

# Brain Booster



CRITICAL THINKING  
RESOURCES



Creative Campus *learning with latitude*



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# PREFACE

*Brain Booster: Critical Thinking Resources* is a complimentary e-offering of thought-provoking write ups, articles and discussion questions to help students improve their critical thinking ability. In this edition, we have carefully curated seven evergreen discussion topics and resources first published in our monthly e-newsletter - *On Campus*.

We are confident this compilation will help the student reader to improve analytical and evaluative skills, which are crucial and fundamental steps in preparing for the demands of secondary education and beyond.



## ABOUT US

**Creative Campus** is an oasis for learning English, where youths are inspired and empowered to learn with latitude.

**Creative Campus** embodies the directors' shared vision of the ideal learning environment — intimate, student-focussed, enriching and enlivened. It is an ideal that has been honed over more than 20 years of collaboration. Ms Geraldine Chew and Mrs Elizabeth Yeo, have been instrumental in training over 200 teachers and developing English curriculum in the course of the last two decades.

With particular expertise in curriculum development, dynamic lesson-delivery, and establishing strong rapport with students, **Creative Campus** is an academic powerhouse in English instruction that nurtures in our students the twin goals of excelling in school and cultivating the love for English as an essential life skill. This is done via a two-pronged approach: **English Enrichment**, and **Critical Thinking**.

~ **Ms Geraldine Chew & Mrs Elizabeth Yeo**

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**CRITICAL THINKING**

**ARTICLES AND  
QUESTIONS**

# 1. THE INSIDIOUS EFFECTS OF SMARTPHONES

First appeared in the *On Campus* October 2017 edition

The whole world tuned in with anticipation as Apple unveiled its latest smartphone to mark the 10th anniversary of its iconic product. Despite its exorbitant price tag, one can be sure the iPhone X will sell like hot cakes. The world's obsession with smartphones has seen shareholders of Apple and Samsung reaping dividends; and leaving once key-players like Nokia in the dust.

The smartphone is more than just a portable computer. It can make e-payment, provide street directions on-the-go, is an entertainment portal etc.

However, in its wake, smartphones have opened a can of worms. Coupled with its close cousin, the social media, wired societies have been hit by a slew of cases involving smartphone addiction. Impressionable teens are the hardest hit. Research has shown that

prolonged and extended use of smartphones can result in depression, insomnia, indolence, as well as delayed social maturity.

It is ironic that teenagers these days are more connected, thanks to their smartphones, but end up more alienated and lonely. How can parents drive a change to avert this mental-health crisis?

Read the full article here: [Have Smartphones Destroyed A Generation?](#)

## Questions for Discussion

1. How accurate are the writer's concerns in the Singaporean context?
2. How old should children be before we first introduce electronic devices to them, and why?
3. What do you think are the role and responsibilities of the parent when gifting children with gadgets such as smartphones or iPads?

## 2. THE GIFTED CHILD: A NATURE VS NURTURE DEBATE

First appeared in the *On Campus* September 2017 edition

Mathematician Maryam Mirzakhani was the first woman to earn the Fields Medal, the highest honour in the field. She began to show signs of genius as a teenager, winning gold medals at Math Olympiads. It might be easy to assume Maryam was a child savant who excelled from Babyhood. The truth is, Maryam's talent for Mathematics was not apparent till middle school. In fact, most Nobel prize winners had rather ordinary childhood. Einstein himself had been deemed as slow at learning in his youth. It is undeniable that through the ages, child prodigies like Mozart and William James Sidis have shown that some gifts are indeed bestowed from birth. Perhaps the question should not be whether there is such a thing as a gifted child, but rather, whether, in reality, such extraordinary abilities have a direct correlation with success.

Research has shown that Intelligence Quotient (IQ) can change for an individual. People do discover better ways to acquire and retain information, or find more effective ways of learning as they grow. And practice really does make perfect. Perseverance does matter. Einstein once commented, "Most people say that it is the intellect which makes a great scientist. They are wrong: it is character." It is believed that Einstein himself had an IQ of only 150, and not 190. Malcolm Gladwell stated in his bestseller, *Outliers*, that a person just has to be *smart enough* to be successful. It does not present additional advantages in life for a person to have a 195 IQ, compared to a person with an IQ of 130.





High achievers are also known to have good family support and parental influence. Benjamin Bloom, a well-known educationist, found a pattern within a group of high achievers. Their parents were encouraging and supportive when creating interest during the learning process, and even when specialising in a subject. Not surprisingly, these parents have strong work ethics themselves and their diligence does rub off on their children.

Read the full article: [Why there is no such thing as a gifted child?](#)

### **Questions for Discussion**

1. Which is more important in a child's cognitive development: nature or nurture? Why?
2. Does having an extraordinary ability necessarily ensure one's success?
3. How can caregivers create a better learning environment for their charges?

### 3. BILINGUALISM

First appeared in the *On Campus* August 2017 edition

Experts have found that bilingualism can improve one's general language-learning ability. In light of this, parents are often keen to ensure their children grow up to be effectively bilingual. However, this is no mean feat for the child.

Exposure to the language is essential, but the nature of this exposure can affect its effectiveness. Conversations in person appear to be more effective than time spent staring at a screen. Studies have also found that listening to native speakers is more effective than listening to those who are not fully comfortable with the language. Experts also recommend "rich and complex language exposure". This means that exposure tends to be more effective when it includes music, stories and other elements of culture.

