



First place: Fiona

What is the point of education?

“We cannot solve our problems with the same thinking we used when we created them”. Einstein’s view of progress places emphasis on critical thinking. The point of education lies here - to learn to critically think. This can be fostered through a positive and inspiring learning environment. Our society has rapidly evolved over the past century, but why is the education system unfit for purpose in the 21st century? It is our flawed assumption that the point of education is for academic attainment. This has led to the restrictive indicator of short-term results being the measure of education’s success. See the students with their hammered armours of perfect, shining scores – exclusively produced by the Education – to be presented to society: our great people! But are they global citizens, who can promote change in the world? I will question our modern definition of education by exploring historical philosophy and views of education; examining two themes of education’s many purposes and demonstrating the importance and benefits of critical thinking. When one is taught to question, it opens up the doors to action in an ever-changing world. Could this give rise to the change we all hope for?

Education is generally defined as the ‘process of teaching, training and learning’, mostly in institutions of education, to acquire knowledge and skills. Our definition of education has changed throughout history, but our modern understanding is a slimmed down version, missing out the richness of many historical theories. Critical thinking weaves itself through these historical theories. By exploring historical stances on education, it will illuminate how critical thinking is the foundation of good education.

Ancient Greece was one of the first societies where students were taught to think independently – to question, discuss, debate, argue, and criticise. Particularly in the Academy, founded by Plato. Like the Socratic Method, students didn’t just echo the teacher, instead the teacher asked questions to prompt reflection and critical thinking. Aristotle believed that the purpose of education is to provide a skill and knowledge base, and develop and exercise the students’ potential for reasoning, forming habits for an ethical character. This led to the greatest rapid expansion of knowledge ever known, and the idea that knowledge could grow through criticism was planted.

The Greeks also developed the “all-round education” that has become the model for the rest of Europe. Although this notion prevails, our present education has not grasped its essence of creating citizens who have the ability to critically think. Two thousand years ago in the east, Confucius’ philosophy on education agreed with this, as the purpose of education was to change people by refining their conventional ways of thinking; for paradigm shift and character development. ‘Knowing others in intelligence; knowing yourself is true wisdom.’ Laozi’s “*Daode Jing*” had the view that wisdom was being able to have an insightful understanding of yourself. To recognise your flaws and strengths, and change to improve yourself - which are realised through critical thinking. What a contrast to modern society where individuals are expected to follow conventional thought.

“*Essays*” by Michel de Montaigne, written in the French Renaissance, confronts an education system that encourages students to be passive. Montaigne disagreed with what and how children were taught in his

time, and thought learning was not just book learning and memorisation. Children were being filled with ready-made facts, and they accepted them uncritically. In this way, students would grow up as passive adults, blindly following authorities and social conventions, lacking the ability to think independently. He believed that true learning was to make knowledge one's own and to expand upon it. According to Montaigne, experience was the basis of knowledge. Tutors should foster natural curiosity, interact through discussion, and encourage students to inquire into new things, so they could be active learners. In "*The Education of Children*", Montaigne lays out the point of education as forming the whole person - promoting wisdom, character, and physical development, and active, social lifestyles. Had Montaigne been alive today, he would have encountered the same problem in today's education. Montaigne focuses on forming active citizens in lieu, and the ultimate effect of education would be wisdom and happiness.

Similarly, John Locke's fundamental message urged common sense; don't unthinkingly follow authorities or social conventions but think: what are the facts? Then base one's views and behaviour on how things actually are. Today this is very familiar to us, but when Locke introduced this, it was revolutionary. "*Essay Concerning Human Understanding*" (1689) declared that children are born with a mind as a *tabula rasa*, or a blank slate – all future development depended on education. So, all human beings have the potential for growth. Exploring deeper, this exciting possibility means that any individual can be transformed by a good education, one that encourages critical thinking, and spreads positive impact.

The point of education for these historical thinkers was expansive and embraces boundless dimensions. On a more practical level, one can group ideas around education into two themes - cognition and critical thinking. Cognition is the development of knowledge in the mind, which can help us understand and keep pace with one's current situation, like a sponge soaking up things uncritically. However critical thinking involves evaluating information in order to form a logical judgement as to the extent one believes something is right or wrong, which can move society forwards towards progress. For example, humans had to work out whether they can eat unknown plants and then share that learning with their community. 'If you learn but do not think, you will be dazed'. Confucius points out that it is not enough just to learn. Knowledge has the potential to inspire and empower, but knowledge is not power alone. One should go beyond skills training and cognitive development, but perceive knowledge in another angle: how can one apply it to challenges in life and promote peace? This requires critical thinking. I will illustrate its invaluable role for promoting a moral individual by exploring one of the worst catastrophes in history.

