

Epreuve écrite

Examen de fin d'études secondaires 2007

Section: B, C, D, E, F, G

Branche: Anglais

Numéro d'ordre du candidat

We can't blame popular culture for society's ills. Nor can we ignore it.

This week's headlines have been dominated by some depressing stories. We have seen an outburst of juvenile gun crime, a row about the use of dangerously thin models at London Fashion Week and a damning report on the welfare of British children. Disparate as these issues are, they are linked by one, powerful element: our popular culture.

Those who work with children suggest that gun crime among young boys and eating disorders among young girls are being aggravated by the way the media glamorises certain lifestyles and images. Teenage girls want to emulate the women they see in magazines and on advertising billboards. This has made a generation of young girls unhappy with their bodies.

Meanwhile, music such as gangsta rap has glorified violence, hatred of women and homosexuals. Many young boys regard its stars as role models. Some even go as far as embracing the gangster 'lifestyle' themselves. There is a host of other negative influences on young people, too. Video games are often disgustingly violent, helping to desensitise children to the pain of others. There is also unease over the level of sadistic violence in film and on television.

It would be quite wrong to suggest that there is a direct link here. If such influences were removed tomorrow, does anyone seriously believe that problems such as youth crime and anorexia would instantly disappear? That is the trap that cultural conservatives have often fallen into in the past, heaping all the blame for society's moral collapse on artistic trends they dislike. Those of a liberal persuasion have instinctively rejected such hysteria, usually rightly. And it remains true that social problems such as gun crime have as much to do with deprivation, social breakdown and the drug industry as music videos and glossy magazines. But liberals have also been guilty of failing to grasp the degree to which the signals from popular culture are reinforcing negative influences in our society, especially on our children.

Young people today are living in a very different sort of media world from the one that existed for those who grew up even a decade ago. Of course, most are perfectly able to deal with it. But there seems to be an increasing number who are not.

The most difficult question, as always, is what is to be done. State censorship is no reasonable option. It is impossible for a free society to impose restrictions on cultural expression. Depictions of sex and violence can be essential to the artist's vision. The same is true in music, perhaps even computer games. Unsavoury material is often as much a reflection of what is going on in a society as a cause of it. Censorship is also likely to prove counterproductive. Anyway, on the internet, proscribed material will often slip through the censors' fingers.

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The only serious way forward is through what has been called 'corporate social responsibility.' Those in positions of influence and power in music, film, advertising, fashion and publishing must acknowledge that they have a duty not to exploit starvation, violence, misogyny and the like for commercial gain. The alternative is to play a role, however slender, in encouraging crime and childhood unhappiness.

(600 words)

The Independent
17 February 2007
(Leading article)

I Comprehension: Answer the following questions in your own words (30 points)

1. According to the journalist, in what ways do the media influence teenagers' behaviour? (12)
2. What other reasons for social problems are mentioned? (6)
3. Why does the author reject the idea of State censorship? (6)
4. What does the journalist mean by 'corporate social responsibility'? (6)

II Development essay (30 points)

Write an essay of 250-350 words and indicate the number of words you have used.

Is our society built upon a false set of values?