**GP Essays – Reflective Issues**

**Questions**

1. Is the world today really an unhappy place to live in?
2. How far is the establishment of a welfare state desirable to your country?
3. Is xenophobia justified?
4. ‘Science educates, religion complicates.’ Do you agree?
5. Should we always be compassionate?
6. Should people in your society be fearful of the future?
7. ‘Promises should never be broken.’ What is your view?
8. Is competition always desirable?
9. ‘Everyone has an opinion, but not everyone’s opinion is of equal value.’ What is your view?
10. ‘No cause is worth dying for.’ Discuss.
11. No belief, purpose, a pursuit in life is worth sacrificing for.
12. 'Getting what one wants in life is what matters.' Discuss.
13. To achieve what one aspires for in life is the most important in life.

What is a reflective essay?

It reflects an opinion about an issue in life

What makes a good reflective essay?

Opinionated, expressive, logical and dimensional in discussion

How to approach and write a reflective essay?

1. Rephrase the meaning of the quote or phrase

2. Set perspectives / proposition (EOA)

3. Set categories

4. Identify the nature of discussion – DYA?

5. Conceptualized idea

6. Paragraph development – topic sentence, elaboration, examples, concluding sentence

7. Types of paragraph – opposing view, rebuttal and supporting view – depends on the type of question

**Question 1**

**Is the World today really an unhappy place to live in?**

Nature of the question – do you agree?

Introduction

Main Body

* Opposing view
* Rebuttal to opposing view
* Supporting Views – 3 Paragraphs

Conclusion

**Derivation of thesis and anti-thesis**

* thesis – the world today is really an unhappy place live
* anti-thesis – the world today is not an unhappy place to live , it is a happy pace to live

**Analysis of the question**

* World today – modern society (the way we live, the values and norms, economics, political factors, education, family, environment, health)
* Notion of happiness – manifestation of the notion of happiness, unhappiness)

**(observation, perspectives, stand)**

**thesis – the modern society is a happy place to live in**

**anti-thesis – the modern society is not a happy place to live in**

Life in the modern world is often seen as progressive as we are bestowed with advanced technological development and infrastructures that have made our lives more comfortable, convenient and conducive for living, shaping many to feel that the world today is really a happy place to live in. However, if we observe closer the lives of many dwellers in urbanized cities and developed countries, we will not be surprised to hear a less optimistic and more negative view about their sense of happiness. In view of these diverse opinions, this essay is more inclined to the view that the world today is really an unhappy place to live.

(opposing linking sentence)

For those who are fortunate and live a blissful life, it is quite logical for them to feel that the world is a happy place to live in as they are enjoying the luxuries and comfort of life. They live in the modern era where food is easily accessible if they have the financial means and comfort and safety of their community can be achieved with efficient and advanced infrastructures. Technological advancement has allowed the masses to travel more often, enriching our lives with diverse experiences while the advent of smartphones and social media have provided new forms of entertainments that make life more interesting and less boring. Some are also blessed with good health, talented attributes, more advantaged family environment and cordial and close-knitted relationship. These fortunate developments in the lives of this small group of people in this world will shape their view that the world is a happy place to live in as the various levels of needs in their lives as identified by psychologists like Maslow can be satisfied. When your needs and expectations are met, one will feel hopeful and you will be able to have the capacity to create the ‘good life’ as identified by positive psychologists like Martin Seligman.

(LINKING SENTENCE FOR REBUTTAL)

 But such an explanation holds a modicum of truths as not everyone is blessed with such good fortunes or are capable to create ‘the good life’ as life in a modern world is demanding and complex. The comfort and affluent lifestyle does not come cheap and this may be beyond the affordability of the average Joe as 69 of the major cities have higher consumer price index in 2012 as stated by Unhabitat, a research firm. Rising global food prices and resources like oil has contributed to extensive rise in cost of living which will add on the economic burden for the lower income earners whose wage will not be sufficient to sustain their living. This will add pressure on their lives as they need to work longer hours or additional jobs to sustain their living, cutting their time to rest and spend times with their families. We observe how many city dwellers in city like Hong Kong, Singapore, Beijing and other major cities complained over housing issues, rising food and transport prices which have made life financially unbearable, shaping the view that the contemporary society is indeed an unhappy place to live in.

