

'Young people are *changing the world for the better.*' What is your opinion?

[2021 GCE O-Level Exam Question]

By Jenia Lo

[Completely Agree]



"If you adults won't save the world, we will." That is the title of a TED Talk by 19-year-old climate activist Xiye Batisda, reflecting on her breakthroughs in driving the conversation on climate change around the world. Batisda is but one of the many youth activists who have risen in recent years to advocate for various pressing issues confronting our world today. In that light, I agree with the statement that indeed, young people are changing the world for the better.

It is the young people who are the victims of current issues. Climate change, the lack of education for girls and gun violence in schools are problems that ¹disproportionately afflict the young and future generations. As such, many young people with a stake in resolving these problems have since come out of the woodwork to champion changes in these areas. Activists such as Xiye Batisda, Greta Thunberg, Malala Yousafzai and X González are just a few of those young people who have stepped up to push for climate justice, education for girls and gun control respectively, at their own risk. As Batisda indicated in the title of her talk, these young people have, in a way, been forced to take up the ²mantle because adults are unwilling to do so. As such, because these issues have the potential to hurt them personally, the youth are more motivated than ever to push for change in those areas.

Young people are also uniquely positioned to change the world for the better. Passion, energy and conviction seem to come more easily to young people, by virtue of their youth. Unlike adults, they have yet to be ³disillusioned by the state of the world, and have yet to be trained to respond to big problems with ⁴cynicism and a disbelief that nothing can be done about them. Where adults may be ⁵jaded and resigned, the young are still hopeful that they can make a difference. They respond to issues such as police brutality with shock, rage and an overwhelming urge to speak out and create change, and they put their words into action by taking to the streets to protest. The young, then, possess optimism and the belief that they have the power to make the world a better place, two things that can be said to be the starting points of any change in the world.

Many youngsters also use social media to champion their causes. They have ⁶harnessed the reach that social media provides for their campaigns and have begun organising and ⁷galvanising support for movements online. For instance, the youngest woman ever to be elected into the United States Congress, Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez, is famously



Word Bank:

known for using her Instagram Stories to explain the work that she does as Congresswoman in a way that makes politics simple and easy to understand, effectively reaching out to her followers and garnering support for the policy changes she hopes to push for. Social media, in this case, as utilised by the young, is a tool of change.

All in all, I believe that young people are rising and pushing for change at a never-before-seen rate. Many have sprung up in response to issues that plague them personally and are able to continue championing important causes, both online and offline, because they have the power of optimism and hope working in their favour.

1 **disproportionately:**

in a way that is too large or too small when compared with something else

2 **mantle:**

the responsibilities of an important position or job, especially as given from the person who had the job to the person who replaces them

3 **disillusioned:**

disappointed in someone or something that one discovers to be less good than one had believed

4 **cynicism:**

the belief that something good will not happen or that something is not important

5 **jaded:**

not having interest or losing interest because you have experienced something too many times

6 **harnessed:**

controlled or made use of (natural resources), especially to produce energy

7 **galvanising:**

shocking or exciting (someone) into taking action

References:

1. If you adults won't save the world, we will, from TED, July 2020.
2. Eight young activists changing the world, from BBC.
3. Go ahead, millennials, destroy us, from The New York Times, 2 March 2018.
4. Instant pot politics, from Slate, 20 November 2018.

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METACOGNITIVE checkPOINT

What questions do I have about the topic so far?

'Young people are *changing the world for the better.*' What is your opinion?

[2021 GCE O-Level Exam Question]

[Completely Disagree]



By Jenia Lo



Whenever an adult starts his or her sentence with the words, "Kids these days...", chances are, it does not end positively. More likely, complaints about how "kids these days" are overly pampered, entitled and self-obsessed will follow the familiar phrase. Unfortunately, these adults might be right. As such, I disagree with the statement that young people are changing the world for the better. If not making it worse, they are merely sustaining the ¹status quo and leaving the world as they have found it.

To begin, young people these days are, as the elders are fond of saying, self-centred and not used to thinking about anyone else besides themselves. Especially as the use of social media becomes increasingly common and frequent, more and more of our young people seem incapable of tearing their eyes away from their phones, preoccupied only with their Instagram feeds and how their peers perceive them online. Besides being self-obsessed, it can be said that the youth of today have contributed to a worse world by creating ²unprecedented body im-

age and mental health crises among users, from the way they only present their 'perfect', photo-shopped selves on the platform and pass them off as natural. The world has arguably become a worse place, since young people got their hands on such technology.

Moreover, many young people are not in any position to change the world for the better. Statistics report a mental health ³epidemic amongst our youths who are increasingly depressed and anxious, a pattern that experts say can be attributed to smartphone usage. Besides struggling with social media-fuelled mental health issues, many youths in the world are also struggling to get by financially each day, living hand-to-mouth with the hope of seeing another day. These young people do not have the luxury to concern themselves with issues outside of their immediate needs and lives. Still in the process of figuring out their own lives and their place in the world, many young people simply do not have the time or resources to contemplate world-changing ideas.



**BLACK LIVES
MATTER**



Young people may give the impression that they are voicing their opinions about important issues and fighting for the changes they wish to see in the world. However, very often, they do not follow through on their commitment to change, except for a handful such as Malala Yousafzai and Greta Thunberg. Many do not take much action for the causes they proclaim to care about. In the wake of the 2020 Black Lives Matter movement in the United States for instance, many young people were accused of 'performative activism' online, a ⁴derogatory term to describe those who support a cause only on the surface to signal to others their supposed values and beliefs, rather than actually caring about making a difference in the area. As a result, such empty talk on the part of young people does nothing to contribute to a better world.

