

Year 10 Personal Development, Health and Physical Education Assessment Task

Outcomes Assessed:

- 5.1 A student analyses how they can support their own and others' sense of self.
- 5.3 A student analyses factors that contribute to positive, inclusive and satisfying relationships.
- 5.6 A student analyses attitudes, behaviours and consequences related to health issues affecting young people.
- 5.7 A student analyses influences on health decision-making and develops strategies to promote health and safe behaviours.
- 5.8 A student critically analyses health information, products and services to promote health.

The Task:

PART ONE: Before you read the extract, give your own answers to the five questions on p78. This section should be 500-800 written words in length or three to four minutes worth of speech which can be presented live or pre-recorded on video.

PART TWO: Read this extract from Chris Parker's book *The Frog and the Fish: Reflections on work, technology, sex, stuff, truth and happiness*. As you read, have your mind critically engaged. Use a highlighter and write notes in the margins or on a separate bit of paper. Ask yourself: Do I agree with what I am reading? If so, why? If not, why not? After reading, you are going to write a review that begins with one of the following sentences:

- a) Chris Parker's discussion of sex raises some very important points for young people to consider and would be incredibly helpful reading for a young person who is trying to make sense of our hyper-sexualised world.
- b) Chris Parker's discussion of sex presents one way of looking at sexuality but there is much, much more to be said.
- c) Chris Parker's discussion of sex is utterly misleading and unhelpful and I'm about to explain to you why.

This section should be another 500-800 words in length or three to four minutes worth of speech which can be presented live or pre-recorded on video.



"THE FROG AND THE FISH: REFLECTIONS ON WORK, TECHNOLOGY, SEX, STUFF TRUTH AND HAPPINESS"

BY CHRIS
PARKER

**We are, at almost every point
of our day, immersed in cultural
diversity: faces, clothes, smells,
attitudes, values, traditions,
behaviours, beliefs, rituals.**

Randa Abdel-Fattah

A well-known fable tells of a frog that has jumped into a pot of water recently placed on a stove. As easily as it jumped in it is able to jump back out. However, the frog is happy to have found a little water and a moist place to settle. The problem is, the water is getting warmer, and will soon boil. The story goes that although the frog can jump back out, it stays in the water—in perceived comfort and security—and boils to death.

Before we explore how the water in this fable relates to the questions and issues of life, let me introduce the fish by noting an old saying. It goes something like this, "If you want to know about water, don't ask a fish."

The frog and the fish are living (or dying) in something that is having a shaping effect on them: the water of their world. The way that we think about and approach the questions, issues, and decisions of life will be shaped by the water of *our* worlds. Just like with the frog and the fish, this happens whether we are aware of it or not.

With the frog image, the shaping effect is slow and subtle, and the frog continues doing what seems good and right for a frog. The message of

the fish image is slightly different. The fish is so immersed in its world of water that it knows nothing outside of the water. Even if it feels confident to commentate on water, its understanding will suffer from a certain naivety that comes from not experiencing a bigger picture.

I suggest that we can equate the water of the frog and the fish to the culture in which we live.

We are all immersed in, and shaped by, a culture. It shapes us in a big picture sense by presenting a 'story' about life. Every culture tells such a story and this story subtly shapes our answers to life's big questions. This effect is so strong that even what we consider to be the 'big questions' is shaped by this cultural storytelling!

We learn from the frog image that this cultural impact can be slow, subtle, and subconscious. With the fish, however, even though it might be more conscious of its culture, the amount that it is able to realise the impact its culture is having is hindered by not having an outside point of reference.

