



Creative Soul:

A Collection of Writing

by Students of St. Paul's Convent School



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Editors | **Ms. R. Fok and Ms. V. Tong**

Technical Assistance | **Mr. N. Wong**

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Students of SPCS

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FOREWORD

One of the greatest rewards of English teachers at St. Paul's Convent School is being continually fascinated by the exceptional quality and creativity of our students' work. As the Panel Head of the English and English Literature Department, I feel obliged to provide a platform to recognize and showcase our students' achievements in English learning. As my team and I compiled this anthology, it gave us immense joy to review the great number of outstanding written work. The work includes reverse poems, performative monologues, poems on COVID 19 and lyrics to show gratitude to medical workers. This collection is by no means exhaustive of all our students' achievements.

This anthology of English writing marks the culmination of several years of hard work of budding young writers, devoted teachers and supportive parents of St. Paul's Convent School. I would like to dedicate this anthology to Ms. Karen Lau, an inspirational teacher who tirelessly nurtured her students' creativity and encouraged them to produce work that nourishes the soul.

To quote the writer and poet Kahlil Gibran: "The teacher who is indeed wise does not bid you to enter the house of his wisdom, but rather leads you to the threshold of your mind." Ms. Lau certainly had the ability to inspire students and through writing she led them to fulfill their potential.

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May our young writers continue to let their imagination take flight by putting pen to paper to scale new heights in their achievements.

Mr. Neil Maxwell
Panel Head of English and English Literature Department
St. Paul's Convent School

COMPETITION WINNING ENTRIES

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CILTHK Student Essay Competition

The Chartered Institute of Logistics and Transport

First Runner-Up

Jasmine Wan 5S (2020 – 2021)

The challenge:

Is Hong Kong's supply chain resilient for an unexpected crisis?



There are a lot of perceptions towards whether or not Hong Kong's supply chain is resilient for an unexpected crisis. In this essay, I will discuss what types of resilience Hong Kong's supply chain contains and the various types of crises that could occur, as well as offering solutions and coming to a conclusion.

Before I start, I would like to define some key terms. A supply chain in today's global economy is end-to-end network between a company and its suppliers to produce and deliver a product to its end consumer. Resilience is the capacity of a system or object to recover from adverse conditions or withstand difficulties it experiences, whilst a crisis is a turning point when a major decision needs to be made or a time of danger.

Let us start with the types of crises that Hong Kong can experience. It can range from social unrest which Hong Kong experienced in 2019, the coronavirus pandemic which Hong Kong experienced in 2020 and continues to do so along with the rest of the world, a natural disaster, acts of war, terrorism, changing weather patterns or large-scale destructive typhoons. This all assumes that Hong Kong is experiencing the crisis first hand. But what if these events occur elsewhere outside of Hong Kong? What then? Hong Kong could still be vulnerable. If we look at the economic and social fabric of Hong Kong, it needs to import goods for consumption, be they food products, water or necessities. So, the major supply chain factor is the logistics operational set up that Hong Kong has. If this is fundamentally sound, it is therefore resilient to events happening in Hong Kong.

In today's global supply chain model, complexity reigns. For example, a typical Toyota car has 30,000 components and parts, and has a global supply from a number of different countries. There are hundreds of subcontractors all contributing to the production and distribution of these parts, and an external disruption in any of the chain suppliers could affect the smooth operation of the production of a car. To further elaborate, we can take a look at other examples of crises in different parts of the world which affected the supply chain severely, such as the Fukushima nuclear tsunami in 2011, which rendered part of Japan inoperable. Not only did this disaster adversely affect transportation networks, it also affected the global supply of semiconductors in 2011 as Japan accounted for 20% of the world's production. Another example would be flooding in parts of Thailand, which caused disruption to automobile supply chains as it was a large automobile parts provider.

One main crisis in the modern world today is without doubt, the COVID-19 pandemic and its effects towards supply chains. According to a survey conducted by American worldwide manufacturing service company Jabil, amongst 700+ companies, 94% cared about supply chain resilience but only 64% actually fund resilience programmes. Traditionally, as supply chains have been built on the basis of

cost and efficiency, the coronavirus pandemic has challenged this traditional concept by disrupting many supply chains throughout the spreading of the virus.

Such crises in Hong Kong are inevitable to avoid. However, there are numerous factors that could enhance resilience in Hong Kong's supply chains, such as operational resilience. I believe that there is a need to reduce risk from over reliance on just one country or a supplier. Risk assessments should be performed on a regular basis on the supply chains end to end, and management information such as KPI management information such as KPI dashboards should be prepared regularly and analysed by management.

To ensure Hong Kong remains operationally resilient for a sudden crisis, it must embrace technology to take advantage of unexpected events. During the pandemic, online businesses have fared quite well. Video conferencing apps such as Zoom enables workers to communicate with each other, allowing meetings with suppliers and customers to continue operations. This demonstrates how Hong Kong needs to maintain an innovative culture to succeed in making Hong Kong's side of the supply chain resilient. Local mask production was also one key element to Hong Kong's operational resilience. At the outset of the pandemic, citizens were queuing up for hours to buy a handful of masks. With local mask production, many supply chain deficiencies have been addressed on this aspect so that people can go about with their everyday lives.

Nevertheless, apart from business continuities, there are also dependencies that need to be considered. Take for example, COVID-19 which has forced businesses and governments to take actions so that people can work from home if possible. Schools and universities have also been providing lessons remotely so that students can study from home. This all assumes two major supply chain reliance considerations: One, that the internet network is reliable and safe and two, electricity supply is readily available. The complexity as companies seek more efficiencies and cost reduction in a competing environment is exacerbated by the multitude of outsourced suppliers and subcontractors, which can make businesses and organizations vulnerable to unforeseen shocks.

On the other extreme, single supplier vulnerability exposes the supply chain if there is a mishap to a single supplier, and the timing of the operational hiatus is a key issue. For example, a disaster due to the inclement weather could be devastating yet has a short duration; however, something like the pandemic could be for a year and above as we are experiencing now. Other risks include technological risks, cyber-attacks and ransomware attacks. An example of this would be in Australia, where an IT company called Talman Solutions suffered a disruption when its computer systems were hacked and ransomware was implanted into its IT systems. This resulted in a wool auction cancellation and prevented \$70 million of wool from entering the market.

Finally, in order to ensure the resilience of Hong Kong's supply chain, technology is vital to this process, because only by improving and continuously upgrading technology can Hong Kong respond rapidly to unpredictable and unexpected events. One technological solution to this is the use of Internet of Things (IOT). IOT allows communication between connected devices, and sensors can store, collect, exchange data and make intelligent decisions without any human intervention. With the help of IOT, connected road vehicles and shipping containers will be able to use data to adapt to different routes and increase the efficiency of fleets. IOT will also be able to control logistics flows, precision and transparency, establishing the resilience of Hong Kong's supply chain.

One of the major factors that cause logistics delays which humans cannot control is the weather. With the help of artificial intelligence, these can predict weather patterns especially over longer periods of time, so that the planning of vessels and deliveries in weather prone districts can be

longer periods of time, so that the planning of vessels and deliveries in weather prone districts can be planned in advance to improve efficiency and safer deliver. Weather patterns can be ascertained with the use of orbiting satellites around the Earth and improve upon today's computer-generated models, with far more power and computing capability. With these points in mind, artificial intelligences would generally benefit the logistics industry, given that its advantage in pattern recognition and learning could be applied to robots to perform tasks and making decisions. This would aid the industry enormously given its reliance on predictability and efficiency of logistics flows.

In terms of environment, the use of technology to improve environmental concerns would be invaluable to the logistics industry. For example, cargo ships in the oceans emit a huge amount of carbon dioxide. In order to reduce the world's carbon dioxide emissions immensely, the invention of technology to enhance alternative sources of energy such as hydrogen power would be able to achieve this goal and make it more commercially viable. Add to this electric cars, trucks and other vehicles, which may very well become the norm in 10 years' time, the world will become a less polluted place and the logistics industry will be at the forefront and beneficiary of this technology.

In terms of other forms of transport, self-driving cars and robots can be used at delivery hubs and warehouses, automated robotic forklift trucks can operate autonomously with AI programming, and driverless trucks can also ferry goods between the hubs. This will improve efficiency of warehouse management, cut work error rates and enhance accuracy and transparency, resulting in lower operating costs and higher efficiency beneficial to the logistics companies. This can be even extended to automating cranes at docks to offload containers on board ships, which in turn can also be automated.

With mobile phones being utilised almost anywhere in the world, and with the rapid spread of technology, the use of mobile apps on smart devices can aid shippers and delivery agents to match routes, tolls, rates, and times of delivery. These won't only minimize operational expenses and ensure smooth flow of point-to-point deliveries; they will also lead to a reduction of space usage and less need for the number of warehouses. Staff costs can even be reduced as automation increases, decreasing the need for outsourcing to third parties.

In addition to mobile devices, blockchain technology could also be of great value to support Hong Kong's logistics industry. Blockchain can be used to share blocks of information, making the whole front to end logistics chain very transparent, with no hidden costs nor single points of failure as the whole chain is shared by all, not just by one entity. Interruption errors and delays cannot be hidden, ensuring that customers have full visibility of the process. There are also tracking systems in which customers can receive instant answers to their questions and delivery status. Not only will this relieve customers of their worries, this can enhance competition in the logistics sector as well, which is a positive outcome of using blockchain. Furthermore, technology warehouse systems can provide real time stock checking, enabling the reduction of stock losses. These systems can also monitor resources, potential errors and even opportunities. By using blockchain technology, this can enhance the supply chain to manage the logistical aspects of the chain, by giving transparency to stakeholders on knowledge of where in the chain is that product being produced or delivered.

In conclusion, Hong Kong is a major financial and transportation logistics hub in Asia. The strong banking system and large fiscal reserves that Hong Kong has built over the years has indeed helped Hong Kong shield itself financially from the pandemic and other types of crises. If Hong Kong can embrace such technology to take steps and measures to address operational resilience in its supply chains, then there is no reason why it cannot make itself more resilient for an unexpected crisis.

CILTHK Student Essay Competition


The Chartered Institute of Logistics and Transport

Merit Award

Christine Lam 3S (2020 – 2021)

The challenge:

Are e-scooter and e-bike suitable for Hong Kong?



The wind quietly whispers, gently pushing the electric bicycle to no avail. The tires made their monotonous hisses over the rain-washed streets while the dim, yellow light played in the pouring droplets, lightening up this deluge from the sky. The electric bicycle kept speedy until all of a sudden, “BANG”! It swerved out of control, then collided with the railings. Silence filled the atmosphere, as the world flashed before your eyes from bitter darkness to a blinding white light. Distinct crackles of the bones and the crushing of glass filled your ears. The pain utterly devoured you.

Terrible, isn't it? However, this may simply be the figurative form of stating the potential danger of riding an electric bike.

Yet, there is no need to worry, forasmuch both unlicensed electrical scooters and bikes are strictly prohibited in Hong Kong. A maximum fine of HK\$5,000 and imprisonment for three months will be given to a driver of an unlicensed vehicle. Nevertheless, many still enjoy the thrills offered by the rapid ride and became discontented with the law. It is perhaps not the biggest controversy in Hong Kong, but attention was brought due to the shocking amount of people who adored or fancied the experience since the technology became trendy in western countries.

Hong Kong is different. It was a colony of England not long ago until 1997, it returned to China. Both Chinese and English culture dwells in citizen's hearts and is kept in this way for years. I find this very intriguing about Hong Kong. Whenever it's Easter or Christmas, many other parts of China may not have lavish ornaments and decorations to embellish the dull streets, but in Hong Kong, the sound of delightful music, golden candlelight, wild scented flowers, and the ringing of church bells all harmonized into this beautiful piece of art to be admired.

The city has a heart, a soul, and a rhythm. It lives in our music, plays in our everyday lives, found in each act of kindness. From micro flats to apartments, to penthouse suites, our city is alive. We are connected.

Through connection, technology from both China and other western countries flows into the city swiftly. It shaped Hong Kong into a developed city with a bright future then gradually, people became interested in this small city on China's southern coast that used to be a small, primitive village.

Therefore, electric bicycle and scooters became very popular even before it is launched in Hong Kong's market for they are convenient, faster, has higher versatility and so on advantages. Many may favour them over traditional ones and wish to ride one on packed streets, excluding me. You may find my view absurd, but allow me to justify my perspective.

I never found electric bicycles or scooters fascinating. Instead, to me, they are unnecessary. Both regular and electric bicycles or scooters do not emit any greenhouse gases, thus, there is no need to rationalize the act for the sake of showing respect to the environment. Besides, the aim for most Hong Kong people who ride bicycles and scooters for either entertainment or convenience's purpose is to reduce the enormous barrier between exercising and their packed routine. However, electric bicycles and scooters, on the other hand, are the principal source of enabling entitlement to motion and a sense of false accomplishment when you only make yourself better and stronger, if you ride a regular one. They are illusions telling your mind that you are exercising, while it is the electric motor that assists propulsion.

Besides, think of the actual cost you will pay to maintain an electric bicycle. It is far more expensive than you think it is. It costs way more than your average bike, and often even a motorcycle. Its technology hasn't peaked yet, and there are still various flaws in the model. There is absolutely no need for Hong Kong people to spend much more on just a bicycle with an integrated electric motor. Commodities in the city are already very pricey, do not burden yourself even more with unnecessary objects.

However, I believe the main reason for the government to make the decision of banning unlicensed bicycles and scooters, is that it is a perilous action to allow any unprofessional people to ride vehicles with potential danger. Electric bicycles and scooters are hard to control for an unskilled person. They may start off turbulence as I am sure it is unmanageable for them.

Moreover, Hong Kong is small, tiny compared to other cities. In order to accommodate such a high density of population, many estates are built just next to one another. Streets and malls are always overwhelmed with people, thus, riding electrical bicycles or scooters became a dangerous activity. Without slight awareness, you might have already bumped into another pedestrian on crowded streets. They are not suitable for populated cities like Hong Kong.

People may envy other countries that allow electric bikes and scooters just casually sliding past streets, but it is foolish to begrudge what other cities allow when our city doesn't because we are different from others. Every city has its condition and ways to deal with problems. Governments are set up to make the best choice for the city so that everyone can live in perfect harmony and peace. Have trust in the government and seek the good in what you perceive as bad.

Despite electric bicycles and scooters are in my humble opinion, unnecessary, more pricey, and risky, I do not doubt their convenience. They can act as substitutes for cars. They may not be as advanced as cars, but through electrical technology, there is a trend towards smaller, cheaper and slimmer designs being developed over the years. Batteries and motors are generally now kept both low and central in bike design to ensure the best handling. It may be one of the many reasons why Hong Kong citizens adore it more than usual ones for it can catch up with the fast pace of our city without paying the cost of buying a car.

All in all, electric bicycles and scooters may not be the perfect transport for Hong Kong because they do somehow annoy people on sidewalks and cause risky scenarios. Not only that, but they are also misleading people when they aren't reducing the gap between exercising and their unhealthy routines.

For those who are up against this particular law, why not change your perspective and try to understand the government's need to prevent any severe accidents in order to protect citizens from needless injuries?

COVID19 Winter Writing Competition

The City University of Hong Kong

First Prize — Junior Category (DSE)

Tam Wing Yu, Angela 3P (2020 – 2021)

The challenge:

Back to the Future: What was the impact of COVID19 on life in Hong Kong?

‘Grandma,’ a chubby hand not even half the size of mine tugged at it urgently. I resisted a shiver as I rolled over to the cold side of the bed and faced the pouty face waiting for me at the edge. ‘What’s wrong sweetie? It’s way past your bedtime...’ I murmured softly. She wrung her hands together nervously, and I immediately understood that the child had a hard time sleeping. I gave an exasperated but affectionate sigh and lifted her up to the cozy bundle of blankets and her eyes immediately lit up with the warm tones of the fire shining through her eyes and she stifled a tiny giggle. ‘Grandma, do you ever think I could become a doctor when I grow up? I want to be just like you!’ this innocent question left me speechless. All of a sudden, I no longer saw the hopeful gaze of the sweet eleven-year-old, but my own face when I was younger, ages ago, staring intently at the television as the fatality numbers soared higher and higher by the second. This image was broken when I refocused back at my grandchild as she waited for my answer.

‘Oh yes, darling. Of course you could.’

When her deep breathing faded to light snores, I sneaked out reluctantly from the warm room, fragile back cracking, and being cautious not to wake the sleeping child. When I arrived at the attic, I suppressed a shiver, not because of the cold, but because of the sad sight of the long-abandoned room. In contrast with the well-modernized house, with its advanced security systems, automatic lights and eco-friendly heating, the attic was a sore sight. Passing limp cobwebs and settling dust, I finally came to the lonely wooden box sitting at the back behind the boxes of other treasures. One by one, and being careful not to rip them, I took out stacks of paper and sorted them out on the musty attic floor. It was late, but I couldn’t bear to tear my eyes away from the first letter.

Dear Lucy,

How are you? I had great fun today, my family and I had an amazing feast and we hung out with my friends at the square. We even shopped together at the mall! What did you do this winter?

Yours, Sophie
27th December, 2019

‘If only you knew what would happen soon, Sophie, that was your last hangout of the year.’ I muttered, mentally shaking my head at her light-hearted words and naïve thinking. I remembered when my family and I would stroll along the beautiful Victoria Harbour, with the vibrant Christmas lights glimmering off the gentle ripples at night. I moved on to the next letter.

Dear Lucy,

Happy new year! How are you doing? I'm glad to hear that you spent your Christmas happily. You have your final exams soon, right? Work hard for them!

Anyways, have you heard of the 'Covid' thing that's going on recently? It's okay though, I'm pretty sure it will pass in a few months. In the meantime, stay safe Luce!

Yours, Sophie
15th January, 2020

At this, I sighed out loud. Ah yes, I thought. How important the entry exams were, as they contributed a lot to what I was able to do in the future. Suddenly I was no longer in the dimly lit attic, but in my old room, ages ago, staring at the heavy stack of paper that was equivalent to some alien language that I did not understand. I had just received the news that the exam has been delayed and would be held online, following the news of school suspension. Tears would warm up and blur my already tired, bloodshot eyes from hours of staring at a computer, while I had no choice but to force myself to get myself together and work through the night.

What a pathetically sad sight I was, I thought now, reading through the papers that I had now become so familiar with. At that moment I was immensely exhausted, both mentally and physically, when I was left to figure out unclear teachings from online school on the same day, while also tackling online tutorial lessons at the same time. I felt trapped in a dark tunnel with no guidance from a light, and absolutely no way out. Stress was a burden on my shoulders, pushing me further down with no way to shake it off.

Pulling myself out of the memory, I reached towards a wrinkled letter, dried dents the proof that the writer had tears soaked through the leaking ink.

Lucy,

A lot has happened since I've received your letter. My parents are now unemployed, since they no longer require pilots and flight attendants after the economic recession from corona virus. My sister who was studying in England has to come back home and find a job immediately. I'm scared, Luce. Why isn't the epidemic getting better? What am I going to do?

Yours, Sophie
25th February, 2020

I remember seeing the mass unemployment on the news. How fortunate I felt when I learnt that my own parents were not going to lose their jobs, and that I was able to continue my studies online, even though they may not be as efficient as those that took place face-to-face. Not only that, but there was mass news on the TV that doctors and nurses in high-risk hospitals were being overworked, and there was not enough protective equipment for nurses in contact with the sick. Luckily, the Hong Kong medical staff fared better than the ones in other countries. Even so, my mother would arrive home late night with sagging shoulders and exhausted eyes every day, until she stopped coming back when the cases were serious and stayed at the dorms near the hospitals instead. I understood that it was to keep our family safe from infections, but I missed her dearly for two months before she finally returned home.

My withered hands reached for the last letter.

Lucy,

I completed my covid test this Monday, and unfortunately, I tested positive for the virus. I am staying at one of the hospitals right now, and I feel absolutely terrible. Not only does my head and throat ache insanely, but I feel that lead is running through my body instead of blood. I am hoping for a smooth recovery, but my doctors say that since I already have chronic heart problems, the risk of the side effects of the medicine they are going to give me are going to affect me greatly. Please write to me soon, to stop loneliness and dread from consuming me.

Yours, Sophie
9th March, 2020

I did, I did in fact write back to her, letter after letter and getting more and more anxious when she didn't respond. Days bled into months, and when the pandemic gradually died down, the world was left in ruins, and so was my heart when I received the news from Sophie's family that she had in fact passed away, along with millions of people at the hands of the coronavirus. Since then, I steeled my heart into becoming a doctor in the future.

Hong Kong then marched through the after-effects of the pandemic and resumed its glory, step by step, and cooperated with the rest of the world to develop a greater medical dimension along the way. This ensured that if another monstrous plague was to be unleashed in the future, studies could be made without delay and prevent the widespread fatalities around the world.

And I stayed up late at night, making sense of the weird symbols and worked my way up the ranks, slowly and steadily, my once-unreachable dream of becoming a doctor was finally achieved.

So, then I picked up a stray pen and a piece of paper off the floor and wrote:

Dear Sophie,

My dear grandchild, I hope you will find this letter in the future, when you feel lost and disoriented by everything going on around you; and when you feel like your classmates are reaching higher steps while you run on the same spot, there will always be a way up. Your grandma has gone through online schools, a delayed entry exam, a loss of her friend that fuelled up her determination for her future. It's a great responsibility, I know. But if I can do it, you can too.

Yours, Lucy
1st December, 2070

COVID19 Winter Writing Competition

The City University of Hong Kong

First Prize — Junior Category (Open)

Wahab Ching Yan, Rebecca 3S (2020 – 2021)

The challenge:

Back to the Future: What was the impact of COVID19 on life in Hong Kong?



The moonlight shimmered through the curtains, gently caressing the dusty covid-19 memorabilia in my hands which holds the effaced memories of the great pandemic. Oh how quick does time pass by! It's already been half a century!

"Grandpa! Grandpa!" My granddaughter chirped excitedly as she sprinted into my arms, "You promised to tell me about the great pandemic that happened in your teenage years!"

"Oh yes yes." I pulled her into my warm embrace, "What would my little princess like to learn about the great pandemic?"

"How did it all begin? What happened?"

"It was unexpected. One day me and my friends were still hanging out normally, watching movies in cinemas and going out whenever we liked. But the other day the news came reporting the first cases of covid-19 and everything changed..." I looked back at my granddaughter, only to see her puzzled countenance as she tilted her head.

"What's a cinema?"

Oh right. Cinemas have gone extinct in Hong Kong since the pandemic, how could I forget that?

"A cinema is where people watch movies together in a room on a big screen, but since covid-19 hit Hong Kong restrictions came and people could no longer gather."

"Silly grandpa! You can just go online if you want to watch a movie, why bother crowding in a room with everyone else?" She said with a hint of pride.

"But the mood is different when you're watching the movie with everyone else. Same goes with learning, we used to learn in facilities called schools where we could interact with other classmates physically and play basketball during recess! Doesn't that sound more attractive than staring at a blank screen for 8 hours a day to learn?"

"Well it actually does... it's already 3 months since online classes started and I still haven't seen some of my classmate's faces yet because they wouldn't turn their cameras on!" She pouted at the fact she couldn't experience the fun I had. "But what did people do to fight covid-19?"

"Everyone had to stay indoors, we would only go out when necessary, such as getting groceries-"

"Wait you actually had to go out to get groceries yourself?" She exclaimed in shock, "Instead of ordering on your phone and having them transported to your house by drones?!"

“Oh yes back then online shopping was not as popular as it is now, it was after covid-19 attacked Hong Kong that online shopping was broadly adapted and improved so that people could avoid chances of catching the virus on the streets.”

“But they’re so heavy! How could anyone possibly take their groceries home all by themselves?”

“It sure is hard, so do be glad you have delivery drones nowadays!” I chuckled slightly, reminiscing on how my hands would burn after helping my mother take her groceries. “But anyways, during the pandemic many healthcare workers fought the virus fearlessly. See that tarnished statue in Central? It honors all those who sacrificed their lives just for the sake of saving victims from the tight grip of death.’

“They sent actual people to fight in the frontlines?!”

“Yes. Actual people.”

“Can’t they just send in AI robots like doctor Jefferson?”

“They can’t, doctor Jefferson along with other AI doctors we see today were only invented near the end of the pandemic because too many frontline workers were left impoverished or even killed by the virus. 5G technology wasn’t advanced enough back then to allow them to be published onto the market in the beginning of the pandemic.”

“That’s tragic... It seems like the pandemic only brought forth negative impacts didn’t it?”

“Oh no not at all! At least people in Hong Kong got to spend more time with their families due to office shutdowns. Even after all these years we never forgot the importance of slowing down and bonding with our loved ones instead of plunging into incessant work,” I smiled back at the drowsy child secured in my arms, “just like how much I cherish spending time with you, love bug.”

“Time well spent?” She asked with a yawn.

“Time definitely well spent,” I assured the sleeping child, “and that’s the most wondrous change that could ever take place in Hong Kong within these 50 years.”

COVID19 Winter Writing Competition

The City University of Hong Kong

First Prize — Senior Category (Open)

Jasmine Wan 5S (2020 – 2021)

The challenge:

Back to the Future: What was the impact of COVID19 on life in Hong Kong?



THE MASKS

2070 AD

The masks were in the museum.

She recognises them, of course. After all, she had worn every single one in her lifetime.

The three masks lay in perfect symmetry, sealed in glass display cases. Did she dare walk towards them? She jolts forward, then hesitates as waves of memories come crashing over her.

A group of girls walk in a huddle past her, giggling loudly. For them, the museum is just a place to hang out.

For her, the museum is a mistake. A place which forces her to come to terms with her past.

Gathering up her courage, she takes a look at the first glass case.

*

Title of Piece: Surgical Mask

Date: 2020-25 AD

Medium: Non-woven polypropylene

Location: Taken from the former Queen Mary Hospital, currently Queen Mary Archaeological Site

Background: Historians believe this mask was left behind in the hospital as the Mutation began.

2021 AD

"You know, there's something special about wearing a mask."

I groaned.

"Please don't tell me this is one of your so-called 'philosophical questions' to get me to lighten up my mood, because that is not working."

Freya shrugged.

"It's called a conversation starter."

“That’s a lousy conversation starter.”

“Is it? Well, we’re conversing now, aren’t we? Checkmate!”

I laughed, despite myself.

“Fine, fine. You win this round. The mask just prevents us from getting Covid-19. That’s it.”

Freya’s brow creased.

“Don’t you think there’s a beauty in all of this? I mean, although the pandemic’s still going on—”

“We can’t go out for dinner.” I reminded her.

Ophelia, who had been listening to their whole conversation, chimed in.

“We can’t go to the movies.”

Freya waved her hands around in exasperation.

“No, just listen. The coronavirus gave us so many opportunities to change ourselves for the better. Say, for example, if 2020 hadn’t happened, I wouldn’t have known the correct way to wear a mask. Claire, you wouldn’t have had the time to learn French in quarantine, and Ophelia wouldn’t have had the time to finish watching all 7 seasons of Brooklyn Nine-Nine.”

I smiled, as my friends launched into a lengthy discussion of which TV series was worth watching. Their laughter was infectious, and it was almost enough to hide the fact that I had not seen the lower half of my friends’ faces for a year, had not eaten with them, had not truly hung out with them outside of school since 2019.

Almost.

After school, I walked to the MTR station with Freya.

A sudden thought came to me.

“You still haven’t told me what’s so special about a mask.”

Freya blinked.

“Oh, right. I just thought it beautiful that even though a mask covers up our faces every day, it never dampened our spirits, and we still manage to talk to one another.”

I watched as Freya looked out towards the towering skyscrapers that shielded Hong Kong.

“Even though there’s a raging pandemic out here in the world, we’re still trying our best to survive and get through this together.”

The last thing I heard before the doors of the MTR closed was Freya murmuring under her breath,

“We will always move on.”

Move on.

*

She moved on.

*

Title of Piece: Gas Mask

Date: 2035-40 AD

Medium: Silicone and rubber

Location: Scavenged from the banks of Victoria Harbour

Background: This mask was handed over to museum authorities in the aftermath of the Battle of West Kowloon

*

2046 AD

"I don't think that's supposed to come out."

Freya and I stared at the black pool of fluid sliding out of the Mutant's organs.

"It's blood that's been turned. What were you expecting, a flood of rainbows and sprinkles?"

A screech came from behind them, and I tackled Freya onto the ground, just in time as another Mutant exploded.

As Freya panted for breath, I raised my head to look at the sky.

All around us, Hong Kong burned. Skyscrapers that once towered over Hong Kong now crumbled into ash and dust. Once, peaceful yachts sailed over Victoria Harbour, the waves gently lapping across the shore.

Now, the harbour's only function was a graveyard for bodies to bury under the sea.

I swore silently to myself as I double checked the bullets nestled in the magazine of my gun. Four years of medical school and three years of residency all wasted because of the Mutation.

