

## Comprehension Exercise

### Soaps - More harm than good?

#### Article A: Yes

(1) In virtually every home there is an extra member of the family, a substitute for the elderly relative who regales us with tales of former exploits, or the grandparent who dispenses acquired wisdom . namely the television. Often derided as the monster in the living room and destroyer of conversation, television is just the opposite. It has the potential to enrich our lives by allowing the viewer to share in new sights and sensations. It has the power to shape our thinking and to be a social force. It is at once a source of relaxation, entertainment and education in its widest sense.

(2) I like television. I am not one of those .eccentrics. who abhors its influences. But, I do believe that television soaps do children more harm than good because of the effect they can have on impressionable young minds. The problem lies in the genre. A soap is in essence fiction dressed up as fact. We are told soaps are a true representation of our lives. How many people, especially the young, recognise their lifestyle in them? When I taught in a Salford school, in the area which features in the Coronation Street credits, I remember that the locals were annoyed with the .demeaning. depiction of their way of life.

(3) A soap has to have a wide appeal across its audience, including the young, if it is to succeed in the ratings war. But, aiming mainly at children will not attract the older audience, as seen in the falling ratings of the Australian soap Neighbours since the decision to focus upon its school-age characters. Grange Hill, it is claimed, is aimed strictly at young people. But what is appropriate for discussion by pupils in Years 10 and 11 is not always suitable for their siblings in Years 5 and 6.

(4) Those responsible for the production of these soaps will tell us that they aim to deal with real life issues in a responsible way. But do they? Are not the storylines just to catch the headlines and increase the audience share? Are sensitive issues dealt with in an appropriate way? The message might have been to .practise safe sex. to those old enough to understand it. However, I wonder how many younger children asked their parent, .What is a condom, mummy (or daddy)? after one character's recent exploits in EastEnders.

(5) The Broadcasting Standards Commission has at last woken up to public concern. It has called for research into the effects of violence on our screens, especially in soaps. In many situations, the way to get what you want or settle a problem appears to be to resort to violence. Is this the message we want our impressionable youngsters to be receiving? We are told that children will not take that message. They are far more discerning than we give them credit for. Are they really more discerning than adults? If adults see characters as .real. people and react to storylines accordingly witness the recent response to court appearances by characters in the main soaps can we expect our youngsters to be able to do better?

(6) Therein lies the rub: fiction becomes confused with fact. Our children, without the experience to discern the difference, get wrong messages. That is why, overall, I believe that television soaps do children more harm than good.

Source: adapted from an article by JIM O'NEILL, *The Times Educational Supplement*, 29 August 2003  
The author is president of the Professional Association of Teachers

## Article B: No

(7) Ever since I wrote the first episode of Grange Hill in 1976, I have been engaged in the debate about whether Grange Hill, then Brookside and more recently Hollyoaks are good, bad or indifferent for children. It has never ceased to amaze me how daft some people are. I like the word .daft. because it is not a harsh word. It enables you to describe people who are usually quite amiable and rational. I've also learned to appreciate that moments of daftness can often flow from the genuine desire to do good. Unfortunately, that does not negate the daftness itself.

(8) I could defend soap-writers by highlighting social campaigns that soaps have supported. They help teachers stimulate debate in English, media studies and citizenship and encourage children who may not have literary stimulation at home. To demonise any television genre is as daft as demonising books, magazines, art, video games, the internet, music, nations and creeds. They can be influential, uplifting and enlightening, just as they can be disturbing, distasteful and depressing. We choose to ignore much of what is around us because we can see no value in contextualising it in our daily existence and life experience.

(9) Herein lies the real debate. Do children have the life experience to contextualise what they see and hear? It is this question that now governs much of what we see on television. It is also what is making television, contrary to what media observers believe, less and less of a social force. With the best intention in the world, the protection of young people and .susceptible adults., we now have a regulatory system that is driving broadcasters along the road to banality. Most soaps are produced with one aim: to reach as much of their intended target audience as possible. The wider that is, then the greater the range of social characters and storylines will be. And here is the rub. Most of the target audience have a much tougher life than most would-be social regulators. Difficult to face up to, but true nevertheless.

