

The Future Scholar

A collection of KS3 and 4 student essays and research from Future Academies

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In this edition of the Future Scholar, we showcase snapshots from some of the best essays and research from across Future Academies.
Over Autumn and Spring term, seven Future Academies schools participated in The Brilliant Club. They were matched with a PhD tutor who guided them through the research process and shared their expertise in their field. The programme culminated in a graduation ceremony at Wadham College, Oxford, in February and another in Jesus College in May. Gracewood Academy submissions were part of a Y8-10 essay competition, responding to the prompt 'The Cost of Progress'

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THE BRILLIANT CLUB GRADUATION



KEY NOTE SPEECH TO THE BRILLIANT CLUB GRADUATES WADHAM COLLEGE, OXFORD

I'm Ellis Bolle, Head of Access at Future Academies. I work to open doors for students across our trust, connecting them with opportunities like The Brilliant Club and top universities such as University of Oxford that can often seem inaccessible.

Around this time last year, I took a group of Year 12 students to visit Oxbridge. One student turned to me and said, "this place isn't for people like me." It was a difficult moment, because we want every young person to feel these institutions are open to them - not distant or reserved for others.

We're delighted that her doubts didn't last. She went on to apply, and we supported her with the personal statement and interview preparation - this student has now secured an offer from St Hugh's College, Oxford, to study Philosophy and Linguistics!

When I was younger, I didn't think that getting in to somewhere like Oxford was possible for me either. I went to a state school, and because my parents hadn't been to university, it simply wasn't something we talked about. But I loved reading and during my A-levels I discovered I was a strong writer. I went on to study Literature as an undergraduate and, almost on a whim - begrudging the £50 application fee - decided to apply to University of Oxford. To my great surprise, I was awarded a scholarship to study World Literature for my postgraduate degree. My time there was one of the most memorable and formative periods of my life.

I went to Mansfield College but the college we're in now, Wadham, has wonderful memories for me. It was the first college to fly the rainbow flag in 2011, and they host 'Queerfest' here in Michaelmas term every year. It was there that I met a brilliantly eccentric guy decked out in peacock feathers, who would become my best friend and, ten years later, officiate my wedding ceremony.

My time at University of Oxford wasn't just academically stimulating; it was socially vibrant and personally liberating.

Also here in Wadham College is where we had our postcolonial tutorials with Professor Ankhi Mukherjee. Imagine it - me, a Jewish boy from east London; an American-Indian girl; a Sri Lankan-Australian; and a South African guy, sitting around a great ornate table discussing great works of literature by South African, Nigerian and Indian writers. Then we'd go to the pub round the corner - the King's Arms - and continue passionately discussing why those books and writers mattered.

We were from different places and have since returned to our birth countries, but what brought us together over 10 years ago in Oxford was a deep curiosity, a love of literature, and a belief in the power of storytelling to build communities and create spaces of belonging.

Oxford can and should be a place full of diverse stories - brilliant minds from all different cultures and backgrounds belong here. You students here today have shown that you have that potential and deserve to be part of the story!

So, as Year 9 and 10 students at Future Academies, I encourage you to keep enquiring into the subjects you love - develop your curiosity, and aspire to places like Oxford University. You're graduating from The Brilliant Club today, and we believe many of you will be graduating from great universities like this in the future!

TEA'S SPEECH AT THE BRILLIANT CLUB GRADUATION

Good afternoon, everyone,

My name is Tea and I'm a Year 9 Student from Barclay Academy. Before I begin, I would like to thank Daryl Scott for being our tutor and helping me and my group gain valuable skills that can help us succeed in our future careers.

During our course 'Film Language: the Deconstruction of Meaning', we not only learnt the different aspects of film-making, but also learned how studying at university would feel like. In Tutorial 3, I remember being fascinated by semiotics in the media because I liked how it made me think twice and contemplate what I was seeing. We learnt about connotation and denotation and how they could help us understand film better. The idea of my media hiding secret symbols with hidden meanings interested me so much that I started looking for signs everywhere. In shows, movies, books, music.

I started noticing signs everywhere, and I believe this course helped me improve my attention to detail. Another thing that this programme has helped me with are my research skills. I've learned to reference relevant sources and format my citations. Before I did this course, I had no idea what citations were and now I can comfortably use them in my writing.

I also learnt how to structure my writing. The structure was one of the hardest parts for me because I couldn't think of what I could write about for each paragraph. My peers even mentioned how they struggled with writing their essays and how much resilience it took them. I wrote many drafts before I landed on one that worked for me and how I wanted my essay to be. I learnt how to be concise but detailed while writing and how to organise my thoughts in a cohesive, intelligible way.

I'm not just speaking for myself when I say that we felt euphoric when we finished. Messaging each other and asking questions about the task, this was one of the biggest challenges we had faced. Through collaboration, teamwork, and hard work, we were all able to write an essay we were proud of.

This programme gave me an in-depth view of what studying in university would be like, and I'm currently researching subjects I may want to study. I've been exploring interdisciplinary degrees, like Liberal Arts or Performance studies, where I can combine my analytical skills with my passion for the performing arts.

I've always loved singing, dancing and theatre, but the Scholar's Programme has also shown me that I enjoy complex analysis and contemplation as well. My goal is to find a subject that allows me to combine both the critical thinking skills I've developed here and the expressive hobbies I have. Whatever subject I choose to study in the future, I know that the confidence and skills I've gained through this programme will help me succeed.

Thank you.







A CRITICAL EVALUATION OF THE FATE OF OPHELIA (2025).

By Tea Arunaj

Taylor Swift's feminist interpretation of Shakespeare s Ophelia utilizes symbolic visual language and intertextuality to reference artworks, tragedies and her own brand, to subvert the patriarchal narrative of female oppression. Swift asserts a narrative of survival, autonomy and reclamation, inciting the question of how Taylor Swift uses symbolic imagery to construct a feminist narrative and challenge patriarchal representations of Ophelia in Hamlet (Shakespeare).

NARRATIVE - REPUTATION AND OPHELIA

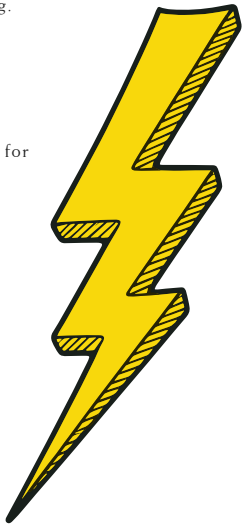
Taylor Swift's Reputation is vital in demonstrating how she constructs a narrative of feminism and autonomy. The album reflects a period in her life in which she was manipulated by men in power as a young artist, yet ultimately emerges resilient and self-authoring. During this time, due to extensive media scrutiny, As Swift herself notes, nobody physically saw me for a year (Swift), highlighting the extent of her withdrawal under intense public scrutiny. Swift went into isolation after being gaslit and subjected to sustained media distortion and psychological manipulation. Her Reputation era symbolizes a cycle of death and rebirth; the songs building a complex tale of her shedding her childhood innocence and naïveté after being publicly humiliated by Kanye West and the news. This trajectory contrasts sharply with Shakespeare's Ophelia, whose response to manipulation and betrayal follows a markedly different path. While Ophelia, when deceived and betrayed, is driven to madness and ultimately destroyed by patriarchal structures, Swift's narrative resists this outcome.

In 'The Life of a Showgirl', Swift subverts Hamlet's narrative by reimagining Ophelia as a figure of resilience. The story portrays Ophelia as a strong female character who can rise from the ashes of her demise, rather than crumble under the pressures of society. In the opening scene, Swift initially presents herself as Ophelia within a Friedrich Heyser–style portrait, visually situating herself within a canonical image of female tragedy before deliberately stepping beyond it. Her physical movement out of the frame symbolizes a rejection of predetermined female suffering and asserts her agency in authoring her own narrative. By aligning the narratives of Reputation and Hamlet, Swift reframes her own recovery as a feminist reworking of Ophelia's fate, demonstrating a capacity for survival and reinvention denied to Shakespeare's character.

FILM LANGUAGE IN THUNDERBOLTS, THE MOVIE

By Hannah Fahim

Thunderbolts* is a movie produced by Marvel Studios and released in 2025. The plot centres around a group of characters forced to come together under the desperate circumstances of the fact that they will die if they don't. Beyond that, the film explores themes of mental health and depression, portrayed differently through the different characters. Much of the film uses contrasting ideas of what's good and what's bad, but how does it translate through the film's use of film language techniques? Is it just the good and bad that the film shows contrast about? Narrative In film language, the narrative is the order of events. There are multiple types; linear and non linear are the most common. Going deeper into the order of events, Tzvetan Todorov introduced a more detailed theory. He stated that every narrative has five stages: equilibrium, disruption, recognition, reparation, and the new equilibrium. In an analysis of narrative, Richard L. W. Clarke stated, "Todorov wants to propose a form of analysis that focuses on the syntax of narrative" (1981). The film follows a linear narrative but relies deeply on the audience's understanding of the characters' individual stories. For example, John Walker was previously married to a woman called Olivia. This isn't explicitly stated at any point, but his worst memory is shown to be between them. The only way to know who it was is by watching the series 'The Falcon and the Winter Soldier' where Walker's character is first debuted. Another example is Ava Starr herself. If you have only watched Thunderbolts*, the most you know about Ava is that she worked for Valentina and spent a long time in labs to create a suit that allows her to function as a normal human being.



However, her story actually starts in 'Ant-Man and the Wasp', where she is the antagonist. Valentina Allegra de Fontaine is the antagonist but even she isn't necessarily a new character. She has featured in multiple end-of-credit scenes for Marvel, and they happen to show her collecting everyone in Thunderbolts* to work for her. Every character has a history that can be tracked through previous movies and series.

It also uses Todorov Theory. The equilibrium at the beginning is where all the characters are doing their respective jobs. The disruption is where the protagonists are sent to kill each other. The recognition is when they decide to work together. The reparation is when the void retreats from New York. Finally, the new equilibrium is when Yelena whispers "We own you now" into Valentina's ear. It symbolises a change in the balance of power. The renewed equilibrium could be viewed as negative because from the public's point of view, nothing has changed. On the other hand, I view it as positive because it shows how imagery matters in our present society. Herd mentality is very common so representation can mean everything.





CRITICAL ANALYSIS OF CONSUMERIST IDEOLOGY, SEMIOTICS AND INTERTEXTUALITY IN "PUSS IN BOOTS: THE LAST WISH" (2022)

By Jacob Sellens

This essay will evaluate Puss in Boots – The Last Wish (2022). It demonstrates the ideological function of the "Last Wish", representing an overconfident, swashbuckling, superhero who never shows any weakness but after years of daring exploits discovers that his legendry bravery had come at a cost. He had lost eight of his nine lives. Death in the form of The Big Bad Wolf who adds 'And you didn't value any of them. So why don't I do us both a favour and take this last one now'. Faced with fear of death for the first time he embarks on a perilous quest to find the mythical Last Wish. The film uses a darker direction than the previous Puss in Boots taking inspiration from Grimms Fairy Tales. This darker place was needed in order to highlight the brightness and hope. It portrays a widespread ideology of the "Last Wish" and how a last wish can really impact our world, this gives a huge reality check as both the film universe and our universe come in to so many similarities. Also, the reality of the culture is meant to root in the themes of self discovery, mortality, anxiety and the value of life, although this is a mystical fantasy film as there are many non-realistic characters, such as the Sleeping Giant of Del Mar for example.

Semiotics

This film is extraordinarily rich in symbolic language for an animated film. It uses many options such as characters, colours, and objects as signs that convey deeper meaning regarding mortality, fear, identity, and the value of life.

Denotation: The film is clever in its use of both visual and aural semiotics using the big bad wolf 'Death' symbolising inevitability and fear in contrast to Puss's flamboyant persona and his bravado. The use of the whistle also precedes his presence and of impending doom thus causing Puss to panic. The Wish Star by shining bright is seen automatically as a positive in all aspects. Who doesn't love looking at the starts shining bright in the sky and who doesn't remember getting Stars for good work at school. It is a metaphor for one to think and realise that happiness is found in existing relationships and not in some magical fix.

Connotation: Subconsciously a Star gives us a warm & positive feeling & fills one with hope. Perrito shows compassion when Puss has his panic attacks. Compared to Puss's lifestyle, Perrito personifies goodness and kindness – such as lying his head on Puss's stomach. Goldilocks personifies a mentally active character as she has only been shown as an antagonist when stopping Puss in Boots and his comrades from getting to the Last wish. This is because just like Perrito, she has a sad story. Perrito was often clowned a lot when he was a puppy and Goldilocks believed that she had no true family. However, this point is proven wrong as in the book an easter egg was shown and there was a specific page where the first letter of each line on the page formed a quote. That quote was," you already have it". This secret easter egg was abundant to our vision during the period where Goldilocksfelt a lot of emotion from her sad reality (not having a true family). But the easter egg states that the 3 Bears are her true family. This foreshadows her happy ending and the fact that she wouldn't need the wish.

