

BERKSHIRE STUDENT WINS MAJOR NATIONAL SOCIOLOGY AWARD



A short play written by a Berkshire sixth-former has won a major new national sociology prize.

Lauren Seward, a student at Trinity School in Newbury, won the British Sociological Association Sixth Form competition for writing a scene in which a group of students discover why sociology is important today.

Lauren, who wins an iPad 2, and £250 for her school, based the play on her classmates, and “the great fun we had” in sociology classes.

This year is the first time the competition has been run, and entries were received from sixth-forms across the country. It is organised by the BSA’s Teaching Group, and sponsored by Polity Books, promoting the book ‘Sociology for AS AQA’ by Ken Browne.

The entrants, aged 16-19, were set the task of answering the question ‘why is sociology important today?’ in a 2,000-word written piece or a 10-minute podcast or YouTube clip.

Lauren’s work features six sixth-formers in a class discussing sociology. One, Ellie, says: “I’ve always viewed Psychology as the study of the individual, something that is key in understanding why we think and act as we do, singly. But Sociology is the study of the collective and it’s important in understanding why we behave as a whole.”

Another character, Shaun, says: “History is about the ‘when’, Geography is about the ‘where’, English is about the ‘what’

and Science – Sociology – is about the ‘how’ and the ‘why’.”

The judges, sociologist Professor Linda McKie and criminologist Professor Maggie O’Neill, both based at Durham University, praised Lauren’s play for being “a compelling and motivational read. The key points are very well made, and the understanding of sociology is good and is expressed well. We can visualise this being performed and filmed.”

Lauren was given her prize at a presentation on 21 October at Trinity School, a co-educational secondary institution with academy status and 1,000 students. It was awarded by Dr Jill Swale, a member of the BSA Teaching Group and author of many AS and A level sociology text books, and Pam Law, a BSA trustee, author, senior examiner and course work moderator.

Lauren said: “I took inspiration from my classmates, upon whom the characters are based, and then I just let my ideas flow into many different voices. I loved writing it and I love reading it, because if nothing else it will always remind me of my sociology class and the great fun we had.

“Sociology has helped me to understand the world, in the sense that it made me consider its many flaws and growths, how others see and understand it, and what exactly it is within society that helps keep it going round and round. It gives a little insight to the many questions all beginning with ‘why’.”

BSA Chief Executive, Judith Mudd said:

“Congratulations to Lauren, who is a worthy winner of our first competition with an entertaining and informative piece.

“We were delighted by the response we had – we have received outstanding entries from across the country. It clearly shows that many sixth-formers realise the importance of sociology today, and no doubt many of these will go on to study the subject at university and benefit from its insights and rigorous research methods in their careers.”

Second place was awarded to Andrew Cassidy, of Heaton Manor School, Newcastle, and third place to Oliver Down and Alice Reading, of Sidmouth College, Devon. Randa Najjar, of The Burgate School & Sixth Form Centre, Fordingbridge, Dorset, was given a special mention. The runners-up received a book, and everyone who entered has been sent a BSA t-shirt.

- 30,688 students sat A level sociology in the UK this year and 51,981 students sat AS level sociology.

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Why Sociology is Important Today

Scene opens on the Sociology classroom. Mr Drake is at the front, explaining something. Robin is snoozing on the table. Next to him, Ellie is eagerly writing notes. Beside her, Jake is poking Ginger with his pen, who in returns kicks him. Demetri is also writing notes whilst Shaun stares on confused.

Mr Drake: ... and that is Becker's Labelling Theory [looks to the class] any questions?

Shaun: Sir, why is Sociology important today?

[Shaun raises his hand.]

[Everyone stills, turning to look at Shaun in disbelief.]

Demetri: [incredulously] You're actually asking that?

