

**60 TEXTS
FOR READING
AND DISCUSSION**

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1. Music

When I was a child I had violin lessons for six or seven years. Music gave me a lot of pleasure and I used to dream of being a professional musician. But as time went on I realised that I would never reach that standard, mainly because I didn't have a good enough ear. So I gradually lost interest in the violin, and when I left school I stopped playing altogether. I may take up the violin again one of these days, but it will have to wait until I have time to practise properly.

Listening to music is a different matter. I go to concerts when I have time and I often listen to music when I am working (though I sometimes find it hard to concentrate on music and work at the same time). My tastes are quite varied. I like a lot of classical music (particularly Bach, Handel, Beethoven and Stravinsky), but opera leaves me cold. I like modern jazz very much, and I have a passion for British and American folk music. The one thing I really can't stand is pop music, especially if it's played loud.

2. Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart

The composer Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart was born in Salzburg, Austria in 1756, with an extraordinary musical talent. The son of a musician, at the age of three he started to play notes on the clavichord (an early kind of piano). He composed his first piece of music when he was five years old, and he first performed in public at the age of six. The boy travelled around Europe with his father and sister, performing in many countries. When he was thirteen he went to Rome, where the Pope praised his wonderful talent. Wherever he performed as a child, he was a great success.

He started to work at the age of fifteen. For a time, he worked for Emperor Joseph of Austria, but the Emperor didn't pay him very well and Mozart's family had very little money. Mozart was very hardworking. He composed an enormous amount of music. But some people in his world didn't like his talent, and towards the end of his life, he stopped public performances and earned money teaching. He was only 35 when he died, and he was never rich in his lifetime. But nearly 250 years later, recordings of his music make millions of dollars each year.

3. My Favourite Singer

My favourite singer is Michael Jackson. I like his songs very much because they are full of energy and very melodic. I also like the way he dances.

There were nine children in Michael's family. They lived in a small four-room house. Today he lives in a house which has seventeen rooms downstairs and sixteen rooms upstairs. It stands in 2,700 acres of ground. Besides the house there are guest houses, a golf course, a swimming pool, tennis courts, stables, gardens, lakes, forests and a zoo.

A lot of strange stories are told about Jackson. It's difficult to decide whether they are true or not. Michael never gives interviews and is rarely seen in public, except on stage. Certainly his behaviour may seem eccentric. In public he often wears a face mask to protect himself from germs, he sleeps inside an oxygen capsule, which he believes will help him to live longer. But his manager says that Jackson isn't eccentric. He is just shy. Michael sang in public for the first time when he was five. Since that time he has always been in the public eye. And since that time he has been working like a grown-up.

There were times when he came home from school and he only had time to put his books and get ready for the studio. He often sang until late at night, even if it was past his bedtime. There was a park across the street from the studio, and Michael looked at the kids playing games. And he just stared at them in wonder — he couldn't imagine such freedom, such a carefree life.

Now he says about himself that in the crowd he is afraid, on stage he is safe. Off stage he feels happiest with animals and children. He is well-known for his childish tastes. It's not a secret that his favourite hero is Peter Pan.

Michael has been called "the child who never grew up", but I think he is a grown-up who was never allowed to be a child.

Whether he is crazy, childish, eccentric or just shy, he is no fool. He has created a brilliantly successful image, he makes a lot of money and spends it on the things he wants. Who wouldn't like to do the same?

4. William Hogarth

William Hogarth (1697-1764), was a great English painter and engraver, who is famous for his portrayals of human weaknesses. He was born in London.

His father was a schoolmaster. From childhood, Hogarth showed a talent for drawing. He was apprenticed to a silverplate engraver until 1720 when he went into his own business as an engraver. He also studied painting at the art school of Sir James Thornhill, and in 1729 he married Thornhill's daughter.

Hogarth's earliest completed series of six paintings for which he first became famous was *The Harlot's Progress*, completed in 1731. This was followed by two other series, *A Rake's Progress*, eight paintings, and *Marriage a la Mode*, six paintings. He made engravings of all these.

In all his paintings Hogarth tried to do the same things. He wanted his paintings to be like a play. Instead of actors on a stage speaking parts, he wanted his paintings to be his stage and the men and women he drew to be his actors and to tell a story. He tried to have them tell their story by certain actions and movements. Although he is often humorous in the way in which he drew things, he never softened or made his subjects pleasant if they were not so.

Because these pictures show wit and are often entertaining, at times Hogarth's talent as a fine portrait painter have been overlooked. His portraits show the same harmony in colour, direct handling of subject, and excellent composition as his storytelling pictures. Some of his more famous portraits are of Peg Woffington, himself with his dog Trump, his sister Mary Hogarth, and also those of Lavinia Fenton and of David Garrick, a famous English actor. Most of Hogarth's pictures can be seen in the National Gallery in London.

5. Thomas Gainsborough

Thomas Gainsborough (1727-1788), one of the greatest masters of the English school, was a portraitist and a landscape painter. His portraits are painted in clear tones. Blue and green are predominant colours. One of the most famous works is *the portrait of the Duchess of Beaufort*. He managed to create a true impression of the sitter. Gainsborough greatly influenced the English school of landscape painting. He was the first English artist to paint his native countryside so sincerely. His works contain much poetry and music. He is sometimes considered the forerunner of the impressionists. Gainsborough was the antithesis of the businesslike Reynolds. He was very poetic by his nature, he abhorred rules and cared little about the old masters. By necessity a portraitist he was by inclination a landscapist.

6. "The Morning Walk" By Thomas Gainsborough

Gainsborough is famous for his brilliant sense of composition, harmony and form. In the foreground of the picture you see a pretty slim young woman of about 25 and an elegant young man. The woman has a very fashionable long dress on, her face is attractive. She has dreamy blue eyes, and thick curly golden hair. As for the man, he is tall and handsome, the features of his face are pleasant and expressive. His eyes are dark, his look is proud, his mouth is rather large, his nose is straight, and he has a classical strong figure. I am sure that the young people are happy because they are young, they are in love, because the day is fine, and life is beautiful. It is an idyllic scene in a romantic landscape. Thanks to the soft colour treatment the picture has a lyrical and poetic atmosphere. (1785, oil on canvas, National Gallery, London)

7. Abstract Art

Have you ever seen a painting that puzzled you? Perhaps you could not see anything "real" or "natural" in it. Perhaps it seemed a jumble of lines and colours. You were probably looking at an example of abstract art.

Before the 20th century, most artists showed things more or less as they might look to an observer. Their scenes were recognisable. Even when they painted imaginary scenes, the elements of the picture could usually be identified.

Of course, artists have always put their own personalities into their paintings. A painting by Van Gogh, for example, can easily be recognised — it has his personal stamp. It shows the way Van Gogh looked at real things. Because of his particular style, his paintings look strange to many people. But in his art, people are still recognisable as people. No tree ever looked quite like a Van Gogh tree (he painted trees as great swirling figures), but his trees are still clearly trees.

Individual painters have always experimented with unusual ways of showing real objects. But in the 21st century artists in large numbers began to break away from realistic ways of painting. Many artists seemed to be saying, "If you want an accurate picture of a scene, buy a photograph or a picture postcard." They began to paint life in different ways. They concentrated on form, colour and shape, and avoided any attempt to tell a story or show a scene naturally.

The kind of art just described is often called abstract art. Once upon a time it was a revolutionary movement. Now it has won acceptance. Most museums have examples of abstract art. Some modern museums contain only abstract art.

Great numbers of people still prefer a more realistic art. But even the tastes of these people have been shaped, in part, by the abstract artists. Modern design has been influenced by abstract art. Even the floor covering in your kitchen may have been copied from the design of an abstract artist.

8. Pablo Picasso

Pablo Picasso was born in Spain in 1881 and lived for 91 years. For most of his life he lived in Paris, France. When he died his mansion was turned into Museum Picasso, where his art can be seen today.

People say Picasso could draw before he could walk, with two well known paintings being achieved at the ages of 9 and 13. When Picasso was a child, pictures by Vincent Van Gogh and Paul Cezanne were the modern masterpieces. These paintings looked nothing like real life. With Picasso's fantastic imagination he took those ideas even further. He started to paint about what he knew about the object or person. Anything solid was broken down into flattened, cut out 'pieces' so you could see all around it. The pieces were shaped like patterns, or cubes, so the new style was called 'Cubism'. When cubism first appeared some critics said it was a complete disaster. Some still do, though the style was Picasso's first gift to the art world. He didn't stop there.

Picasso once said that "a head has an eye, nose, ear and mouth and you can put them anywhere in a picture but the head remains a head". The exciting thing about Picasso was that he kept developing new styles, constantly switching between them.

It is impossible to label his work for one simple reason — Picasso was a genius in just the same way that Mozart magically composed music. Style didn't bother him and he painted and sculptured in any way he wanted. A few years after his cubism period he painted a portrait of his wife, Olga, a Russian ballerina in a peaceful and calm way.

