

## Step by step Working with a newspaper article

### COMPREHENSION

#### 1 Understanding the headline

- Explain the meaning of the headline "Gap years: Wasted youth?" with the help of the dictionary entry and the photo.
- Speculate on the author's attitude towards the topic and the reasons for it.

#### 2 Identifying the theme

- When working on a text, it is important to start by summing up what an article, for example, is about. Such a sentence is supposed to give all the basic information (e.g. author, title, type of text) and express the main theme or problem presented in the text. Choose the sentence from the ones below that best sums up what the article is about.

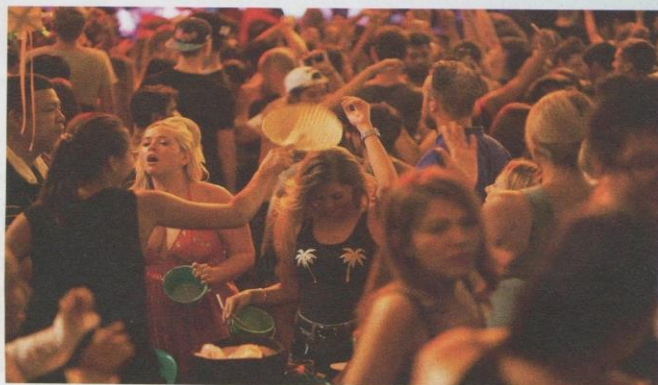
The newspaper article "Gap years: Wasted youth?" by Patrick Kingsley, published in *The Guardian* on 6 September 2010, deals with ...

- ... the differences between real "gappers" and tourists travelling around Thailand.
- ... the party culture of young people going abroad for a gap year.
- ... young people's activities in their gap year in Koh Phangan, Thailand.
- ... the question of whether young people use their gap year constructively.

PATRICK KINGSLEY

### Gap years: Wasted youth?

Ever wondered what students really get up to on their gap years? A report from the Full Moon Party in Thailand



The Guardian, 6 September 2010

Up and down the beach, young western men are unzipping their shorts and peeing into the Gulf of Thailand. Behind them, under the light of the full moon, thousands more shirtless, shoeless Europeans are massed outside 14 beachside bars, their knees bending awkwardly to a soundtrack of the Black Eyed Peas, Justin Bieber and generic drum'n'bass. And squeezed between the

bars and the crowds are 35 wooden stalls, each selling plastic buckets filled with a litre's worth of vodka and Red Bull. The stalls are daubed<sup>1</sup> with deeply dubious slogans, ranging from the lurid to the moronic. "No Bucket No Boom Boom", "Fuck My Buckets", "Everybody Fuck My Strong Buckets" – that kind of thing.

**wast-ed** /'weɪstɪd/ *adj* 1 wasted journey/time etc something unnecessary or something that is not taken advantage of: *In the end it was a wasted journey, as Clara wasn't home when we arrived.* 2 physically weak, very thin, normally due to illness: *His body lay pale and wasted on the hospital bed.* 3 informal intoxicated by drugs or alcohol

Welcome to the Full Moon Party, the largest beach rave in the world. Twenty-five years ago, this was a little-known hippy hang-out on the remote Thai island of Koh Phangan. Today, frequented every month by between 10,000 and 30,000 European youngsters, the all-night party is the ultimate destination [...] for footloose gap-year tourists. This party scene, right here on this beach, is arguably the epitome<sup>2</sup>, the pinnacle<sup>3</sup>, of the modern gap-year experience.

Three weeks ago, the chief executive<sup>4</sup> of the universities and colleges admissions service (UCAS)<sup>5</sup> declared to a Sunday newspaper that "the golden age of the gap year is over". Mary Curnock Cook argued that while in the past "a gap year has been when young people take a nice break and go out and see the world", the period should now "be used in a focused way to support an application to the course or university you are targeting". In a year when the number of university applications – a record 660,000 – has dwarfed<sup>6</sup> the number of university places available – 450,000 – Curnock Cook may have a point.