Culture includes language, attitudes, traditions, beliefs, fashions, laws, societal structures, technologies, etc. Combinations of these, and the assumptions behind them, form storylines or cultural narratives. For example, the way news is reported, and even which events are deemed to be 'news', forms part of the storytelling in a culture. The things politicians decide to talk about when campaigning, becomes part of our cultural storytelling. The language of our laws, and the way we structure our legal system, forms part of the storytelling. What is chosen to be taught in schools (and what is chosen not to be taught), what hooks advertisers use to motivate us to purchase products, the theme and the 'moral to the story' that is woven into mainstream movies, innovations in the efficiency of digital technologies, all form part of the storytelling of our culture. Culture is a powerful storyteller; a strong shaping influence on who we are, how we think, the decisions we make, and our big picture view of life.

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**HAVE YOU EVER
PONDERED:**

+

What is sex for?

+

What makes sex most fulfilling?

+

How important do I believe sex
is for a full and flourishing life?

+

What happens when sex be-
comes a lens through which I
look at the world and my life?

+

What happens if I have misused
the good gift of sex in my life?

**Sex. In America an obsession.
In other parts of the world a fact.**

Marlene Dietrich

A newspaper journalist described her recent experience of walking through a supermarket carpark with her daughter. Two teenage boys walk past them followed by a wolf whistle directed at her daughter. She reflected on all the layers of inappropriateness and awkwardness. However, the kick in the story comes when she states that her daughter was only six!

When it comes to the place, purpose, and emphasis given to sex in our Western culture, you and I are swimming in highly charged water. As a result of such high concentrations of sex being dissolved into our cultural storytelling, it has become difficult for us to not view most aspects of our life and world through a sexualised lens.

We are becoming increasingly desensitised to this sexualisation, to the point where the following examples start to seem normal:

large billboards for a highly successful online dating company for married people advertising secret affairs with the slogan, "Life is short, have an affair";

a magazine sold at the supermarket checkout featuring a picture of a bikini-clad young woman separated at the waist into two halves with the encouragement to answer the question (by commenting on the magazine's Facebook page), "Which half do you prefer and why?";

the cover of a mainstream popularly read magazine featuring an article celebrating how a wife gave her husband a ménage a trois (threesome) for his 40th birthday;

video clips of top 20 music hits watched and adored by children—such as “Wrecking Ball” by Miley Cyrus—that have overtly sexualised if not pornographic suggestions and imagery;

mothers dressing their babies in T-shirts that read, “All daddy wanted was a blow job.”;

mainstream movies at local cinemas promoting casual sex with titles like *Friends with Benefits* and *No Strings Attached*;

the practice of sexting and posting naked and near-naked selfies in potentially public online contexts;

2.5 billion emails sent or received every day that contain pornography.

We are living in a world of highly sexualised advertising, entertainment media (movies, music, online games, etc.), celebrity commentary, fashion, politics, and even everyday humour, and these are all having a shaping effect on how we view the world, ourselves, and others.

How did this happen?

Widespread cultural views are usually slow to change. However, the last 50 years have seen a rapid, and radical, change in our view of the place, purpose, and meaning of sex and sexuality. So much so that historians, and cultural commentators, speak about a decade in which the change was so substantial and far-reaching in the Western world that it could be considered a revolution—the sexual revolution of the 1960s. Not a revolution of violence and overthrow, but one of peace, flowers, and free love with minimal moral boundaries. A revolution ignited by individualism, fuelled by extreme feminism, and facilitated by the innovation of a reliable contraceptive (‘the pill’).

Some might say that there was nothing new and that we have frequently seen examples of un-Christian sexual morals in the history

of Western culture. This can't be denied. However, what we find being proclaimed as a result of the sexual revolution, is an everyday cultural acceptance of a sexual morality that sees only one boundary to having sex with whomever we want, whenever we want—mutual consent. If two (or more) people are attracted to each other, and the sex is safe, and both parties are happy, then why not?

Concerns about commitment levels, age, gender, and even marital status, are being minimised. You meet someone at a party and end up sleeping at their place—but don't necessarily plan to see them again—and the message of our culture is “Good for you!”. This is the end point of the individualism that fuelled the sexual revolution.

