

Bijlage VWO

2009

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Engels

Tekstboekje

Teenage dreaming?

Sir: I am delighted to read that a survey has backed up what I hoped about my generation (“Optimistic, responsible and political: the face of today’s teens”, 31 March) – that one day we might be the ones to reverse the tides of inequality, conflict, exploitative economics and destruction that have engulfed this world. However, your editorial’s tongue-in-cheek ending – “let’s hope it’s not just a phase they’re going through” – voices my own real concerns. We may not be the useless, solipsistic, grumpy stereotypes of yore (were we ever?) but we’re still clearly honouring a time-honoured adolescent tradition – challenging the status quo.

There is a fine, but deeply important, line between this mental attitude towards global

issues (“I wouldn’t call myself political but I care about things that matter”) and active involvement which will bring about real change – being political and being proud of it, reclaiming “politics” as a positive thing. We can talk to think tanks about ethical clothing all we like, but if we’re not prepared to vote, to write letters, to keep our beliefs alive and take them into the systems that govern the world, our words against Blair, Bush and multinationals will be useless. I wonder, 10 years down the line, how many of the “Sunshine generation” will still be committed to changing the world, and how many will hold their youthful liberalism as only a fond memory?
GLORIA DAWSON

Age 18

London SE26

The Independent



DEAR ECONOMIST

Resolving readers' dilemmas with
the tools of Adam Smith

**Dear Economist,
Following the parable of the
talents, my local church has
handed out £10 to each of its
churchgoers as “seed money”,
which it hopes will multiply to
raise funds for the church.
What should I do with my
£10?**

Harvey Garrett, London

Dear Mr Garrett,

The parable tells of a master entrusting money to three slaves before departing on a long journey. Two of the slaves double the investment by the time he returns. Is this a parable about the virtues of stewardship or about eye-popping investment success? Your pastor is clearly salivating at the prospect of the latter but he is being foolish.

The very phrase “seed money” suggests venture capital and expectations of glorious growth.

I am sorry to awaken you rudely from this daydream but you

have to remember that biblical Judea was severely capital-constrained. Anyone lucky enough to have investment capital had a great choice of projects and 100 per cent returns were not uncommon.

A comparable present-day return on your money might be 10 per cent, or £1. Had Jesus wished to tell a parable about extraordinary investment savvy, he'd have said that the slaves quintupled the money.

Second, a “talent” was worth £550 or more in today's money, the kind of sum that would fund participation in a significant venture. And third, household slaves were experienced money-managers. 4, your church is dishing out peanuts to monkeys.

Most serious of all, the parable of the talents has a master entrusting money to slaves who could not run away. You, on the other hand, are a free agent.

I usually hesitate to proffer investment advice but, since you ask, there is nothing to constrain you from investing your £10 in a round of drinks.

Tim Harford

Financial Times

Are mobile phones on trains dangerous?

COMMUTER trains are often stuffy and crowded, and they frequently fail to run on time. As if that were not bad enough, Tsuyoshi Hondou, a physicist at Tohoku University in Japan, published a paper in 2002 that gave commuters yet another reason to feel uncomfortable. Dr Hondou examined mobile-phone usage in enclosed spaces such as railway carriages, buses and lifts, all of which are, in essence, metal boxes. His model predicted that a large number of passengers crowded together, all blathering, sending text messages, or browsing the web on their phones, could produce levels of electromagnetic radiation that exceed international safety standards. That is because the radio waves produced by each phone are reflected off the metal walls of the carriage, bus or lift. Enough radiation escapes to allow the phone to communicate with the network, but the rest bathes the inside of the carriage with bouncing microwaves.

This sounds worrying. But maybe it isn't after all. In a paper published recently in *Applied Physics Letters*, Jaime Ferrer from the University of Oviedo in Spain — along with colleagues from the Polytechnic University of Madrid and Telefónica Móviles, a Spanish mobile operator — dispute Dr Hondou's findings. He concludes that the level of radiation is safe after all.

The key addition to the new research is the effect of the passengers themselves. While each phone produces radiation that bounces around the car, the passengers absorb some of it, which has the effect of reducing the overall intensity, just as the presence of an audience changes the acoustics of a concert hall, making it less reverberant. Dr Hondou's model, in short, was valid only in the case of a single passenger sitting in an empty carriage with an active mobile phone on every seat.