Supporting view – linking sentence

Life is also filled with many uneventful and unfortunate moments as we grow older, subjecting us to failures, separation, disappointments, upsets, complexity and crisis and all these adversities will give rise to greater hardship that makes our lives difficult and unpleasant to live. Not everyone is fortunate to be blessed with the mental acumen and social and family supports that will enable them to overcome these inevitable mishaps in their lives and many will succumb to them and fall into a state of depression or despondency that will make life unhappy and unbearable. As reported by Today, the national suicide for Singapore has risen from 8.13 per 100000 residents in 2010 to 10.27 in 2011. There are also a rising number of patients seeking for treatments in Institute of Mental Health. On a whole, our social tensions are rising as life becomes more challenging, creating a dispirited and abject environment. Life cannot be happy and rosy with this bleak mood.

Our world is indeed an unhappy place to live when there is higher degree of competition created by growing population, greater global connectedness and depleting scare resources that will demand individuals to strive to win in this economic competition for resources and benefits. Students now have to compete for limited spaces in education institutions from kindergarten to tertiary places on merit or economic capacity while workers compete for employment and business opportunities for advancement and economic gains. Consequently, people will now have less time, energy and resource to devote to intrinsic development in their lives like social interaction, hobbies and leisure to cultivate a holistic lifestyle with meaningful purposes and amiable relationships. Instead, life has become tensed, trivialized and confrontational as we need to combative and aggressive to survive in a highly competitive environment. This is evidently seen in mega cities like Singapore, New York, Hong Kong and Shanghai where many are seen to be unhappy souls in social surveys about their life. Under such competitive ethos, we can never live a happy life.

As for those who are living in less developed state with rural and improvised background, the world is even more unhappy place to live in as life is tough as they fight against perilous natural difficulties and social and cultural backwardness. Life in these backward or rural regions are deprived of modern amenities to raise their comfort of lives and opportunities for personal and social development are deplorable, forcing many youths to sought life in the city which is equally tough but more hopeful for those who feel bleak in the rural regions as evidently seen in the growth of population in many urbanized cities in China. For these rural folks in less developed nations, employment opportunities are scarce and they are also undermined by dogmatic rural values that may lead to social and gender discrimination where girls are deprived of equal opportunities and rights. Although some may argue that simplicity is the way of life towards happiness, it is never easy to live in ignorance, deprivation and aimless as life is simply too simple to live and thus, a place in this world cannot be happy for the less connected and deprived.

 Although the current world political development may have democratized and empowered the individuals with rights through revolutions, legislatures and the proliferation of the mass media, part of the world still experiences political suppression and restraint which will make their world an unhappy place to live in. In many less developed states, the people are living in autocratic states like North Korea and Syria, who are experiencing fear, suppression and restriction. Deprivation of freedom and rights to access for basic resources and equal treatments will definitely shape the world to be an unhappy place to live in. In these states, the absence of democratic and effective governance will give rise to political instability, civil wars and rampant crimes which will threaten the lives of the people. Life in a perilous environment where one is oppressed, and life is threatened will not create a happy environment to live in. Ask the people in Iraq, Somalia and Syria, they will agree to this.

Conclusion

 In retrospect, we indeed live in an unhappy world. As we grow older and our world develops, we face with more complex and challenging changes that will lead to more mishaps and misfortunes, shaping our world to be disheartening, dreadful, intolerable and calamitous. However, life goes on, bearable or unbearable, we must continue living and we can shape our mindsets to make our lives as happy as we can. Though we cannot change the world to make it a happy place for us to live in, we can still shape ourselves to become happy people to live a happy life in this unhappy world.

