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HEROES and VILLAINS

The *Around DB* and *Life on Lantau* Young Writer's Competition 2017 challenged students to write from the point of view of a famous historical figure.

Sam Agars meets the finalists



The finalists: Janice Ho, Kayla Lee and Sienna Bertamini

Photos by Baijit Gidwani - www.evoqueportraits.com

The *Around DB* and *Life on Lantau* Young Writer's Competition (YWC) continues to surprise each year, with local students producing articulate and considered pieces in a bid to have their work published. This year's theme – writing from the point of view of a famous historical figure – required in-depth research and a thoughtful approach, something that

was delivered in spades by the young writers, submitting entries from seven schools.

It was then up to the judges Peter Sherwood, Sharon Lesley Le Roux and Trisha Hughes, all regular *Around DB* contributors, to select and mentor three finalists and shape their work. Peter chose 14-year-old Sienna Bertamini from Discovery Bay International School (DBIS),

Sharon selected Janice Ho, 13 and also from DBIS, and Trisha picked 13-year-old Kayla Lee from YMCA of Hong Kong Christian College.

The judges also chose three runners-up – Micah Zirkelbach, Seo Jin Park and Maika Ono, all DB residents. Micah, 13, a DBIS student, wrote from the point of view of Jesus Christ, Seo Jin, 14, a Discovery College student, Albert Einstein,

and Maika Ono, 13, from Island School, Katharine Hepburn.

In the subsequent online vote, conducted on the *Around DB* and *Life on Lantau* Facebook pages, Kayla was crowned the winner of the Bookazine-sponsored competition with 284 votes, while Janice placed second with 116 votes and Sienna third, with 76 votes.

You can read the finalists' stories at www.arounddb.com/articles, and Kayla's winning story on page 44, but first let's learn a little more about the writers and their work.

Kayla: Josef Mengele

It was on noticing that people often write about good people that Kayla chose Josef Mengele, the SS physician, infamous for his inhumane medical experimentation on concentration camp prisoners at Auschwitz during the Second World War. Kayla, who lives in Tung Chung, has Josef grappling with what is right and wrong as he struggles with the lack of recognition for his monstrous deeds.

Kayla says she wanted to write from Josef's point of view because "people tend to see others in only black and white. I decided to write about Josef Mengele so that I could detail the depths of the human personality."

Writing has long been a hobby of Kayla's and something that helps her step back from the pressures of everyday life, and she says she entered the competition for fun and to challenge herself. "I thought it would be a really good opportunity for me to improve my skills," she says. "I love the fact that I can create new worlds out of mid air and new characters, and I can escape when I'm having real-life problems."

Through her work with Trisha, Kayla was able to add depth to her writing, something she hopes will

help her in her goal to one day have a book published.

"I really loved working with Trisha, she taught me how to delve more into the complexity of Josef Mengele," Kayla says. "I am working on two books at the moment and I have a character who is based on Josef Mengele, my villain, and I thought it would be a good creative exercise for me to get to know my villain for my book."

Trisha says Kayla "listened beautifully and took all of my suggestions on board", and that she chose her story because it was different from the rest.

I decided to write about Josef Mengele so that I could detail the depths of the human personality

"For a 13-year-old I could see a lot of emotion in there," says Trisha, the author of best-selling memoir *Daughters of Nazareth* and the just-published historical novel, *Vikings to Virgin: The Hazards of being King*. "If she can produce this now at 13, then she has got the world at her feet."

It only took minor tweaks to enhance Kayla's story. "Her story was good, but I knew it could be better," Trisha says. "I knew she had it in her because she had already brought out a lot of the arrogance and the disdain of what Mengele was like."

Janice: Anne Frank

The holocaust theme continues in Janice's work, with the DB resident choosing Anne Frank, one of the most well-known victims of Hitler's Nazi Germany. Janice chose Anne for two reasons – her interest in the holocaust and because she was learning about her in drama class.

"The hiding part of her life really stood out to me and that is what she is well known for," Janice says. "I don't usually write diary entries so it was different and I really enjoyed writing it."

Janice feels she is a better writer after working with her mentor, Sharon, calling the experience amazing. "She taught me how to drag someone into the story and how to make the reader read in Anne Frank's voice," Janice says.

Like Kayla, Janice finds the writing process therapeutic. "It's probably my only way to escape from reality, and writing down my emotions really does help me calm down and release all of my stress," she says.

Sharon, who runs creative writing workshops for kids through The Story Studio, was impressed by Janice's original work and says that only minimal changes were needed. "Her piece was really insightful, it obviously touched her, the Anne Frank story, as she really got in character," she says. "She was really good at showing what was happening in the house and the tensions; she was really good at showing, not telling."