Psychologist Gigliana Melzi concludes that bilingualism is worthwhile despite the hard work it entails. Dr Melzi also advises parents not to be too concerned about whether their children are equally proficient in both languages. She believes that children will benefit even if they do not turn out to be perfectly balanced bilinguals.

Read The Full Article: [Raising a Truly Bilingual Child](#)

#### Questions to Consider

1. What are your thoughts on the dominance of the English language?
2. In your experience, what are the most effective ways to learn a second language?
3. Should more weight be given to second languages in Singapore schools? For instance, should other content subjects be offered in students' mother tongues instead of English?

## 4. HARVARD ACCEPTANCE RESCINDED: THE IMPORTANCE OF SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY

First appeared in the *On Campus* July 2017 edition

A group of young people started a private Facebook group. In this chat group, they posted messages mocking minority cultures, the abuse of children and the Holocaust. These young people had one thing in common; they had all received acceptance letters to Harvard, and were due to begin their university experiences in 2017.

Harvard became aware of this behaviour and responded swiftly: all students involved in this dreadful online conversation lost their tickets to Harvard.

At the core of discussions surrounding this incident is a question of morality.

Many have lauded Harvard's response because it highlighted the fact that academic performance and extra-curricular records are not all that matter. Evidence of poor character is also to be considered by university admissions officers. A secondary issue stemming from this incident relates to privacy. Some question if individuals should be judged based on messages or graphics posted on private online platforms.

Read The Full Article: [Harvard Yanks 10 Acceptance Letters Over Offensive Facebook Posts](#)

## Questions for Discussion

1. Do you think social media posts should factor into the college admissions process?
2. If you were in charge of college admissions, what would you value in applicants?
3. Should youths who post obscene material on social media be punished in any other way? What would be a good way to educate them on their wrongdoing?
4. Has social media had a negative impact on youth?



## 5. BUGS: A SUSTAINABLE FOOD SOURCE

First appeared in the *On Campus* March 2017 edition

Angelina Jolie loves noshing on the creepy crawlies. On her recent trip to Cambodia, she shared some of her favourite ways to prepare scorpion and tarantula. The video has understandably elicited mixed responses.

Instead of dwelling on the "icky" factor, consider the benefits of including insects in our diets. First and foremost, bugs are nutritious. They are a good source of protein, minerals and amino acids.

Secondly, bugs are a more sustainable food source than other meat products. As the estimated population of the world is expected to hit 9 billion in 2050, there is an urgent need to address the possibility of a food shortage.

Bugs fit the bill as it takes 75% less feed to produce 1kg of insects than to produce an equal amount of cattle.

One member of the edible bugs industry believes that bugs will eventually be as well-liked as sushi!

Read the full article: [Should we eat bugs?](#)

### Questions for Discussion

1. Should governments actively support the growth of the edible bugs industry?
2. Not keen on bugs? What other sustainable food sources can you think of?
3. How could people from cultures that do not traditionally consume insects be enticed to try them?



## 6. SOCIAL MEDIA: TERMS AND CONDITIONS

First appeared in the *On Campus* February 2017 edition

A task force, headed by England's Children's Commissioner, recently shared its findings on how children are navigating the digital world. Approximately half of the children surveyed had Instagram accounts, but none of them could figure out its terms.

When the same children viewed a simplified version of Instagram's terms, many found the content shocking, and some decided to stop using the platform. As stipulated in the onerous set of conditions, Instagram can allow anyone to use images posted by its users without crediting or even notifying the original poster. Additionally, users' personal information can be shared with other businesses. Critics have questioned if children can provide informed consent in these conditions.

Read the full article: [Children in England sign over digital rights “regularly and unknowingly”](#)

### Questions for Discussion

1. Should social media websites be required to present their terms and conditions in a more digestible form?
2. In the absence of parental consent, should children be barred from using social media? Support your answer with evidence from your observations and readings.
3. To what extent is social media responsible for the well-being of underage users?





## 7. GUN VIOLENCE

First appeared in the *On Campus* January 2017 edition

Recently, our students discussed the issue of gun violence in the United States. The ambiguous phrasing of the Second Amendment of the U.S Constitution has, and will understandably continue to be, a point of contention for both Republicans and Democrats alike.

Regardless, vigilance always plays an important role in the early detection of potential dangers. Commissioned by Sandy Hook Promise, the commercial is both ingenious and powerful. You would probably hit that 'play' button again.

Click on the image to view the video.



Read the full article: [Can you figure out the mystery inside this remarkable ad about high school love?](#)

### Questions for Discussion

1. Do you think gun control should be more stringent in America?
2. Compared with the United States, Singapore has zero tolerance for gun ownership. Do you think that Singapore should be more lenient on gun control laws?
3. Without guns, how have Singaporeans protected their families in the face of danger?



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Our sincerest thanks, especially to all the writers and contributors who created and pored through the manuscripts endlessly.

Most of all, we would like to thank you for buying ***Brain Booster: Critical Thinking Resources*** and perpetuating the cycle of reading and thinking.

With appreciation,

~ ***Ms Geraldine Chew & Mrs Elizabeth Yeo***

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