**Question 2**

**How far is the establishment of a welfare state desirable to your country?**

Introduction

The recent economic crisis in US and Europe, where huge public debt and widening budget deficit are seen as the cause of the economic crisis, have introduced a controversial and debatable concern about the establishment of welfare state. Economists who are more prudent and hold long visionary opinion in management of the economy would see the establishment of a welfare state as undesirable and unsustainable and therefore, they reject this direction of development. On the other hand, right activists and the general public are likely to support this establishment, sharing the view that the state is accountable for the establishment of the welfare state as it the responsibility of the state to do so. To assess the extent of desirability of the establishment of the welfare state to Singapore, we need to understand the impact of this proposal on Singapore from a dimensional perspective.

Main Body

Rights activists and welfare organizations are quick to recognize that the establishment of the welfare state will be desirable as it promotes the interests of the people. The welfare provided by the state will ensure that the citizens of the country are rewarded and care for the contributions they have made in their lifetime to the country. When our citizens realize that their contributions and effort they contribute to Singapore is appreciated and rewarded, this will naturally raise their sense of patriotism to the nation. In Finland, many of her citizens have extended their military services voluntarily to the nation beyond their mandated requirement where welfare services provided by the state are extensive from the care to the children and medical welfare and education subsidy to the adult. Thus, we can see that the welfare state to Singapore is desirable as it is a utilitarian measure to cultivate nationalism.

It depends on the extent of welfare that the nation will bestow to the people – this will induce calculation as they will see it as exchange of contributions in relation to the welfare received - this is not a sensible way to cultivate patriotism – furthermore, such a measure will not be applicable to the higher income group who may not need these forms of welfare and thus they will not need to contribute to the country – this is the issue of degree of reciprocal – will the individuals reciprocate the same degree of patriotism as what the state has given to them?

Rebuttal –

Depending factor for it to work

Weakness or limitation of the scheme

From an economic angle, the welfare state is desirable to the nation as it will raise the productivity and efficiency of production and distribution of goods and services, especially the essential public services. Through the provision of these public services, they will raise the welfare of the people and enhancing their capacity to work harder as our citizens have healthy mental and physical acumen to work more. In Singapore, many citizens work very long hours and face fierce economic competition from neighbouring nations due her vulnerability as a small nation with limited resources and this will make the provision of education, medical and public services significant in shaping Singaporeans to be productive and effective workers.

**Counter argument on the same ground**

Welfare state will induce loft, reliance, inefficiency and laziness – the comfort and convenience of life is attained easily without effort - a very tempting offer that is hard to refuse

**Assumption / depending factors**

The state is able to provide effective public welfare that will enhance the life of the people and thus, make them work more productively.

Evidence – this will raise extensive demand and expectation of the public services

**Complete disagreement to the direct causation**

Most of all, the welfare state is often criticized and refuted by many politicians and economists in Singapore as they believe that it is not unsustainable for a small nation like Singapore. It is impossible to generate resources to derive constant sources of income to fund the welfare scheme in a modern society like Singapore as population growth and higher level of expectations of public welfare will aggravate the cost of funding for these welfare programmes, leading to economic problems of rising public debts as seen in countries like Greece, Spain and Italy. Although some may argue that the issue of public debts in Europe is the result of poor planning and ineffective planning of public policies, such welfare state is still dismissed as self-reliance and co-payment scheme are preferred as a way for Singapore to take care of the people. This can be seen from the Central Provident Fund scheme which was adopted by Singapore as the structure on how we will solve the social issues of medical, housing, education and retirement issues.

Conclusion

In retrospect, the notion of a welfare state is desirable to many in expectation. However, in reality, such a concept of governance will present many frictional and complex concerns that make this impossible to actualize. If Singapore seeks to pursue the development of a welfare state, it needs to take note of the hindrances and limitations so that the welfare state will be beneficial to the nation.

