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## Comprehension SAQ - Youth

### Passage: Youths

#### Paragraph 1

Ah, youth. Has there ever been a word more conflictingly loaded? It resonates with infinite potential – and loss. Youth is our future, and our past. It is everything that is good as well as bad about the world. The young are our own children, yet they are also the little-understood enemy. They are super-predators and they are lost lambs. They are the problem – and the solution. They will, for better or worse, inherit the earth.

#### Paragraph 2

The young are victims wherever there is trouble, from wars to famine. They are also the victimisers and an extreme caricature of our culture, from Britain's "yoof" (youth) hooligans to America's inner-city gangs to the parody of adulthood among teenage girls. Yet they are also carefully crafted in our own image, raised to reflect our values and given every chance to improve upon them. Read about young people and despair for them. They are in perpetual crisis - fat, lazy and amoral, sexually promiscuous and drug-addicted, failed by a deteriorating education system and sent astray by society's dropping standards. They are explosive, aimless, spoiled and corrupted by materialism, television and violent video games. They are sullen and distant and ... armed. The majority of them will live and die in poverty, most of their potential untapped. China, India and the African continent between them have more than 1 billion children, more than half the world's total. These developing-world children are responsible for almost all of the world's population growth, and all the problems that will bring. There are too many of them, and every one of them will get less than he or she deserves.

#### Paragraph 3

But we can also know youth and rejoice. They are our pride and joy, our darlings. They are bright and full of optimism; a brand-new day embodied. They see the world with fresh eyes. Today's young will be the richest, best-educated and healthiest generation in history, and the largest one, too. Their accomplishments will exceed our wildest dreams.

#### Paragraph 4

What are these qualities of youth that the world now values so highly? Technological adeptness, first of all. If there is a digital divide today, it is between generations. More than 60% of American households with children have computers with Internet access. Although only 10% of American university students graduate with technical degrees, nearly all of them use e-mail, the web and the latest Internet music-piracy technology. Where Generation X, born in the 1960s and 70s, was computer savvy, their successor, the millennials, are technologically precocious, growing up with a rattle in one hand and

a computer mouse in the other. This generational difference shows up in the emergence of the “family tech guru” who, these days, is far more likely to be a teenager than the father of the house. A Carnegie Mellon study of home computer use found that “those with the least seniority claimed the most authority,” with calls to technical support (generally a sign of the household “power user”) coming predominantly from children, not adults.

#### Paragraph 5

Many other characteristics of youth, and especially today’s youth, will serve this generation especially well when it starts work. Like all young people, they are passionate, inquisitive and challenging, and want to leave their mark on the world.

#### Paragraph 6

They welcome change. Young adults are by nature well-suited for the unpredictable workplace of the future. They have less baggage and can therefore afford to take risks. People today get married later, and women have children three years later in life than their mothers did. Each generation is born into an era of more rapid change than their parents, making them ever better adapted for the frenetic world they are about to enter. “The young do not know enough to be prudent, and therefore they attempt the impossible – and achieve it, generation after generation,” wrote Pearl S. Buck half a century ago. That is even more true of this generation.

#### Paragraph 7

They think differently. Where years of education, training and experience were once necessary to succeed, now they are increasingly seen as irrelevant, even a liability. As *Fast Company*, a magazine that has become the bible of the new business philosophy, put it: “Forget the experience curve. The most powerful force in business is the inexperience curve. Young companies, born on the right side of the digital divide, are running circles around their older, richer, slower rivals. If you want your company to think outside the box, why not learn by working with people who don’t know there is a box?”

#### Paragraph 8

They are independent. One of the most pervasive business trends of the past decade has been the rise of the “free agent”, caused both by the breakdown of the social contract between companies and employees, and by the growing share in the workforce of knowledge workers with portable skills. Today’s twenty somethings came of age as that social contract was dissolving. They have never expected loyalty from a company, nor have they expected to give it. They define themselves by their skills, not the firm they work for. “The overwhelming majority of graduates see their career at graduation not as a straight line of advancement in one company but as a zigzag path from

company to company, job to job, skill to skill,” writes Meredith Bagby in “Rational Exuberance: The Influence of Generation X on the New American Economy”.

