

Essay Topics

Applicants were to choose one of the following topics and submit a 500-word essay response:

1. Should schools use video games as a teaching tool?
2. How important are grandparents to children today?
3. Have cell phones and social media made families closer or not?
4. Is hunting good or bad for the environment?
5. Does recycling really make a difference?
6. How does the music we listen to affect our relations with other people?

Scoring Criteria

Subject Matter: Relevance to the selected topic; quality of insight and thought; unity of theme, imagery and concrete detail.

Organization: Arrangement of material; clarity of description or argument; management of transitions.

Grammar & Style: Command of the written language.

2020 Recipients and Essay Responses

Page 2 Alicia Raposo

Page 3 Alyssa Landriault

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Cell phones and social media offer convenient ways to stay connected to our families when we can't be with them in person, though I don't think they necessarily make us closer. Texting and messaging through social media are simply different means of communicating with our friends and families, but they cannot replace the time spent together nor can they strengthen our relationships.

My parents both grew up in Portugal so that's where a lot of my family still lives and since they live so far, we don't see them as often as we'd like. Luckily though, we are all fortunate enough to have access to the internet, so we are able to communicate with them online. Not only can we message them at any time, but we can also video chat with them which, in my opinion, feels more intimate — though not as intimate as being with them in person. In circumstances like these, we rely on social media to stay connected with our family, however, we cannot rely on it to strengthen our relationships or make us closer. Relationships are built on memories and moments that cannot be experienced through a screen because it lacks a more personal connection than being face to face.

Sometimes, social media can have the opposite effect of bringing families closer together because it can act as a barrier between people sitting in the same room. In the example I gave before, social media is used to connect people that are far away, but more often than not, it's used as a way to separate people that are close. I must admit that my family and I are guilty of this though we've never let it affect our relationship because we always make time for each other. But still, there are times when I'm in the living room with my parents and we're all on our respective phones texting other people or playing some game. With all of us distracted by these screens we are almost oblivious to each other's company, which – if this was how we always spent our time together – could eventually deteriorate our relationship with one another. Thankfully this hasn't happened because we always make time for each other whether we play a board game, or watch a movie, or just sit and talk – which is what usually ends up happening.

It's the moments spent together that really strengthen a relationship and allow people to grow closer. I, for example, do not feel any closer to my grandmother just because I message her every once in a while, because if it wasn't for online messaging, I could write her a letter which would essentially have the same effect. I'm close with my grandmother because of the times I have gone to visit her and the memories we've created. Therefore, though they have become crucial in keeping long distance friends and relatives in touch, I don't think cell phones and social media make families any closer.

Submitted by recipient: Alicia Raposo

How Does the Music We Listen Affect Our Relations with Other People?

Music is always evolving and changing as society does. The music we listen to strongly affects our relations with other people, positively and negatively. This is because things like video idealization and tones of a song can vary in many different ways causing different effects.

Video Idealization

A lot of songs today are released as music videos, which have aspects that change the outlook of society's minds. These videos are often idealized, which affect how we look at our relationships. Idealization in music is shown through videos depicting the world through a select representation of society, often featuring those who are considered 'beautiful'. The effect of idealization can give listeners the negative feelings of envy, jealousy and even depression. With idealization, music videos depict the ideas of 'perfect' relationships, causing unhealthy obsessions with having exactly what is portrayed in the videos. These factors ultimately lead to unhealthy straining on relationships and hides the truth that every relationship is unique, different and should be portrayed realistically.

More recently societies' views on mental health have begun to become more open in the media and within relationships. Following this, music has begun to take a more inspirational turn, where the videos are aiming to connect with and inspire their listeners. This shift brings back music's ability to help form positive and healthy relations with other people.

Tones of Music

All aspects of music have tones, which allow listeners to feel the song's emotion. In some music the tone of the song is not the same as the tone in the video, so circumstance can result in a different effect.

It is important to ensure that mental health is kept in check and under control, poor mental health can cause many different strains on relationships. Music has been associated with easing of stress and depression. Unlike the idealization of content in the videos, the effect on tones are not something that is unhealthy for relationships. The emotions that are brought up due to tones of music are real and acknowledgement of them can bring truth and acceptance into a relationship.

Tones in videos can also have strong influences on people's relationships. A music video can have the same or different tone to the music, this can determine the message it is intended to have. If the tone of the video is different from the song it can be inspiring against the negative story the music is telling or vice versa. This can inspire the listener to fight in the same way the story in the music does.

Music has an incredible effect on our relations with people, through its use of idealization in video and its impact that it has through its tone. Music will continue to change as society changes and we can hope that society's ideals will continue to change allowing music to inspire rather than diminish relationships.

Submitted by recipient: Alyssa Landriault

Have Cell Phones and Social Media Made Families Closer or Not?

Have cell phones and social media made families closer or not? That is the question that seems to be constantly up for debate in society today. Some may argue that they separate families by keeping them from spending quality time together, however, I disagree. In my opinion, cell phones and social media bring families closer by providing communication, teaching independence and responsibility, and eliminating the distance that some families experience.

Firstly, cell phones and social media make families closer by providing a means of communication. The ability to contact family members in order to let them know you are safe is essential when children become more independent and spend time away from their parents. Coming from a single-parent family, I often relied on my cell phone to let my mother know I was safe when I got home from school, before she finished work. It was also important that I had a means to contact her in case of an emergency while I was home alone.