After the coronavirus merged into something more deadly, it was strong enough to kill, and strong enough to change the genes of the infected. Overnight, patients reported having seizures, with some experiencing chest pains and heart attacks. Hospitals were in pandemonium, and nothing could be done to heal them. Their blood turned black, they lost all sense of humaneness and resorted to living in an animalistic shell of themselves.

The media called it the Mutation, and the infected were called Mutants.

And mutants they were.

Across Hong Kong, lockdown ensued. The remaining citizens who did not fall ill barricaded their doors. Mutants scrambled across Hong Kong, killing anyone at first sight. If they came too near, you would get infected as well, and people resorted to wearing gas masks.

When I came back to Hong Kong to practice anaesthesiology, there was nothing left to do. The only standing hospital, Tung Wah Hospital was full of refugees whose homes were destroyed in attacks.

The only silver lining was seeing Freya again, who was working as an aid worker for the refugees.

Freya.

Her scream jolted me out of my thoughts.

"DON'T JUST SIT THERE! RUN!"

The Mutants.

Seven of them were scrambling over cars we had pushed onto the road as an effort to block them from coming forward.

My gun only had five bullets left. It wasn't enough to hold them back. Turning around, I saw an opening towards the small rowing boats bobbing on the harbour.

As if sensing my thoughts, Freya tugged on my arm.

"The boats have enough space for the two of us. Let's go!"

"And there's only one gas mask."

Three mutants were reaching us.

I shoved my gas mask towards Freya.

"Go." She hesitated, and I added,

"I'll follow you."

She hugged me fiercely, and hot tears pricked behind my eyelids.

"Don't wait for me, okay? Move on."

That was the last time I ever saw Freya.

Move on.

With tears sliding down her face, she moved on.

*

Title of Piece: NanoDiamond Mask

Date: 2070 AD

Medium: Diamond nanoparticles

Location: Nanotech and Co.

Background: This familiar mask, donated by Nanotech and Co. is the one we use nowadays, and has proved its effectiveness in preventing the spread of the Mutation

*

"The Hong Kong History Museum will be closing in 15 minutes. Thank you for your kind attention."

Absentmindedly, she touches the nanodiamond mask she wears now.

It's been 25 years since she last saw her best friend. Hong Kong gradually returned to a state of calm, but she never did. She regrets leaving her behind, to this very day.

She stares at the display cases. Three masks, all in perfect symmetry.

Move on.

She smiles sadly at the memories, the life she left behind.

Then, she straightens her shoulders. Blots her tears with the crumpled tissue in her hand and tosses it into the trash can.

Move on.

With a shaky breath, Freya Cheng walks out of the Hong Kong History Museum.

And never looks back.

COVID19 Winter Writing Competition


The City University of Hong Kong

First Prize — Senior Category (Open)

Ng Sze Ying, Sammi 5P (2020 – 2021)

The challenge:

Oral History: What has been the impact of COVID19 on your life in Hong Kong?



Distance — Word of the Year

“The confirmed cases recorded today was... of which 10 cases were from unknown sources...” we may have as well went numb to all the numbers from the daily news report, or in another way, accepted them as part of our “new normal”. Things have never been the same since the launch of the novel virus. In the fear that it would walk again in the footsteps of the notorious Black Death, people over the world settled themselves in quarantine after scrambling necessities in supermarkets, avoiding face-to-face contacts. Distance has inevitably become the word that best describes our lives this year.

The first “distance” coming to our minds should be “social distancing” without a sense of doubt. This overly heard phrase is bounded to dwell with us under the influence of covid-19. But at a second thought, this word was still a new term to us just one year ago. After a painful loss of valuable lives at the beginning of the year, people across the world have learned the importance of the word “social distancing”. Upon the unprecedented threat of this invisible enemy, our daily lives have much changed: family gatherings, parties, travel or even the most basic, traveling to work or school on mass transport system like how we used to, were no longer a suitable choice. To protect ourselves and others, we moved our daily activities indoor, distancing ourselves from public gatherings. Offices went empty, restaurant front doors were occupied by enormous piles of take-outs, even the bricks of the busiest streets in central that was previously crowded with white collars around the clock had finally come under sunlight. Our society is forced to switch from the outdoor mode back to the indoor mode in a few days, making it hard to adapt for most of us. Nevertheless, the working mode has changed little to those who served in the medical frontlines and service industries, except that days were much harsher to them as their burden rose with the numbers of the infected. They spent a hectic year trying to maintain social order and safeguard the daily lives of citizens at the price of sacrificing their distance from their families, and our “social distancing” is the best thing we can contribute to their hard work.

And hence the second “distance” we come up with would be our increased geographical distance from our loved ones, as social distancing is in place. We can no longer hop on a bus and visit our relatives or friends whenever we wanted to, not to mention having a proper meal together and chat face to face in their households or a restaurant. However, distance is but a relative concept. It could mean that we are getting further apart, or that we are actually getting closer. With technology such as facetime and WhatsApp growing increasingly common these days, the pandemic might actually be pulling us back together. Missing a friend that you haven’t seen for months? Just text them directly,

there is no trouble in choosing clothes and finding a dinner time. Having trouble finding a common free period for a gathering? Click open a video meeting would do: with no need to consider the location and traveling time, a gathering is much more convenient. With the ease of technology during the pandemic breaking down geographic boundaries, we were granted more chances to connect with the people we cared for. This pandemic is also a lesson for us to learn to cherish our loved ones: the sense of comfort when you know that they are still in good health despite many others that were less fortunate suffers from the virus was enormous. The pandemic has made us stay indoors, but at the same time giving us a chance to make up the time we spend with our families, pulling us back together.

The third “distance” that comes to us this year would be the distance from our goals. Some may have drifted further apart from it, while some have taken the initiative to step forward while working from home. We sure have settled new year’s resolution or bucket lists as the new year routine, yet things were not going as planned from the very beginning, but in fact, distorting our plans to a large extent. Businesses, sporting events, restaurants were forced to fall off their track, even the international Olympics games have to be halted to prevent the spread of the disease. Many who planned to take a big leap forward this year in their business and work were getting pulled away from their goals, constrained in their homes without being able to step up any of their goals. While some of them stared out of their windows into nothingness and typed complaints on the internet saying “This is definitely not my year” in the echo chamber of depressives, some made good use of their time to develop steps towards reaching their goals and hobbies. As we are working from home, the distance from rest to work is only a few steps off the bed and to the desk instead of an hour-long bus ride that we occasionally doze off on its cold seats. Time previously occupied by travel is now given back to us free of charge, and enthusiastic souls began to thrive. With approximately two additional hours to their 24-hour day, they picked up reading, cooking, music, online courses ... day by day their distance between them and their goals went narrower. It has been a year since the novel virus has appeared, and they have made great progress, fulfilling their “if only I had the time to” goals. The distance we made this year, between us and our goals, depended solely on our attitudes.

As the timely saying goes: 2020 is not the year we get everything we want but the year we learn to appreciate everything we have. With all the distance between us, no matter drifting further apart or getting bonded closer, we still bear a common wish as the countdown initiates: may the pandemic get over as soon as possible, such that we can restore the smile under the mask we have lost in this year.

COVID19 Winter Writing Competition


The City University of Hong Kong

Second Prize — Senior Category (Open)

Rin Kimura 4P (2020 – 2021)

The challenge:

Oral History: What has been the impact of COVID19 on your life in Hong Kong?



COVID-19, the Hope Killer

I think it is safe to say that COVID-19 is quite a big deal. It has affected the entire world by worsening the economy, straining relationships and overall, just negatively impacting everyone's life. In Hong Kong, we first heard about the virus in January and so, it has been a little over a year since our lives changed. Personally, this pandemic has brought a lot of stress to me, my family and my friends for a plethora of reasons, academic stress, worries about income and relationships and even eyesight problems.

Before talking to anyone, I believed that most people would feel the same amount of stress that I have as we are all experiencing the same pandemic and we all have to adapt. I also believed that everyone would be hopeful that COVID would end soon.

As everyone's life instantly changed overnight, students are no exception. Instead of doing face-to-face school, we have been doing online school using "Zoom" for the past year, starting February of 2020. Speaking from the perspective of a student, myself, I would say that this arrangement has definitely increased my already significant amount of academic stress. Firstly, online school is really just an honest system. Teachers trust you enough to pay attention and even with cameras on, it is easy to fool them into thinking you are actually there while in reality, you are lying in bed, catching up on sleep. The temptation to leave your class and do anything else is hard to resist, especially when online classes require a much longer attention span. As a result, teachers are assigning extra work in order to make sure that everyone is up to date on the content taught and are really paying attention in their classes. Staring at a screen all day is not good for the eyes, so on top of all the extra work, we, "glasses-wearing" students are also worrying about our worsening eyesight.

Adults have a different perspective, however. My mom and dad play a big role in my life, so how the pandemic impacts them, impacts me too. Both my parents have said that they are worrying about their job stability. People are getting laid off more frequently as businesses are quickly losing customers and as the economy worsens, my family grows more and more concerned about the household income and how it might be affected.

As all generations become more stressed, the different methods of relieving said stress, also becomes more limited. Before COVID-19, we would be able to go outside and get some fresh air to release our pressure. However, going out now, during COVID-19, is a nerve-racking experience as we have to frequently sanitise and beware of surfaces that we may touch. Certain activities such as

travelling, eating out and regularly seeing friends are no longer allowed and those are also huge stress relievers. Not travelling and eating out less often are sacrifices that we can easily make but only seeing your family and no one else for a few months can be really exhausting and even turn people against each other.

Teenagers are known to be quite negative and moody and this is how I felt for the first few months stuck at home. I had no hope that COVID-19 would end and this really added to my already-deteriorating mental health. I constantly worried about me, my family or my friends getting sick and would be extra careful to stay clean when going out. I talked to the people around me and apparently, a lot of us felt the same way and so, we tried to communicate more and allow ourselves to feel better after dealing with the messes that were, our lives. This was one of the positive changes that COVID-19 brought me. I was able to talk to my friends more. Somehow, it took a global pandemic for us to get together, we all helped each other when we were at our lowest points. Talking to several people about this made me see that I was not the only one who gained support during this time. COVID-19 allowed everyone to reach out to those they love and make sure they were safe, people regularly kept in contact with their friends and made sure everyone was doing okay. Funny enough, a global pandemic that required everyone to social distance actually brought people together.

While I am closer to the people that I am now legally required to be distanced from, I cannot say the same about my relationships with the people in my family. I do believe that spending so much time with each other has taken its toll on us all and it is much easier for me to get into arguments with my parents or my siblings. What I miss most about my life before COVID is that I was able to escape whenever things got bad. If I had a falling out with my mother, I would go to school the next day and not have to deal with it immediately but I do not have that option anymore. It's not only me who feels this way, most people I have talked to definitely agree that being around the same people for 24 hours a day, 7 days a week is not good for their relationships.

When I first learned about COVID-19, I thought it would be over in a month and that everything would be back to normal. I underestimated the power of a global pandemic. Now, I look back on myself over a year ago and laugh. It was a global pandemic for god's sake. How could I believe that it would be solved in a month? Right now, I do not think that COVID will go away in the near future and all those I have asked share the same view as me. I believe it is because it has been so long and it seems as though no real progress has been made to lower the amount of cases. I asked my dad whether he thought COVID-19 would end and he had an interesting answer. He told me that, "the pandemic itself was created by humans. The virus, itself, will never go away but once us, humans decide to stop referring to it as a pandemic, it will end."

Speaking to people about COVID-19 made me realise that I was right about how everyone is facing stress. Whether you are a student or you are working, everyone has their own source of stress brought on by the pandemic. However, people are not as hopeful as I thought. Most people do not believe that the virus will end and I think that seeing everyone be as hopeless as me, only makes me lose more hope. No matter how many positive effects COVID-19 has left us, I definitely believe the negative ones outweigh them much more. The loss of optimism in the community has left us more hopeless than ever before and I hope that all our predictions are defied and that COVID-19 ends soon.

Hong Kong Budding Poets (English) Awards 2020/21

The Hong Kong Academy for Gifted Education

The Outstanding Student Poet Award — Honourable Mention

The Poet of the School Award

Yue Lok Yin Hillary 4S (2020 – 2021)

The challenge:

Participants are encouraged to write to echo with the theme of the year — Positive Values and Attitudes.



be grateful for

pessimism, misery, brought by covid-19
we struggle adrift in a sea of crushed dreams
hidden behind our masked faces we scream

isolated from our dear family and friends
with bated breath, tracking the infection trend
at night, many kneel, praying for the end

painful affliction
economy stagnation
missing motivation
lost direction
who will bring the solution, our salvation?
what will happen to our generation?
when will the suffering reach a cessation?
where is our comfort, our consolation?

amidst the hurled hateful epithets
amidst the chaos we musn't forget
to face the pandemic, our greatest asset

selflessness, courage, brought by covid-19
the unbreakable spirit pushed to the extreme
gratitude in our hearts for our heroes we esteem

doctors, nurses, our valiant frontlines
altruistic effort we should not undermine
hence we stay home and follow the guidelines

the fortunate ones give thanks they are healthy
list of things to be grateful for aplenty
in love and care we are wealthy

kindness, gratefulness, brought by covid-19
we stay afloat in our sea of shared future dreams
sun on unmasked faces, our smiles gleam

Hong Kong Young Writers Awards 2020


Playtimes

Winner — Cyberport Award for Poetry: Group 5

Choi Lok Yin 5P (2019 – 2020)

The challenge:

Future Adventures of the Greater Bay Area



The Midnight Train

Two headlights
ablaze
as the train pulls into the station.
Solitary, I board, stow my luggage,
settle down for the ride. Two hours. Behind me
the platform ebbs in reverse.
The shadows of skyscrapers too streak backwards
while the tethered flow of time races
parallel
outside the window.
Only the rumble of wheels and neon bursts
drown the drowsy silence
and the two cities before the sea
slumber
with open, lucent eyes.

I awake to horizons blackened by
silhouettes of figures blurred through hazy vision.
No stars in sight.
Just the hum of static as the train,
an impulse in itself,
speeds along the tracks spidering like neurones and synapses
through the expanse,
kindling limelight and embers of red and yellow and fluorescent white
with its passage until an ocean of distant firefly simulations flicker in reply
akin to the northern beacons of old.
Mere juvenile nebulae,
yet my view clears as the clusters of dust compress
to emit radiance, piercing the sky to reveal the outlines
of steel and concrete intertwined,
mirroring the pewter clouds lined with pristine silver.

Two headlights
dimming
as the train pulls into the station.
The dazzle of overhead lamps douses all;
the platform hurries forth in greeting.
As the crowd rushes in to displace those alighting
the flashes and buzz promise me of home away from home,
for this, this world before me, this unfamiliar familiarity
is simply home
extended.
Two hundred kilometres out
in the early morning hours
I see cities, scintillating,
as I draw near the heart
of a realm yet unnamed, but faintly glowing.

Hong Kong Young Writers Awards 2020


Playtimes

Highly Commended — Fiction

Natalie Fung 5P (2019 – 2020)

The challenge:

Future Adventures of the Greater Bay Area



Future Adventures of the Greater Bay Area

Don't Forget the Ocean

I first met the ocean when I was eight.

She was a young mother, full of light and prosperity, and I watched on, giggling as she swept swirls of waves pass and around me and over me and around me again, dipping me in softly and laughing gently as I came out spluttering with all the indignance of an eight year old. Mama and Daddy looked on fondly on the sand-covered towel, sharing a coconut drink while Mama's sundress fluttered softly amongst the thrifting dance of the wind, and Daddy's sunglasses glittered in resonance with the sun's playful glare.

The ocean's gentle touches on my softly burnt skin that summer lingered all throughout the year - and eight was the start of my relationship with the ocean.

Nine, ten, eleven, twelve.

Each summer spent in the cooling embrace of the ocean with the contrasting heat of the sun and the sand jumping and yipping at the pitter-patter of my feet against the soft and hard grains. The young mother I first met grew younger and younger, into a shadow of my best friend, stifling giggles of mischiefs under each of our breaths while Mama and Daddy put on their detective glasses and we'd dissolve and succumb under the teasing tickles.

Each summer was one where we both started each new, bright day, determined to hunt for adventures amongst the shimmering waves, hunting for the newest home for Mr. Crabby or gazing in wonder at the star that fell and laid in the sand, hard and soft at the same time. Each day was a new adventure, and each year was spent waiting for the days where we'd be diving up and down among the waves

Then thirteen came.

And the young girl that I once knew, the loving mother that I once embraced, was long gone without a shadow left behind for me to hold or hug or just touch to convince myself that it wasn't all just a feverish dream. Thirteen was when Mom held me in her trembling and frail embrace, a harsh, white gown replacing the flickering shadow of a bright yellow sundress and where Dad -

Thirteen was when Auntie brought me to the ocean one night and all I saw was a weathered old man, howling with the raging beasts in the air, angry at the hand that he's been dealt at life and the aching emptiness, sealed behind a bitter old, facade. It was when I cried and howled with the man, raging for him and at him to bring back the sweet friend I tackled in the golden rays, the mother I sang and danced and laughed and played with.

Thirteen was when I no longer knew the ocean.

Thirteen was when everything was gone and lost.

Fourteen to fifteen to seventeen to eighteen was when everything stayed the same and everything changed.

The past was but a fleeting thought in the rush of a current downstream, the roar of a waterfall and the thunder of the rapids. The sun shone down on the rectangles which sucked and sucked and slowly the sun shone through the lights and the elevators and shone through the buildings and the sun was everywhere - even in the darkest of nights and the coldest of winters. The wind blew and blew until the mill turned and turned and the car roared in agreement and huffed and puffed as it raced around the city. The sun now shone through our phones and computers and notebooks and screens and the wind blew and blew through the microphones until our ears bled from the waves.

Fourteen and eighteen and fifteen and seventeen was when I lost and found everything, where I jumped from gust and gust of wind until I found where I wanted to be and then lost the faith again in the split of a second before climbing up to another height and freefalling again. It was when I started learning how to collect the wind through small rectangles and how to collect the roaring and the meek wind while ordering the cars to run faster and faster around in circles until they were just a blur in the peripheral vision and their roars a ringing in your ear as they grew louder and sharper and softer and dimmer.

Twenty was when I met the ocean again.

Twenty, was when I strode down the road, stomping on the quaking and shivering blades of green beneath my sole, was when I ripped out the dancing flowers from their beds where they slept, where I suddenly bumped into a familiar figure halfway down the road.

It was her.

The ocean which I have not seen since I was twelve, the young girl that I neglected to see, and the young mother I once loved all wrapped up in one.

It was a figure that was aching familiar, yet painfully foreign.

I stopped in my tracks.

The figure in front of me smiled tiredly. Gone was the light and clear girl that splashed around in the summer, or the gentle and soft mother that sang softly during under the gentle caress of the sun's beams.

No.

The figure before me was one that was filled with harsh lines. Scratches and split lines tore through her figure, and soil and plastic bags and straws and cans and all sort of things shifted in her body when she moved, no longer gracefully like she once did in a summer long ago, but moving instead with all the crankiness and rustiness of an elderly man struggling to his feet.

There was this sort of grimness to her face, a sort of resignation, that settled reluctantly in the lines of her face.

I stared.

I stared at her, mouth agape, half in horror and half in shock, at the worn out and sluggish figure in front of me. Surely, this isn't -

I reached out, carefully trying to avoid the sharp bits and pieces of sharp, yellowed plastic sticking out from her body, reaching out, with trembling hands, half with the care of a well-meaning friend, half with the yearning of a child, looking for a long-lost friend.

Then she disintegrated the millisecond before I could reach her, into fragments and droplets and molecules of sand and water and buckets and buckets of oil and plastic and metal and chemicals and algae, leaving behind nothing but a putrid smell and a heart that ached.

I let out a soundless gasp, fingers outstretched, and I turned abruptly - where did she go?

And there she was, in the corner of my eyes, and in the shadows of the alley, a sad, forlorn figure, looking mournfully at me, hands wrapping around her own figure protectively, shards of plastic and metal impaling her pale, harsh figure, and I ran towards her, wanting to save her from whatever doom she is facing, but she faded away again.

Over the next few days, she appeared again and again and disappeared just as quickly as she appeared.

In the corner of my room on the building of glass I made, staring mournfully at me over the grunts and mutters of the suits and ties in my room, and I stared at her helplessly, absently fiddling at the plastic

hanging down my neck, fingers itching to soothe the pain somehow, but not really knowing how, and she'd disappear again.

Or when I'm in the reflective suit, clipboard in hand, overlooking the newest mound of sand and stone to be shaped, or when I'm zooming past borders to city after city filled with light and light and buildings that scraped the sky, fingers splayed against the windows, she'd appear again, drifting in the corners of the cabin I'm in, remorse oozing from every inch of her figure.

She came and went, and desperation slowly filled every inch of my being.

What happened to the girl? What happened to the mother? What happened to the joyous and calming figure that was once at peace with the world and herself?

I rubbed calloused hands furiously against my eyes.

A straight-faced steel machine honked me out of my reverie as I stood in the middle of the road, staring into nothing.

"Get out of the way! Daydreaming in the middle of the road" A nameless voice zoomed away in clouds of black smoke and dust, and my throat seized up as I choked on the thick, thick air. The black smoke clogged up the corridors in my lung, and for a moment, I thought I was drowning, drowning, drowning and -

And it hit me.

I spun around, hoping to catch a glimpse of the figure that has grown so familiar in the past couple days, but the search was in vain. I realised with a growing sense of fear and trepidation that I was standing on "reclaimed land".

I sprinted back to my office with a renewed sense of purpose. I suddenly knew with an unwavering sense of certainty what I had to do, what I needed to do, not only for me or for the young girl that I once knew, but for the countless little girls and boys who have been robbed of the chance of swirling and dancing and skipping with their little girls and mothers and splashing under the sun's warm guidance.

I knew.

Standing now, in front of a room of suits and ties and glares and expensive watches, the determination I felt suddenly ebbed away and gave way to uncertainty.

How do I tell them of my determination to bring back the young girl and mother? How do I tell them of the warm times spent, of the fire that's starting to burn inside me, stretching and expanding and dying

to recover the image of the figure I once knew? How do I open my mouth, and get them to feel what I feel, and do what I want to do, not when what I want to do would lose them several buildings of gold and some trenches of wealth?

“I’m -“

The bravery that the determination bestowed upon me suddenly deserted me. I shifted onto another leg, fiddling with my shirt, suddenly not so certain of what I was going to say anymore.

A soft breeze alerted me to a sudden presence by my side.

I looked over, and a hand, filled with grim and soil and sediment and oil was outstretched at my side. My eyes traced along the arm and reached a gentle, encouraging gaze that looked warmer than ever despite the pieces of broken glass floating inside it.

I felt a lump in the back of my throat. Here she was, my young friend and the mother all wrapped up in once, standing tall and strong, and offering me support while being scratched and broken, and cast away and abused by many who relied on her and her grace.

Here she was, offering me her support, while I stood strong and healthy, with nothing stopping me but myself.

I reached out and took her hand.

The instance I took her hand, something shifted in me and her, in our little room and in the planet. Her arm looked a little clearer, and the scratches lightened a little. It wasn’t much but -

It means the world to me.

A voice spoke softly into my head.

Nodding my head and blinking away the stubborn tears that had come from nowhere, I stood taller, and cleared my throat. There was a sense of approval and relief emanating from the hand holding me, and gripping it tighter, I finally felt at peace with myself - a peace that I haven’t felt since I was twelve.

Twenty-one, was when I held the hand of the ocean again, and began making changes.

Twenty-one, was when I finally saw beyond myself and my own grievances.

Twenty-one was the catalyst I needed in me.

Hong Kong Young Writers Awards 2021


Playtimes

Shortlisted — Fiction

Chloe Lee 3U (2020 – 2021)

The challenge:

Tales from China's Magical Mountains



Forgotten

Why is Huangshan so captivating? When you gaze at the endless rocks of Huangshan, what do you think of? How time, no matter how fluid, solidifies and merges the modern age with Ancient China? How the soil you tread on has been an inspiration for Chinese poets, how the fragrant air lets you understand the praises Li Bai once wrote for this mountain? For me, it's the overnight K46 rushing beneath a canopy of stars in Fuzhou.

With Hong Kong miles behind me and a blanket wrapped around my drowsy self, the train soars out of a tunnel and reveals the chartreuse plains of the land of dragons. The most thrilling ride in China indeed! The train sails onto the bridge, drifts over the rail, but a second later glides on air. Screams explode as carriages tumble into another black shroud. My window shatters to the rattle of metal wind chimes, and like Icarus, I plummet out of the twisted cage.

At the end of the portal lies pain as I hit the ground, but also a mesmerising scene. The Greeting-Guests Pine bows, with its outstretched jade hand pointing to the heavens. I stagger towards the light and see a sage standing among its roots. With a bearded face and knobbly hands stroking the thin hairs, he directs his radiant smile towards the rising sun, as if challenging the stars to shine brighter. "Ah!" he cries. "The sparrows told me you would arrive." He turns around and his silver grey robe twirls in the wind. "Come, I know the perfect place to have lunch." If nature predicted my arrival, then let this be my fate.

Huangshan's mountainous landscape is harder to climb than I thought. Its sides are jagged and the trees cover its uneven body sparsely as if they were rags. All around us were mountains, mountains and mountains, their gorges dipping far below the fog and their proud crests braving the elements. I imagine that the gods pulled up piles of mud, draped it in random mismatching clothes, set it on the far prettier stairway to their holy empire, let it gaze at people walking on plateaus and gracing the hills, and whispered in its ear: "Oh child, that's not for you." The scholar leads me, panting like a dog, to the top of the peaks. I must exercise more in the future.

"I guess I'll talk to ease the tension," he announces. "I'm Yiwang, a poet-in-training. I come to these mountains to seek inspiration. Why are you here?"

"Would you believe me if I told you I fell through a portal?" I answer meekly.

He tilts his head. "A portal? It must be the work of the gods. They have given me inspiration!" His eyes glimmer as he proclaims "Thank Huangdi! My work will soar beyond excellency!" I do not understand his ecstasy, but am glad to be the source of it.

We pass the Lotus Peak, up the Hundred Ladders, across the Haixin Pavillion, and arrive at Bu Xian Qiao, the famous fairy bridge. Stationed in a crevice, its immense height adds to the feeling of flight. Between cloud and sky we lay out fruit, rice and leeks, and sup until noon. The sun beams at us mortal fairies, warming our cheeks as we chat and eat. "Where are you really from, my friend?"

"The South, sir." I reply.

He clutches his peach as he bursts into peals of laughter, the sweet juices running down his fingers as he chuckles, and his black irises disappear behind the slits of his heavy eyelids. "The South! There's no need to be humble; you fell out from the sky." Smirking, he glances up at the fog and stops guffawing. "We should get going; we have to arrive at the camp before sunset."

We continue trekking around the summits for 6 hours, Yiwang belting a merry tune or two to loosen the tension. His booming voice rings around the heights, intense and passionate, round and round. "Chant the female part!" I, with my coarse howling, belt out his song. He doesn't seem to mind my cawing though. I wish my music teachers were like him.

Slowly the sun leaves us to our own company as we arrive at our destination under Flying Over Rock. "Bai Jiu is a treasure in my village. Only the best is reserved for guests." He uncaps a wide jar shaped like a Greek aryballos flask, and pours out the transparent liquid. "I figure that we would wine and dine as I tell you more about a poet's life," he says mid sip.

"You must have heard of Li Bai and Du Fu. They write such amazing poems about nature. See, I aspire to be famous like Li Bai, and I know that anyone can achieve their goals as long as they have the right beginning. I have tried so hard to wake up my talents inside. I went to rural villages, stayed in every city, and wandered around in the countryside, in the hope that I would be stimulated to write something that would be marvelled at for ages to come. I constantly dream that even after I die, scholars would pick up my work and be proud that they hold the original manuscript, like a precious piece of art." I nod, having gone through the pains of writing English poems myself. "But nothing seems to motivate my pen to spill a single valuable word. Nothing flows out like the Eastern wind. Nothing seems to sound right. I asked Wendi, the patron gods of poets, for help so my writing be realistic, enthralling and memorable. And you came!" He takes another swig of the liquor, furrows his brow and stares into the distance. "My name is of bad fortune, it sounds like the word 'forgotten'. I don't want to be buried in an unmarked grave. I want my story to be told, my legacy to be my sensational poems. But first I must write one." He empties his cup, stands up and hands me a writing brush. "You bring me promise, potential seen in none other. Quick, write before the candle runs out!" I swallow the savoury wine and grin at my partner.

What would otherwise be a boring night with Netflix becomes a flurry of ideas, imagination, images translated through ink. We delve into the depths of heart and brain, summoning every ounce of energy, channelling excellency into each brush, infusing every piece of paper with power and pride, pouring out a masterpiece while gulping down spirits. We compose drunkenly, but passionately.

By sunrise, we unroll the scroll which Yiwang deems "Perfect! I see a glorious future: people lining up for commissions, waiting as I unlock the mysteries of Huangshan." The rays of the rising sun shine over the crests of Huangshan. "Look! Huangdi has shone his light on me!" I laugh hesitantly, knowing that I have done nothing to change his fate.