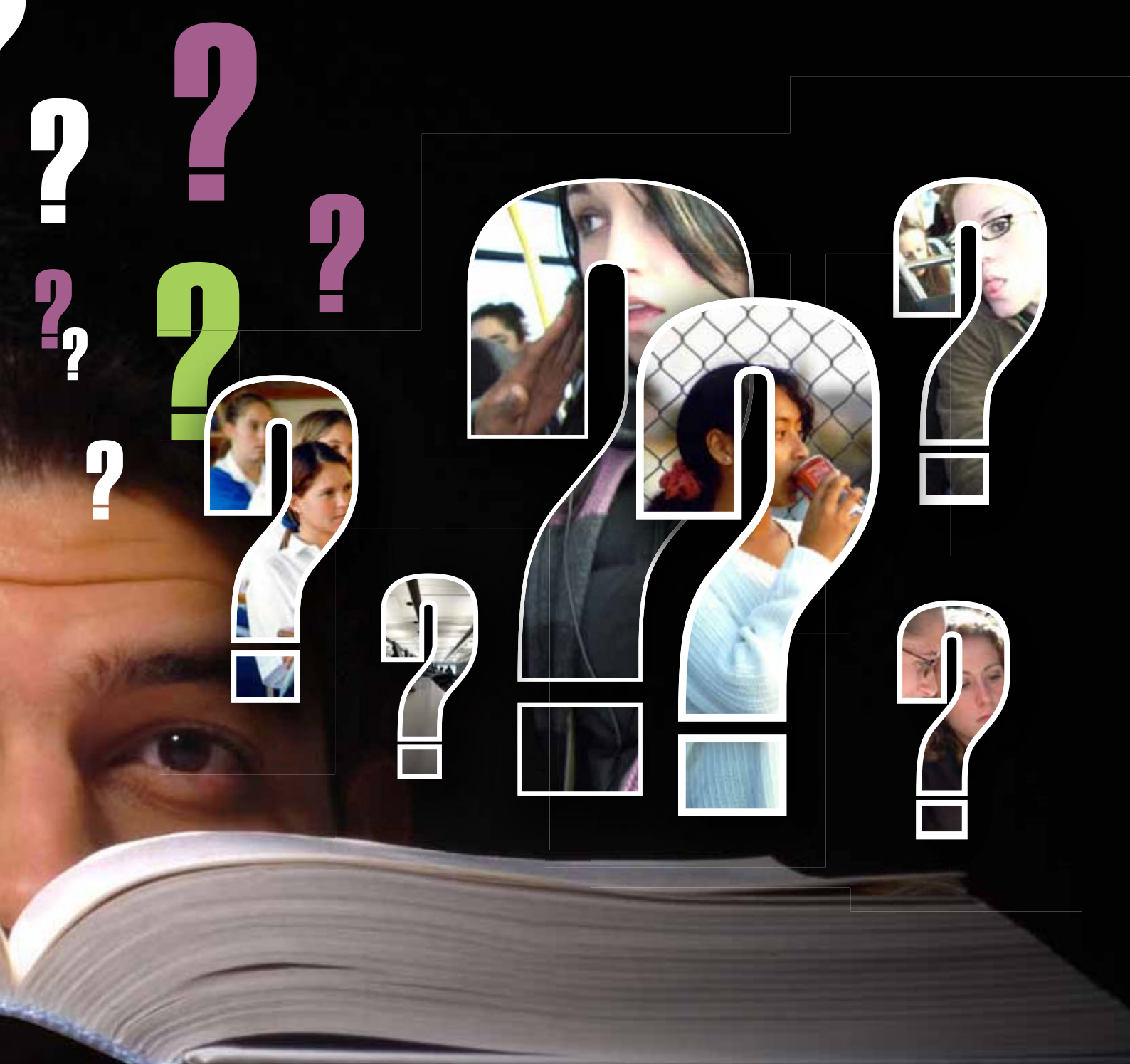
Shaun: [shifting sheepishly] Yeah... well... I was just wondering.

Ellie: [confused] Why would you take a subject you didn't see the importance in?

Shaun: I do see the importance; I just wanted to know why it was important today.



Lauren Seward, Winner of the BSA "Why is Sociology Important?" competition 2013.



Ellie: [frowning] Isn't that obvious? Sociology is important because... well... it gives us greater insight and understanding into ours and others' societies. Surely that makes it worth something?

Shaun: [nervously] Uh... didn't Ellie already answer that.

Shaun: Well... yeah... but there has to be more to it than that. [He looks to Mr Drake] Right, Sir?