Dr Hondou did not calculate the effect that leaving out the other passengers would have on the radiation level. As a result, says the author of the new paper, he significantly overestimated the level of electromagnetic radiation. When one is sitting on a train, Dr Ferrer and his colleagues found, the most important sources of radiation are one's own phone, and those of one's immediate neighbours. The radiation from these sources far exceeds that from other phones or from waves bouncing around the carriage. And all these sources together produce a level of radiation within the bounds defined by the ICNIRP, the international body that regulates such matters.

People concerned about the effects of mobile-phone radiation are unlikely to take much comfort from Dr Ferrer's results. They worry that even small amounts of microwave radiation — within the ICNIRP's limits — may have adverse health effects. The evidence so far is ambiguous, inconsistent and sparse. Indeed, Dr Ferrer says he was surprised at how little research has been done in this area.

Yet both Dr Hondou's results and Dr Ferrer's are based on mathematical models, not physical measurements. Their models make assumptions about the physical properties of train carriages and their passengers, and both assume that the radiation is uniformly

distributed rather than clumped into "hot spots". But if the debate about the safety of mobile phones is to be resolved, there must be less reliance on models and anecdotes, and more emphasis on hard experimental data.

<http://www.economist.com>

De volgende tekst is het begin van de roman The Night Listener by Armistead Maupin

Chapter one Jewelling the Elephant

I know how it sounds when I call him my son. There's something a little precious about it, a little too wishful to be taken seriously. I've noticed the looks on people's faces, those dim, indulgent smiles that vanish in a heartbeat. It's easy enough to see how they've pegged me: an unfulfilled man on the shady side of fifty, making a last grasp at fatherhood with somebody else's child.

That's not the way it is. Frankly, I've never wanted a kid. Never once believed that nature's whim had robbed me of my manly destiny. Pete and I were an accident, pure and simple, a collision of kindred spirits that had nothing to do with paternal urges, latent or otherwise. That much I can tell you for sure.

Son isn't the right word, of course.

Just the only one big enough to describe what happened.

I'm a fabulist by trade, so be forewarned: I've spent years looting my life for fiction. Like a magpie, I save the shiny stuff and discard the rest; it's of no use to me if it doesn't serve the geometry of the story. This makes me less than reliable when it comes to the facts. Ask Jess Carmody, who lived with me for ten years and observed this affliction firsthand. He even had a name for it – The Jewelled Elephant Syndrome – after a story I once told him about an old friend from college.

My friend, whose name was Boyd, joined the Peace Corps in the late sixties. He was sent to a village in India where he fell in love with a local girl and eventually proposed to her. But Boyd's blue-blooded parents back in South Carolina were so aghast at the prospect of dusky grandchildren that they refused to attend the wedding in New Delhi.

So Boyd sent them photographs. The bride turned out to be an aristocrat of the highest caste, better bred by far than any member of Boyd's family. The couple had been wed in regal splendor, perched atop a pair of jewelled elephants. Boyd's parents, imprisoned in their middle-class snobbery, had managed to miss the social event of a lifetime.

I had told that story so often that Jess knew it by heart. So when Boyd came to town on business and met Jess for the first time, Jess was sure he had the perfect opener.

"Well," he said brightly, "Gabriel tells me you got married on an elephant."

Boyd just blinked at him in confusion.

I could already feel myself reddening. "You weren't?"

"No," Boyd said with an uncomfortable laugh. "We were married in a Presbyterian church."

Jess said nothing, but he gave me a heavy-lidded stare whose meaning I had long before learned to decipher: You are never to be trusted with the facts.

In my defense, the essence of the story had been true. Boyd had indeed married an Indian girl he had met in the Peace Corps, and she had proved to be quite rich. And Boyd's parents – who were, in fact, exceptionally stuffy – had always regretted that they'd missed the wedding.

I don't know what to say about those elephants, except that I believed in them utterly. They certainly never felt like a lie. More like a kind of shorthand for a larger, less

satisfying truth. Most stories have holes in them that cry out for jewelled elephants. And my instinct, alas, is to supply them.