In 1942, Nazi administrator Adolf Eichmann made efficient train timetables that transported millions of Jews and others to various concentration camps in Poland, including Auschwitz, in support of Hitler's 'Final Solution'. Eichmann orchestrated the mass murder, even though it was not his idea. Was Eichmann an evil sadist who found delight in people's suffering? After reporting on the war crimes trial of Eichmann for *The New Yorker* in 1961, the philosopher Hannah Arendt came to a different conclusion. She faced a terrifyingly ordinary man of 'everydayness', who would belong in a café - someone more common than the sadist but equally dangerous: the unthinking man. Arendt suggests that he was a product of an oppressive system that exploited our weakness of thought and judgement. Eichmann did his job without any motive other than to diligently advance his career in the Nazi bureaucracy. He carried out evil deeds without evil intentions, having disengaged from the consequences: a fact which comes from his thoughtlessness. Arendt describes this as "the banality of evil".

However, the key to explaining Eichmann's behaviour is his education. Locke proposed that every individual is born with a mind as a blank slate which is developed through education, so Eichmann's banal behaviour was testament to his education's indoctrination. Having no disposition to critically think - to

wonder, to question, or to reason - led to his immoral actions. Eichmann was stuck in his familiar assumptions and couldn't reflect upon them from a different perspective. He was not a monster, which challenges us to contemplate how we are all capable of evil in daily life. Through an effective education, one which cultivates critical thinking, individuals can develop a habit of good reasoning, which is vital for good change in our society.

The benefits of being able to think critically are felt throughout one's life, lasting beyond school. As well as being able to form a judgement from facts, it helps one flourish in life: it enhances academic excellence, personal growth, civic participation, and career success, and encourages fulfilment and wellbeing. Our world is the fruit of our thinking and cannot evolve without changing our thinking. If everyone thinks the same, society becomes stagnant. The point of the current education system is to create students with cognition. The point of a successful education is to nurture critical thinking in students in their journey of lifelong learning, so they can critically think beyond society's conventional thought and transform the world - ultimately culminating in positive change in our world.

Judges Feedback: I loved this essay, a truly excellent grasp of the question and a wonderful use of quotations and examples which were weaved into the narrative in such an expert way, they really enhanced each paragraph and lent weight to Fiona's arguments. Well sourced, well thought through, and beautifully written. Congratulations Fiona!

Second Place: Genevieve

What is the point of education? G Donald

Many of the best-known philosophers have pondered and written about this question, from Plato to Steiner. My view is that the point of education is to shape each generation to become more intellectually advanced, more analytical, and more successful than the previous generation. These skills are learnt through; the production of knowledge as well as knowledgeable students, the fostering of curiosity and inquisitiveness, the enhancement of understanding, the enlargement of the imagination, the civilizing of students, the fostering of rationality and/or autonomy, and the development of students who show care and concern. From the perspective of an individual, the point of education is to enable them to acquire skills through gained knowledge. And as logic would have it there must be a point to education, otherwise, I might not be writing about it!

Firstly, the production of knowledge itself; can be seen as a key point of education. The aim is that students mature into adults who can contribute positively to society as they have gained experience through education. Through the right sort of didacticism, students can gain vast amounts of knowledge. Additionally, the idea of utilitarianism in education means that educators should continue to educate, as the nurturing of this knowledge provides the best outcome for the greatest number of people.

Secondly, most people agree that there is an intrinsic value to education, the 'ars gratia artis' principle, or put in another way, that education fosters curiosity or inquisitiveness. Being a lifelong learner through positive educational experiences can show us that education helps citizens to be able to contribute to society innovatively. Research, more creative thinking, and more holistic thinking are among the advantages of a positive attitude towards learning fostered through education. The interest that students gain in their different subjects encourages their intrinsic motivation to do well and make scientific

discoveries, for example, cures to diseases, political resolutions, and advances such as new ideas around the harnessing of sustainable energy sources.

Thirdly, the 'flourishing' or personal development associated with school, i.e., not simply textbook learning or narrow specialisation, can be seen as a key point of education. Developing resourcefulness encourages students to find new ways of thinking and problem solving, as well as being able to recognise the impacts of their actions. This 'epistemic' aim means that the point of education is to enable students to develop critical thinking and assessment skills as this is key to their ability to discover new things. Developing confidence is also key as that enables students to take risks – challenges and risks propel us forward and are vital in innovation. Analytical abilities are crucial because they enable people to find solutions to a variety of issues and to develop actual decisions and plans to address such issues. Developing determination to keep going in the face of adversity is extremely important as students mature. Interdisciplinary skills such as organisational skills and collaboration are important because they help students to prepare for the workplace. You can make your team more productive by improving the flows of communication through your structure. Better communication, after all, leads to better outcomes. Considering recent times, where students had to work from home, IT skills have been developed, as part of education, to a high standard. This is very useful because it gives students fast access to knowledge, rapid learning, and engaging ways to apply what they've learned. It allows students, particularly in STEM-based subjects, to explore new disciplines and get a better comprehension of complex concepts. A high level of IT skills and computer literacy is also extremely attractive to potential employers because of the rapidity of communication, and a reliance on modern technology.