FILM LANGUAGE IN JAMES CAMERON'S AVATAR (2009)

By Mia Jakovleva

Introduction

Film language is the visual and sound techniques used by filmmakers to create meaning for the audience. Bordwell and Thompson believe that film language involves "the director's use of cinematic techniques to create meaning and emotion" (Bordwell and Thompson, 2017). These techniques include camera angles, lighting, sound, colour and editing so that viewers can interpret characters and scenes. This is important because it allows the audience to understand how films can show emotion and ideas rather than just being entertainment.

James Cameron's Avatar (2009) is a film that uses a lot of film language to tell its story and to communicate messages. An example of this is how Cameron uses techniques like lighting and colour to show the difference between the human world and Pandora. The human world had dark colours and artificial lighting whereas Pandora is shown with bright colours, natural lighting and peaceful sounds. The use of these techniques make viewers view nature as sacred to the Na'vi and it makes the human world seem more depressing.

This essay will analyse the use of narrative theory, semiotics and intertextuality in James Cameron's Avatar to show how film language creates meaning. Narrative theory is used to show how the film uses a hero's journey structure. Semiotics shows how symbols like colours and nature create ideas about power and morality. Intertextuality shows how Avatar uses other stories and cultural texts to strengthen the themes in the film. Overall, film language is very important in helping the audience understand the film's deeper meanings.

Narrative Theory: Todorov's Framework Narrative theory is how stories are structured and how this changes the audience's understanding of characters and events. Todorov was a narrative theorist that believed narratives and film follow a pattern so that the viewers can understand the story. Todorov stated that stories move from "a state of equilibrium to disequilibrium, and finally to the establishment of a new equilibrium" (Todorov, 1977). His theory has five stages: an equilibrium, disruption, recognition of the disruption, an attempt to repair the disruption and a new equilibrium. Cameron's Avatar (2009) uses Todorov's structure to make the narrative clear for the audience.

The equilibrium, the first stage of Todorov's theory, is in the beginning of the film when Jake Sully arrives on Pandora where the humans are working. Even though it seems that the world is not peaceful at this point as there is machinery and dull colours in this area, it shows how the humans are in control and are stable. The disruption is seen when Jake becomes an avatar and sees the Na'vi way of life. His connection to nature on Pandora and Neytiri makes his loyalty to the humans weaken, disrupting the balance. The recognition of the disruption is seen when Jake notices how the humans are destroying Pandora and that the Na'vi people are threatened by them. This makes him go on the Na'vi side and he is no longer neutral. The next stage, the attempt to repair the disruption, is shown when Jake decides to go against the humans and he helps the Na'vi resist them. He prepares for battle and lots of conflict, creating tension.

The final stage, a new equilibrium, happens after the humans are defeated and when Jake decides to stay in the avatar body permanently to show his commitment to the Na'vi way of life. Even though the equilibrium is restored, it is still different to the original equilibrium. By following Todorov's structure, Avatar has a clear storyline that makes it easy for the audience to understand. It allows viewers to connect more with the film and understand the themes in it instead of viewers just watching it for entertainment.



YUMMY FOODS MOVEMENT TO THE CIRCULAR ECONOMY

By Alexander Bansal

Yummy Foods Movement to the Circular Economy:

This report explores how catering organisations can transition from the traditional linear economy to the future of sustainable products of the circular economy.

The linear economy is a traditional model where raw materials are collected and transformed into products that consumers use until discarding them as waste. In contrast, the circular economy is an economic model and a new way of producing and consuming with the aims to eliminate waste and pollution by keeping products and materials in use for as long as possible using the five R's.

This report will examine how the circular economy can be adopted by food companies to have a number of beneficial factors, including reduced waste, improved resource efficiency, and enhanced corporate reputation whilst also adding to financial gain in the future. However it can come with a handful of negatives, such as increased initial costs, operational complexity, and the need for changes in supply chain management.

This report will analyse circular economy strategies that have been successfully implemented by companies similar to Yummies and will recommend appropriate practices for Yummies to adopt. These recommendations will be supported by a cost–benefit analysis to evaluate their financial and operational implications.

Analysis of Yummy Foods Linear Practices:

Yummy Foods currently engage in a variety of linear programs that significantly contribute to environmental pollution and waste, which ultimately harm both the environment due to their continuous release of greenhouse gas emissions as well as potentially harming the long term sustainability of their business.

One major issue that will lead to the downfall of their business would be their reliance on the use of single use plastic containers for ready made meals, which are immediately discarded upon use which often end up in landfills or the natural environment, negatively impacting the wildlife through ingestion or entanglement (UNEP, 2021). Additionally, the company overproduces food, leading to unsold meals being continually thrown away; this negatively impacts both their companies economic status due to a continuous loss in profit due to the number of meals produced compared to the number bought whilst also significantly damaging the local and global environment due to the accumulation of food waste resulting in a release of methane which is a greenhouse gas that is detrimental to the environment due to its role in aiding the global warming potential contributing to climate change (WRAP, 2020).

Yummy food also relies on old gas powered appliances, which are less energy efficient and produce higher carbon emissions compared to its modern competitors. These appliances increase air pollution which negatively impact human health (IEA, 2022), they affect the function of the organs resulting in the degeneration of the human body showing the unfavourable scale of the impact on the health of the human population. Furthermore, the practice of delivering individual customer orders results in a high number of short vehicle journeys, increasing the demand for drivers which place an economic burden on the restaurant as well as increase the fuel consumption and greenhouse gas emissions within the local community.

Together, these traditional linear economic activities damage ecosystems, threaten wildlife and place serious health problems among the local and global population through the worsening environmental quality and climate impacts, while imposing economic burdens on Yummy Foods through their outdated linear operating systems, these factors could potentially damage their reputation due to the recent trend of consumers favouring environmentally responsible companies (OECD 2020).

CIRCULAR ECONOMY AND IT'S 5 KEY STRATEGIES

By Ana Luiza

The circular economy is a system where materials never become waste and nature is regenerated. This is important as pollution and waste are eliminated decreasing chances of global warming, and as nature is regenerated its improves overall soil health reducing reliance on limited natural resources. The circular economy is underpinned by a set of interconnected strategies that aim to expand the lifespan of products and materials.

The first key strategy is Rethink, this encourages us to rethink about the way we go about producing and consuming products. Rather than owning many products, gadgets or devices, we can rent or share. This means that fewer resources are used.

Following this, Redesign involves increasing a product or material's use. For instance, redesigning electronic devices to have a common charging cable rather than having different types of chargers, refillable deodorant, multi-purpose furniture parts and etc. These redesigns of products gives them a second chance and a longer durability, increasing its use.

Reduce strategies help cut down on the number of resources being used in production or consumption. This means avoiding single-use or disposable products and packaging and reducing waste.

Similarly, Reuse strategies, extend the life span of products through repairing, remanufacturing, refurbishing etc. Products can also be viewed as services and used on subscription basis, which helps reduce waste.

Finally, Recycle involves finding new applications for products or materials in their current form. Although recycling is an important component of the circular economy, it should only be considered when there is no alternative activity that can prolong the lifecycle of products.



By integrating these strategies, (Rethink, Reuse, Reduce, Redesign, Recycle), the circular economy fosters innovation, driving economic opportunities and reducing environments, and social, impacts - advocating for a system where products are not viewed as waste, but as valuable resources for future cycles. As nature is regenerated, it improves overall soil health reducing reliance on limited natural resources.

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HOW CAN ORGANISATIONS TRANSITION FROM LINEAR TO CIRCULAR PRACTICES? -YUMMY FOODS

By Izel Ishemunyoro

A preview on how other businesses have embodied the circular economy

There are multiple local businesses that have adapted to the circular economy. For instance, Too Good To Go. This is a Danish developed service with a mobile application which connects customers to restaurants and stores with large amounts of unsold food. Customers are then able to purchase whatever the food outlet considers to be surplus, for a third of the original cost. Too Good To Go aims to reduce food waste worldwide. This is an ideal representation on how to adopt the reuse and reduce strategy.



Furthermore, McDonald's uses disposable materials for their packaging. They use paper and paperboard for things like: drink carriers, burger clamshell trays, and even carrier bags. McDonalds designed their packaging with recycling in mind, and they are working to improve so that 100 percent of their packaging is from renewable, recycled or certified materials. This is a model example of how to embody the redesign strategy.

Potentials benefits and costs

There are many probable benefits and costs of incorporating the 5 R strategies in Yummy Foods' way of business.
When following the redesign strategy, one disadvantage of this is the rebound effect. The rebound effect is when consumers value circular products more ,it can then encourage businesses to make more recycled products, however, this can lead to problems. For instance, a company might produce more materials and waste on purpose, just to have enough inputs for recycling. Meaning that more natural resources are being extracted from the environment, causing extra damage. To summarise, the rebound effect is when circular activities result in increasing production rather than reducing it.
On the other hand, a potential advantage of the redesign strategy is an increase in profit. Since materials are typically 40 to 60 percent of manufacturing costs in Europe. By redesigning products to allow the materials to be used more efficiently leads to increase of profits.

Also, when following the reuse strategy a disadvantage of this is uncertainty about potential profits. The quality of recycled materials, how people would react to circular products and the rebound effect, all add to uncertainty. This uncertainty can lead to insecurity for businesses in the supply chain. The more cautious a business is the more costly and difficult the move to circularity seems to them.

However, a potential benefit of the reuse strategy is efficient use of money. As companies are reusing materials rather than discarding them, they are able to get their money's worth on materials and there would be no reason to repurchase these materials again. This helps decrease the demand on raw materials to be extracted from the environment.

Additionally, when following the rethink strategy a disadvantage of this is that, initially, it may be more expensive. If a company were to invest in new electric appliances run by renewable energy resources it would be very costly and not in budget.
An advantage of this is that ,in terms of longevity, companies won't need to pay for constant repairs on their old gas appliances ,and the health of the workers and customers will gradually be at less of a risk.

Unfortunately, one disadvantage of following the reduce strategy is delivery fees or refunds. If a company were to use one delivery car for multiple orders, it could result in consumers waiting an extended amount of time for their order. This could lead to customers asking for a refund or even a small deduction on their next order. This idea tends to restrict companies from moving to a circular form of business.

On the other hand, one possible benefit of adopting the reduce strategy is cost savings. As if a company were to send out many cars out at once with many orders per each car, the less fuel and petrol needed as there is a cut off in the journey time. Therefore, allowing a business to save money on things like petrol and fuel.

HOW CAN ORGANISATIONS TRANSITION FROM LINEAR TO CIRCULAR PRACTICES?

By Summer Curtis

The change to circular strategies gives positive environmental impacts, but Yummy Foods must critically evaluate the potential benefits and costs of the recommended strategies. One key benefit of a circular economy is for food. For example, the circular economy can help to regenerate natural systems because food comes from farms using practices that improve the land overall health of the local ecosystem, promoting good human health and protecting natural habitats (Tansy Robertson Fall, 2021). This shows that circular economy strategies can have benefits that are not just about waste reduction and can benefit the food systems as well.

Another key benefit of a circular economy is for businesses. For example, higher resource productivity meaning there will be higher profits. Materials and components can be up to 80% of the UK's construction costs, so using materials more efficiently by improving resource productivity will reduce input cots therefore increasing profits (Green Alliance, 2024). This shows that resource productivity reduces operating costs and increases profit to transition from linear to circular practices and helping in the long-term.

On the other hand, there are also key costs and economic issues associated with the transition to a circular economy. For example, the changes in costs of production. Moving from a linear economy to a circular economy can also bring extra costs, that come from changing the way products are made and the bigger the changes needed, the higher the costs for the productions (Springer Nature Link, 2023). A way the costs can be increased is when redesigning products for recyclability, to help reduce waste and pollution. This also suggests that even though redesigning products to improve recyclability can reduce waste, it may also increase production costs. Another example of a key cost of the circular economy is the cost of establishing the circular economy units and producing secondary products. The use of secondary products can cause cost savings and help improve the environment but creating these products can be costly due to operation prices and equipment machinery needed. To produce these secondary products the materials still need to be recovered, recycled, and then the waste and byproducts still need to be treated which can is also additional costs. This demonstrates that although creating secondary products is a positive impact for the environment, it is still costly to move from a linear to circular economy.

In conclusion, Yummy Foods could become more environmentally friendly and transition from linear to circular practices through recognising and adopting the key strategies of the circular economy, and realising that the current linear practices being used are damaging towards the environment and should be dealt with.



JAHALUKA'S SPEECH AT THE BRILLIANT CLUB GRADUATION



Good afternoon, everyone,

My name is Jahaluka, and I'm in year 9. But before I properly start, I'd just like to say well done to the many students who, alongside me in this room, are graduating from the Scholars Programme! We've all come a really long way from where we started in November, and that is worth celebrating.

