



General Certificate of Education
Advanced Subsidiary Examination
January 2011

General Studies (Specification A)

GENA1

Unit 1 AS Culture and Society

Source Booklet

Sources for use with **Questions 1.1 to 1.30** and **Questions 2 to 5**.

Section A

Source A for Questions 1.1 to 1.30

Is Big Brother bad for our kids?

Article A: Yes

- (1) Unbelievably, people I normally respect and admire admit to watching *Big Brother*. Through choked-back sniggers, they tell me of the 'goings-on' in the house. They casually name-drop house-mates' nicknames as if talking about old school friends. They analyse the emotional chemistry that apparently crackles through the house. They even like Davina McCall.
- (2) Have I died and gone to hell? I listen in blank-faced disbelief, reach for another glass of wine, and wonder how friends of mine can be so easily duped. This debate isn't about whether *Big Brother* is any good. We know lots of people like it and that the programme – fuelled by summer tabloid frenzy – worms itself insidiously into people's lives. The question is: should our children be watching it? Isn't it the televisual equivalent of feeding chicken waste to chickens – and then being surprised at the way they develop?
- (3) We *BB* refuseniks feel the show resembles the Victorian freak show so memorably depicted in the film *Elephant Man*. Remember Michael Elphick sauntering through the labyrinths of London, pointing out the wretches who will entertain paying punters: the Incredible Wind Man, the Bearded Lady and, most enticingly, the *Elephant Man*.
- (4) This year, 14 contestants – one of whom won a place in the house by finding a golden ticket in a *Kit Kat* – entered the *BB* house. They included four models, two gay men, socialites, a stockbroker and a winner with Tourette's Syndrome.
- (5) All life is here, but not as we know it. This isn't a representative world; rather, it's a deliberately assembled one in which you throw together a wacky mix of people keen to grab their 15 minutes of fame for viewers' voyeuristic pleasure.
- (6) Thus Nikki, 24, flaunts her false breasts and dreams of marrying a footballer. Bonnie "wants to be more famous than Madonna". Channel 4 producers say the programme will be "more twisted than ever" and have installed glass walls and mirrors so contestants feel exposed and insecure. Oh, and there aren't enough beds for them all.
- (7) It's like the sink groups we used to create by mixing all the kids who couldn't cope with exams – except we didn't deliberately provoke them to misbehave, ply them with alcohol, and pen them in a garden that even Laurence Llewellyn-Bowen has described as "the seventh circle of hell" (and he should know), and then offer £50 000 if they can endure it.
- (8) What you get isn't far removed from the values of any town centre on a Saturday night captured on CCTV. The housemates smoke, drink, swear, laugh and pontificate intensely about favourite types of chocolate or the person they would most like to sleep with.
- (9) And in a move that seems deliberately calculated to increase young viewers, within 60 seconds of the 9pm watershed our pupils can watch this, just as the *Kit Kat* marketing campaign nudges the show deeper into their consciousness. The show further blurs the boundaries of what's for adults and what's for children, serving up the values of a 2 am nightclub as if they were the norm.

- (10) So what do our pupils learn from all this? They see the parading of lowest common denominator values, a celebration of our lowest swearing, lust and bullying instincts. It teaches them that nothing matters more than being famous and popular. It's lazy and depressing television that does nothing to challenge us, develop us, or inspire us to better ourselves. And if such aims seem old-fashioned, then we shouldn't be teachers.

Geoff Barton, Headteacher

Article B: No

- (11) Ever since it graced our screens in 2000, I have dedicated a small percentage of the summer to the Brother that's Big. I am unashamedly a fan, which is not to say that I am a fan of reality TV *per se*, just this juggernaut of a show – the original and best of reality TV shows. I particularly liked the early years and dare I say it, the boring year – when the viewing pleasure was about watching a bunch of odd-bodies naively muddling through the day (a sort of human zoo) – rather than the fame-hungry bitchfest it has subsequently become.
- (12) That said, when it all kicks off in the *BB* house (as it often has this year) there is a compulsion to view. As I discovered one morning when I tentatively asked “Did anyone watch *Big Brother* last night?”, this compulsion unites me with my staff and pupils. The morning after a row, temper-tantrums or kiss, we excitedly share our opinions, assassinate characters, and discuss predictions for the next few days. We are a pop-psychology *tour de force*, but our conversations can stretch to more thorough analysis.
- (13) In this emotionally illiterate social climate, our *BB* analysis becomes a valuable way to encourage young people to talk about their feelings and to recognise the cause and effect of their actions. What do we think of the in-house bullying? Is Aisleyne sincere or scheming? Is it right for the Brother himself to be so cruel?
- (14) Pupils who are otherwise hard to communicate with will probably have something to say about Spiral's latest outburst, or Imogen's flirtations with Mikey. *Big Brother* connects people, because it is based on something that we can all relate to: human behaviour. The social struggles and petty gripes that so often get in the way of learning are all reflected in the programme: the pecking order, the arguments over boys, the falling out, the making up. We see their two-faced betrayals, arrogant sneers and unhinged tempers. But we also see the camaraderie and peacemaking. One of the most valuable messages this year is that things change: anger passes, and people forgive.
- (15) From the drama we can also reflect on our own experiences. Are we better than these people? This is *Big Brother* as therapy: a vehicle for examining behaviour and learning from it – and I haven't mentioned Pete yet. Hasn't he been a fantastic ambassador for inclusion, proving that a condition such as Tourette's can be lived with? But perhaps more importantly, Pete, the bookies' favourite, shows us Tourette's is not the sum total of his existence. He, more than any other housemate, has shone as a charming, considerate, well-balanced individual. It is refreshing to see that among the loud personalities and fast glamour, genuine goodness still wins through.

