Ex 1

I think the priorities of education in Singapore should be cultivating academic aptitude, creativity and also instilling morality and character in students.

Firstly, education in the academic sense is extremely important in today’s competitive world. It equips students with the knowledge and skills that may be useful in future. This agrees with the utilitarian concept proposed in the article. As a first-world country with no natural resources, Singapore has to depend on people with high qualifications to effectively run the country. People with high qualifications can also be the forerunners in areas of research (e.g. medical research), helping Singapore gain global recognition. Hence, the Singapore education system must focus on the academic aspect and churn out individuals who can do well in their studies. Furthermore, to land a good job with a high pay locally, degree-holders usually have a higher chance to be employed compared to other applicants with lower qualifications. As such, education plays a part in ensuring financial security.

Secondly, other than being able to excel in one’s studies, creativity can also help pave the way to success. In the working world where more and more people are degree-holders, what distinguishes one candidate from another, both of whom are highly educated, could be creativity as the more innovative person would have the better ideas to help his company sell better. For example, Google is a company that highly prizes creative employees who have contributed to the company, even giving them recognition on their website. Also, creativity is vital to success in other areas such as filmmaking and entrepreneurship. Such is the case of Royston Tan, the Singaporean filmmaker of the highly-acclaimed “881” movie that has met with huge success locally as well as abroad. By cultivating creativity in our students, we hope to better arm our future leaders for the future.

Lastly, I think it is important that the Singapore education system starts to emphasise on the character and morality of students. There has been a recent spate of violent attacks in Singapore committed by youths, some of whom are in secret societies. I think this has to do with the upbringing of the child. While parents are undoubtedly the key stakeholders in bringing up their children the right way, I believe schools and education also play an important role since children spend at least a good 10 years of their lives in these learning institutions. By instilling good character in students, they will be more able to make morally correct decisions and prevent bad influence from peers or the environment from affecting them. Schools should also counsel at-risk youths and help them focus on their studies and passion so that they will not deviate into a life of crime or violence.

Ex 5

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Strengths   * Integrity and trustworthiness * Dedication to work and meeting targets * Analytical, methodical and focused * Adept at improving processes and products | Weaknesses   * Not adept at improving blue-sky ideas or finding solutions to non-technical problems * Uncomfortable with questioning assumptions * “unable to dream beyond the established or to advance the frontiers” * “more conforming that independent” * “not curious enough about most things” * Not spending much time on an issue that does not make money * Weak in unplanned, informal “give-and-take” interaction * Not enough leaders capable of creating and managing change, and inspiring and motivating others |

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Good managers   * Having integrity and trustworthiness * Accountable, dedicated and productive * Adept at task at hand | Good leaders   * Having the qualities of a good manager * Capable of creating and managing change and inspiring and motivating others * Venturing out of comfort zone to scale new heights * Inquisitive of surroundings * Dare to question assumptions * Empathetic, compassionate and passionate |

I think he means that more Singaporeans should become leaders instead of merely managers. “Moving up the food chain” implies that leaders are above managers in terms of level and value. Leaders should be creative and able individuals who can make their own mark in the world, promoting innovation among their followers (or employees) to come up with new ideas to create new, useful things for people. Leaders should also be the forerunners in research so that they can venture further into uncharted territory and “advance the frontiers”.

Ex 6

I think the Singapore government is democratic in reality and to a large extent but also exercises its power to protect its democracy.

Firstly, the General Elections in Singapore have been free and fair and there is universal suffrage. Citizens aged 21 and above are entitled to vote.

While being a democratic society, Singapore has indeed excelled in terms of quality in the social, cultural and economic spheres. From time to time, our Prime Minister would invite fellow Singaporeans to critically reflect on the year and set new goals for the future to strive towards (e.g. during the Prime Minster’s speech). Singapore has also managed its multiracial population well, seeing that there are few or virtually no racial disputes in the recent years. Economically, Singapore managed to do well despite the economic depression, having an economic growth of 14% in 2010.

However, it is observed that the civil and political rights of people are not really respected in Singapore. The most prominent example would be the restriction of free speech in Singapore. According to Article 14(2)(a) of the Constitution of Singapore, the Parliament may restrict freedom of speech in order to protect Singapore’s security and public order. Sensitive issues such as those regarding race or the Government are very rarely discussed publicly or even in private lest ISA officers will arrest the people who speak ill of the the Government. Also, being a conservative society, homosexuality can be considered a taboo in Singapore. Known homosexuals are also denied jobs of a “sensitive nature”, hence their job scope is shortened. I think the CPF scheme is also an infringement of the individual’s right to manage his own wealth.