When I first started this program, I had no idea what to expect from it. The idea of doing university-style work seemed daunting to me, and truth be told, I was only in for it because my teacher, who organised the entire thing, Mr Fenton, told me it would look good on my CV and actual university application. I knew it was an opportunity that not every student in the UK had, but I didn't realise how much I was capable of, or how much the programme would change my perspective on an issue that is growing at an alarming pace globally.

I and my classmates that were also chosen for this programme, studied the "Climate Change Conundrum" with my programme mentor, Dr Faisal Farooq, and, as I said before, climate change is an issue we downplay heavily, mainly because we don't see its effects, but the course we studied showed that issues that build in the background have worse effects than we imagine. It's not like governments globally aren't trying to reduce the impacts of climate change; however, it simply isn't enough for the mass scale of this problem.

We learnt about previous and current climate agreements, where governments agree to reduce the amount of greenhouse gases they emit, like the Kyoto Agreement, but as scientists will tell you, the agreements seem to be more word of mouth than genuine action taken. We created our own hypothetical solutions to the issue of climate change and governments internationally not taking more responsibility, and it's safe to say that we are graduating today with a lot more knowledge and awareness of Climate Change.

Of course, there were challenges to this programme. One that I should probably admit to was not always completing the homework as quickly as I should have, but Mr Fenton was always there to support us with work, and our programme mentor made sure to make himself approachable and available for us and inquiries we had regarding things like the assignments we were set.

To conclude, I would like to thank, well, Mr Fenton, for providing us all an opportunity we wouldn't have otherwise, and our mentor, Dr Faisal Farooq, for all that he taught us in his time. I would like to thank the official organisers of the programme for creating opportunities like these for secondary school students, and most of all, I'm extremely thankful and proud of all the students sitting in this room with me, because if it weren't for aspiring students like yourselves, this graduation wouldn't be a thing.



HOW FAR HAVE INTERNATIONAL CLIMATE AGREEMENTS SUCCEEDED IN REDUCING GLOBAL GREENHOUSE GAS EMISSIONS?

By Ivy Kusi



Climate change is one of the most serious global problems facing the world today. Scientists agree that human activities, especially the burning of fossil fuels such as coal, oil and gas, are the main cause of rising greenhouse gas emissions (IPCC, 2021). These emissions trap heat in the atmosphere and lead to global warming, which causes extreme weather, rising sea levels and damage to ecosystems. Because climate change affects all countries, international cooperation has been seen as essential.

Since the early 1990s, governments have worked together through international climate agreements to reduce greenhouse gas emissions. The most important of these agreements are the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) in 1992, the Kyoto Protocol in 1997 and the Paris Agreement in 2015. These agreements aim to limit global warming by encouraging countries to reduce emissions and move towards cleaner energy. Although they have influenced national policies, such as the UK's Climate Change Act (2008), global emissions have continued to rise and reached record levels in recent years (IPCC, 2021).

This essay examines how successful international climate agreements have been in reducing global greenhouse gas emissions. It will first explain the aims and methods of the main agreements. It will then assess their successes, using the United Kingdom as a case study. Finally, it will explore the main problems and limitations that reduce their effectiveness. Overall, this essay argues that while international climate agreements have made some progress, they have not been successful enough to significantly reduce global emissions.

The United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change



The UNFCCC was agreed at the Rio Earth Summit in 1992 and was the first major international response to climate change. Its main goal is to stabilise greenhouse gas concentrations at a level that prevents dangerous human interference with the climate system (UNFCCC, 1992). Rather than setting strict emission targets, the UNFCCC focused on encouraging cooperation, sharing information and building trust between countries.

One of the most important ideas introduced by the UNFCCC was common but differentiated responsibilities (CBDR). This principle recognises that all countries are responsible for tackling climate change, but developed countries should take the lead because they have produced most historical emissions and have more resources. The UNFCCC also established yearly meetings called Conferences of the Parties (COPs), where countries discuss progress and future action.

However, the UNFCCC did not lead to immediate emission reductions. During the 1990s, global emissions continued to increase as many countries focused on economic growth. Despite this, the UNFCCC was successful in setting the foundations for later agreements and placing climate change firmly on the global political agenda.

Case Study:

The United Kingdom The UK is often seen as a leader in climate action. The Climate Change Act (2008) set legally binding targets for reducing emissions and introduced five-year carbon budgets. By 2020, the UK had reduced its territorial greenhouse gas emissions by almost 50% compared to 1990 levels (BEIS, 2021). This was mainly due to replacing coal with renewable energy and improving energy efficiency.

International climate agreements played an important role in encouraging these changes by setting expectations and applying international pressure. However, when emissions from imported goods are included, the UK's overall carbon footprint is much higher (BBC, 2015). This shows that national success does not always lead to global success.

TO WHAT EXTENT HAVE INTERNATIONAL CLIMATE AGREEMENTS SUCCEEDED IN REDUCING GLOBAL GREENHOUSE GAS EMISSIONS?

By Jahaluka Ukwuoma

Introduction

Global greenhouse gas emissions have been the root cause of our ever-growing climate change dilemma, and the international community aims to reduce emissions by attempting global cooperation and establishing climate agreements. Within the last three decades, they have established three different climate agreements – the UNFCCC (1992), The Kyoto Protocol (1997) and the Paris Agreement (2015) - and it can be argued that they have had mixed success because whilst they have encouraged significant emission reductions in countries like the UK and have set frameworks for future actions and long-term carbon mitigation, inconsistent participation, a lack of enforcement and indecision within the political powers – especially notable in the USA – have limited their full effectiveness.

This essay aims to explain what the three major agreements were, why they were not as effective as they could've been. It is also going to explore two examples of countries that have been members of all three agreements, at some point, and analyse the progress made by these countries. And to conclude, the essay will explore some improvements that could be made to future agreements so greenhouse gases can be decreased consistently.

What are some solutions the agreements could take up?

There are directions the agreements could hypothetically take, and whilst they seem simpler to say rather than do, if we looked at the bigger picture, it would solve a lot of global climate issues.

- The first solution would be stronger bonds to NDCs and clear guidelines for the reports they make every 5 years. There would be legal punishments for an unmet target, and it would be highlighted within guidelines.
- A second solution would be to provide more financial assistance and support for developing nations. Since developing countries have physical factors blocking target progress, the support provided would not just assist in GHG mitigation but also prioritizing adaptation.
- And the third solution would be long-term consistency in emissions reduction influenced by political stability specifically within climate policies, so nations cannot undo progress made at every electoral cycle.

All these solutions, like said before, are easier said than done but if member countries took these things into account, GHG reduction would be a smoother process compared to how it is now.

Conclusion

To conclude, these climate agreements were created in hopes of building global awareness and change. There has been some progress made, as we've seen in the UK, but there has been some stunted growth due to political instability and weak enforcement of climate policies (as the USA has shown us). That isn't to discredit the little progress they have made, but it isn't enough considering the scale of the situation at hand. The future and health of our planet depend on global cooperation, and these international agreements have set up the groundwork for change, but until nations worldwide decide to cooperate, the effectiveness of these agreements remains very uncertain.





THE FUTURE OF VACCINES

By Alma Dalool

Vaccination vs Variolation

There are many different types of vaccination that can be used for diseases and viruses. An example of a historical method is called variolation. Variolation dated back to the 16th century where it was first used in China and later spread to countries such as England. It was performed by having a sick person transfer the disease to a perfectly healthy person, resulting in a milder version of the disease. This was used to try cure the sick person and to build a stronger immune system. However, variolation is now considered to be very dangerous as there are many consequences of using this method. One example of the consequences was that variolation increased the risk of deaths because the pathogen that was transferred was not weakened enough for the immune system to fight against. An advantage of variolation is that it led to more scientific studies and research on how to develop better methods for curing sick people.

Vaccinations, on the other hand, are much safer compared to variolation because a dead or weakened version of a pathogen was injected into your body. An example of this is Edward Jenner's cowpox vaccination that played a role in our modern vaccination system today. He was an English doctor that came up with the idea of taking a girl with chicken pox and giving it to a boy, who doesn't have the chicken pox, to try and make him immune to it. The effects of this were clear: the boy had a milder effect compared to the girl. Once smallpox started to spread, the boy was exposed to it but he found out he was immune to the disease. This was because the antigens in both the smallpox and cow pox were similar to each other. Edward Jenner was later called "The father of vaccination" and is one of the most influential doctors in history today. Around 400,000 people died due to smallpox before this discovery was made. This is evidence to show the effects and impacts of vaccination.

Traditional Vaccines and RNA vaccines: Advantages vs Disadvantages

The time it took to develop the mRNA vaccine as well as the first human clinical trial used started in 2001. Four years later, a method used to transport mRNA inside cells without setting off the body's defence system was reported.

A disadvantage of RNA vaccines is that it is very expensive to make and that it has taken less time to be put onto the market. A second disadvantage of RNA vaccines is that the symptoms are similar to traditional vaccines which could make people feel scammed and unsafe. A third disadvantage is that they must be kept in extreme storage conditions. However, an advantage of RNA vaccines is that the antigen is expressed much quicker in RNA compared to traditional vaccines. Another advantage is that it is less likely to integrate with the human genome and won't break down as easily.

Moreover, a disadvantage of traditional vaccines (such as the live attenuated, toxoid and Recombinant vaccine) is that they take a long time to be developed. An advantage of these vaccines is that they have been on the market for decades, so they are considered as safe and are trusted a lot by the public. Another advantage is that it is also a lot cheaper compared to RNA vaccines.

WHAT CHOICE SHOULD THE DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF CONGO MAKE FOLLOWING THE OUTBREAK OF VIRUS X?

By Samara Maalin

Difference between vaccination and variolation

Following the outbreak of the Virus X- The Demographic Republic of the Congo should try preventing the spreading of the virus with an epidemic. With this epidemic more lives would be saved and prevent any further deaths. The Demographic Republic of the Congo should reach out to the WHO. The WHO stands for World Health Organisation." WHO is the United Nations agency that connects nations, partners, and people to promote health, keep the world safe and serve the vulnerable" - WHO website.

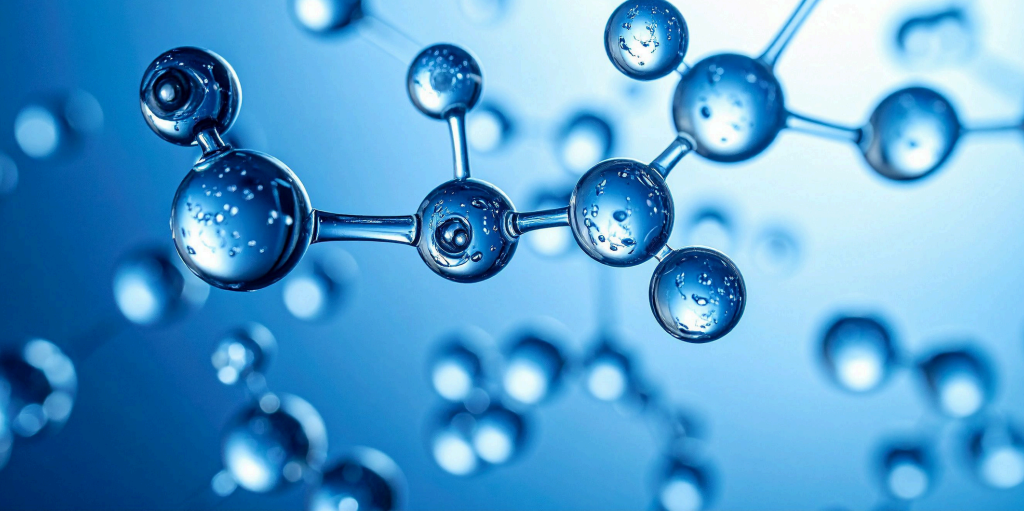
To study our options more carefully, we must be able to differentiate between the two types of vaccination; variolation and vaccination. Variolation is the historical method of vaccination which started to be put into practice around the 18th century-variolation is the historical method of vaccination in which the material of the infected person was transferred to the healthy person (through puss).As a result, the healthy person would catch a milder version of the virus but it still triggers a response from the immune system.

However, there are some negatives to variolation. Firstly, there is not any guarantee that it would be 100 percent safe – there is a risk that the patient might catch the life-threatening pathogen which might result in severe hospitalisation or even death. The history of variolation came a long way with first use of variolation starting back before the 18th century in some regions in Asia and Africa. A British pioneer by the name of Edward Jenner realised that cowpox could be used to vaccinate against smallpox. This is because the immune system recognised the antigens on both cowpox and smallpox as the same virus - this means that if either cowpox or smallpox enter the body, the body recognised it as one virus.



On the other hand, there is a safer alternative to vaccination-vaccination is a safer alternative because specialists and scientists have been doing years of research and preparation to find out how to make the vaccination as safe and effective as possible. As technology and our understanding of vaccination grows, RNA vaccines have taken a better approach to pathogens than ever before. RNA vaccines are incredibly unique because they have the virus' genetic information, so they body creates the pathogen. As the pathogen mutates, the vaccine changes alongside it so years of research does not have to be wasted due to a small mutation.