But this is a point that has yet to trickle down<sup>7</sup>, in practical terms, to the nation's school-leavers. In fact, the vast majority of gappers do not use their year-out in anything approaching a fashion that might – in the eyes of universities – be viewed as "constructive". Every year around 160,000 British school-leavers take a gap year before entering university. More than 80% of them, says Richard Oliver, chairman of trustees at Year Out, "just go off and travel independently without any real purpose. Sun, sand and sangria, as I call it." Indeed, the trend might even be away from the year of constructive good deeds that Curnock Cook might be thinking of – a trend towards increasingly mindless hedonism. [...]

Attempting to understand why they go, however, why this is the modern gap-year experience, is exactly what brings me to the Full Moon Party, surrounded by scores of topless teenagers urinating into the ocean to the words of the Black Eyed Peas' "I gotta feeling/That tonight's gonna be a good night/That tonight's gonna be a good, good night." What exactly is the lure of this beach to teenagers who are, after all, meant to be

Britain's brightest? I'm here to find out. [...] "You know what the worst thing about travelling is?" asks Londoner Jez, 19 years old, dressed in a vest, and approaching me: "TOURISTS." It's a slightly strange answer: we're sitting on the side of a dirt track near the centre of Had Rin, the main tourist town on Koh Phangan, and venue for tomorrow's Full Moon Party. Tourists are whizzing past every 30 seconds on mopeds belching out acrid fumes. [...] But Jez – a warm, welcoming guy – doesn't think of himself as a tourist: he's a backpacker. "Most of the people here are backpackers," he insists. "Backpackers are infinitely different to tourists. [...] All the people you've met while you're travelling will be here. It's just awesome." [...] Hailey's gap-year experiences were slightly different to Jez's. She didn't go travelling at all, she says, but spent the entire period working in a hospital in order to enhance<sup>8</sup> her application to medical school; a perfect exemplar of the kind of gap year favoured by Curnock Cook. In many ways, though, she wishes she'd chosen a more relaxed path. "I don't know if I should say this," she starts, pauses, then continues: "I was in a verbally abusive relationship for three years, which meant I had no self-confidence. And I turned into a bit of a slut<sup>9</sup> on my gap year because I was really messed up in the head. And then I went to uni, and I thought, 'I don't want to be either of those people I've been, I want to be someone else.' So then I sort of<sup>10</sup> had three personalities. But coming out here on my own, having to go over and talk to people, having to be nice, not an asshole ... It's been great. It teaches you how to socialise properly. It makes you so much more confident. [...] If I'd done the whole travelling on my own thing in my gap year, I would have been slightly less messed up<sup>11</sup> at uni." [...]

Up and down the beach, young western men are still unzipping their shorts and peeing into the Gulf of Thailand. Though I never took a gap year, never took the chance to either let my hair down like this, or do something more constructive, nothing that I've heard or seen here makes me want to join them.

#### Annotations

<sup>2</sup> **epitome** /i'pɪtəmi/= the best possible example of a particular type of person or thing

<sup>3</sup> **pinnacle** /'pɪnəkl(ə)/ = here: the most exciting part of sb's life

<sup>4</sup> **chief executive** = the most senior manager

<sup>5</sup> **UCAS** /'ju:kæs/= an organization responsible for managing applications to almost all UK universities and colleges

<sup>6</sup> **to dwarf** /dwaʊ(r)f/ = to make sth. seem small or unimportant

<sup>7</sup> **to trickle down** = to spread slowly like drops of water

<sup>8</sup> **to enhance** /ɪn'hɑːns/= to improve

<sup>9</sup> **slut** (infml) = a woman that is considered to have a lot of different sexual partners

<sup>10</sup> **sort of** (infml) = somewhat, rather

<sup>11</sup> **messed up** (infml) = sb who is messed up has emotional or mental problems because unpleasant things have happened to them