

1. Mark your confusion
 2. Show evidence of close reading
 3. Write a 1+ page reflection.
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Plagued by worry, "smartphone generation" has harsher view of world

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Guardian Editor's Note: After our in-depth investigation of the issues faced by young adults, Noreena Hertz takes a look at the lives of today's teenagers, after interviewing 2,000 of them in the past 18 months – and finds a generation who feels profoundly anxious and distrustful.

When Sarah woke up after an operation, her first words were not "mom" or "nurse," but "iPhone, iPhone."

Eighteen-year-old Sarah is part of the smartphone generation, ages 14 to 21.

While technology is important to millennials, who are between 20 and 35 years old, it is essential to those such as Sarah who come after. Their devices are permanently switched on, multiscreening and multitasking. The most common name this group is given is Gen Z; I call them Generation K, after Katniss Everdeen, the heroine of "The Hunger Games." Like Katniss, they feel the world they live in is one of perpetual struggle – dystopian, unequal and harsh.

"Life for us is hard. A struggle," says Jake, 16. "I think we've got it much tougher than our parents' generation. But we can't give up." Think about the World Health Organization report, published recently, which suggests that British teenagers are among the most troubled in the world. Of the 42 nationalities surveyed, only Macedonian and Polish teens are less happy. Our teenagers say they feel pressured by schoolwork and worried about the way they look. Researchers say they were particularly struck by how the life satisfaction of those ages 11 to 15 had gone down everywhere.

They Believe Their Lives Will Be More Difficult

And little wonder. When asked whether they think their lives are likely to be more of a struggle than their parents' lives, their answer is a clear yes: 79 percent worry about getting a job while 72 percent worry about owing money – and not only student loans to attend college. Asked to draw what debt means for them, they offer images including chains, shackles and prison bars. "For me, debt is a cage in which we are trapped," Jake says. It is a "heavy weight that everyone in my generation is going to share."

Generation K is also growing up during a time of increased threat of violence, and 70 percent say they are worried about terrorism.

Only 6 percent of them trust big corporations to do the right thing, while 60 percent of adults feel that way.

Their feelings about government are also negative, and only 1 in 10 of this generation say they trust the government to do the right thing. Generation K does not feel that politicians care about ordinary people.

The Only Politician They Trust Is Bernie Sanders

But sometimes they sense that a politician is different. Democratic presidential candidate Bernie Sanders has been extremely popular among younger voters, and even among British teenagers, Sanders was the only politician they said they trusted.

The selfie generation is not, it turns out, that selfish after all: 92 percent believe that helping others in need is important, and 70 percent say inequality is one of the issues that worries them greatly.

This generation does not believe that life is fair. In fact, not one teenager surveyed agrees with the statement that “society is fair and everyone has an equal chance.” Instead, they believe that it is the color of their skin, their gender and how much money their parents have that will determine their future.

Swedish YouTube Star Is Their Favorite Celebrity

Among the U.S. teenagers interviewed, their favorite celebrity was Felix Kjellberg. He is the 26-year old Swedish YouTube superstar, better known by his YouTube handle, PewDiePie.

Kjellberg does not sing or act, but films himself playing video games. Key to his appeal is that Kjellberg comes across as 100 percent real, and in his videos he laughs, swears and goofs around.

Kjellberg’s appeal shows something else about this generation: just how desperately they want to be connected with people. “Many people see me as a friend they can chill with for 15 minutes a day,” says Kjellberg. “The loneliness in front of the computer screens brings us together.”

They Are Lonely, Despite Screen Time

He is on to something here: Generation K is far lonelier than we might realize. With all the time they spend texting, gaming and on Snapchat or Tumblr, the activities they most enjoyed are those they can do with other people. Eighty percent of those I have surveyed prefer spending time with their friends in person rather than on the phone or online.

Members of Generation K do not just want to buy stuff. They also increasingly value things they can actively create. It is a generation of makers, creators and inventors. Sarah builds her own computers and Jake loves making horror films with his pals on his iPhone.

This Is A Generation Unlike Any Other

Starbucks has figured this out. Did you know that you can go into a Starbucks and order a mojito refresher? No? But it turns out British and American teenagers do. They have been going crazy for Starbucks’ “secret menu,” which allows them to create any concoction they can come up. The cotton candy frappuccino is one of their favorites. By tapping into this world, Starbucks has made a genius move – its fastest-growing market now comprises teenagers who do not even drink coffee.

This generation is selfie-taking yet unselfish, connected yet lonely, anxious yet realistic, risk-averse yet entrepreneurial. Generation K is a distinct group, a generation very different from those that came before. They know this already, and they have got the cotton candy frappuccinos to prove it.

Possible Response Questions:

1. What was new or surprising to you in this article?
2. To what extent do you think the research in this article represents your own life or what you have observed about others in our generation?
3. What else would you include in the article about your generation? In other words, what might the researchers have missed about teens today?
4. What lessons do you think there are in this article for teachers and parents?
5. Choose any paragraph(s) and write a response.