifelong bonds.

Some teenagers feel lonely because of their reluctance to reveal their true side for fear of being rejected by society. For instance, if you were interested in a particular role-playing game while almost everyone around you was interested in shooting games like Halo, your first instinct would be to keep it to yourself. You felt different and were afraid of being disliked by others. Such situations can sow distrust between schoolmates, resulting in frictions or barrier being formed due to minor differences. Our society needs to be more welcoming and not segregate people according to interests, practices or beliefs. We must all embrace differences. In this way, youngsters will not feel a need to conform and contort themselves to fit a certain mould.

Secondly, parents being absent in teenagers' lives forces them to take things into their own hands. They feel there is no one or place that they can turn to for comfort and security. Imagine you have just broken up from a relationship and you need comfort and assurance; your only refuge is home. But you step through the door only to realise that your parents are working overtime again. Picture the frustrations running through your head. That is why it is so important for parents to spend time with their children and share their lifetime experiences with them, rather than just focus on their careers. Money is important but having a bigger nest egg than one's neighbours is not. Parents should realise family bonds are the most important because when it comes to the crunch, a family is the only refuge a teenager can turn to.

Finally, the education system has a part to play in overcoming this problem. Activities can be carried out by teachers to allow students to make friends with each other, encouraging bonds of friendship to be nurtured from a young age so that they would have a much easier time going through their teenage years. Teachers themselves, in fact, could befriend their own students as well, becoming a trusted companion on their journey to maturity, showing the benefits of friendship and consequences of going through life alone. The school therefore becomes an extended family for those whose primary family is in disarray.

All these solutions should, theoretically, negate any negative thoughts of being alone, but as the saying goes: "Actions speak louder than words". Therefore, if this dilemma is to be truly and utterly dealt with, we need to challenge ourselves to physically carry out these grand plans.

(495 words)

Written by: John Chan (4S1, 2013)

Edited by: Mr Liang Sea Fong

Strengths:

1. Good Introduction with a thesis.
2. Variety of sentence structures.
3. Good use of conditional clauses.

3. “With the Internet, going to school for an education is no longer necessary.” Do you agree?

The Internet is now the greatest repository of information in the world. Far surpassing all the textbooks and encyclopaedias, it has transformed the way we communicate and learn. However, the Internet is not ready to replace schools in our pursuit of education as some things like life skills and values cannot be learnt through a computer network. Furthermore, unlike teachers, the Internet has no personal guidance for the individuals.

Firstly, only through real life interactions with friends and teachers can one learn social skills and understand things like etiquette. A computer, on the other hand, will not change its response to a person no matter how rude or polite he has been. At best, he can only read about the definitions of these values. As such, online learners who communicate only through the Internet are not accustomed to social skills and norms like respect. In the absence of genuine group work – so common in and outside the classrooms – they are not able to develop desirable values like teamwork and leadership. This may have an impact on the harmony we must maintain in multi-racial Singapore.

Nevertheless, some net-savvy individuals insist that the Internet can replace schools as the mecca of learning. They argue that the Internet allows teachers and students to stay connected no matter the place and time. As long as a ubiquitous smartphone is at hand, we are ready to learn. Questions can be answered instantaneously and homework is just a click away for unlimited download. Students can no longer use their favourite “My dog ate my worksheet” excuse anymore and teachers do not have to hound after students to file their work neatly. To them, the Internet is a God-sent. But is this so?

Unfortunately, using the Internet for schooling has its disadvantages. Firstly, some mistakes cannot be seen through the flat LCD screen. For example, a student’s bad handwriting will go unnoticed – and hence not rectified – as it will not be observed by any teachers physically. Having grown accustomed to typing on the keyboard, students stand to lose their ability to write legibly in free hand – a heavy price to pay in the long term. Next, online learning opens up the gate to cheating. Students may just cut and paste information on the Internet and pass them as their own with just some skillful rephrasing. In extreme cases, it might not even be the students themselves clicking the mouse. Therefore, a living, breathing teacher is necessary to watch over young learners as they navigate the sea of information to seek out knowledge. In schools, it is very common for teachers to rectify students’ errors and misconduct. Face to face interactions ensure that something is learnt, especially for impressionable young learners.

All in all, we must not forget that a large repository of information at just a click away may not yield the knowledge that young learners seek. A school provides the holistic education that no machines can recreate.

(491 words)

Written by: Md Raihan B Tarmidi (4S1, 2013)

Edited by: Mr Liang Sea Fong

Strengths

Although this essay does not follow the standard argumentative format, it has a clear Introduction and Conclusion. Each body paragraph has a clear topic sentence that deals with one main idea only. Writer also tries to inject some humour -- in a dignified and formal way -- into the essay. Good use of metaphors too.

4. “Be grateful for what you have.” Have you always been grateful or thankful for all the things that you have been given?

Growing up in a first world economy country like Singapore, we enjoy a high standard of living with well-maintained infrastructures and efficient systems like education and transport. With no poverty in sight, it is easy for us to take life’s simple pleasures like water for granted. I am particularly grateful to have been blessed with a good healthcare system and a fabulous family; however, I am guilty of not appreciating the food on my table.

Firstly, I am thankful for my country’s efficient healthcare system. In Singapore, we have highly qualified doctors and nurses who are ever willing to accommodate every patient’s needs. But unfortunately, they do not always get recognised for their efforts put in as Singaporeans are basically a practical and unappreciative lot. Some go as far as to abuse the healthcare workers – even using physical force. They think that it is a given that the Government should provide efficient healthcare as they are all working so hard to pay taxes. They have an “I’m boss, serve me now” attitude. So whenever I visit a clinic, I make it a point to thank the nurses and doctors. It is a little gesture from me to show my appreciation to our angels in white.

Next, my family has been such a blessing for me. Whenever I need them, I can count on my parents or siblings to help me. Despite their busy schedule, they will make time to show care and concern for me. This can come in the form of a little chat or a pat on my shoulder to encourage me when I am demoralized. Unlike some quarrelsome siblings that my friends have, my elder brother and sister also share their things with me willingly. I have also heard of how some children are abandoned in war-torn countries or are left to die in the slums of filthy cities. Thus, compared to all these suffering children, a big boy like me is living in the lap of family luxury indeed, where there is warmth, love and care.

Alas, as I am but a mere mortal, I have my sin. I do not treasure the food that I am served with. Thinking that I must always fill my ever hungry stomach, I tend to ask for large servings, especially so at buffets. I can attribute such undesirable attitude to my greed too. So I will try my best to fill my plate with as much food as I could but after a while, I will not be able to finish up the food as I will be gouging on the free-flowing ice-cream and other delicacies that catch my fancy. Although each time I try to imagine how the hungry starving children of Africa would benefit from my leftover, my greed would take over my guilt.

Although I am grateful for most of the things I am given, I rarely look from the perspective of an underprivileged child from a third world country. Oh God, please give me strength!

(500 words)

Written by: Eng Wee Long (4SA. 2013)

Edited (heavily) by: Mr Liang Sea Fong

Strengths:

1. Writer displays willingness to share intimate details; very personal.
2. Good paragraph development.
3. Attempt to bring in liveliness through tone and some religious reference.
4. Use of personal pronoun “I” is acceptable as this is a question requiring personal recounts.