

General Studies

The Arts & Society

“The place and value of the arts in education”. Discuss this topic and illustrate your answer with examples from your own experience.

The arts, are a broad aspect upon which human life emulate, as for most, they are guidelines to live life, where lessons can be learned, to help initiate a better world, or better place for living. The arts cover a wide range of forms, such as painting, sculpture, drama, media, dance, as well as the study of language. In my opinion I see art, as a whole, as a form of expression; it can entertain, it can teach, it can be used as propaganda, it can promote religion, it can reveal truth, it can immortalise and to celebrate, to recall history, to stimulate the intellect, to educate, to meet the needs of the artist, perhaps it has no purpose – Art for art’s sake, and most importantly in my eyes, escapism. More so, people with impaired learning skills, can enjoy art, and they can use it as a form of expression, as a language, to communicate their feelings with others. I therefore feel that art has an important rôle in our society, and thus a considerable amount of the school curriculum should be devoted to the arts.

An average candidate who sits examinations at the end of their compulsory education will have studied the core subjects (English Language, Mathematics and Science), with further subjects of their choice, ranging from Technology to Economics, and such subjects which could be considered to be an Art; Music, Art, English Literature and Drama. From this point, students either continue their education (to A-level, or perhaps even degree level, where from here they then get a job) or students after their compulsory examinations may go straight into employment. In my opinion, a majority of people are faced in the direction of science and technology where they may seek employment, since our world relies upon the advances in medicine for health (as more illnesses are being found), and countries are becoming more competitive in terms of technology. A further reason for people being directed in these directions for jobs, are that there tends to be higher salaries within these sectors. I agree that our country needs to sustain a high workforce in science and technology, so that we do not fall behind the rest of the world, as this could lead to devastating effects in later times, however I feel that people should also be directed towards the study of English and the Arts, since there is a considerable amount of money to be made in this industry, especially if another artistic era is invented (like cubism or pointillism). An argument which I am aware of which would promote the arts more so than science, is that with medicine for example, as soon as a disease is found, a sure will be found, however, over time, the disease becomes resistant to the cure, and so an even more powerful cure has to be made. If this continues, then there will be a stage where the medication will be too strong for our bodies to handle, or a stage where we will not be able to make a cure an illness. So the argument put forward, is to allow our bodies and our immune systems to overcome illness on their own. In the short term for businesses in this sector, it could be profitable making new cures every so often, however, in the long run, we are putting the human race at risk where research will become a drain on the economy. Also, by making such advances in science, we will be producing more dangerous weapons, and so there may come a point where a war may erupt, and it could just wipe out the human race anyway. So, why not just focus on the arts where we will not face such problems?

From personal experience, I have been led in the direction of science and technology, and currently am intending to go on to study dentistry after my A-levels. I have never been a successful candidate at English, since I have never had the intent to read or

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write, however, only recently have I been inspired by a teacher within the English department, who revealed to me that there is a lot more to English, and a lot to be learnt in the development of life through it. I therefore feel that the Arts should be devoted more to the curriculum, in hope that it may inspire more people, and perhaps lead to a more civilised country with fewer problems, such as crime.

The Arts have crucial values. Years ago, patrons would give influential and financial support to artists who they felt had potential. Patrons would usually have been someone within the Royal family. Patrons would have supported artists for two reasons; they would have got their portraits painted regularly (to promote themselves to the public) and when such artists got recognised by the public, their excellency would be reflected by the patron, and credit would be gained, for identifying potential at an early stage in an artist's career. An example of this would be Charles Saatchi supporting Damien Hirst for his notoriously bizarre conceptual pieces of art (sliced sharks and pickled sheep).

Eric Bolton, Chairman of the RSA Arts Matter Steering Committee 1996, stated that,

“the arts are in short, a unique and sustained exploration of the human condition...they constitute a particular way of explaining human motivation, experience, behaviour and the world in which we live. Implicitly and explicitly the arts, separately and collectively, ask and seek to answer the question of what life is about.”

I personally agree with this quote, since most artists paint what they see, and feel through their experiences. Furthermore, artists have incredible imaginations, which within a picture, an observer can interpret it in many different ways, and may therefore derive an answer to their difficulties in life, through art.

The National Heritage Select Committee in 1996 claimed,

“The arts are part of our heritage. They tell us where we came from and they signify the direction in which we are going. They illuminate our past and foreshadow our future.”

I would again, fully accept this quote, since we can learn from our previous mistakes made in history, and so the arts can assess the situation, and display where we are heading for as a society, thus meaning that the arts are a keen constituent in the progression of our society.

Maynard Keynes said in an article in *The Listener* in July 1945,

“The artist walks where the breath of the spirit blows him.”

From this quote, we can interpret that an artist does not know where the aspiration comes from to develop a picture, or a piece of work. However, we can deduce from this, that Keynes feels that artists have imaginations that are fantastic, and thus should be followed. I cannot wholly agree with this, since artists like Van Gogh cut off his ear, which doesn't seem like a justifiable action to me without a cause. However, Keynes is trying to say that artists, in general, have an imagination, which explores

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the articulateness of the world, and usually perceive it in a different frame of mind, and in some cases, are beneficial. Chuck Close for example, used a technique known as photo-realism, to develop his self-portrait. It is an image that reveals an ugly truth, which he seems not to be bothered by. This image was produced, merely to show others that there are also ugly, horrific sights, to those beautiful pictures of the human race, such as Mona Lisa by Leonardo Di Vinci. Therefore, art is a crucial part of the development of the human race, as it exposes reality as well as illusory aspects of the world.

The Right Honourable Virginia Bottomley, JP, MP, then Secretary of State for National heritage in 1996 said,

“I believe that the artistic excellence of today comes with a flourishing economy in which initiative, enterprise and risk-taking are valued...Civilisation is not a gift of the Gods, it must be won anew by each generation. Without art, there can be no meaning to civilisation. Our duty is to transmit to future generations the value of the arts, so that art inspires our future as it has done our past”

This quote, in my honest opinion, has the most justified reason as to why the arts are an essential part of school curriculum today. I fully accept what was said in this quote, since I agree that there can be no progression of civilisation without having literature and history, for example to help guide us from making mistakes our ancestors made. Therefore, if there is a good schooling system with a firm basis consisting of the arts, then the value of the arts should be passed on successfully and inspire further generations to provide a better economy in the future.

In conclusion, I feel that the arts have a serious rôle in education today. The arts are necessary to inspire our future as it has done our past. From the arts, we can learn from our past and avoid making the mistakes that were made, and progress. Our economy may become more structured. However, I see the arts as a language for all; we can pass on ideas through it and we can communicate through it. This is the key point which I want to make, as I see the arts important for this reason. From personal experience, I have friends who are deaf, or have impaired learning skills. Such examples would be at my ten pin-bowling club. One of my coaches bowls in the British Deaf Team, and he is passing his knowledge onto me, through art and acting, since he cannot speak to me. I therefore feel that the arts are crucial for communication and a progression of the human race.