Ex7

I think democracy is not necessarily a pre-requisite of good government. Good government can come about due to other reasons.

Firstly, a good government would ensure that the people’s civil and political rights are protected. A good government would also bring prosperity and security to the country so that the people can have a high standard of living.

To achieve that, the country would need honest, capable leaders to run the country. These people do not exist because democracy or fair elections exist, but because they are people who want to help run the country to make it a better place to live in for the people. These people that make up a good government do not necessarily have to be elected by the people by democracy. As mentioned in the article, a good emperor and his wise decisions regarding state affairs can bring prosperity and security to his people. This is true in the case of the Five Good Emperors of Rome, where each succeeding emperor is chosen by the preceding one to take over the throne. Hence, we can see that democracy is not a pre-requisite of good government

A good government also has to lay down measures that are effective and efficient for the people and itself to keep within. This is to protect the rights of the people and also to prevent the government from overstepping their rights in their political runnings. It must also have the foresight to take calculated risks to further the progress of the country.

Ex9

I agree more with Bhavani that media control is necessary in Singapore.

Bhavani says that Singapore’s media model is “adopted to our circumstance and needs”. I agree with this, especially within the Asian context. Being a largely Asian society, we have to protect the conservative interests of the majority. For example, homosexuality is rather censored to a large extent because it contradicts the traditional values of family-making. Homosexual content can also prove to be dangerous to curious children or youths as they may experiment deviant sexual acts with peers or even be exploited by paedophiles.

Backman suggests that media censorship with regard to maintaining racial and religious harmony is unnecessary with the implementation of anti-racial vilification legislation. I disagree with his idea. While many countries are becoming more multi-racial like Singapore, this does not mean we have to follow them and loosen our grip on censoring the media pertaining to the sensitive issue of race. Singapore is an intrinsically multi-racial society which has experienced violent riots caused by racial tensions in the past. Hence, Singapore should know better to protect its citizens from offensive material. Even with the “moderate and effective” legislation proposed by Backman to punish newspapers, any offensive material that is published can bring about unnecessary yet dire repercussions among the different races. Prevention is better than cure in this case.

Bhavani said that “it is not the role of the media to confound editorialising with news reporting, stir up issues or campaign against the Government”. There is a warp truth to this statement because according to a speech by Dr Chee Soon Juan, an Opposition Leader, high-ranking personnel of the Singapore Press Holdings are former leaders in the Internal Security Department in Singapore. As such, the media is actually controlled to not jeopardise the current political air in Singapore, hence keeping the leaders of the Government in power. As part of the Government, Bhavani may be trying to defend such a truth to protect the Government’s integrity.

Ex 10

1. No, he does not. He does not go on to explain and elaborate on the stands of the people in the second and third paragraphs. Hence, the first three paragraphs are relatively unbacked compared to the subsequent paragraphs where he goes on to explain the rationale and philosophy behind his stance.

I suppose it would be better if he had talked about euthanasia because not only is it highly pertinent to human rights, it also concerns life and death and the right to live or die.

1. The evidence is not enough. The point he is trying to make in the paragraph is that individuals should not be allowed to exercise their freedoms without thinking of how their actions will affect people. His description of a careening car causing injuring to pedestrians and the riders in the car does not fully explain his point. I think the cause of such a car accident is due to speeding or recklessness and not whether one drives with a seat belt or air bag or not. However, he seems to imply in the paragraph that it is due to the absence of such safety features that results in his careening car, not because of his own reckless actions.
2. Yes, he does. An example would be the “smokers”. He did not say anything about smoking previously and smoking is hardly a human rights issue. I suppose he is just lobbying against unhealthy habits.

*Irresponsibly* implies that the individual should be accountable for his actions. This supports his stand that people should not be entitled full autonomy of their actions because it can result in damage to “public goods”.

1. Not at all. I think they are rather aptly used and hence effective yet fair.

For example, it is true that it is natural (human) for us to be rational and irrational at times. It is also correct that people can make up their own mind about Laetrile freely (libertarian concept).

1. I think his example on driving slowly and with safety features like seat belts and air bags best supports his central thesis. When accidents happen, people without these safety features are more likely to be gravely injured or killed. As such, it is vital that the Government mandates seat belts and air bags in order to protect us fallible humans. It is all done with good intent.

No other examples are equally supportive. It seems a little unlikely that most Americans would try Laetrile first and wait for any effects before choosing surgery immediately.

