



HWA CHONG INSTITUTION
C2 PRELIMINARY EXAMINATION
Higher 1

**CANDIDATE
NAME**

CT GROUP

**CENTRE
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**INDEX
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GENERAL PAPER

8807/02

Paper 2

29 August 2017

Insert

1 hour 30 minutes

INSTRUCTIONS TO CANDIDATES

This Insert contains the passage for Paper 2.

Hans Affleck worries about the pervasiveness of lies in the world today.

- 1 Honesty is the best policy, or so claims the universal adage that every school-going child has been taught to chant and uphold. While the “Never Lie!” exhortation may be an ideal that well-meaning adults feel obligated to endorse, especially in the presence of children, anyone who attempts to practise it today will be immediately labelled a misfit. The truth of the matter is that honesty no longer paves the way to a brilliant career or a purposeful life. Instead, lying has become the new norm because it gets people to places, and brings societies the quick successes they crave. Welcome to the twenty-first century – a world where strands of truth and deceit are ridiculously spun to cloak inadequacies, camouflage intentions and shield their weavers from responsibilities and repercussions! 5
- 2 There is no better evidence of this phenomenon than what is happening in the political realm: not only are most politicians well-versed in the art of weaving truths, politics has mutated into a showdown of wit and rhetoric. Unscrupulous politicians could not care less about the truth. They churn out a mix of titillating insinuations and incredulous speculations and reinforce them with arresting visuals to keep audiences spellbound and attract the highest votes. Elected to office, the best ‘spin doctors’ rely even more heavily on their public relations machinery. Styling themselves after larger-than-life pop stars and magicians, they stage grand appearances where they crow about spectacular economic rebounds and the imminent abolition of poverty and environmental woes. As facts continue to play second fiddle, good governance slips deeper into the realm of the sensible citizen’s imagination. 10 15 20
- 3 Branding is now the heart of any business, and skilful marketing built upon evocative narratives and glowing reviews is the invisible hand that sends products flying from manufacturing plants into consumers’ homes. Given its ability to drive phenomenal sales, story-telling has become an indispensable tool and valued more highly than product development in the business playbook. To see how it works, we just need to study the globalised obsession with smart devices. Seemingly innocuous seconds-long advertisements implant in our subconscious mind a fervent desire to own not just any smart phone, tablet or watch, but the latest version. Given such allegiance, is it surprising that businesses built on deceit are commonplace and thriving? As long as they package their narratives prettily and sidestep complaints daintily, gullible consumers will continue to mire themselves in a ruinous cycle of purchases and loans. 25 30
- 4 The perpetuation of lies is made possible by two threats to modern society: a distrust of the very leaders and institutions who have been entrusted with its care and a sea change in the way information is disseminated to the public. Worldwide, spectacular failures and the inability of governments to propose sensible remedies have led to acute cynicism towards politically-correct officials who parrot trite replies. The disillusioned even declare their hairdressers and the man-in-the-street to be twice as trustworthy as any government official or business leader. Some maintain a worrying preference for mavericks whose so-called insider knowledge enables them to “tell it as it is”. It certainly does not help that experts are frequently contradicting one another, or that politicians regularly prioritise their vested interests above all else. The latter can be expected to cast doubts on a stringent climate policy by magnifying the uncertainties of science if doing so pleases their campaign sponsors and power brokers. In their hands, statistics is no longer a tool for honest analysis or social progress but a mere numbers game to “prove” their assertions. 35 40 45
- 5 Society would not be so easily enmeshed in the web of deceit if not for accomplices such as the Internet and the services it spawns. On Facebook, Reddit, Twitter or YouTube, anybody can be a publisher. A single idea, or “meme”, can be replicated shorn of all context, for the dark purposes of trolling, doxxing and slamming. Once a haven for geeks with lofty ideals about the free flow of information, the Internet now goads users into acts 50

of self-destruction. Even though Facebook and other forms of social media profess to filter news according to user sensibilities, they are poor moderators of what is genuine or malicious. They are no match for reprehensible publications mining a niche of virulent hoaxes that perpetuate rumours or prejudices for clicks and profits. Google's algorithms which personalise results based on search preferences and surfing behaviour further 55 impede netizens from chancing upon countervailing views, leaving them hopelessly ensnared by biased narratives. In essence, the online hunt for truth now is similar to the proverbial search for a needle in a haystack.

- 6 But all is not lost! There is a silver lining amidst the dark clouds: conscientious journalists who make up the Fourth Estate. They are our bulwark against encroaching falsehood, 60 the bastion of truth for whom accuracy and objectivity are not mere mantras to be chanted. Every news idea is grounded in extensive research, every lead verified through rigorous interviews and every morsel of information scrupulously corroborated to distil partiality from facts. Only after exacting standards in fact checking, copy editing and proofreading are met will the article be given life as a published piece. We often read of 65 editors and reporters who remain staunchly committed to the truth even when their visibility and courage make them scapegoats and adversaries of those they have crossed. The invaluable contributions of these professionals make them our unsung heroes, and we cannot thank them enough for taking up the cudgels against duplicity.
- 7 Truth is important in and of itself: it is gold that has been painstakingly panned from the 70 sediments of time and experience by generations. Its extrinsic value is clearly integral in modern human societies, be it in justice, trade, ethics or government. It is my firm belief that truth is the property of no individual but is the treasure of all men. Today, we sorely need the scrupulous to shine a beacon through the apocalyptic fog of manipulation, lies and deceit, and light our way to this forgotten trove. 75
- 8 Factual integrity is the most valuable legacy we can leave to our future generations in today's world where falsehood flies, and truth comes limping after it. We must harken to the clarion call of the Press and rescue truth from its tormentors before it is too late.