As to a fourth point to education, the teaching of morality in life and the development of care, concern and kindness are important points. Early exposure to positive moral principles such as kindness, humility, courage, and compassion helps to shape a child's character. It becomes a basis for their moral views and shapes the very essence of their being. Moral education aids in the recognition of right and wrong. It manifests itself in one's personality. It helps develop a positive personal and professional life. It helps us to try to remove violence, dishonesty, and envy from our lives. An ethical person is one whose morals are demonstrated by their willingness to do the right thing, even if it is difficult or risky. Morality is concerned with the preservation of life and the treatment of others. Moral values will guide children in their decision-making and problem-solving whenever they are taught.

The fifth point of education is the fostering of rationality in children. The purpose of rationality development is for children to learn to seek out and evaluate reasons and evidence on their own, as opposed to just 'guessing'. This leads to the encouragement of autonomy in students, as you can use your reason and logic. Autonomy in education is important because it stimulates the development of thinking rather than copying your teacher. If you are not thinking autonomously, you cannot be learning.

Education, according to Plato, is a means of achieving "justice", both individual and communal justice. Individual justice, according to Plato, can be attained when each person maximises his or her abilities. I would argue that one of the basic points of education is to make the most of yourself and your ability to benefit your community. Plato believed that ability was not passed down through the generations and that it might be found in children of any social status. Both boys and girls were educated in the same way. Music and gymnastics were used in elementary school to teach and mix gentle and fierce tendencies in the individual, resulting in the so-called "harmonious" person.

Despite his admiration for Plato's theory, Rousseau, a French philosopher dismissed it as unworkable considering society's degradation. Rousseau also had a different idea of human growth than Plato; whereas Plato believed that people are born with talents appropriate to different castes (albeit he did not believe these skills were hereditary), Rousseau believed that all humans go through the same developmental process. This differed from the 'tabula rasa' of Locke, an English philosopher and physician in that he believed education was an active process driven by the child's nature to learn and adapt to its surroundings. However, Locke felt that the objective of education was to raise moral children using reason to conquer desire. Rather than examining individual interests, education was to be focused on teaching moral behaviour in society.

Ibn Sina, a Persian polymath, emphasised the importance of group education, believing that children should be educated and trained alongside their peers. Children should be sent to a maktab school at the age of six and taught primary education until they reach the age of fourteen. During this time, he wrote that the Qur'an, Islamic metaphysics, language, literature, Islamic ethics, and manual skills should all be taught to them (which could refer to a variety of practical skills). Ibn Sina refers to the secondary education stage of maktab schooling as the phase of specialisation, during which students, regardless of their social level, should begin to acquire manual skills. After the age of 14, he writes, children should be allowed to choose and specialise in subjects that interest them, whether it's reading, manual skills, literature, preaching, medicine, geometry, trade and commerce, craftsmanship, or any other subject or profession they'd like to pursue as a future career. He noted that this was a transitional period and that there should be some flexibility in terms of the age at which students graduate because the student's emotional growth and subjects of choice must be considered.

It is also important to mention the difference between education and indoctrination. Education entails the pursuit of knowledge and the discovery of what is and is not true – “true belief” or at least “justified belief”. Indoctrination aims to persuade people to believe in truths without being able to back them up with anything other than their own opinions. A political party, a cult, or a belief system can all indoctrinate you. Education should avoid indoctrination in any form because students need to be able to develop their own informed opinions supported by facts and statistics which their educators have taught them how to find and apply.

In conclusion, the point of education is to mould each generation into a more innovative, analytical, and successful generation than the one before it. I believe the primary goal of education is to promote a person's holistic development and transferable skills. It is also a source of its evident advantages for a richer and happier existence. Education, done well, has the potential to improve society as a whole, so we must all seize it to be lifelong learners.

Judges Feedback: I thought this was a very clear and thorough contemplation of the question and what education means. It was well structured, I had a clear sense of Genevieve's thoughts and voice, and brilliant use of historical references and ideas which all added to the argument.

Highly Commended: Cice, Isabelle, Margot, Todi

Cice

What makes a book a classic?

What first comes to mind when you think of “literary classics”? Are the words met with joy, excitement, or dread and alarm? What is associated with the term? Perhaps it is the overly long sentences with excessive use of semicolons. Perhaps it is the abstruse, advanced language, agonisingly abstract and notorious for their uncanny ability to lull one to sleep.

This essay has taken a wide selection of classics for comparison and analysis. Everything ranging from the most iconic and well-loved, to my personal favourites. Before diving into the search for a common factor between them, however, consider the dictionary's definition of “classic”. It states: “judged over a period of time to be of the highest quality and outstanding of its kind”; “a work of art of recognised and established value.” This provided a criteria for what classics are: literature that stood the test of time, something with the highest quality content and writing, particular aspects that made it stand out. Most importantly, they must be a work of art.

