
GP Comprehension MCQ - Education

Passage 1: The role of Education

Christina Hoff Sommers thinks that schools should teach moral values.

Paragraph 1

When you have as many conversations as I do with young people, you come away both exhilarated and depressed. There is a great deal of simple good heartedness, instinctive fair-mindedness, and spontaneous generosity of spirit in our young people. Most of the young people I encounter strike me as being basically decent. This is a generation of kids that, with relatively little guidance and religious training, is doing some very concrete and effective things for other people.

Paragraph 2

But conceptually and culturally, today's young people live in a moral haze. Ask one of them if there even is such a thing as right and wrong and suddenly you are confronted with a confused, tongue-tied, nervous, and insecure individual. The same person who volunteers for a suicide prevention hotline or a domestic violence shelter might tell you, "Well, there really is no such thing as right or wrong. It's kind of like what works best for the individual. Each person has to work it out for himself." Ladies and gentlemen: that kind of answer, which is so common as to be typical, is no better than the moral philosophy of a sociopath. In effect, we are raising a generation of young people who are not being given the arguments to support the ideals by which most of them instinctively live. They are morally inarticulate. For it is today fashionable to cast doubt on what is objectively obvious and to denigrate the truths of morality by which decent people live and love. By the same token it has become unfashionable to defend those truths.

Paragraph 3

We need a Great Relearning in moral conservatism. We must encourage and honour those teachers who accept the responsibility of providing a classical moral education for their students. The last few decades of the twentieth century has seen a steady erosion of knowledge and steady increase in moral scepticism. It is partly due to the diffidence of many teachers confused by all the talk about pluralism. Such teachers actually believe that it is not right to 'indoctrinate' our children in their own culture and moral tradition. But of course all cultures pass on their moral teachings to their young. Why should contemporary America be the exception?

Paragraph 4

We cannot deny that there are pressing moral issues around which there is no consensus. As a modern pluralistic society we are arguing about gay rights, assisted suicide, and abortion. That is understandable. New moral dilemmas arise in every generation. But we have long ago achieved consensus on other basic moral questions. While it is true that our society must debate such controversial issues as capital punishment, assisted suicide, etc., we must not forget that there are also the core of uncontroversial ethical issues that were settled a long time ago. Read the Bible, read Aristotle's Ethics, read Shakespeare's King Lear, read the Koran, or the Analects of Confucius, read almost any great work and you encounter the uncontroversial moral basics: integrity, respect for human life, self-control, honesty and sacrifice.

Paragraph 5

We need to bring the great books and the great ideas back into the centre of the curriculum. We need to transmit the best of our political and cultural heritage. We need to hold back on the cynical attacks on our traditions and institutions. We need to teach our young people to understand, to respect and to protect the institutions that protect us and preserve our humane, free and democratic society. This we can do. This we must do. And when we engage in the great relearning that is so badly needed today, the lives of our children will be safer, saner, more dignified, more humane, for we shall then be truly 'educating to live and lead in a civil society.'

Passage 2: American schools and moral education

Joel Turtel believes that schools in America are not teaching moral education correctly

Paragraph 1

Is there anything wrong with lying, cheating, stealing, shop-lifting, taking drugs, premarital sex, insulting your parents, pornography, irresponsibility, or getting pregnant in junior high school? Not according to the values taught to children in many public schools in America today.

Paragraph 2

Today, many school authorities seem to have contempt for traditional moral values. They carry out moral education programmes that often pretend to teach children real values to pacify parents. Through these programmes, children are taught that all moral values are subjective and meaningless and the argument held by many teacher-facilitators, as some now prefer to call themselves, is that children do not need established values to make moral choices. They teach kids that whatever feels good at the moment or whatever the group considers acceptable is a 'good' value. The right value, they assert, depends on the situation and the individual — a value is good if it 'works' for a particular child at a particular time.

Paragraph 3

This is unfortunately contrary to what parents want. Most parents want schools to teach their children traditional values like honesty, hard work, integrity, justice, self-control, responsibility, respect for parents, and fidelity in marriage. They want their children to have a sound moral compass, to be able to judge for themselves what is right or wrong. It is in my opinion what schools should be doing.