MASS SPECTROMETRY: UNVEILING MOLECULES WITH SCIENCE

By Dany Muhiedddine

What is this substance is a common question amongst many scientists. Answers to the question are very significant in many cases, such as identifying pollutants in rivers, testing for harmful substances in food, discovering new drugs, or analysing unknown chemicals at crime scenes. Identifying substances is key everywhere as it plays a critical role in many fields, and without it, scientists and doctors could not identify and diagnose certain substances and mixtures accurately. This is especially important in medicine and science because any mistake could be costly. Scientists and doctors need to be able to identify substances at a molecular level, allowing them to provide precise and reliable results.

In real life, correctly identifying substances has saved countless lives. For instance, toxicologists can detect poisonous chemicals in blood samples during emergencies, allowing doctors to administer the correct antidote quickly. Similarly, environmental scientists monitor water quality to ensure it is safe for communities, testing for pollutants like lead, pesticides, or industrial chemicals. Even in everyday food safety, laboratories test for allergens and contaminants in products like peanut butter, milk, or seafood to prevent health risks. Without accurate identification, all these fields would face serious challenges, and public safety would be compromised.

Identifying unknown substances is not as simple as it may sound. Many real-world samples are mixtures, meaning they contain multiple compounds that interact with each other. Blood, for example, contains a complex mix of proteins, salts, hormones, drugs, and waste products. Soil can include minerals, organic matter, bacteria, and traces of chemical pollutants. Food items may contain dozens of natural compounds, preservatives, and additives. This complexity makes isolating and understanding a single substance very challenging. Scientists need techniques that can separate these mixtures into their individual components before analysing them further.

Some substances are present in extremely tiny amounts, which makes detection even harder. Trace pollutants in rivers can damage entire ecosystems even at low concentrations. Similarly, a crime scene may only have microscopic traces of a chemical, yet this small amount can provide critical evidence. In medicine, researchers often study new drugs that are present in minute quantities in lab samples, meaning highly sensitive tools are required to identify and understand them. Even small mistakes in these cases can lead to serious consequences, highlighting why accuracy is so important.

Physical observations like color, smell, melting point, or solubility were historically used to identify substances. While these properties can still provide initial clues, they are rarely enough on their own. Two substances may look similar but behave completely differently. For example, sugar and certain toxic powders can appear almost identical, yet one is safe to eat while the other could be deadly. Situations like this demonstrate the importance of advanced analytical techniques that can examine substances at the molecular level.

Analytical chemistry is the branch of science that focuses on identifying substances and understanding their properties. Scientists follow a systematic process when working with unknown substances. First, the sample is prepared, which may involve dissolving solids, filtering impurities, concentrating or diluting the substance, depending on the type of analysis needed. Next, if the sample is a mixture, its components are separated to prevent interference during testing. Then, instruments are used to collect data about the chemical properties, molecular mass, and how the substance fragments. Finally, scientists interpret this data, often comparing it with known substances to identify the unknown.

No single technique can provide all the answers, which is why scientists often use multiple methods together. Combining techniques increases accuracy and reduces errors. One of the most widely used methods is mass spectrometry (MS), which measures the mass of molecules by turning them into charged particles, called ions, and analyzing how they move in electric or magnetic fields. The resulting graph, called a mass spectrum, acts like a molecular fingerprint, showing peaks that represent ions of specific masses.

FROM MYSTERY TO MOLECULE: THE SCIENCE BEHIND MASS SPECTROMETRY

By Harry McIntyre

In science there are many reasons and times where a scientist may need to identify unknown substances. They can do this is many different ways. The techniques I will be explaining are to do with mass spectrometry and using mass to discover the contents of unknown substances. Identifying unknown substances matters so much as not knowing what a substance contains can have a detrimental effect in medicine, environmental work, and everyday life.

Mass spectrometry is a technique that is used in identifying unknown substances. It is used to identify and detect molecules based on their mass. Scientist may need to use mass spectrometry for different reasons one of which is testing for performance enhancing drugs in an athlete's blood as without testing blood many sporting competitions such as the Olympics would become unfair and put those playing by the rules at a severe disadvantage. Another reason is to find out the contents of an unknown substance. It might be important to identify unknown molecules that we can't see as if there is a substance or medicine that is being sold by a pharmaceutical company that contains unknown chemicals it can potentially pose a threat to everyone using said substance.

A second technique that is used in identifying unknown substances is liquid chromatography. Liquid chromatography is a technique that separates the components of a mixture by using how quickly they move through a column packed with a solid material (stationary phase). Liquid chromatography can be especially helpful when scientists are dealing with complex mixtures such as blood, food, or water. Liquid chromatography works by a liquid (mobile phase) carrying a mixture through a tube. As the mixture is carried through the column by the mobile phase it interacts with the stationary phase. This separates the mixture as the different molecules interact differently with the stationary phase and move past it at different speeds. This process allows scientists to separate a complex mixture before analysing them in the mass spectrometer.

A third technique used to identify unknown substances is called mass spectrometry imaging also known as MSI. MSI is a technique that combines mass spectrometry with spatial mapping. This allows scientists to see the distribution of molecules in a substance. When using MSI scientists scan each point of a sample e.g. tissue in a grid like pattern and each point of the sample is shown as a small square like pixels. MSI can show scientists which molecules are present in a sample, where they are located and the intensity of each molecule. This is all shown as a colourful map like image with different colours showing the location and intensity of each molecule. MSI can be especially useful in biomedical research to test drugs or diseases within a living patient. A real-life example of when MSI is used is in cancer research. Scientists can use MSI to find cancerous cell within a patient. The map produced by MSI can also show them how intense the cancer is and where to treat it. A second real life example of when MSI can be important is in food safety when testing for unsafe bacteria or chemical within food. Using MSI scientists can identify dangerous or harmful substances within food before it becomes available to the public and preventing sickness and food poisoning.

Finally, a fourth technique used to identify unknown molecules is called structural elucidation. Structural elucidation breaks down larger ions into fragments which gives scientists clues about the structure of the larger molecule. You could think of structural elucidation as breaking down a big picture into smaller puzzle pieces and then using them to identify unknown molecules. Scientists use structural elucidation to identify unknown compounds and to learn about how molecules can break apart into different parts within the body or environment. Understanding a molecule's structure helps scientists in medicine to design safer drugs, in forensics to identify different substances in crime investigation. And in environmental research to identify pollutants or toxins in water and soil. The structure of a molecule can be very important as it tells scientists about the way the molecule behave and how it can affect the body or environment. When using structural elucidation scientists look for the mass of the full molecule and each fragment that the molecule is broken down into. Once given the fragments scientists have to then work out how they go together to create the unknown molecule. They have to be very accurate otherwise they may make a mistake and incorrectly identify the molecule leading to problems further down the line.



HOW CAN WE MAKE HEMEL HEMSPTEAD A GENUINELY CHILD-FRIENDLY TOWN?

By Jamal Safeer

In this report, I'll be considering how Hemel Hempstead supports the rights and well-being of its young residents. I will explore how local decision-making, public spaces, transport, safety, and leisure opportunities either support or limit young people's rights, and I will provide recommendations to make Hemel Hempstead a more inclusive and child-friendly town.

The essay will also analyse how young people's voices are included in local governance, comparing Hemel Hempstead with other towns, before concluding with practical steps the council can take to ensure that the town works for everyone, not just children. By examining these areas, this report aims to highlight the importance of recognising and embedding children's rights into the very fabric of local communities. Child rights are the fundamental freedoms and protections to which all young

To make Hemel Hempstead a genuinely child-friendly town, the council should implement a range of practical, realistic strategies that actively support young people's rights and participation. First, the council should expand youth involvement in decision-making by creating dedicated youth advisory panels that feed directly into planning committees for public spaces such as the Marlowes shopping area and Gadebridge Park. This would ensure young people's opinions influence local development and aligns with Article 12 of the UNCRC, which states that children have the right to express their views in all matters affecting them.

Second, transport services should be reviewed to improve affordability and accessibility for young people, particularly during evenings and weekends. Lower fares and more frequent services would increase independence, supporting Article 2, which protects children's rights from discrimination, including on the basis of financial circumstances.

Third, the council should enhance safety in public areas by installing better lighting, CCTV in key locations, and regular patrols in consultation with young people. This measure would address concerns about intimidation and promote confidence in using public spaces, linking directly to Article 19, which requires protection from physical and mental harm.

Fourth, Hemel Hempstead should provide more age-appropriate leisure facilities, particularly for older teenagers, including low-cost sports sessions, creative hubs, and informal social spaces. Ensuring accessible and inclusive leisure opportunities would support Article 31, which recognises children's right to rest, play and cultural participation.

Fifth, the council should establish participatory budgeting initiatives specifically for young people, allowing them to allocate funds to community projects such as park improvements, youth clubs, or cultural events. This recommendation gives tangible decision-making power, reinforcing Article 12 by moving young people from advisory roles to active participants in shaping their environment.

Sixth, awareness campaigns and workshops should be delivered to local adults, businesses, and service providers to promote positive perceptions of young people and their contributions. By challenging stereotypes and fostering understanding, these campaigns would help uphold Article 3, which requires that the best interests of the child are a primary consideration, ensuring that young people are treated as valued members of the community rather than a problem to manage.

Together, these six recommendations create a realistic roadmap for improving the inclusivity, safety, and engagement of young people in Hemel Hempstead. By addressing public spaces, transport, safety, leisure, budgeting, and community attitudes, the council can ensure that young people's rights are not only recognised on paper but implemented in everyday life. Implementing these measures would transform Hemel Hempstead into a truly child-friendly town where young people feel empowered, safe, and respected, helping to cultivate a sense of civic responsibility and belonging that will benefit both young residents and the wider community.



A CHILD-FRIENDLY FUTURE FOR HEMEL HEMPSTEAD

By Rebecca Hobbs

Making Hemel Hempstead a child-friendly town would mean changing many things about governmental policies that are in place, and finding a way to alter the beliefs about children and childhood to influence people's ideas and expectations. To successfully fulfil the task of turning Hemel Hempstead more child-friendly, one would have to tend to the rights of our children. Children's rights are a set of human rights that ensure safety and protection for those under the age of eighteen. Additionally, things such as having the right to an education, a sufficient standard of living, protection from harm, and the right to be heard are guaranteed. In this essay, I will state and explain why these rights are vital to maintain a healthy well-being, whether it is physical, mental or emotional, in children, and what changes should be made in order to make Hemel Hempstead truly child-friendly. Making Hemel Hempstead a child-friendly town means creating an environment where children's rights are respected and upheld, ensuring they have access to education, healthcare, safe spaces to play, and opportunities to express their views in decision-making

What Hemel Hempstead Has And Lacks

In Hemel Hempstead, there are many child-friendly activities available, such as the Snow Centre or Gadebridge Park. There are also a high number of schools (primary and secondary). The One Step Healthcare services (for young people) were rated by the Care Quality Commission (CQC) as 'good' and stated it was 'safe, effective, caring', 'responsive, and well-led'. Also, Hemel Hempstead, via Dacorum Borough Council and the Services for Young People (SfYP) Dacorum team, provides specific mechanisms for children and young people to have their voices heard and be involved in local decision-making. These views are then used to inform local government initiatives.

On the other hand, there are some questions about the accessibility of mental health services in schools. One article states, 'For one Hemel Hempstead family, it has meant a battle lasting six years – and counting – to get a child the support he needs'. Additionally, the Hemel Hempstead Hospital, in contrast to One Step Healthcare, has a rating by the CQC as, 'requires improvement' overall. Some concerns have been raised in parliament by David Taylor, our Member of Parliament, about drug dealing. This brings up worries about safety and leaves some people too frightened to exit their own homes. 'There are people in Hemel Hempstead who live in constant fear, people who are too scared to leave their homes, or who fear for their children's safety'. David Taylor goes on to discuss how the sounds of doors slamming, shouting, and motorbikes riding up and down roads may frighten children. He also mentions that young people have avoided going outdoors due to the community's failure to clean up the green spaces that were once used for playing.

These things violate the rights of children, making them feel unsafe in their local area, and the failure to supply support to children who need more help than others causes mental health struggles. Lots of the decisions made to avoid these problems or indirectly worsen them are made without consulting children. It is excluding children and their voices, highlighting a failure to make a fully inclusive city. Feedback is always important, and especially so when making a significant choice that will affect many.
Some schools in Hemel Hempstead don't have sufficient amounts of mental health support. The situation in Finland is similar, with them having available and high-quality schools, but with an increase in mental health struggles among the students. However, Finnish children have raised their voices about this. Student unions and youth councils have called for more investment in school-based youth counselling, mental health professionals and earlier intervention programmes. This shows that even though there are problems, solutions come with them. We could take a page out of Finland's book and start addressing our issues, and not just with children's mental health, but also with making children feel safe and protecting them from harm.