Firstly, in classic literature, a piece of work is usually considered to be a representation of the period in which it was written—and merits long lasting recognition. “To me, a book cannot be considered a classic before it has stood the test of generations of readers,” explains Elizabeth Bluemle in Publishers Weekly. In other words, even if a book of recent publication is that of high quality, acclaim and influence, it still needs at least a few generations to determine whether it deserves such a title. However, it is not always a question of age, the older the book does not make it more “classic”. The concept of “modern classics” does exist, applying to books written after World War II. These are outstanding books that are likely to continue to represent either the era, a particular wave, movement, or impact. Great works of literature are universally and eternally appealing. They touch readers to their very core, because they combine themes that are understood by people from a wide range of backgrounds and levels of experience. Themes of love, hate, death, life, and faith, for example, deals with some of our most basic emotional responses. Classics from Homer and Jane Austen and Miguel de Cervantes Saavedra can be read, and the characters and situations will still be so relatable despite the difference in era.

Secondly, classic literature has content that will never be tired of. A certain Christopher Smith defines a classic as “any book that merits re-reading, 5, 10, even 100 years or more after its publication.” One can read classics in their youth and gather a basic understanding of the author's themes, and then read them again later in life to see additional layers of truth that they missed previously. The complexity enables the work to communicate to multiple age groups throughout time. Reading *To Kill a Mockingbird* as a young person for the first time might lead you to identify with Scout, a curious kid trying to make sense of the complex world around her. However, as you transition into adulthood, another reading of this particular piece might cause you to latch onto Atticus, a man trying to protect his children while grappling with the moral ambiguity of society. Either way, a true classic of literature can be read and reread, read and reread, demonstrating new significance each time.

Similarly, a true classic has consistently high quality writing, plot and characters. Great works are based contrast and tension—not just conflicting characters, but also conflicting ideas, images, and viewpoints, allowing room for readers to entertain all sides.

Most classic books also feature central characters with vivid, distinct personalities and strong points of view about the world around them. These characters often serve as the reader's eyes and ears, providing a compelling vessel through which to observe the events of a novel. They give us an immediate sense of place. In *The Scarlet Letter*, Nathaniel Hawthorne vividly makes the reader feel like they are in the middle of colonial America by providing them with a clear mental image of their surroundings, down to the very sights, sounds and smells. Each classic author has their own unique and distinctive style that is difficult to be replicated. Everyone is familiar with Dickens's characteristic lavish descriptive style. He was a master of high humour—satire, puns, wordplay, and a curious method of characterising that poked fun at his own creations even as he fleshed them out with life and a persona all their own.

Thirdly, classic books have elements that make them stand out. Great literature is based on startling, unexpected, unusual, weighty or new ideas that exercise enduring influence over their readers. For example, Jane Austen, who lived from 1775 to 1817, is often cited as the first writer to use free indirect discourse in her narration. Free indirect discourse is a distinct kind of third-person narration which seamlessly slips in and out of a character's consciousness while still being presented by the third-person narrator. Austen's employment of FID was revolutionary, because it creates opportunities for tremendous narrative flexibility, and a narrator can make ironic points at a character's expense even as the narration seems to let characters speak or think for themselves. In this extract of a novel by Austen that heavily uses FID, Emma and Harriet are reading Mr. Elton's charade, the narrator records Emma's thoughts: "Humph—Harriet's ready wit! All the better. A man must be very much in love indeed, to describe her so." Through FID's capacity for complex ironies, this passage makes the reader cringe at how completely deluded Emma is in her marriage scheme for Harriet.

Furthermore, another example is *Jane Eyre* by Charlotte Brontë, arguably the most controversial novels ever published. It is one of the most inspiring, early feminist works. Brontë's novel outraged many critics at the time because of its realism, challenging the role of women, religion, and mortality in the Victorian society. Scandalous, realistic exposure of thoughts once considered improper for a lady of the 19th century, emotions any respectable girl would repress. To conceive the thought of them expressing rage and blatantly retaliating against patriarchal authority was a defiance against the traditional role of women. Brontë straight up dismantled lookism and classism in the strict, hierarchal Victorian structure. Her storyline about a relationship between a lowly governess and a wealthy nobleman was also simply unheard of. These thoughts are also expressed in the novel:

"Women feel just as men feel; they need exercise for their faculties, and a field for their efforts, as much as their brothers do; they suffer from too rigid a restraint, to absolute a stagnation, precisely as men would suffer; and it is narrow-minded in their more privileged fellow-creatures to say that they ought to confine themselves to making puddings and knitting stockings, to playing on the piano and embroidering bags. It is thoughtless to condemn them, or laugh at them, if they seek to do more or learn more than custom has pronounced necessary for their sex."

Forgive me for not having the heart to abridge this lengthy quote, it is simply too brilliant. Here, she directly rebels against gender inequality, stereotypes. She even goes a step further to beautifully defy societal expectations by making the male love interest, Mr Rochester, declare his preference for a woman who is independent and strong in character and voice, in stark contrast to male gender role expectations:

“To women who please me only by their faces, I am the very devil when I find out they have neither souls nor hearts...but to the clear eye and eloquent tongue, to the soul made of fire, and the character that bends but does not break...I am every tender and true...”

