

Jane Thynne: I set my teenage daughter a computer curfew

- [...] At 13, I would spend long vigils beside the home telephone every evening, calling the friends who I had seen all day at school to resume our conversation. Everyone did. It's normal for teenagers to require constant interaction with their peer group, while other figures, like parents, vanish to the margins, and I saw nothing strange about spending hours crouched in our hall, discussing embarrassing teachers and hilarious friends in forensic detail. Sometimes, an exasperated parent would wrench the phone out of my hand, forcing me to skulk back to my room.
- Last month I imposed the 21st century equivalent of wrenching the landline from my 13-year-old daughter's hand by imposing a computer curfew. This entailed removing her laptop, phone, Game Boy and all other screens from her room after 9pm at night, about an hour before she goes to sleep. The aim was to allow her this hour to think her own thoughts. An hour of interior life.
- Our children, like most of their friends, are accessorised with both laptop and mobile phone. As a result, the potential for constant communication with their friends is ever present. Texting begins early morning and lets up last thing at night. Friends wake them up, friends say goodnight and Facebook fills all the gaps in between. The sweet, individualised ring tones that signify when a particular friend is texting beep from 6.30 am to 11 pm, chirruping their insistent way through supper, homework, bath time and sleep. On the bus, kids attach their headphones and carry on. Technology embraces our children, like ourselves, in a warm electronic sea, and the tide of it comes ever higher.
- Does this matter? Susan Greenfield, the neuroscientist, thinks it does. Last month she told the BBC Radio 4's Today Programme that this "cyber-lifestyle" is rewiring our brains and even without making a value judgment, we need at least to acknowledge that there is an issue.
- Others are not so wary of making a value judgment. Nicholas Carr, in his book *The Shallows: What The Internet Is Doing To Our Brains*, claims that "loss of concentration and focus, division of our attention and fragmentation of our thoughts", is changing how our minds work, creating shorter attention spans and making reading harder by destroying "the linear, literary mind". Sue Palmer, in her new book, *21st Century Girls*, goes all out for total technological cold turkey. "Allowing electronic strangers into a girl's bedroom before her mid-teens is an extremely bad idea. If parents want their daughters to establish healthy sleeping habits they have to bite the bullet and insist that their bedroom remains a technology-free zone."
- Especially for girls, with their intimate, gossipy, social natures, the drive to remain as connected as possible with friends is overwhelming. Yet perversely, floating in an electronic sea has the deeper effect of depriving them of the habit of being alone, developing their own thoughts. Needless to say, my efforts to explain this to my daughter were pretty hapless.
- [...] As a writer, married to another writer, Philip Kerr, I had one other, overriding concern. The key thing children miss out on without that moment of solitude before sleep, is reading. A generation ago, if you saw a light under a child's bedclothes, it would be a torch illuminating some secretive paperback. Now the light under the bedclothes has changed to the blue phosphorescent glow of a laptop or an iPad or a phone, and it's a dead cert that no one is reading Jane Eyre.
- The concern that children aren't reading isn't new, of course – there's a survey practically every day. A report by Professor Keith Topping for this year's World Book Day, which looked at the reading habits of 300,000 pupils, found that reading ages were actually declining. Increasing numbers of 13 and 14-year-olds opted for books with a primary-school reading age.
- Topping warned that if children don't engage with more sophisticated books, they will fail to engage with more sophisticated ideas. [...] reading also develops key life skills, including the empathy to place yourself imaginatively in another mind and the ability to sustain deep concentration.
- My children would be the first to point out that I'm as bad as any teenager in wasting time on Twitter and Facebook. Those addictive social networks account for at least half an hour of my day that I won't get back. Yet it seems a more grievous thing to rob a child of the chance to read. Particularly when I had the best of chances myself.
- [...] Yet here am I with my heavy-handed computer curfew. Luckily, our daughter has taken to it. She reads and loves poetry, but I know I'm just Canute trying to hold back the tide. I can't help envying previous generations of parents who didn't have to face this addictive electronic onslaught in their efforts to give their children a bit of time on their own. Adults can subscribe to computer programmes like the Freedom internet blocking software, which forcibly prevents them from social networking for several hours a day. They can even turn off the internet router, though that doesn't stop access from a 3G phone. But the fact remains that for children, the chance to be alone and read, write or simply think, is vanishing in our connected world. We should do everything we can to help them reclaim a small desert island of their own in the electronic sea.