Unlike many other artists Picasso wasn't poor. He had been successful nearly all his life and so had plenty of money. He lived in an elegant flat in a fashionable Paris street. Picasso constantly tried out new forms of art and invented a new style which, strangely, remained a secret for most of his life — his sculptures. What made them so new and different was that he built them rather than carved them. He loved animals and built sculptures of them from materials he found just lying around, often in rubbish heaps.

One of Picasso's most striking animal sculptures grew out of the handle bars and saddle of an old bike. He found them by chance and decided they were in fact a bull's head. It is even more powerful because Picasso made it during the second World War when Paris was occupied by the Nazi German Army. The Bull is said to be like a menacing enemy.

9. Travelling by Train

When I was sent to school in England, I used to travel by train from London to Salonica in Greece and back once a year for my summer holidays with my two younger brothers. We used to go third class, sitting on hard wooden seats for three days and three nights. Once I got older, I found that I could do the journey by going through Germany, second class, in considerable comfort, having a sleeper at night only. At that time the Germans offered a sixty per cent discount on journeys through their country.

I used to love those journeys through beautiful scenery, without any worries or problems, changing trains in Munich and having a good lunch there one other less important things like cooking. We also like the same music and that is important when you spend a lot of time together.

When I'm feeling down or when I need to talk to somebody, I can always call him. Recently, I had some problem and he was great - he's a really good listener. He just lets you speak and he listens.

But he isn't perfect! He's always late for everything and he never says sorry. The last time I saw him was last weekend. We arranged to meet at four o'clock to play football, and he arrived at half past six! It was nearly dark. Oh well, nobody's perfect, are they? He's still a really good mate.

10. Riding a Bicycle

More people are riding bicycles these days. Of course it is healthier and cheaper to travel by bike, but it is certainly not safer. We often hear about bicycle accidents. There are two main problems. Firstly, most towns do little for cyclists. For example, there are very few special cycle lanes or tracks in busy areas. And secondly, motorists just do not think about cyclists. Too often they think that cyclists get in their way. This makes them angry.

I think our towns should make plans to help cyclists in their area. They should also put up large advertisements which ask motorists and cyclists to be more careful.

11. Holidays

The most popular kind of holiday in many countries is simply to get into the car and drive to a destination such as one of the memorials, national parks, lakes and rivers or seashores. Outdoor recreation may be to go hiking and camping with a tent. Foreign travel has always been popular. Nowadays, more people than before can afford their dream of travelling abroad.

In some cultures leisure is seen as time for development, both of mind and body. At weekends, a lot of people go in for painting, pottery or playing musical instruments and so on. In our country a lot of people take their pleasure seriously. They like to have an aim, even when spending the time which is entirely their own. It is difficult to imagine people going aimlessly for a walk in the country. They will go to pick mushrooms, or berries, or visit a place of historical importance, to walk a long distance as a training exercise, or go for a swim at the local beach.

People in our country have now more leisure time and money than ever before. It is therefore possible to spend the weekends in many new ways, and to get away from home for a couple of days. Most people have over twenty days' holiday a year. This gives an opportunity for holidays in the country or at the seaside.

12. What Is a Hobby?

In the 16th century a favourite toy for children of all ages was the hobbyhorse. In appearance a hobbyhorse could be as simple as a stick, or it could have a decorated wooden framework with an imitation horse's head attached.

Whether simple or elaborate, children used them for the games of the time involving war and knighthood, much as children in the early part of the 20th century played cowboys and Indians. In time the popularity of the hobbyhorse declined, but the pleasure of doing something outside the routine activities of daily life had brought a new word into the language, the word hobby, which is a shortened form of hobbyhorse.

Hobbies today include a vast range of activities. The definition that best covers all these activities is probably constructive leisure-time activities. It excludes games and leaves out purely spectator activities like watching television.

It also excludes schooling and work done to make a living. A hobby, like playing with a hobbyhorse, is an activity apart from the ordinary routines of life. It should encourage the use of creativity and imagination and bring the reward of learning. Some hobbies bring monetary rewards as well.

13. Stamp-Collecting

Stamp-collecting can be a very interesting pastime. Stamps come in many different colours and sizes. They look beautiful when assembled together in a collection, and they teach us so much about the history and culture of other countries. Many people begin collecting stamps when they are children, usually having been encouraged by a parent or other relative. Some of the world's most famous people have collected stamps. Bill Clinton built up a fine collection in his youth, and Queen Elizabeth has the world's largest collection. Despite this fact, stamp-collecting is still thought by many to be boring. In fact, making your own collection of stamps is a rewarding experience, and the end product can be worth a lot of money. The world's oldest stamp, which originally cost one penny, is now worth a fortune. So why not give collecting a try and see for yourself?

14. Toys

Toys have formed part of human culture since the earliest times. Every society has provided its children with imitation of human beings or animals, and dolls are probably the oldest form of toy. No dolls have been found in prehistoric graves, but this may be because they were made of materials like wood or cloth that have perished. Nevertheless, a doll with movable arms has been found in a Babylonian grave, and there were certainly dolls in Egypt over six thousand years ago.

Other ancient toys include balls and sticks, and it is clear that most games requiring physical action were originally introduced to train boys in the art of warfare³. Sometimes the result went beyond the inventors' intention. Football was banned in England in the reign⁵ of Queen Elizabeth I because it became too violent. But boys continued to play with toy soldiers and weapons. We have examples dating from the Middle Ages.

Moving toys also have a long history. The Chinese developed explosive toy weapons from the use of fireworks, and many early toys employed wheels⁶. Modern technology has made possible the production of sophisticated moving toys like model railways, aircraft controlled by radio, and dolls that can walk.

Children need toys because many adult skills are developed from playing with them. Children who learn to construct model aircraft are using their hands to a purpose; children who solve jigsaw puzzles are using their minds. Above all, children's imagination is stimulated by playing with objects.

But it is not clear that giving children particular toys changes the nature of their games, or that the most elaborate toys will be the ones they like most. Many parents are upset to find that two or three days after Christmas or a child's birthday, the expensive presents they bought have been broken or are lying in a corner of the room, and the child is once again happily building an imaginary castle with a few pieces of wood or playing with an old teddy bear the parents think is ugly and should be thrown away.

15. Books or Films?

Nowadays, people prefer going to the cinema to reading the same story in a book. Both forms of entertainment have their advantages and disadvantages.

On the one hand, books help to develop your imagination. You can decide what the characters and places in the story look like, whereas in the film you are given one interpretation, which may not be the best. Furthermore, the enjoyment from a book lasts much longer than from a film and you can read it wherever and whenever you want. Another disadvantage of films is that they sometimes cut out the most interesting parts of the book or change the story completely.

On the other hand, films are very visual, and this makes the story more memorable. Moreover, special effects are so good that most of the scenes from a book can be shown on the screen. Some people prefer watching film versions because it takes fewer efforts than reading. As for me, I think it is always better to read the story first and then see it at the cinema if you want to make a comparison.

16. My Favourite Actor

David Duchovny was born in New York City on the 7th of August, 1960. His father is a writer and his mother is a housewife. Before David was born his parents had been English teachers. When his parents divorced, David was raised by his mother, along with his sister Laurie and his brother Daniel.

David went to a prestigious private school in Manhattan. "He was a very bright kid with a brilliant sense of humour," his father remembers. "At school he was always top of the class." After school he entered Princeton University. Then he studied English Literature at Yale University and worked as a teaching assistant.

David was working at his PhD thesis at Yale when one of his friends suggested that he should try acting classes.

Duchovny's PhD thesis, Magic and Technology in Contemporary Fiction and Poetry was never finished. He moved to Hollywood.

His mother was angry when he had given up studying. Even now, when she speaks to him on the phone, she always asks him: "When are you going to finish your thesis?" He laughs and says: "Later, later."

David's first year in Hollywood was very hard. He was unemployed and could hardly make both ends meet. Luckily, he was invited to play in a commercial and later in a feature film. "Acting gave me a sense of team and I liked this very much," David says.

Very soon Duchovny appeared in such feature films as Chaplin, Beethoven and California. His work in the movies attracted the attention of Chris Carter, the famous creator of The X-Files. A TV series weren't in Duchovny's plans but he was impressed by the script for The X-Files. So he became agent Fox Mulder.

David is very surprised not only by the success of The X-Files but by his own personal popularity.

Actors who have worked with him describe him as modest, professional and hard-working. David is fond of sports. He played basketball and baseball at school and university. He keeps in shape with jogging and yoga exercises.

He writes poetry, but, as he says, he does not read it in public any more.

17. Steven Spielberg

Over the last thirty years, Spielberg has directed or produced some of the most successful films of all time.