Jane Eyre completely changed people's perspective of women. In just eight years after the publication of the novel, women began standing up for themselves and gained more independence. This is the impact classic literature can have over cultural norms; Brontë as well as many other writers have valiantly endeavoured to reform the sexist, classist and lookist mindset of their times

Finally, then, and most importantly, classic literature is an expression of truth and beauty. Although different styles will come and go, a classic can be always appreciated for its construction and literary art. It may not be a bestseller today due to pacing and dated language, but you can still learn from its historical background and be inspired by its breath-taking poetry. Art is an expression of creativity and imagination; it is also a relationship between the artist and the audience. Literature is an art that shares a story with its readers. Either the style of a great work is incredibly interesting and beautiful, or the drama leaves us breathless, or the characters or scenes are so expertly drawn. We are lifted from our ordinary mode of being and given mental and spiritual refreshment from the high aesthetic experience of reading great literature.

The power of classics for me is not something any odd book can achieve. Some have moved me to tears, or spiked exhilaration into my heart, challenging my accustomed way of thinking, affirming my beliefs and making me feel less lonely. In the end “classic” is a fluid concept and a definitive definition is hard to pin down. It may not be old, particularly elaborate or popular, but it will always be a work of art.

Judges Feedback: I really enjoyed your specific examples of why certain literature was deemed revolutionary at the time, and how that might contribute to a book's status as a classic.

Isabelle

Should we judge those in the past by the standards of today?

It is important to first define what we mean by the standards of today. I believe there is no uniform standard of morality - people, societies and cultures across the globe have differing views and standards today and some of these may appear outdated to others. Are we entitled to condemn and criticize others from our own unique and varied positions of perceived moral superiority? I believe so.

While we seek to remain impartial for judging those for actions that once may have been legal, today's vastly different moral leanings make this difficult, maybe even impossible. Societies and individuals around the world will always define what is right in their circles and reshape what is acceptable, abolishing laws and tearing down statues if necessary. Figures in the past and their actions opened themselves up for judgement, and while they may once have been celebrated, this may not be appropriate in the present day. It is inevitable that in the future we will be criticized too, and I will argue that we should accept this to be the case in for the cause of ongoing progress. While I do believe that we should avoid judging too harshly those from the past operating within the laws and customs of their society, or let this cause hate, we must judge them for society to progress. I will be looking at Darwinism, Bristol and the nature of judgment to argue that we should judge the past.

In June 2020, a statue of Edward Colston was pulled down into Bristol's Harbour. The statue was toppled because Colston, during his life in the 17th century, was an active member of the Royal African Company and was heavily involved in the slave trade. A statue celebrates a legacy, and some people felt it no longer represented their standards. They passed judgment on Colston and his memory by throwing it into the harbour.

Is this okay?

Judgment is perceived by many to be something negative, but a statue is a representation of a positive judgment - showing that a person was celebrated in their time for commendable virtues and accomplishments. Tearing down a statue is just as much an act of judgement as putting it up, and if one is to accept the former, they must accept the latter too. Indeed, in January 'the Colston four' who tore down the statue were deemed not guilty by a jury despite admitting what they did. In Colston's time, the community deemed him worth celebrating, and now the community has decided otherwise. Not only is judging people by 'today's standards' okay, but it is also a natural process.

A theory which supports my argument that we should judge those in the past by the standards of today is Darwinism. This belief is centred around evolution and the idea that all living organisms develop over time to survive and inherit genes and DNA which increase the development and ability of a species. From a Darwinist's perspective, one could argue that they should judge the past, as by examining the past is the only way to look and learn from it.

This theory of Darwinism ties into the fact that the past should be judged for us to learn from it - there is no other way to progress as a society. George Santayana, a writer and philosopher, famously said: "Those who cannot remember the past are condemned to repeat it". This quote supports the idea that if you do not look at, understand, and therefore judge the mistakes of the past, it is inevitable that you will repeat those mistakes.

We must also consider that we as humans, from natural impulse, find it impossible not to judge others, whether that be in the present or the future. We inflict our own moral behaviours and standards on others, and it is natural to neglect to acknowledge the different moral beliefs of others if they do not align with our own. When someone is told about the many things that happened in the past which are now viewed as immoral or abhorrent, such as slavery, we impulsively regard it as bad, but do not immediately recognise that the act of slavery was legal at the time, and deemed right. This is human nature and although we may acknowledge the past normalisation of those actions which we criticize, we can't help but to condemn and criticise those judgements anyway – it is normal and natural.

The gladiatorial practice of Romans slaughtering elephants and each other for the entertainment of thousands inside the colosseum is completely at odds with the standards that most of the modern population would now share. We can accept that it was legal at the time, but we can and will judge them anyway. It is our ability to judge them that allows us to move forward. It is the reason this practice no longer exists.