(900 words)

Annotations

- line 36: to rewire our brains** – to produce different, new connections of brain cells so that the brain functions in a different way
- line 37: value judgment** – decision about how good or bad something is
- line 47: to go all out for technological cold turkey** – digital detox (*Entzugsprogramm*), not using any gadgets from one day to the next after having become addicted
- line 71: Jane Eyre** – a famous novel written by Charlotte Brontë in 1847
- line 97: Canute** – refers to the legendary story of *King Canute and the waves*, in which Canute is not able to turn back the tide, thus illustrating that nature cannot be controlled
- line 106: a 3G phone** – works on third generation telecommunication technology including voice telephony, mobile internet access, video calls, mobile TV etc.

Tasks

1 Content/Comprehension

- Point out what Jane Thynne means when she talks about a computer curfew.
- Summarise why she has imposed a computer curfew on her daughter.

2 Form/Analysis

- Analyse how the author emphasises the ways in which a computer curfew can enhance personal development.
- Analyse the pictures and explain which picture best visualises the point the author wants to make.



3 Comment/Text production

Choose one of the following tasks:

- Write a personal letter to Jane Thynne's daughter in which you give her advice on how to cope with the curfew.
- Comment on Jane Thynne's view that adults "should do everything [they] can to help [children] reclaim a small desert island of their own in the electronic sea" (ll. 109ff).
- In a letter to the editor explain the role technical gadgets play in your life by comparing your experiences to those of Jane Thynne's daughter.

Elektronisch gefesselt

PC-Kenntnisse sind heute wichtig. Doch wer die reale gegen die virtuelle Welt eintauscht, ist gefährdet.

5 *Macht das Internet abhängig? Die Frage ist offiziell nicht geklärt. Doch wer mit Jugendlichen zu tun hat, die 16 Stunden pro Tag vor dem PC sitzen, sagt: Rollenspiele und soziale Netzwerke bergen ein Suchtpotenzial, das von vielen unterschätzt wird – allen voran von Eltern.*

10 [...] „Die Sucht beginnt, wenn die virtuelle Welt das eigene Leben dominiert, die Gedanken nur noch um den Cyberspace kreisen, Hobbys und Freundschaften, ja selbst der Kontakt zur Familie dafür aufgegeben werden“, sagt Rainer Thomasius, ärztlicher Leiter des
15 Deutschen Zentrum für Suchtfragen des Kindes- und Jugendalters (DZSKJ) der Universitätsklinik Hamburg-Eppendorf. Die Einrichtung therapiert im Jahr 1300 bis 1500 abhängige Kinder und Jugendliche, davon 300 Onlinesüchtige. Tendenz steigend.

20 „In Studien wurde eine erhöhte Aktivität des Suchtgedächtnisses während des Spielens nachgewiesen“, sagt Thomasius. Dabei komme es zu einer verstärkten Ausschüttung des Hirnbotsstoffes Dopamin, der für das Belohnungssystem
25 verantwortlich ist. „Der einzige Unterschied zu stofflichen Drogen ist, dass das Suchtgedächtnis nicht durch eine Substanz, sondern durch optische und akustische Eindrücke stimuliert wird“, erläutert der Arzt.

30 In einer vom Bundesgesundheitsministerium in Auftrag gegebenen Studie werden rund 560.000 Menschen als internetsüchtig eingestuft. Weitere 2,5 Millionen fallen in die Kategorie der „problematischen Internetnutzer“. Junge Nutzer bilden die größte Gruppe
35 der Online-Süchtigen. So gelten der Erhebung zufolge zirka 250.000 der 14- bis 24-Jährigen als abhängig. Betroffen sind Mädchen und Jungen gleichermaßen. In der Altersgruppe der 14- bis 16-Jährigen wurden sogar mehr Mädchen (4,9 Prozent) als Jungen (3,1 Prozent)
40 als süchtig ermittelt. Während sich die weiblichen Nutzer vor allem im Sog der sozialen Netzwerke wie Facebook verlieren, kleben Jungs hauptsächlich für Online-Rollenspiele am Bildschirm.