Ex 12

Based on the scientific findings on serotonin levels in human beings, it may be true that criminal behaviour, or a tendency towards violence leading to crime, may have a biological basis. However, I think criminal behaviour is more heavily influenced by the environment or external factors. In an environment with good parental guidance, a child can be brought up the right way to respect and live up to societal expectations. Any unacceptable behaviour or actions (e.g. hitting people, stealing) can be immediately corrected and the child will not deviate morally. For a victim of child abuse, the detrimental effects can be devastating and long-lasting. The emotional trauma can backlash in future as the person may choose to act out the abuse on other people as an outlet. In a dysfunctional family with uncaring parents, the child may grow up to commit crimes to gain the attention they seek since young.

150 words

Ex 14

War crimes should indubitably be punished. Genocide and rape are already not condoned, but the systematic destruction and mass slaughter of urban populations like that in Nanking are outright inhumane and unfathomable – helpless civilians were casually murdered in every section of the city; women of all ages were raped repeatedly by 15 to 20 men and subsequently killed when they no longer satisfied the soldiers’ perverse sexual hunger; babies were stabbed with bayonets and tossed into boiling water. For all these atrocities committed, the perpetrators are psychotic monsters with no regard for the sanctity of life that must be punished to uphold justice and executed to protect the innocent. While some soldiers were psyched into perverted people, that does not exonerate them from the innumerable atrocities they have committed. As for Nagatomi Hakudo, I believe he would not mind being punished for the war crimes he had committed.

148 words

Ex 15

I think the efforts of the Japanese ambassador to address the Nanking Massacre are not enough. He hinges on ambiguity in his response, saying that “during a certain period in the not-too-distant-past, Japan…… caused tremendous damage and suffering to the people of many countries, particularly those of Asia”, and that does not portray sincerity well. This is rather reflected in Article 17, saying that “the Japanese leaders have perfunctorily apologised…… they have never really come clean”.

There is a need to admit the atrocities committed. This is to show acknowledgement of guilt and wrongdoing to the victims and their relatives. This is also a first step to justice. It seems from Articles 15 and 16 that the evidence of the Rape of Nanking happening is true and undeniable. An example would be the eye-witness account of Tillman Durdin in Article 16 of the execution of 200 men.

I think the Japanese government should have more control over dealing with the perpetrators of the atrocities. They should punish the war participants who are living a good and comfortable life and not let them get away scot-free. This can reflect badly on the power of the Japanese government.

Name: Samuel Tan CT: 10S6C GP Tutor: Ms Lim Ai Hua

Book Title: The Physicists Author: Friedrich Dürrenmatt

1. Why did you choose this book?

This book was recommended by my German teacher. It comes in a form of a play and is rather easy to read (like Emily of Emerald Hill). The characters are also interestingly named after famed physicists, namely Sir Isaac Newton and Albert Einstein. I am also interested in reading a piece of literature after so long..

1. Content of the book

The play begins with a grisly murder of a nurse in a sanatorium (or psychiatric hospital) by “Einstein”, a patient who is actually a famed physicist with a hidden agenda feigning as a crazy person. The police are called in to investigate. It is revealed that three months ago, a similar murder took place, this time committed by “Newton”, another famed physicist just like “Einstein”. Both of them are after the works of Moebius, the world’s greatest physicist who has discovered the Unifying Formula that relates everything in the world together and is also checked into the sanatorium to keep his findings a secret from the world. He murders a nurse in order to avert suspicion of his actual sanity. The climax of the play is when all three physicists shed their cover and confront one another, with “Einstein” and “Newton” trying to convince Moebius to join their own cause. However, it is Moebius who convinced them stay in the sanatorium with him to keep their dangerous secret away from the outside world who may misuse the formula. In a plot twist, the sanatorium manager has been copying the works of Moebius secretly and intends to rule the world with the newfound formula. The three physicists are left helpless as they cannot leave the sanatorium with immunity from the law of being insane for the murders.

1. Name a person or character that you found interesting and say why.

I found Moebius rather interesting. As a great physicist, I am astonished why he would check himself into a sanatorium and not utilise his great finding to benefit the world. I suppose a great responsibility arises from his discovery, yet he is willing to spend the rest of his life feigning insanity in order to protect his works from people who may seek to exploit the Unifying Formula for their own misdeeds. He is insane yet wise, imprisoned yet free, and that is why he is particularly interesting.

1. What issues or themes are raised in the book?

Most evidently, the central theme is about scientific ethics. What are the responsibilities of our scientists? Who should harness the great power of science? How should it be used? How can we prevent it from falling into the hands of evil? Should we even then try to look for the Theory of Everything?

1. Would you recommend this book to others? If yes, to whom?

I would recommend this book to anyone who likes to read plays and is interested in learning about scientific ethics. This gives food for thought of how we should handle great knowledge and power.