It is inevitable that in the future we will be judged as well. We criticize those in the past because of our expansion of knowledge and have good reasons to discourage past beliefs and actions. And it is true that many of our present-day normalities will very likely be condemned in the future. We still have a lot to learn, so in the future when that knowledge is attained, the actions to which they object will be discouraged. There are many things we already understand are not right in the present day, such as

climate change, gun ownership and racial and gender inequality, but we ourselves find it hard to overcome these issues. People in the future may be dumbfounded by our inability to act on this. By understanding that we will be judged, we can also think and consider what we are doing in the modern day that will not be looked upon kindly in the future. To be 'on the right side of history' is a worthy motive and by being wary of how we may be judged in the future we can be more aware of our actions in the present.

Judgement can come from anywhere and we shouldn't close ourselves off to this, because we too may be part of progress one day, either for good or bad, and this helps the development of our society.

There are those who argue that by tearing down a statue we may forget that piece of history. But celebrating Colston's virtues and accomplishments at the time was part of history and dismantling his statue is too. Besides, in much of society, museums now exist to serve the purpose of preserving history and, crucially, in the correct context. Placed there, the statue could serve as a reminder of racial inequality and slavery faced in the time of Edward Colston. In a museum, there is a different atmosphere and people are there to be informed, and the statue would not be placed as a commemoration but instead in context, where people admiring can be aware of its associations. It is no longer possible to justify the act of slavery, so without any good intentions, the statue should not be placed for others to see, where it could easily be mistaken for the celebration of such a person. The community made this known, and clearly could not help but pass judgment upon Colston, such was the disparity between the standards he held, and the standards Bristol now holds.

Others argue that, for example, if Colston is to be torn down then monuments such as the pyramids, also built by slaves, must be too by that logic. However, it could even be perceived as an insult to destroy works completed by slaves - to undo these works despite the conditions under which they were completed would be a waste of their laborious efforts. Colston exploited the slave trade for gain, but these buildings exist because of the people who built them. Following this point, we could extend this argument to the cities where most of the slave-trade occurred, for example Liverpool, which was the largest slave-trading port in Britain. Does this argument imply that we should disregard Liverpool in any way, or be submissive of the community living in Liverpool presently, only because they were involved with the slave trade? The existence of a city or monument is not a celebration of the slave-trade, while the Colston statue glorifies someone who believed in it.

In conclusion, considering the need to evolve standards by passing judgment on the legal customs of societies from the past, the judgment passed on Colston and then the judgment passed on the people who brought him down, as well as Darwinism, I believe we should judge the past by the standards of today. It can't be helped, it happens every day, and what's more, it must be done.

Judges Feedback: An excellent essay, specifically on breaking down some of the complex debate related to pulling down the Edward Colston statue - I thought it was a well weighted argument, brilliantly explained.

Margot

What makes a book a classic?

The term classic is a widely disputed and unclear phrase. The line between what is and what is not a classic is blurred and distorted by individual values and perspectives. However, I will argue that, although classics can be inconsistent across culture, country, and family, they share broad characteristics and a single fundamental quality which defines them.

To fully understand what a classic book is, first it is important to appreciate what the term classic means. The Cambridge dictionary defines the term classic as, "having a high quality or standard against which other things are judged". In other words, it is a benchmark that we measure great literary works by and that we hold as the uppermost examples that we have. This is the reason that we have classics; they are traditions that we inherit from the generations before us, and they are some of the vibrant threads that make up the fabric of culture.

An integral area of the literature recognised as classic, by many people, are the novels of the western canon. However, not all classics originated in the West and such works are valued across the globe. The word canon comes from the ancient Greek word *κανών* which means standard or measuring rod, thus leading back to the idea that a classic is a standard of excellence.

The early renaissance in the West was when Classical literature was first recognized. Revival of a love of the arts and a fascination with ancient civilisations set in motion a search for their manuscripts and literature, and this in turn revealed that the past is perhaps the greatest resource for new ideas. The ancient Greek classics are possibly the first - and some would argue the greatest - classic writing of all time. Many of the great patrons of the renaissance would go to great lengths to find the writings of the philosophers, so that they could learn the valuable and enlightened ideas that the past held and perceive new ways to apply this thinking to problems of the present.

A classic book tells us about the intellectual values and morals of the time when it was written. The book allows the reader to gain some knowledge of how society and ideals worked at the time of its writing and when properly analysed gives a much larger picture of the way the world works. For example, Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales*, recognized as a very important classic, is now regarded as one of the most useful sources of information on 14th century England. Another illustration of this is Charles Dickens's novels, as these have provided great insight into the attitudes of the Victorian working class and society.