Mr Drake: [crosses his arms, considering this] I'm willing to bet that 'why a subject is important' is the most commonly asked question in school; excluding 'why haven't you done your homework?' [The students look confused as to where he's going with this] It seems students are always looking for significance in what they learn – probably so they can find an excuse not to listen [he gives Shaun a pointed look, who smiles back guiltily.] But how about you tell me why you think Sociology is important today?

Shaun: [nervously] Uh... didn't Ellie already answer that.

Mr Drake: [grinning] You were the one who wanted a more insightful answer.

[Shaun looks down, cursing himself.]

Demetri: [thoughtfully] I don't think many people see reason to question Sociology's importance. RS is often questioned because if you see no logic in Religion, you see no logic in studying it; but as for Sociology, I'm guessing most either see its importance as pretty blatant or have simply never heard of it.

[Shaun sinks further into his seat, embarrassed.]

Ginger: [shrugs] To be honest, I'd never even heard of Sociology until I reached A level and then I just thought 'that seems interesting... I want to study that...' [smiling] or at least... it seemed more interesting than Maths.



[Robin sits up attentively, appearing to have woken from his nap.]

Robin: I think the clue is in the name; 'socio' relates to society and originates from the Latin 'socius', meaning 'companion'; whilst 'logy' references 'the study of'. So all together you get 'the study of society' or 'the study of companions', either way that seems pretty significant.

[The others stare at Robin in surprise.]

Robin: [shrugging] I looked it up.

Ellie: [brightly] Yes! Think about it like this; I've always viewed Psychology as the study of the individual, something that is key in understanding why we think and act as we do, singly. But Sociology is the study of the collective and it's important in understanding why we behave as well do as a whole.

Robin: [nodding] Right; consider it in terms of the Functionalist perspective. We are all separately functioning parts of one body. However, only together can the body function. We are all linked and we all have a role to play. Now we may not always understand why other people function in the way they do, but through Sociology we can understand and that allows us to prevent hindering their purpose and consequently ourselves, but rather allow growth, change and evolution. [He looks to the others for confirmation] Do you understand what I mean?"

Demetri: [casually] If what you mean is Sociology allows us greater insight into different social groups and cultures thus aiding us with better knowledge and acceptance which hence helps us to grow and improve as one race – then yeah, I think so.

Ginger: [grinning] So in short, Sociology prevents ignorance and allows us greater understanding of different societies so we can better our lives.

Robin: [shrugging] That works too.

Ellie: [thoughtfully] You know, I remember reading this quote by Bourdieu; 'the function of sociology, as of every science, is to reveal that which is hidden'. I guess what it means is... well imagine it in terms of cleaning your room.

Mr Drake: Might want to be careful there, I don't think some of the people here [looks specifically at Jake and Shaun] know what that is ... let alone what it involves.

Jake: Hey!

Ellie: [regaining focus] No one wants to acknowledge all the bad stuff because it looks... bad. So instead it all gets swept under the carpet – the inequality, prejudice, discrimination; what we know isn't fair but would rather hide and pretend it's not there than sort it out. Sociology pulls the rug from our feet and puts on display all these issues so that we have to face them and then we have to... clean them up so things can be made better ...or at least understand why they're there in the first place.

Shaun: [shrugging]
He has a point.

Shaun: [smartly] Because understanding why something is wrong is the first step in fixing the problem.

Jake: [enthusiastically] It helps us get to the root; like... Connolly! He found that racism caused negative performance in education, so consequently ethnic-minorities won't be unfairly blamed for underachievement and the problem can be fixed at the source!

Ginger: Presumably by these sociologists carrying out this research and writing about these issues people will realise what's wrong and so they'll try to prevent it. Problem solved, right?

Demetri: [shrugs] Maybe. One can only hope; the knowledge is there, it just depends on how people use it.

Ellie: Like a library; all the resources are available, it's others' choice on how they use them, but if they're there at least we get the option.

Jake: [brashly] I find Sociology useful when I'm trying to explain a point!

Ginger: [slyly] You mean argue a point.

Jake: [shrugs] Same difference; point is Sociology gives us the means by which to express our opinions. For example, using research by Gillborn and Mirza I can tell you that 'Class' has five times the effect as 'Gender' on educational achievement and 'Ethnicity' twice the effect; so radical feminists can't be right in thinking patriarchy is the most important affecting factor on society.