I don't want that to happen when I talk about Pete. I will try to lay out the facts exactly as I remember them, one after the other, as unbejewelled as possible. I owe that much to my son – to both of us, really – and to the unscripted intrigues of everyday life. But, most of all, I want you to believe this. And that will be hard enough as it is.

I wasn't myself the afternoon that Pete appeared. Or maybe more severely myself than I had ever been. Jess had left me two weeks earlier, and I was raw with the realization of it. I have never known sorrow to be such a physical thing, an actual presence that weighed on my limbs like something wet and woolen. I couldn't write – or wouldn't, at any rate – unable to face the gruelling self-scrutiny that fiction demands. I would feed the dog, walk him, check the mail, feed myself, do the dishes, lie on the sofa for hours watching television.

Everything seemed pertinent to my pain. The silliest coffee commercial could plunge me into profound Chekhovian gloom. There was no way around the self-doubt or the panic or the anger. My marriage had exploded in mid-air, strewn itself across the landscape, and all I could do was search the rubble for some sign of a probable cause, some telltale black box.

The things I knew for sure had become a litany I recited to friends on the telephone: Jess had taken an apartment on Buena Vista Park. He wanted space, he said, a place to be alone. He had spent a decade expecting to die, and now he planned to think about living. (He could actually do that, he realized, without having to call it denial.) He would meditate and read, and focus on himself for once. He couldn't say for sure when he'd be back, or if he'd ever be back, or if I'd even want him when it was over. I was not to take this personally, he said; it had nothing to do with me.

Then, after stuffing his saddlebags full of protease inhibitors¹⁾, he pecked me solemnly on the lips and mounted the red motorcycle he had taught himself to ride six months earlier. I'd never trusted that machine. Now, as I watched it roar off down the hill, I realized why: It had always seemed made for this moment.

noot 1 protease inhibitors: pills prescribed to people infected by HIV

Fingers in the word-till

Mark Lawson

The best image of plagiarism I can think of is that of someone being caught with their fingers in the word-till. Unfortunately, it wasn't me who thought of it, but Martin Amis.

Is it possible, 7, that having read and admired that metaphor many years ago, I might somehow have buried it in my subconsciousness so that it jumps out one day as my own fresh phrase? And, even as I wrote that scrupulously attributed opening paragraph, a fear lurked that this thieving-from-Amis conceit had been used in a previous column on plagiarism. But was it by me or by DJ Taylor?

This panic about language-theft is 8 by Kaavya Viswanathan, the teenage American writer whose debut book - *How Opal Mehta Got Kissed, Got Wild, and Got a Life* - has been withdrawn from bookstores and her publishing contract cancelled after the discovery that her first novel incorporated portions of books by four other writers, including Megan McCafferty and Salman Rushdie. This case seems to have some similarities with those of two American journalists - Stephen Glass of the *New Republic* and Jayson Blair of the *New York Times* - whose writing was proved to be fraudulent, 9 the techniques slightly varied: Glass was fictionalising material, Blair stealing it from others. Viswanathan seems to have combined these approaches by passing off the fiction of others as her own.



Kaavya Viswanathan: debut book withdrawn

The young novelist has not yet given her tearful apologia to Oprah or had a movie made about her but Glass and Blair, who have suffered such analysis, seem to have behaved as they did because their desire to be journalists was greater than their talent or aptitude for it. It seems a reasonable guess that Viswanathan was also inventing a persona that she was 10 unable to become.

The key question - for psychologists and perhaps also attorneys - will be whether the 19-year-old knew what she was doing and, if she did, whether she accepts that it was plagiarism. These issues may not be clear-cut. 11, all authors are plagiarists: they begin their career by carrying out a style-heist from writers they admire. The bookstores are full of novels that adopt the rhythms and interests of Amis, Rushdie, or Muriel Spark, but have the names of much younger writers on the cover.

For example, someone who once admired Amis's description of plagiarism might end up comparing word-theft to being caught wheeling a trolley out of the phrase-vaults, an image that could not have existed without Amis's but also 12.

Viswanathan, though, went far beyond homage. Comparison between her novel and its models suggests a photocopier fitted with software to dictate 5% variations. In her only public defence before events or lawyers encouraged her to shut up, she blamed her recycled writing on a "photographic memory" - but she really needs to forget that one. A person who truly has camera-like recall retains an image of even where the phrase lies on the page, and it seems

unlikely that the little matter of who had initially 13 the perfectly-remembered sentences would somehow slip their mind.