Steven Spielberg was born in Cincinnati, Ohio, in 1947 and was interested in cinema from a very early age. He started making films when he was just 12 years old and, by the time he finished college, he had directed at least eight amateur works. In 1970, Spielberg's talent came to the attention of the film studio Universal Pictures and he signed a contract to direct films for television. In 1975, the thriller Jaws gave him his first big success. This film established Spielberg's reputation and name and was followed by many action adventure films, such as Gremlins, Back to Future and others. Soon, every 212 film Spielberg worked on became a great success, both financially and artistically.

The film that brought Spielberg wide recognition was the science fiction fantasy ET: the Extraterrestrial, which was released in 1982. Many people think this heart-warming film is Spielberg's best. At the same time, ET made more money than any film had ever made, but the record was broken eleven years later when Spielberg's Jurassic Park, featuring amazing and terrifying computer-created dinosaurs, was released. Spielberg's influence on popular American culture continues to grow.

18. The Future Of the Book — If It Has a Future

The death of the book has been predicted for centuries. There were those who thought that the invention of printing heralded the end of civilisation. Cinema, radio and television have all been presented as the murderers of our most treasured cultural icon. The Internet is the latest suspect to hold the smoking gun.

The problem is that this is a murder without a victim. More books are being published than ever before. The mass media of the twentieth century have generated print, not destroyed it. Books derived from movies and broadcasts groan on the shelves of bookshops throughout the world. Newspapers are filled with stories about media people, both in reality and in the soapy world, which they inhabit. Far from killing the book, the media have been one of its saviours. Computing, and the development of the Internet, may be different. Some books are indeed being replaced by electronic media. Who wants to use a twenty-volume encyclopaedia when information can be retrieved instantaneously from a CD-ROM?

Why should a lawyer spend time (and a client's money) searching through massive tomes, when what is sought can be found in seconds from a database? But no one will lie in bed reading a novel from a CD-ROM. Even with laptops, electronic books are not easily transportable.

This medium, so powerful and so pervasive, has its limits just like any other. It is, of course, the greatest revolution in communications since the invention of printing and arguably comparable in its impact with the invention of writing itself. The marriage of computing and telecommunications has finally broken the tyrannies of time and distance to which we have been subjected since the dawn of time. But reading — and the books, magazines and newspapers that we read — still have a part to play. They will continue to instruct, amuse, influence and infuriate for decades and centuries to come.

19. Robert Burns

Robert Burns was born in 1759 and was the eldest of 7 children, growing up in a life of poverty and hard farm work. His father made sure that his sons were well educated and employed a private tutor to teach them English, French, Latin, and even Philosophy. It was the kind of education that rich children of the day might have had, certainly not the son of a poor farmer.

When Robert wasn't having lessons he would help his father on the farm. In his spare time he started to write poetry. In 1784 Robert's father died leaving Robert with his mother, and the rest of the family, to support. The farm was a failure, the crops wouldn't grow and to make matters worse, Robert had fallen in love with Jean Anna.

They wanted to marry but Jean's father disapproved. Burns was a poor farmer with little money and not good enough for his daughter.

Burns was fed up and planned to emigrate from Scotland to Jamaica and in order to make some money for the voyage he decided to print some of his poems. When *Poems Chiefly in the Scottish Dialect* was published, Burns became famous overnight and editions appeared all over the world.

Burns didn't just write poems, he was Scotland's first collector of folk songs. In 1787 he set off on a journey around Scotland, jotting down fragments of old songs like *Auld Lang Syne*, often rewriting them into the versions we know today.

In 1788 Burns and Jean Arma married and went to live at Ellisland Farm. There he wrote his famous *Tar O 'Shanter* — a tale of a farmer who, after a night of drinking, stumbles across some dancing witches on his way home.

Burns and his family left Ellisland and moved to Dumfries in 1793. *My love is Like a Red Red Rose* was written soon after.

By 1796 Burns had become dangerously ill and on the 21st of July he died, aged just 37 years old. Scotland had lost one of its best loved poets and a national hero. Burns dreamt of immortality and wanted to be the poet of Scotland. His dream came true and today his work is loved by millions all over the world.

20. Mark Twain

Mark Twain is one of America's most famous authors. He wrote many books, *IVI* including *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer* and *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*. Mark Twain's own life was interesting enough to be a book.

Twain was born in 1835 in the state of Missouri, near the Mississippi River. He came from a poor family. His father died when he was twelve, so he had to leave school. While he was still a boy, he worked as a riverboat pilot. He steered boats up and down the long Mississippi River. The Civil War, which started in 1861, made travelling on the Mississippi impossible.

Twain then went west to Nevada. There he worked on a newspaper. In 1864 he went to California to find gold. Twain did not have much luck as a gold miner. He left California to travel in Europe. Twain wrote a book about his trips around Europe.

But the most important influence on Twain and his books was the Mississippi River. When Twain finally settled down, he lived in a house with a porch that looked like the deck of a riverboat. *Huckleberry Finn*, Twain's greatest book, is about the adventures of a boy on the Mississippi River. Another of Twain's books is called *Life on the Mississippi*.

In fact, even the name Mark Twain comes from the Mississippi. Mark Twain's real name was Samuel Langhorne Clemens. On the river Samuel Clemens often heard the boatmen shout "Mark twain!" This meant the water was twelve feet deep. When Samuel Clemens began to write he chose for himself the name Mark Twain.

21. J.K. Rowling

J.K. Rowling's life is a bit like a fairytale. Only a few years ago she lived on a small income in a little flat in Edinburgh. Today she lives in a big house in London. The reason for this fantastic change in fortune is a little boy called Harry Potter. The Potter books have become a tremendous publishing success and Rowling's name is heard in every playground the world over.

J.K. Rowling was educated at Exeter University, and went on to become a teacher of English abroad. There she met a man, married him and had a baby girl. Unfortunately, the marriage didn't last, leaving Rowling a single parent. She wrote the first of the Harry Potter

books, Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone, on pieces of paper in a cafe while her baby daughter was sleeping in a pram.

The first Harry Potter book won no fewer than three awards. But that was not the end of Rowling's success. The five books published so far have now sold over 30 million copies worldwide and have been translated into thirty-three languages. J.K. Rowling plans to write seven Harry books in total — one for each year of Harry's schooling. She hasn't started to write her next book but already orders are flooding in. Booksellers say that this is the first time in publishing history that so many advance orders have been received for an unwritten book. It seems that J.K. Rowling's success is unstoppable.

22. My Favourite Literary Character

Agatha Christie's novels are popular all over the world. Her success as a detective writer can be explained by brilliantly constructed plots of novels and the characters of the two detectives who solve mysteries in her books. One of them is Hercule Poirot, a retired Belgian police officer, who appears on the pages of many of her novels. With a few details in his appearance, Agatha Christie creates a very vivid character. He is short, with an egg-shaped head and a big moustache. He is a little bit old-fashioned and very particular about his clothes. When people meet him for the first time they often don't take him seriously. Hercule Poirot maybe selfish, eccentric and sometimes even funny but he has a lot of wisdom and philosophical insight that enable him to solve crimes. His motto is "method, order and little grey cells". He is always cheerful and optimistic. His belief that the strength of human intellect is unlimited makes him a very attractive person.

Hercule Poirot is always on the side of justice. He not only solves crimes but he also helps honest people who get into trouble. When he undertakes a criminal investigation you can always be sure that bad people will be punished and good people will be rewarded. This makes Hercule Poirot one of my favourite characters.

23. Michael Jordan

Michael Jordan is one of the most talented athletes in history. He won six National Basketball Association titles, he had sport shoes named after him, he even starred in a Hollywood film. Jordan is an international superstar. But success for Michael Jordan was never a matter of luck. It was always a matter of talent and hard work.

Michael Jordan was born in Brooklyn, New York, in 1963. He was the fourth of five children, so he learned to compete young. As a child, Michael was very athletic. He played basketball, baseball and football, but his favourite sport was baseball. However, this soon changed when he started playing basketball with his older and taller brother Larry. Larry kept on beating Michael when they played one-to-one. Michael didn't like losing, so he worked hard to become a better player. His basketball gradually improved, but in 1978 he suffered a big disappointment. He was dropped from his High School basketball team. However, Michael didn't give up. Instead he trained harder and longer, and as a result was soon playing again.

Today Michael Jordan has scored over 30,000 points in basketball games all over the world. Over 50% of American children have voted him their idol. However, it's not just his basketball skills that have made Jordan popular. It's his courage, determination and positive approach to life. "I can accept failure," he once said, "but I can't accept not trying."

24. My Favourite Sport

A. I think that sport is supposed to be for enjoyment and for the good feeling that is produced when the body has done some physical work. Many people nowadays work in offices where they have to sit at desks for seven or eight hours a day. Children may spend long hours sitting at desks at school or doing their homework. For this reason we feel the need for exercise at the end of the day and the best way to get rid of tension is to do some sport.