45 Doch warum fühlen sich viele Kinder und Jugendliche so stark vom Internet angezogen?

Studien weisen darauf hin, dass das Internet Usern ermöglicht, ihre Grundbedürfnisse nach Autonomie, Kompetenz und Verbundenheit zu befriedigen, wenn ihnen die wirkliche Welt dies versagt. Psychologen sind sich einig, dass
50 problematische, konfliktreiche und unbefriedigende Beziehungen im Familien- und Freundeskreis dazu beitragen, dass sich Jugendliche hinter den Bildschirm zurückziehen. Der Schweizer Psychologe und Suchtexperte
55 Franz Eidenbenz sieht beispielsweise einen direkten Zusammenhang zwischen Bindungsstörungen und Online-Sucht.

Ein zusätzliches Suchtrisiko seien zudem bestimmte Persönlichkeitsmerkmale. „Es gibt
60 niemanden, der das Kriterium Computersucht erfüllt und nicht gleichzeitig noch andere psychische Störungen hat“, betont Thomasius. Sozialphobische Störungen, Depressionen, ADHS
65

oder massive Selbstwertprobleme können die Abhängigkeit vom PC begünstigen. Online-Rollenspiele, wie „World of Warcraft“, bieten dann eine ausgezeichnete Gelegenheit, sich mit
70 mächtigen und kompetenten Spielfiguren zu identifizieren und wenigstens in der virtuellen Welt als Sieger dazustehen. Das macht es auch besonders schwierig, von der Droge zu lassen. [...]

„Ich würde mir wünschen, dass es für das
75 Suchtmittel Internet ein ähnliches Bewusstsein gäbe wie für Drogen“, sagt Thomasius. Gerade Eltern hätten einen großen Nachholbedarf. Der Suchtexperte plädiert hier für eine Mischung aus Anleitung und Restriktionen. Erwachsene sollten
80 klare Zeitgrenzen setzen und Computer nicht ins Kinderzimmer stellen. Es sei wichtig, dass sich Eltern für die Spiele ihrer Kinder interessieren und sich damit auseinandersetzen.

Thomasius rät zudem, mindestens einen Tag
85 pro Woche computerfrei zu lassen. Zur Vorbeugung gehöre auch, andere Interessen und Hobbys jenseits des Internets zu fördern, bei denen Kinder und Jugendliche Selbstbestätigung finden. Dann müssen sie nämlich nicht im Netz
90 danach suchen. (531 words)

4 Mediation

You regularly contribute to an international youth blog about the impact of the internet on society. Based on the article by Katrin Neubauer in the *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, write a blog post on internet addiction. Point out which group is mainly affected, and the reasons for and consequences of internet addiction.

Erwartungshorizont

Textinformationen

Autor	Jane Thynne
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1 Content/Comprehension

a) Point out what Jane Thynne means when she talks about a computer curfew.

A computer curfew means that her daughter is not allowed to use her laptop, phone, Game Boy or any other screens/technical devices in her room (her parents take the gadgets out of her room) after 9 p.m.

b) Summarise why she has imposed a computer curfew on her daughter.

Reasons for imposing a computer curfew:

- ✦ make sure that daughter has time to spend on thinking on her own
- ✦ keep technology and constant communication from determining/influencing her daughter's life around the clock
- ✦ limit the use of technology and its impact on her lifestyle and the way her brain works
- ✦ enforce healthy sleeping
- ✦ reduce the risk of her daughter becoming addicted
- ✦ provide her daughter with the chance to read more intellectually challenging books suitable for her age
- ✦ promote being focused and empathetic and foster the ability to see things from another perspective
- ✦ limit time spent on social networking sites as this time is not spent in a meaningful way
- ✦ children are not aware of the potential dangers of internet addiction and must be helped by adults to set time aside for reading and thinking

Therefore, Jane Thynne wants to protect her daughter from the negative influences of all kinds of mobile technical devices/gadgets on her personal development.