Possible Solutions

There are many ways to end or prevent the violation of children's rights, and it is simply to stop violating them. However, doing so is much harder than it sounds, since there are many supplies, services and requirements that may need changing, to adjust to their rights. And even so, utopia is impossible in an imperfect world. There are supplies needed for children, like equipment in hospitals and schools, toys, hygiene products and textbooks. And there are services, such as clubs that need to be funded, schools and hospitals, toilets that have to be up kept and support within schools, and play areas that have to be
kept tidy. And there are requirements, like having to have access to an education. healthcare, safe spaces to play, and a sufficient standard of living at home. A lot of these things cost money, but all of them are necessary to adhere to children's rights.



By Oliver Parkins

MAKING HEMEL HEMPSTEAD A CHILD-INCLUSIVE PLACE

Children's rights are essential to ensuring that young people are protected, valued and able to actively participate in society. The UNCRC (The United Nations Convention on the Rights of a Child) provides an internationally recognised framework that outlines the fundamental rights every child is entitled to. All children should have their basic human rights just as adults do, regardless of age, culture, race, gender, or background. This includes the right to speak out and express opinions, as well as the right to equality, health, education, a clean environment and for a child to know their own rights. Although children's rights should be implemented globally as well as locally, this is not always the case. For example, in Finland and the UK, all children have the rights to an education. However, examples where children's rights are not fulfilled and fully respected is South Africa. In South Africa, many public schools face sever inequality: classrooms are overcrowded, unsafe and lack basic facilities like clean water to drink. Understanding children's rights through a sociological perspective highlighting how social structures, power, and policy influences young people's experiences. In this essay I will discuss how Hemel Hempstead is and can be a child friendly city.

Inclusive City Making

Local city decision-making can both include and exclude young people. Many cities, particularly in the UK, have established specific programs, youth councils, and initiatives to actively involve young people in local decision-making and ensure their voices are heard. There is no single city that uniquely does this; rather, it is widespread practice among local authorities and youth organizations. A city that has young voices listened to is Cambridge, the city has hosted a Youth Assembly where young people presented their concerns, such as local transportation and mental health, directly to decision-makers. Other examples include Southend-on-Sea, London, Manchester, Liverpool City Region, Leeds, Leicester, Hull, and Portsmouth. These examples demonstrate a growing emphasis across various UK cities on formalizing platforms for young people to influence the decisions that affect their lives. Hemel Hempstead is also a town that actively includes young peoples' voices through initiatives like the Dacorum Youth Council and Services for Young People centres, offering platforms for 11–17-year-olds to participate in projects, and express views and concerns. This means that Hemel Hempstead includes young peoples' views, comments, and concerns, this helps shape Hemel Hempstead into a child friendly town meaning it can be well suited for young people and adults alike.

Recommendations for a Child-Friendly City

To make Hemel Hempstead a more child-friendly town, local decision-makers must recognise children's views and see young people as key members if the community whose needs and rights should be reflected in local planning. Many recommendations suggest realistic changes that could improve everyday life for children while supporting their rights under the UN Convention on the Rights of a Child (UNCRC).

Firstly, Dacorum Borough Council should strengthen opportunities for young people to participate in local decision-making. While some young people's voices are sometimes listened to, children are often excluded from discussions about the town centre development, public spaces, and transport. Creating a local youth council linked to schools in Hemel Hempstead, alongside regular meetings to discuss issues on road safety, and leisure facilities would have a positive impact on Hemel Hempstead. This directly supports Article 12, which states that children have the right to express their views and have them taken seriously in matters that affect them.

Secondly, public spaces in Hemel Hempstead should be made safer and more inclusive for young people. Although the town has several parks, some areas lack modern accessible play equipment and safe walking routes. Improved street lighting, maintaining play areas, and introducing more inclusive playground equipment would support Article 31, the right to play and leisure. Decreasing speed limits on road near and around schools and residential areas would also support Article 6, the right to healthy development, by allowing children to play and travel safely.

Finally, services should focus on reducing inequality between different areas of Hemel Hempstead. Increased access to youth services, mental health support in schools, and investment in disadvantaged neighbourhoods would support Article 2, the right to non-discrimination, and Article 24, the right to health. These changes would help ensure that all children in Hemel Hempstead can grow up safe, healthy, and included.

THE POWER AND ECONOMY OF READING IN THE LATE EIGHTEENTH CENTURY

By Nadine Abdou

"All Ranks and Degrees now READ" - To what extent do you think this statement was true at the end of the eighteenth century? This essay will explore whether James Lackington's statement that people from all backgrounds in the eighteenth century could read, and had access to the written word was accurate. It will first examine the economic factors that influenced access to books and printed materials, before exploring the role of education in expanding literacy. Finally, it will consider the politics of reading and the obstacles that different groups in society faced. It will particularly focus on the experiences and lives of Thomas Holcroft, Olaudah Equiano, Thomas Spence, John Gregory and others. At a time when revolutions were reshaping societies and ideas could travel faster than ever through print, the question of whether people from all backgrounds could now read matters not just as a measure of literacy, but as a key to understanding who truly had access to knowledge, power, and influence at the end of the eighteenth century.

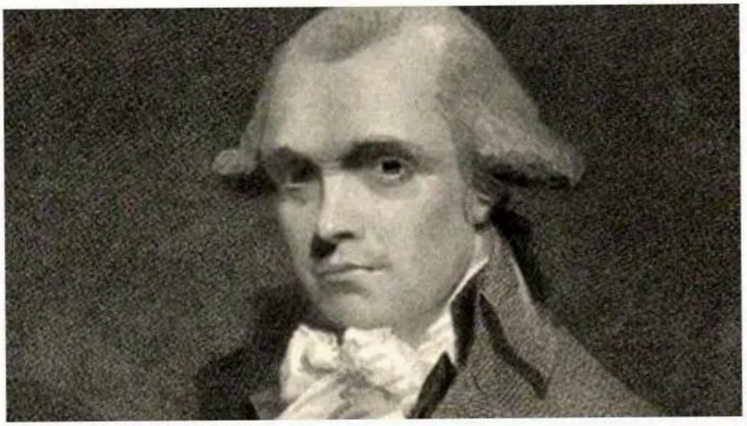


When considering whether everyone in Georgian England was able to read, it is useful to think about what reading might cost someone. A popular book at the time such as 'Tom Jones, or History of a Foundling by Fielding, 4 vol.' Cost between 6 shillings and 8 shillings depending on the condition of the book. It is difficult, today, to imagine what this might have been worth two hundred years ago. If someone did not want to spend 6s or 8s on a four-volume novel, then they could buy a chapbook. A chapbook is a small, inexpensive, saddle-stitched booklet, typically 15 to 50 pages that was used to publish poetry, short stories, or recipes. Originating in the 16th century, these became popular for emerging authors that wanted to showcase their new works. Historically, they were sold by peddlers called chapmen that went around to different rural villages and sold the chapbooks to areas that usually had less access to literature.

Wages for people at the time varied greatly based on the work that they did. For example, lawyers' clerks earned around 10 shillings and 6 pence whereas book sellers apprentices earned around 4 shillings in 1814. To buy a popular book like Tom Jones, this would take around a week and a half of a book seller's apprentice's wage, leaving no money for essentials such as food and living expenses. The historian, William St Clair, observes that, 'With 1 shilling and 6 pence, a book-sellers apprentice in Edinburgh could have a shared bedroom, a landlady to do the cooking, and the right to sit by the fire.' This shows how the money spent on a book could be used in a more "useful" way for the worker. He continues, "For such men, there could be no question of buying the newly published literature". This highlights how men in the working classes would have found it difficult to access popular literature as they would rather spend their hard-earned money on essential expenses. In the eighteenth century, most of the working class measured their days by what their labour could bring them, not by the pages of the newest book. When a few hours' worth of work might mean three pence for the essential food, time itself felt too dear to spend onpopular stories. Leisure was a luxury, and every moment spent reading could be spent feeding their family. For many of the working class, the value of their time lay in survival; reading the latest novel could not fill their empty stomach. Work, however tiring, gave them something certain at the end of the day, and that certainty mattered more to them than any new piece of literature.

Once a book is acquired, one would still need lighting a privacy to read the book. By the time that the worker had finished working, it would have been already dark outside, meaning that they would need light to read. Wax candles burned strongly and more consistently but they were much too expensive for the working class. Tallow candles also provided a source of light; however they presented the reader with the decision of whether they should be used as a source of light or a source of food, and its use as food usually won. Fire was a luxury at the time, and the only source of heating in the cold winter nights. The living rooms of the house usually had the fire, but they were much too noisy, because of the amount of people using it at a time, for someone to read. Jane Austen wrote "By sitting together upstairs, they avoided a great deal of the disturbance of the house ... They sat without a fire." This means that if a person wanted to read, they most likely had to give up the warmth of a fire and sit in cold conditions so that they had peace.

Therefore, a less wealthy reader would have found it very difficult to access literature. In the end, the printed word in the eighteenth century was not equally within everyone's reach at the time. For those in the working class, the newest literature was often priced beyond what daily wages could comfortably allow, and time itself was a scarce resource for them. When earning a few pence meant food on the table for them and their family, reading became a luxury rather than a habit. As a result, access to literature reflected the wider inequalities of the time period, showing us that the growth of literature did not automatically mean the growth of opportunity for all.



James Lackington (1746-1815) a bookseller who is credited with revolutionizing the British book trade.

READING IN THE 18TH CENTURY, CLASS, AND LACKINGTON

By Humayra Kamal

For a young person who was not born into a wealthy family in the 18th century, motivation was key in even considering going through the effort of learning to read. James Lackington lived away from home as a shoemaker's apprentice, later noting in his autobiography that "the controversies between the mother and the sons made me think that they knew many matters of which I was totally ignorant. This created in me a desire for knowledge [...] But to my great mortification, I could not read". Not being able to read whilst living with a family of readers felt humiliating for Lackington, as he could not understand their arguments and opinions at depth. Motivated to be aware and educated to these conversations, he "set about learning with all my might. My mistress would sometimes instruct me; and having three-halfpence per week allowed me by my mother, this money i gave to John (my master's youngest son) [...] And this was done in the dark, as we were not allowed a candle, after we were sent upstairs to bed". Lackington had briefly attended school as a young boy, but his mother could not afford 2d. per week for his schooling and he was required, as many other children were, to help at home. His disadvantage did not stop him from seeking the knowledge he knew would elevate his mental skill and capabilities. This demonstrates how young people would be motivated to become literate to put them at the same level, rather than being at a disadvantage to, their peers.

When considering how poorer young people were able to become literate in the 18th century, a significant factor is society's views at the time. An MP named Davies Giddy believed "giving education to the labouring classes or the poor [...] would teach them to despise their lot in life, instead of making them good servants in agriculture and other laborious employment".11 This presents a common belief that educating the oppressed working people prevented them from conforming to their inferior role that society relied on. However, religious reading may have evaded the sort of criticism that came from people like Giddy because it was seen as being focused on a more pious end. This could be achieved through attending Sunday schools which were being set up towards the end of the century and through reading the Bible, which was often the only book a family might own. Therefore, there were efforts to suppress labourer's access to books in an attempt to maintain their subordination, when in reality, many people like Thomas Holcroft became literate by reading the Bible and then moved away from this to explore philosophical and political ideas, or found other ways to learn, like James Lackington did, and transformed their lives.

Not everyone in eighteenth century England encouraged all members of society to read widely. In the 18th century women were made to be worth nothing. Unmarried women were usually subject to the decisions of their male relatives. A married woman had no right over the children she gave birth to. She had no right to property, and she did not own any money she may have had prior to marriage, the clothes she wore or her own jewellery or books. In summary, "the very being or legal existence of the woman is suspended during the marriage or at least is incorporated and consolidated into that of her husband". This shows that women were meant to be invisible in the shadow of her husband or male relatives' position in society. These unfortunate foundations burdened a prospective female reader, who would face many obstacles in seeking knowledge or indulgence from books.

However, one would be motivated to persevere; when the heroine in Jane Austen's novel Mansfield Park subscribed to a library, she was "amazed at being any thing in propria persona, amazed at her own doings in every way, to be a renter, a chuser of books!" Here, the woman recognises the value of the agency reading that allows her - in propria persona literally meant she felt allowed to be a person in her own right. Therefore, this highlights how reading was liberating, both for the mind and the person, allowing her to think more broadly and achieve as an intelligent individual.

The advice given on reading for men and women were diametrically opposed. Lord Chesterfield wrote to his son that "the principal object of his stay there [at school], is the knowledge of books", adding that "a life of ignorance is not only a very contemptible, but a very tiresome one", whereas John Gregory warned his daughters to "shun, as you would the most fatal poison, all that species of reading and conversation that warms the imagination", that if they "happen to have any learning, keep it a profound secret especially from the men, who generally look with a jealous and malignant eye". The contrast here is stark; boys were expected to strive to be well-versed or otherwise face an inadequate quality of life, whilst girls should remain ignorant to any creative works to instead make themselves appealing and amiable to men. Perhaps this desired presentation of simple-minded, conforming females suggests a fear of a well-educated girl assuming a superiority of intelligence and artistry.