Paragraph 4

Yet, to many teacher-facilitators, there is no purpose in teaching that cheating, lying, stealing, or having casual sex with other students are undesirable acts in themselves. To them, such actions are just unfortunate choices that students make, depending on circumstances and personality traits, out of many alternative moral choices. Moral education classes deliberately teach children to be non-judgmental about moral values. Moreover, is there even a point? Moral education debates often turn into 'bull' sessions where each student gives their opinion about a moral issue but conclusions are never reached. In these classes, the teacher-facilitator often acts like a talk-show host who gets the students to debate such topics as the merits or bad consequences of stealing, lying, pre-marital sex, or taking drugs. People do discuss and debate, but ultimately agree to disagree. In sex-education classes, sexual behaviour is often described in purely mechanical terms and sexual choices

are presented as morally neutral options or simply personal preferences each student has to decide for himself. Even in many drug-education programmes the same non-judgmental attitude often prevails — students are encouraged to talk about the good and bad consequences of taking drugs without reaching a clear moral conclusion.

Paragraph 5

Many public schools teach children that only self gratification and their feelings of the moment matter, that there are no moral absolutes. Admittedly, some parents are to blame for not teaching their children good ethical values, but moral education programmes are an assault on the time-tested values most parents teach their children. Since moral education programmes teach children that all values are subjective, they destroy real values and corrupt children at the deepest level. If schools insist that all values are subjective, our children will no longer be able to differentiate between mercy and murder, honesty and theft, sexual consent and rape, loyalty and treachery, or fidelity and adultery.

Paragraph 6

In a world where anything goes, children are turned into amoral creatures who will do anything to satisfy their momentary desires. Yet these are the insidious moral anti-values that many public schools now promote with moral education classes.

Read the passages in the Insert and then answer **all** the questions. Note that up to fifteen marks will be given for the quality and accuracy of your use of English throughout this Paper.

NOTE: When a question asks for an answer IN YOUR OWN WORDS AS FAR AS POSSIBLE and you select the appropriate material from the passage for your answer, you must still use your own words to express it. Little credit can be given to answers which only copy words or phrases from the passages.

From Passage 1

- 1 What does the phrase 'exhilarated and depressed' (line 2) suggest about the writer's attitude towards young people? (2)

Paragraph 1

Grade 2 - Language Application

Answer: The writer is doubtful towards the young people in terms of their mindsets as they have many virtues but yet they have negativism that leads many to feel a sense of despair. This creates this state of ambivalence towards the youths which causes her to have this doubtful attitude.

2. From these sentence, 'The same person who volunteers for a suicide prevention hotline or a domestic violence shelter might tell you, "Well, there really is no such thing as right or wrong. It's kind of like what works best for the individuals," explain why this is ironic ? (2)

Paragraph 2

Grade 2 - Language Application

Answer: This is ironic as you expect a youth who is able to handle the problems of other people to be able to give advice on matters on crisis of life but in reality, these youths are equally confused and ambiguous about these matters.

3. What are the reasons given by the writer that the youths are 'morally inarticulate' ? (2)

Paragraph 3

Grade 2 - Factual Explanation

Answer: The writer thinks that the youths are unable to make moral arguments as they are not supported and trained to make arguments and it is also not the social norm for youths to make their arguments to support their moral views.

4. Although it is not easy to derive moral consensus in this diverse modern society, why does the writer feel that we can still achieve it? (2)

Paragraph 4

Grade 2 - Factual explanation

Answer: The writer believes that we can still achieve consensus despite the diversity in modern society as we have learnt to clear moral disputes in the past on issues like capital punishment, slavery. We also have traditional values like religions to develop our capacity to derive a common sense on what are our moral yardstick.

5. According to the writer, how can we create a society which ensures that our youths can be educated to 'live and lead in a civil society'? (2)

Paragraph 5

Grade 2 - Factual explanation

Answer: The writer states that we need to build our cultural and political entities by respecting them without excessive criticism against them and in doing so, shape them to preserve the values of freedom, civics and fairness. As such, our youths live in a socially stable and upright society to allow them to be educated and build leadership for the civil society.

Passage 2

6. What is the writer's attitude towards the school moral education programme? (2)

Grade 2 - Language Application

Paragraph 2

Answer: The writer is skeptical towards the efficacy of moral education conducted by the school as he feels that the school is only teaching them in a flexible way to please the parents. The schools are not willing to teach as they do not believe that there is no moral absolute to achieve this.

7. What are the reasons given by the writer that the schools are unable to achieve the parents' aim that they children should have 'a sound moral compass' (2)

Paragraph 3 and 4

Grade 2 - Process Explanation

Answer: The writer gives the reasons that the schools do not believe that their teaching will help the youths to have sound moral judgements as their immoral conducts are the result of unfortunate circumstances. The schools have also made their moral lessons to be flexible without teaching moral absolutes as the teachers feel that it is wrong to inculcate moral absolutes in the students, allowing children to reflect on their own to make judgements.