Turn over ►

- (16) I am not going to pretend I can convince anyone of the intellectual properties of *Big Brother's* game. Most contestants are absurd, desperate or painfully shallow, and it is clear that the creators favour sensationalism over substance. The point is, while the content of the show may be puerile, the debate it can inspire is not. Lastly, I wish to point out that I stick strictly to the daily terrestrial show. One of my teaching assistants prefers the 'pure' unedited version on E4. We compare notes, and often find that we are watching very different versions of the same events. As a one-time media studies teacher, I believe that it is important to teach young people about the power (for good and evil) the media holds – and how a few careful snips in the cutting room can distort and conceal. *Big Brother* is a perfect and accessible example of this, providing ample lesson material on how to be wise to the real 'big brothers' of this world.

Louisa Leaman, special needs teacher

Source: adapted from *The Times Educational Supplement*, 28 July 2006

Section B**Sources for Questions 2 to 5**

Source B

An Ofsted report published last autumn found that many of the 150 locally devised syllabuses that determine what is taught in RE lessons are inadequate. As a result, according to its findings, pupils are struggling to reach the required standards. Few teachers have qualifications in RE and it can no longer be assumed that they have any real experience of religion or understanding of worship and belief.

The problem with RE in school is not just a shortage of qualified teachers. The fact is that the politicians, who are ultimately responsible for what is taught in schools, are frightened to offer children any experience of that mixture of doctrine, worship and prayer which is religion. Knowledge without experience is worthless. That is why so many parents want their children in a faith school.

The 14 000 state schools with no religious affiliation should rely on their pastoral care systems and social education programmes to develop the moral responsibility of pupils. Scrap RE and devote more time to maths and English.

Source: adapted from CHRIS WOODHEAD, 'Let's banish God from the classroom',
The Sunday Times, 14 July 2005

Source C

The disappearance of God, according to philosophers like Nietzsche and sociologists like Weber, became the spirit of the modern age. The more urbanised, industrialised and educated our society became, the less religious, and more secularised it would be. And it is true that institutionalised religion continues to decline steadily, with church attendance rates dropping below 20% even in Catholic Spain, Italy and Ireland, and priests dying out and not being replaced. Religion no longer lays down the blueprint for the operation of society and politics, and people like Richard Dawkins preach absolute belief in science, reason and progress and call for the eradication of religion's "evil superstitions".

But religion has not withered away as predicted and can be said to be on the ascendancy. Individual interest in religion is booming with millions going on pilgrimage to Mecca and to Lourdes. Forms of alternative spirituality such as the Alexander technique, Buddhism, New Age beliefs, herbalism, reiki and yoga are also thriving.

It is ironic that the further modern humans seem to move from religion and its many restraints, the more they thirst for its certainty and coherence; the greater their sense of emptiness and meaninglessness, the deeper their need for spiritual fullness and a moral horizon.

Source: adapted from SOUMAYA GHANNOUSHI, 'God is not dead', *The Guardian*, 9 November 2007

Turn over ►

Source D

According to Conservative leader, David Cameron, Britain exhibits symptoms of a society that is broken; in which stable two-parent families are becoming the exception; where individual rights have blunted our sense of duty and responsibility; and where successive generations of children face a life devoid of hope or dignity.

The Centre for Social Justice, a think-tank founded by former Tory party leader Iain Duncan Smith, estimates there are one million people living in 'severe poverty' in areas with the highest levels of teenage pregnancy in Europe and where every year 30 000 children leave school with no educational qualifications.

According to the centre there are several 'drivers' of poverty and the broken society including welfare dependency, educational failure and serious personal debt. But the key factor is the decline of marriage – figures published this year show the lowest total of marriages for 112 years.

Keeping families together is the key to mending a broken society – that's the way to turn society around.

Source: adapted from a speech by PAUL KENDALL, 'Broken Britain – can we fix it?', *The Sunday Telegraph*, 12 July 2009

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