A survey taken in 2018 reveals that 60% of British people have lied about reading classics in order to appear more intelligent. From this we can clearly see that classic books have a reputation as difficult and intellectual reads. Deep thought, reflection and profound emotion are consistently associated with classic books, and this tells us that for a book to be considered a classic it must cause the reader to think about the deeper meaning it is attempting to convey and not simply tell a story. Therefore, society considers these books to be challenging and advanced reads. This establishes how a classic has a message to deliver that can teach every individual something when acutely reflected upon. The message that a classic conveys is different to that of a book not considered a classic, in that the message is something that society believes that every individual should attempt to appreciate, use to better themselves as a person and use as a tool to understand how a society works.

This raises the broader question of why society values reading books at all. Is it, on the one hand that we read to recognise ourselves, or on the other hand, whether we read to be immersed in another reality? To be seen or to see. People whose identities have been marginalised can feel themselves to be seen in certain works of literature and this helps them to understand parts of their identity more clearly. People who do not experience marginalisation often and have found their identity to be represented regularly in popular culture can find value in understanding and witnessing another person's experience. This helps us to further understand the meaning of a classic by allowing us to see how a classic can target a certain audience that it can relate to but also be understandable and captivating for other people, allowing it to be experienced and connected with by most people. This is another key feature that classics share; they can facilitate connections between different people and therefore have meaning to most readers and provide an important insight to either your own experience, or to someone else's.

Another common feature that most classic books share is endurance. Most classic books have withstood the constant weathering and chipping away of time and still have something valuable to offer today. Classic books have been read by generation after generation and their message is still a useful addition to the wider education of the individual. For example, Chaucer is still read today even though he wrote over 700 years ago as his books are still extremely potent in their message and admired for their beauty as literature.

An idea that contradicts the theme of endurance is the term "modern classic". This is how books with an extremely potent message, written in the 20th century and more recently, are described. An example of a modern classic is Harper Lee's *To Kill a Mockingbird*; the classic novel beautifully illustrates the injustice of race and class and is centred around the transformation of the deep south in the 1930s. When it was published in 1960 during the civil rights movement it resonated with readers across cultural lines and became an important and useful way of educating young people about racial and gender discrimination. The reason that it is now regarded as a modern classic is because it was instantly realized that the lessons that could be learned from this book were imperative in order to create a more equal and progressive society.

Throughout every culture there are classics and a rich sample of this is in Russian culture. The classic *Crime and Punishment* by Feodor Dostoevsky, published in 1866, delves into the complexities of Russian society and remains a timely and relevant source of information about the formation of the Russian ethos. Dostoevsky explores in his writing what he saw as the harsh but proud brutality of Russia and although it was written over a century ago still provides a valuable window into the views and the core values that make Russia what it is today. This is a great example of the way classics can be analysed to reveal a reflection of the core values of that group, providing an insight into the inner workings of each society. Works of literature like *The Odyssey*, an important part of the western cannon, reflects many core Western values including individual heroism and loyalty.

In conclusion, classics share many common traits, which include needing to be exceptionally well-written, endure the test of time, have potent messages about contemporaneous life, and evoke deep thinking, reflection, and emotion for most readers. However, the most important quality that all classics contain, is that they allow the reader to grasp and understand the shared and connected values that society, culture, family, and individuals have at their heart. In my opinion, this is what makes a book a classic.

Judges Feedback: She intelligently delves into what a 'classic' book is, and how we should define it. A great breadth of examples and a clear personal reflection on some of the benefits books bring us.

Todi

Should we judge those in the past by the standards of today?

Although it is completely illogical, ahistorical, and unfair to natural justice to judge the people of the past by today's morals, it is also very hard not to. If we merely judge them by the morals of their own times, it doesn't tell us very much about their society compared to ours. However, if we don't judge them morally at all, we let off the likes of Hitler and Stalin in a welter of moral relativism. In this essay, I will aim to distinguish the line between blame and responsibility as they are paramount issues in how we make amends for historical moral wrongdoings as a society. This question is very relevant to us today, as following the widespread resurgence of the Black Lives Matter movement and the removal of monuments of controversial figures in countries globally has sparked debate on whether we should use common moral standards of today as benchmarks by which to judge past behaviour. For example, the demolition of the statue of Edward Colston, a prominent slave trader in the 17th century, by Black Lives Matter demonstrators in Bristol. Furthermore, standards of morality will be explored in this essay, in order to discover whether it is unique to different periods or truly timeless. All in efforts to conclude if it's rational to judge figures in the past by today's standards.

The first perspective that will be examined is the argument against judging those in the past. A main view opposing the statement would be moral relativism. It argues that our values today can't be compared with the values from another era saying that what was right for them was right for them and what is right for us is right for us. Moral relativists argue that there is no way to prove that one moral code is better than another without being biased, and so it is irrational to judge the past from our particular historical standpoint, as their morality was defined by their society at the time. Furthermore, by attempting to admonish those in past by our standards we are faced with the pressing issue of presentism. The Oxford English Dictionary defines this as "uncritical adherence to present-day attitudes, especially the tendency to interpret past events in terms of modern values and concepts." Some may argue that it is important for us as a society to refrain from presentist views as they encourage moral complacency and self-congratulation. By interpreting the past in terms of present concerns, it can lead to the feeling of moral superiority, which is a hindrance in the progression and development of society.

