



GSOC.FA5 Childhood and Its Social Construction

AQA 8192 · Calculators not allowed · about 78 minutes

Total Marks

Name: _____ Date: ____ / ____ / ____

Answer ALL questions. Show your understanding by using sociological vocabulary and, where asked, your own examples.

Item A: Aisha's Day

A hypothetical scenario, written for Revision Library to illustrate ideas about childhood. Not a real child.

Aisha is ten years old. She is legally required to attend school five days a week, where she is taught by qualified teachers, and she is not allowed to be employed in paid work during school hours. After school she has forty minutes of screen time on a tablet, then attends a supervised football club before her parents collect her. Her bedtime is set by her parents at 8.30pm on school nights, and she is not allowed to walk to the local shop alone after dark. Aisha's grandmother, who grew up in the same town seventy years earlier, left school at fourteen and began working in a shop, contributing her wages to the family budget.

- 1** Which historian argued that in medieval Europe there was no separate concept of childhood, and that children were treated much like small adults once they no longer needed constant care?

- ☐ A) Neil Postman
- ☐ B) Philippe Aries
- ☐ C) Sue Palmer
- ☐ D) Jens Qvortrup

(Total for Question 1 is 1 mark)

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- 2** Define what sociologists mean when they say childhood is a 'social construction'.

(Total for Question 2 is 2 marks)

3 The historian Philippe Aries (1962) studied ideas about childhood in the past.

(a) Explain Aries' claim about childhood in medieval Europe. (2)

(b) Explain how Aries argued the idea of childhood changed in more modern times. (2)

(Total for Question 3 is 4 marks)

4 The sociologist Neil Postman (1982) argued that childhood, once created, could also disappear again.

(a) Explain Postman's main claim about childhood in the modern media age. (2)

(b) Explain why Postman thought this mattered for the idea of childhood as a protected stage. (2)

(Total for Question 4 is 4 marks)

5 In 'Toxic Childhood' (2006), the writer Sue Palmer argued that aspects of modern life can be harmful to children's development.

(Total for Question 5 is 4 marks)

6 Sociologists disagree about whether childhood has generally improved over time.

(Total for Question 6 is 4 marks)

7 State one criticism that has been made of Aries' argument about medieval childhood.

(Total for Question 7 is 2 marks)

8 State one criticism that has been made of Postman's view that childhood is disappearing.

(Total for Question 8 is 2 marks)

9 Look at Item A.

(a) Using Item A, identify two features of Aisha's life that reflect the modern, protected idea of childhood described by Aries. (2)

(b) Using Item A, explain one way Aisha's grandmother's childhood, as described in Item A, differed from Aisha's. (2)

(Total for Question 9 is 4 marks)

10 Look at Item A again.

(a) Using Item A, give one example from Aisha's day that could illustrate Sue Palmer's 'toxic childhood' concerns about screen time, and explain why. (2)

(b) Using Item A, give one example from Aisha's day that could illustrate Palmer's concerns about children's free time and family time, and explain why. (2)

(Total for Question 10 is 4 marks)

11 Explain one reason compulsory schooling changed the position of children in society.

(Total for Question 11 is 2 marks)

12 Give one example of a legal protection for children in the UK today, other than compulsory schooling.

(Total for Question 12 is 2 marks)

13 State one criticism of the 'march of progress' view of childhood.

(Total for Question 13 is 2 marks)

14 State one strength of comparing childhood across different time periods, as Aries did.

(Total for Question 14 is 2 marks)

15 Explain two ways ideas about childhood can differ between different cultures or societies today.

(Total for Question 15 is 4 marks)

16 Explain one way growing up with widely available internet access could support Postman's argument that childhood is disappearing.

(Total for Question 16 is 2 marks)

17 Which view, Aries' or Postman's, fits Item A better? Give two reasons for your answer, referring to Item A, and acknowledge one limit of your chosen view.

(Total for Question 17 is 4 marks)

18 The idea that children have their own rights has developed over time.

- (a)** Explain how the idea of children's rights has developed, referring to the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989). (2)
- (b)** Explain how this contrasts with historical views of children. (2)
- (c)** State one strength of having internationally agreed children's rights. (2)

(Total for Question 18 is 6 marks)

Mark scheme · GSOC.FA5 Childhood and Its Social Construction

Question 1

- **B1** B (Philippe Aries)
- **Answer: B**

Question 2

- **B1** identifies that a social construction is an idea created and given meaning by society or culture, rather than something fixed or natural (oe)
- **B1** development, e.g. sociologists argue 'childhood' is understood differently in different times and places, rather than meaning exactly the same thing everywhere
- **Answer: A social construction is an idea created and given meaning by society or culture, rather than something fixed or natural; sociologists argue childhood is understood differently in different times and places.**