Like doctors faced with a Shipman, the British GP who murdered many of his patients, publishers will convince themselves that Viswanathan is a monstrous one-off. But there are two reasons to fear that many other writers may copy her copying.

University teachers admit in private that it is now wise to assume that an essay will contain pre-written material. The job of a don is to adjudicate on whether it has been deftly used or well disguised. And much of the art to which the young have been exposed exhibits 14: sampled music, found sculpture, movies created through visual quotation. The phenomenon of music downloading is a direct assault on the very idea of copyright.

But, if Viswanathan came to believe that karaoke prose is a strike for the freedom of information, her publishers may have encouraged her downfall by subjecting her to another modern pressure.

In a time when authors need to make their mark against ever more competing entertainments, the story behind a book has become at least as important as the one the volume tells. In this year's previous American 15, James Frey admitted to having exaggerated the addiction memoir, *A Million Little Pieces*.

While neither Frey's nor Viswanathan's publishers would have released the books if they had known the provenance of the content, the business must bear some responsibility for leading the authors to their deceits. Frey lied to provide what the current publishing market most wanted, which was accounts of sensational experience. What the big publishing houses also badly want at the moment is young attractive writers with cross-cultural appeal, and perhaps the Indian-American student moulded herself to fulfil this 16. The plagiarist deserves shame but perhaps publishing - with its craving for striking talent - left, as it were, the word-till open.

Guardian Unlimited

An unusual approach to autism

Animals in Translation: Using the Mysteries of Autism to Decode Animal Behaviour

by Temple Grandin and Catherine Johnson

Simon Baron-Cohen

- 1 This magisterial book on animal behaviour is unique and, for me, is gripping reading. It is written by Temple Grandin, perhaps the best-known woman with autism on the planet, and co-authored by Catherine Johnson, a mother of two children with autism.
- 2 Grandin is famous because she lectures tirelessly on what it is like to have autism. She is unusual because she is a woman with autism (most people with autism are male). She was one of the first people with considerable professional qualifications (she is an associate professor of animal science at Colorado State University) to go public about her diagnosis of autism.
- 3 In this fascinating book, Grandin attempts two ambitious projects. First, to explain animal behaviour. Linked to this, she aims to show how problems in animal behaviour can be easily remedied if you understand the causes of the behaviour. To this end, she has analysed animal behaviour down to its smallest details, so that she can predict what an animal will do.
- 4 Her second big focus is a new theory of autism. She argues that the autistic mind is closer to the animal mind than it is to the typical human mind when it comes to perception of detail. This last thesis will be most

controversial, but it opens up a whole new way of understanding autism.

- 5 Some readers may wonder why a person with autism, who readily recognises she has difficulties understanding the social lives of people, can have such an intuitive and accurate understanding of other animals. Surely a person with autism would be more likely to choose an inanimate domain, such as mathematics, or music, or computers? Aren't animals and their social lives just as confusing as other humans to a person with autism?
- 6 We know there are autistic "savants" who can identify a prime number with lightning speed, or can perform calculations such as multiplying two six-digit numbers together faster than a hand-calculator, or can listen to a piece of music just once and then reproduce it, or can tell you on what day of the week any date will fall. In all of these instances, the individual has systemised an inanimate system. They have analysed how the calendar works, as a system. Or they have analysed how music works, as a system. Or how numbers work, as a system.
- 7 When we systemise, we try to identify the rules that govern the system so that we can predict the system. And to identify the system's laws you have to analyse the system down to its smallest details, to spot regularities of the kind "If A, then B" or "If I do X, then Y occurs". Put formally, systemising involves piecing together "input-operation-output". According to the theory I advanced in *The Essential Difference*

(Penguin/Basic Books), people with autism are hyper-systemisers.

8 Grandin has successfully systemised animal behaviour. She notes that the behaviourist psychologist BF Skinner tried to do this in the 1950. In my opinion Grandin has done a better job than Skinner did. This is because Skinner did not spend all his waking life trying to imagine how animals see, how they feel and how they think. Indeed, he famously argued that one should not speculate about an animal's emotions, thoughts, perceptions and drives, and instead recommended an exclusive focus on the environmental factors that either reward the animal's behaviour (leading to it being repeated) or punish it (leading to it not being repeated).