THE POLITICS OF READING AND OBSTACLES IN THE WAY OF READERS

By Tudor Cimpoiasu

Not everyone in eighteenth-century England encouraged all members of society to read widely. In the Georgian period, it was often a great difficulty for women to acquire the skill of reading, as it could be seen as disgraceful or unattractive. This essay will now explore the reasons for such beliefs about women's education at the time, examining the bias toward the "purpose" of women as mere marital assets or child bearers and the attitudes that led some women to read (or not).

Firstly, some context on how women were viewed in the Georgian period. Legally, women were viewed in a very materialistic manner almost as property that is legally adjunct to their husbands or fathers, as a commentary on English law notes that "The very being or legal existence of the woman is suspended during marriage or at least is incorporated and consolidated into that of her husband." This shows how oftentimes women were only their own being as long as they weren't married when they might be under the control of a father or legal guardian. After fulfilling their "purpose" of getting married, they often stopped being their own person and became their husband's property. Again, English law stipulates that if the woman in a marriage is "injured in her person or property she can bring no action for redress without her husband's concurrence and in his name as well as her own." Women were unable to do almost anything without permission from their husband, as they were considered incompetent and unable to make such decisions for themselves. This shows the overall point in a woman's life as one to get married.

Most of the time, women were seen as needing to find a husband to succeed in life. It is for that reason that many women didn't pursue an extensive education, as it was seen as an unattractive skill and one that would ward off suitors. John Gregory, a man writing to his daughters, said "If you happen to have any learning, keep it a profound secret, especially from the men who look with a malignant eye on a woman of great parts and a cultivated understanding." This might have led women to ignore the skill of reading, as they were often motivated to marry and have children. Therefore, if they believed that men wouldn't want to marry them if they were educated or read widely, they would shy away from learning such a skill to try to get themselves a husband. It is also said that they should ignore reading as a way to preserve their happiness, as John Gregory also writes, "Avoid all books… that shake your faith on those great points of religion which regulate your conduct and which your hopes of a future and eternal happiness depend" This directly tells women that avoiding reading challenging material and seeding an education are key factors to having a future and a happy life, showing how women were taught that reading would condemn them to a painful life. For this reason, they should completely ignore reading and focus on other skills that would make them more attractive to men. By contrast, more money was spent of the education of sons and one father declared that 'a life of ignorance is not only a very contemptible, but a very tiresome one.

Finally, overall, women read despite these forbidding warnings, and they read with enthusiasm as this observation from a visitor to France notes, "Everyone in Paris is reading…everyone. But women in particular." Women were reading, supposedly more often than men, as the same source later states "People read while riding in carriages, taking walks…while seated in front of their houses." Women ignored all the warnings against how unattractive reading was and still decided to start reading. Some paintings at the time, such as "The Reader" by Jean-Honoré Fragonard, depict a woman reading rather than a man turning the page, showing how women were still seen reading and had embraced reading for their own benefit rather than conforming to the sexist standard that held that only men should read. Many women were also writing and publishing their work.

As this demonstrates, despite the many warnings and condemnations that women faced for trying to read, they did so anyway. Even though for many women, reading was a rare skill, those who could learn it did so despite social opprobrium. Overall, the main reason that women didn't read was because of the opposition they faced from some men; however, they still educated themselves and read to an extreme degree. Towards the end of the century, we find accounts of husbands and wives reading together as James Lackington did with his second wife, Dorcas.



THE MUSEUM OF HUMAN PROGRESS

By Polly Thompson

The year is 2200. Our class are on a trip. A trip to a museum, a standard 'normal' school outing, yet the word that does not fit the description of this museum is, normal. Unlike other museums which display treasures and trophies, this is The Museum of Human Progress. Its displays, as we are about to discover, demonstrate the price humanity paid for progress. Despite this, the students around me buzz with anticipation, expecting to see inventions and heroes, but they are mistaken. The tour guide, who has appeared in front of us clears his throat. He looks tired, as if he has been working here for a lifetime. He wearily greets us, "Everything here you witness today cost someone something. This museum exists because of a realisation that progress could not be fully understood by the celebrating achievements alone. To understand how humanity moved forward, we must also remember what has been sacrificed along the way."

We enter a room with thousands of glowing names. Each name belonged to a victim of pandemics throughout history. A hologram behind our tour guide lights up. It depicts an overcrowded hospital, patients with faces etched with fear and uncertainty. Some cling to their loved ones, others lie calmly– they have accepted their fate, they are prepared. Here, the tour guide robotically recites that disease has killed millions, taken peoples family, friends, partners. People they loved. I step aside from the throng of students and look upon a rusted plaque.

'The Lübeck disaster happened in Germany in 1930. Doctors gave a new vaccine to 251 newborn babies. But the vaccine was accidentally mixed with a deadly disease called tuberculosis. This mistake turned into a huge medical tragedy, making the babies sick. This catastrophic event killed seventy-seven infants, yet this accident and sacrifice of life lead doctors to find the cure for tuberculosis.'

As I finish reading, a student questions "Were they heroes?" As she points at the long glowing list. The guide pauses. "Some chose the risk. Many did not." I notice the pensive silence around me as I consider that we all benefit from modern medicine, yet few know the names of those who paid the price. "Medicine saves lives, but it has often been built upon suffering." The guide adds, before leading our class onwards, towards a thick, weathered, steel door. "The cost of progress was not only paid in hospitals."

The doors open to reveal a wall of technological advances. Radars, jet engines, computers. They all majestically glimmer, contrasting to the pulsing red lights around the room. Beyond the inventions, tiny white lights flash rhythmically, like a heartbeat. More appear, spreading around the room like a virus, until the room is full of these flashing heartbeats. Behind me, a small chunk of these lights slowed down, slower and slower, until… they stopped. They all stopped. They didn't come back, they were gone. I felt an odd twang of sadness in my heart, but I wasn't sure why. "World War 2," the guide monotonously starts, facing the wall that is now empty of light, "killed an estimated eighty-five million people. Civilians, soldiers, children. Victims of conflict, murdered. The lights in this room symbolise the lives taken. Each represents not one but ten thousand lives."

One student excitedly points out an invention and challenges, "But many breakthroughs emerged during wartime because nations poured enormous resources into research. Wars cause great creations to be made." Without turning to face the student, the guide questions, "Would you still admire it if you had met the people buried behind it?" I begin to realise that progress is morally complicated. History is not a simple story of improvement. Sometimes advances arrive though tragedy. If an invention saves millions, but cost millions, how should we judge it? The guide leads us to another door, this time a detailed, wooden door, covered in ivy. "Not all sacrifices were human."

The doors protested with a high-pitched creak, but revealed a beautiful scene. Perfect green trees and bright blue skies accompanied the innocent chirping of birds. The room feels perfect, peaceful. Then it changes. The trees disappear, the sky turns into blackened smog, the birds quietened- until they were silent. The air felt stale, as if it had no oxygen left in it. The illusion changes to a polluted river, a thick, neon-green slime covering its surface. The murky water, silently, sluggishly moved against sharp rocks. Along the riverbank, there were countless tree stumps, where trees lay like fallen giants. Our guide lazily opens his mouth, unusually colourless, and speaks.

"Industrial progress changed our lives. It has increased our average age life expectancy, better transportation, and global communication. But this progress doesn't compare to the price the environment paid. Scientists estimate that over 99% of all species that have ever lived are now extinct. In total, this amounts to over 5 billion species exiting our planet over billions of years. One of the most significant animals to become extinct was the orangutan. In 2109, after years and years of deforestation for reasons such as agricultural expansion and the harvesting of palm oil, the final orangutans were killed, after numerous failed attempts at rehoming them in what remained their natural habitat."

I understand. Our environment paid the price for our actions, our foolish choices but it couldn't tell its story. Our environment was left helpless yet had no way of protecting itself. Progress often has a winner or loser, and we often only acknowledge the successes of it. What if society realised the consequences of progress, but continued anyway?

We enter the final exhibit. Initially, the room appears empty. Then the walls become mirrors. Students stare at their reflections, confused. "This room contains the people who will determine the future cost of progress, you." Our guide says.
I like to think this museum isn't about the past, it's about the future, our choices. Every generation faces choices. Artificial intelligence, genetic intelligence, new inventions yet to be made. The question we face is no longer "What did progress cost?", but rather "What are we willing to sacrifice next?"

As we leave the museum I can't help but look back at it. We make our choices, we decide our future. Progress itself is not the enemy, forgetting the cost is.



THE COST OF PROGRESS: THE STORY OF MY FAMILY'S MIGRATION FROM INDIAN TO KENYA TO THE UK

By Ayaan Patel

My essay is a short story/literary nonfiction about my grandpa and grandma leaving their home country because the prime minister at the time banned all Indians and Asians from the country.

It started in Kenya during the late 1960s, the newly independent government introduced strict "Africanization" policies. These policies restricted work and trade permits for non-citizens. This forced thousands of Indians and other Asians holding British passports to leave the country. The administration of President Jomo Kenyatta systematically pushed all of the non-citizens out of the country's economy by utilizing two complementary legislative pillars passed in 1967. Rather than giving an outright physical expulsion decree, the government created legal and economic barriers that made it impossible for non-citizens to earn anything. This had a huge impact on the non-citizens since they can't earn any money and the Immigration Act of 1967 is what it was called. It targeted the workforce by establishing strict regulations on residency and employment.

These regulations were:
Mandatory work permits: The law declared that the presence of any non-citizen in Kenya was illegal unless they possessed a valid entry or work permit.
Job reservation: Work permits for foreigners were granted only on a temporary basis. They were heavily restricted to specialized roles where no qualified indigenous Kenyan citizen could be found.
Lastly, Phased replacement: Private businesses were forced to create local "Africanisation" training timelines. Non-citizen employees (overwhelmingly Indian clerks, artisans and professionals) were replaced as soon as a Kenyan citizen was trained to take over.

My grandma and grandpa lost their jobs, lost their homes and the only way they can move forward in life is to move to here, the UK. The cost of progress moving forward losing everything they ever built in their home country has gone to waste because of this rule. They have to move forward.



My Grandparents were confused and scared just like the other Asians around them. They moved to the UK and the council gave them a flat. My Grandparents and their siblings. They had no money in (£) and they had to start from scratch. Their living conditions were not that great and they needed to find jobs. They struggled with that because of the language barriers. They couldn't speak English they could only speak Gujarati (Indian language). It was difficult to get a job and to learn English. Slowly, slowly they learnt English, they got jobs. My grandma worked at a launderette and my grandpa did factory work. They switched between jobs to working at a biscuit factory or different factories. They started building up money and becoming more fluent in English and they slowly built up their lives from scratch. They needed more money to move out of the council house in St Albans to another area.

Eventually they built there life back up, making lots of money, getting new jobs and being fluent in English and they are all happy. The younger siblings got married and also got new houses. All of them built there life here, in the UK. They made a carpentry company and bought three house in Wembley. They had children, my mum and my uncle, and helped them grow up. They finally built their life from scratch, moved out the flat in St Albans to Wembley, having a successful business in carpentry and can speak English (enough to move a conversation). Everything went really well for them. They saw that they would build a better life here in the UK and they advanced through these difficult times where they could barely buy food, to having a house and living a comfortable life. They gained back their confidence and stability after their losses and they accepted the consequence of sacrificing everything back in Kenya. They now moved to India speaking their own language and when my mum grew up, she had me. They are still living a wonderful life in the suburbs.

THE IMPACTS OF PROGRESS ON MENTAL HEALTH

By Turlough Maguire

Often progress is seen as a positive force that improves people's lives through advances in technology, education, and society. However, I believe that, due to the positives of progress and the success that many people experience, the negatives are often overshadowed. Progress in society causes success throughout the world. Due to success, people everywhere feel pride and gratification. Yet, the mental toll it takes on a person to live up to the expectations of others to achieve progress can be unseen by people around you. It is important to consider both the benefits and drawbacks of progress and discussions must be had regarding the impacts on mental health involved with progress; many believe as I am doing quite well at school, I do not have the same problems or emotions that others have. At this point in my life, I know that, despite all the impediments I may face from others, I will be able to push past and continue to do work. But at what cost?

For instance, at Gracewood Academy, the teachers at the school issue badges to those who are doing well in their lessons whilst also gaining badges for "doing the right thing every day". It had been upcoming that I would gain my platinum badge for some time now and I was excited to achieve that. When I walked in and told my friends, young academics who usually show kind and considerate emotions, several of them congratulated me, whilst others made judgemental and discourteous comments. The "reality of progressing" is that others may disregard your feelings because of someone's academic achievements and attempt to hurt your self-esteem and ruin how you see yourself. Progress, despite being a successful thing, can segregate people rather than bringing communities together, and this experience helped me realise that not all progress can be witnessed as positive. Rather than being able to use progress positively in these people's responses, they were unmannerly and impertinent which affects people's mental health in negative ways. People can be easily affected by words and sometimes others can be inconsiderate even when they do not notice it. This can be considered ignorant and judgemental.