Secondly, cell phones and social media make families closer by teaching children independence and responsibility. Children often learn to save for and take care of their cell phones, which teaches them about money. In order to have my first phone at thirteen years old, I made a deal with my mother. I was to save enough money to buy the phone outright as well as the two year phone plan. When I was eleven years old, I began walking dogs and raking leaves, and by the time I turned twelve years old, I had saved enough money. Not only had that experience taught me about working hard for what I wanted, but it also allowed me to purchase my phone one year earlier than planned! I also feel that because I had worked hard and paid for my own phone, I was more determined to take care of it.

Finally, cell phones and social media make families closer by eliminating the distance some people experience. For many different reasons, some families live countries apart from their loved ones, which can be difficult. Cell phones and social media allow people to keep in contact no matter how far apart they may be. Growing up, I lived in the Dominican Republic, which is a four hour plane ride from Canada. After living there for ten years, my mother and I moved back to Canada which unfortunately meant we would be far away from all of our family and friends. Thanks to cell phones and social media, we were able to keep in touch with everyone on the island, which made moving away a little easier.

In my opinion, cell phones and social media make families closer. They provide means of communication so that children can update their parents on their whereabouts or contact them in case of emergency. They teach children independence and responsibility by teaching them to save money and take care of their property. Finally, they eliminate the distance some families experience.

Submitted by recipient: Destiny (Ally) Alejandra Bentz-Flynn

Helping Role for the Environment

Does recycling really make a difference?

The efficiency of recycling has always been a question on whether it is beneficial or not to the environment. What happens beyond individuals putting used plastic and papered items in recycling bins, is where it is all systematically created to help the earth. Recycling helps the environment by reducing pollution, decreasing contamination to landfills and conserving more natural resources.

Recycling helps make a difference to the environment by reducing pollution. According to Laurie Brenner from Sciencing; when companies use recycled items, they help decrease air and water pollution by a great amount. For example, using recycled paper, the air pollution is cut down by 73% and water pollution by 35%. While companies and factories are excavating natural resources to create more articles for their businesses, they are causing water and air pollution by emitting many harmful chemicals like burning fossil fuels into the atmosphere. With the help of recycling, companies can reuse these materials, using less energy and burning less fuels that contribute a great deal to world pollution.

Recycling helps make a difference to the environment by reducing the contamination on landfills. For example, Drew Brucker from Rubicon indicated that around 80% of trash that is sent to landfills could be recycled. That means that much materials could be saved and repurposed instead of polluting and harming the environment. Reusing many of these recycled products permits for much less waste to be brought to landfills.

Recycling also helps make a difference to the environment by conserving more natural resources. A website named Recycling to Live Green stated that, materials such as water, wood and minerals are natural resources that can be conserved from recycling because they can all be repurposed. For example, 4,100 kilowatts of energy, 2 barrels of oil and 17 trees can all be saved with every ton of paper that is recycled. If recycling were not a strategy, companies would be forced to extract more natural resources, leading to a very unhealthy and bare environment. Reusing these items that still have repurposes to them, allow for more desirable natural resources to stay stable.

Recycling helps the environment by reducing pollution, decreasing contamination to landfills and conserving more natural resources. Recycling helps reduce pollution by using less factory energy through repurposing materials, allowing less harmful gases to be released into the atmosphere. It helps by reducing contamination to the earth by reusing recycled materials that normally end up in landfills. It additionally helps conserve more natural resources by reusing old materials to create something new, instead of extracting more raw materials from earth. According to research, recycling can make a positive difference to the environment. Another question to ask is why are some individuals and corporations still choosing not to recycle?

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Submitted by recipient: Heidi Quesnelle

Cell Phones Have Improved The Relationships Among Families

Whether it is parents, grandparents, long-distance cousins or siblings, social media and the use of cell phones as a major benefit in building relationships. It can build bonds that otherwise would have never been made or strengthen relationships that are already present. Social media and cell phones can improve long-distance relationships with family members, it can increase family interaction on a daily basis and it improves the safety and security of everyone.

Being able to communicate with family even when they are thousands of miles away is a blessing brought to us by technology. This is a tool that my parents and grandparents wished they had when they were younger. We are able to stay in contact with family members through facetime, in order to have live video conferences, we can text, or Snapchat images of what is going on around us. We can even post photos of what we are doing on Instagram for our family to see. When family members go away for long periods of time or move away it is easy to stay in contact because of all of the social media tools that have evolved.

As well as improving long-distance relationships, social media has also allowed for increased interaction and communication between family members. The amount of challenges that can be downloaded on your phone is endless for friendly family fun. These include daily step challenges, where you can message your family and motivate them to keep up their steps. You can also text your family and send them photos of what is going on, so everyone stays in the loop. Parents/guardians can get immediate updates on how our day is going. If I had a test I can let them know when I am finished and how I think it went. If I was having a bad day and needed some support I can send a text to a family member so they can know how I am feeling and help me work through whatever is bothering me. These reasons demonstrate how social media and technology increase the interaction and communication among families.

Along with staying in touch with long-distance family members, and the increase in communication, social media also increases safety and security among families. Whenever people go out they can send messages that say "I have arrived safely." This allows for family members to be at ease while their child or sibling is out. There are also apps such as find my friends which allows you to see where people are, so you can make sure they are safe and check up on how they are and how they are doing. Phone calls also make a huge difference because if you ever need immediate help everything is just a phone call away. There are also safety features installed on phones, for example, if you click the on/off button multiple times in sequence on the iPhone then the police will be called. All of these reasons prove why social media has improved family security and safety.

Therefore, it is clearly evident that social media and cell phones have had a huge benefit on helping families build long-distance relationships, allow us to challenge each other and increase communication, as well as reassuring family members of other's safety and whereabouts. Technology is increasingly getting better and safer at rapid rates which can in turn really benefit our community and family relationships in the future.

Submitted by recipient: Nicole Johnston