The heavens transported me here, and now they will return me to my city. Flames engulf the pinacles of the dragons, and the sky swallows Yiwang in the middle of his speech. "Wait! Our composition isn't finished yet..." I shake my head helplessly. What can I do? I am no longer a welcome guest of this century. The clouds claw me from the ground. "Don't! I have so much left to write!" They harden against my pleas and place me back in 2021. I reappear in Hong Kong, with its cars honking and dogs barking, as if my expedition to Anhui never happened.

While Li Bai and Du Fu went on to be acclaimed as the greatest poets of their time, I never heard of Yiwang ever again. It was as if Huangdi removed him from history, because he cheated on Calliope with a friend from another country. Or did he wake from his drunken dream, with his scroll lost in the labyrinth of time, ultimately fulfilling the prophecy of his name?

*Our cups raised to the mighty Huangshan,
Flora and fauna crown my friend divine.
I care not when she would depart,
Creations with the muses will always shine.*

Huangshan gave Yiwang the spark for his flame and took everything else away. Likewise, the misty mountains embraced me in their magic, yet blurred my mourning eyes from the mystical scenery.

Hong Kong Young Writers Awards 2021

Playtimes

Shortlisted — Fiction

Jasmine Wan 5S (2020 – 2021)

The challenge:

Tales from China's Magical Mountains

A Game of Prophecies

Xia Feng

"Your smile should be sweet and genuine. You look as though you've eaten a sour pear." Xia Feng's mother scolded.

Xia Feng's face hurt from all the smiling. The time had come for the Emperor to choose yet another bride, and her family hoped that Feng could get into the Emperor's good graces. It was a pity to the Xia's however, that Feng was not fit for life in a palace.

Traditional Chinese culture wanted Feng to be three things – obedient, quiet and beautiful. Feng was none of these things. Every night, she slipped out of bed to practice sword fighting in her backyard. To her family's dismay, Feng was loud and brash. She spoke her mind, and she didn't care about looking pretty, or cooking or cleaning.

Just then, the temple bells started to ring. Feng's mother frowned.

"We'll practice later. Let's see what message the Seer delivers first."

Feng rolled her eyes. The village seer was an old man with a long, white scraggly beard. Although he was blind, he claimed to have the power of 'invisible sight' and was able to predict the future by giving prophecies. The villagers trusted him wholeheartedly, but Feng thought that the seer was crazy. In her opinion, prophecies and predictions were useless. They led to nothing but trouble.

Wen Ping

"Oi! Ping! Why are you dawdling? Get to work!"

Ping flinched at the sound of his brother's voice. He hurriedly stuffed his book back down into the hole where it was buried. Brushing aside crops, he arranged mud on top of the hole so it looked nice and normal. Definitely not where a book was hidden.

Rustling noises came from behind him. Ping quickly sat on top of the hole, hiding the book. Just in time too, as a scarred face poked into the tiny alcove of wheat.

"Why are you sitting on the ground? You want Ba to hit you? If he finds out you're not doing any work, you'll get into trouble!"

Ping scrambled for an excuse.

"I was working! I was – um – checking the quality of the soil-" Ping trailed off, once again regretting his choice of opening his mouth to speak.

His brother's face softened.

"Were you reading again?"

Ping gulped.

"Look. This time I won't tell Ba. But the wheat isn't going to sit there and reap itself. Pick up your sickle, harvest the grains, and maybe if you have time you can read."

It was unfortunate that Ping did not belong in a family of scholars. No, his family had been farmers for generations. Yet, Ping was everything a farmer's son was not. Instead of being rough and manly, Ping preferred sitting by his mother's side and listening to her stories of Huangshan – the Magical Mountains, and the creatures that resided there.

As Ping reluctantly hacked at wheat, the temple bells began to ring. Muttering a prayer, he joyfully tossed his sickle aside. Hopefully the village seer could distract his father long enough for him to run back to the field to continue reading his book.

Xia Feng

"Today, as the sun started to rise, the spirits came to me."

Feng groaned audibly. Just how much longer was this going to take? The seer rambled on about how the gods had given him a message in the form of a prophecy to deliver. Yet, still no one had heard the actual prophecy. Even the villagers beside her were growing restless, chatting among themselves.

"Just say it already, old man!" a shout came from the crowd.

The seer held up a finger. "Patience."

The crowd's rumbling swelled.

Then the seer snapped his fingers.

"The prophecy is complete." His voice lowered, and the villagers surged forward to hear what he was saying.

"Wind and Tranquility, two young adventurers

Will climb the Mountains of the Yellow Emperor

If they fail to slay the beast

Destruction will be brought upon all at the very least."

A gloomy silence had settled over the crowd. After all, it wasn't every day the seer proclaimed destruction towards the whole village.

Then the whispers began. Who were the two adventurers?

The village seer cleared his throat. No one paid him any attention. He then raised his voice,

"Quiet!"

The crowd's excited whispers gradually faded, and he spoke.

"After detailed analyzation, I have come to believe that 'wind' and 'tranquility' are two metaphors that can be translated into the names of our two heroes."

He paused for dramatic effect, and continued.

"Therefore, I have concluded, 'wind' is Feng. Xia Feng, daughter of scholar Xia Ming. And tranquility, is Ping. Wen Ping, son of farmer Wen Nu."

Wen Ping

Why did he always get the worst luck?

After the village seer had brazenly announced the heroes, he disappeared back into the temple without a word, leaving the villagers mingling outside.

Ping was worried about the third line of the prophecy – If they fail to slay the beast. What beast? The prophecy was irritatingly vague, and Ping didn't want to kill anything.

He knew all the Confucian classics by heart. He could recite poems by Li Bai. He was able to compose poetry. What he didn't know was how to walk up into the Huangshan Mountains and slay a beast.

His father was too excited to listen to Ping's concerns, heartily slapping Ping on the back.

"I knew you were special, my boy! The gods have smiled down upon us. After you go on this quest, slay the beast and save the village, you'll become a hero! This would be good for our farming business. Who knows? You might even become rich!"

As his family busily contemplated reward money, Ping felt someone staring at him.

Whipping his head around, he saw Xia Feng. She had cocked her head and was looking at him, seemingly assessing his every move.

He gave her a tentative smile. She did not return it.

Feeling embarrassed, he walked back home with his family, thinking about how he was going to survive the quest.

Xia Feng

It was early in the morning. The rooster hadn't crowed, and the sun hadn't risen.

Yet, here she was, hacking away at shrubs with her sword.

Wen Ping was behind her, clutching his satchel glancing around nervously, as if the beast was going to appear any second.

Yesterday, they had started to climb up the mountain. The village seer had told them to find a mystic poet on the tallest peak, who would lead them towards the beast. So now, they were trying to find the poet, but so far there was no one on the mountain except for themselves.

Feng had originally felt good about the quest, except for one factor: Ping didn't seem to know how to fight. She had rummaged through his satchel whilst he was sleeping last night, and it contained food,

which was useful, and the Classics of Poetry, which was not. There was no sign of any weapon or fighting tool.

“Where did you get that sword?” Ping broke the silence by asking.

She shrugged. “It was my grandfather’s. I inherited it.”

Ping shot her an accusing look.

“Women aren’t allowed to inherit anything. You stole it?”

Feng arched an eyebrow. “You won’t be complaining when the beast jumps out of the bushes to eat you.”

Ping opened his mouth, and shut it.

Good. The less talking, the quicker they could reach the summit and find this poet.

Wen Ping

They had been climbing for five hours now.

As they neared the summit, the air around them thinned, and Ping found it hard to breathe.

“Breathe with your mouth, not your nose. It saves oxygen.” Feng’s voice came from in front of him.

Ping quickly switched his breathing technique, and his vision cleared.

“Thanks.” He mumbled.

They had reached the top of the Huangshan Mountains. Ping looked around him, and gave a sharp intake of breath.

Afternoon sun struck the tree tops, and leaves glistened with sunlight. They were so high up the mountain, underneath them was a sea of fluffy clouds. Amidst the rocks and crevices, surrounding peaks seemed to bloom like lotus flowers, piercing the sky.

Feng was silent too, gazing at the scenery around them.

“It’s like a kingdom in the clouds.” She whispered, her voice hoarse.

Ping nodded. His mother had described to him before how majestic Huangshan was, but no story could compare to what he was seeing now.

“That’s all well and good, but would you two children please move? You’re blocking my way.”

Ping gave a yelp, and spun around.

The famous poet Li Bai stared back at them, and sighed.

“Let me guess – you two need my help in killing a beast in order to save your village from total destruction?”

He looked at their expressions, and sighed.

“Just great. You’d better come in.”

Xia Feng

She couldn't believe it. Li Bai was the mystic poet they had to find?

Apparently, Ping couldn't believe it either, because he was practically hyperventilating.

"Master Li, Master Li! You're my hero! I've read all of your poems – I can't believe I'm seeing you in person! This is a dream come true!"

Feng couldn't care less about Li Bai's poems. Ping and her didn't have time. They'd already spent too much time on Huangshan. They had to find that beast before it was too late.

"Master Li. My name is Xia Feng, and he is Wen Ping. We would like to humbly seek your advice on where the beast is."

Li Bai seemed to look at her for the first time.

"Ah, yes."

He didn't speak for a while. Feng tapped her foot impatiently.

Li Bai closed his eyes in deep thinking. Just when Feng thought that he had fallen asleep, he snapped his eyes open.

"I will help you. But there are conditions."

Feng smiled. Finally.

"Name them."

"I will ask three questions. If your answer is to my liking, I will tell you where the beast is. If you cannot answer them, well, your village gets destroyed, and you can get out of my house."

Feng's heart sank. She had hoped it would be a sword fight, or a sparring session. She hated questions and riddles with their twisted meanings.

Ping however, looked pleased. She hoped that Ping would be able to solve Li Bai's questions.

Otherwise, they would fail.

Wen Ping

"My first question is a riddle. I pass before the sun, yet I make no shadow. What am I?"

Ping frowned. This was a tough one. He racked his head trying to think it through. Birds passed before the sun, but they made shadows on the ground...

Feng laughed. "I know this one! My father asked me this before. The answer is my name. Wind."

And she was right. The answer fit! Ping grinned as Li Bai inclined his head, signaling that they were correct.

"My second question is, what is always in front of you but you cannot see it?"

Ping thought in vain. Next to him, Feng was also furrowing her brow. What could they not see, yet was right before their eyes?

He remembered how his father always scolded him, "Why won't you work harder in the fields and lead the next generation of farmers? You cannot survive the future by simply becoming a scholar!" Ping silently thanked his father.

"Master Li, is the answer the future?"

Li Bai looked surprised. "That is correct."

Feng jumped up and down with glee. However, their momentary joy did not last long.

"My last question: what is the heaviest weight to carry?"

Feng slumped down. "A house? A cow? Answers are limitless!"

Ping shook his head, thinking. The heaviest weight to carry... how many times had Ping felt the weight of guilt when his father scolded him? When he couldn't be the son his family wanted? Every time his father burnt his books, or his brother yelled at him, he felt a heavy weight pressing down onto his shoulders.

He turned to Li Bai and said,

"Guilt. Guilt is the heaviest weight to carry."

Li Bai nodded, pleased with his answer.

"I have to admit, I am surprised by your intellect. The beast you seek to slay is the Great Dragon. Walk east from here to find her. You will know when you are close. Good luck."

Xia Feng

The smell of rotting carcasses was hard to miss.

After Ping and her had left Li Bai's home, the tension between them had dissipated almost completely. She and Ping traded stories about their lives, laughing and chatting to one another as they hiked through Huangshan.

The friendly atmosphere dissolved when Ping spotted a skull lying on the ground and screamed.

Feng's hand quickly flew to her sword.

"Ping, you idiot" she hissed. "We're obviously nearing the dragon's hideout. If you don't keep quiet the dragon's going to hear us!"

"Sorry!" Ping whispered loudly. He then stepped on a twig, and a creaking sound filled the area.

Feng's sword was already in her hand. She glanced quickly to her left and right, but there was no sign of the dragon.

"The dragon's not here. Maybe we should continue to walk south" she broke off as Ping made a weird noise.

"What's wrong? The dragon's not here."

Ping's face had turned stark white, and he made a gagging noise.

Feng sighed and turned around.

And came face to face with the Great Dragon.

Wen Ping

Ping was sure the gods were mocking them.

Firstly, Feng and him braved the dangers of sleeping on narrow paths where a tree could fall on them any second. After being scratched by twigs and branches, he then almost died by not being able to adjust to the high altitude on the peak. The only silver lining was getting to meet Li Bai, and after that they were now pitched against a dragon, facing certain death. Again.

It was unfair that the dragon was so beautiful. She had an overwhelmingly massive presence, yet her gracefulness was equally evident. Her body was emerald green, flaked with crystal scales of luster that shone with radiance.

The dragon looked up at him, and snorted. Little puffs of air came out from her nostrils, and Ping couldn't help but smile.

In front of him, Feng had brandished her sword.

"Ping, run. I'll handle this."

Ping gulped.

"Feng, wait. What if we don't have to kill the dragon?"

"Are you crazy? If the dragon doesn't die, the villagers die!" Seeing Ping's stricken face, her face softened.

"Look, I know that you don't want the dragon to die. But we don't have any choice. Now, on the count of three--"

"Can't we just find a solution that doesn't involve dying on both sides?" Ping interrupted.

He shakily walked over to the dragon. Heavens, it was even larger up close. Reaching out a trembling hand, he placed it on top of the dragon's snout.

"See? She's friendly and harmless. Feng, I don't think she would attack our village."

Feng's face was a stony mask. The dragon ambled closer to her and pushed her nose into Feng's face.

"Gah! Get off me! Ugh, fine. I won't kill you. But Ping, how are we going to tell the village?"

Ping wasn't sure yet. "We'll cross the bridge if we come to it."

He looked deep into the dragon's eyes.

"Do you promise not to destroy our village?"

The dragon cocked her head, as if she seemingly understood. Then she gave a large snort.

Feng laughed. "I'm assuming that means yes."

The dragon's eyes glinted as she looked at them. Then, her jade colored wings unfolded, incomparably beautiful to any jewel on earth. She gave one last snort of goodbye, and then took flight.

Ping covered his eyes as leaves and twigs swirled around them. When he opened his eyes, the Great Dragon was just a speck in the golden clouds.

Xia Feng

Feng had been too enthralled by the dragon to notice the changing scenery.

As the dragon took flight, Ping had closed his eyes, but she strained hers open, hoping to catch every vision of the Great Dragon and commit it to memory.

After the magnificence of the dragon, Feng didn't think she could take in any more beauty, yet Huangshan's sunset proved her wrong.

The sky had turned a burst of crimson. The clouds dipped all around them, rosy with hues of gold. Just towards the west, she could see the sun, a blazing orb setting just between two peaks of the Mountains.

Next to her, Ping lamented.

"When I first came on this quest, I just wanted to leave. Now, all I want to do is stay here forever."

"You could always ask Li Bai to adopt you. I'm sure he'd be willing to oblige."

Ping lightly punched her in the shoulder.

"In all honesty, I don't think I can return to life as a farmer's son after this."

Feng understood. There was so much in the world to explore. She didn't want to go back to her village and experience the same routine over and over again.

But her family needed their daughter, and Ping's family needed their son.

She nudged Ping.

"Who knows? Maybe the village seer would give us another quest."

Ping's expression was unreadable.

"But what if he doesn't?"

Feng wasn't sure either. She took one last look at the sunset.

"We'll cross the bridge if we come to it."

The two then began their slow descent back down the mountain, expressions of reluctance and wistfulness painted on their faces.

Unbeknownst to them, a certain poet was watching the two from his alcove, and whispered,

"Go forth children, and live your lives,

Drifting like clouds, the wanderer's mind

Appreciate the sunset, heart of your old friend,

Until Huangshan hears and beckons you again."

THE END

Hong Kong Young Writers Awards 2021

Playtimes

Honorable Mention

Dorothy Chen 2S (2020 – 2021)

The challenge:

Tales from China's Magical Mountains



Kunlun Mountain Range ~ A Forever Legend

Humans have always felt connected with soaring high mountains. In this rapidly developing society, we tend to find inner peace in absolute silence and the tranquil mountains are definitely preferable spots. In the wilderness, the environment is peaceful and calm where nothing can be heard but birds chirping and symphonizing to rivers' bickering. Not only are we captivated by the majestic panoramic view accompanied with soothing breeze, but also fascinated by their beautiful tales.

China has profound cultural heritage and mythological knowledge developed over 5,000 years of history. With well-known myths, legends and tales, Kunlun Mountain Range, being named as the Holy Mountains, has attracted imaginative writers or novelists to add in magical and mysterious elements, making it the cradle of Chinese mythology. Allow me to explain how its background, environment and history gradually form its colourful stories.

Kunlun Mountain Range, located in the junction of Xinjiang, Tibet and Qinghai, is as gigantic as a behemoth with a total length of 2,000 kilometers and the highest peak of elevation of 7,120 meters. At the edge of the Takla Makan Desert, this snowy range appears stupendously gorgeous due to the strong contrast against the soft golden sand. It is so colossal that it stretches out and branches off into several other mountain ranges, which earns the nickname 'Forefather of Mountains'. Tales are formed due to its thin layer of midst mystifying generations.

Its name involves the word 'kun', which literally means insects. Though much of its area consists of rock deserts with occasional stagnant pools of water, which is not the most favourable habitat, it answers to its name as rare plants and peculiar animal species like Tibetan gazelle, antelope and wild yak manage to settle down in this barren land. The western part of the range is a relatively humid and hospitable area, where argali sheep can be found grazing on the high grasslands while blue sheep and ibex inhabit upper crags. On top of that, brown bears, wolves and snow leopard find their perfect habitat near willow thickets.

Moreover, the word 'Kunlun' often refers to remote, mysterious and exotic places in which bizarre events occur. It is an iconic symbol of divinity where origins and acts of deities are explained. The range is referred to as a place outside time, pain, suffering or death, allowing all sorts of pleasure and arts to thrive: vibrant music, vigorous dancing, romantic poetry and sumptuous feasts. Fabled plants as well as mythical creatures are created, for example, Bai Ze, an extremely knowledgeable animal which represents luck, security and merriment.

Since Kunlun Mountain Range is such a magnificent place, it has certainly been in the eyes of the supreme deities and become the dwelling place of gods and goddesses. The most well-known legend is, undoubtedly, Xi Wangmu (Hsi Wang Mu), also known as the Queen Mother of the West. The first record of her presence in Kunlun Mountain Range was about the adventures of King Mu from the Zhou Dynasty. He first discovered the Jade Palace of the Yellow Emperor on the sanctified mountain where he met Xi Wangmu. She is shown in literary works as the immortal goddess of marriage, fertility and the patron saint of women who takes residence in the mountains in the far west, the margin of heaven and earth. Served by two blue birds, Xi Wangmu takes the form of a human with tiger's teeth with leopard's tail. She ordains life and death, illness and recovery, occurrences of calamities and has total control over the life spans of all living things with her sacred powers of creation and destruction. Immortals and spirits travel to Kunlun Mountain Range to join Xi Wangmu. In the 'Journey to the West', one of the four greatest Chinese novels of all time, the rebellious Monkey King, Sun Wukong, who repeatedly defies the authority of the Jade Emperor, is put in charge of Kunlun Mountains' Garden of Immortality to tend to the peaches of immortality. This is considered a noteworthy task as the peaches will only blossom once every 3,000 years on a colossal Tree. Instead, he purloins all of them in an act of defiance, creating a great nuisance and disturbance in heaven, thus being punished by pinning him under the Five-finger Mountain.

Furthermore, the novel 'Heavenly Sword and Dragon Slaying Sabre' by Jin Rong introduces the merge of martial arts and historical records of mountains, creating unique tales which people can immediately associate with Kunlun Mountain Range. The exhilarating plot is driven by conflicts of interest between two sects located in the same mountain range, namely Kunlun and Mingjiao. In the martial arts world, wulin consists of six main sects, who all have grudges with Mingjiao, thus are determined to seek vengeance despite the fact that Mingjiao's general alter, Guangmingding, is situated in the far west of the range. The gruelling distance of the mountains from the sects' origins delivers the strong sense of hatred among them. Likewise, it shows the greatness of the legendary master, Zhang Wuji, who harnesses the wugong of 'Jiuyang shengong' in the same mountain range, to be able to eliminate the accumulated grievances among the sects and unify them to defend their homeland. Throughout the wuxia novel, Mr. Jin Rong's deliberate arrangement of Kunlun Mountain Range has reached perfection not only in the perspective of artistic effect, but the connections of the storyline as well.

The unexpected marriage of ancient Chinese mythology and modernity has left not only Chinese nationals, but also researchers in awe. Since the beginning of civilization, people have gathered together to share stories of irate gods, tormenting journeys of exploration and magical beasts. Mythology, being the collective wisdom of mankind, has allowed these fascinating stories to spring to life for centuries and millennia, passing their legacy from generation to generation. These compelling tales and beliefs have taken a significant role in shaping the Chinese modern society since they give comprehensive and valuable insights of how people perceive the world surrounding them. Even though scientific research has overthrown myths' explanations, these stories still serve as receptacles of crucial cultural values. Tales are relevant to us nowadays as they establish a foundation of our intellectual improvements, a basis of moral boundaries and basic guidelines of our lifestyles.

As an illustration, the mysterious Kunlun Mountain Range gives mortals hope that by leading a virtuous life, we can earn the opportunity to meet deities and attain eternal life. Xi Wangmu's extraordinary powers help explain the natural phenomena as exasperated acts of gods rather than erratic laws of nature. Additionally, the banishment of the Monkey King serves as warnings of wrongful

acts: immoral deeds comes with a cost. Besides, the Kungfu master, Zhang Wuji, sets a positive model for aspiring teenagers that determination defines their fate. Although cultures may differ drastically as time passes by, oral traditions have striking similarities, it is just an issue of reinterpretation. As a matter of fact, legends are continuations of history, linking ancient times with the modern, molding the present society, country and world.

In conclusion, the charm of Kunlun Mountain Range is irresistible due to its breath-taking scenery as well as its fabulous tales of supreme beings and martial arts. Myths have taken an essential role in the modern society and that we should continue to appreciate the beauty within.

Hong Kong Young Writers Awards 2021


Playtimes

Honorable Mention

Zoe Lui 3P (2020 – 2021)

The challenge:

Tales from China's Magical Mountains



The Stranger Says Hi

I'm constantly moving, but I'm always here.

For some of me, I've been here all my life. The beautiful Huangshan Mountain is all I know. For some of me, this is only part of a longer journey. Where the journey is to though, I only have a vague idea.

Sometimes, I stare down in an almighty, omniscient manner. I see everything from here. Time, while it is a significant matter to most who tread into the mountains, means almost nothing to me. I have seen famous poets, Li Bai and Du Fu. I have seen other poets, perhaps not as famous, throughout the centuries, and I will continue to do so as time passes (though an intriguing boy taught me that this wouldn't necessarily be true).

Sometimes, I fancy myself as the sea. People do call me a sea, after all. I am told that the sea can have many colours. I have never seen the turquoise waters of a bay, or ferocious waves crashing down into the inky depths. The sea is poetic, I am told, and so am I.

I am the 'Sea of Clouds'.

Or that's what they call me, anyway.

*A young man is he, young as one could've been
Armed with first honours
With a heart full with glee
"Provide the poor with manors!
Bygone the ill men's drees!
Away with rich scammers
And scandalous decrees!"*

Huangshan is known for its strange-looking pines, hot springs, mystical clouds and stunning peaks. We are called the *Sijue*, the Four Extremes. Sometimes we hope that it means extremely beautiful. It may sound vain, after all, we are marvels of the mountains, we are striking, otherworldly. But sometimes we ask ourselves, is this how we are defined?

*Here comes Covid-19,
Quick, angry and keen.
Oh no his plans! His future! His job!
And his poor girlfriend Eugene!
“Away with earthly matters, my dear boy,
Come be zen like me!
Be enlightened! Inspired! And don’t die!
Come to Huangshan with me!”*

*He came, he ran, he got lost,
And got tossed
Somewhere into the mysterious massive ancient towering multi-coloured mountainously– rocky
Huangshan.*

The boy is lost. I can see him with knees pulled to his chest from the sky. “Blasted old man,” he mutters. “Why am I here? Stupid long beard!” Long beard? I think of one of Li Bai’s famous lines: My white hair is three thousand feet long, but my misery exceeds it by far. A poor scholar told me about it. He wanted to be greater than Li Bai. I wonder if he succeeded.

Perhaps Li Bai himself brought the boy here. Maybe he came back briefly when the realms of Heaven and Hell and the realm of the living were open in Yulan Festival. I try to tell the boy that he is next to Pine. Which means he’s about to fall off the cliff, when he murmurs:

*To chop, or not to chop, that is the question:
Whether ‘tis nobler for nematodes to chew
The gnarled exotic branches of Huangshan’s pride,
Or to marvel nature’s brilliance, clear sky against loden leaves,
To chop? To admire?
And by that ax to say we decide all,
Pine furniture, or pine feed for bugs,
Which is better? Tis the perseverance,
That sets the pine on cliffs
To eat? To admire!*

Granted, I only ever hear Chinese poets lamenting about wine (Li Bai’s favourite, as I recall), or describing wars (Du Fu was born in the right time), but never Shakespeare parodies about chopping trees. Pine looked rather relieved that it wasn’t going to be sold as a cupboard in IKEA, though bringing up pine nematodes is a terrible idea. Doesn’t he know that it’s a great threat to Pine?

“How do you stay up like this?” The boy asks Pine. “How can anything grow on rocks?”

Pine replies:

“I’m just a pine tree, boy. I grow, I survive.”

A nearby squirrel adds:

“Now why don’t you switch off your camera flash, it’s disturbing.”

*“In hot springs you will find
(Aside that one should never wear jeans in springs)
Why beauty’s essence
Cannot be captured
By pixels, by ink,
But by a genuine link,
Of nature’s appreciation, by mankind’s admiration.”*

But he sees this:

*ALL HAIL SPRING THE CASH COW!
Dewdrops on leaves, twinkle, shimmer,
Mist in the mountains, wavers, drifts,
As gold under fingertips, from hotels you bring
Laughs, chuckles, whistles, sings,
Oh cash cow of Huangshan! How you are revered!
How you are worshipped!
By mankind’s admiration of the gold you bring!*

He stands on one of Huangshan’s peaks. Spring is still fuming from the insult. Despite everything, Peak still gives him a stunning view. And I think, perhaps rather arrogantly, that he must be admiring how the huge boulders rise dramatically from the ground. Clouds encase them, like thick candy floss. The mist casts a thin veil over the striking rocks. His mouth drops open, his eyes shine brightly, and he finally says: “This is nothing like the Seven Star Crag!”

Ah, he isn’t so ignorant after all.

He sighs. “You are such a beautiful cash cow.” He even looks sad.

I take it back. I wish someone would just tell him that we have thirteen species under state protection, and a cloud leopard (one of those species) should eat him up for seeing us as a gold mine instead of appreciating nature’s gift to mankind.

How can he judge, when he hasn’t even explored all our imposing peaks, or our graceful waterfalls? When he would never reach the significance of the countless poets and artists who lived here, or the importance of us in Chinese art and literature?

“You have no sense of aesthetics,” I say.

He looks up calmly. “Do you want me to like it here?”

"You must love the pandemic," he adds, "There're almost no tourists."

I am the Sea of Clouds. I am an endless ocean. I have no beginning, no end, no face, but he must know that I'm confused.

"Ah, I forgot, you've got your heads in the clouds," he smirks. "Literally," he says to Peak.

"You are breathtaking, only because you're... massive. Even the rich and powerful would feel small, standing here. You are the universe, and I am just a spot. You make us feel small. Is this why you're mysterious? Because we can't look beyond? Because you obscure our sight?"

"It must be," he says to himself. "Most people don't look at things twice when the path is clear."

"So they like us, BECAUSE WE BLIND THEM?" I roar. The sky darkens and splits like a desert after drought.

He glares at me. It looks rather comical, like an ant angry at humans for being too large.

*You think you're so great
Cuz clouds can talk
And your vast botanology.
The Shanshui is nice
The poems all praise
And Avatar has blue aliens*

*Ancient pine trees
Mean nothing to me
'Cept they grow on cliffs
Does it matter to you?
Does it make you jolly
If we'd bow and wow and scream?
Everyone roots in soil
But your roots are in rock
And that's what's so amazin'
End of the day
You're just survivin'
They don't care if you're rottin'
They don't care if bugs a-chewin'
They're here cuz
Pine's a special tinkerthingy*

*Green in the mountains
Makes Peak less plain
What do people need for rock
'Cept for Shanshui?
People look at you
Cuz Pine grows sideways
Green looks better
Than plain old granite*

*I see your birds, I see your bugs
Bustling Thronging Buzzing Twittering
Those Living stuff, Feeling stuff
I see the litter, I see the cigs
Stinking Reeking Spoiling Rotting
I see
The green dots that dot your daunting rocks
Your flora, fauna, flourishing
We don't
Care whatsoever
But they
Were here forever
But they are what makes you true
Our cigs can burn you down
Our visitors wear you down
Dead things are only pretty
If we give you meaning
But your habitants love you through and through
So love them better
Your permanent residents
Before we make you go*

*Dead things are only pretty
If we give you meaning
But your habitants love you through and through*

"When I think of Huangshan, I see mountains with no people and clear waterfalls. It looks heavenly, somewhere we can't reach. Now we can see you, hear you, feel you. We even have cable cars where we can wow at you for an hour then go back to hot spring hotels for a nice bath."

"We don't like you as much when our presence is so clear, but don't worry, your reputation from all those poems and paintings will keep you popular for a while if nothing drastic happens. But your natural inhabitants will love you forever. We may not."

He walks away. He looks satisfied with his lecture. As a response, I rain on the plants.

*I went to Huangshan
The view's an electric shock
Pretty clouds can talk.*

Hong Kong Young Writers Awards 2021

Playtimes

Honorable Mention

Charlotte Tong 3P (2020 – 2021)

The challenge:

Tales from China's Magical Mountains

Dark Secrets

The mountains were wreathed in mist and clouds. People said it made the mountains seem more magical, but are the mists actually hiding some dark secrets beneath?

Rosalind took out her precious camera, capturing scene after scene of the heart-stopping view before her. When she was small, her grandpa taught her photography skills such that she could capture precious moments of her life. Huangshan was definitely a place worth remembering. It was a heavenly place in this mortal world. Putting her camera away, Rosalind continued her long journey up the mountains, squeezing her way through the narrow roads and staircases, until she finally reached the famous “yi xian tian” of Huangshan.

Light seeped through the gap, painting the dull grey of the mountains into a buttery gold. And standing on the exit of the “yi xian tian” was... a girl? Rosalind’s mouth hang open in dismay. The girl, seeing Rosalind stare at her, signalled her with a whisper, “Come.”

Enthralled, Rosalind started walking towards the girl, curiosity taking the best of her. Yet, when she neared the entrance, the girl smiled impishly and ran away, leaving Rosalind alone, trying desperately to catch her. Running breathlessly towards the exit, Rosalind tripped, and entered a world of darkness.

“Now, why did you have to complicate the whole problem, Sorbus? I told you this is serious matter.” A voice said.

“Why didn’t you bring her here in the way we told you to? Now look what you’ve done!” Another voice agreed.

“Oh come on! I just wanted to see her face when she ran through the gateway while chasing me! It’s so fun seeing mortal’s face when they find themselves suddenly in a new era.” Sorbus replied, her voice tinged with childishness. “Besides, it’s not like she will die from just a little trip.”

A sigh. "Sorbus, I thought we'd discussed when you can have fun and when you should be serious, hadn't we? What if the trip was lethal? What if – Rosalind, you're awake!" The speaker exclaimed.

Rosalind looked around in confusion. Where was she? She took a glance at the people standing beside her, and was utterly shocked. The famous, and supposed-to-be-dead poet Li Bai, was standing next to her with two other teenagers, and the also supposed-to-be-dead poet Du Fu.

"Rosalind. Nice to meet you." Li Bai greeted.

"Why are you alive?" Rosalind responded, terrified. Am I dead? Am I seeing ghosts? She wondered.

"No, you are very much alive, and so am I." Li Bai said, and Rosalind realized she had spoken her thoughts out. "Now that you are awake, I'm sure you must wonder why you are suddenly here. Allow me to tell you the story as we enjoy some Huangshan Maofeng."

"I lived here, in Huangshan during the 8th Century. I'm sure you know that. And I'm also sure you know people said I died because I was drunk. What a joke. Instead, I *nearly* died in a terrible war, between us poets and government officials. The government official who was the emperor's favourite back then hated me as he overheard the emperor admiring my works, thinking of giving me a position that is higher than his. He ordered people to create a poem in my name, shading the emperor, provoking the emperor, ordering to kill me. Du Fu and some of my supporters formed an army in attempt to beat them and regain my name, but we lost. The emperor ordered people to make up some story faking my death and hid the whole history of the war. They thought they had killed me, but they did not. One of the Eight Immortals pitied me and saved me, Du Fu, and the others, and built us this village in Huangshan to protect us from enemies. Time is frozen on the day of the war. We go through the same loop every day -- waking up, training, preparing ourselves for the war, and in the afternoon, the Emperor's Army invade us, kill us, we fall into darkness, and when we wake up, we're all fine again. It's just the same loop.

No matter how we train, we could never defeat the enemies. So we're hoping you might help us defeat them, to put evils back where they belong. Hell."

"Wait what? Why me? I know nothing about fighting." Rosalind protested.

"It has to be you. The Eight Immortals revealed to us if anyone had high chance of beating them, it would be you."

"Now, do come on. You got to start training. We have 2 hours until the war begins." Du Fu cut in.

The time has come. After two hours of training, Rosalind felt fueled up. Especially after seeing others training with such enthusiasm and passion, Rosalind trained even harder, determined not to let them down. And now the time has come.

They were standing in front of Huangshan, wielding weapons, eyes staring ferociously ahead. Rosalind could feel her heart thumping, not because of fear, she realized in a jolt, but because of the adrenaline from the incoming war.

The mountains were quiet, the chilling calmness before a battle. After a while, Rosalind finally saw something coming. It looked somewhat like a sandstorm, but no, they were thousands, millions of men on galloping horses. The galloping sound of the horse hooves drew nearer, the “clip clop clip clop” matching the rhythm of Rosalind’s own beating heart.

Li Bai patted her on the back. “Remember, this is your chance to change history. Oh, and one thing I forgot to tell you, since you’re not like us, who are stuck in this time loop, you’ll really die if you get killed later on. Don’t worry,” Li Bai added, seeing Rosalind’s face turn pale white. “you’ll be amazing, won’t you? Oh, also note you might see someone you love very dearly later on in the battle. But it’s just an illusion. Ignore it and continue your fighting. If you don’t, you’ll get hypnotised and eventually killed. Keep this in mind: the only thing that matters in a battle, is the final winner. “

As if planned, the enemy started their fight once Li Bai stopped speaking. Quickly tying her hair back in a ponytail, Rosalind began to fight.

She was a hurricane. Her blade was a merciless blur of silver, killing everyone in her way until she reached --

“Grandpa?” Rosalind whispered, dropping her weapon. Indeed, the face in front of her looked exactly like her long lost grandpa’s face.

“Rosalind! Dear Rosalind, please let me go. You can bring peace to this land, by simply turning around, and letting me put this rope right here.” The man said gently, though his eyes were merciless. He smirked in victory seeing Rosalind follow his orders. It was just a simple illusion, transforming himself into her beloved grandpa, and that was all it took to beat this girl Li Bai took to be his saviour. However strong she might be, he knew all too well about the common weakness of mortals. They are too cowardly to kill people dear to them.

The man pushed Rosalind violently to the ground. Putting his blade dangerously near her throat, he declared in a sing-song voice, “Put down your weapons! Or your little saviour dies~”

No! Rosalind screamed silently in her mind, seeing Li Bai and the others abandon their weapons to save her. But she could do nothing. Although she had broken out of her trance by the time the man pushed her to the ground, she was still unable to control her body the way she wanted. Oh, how useless she felt right now, seeing that man order his troops to kill Sorbus, Billis, Du Fu, and finally Li Bai right in front of her. They had looked up to her as their saviour, and she had got them killed. Even if she knew they

would probably wake up all healthy again the next day due to the time loop, Rosalind still felt torn inside, knowing she failed them.

“Oh, Rosalind. All of your friends sacrificed themselves for you! How touching.” Wiping his eyes sarcastically, he continued, “And you failed them because of not having the courage to kill your grandpa, to feel your his life seep away in your hands. You are so weak, when it comes to the topic of loved ones. As much as I pity you, there must only be one winner of this war. And that is, me.” The man stuck his blade into Rosalind’s heart and drew it out in a swift. Rosalind crumpled onto the Earth, her blood slowly staining the trees near her.

Every spring in the years later, the trees that were stained by Rosalind’s blood bloomed with bright red flowers known as the Huangshan Azalea, their presence a silent reminder of the dark, twisted history and the wronged poets who live in the village hidden behind the mists, on the peaks of Huangshan.

Mediation Essay Competition 2020

*The Department of Justice, the Education Bureau,
Rotary International District 3450 and
Asia Conflict Resolution Institute Limited*

Second Runner-Up (Senior Division)

Choi Lok Yin 5P (2019 – 2020)

The challenge:

Write an essay on “Sorry seems to be the hardest word?”.

Sorry seems to be the hardest word?

“I’m sorry”—a phrase that sounds and looks simple but is remarkably difficult to say. The concept of apologies has been instilled into every one of us since childhood, teaching us to take responsibility for our own actions. We learn, or rather, are prompted to apologise to others when having wronged them, be it bumping into a playmate or hogging all the crayons. We learn that apology is the way to forgiveness. Yet, as we grow older, “I’m sorry” seems to fade out of our vocabulary, only pried from the depths of our throats to enunciate the words in reluctance when absolutely necessary. What, then, is the significance of apologies, and why do we find it so hard to express them?

In mediation, the goal is for the parties involved to settle a dispute. An apology is central to mediation, allowing partakers to acknowledge faults and thus enabling closure and improving relations. A famous example would be that of Wayne Blanchard and Gary Geiger, in which Blanchard shot Geiger in an armed robbery and caused the latter to end his sprinting career and lose his job. Geiger suffered from chronic anxiety and post-traumatic stress following the incident. In an attempt to take the weight off his chest, Geiger contacted the then-incarcerated Blanchard through a victim-offender mediation session to discuss the shooting. The intimacy and directness of the encounter provided both men the sense of security to speak of the event vulnerably, which contributed to Blanchard’s authentic and heartfelt apology as well as Geiger’s subsequent acceptance, gave both parties the assurance and peace of mind for Geiger to forgive Blanchard and end on friendly terms with him. Geiger even testified for Blanchard, asking for him to be released on parole.

An apology is, in this sense, a non-coercive method of balancing evening out previous power imbalances. The apology serves to bring the transgressor, in this case Blanchard, to humility while empowering Geiger, the victim. It symbolically lowers the perpetrator and raises up the wronged to meet on a level playing field, dismissing the warped power dynamic and instead allowing both to see eye to eye. In turn, this gives both parties a new understanding of each other and is ultimately transformative in terms of the individual as well as the relationship between the two—Geiger no longer saw Blanchard as the powerful entity in his nightmares, and in return, Blanchard received validation and acceptance from Geiger.

Given the cathartic power of apologies in mediation, it then seems counterintuitive to be so opposed to saying sorry. However, we, as human beings, have our own reasoning behind this seemingly illogical behaviour.

Speaking of mediation outside of extremes like the Blanchard–Geiger case, in daily life where circumstances are less intense, the transgressor may deliberately refuse to apologise as a means of defending one's dignity. This is due to the innate perceived threat that apology poses to one's self esteem, which undermines their value integrity, or one's confidence in the belief of their goodness and core values. Withholding apology, on the other hand, has been shown to increase the transgressor's feelings of power and control over themselves and the situation, leading to a smaller emotional and cognitive incentive to apologise, as doing so may elicit a sense of guilt. Another cause for the difficulty of expressing repentance is the intimidating prospect of admitting fault and putting oneself in a vulnerable position. This fear of humiliation leads to even more negative emotions of shame, creating a stronger aversion to apologising. Hence, our nature of prioritising protecting our sense of self is integral to our disinclination towards expressing apology.

Nevertheless, it is still imperative that we initiate apologies in order to maintain positive interpersonal relationships and cooperate as a community. Goffman's principle of proportionality proposes that an effective apology should be proportional to the wrongdoings they serve to right. A good apology should admit responsibility, refrain from justifying one's behaviour, and offer to make amends. Therefore, to build a more harmonious society, we should learn to let go of our egos, and apologise when appropriate, embracing social connections with others instead.

MI Young Writers Award 2021


Magazines International (Asia) Limited

Winner (Senior)

Dawn Chow 4P (2020 – 2021)

The challenge:

What is the impact of this global epidemic to you? Any lessons learned?



A beacon of light pierced through the mullioned panes of glass, arousing me from my slumbers – another insipid day of quarantine has commenced.

2020 has been a patent pandemonium due to the onslaught of the new coronavirus. This virulent pathogen has not only claimed countless lives, but proliferated exponentially, hampering worldwide economies and has since facilitated the upsurge of a myriad of other problems.

It is an irrefutable fact that COVID-19 has impacted the livelihood of every civilian, and unequivocally, has bestowed upon me a variety of complications. Because of this pandemic, I have been coerced to resort to online learning, I self-isolated and wasn't able to meet my friends for nearly half a year – simply put, it had been tortured anguish. Now these are just the tip of the iceberg, and are merely a small proportion of one side of the coin. The other side showcases the myriad of enlightening lessons I have learnt, that will stay with me for the rest of my life.

Following the surging infected cases, stringent quarantine and extensive social distancing controls have been implemented by the government, forcing us to stay at our homes incessantly. Because of the extra time I have spent staying at home, I have been able to devote more time for self-development, as well as foster better relationships with close friends and family. Growing up, I have always had an estranged kinship with my parents. It was never easy to communicate amicably, and the last hug I have had with either of my parents was probably over 5 years ago. Well, that was before the new coronavirus marauded the world. I was vouchsafed the recherche opportunity to have amplified time spent with my loved ones, which allowed for much more meaningful conversation. I am eminently appreciative that through this harrowing period of quarantine, I was able to make the most out of it by amending my once ruptured familial relationships. If not for the virus, I would never have had the chance nor the heart to break down barriers between myself and my family, and now, I will always be reminded of the fact that everything can be resolved upon active communication.

I ambled out to the porch, quickly enshrouded by the sombre skies. A dusted picture of my grandfather, who has deceased from the coronavirus, stood right in front of me. My delightful grandfather, the very person who taught me to always be appreciative of all the people, things or experiences that I am beyond blessed to have. This is exactly what COVID-19 has reinforced. Gratitude. The aforementioned is

an immensely significant concept that a preponderance of us have been ignoring for years now. Needless to say, such a noxious disease has plunged families all over the world into abject despondency, with a proliferating number of people having to deal with the ill-fated demise of their beloved. Although vastly infelicitous, on the “bright” side, people will be able to learn about gratitude pragmatically from their very own experiences. By knowing that your loved ones may not be at your side the very next moment, one is guided to perpetually exhibit gratitude and appreciation, which spreads positivity to the wider society. Studies have also extrapolated that oftentimes, conjuring positive feelings may potentially lead to better health. This insinuates that gratitude and health complements each other in a sense, concocting a virtuous cycle of both refined public health and a better psychological welfare of the status quo in general.

For the past minute, I have been reminiscing on the memories that I have had with my lovely grandfather. If only I had known to be more grateful for his existence, if only I had spent more valuable time with him... I gently put down the picture, softly blowing off the dust with a balmy breath of remorse. Looking down at the busy streets, I see an opulent man crossing the same bridge where a homeless child had been sheltering under for weeks. That’s when I thought...

On a more practical level, this global epidemic has also taught me the strength of unity – from comradeship between individuals, to social cohesion, to diplomatic amity. As well-off individuals, we should be offering a helping hand to destitutes in desperate need of assistance. As civilians of the larger community, we should hew to our collective responsibility to, for example, wear masks to reduce further infections. As global citizens, it is our duty to contribute however we can to the well-being of the world, and to allocate resources more evenly across nations. Only when we acknowledge the mounting importance to come to the aid of others, only when we play our part no matter how small, to take up the mantle and act, will we declare victory upon this noxious virus.

In spite of the lethal barrage of the coronavirus, I have certainly learnt a whole lot. I have been taught from perspectives as small-scale as my individual life, to abstract concepts, to the global efforts it would take such that we can bring a definite end to the coronavirus. And now that I think of it, there is a way that we can defeat the virus. There is hope.

Just as the derelict stood up, getting ready for another arduous day of lockdown, he picks up a patch of white from the ground. I squinted my eyes – it was the first dandelion I have seen this year round. The child rubbed the petals gently, and immediately, the air around him was permeated with dancing seeds, flowing along the direction of the summer breeze. There I see it, hope. Hope, radiant, like a scintillating star; hope, illuminating the sunless skies; hope, as the myriad of darkness is swelled by the warm arms of hope.

The Queen's Commonwealth Essay Competition 2019


The Royal Commonwealth Society

Silver Award (Senior)

Cherian Leung 5U (2019 – 2020)

The challenge:

'You are the most optimistic, connected generation the world has ever known.' HRH The Duke of Sussex. How can you use Commonwealth connections for positive change?



Aqeefa dared not look back. She could almost hear her mother's silenced crying, and the drips of blood crossing at the labyrinth of paths, like gems of ruby under the blinding sun.

This is Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Pakistan. Aqeefa had been living under collapsed debris and deafening gunshot her whole life, and now she was among the tens of thousands of refugees who were fleeing for the better. The UNICEF camp was two miles away, and Aqeefa knew she was to keep going no matter who died along the way. Stumbling upon rocks and shattered glass in her bare feet of healing callus, she knew it was going to be tough starting a new life in another country, but at this point, nothing could possibly beat the fright and grief of losing her family and friends, one by one, to the ongoing war. Aqeefa refused to wait any longer— she had to save herself.

Let us take a step back right now- Aqeefa is merely the protagonist of a brief fictional story, but we must not overlook the fact that there are millions of people surviving a sick fate like her, along with billions of people living a life the fortunate opposite of Aqeefa's.

His Royal Highness The Duke of Sussex once said, "You are the most optimistic, connected generation the world has ever known." Indeed, we are now in an era where globalisation and the internet shape the entirety of our lives, and today's youth bear a set of values stronger than ever. Breaking down The Duke's words, "optimistic"— one's feeling of hope and goodness, although largely based on our inborn character and personal experience, can also be gained through shared positivity between people. As for "connected", not only is social media and the internet a significant indication of interpersonal relationships and instantaneous knowledge of the world around us, but economical and diplomatic advancements have also enhanced our connection through the increased accessibility between countries, no matter rich or poor, big or small. The question here is- does our connection facilitate the sharing of optimism, or is optimism the reason we are connected like we are now? In my opinion, the two are intertwined— in fact, a healthy cycle of global growth must consist of both optimism and connection, which I am honoured to further discuss in the following.

Starting by how connection gives rise to mutual optimism, the first thing that comes into mind would be social media. Despite security risks and possible spreading of malicious information, youth of this generation are well-educated on the safe use of the internet and most teenagers have now gone beyond the mere sharing of everyday encounters into voicing their opinions on world issues through a variety of social platforms. A recent example would be the Instagram account "@world_record_egg". Although initially designed for a seemingly absurd cause, the owner of the account did use its accelerating fame to promote mental well-being, demonstrating the mighty influence social media has

in encouraging health and happiness, and in this case of the “egg”, a provision of optimism to those struggling with stress and affirmation to those in time of failure. Apart from the shared positivity through social media, our physical connection has greatly improved over the past century thanks to the rapid development of politics and the economy. Third-world countries like South Sudan where millions are left with the trauma of the civil war, are now appropriately provided with aid such that the innocent are able to return to a life with guaranteed, basic human rights. Echoing the story of Aqeefa, the UN and the Commonwealth have been great contributors to saving the life and soul of many, along with commissions of named organisations such as UNICEF and the UNHCR, assisting countless refugees and youth in crisis in search for a safe, stable living, and that alone is an example of the power of connection in upholding optimism. The work of these very organisations have made use of the accessibility between countries to offer help, transporting resources packages efficiently through agreed export routes, and as a result restoring civilians’ hope for the future.

Moving on to optimism as a cause of connection, it is true that aspirations for the future had been the driving force of innovation and global development. In so far as technology, the launching of Facebook is undoubtedly a milestone regarding social connectivity. Mark Zuckerberg, the founder of said medium, was a Harvard student when he started his pursuit for an open platform connecting people around the Harvard campus, and soon around the world. Facebook is now one of the most used social media platforms internationally, a place where east truly meets west, and it all started because of a young adult’s optimism in surpassing the limited exchange of culture and ideas in the past. Diplomatically, the post-war period itself is a time of prosperity. Learning lessons from the brutality of history, our world leaders have invested hope into friendly global relations, and the peacekeeping work of world leaders and intergovernmental organisations is what grants us the convenience and shared wealth of resources nowadays. The Belt and Road Initiative, or the Maritime Silk Road, would be the definition of connection in the 21st century. Involving over 152 countries, the project has already worked wonders in improving the efficiency of infrastructure and providing job opportunities, especially for those in less developed countries. The shortened distance between civilisations would naturally bring about a narrowed gap between the superiority and inferiority of development, and it is because our world leaders have been optimistic in the future of globalisation, that we are now able to enjoy the benefits of connection and shared wealth.

Considering how optimism and connection are so closely related, it would be unjustifiable not to mention the Commonwealth’s role in positive change. Of the hundreds of fields the Commonwealth works in, the Secretariat’s achievements in youth development and the works of the Commonwealth Fund for Technical Co-operation (CFTC) in global connectivity would have made the most impact regarding a sustainable future. Community-oriented projects like assisting the Office of the Ministry of Finance in National Planning expands the knowledge base on macro-economics within the Kingdom of Tonga and as a result strengthens the economic capacity of the area. Because a country’s economy is of such significance to the overall upkeep to its people, such schemes help the comprehensive development of the society. More initiatives such as the CFTC’s effort in the Review and Development of New National Youth Policy in Dominica renews youth support programmes, and assisting youngsters in reaching their full potential make a great impact on the future because the next generation’s ability determine the development of humanity. Today’s youth will soon become breadwinners for the economy and ridgepoles of the community, and the Commonwealth’s accomplishments are surely contributing to a positive future. To maximise the effects of such initiatives, however, require our enthusiasm in making a change to the current flaws in our community. It is unto us to actively participate in this protest against past mistakes, that the true benefits of the Commonwealth’ work can be brought about.

In a nutshell, optimism and connection are truly intertwined. Our hopes in shared growth is what granted us today's connection, and while the vast network of boundless ideas increase the possibility of conflict, the diversity of opinions are beyond effective in strengthening common values and sharing thoughts on the future of this generation. However, despite the efforts of world leaders and organisations like the Commonwealth, it is also our obligation to fulfil our roles as global citizens, to care for the earth and to serve one another in anticipation

that the future is going to be one big unit connected by the health and positivity of individuals. I would like to end with the world-renowned legacy Maya Angelou's quote, "We are more alike, my friends, than we are unlike." We are, as Angelou states, friends. We are here to contribute all we have to the society, so that the our material and spiritual wealth can be enjoyed together as members of one body.

The Queen's Commonwealth Essay Competition 2020

The Royal Commonwealth Society

Silver Award (Junior)

Ankie Leung 1T (2019 – 2020)

The challenge:

Imagine you are Planet Earth, what would you say to Humans?



In Harmony

Aura of colours awash above high,
See birds weave around zephyrs, conjoined in flight.
Gushing rivers reflected blue by the sky,
While the sun shines through leaves in fragmented light.
Dart along to see receding waves on shores,
To hear the sirens' song and let your dreams soar.

Eventide's Northern lights billow like mist,
Eldritch tendrils flow, waxing and waning.
Flurries of snow descend, leaving behind a frozen kiss,
Crystalline glaciers stand regally, stiff yet not straining.
Reflected moonshine ripples in radiant song.
First light silhouettes animals as they slumber on.

Days of harmony brought to an end,
Nature shackled to kneel at Violence's feet.
Cities reap for more as changes impede.
Displaying their might through marvellous feats.
How are we living in such a ludicrous Age?
Continue like this and the idyllic future shall change.

Our planet in silence cursed for years.
Her brunt of suffering wavers over time.
Abnormalities arise, Nature confirms our worst fears.
Elements reign to punish man for their crime.
The universal bell chimes at the drastic climate shift.
Calamities rise to mark Man and Nature's rift.

The sweltering sun rages all day.
Glaciers tinged blue implode and plummet all around,
Sea heats as it to global warming, falls prey.
Marine creatures forced from habitats, unable to settle down.
A plethora of species extinct, resting in eternal sleep,
Cycle of sea life disrupted as the inhabitants weep.

Waters climb high as monstrous crests rear,
And islands of coral sink beneath waves.
People flee from once paradise, homeless lament in fear,
Islands dwindle to meet their watery graves.
Lest global warming cease, the future is bleak.
How many more shall we lose from the Lady of the Sea?

You know naught of my pain,
Nor see your brethren's crimes.
You are blind to how pain drags at me like chains.
My trust is like a trapped bird: unkindled, confined.
Man and Nature, different as Night and Day.
In Day's presence, Night must fade.

I perceive all your pain,
Understand man's sinful crimes,
And am not blind to your woes clinging to you like chains.
Yet, hope still in your chest pounding but confined.
Day and Night spawn Twilight, a balance between both.
Man and Nature shall harmonize, so let the days surge forth...

WYNG Philomathia Student Essay Contest 2018/19

*WYNG Foundation, Philomathia Foundation and
Trinity Hall, University of Cambridge*

Finalist

Chloe Sit 5U (2019 – 2020)

The challenge:

Students need to pick a photo from the organizations website and write no more than 1,000 English words on the theme 'Opportunity'.



I See Colours

I was 6. I was surrounded by strokes of ocean-blue and burning yellow and rose petal pink, as if I were standing at the heart of an illuminating sunset. I sat, enchanted, in my very first art class. Awestruck at the vibrant, colourful pieces of art propped up delicately on glass shelves and wooden tables, I smiled, eyes twinkling as I took in the picturesque dreamscape that seemed like something out of a storybook. Clumsily picking up the paintbrush in front of me, I pressed the bristles onto the smooth table in curiosity. An indescribable sort of bliss flowed through me, and I was content in that moment of swirling hues and soft murmurs and graceless strokes of paint.

I was 8. It was Chinese New Year, I recall. I'd wrapped up a painting I'd made in art class to surprise you. Koi of vibrant shades of crimson darted across the ultramarine canvas, 5 hours of acrylic bringing the calming scene to life. I dragged the large painting into the living room, struggling not to crumple the fragile paper gift wrap. My gleeful, innocent grin was met by your towering rage. You clutched my report card in your fists, and screamed at me for the blotch of red which flared brighter than the red on my painting ever would. My painting was tossed to the side and soon forgotten, but you would be happy to know that I never failed a test after that.

I was 11. I raced home at the speed of light, and barged through the front door with my first ever perfectly-scored exam. I felt your exhilaration as you delicately took the paper from my hands, saw your delight as you cleared space on the silver surface of the refrigerator to pin up this pride and joy, heard the bliss from the praise and approval that you showered me with. I was beaming too, until I took a step back, and saw you gazing at that lifeless sheet of paper with more happiness you'd ever had looking at me.

I was 15. You sat me down to discuss my future. I should aim for law school, you said. My academic excellence had paved the way for a profession as a solicitor, and I could earn an annual salary of up to a million. "But my art," I remember protesting, my love for painting coming to mind. My world was filled with tints of ruby and sapphire and amber, yet you seemed to see through a lens of black and white,

the need for success filtering out the colours that brought vibrancy to my life. “This will open doors for you,” you insisted. “Chasing rainbows with your amateur art will get you nowhere. I always made sure you have the opportunities that I never did growing up, and now all the hard work we’ve put in is paying off.”

I am 18. I stare at the mirror, and a face carved with numbers gazes blankly back at me, each test mark, each exam score, each grade on a report card imprinted on me, all that I will ever be seen as.

But I am more than just a book of worthless numbers and grades.

You’ve opened doors of silver and gold and bronze for me, mother, but I believe that in this land of opportunities, there is more than one right door to success. I’m writing to tell you that I’ve taken up the art school scholarship you told me to decline. I choose to open my door, and face more than a world of black and white and grey.

I hold up an acrylic-dipped brush to my reflection, painting over the numbers and grades etched into my skin. Shades of violet, cerise, amethyst-purple and mint-green stretch over the glass, and I watch as I’m surrounded once more by strokes of ocean-blue and burning yellow and rose petal pink, as if I were standing at the heart of an illuminating sunset. I step back and admire my new mirror image, my grinning face framed by a myriad of flowing colours. An indescribable feeling of pure bliss flows through me, just as it did so many years ago, in my very first art class.

Now, I see colours.

- Inspired by the photo series
Time to tame the tigers?
by Saskia WESSELING

A Letter to COVID-19 Poems

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Introduction to COVID-19 Poems

An explanation on the significance of COVID-19 poems

The great poet Robert Frost once said, "Poetry is when an emotion has found its thoughts and the thought has found words".

In times of adversity such as the COVID-19 pandemic, there is a need for expressing emotions one is undergoing. Unquestionably, this pandemic has affected us all, especially students who have to adapt traditional learning to digital classrooms. It is all the more meaningful for students to create poems based on the theme of COVID-19 in order to have them direct their experiences through a creative outlet.

The following poems presented touched on all major aspects of COVID-19, including but not limited to, impacts of the pandemic, the power of gratitude and observations of the new norm. We believe by having students write these poems, it could ease their potential stress formed from coping with day to day changes. Also, students are able to make use of interesting literary devices they have learnt in class such as personification, metaphor and emotive language to convey their ideas.

These poems have been very relevant during these difficult times. Through reading the following poems, we hope that fellow readers can try to express any emotion one may have through the art of writing.

The Virus

Chrysilla Chan 3S (2019 – 2020)

The Virus

Fear, fright, fuss, faint,
Is what COVID-19 brings.
From elderly as stubborn as a mule
to infants tiny like seed pearls,
his existence scares people away,
and they dare not leave home on any day.

He turns countries into dead castles,
creates silence to scintillating seaports.

Muted...

Emptied...

Devastated...

Babies' cries get softer,
even stray cats' footsteps get weaker.


Families and loved ones are being pulled apart,
as medical staffs start a long journey,

They depart.

Caring for suffering patients restlessly
as they both long to meet their isolated families.

Worries, anxiety, stress all endured.

Only under stuffy masks, they shed their helpless tears.



The increasing number of death is tragic,
making all the earth's people panic.
But all they can do is stay at home
or lock themselves in their rooms.
More and more are suffering, dying because of him.
Together, the sun sighs in despair as he dims.

Yet, he made the people unite and fight.
Starting factories, working day and night,
providing protective gears to those in need.
It's really a heartwarming scene indeed.
Elders give away their life support machines
to young men who have more to seek.

Love, support, cooperation, perseverance,
People show him how they fight against his arrogance.
One day he will lose his power
As he spreads around slower and slower.

Stay strong
So he will know what he had done wrong.
Together humans unite,
Together their spirits ignite.
Together they build defensive barriers,
And together they are warriors!

Do you not hear?

Angela Chan 3S (2019 – 2020)

Do you not hear?

Do you hear the muffled mutters
In the queue of shoppers hopeful
For a disheartening glimpse
Of shelving deprived of commodities?

Do you hear the suppressed cough
Or the passer-by's involuntary sneeze
Preceding the fearful glances
And accelerating footsteps?

Do you see the raw burning hands
Weary from vigorous scrubbing
Corroded by disinfectants
Submissive to the contagion?

So
You now feel the solitude
Permeating the quarantine units,
Of this sky-scraping vertical city
Overtaken by towering death tolls.

So
You now hear the fearful trill
Of a rogue bird through dense verdure,
In our concrete jungle pervaded



By sickly fumes of incinerated bodies.

Yet

I still hear the heart-warming chuckles,
Unmasked by incidental remarks
Inquiring of one's wellbeing,
With an exchange of thanks.

Yet

I still hear the whole-hearted applause
For the innumerable unsung heroes,
Who wear no pristine red capes
But stained green scrubs.

Yet

I still see the weary yet confident smiles
Unobscured by suffocating masks,
From waiting rooms and operation theatres,
From isolation units and hospital alleyways

So I ask

Do you not hear the resilience and grit
In the heart monitors' continual beat?
Or the unspoken determination
In the rhythm of respirator inhalations?



So I ask

Do you not hear the songbird's calling

Of a glorious daybreak dawning?

Against nightfall, defying its plight

Declaring its defiance, it takes its flight.

Listen

To its message pulsating across the globe

Listen

To the songbird's resonating ode

Proclaiming the faith our unity bestowed

Listen

To the plague-free future it forebode,

For I know why its tune rings bold

For the songbird sings of hope

Listen

And sing

Myriad

Hilary Yue 3S (2019 – 2020)

Myriad

Myriad of emotions, brought by COVID-19
Yearning for it to end.
Ravaging the world, as time passes
Inflicting pain and suffering, for humans.
A numbness then settles, as time passes
Devastation, for those who were lost.

Yearning for it to end.
Every day, chasing recent updates
A prayer spoken, fingers clasped together
“Rid us of this global pandemic.”
Nations fall to their knees and beg.

Ravaging the world, as time passes
As the battle rages on
valiant frontlines, the war never ceases
A selfless, courageous, and unbreakable spirit.
Gratitude in our hearts, for their
Efforts in helping those in need.

Pain and suffering, for humans
Agony, writhing on beds, lungs dry like sandpaper.
Imagining the emotions, experience
Never fails to send shivers down my spine.

Numbness settles, as time passes
Ubiquitous threats, safely staying still at home.
Motivation lost, tiredness settles.
It’s been months already?



Devastation, for those who were lost.
Elderly, young children, medical frontlines
Vulnerable times, they call it.
As we wonder, if we would be next
Sometimes, brought to the surface, is
The myriad of negativity, by uncertain, dark times.
A simple reminder would suffice,
That in the horizons, the sun is rising
Entering: hope

Majestically it rises, hope
Yes, with certainty, hope
Radiant, like a shining star, hope
Illuminating the dark skies, hope
As the myriad of
Darkness is swallowed by the warm arms of hope.

Crown Me King

Hayley Ng 3T (2019 – 2020)



Crown Me King

Once upon a time,
Flashes of light blinded my eyes,
Galling children laugh and whine.
Silence! I demand.
Unheard was my command.

No more disobedience.
No more defiance.
Listen and obey.
Tremble and pray.

Ignorant humans crowned me king,
Blessed me with a noble name,
Destruction and devastation I bring.
Die! I order.
Ensured was disorder.

Metallic tang of blood stained the air,
Graveyards run miles long,
Tears flooded the city,
Doctors drown in the burden they bear.



It's the age of human's downfall,

It's the age of Coronavirus.

The new king arises,

The old king befalls.

Death.

Perish.

Abolish.

My wish is your command.

Dear COVID-19

Macy Wu 3T (2019 – 2020)

Dear COVID-19

I recalled the times when **YOU** weren't around
Friday night outs in a crowded theater
Conversations with my neighbours
Enjoying a small coffee at a mall,
And having full shelves at the stores.
Poof! Vanished.
All because **YOU** came.
YOU took away the roaring stadiums.
YOU took away the busy streets.
YOU took away graduation ceremonies.
YOU took away many people's last heart beat.
Are **YOU** proud of what **YOU'VE** achieved?
Doctors and nurses working countless hours,
To help the innocent people who cannot even breathe
While the lucky ones stay home and stress over the forever rising numbers.
Dear **YOU**, COVID-19,
The human race is united as one,
We are determined to win this battle
And **YOU** will not be the last man standing.

Covid-19: A Curse or A Blessing?

Dawn Chow 3P (2019 – 2020)

Covid-19: A Curse or A Blessing?

This is my revenge
Served on an icy-cold platter,
To the world for not caring,
Not caring about climate change
Not caring about social equality
Not being aware of our many social problems
Not exhibiting immense gratitude for what we already have.
And now, as I announce this blood-curdling battle,
Innumerable lives will be terminated
Families destroyed
Relationships severed.
It is time for humans to pay
For their selfishness on this day.

But this, is not all doom and gloom.
Not merely myriads of lethal annihilations
Brutal afflictions
Stone-hearted, cold-blooded torment.
Not merely a ruthless catastrophe.
This, is a chance.
For the world to recognise its faults,
To realise the consequences to their actions,
To right its wrong.

I fight
I take over
I proliferate on a large scale.
Upon the vicious onslaught on patient zero
Tens of cases become hundreds
And hundreds become thousands.
Swelling with rage, I am inevitable.
The situation will only continue getting out of hand
Until mankind takes a deflection for the better.



Prepare for the worst
And hope for the best

Pandemic. Global epidemic. Biological warfare.
I am a massacre causing countless scares.

It is my mission to invade, to conquer.
Your immune system leaps into action,
But as I announce my attack,
I fight
I take over
I spread exponentially
And I always win.

The robust health systems with plush settings,
Lavish investments of affluent countries, thriving
To recruit an army to develop new cures, new vaccines.
While in other nations I travelled,
Brimming hospitals packed with mouldering, maggoty carcasses
A miasma of pungent stench
Causing people to eschew ancillary hospital care.
Asymptomatic carriers wandering the squares,
Without a single mask.
Cough. Co-o-u-u-u-gh.
Another flock of victims swarm in as outcasts.

With triage demands
Results in agonizing decisions.
Scanty, scarce resources, grant
One patient another chance in life,
While wailing wields through the door brim
As I snuff out the life
Of the neighbouring victim.



As I rampantly rage across the globe,
Burning through the population,
Governments impose ever-tighter controls
Attempting to flatten the curve,
To smooth the spikes.
To soothe the turmoil.
Extensively, they force lockdowns,
Quarantine,
Social distances within six feet
But if you don't grasp this time to take a break,
Pause.
From your fast-paced lives,
To take a step back.
In the harrowing months that only extends,
Covid-19 will never come to an end.

Markets tumble, investments crumble,
The economy withers
As innovation stalls and sanity decays.
I can hobble up businesses,
Effectuate firm shutdowns,
Trigger colossal losses.
But if you don't renounce your selfish acts,
Your lack of gratitude
For all that exists —
It will only take a sec
Until no one survives the wreck.

The conjuring speculation of healthcare systems,
Social and economic cannibalism,
This deadly pandemic
Causes more than Depression,
It does so, so much more than you'll ever imagine.



So please, take this period as a chance,
To notice all the unjust existing.
And never. Never take anything for granted.

Do you see the fear,
As others vigorously fight back their tears?
Do you dread the suppressed cough,
And run away with scornful scoffs?
Do you hear the silent screams,
Bound behind suffocating masks?
Do you not witness the suffering,
The pain and pricking emerging?
Do you not sense the melancholy,
As I dismember another family?

But,
They say that
After so many years of dissonance,
Decades after decades of fast-paced living,
You can hear the birds chirp again.
They say that after merely a month of solitude,
The sky is no longer thick with fumes,
But azure, and sometimes grey,
But always majestically clear.

They say that within the alleys of towns,
People blast music, and dance together
With brilliant, beguiling gowns,
Well, within a distance,
But with their windows wide-open,
So that those who are alone
May hear the resonance of love calling out to them.



They say that commercial firms all across the globe,
Are offering free meals to the housebound.
They say that with every moment this virus hithers,
The world is becoming a better place.

Thanks to me,
All over the world
People are slowing down, reflecting.
All over the world
People are removing their deprecating lenses.
All over the world
People are waking up to a brand-new reality,
To how kindhearted, how sympathetic we could be,
To how big we actually are in unity,
To what matters —
To love,
Benevolence,
And compassion.

Yes, there is fear
But there doesn't need to be hate.
Yes, there are uncivilised laymen,
Who bear zero public morality
But what about the unsung heroes,
Not with red capes but turquoise robes?
Yes, there is pain, but
Do you not sense the resilience on hospital bed sheets,
By the heart monitors' recurring beat?
Yes, there is sickness
But it doesn't give us an excuse
To perceive others with dismissive abuses.



And yes, there is even death
But, smile, be hopeful,
And spread more positivity than usual
For I am not mortal.
But your love,
And gratitude,
And kindness is.
Smile.

COVID-19 Poem

Mirella Wai 3P (2019 – 2020)

COVID-19 Poem

Let's fight the pandemic.
Eradicate the panic
and the melancholy and maniac.
Then go back to the basic.

Unusual as it is an epidemic,
It worsens at a speed of light.
Everyone needs to be hygienic
In order to be alright.

The virus is lethal.
Many have died and been ill
But some still go out for a thrill.
Only social distancing is left helpful.

Imagine a world after the coronavirus,
Getting better and unifying the human race.
The youth of today will have stories to share
But their next generation will not care.

Coronavirus,
Enjoying its own world tour.
Towns, cities, countries are all in threat,
Masks and hand sanitizers prevent us from death.
Vividly remembering every scene,
I truly hope a vaccine can be seen.

Immeasurable endeavors we have made,
Surely we can contend the virus with everyone's aid.
Given that we have tried our best,
Evolutionary breakthrough is still in medical worker's quest.

Where is the end of this drama?
We had enough of the trauma.
With everyone's effort
We will embrace a virus-free world.

Glimmers of Hope amid the Devastation of Covid-19

Maisie Chan 3A (2019 – 2020)

Glimmers of Hope amid the Devastation of Covid-19

Earth was a busy planet
With bustling streets crowded with preoccupied people.
Who worked day after day restlessly
Then came a macabre pandemic,
And the gears stop turning.

Unprecedentedly,
Cities are shut down.
Hectic work life grinds to a halt.
The planet goes quiet.

The virus ravage cities and countries,
And it wreaks havoc.
Swarms of people are isolated,
segregated from the rest of the society.

The once tumultuous stream of traffic has vanished.
Hospitals are replete with pallid faces,
lusterless eyes,
debilitated patients
and lament wails.

Yet, amid the darkness, there are glimpses of light.
Like incandescent meteorites in the vast black sky, illuminating the night.
Or luminous supernovas that are interspersed



Throughout the pitch-black universe.
Everywhere across the globe
People are sending out messages of hope
The sick are combating with the Diseases
Fighting it back despite the agony

Medical workers are on the frontline
Working a double shift in the meantime
They self-isolate for weeks and months
But never slack off, not even once
Doctors prepared for their own demise
They devote themselves and are willing to sacrifice

Some are applauding the medical staff
Thanking them on others' behalf
Music reverberates on deserted streets
As people sing to those who're struggling
This plight is not inescapable
And I'm sure of it, it's unmistakable
Light will glimmer, brighter and brighter
And soon the darkness will be over
One day everything will be well
Just remember this, hope always prevails

Covid-19

April Chan 3A (2019 – 2020)

Covid-19

When the grassroot of society becomes the pillar.

Every man, woman and child stands against the invisible killer.

Whispers of conspiracy plague the streets, entire societies fall

Into decay. Fear. Terror. Panic. Panic. All those you have

Loved are susceptible, and all the distancing makes you feel small

Longing for blue skies once more.

Before we reach the end, there will be times that are bitter.

Every hope, every dream stands against the invisible killer.

Vacant are the main-streets, and vacant are the parks.

In spite of the churning world, full are the linings of our hearts.

Cautiously we await the day we can rebuild all we've worked for;

Tenaciously we hold out for the sake of all that we adore.

Ostensibly the cycle of panic and confusion is never-ending,

Regardless, the rift between Man and nature is ever-mending.

If we maintain resilience and faith in this time of global danger,

One day we'll move forward, it's in our human nature.

Until then we must be vigilant, but know where the line is drawn —

Still even in these times, life goes on.

Window

Angie Chu 3U (2019 – 2020)

Window

She looks out of a window
Of the place cramped with
Patients of Covid-19 begging to survive,
Of the place full of uneven breaths and sorrowful cries,
Of the place filled with people hugging one another -
Whispering their final goodbyes,
Of the place loaded with the beeping noises
Of countless heart monitors
Recording the struggles and fights for survival.

She walks away from the window
Legs shaking, her weak body about to collapse
The paleness of her skin blending in with her room surrounded by white walls
She stares lifelessly at the glittering window
Which was separating her from the outside
She wonders what it's like to take in fresh air
Instead of the suffocating, dreadful air of the hospital
That seemingly pushes her into the void of nothingness
Unconsciousness takes over her,
Creepily, quietly, slowly.
However -
She holds on to the of support and love from her family,
She imagines returning to the hugs and comfort of her home
She holds on -
She lives.



I peep out of my window
Noticing how the once bustling streets are becoming empty,
Noticing how the once deafening noises of cars and taxis hooting
are replaced by the sound of nothing.

I wonder-
When will we be able to finally set foot into the utopia
Of the outside world that is so close, yet so far away?
How can I provide help to the victims of covid-19?
When will the pandemic finally be over?

I swing open the windows
Breezy wind filling up the emptiness of my room
Bright sunlight piercing through the darkness of my room
Like sweet honey, bringing me warmth and comfort
Together, let's open up the windows of our minds
And let positivity power its way through the negative thoughts.
Together,
Even the desert can become an oasis.
Together,
We can hope for better days.
And together,
We can win the merciless battle against Covid-19.

Lessons learnt from COVID-19

Alice Kuo 3U (2019 – 2020)

Lessons learnt from COVID-19

The Hustling and Bustling streets
With people moving like enchanting shoals of fish
Enjoying the Nights of Laughs and Beats.
Trains Crowded and Packed like sardines in a tin,
People Fighting and Pushing for a seat.
That's what the world looked like.

But now, everything stops.
Without a sound,
We are drowned
In the wave of terror.

Shops are closed, windows are shut,
Roads are cleared and lives being disrupted.
The world is buried in darkness.
The darkness robs you of your best sense
And replaces it with a paralyzing fear.
Unable to defend,
Forced to stay home and be alone,
It may be a stress, looking at the locked doors
Wondering why we are trapped
Like a caged bird
With hopeless
Soundless
Chirp.

But have you ever thought of
The precious moments
Brought by
The pandemic?
The morning light trickled in through the blinds.



Soaked in warmth, you gently open your eyes,
Sitting under the great, glorious, golden rays,
Getting some coffee
For the start of your day.
Reading your favourite book
Which was originally put aside,
With no time to take a look.

It's a blessing
For the busy ones to slow down their footsteps
And get along with the nature.
For families to embrace one another,
For the loved ones to spend time together.
It's a blessing
Wrapped in love and glory.

Slow down, human beings.
Have you ever noticed
What is happening to our mother nature?
Rivers become as clear as a mirror
Reflecting the blue sky with dashes of white.
The sparkling water coming and going,
Lighting up the soul of the marine life.

Slow down, human beings.
Have you ever noticed
What is happening to our mother nature?
Factories are closed
With no pollutants exposed.
We have never
Ever
Had a sky
Miraculously bright



And we can finally
Take a deep breath of the thin, cool air
Which refreshes and repairs
Our minds and souls.

It may be an unbearable suffering
For all human beings
But it's time for our beloved Earth
To heal and recover.
It's a punishment, a warning, a signal
To alert all humans
To remind how fragile and tenuous we are
To remind us that we should slow down
To look back,
Take a pause, slow down
And wait for our beloved mother Earth.

And now, everything stops.
Everyone has learnt a lesson
Through this intangible weapon.
Instead of tearing down our Earth,
We should humbly serve,
Get rid of discrimination and hatred.
Together, we are united.

Be grateful
To all the angels sent by God on Earth
Who save lives
Risking their own life.
Remember the lesson, the history, the admonition
To all human beings
Who are selfish
And do not learn from mistakes



And easily forget
The pain and agony learnt
From the past history.

And now, everything stops.
With angels singing,
Humans praying,
Hoping that the sunlight
Can bathe the surface
Of this planet
Again.

VIRUS SAID

Wing Mok 3U (2019 – 2020)

VIRUS SAID

We breed and appear everywhere
We exist and float around.
You never knew us in the air
Until we spread from town to town.

We enter your nostrils and down to your lungs
Fiberize your bronchi into lifeless branches
It ends with a ticklish cough and a heating forehead
And our job is done
In silence.

“It’s just a common flu,”
You may say
“You’ll recover in a week or two.”
“Have a tablet, some water, and a ten-hour sleep”
Yet it never came true.

It’s time to realize your fault, my dear.
Shut down schools, restaurants, playgrounds, bars,
Snatching facemasks, alcohol, sanitizers and tissues,
Leaving the city in fear.

You named us deadly COVID-19
Made us famous in headlines of 2020.
Get ready for your biggest quarantine
The danger is now for you to see.



Confirmed cases rose like a rocket
Doctors and nurses worked day and night
“Stay home, stay safe.” the government warned,
“It’s time for us to fight.”

Fight? What a joke!
Force and war will never succeed.
You think guns and tanks can bring you peace?
Well. That is ridiculous indeed.

The roads are silent, the factories have stopped.
No cars honk and crowds have disappeared.

“It’s over, my dear.” Mama duck said
As she waddled with her ducklings
As the sky reappeared.

Souls of Hope

Joanne Yau 3U (2019 – 2020)

Souls of Hope

Dusk emerges, burying
the pale city in the gravel-grey sky.
Shops closed,
Venues shuttered,
Events cancelled,
Eerily empty theatres in London and
Deserted canals in Venice;
Nothing but the sights of fear:
Flashing spectrum of red and blue,
frantic scenes filled with fearing souls.

Wall Street in New York and
Central in Hong Kong
quarantined from the hustle and bustle.
The humming city hushed,
No honking traffic nor roaring motors
No fussing crowds nor childish giggles;
Nothing but the sounds of fear:
Beeping sirens,
Gasping breaths,
Rattling coughs,
Pounding hearts,
Whining wails.
Ghost-town filled with empty souls.



Yes, there is fear and dismay
Yes, there is sickness and death.
Scars all over
the heart and the body
that mark the
era of human victory,
As we unite in distancing,
As we fight until the bitter end.
Descend the sounds of hope:
Balcony parties and virtual concerts,
symphonies easing the hearts with joy.
Amid the Covid,
Hope booms in the fear of doom.

Time will soon come when
the feeble man recovers, like the
barren land in the frigid winter
Has revived
Has rejuvenated
Has been reborn,
Bringing hope to our nations
when dawn wakes the hopeful souls.

Go and Wash Your Hands!

Valerie Chen 3L (2019 – 2020)

Go and Wash Your Hands!

Go and Wash Your Hands!

Says father.

My joints crackle,

Unwilling to withstand

Such humongous mass.

Go and Wash Your Hands!

Says mother.

I trudge up the corridor,

Feet stuck

on the ice floor.

Go and Wash Your Hands!

Says little George

I pick the Unpickable Lock,

And bulldoze

The dull dense door.

Try not to step into one of the infinite puddles,

Pick up the disgusting soggy soap,

And watch the clear rush of stream

wash away the all the sickening soap

wash away the all the rules and protocols

wash away everything.



I slip and fall,
Hands against the dirt.

Go and Wash Your Hands!
Says everyone.
My poor joints crack,
Unwilling to withstand
Such humongous mass.

Wash Your Hands

Karan Kwok 3L (2019 – 2020)

Wash Your Hands

Somehow,
Earth has stopped spinning
We have halted facing darkness,
The sun behind our backs,
The eternal night stretching onwards.
We shrink back into our caves.
Deep in slumber,
For no warmth shall shine through our eyelids
To wake us up.

But why is that light I see?
Are we not asleep?
Have we woken up?
Sleep paralysis?

But indeed the sun is up and bright
The heavy smog dispensed
There is movement in this sudden coma.
Clear flowing streams rushing through the aisles of Venice and running through our taps
Somewhere far away, quite nearby actually, choirs bounce through our windows
People shouting through their masks for a better 'morrow
On the streets I hear a woman offering disinfectant to her elderly neighbour.
Doctors and nurses hurrying in and out, day and night, curing who they can
While cards of thanks and gratitude pour in through their mailboxes.



We bond together, staying in and wearing masks not just for ourselves
But for those who cannot afford to do so
For those weaker than the fortunate
We bond together, reasoning with those who refuse to listen
Rejecting those who roam around this unmoving orb
With no regards of others.

Perhaps Earth's never-ending spin
Has made us blind to light and dark.
It's revolution too quick.
Our eyes could never really
Adjust or un-adjust
With this ever-stretching stop
We can finally see
The night day and everything in between.

But what did it take for the Earth to face the sun?
Did it take a 160 000 pairs of sleeping eyes
In exchange for light to reflect upon ours?
Is selflessness what made us yield?
If so
Why then
Did no one yield
When millions suffer and lose their lives
From executing the right to simply exist?
Why then



Did no one yield
When the children die
Not even knowing what a birthday cake is?
Why then
Did no one yield
When the Earth blew up in flames,
Greed, injustice, and bondage?

The shouts and hymns that sound through Earth
Is not a stranger to our ears
Yet the echoes from the mountaintops
Were unheard of 'til this morn
Today still
A boundless night plague half the Earth
The man who discovered COVID-19
Forgotten

The virus doesn't discriminate
Weath
Power
Race
Gender
Privilege
Death cares for no none
Is this what made us finally yield?



Wash our hands
Let's do something selfless
Let's stay in our homes
Let's wear masks and use hand sanitisers
Let's send cards to the hospital
Let's run water through our taps
And wash our hands for 20 seconds with soap
For once, let us -
Before the Earth revolves again
Before night and day blurs into a pulp once more
Like Pilate
Let's wash our hands.

REVERSE POEMS

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Introduction to Reverse Poems

A brief description and explanation on how to enjoy reverse poems.



Have you ever tried reading a piece of text backwards? In the land of poetry, it is completely possible to read a piece of text backwards and have it make sense. This type of writing is called Reverse poetry.

Reverse poetry is a form of literature that uses classic literary devices but with one special feature: it has dual meanings when you read from the top to bottom and conversely, from the bottom to the top. When you read the poem forwards (top to bottom), it usually has a negative connotation, whereas if you read backwards (bottom to top), it conveys an opposite or positive effect.

In this chapter, students will showcase the reverse poems they have created during English lessons. These poems have been done either individually or in groups. Their work displayed in this chapter is not only expressive, but also meaningful, thought-provoking and captivating.

We believe that students should be encouraged to write poetry due to the following reasons:

- It gives students a chance to express their creativity through the flexibility allowed in grammar
- The topics they have chosen can be something that deeply resonates with them
- They get to try a variety of writing styles
- They can use interesting literary techniques such as simile and rhyme.
- They feel a sense of achievement after writing their poems.

It goes without saying that we are tremendously proud of our students' creations. We hope every reader who comes across this chapter enjoys reading it as much as we did whilst assembling it.

The Gilded Cage

Andria Sze 3T (2019 – 2020)

The Gilded Cage

I cannot identify the woman in the mirror.
You will never hear me say that
I am poised.
The increasing thrum of my heartbeat,
Do you hear that?
I am driven by the anxiety clawing at my heels;
I am done being a fool, let's not mistakenly think
there is hope perched in the soul.
Let the echoes in my head tear me apart.
I repudiate to
pick myself off the ground and try again.
The solution is to
exist as someone else.
I should stop trying to
embrace my own company,
give in to the itch for solitude.
Instead, I should
hide in bars, behind bottles.
Rush out into the night
try to blend into the world
I am tired of hearing people say
this too shall pass.
Chin up and breathe,
It throws me off, making me reconsider

"You are stronger than your
depression"

No! Wipe that off.

There is proof of sadness lingering
upon my cheek.

Continued to be haunted by
memories of my past.

This is me.



The Teens

Chloe Chu 3T (2019 – 2020)

The Teens

The teen years are beset with frustrations.

I don't believe in the least that

Teenage life is brimming with thrills and wonders.

In my very experience

Parents' demands weigh me down.

I do not concede that

Achieving goals will make us any joyful.

There is no denying that

Peer pressure causes teenagers' pain and sorrow.

No grown-up wishes they were teenagers again.

I find it incredible that

Adults envy teenagers for their carefree youth.

Do not wonder for a minute that

You will cherish your teen years.

I can assure you

You won't look back with good memories.

You'd be mistaken to think

Innocence and genuineness are the hallmarks.

It is true that

Teenagers know little about their talents and the world around them.

I never agree that

It is a time when you make lifelong friends.

You should anticipate what is in store

The turmoil of emotions is hard to bear.

It is wrong to think that

The teens are the happiest years in one's life.



Aggrandizement

Dawn Chow 3P (2019 – 2020)

Aggrandizement

Be who I aspire to be.

For I was and I will,

Be an eradicated, nugatory being

For I never was, and never will be,

An unfettered songbird with empowerment inborn,

Isn't it invigorating? My metempsychosis, as

An incarcerated fowl, its ploy of emancipation forlorn?

Or a waif-like bird, ululating its absurdity?

A decrepit enigma,

Isn't it specious? My spurious semblance of

A paragon where equanimity adorn.

I realise I am now

Its patsy in the dwam of an imbecile mug's game,

A callous ruse ambuscading

For I finally deduced what underlies the media's acclaim —

The constant reassurance of my inferiority

The corpulent displays on my weighbridge, and

The likes of my Instagram posts It doesn't matter.

I am worthless.

And I refuse to believe people who say that I am enduring and absolved from abashment

I am bound in the moans of hushed cries,

No longer can it be said that I am an audacious sailboat,

Surmounting wave crests of my pride.

Despair

Emily Ng 3P (2019 – 2020)



Despair

I surrendered.
I'll never say that
There is a beam of light to lead my road in the darkness.
It's always true that
Life is all about failure.
It's foolish to believe that
Hope does exist.
I realize this may be a shock, but
Hope knows no fear
is a lie as
Hope can never blossom in the gloom and doom.
I know it's true that
I should simply quit in the face of frustrations.
Never have I believed that
I can conquer the darkness as a courageous warrior
As everyone said,
'Give up is the best.'
Never in a million years would I think that
Success is failure turned inside out.
It must be true that
I can never stand up again.
I refuse to proclaim that
'Yes, I can rise.'



My Brother

Geneva Chan 3P (2019 – 2020)

My Brother

My brother is a brat
I refuse to believe that
He is an angel in disguise
I am absolutely sure that
I must've owe him something in my previous
life to have him as my brother in this life
I really don't think that
Brothers are sweet little creatures that make
my life worth living

And I strongly believe that
Ignorant and stupidity are two words that
represent him
I must've been pulling your leg when I say that
He's the gift from above that I've always
wanted
I am proud to say that
I have dressed him in a pink tutu and took pic-
tures just to laugh at him
Never in a million years would
I thank God for making him exist

How can it not be true that
He is a little demon who fooled everyone with
his innocent smile
I refuse to believe that
My brother is the sweetest boy on earth

To be frank,
I want to tear his wings piece by piece,
get that smile off his face
Never would
I want to tell my brother I love him
from the bottom of my heart



Insects

Iris Cheuk 3T (2019 – 2020)



Insects are terrifying creatures

And I refuse to believe that

They can provide useful services to mankind

I strongly agree that

Insects have the power to destroy crops

And I cannot believe that

Insects are served as a food source for people for tens of thousands of years

I truly think that

Insects can scare me to death

It is such a lie that

These horrifying creatures can contribute to entomotherapy

I believe that

All insects are parasitic

I disagree that

Insects can be beneficial to humans.



Loneliness

Jasmine Wong 3T (2019 – 2020)

Loneliness

Loneliness is what I have.

And I can't believe that

Friends will bring you happiness.

It is true that Loneliness is the cruelest irony.

So don't try to convince me that

The soul that sees beauty may sometimes walk alone.

I strongly believe that,

Keeping people away from me is the best way to protect yourself.

So stop saying that

The people who care about me are my guardian angels.

I am absolutely sure that

The pain of loneliness will last forever.

I just don't admit that

Having friends will make my life much better.

I have to say that

This is a barbaric society.

And there's no way that

I could ever escape from the brutal, dreadful and stressful reality.



Soulless

Nicole Lai 3T (2019 – 2020)



Soulless

No one could differentiate me from a living
zombie

I refuse to believe that
Life is a melody, a heart-warming
and harmonious one.

I constantly remind myself that
I am a plant without roots
And you can no longer say that
Everlasting relationship never fails

I never doubted the fact that
Indispensable friends only exist in fairy tales.

Do not persuade me that
Loving souls are surrounding us
We all should bear in mind that
the Devil is dwelling in everyone's heart

I don't see that
Every rainstorm can be calmed
It is a must to acknowledge that
Life is as grey as a sullen tomb
Hence it is foolish to assume that
Beauty exists inside every single soul

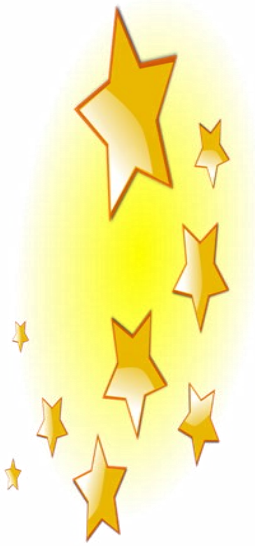


Dreams

Niko Lau 3T (2019 – 2020)

Dreams

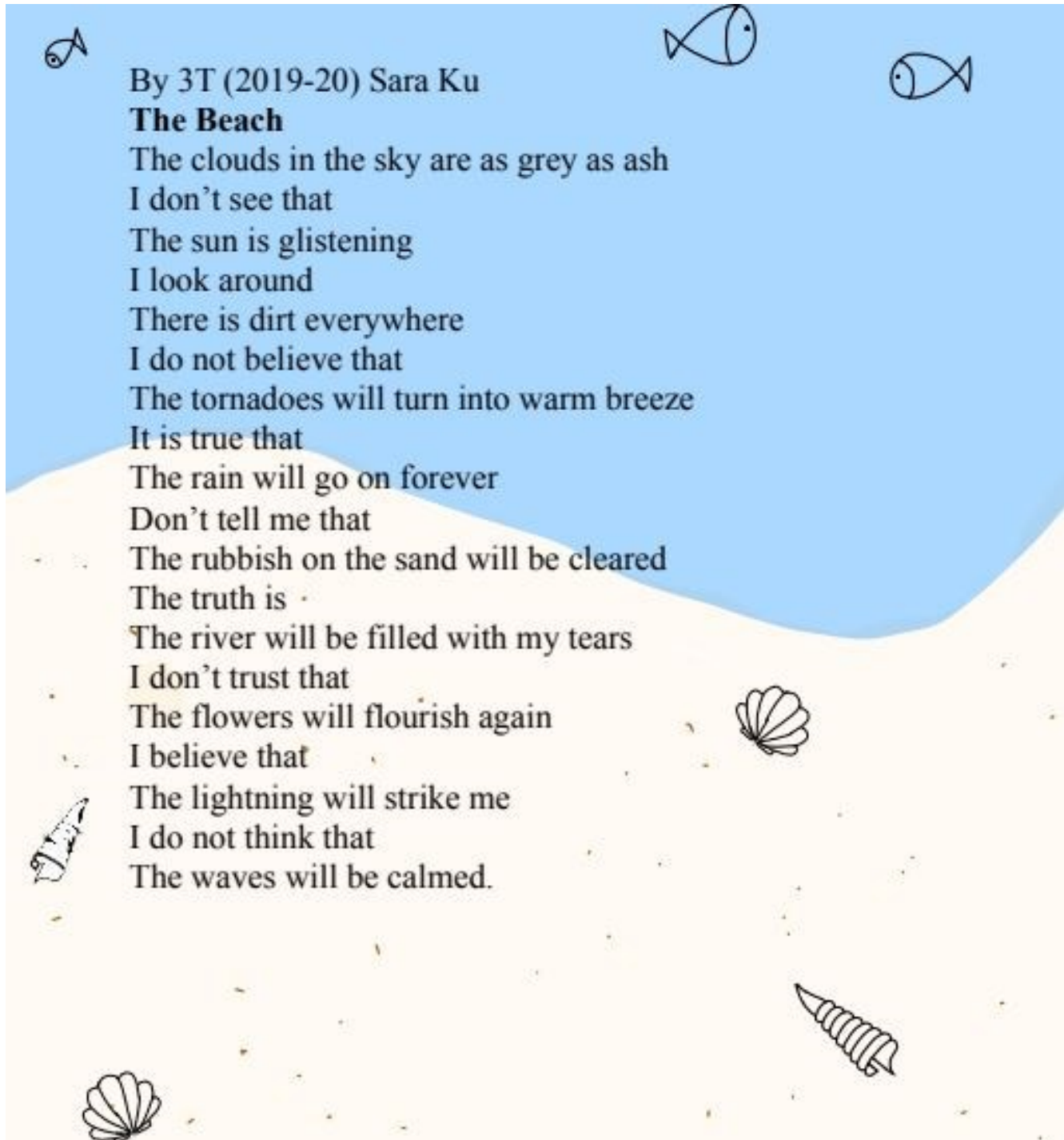
Dreams are dispensable
Stop saying that
Motivation comes from dreams
I truly believe that
It is an obstacle to our learning
We are denying that
Dreams are broken-winged birds
It is a truth that
The cruel society makes us sober
I never admit that
Our dreams will come true
I never doubt that
Dreams are painful like sores
It is a deception that
Dreams can support us
It is proven that
Dreams are useless, worthless and aimless
Only morons think that
Happiness comes from dreams.



Dream

The Beach

Sara Ku 3T (2019 – 2020)



It is Always Better to Give than to Receive

Sophie Tsang 3T (2019 – 2020)

It is Always Better to Give than to Receive

Time is precious

Treasure it

Your life is a fragile, aging photo album

And

Those meaningful, memorable moments are just snap-shots

Spend your time wisely, and remember that

True moments of life are rare and impossible to find

And don't even think that

It just takes a jiffy to help a stranger to make a friend

Keep in mind:

Your time is valuable

It is naïve to think

A simple moment of kindness can spread and have everlasting effects

So why bother?

Time is wasted everyday on silly things just like that

If you don't stop to help anyone, you can be the first

Don't waste that chance

And when you have the power to better another life

Take advantage of that opportunity for yourself

An impulsive moment of charity can deeply affect you

By making your life harder and worse off

Being selfish will only change you

Into a stronger person

It can completely transform you

If you give it often, you'll know that

A moment of generosity only benefits the recipient

Don't believe anyone that thinks

"It is always better to given than to receive"

That is just foolish talk

Nothing beats getting what you want.



After Failure

Sonia Ngan 3T (2019 – 2020)

After Failure

You swept away a tear
Staring at the lavish vermilion sun
Devastated
You ceased being
The nonchalant person you once were
Turning back to
The being moulded by the harsh hands of reality
You no longer want to be
Experienced of the buoyancies in life
Sitting in frustration, exasperated
Giving yourself no reason for
Forgiving the times you've failed yourself
You learnt through
Countless sweat and tears
Made unstoppable by the
Wraths of failure
Ignorant of
The desperate voices around hauling you back to optimism
Yet you choose to hear
Your self-criticism
Blocking out
Any remaining hope
Arms outstretched for
Surrender towards failure
Trying your very best not conceding
To the beauties of life and the lessons they bear.
Giving in.



The Path to Success

Zoe Chan 3T (2019 – 2020)

The Path to Success



Nothing is worth trying
and I refuse to believe that
I am capable of accomplishments
because I am certain that
I will never be as good as others
don't ever think that
I will achieve my goals
and no matter how long it takes
I will always fail
I know it's not true that
I should come out to try
because I know that
I need to hide in my own shadows
and I need to stop thinking that
I will succeed.



Blossom

Elinor Cheung, Charlotte Lau, Charlotte Tong 3P (2020 – 2021)

Blossom

The seed we planted has become a flower that is wilted and dead.

It is impossible that our love -

Will be blooming and flowering

For no matter the circumstances, I believe that our love

Is like a Juliet Rose—beautiful but dangerous.

I was foolish to think that Fate

Will lead us to a happy ending

I believe that our love,

Like the thorns of a Juliet Rose, will prickle us to death

It is hard to accept, my dear, that the blood running in our veins

Must be sacrificed for us to be together

For nothing

Can revive our withered Juliet Rose

I believe our dream

Our dream of a life beautiful like a blossoming Juliet Rose will be shattered

It is impossible that

Our Juliet Rose will be in full bloom.



Strangled?

Valarie Cheng, Charmayne Kam, Joby Ling 3P (2020 – 2021)

Strangled?

I am forever drowned in the sea of pressure

There is no possibility that

I can find a way out

I am sure

The black hole of assignments will engulf me

It is ridiculous that

All stress and anxiety can fly away

There is no doubt

Projects are never-ending

No one can convince me

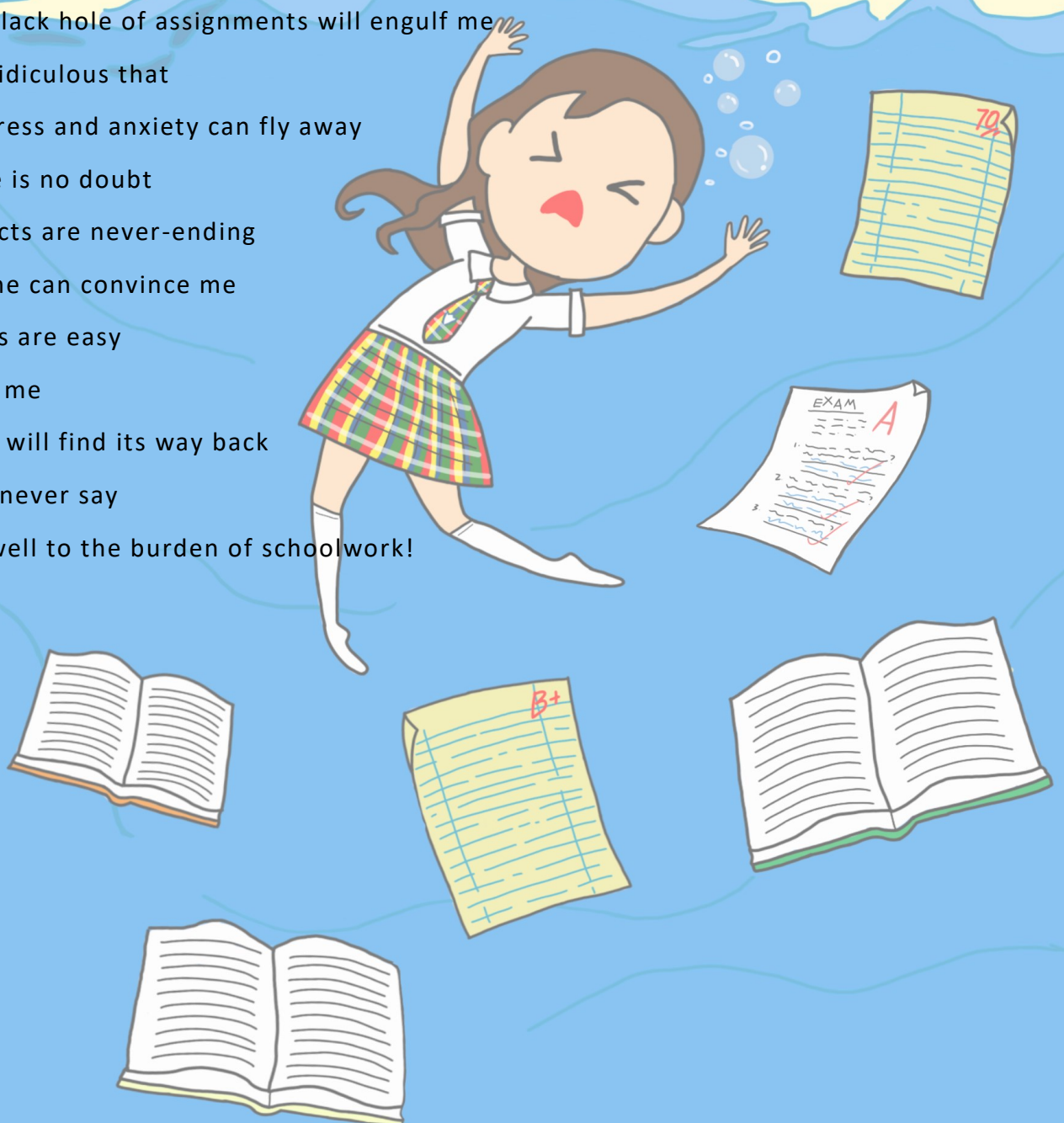
Exams are easy

Trust me

Work will find its way back

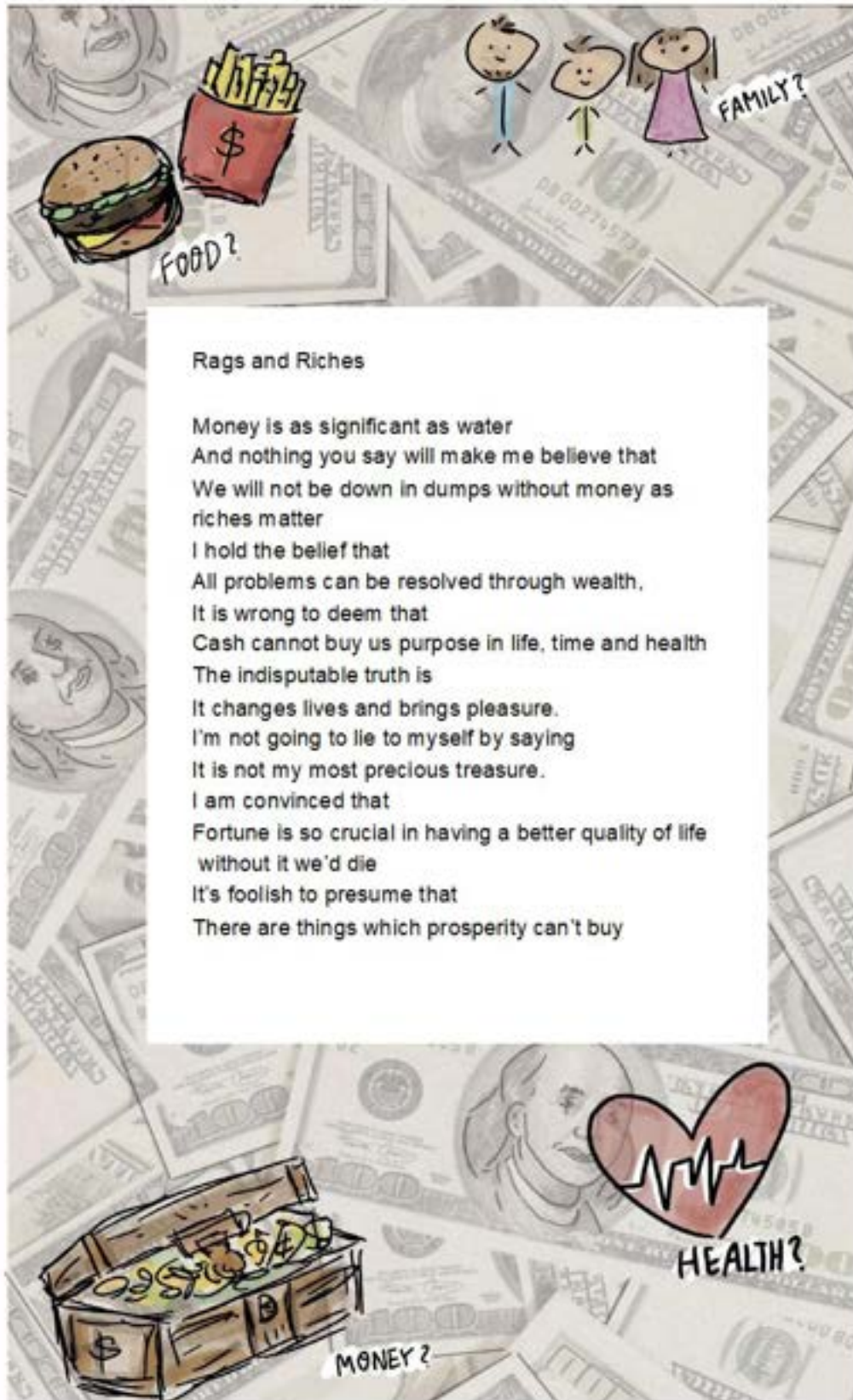
I can never say

Farewell to the burden of schoolwork!



Rags and Riches

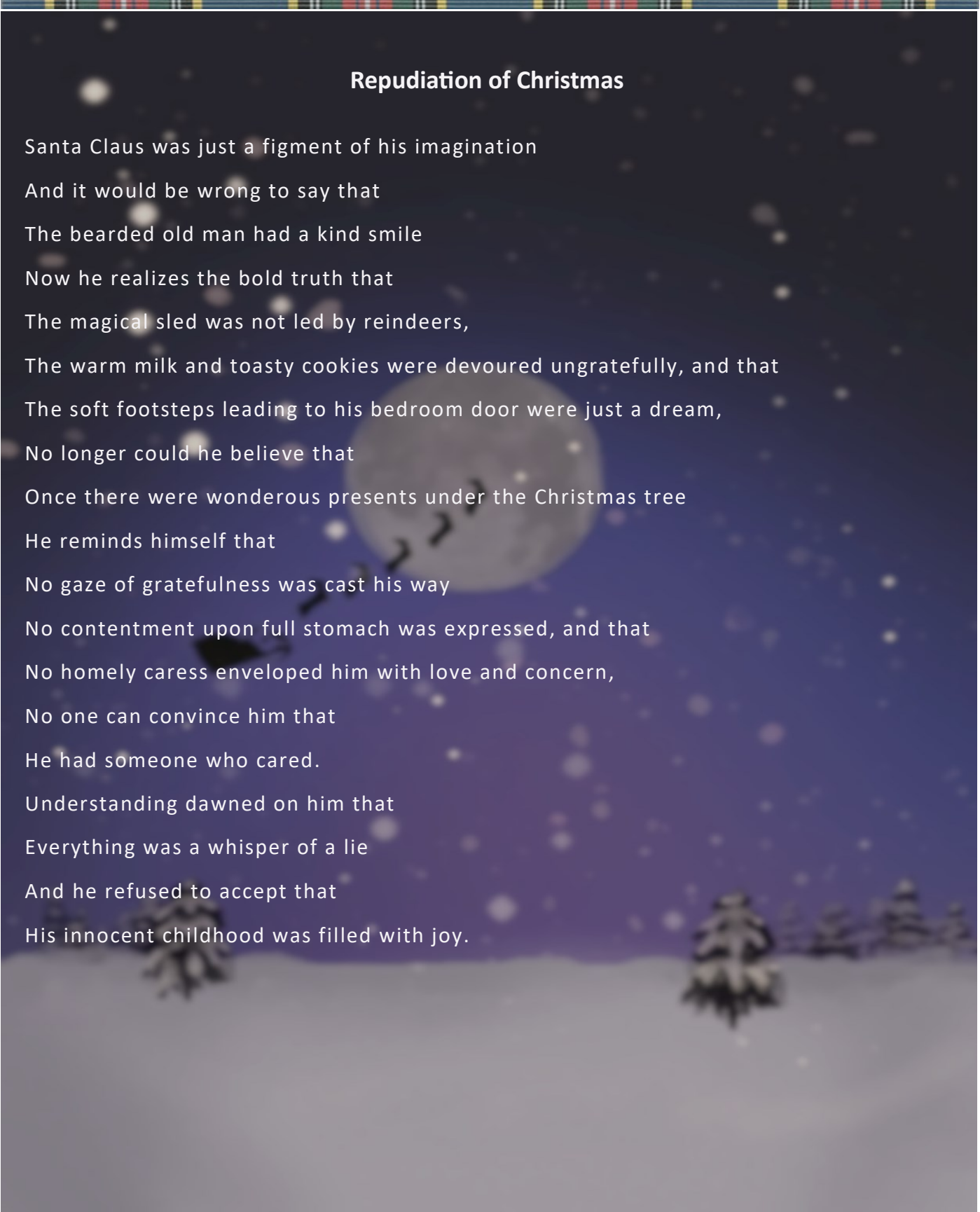
Sarah Au Yeung, Natalie Chan, Jovy Che, Hazel Wong and Gabrielle Wu 3U (2020 – 2021)



Repudiation of Christmas

Liyan Lam, Angela Tam, Venus Wong, Snowy Yeung 3P (2020 – 2021)

Repudiation of Christmas



Santa Claus was just a figment of his imagination
And it would be wrong to say that
The bearded old man had a kind smile
Now he realizes the bold truth that
The magical sled was not led by reindeers,
The warm milk and toasty cookies were devoured ungratefully, and that
The soft footsteps leading to his bedroom door were just a dream,
No longer could he believe that
Once there were wonderous presents under the Christmas tree
He reminds himself that
No gaze of gratefulness was cast his way
No contentment upon full stomach was expressed, and that
No homely caress enveloped him with love and concern,
No one can convince him that
He had someone who cared.
Understanding dawned on him that
Everything was a whisper of a lie
And he refused to accept that
His innocent childhood was filled with joy.

Sorrowful Buoyancy

Megan Kwok, Eunice Mak, Rebecca Wahab 3S (2020 – 2021)

Sorrowful Buoyancy



One could never predict the future

For,

life is like a box of chocolates.

Shall we say,

Life is a tragedy.

No longer can I think that
one can live life to the fullest.

One can always chase their dreams to the furthest horizon.

Or perhaps

Be blessed by the beauty of life, the goodness of humanity

But it is still unreasonable to believe that one cannot

Be bombarded by the atrocities of harsh reality,

Or even worse

One can be lost from any sign of hope

In your dreams

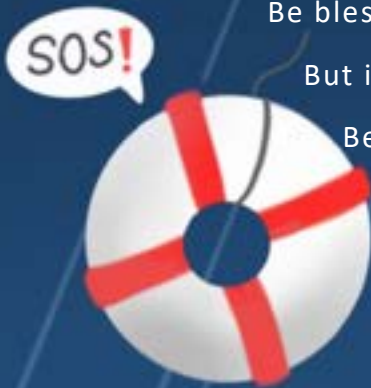
Looking forward to the coming of hope,

while waiting for the tiniest hint of light,

with no possibility of surviving.

There is nothing more than suffering in life

I cannot imagine how,





Something better would happen to me.
I believe that
Pain and evil will surround me forever,
like bees buzzing fiercely around one's ears
I cannot escape from this thought
I came to realize,
that goodness did not bother to care about me
Only Illness will accompany my lonely days and
I doubt that
I will find the oasis in a desolate desert
Agony introduced me into the world of pain
It is impossible that
I will be freed from the shackles of depression.



I see more possibilities seeping under the cracks of my door
when the sun shines onto my bedside.
But,
There are still times I am engulfed by the fumes of illness and tragedy





Is there something more than suffering in life?

Can we battle the pain?

I have given up every possibility in life.

I cannot understand why some think

Triumph and pleasures will flourish.

Life is nothing more than a melancholic symphony.

It is impossible that

I will put my amour on

To fight the hurricanes that roared and hurled

To break free from the darkness of the world

“Joy comes out of suffering”

They say,

“The paradise of delight lies ahead”

Life is nothing but tenebrosity

And never will I admit that

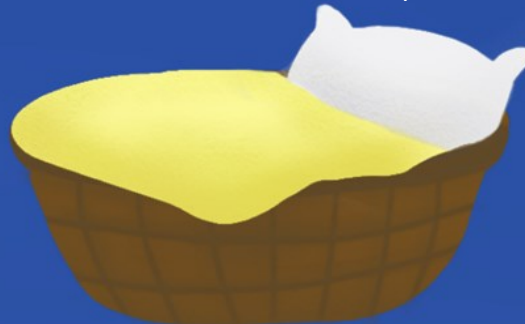
There will always be stars illuminating the pitch dark skies

There will always be light within darkness

There will always be hope in dolour

Just because

Life is like a cradle for hope.



Skeletons in the Mines

Valerie Chan, Cheryl Chan and Jenny Chan 3P (2020 – 2021)

Skeletons in the Mines

Children are Sorrowing, Suffering, Sacrificing for what?

For that shimmering, pearlescent sheen on skin

ASHy powdered noses and triumphant wins

For the crown and glory

Children climb downwards in the earth

For the beautiful to stay beautiful

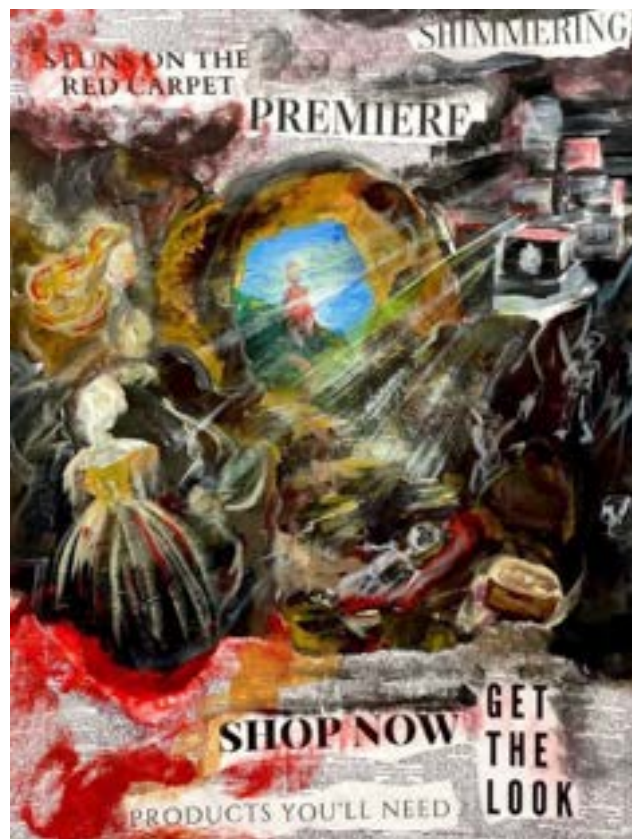
For the system to remain intact

For the rich to profit

Children, young as five risk everything

And we watch as

We live in a world aglow with beauty.



Tears

Nicole Chin, Phoebe Ching, Christine Lam 3S (2020 – 2021)

Tears

Last tears shed
Into deserts emerge behind arid orbs
Carrying with grace, the remnants of my existence
Perhaps an illusion cloaking defeat
These ragged scars of mine
Penetrating souls like living daggers
As glimmering dewdrops of the heart
My tears are prophets telling my story
Agony materialized
Polluted with lingering grey
Lurking in the depths of my shadow
Give in to the whispers of the night
Never
Let go of shadow's embrace
A symphony to lead notes of sorrow away
Allowing
Streams of liquid silver
Ones which strangle my soul
Phantasmic tendrils winding about
I cleave
The thread that fastened my heart whole

I seal
The façade that smothered unending pain
The dam that kept me numb
I break
An unbreakable vow I'd promise to fulfill
"To always be strong"
Mother said
Only warriors cry tears
But I am living proof
How hollow jewels fondle coward's cheeks



Monologues

Introduction **125**
What is a Monologue?

Monologues written by
Form 1 students in the year of 2020 – 2021

Elma Or **126**

Joanna Wu **127**

Wihelmina Yiu **128**

Monologues written by
Form 2 student(s) in the year of 2020 – 2021


Karen Chan **129**

Monologues written by
Form 3 student(s) in the year of 2020 – 2021

Valerie Chan **130– 131**

Introduction to Monologues

What is a Monologue?