Sometimes, people who control their progression by choosing to work hard and try, can be susceptible to the ignorance of others. For example, in situations I have witnessed around me, people's disinterest to communicate and consider other people's feelings with empathy leads people to be ignorant. This means that people can control someone else's emotions just by being too inconsiderate to even ask questions. Therefore, whilst hard work and intelligence can lead to success, the treatment of others can also cause a lasting impact on your confidence and wellbeing. This demonstrates that progress is not only important academically but also emotional maturity to remain confident in yourself rather than allowing others to define your self-worth. In my experience, people who do not care for other people's thoughts or emotions are those who struggle to accept when they are finding something difficult. Being able to control your perception of the world is important because you learn new things. "The failure to ask questions is the failure to know more". In society, people are ignorant all the time because they are careless to learn about other people and how they run their life. If there was no ignorance in the world, there would be no problems: no war, no world hunger, no homelessness, no climate change and global warming. All these changes have happened because of our inability to listen and question problems rather than believing things blindly. Things can lead to poor mental health and put pressure on those doing well.

I know from personal experience, with people around me, that mental health is a massive part of progress. As someone that comes to school every day and works hard, it can be difficult to withstand the pressure placed on you. When you are expected to do more, and you are expected to go above and beyond, that can really make you stressed even when it is unnecessary. When school or work puts stress on you, it can affect you, but stress is natural and that we experience a wide range of emotions. The importance is knowing when you must push past stress and when you must calm down from it. I am not saying that you must control or suppress your emotions as that is unhealthy and can contribute to bigger mental health issues. However, to know when you can push past emotion is much better than attempting to control them. Sometimes, pressure and mental health still can make people more successful but for others, it can cut them down and hurt them mentally taking a toll physically too. Mental health is somewhat overlooked because harshness and ill-mannered behaviour has become common in society. This causes problems as people develop the belief that this ill-mannered behaviour is accpetable - but it's not.

Due to the success that comes from progress, the negative aspects ae outshined. Hopefully, I have opened your eyes more to the potential flaws of progress by showing issues in the aspects of how communities treat progress. Therefore, in the future, a person's progress should be celebrated and lead to others coming together in unison to create a society where people can be accepted and respected for their success. Progress can create bridges between people, but obnoxiousness and igporance can destroy these bridges and make society worse.



THE COST OF CONVENIENCE

By Teja Kildisiute

As humans we have progressed over thousands and thousands of years, making technological, medical and societal advancements. From cavemen to current humans, revolutionary discoveries have happened and benefited humanity greatly. However, progress isn't universal; one group's growth relies on another group's sacrifice. So, this begs the question, who gets left behind whilst we thrive?

We see this through the exploitation of the poor by rich billionaires. Countries commonly exploited for their valuable resources are usually found in South Asia or Africa. In the south of Asia, in countries like Malaysia, Vietnam and Indonesia, something known as "waste" or "plastic" colonialism and pollution occurs. This is when wealthy countries, like the UK, dump their waste in poor countries, leaving devastating consequences for the communities to deal with, which they don't have the money or resources for. The most common victim of this practice is Malaysia. Reports by the New Internationalist reveal that around 610,000 tonnes of waste is imported into their oceans by wealthy, foreign nations. This can cause extreme harm to the environment, the people, and can also be a cause for disease. Waste pollution kills from 400,000 to 1 million people per year. This is because of contaminated drinking water, exposure to lethal toxins and fatal accidents. Wealthy countries disguise their waste as "recyclable" and can continue this shameful scheme by acting like they are behaving with good morals, when really they are avoiding their own problems. Whilst we live in clean cities, we force those who can't and shouldn't have to deal with these issues, to bear the burden of cleaning our waste. This leads to these corrupt countries flourishing and progressing in society by not having to spend money on disposing of plastic. As a result, poor countries are continuing to be left in poverty. This system is unjust and dishonourable.

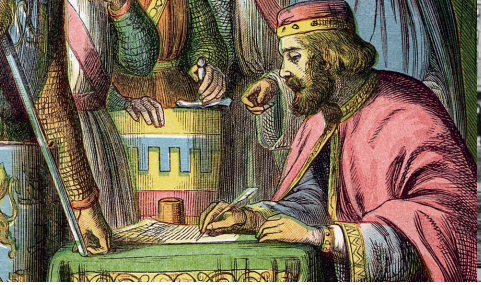
One way our society contributes to waste pollution is through fast fashion. Brands like SHEIN, Zara and H&M promote affordable clothing and rapidly mass produce new styles every week that follow social media trends. Clothing is typically very low quality, worn only a handful of times and produced by exploited workers. Data from Encyclopaedia Britannica cites statistics showing that 100 billion garments are produced annually by the industry and brands produce 50% to 100% more clothing than they did in the 2000s. Undoubtedly, this results in environmental degradation and ethical challenges. Because these clothes are so accessible and fashionable (for small amounts of time), this lures many people into buying and then throwing them away, whilst waiting for the new trend to happen. Clothing then continues to pile up into landfills, which contributes to waste and plastic pollution. Due to the clothing being made from fossil fuels, they are not biodegradable. As a whole, the industry produces 10% of carbon emissions. Undeniably, fast fashion plays a large part in this. Low quality means affordable. Affordable means people in poverty have no choice but to feed into this system. Garment workers also face harsh conditions: long hours, hot temperatures, little pay, dangerous working conditions and cruel employers. Therefore, this fundamentally means fast fashion clothing is unethical and unrecyclable. Unfortunately, society still contributes to fast fashion. While it's understood some don't have a choice due to the affordability, others turn a blind eye and continue to promote mass consumerism. Whilst the western world works towards progression, developing worlds are forced to produce goods for our satisfaction

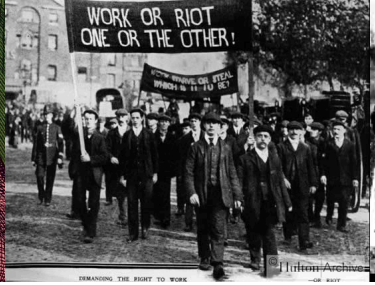


Developing countries are also victims of the phenomenon known as the "brain drain". This is the large-scale emigration of skilled workers from poor countries moving to wealthy economies. This also includes students moving for higher education and then remaining in their host countries. Due to their home countries not being able to provide a desirable life for them, they emigrate so that they can secure more opportunities. It's a reasonable choice for themselves but leaves structural loss for their home country. This severely stunts the growth of poor countries due to much fewer healthcare workers, IT professionals and engineers. This means that those who decide to stay are left with much more to take care of and can put a severe strain on the remaining workers. As of recently, according to statistics published by British Future, 52% of immigrants in the UK come here to study, and 31% come to work.

Clearly, this is very convenient for the UK because they have significantly more well-educated and skilled citizens. Nations facing the brain drain that frequently send talent to the UK include India, Nigeria, Ghana and the Philippines. From our perspective, the "brain drain" turns into a "brain gain". This means that our society can continue to benefit, but this is a great disadvantage to those poorer countries. Although immigrants frequently send large amounts of money home, which can help local communities advance, it's not nearly enough to make a considerable impact to their society. This is because their family at home are most likely using this money for essentials: decent food, clean water, medical bills and a comfortable place to sleep. A way to solve the brain drain is through transforming it into a "brain circulation". Circular migration can bring new knowledge back to poor countries which can help them advance. Although it is not an automatic fix, it can help benefit communities.

Ultimately, whilst progress does benefit us as a society, it leads to global economic exploitation and societal imbalance. We cannot celebrate our innovation while others suffer at our own expense. For instance, we plague developing countries with waste pollution and the culture of fast fashion, which prevents them from affording sustainable infrastructure. We then take their talents because we have deprived the citizens of these countries of the opportunity of having decent employment. Therefore, we cannot just measure progre







THE COST OF PROGRESS: THE MAGNA CARTA, THE INDUSTRIAL REVOLUTION AND THE SUFFRAGETTES

By Abena Asante

Many things in this world pushes us to move forward to leave some valuable things behind. This is the cost of progress. Throughout the decades of history many people have gave up their lives in protest, war, and prosecution for a better world of those descendants after them. A subject in school already talks about the achievements that bring us here today, and that is history. History allows us to open our eyes into the past and learn mistakes of others. History as a subject introduces us to cultures and answers many of why the world is like this today. For my project, I will be writing an account of three different periods the world had faced that still influences today's world yet had to make countless of sacrifices for.

Firstly, the earliest start of power to the people is the Magna Carta. After England faced many tyrannical kings throughout the decades up to 1215 and a group of barons decided that it was time to stop those in power to decide everything themselves with no rules or regulations. For some type of change to happen, the first baron war happened. Led by Robert Fitzwalter and a group of wealthy landowners waged war on King John. Blood was spilled for many months. And finally, 12th June 1215, the Magna Carta was signed. The document contained sixty-three different clauses. One being No one shall be imprisoned or have their rights taken away without trial. To this day this clause still stands and even inspired the right to free fair trial. Even though it did not have such a shocking impact for the majority it carried on throughout centuries to not only be a guideline for the king to follow, but for everyone civilian. Yet even to this day what the Magna Carta stands for and everything after it has been threatened for so many years, enormous widespread rallies across the globe demand for change, for respect even for minorities they have no affiliation to. This highlights that it is human nature to always move forward, just enough is never enough if there is space for improvements.

Another improvement in history that changes everyone's lives are the developments of trade unions and workers' rights. The industrial revolution was an impactful change that went across Europe. Consequently, it put many people in employment struggling to even get the will to live. Workhouses were set up across Britain, forcing men children and omen to slave away in factories with such little pay. Little boys would be scrapping in crammed chimneys or breathing in soot under the mines. But it is not like anyone sat back and let this happened. Normal citizens protested this and finally the first trade unions appeared. Trade Unions protected workers from unfair dismissal. Even without a trade union, in today's world, the Employment Act of 2025 protects workers from mistreatment at the workplace. Of course, these series of protest had so many difficulties like the Tolpuddle martyrs who were wrongfully sent to Australia for a secret agreement to look after each other as fellow farmers. A series of protest calling them to be rightfully returned occurred throughout until they rightfully came back. Even after so many losses, the goal of worker's being respected a treated properly was granted after so many years of turmoil and distraught. Like always, there are still movements to put an end to unsafe workplaces and child labour. Work is supposed to earn people a living, not fear for their lives.

Lastly the most influential movements for progress were protests to extend the franchise. Most importantly, the suffragettes. This group of women fought for years for something to be already granted to them as they were living in a " democratic Britain." For so long, women were seen as incapable to think, work and vote. The suffragettes fought tirelessly. They would chain themselves to parliament, blow up post boxes of influential men. Even when imprisoned manywould go on dangerous hunger strikes just for their voices to be heard for behind those steel bars. Repeatedly these women were put down and told to give up but they never did. They consistently persevered throughout the late 19th century; help stabilise the country while men were at war during the 1910s. Even after the right to suffrage was granted only a few women could have the privilege. It was not enough. To fully achieve what the suffragettes once stood for, thousands of women advocated until everyone could vote helping to construct a real democratic country. Although many women gave up their lives like Emily Davison, accepted that society would see them as hysterical women instead of dutiful wives, perseverance was still present. These devoted activists new that if they did not stand for change at that moment, it would take a long time for everyone's voices to be heard.

Whenever protests, strikes and riots happen they always cause a commotion or unrest. But hat people fail to realise that if we need to start making progress, we need to give up these relaxed emotions because nothing you want will come to if you do not even attempt to ask. In the star these people did ask for peers to listen to them. But when ignored repeatedly it is time that you start taking some action. The definition of progress: development towards an improved or more advanced condition. This fundamentally states progress is always necessary to sacrifice some treasured things to gain even better resources, experiences and or lives. If you as a person lived in a time that I stated in this piece of writing you might have as well agreed that what they are doing is essential for a better Britain. Magna Carta led inspired The Universal Declaration of Human Rights and modern-day democracy. Factory and social reform not only changed life for the better for factory workers but the whole working class of Britain making sure they are not exploited, even if it did cost those business owners it was still very much mandatory. Lastly, the suffragettes' movement to extend the franchise is still impactful and taught in schools to this day. To archive all of this took a while. Even working in the gym takes week for you to create an image of yourself that you are happy with. Yes, climbing for progress can be terribly slow but over the mountain awaits the sweet medal of success.



FUTURE ACADEMIES WATFORD STUDENTS GRADUATE FROM THE BRILLIANT CLUB SCHOLARS PORGRAMME

On 20 May, Future Academies Watford celebrated the achievements of twenty-six students—fourteen in Year 12 and twelve in Year 9—who graduated from The Scholars Programme at the University of Oxford.