2 Form/Analysis

a) Analyse how the author emphasises the ways in which a computer curfew can enhance personal development.

- ✦ Jane Thynne uses stylistic devices to emphasise her position:
 - personification (“technology embraces”, l. 30);
 - metaphoric language (using technology means being in a comfortable “warm electronic sea”, l. 31, l. 111; living without digital gadgets is compared to a “technical cold turkey”, l. 47; “a small desert island” refers to the fact that being alone/on your own for some time is a basic human experience and also important for a person's development);
 - allusion is used when the author refers to King Canute (l. 97) (He was unable to turn back the tide as tides are a natural occurrence which no one can really stop. The tide refers to all kinds of gadgets/devices which are a part of our lives, and parents will not be able to stop that development just as Canute could not stop the tide. This is a very realistic point of view.).
- ✦ To persuade parents that they should prevent technology from taking over their children's lives, the author does the following:
 - she enumerates the possible negative impacts possessing and using mobile devices can have on children's lives (ll. 19ff), which she calls a “cyber-lifestyle” (l. 35);

- she refers to specialists like neuroscientist Susan Greenfield as well as writers Nicholas Carr and Sue Palmer to prove the potential damage which the use of digital devices can do to children. In addition, she cites a report written by Keith Toppings, which hints at the negative impact of diminishing reading abilities on social development (ll. 32ff, ll. 74ff);
- she compares her own personal development to her daughter's and includes parents' reactions to typical teenage behaviour. She uses concrete examples so that readers can identify with her message and realise the changes brought about by technological developments (ll. 5ff, ll. 64ff, ll. 99ff).
- ♦ Thynne gets her message across by saying that a computer curfew is the least parents can do to support their children's development. As parents cannot completely stop their children from using digital technology, they have to encourage responsible usage of this technology by enforcing rules. That way children have the opportunity to develop other important abilities, such as reading.

b) Analyse the pictures and explain which picture best visualises the point the author wants to make.

Picture A

- First impression: idyllic, peaceful living room setting.
- Description: The mother and daughter are sitting on comfortable chairs and both are happily reading books; they are relaxed and smiling and looking down at their books. The mother is in the foreground, on the left-hand side, and the daughter in the background, on the right-hand side, like a small reflection of her mother.
- Interpretation: Although both people in the picture are busy doing something individually, their happy companionship is emphasised by the fact that they are sitting in the same room and they are sitting in positions facing towards the centre of the picture. They are not using typical modern technology but they look happier for it.
- Evaluation: The photo shows how comfortable and relaxing time away from modern media could be if people just take some time to be together and read.

Picture B

- First impression: typical family scene in our times.
- Description: A family is sitting around a table, each holding a different mobile device. The mother and daughter are close to the centre of the picture; the father and brother are sitting with their backs to the photographer in the foreground on the right and left-hand sides of the picture. To the mother's right there is another seated person, only partly visible, and an older man standing behind the family and also concentrating on a mobile device.
- Interpretation: The focus is on the mother and daughter in the centre, concentrating on their mobiles and both frowning, but the people around them support the impression that nobody is particularly happy and they are all ignoring their surroundings – not only the food on the plates in front of them, but also there is no interaction between the people. They all seem to be busy but not particularly relaxed and happy.
- Evaluation: This photo illustrates how mobile devices have become an integral part of modern life for all generations, but at the same time, if they are never switched off, they will distract people away from companionable activities like spending mealtimes together and talking to each other.

Picture A matches the point Thynne wants to make in her article because it shows how healthy time away from electronic media can be. Picture B shows a whole family hooked on modern mobile devices, which Thynne also writes about, but Thynne concentrates more on the effects of digital technology on young teenagers than on their parents' (and grandparents') addiction in her article.

3 Comment/Text production

a) Write a personal letter to Jane Thynne's daughter in which you give her advice on how to cope with the situation.