8. What are the consequences identified by the writer if schools believe that there is 'no moral absolute'? (2)

Paragraph 6

Grade 2 - Process Explanation

Answer: This belief shapes the youths to be void of the moral absolute to test themselves about moral conflicts in their lives and are unable to uphold a moral yardstick in their lives. Consequently, it undermines their capacity to make judgments about the values and behaviours in their lives.

9) Both writers believe that schools should guide children in developing a sound moral character. Sommers suggests that schools should engage in a Great Relearning while Turtel criticises the way American public schools conduct moral education programmes.

With reference to the ideas presented in the passages, consider how far the young people in your society need a school-based moral education programme. [8]

Both writers have expressed their views on the need of school-based moral education and provided reasons for the justification on why we may need a school-based moral education. Their views are justifiable but at a certain level only.

In paragraph 2, Joel Turtle makes the claim that students today are living in a “moral haze” and are “morally inarticulate”. Based on this view, he is suggesting that students are confused about their moral compass as they are unable to distinguish between right and wrong, and they are unable to justify their moral judgement and decisions. As such, I agree that this bring about an pressing need for Singapore to have a school-based moral education. This is especially the case for our Singaporeans youth who may be lack of parental guidance in cultivating their moral compass. Living in our fast paced and competitive society, many parents end up prioritising their careers over spending time with their children as a means of sustaining their livelihood. As a result, their children lack a strong guiding pillar as they do not have anyone to turn to for advice regarding the moral struggles that they face as their parents fail to be there for them. Thus, this leads to a compromise in their moral compass as they lack the moral acumen to resolve their moral dilemmas. Additionally, it has been difficult to educate our youths on such matters due to the complexity of the morals - they are subjective and would differ across people due to their growing environment and upbringing. As such, it is difficult to set a yardstick for morals as there is no right or wrong, which makes it so much more difficult for the youth to decide how to best approach their moral dilemmas with the lack of guidance that they have. This compromise on their moral compass due to this lack guidance and complexity of the issue can be seen from the National Crime Prevention Council, where it was reported that most problem youths come from homes lacking in parental guidance and are usually in schools with Low self-esteem. As such, it is imperative to have a school-based moral education to fill in this direct and cultivate value these youths are lacking in.

However, despite the lack of parental guidance, there is no pressing need for school based moral education due to the relentless efforts by other organisations in our society in cultivating moral values and judgement in students. For instance, there is extensive regulation by the government as imposed by the Juvenile Court and social institutions like National Youth Challenge Council. Apart from the many other religious institutions such as churches to guides the youth, we can see from the fall of youth crimes, as reported by the department of Singapore statistics, proving that there is no need for a school-based moral education which is a demanding task for the teacher. Thus, it is very debatable to whether school-based moral education is needed. Therefore, it is rational to conclude that all or more means for education by more institutions would be helpful to enrich the moral acumen of our youth instead of just a school-based moral education.

In paragraph 4, Joel Turtel makes the claims that “there is no purposes in teaching that cheating, lying, stealing or having casual sex with other students are undesirable acts in themselves”. The writer is suggesting that it is unnecessary to educate students on such matters as these are merely poor choices that students make in their lives depending on their situation at that point in time, thus implying that there is no need for the youth to have a school-based moral education. However, I do not agree with this, instead I feel that it tells us that there is now a greater need for such education in our Singaporean youths. Adolescent is a period where many youths are susceptible to the peer pressure and the environment they grow in, and the period where undesirable actions that they make can have dire consequences on their lives. As such, it imperative that they receive proper guidance on what to and not to do in their life. Without a doubt, an effective moral education on such matters are effective as these interventions would prevent the youths from committing the wrong acts that would likely to ruin their lives. This importance of educating them on such matters can be seen from the Department of Singapore statistics, where the number of youth crimes have been failing due to the efforts of MOE in imparting moral education for the youths in recent years. Such acts would bring such issues to light to the youth and ensures that they do not make similar mistakes as they grow up.

However, they is some truth to the authors claim where there is no purpose to have a school based moral education as current measures taken by society are ineffective in solving the situation. Most of the efforts by our society in correcting such issues are consequential ramification - where action is only taken when youths become delinquents. More than just a consequential ramification, there is a greater need for a preventative measure in order to alleviate the problem. As such, school based moral education will do little to solve this problem, as measures such as consultations and lessons is merely a reflection of what society is currently doing. The juvenile law, that deals with youth below the age of 18 commuting unlawful activities is one such example consequential ramification, which only intervenes when the problem surfaces rather than prevent. As such, there is little purpose in having a school based moral education which would bring about a similar effect.

In view of the above discussion, school-based moral education are functional in helping to nurture morally upright youths but the focus on whether it is needed or not is not the issue. The main point of discussion is on how it is properly implemented to educate the youths as this writer would advocate.