9 Grandin, in contrast, asked such questions as: what kinds of stimuli might make an animal frightened? What kinds of stimuli might make an animal angry? What do we know about the neuroscience of animal drives that might help us predict its behaviour? Grandin's incredibly patient, thorough, fine-grained analysis of animal behaviour results in her understanding it to the point of being able to predict it, fix it, control it and explain it. Her book almost stands as a manual for animal behaviour.

10 She readily recognises that human behaviour is much harder to systemise than is animal behaviour, not least because animal emotions are few in number. She estimates there are four primal emotions in animals (rage, prey-chase, fear and curiosity) and four primary social emotions in animals (sexual attraction, separation distress, attachment and playfulness). In contrast, our recent count of

discrete human emotions listed 412 (see www.jkp.com/mindreading). The non-autistic person effortlessly makes sense of other people's behaviour despite this complexity not by trying to systemise people, but by using a different approach (empathising).

11 What of Grandin's theory of autism: that people with autism are closer to animals than they are to humans? Such a theory could be taken as offensive (suggesting people with autism are somehow sub-human).

23, Grandin's claim is that animals have superior perception of detail, and so do people with autism, and she backs up these claims with evidence. So, far from offending people with autism, she is if anything suggesting that non-autistic people have less sharp perception. We are, if you like, sub-autistic.

12 She links the two themes of her book by arguing that a person with autism will have a greater affinity for animals than will a person without autism, because the same sorts of unexpected flickering lights or sudden small movements or sounds that might startle an animal might also startle a person with autism. She goes further to argue that understanding animal perception might help us understand autistic perception.

13 Grandin is the modern day Doctor Dolittle who does not have any mystical telepathy with animals — she is simply an extremely experienced, sharp observer and careful scientist who has isolated the principles that govern animal behaviour. We owe her a huge debt for having used her autistic obsession (into animals) and her autistic perception (for accurate details) to teach us so much.

Guardian Review

World View

We All Have a Lot to Learn

BY FAREED ZAKARIA

1 Last week India was hit by a terror attack that unsettled the country. A gunman entered the main conference hall of the Indian Institute of Science in Bangalore, tossed four grenades into the audience and, when the explosives failed, fired his AK-47 at the crowd. One man, a retired professor of mathematics from one of the Indian Institutes of Technology, was killed. What has worried some about this attack is not its scope or planning or effect — all unimpressive — but 25. The terrorists went after what is increasingly seen as India's core strategic asset for the 21st century: its scientific and technological brain trust. If that becomes insecure, what will become of India's future?

2 This small event says a lot about global competition. Travelling around Asia for most of the past month, I have been struck by the relentless focus on education. It makes sense. Many of these countries have no natural resources, other than their people; making them smarter is the only path for development. China, as always, appears to be moving fastest. When officials there talk about their plans for future growth, they point out that they have increased spending on colleges and universities *almost tenfold* in the past 10 years. Yale's president, Richard Levin, notes that Peking University's



two state-of-the-art semiconductor fabrication lines — each employing a different technology — outshine anything in the United States. East Asian countries top virtually every global ranking of students in science and mathematics.

American kids do better in the real world. Why?

3 But one thing puzzles me about these oft-made comparisons. I talked to Tharman Shanmugaratnam to understand it better. He's the minister of Education of Singapore, the country that is No. 1 in the global science and math rankings for schoolchildren. I asked the minister how to explain the fact that even though Singapore's students do so brilliantly on these tests, when you look at these same students 10 or 20 years later, few of them are worldbeaters anymore. Singapore has few truly top-ranked scientists, entrepreneurs, inventors, business executives or academics.

American kids, by contrast, test much worse in the fourth and eighth grades but seem to do better later in life and in the real world. Why?

4 “We both have meritocracies,” Shanmugaratnam said. “Yours is a talent meritocracy, ours is an exam meritocracy. There are some parts of the intellect that we are not able to test well — like creativity, curiosity, a sense of adventure, ambition. Most of all, America has a culture of learning that challenges conventional wisdom, even if it means challenging authority. These are the areas where Singapore must learn from America.”