- ✦ letter/email written in a neutral/informal style (students do not know her daughter personally, but they are peers)
- ✦ address an unknown girl of your age
- ✦ introduce yourself and explain why you are writing
- ✦ describe how a computer curfew (no gadgets after 9 p.m.) can influence children growing up
 - no communication with friends, feel excluded/lonely, embarrassed, annoyed, angry about parents' reactions and measures at first, miss out on something (describe feelings and reactions)
 - awareness of problems/damage which can arise from using mobile devices
 - the decisive role mobile devices/phones play in personal life can lead to dependence/addiction (they serve as a clock, diary, book, reference book, means of communication via various channels about anything and everything, keep in touch over long distances etc.)
 - your own experiences, e.g. how you rebelled against parents and tried to circumvent rules
- ✦ how have you (not) learnt to handle mobile devices responsibly? Did you negotiate on rules?
- ✦ have you made judgments about how parents/teachers deal with the problem?
- ✦ what you would do in your parents' shoes (change of perspective)
- ✦ advantages/disadvantages of giving in to parents or rebelling against them
- ✦ conclude by comparing your experience with her situation
- ✦ ending statements and complimentary close

b) Comment on Jane Thynne's view that adults "should do everything [they] can to help [children] reclaim a small desert island of their own in the electronic sea" (ll. 109ff).

The comment requires an essay-like structure.

Introduction:

- ✦ explain the quotation (cf. imagery)
- ✦ interpret the argument (the author's warning about dangers which can arise from current technological developments)
- ✦ agree or disagree with the warning and make a cohesive thesis statement

Main part:

- ✦ state three to five arguments to support your thesis statement
- ✦ define the information age and its characteristics

Conclusion:

- ✦ summarise what should be done to cope with technological developments (individual answers expected)

The students are expected to argue convincingly; for example, they could compare Thynne to Canute when she utters the warning.

c) In a letter to the editor explain the role technical gadgets play in your life by comparing your experiences to those of Jane Thynne's daughter.

The students are expected to consider the following aspects:

- ✦ correct salutation and statement of topic
- ✦ self-contained paragraphs; the line of thought should be logically structured
- ✦ include personal experiences with technical gadgets
- ✦ take a stance either in favour of or against a cyber-lifestyle
- ✦ refer to the cyber-lifestyle as described in Thynne's article in ll. 19–32
- ✦ arguments should be enumerated according to importance
- ✦ explain and assess potential future technological developments and describe their potential impact
- ✦ use neutral/technical (media) language
- ✦ state your message clearly

4 Mediation

You regularly contribute to an international youth blog about the impact of the internet on society. Based on the article by Katrin Neubauer in the *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, write a blog post on internet addiction. Point out which group is mainly affected, and the reasons for and consequences of internet addiction.

- ◆ Potential translations of the title include ‘absorbed/caught/confined by the internet’, or ‘in electronic chains’; written by Katrin Neubauer; published in the online edition of a well-known German newspaper *Süddeutsche Zeitung*; the newspaper is famous for its reliable and well-documented investigations into subject matters.
- ◆ The article is about/deals with internet addiction in Germany.
- ◆ People become internet addicts/addicted to the internet when they start living in the virtual world and neglect, ignore or even give up hobbies, friends and family.
- ◆ Our brains react to optical/visual and acoustic/audio signals in the same way as drugs – dopamine production increases and activates the reward system.
- ◆ A survey states that about 560,000 people are addicted to the internet in Germany. 250,000 are between 14 and 24 years old. Girls get addicted to social networking sites whereas boys tend to prefer role playing games/video games.
- ◆ Reasons for addiction: People can satisfy their needs for the autonomy, competence and bonding/attachment which they lack in real life.
- ◆ People who are addicted to the Internet mainly suffer from various other psychological disorders.
- ◆ Online gaming provides them with the chance to identify with powerful and competent figures, unlike their feelings of being losers in real life.
- ◆ Internet addiction is difficult to cure because of the underlying personality problems connected with the addiction and a lack of awareness about the severity of this addiction, especially among parents.
- ◆ Children need instructions, parental guidance and limits.