**Question 3**

**Is xenophobia justified?**

Introduction

 As the world becomes more inter-connected and integrated as it globalizes, it has become very common for countries to experience extensive influx of foreigners by virtue of migration, personal and business development and tourism. Unfortunately, these developments have created a negative sentiment among the local residents towards these foreigners which some sociologists have classified it as xenophobia, the fear of foreigners. While those who have experienced negative impacts of the influx of foreigners will feel that xenophobia is justified, the more open-minded individuals will think that xenophobia is the result of subjective mindsets. In view of the diverse opinions, this essay is more inclined to the view that xenophobia is justifiable.

Main Body

 For those who are receptive to globalization, they are unlikely to see xenophobia as justifiable sentiment as they recognize the economic benefits to interact with foreigners.

 However, such observations hold a modicum of truth as the benefits are only reaped from a macro perspective, but the influx of foreigners are quite detrimental when the effect is considered from the micro perspective where the impact of unemployment is often felt by the low skilled local workers.

 The sentiment of xenophobia is justified when we observe how local citizens experience negative social interactions with foreigners due to diverse social behaviours and values.

 As for those who ardently uphold their cultural heritage, they will share this sentiment of xenophobia as they fear the occurrence of cultural subversion.

The fear of foreigners is also justified when we observe how the foreigners are affecting their way of life.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the fear of foreigners is justified as we cannot deny that local people will feel negative towards foreigners when their lives are adversely affected by them. There are also many detrimental impacts that the society as a whole would experience that prompts the general public to feel this fear. However, if countries are able to rectify the negative effects and ensure that the foreigners integrate well into our society as genteel members, this sense of xenophobia will be eliminated.

**Question 6**

**Should people in your society be fearful of the future?**

Requirements of discussion

In this question, there is a need to understand the nature of our society on how it is building its social, economic and political framework as we move towards the future. The degree of preparation and building the people and the government have put in to build our society will be a yardstick to assess whether we are fearful of the future or not. On the other hand, for the aspect why we are fearful of the future, we will need to understand why the unpredictable, complicated, perilous and vulnerability of the different aspects of our society to understand why we should be fearful of the society.

In the development of the respective paragraphs, students need to observe a good topic sentence to ensure the ideas supporting the perspective is stated clearly. The development of the paragraph must be done with the understanding of the programmes and effort the people or the society has put in to prepare the society.

As for the perspective that the society should be fearful a good topic sentence and the understanding of the challenges of the regional geopolitics, economic instability, social and cultural conflicts will be the factors that students can adopt to answer the questions. Students need to make sure that their elaboration of their arguments must have the focus on the process of impact and not just listing a term without consideration on how it occurs. Examples supporting the points of elaboration are equally important.

Most important aspect of development **is to examine this issue from the Singapore perspective** and to do so, students need to base discussion on Singapore development and the surrounding regional and international development that will affects us.

**Structure of development**

Question type: Do you agree?

Structure:
Introduction (observation, perspectives, stand)

Main Body

1. Opposing view
	1. Linking sentence – to state opposing perspective
	2. Topic sentence
	3. Elaboration
	4. Example
	5. Concluding sentence
2. Rebuttal
	1. Linking sentence to show that it is rebuttal
	2. Topic sentence
	3. Elaboration
	4. Example
	5. Concluding sentence
3. Supporting View 1
	1. linking sentence to show that it is supporting view
	2. Topic sentence
	3. Elaboration
	4. Example
	5. Concluding sentence
4. Supporting View 2
	1. linking sentence to connect as point 2 of the supporting view
	2. Topic sentence
	3. Elaboration
	4. Example
	5. Concluding sentence
5. Supporting View 3
	1. linking sentence to connect s point 3 of the supporting view
	2. Topic sentence
	3. Elaboration
	4. Example
	5. Concluding sentence

Conclusion

Repeat your stand and identify the most significant factors that will determine your view that people in our society needs to be fearful or not about the future. Are we fearful or not depends on our preparation and the degree of vulnerability the surrounding development is affecting us.