Ellie: [sighing] Don't start this again.

Jake: [resolute] Well that's just my view, and the idea of Sociology is it gives us the opportunity to look at matters from alternate views and decide whether we think they're right or wrong and form our own. It gives us the means for us to argue our opinions, to prove others wrong or to be proved wrong so we can move forward and form new ideas and theories, make new discoveries and just generally evolve! So then it must be important; especially today when we have more freedom to express ourselves.

Ellie: We're becoming more connected; with increasing globalisation we're becoming less of individual separate societies and more of one world.

Demetri: And now that that's happening it's even more important that we take into consideration every different culture and society; the affect we have on them and the affect they have on us.

Ginger: We can prevent unnecessary conflict.

Shaun: [enthusiastically] And maybe one day achieve world peace!

Robin: Or at least avoid so much discrimination.

Ellie: But everyone's always going to have different views no matter how much you understand something.

Robin: All we can do with Sociology is gain a clearer answer on what is right, what is wrong, and what needs to be resolved.

Ginger: I don't think understanding why 'Labelling' happens is necessarily going to put an end to it, but at least increased awareness can reduce it.

Jake: Sociology has never really been about solving problems [backtracks] ...I mean, there's probably some of that in there, but really what it's mainly about is understanding problems ...and just... society... life in general.

Mr Drake: Somehow all your points seem to link back to understanding.

Robin: [shrugging] Well isn't that what most sciences are about; - understanding why something happens?

Mr Drake: True, but what makes understanding so important? I don't understand why my car goes when I start the engine but I'm still able to drive it

Ellie: [pointedly] This is true; and we don't always need to understand to live our lives, but when your car breaks down and you don't know how to fix it, what're you going to do? You're going to call someone who does know.

Shaun: He's right. History is about the 'when', Geography is about the 'where', English is about the 'what' and Science – Sociology – is about the 'how' and the 'why'.

Shaun: Whoo! Point to Ellie!

[Robin and Ellie low-five.]

Ginger: She's right; we can carry on with our lives, ignorant and impassive but eventually that's going to bite us in the backside.

Ellie: Sociology is important, understanding is important [she looks to Shaun] especially today. Because today we face many growing threats and not just to ourselves but to the entire world.

Robin: Global Warming.

Ginger: Nuclear War.

Jake: Zombie Apocalypse! [Everyone looks to him] It's going to happen.

Demetri: Point is, eventually we will need to work together for whatever reason, and unless we can get along – unless we can accept one another, understand each other – we're not going to last much longer.

Ellie: Life-threatening circumstances aside, Sociology is important to me because it helps me to understand myself ...and others! Most people don't even understand themselves let alone the person next to them.

Ginger: [staring pointedly at Jake] I certainly don't understand the person next to me.

Ellie: I like knowing the 'whats' and the 'whys' and the 'hows'. To me Sociology is an answer, an explanation – it gives us meaning. As humans we are extremely curious, and in a world full of questions, an answer is always important ...especially today, because today I think we've started asking much more.

Robin: Sociology would have always been important had it always existed, but mostly today because today there are about 7 billion people in this world; that means a lot more societies and a lot more viewpoints and certainly a lot more questions.

Ellie: So yeah, that's why Sociology is important today. It gives us understanding, it gives us meaning.

Robin: It gives us answers.

Ginger: It gives us the power to reduce conflict.

Jake: Or at least gives it better purpose.

Demetri: It displays what is wrong so we have the means to fix it.

Ellie: And although we could never fix everything that is wrong with the world it allows us the chance to move forward into a brighter – clichéd – tomorrow.

Robin: More importantly it gives us perspective of the world we live in and the people around us; that sometimes those we overlook and pass-off are really the key cogs in the machine or how one little action can affect so many.

Ginger: The thing is, if we didn't have Sociology maybe we'd still be fine where we were but would we ever move forward?

Demetri: Sometimes it seems like it's giving us the obvious answer, but maybe it's just pointing out what was right in front of us which we failed to see.

Jake: And in the end all knowledge is important, and Sociology is a lot of knowledge.

Ellie: Sociology is important, simple as.

[They look to Mr Drake who nods, impressed; he turns to Shaun.]

Mr Drake: So, does that answer your question?

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