#### Paragraph 9

“Dues-paying is an obsolete concept for Xers who face an employment market that offers no hope of long-term job security with any one employer,” writes Bruce Tulgan, author of “Managing Generation X”. “The US economy – unpredictable and fiercely competitive – has shaped the habits and career expectations of Gen Xers. All they’ve known is a technology-based economy that moves quickly, downsizes constantly and places a premium on change.” The daily *USA Today* makes a similar point: “Raised on a diet of MTV and video games, young managers are quick to roam from job to job, hungry for quick results, willing to do things differently and intolerant of technophobes.”

#### Paragraph 10

They are entrepreneurial. With a booming economy, capital for the taking and unprecedented technological opportunity, it is no surprise that more young people have been striking out on their own. A *US News* survey found that “entrepreneur” was the preferred career of Generation X. Asked to name their hero, nearly half of the millennials picked Bill Gates (who dropped out of college to start Microsoft), according to a *Newsweek* poll. Nor is this just the bravado of callow youth: by the time they enter university, most teenagers already know far more about the business world than their parents ever did. The signs of this business precociousness are everywhere. Universities used to tell students to go out and get experience in the workplace, learning at someone’s expense, before thinking about starting their own firms. Now they run on-campus incubators for the shrinking number of students that have postponed entrepreneurship long enough to go to college at all. That oracle of trend-spotting, *Vanity Fair*, has had to coin a new word to capture the phenomenon: “Enfantpreneurs”

#### Paragraph 11

In her anthropological studies of primitive cultures, Margaret Mead found that in “pre-figurative” societies – those going through rapid technological evolution – parents have little to offer their children because their knowledge is not relevant. “Adults don’t have all the answers any more. They’re not in a position to tell young people what to do,” says Yvonne Fritzsche, a researcher at Frankfurt’s Psydata market-research institute. “Technology is one of the reasons that the relationship between the young and old is becoming a dialogue, rather than a lesson. It affects the traditional role of authority in a way that brings generations closer together. You can’t rebel against helplessness.”

Adapted from “*Bright Young Things*” and “*Know the Future*”  
The Economist

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## Suggested Answers

### Q1. What is the writer's attitude in paragraph 2?(2)

#### Grade 2 - Language Use

The writer has a solemn and pessimistic attitude. The author mentioned "read about young people and despair for them" and this reflects the pain and agony that he genuinely feels towards the plight of young people today.

### Q2. What is the writer's purpose in using the three dots (...) in paragraph 2?(1)

#### Grade 2 - Language Use

The writer uses the three dots to express a change in the behaviour of youths, from being emotionally affected to potentially engaging in acts of violence.

### Q3. In paragraph 4, how does the writer show that the youth possess "technological adeptness"? (2)

#### Factual explanation

The writer mentions that most youth can use the internet and obtain illegal copies of work. Furthermore, they are mostly asked by other family members for technological related issues.

### Q4. According to the writer in paragraph 6, why are young adults "well-suited for the unpredictable workplace of the future"? (3)

#### Grade 2 - Process explanation

Young adults have reduced responsibility which allows them to take gambles. Furthermore, they exist in a period of swift transformation making them well accustomed to the fast-paced reality. Lastly, they are not intellectually developed enough to be sensible.

### Q5. What does the author mean by "learn to work with people who don't know there is a box"? (2)

#### Grade 2 - Factual explanation

The author meant that if one wants their company to be creative, they could acquire skills by working with the young who lack practical knowledge and have brilliant ideas.

### Q6. According to the writer in paragraph 9, how has the US economy shaped the habits and career expectations of Gen Xers?

#### Grade 2 - Process explanation

The US economy experiences rapid transformation, frequent lay-off of workers and has an intensely cut-throat environment. This has influenced the young to disprefer employment security, desire instant outcomes and openness to different approaches.

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**Q7. In paragraph 10, what does the author mean by “Nor is it just the bravado of callow youth”?**

**Grade 2 - Factual explanation**

The author meant that the boldness of inexperienced youths is not the reason that they engage in enterprising business as in actual fact, they possess more enterprising awareness than their parents.

**Q8. What does the author mean in paragraph 11 when he mentions “the relationship... is becoming a dialogue rather than a lesson”?**

**Grade 2 - Factual explanation**

The author meant that the relationship between the young and old becomes less domineering and instructive. Technology has reduced the power that elders hold over the young and this forges stronger bonds.