(10) My belief has always been that children learn to contextualise life based on the examples given in their own homes. Although there might occasionally be things that we all find are not to our tastes and standards, this is a situation that faced parents long before television was invented. All parents have to recognise the moment when their children start to become aware of life and ideas outside their parental shadows and contextualise that against their own values. It may be what happens outside their particular home, but it has to be set against what role model they project. Just because there appear to be more stimuli now does not change that basic parenting obligation.

(11) So while there will always be things we do not like outside our own domestic settings, there will equally be a lot of things we do like. Creativity in any form can stimulate as well as corrupt. The issue is not whether a particular genre is good, bad or indifferent, but more to do with how we help and encourage people to see it as just part of the normal parental mentoring challenge. Anyone who thinks otherwise is being, well, daft.

Source: PHIL REDMOND, *The Times Educational Supplement*, 29 August 2003

The author is chairman of Mersey Television and creator of Brookside and Grange Hill

## Questions

**1 The reference to the .grandparent who dispenses acquired wisdom. (paragraph 1) is based on**

A the truth. B a stereotype. C information from relatives D logical argument

**2 In paragraph 1 the author suggests that television has replaced**

1 the voice of experience. 2 discussion.  
3 oral history. 4 entertainment.

Answer

A if 1 and 3 only are correct.

B if 2 and 4 only are correct.

C if 1, 3 and 4 only are correct.

D if all are correct.

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**3 The statement 'I do believe that television soaps do children more harm than good (paragraph 2) is**

- A a subjective view.
- B an objective view.
- C a quote from empirical research.
- D the view of The Times Educational Supplement.

**4 In using the word 'genre' (paragraphs 2, 8 and 11) both authors are referring to a programme.s**

- A aims.
- B content.
- C audience.
- D type.

**5 In paragraph 2 the author implies that soaps**

- A paint a harsh picture of life. B are essentially unrealistic.
- C encourage imitation.
- D deal with adult issues.

**6 The most likely purpose of the last sentence in paragraph 3 ('But what is appropriate for discussion by pupils in Years 10 and 11 is not always suitable for their siblings in Years 5 and 6') is to show**

- A the narrow age range which watches Grange Hill.
- B the suitability of the programme for young people.
- C the difficulty of selecting appropriate material for the programme.
- D how much young people discuss the issues raised in the programme.

**7 In paragraphs 3 and 4 O'Neill criticises the producers of soaps because**

- 1 their programmes can contain inappropriate material.
- 2 they are influenced by the ratings.
- 3 their focus can lack broad appeal.
- 4 they seek publicity.

Answer

- A if 1 and 2 only are correct.
- B if 3 and 4 only are correct.
- C if 1, 2 and 3 only are correct.
- D if all are correct.

**8 'Public concern' (paragraph 5) has arisen for each of the following reasons except**

- A children are no more discerning than adults.
- B too many characters end up in court.
- C characters resort too quickly to violence.
- D children lack the experience of life to balance what they see on television.

**9 When the author uses the word 'discerning' in paragraph 5 he is referring to the**

- A level of concern generated by a problem.
- B difference between fact and fiction.
- C children's ability to make appropriate judgements.
- D failure of adults to educate their children properly.

**10 The main point made by the author in paragraph 5 is that**

- A the Broadcasting Standards Commission is failing to do its job.
- B there is too much violence in television soaps.
- C some viewers do not always distinguish between fact and fiction.
- D adults often set bad examples for children to follow.

**11 The author's style of questioning in paragraphs 4 and 5 is best described as**

- A argumentative
- B combative
- C interrogating
- D rhetorical

**12 In paragraph 6 the author uses fiction to mean stories which are essentially**

A based on fact      B imaginary      C realistic      D untrue.