In addition, the test for blame is defined by whether the person or people could have known any different. This view is shared by English philosopher Miranda Fricker who stated that "the proper standards by which to judge people are the best standards that were available to them at the time". The attitude of blame presupposes that the person was in a position to have done better and doesn't consider varying circumstances. Moreover, it would be unjust to blame people for failing to be moral pioneers as it is unrealistic that at the time people would have undergone moral revelations, suddenly deciding that a common, widespread practice is wrong, contradicting the views of their contemporaries. Slavery in ancient Greece is a clear example of this. Although it is recognised that slaves didn't necessarily enjoy their position, the abolition of slavery was unthought-of due to it being the backbone of society. Therefore, it would be unfair to judge any individual person in Ancient Greece as a horrible human being for not overtly advocating for the abolition of slavery. For instance, it wouldn't be rational to denounce Socrates as the most repulsive morally deplorable person to ever live just because he didn't advocate for the abolition of slavery. As not only was the concept not in circulation, it wouldn't have been feasible. Overall, It would be unfair for us to blame specific historical individuals for not supporting progressive causes that no one else at the time that we know of was even proposing.

On the other hand, another very compelling argument is that we indeed should judge the past of the standards of today. Contradicting Miranda Fricker, a key perspective is that if we cannot blame people for abhorrent views, does that also mean we can't hold them responsible for these views. Furthermore, opposing the view that standards of morality change gradually over time, it has been shown that it is possible for morality to undergo a revolution within a generation. For example, the acceptance of the LGBTQ+ community in society. Moreover, the idea that morality is determined solely by social consensus holds bizarre and disturbing implications, it is also an anti-progressive idea. If morality is dictated solely by society and whatever society says is just must therefore be just, that would mean if people decided for no apparent reason that rape and murder were morally good and not heinous crimes, it would *actually* become morally good to do so. These concepts are very dangerous to how society is managed and how matters are regulated. In addition, if morality is not determined by logic or reason, then all that would matter is conformity- another precarious prospect. This would mean that all social reformers would be dishonourable for not keeping to the restraints of society, once again limiting progression and growth. Society benefits when it judges the past from the current standards and values because as Spanish philosopher George Santayana mentioned, we must learn from history in order to avoid making the same mistakes.

Additionally, the idea of not judging contemporary figures by moral standards tends to be abused a lot by conservatives looking to exonerate traditional heroes of their crimes and hypocrisies. For instance, founding father Thomas Jefferson (1743-1826) and his involvement with slavery. Thomas Jefferson was a hypocrite regarding the slave trade. He stated that it was "moral depravity", "abominable crime" and "hideous blot", but he had owned slaves throughout his adult life and harboured deep racial prejudice against black people. Although the opposing argument may not condemn Jefferson by stating that the ownership of slaves was acceptable at his time and was justified because everyone partook in it, their argument falls flat as it completely overlooks and trivialises the injustices of the enslaved, being forced to work in cruel conditions, as they were certainly not content about being slaves. Also, unlike ancient Greece, there was a growing abolition movement, which he would have been aware of and he could have freed his slaves, but instead decided to keep the vast majority. Contradicting the statement that 'everyone would have owned slaves at the time', John Adams, Jefferson's contemporary and colleague, didn't own any enslaved people but instead hired white and free African-American workers to provide services in his home. This means that it would have been very possible for Thomas Jefferson to do the same. Taking everything into account, by condemning Jefferson for hypocrisy on slavery, we are not only judging him by the standards of our own time, in order to learn from the past's mistakes; but his own time, showing that he could have made many more moral choices, but chose otherwise.

In conclusion, I believe we cannot indict specific historical figures as uniquely monstrous for not supporting social causes that either did not exist or were not prominent at the times when they were alive. Nonetheless, if a historical figure did something immoral, we can say that their actions were immoral. If someone owned slaves, then we can rightly characterize their ownership of slaves as immoral. However, my main support is directed to the argument outlining we should judge those in the past by the standards of today. This is because by reflecting and condemning the actions of those in the past we are allowing the progression of society. As it keeps developing we need to keep judging and improving our practices from previous ones, allowing us to learn from our mistakes, ensuring efficiency. Furthermore, I believe that presentism, a main point used in the opposing argument, can be positive. Strategic presentism is useful as it allows us to take moral judgments into account and although we cannot fully blame past figures, we can hold them accountable. Only if we embrace presentism will we be able to frame judgments and practices conducive to human flourishing. Overall as famously said by Spanish aphorist George Santayana "those who cannot remember the past are condemned to repeat it"

and this is what we must take into consideration when deciding whether we should judge those in the past by the standards of today.

Judges Feedback: I loved your differentiation between the owning of slaves in Ancient Greece vs Thomas Jefferson's America - showed you'd really thought through the logic of your argument. It was well explained, with a great use of quotes and references.

<End>