How do we know what is right—moral—when it comes to sex? The answer in the West had previously been shaped by a view of sex and sexuality unfolded in the biblical story of the world, but it is now measured largely by individual feelings. If it feels good (and no one is harmed) then it is my right to be able to do it—and I will be fulfilled as a human when I do (and unfulfilled if I am prevented).

This intense focus on individual rights, combined with a growing suspicion towards a ‘Christian’ view of morals, resulted in sex being separated from marriage, family, and childbearing and linked to individual identity, freedom, and fulfilment. Not only is a person now free to explore sexual expression in whatever way suits them best, it has come to seem normal to think that our sexuality, and even the amount of sex we are having, is crucial to our fulfilment as human beings. Sex had previously been valued as a beautiful gift from God: one of many. However, it is now seen as beyond good and actually an ultimate individual right.

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For the fish, who has never thought outside of the water in which it swims—in this case a highly sexualised water that idolises individual rights above community welfare—the biblically shaped view can seem outdated and irrelevant.

If the sexual revolution was chapter one in this new story, then in the last two decades the injection of digital image technologies, the Internet, aggressive marketing, and social networking, have helped usher in the hyper-sexualised chapter two. We are now hearing cultural storytelling that is whispering incessantly and insistently (and sometimes shouting), “You will be missing out on the best of human fulfilment and intimacy if you are not free to engage in sex early and often and with anyone you want!”

I can't stress enough just how persuasive and pervasive this cultural storytelling has become, and how different it is from God's good design for life. You are being shaped by it every day. I am being shaped by it every day! Sometimes the effects can be subtle and unexpected and flow over into our view of other aspects of life without us realising:

- a view that our value is centred on our bodies;
- a view that has us seeing others as objects more than complete humans;
- a view that tends towards a consumeristic approach to people and relationships.

Your body

How much do you think about the physical part of who you are—your body? If fulfilment is linked to sexuality in a sexualised world, then your body becomes a focus. We begin to obsess about our bodies because if I am not 'sexy' then I risk not being fulfilled and I will be less valuable in a society where sex and sexiness are the ultimate. Do you recognise this storyline? Have you ever felt its pressure?

Here is a little activity you can do right now. Search for #selfie within Instagram and see how many headless, body-revealing, self-

taken images are being posted. Consider also the growing focus on tattooing, piercing, bodybuilding, and body sculpting of one form or another. I am not suggesting that these are necessarily wrong in and of themselves (those of you with arm sleeve tats and a pierced belly button don't need to send cranky emails), but they do suggest an increased focus of attention on our bodies that flows from a hyper-sexualised view of life.

When we view ourselves through this sexualised lens, we may experience the feeling that we nearly always don't live up to the ideals of 'sexy'—and therefore value—that are bombarding us constantly.

Not only is our obsessing about our constant shortfall draining and depressing, we can sometimes turn our anxiety onto its source—our bodies. Self-harm is a tragedy. Sure, it's complex, but the part of it that results from our culture's high sexualised expectations must be recognised. These expectations need not get their hooks into us. A Bible-shaped view of sexuality offers a beautiful, rich freedom from these anxieties.

View of sex and sexuality shaped by the Bible

Let's start by acknowledging (as we did in Chapter 3) that God's creation is profoundly good to its core. All strands of creation are good: including sex, sexuality, and our bodies. God's view of the goodness of our bodies extends to him being willing to become a human for our sake. The biblical story of the world culminates with a resurrection of people's bodies—starting with Jesus. Our bodies are God-given, they are good, and they matter.

We are sexualised beings and we are gendered beings—male and female. It is God's design for us to be this way. Like all of God's

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goodness in creation, this is worth celebrating and can bring a great sense of joy and peace. However, when we either ignore the goodness of an aspect of creation, or alternatively idolise it, we may drag the strand out of its good creational design framework. This results in the people involved being outside of God's will for them and disconnected from his goodness and grace. Another way of saying this is, that they won't be living the full, rich, flourishing life that God has designed for them and their sexuality.