During the programme, students took part in seven tutorials led by PhD researchers, developing independent thinking and academic skills. Year 9 students studied Gender and Peace, while Year 12 students explored The Geography of Sexuality Education. Each student completed a challenging final essay, assessed at university level.

Run by The Brilliant Club, The Scholars Programme supports students across the UK to develop the skills and confidence needed for competitive universities. It also provides a unique opportunity for students to engage with expert researchers and explore topics beyond the school curriculum.

Michael (Year 12) reflected:

"This course has changed the way I view education… It has strengthened my interest in thinking critically about the world around me."

The graduation ceremony at Jesus College, Oxford, gave students the chance to reflect on their learning and future ambitions. We are incredibly proud of their achievements and thank The Brilliant Club for providing such a valuable experience.





WHAT PEACE MEANS TO ME

By James Williams

Many people believe that peace is the ending of all wars and conflicts. However, personally, I believe that true peace is more than ending wars. Peace to me is the end of suffering and pain in the world as well as ending wars and conflicts. When I think about peace, I think about the UN, the incredible power of activism, the relation with gender and the role of the WILPF and similar peaceful groups run by women.

Peace can be defined in many ways. The definition of peace can differ depending on the subject or person defining it as many people may define peace as a world without war, whereas there could still not be peace as there could be suffering still and homelessness. However, I think that a world without war would be more peaceful than a world with war. Peace can also look different in different countries and cultures as many countries that are in a war would believe that peace is to end their war. Also, different cultures may have different ideas on peace depending on their religion, such as Christians believing that heaven is peaceful. There are many definitions for peace such as the definition as a peace treaty. Peace in a peace treaty means the end of a war, that is signed by 2 or more countries. There is also peace as an absence of war, which basically means that any country not in war is in peace.

Another definition of peace is peace as civil government, which means that peace is a state of law that everyone in that country must obey. Finally, there is a definition of peace as a social contract, which is where if someone is violent, they are ostracised. Therefore, the definition of peace varies depending on where you are in the world. For example, if you live in the North America, South America or Europe, you might believe that peace means that there is no suffering. However, in the Middle East, you might believe that peace means that there is no war. Many actions must be taken to gain peace as it is hard to completely stop suffering. For example, many countries would need to agree to peace that are at war such as Ukraine and Russia. Then, aid would have to be given to other countries that are struggling with natural disasters and corruption, such as Haiti. Finally, many homes would have to be built to accommodate all the homeless people in the world. Therefore, with all of this in mind, I believe that complete peace is possible. However, I do not think that peace is probable as the steps that must be taken to have peace would be too financially expensive and trying to prevent all the wars in the would be extremely difficult. So personally, I believe that complete peace is possible but is very unlikely to be achieved soon.

A representation of gender playing a great role in peace is the incredible impact of the WILPF. The WILPF (the Women`s International League for Peace and Freedom) are an organisation founded by women that was launched in 1915 as a reaction against the horrors of the First World War. The WILPF and similar organisations are crucial to promoting peace as they set the boundaries for what peace looks like after World War 1. The things that they were clear about were that there should be no territory given away unless all the people agree to it. Also, this congress urged all governments to come to an agreement in all wars. The WILPF also uses international pressure to stop any countries to go to war and that foreign politics should be decided by the people, not the political party leaders.

Finally, I believed that all genders should be equal because in order to achieve true peace, everybody must accept that no matter what gender you are, you are equal. Finally, the WILPF are not a violent group; they only protest peacefully. This is a big deal because almost all the people in power were men and they almost never listened to women. For the WILPF (an organisation made up of 1136 women when it was founded in 1915), this was an incredible achievement. Now, in 2026, the WILPF are still active with 100 branches in the US alone, with branches in approximately 50 different countries. Research now shows that peace agreements generally last longer when a woman is involved compared to when they are negotiated by only men. However, the WILPF has faced many challenges, such as the fact that their protests were often thought of as unrealistic and idealistic. Also, governments that have invested heavily in their army and equipment were generally not willing to disarm themselves. This is how gender is crucial to defining peace.

GENDER, PEACE AND GLOBAL ACTIVISM

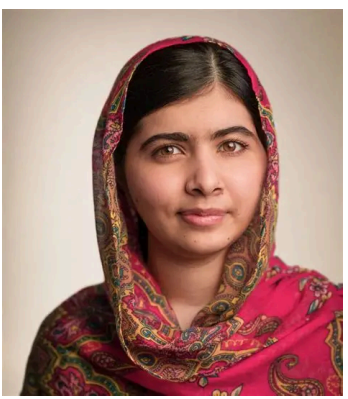
By Jessica Crane

An important part of peace and fairness in the world is gender and activism. Gender might seem like something simple, like whether someone is a boy or a girl, but it actually affects people's lives in huge ways. For a long time, women and girls in many countries have not had the same rights as men. They were not allowed to vote, go to school, or even choose their own jobs. Even today, in some places, girls are still stopped from getting an education or are forced into early marriage. This is why activism is so important. Activism is when people stand up and speak out to make the world better, even when it is difficult or dangerous.

Without activists, many unfair rules would still exist. One of the biggest examples of gender activism is the fight for women's rights. Activists like Malala Yousafzai have risked their lives to make sure girls can go to school. She was attacked for speaking up, but instead of giving up, she became even stronger and now inspires millions of people. Her story shows how activism can create real change, even when powerful groups try to silence people.

Some activists fight for LGBTQ+ rights, because gender is not just about being male or female. Some people are transgender or non-binary, and they also deserve safety, respect, and equal treatment. Activists help raise awareness so that more people understand these issues instead of judging or excluding others.The UN says it supports gender equality, and it even made it one of its Sustainable Development Goals. But just like with peacekeeping, the UN has not always done enough. In some cases, they have been too slow to protect women from violence or to punish countries that break human-rights laws. This shows that activism outside the UN is still needed. Ordinary people, charities, and youth groups often push harder and faster for change than big organisations do. Activism can happen anywhere: online, in schools, in communities, or even through peaceful protests. When people work together and refuse to stay silent, they can challenge unfair systems and make leaders listen. Overall, we need activists to help promote peace because without people who are brave enough to fight for everyone to have equal votes, no matter their gender, for a future that contains more peace.





In conclusion, peace is far more complicated than simply the absence of war, even though that is the meaning that makes the most sense to me. Throughout history, people, governments, and organisations have all tried to define peace in different ways, whether through treaties, social expectations, or systems of law. The UN was created to protect peace, yet even it has struggled with corruption, slow action, and contradictions between its ideals and its behaviour. This shows that peace is not something that can be guaranteed by one organisation alone. It requires constant effort from ordinary people as well as world leaders. Activists, especially those fighting for gender equality and human rights, prove that individuals can create real change even when powerful systems fail to act. Their courage shows that peace is not just about stopping wars but also about making life fairer and safer for everyone.

Even though I do not believe the world will ever reach complete peace, I still think it is worth striving for. Peace may never be perfect or permanent, but every step towards kindness, equality, and understanding makes a difference. If people continue to challenge injustice and support one another, the world can become more peaceful than it is today.

THE UN AND GLOBAL PEACE

By Peter Hughes

The definition of peace that most people have is the absence of war or conflict, however some might also say that to achieve peace you need to have inner peace with your surroundings. Other people might liken peace to quiet and tranquillity, yet these viewpoints are not how you accurately describe the word peace. They do not capture how peace can be described as the absence of inequalities and social injustice across all societies throughout the globe. Peace is one of the main sources of hope for people going through troubling times, this is why peace is important and needed for everyone to have. Through exploring aspects of peace in the world today, it is possible to establish a greater sense of its meaning.

The positionality of peace differs throughout the deepest corners of the world from how people experience peace and conflict. Those who live in a place where conflict is a socially accepted norm use peace as a light of hope throughout the dark times in their lives; they are unable to see a world where conflict does not exist and a world where peace is important over everything else. These places are often developing countries full of people living in poorer conditions, with few opportunities and economic instability, which causes them to view life through a certain lens. On the other hand, the west - which is what foreign nations refer to as primarily Western Europe, North America and Australasia, due to their geopolitical power and influence - has a view of peace which differs from people or groups in a place of conflict since they have a safer position in life. This shows that throughout all corners of the world everyone can have a different view of peace and what it means in their own way, shape and form. It also shows that peace and how people view it changes depending on what situation they are in life and how their mind adapts to any positive or negative situations that they face. This is an important reason as to why there is a massive difference in views on peace across the world and highlights how clashing opinions lead to large amounts of conflict throughout the globe.

Another factor relating to positionality is how the majority of states worldwide view the core values of the United Nations (known as the UN), a peace organisation, which are deeply rooted in the UN Charter. The values being "peace, justice, respect, human rights, tolerance and solidarity", which help their appeal in helping different people in different types of conflict zones around the world. In Chapter 1 Article 1, the purposes listed are to maintain international peace and security, to develop friendly relations among nations, to achieve international co-operation in solving international problems and to be a centre for harmonizing the actions of nations. Also Chapter 1, but in Article 2, the principles highlighted are based on the principle of the sovereign equality of all its members, that all members shall settle their international disputes by peaceful means, that all members shall refrain in their international relations from the threat or use of force and that the UN shall ensure that states which are not members of the UN act in accordance with these principles. This highlights the fact that peace organisations such as the UN can implement rules that are influential and powerful.

The United Nations was formed following the end of World War 2 (1939-1945), when the world's countries and politicians recognised that things needed to change to prevent future conflicts around the world. To complete this goal, representatives of fifty countries met in San Francisco, USA and started to draft the United Nations Charter. Since then, many people have had different views on how the UN is run and governed. A key role that the UN plays in keeping the peace is that the UN Charter grants the Security Council maximum responsibility for the control of international peace and security. To do this the Council can create a United Nations peacekeeping operation. Their tasks differ from one situation to another, depending on the nature of the conflict and the challenge it presents. This dependence on the Council shows that there are many different parts that make up the UN that are all heavily relied on for the different tasks needed to maintain the UN's inner workings. The UN has received criticism over the years, such as, in its 70 years of existing they have spent over half a trillion dollars, it is a shameful den of dictatorships, western governments see the UN as bloated and inefficient, developing countries regard the UN as undemocratic and dominated by the rich, the annual expenditure is 40 times higher than it was in the early 1950s and its regular budget has more than doubled over the past two decades to $5.4bn. This shows that whilst the UN has done some good things it can still fall to inner corruption and international stereotypes that can change the way it is governed and perceived.





WHAT DOES PEACE MEAN TO ME?

By Joseph Payne

Peace to me means the absence of any conflict whether that is between countries, people or internally. However, some may use a narrower definition, that being the absence of war. Johan Galtung (1969) believed there were 2 types of peace, the types of peace were "negative peace", being the absence of war and "positive peace", being the removal of structural violence in social, political and economic system. My view of peace aligns more with positive peace because for me, a system that can't hold itself and turns towards inner conflict is not inherently peaceful. Though I agree that the absence of war is needed for peace, if only 1 type of peace could exist, I would choose to have positive peace. Positive peace in my opinion is closer to true peace than negative peace.

In 1945, the UN was formed with the task of keeping international peace through the means of sanctions, mediation and peacekeeping operations they have been somewhat successful. The UN charter commits to member states to resolve disagreements in a peaceful manner rather than using conflict (United Nations, 1945). According to Article 2 of the UN charter all organization members recognize the base sovereign equality of all its members (Appendix 3 of the course handbook). The equality of others helps with recognition. When people aren't recognized, they have a higher tendency to act out in less peaceful means. As the UN was created for peace, I believe that that their position on how peace can be upheld must have some weight behind it. Though the UN have arguably taken part in non-peaceful actions, they still have a powerful say in what world peace and internation peace are. To me, World Peace can be defined as "No conflict around the globe whether that being active conflict or tensions between people and countries". To others peace may be seen as there being no wars around the earth. The second definition of peace seems a lot more feasible than my one but overall, the concept of world peace seems almost completely impossible. Though 'world peace' is extremely difficult no matter what the definition is, without a body like the UN it would be impossible. The UN is needed for international peace.

Activism is defined as "the policy or action of using vigorous campaigning to bring about political or social change". Activism for peace comes in a variety of ways. For instance, occasionally there have been 1000s of people using their own time to peacefully protest the current war in Gaza. With everything that is political there is always a side for and a side against. There are many who say that the protests are useful to spread awareness about the conflict and to get closer to reaching a compromise between the two sides. That would get us closer to achieving negative peace. On the other hand, lots of people
say that the protests are useless and do nothing more than get in everyone's way. I personally believe that the protests are good for awareness and the fact that they block people's everyday lives helps with spreading awareness because if they didn't affect you at all then you would ignore them and they would be futile. A more formal approach to activism would be through ACAS (Advisory, Conciliation and Arbitration Service). ACAS is a service who solve disputes between employees and employers and attempts to find a middle ground. ACAS provide free and impartial advice through representatives on:

- Employment rights
- Best practice and policies
- Resolving workplace conflict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