I have always enjoyed skiing, so when I saw some people snowboarding, I decided to give it a try. It was more difficult to do than I expected. At first I found that I could not keep my balance on a board as easily as on skis, and it was almost Impossible for me to go any distance without falling. I hate failing at any sport, so I continued trying and I finally managed to go all the way down the slope without an accident. It was then that I realized what a great sport it is, and now I'd rather go snowboarding than skiing any day.

B. Whether you like running around a track or prefer sitting indoors playing chess, sports and hobbies nowadays are so numerous that there is something to suit everyone. The pace of life today is so fast and stressful that being able to do something relaxing is becoming more and more important. The need for exercise has led to huge growth of the sports industry. But the importance of less active hobbies, such as chess or even stamp collecting, should not be ignored. For some people, mental activity is just as beneficial as any physical sport. Unfortunately, the influence of television and the growing use of home computers often mean that people lack the willingness to take up other interests.

25. Studying for Exams

If you want to do your best in an exam, you should be relaxed and so one of the best things to do is to take regular breaks, even if they are only for a few minutes. During revision time, you should take some more time off to go for a walk or play your favourite sport. It is a mistake to give up all physical activity. Exercise can get you to relax. You should spend at least twenty minutes doing something different every day. Parents don't like it when their teenage children spend hours on the phone, but in fact, chatting to a friend is very good for you. Parents think that children are wasting time and money. But research says talking to friends gives you a chance to relax, and this will make the time you spend studying more effective.

26. Olga Korbut

To be successful in sport takes ambition and dedication. It is also necessary to have determination to succeed. Most famous sports people began training during their childhood. Olga Korbut started training at the age of eight. When Olga was eleven, Renald Knysh became her personal coach. It was the 1972 Munich Olympics which made her the most sensational gymnast to date in the sport's history. She won gold medals for her brilliant performance on the balance beam and in the floor exercise. She also won the silver medal on the uneven bars. Following the 1972 Games, Korbut toured the world as an international heroine. In 1973, she was named Female Athlete of the year, Sportswoman of the Year and Athlete of the Year.

27. The Key to Good Health

In our busy modern world it is all too easy to neglect our health. A healthy lifestyle is, however, a necessity for a long and happy life. So how can we stay healthy? To begin with, we should eat healthily. Healthy eating is undoubtedly the key to general well-being.

Our bodies are made of what we eat. Sweets, chocolates and cakes are fine, but trouble arises when people just can't leave them alone, greedily eating everything that comes along. Make a careful choice when it comes to desserts. A diet rich in fibre, with fruit, vegetables, a moderate amount of fat and low in sugar is the optimum one. Meat should be more often replaced with fish, pulses and dairy products, and fast food and artificial preservatives cut out altogether. A diet based on these ingredients gives the body essential nutrients and stabilizes the weight.

Secondly, we can take exercise. This may be anything from sports to walking and taking the stairs instead of the lift.

Finally, we can take up a hobby, whatever we enjoy doing. This will improve our mental and emotional health, and help to beat stress. All these recommendations can help us to lead a healthier life.

28. Smoking

The World Health Organization reports that 3.5 million people die every year from tobacco related diseases. Half of these deaths occur¹ in industrial countries. Anti-smoking campaigns have been started in most developed countries — banning² tobacco advertising in the mass media, increasing cigarette taxes and requiring health warnings on cigarette packages.

For the first time in a quarter of a century the number of women smoking is on an increase⁵. Statistics show that it's the youngest women who are increasingly taking up⁶ the habit.

The habit is on an increase among teenage girls while it is falling in all other groups of the population. Now almost one in three girls of school-leaving age are smokers. Teenage girls who smoke believe cigarettes help keep them slim, make them look grown-up and control stress,

health experts say. And while they know the risks to their future health, they would still rather smoke.

Health experts are puzzled as to why the anti-tobacco message is not reaching them. Dr. Anne Charlton said "We do not really know why they keep taking up smoking when everyone is giving up." Teenage girls are twice as likely to start smoking if one of their parents is a smoker. They probably have a best friend who smokes and parents who do not disapprove of their taking up the habit. They are more likely to leave school at 16.

Fifty per cent of girls who leave school to start a career in hairdressing are smokers. In nursing the figure is 44 per cent and around 34 per cent in secretarial work. Dr. Charlton said: "The rates are less among those who go to university. The smokers are usually the ones who do not do well at school and show few signs of wanting to. They mistakenly believe it helps to keep their weight down, although they have no weight problem in the first place".

29. Captain James Cook

James Cook, the famous captain, explorer and navigator, was born in Marton, a Yorkshire village, on October 27, 1728. His father was a poor farm labourer who worked hard to feed and clothe his seven children. Young James attended school until he was twelve and it was there that he developed love of mathematics. However, the time soon came for the boy to earn his living. He left school and followed in his father's footsteps until he found work on a coal ship at the age of 18.

Cook was ambitious and loved the sea and so in 1755 he joined the navy as a sailor. Soon he was promoted to Master's mate because of his extraordinary ability as a seaman. Four years later, in command of his own ship he sailed to North America. Cook's genius in maths helped him to chart the channel of the St Lawrence River with such accuracy that his maps were being used up until the twentieth century.

During his many voyages Cook discovered the east coast of Australia and explored the coasts of Canada, North America and New Zealand. Moreover, Cook and his crew were the first men to sail around the Antarctic. James Cook's life was cut short in 1779, in Hawaii, when he was fatally wounded during a quarrel. He was fifty-one years old.

30. Loch Ness Monster

Loch Ness is a huge lake in Northern Scotland. It is the third largest fresh-water lake in Europe. The lake has been the centre of one of the world's most famous mysteries for centuries: it is said to be the home of the Loch Ness Monster.

For thousands of years there have been stories about an enormous creature in the lake, but no one has ever succeeded in filming or catching it. No one can be really sure that they have seen it, although some people say that they have taken photos of it. The monster could be the product of people's powerful imagination. But many people believe that the stories are not just invented. There must be some truth in them, they say.

All the evidence suggests that there might be something in the water of Loch Ness. We cannot say that there is definitely no monster there. It could be a huge fish, or it could be some sort of dinosaur. Or are all those stories the inventions of people's imagination?

31. Stonehenge

No ancient monument, except perhaps the Great Pyramid of Egypt, has been the subject of as much speculation as England's Stonehenge. It is such an amazing structure that people come from all parts of the world to see it. One early historian said Stonehenge meant 'hanging stones' because they seem to hang in the air. He meant the horizontal stones placed on top of the vertical ones.

There are many stories about Stonehenge but everything is doubtful, nothing is certain. We don't know how it was built nor why and we probably will never know. Archaeologists believe that the monument was under construction for nearly 2000 years. What caused primitive people to devote so much time and energy to this astounding project? Some archaeologists say one thing and others insist on something quite different. Everyone agrees on the point, however: Stonehenge was a kind of temple. In 1901 a British astronomer, Sir Norman Lockyer, completed the study of the theory that Stonehenge was a kind of calendar-computer. Others have made further studies, continuing this approach. In 1963 another astronomer, Gerald Hawkins, stated that each stone in the monument lined up with at least one other stone to point to some position

of the sun or moon. It seems so possible that this was an accurate method of determining the length of the year that today it is the most popular theory of all.

32. The Romans on the British Isles

The Romans used to be masters of nearly all that part of Britain which is now called England. At first they had to fight many battles, but after a time the Britons submitted to the Romans. For nearly four hundred years the Romans stayed in the country, and today we can still find many marks of the things that they did when they were here.

The Romans were great builders. They knew how to erect large buildings of stone and especially of brick. Most of the buildings which they built in Britain have fallen into ruin, but parts of them have been found in many places. And enough is left to show how beautiful the buildings must have been when they were new.

But though the Romans were famous as builders of houses, they were still more famous as makers of roads. The Romans were the first people to make great roads from one end of England to the other. The roads were paved with stone and they ran in a straight line from one town to another.

Besides their buildings and their roads, the Romans have also left us a wonderful mark on the border between England and Scotland. After the Romans had made peace in that part of Britain which we now call England, they found that they were often troubled by enemies who came down from the country which we now call Scotland. These enemies were known as 'Picts'. The Romans built a great wall right across the country to keep them out.

33. British Customs and Traditions

Every country has its own traditions, some of which have existed for centuries. In my opinion we should do everything possible to preserve them.

Some people think that in today's high-tech world traditional celebrations are too old-fashioned and irrelevant to our lives. However, events such as Carnival are important, as they bring communities together and make us think about other people and not just computers.

Another argument against traditional festivals is that they are expensive to organize. To some extent this is true, particularly when there are firework displays or parades. On the other hand, it is a small price to pay for brightening up our lives with entertainment and colour. Moreover, some celebrations attract many tourists and their money.

