NEWS LESSON

The 1990s Are Back, but What Are We Really Missing?



BEFORE YOU READ

1 Warm up

Talk about these questions with a partner.

1. Which old object would you choose over its modern version?
2. Can you miss a time you never lived through?
3. What do you think people will miss about life today?

2 Key words

These words are in the article. Write the letter of the meaning (A to H) in each box.

1	**imagine**	☐
2	**constantly**	☐
3	**privacy**	☐
4	**old-fashioned**	☐
5	**distant**	☐
6	**dissatisfaction**	☐
7	**discrimination**	☐
8	**recorded**	☐

A	unfair treatment of people because of who they are
B	not modern any more
C	saved on a camera, phone or other device so you can see or hear it later
D	the unhappy feeling when something is not good enough
E	to make a picture of something in your mind
F	the freedom to keep things to yourself, away from other people
G	far away in time or space
H	all the time, without stopping

3 Read

Read the article and underline the key words from task 2. The paragraphs are numbered.

Objects that are slower and less reliable than a phone are selling well. The appeal may be the limits they impose rather than the decade itself.

1 A young music fan buys a CD released before she was born. Someone else carries an old film camera, which cannot show whether the photograph worked until the film is developed. These objects are slower and less convenient than the phones already in their pockets, and that may be the point. The return of 1990s clothes, music and technology is not only nostalgia. For people with no memory of the decade, it can represent a life with fewer notifications and less pressure to record everything.

2 It is tempting to put the trend down to nostalgia, but that only goes so far. Plenty of the people buying 90s clothes or listening to Britpop have no personal memories of the period. For them, the decade represents something they imagine modern life has lost: a world in which people were not constantly checking their phones or worrying about what might appear on social media. Photographs were developed later, and an evening out could pass without being recorded. To a generation that has grown up online, that sounds less like a limitation than a kind of privacy.

3 The appeal goes beyond technology. Fashion moves in cycles, and styles that once looked old-fashioned eventually seem fresh again. Music can have the same effect. A song becomes popular with a new generation, older fans rediscover it and suddenly a period that seemed distant is everywhere. Parents and children may even find themselves enjoying the same bands, though perhaps for different reasons.

4 There is another reason some younger people find the past attractive: modern life can feel exhausting. Notifications, online arguments and the pressure to keep up with everyone else rarely give us a moment's peace. Using an old camera or listening to a CD requires a little more patience. These small habits can make an experience feel more personal, even if they are less convenient.

5 However, it is easy to look back through rose-tinted glasses. The 1990s were not free of serious problems. Wars, discrimination and the AIDS crisis affected millions of lives. Without today's technology, keeping in touch across countries could be expensive and difficult, and finding information was far less convenient. The decade was not a simpler world for everyone.

6 Perhaps today's revival is less about wanting to live in the past than choosing what to bring into the present. People can enjoy old music, clothes and technology without pretending that an earlier generation had everything right. The interesting question is why objects that were once replaced by newer inventions now seem worth using again. Their attraction may tell us more about our dissatisfaction with modern habits than about the 1990s themselves.

Sources: Tate Britain. Picture: AI illustration.

4 True, false or not given

Circle **T** (true), **F** (false) or **NG** (the article does not say).

1. The text suggests that part of the 1990s appeal for young people is a sense of privacy. T F NG
2. The writer believes nostalgia fully explains the trend. T F NG
3. CD sales have overtaken streaming among younger listeners. T F NG
4. According to the text, keeping in touch across countries was easier in the 1990s than it is now. T F NG
5. Parents and children can enjoy the same bands for different reasons. T F NG

5 Vocabulary

Complete the sentences with words from the box. Two words are not needed.

affected	distraction	exhausting	nostalgia	patience	reliable	revival	tempting

1. Free delivery makes the offer very _____ .
2. After a twelve-hour shift, the long journey home was _____ .
3. Learning to play an instrument takes a great deal of _____ .
4. Interest in vinyl records is part of a wider _____ of old technology.
5. The strike _____ thousands of passengers across the country.
6. Hearing that old song filled her with _____ for her school days.

6 Verb forms

Write the correct form of the verb in brackets.

1. When she finally saw the photographs, she _____ where they were taken. (FORGET)
2. Film cameras _____ by a growing number of young photographers. (USE)
3. If people had to wait for their photographs, they _____ more carefully about each shot. (THINK)
4. She _____ her phone all morning, so she needs a break. (CHECK)
5. Years ago, friends _____ meet at a fixed time because they could not send messages. (HAVE TO)

7 Language focus: phrasal verbs

Complete the sentences with words from the box. Two words are not needed. Many phrasal verbs have a fixed particle that you must learn with the verb. Some, like put down to, have two particles and a meaning you cannot guess.

bring	carry	catch	keep	look	pick	put

1. The shop owner _____ the drop in sales down to bad weather.
2. I try to _____ in touch with school friends by calling every Sunday.
3. When I _____ back, my school days seem much simpler.
4. The exhibition aims to _____ the past back to life.
5. Styles like this often _____ on quickly with teenagers.

SPEAK

8 Talk about it

Discuss in pairs or small groups. Give reasons for your answers.

1. Which older habit would you bring back for a week?
2. Is using an old device a real break from modern life or another trend?
3. What makes an inconvenient object enjoyable to use?

9 Role-play: a phone-free weekend

Work in pairs. Read your card, then have the conversation. Swap roles and do it again.

Student A · the friend with the idea

You want a phone-free weekend with your friend. You would use a film camera, play CDs and make plans on paper. Explain why you think it will be relaxing, and answer your friend's worries.

Student B · the friend with doubts

You like the idea a little, but you need your phone for work messages and for getting around. Ask questions, say what worries you, and try to agree a plan that you both like.

Useful phrases

I'd love to try a weekend without my phone.

It'd be nice to talk without any notifications.

But what if my boss needs to reach me?

We could check our messages once a day.

I'm not sure that's a good idea.

Let's give it a go and see what happens.

Afterwards, tell the class: did you agree a plan, and would you really do it?

ANSWER KEY

2 Key words

1 E · 2 H · 3 F · 4 B · 5 G · 6 D · 7 A · 8 C

4 True, false or not given

1 T · 2 F · 3 NG · 4 F · 5 T

5 Vocabulary

1 tempting · 2 exhausting · 3 patience · 4 revival · 5 affected · 6 nostalgia

6 Verb forms

1 had forgotten · 2 are used or are being used · 3 would think · 4 has been checking or has checked · 5 had to

7 Language focus

1 put · 2 keep · 3 look · 4 bring · 5 catch

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