5 Shanmugaratnam also pointed out that American universities are unrivaled globally — and are getting better. “You have created a public-private partnership in tertiary education that is amazingly successful. The government provides massive funding, and private and public colleges compete, raising everyone’s standards.” Shanmugaratnam highlighted in particular the role that American foundations play. “Someone in society has to be focused on the long term, on maintaining excellence, on raising quality. You have this array of foundations — in fact, a whole tradition of civic-minded volunteerism — that fulfills this role. For example, you could not imagine American advances in biomedical sciences without the Howard Hughes Foundation.”

6 Singapore is now emphasizing factors other than raw testing skills when selecting its top students. But cultures are hard to change.

A Singaporean friend recently brought his children back from America and put them in his country’s much-heralded schools. He described the difference. “In the American school, when my son would speak up, he was applauded and encouraged. In Singapore, he’s seen as pushy and weird. The culture of making learning something to love and engage in with gusto is totally absent. Here it is a chore. Work hard, memorize and test well.” He took his children out of the Singapore state school and put them into a private, Western-style one.

7 Despite all the praise Shanmugaratnam showered on the States, he said that the U.S. educational system “as a whole has failed.” “Unless you are comfortably middle class or richer,” he explained, “you get an education that is truly second-rate by any standards. Apart from issues of fairness, what this means is that you never really access the talent of poor, bright kids. They don’t go to good schools and, because of teaching methods that focus on bringing everyone along, the bright ones are never pushed. In Singapore we get the poor kid who is very bright and very hungry, and that’s crucial to our success.”

8 “From where I sit, it’s not a flat world,” Shanmugaratnam concluded. “It’s one of peaks and valleys. The good news for America is that the peaks are getting higher. But the valleys are getting deeper, and many of them are also in the United States.”

Newsweek

The Beckhams versus the Archbishop of York

- 1 Can charities use extravagant expenditure to raise funds? I think the Archbishop of York, Dr. John Sentamu, may have been guilty of populism in his criticism of the Beckham party. The facts, as reported by Ruth Gledhill in *The Times*, are these: David Beckham, who is the Captain of the England football team, planned to hold a party before the World Cup. The Beckhams decided to use the party to raise money for charity, and sold tickets to their friends, many of whom are highly paid footballers, for £2,000 each.
- 2 No doubt £2,000 is a large sum to pay for an evening party, but it is not a particularly large sum for wealthy people to give to a deserving charity. A pair of these tickets were then auctioned at another charity function. As the Archbishop will know, these charity auctions often achieve exceptional sums for good causes.
- 3 The bidders are not concerned with the object they are buying, but want to make a large donation to the charity involved. The pair of tickets were not being sold for their own value; they were sold as an opportunity for charitable giving. In the event, they sold for £100,000. This is indeed a much higher level of giving, but not uncommon with private charitable trusts.
- 4 The Archbishop might reasonably have praised the Beckhams for making an entirely appropriate party into a charitable occasion. There is nothing wicked about parties; there is much good about giving to charity. He might have praised those who paid £2,000 for a ticket. They may have had other motives, such as hobnobbing with celebrities, but they were helping deserving causes.
- 5 He might also have praised the generosity of the man who spent £100,000 on two tickets with a face value of £4,000, thereby giving £96,000 to another charity. The Archbishop — and this would be regarded as sensationalism by journalists — recast the story to make a quite different point. “For one person to spend £50,000 on an evening out while another earns £131 a week is just not right. Is that a fair and just society? I do not think so.”
- 6 The flaw in the Archbishop’s argument is that no one spent £50,000 for an evening out. A rich and generous man gave £50,000 to buy a £2,000 ticket for a social occasion he thought might be entertaining. His main concern was to give a large sum to charity, if in a way that would give him some additional enjoyment. He did not spend the money for an evening out. He spent the money primarily on charitable giving. We cannot be sure of the balance of his motives, but nor can the Archbishop.
- 7 The Archbishop must spend much of his time supporting charitable appeals. He knows how difficult it is for them to raise money, and how useful it can be to put a little jam on the pill. The Archbishop is perfectly entitled to criticise the unequal distribution of wealth in modern Britain, but he should not misrepresent the motive of charitable fundraising and givings on social occasions. Some of these parties can be dull, but that is another matter.
- 8 I would not, in any case, single out the earnings of footballers for criticism. Only a few of them become stars. They have relatively short professional lives, and a high risk of injury. Their lifetime earnings are not proportionate to 35. Very few footballers retire as wealthy men.