Finally, although I agree that some traditional customs have lost their original significance, they can provide an opportunity for us to learn about our past. For example, Bonfire Night teaches British children about a particular period of their country's history.

I think traditional celebrations are a source of great pleasure and interest and they are certainly worth keeping.

34. Burns Night

Burns Night is a famous Scottish celebration which is held on 25th January. It is the anniversary of the birth of the man who is considered Scotland's great national poet. His name is Robert Burns and he lived in the second half of the eighteenth century. Burns Night usually consists of an evening meal which features traditional Scottish dishes. The most important part of the meal is 'haggis': a dish made from sheep's organs which is served with potatoes. The people who attend Burns Night sing traditional Scottish songs. A famous song that everybody in Britain knows is "Auld lang syne". It is about remembering good times in the past. It was Robert Burns who wrote the words, and it is now the best known traditional Scottish song. Another famous poem which he wrote is read out when the haggis is put on the dinner table. There is usually bagpipe music to announce the arrival of the haggis. The person who plays the Scottish bagpipes (the piper) wears a traditional Scottish costume - a skirt called a 'kilt'. Afterwards, everyone who wants to takes part in traditional Scottish dancing.

35. Time For Tea

The British and tea are inseparable. 8 out of 10 people in Britain drink tea every day and Britain imports about 20% of all the world's tea. Tea makes up about half of all that a British person drinks. Tea has even played a part in British literature and history.

Do you remember the Mad Hatter's tea party in Alice in Wonderland? And there was the "Boston Tea Party" when a group of Americans threw a delivery of tea from the ships into the

waters of Boston harbour because the ruling British government wanted to tax it. This particular tea party marks the beginning of the movement to make America independent.

Tea didn't come to Europe until 1610 and was introduced to Britain in 1657 by Catherine of Braganza, King Charles II's wife. But by the 1800s, the exotic drink became so popular that special ships ("clippers") were designed to bring it quickly from China.

Most people in Britain drink tea with black leaves although now herbal teas which do not contain caffeine are becoming more popular.

The taste of teas can be very different even if they are from the same farm and expert tea-tasters have to blend them to ensure that packets of tea which have the same label taste the same when you buy them in a shop.

The British are very fussy about how their tea is made. The teapot must be warmed before the tea is put in, the water must be boiling properly, the right quantity of tea — "one spoon for each person and one for the pot" — must be used and the tea must be brewed for three minutes. They see the drinking of tea as the opportunity to relax for a few minutes. It's also regarded as a great comforter. If you've just suffered a misfortune in Britain and you call on a friend, you're likely to be told, "Oh well, just sit down and I'll make you a nice cup of tea"!

36. British Character

One of the most striking features of British life is the self-discipline and courtesy of people of all classes. There is little noisy behaviour, and practically no loud disputing in the street. People do not rush excitedly for seats in buses or trains, but take their seats in queues at bus stops in a quiet and orderly manner.

The British are naturally polite and are never tired in saying "Thank you", "I'm sorry", "Beg your pardon". If you follow anyone who is entering a building or a room, he will hold a door open for you. Many foreigners have commented on a remarkable politeness of the British people.

The British don't like displaying their emotions even in dangerous and tragic situations, and ordinary people seem to remain good-tempered and cheerful under difficulties. They don't like any boasting or showing off in manners, dress or speech.

Sometimes they conceal their knowledge: a linguist, for example, may not mention his understanding of a foreigner's language.

People abroad often have very fixed ideas about the British — they are cold, reserved, aristocratic, lazy, etc. Many people believe that half Britain is always on strike, and the other half wears a suit, a bowler hat and carries an umbrella. But the British people are different from any fixed idea you may have.

One thing British people share is a love of politeness. It is important to be polite in Britain, even to people you do not know. But their politeness is not always real.

English people are very tolerant, and you rarely see anyone turning round when a funny-dressed person walks through the streets. They are waiting patiently for buses, for their turn to be served. But the British do not like people who shout loudly in the street or push their way through crowds with their elbows. People don't put on their best clothes on Sundays, but are relaxed and pleasantly untidy.

37. The Belarusians: Lord Created Us Centrist

First of all, let us see what has been influencing the formation of the Belarusian national character. We'll start with the natural and climatic conditions.

There is a precise definition for our climate, "moderate". We have no beat or biting frosts, no high temperature jumps in the summertime and winter. Lithuania is not far away from Belarus, but it is a maritime area, where land and sea meet, while the sea is quite different a life. They've got storms, winds and unpredictability there. And the characters there are different: austere and businesslike, they are formed by a transition from one element to the other. Sharp contrasts outside, inside and in the souls are not typical for Belarus.

Now to the landscape. Our rivers are flat, calm and not very deep. They are homely and dear. All the rest of the landscape features follow the same pattern. Hills, rather than mountains. Fields, rather than deserts and prairies. The Belarusian character has no somberness and tense readiness for unexpected dangers. The nature of Belarus does not know storms or any cataclysms in general. Therefore, the Belarusians are trustful and on the whole optimistic, they never expect a misfortune.

The Belarusians are accustomed to work hard, so as to produce something on this soil, sand or clay, that is why they are patient and hardworking. "Uparty Belarus", or an "obstinate Belarusian" is a very precise definition. The environmental peculiarities require our universality. We must be able of doing much, if not everything. Diligence and universality are the qualities that have been and still are helping us to survive. Moreover, the Belarusians are undemanding and modest. To a certain degree they are accustomed to poverty. A- Belarusian does not need very much any external demonstrations, he is more oriented at internal work.

The Belarusian music, songs and folklore may also say a lot about the national character. They are merry, but not too much, there is suffering about them, but no horrible Russian misery. The word "destiny" is often mentioned in our vocabulary, although the Belarusians can hardly be named fatalists. Due to his calm and reserve a Belarusian is more conservative and stable in his styles and ways of life. Sometimes he may seem indifferent to everything around him. But it is also to a certain degree. If there is violence used against him, he has no other choice than to reach for a weapon to defend himself. History proves it too well.

38. "Kalyady" Has Come

If you want to experience real joy — the joy that isn't even spoiled by falling snow or severe frost — you should come to Belarus when "Kalyady" is being celebrated. Catholics celebrate it from December, 25 to January, 6 when the sun turns its gaze towards spring and the days begin to become longer. As for Ortho-lox Christians and the old calendar, the mysterious time of the year comes a bit later — it continues from January, 7 to January, 19. People say that "Kalyady" is i God's holiday. In Russia, all these days and nights from Christmas till Epiphany he called "Svyatki" (Sacred Evenings) and in Belarus — "Kalyady." It is a jolly time when people are enjoying themselves.

During "Kalyady" groups of merry young boys and girls in smart clothes go from house in house in Belarusian villages and towns. "Kalyady" celebrations have ancient, pagan traditions. In many countries of the world, people have carnivals and masquerades to see the New Year in. Such festivals are also held in Belarus. Each person in the processions of 'Kalyadovschchyki"(carol-singers) has a role according to his character and temperament: one of them bears the star, others sing carols, amateur musicians play the accordion or beat the tamburine, amateur actors are disguised as Goats, Bears, Storks, Horses, Gypsies and Old Men. Hosts and hostesses usually treat them to delicious things and thank them for well-wishing and carol-singing.

"Kalyady" is the time when three ritual suppers are cooked in every Belarusian home. They are called "Kalyadnaya Kuttzya". Our forefathers believed that "Kuttzya" (a sort of porridge — "kasha" — made from barley) was sacred food which could save and protect people's lives. So "Kuttzya" was a symbol of immortality and eternity of life.

On "Kalyady" the Belarusians like to visit each other, celebrate weddings and arrange fairs. By the way, it was at the fairs in the old days when vagrant musicians and puppeteers gave their performances. Small puppet theatres called "Batleyka" were popular in Belarus. They acted out stories about Christ from the Bible. Some people think that the word "Batleyka" originated from the word "Bethlehem" — the name of Christ's birthplace. So we can say that our theatre has its roots in "Kalyady."

The pagan holiday of "Kalyady" coincided later with Christmas, which was celebrated by Christians. The main purpose of "Kalyady" is to get rid of everything bad in one's life and to begin a new life cycle with joy and optimism.

39. A Midsummer Night's Dream: "Kupalle"

As it is known, the sun in its annual cycle passes through two very important points — winter solstice (which is connected with the holiday of Kalyady) and summer solstice (which is connected with another traditional holiday). People used to celebrate the Midsummer Day holiday on June, 25. But nowadays, since most Belarusians belong to the Orthodox Church, the holiday is celebrated on the night of July, 7. In accordance with the Orthodox calendar and is called "Kupalle." We must admit that it is one of the most mysterious holidays in Belarus.

