

## Working with a newspaper article

### PRE-READING: LISTENING

1

You are going to listen to a report broadcast by US public radio *npr* on Malia Obama, the former US President's daughter, and gap years in the US. Read the questions first before you start listening. Take notes while listening to provide short answers.

- 1 What are Malia Obama's plans for her time after school?
- 2 How do young Americans feel about taking a gap year in recent years?
- 3 What has been the effect of Malia's announcement of taking a gap year?
- 4 What should gappers learn from taking a gap year according to Marie Schwartz?
- 5 Rick Weissbourd has some ideas to make it easier for every student to take a gap year. What should be combined in a gap programme?
- 6 What did Kerry Buouy's mother worry about with regard to taking a gap year?
- 7 How many gappers do not go back to school?
- 8 What is most gappers' performance at college or university like?
- 9 What is the general attitude of the radio programme, also compared to the article "Gap years: Wasted youth?"

### COMPREHENSION

2

- a) Read the article on p. 99. In one sentence, summarize what is about.
- b) Write a full summary of the article.

### ANALYSIS

3 Language awareness

Analyse to what extent the author's use of language reveals her attitude. Consider choice of words, rhetorical strategies and stylistic devices.

### WRITING: ARGUMENTATIVE ARTICLE

4

Uzma Chaudhry expresses her anger over critics of gap years as a waste of time. Use the information from the text to write an argumentative article for an online teenage magazine in which you argue why young people should or should not take a gap year.

## Why Malia Obama is right to take a gap year

Age is just a number. And I measure age not by the passage of time – the number of minutes, hours or days since I was brought into the world – but by the richness of my experiences. I measure age by those moments when I'm truly alive.

It can be hard to create those moments when so much time is inevitably spent in a classroom, dealing with the stress and pressure of yet another set of exams. So I wasn't surprised when the White House announced last week that Malia Obama will take a gap year before she starts at Harvard in 2017.

Having taken a gap year myself, I applaud her decision.

What I don't applaud though, is the tired sighs I can already hear from critics whose outdated views assume Malia will spend that year waking up at midday and trudging around in pyjamas until someone suggests otherwise.

It's this archaic mindset which perpetuates<sup>1</sup> the idea of young people taking gap years to pass off any real sort of responsibility – either at university or in employment – and embark on a glorified holiday.

My own experience was a far cry from this, and I'm sure this will be the case for Malia too. In fact, for many young people, a gap year is a unique opportunity to grab hold of a host of new opportunities with both hands.

However we choose to spend that year – whether it's travelling, learning to code or doing a host of work experience placements – it's not up to anyone else to argue that we're wasting our time. Taking a gap year was one of the best decisions I've ever made. [...]

Most importantly, it meant I could confront an anxiety<sup>2</sup> which had long filled me with dread: that I was going to university for the sake of it. That I was pursuing a degree I didn't want – potentially wasting time and money – because I didn't really know what else was out there.

Instead, I came across an opportunity with youth charity vInspired, who were recruiting for a voluntary nine month leadership programme.

Having made it through the selection process, I joined 120 young people from across the country to attend crash courses in everything from

politics and finance, to social media and PR.

With our newly gained knowledge under our belts, we set to work campaigning for issues as diverse as the importance of sustainable living; raising awareness of unhealthy relationships; and tackling the stigma behind asylum seekers.

vInspired ignited<sup>3</sup> my passion to try to make a difference. And much to my surprise, I was pretty good at it.

My first change.org petition calling for closer monitoring<sup>4</sup> of MPs' expenses gained 100,000 signatures in a few days. I drove several further campaigns across the course of the year, and was even given the chance to speak at the Labour Party conference on behalf of the charity.

More than anything, it was a steep learning curve in discovering who I am as a person – what I enjoy doing and where my strengths are. [...]

As a jam-packed year came to an end, and with all that insight and experience behind me, I was finally confident in making the decision I hadn't been able to tackle at school. University just wasn't for me. I wanted to do, not to study. To get my hands dirty, not sit in a library.

That's when another opportunity came about to get involved with a voluntary pilot scheme run by O2 Think Big, teaching digital skills to a community of young people in Lancaster.

As the pilot reached its close, I decided to apply for O2's apprenticeship scheme. Without my gap year, I doubt my application would've stood out from the hundreds of others. [...]

Ultimately, gap years are unique because they allow for important introspection. After the relentless pressure of school or university, they give us the time and headspace to gain real clarity on our next move. What are we good at? What do we want to improve on?

For countless young people, gap years are a focussed, positive use of time. It's high time we gave Malia – and all other gap year takers – a well-deserved break.

#### Annotations

<sup>1</sup> to **perpetuate** /pə(r)'petʃueɪt/= to make sth continue to exist

<sup>2</sup> **anxiety** /æŋ'zaɪəti/= worry

<sup>3</sup> to **ignite** /ɪg'naɪt/= to set on fire

<sup>4</sup> to **monitor** = to watch and check