All in all, young people are not ready to create the changes that will make the world a better place. Presently, they are either too self-absorbed to be bothered about making a difference in other people's lives, or simply too busy focusing on their own pressing needs to make world-changing moves.

Word Bank:

- 1 status quo:**
the existing social, economic and/or political system
- 2 unprecedented:**
that has never happened before
- 3 epidemic:**
a sudden outbreak of infectious disease that spreads rapidly through the population, affecting a large proportion of people
- 4 derogatory:**
showing a strong disapproval and not showing respect

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METACOGNITIVE POINT:
REFLECTION

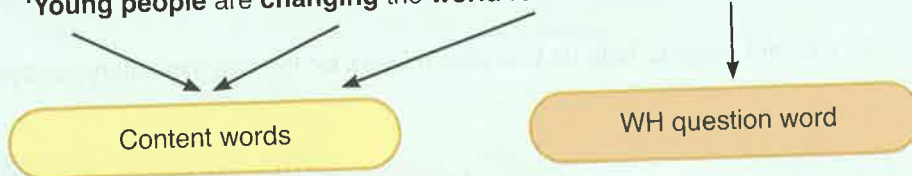
“What are two ideas you found contradictory after reading Essays E3 and E4?”



Part 1: Question Analysis

Let's look at the key words in this question:

'Young people are changing the world for the better.' What is your opinion?



Let's look at the introduction paragraphs of the two expository essays to learn how the writer defines the key words and addresses the question.

Essay E3:

"If you adults won't save the world, **we** will." That is the title of a TED Talk by **19-year-old climate activist Xiye Batisda**, reflecting on her **breakthroughs in driving the conversation on climate change** around the world. **Batisda is but one of the many youth activists** who have risen in recent years to advocate for various pressing issues confronting our world today. In that light, I agree with the statement that indeed, young people are changing the world for the better.

The definition of a **young person** covers the age range of 10-24 years, according to the World Health Organisation. In the introduction, the writer refers to a 19-year-old climate activist. The writer also gives examples of what she thinks is changing the world for the better – someone who advocates for pressing issues confronting our world.

→ The WH-question asks for your opinion and it is important to state this clearly in the introduction.

Essay E4:

Whenever an adult starts his or her sentence with the words, "**Kids** these days...", chances are, it does not end positively. More likely, complaints about how "**kids** these days" are overly **pampered, entitled, and self-obsessed** will follow the familiar phrase. These adults might be right. As such, I disagree with the statement that young people are changing the world for the better. If not making it worse, they are merely sustaining the status quo and leaving the world as they had found it.

The writer defines the key words by giving reasons why young people (kids) are not changing the world for the better, namely that they are **pampered, entitled and self-obsessed**.

The writer also addresses the WH-question here by disagreeing with the statement that young people are changing the world for the better.

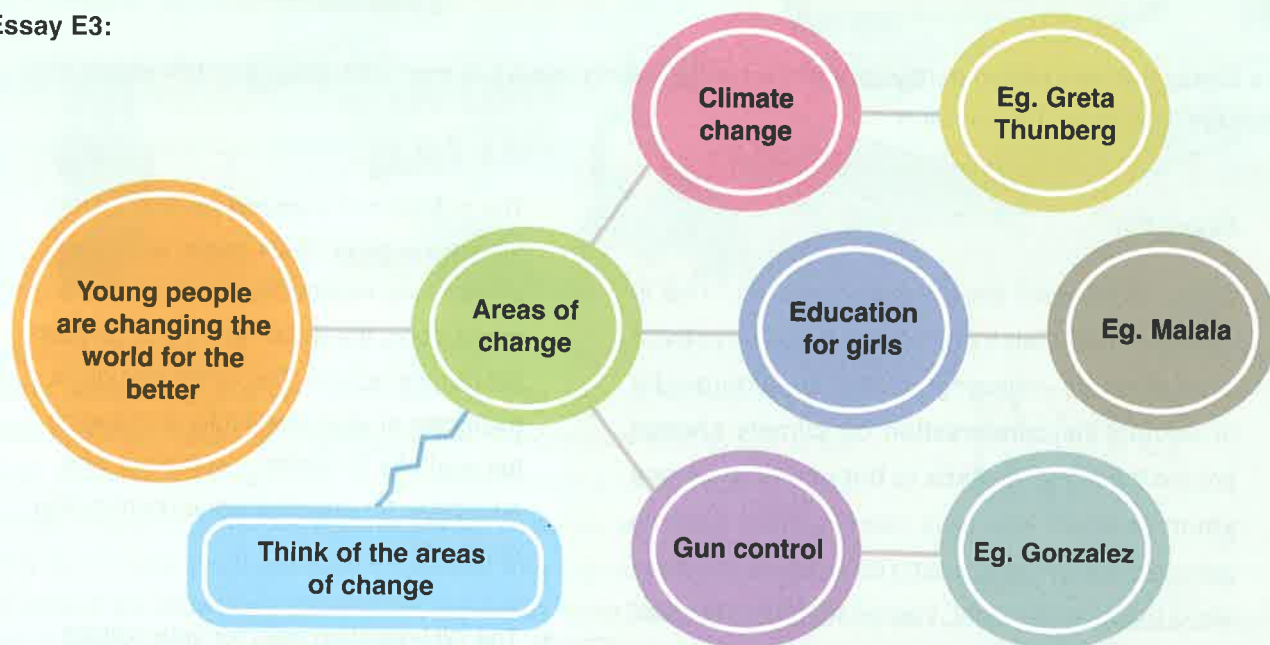


Part 2: Brainstorming for Ideas

We can brainstorm ideas by using a concept map. It is a convenient and easy tool to help us present information visually and to see the relationship among the different ideas.

Let's see how we can use concept maps to help us brainstorm ideas for the two expository essays.

Essay E3:



Essay E4:

