Opinions

Teenage solo endurance sailors have been making headlines in quick succession. As young people are less able to assess the risks involved in solo sailing, they are often less informed of the risks involved in this dangerous activity. In recent years, the number of young sailors who have attempted solo voyages has increased significantly. This has led to a debate about whether young people should be allowed to attempt such voyages.

Some young people have been successful in their attempts, such as Jessica Watson, who became the youngest person to sail solo around the world in 2010. Others, like Zac Sunderland, have faced numerous challenges and have not been as successful. The debate about whether young people should be allowed to attempt such voyages continues to be a topic of discussion.

The teenage years are a time of great change and development. During this time, young people are often more likely to take risks and make decisions without fully understanding the consequences. It is important to consider the risks involved in solo sailing and to ensure that young people are adequately prepared and informed before attempting such voyages.

In conclusion, while young people should be encouraged to pursue their dreams and to strive for excellence, it is important to ensure that they are adequately prepared and informed before attempting such voyages. The teenage years are a time of great change and development, and it is important to ensure that young people are prepared to face the challenges that these years bring.
These words look like Chinese writing, but they are written in a script invented by the Chinese artist Xu Bing. He uses the techniques of Chinese calligraphy\(^1\) to create what he calls “square words”. These square words look like Chinese characters\(^2\) but people who read English can understand them.

A quick glance and you think: “I can't read it!” Now look again, and start with “The” at the top, easy to spot. The next word is underneath, so you read the phrase from top to bottom. Then, within the words, you read the letters in the order used in Chinese characters, that is, from left to right, top to bottom, outside to inside. Little by little you can decipher “The third asia pacific triennial of contemporary art.”

Texts painted in square words are beautiful in themselves. But Xu Bing says he wants them to give viewers a problem to solve, one that makes them “think about their cultural condition” and “open new spaces in their minds.”

\(^1\) calligraphy: artistic writing using special materials.
\(^2\) characters are words written in Chinese script.
Much of the Pacific was unknown to Europeans until Captain James Cook's three voyages in the 1770s. On his final voyage, in the ship HMS Resolution, Cook carried prototypes of the first accurate ship's clocks. Both worked quite well, although the Arnold design proved more successful. This poem is about Cook's two clocks.

**Five Visions of Captain Cook, Section III**  
*by Kenneth Slessor, 1931.*

1 Two chronometers the captain had,  
One by Arnold that ran like mad,  
One by Kendall in a walnut case,  
Poor devoted creature with a hangdog face.

5 Arnold always hurried with a crazed click-click,  
Dancing over Greenwich like a lunatic.¹  
Kendall panted faithfully his watch dog beat,  
Climbing out of Yesterday with sticky little feet.²

Arnold choked with appetite to wolf up time,  
10 Madly round the numerals his hands would climb,  
His cogs rushed over and his wheels ran miles,  
Dragging Captain Cook to the Sandwich Isles.³

But Kendall dawdled in the tombstoned past,  
With a sentimental prejudice to going fast,  
15 And he thought very often of a haberdasher's door  
And a yellow-haired boy⁴ who would knock no more.

All through the night time, clock talked to clock  
In the captain's cabin, tock-tock-tock,  
One ticked fast and one ticked slow,  
20 And Time went over them a hundred years ago.

¹ *Dancing over Greenwich like a lunatic:* Running faster than standard time as measured at the Greenwich Observatory in England.  
² *feet:* The beat of a poem is based on units, called feet, containing a pattern of stressed and unstressed syllables.  
³ *Sandwich Isles:* Hawaii, unknown in Europe before Cook found them. On a return visit he was killed.  
⁴ *haberdasher's door/ And a yellow-haired boy:* When he was 16, Cook worked in a haberdasher (sewing) shop.
Opinion

Solo, around-the-world teenage sailors

Should we stop these young adventurers?

Teenage solo endurance sailors have been making headlines in quick succession. A young person alone in a dangerous situation attracts attention – and sponsors. Young sailors also attract divided opinions. For example, Jessica Watson was asked by the Queensland government to cancel her voyage; yet the Prime Minister called her “a hero for young Australians” when she returned. It seems there is confusion about the competence and independence of young people.

One misunderstanding at least should be cleared up: children are not going to sea in an unregulated way. Consider the case of the Dutch girl, Laura Dekker. When her father agreed to her making a solo voyage at age 13, the Dutch Council for Child Care prevented it. The World Sailing Speed Record Council also moved to discourage very young sailors by abolishing their age-based records in early 2009.

So considerable community control of children under 16 years already happens. But the case for controlling older teenagers as if they were children is weak. Teenage brains, so the popular psychologists tell us, are liable to make faulty judgments. But such generalisations often do not apply to specific individuals. Between the ages of 14 and 18, teenagers vary greatly in their abilities. The amount of autonomy each is allowed should be determined not simply by their age but by negotiations with the relevant, responsible adults.

Some teens are certainly inexperienced and capable of childish mistakes, but the ones who attempt dangerous journeys normally do so by winning the confidence of hard-headed and well-qualified adult supporters.

But it is also wrong to think that any 16 year old can aspire to achievements as unusual as Jessica Watson’s. Watson seems to suggest they can when she calls herself “an ordinary girl who had a dream”. Her intention is to encourage teenagers but this notion can have the reverse effect of making them feel inadequate because spectacular feats are beyond them. Should all teens have such dreams? In reality, individuals face varying circumstances that restrict their aspirations.

Teenage circumnavigators should not be judged by preconceived views about young people. But nor should “ordinary” teenagers feel pressure to aspire to extraordinary personal goals. In fact, I believe the example of solo sailing over-stresses individualism. The teenage years are when most of us “ordinary” people learn that we can achieve great things in collaboration with others.

Recent solo circumnavigations by teenagers

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Completion date</th>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Days of travel</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Conditions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>July 2009</td>
<td>Zac Sunderland</td>
<td>396</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>with stops</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>USA</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>August 2009</td>
<td>Michael Perham</td>
<td>284</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>with stops and assistance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UK</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>May 2010</td>
<td>Jessica Watson</td>
<td>210</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>non-stop, unassisted</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AUS</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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Jessica Watson sailed for seven months around the Southern Ocean.
Acknowledgments

Mireille Vignol for ideas from her “postcard No.6” on the Queensland Art Gallery’s APT 3.

Xu Bing Studios Inc. for two “Square word” images, one from the Queensland Art Gallery’s APT 3 website and the other published on the site Xubing.com/NewEnglishCalligraphy in 2005.

The website of the British Museum for a photograph of an Arnold chronometer.


Jessicawatson.com for a photograph of Jessica Watson’s boat, “Pink Lady”.

Wikipedia for an adapted table of youth solo sailing ventures.