**13 The author chooses the word 'daft' in paragraph 7 for each of the following reasons except**

A it indicates only an occasional retreat from common sense.

B the word is unlikely to cause offence.

C it is a calculated insult.

D the views it refers to come from good intentions.

**14 In paragraph 8 Redmond praises soaps and soap writers for each of the following reasons except**

A helping educationally disadvantaged children.      B raising awareness of social issues.

C improving children's self-esteem.      D encouraging children to discuss current events.

**15 By 'contextualising' (paragraphs 8, 9 and 10) the author means**

A paying careful attention to it.

B acknowledging its importance.

C being aware of its existence.

D relating it to what is known already.

**16 Which of the following arguments can be found in paragraph 9?**

1 Young people and .susceptible adults. need more protection from unsuitable programmes.

2 Television programmes are becoming more bland with less of a social impact.

3 The success of television programmes is enhanced if their target audience is wide.

4 The television regulatory system works well because the regulators share the viewers.life experience.

Answer

A if 1 and 2 only are correct.

B if 2 and 3 only are correct.

C if 1, 2 and 3 only are correct.

D if all are correct.

**17 In paragraph 9 the author contends that**

A children are not affected by what they see.

B the subject of soaps refl ects the life of viewers.

C rules irritate the producers of programmes.

D those who apply the rules are out of touch.

**18 According to paragraphs 9 and 10 children can best contextualise what they see and hear through their**

A domestic situation

B experience of soaps

C television viewing

D rejection of parental values.

**19 The author of Article A feels that the aims of the producers of soaps are essentially to**

1 sensationalise to gain further media coverage.

2 reflect real life.

3 deal with sensitive issues.

4 capture a larger audience.

Answer

A if 1 and 3 only are correct.

B if 1 and 4 only are correct.

C if 2 and 3 only are correct.

D if all are correct.

**20 In Article B Redmond opposes the strict censorship of television because it**

1 aims to protect children and immature adults.

2 makes for mundane viewing.

3 reduces the range of story lines.

**Answer**

- A if none is correct.                      B if 1 alone is correct.  
C if 2 and 3 only are correct.          D if all are correct.

**21 In Article B Redmond would agree with each of the following statements except**

- A parents need to monitor what children watch.  
B those who regulate TV are becoming over protective.  
C TV has less influence on children than people think.  
D watching soaps poses no dangers to children.

**22 Redmond's concluding argument in Article B is that**

- A children are not influenced by what they see on television.  
B it is the responsibility of parents to guide their children through new experiences.  
C children pick up both good and bad messages from television.  
D there are far worse things in life than poor television programmes.

**23 Which of the following statements best summarises the main arguments of both articles?**

- A Children can be influenced by what they see in television soaps, but it is up to parents to put the issues in perspective.  
B Children are more aware than adults give credit for and only a few will be affected by what they see in television soaps.  
C Television soaps are capable of both harm and good and parents should decide what they allow their children to watch.  
D It is silly for parents to think that they can protect their children from all of life's influences, so children should be allowed to make up their own mind about the programmes they watch.

**24 The best description of the intention of both articles is to**

- A persuade.  
B inform.  
C instruct.  
D entertain.

**25 Which of the following are reasonable conclusions about the authors of the two articles?**

- 1 As a professional teacher the author of Article A is bound to be critical of the influence of television over children.  
2 The author of Article B is only seeking to defend his own programmes.  
3 The author of Article A is obviously writing as a parent, whereas the author of Article B is not.  
4 Neither of the authors has presented any convincing arguments to support their case.

**Answer**

- A if none is correct.                      B if 1 and 2 only are correct.  
C if 3 and 4 only are correct.          D if all are correct.

1 B      2 A      3 A      4 D      5 B      6 C      7 D  
8 B      9 C      10 C      11 D      12 B



13 C      14 C      15 D      16 B      17 D      18 A  
19 B      20 C      21 D      22 B      23 A      24 A      25 A