One can easily identify a monologue when a character gives an impassioned speech during a dramatic scene in a film or a play. These speeches typically aim to stir up emotions within the audience. According to the Oxford dictionary, a monologue is a 'long speech by one actor in a play or film,' sometimes it might even be 'part of a theatrical or broadcast programme'. Its roots are derived the Greek word 'monologos', which means 'speaking alone'. Hence, the standalone speech is often used to allow writers to express characters' thoughts and emotions, illustrate the backstory of a character as well as provide additional information about the plot. This literary device has a rich historical background, as monologues have been used since ancient Greek theatre times. Nonetheless, it is very common in modern plays and films.

In this section, students have created monologues based on different sources, some used existing plays for inspiration, while some wrote a monologue with completely original storylines. All the pieces submitted have been extraordinary and we appreciate each and every one of them immensely.

Elma Or 1T (2020 – 21)

The following piece is an original monologue based off of the “Starlight Express” musical. “Starlight Express” tells the story of an obsolete steam engine who races in a championship to win the hand of his love, Pearl.

Come, my friend. Don't you give up just yet— the race you just lost is but preceding the many races that you're destined to win, little Blitzschlag. Let me tell you a story. Hmm? You say that an old train like me isn't worth listening to? Ah, sit down. Gestirn Platin's got many lessons in store for you. The way your wheels grind against the race tracks, the motion of your whole body— there's so much to be explored. I can guide you through it. Ja, in der Tat. You know, I used to be a glorious thing, snagging the headlines of every newspaper. Indeed, a lovely period. Especially in Germany and Japan — I was a collaboration between the two countries' best scientists. Everyone cheered for me! I used to win every train race I went into— but do you really think I started off so successfully? No, not at all, I was a let-down to my creators, to my teammates, the slowest one of it all. Then, I was visited by a mysterious figure in my dreams. I'm well aware that we trains can't dream! I know that our “dreams” are really just memories broken apart and reassembled. But there really was a certain someone there— I'll coin the name of Starlight Express to him, since he looked like a constellation. I don't remember what it was that the Starlight Express said, but the next day, I tried a brand new way of skating— the one you now know so well, the basic, default rolling motion. Yes, it was I— or rather, the Starlight Express— who created the moves you now know so well by heart, step forward, push, step forward, push. My speed immediately increased thrice from previous records! I experimented with various skating motions, and in no time I was winning championships like a jackpot— on, and on, and on... Then an accident happened. I was so, so close to reaching the finishing line! I was almost there! Gottes willen! And then— ah... sweet success staring me in the eye as one of my wheels decided to fly off at that crucial moment... You can see the rest— after the race, I was coarsely repaired, thrown out, my creators deemed me a piece of waste metal, I was left here. But! Electra! Your appearance has blessed me with new power. I feel determination boiling in me... Meine Zeit ist gekommen! Hey, what if we make a deal? I could teach you some real swift moves, while you let me train with you. Then we can both win some races, maybe? Hmm? You've got a skeptical look on your face. You aren't gonna turn an old whistle down, are you? Ah, now, that's the spirit. Herrlich! Let's get going, then!

Joanna's piece is based on the theme of gratitude about a fox.

When I was little, there was this.....fox that would come by my backyard every now and then. I named her Dawn and I shall be forever grateful to Dawn because whenever she visited me, she always managed to bring me joy, a sense of comfort, a sense of warmth and a sense of belonging. Mother said I was ridiculous for thinking so highly of a fox. But I feel like Dawn knew when I was not feeling myself, for it was always those times she visited most. It's strange how an animal could bring me more comfort than any human could. I still remember the first time she visited, it was snowing and I was upset because of some horrid girls from school. That was until I saw Dawn, she ran away quite quickly before I got a chance to get a more detailed look. But even though I only saw her for a few seconds, it made me happy for the rest of the day. I wonder where Dawn is now? I do hope she knows how much of an impact she had on me and how I am eternally thankful to her.

Wihelmina Yu 1A (2020 – 21)

The monologue below shows a beauty pageant contestant giving an acceptance speech after winning the contest. This was submitted by Wihelmina for her gratitude monologue assignment.

Hello everyone! I am contestant number 8, Lee Wai Ling Evelyn. I am here to thank my family and friends who have supported and encouraged me to participate in this beauty pageant. This decision has changed my life.

Before the pageant, I was just a very timid and ordinary girl. I would never have imagined myself giving a speech in front of thousands of people in the audience but look at where I am now – standing on a stage, talking to you in this gorgeous dress and makeup. I have witnessed remarkable changes in myself along the journey, from doubting my appearance and body shape to appreciating beauty of all kinds – tall or short, thick or lean – everything has its own beauty. Today, I am confident to say, “I am beautiful”, and I want every girl out there to be able to say the same about themselves. Appreciate your own beauty and always have faith in yourself! Lastly, I am blessed to be surrounded by friends and family on this special evening. Thank you for your support! I am grateful no matter the result. Good night!

Karen Chan 2A (2020 – 21)

This next speech encompasses the theme of gratitude. It is also written to be part of a drama performance.

I'm a beautiful blossoming flower, thriving in beauty, at least, that's what my owner told me.

I always felt like I was just one tiny flower among all the other gorgeous plants. I felt like I wasn't special, I felt like I did not deserve to be valued.

Until one day, *she* moved in and from then on, every morning at seven, she takes her watering can to the garden and greets all of us. She crouches down to get closer to me, she looks at me ever so fondly, and compliments on how unique and precious I am. She waters me ever so gently as if I am way too fragile for the world.

I'm so grateful, that she cares for me like nothing else. I'm so grateful, that she nurtures me, sings to me, and talks to me, as if I am valued and important. It is as if I am loved, and cherished.

Valerie Chan 3T (2020 – 21)

Last but not least, this monologue is from Valerie's original collection of writing.

It's in captivating eyes and smiles,
in the little wrinkles
at the corners of a mouth.
It's in laughing even when times are hard,
and crying at night.
It's in streetlights
and innocent children
and tired commuters.
It's in the split second when you run and
you just fly through the air,
and in the moment when you stand under a
bright spotlight with applause
ringing in your ears.

It's in road trips,
when there's music playing
and there's this hazy feeling
and everything is just perfect.
It's when you call someone,
and they pick up on the first ring.
It's in knowing someone
and never running out of things to say.
It's in reading a book
during a thunderstorm.
It's in finding a song
that represents you ever so well.
It's when the orchestra reaches a crescendo
and it's grand and dreamy and stunning.



It's the moment
when weeks of hard work suddenly converge
into a glorious moment of tears and shock.
It's when you stand watching the sun rise
and the entire world is quiet,
and that small slice of time is filled with peace and light.
It's under a starry night sky,
when the slightly smoky smell of the fire fills the air
and you realise how big the universe really is.

It's in fighting together,
having people stand beside you
and behind you in unity.
It's in believing,
and holding firm to that belief.
It's in dreams
of a better world,
one where everyone can just be themselves.
It's in the feeling of freedom,
and vindication,
joy and peacefulness.
It's this strange quality,
one that no one can explain,
but it's filled with love and life.

Lyrics Writing Competition 2020

The Music Society, St. Paul's Convent School

The Music Society organised the Lyrics Writing Competition 2020 with the theme of Gratitude to express appreciation to medical workers for battling the COVID-19 pandemic. Participants re-write the lyrics of a pop song or a hymn from the hymnal to express their gratitude to all the medical workers for their selfless service during the pandemic. The competition was well received with 115 entries. This chapter includes some of the English winning entries.



Lyrics Writing Competition 2020

The Best English Lyrics Award <i>4P Natalie Tam (2020-21)</i>	134 – 135
The Best Theme Song Award <i>2S Hosanna Lee, Peony Tsang, Sun Wong and Cecilia Yip (2020-21)</i>	136 – 137
The Best Hymn Song Award <i>1L Valerie Lau, Milly Tung, Phoebe Lau and Katie Cheung (2020-21)</i>	138
The Most Creative Award <i>2S Fiona Chan, Bernice Fong, Chloe Fung and Katie Wong (2020-21)</i>	139 – 140
The Best Singing Award <i>2A Tiffany Ho, Sherman Ho, Jasmine Lam and Annika Suen (2020-21)</i>	141 – 142
The Best Participation Award <i>2S Audrey Lee, Abbie Leung, Cherene Ngai and Michelle Yeung (2020-21)</i>	143 – 144
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Lyrics Writing Competition 2020

The Music Society, St. Paul's Convent School

The Best English Lyrics Award

Yesterday (Original Song: Ours by Taylor Swift)

Natalie Tam 4P (2020 – 2021)



Yesterday

Quiet streets that once are hustled with noise
Empty racks for toilet paper in stores
Who had thought the days of week would be the first to go
What day is it? I'm not sure I know

Life stopped yet news and numbers do not
Every week the confirmed cases topped
We were quarantined yet people still had their parties
The indifference, selfishness robbed

It only seemed like yesterday when
We could go out free no mask on
And distancing, weren't a thing
This pandemic, made us rethink
What mattered most

The confinement is putting us in distress
Nostalgia to what it all could have been
Aspirations, goals and dreams all locked a door away
But for the best, here's where we'll stay

It only seemed like yesterday when
We could go out free no mask on
And distancing, weren't a thing
This pandemic, made us rethink
What mattered most

Though the self-isolation doesn't make us manic
Such crucial times stimulate fear and breeds panic
I've never guessed that I'll miss school, or the
endless work

Now simple walks outside mean much
Small conversations with friends and such
We shall pull each other through this page in history
Though miles apart, never in heart

It only seemed like yesterday when
We could go out free no mask on
And distancing, weren't a thing
The world has stopped for once and we can find
Clearer streams and cleaner skies and we
Realised what matters most
All this time is life

To live our full
Do what we should
Not waste a day

Lyrics Writing Competition 2020

The Music Society, St. Paul's Convent School

The Best Theme Song Award

Together We Stand (Original Song: The Next Right Thing by *Kristen Bell*)

Hosanna Lee, Peony Tsang, Sun Wong and Cecilia Yip 2S (2020 – 2021)

Together We Stand

I've been feared before, but not like this
What is wrong? This is scary, all are lost
The sadness gnaws at my chest, it breaks my heart
The pain of loss is tearing me apart

We pray all day and night, we always do
Yet the virus is still spreading over
The worries flow through my skin, they drown me down
But a spark of hope guides me through the dark

Wear your mask, wash your hands
Don't go out too much
Just pray that it will end

The nurses and docs are kind and brave
Risk their lives, heal the sick, deal with deaths
All the smiles on all the faces that you have served
You'll always be in our thoughts and our prayers

Thank you nurses and docs
For healing us with love and care
Just pray that it will end
Stand up tall, lift my head
It is all that I can to live
Each day with faith

I won't look too far ahead
It's too hard for me to guess
But with belief we can make it, defeat it
Trust in joy and live hope for us all

Let's arise from our fear
Breaking free out of the dark
Just pray that it will end
Let us stand strong, side by side
I believe that everything is going to be great again

Let's be firm and brave. Don't be afraid

Let's arise from our fear
Breaking free out of the dark
Just pray that it will end
Let us stand strong, side by side
I believe that everything is going to be great again

Let's be firm and brave. Don't be afraid

Lyrics Writing Competition 2020

The Music Society, St. Paul's Convent School

The Best Hymn Song Award

He

Valerie Lau, Milly Tung, Phoebe Lau, Katie Cheung 1L (2020 – 2021)



He

Thanks to all the people who care about us
Give hope to the people who are suffering
With the help of Jesus we will cross the pain
And we will pray to God who saved us from death
God is the representative of love

We should thank Him and
follow His words
We are the Paulinians that
show kindness to everyone in the world

Jesus is with us the whole time when we cry
We are with my Heavenly Father whole time
God will bless the Earth and who are suffering
And we should praise God who brings us a new life

We should be grateful with a humble heart
The Holy Spirit is always watching us
God is the guide who leads our life to learn
We should be grateful with true heart

Lyrics Writing Competition 2020

The Music Society, St. Paul's Convent School

The Most Creative Award

Savage COVID (Original Song: Savage Love by Jason Derulo & Jawsh 685)

Fiona Chan, Bernice Fong, Chloe Fung, Katie Wong 2S (2020 – 2021)



Savage COVID

If I tested positive for COVID what can I do
Fortunately we have doctors and the nurses
Corona knock us down knock us down
everyday
Keeping the doctors and nurses from day to night

I just found out medical personnel are exhausted
We should stay strong and fight the virus that affecting us
Corona damage us damage us back to back
We should be so grateful grateful to
who helped us

Bored at home can I go out
Can I travel far away
But hey

Corona I don't want you anymore just go away
Nothing to do bored and cry a long river
When you're here
I just dunno what to do
Cus I don't want that

That Savage COVID
That Savage CO-CO-COVID
That Savage CO-CO-COVID
You could leave now
Cause we don't want that

Baby, I hope coronavirus doesn't get u down
We wanna go get out, right after locking down
Usually I wake up at 7 now I sleep in
Quarantine got me sleeping until straight 10am
Every night and every day
I try to clean this place
But you

Savage COVID
Did somebody did somebody bring you here
Doctors act as angels
Because of Savage COVID
When you come here
I know you weren't meant to stay

But we don't want that
This Savage COVID

This Savage CO-CO-COVID
This Savage CO-CO-COVID
Hey you're not welcome
Cause we don't want that
This Savage COVID

This Savage CO-CO-COVID
This Savage CO-CO-COVID
You're not going to stay
And we don't want that
This Savage COVID
This Savage CO-CO-COVID
This Savage CO-CO-COVID
You're not going to stay

Lyrics Writing Competition 2020

The Music Society, St. Paul's Convent School

The Best Singing Award

Fight the Virus 2020 (Original Song: Photograph by *Ed Sheeran*)

Tiffany Ho, Sherman Ho, Jasmine Lam, Annika Suen 2A (2020 – 2021)



Fight the Virus 2020

These days are hard,
These days are hard sometimes.
Giving your all and saving us.

And when it gets worse,
You know it can get worse sometimes.
All of the effort you've put into us.

We say our thanks in this song.
We thank you for helping us out.

When the times virus hits us,
Frightened worried fearful,
you were by our sides still.

So we say thanks to
Doctors and nurses who have helped us.
Leaving your loved ones to save others.
We won't have to be afraid.
I'll be safe to come home.

You've been here,
You've been here all day.
Countless days and nights you've been here.

I swear it'll get easier.
Cause after all we're still here right here.
Fighting the virus every single day we live.

We say our thanks in this song.
We thank you for helping us out.

When the times virus hits us,
Frightened worried fearful,
you were by our sides still.

So we say thanks to
Doctors and nurses who have helped us.
Leaving your loved ones to save others.
We won't have to be afraid.

Maybe one day,
It'll all be over, we'll be free.
Live our lives like they used to be.
We won't have to be afraid.

I'll be safe to come home.
I'll be safe to come home.
I'll be safe to come home.
I'll be safe to come home.

Oh things will be fine.
If we wait for a while till the cure's found.
Everyone will be saved at last.
We'll be free to go home.

And maybe one day,
It'll all be over, we'll be free.
Live our lives like they used to be.
We won't have to be afraid.

Thanks again to
Doctors and nurses who have helped us.
Leaving your loved ones to save others.
We won't have to be afraid.
I'll be safe to come home.

Lyrics Writing Competition 2020

The Music Society, St. Paul's Convent School

The Best Participation Award

A Million Months with COVID-19 (Original Song: A Million Dreams)

Audrey Lee, Abbie Leung, Cherene Ngai, Michelle Yeung 2S (2020 – 2021)

A Million Months with COVID-19

I close my eyes and I still can't
Forget the world is suffering
Everyone wears masks
Through the dawn, through the dusk
Streets were always half empty
Not even a sound
We can say we are always grounded at home
We can say the virus is killing us
People stop interacting with their best friends
When can we live a normal life again?

Cause every night I return home
The room where dirty virus roams
The illnesses are keeping me awake
I think of what the world could be
Without the virus haunting me
Stay hygienic is all it's gonna take
A healthy world is what we're all gonna make

There's a war we must fight
Hospitals, clinics are full
With patients everywhere
Wearing masks in and out
No one ever sees your smile
On a rainy day
We can say we can say thank you to doctors
We can say we can say thank you to nurse
I don't know, I don't know if this will end soon
Runaway to a world without virus

Every night I return home
The room where dirty virus roams
The illnesses are keeping me awake
I think of what the world could be
Without the virus haunting me
Stay hygienic is all it's gonna take
Oh, a healthy world is what we're gonna make

However hard, we'll face the wall
Let us overcome it all
Share your dreams with me
We may be scared, but God is here
He is hearing us with all ears
To the world you see
To the world I close my eyes to see
I close my eyes to see

Cause every night I return home
The room where dirty virus roams
The illnesses are keeping me awake
COVID-19, COVID-19

I think of what the world could be
Without the virus haunting me
Stay hygienic is all it's gonna take
A healthy world is what we're all gonna make
For the world we're gonna make

Lyrics Writing Competition 2020

The Music Society, St. Paul's Convent School

The Best Participation Award

Light in COVID (Original Song: You're My Everything)

Sharon Yan 2S (2020 – 2021)



Light in COVID

Far beyond ourselves
Some people are there lying in the hospital
All alone in there fighting for their pulse
You and I have known them well
Calling on all nurse
and doctors in the big wide sacred Universe
Who are finding ways to finally break this curse
And with this we give thanks
to you

Look upon the sun
The stars are there in secret cheering on for us
Visions are not dark
As long as we keep shining through the sparks
Like Sar's

It's the era of
the virus partying no matter where the source
But we will not
behave and let it bring disgrace
to human race

Don't cry I'm always by your side
Be careful
Keep moral in your minds
and time will slowly wash away all that hurts
Dawn will come at last

Remember!

Look upon the sun

The stars are there in secret cheering on for us

Visions are not dark

As long as we keep shining through the sparks
like Sar's

Do your part

There's nothing to fear 'cause we're all smart

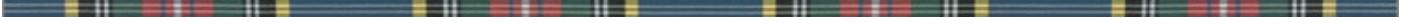
To be responsible

and do what we've been told

by moral

It'll be alright

Other Miscellaneous Work



This chapter includes other students' work ranging from poetry, individual and group project, and expressions of various themes. These tasks were carefully designed to provide diverse learning opportunities to students to hone their English for study, work, leisure and personal enrichment. You will have a glimpse of some of the many learning outcomes that showcase the remarkable versatility, creativity and conscientiousness of SPCS students.

Other Miscellaneous Work

Expressions — Story Writing <i>1S Stephanie Chow (2020-21)</i>	149 – 150
Magazine Article <i>1U Adele Chan (2020-21)</i>	151 – 154
Magazine Article <i>1L Natalie Leung (2020-21)</i>	155 – 159
Group Project — Travel Brochure <i>2S Dorothy Chan, Cherene Ngai, Annie Qin, Audrey Seng (2020-21)</i>	160 – 162
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Poem — I'll Watch You As We Ride <i>3U Chloe Lee (2020-21)</i>	166
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Expressions — Blog Entry On Virtual Tour <i>5A Cheryl Chan (2019-20)</i>	168 – 169
Expressions — Blog Entry On Virtual Tour <i>5P Natalie Fung (2019-20)</i>	170 – 171
Descriptive Writing — River <i>5U Louisa Law (2020-21)</i>	172

Other Miscellaneous Work

Expressions — Story Writing

Stephanie Chow 1S (2020 — 2021)

The challenge:

Write a story about having supernatural powers.



One Hour

I sighed. I was staring at my Expressions book, trying to think of what to write. Sadly, the ideas just weren't coming to me. After an hour, I gave up and decided to have a break by strolling on the streets randomly.

I wasn't paying much attention to my surroundings while walking. In fact, I was so distracted that I tripped over a rusty oil lamp!

Frowning, I picked it up. Being a bookworm, I'd heard many stories about genies that lived in lamps. It seemed crazy to imagine that a genie was inside, but I was feeling crazy after spending so much time brainstorming ideas for my Expressions entry. Carefully, I rubbed the surface of the lamp.

Immediately, a huge ball of smoke flew out of it! The smoke twisted and turned and swirled, until it solidified and turned into a buff guy.

'I am Darius, a genie,' the man rumbled. 'Thank you so much for freeing me from this curse! It would be my greatest honour to reward you! Unfortunately, I'm not very powerful. Hmm...' he snapped his fingers. 'From now on, you'll have the power of time-travelling! You can travel to the past whenever you want!'

My eyes lit up instantly. 'Oh my goodness! Thank you so much!' I gasped.

'But... there's a drawback,' Darius replied. 'My magic is limited, so your power will have restrictions. You will only be able to travel to one hour prior.'

The gleam in my eyes vanished right away. I tried my best to hide my disappointment. 'Thanks anyway, Darius.'

Smiling, he snapped his fingers and disappeared.

I felt a bit bitter. Sure, time-travelling was cool, but I was so certain that I'd be able to visit the dinosaur times, or at least catch a glimpse of how my parents looked when they were young! Instead, I was stuck with the one-hour limit.

While I was busy thinking about my useless powers, I heard a man's loud, gruff voice demanding something, followed by a woman's muffled scream. I whipped my head to the source of the sound and found that it had come from a nearby bank.

Robbers, I thought immediately. Quickly, I sprinted towards the bank and stood in a corner where the robber—a man who resembled a ninja with a black scarf tied around his nose and mouth—couldn't see me.

From my hiding place, I could see the robber pointing a gun at a woman's head. 'Give me ALL the cash from ALL the vaults, unless you want me to do her in. NOW!'

I trembled with fear. I mean, it wasn't every day that you witnessed a robbery, right?

I wanted nothing more than to shoot the robber with his own gun and arrest him, but he was probably twice as strong and muscular as I was. My head started spinning. I could never stop this robbery unless I did something stealthy, something that would prevent it...

Then it hit me. An hour? That was much more than I needed.

I braced myself and whispered, 'Take me to fifteen minutes ago, when the robber was still preparing for the robbery.'

I was immediately surrounded by a dazzling white glow, and I closed my eyes instinctively.

I opened my eyes after the light had finally faded. Looking around, I saw that nothing had changed, apart from the bank, which, of course, was still open. The robber was nowhere to be seen.

I scanned the road in front of me and fixed my gaze at a car. I stepped closer and saw the driver open its door, rushing in the direction of the restroom. In the driver's seat, there was something that looked very much like a gun.

The car door was unlocked, so I simply went inside and took the gun away, hoping that the robber didn't have a spare one. I ran out of the car, hid the gun in my jeans pocket and approached the bank.

A few minutes later, the man came back into his car. It took him about three seconds to notice that his gun was missing, and when he did, he cursed so loudly that he got many strange looks from pedestrians.

This probably meant that he hadn't got a spare gun, which satisfied me. However, I still wanted to make sure that he didn't rob the bank. I glanced at my watch. It was 17:00 now, which meant that the original robbery would start at around 17:15. Patiently, I waited for the fifteen minutes to pass.

And when it did, the bank kept running as usual.

After all this shock, I discarded the gun and dashed back home as quickly as possible. Using my superpower once again, I travelled to an hour before and saw my past self staring at her blank Expressions book.

'Hey,' I said to her, trying to keep my voice steady. I'm not going to go in details about how weird it is to be having a conversation with yourself. 'This is your future self from an hour later. Don't ask any questions; you'll understand everything once I'm done telling you what's happened.' I reeled off about how I'd met Darius the genie and witnessed the robbery. 'You need to study for your Life and Society test tomorrow, plus memorize the monologue that you're going to be presenting in your Speech and Drama lesson. Stop wasting your time thinking of what you're going to put in your Expressions assignment! Write all that down in your entry as a story. Although it's not. Mrs Ho will have a good laugh, not realizing what she's reading is true. At the end of the so-called story, add a line stating that a seemingly useless power might turn out to be life-saving.'

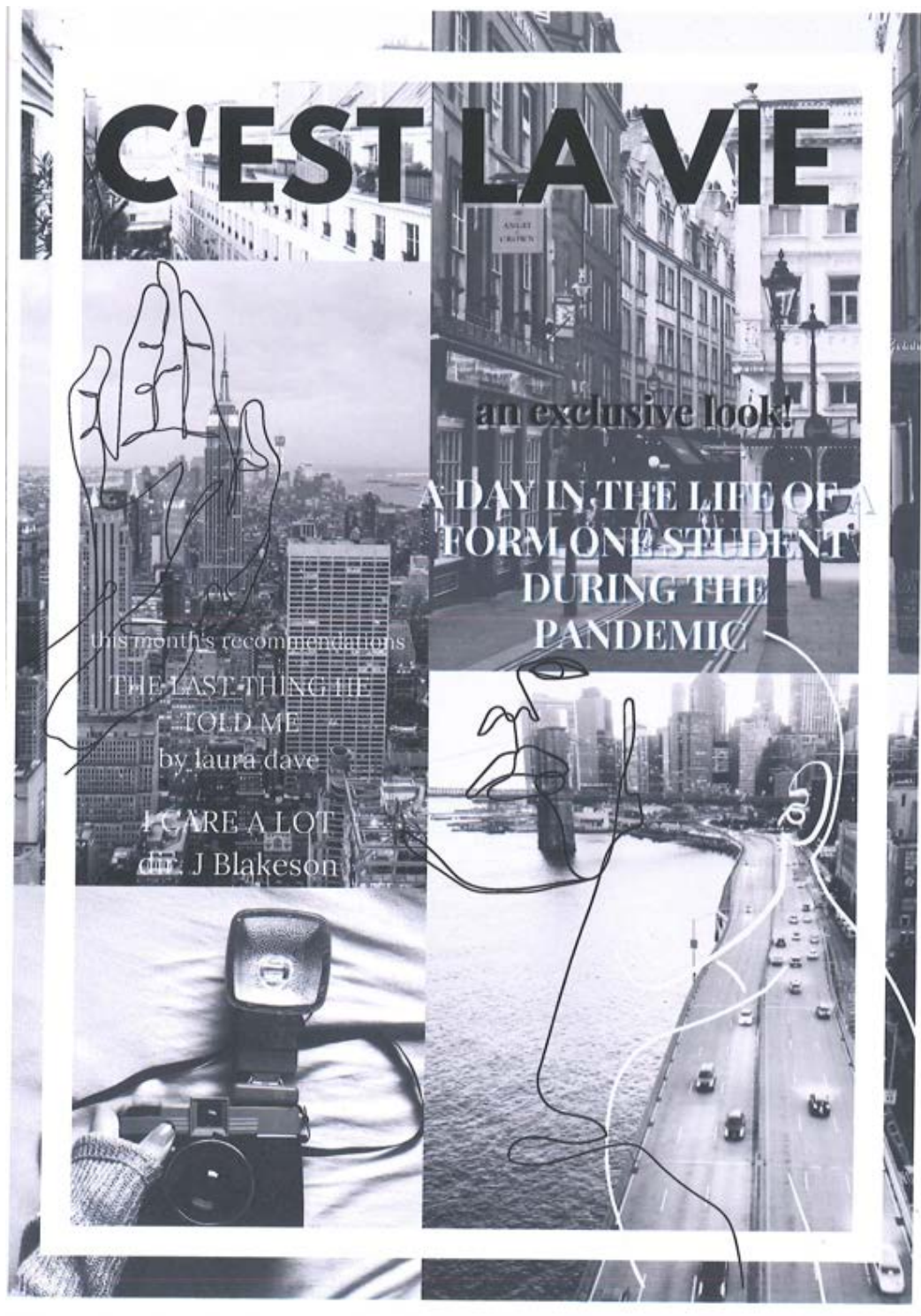
Other Miscellaneous Work

Magazine Article

Adele Chan 1U (2020 — 2021)

The theme:

A day in the life of a F.1 student during the pandemic



a day in the life of a form one student during the pandemic

Ellie, 12, recently started her first year at secondary school. "It's hard to adapt," she said. "Changing to a new school especially in this current situation may have affected my concentration on schoolwork. I'd much rather see my friends at face-to-face school than logging on to my computer every day." Ellie wishes that everything will go back to normal soon. She reminded everyone to sanitise frequently, and to be safe. "The pandemic taught me not to take things for granted and to take care of myself. Always making sure that I'm wearing a mask properly, or if I'm washing my hands enough is tiring. I'm sure that if we all work together, we will get through this successfully!"



Many students also feel the same. Now that face-to-face classes have resumed, we were curious if Ellie feels happier. "I am happier. I get to see my friends and teachers in the flesh, but I still feel restricted. I'm not allowed out of the house that much other than travelling between my school and my home." Ellie explained that dealing with the harsher workload of secondary school, it has been a hard year for all F1 students, especially the ones that needed to change schools. Being a student this year was very tough, but we should remain positive and simply hope for the better.

WHAT TO DO DURING THE PANDEMIC

We're all feeling frantic in this time, what with checking the news all the time, or simply coping with living in the pandemic. Here are some relaxing activities that you could do to calm down:

Just treat yourself to a nice bubble bath!

Try doing some exercise, like yoga.

Bake with your family during the weekend!

Complete a puzzle.

Write in a journal.

