

We are all teenagers

1 Lead in

Look at the adjectives below. Which words describe young people? Which ones describe older people?

wise adolescent serious rebellious dynamic
knowledgeable sceptical innovative shallow

In your opinion, in what ways do the following reflect the values and concerns of young people?

recent films modern art television programmes

2 Reading 1

Read the newspaper article. Which is the best summary of the article?

- 1 Culture is dominated by the concerns of young people. This is a bad thing because this culture is shallow and lacks a sense of history.
- 2 The vibrant, energetic culture of young people is transforming our society and culture, making it more profound and meaningful.

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Martin Jacques on why age and wisdom have been cast out of our infantilised society

There is a strange phenomenon. Britain is getting older. In fact, the population is older now than it has been for over a century. Yet at the same time our culture has never been more adolescent. Young people may be a dwindling minority, but they exercise an extraordinarily powerful influence on the cultural stage, from television and newspapers to film and art.

The turning point, of course, was the 1960s. Until then, young people were largely ignored in a culture that was stiflingly middle-aged. A generation, who were brought up in very different conditions from those of their parents, rebelled in a way that remains unprecedented in western society. It is not difficult to explain or understand the 60s. The young were a product of the long postwar boom, not war and unemployment, and the baby boom lent them exceptional demographic weight. What is far more difficult to comprehend is why our culture, in the decades since, has become progressively more infantile. It is as if the 60s gave birth to a new

dynamic, which made young people the dominant and permanent subjects of our culture.

It started with the birth of pop music as a youth genre, but the concerns and attitudes of the young generation have since permeated areas that were never adolescent. One only has to think of Britart, for example, whose motif has been the desire to shock, or film, whose preoccupation with violence as spectacle is driven by the appetite of the young, to see how powerful these adolescent values have become. It is not that they are simply negative or offer nothing: on the contrary, there is much to be admired in their energy, scepticism and commitment to innovation. But they are also characterised by transience and shallowness, a desire to shock for shock's sake, and a belief that only the present is of value. A culture that succumbs to adolescence is a culture that is drained of meaning and experience, not to mention history and profundity.

But why is it happening? It can be argued that the 60s unleashed a new cultural dynamic, which is still working its way through society. A new mindset was formed, which gave priority to the young. It is

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plausible to suggest that parents and grandparents who themselves were the rebels of the 60s are more inclined to respect, and defer to, the sensibilities and demands of youth. And this tendency has been reinforced by a new technological dynamic, manifest in the internet, mobiles and the like, which has left older generations feeling a little left out, and lent credence to a misplaced technological determinism among the young.

There is more than a grain of truth in all this. But as the proportion of young people steadily declines, one would still expect the sheer weight of growing age to assert itself. So far there is absolutely no sign of this. In fact, extraordinarily, the opposite is happening. The underlying reason for all this could not be more fundamental. It concerns the western condition. For over half a century we have only known prosperity, never

experienced mass unemployment, never fought wars except on the edges at other people's expense, never known the extremes of human existence, comfortable in a continent that has enjoyed, for the most part, a similar existence and, having turned its back on grand visions, opted for the quiet life. Yet it is extremes, personal or political or both, that teach us the meaning of life. Without them, the excesses of the young provide a little of the excitement otherwise lacking. The outcome is a growing shallowness. Britart may shock, but it hardly provides us with a deeper insight into the human condition. Hollywood movies may entertain, but they barely ever enlighten. An adolescent culture is one that lives on the surface, unencumbered by memory, light on knowledge and devoid of wisdom.

The Guardian Weekly

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3 Reading 2

Read the passage again and complete the sentences with the correct ending.

- 1 The tastes and concerns of young people are dominant
 - a. because there are more young people nowadays.
 - b. despite the fact that there are more old people nowadays.

- 2 Key factors in the social and cultural change that began in the 1960s were
 - a. economic prosperity and peace
 - b. unemployment and hard work

- 3 The concerns of young people
 - a. are only reflected in pop music
 - b. are reflected in many areas of the arts

- 4 According to the writer, youth culture
 - a. is negative and dull
 - b. is only interested in the present

- 5 According to the writer, our culture is shallow because
 - a. life is too easy
 - b. life is demanding and hard

4 Vocabulary in context

Choose the correct definition for the words from the article.

- 1 dwindling
 - a. getting bigger
 - b. getting smaller

- 2 stiflingly
 - a. unencouragingly
 - b. encouragingly

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- 3 baby boom
a. increase in the birth rate b. decrease in the birth rate
- 4 motif
a. repeated idea b. shape
- 5 transience
a. lasting a long time b. lasting a short time
- 6 succumbs
a. loses the fight against something b. wins the fight against something
- 7 plausible
a. incredible b. believable
- 8 manifest
a. clearly shown b. unclear
- 9 opted
b. lost b. chose
- 10 devoid
a. lacking b. possessing

5 Follow up

A class debate.

‘Teenage culture is shallow, transient and lacks a sense of history.’

Divide into two groups. Group A must think of five arguments that support the statement above. Group B must think of five arguments against the statement.

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For example

Group A *Young people like watching reality TV programmes like Big Brother – they are only interested in celebrities*

Group B *Some young pop stars write great songs which say profound things about life and love*

When you are ready, each group must present their ideas to the class.

Have a class vote. Find out who agrees, and who disagrees with the statement.

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Teacher's notes – we're all teenagers

Lead-in

Ask students to look up the adjectives in their dictionaries, then decide which words describe young people, and which ones describe older people.

Suggested answers

Young people: adolescent, rebellious, dynamic, innovative, shallow

Older people: wise, serious, knowledgeable, sceptical

Ask students to discuss in what ways films, art, and TV programmes reflect the values and concerns of young people.

Suggested ideas

recent films: actors in films are often young; films are often violent which young people like

modern art: often shocking

television programmes: reality TV; lots of young celebrities

Reading 1

Ask students to read the newspaper article, and decide which is the best summary.

Answers: Summary 1 is the best.

Reading 2

Ask students to read the passage again and complete the sentences with the correct ending.

Answers: 1b, 2a, 3b, 4b, 5a

Vocabulary in context

Ask students to choose the correct definition for the words from the article.

Answers: 1b, 2a, 3a, 4a, 5b, 6a, 7b, 8a, 9b, 10a

Follow-up

Divide the students into two groups. Ask each group to prepare arguments. Ask a spokesperson to present their group's ideas to the class. At the end, have a class vote, and decide whether the class agree or disagree with the statement.