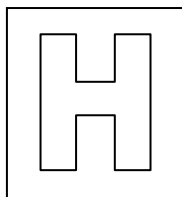


Candidate Name: _____

Class	Adm No
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2017 Preliminary Examination 2 Pre-University 3

GENERAL PAPER

8807/02

Paper 2
Tuesday

29 August 2017

1 hour 30 minutes

INSERT

READ THESE INSTRUCTIONS FIRST

Write your **name**, **class** and **admission number** in the spaces provided at the top of this page.
This insert contains the passage for Paper 2.

This insert consists of 3 printed pages and 1 blank page.

Barbara Cartlens considers the place of stories in our society.

- 1 Stories, more than the wisdom that has been passed down through the ages, are the building blocks of human character and society, and look likely to last longer than fossil fuel. There is no escaping stories, or the pressure to tell them. Human beings are natural storytellers; they cannot help telling stories, and they turn things that are not really stories into stories because they like narratives so much. Everything — faith, science, love — needs a story for people to find it plausible. No story, no sale. 5
- 2 We all like stories. When we do not have a story we look for one. Journalists chasing a news lead will go to extreme ends to pursue their subjects. Boy scouts sitting round a camp fire have it easier; they make it up as the tale unfolds. Religions are so successful because they tell stories, though, to be sure, some of their stories have nice morals and some are not nice at all. Different people like different kinds of morals in their stories. Some draw inspiration from the stories of entrepreneurs who made good despite the odds they faced in life. Some never cease to be fascinated by the heroic tales from the distant past. Yet others will never skip an episode of their favourite family drama on television. 10 15
- 3 Primates, like monkeys and chimpanzees, groom each other not to pick out lice, which do not really trouble them, but as a form of gossip, a way of exchanging social information — who grooms who for how long tells who's doing well and who's not. This primate grooming and the “gossip” that it entails actually produce brain-opiates, chemicals that make them feel good. Of course, since human groups are roughly three times larger than other primate groups, gossip was no longer enough to produce the opiates that make social interaction pleasant for primates. We started sharing stories about people as a way of drawing each other closer, apart from passing idle time. Indeed, to this day, almost all talk of this nature, is gossip and grooming, though the removal of bodily pests is no longer necessary. This thesis may or may not be true, but it has the excitement of a theory that surprises: it's a good story. 20 25
- 4 Good stories work in other intriguing ways. What strong scientific theories have in common with good stories is not some profound-sounding generalisations. It is that they make claims so astonishing that they seem instantly very different from all the other stories we have ever heard. The excitement of the great scientific theories lies not in the laws that they establish, but the shock they trigger: the Queen of England is actually the distant relative of an ape with furry arms that lived in a tree! Or simply consider this story: locked inside the nucleus of each little invisible atom is a force so vast it can destroy an entire city! 30 35
- 5 Studies show that people who read a lot of novels have better social and empathetic abilities, are more skilful navigators, than those who do not. And if these claims seem almost too large to argue, the more central claim — that stories increase our empathy, and make societies work better by encouraging us to behave ethically — seems too absurd even to argue with. Stories are also a great way to bring parents and their children together. As children grow older, they will be on the move — playing, running, and constantly exploring their environment. Snuggling up with a book allows both parent and child to slow down and recapture that sweet, cuddly time they enjoyed when the child was a baby. Numerous studies have also shown that students who are exposed to reading stories before 40 45

preschool are more likely to do well in all facets of formal education. After all, if a student struggles to put together words and sentences, how can he be expected to grasp the mathematics, science, and social concepts he will be presented with when he begins primary school?

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- 6 As communication technology develops, stories have found new ways to enter our lives. The increasing popularity of audio storytelling owes a lot to technology, as smartphones allow people to consume shows on demand anywhere, and cars increasingly come equipped with satellite radio and internet-friendly dashboards. A recent report estimated that a significant majority of young adults listened to online radio weekly. But some research has shown that people who listen to the narration of a passage, like the audio storytelling found in traditional audiobooks, remember less information, are less interested in the content, and are more likely to daydream than those who read the same book out loud or silently to themselves. 55
- 7 With the internet, the stories we encounter today are sometimes more than what they appear to be. People are attracted to stories circulating on the internet, more so if they are stories of tragedy, perversion, penance or plain, old scandal. Nowadays, it is easy to find an endless number of negative messages in stories of all shades and forms that discourage us from being proactive and going forth into the world. A major problem in this regard is that, for the most part, we are so used to negative messages that we are not even aware when we are imbibing them. We no longer question the stories that we hear or read, and we even pass them on. In a world characterised by steadily decreasing attention spans and rampantly increasing information onslaughts, the temptation to simplify and summarise just to keep on top of facts and fiction that come our way is immense. 60
- 8 Moreover, not all stories tell it like it is. In the past few decades, the fortunate among us have recognised the hazards of living with an overabundance of food (obesity and diabetes, for example) and have started to change our diets. But most of us do not yet understand that stories, in the form of news, are to the mind what sugar is to the body. News is easy to digest. The media feeds us small bites of trivial matter, titbits that do not really concern our lives and do not require thinking. That is why we experience almost no saturation. Unlike reading books and long magazine articles (which require thinking), we can swallow limitless quantities of news flashes, stories which are brightly coloured candies for the mind. Today, we have reached the same point in relation to information that we faced twenty years ago in regard to food. We are beginning to recognise how toxic news, and newsy stories, can be. 75
- 9 Perhaps it can be said that there are no good or bad stories. The power to astonish that stories have is true even of seemingly long or complicated novels that no one is said to read (but they do anyway). A sensitive, educated man is madly in love with an eighteen-year-old girl! Yikes! What happened? Are you serious? What will they do next? It took us so long, and so many long sentences, to find that out — but it was worth it. The interesting questions about stories, which, as they say, have fuelled the interests of people for millennia — and will excite them for millennia more — are what makes the enduring ones so different from the dull ones, and whether the good ones really make us better people, or just make us people who happen to have heard a good story. 85

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