**THE BIG ISSUE: MIND THE GAP YEARS**

Critics suggest that it is simply a doss year, an extended holiday which is usually paid for by the bank of Mum and Dad.

 Its advocates, on the other hand, argue that it makes students more mature, giving them a sense of independence and a chance to see something f the real world before they go on  to third-level education.

Although the gap year is not nearly as popular here as in Britain, where up to a fifth of college-goers take one, there are signs that it is now becoming a fashionable option for Irish school leavers.

A growing number of Irish teenagers, particularly in affluent areas, are following the example of Prince William, who was famously pictured cleaning toilets in a remote place of Chile on his gap year […]. As a volunteer for the charity Raleigh International, William helped build new walk-ways in the mountainous area and taught English in a local village.

Some gap-years students, or gappies as they have become known, are much less diligent, spending much of their time lolling about on beaches in places such as Thailand. Others spend their time working and saving for college.

Career guidance counselor Andree Harpur says the gap year is growing in popularity in Ireland because parents see that many of the voluntary schemes available are now well-organized. “It’s not just a matter of a teenager heading off on a train to Marrakech any more. Parents feel reassured when they see a programme that has been put together carefully”, she says.

“I know of students who have got enormous benefits from a gap year. They might not have decided what they wanted to do. Say, for example, if they were considering social work, some kind of voluntary work could help them to make a decision”.

As a careers advisor, Andree Harpur believes gap years are often looked upon positively by employers. “If you are prepared to get on a plane to go to work somewhere on the other side of the world, you are showing that you are adaptable. You are open to new ways of doing things.”

“But it has to be planned properly and it should be clear that it will only last a year. There is a danger that students with wanderlust will not continue with their education at all.” Gap-year students who want to do voluntary work should check carefully the credentials of the organizers of the scheme. Is the work genuinely helpful, or is it just a profit-making venture?

The huge growth in the gap-year market has given rise to some spurious schemes that can do more harm than good, according to Voluntary Service Overseas, an international development charity. VSO recently warned that badly planned, so-called “voluntourism” schemes could have a negative impact on young people and the communities they worked with.

 In one case, reported by the Guardian, a group of villagers in South America returned home from work to find that their houses had been painted by volunteers without their permission. […] There are a number of more reputable gapyear voluntary schemes that are non-profit making.

 Lattitude, formerly known as Gap Activity Projects, is a well- established British charity which has taken a number of Irish volunteers abroad. “We ensure that we only offer voluntary work that is going to be worthwhile,” says

 Lattitude spokesman Ben Clifton. “It has to be suitable work that improves the quality of life of the people concerned.” The European Voluntary Service (EVS), funded by the European Commission, offers young people the opportunity to do voluntary work in other European countries. Unlike many other gap-year schemes, the scheme does not require volunteers to pay a fee. Gap-year students can also stay in Ireland and do voluntary work here. Others take on paid jobs in order to get work experience and to make themselves financially secure before going into college.

 By Kim Bielenberg

 The Irish Independent, March 5th, 2008

|  |
| --- |
| **The big issue: Mind the gap years** |

**I.**                    **General comprehension.**

1    Introduce the document (type, source, author, date and main topic). What can you guess about the text from reading the title: *Big Issues :Mind the gap years?*

**II.**                  **Detailed comprehension.**

1.       Vocabulary: find the equivalents in the text.

Une année pour flemmarder:                             À la mode:

Riche :                                               Isolé, reculé (lieu) :

Sentier :                                                                Assidu/appliqué :

Se prélasser :                                                      Economiser :

Un conseiller à l’emploi :                                    Système / procédé :

Disponible :                                                          Partir :

Correctement :                                                     Envie de voyager :

 Vérifier :                                                                Sincèrement :

Faux / fallacieux :                                                 Qui en vaut la peine :

Approprié :                                                            Frais (d’inscription) :

2.       List the benefits of a gap year.

3.       In what ways can a gap year be dangerous?

4.       What advice would you give to someone considering a gap year?

If I were you, I would....

If I were in your shoes, I would....

What about + V-ING

Why don't you + V

I advise you too

I recommend you to