There are a lot of legends and customs connected with this magic holiday. According to one of them there is a constant struggle between good and evil (or symbolically, between dark and light) in our soul. And on the day when the sun achieves its highest point (as if reaching its heavenly throne to rule the world of light), the dark forces become very active, especially at night.

People try to help the forces of light and themselves to defeat the evil witches and wizards. They light bonfires, dance and sing songs around them.

According to another legend, God Yarila marries the Earth on this day. That's why a lot of customs and traditions are associated with love. Girls gather flowers and weave coronets, which they wear at the holiday, and then, at dawn, they throw their coronets into the river and let them float downstream. The boy who fishes the coronet out of the water will be that girl's intended. It is the best time to gather herbs for medicine and love potions. At night, young and old light bonfires not far from their village or town and perform traditional dances, sing folk songs and jump over the fire. Jumping over the fire when it is burning low, as well as bathing (usually naked) in a river or lake are supposed to be the acts of purification. One of the culminating moments of the event is the search for a magic fern-flower in the forest. As the old legend says this flower blossoms only once a year, on "Kupalle", and the one who is lucky to find it will master the language of grass, trees, birds and animals and be happy for the rest of his life. No wonder that a lot of young boys and girls spend hours in the search for the fern-flower in blossom, which is also a symbol of love.

Dozens of splendid folk songs were composed to celebrate this jolly holiday but unfortunately, a lot of them have been forgotten by now. The holiday has been widely featured in the Belarusian literature and works of art.

It lives on the Belarusian soil as if it were a living reminder of our past and our hope for a better future.

It's great that in the endeavour to reassert their national identity young people are eager to revive the national customs and traditions.

40. Recycling

Recycling reduces waste and is good for the environment.

Paper is the easiest material to recycle. In the developed countries several million tons of paper are recycled every year and turned into birthday cards, cereal boxes and hundreds of other things. Paper can be recycled several times and then burned to create energy.

Plastic is the hardest material to recycle because there are so many different kinds, all of which need to be treated differently. At the moment, very little plastic is recycled. But it has its uses. For example, one company in the United States uses plastic from recycled car headlights to make windows. In some ways they are better than normal windows because they are much harder to break. Another American company uses plastic to make carpets and rugs.

Metal is another important material. It is easier to recycle an aluminium can than to make a new one. It is also 20% cheaper. So many of the things we use are made of metal, and can all be reused after they stop working. Recycling car parts, for example, is a big business. There is also very little waste involved in recycling metal. Steel is 100% recyclable, and can be recycled hundreds of times. Recycling steel is cheaper than mining it.

Glass can also be recycled and used for a number of things. For example, it can be mixed with asphalt or cement and used to pave roads. It can be melted down and used to make new bottles. Recycling glass is a huge worldwide business.

So remember, think before you throw things away — they may still be used. If we all make an effort to recycle, we can make the planet a cleaner place to live.

41. Air Pollution

A lot of big cities suffer from high levels of air pollution. For example, Tokyo has such a serious pollution problem that oxygen masks are supplied to policemen who direct traffic on busy roads. The task of cleaning up air pollution, though difficult, is not impossible. Use of fuels that are low in pollutants and a change to less polluting forms of power generation are currently used methods. The example of London, as well as other cities, has shown that major improvements in air quality can be achieved in ten years or less.

42. Global Warming

Many scientists believe that recent natural disasters have taken place because of an increase in the world's temperatures and are convinced that the Earth is at risk from the forces of the wind, rain and sun. According to scientists, global warming is making extreme weather events, such as hurricanes and droughts, even more severe and causing sea levels all around the world to rise.

Environmental groups are putting pressure on governments to take action to reduce the amount of carbon dioxide which is given off by factories and power plants. They demand that more money should be spent on research into solar, wind and wave energy devices, which could then replace existing power stations. Some scientists, however, believe that even if we stopped releasing carbon dioxide and other gases into the atmosphere tomorrow, we would have to wait for many years to notice the results.

43. How to Be a Friend of the Earth

There are many simple things we can all do to stop the destruction of the environment. First of all, we should not dump our rubbish without thinking which things, such as bottles and paper, can be recycled. We should put objects that we can recycle in recycling bins. Secondly, instead of taking our car wherever we go, we should leave it at home whenever possible, and go on foot or by public transport. If there is something wrong with our car's exhaust pipe, we should fix it immediately. When we need to drive to the supermarket to do our shopping, we should always remember to take our own bag, so that we don't have to use the supermarket's plastic bags. Some people think natural resources will go on forever, but they won't. We have an obligation to protect the environment.

44. Back to Nature?

I am one of the many city people who are always saying that given the choice we would prefer to live in the country away from the dirt and noise of a large city. I often think that if it weren't for my job I would immediately go back to nature in some small village. But how realistic is this dream?

Cities can be frightening places. The majority of the population live in massive tower blocks which are noisy and impersonal. The sense of belonging to a community tends to disappear when you live eight floors up. All you can see from your windows is the sky or other blocks of flats. In the past the inhabitants of one street all knew each other, nowadays people on the same floor in tower blocks often don't even say hello to each other.

Country life, on the other hand, differs from this kind of isolated existence in that a sense of community generally binds the inhabitants of small villages together. People have the advantage of knowing that there is always someone to turn to when they need help. But country life has disadvantages too. When you live in a village you are cut off from the exciting and important events that take place in cities. There's little possibility of going to a new show or the latest movie. Shopping becomes a major problem, and for anything slightly out of the ordinary you have to go to the nearest large town.

Some people have found a compromise between the two. They left the suburbs and moved to villages within commuting distance.

45. The World of Future

Scientists are making new discoveries about the universe all the time. Every day, we read about new inventions that they say will have a huge effect on our everyday lives. In a few years' time, everyone will own a mobile phone, have an e-mail address and know how to surf the internet. The jobs of people like postmen and even teachers will either change completely or disappear. Most of education will be computer-based. One of the most basic qualifications for getting a job now is to be able to use a computer. In the future, if you can't use a computer, you will be illiterate.

One of the most exciting predictions I have heard about the twenty-first century is that we will be living longer and longer. Scientists will come up with a cure for a lot of the most common diseases that people die of at the moment.

They also predict that we will have more free time to spend. Robots, which will look more and more like human beings, will take over a lot of the boring everyday jobs we do today.

The Most Useful Twentieth-Century Invention

A magazine recently asked people what they thought the most useful invention of the last century was. It is a very interesting question, since technology has transformed our lives today. Lots of people said cars, but I disagree. Although cars have made life easier in some ways, I believe they have serious disadvantages. The worst thing about cars is that they are so noisy. They also cause a lot of pollution.

Other people said TV. Of course, entertainment will never be the same again and it can be relaxing to watch TV after a long day. However, I don't think we should forget the educational value of a good book.

46. Can Computers Replace Teachers?

With technology invading every aspect of our lives, many people believe that computers will soon replace teachers in the classroom. But I think that though computers can provide a huge amount of information, they will certainly never be able to play the role of teacher to our children.

To begin with, children need routine and discipline in school. I find it hard to believe that a computer would be able to supply these. Secondly, children need the human touch, especially when they begin school. A cold, impersonal computer will not have the capacity to provide this loving care.

Finally, a sense of humour and the ability to adapt one's behaviour to the individual pupil are the essential qualities of a good teacher. I think that these qualities are totally beyond computers.

Of course from the point of view of the provision of information and instruction, computers may be able to replace teachers. But there is more to being a teacher than that and it is in these spheres that the computer can never hope to compete with humans.

47. The Internet

What exactly is it that gets us all so excited about the Internet?

As well as being a global network of networks, the Internet is a global network of people, ideas and information. The Net is as interesting and exciting as the people, organisations, companies, governments and weirdoes that are connected to it.

There is another thing that's exciting about the Internet. Like love and life, the Net is what you make it. If you don't like what's happening on one part of the network, you can build yourself a whole new cyberspace, appoint yourself as mayor and run it exactly as you want.

The Internet enables you to do a lot of things simultaneously. You can read the latest copy of your favourite newspaper while planning your night's TV viewing and ordering some cheap CDs from an American discount disc store.

You can send e-mail to someone you've never met before ... Some people have "met" over the Internet and got married.

The first web browsers only supported simple texts and images, but now a multitude of multimedia plug-ins enables webpages to sing and dance.

From PC banking to online shopping and chats with celebrities, the Internet is already changing our lives. The arrival of digital TV promises even more exciting things.

Nowadays it is not difficult to get access to the Internet. Most people surf the Internet on computers in their home. Some people go to cyber cafes. However, cyber cafes are mostly used by people who are travelling abroad. This is because it is cheaper to email family and friends than to make a phone call.

Young people use the Internet for many different reasons, and many teenagers use it almost every day. They use the Internet at school to research information for homework and projects. Many also use it to email their friends. Many of them use chat rooms to meet new people and exchange news and information. Teen talk is one of the best known chat rooms in the UK.