Question 3

- (a) **B1** identifies that Aries argued there was no separate concept of childhood as a protected life stage
- (a) **B1** development, e.g. once children no longer needed constant physical care, they were treated much like small adults, working and socialising alongside adults
- **(a) Answer: Aries argued medieval Europe had no separate concept of childhood; once children no longer needed constant care, they were treated much like small adults, working and socialising alongside adults.**
- (b) **B1** identifies that Aries argued a distinct, protected idea of 'childhood' gradually developed from around the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries onward (oe)
- (b) **B1** development, e.g. children came to be seen as innocent and in need of protection, education and nurture, separate from the adult world
- **(b) Answer: Aries argued a distinct, protected idea of childhood gradually developed from around the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, with children increasingly seen as innocent and needing protection, education and nurture.**

Question 4

- (a) **B1** identifies that Postman argued the boundary between childhood and adulthood is blurring or disappearing again (oe)
- (a) **B1** development, e.g. he linked this to television and media giving children access to the same information as adults, which used to be kept separate
- **(a) Answer: Postman argued the boundary between childhood and adulthood is blurring again, linking this to television and media giving children access to information that used to be kept separate from them.**
- (b) **B1** identifies that keeping some information/knowledge separate from children helped mark them out as different from adults, needing protection
- (b) **B1** development, e.g. if children have access to the same knowledge as adults, Postman argued this special protected status becomes harder to maintain
- **(b) Answer: Keeping some knowledge separate from children helped mark them as different from adults, needing protection; if children access the same knowledge as adults, Postman argued this protected status becomes harder to maintain.**

Question 5

- **B1** identifies factors Palmer linked to harming children's wellbeing, e.g. poor diet or junk food, and heavy use of screens/technology
- **B1** development, e.g. she argued this can be linked to reduced outdoor play and physical activity
- **B1** identifies that Palmer also linked toxic childhood to less family time or interaction, e.g. busy schedules or long working hours reducing time spent together
- **B1** development, e.g. she argued these combined pressures could affect children's behaviour, concentration and emotional wellbeing
- **Answer: Palmer linked toxic childhood to poor diet, heavy screen use and reduced outdoor play, plus less family time due to busy schedules, arguing these combined pressures affect children's behaviour, concentration and wellbeing.**

Question 6

- **B1** identifies the 'march of progress' view: children today are generally more protected, valued and cared for than in the past (oe)
- **B1** development, e.g. supported by changes such as compulsory schooling and laws against child labour
- **B1** identifies the conflict/critical view: not all children experience the benefits of modern childhood equally (oe)
- **B1** development, e.g. some children still live in poverty, face abuse or neglect, or take on heavy responsibilities such as caring for a family member (a young carer)
- **Answer: The 'march of progress' view says children today are generally more protected and valued, supported by compulsory schooling and child labour laws; the conflict view argues not all children benefit equally, since some still face poverty, neglect or heavy caring responsibilities.**

Question 7

- **B1** identifies a recognised criticism, e.g. some historians argue his evidence, such as old paintings showing children dressed like small adults, does not prove there was no real concept of childhood at all
- **B1** brief development, e.g. or that conditions and evidence may have varied a great deal between different social classes and regions, rather than being one single medieval pattern
- **Answer: Critics argue Aries' evidence, such as paintings showing children dressed like small adults, does not prove there was no concept of childhood, and that conditions likely varied by social class and region.**

Question 8

- **B1** identifies a recognised criticism, e.g. critics argue childhood is still strongly protected in many ways today, through laws on schooling, employment and child protection
- **B1** brief development, e.g. or that access to more information does not automatically mean children are treated exactly like adults in other respects
- **Answer: Critics argue childhood is still strongly protected today through laws on schooling and child protection, and that having more information does not automatically mean children are treated like adults in other ways.**

Question 9

- (a) **B1** a correct feature, e.g. compulsory school attendance rather than paid work during school hours
- (a) **B1** a second, different correct feature, e.g. rules set by her parents, such as a bedtime and not walking out alone after dark
- (a) **Answer: Aisha attends compulsory school rather than doing paid work, and her parents set protective rules, such as a bedtime and not walking out alone after dark.**
- (b) **B1** identifies the difference, e.g. Aisha's grandmother left school and began paid work at fourteen, while Aisha is required to stay in education and is not allowed to work during school hours
- (b) **B1** development, e.g. this reflects real historical change in child labour and education laws, not just a difference between two individual families
- (b) **Answer: Aisha's grandmother left school and began paid work at fourteen, while Aisha must stay in education and cannot work during school hours, reflecting real historical change in child labour and education law.**

