Interactive Cinema

Going to the cinema can be an enjoyable and reasonably inexpensive evening out. That’s why, despite competition from traditional television channels and online streaming services, cinema attendance in the UK is now higher than it has been since 1971. This increase is partially the result of a wider variety of films which appeal to different age groups. However, the overall numbers cover up a worrying trend. While there has been a large increase in the number of people over 55 years of age and of families with young children going to the cinema, teenagers and young adults are finding alternative forms of entertainment. If they get out of the habit of going to the cinema, where will the future audiences come from?

One theory as to why the younger generation finds the cinema to be less appealing than other forms of entertainment is because it requires them to disconnect from the outside world, as phone use is strongly discouraged or banned in cinemas. It seems that young people don’t mind not talking to their friends sitting next to them, but not being able to check messages from others is another matter. Of course, you can take a look at your phone during a film, but there are risks involved. In Louisville, Kentucky, USA, audience members complained to the management about one man who was texting and chatting throughout the film. When he refused to leave, the police were called to take him away and, when he forcefully tried to return to his seat, they used a taser to stop him and arrested him.

Adam Aron, chairman and CEO of the American cinema chain AMC Entertainment, put forward the idea of mobile-friendly screenings. These would have given audiences the choice of watching the film undisturbed or choosing a different time when blogging, texting or even chatting was allowed. Reaction to the proposal was swift and almost entirely negative. Although Aron would have successfully solved a short-term problem, many were worried that, in the long run, his mobile-friendly screenings would legitimise the use of phones in cinemas. Two days later, worried about the financial effects on his business, he dropped the idea. Disappointing as it was, it would have allowed the majority of filmgoers to watch without phone noise, while also appealing to a new and younger audience.

Cinema owners in the Far East haven’t been deterred, and young people are being tempted back into cinemas with the introduction of “bullet screens”. In these cinemas, people can send text messages commenting on the film they are watching, and these reactions are immediately shown on the screen. The audience can therefore react both to the film and to each other. Audience members have claimed that bullet screens make the whole cinema experience much more sociable and enjoyable, and some hope that one day, films will become even more interactive and allow filmgoers to influence what they see.

We don’t know what the cinemas of the future will look like, but it seems certain that they will have to adapt in order to survive. After all, if cinemas can make more money by offering screenings that attract more young people and still be able to offer traditional screenings as well, then surely everyone wins.

to cover up: ocultar
taser: pistola eléctrica / pistola de electrochoque
screening: proyección
swift: rápido
to drop: abandonar, renunciar a
to deter: dissuadir / disuadir
PART 1: Reading comprehension

Choose the best answer according to the text. Only ONE answer is correct.
[3 points: 0.375 points for each correct answer. Wrong answers will be penalized by deducting 0.125 points. There is no penalty for unanswered questions.]

1. Which of these is NOT a reason for the cinema’s popularity according to the writer?
   a) Showing different kinds of films.
   b) A lack of alternative entertainment.
   c) Offering films liked by different generations.
   d) Offering entertainment at a reasonable price.

2. Why should cinemas worry despite the increase in audience numbers?
   a) Older people aren’t going any more.
   b) People don’t go regularly.
   c) Parents don’t take their children.
   d) Young people go less often.

3. Why does the writer suggest that young people may not enjoy going to the cinema?
   a) They don’t see their friends.
   b) They can’t use their phones.
   c) They can’t talk during a film.
   d) Films are too long.

4. In the incident in Louisville, Kentucky …
   a) the manager noticed the man’s behaviour and called the police.
   b) the police arrested the man when he refused to leave his seat.
   c) the manager tried to get the man to leave his seat without success.
   d) the man left his seat before the police arrived.

5. What was Adam Aron’s idea?
   a) To show the same film to two separate audiences.
   b) To allow mobile phone use only if it didn’t disturb others.
   c) To divide the cinema into two halves so that mobile phone users all sat together.
   d) To make all AMC Entertainment screenings mobile friendly.

6. What was the writer’s reaction to Aron’s idea?
   a) It would have led to a change in attitudes to phone use in cinemas.
   b) It was good that Adam changed his mind.
   c) It could have been good financially for AMC Entertainment.
   d) It was a good idea that would have pleased everybody.

7. Bullet screens allow audiences to …
   a) affect the action of a film.
   b) interact with viewers of the same film in different cinemas.
   c) share their opinions with other audience members.
   d) send texts to other audience members’ phones.

8. What does the writer say in the final paragraph?
   a) Cinemas will change and some people will be unhappy.
   b) Cinemas won’t exist in the future.
   c) Cinemas can change without upsetting anybody.
   d) Cinemas will concentrate more on younger audiences in the future.
PART 2: Writing

Choose ONE topic. Your answer should be 125-150 words in length. There is no specific penalty for exceeding 150 words in length. Extra points are not given for exceeding 150 words. [4 points]

1. Write an essay on the advantages and disadvantages of Adam Aron’s idea of mobile-friendly screenings.

2. You have just been to see a film. While you were watching, a lot of people in the audience were using their mobile phones which made it difficult for you to concentrate on the film. When you mentioned this to staff in the cinema, they didn’t seem very interested. Write a letter to the manager of the cinema expressing your dissatisfaction and making recommendations about what they can do about the problem.
Answers

1. b
2. d
3. b
4. c
5. a
6. d
7. c
8. c