Over 70% of British teenagers use the Internet to visit official fan sites. Leonardo DiCaprio's official website is one of the most popular, along with football sites for teams such as Manchester United. A few young people actually create their own websites which they dedicate to their favourite film star or sports star.

People are using the Internet more and more, for everything from entertainment to research. In the future, the Internet will be accessible not only on computers, but also on mobile phones. Young people will carry on surfing more and more.

48. Hooked On the Net

The latest addiction to trap thousands of people is the Internet, which has been blamed for broken relationships, job losses, financial ruin and even suicide.

Psychologists now recognize Internet Addiction Syndrome (IAS) as a new illness that could cause serious problems and ruin many lives.

IAS is similar to other problems like gambling, smoking and drinking: addicts have dreams about the Internet; they need to use it first thing in the morning; they lie to their parents and partners about how much time they spend online; they wish they could cut down, but are unable to do so.

Many users spend up to 40 hours a week on the Internet. Some of the addicts are teenagers who are already hooked on computer games and who find it very difficult to resist the games on the Internet.

49. Video Games

Everybody's tried them at least once. Sitting in front of a screen with a button or a joystick you can make cars go very fast or move strange little green men about as they escape from dangerous enemies.

You do it with video games, the electronic toys which are loved by young people and adults alike. Some people prefer space settings, others prehistoric scenes and still others realistic situations in the present. With only a little money and a lot of skill, you can pass several hours absorbed in new and unexpected situations.

But, some experts say, excessive use of these screens can be bad for your health. And some very violent video games are now in circulation. So, video games can be bad for you if you don't limit the time you spend in front of the screen or choose intelligent programmes which don't contain violence.

Often players forget reality and start to live the adventures of imaginary "heroes". However, there are also educational video games. These can stimulate imagination or help with the study of history, geography and natural sciences.

50. Household Chores

Technology is everywhere today, and especially in the home. We have a wide range of appliances and devices in our homes. We can't imagine our lives without a fridge or a washing-machine. They are designed to make our life easier.

But it seems the things we most need are not always the things we most love. The cooker keeps us in the kitchen for a long time. If we didn't have to cook, we could do a million and one more interesting things. But we all have to eat, and we couldn't get by on just salads and cold meat. A lot of families have a microwave, though the meals it produces aren't as tasty as those from a conventional oven. The food which has been taken from the freezer and heated in a microwave never tastes as fresh food cooked in a traditional way. The reason many people buy these labour-saving devices is to enable them to spend more time working but this does not make them happier.

On the other hand, modern appliances have reduced the amount of time required to complete domestic chores. Cleaning and ironing, for example, can be done far more quickly and efficiently than fifty years ago. Nowadays everything is so much faster. In most families husbands and wives work just as many hours as each other away from home. They simply couldn't keep families without the support of all these labour-saving devices.

51. Mass Media

The mass media play an important part in our lives. Newspapers, radio and especially TV inform us of what is going on in this world and give us wonderful possibilities for education and entertainment. They also influence the way we see the world and shape our views.

Of course, not all newspapers and TV programmes report the events objectively, but serious journalists and TV reporters try to be fair and provide us with reliable information.

It is true that the world today is full of dramatic events and most news seems to be bad news. But people aren't interested in ordinary events. That is why there are so many programmes and articles about natural disasters, plane crashes, wars, murders and robberies. Good news doesn't usually make headlines. Bad news does.

Some people say that journalists are given too much freedom. They often intrude on people's private lives. They follow celebrities and print sensational stories about them which are untrue or half-true. They take photos of them in their most intimate moments. The question is — should this be allowed?

The main source of news for millions of people is television. People like TV news because they can see everything with their own eyes. And that's an important advantage. Seeing, as we know, is believing. Besides, it's much more difficult for politicians to lie in front of the cameras than on the pages of newspapers.

Still, many people prefer the radio. It's good to listen to in the car, or in the open air, or when you do something about the house.

Newspapers don't react to events as quickly as TV, but they usually provide us with extra detail, comment and background information.

The Internet has recently become another important source of information. Its main advantage is that news appears on the screen as soon as things happen in real life and you don't have to wait for news time on TV.

52. TV or Not TV?

Whether we realise it or not, TV plays a very important part in our lives. It's the main source of information and a cheap form of entertainment for millions of people. It's the window on the world which gives us an opportunity to "travel" all over the world, to "meet" different people and learn about their customs and traditions .

It has the power to educate and broaden our minds. It helps us to relax after a hard day's work and escape from reality.

There's always a great variety of programmes on TV: news and sports programmes, talk shows and TV games, documentaries and feature films, concerts and theatre performances... Of course, not all programmes are good. But many are made in good taste and with great professional skill.

Some people argue that television is a terrible waste of time. It makes us lazier. We stay at home instead of going out. We read less. We think less. We even talk less. It's true that some TV addicts spend hours in front of the "box" watching whatever's on — from second-rate Mexican soap operas to silly commercials.

The trick is to learn to control television and use it intelligently. The ideal is to turn on the TV-set only when there's a really interesting programme.

Violence on TV is another problem that worries people. As George Mikes once said, TV teaches us "how to kill, to rob, to shoot and to poison."

But the same can be said about computer games and many films and books. And if you don't like a certain programme, why watch it?

53. Newspapers

In the past people learnt about news from newspapers. Nowadays people usually learn what is happening in the country and in the world from TV or radio news programmes or from the Internet.

Still we cannot imagine our life without newspapers. There are dozens of them on every news-stand. There are newspapers for professionals, for businessmen, for children and teenagers, for men and women, for sports fans, for those who are interested in gardening and for those who keep pets.

Some newspapers publish serious articles on politics, economy and finance, some aim to entertain their readers. Many newspapers express certain political opinion and people choose them according to their own political beliefs. In short, you can always find a paper which suits your interests.

Besides, there are many free local newspapers which are put into your postbox whether you ask for it or not. Probably they are not interesting, because they consist mainly of advertisements, but you can find a lot of useful telephone numbers and addresses there.

My parents subscribe to Argumenty i Factly. I also like this weekly. I don't read all the articles, but in every issue I find something interesting. I think that most articles are very well written, they give a detailed and well-balanced analysis of current events and trends in economy. I like to read articles on social issues, interviews, reviews of new books, plays and TV shows. One of my favourite columns is The Quotation of the Day, where they quote our popular politicians and give their comments. Sometimes it's very funny.

Quite often I buy Sovershenno Secretno (Top Secret) and practically in each issue there are some fascinating stories which you read like a detective story.

Sometimes they uncover things I have not heard about, sometimes they show well-known events in a completely new light.

From time to time I read Moskovsky Komsomolets. It's one of the most popular daily papers, but I don't consider it serious. However, I never miss an article written by Minkin. I think he is a very good journalist. I also like Merinov's cartoons. Sometimes they publish good reviews of new films, new CDs and so on.

In short, I think that TV, radio and the Internet have their advantages, but nothing can substitute newspapers.

54. The British Press

Probably in no other country are there such great differences between the various national daily newspapers — in the type of news they report and the way they report it.

On the one hand, there are the "quality" newspapers: The Times, The Independent, The Guardian, the Financial Times and The Daily Telegraph. These concern themselves, as far as possible, with factual reports of major national and international events, with the world of politics and business and with the arts and sport.

On the other hand, there are the "populars" and "tabloids," so-called because of their smaller size. The tabloids — the most widely read of which are The Daily Mail, The Daily Express, the Daily Mirror, The Sun and The Daily Star — concentrate on more emotive reporting of stories often featuring sex, violence, the Royal Family, film and pop stars, and sport. It's often said that the popular press aims to entertain its readers rather than inform them.

The tabloid press is much more popular than the quality press.

In some countries, newspapers are owned by government or by political parties. This is not the case in Britain. Newspapers here are mostly owned by individuals or by publishing companies, and the editors of the papers are usually allowed considerable freedom of expression. This is not to say that newspapers are without political bias. Papers like The Daily Telegraph, The Daily Express and The Sun, for example, usually reflect Conservative opinions in their comment and reporting, while the Daily Mirror and The Guardian have a more left-wing bias.

In addition to the 12 national daily newspapers there are nine national papers which are published on Sundays. Most of the "Sundays" contain more reading matter than daily papers, and several of them also include "colour supplements" — separate colour magazines which contain photographically illustrated feature articles. Reading a Sunday paper, like having a big Sunday lunch, is an important tradition in many British households.

Besides, nearly every area in Britain has one or more local newspapers. The British are one of the biggest newspaper-reading nations in the world.

55. What Will Our Life Be Like?

Can you imagine what our life will be like in the year 2050? What will our cities be like in the future? How will we live and behave? Will medical science win its battle against the terrible illnesses that mankind continues to suffer from?