Watch a movie or read a book! (Feel free to check out the ones we recommended)

must read

the last thing he told me

The main character of the story, Hannah is settling into a new life as a stepmom and wife, when her husband suddenly goes missing after the FBI raided his office. All that he left her was 600 thousand dollars and a note that said, 'Protect her.' If the thrilling start doesn't hook you— a missing husband, a duffel bag of cash, a cryptic note and teenage stepdaughter drama— wait till you find out how it ends. Laura Dave gives a new meaning to the phrase 'you can never judge a book by its cover' with her gripping tale of love, deception and disappearance.



"I dare you to stop reading."

Susie Yang, New York Times best-selling author of *White Ivy*

must watch

i care a lot.



In this fresh thriller/comedy, Rosamund Pike stars as a court-appointed legal guardian who defrauds her older clients and traps them under her care. But her most recent mark comes with some unexpected baggage, unwillingly connecting Rosamund's character, Marla to a powerful gangster. *I Care A Lot* officially premiered at TIFF on September 12, 2020, now streaming on Netflix and Prime Video since February 19.

"An unexpectedly gripping thriller that seesaws between comedy and horror, 'I Care A Lot' is cleverly written and wonderfully cast."

The New York Times



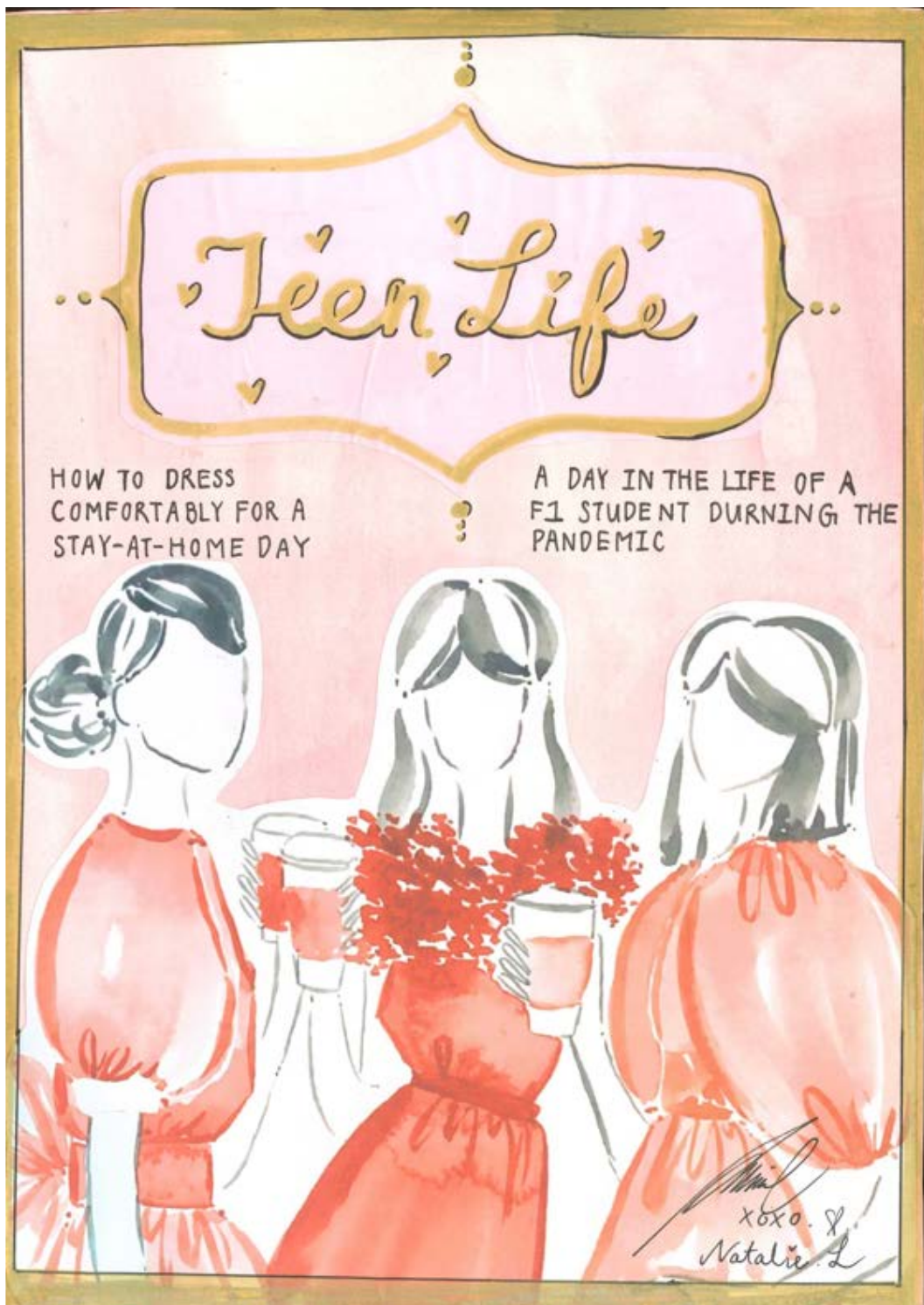
Other Miscellaneous Work

Magazine Article

Natalie Leung 1L (2020 — 2021)

The theme:

A day in the life of a F.1 student during the pandemic



Teen Life

-Tips and tricks for teens

By Natalie Leung

Illustrations by Natalie Leung



Contents:

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Today's Style

HOW TO DRESS
COMFORTABLY FOR A
STAY-AT-HOME DAY

Secret

*Wear a set of comfy pyjamas.
To make your whole-look look
presentable, choose a set of
pyjamas that are the same colour
and tuck the front in to create
a more feminine and elegant look.*

*To make things more comfortable
and easy at home, tie your hair up
into a bun so that you don't have
To worry about your hair dangling
around your face.*

*Wear a pair of
slippers so that
your feet won't
get cold walking
on the ground*



A day in the life of a Form 1 student during the pandemic

What do you think a day in the life of a Form 1 student during the pandemic looks like? Do you think it will be interesting? Do you think it will be fun? Or do you think it will be quite typical, just a normal day for a thirteen year old kid? Let me tell you. For a Form 1 student that has just entered into the next stage of their school life during a 'lockdown-virus mode', it is actually a mixed bag. Although they have the time to get used to a new work schedule, they are missing out on all of the fun and life-changing experiences that a middle school student will usually have. Let me explain by showing you a glimpse of what my typical day looks like.

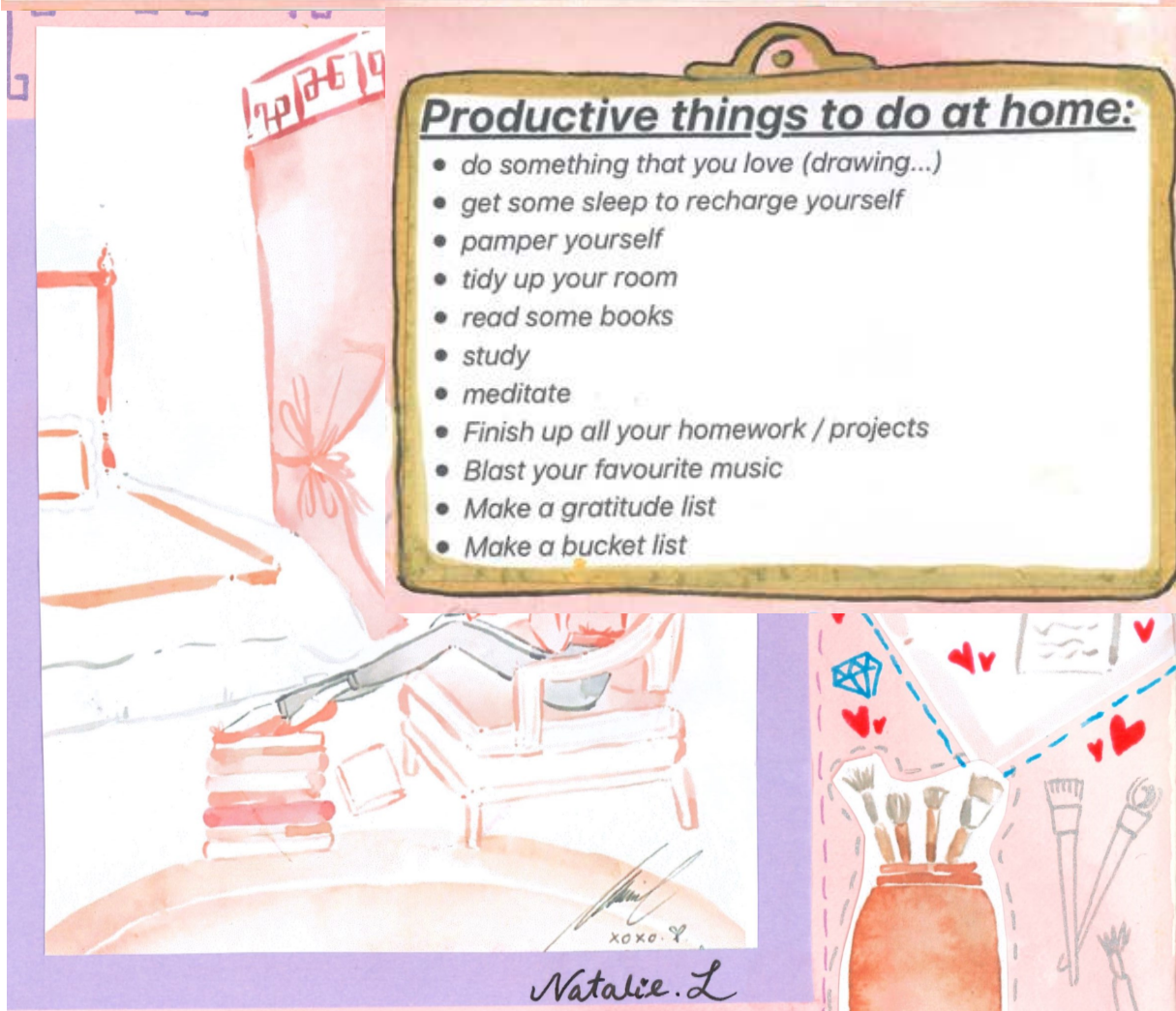
Everyday, I am woken up by my body clock, at 7:00a.m. Even on the weekends. I am a morning person, so this is natural and comfortable. After a leisurely breakfast with my parents, in the warm sunshine that is beaming through my floor to ceiling windows, I log into my zoom account and prepare (mentally and physically) for my first lesson of the day, form period. After our morning chat with the teacher we pray and sing a hymn, and then get ready for the real lessons ahead. The day in front of my computer is filled with eight lessons and three short breaks, just enough time to walk around and stretch my legs after sitting uncomfortably on my silky, soft, squishy chair. The school day ends just in time for lunch and for the teacher to upload different assignments that I need to complete. Even though I am doing all of my regular school work, I don't get to eat lunch with my friends, to walk around the block, to chat.

In the afternoon I try to break away from all electronic devices and really focus on human-interaction and communication by having a student come to my house where I teach her drawing. This is also a great way to help me to achieve the goal that I set during school of improving my money management. Until now, I've already managed to save enough money to pay for my next year's school fees, and even had some left over to buy a delicious and divine lunch for my deserving parents. After this lesson, which lasts for one and a half hours, I tidy up all my art supplies and start working on my homework. Thankfully, the work-load for homework isn't a lot considering the teachers give us at least five days to complete our work. I always try to complete everything at least three days before the deadline so that I don't give myself too much stress. Then, it's 3:00 p.m.

On one very special day, after all of my work was done for the day, I changed into my school uniform and with the company of my parents went to HKSYU University to attend an award ceremony; I was awarded first place in the 'Green Book: Nature and me' competition. I was overjoyed and felt over the moon to see that my art teacher, Ms Kim,

even attended the ceremony with me. I was flattered to be interviewed on the thoughts and designs behind my artwork and enjoyed the tour of the university afterwards. They even let me try the new VR-technology that they are developing. It was such an amazing experience and I was so grateful for all the love and support that I got from everyone. After the amazing time that I had I went home to have dinner because, as usual, we weren't safe dining outside during the pandemic.

My days come to an end with a scrumptious meal, time to study and finish up my projects and then joining my parents for movie nights. This is when I decide to call it a day and go to bed. The most special part of my day happens at the latest time when my mom talks to me before I go to sleep. We talk about my day, her day, what's new, what's happening and the best times are when we lose track of time and it's already 11:00 p.m. so it really is time for bed. I wish that there were more topics that I could speak to my mom about, more about my school life. Keep your fingers crossed that everything will get back to normal.



Other Miscellaneous Work

Group Project — Travel Brochure

2S Dorothy Chan, Cherene Ngai, Annie Qin, Audrey Seng (2020 — 2021)

CADAHA Travel Agency

Introduction

Could you ever imagine a Xanadu with a combination of contemporary architecture in a bustling metropolis with a cosmopolitan and culturally diverse population, picturesque natural scenery and renowned tourist attractions? Ranging from authentic cuisine to uniquely-designed infrastructure, along with fascinating scenic views, Australia has it all!

The world is too big to be left unexplored.

Dream, explore and discover Australia with CADAHA Travel Agency!!!

4-day-3-night Australia Trip Budget

Adult: 30,000 HKD (5,000 AUD);
Children under 12: 20,000 HKD (3,356 AUD)
{Early birds (full payment before 15th April) will receive an exclusive 5% discount.}

FUEL YOUR SOUL WITH AUSTRALIA AND BEYOND.

Agents
2S(2) Dorothy Chan,
2S(22) Cherene Ngai,
2S(23) Annie Qin,
2S(24) Audrey Seng

Itinerary

Day 1 Discover the Capital of Australia - Sydney

Modern and sophisticated, Sydney is definitely a must-go city for tourists! With stunning and world-famous landmarks, I am sure you'll all enjoy it firsthand! Upon arrival and settlement in Park Hyatt, a Five-star graded hotel overseeing the Darling Harbour, we will visit the Sydney Opera House, one of the most prominent landmarks around the globe where you can enjoy dozens of live performances! Don't be fooled by its name, it's not just about opera, providing musical, theatre, dance and comedy performance! What's more? It's not only great on the inside, but it also has a shape of complex architectural style which makes it one of the most photographed landmarks in the world.



Just a mile away, the Sydney Harbour Bridge is the perfect spot for photo-taking. The iconic Sydney Harbour Bridge is the largest steel through arch bridge globally. The spectacular view of it will truly blow your mind away! Both tourist attractions are the top Australian cultural icons, I guarantee that you will be astonished by it!

Day 2 Admire the Beauty of the Picturesque Port Stephens

Port Stephens is nothing but perfect for anyone regardless of age, gender and preferences! Home to golden beaches, national parklands and endless bays, it is flawless for a day of spiritual meditation, admiration and exhilaration! Visualise yourself being massaged by the warm sand as the waves gently brush your feet. How relaxing it would be! Hop on a boat cruise in Nelson Bay to adore wild bottlenose dolphins and whales! Experience your trip to the fullest! Push your boundaries! Go sand boarding down the massive Sand Dunes at Anna Bay! There is surely something for everyone at Port Stephens!



Day 3 Explore Nature & Wildlife in Springbrook National Park

Looking for internal peace and exciting adventures? Sounds contradicting, right? However, paying a visit to Springbrook will fulfil them both!



Enlisted in Queensland's five World Heritage Properties and the World Heritage Family, Springbrook of course has its distinctive features. Its natural sceneries are more than fabulous: spectacular waterfalls, lush forests, steep gorges... imagine being in the park right now and listening to the water cascading down the cliff, doesn't that feel great?



Besides, Springbrook is the habitat of an incredible variety of wildlife. More than 100 bird species live in this not-yet-urbanised area and some of them are rare ancient species. Some endangered species also choose to settle down here. It is full of Australia's oldest trees and plants too. This is the heaven for nature lovers!

Do you want to see things other than concrete forests in busy cities? This is the right place! Broaden your horizon by exploring walking routes with us. There must be something here that will draw your attention!

Day 4 Away from the Urban at the Great Barrier Reef

Aren't you overwhelmed by the hustle and bustle of city life? Don't you long for mental liberation? Come join us and quench your thirst with the absolute tranquility of the Great Barrier Reef. Honoured as one of the seven wonders, this UNESCO World Heritage stretches to miles away to meet the horizon, inhabiting a wide array of marine life. In this majestic fantasy, not only will you embrace spiritual solace, but you will also find yourself mesmerizing in awe at the breathtaking natural scenery! The vibrant-coloured coral reefs embedded in the crystal-clear ocean is like a diamond contrasting the light blue sky.





Don't you anticipate the trip?
Join CADAHA agency's
travel package this instance to
enjoy the magnificent
landmarks and gourmet of
Australia!

Let us be your passport to the
world!



Australia Culinary Delights

We invite you to immerse in the intricate gastronomy escapade in Australia. With luxurious restaurants, rural housing vineyards, delicate boutique winery, gourmet cuisines and fusions await you! Have a blissful taste of fresh seafood, like lobsters and oysters at seafood fisheries. Devour the best fish and chips in Australia! Savour the flavourable national symbol, kanga bangers! You will find yourself jubilantly relishing the complementing blends of diversified textures and sumptuous flavours!



Is that it? That's a sure 'no'! There are so much more mysteries yet to be uncovered! Sports fanatics, what pops up in your mind right now? Take this golden opportunity to snorkel and scuba-dive! Indulge yourself with the fascinating underwater world, search for the silhouette of mystic sea creatures and understand the severity of devastation human activities have brought to the ecosystem. This awe-inspiring wonderland is, without a doubt, the best destination!

Other Miscellaneous Work

Group Project — Travel Brochure

2S Katie Wong, Hazel Wong, Athena Yu (2020-21)



Day 1

On the first day of the trip, you will visit some famous tourist spots in New York! The most worth visiting spot must be the Statue of Liberty. It is the most iconic infrastructure in New York. Do you know what this statue represents? Located on Liberty Island in New York Harbor, the statue commemorates the friendship between the United States and France that began during the American Revolution. Over the years, the Statue of Liberty has symbolized freedom and democracy in the United States. Moreover, if you are a big fan of history, the American Museum of Natural History would be the best choice for you! The museum is located on the Upper West Side of Manhattan, New York City. It is a wonderland of more than 30 million artifacts including tons of dinosaur skeletons, a cutting edge planetarium—the Rose Center for Earth & Space. You should not miss the Great Blue Whale which is located in the Milstein Hall of Ocean Life! It is a 94 feet long and 21,000 pounds sculpture. The blue whale is a great reminder of the majesty of the blue whales, which are nearly extinct. If you are a green lover and you would like a tranquil environment to relax, Central Park must be your first priority! The park is home to scenic hills and many well-known attractions. For example, Strawberry Fields is a memorial to John Lennon, who was tragically murdered in front of the Dakota apartments just off the west side of the park. Also, Bethesda Fountain is one of the architectural highlights of Central Park which is a popular photo-taking site and a pleasant area to relax.



The American Museum of Natural History

Day 2

To make the trip truly unforgettable, you will try out different famous iconic dishes in New York. You will have meals on the streets throughout the whole afternoon. Yes, **ON THE STREET!** The food trucks is one of the unique cultures in New York. They sell many different kinds of food and drinks at affordable prices. Some popular trucks such as Birria Landia, Mystikk Masala and Makina Cafe are highly recommended. The trucks provide not only American food, but also cuisine from other countries such as India and Mexico. Customers can experience the real American lifestyle through this dining experience. For dinner, you will visit a high-end restaurant: Blue Hill Restaurant. You will indulge in a culinary experience prepared by the best chefs in USA.





* Bergdorf Goodman



Day 3

Shopping is one of the most important parts in a trip. On the last day of the trip, you will have a shopping spree at some famous shops. The first shop you will visit is The Strand, paradise of book lovers. The book shop has lots of books and there must be one you like! There's one section that you must check out, that's the \$1 section! You can buy your favourite book with just \$1! New York is the fashion design capital in America. Many notable brands and designers are in New York and one of the top fashion shops is Bergdorf Goodman, landmark of New York. The clothing, handbags and accessories of this brand are gorgeous, but the building itself is the most fascinating of all! The ten-floor high building is all filled with fashion collections. Other than these well-known shops, Memories of New York is the best choice for buying souvenirs. The shop has a variety of souvenirs, such as postcards, clothing, keychains, cups, etc. All products are in 'New York style' with either the word New York on them or have New York attractions' pictures on them. You can buy some souvenirs for your family and friends! We will surely give you the best shopping experience ever and create an unforgettable memory for you on the last day of the trip!

Other Miscellaneous Work

Poem — I'll Watch You As We Ride

Chloe Lee 3U (2020 — 2021)

I'll Watch You As We Ride

Cycling from Tuen Mun to Siu Hong and back,
With me on the red bike and you on the black.
Two bright apples falling from the same tree,
No matter where you ride you'll stay with me.

Two years ago you fell while going round a bend,
I kissed you where it hurt and whispered "cuts always mend."
"Watch out now!" when passing that turn on our path,
If it trips and injures you again it'll cause my wrath.

A singer in the park plugs in his powerful speaker,
Chinese songs surround us, never getting weaker.
Riding side by side we see his graceful bow,
His tunes compete with Queen's Don't Stop Me Now.

The Light Rail trundles by us, Skritch! Scratch!
Mirroring the flapping of the fisherman's catch.
Heed not the cars' deafening roars as we glide,
I'll always protect you because you're my pride.

Two gaunt and hungry hounds snarl and stare,
But as long as I'm here the invaders won't dare.
Never you worry for I'm always by your side,
Never fear brother, I'll watch you as we ride.

Other Miscellaneous Work

Poem — Keep Moving

Lorraine Wu 3U (2020 — 2021)



Keep Moving

Cycling from Tuen Mun to Siu Hong and back,
With me on the red bike and you on the black.
Two bright apples falling from the same tree,
No matter where you ride you'll stay with me.

Two years ago you fell while going round a bend,
I kissed you where it hurt and whispered "cuts always mend."
"Watch out now!" when passing that turn on our path,
If it trips and injures you again it'll cause my wrath.

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Never you worry for I'm always by your side,
Never fear brother, I'll watch you as we ride.

Other Miscellaneous Work

Expressions — Blog Entry On Virtual Tour

Cheryl Chan 5A (2019 — 2020)

Blog Entry on Virtual Tour to Louvre Museum

Posted on 20th April, 2020

First half year of this decade, the whole world is battered by anxiety and restlessness amid the handling of the deadly virus, COVID-19. Whilst countries impose strict social distancing and lockdown measures, there's no way for me to drop by a museum and ease my boredom. So here I am, sharing with you my experience in a virtual tour to Louvre Museum because there is virtually nothing that could stop me from getting in touch with the outside world!

The virtual tour experience was just so vivid and simulative of the real world. While scrolling through the route, it was as if I were physically wandering in the exhibitions and masterpieces of art. I've always heard of the cupid angel that represents love and now I finally got the chance to witness the statue depicting the love story between Cupid and his partner. Being one of the last of the era-defining Italians, the Psyche Revived by Cupid's Kiss captures the most poignant moment of the love story with extreme tenderness. I was especially engrossed in the delicacy and elegance of the artwork.

Moving on, I headed for the enthralling artwork of the Raft of the Medusa. This dynamic and striking piece depicting sailors on board left adrift on an impoverished raft and mourning for succour grabbed my attention once I entered the exhibition hall. This masterpiece has been said to be a revolutionary work that marks a seismic shift from idealised themes in Neo-classicism to the more dramatic and emotional vibe of Romanticism. Even as an art accustomed audience, I was astounded at the shiver it brings me for the macabre sights of men aboard the raft. Of course, I spent just as much time as I wished appreciating the artwork because there was nobody blocking my view or limiting my viewing period (which would otherwise be less enjoyable physically touring around the exhibition)!

Certainly, I could not have missed a glimpse of the world-known and legendary masterpiece of the Mona Lisa by Leonardo da Vinci. I found my way to the enigmatic painting. Well, the route was slightly more complicated than I expected because there wasn't a crowd to divert the right way; but the art was definitely worth the wait. The Mona Lisa intrigued me with her controversial smile. Was she happy? Sad? Pensive? Perplexed? The expression she had was just so obscure that I was left clueless even after taking advantage of the exclusive benefit of virtual tours — zooming in the artwork to give a closer look (there is always a restricted distance between visitors and the masterpiece in real-life museums so we can't really see the details of it). Nonetheless, the technique used by Da Vinci called 'sfumato' in which he layered coats of semi-transparent paint washes was just so masterly employed that a sense of three dimensions were created merely using light and dark. The amazement and awe I felt when looking into this renowned portrait of a definite air of mystery and enigma were absolutely remarkable and unforgettable.

This was more or less my experience virtually touring around the Louvre Museum and witnessing all the captivating paintings and sculptures. What I want to highlight is the fact that virtual tours do indeed have their advantages and uniqueness over real-life tours, so please do not hesitate to try out the joy in having a virtual tour while staying at home to practise social-distancing!

Other Miscellaneous Work

Expressions — Blog Entry On Virtual Tour

Natalie Fung 5P (2019 — 2020)

The Captivating Calrsbad Caves (from my bedroom)

Posted on 20th April, 2020

The gentle trickling of water down the stream, the echoing pitter-patter of your feet down a historical wonder, the quiet shuffling signs of life in a corner — doesn't that sound like a right dream, particularly during these times of quarantine? This afternoon — I was able to visit a wonderful and captivating place that I have always wanted to visit since I learnt of its existing — the Carlsbad Caves.

Before you get into a frenzy about me potentially violating social distancing guidelines, let me reassure you this — I have not placed a single foot out of my home for three whole weeks, and have no intentions of doing otherwise for the near future. Well, you might ask — how would that be possible? Let me introduce you to this amazing thing — virtual tours by Google Arts and Culture. This platform boats virtual tours of national parks with astounding sceneries and enrichening history, all voiced and led by experienced tour guides who practically live and breathe the national parks itself. Of course, as a self-proclaimed “traveller” with Carlsbad Caves having long since been the top of my bucket list, I jumped at this opportunity and I can't wait to tell you all about my experience!

The virtual tour starts off with an introduction from Pamela, the tour guide, covering how the swarms of bats flying to and from the caves has led to its discovery, how the caves are rumoured to have been formed over the course of million sand millions of years, its general features, and the tour guide's own experience with the Caves and how she is best qualified to guide this virtual tour.

Whether it's from a bird's eye view or from an “eye-level”, the virtual tour covers Carlsbad Caves from all angles, and combined with its background noises recorded from the source itself — water trickling gently down a stream or a faint flutter of bat wings somewhere off to the side — at points, the virtual tour was so engaging that if I concentrated just a little harder, I felt as if I were standing in this marvellous place myself. The Caves are absolutely captivating, and in a sense, so much more different than just looking at mere pictures and videos online.

The editing of the scenes, the soft yet assured explanations, the background noises — all perfectly captured by essence of Carlsbad Caves, lending voices to the flowing stream, the ragged foundations of the caves, whispering of an ancient and astounding place, and going on the tour, and being able to feel as though I were physically at the place, had lent me a window of peace amidst this time of turmoil, and being on the tour had felt like reuniting with nature, and being at one with Earth and all her wonders again.

I do have to admit, I did have some reservations about virtual tours before, because how would looking at mere images even compare to actually visiting a place in any possible way? Well, this virtual

tour completely changed my mind, and I would definitely be touring Carlsbad Caves virtually again. While I would definitely be the first to jump at visiting it in real life over virtual tours anyways, virtual tours do come with their own perks and it is definitely worth giving it a go. For instance, virtual tours mean that you can visit your favourite places anytime, anywhere, regardless of any pesky opening hours or weather conditions. Moreover, virtual tours also mean that you get to see more of a place while spending less time and energy, since instead of walking around by yourself and having to take breaks, all it takes is a tap of a finger which takes much less time and gives you the opportunity to see more at the same time.

My experience with the Carlsbad Caves' virtual tour was absolutely captivating and I whole-heartedly endorse giving it a try. While visiting Carlsbad Caves in reality would definitely be a whole other level of experience, virtual tours are definitely our next best alternatives in quarantine and it doesn't disappoint. If you are planning on trying out the Carlsbad Caves virtual tour, let me know in the comments what your thoughts and opinions are!

Other Miscellaneous Work

Descriptive Writing — River

Louisa Law 5U (2020 — 2021)



River

Oh river, where do you lead. From frigid mountain tops I searched for you, an elusive crystalline spring, ebbing and flowing among polished pebbles, winking at me in the sun. Between deep valleys I followed you, your melodious voice singing over the rocks, as I struggled to keep up on your slippery, narrow banks. Through the forest I pursued you, ceaselessly tripping over unkempt grasses while you passed me by, your hair adorned with leaves, gifted by the herbaceous denizens. Over lush plains I chased you, your body spreading over the land in branches, nurturing the inhabitants of the land, a tree of life. Watched on by your children, the stampeding wildebeest, the graceful antelope, the ferocious lion, and the shapes, large or small I simply could not fathom, I ran to the delta. You were there, waiting for me. Then with a tremendous roar, your sapphire blue breast collided with a wall of foam and dissolved into the boundless arms of the emerald green ocean.