Question 10

- (a) **B1** identifies the example, e.g. Aisha's forty minutes of screen time on a tablet
- (a) **B1** explains the link, e.g. Palmer linked heavy screen/technology use in modern childhood to concerns about children's wellbeing and development
- (a) **Answer: Aisha's screen time on a tablet illustrates Palmer's concern about heavy technology use in modern childhood affecting children's wellbeing and development.**
- (b) **B1** identifies the example, e.g. Aisha's day is highly scheduled, with school, screen time, a supervised football club and a set bedtime, leaving little unstructured free time
- (b) **B1** explains the link, e.g. Palmer linked a lack of unstructured play and family time to concerns about children's wellbeing
- (b) **Answer: Aisha's highly scheduled day, with school, screen time, a supervised club and a set bedtime, leaves little unstructured free time, which Palmer linked to concerns about children's wellbeing.**

Question 11

- **B1** identifies, e.g. it removed most children from full-time paid work and grouped them together by age
- **B1** development, e.g. this reinforced the idea of childhood as a separate stage of life focused on learning rather than work
- **Answer: Compulsory schooling removed most children from full-time paid work and grouped them together by age, reinforcing the idea of childhood as a separate stage focused on learning rather than work.**

Question 12

- **B1** a correct example, e.g. laws against employing children below a minimum age, or child protection/safeguarding laws
- **B1** brief development
- **Answer: Laws set a minimum age below which children cannot be employed, and safeguarding laws require agencies such as schools to protect children from harm.**

Question 13

- **B1** identifies a recognised criticism, e.g. it can present childhood today as automatically better for every child, ignoring poverty, abuse or inequality some children still experience
- **B1** brief development, e.g. or that it assumes progress is steady and permanent, when some sociologists argue childhood protections could also be eroded, as Postman suggested
- **Answer: Critics argue the march of progress view can wrongly present childhood as automatically better for every child, ignoring poverty or abuse some still experience, and assumes progress is permanent when protections could also be eroded.**

Question 14

- **B1** identifies a genuine strength, e.g. it shows that ideas about childhood are not fixed or natural, but have changed over time
- **B1** brief development, e.g. this supports the wider sociological argument that childhood is a social construction rather than simply a biological stage
- **Answer: Comparing childhood across time periods shows ideas about childhood are not fixed but have changed, supporting the argument that childhood is a social construction rather than simply a biological stage.**

Question 15

- **B1** identifies one way, e.g. in some societies children take on more responsibility for paid work or family duties at a younger age than is typical in the UK
- **B1** development
- **B1** identifies a second, different way, e.g. the age at which someone is considered an adult, and the rules that apply to children, can vary between different countries and cultures
- **B1** development
- **Answer: In some societies children take on more paid work or family responsibility at a younger age than is typical in the UK, and the age at which someone is considered an adult, and the rules applying to children, vary between cultures.**

Question 16

- **B1** identifies, e.g. children today can access adult-oriented information or content online that was harder for children to access before mass media
- **B1** development, e.g. this can narrow the information gap Postman argued used to separate children from adults
- **Answer: Children today can access adult-oriented information online more easily than before mass media, narrowing the information gap Postman argued used to separate children from adults.**

Question 17

- **B1** identifies a reasonable choice of view (either Aries' or Postman's is creditable if justified)
- **B1** a first reason supporting the choice, referring to Item A
- **B1** a second reason supporting the choice, referring to Item A
- **B1** brief acknowledgement of a limit of the chosen view or a point in favour of the alternative view
- **Answer: A reasonable answer is that Aries' view fits Item A better overall, since Aisha's protected, school-focused, rule-bound life closely matches Aries' modern, protected idea of childhood; though her tablet use also shows some of the media access Postman was concerned about.**

Question 18

- (a) **B1** identifies that children today are increasingly seen as having their own rights, such as the right to safety, education and to be heard in decisions that affect them
- (a) **B1** development, e.g. this is reflected in international agreements such as the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989)
- **(a) Answer: Children today are increasingly seen as having their own rights, such as to safety, education and to be heard in decisions affecting them, reflected in international agreements such as the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989).**
- (b) **B1** identifies that historically children were often seen mainly as the property or responsibility of parents, with few rights of their own (oe)
- (b) **B1** development, e.g. decisions about a child's upbringing, work or education were traditionally left almost entirely to parents or guardians
- **(b) Answer: Historically, children were often seen mainly as the property or responsibility of parents, with few rights of their own, and decisions about their upbringing were left almost entirely to parents or guardians.**
- (c) **B1** identifies a genuine strength, e.g. it set out shared standards for how children should be treated and protected, agreed by most of the world's countries
- (c) **B1** development, e.g. this reinforced the idea globally that children have needs and rights different from adults
- **(c) Answer: Internationally agreed children's rights set out shared standards for how children should be treated and protected, reinforcing the idea globally that children have needs and rights different from adults.**