If things go as researchers plan, by 2050 computers and Internet connections will be in every room in the home, and so will robots!

By 2010 most of us will be working on the move. Your office will be wherever you are. It'll be possible to have a virtual meeting instantly. Simply say to your computer "I want to have a meeting with my team at 11 o'clock" and they'll appear before your eyes on the screen of your wearable computer.

By 2025 we will have cars that drive themselves. By 2040 we could be driving on fully automated highways. Some scientists believe one day there will be flying cars, too. Our power will come from sources cleaner than coal, oil and gas.

In the near future, progress in technology, electronics and genetic engineering will make it possible to regulate DNA. We'll become healthier and will be able to live longer.

In the next thirty years, we may all know someone who has travelled in space. Space travel is really expensive at the moment, but scientists are trying to find a solution.

"Fly me to the moon" may become a common demand, with package tours to lunar resorts.

By the end of the century we could travel to Mars as easily as we do to New York. Mars could be the base for space exploration into the outer regions of the solar system and the Earth may even become a quieter planet

56. Fashions and Good Looks

It's important to look great, isn't it? What's your idea of an attractive person? Someone with long curly or smooth hair or someone with a short haircut? Do you find pierced¹ ears attractive? What about pierced noses? How do you like tattoos² on a boy's or girl's arms and shoulders? If you ask ten people these questions, you will get ten different answers.

The idea of beauty varies a lot from person to person, even more so from society to society. The search for beauty is not a modern phenomenon³. Since ancient times men and women have tried to make themselves more attractive. In old times the male⁴ Indians from the Amazon had their lower lips stretched. This may seem horrible to you, but for them it was a sign of beauty. In some parts of Africa long necks are a sign of beauty. Girls had metal rings round their necks to make their necks longer. Japanese women should have small feet and they wore special tight shoes that wouldn't let their feet grow bigger.

When you look at old portraits or see an old film, made fifty, thirty or even ten years ago you will be surprised or even struck by the clothes that women and men were wearing.

Changing fashions are an essential part of people's idea of beauty. Each year clothes designers⁵ decide what clothes will make millions of men and women more attractive. They decide whether skirts will be short or long, jackets tight or loose, zips⁶ instead of buttons, denim⁷ instead of leather, high-heeled or flat shoes and so on. And, of course, young people are eager to keep up with the latest fashion and hate the thought of putting on clothes that are out of fashion.

At the same time many people don't think about clothes very much and thus illustrate the saying "Appearances are deceptive".

At the theatres, cinemas and concerts you can see people dressed in jeans and sweaters, T-shirts and some may even have trainers on. They think that any clothes are OK as long as you look clean and tidy. But sometimes it's important to wear the right clothes - in offices, banks, universities and schools where you have to wear formal clothes. So if you don't know what to wear on this or that occasion, ask the advice of a friend or your parents. You may also watch what other people do and then do the same.

57. About Museums

We may know already that "museum" is a Latin word. It really is one, but it came to Latin from the Greek word. In fact, the original Greek word meant a temple -well, a religious structure - dedicated to the nine Muses. Not until the Renaissance was the term applied to a collection of objects of beauty and worth. History has it that the first museum - a place dedicated to the Muses - was founded about three centuries before our era in Alexandria, Egypt. It was part of a community of scholars. The community included apartments, a dining hall, lecture hall, botanical garden, zoological park, astronomical observatory, and library. The museum housed such objects as medical and astronomical instruments, elephant tusks, statues, and portrait busts. Of course, those objects were also used for teaching. Unfortunately, the entire museum and most of its library were destroyed during civil disturbances.

What about modern museums? Museums as they are known today were first established in Europe in the 18th century. In 1793 the famous Louvre opened its doors. It is considered to be the first great public art museum. The British Museum in London was founded as a public institution even earlier, in 1753. Yet at the beginning, admission was limited. Prospective visitors had to apply in writing first and then wait two weeks for an admission ticket. Visitors, in small groups, were limited to stays of two hours. Things look quite different today. The British Museum in London ranks among the greatest institutions of its kind in the entire world. If you ever have a chance to visit the British capital, miss no opportunity to go there. If I were you, I would dedicate a whole day to such a visit.

58. Museums Of The World

Well, as I come from London, I should say the capital itself is a living museum. Can you image that - more than 2000 years of history and culture? One can be proud of the fact that London boasts of one of the greatest concentrations of significant museums. There are more than 100 as far as I remember. Goes without saying, the jewel in this cultural crown is the British Museum. It houses more than 4 million exhibits. Never can one see everything there, it's so huge! Well, my culture studies led me to the Victoria and Albert Museum in South Kensington. It is a special place because the museum displays a varied -collection of applied arts. Whenever I went there, I also dropped at the museum just across the street, the Natural

History Museum. When I was little, I used to go there quite often to have a look at the dinosaurs. There is also the Science Museum, which includes a renowned section on the history of medicine.

If you are keen on history, you should visit the Museum of London. It introduces visitors to London's history. Of course, there are lots of museums and galleries located outside London. If you ever get to Oxford, you should visit Oxford University Museum. It contains a diverse collection of rare art and relics. The same can be said, by the way, about Cambridge University. Well, my ancestry is Welsh. That's why I've been fascinated with Welsh history and culture. On my several trips to Cardiff I went to the National Museum of Wales. It focuses on Welsh life, history, and culture. A grand collection, I might add.

59. Mercy and Charity

Mercy is one of the basic virtues of Christian ethics. It is a term used to describe the compassion shown by one person to another. It includes things like care, making someone else's problem your concern, and readiness to help those in need. Charity is one of the works of mercy. Charity can focus on a disaster, a difficult situation in a country, as well as on a certain person or a group of people.

It is a common knowledge that not only the person who receives the charity benefits from it, but also the giver. There are a lot of charity funds and organizations, both state and non-state. The main among them is the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Organization. They do their best to help people in need: raise money, start different campaigns and projects. The aims of these charitable activities are: to combat poverty and diseases; to give education; to provide shelter, food and medical aid in case of war conflicts and natural disasters.

For example, a lot of charitable work has been done in Belarus since Chernobyl Catastrophe.

However, there are some controversial questions concerning charity:

-Is it better to provide help by means of an organization or personally?

-Should we solve a social problem rather than help an individual?

Most people would say that charity is always good, but others highlight some aspects of charity that they claim are bad.

Charity may focus on big disasters or attractive projects rather than on real needs of people. This can result in giving too much to some causes while others get little. Charity is wrong when it's used to hide the fundamental injustice in a society. Sometimes charity is given to achieve political goals. On the whole, charity organizations should be accountable to the donors.

In my opinion, we should help those who ask for help. Our help should not be humiliating for another person. It will be accepted with gratitude when it is given with compassion and understanding, without arrogance.

The famous story about the boy and the starfish shows why using charity to fix individual problems can be very valuable.

Once upon a time, a man walking along a beach saw a boy picking up starfish and throwing them into the sea.

He asked the boy why he was throwing starfish into the sea.

The boy replied, "The tide is going out. If I don't throw them in, they'll dry up and die."

The man smiled patronisingly and said, "But, there are miles of beach and thousands of starfish on every mile. You can't possibly make a difference!"

The boy smiled, bent down, picked up another starfish, and threw it into the sea.

"Well," he said, "I made a difference for that one."

60. Chernobyl Catastrophe

On the 26th of April 1986 a catastrophe broke out 12 kilometres off the Belarusian border. It was the major break-down of the power unit at the Chernobyl nuclear power station. It is the most severe catastrophe throughout the entire world history of the atomic energy use by its scale, complexity and long-term consequences.

As the result of the explosion of the failed reactor a huge amount of radioactive substances was released into the atmosphere. Later on they left the large fall-out «spots» on the ground surface. 23% of the territory of Belarus, 4,8% of the territory of the Ukraine and 0,5% of

the territory of Russia were contaminated. The radiation situation was determined by radio nuclides with the period of half-decay from 8 days till 24390 years.

After the Chernobyl accident Belarus has become the zone of the ecological disaster. The situation got worse because radioactive contamination coincided with the formerly existing zones of high chemical pollution. 260,000 hectares of agricultural lands are forbidden to use for farming purposes. Thousands of hectares of forests are contaminated with radioactive elements. The Chernobyl catastrophe has affected the destinies of millions of people. The radioactive contamination of the ecosystems has created the conditions for making it impossible to conduct the agricultural production and manage forestry in the normal way for many decades.

In order to decrease the influence of radiation on the people considerable work was done during the post-accident period. Measures were taken to evacuate the people from the most dangerous districts, to provide for their medical check-up and treatment. Various measures were carried out — radioactive decontamination, agricultural treatment of soil, provision of clean food. However, these measures are not enough yet. And international co-operation in this field serves the interests of the entire mankind.

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