The Times Blog Posted by Lord Rees-Mogg

Results A-levels expected

- 1 When A-level grades are published on Thursday, we can expect two familiar analyses of how the school-leavers of England and Wales have performed.
- 2 According to one, our children are displaying greater intelligence than children of previous generations, explaining why around one in five grades given is an A. Twenty years ago, it was more like one in 10. The other theory will be that exams are getting easier, that marking is more lenient and that things ain't what they used to be. Parents who watch their kids sweat over revision tend towards the brighter view. University tutors, who struggle to distinguish excellence from mediocrity among a sea of straight-As, tend to be more pessimistic.
- 3 As we report today, the independent exams regulator has come down on the side of the optimists. Ken Boston, chief executive of the Qualifications and Curriculum Authority, says critics of the modern A-level are elitists pointlessly hankering after a bygone era when only a privileged few went to university. Today, 43 per cent do. The government's target is 50 per cent by 2010.
- 4 The A-level is a victim of its own success. Teachers have become better at coaching pupils to get good results. Pupils are better at feeding in the right answers. The system is delivering just what is expected of it - higher grades.
- 5 We should stop worrying about whether exams are easier. The issue is, rather, what we want exams to do for children and how that differs from what we want schools to do for them. Universities and employers need exam results to indicate ability. If everyone continues to improve, they will inevitably look for ways of measuring greater achievement - the International Baccalaureate, for example, or simply ask the exam boards to recalibrate A-level grades.
- 6 But schools are not all about testing. Alan Bennett's play *The History Boys*, now made into an excellent film, brilliantly depicts the difference between teaching for exams and teaching for love of learning. It celebrates erudition as an aspiration that can and should ignore class boundaries. Too often today, it does not. Learning for its own sake has foolishly become identified with snobbery and elitism. The problem is that giving teachers the freedom to inspire will mean loosening the structures that bind them to achieving exam targets. And jeopardising those annually improving grades.
- 7 When this year's school-leavers celebrate the rewards of their hard work on Thursday, we should congratulate them. They and their teachers have done exactly what has been asked of them.

<http://observer.guardian.co.uk/leaders>

Tekst 10

THE LOADED WORD

Put That Book Down!

May 14, 2005

Children do some of their best learning through play. Still, it's disconcerting at first to find that boys of a certain age know more about Reynauld de Chatillon's vicious Crusade-era attacks against Mecca and Medina from the computer game "Age of Empires II" than from their history classes. (In the movie "Kingdom of Heaven," Reynauld is the laughingly cruel nobleman with wild red hair.)

The public schools' curricular skim through the Crusades leaves students with a rudimentary understanding of what the point was (go fight for Jerusalem), and a vague memory of guys called Richard the Lionheart and Saladin. The particulars quickly fade from memory.

In the Microsoft computer game, players generally take the side of Muslim sultan Saladin to construct defenses, deploy troops and embark on campaigns – defending against Reynauld or claiming victory at the Horns of Hattin, precursor to the Muslim recapture of Jerusalem. Between fights (low on graphic violence), they're shown maps, historical information and vocabulary. (And how many of you know the word "trebuchet"? It's a sort of catapult.) Or they can join with Emperor Frederick Barbarossa, whose hasty dive into a river killed him during the Third Crusade. Other "Age of" games plunge into the Roman Empire, Mongol invasions, Greek myths and so forth.

The games tap into two elements key to learning: they get kids personally involved, and they drill players on facts. A child who relives Saladin's campaigns over and over is memorizing them.

"Age of Empires II" is in its present state just a battle game with touches of history and strategy. Yet it could be a baby step toward a yet-undeveloped genre that marries shoot-'em-up video games and educational software. With deeper games tied to curriculum, players might easily memorize complex geography, engage with fascinating personalities, fathom politics or figure out how to get troops across the European land routes that were fatal to so many Crusaders.

Tell our children to stop fooling around and go play their Xbox for a couple of hours? It affronts our cherished notions of academic excellence.

Get over it.

Los Angeles Times