

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

## Is work good?

I am from a generation that was taught that work was a good thing and, by extension, not working was to be avoided at all costs. As a child, I accepted this philosophy unthinkingly. Today, however, I'm not so  
 5 ▶ sure. In fact, I would say that nowadays many people work too hard. Moreover, I am of the opinion that great harm can be caused by the belief that work is good and that having a lot of free time is a bad thing.

Of course, rich people have always thought that the poor  
 10 ▶ should not have much free time. In England, in the early nineteenth century, the working day was fifteen hours for a man, and children very often worked as many as twelve hours a day. When it was suggested that they should work less, the common reply was that if people  
 15 ▶ had a shorter working day they would have more energy after work and could cause all sorts of trouble. When I was a child, at the end of the nineteenth century, certain compulsory public holidays were established. Rich people were furious. I remember one old Duchess who said:  
 20 ▶ 'Why do the poor want holidays? They ought to work.'

There is a simple fact about work today that is very rarely talked about: now that we live in an industrialised world, if everyone worked for only four  
 25 ▶ hours a day, we could produce all that we need and there would be no unemployment. Instead, we have a situation where some people work eight, ten or twelve hours a day, while others are unemployed. It is possible that people wouldn't know what to do if they

worked only four hours a day. However, if this were so,  
 30 ▶ it would show that there are many things wrong with contemporary society.

In the past, people would have had no difficulty in finding activities to fill their free time: playing music, reading, talking to friends and so on. Now,  
 35 ▶ however, there is a feeling that we need to do things for a particular purpose; it is not good enough to do something just because we like doing it. For this reason, some people think that going to the cinema is immoral, and even that it can turn youngsters  
 40 ▶ into criminals. However, these same people think that everyone involved in making the film is doing something worthwhile, because it will generate money when people go to see it in the cinema!

In general, this idea – that only activities that  
 45 ▶ produce a profit are virtuous – is creating a world full of contradictions. For example, the butcher who sells you meat and the baker who provides you with bread are respected, because they are earning  
 50 ▶ their living; but take pleasure in the food you have bought from them, and you are being frivolous!

To conclude, now that we have machines and factories, we do not need to work as hard as before. The fact that half of us continue to devote far too  
 55 ▶ much time to work, while the rest have no work and nothing to eat, is a mistake that we must not keep on making in the future.

Adapted from Bertrand Russell, *In Praise of Idleness* (1932)

### 1 Answer the questions in your own words.

- How have the author's views changed?
- In the author's opinion, why is it a bad idea for some people to work very long hours?
- Why are going to the cinema and enjoying your food not well regarded?

### 2 Say whether the statements are true or false.

#### Quote from the text to justify your answers.

- Rich people thought that a short working day could have dangerous consequences.
- Nowadays, everyone works too hard.
- Some people might find it problematic to work for only four hours.
- Attitudes to free-time activities haven't changed much.

### 3 Find words or phrases in the text that mean:

- negative effects (paragraph 1)
- obligatory (paragraph 2)
- objective (paragraph 4)
- useful (paragraph 4)

### 4 Complete the sentences in your own words.

- The author's parents thought that everyone .....
- At the beginning of the nineteenth century, men and children .....
- Contemporary society has a lot .....
- If an activity doesn't produce a profit, .....

### 5 Write four words from the first paragraph that include the same sound as y in why /aɪ/.