

Higher Tier **Year 10** **Reading Literary Non-fiction Texts**
'Eating Pop Tarts, Watching Pop Videos'

The following will help prepare you for your Year 10 English exam and provide valuable practice for the actual G.C.S.E. exam next year.

Paper 1 contains three questions. Showing understanding of non-fiction is question two. In both your mocks and in the actual G.C.S.E. you will be able to study the texts in advance of the exam – but having a go at an 'unseen' text, and then going through it, will help you focus closely, making use of your own skills. You will learn to read for meaning, select appropriate material and analyse the author's craft.

Task :

Read the article 'Eating Pop Tarts, Watching Pop Videos' by Emma Forrest. Discuss the points that Emma Forrest makes about the attitudes of young people towards reading. You should respond to the following prompts:

- **What points does Emma Forrest make about attitudes of young people towards reading?**
- **What do we learn from the article and the ways in which it is written about Emma Forrest herself?**

Top Tips :

- Ignore the first part of the task – just focus on the bullet points.
- You are asked two questions here – treat them separately
- The first question is simply asking for facts. It's a 'What?' question! Read through each paragraph and jot down every point Emma Forrest makes
- Simply join these points together in one piece of continuous writing.
- Use your own words as far as possible (this proves that you actually understand the text!) – e.g. 'Few teenagers read' rather than a quote from the first paragraph.
- Summarise! Keep it short and to the point. You shouldn't need to write more than half a page of A4, if that!
- You could start '*Emma Forrest believes that...*'
- The second question is different – it's a 'What and How?' question! This is more demanding. A good answer here will gain you higher grades.
- Look closely at the way that the article is written and the examples that Emma Forrest gives. Then ask what this tells us about the writer. The following may help:
- Is Emma Forrest always being entirely serious?
- What are her personal reading habits? How do we know?
- How old is she? Is the style of writing here typical of someone her age? Look critically at the vocabulary she uses, at the sentence structures, at the literary techniques she uses. Give examples to support your ideas

Extension Activity :

Write a letter to 'The Spectator' in reply to the article. You should comment on Emma Forrest's views but put forward a very different view of the reading habits of young people.

EATING POP TARTS, WATCHING POP VIDEOS

Emma Forrest, sixteen, explains why so few of her contemporaries read books

A recent survey enthused that people are reading more than ever. I'd like to know, first, what it is they're reading (I fear a boost to Lord Archers bank balance) and, second, who exactly these avid readers are. I've seen no reference in this survey to teenage readers. Is this because we don't exist? I can tell you only what I see every day at school. A teenager who reads is a rarity.

Our school library has recently and beautifully been refurbished and now boasts a catalogue ranging from Austen to Zola (before then I think it started with Kingsley Amis and stopped at Martin Amis because there wasn't any more shelf space). And whilst the computer-room is packed every lunch hour, the turn-out in the library is sparse at best. Occasionally, people come to stick discarded bubblegum on the radiator. Possibly the non-visitors find the studious atmosphere intimidating, but I think it's simpler than that. Reading is hard work. For a long time children believed their parents when they were told that something that took effort was more worthwhile than instant gratification, that hard work is eventually pleasurable: 'Taking time to clean and boil spinach, good. Using finger to eat peanut butter out of a jar, bad.'

It seems that mine is the first generation to reject this theory. My mother was genuinely surprised at my response when she asked if I didn't feel better for having cleaned my room and I said no. Why should I feel better? I stubbed my toe on the Hoover and it ate into time I could have used to watch pop videos on MTV.

When Marshall McLuhan

prophesied in the 1960s that people would eventually stop reading and communicate instead through the electronic media, his work was considered as subversive as Darwin's. The notion that the printed word might be made obsolete terrified a generation of liberal intellectuals whose status within society was testimony to the importance of literacy. Looking back, we can now see that McLuhan's chant 'the medium is the message' was the original soundbite. I'm assured that hardly anyone actually read his work. Today his books are largely out of print. But it seems his prophecies might be worth re-reading. When he wrote *Understanding Media - The Extensions of Man*, he was dealing with the radio, telephone and television. With microwaves, satellite dishes and fax machines to back us up, we seem to have proof that gratification must always be provided instantly. Because I and all the other children of the Eighties never knew a time when things took effort, we have a different slant on reading. Times may be hard but living is still meant to be easy. It's screens and sounds that link us and give us our identity.

Even the cult literature of angry young men (now dead or, worse, old) fails to persuade us that reading is worth the effort. What use is Jack Kerouac's *On the Road* when we have no desire to venture beyond the boundaries of our bedrooms with their view of the world via satellite? Which of us can relate to the teenage trauma of *Catcher in the Rye* when the cast of Beverley Hills 90210 tell us everything we need to know?

These rebellious books, besides, are now on the school syllabus, immediately labelling them as duty and hard work. It is, after all, difficult to find personal pleasure in the *Catcher in the Rye* after you've had to write a 2,000-word essay analysing its use of slang. Books enjoyed by my parents generation as subversive tales of adolescents battling against the establishment have been adopted by the establishment and I resent it.

I can sit all day watching MTV, eating Pop Tarts heated in the microwave, drinking local, nutrient-free diet Pepsi and listening to electronic music. Sometimes, occasionally, it all makes me feel a bit queasy. It's then that I find myself tentatively reaching for a book to accompany my Pop Tarts. But much as I may enjoy a few stolen hours with black on white, I don't talk about my reading at school. It would be like saying I occasionally get the urge to sleep with fish under my pillow.

On the hand, my school friends' uncompromising rejection of literature and reading disturbs me, but, on the other, I identify with it. Not reading is our way of alerting the intellectual establishment that we've moved on. 'Unliteracy' is our unique contribution to modern culture.

The Spectator

