

► Read the text and complete gaps 1–6 with sentences A–G. There is one extra sentence that you do not need to use.

- A and learn how to build their confidence by leading discussions
- B whenever you want
- C before introducing them to the real world
- D in which more than five million players worldwide create a virtual society
- E what they are trying out in the virtual world today
- F when you don't have facial expressions to help you
- G without waiting for permission

LANGUAGE & CULTURE

The **Open University** is a distance learning university funded and run by the UK government. Its aim is to provide access to higher education to people who cannot attend a traditional university. About seventy per cent of the students are adults in full employment; others include people who are disabled, in prison, abroad or looking after family members. The OU follows an open entry policy, which means no previous academic achievements are required for entry to most undergraduate courses. Since its foundation in 1969 (the first students enrolled in 1971), over three million students have taken OU courses.

A SECOND LOOK AT SCHOOL LIFE

THE FIRST DAY AT A NEW SCHOOL IS NEVER EASY. You're wearing new clothes but you're not sure if the astronaut helmet matches your kilt. Your teacher hovers above the floor, waiting for the final stragglers to arrive. A missing classmate eventually turns up twenty minutes late: she'd been trapped in a cloud of bubbles. Welcome to school life – in Second Life.

Second Life – the online 3D computer game ¹ ____ – is being used to teach teenage pupils as part of 'Schome': a project set up by Peter Twining, director of the centre for curriculum and teaching studies at the Open University. The main aims of Schome (School + Home) are to overcome the problems within the current education system and to develop a better way of learning for the 21st century.

Initially, Dr Twining and his colleagues spent six months trying to get young people to suggest creative ideas for new education systems, but the results were disappointing. Then they realised that the virtual world of Second Life offers a better way to test new designs and ideas ² _____. In a traditional classroom, everyone knows what the rules are, what the teachers and pupils are supposed to do. But in a school in a virtual world you can challenge the established rules, and students can control what they do in a way that would be too expensive or difficult in reality.



Schome Park is a private island in Teen Second Life, which is restricted to those under the age of eighteen. In a conventional workshop the kids turn up and wait to be told what to do; but in workshops in Schome Park, the kids might come in, stay for a while to see if they're interested in the subject, and if not, fly off ³ _____. They're not just skipping lessons, they're busy: creating school buildings and scripting scenarios for other workshops and activities. As a result, the classes are quite unusual: Archaeology classes which take place on a recreation of Hadrian's Wall*, Physics experiments to calculate the value of gravity within Second Life, and Philosophy seminars set in a Japanese Zen garden.

In Schome Park nobody knows who you really are. You can change the appearance of your avatar – the character you play in the world – ⁴ _____. This anonymity means that the students are less worried about making mistakes and so feel free to be more creative, and this, in turn, builds their confidence. 'I have never met any of these children in real life,' says Dr Twining. 'All I know is their avatar. My guess is those children are projecting themselves as something they're really not. And that's very liberating.'

Reaction from the pupils has been overwhelmingly positive. They have discovered that learning isn't just a teacher talking at a class; that clear communication is vital ⁵ ____; and that teamwork is essential. They can also run experiments that in real life would be impossible, for example with giant pendulums. One SParker wrote 'Everyone has their own ideas and contributions and Schome Park allows everyone to make these contributions with confidence. Scripting and building both encourage you to think through problems and to try new ways of doing things.'

And that is just what Schome is: a new way of testing ideas for a new type of education. And ⁶ _____ may well be what we'll all be doing in the real world tomorrow.