Living outside the boundaries for sexuality and sex does not bring the freedom that the storytelling of our culture promises. It brings the bondage that comes from idolatry and self-service along with anxiety or a shallow pride that ultimately ends in despair when gravity takes its toll and partners are few and far between.

So what are these God-honouring, human-flourishing design parameters? An understanding shaped by the biblical view of the world sees sex as an optional, self-sacrificial expression of human sexuality between a man and a woman within the commitment of a life-long marriage that recognises at least the possibility of child-raising and family.

For some of you, reading that last paragraph may prompt you to put this book down. You feel that the last paragraph is at its best, quaint, prudish, and unrealistic thinking, and at its worst, outdated bigotry. However, before you shut me up, please just take a moment to reflect on how much of your response could have been shaped by the cultural storytelling of your world. What are you drawing on to give authority for your view? Maybe your own desires and a striving for individual freedom? Could there be a way of understanding the water outside of the fish's frame of reference? One that it is unaware of? Could it be that the designer of sex and sexuality has revealed a profound truth

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about sex that is counter-cultural but true? Could this be possible? Seriously, could it be possible? I stress the question because the implications for your life are significant.

That last paragraph was somewhat bold and I don't really mean to offend. However, two things prompt me to speak so forthrightly. First, I recognise the shaping effect that this hypersexualised view of the world continues to have on me—in all the ways mentioned. It can be almost a daily struggle. Second, when it comes to Christian young adults, those that have been born into a hypersexualised society, the shaping effect is so strong that I am seeing a generation that is tending to reinterpret the good news of the Bible rather than courageously stand firm and be counter-cultural. I am willing to speak boldly because having the courage to push against this shallow cultural storytelling is where true peace, freedom, hope, love, and fulfilled sexuality will be found.

Final thoughts

May you enjoy your sexuality and your desire for rich and fulfilling relationships with others—including those of the opposite gender. May you enjoy your maleness or femaleness. If marriage is a part of God's plan for you, may you enjoy the blessing of sex within the intimate relationship with your spouse that this brings. If you have—for whatever reason and in whatever way—misused the good gift of sex, may you have the humility and courage to seek God's forgiveness. He's ready to forgive and go forward with you leaving the past behind. It's never too late to live in the way God has designed for us, and to be blessed by the richness and peace that it offers.

THINGS I WISH I HAD KNOWN ABOUT SEX

- ⊕ **Sex is good.** Sex is part of God's good design but it's not ultimate and does not define us as humans. God has created us to be sexual beings. However, this part of who we are is only one part of many. Our sexuality is far from our primary identity.
- ⊕ **Celibacy is OK.** Not having sex for parts, or all, of your life is fine. Celibacy has never reduced anyone's potential to live a richly fulfilling life—despite what your culture might say! Sex is not ultimate.
- ⊕ **Sex has design boundaries.** Our culture shouts that consent is the only boundary. The Bible describes God's good design for sex as being within a life-long commitment between one man and one woman.
- ⊕ **Sex is relational.** By its design, it is intimately and profoundly relational. Sex is far more about self-sacrifice than it is about the relief of biological or psychological urges.
- ⊕ **Sex is linked to children, parenting, and family.** Sex between a male and a female always carries the potential to produce a family and two parents! It is God's design that sex should be expressed in the context where this can, if necessary, be embraced.
- ⊕ **Pornography demeans, diverts, and damages.** Pornography is shockingly common. Its prevalence doesn't make it any less demeaning for the viewer or the 'actor'. It is highly addictive, while at the same time damaging to relationships (even for years to come). It diverts us away from the richness of relationships and sexuality that God has designed.
- ⊕ **Grace and sex.** No matter what we have done with our bodies, expressed with our sexuality, thought in our minds, felt in our hearts, or done with our hands, God's transformative grace and mercy through Jesus is boundlessly offered to all who seek him.