"We made a little tweak about the pork that was being eaten at the end," Sharon adds. "Obviously because of their religion they had never eaten it. It kind of made me as the reader ask, did they eat it or not? I advised Sienna to follow things through to their natural conclusion because the reader will want to know."

Sienna: Harriet Tubman

Sienna chose to write from the perspective of Harriet Tubman, a humanitarian famous for her work freeing slaves during the American Civil War. The young DB resident explores Harriet's thoughts during one of her missions to release slaves, having chosen her as a follow-up to a Year 7 project.

"In Year 7, I did a similar topic on her because we had to choose someone that we thought was a hero," Sienna says. "I chose Harriet Tubman and I did a lot of research into her."

It's clear that Sienna gained a lot from working with her mentor Peter, the author of 15 books and a former *South China Morning Post* columnist. "What I took out of it the most was that to really connect with the reader, you have to understand who you are writing about," Sienna says. "I had to really research into what Harriet Tubman did and try to connect with how she felt, therefore the reader could feel that same way. Peter really showed me how to do that and gave me some really great tips."

Peter chose Sienna's piece not because he initially thought it was the best, but because he felt it showed great promise. "Sienna showed she could feel what her subject was experiencing," he



The runners-up: Micah Zirkelbach, Seo Jin Park and Maika Ono

says. "She was able to colour her story with the atmosphere of the situation. She is naturally curious and I thought she had the potential to improve her story further."

For Sienna, the process has only been a positive one: "The main benefit for me was that overall my

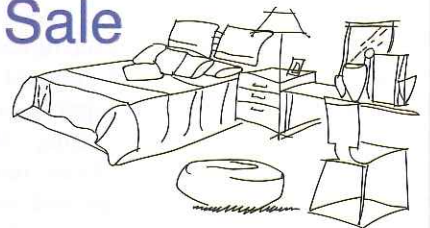
writing has improved, especially when I'm writing in historical context. I just find it relaxing, putting words down on paper. Usually everything is muddled together in my mind, but by putting it down on paper, it's a place for other people to see it. I really like what writing can do." **B**

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Angel of Death-Josef Mengele

The fools. Their astounding lack of intelligence is laughable - how could these two officers come from the so-called greatest land in the world? Their attire is so improper- the buttons on the taller one's have been done sloppily, making me prickly. Does he not care how he represents his country? Does he not care enough to represent it with pride?

The soldiers look at me, with neither fear nor recognition in their dumb, animalistic eyes; though that is enough to stir some rightful hatred within me, I know it puts me at an advantage. If I keep my head low, I shall be set free. Perhaps I'll even be lucky enough to escape to Bavaria or even Austria, and have a home with a lovely piano. But wishful thinking such as this is dangerous, and no outcome comes out of simple dreaming.

How could the soldiers not know of me -the one who had the power to change science as all knew it? The one to, in future, revive the legacy of the long-forgotten, long dormant Aryan master race?

True, I have always valued the outcome of my own hard work more than the vanity of fame, but it stings to not be recognized.

They do not care, I see it in their eyes, in the way they glossed over the prisoners with bored glances and blank purpose-they are nothing, nobody of worth, and as they turn to look at me I conceal the disgust easily with great satisfaction.

I cannot understand how such imbecile-like pigs like these have managed to cut through the heart of great Germany's cities, how they managed to amass enough force to storm our walls with the help of the Soviets.

The Soviets! The worst of the worst, and how I long to dissect them and see if their heart bleeds as red as they say- to match the bloody color of the flag that they hold so dear.

Their lives are worth nothing to me nor are of any use to the intelligent world. My hands itch to probe into the most painstaking part of their nerves, to harvest their organs for the greater good.

Some may call me a monster, but I call myself a simple scientist- my job is to examine and experiment, to get results in order to genetically manufacture a glorious, blonde-haired and sapphire-eyed new empire that shall seep through the ignorant walls of the lands of lesser men, and spread our righteous ideals throughout the world.

I must detach myself and any possible emotions from my work, lest I shall fail out of supposed kindness for mere animals. There are people of purer blood and spirit than these wretched wenches, and for them I am willing to make sacrifices.

Call me a monster, supporters of dystopian democracy, but my allies know me as a great man who does only the best for his country. The ice in my veins is long settled, and I feel no

remorse, I never will- why should I be sorry for doing my rightful duty? As both an SS member and servant to my country? I don't care if you oppose me; your blatant ignorance of my greatness shall be your own demise.

I do not care to rid you of your blindness; I am no miracle worker, nor am I a saviour like our beloved fuhrer Adolf Hitler - I am but one of the masses slowly working my way to eternal remembrance and glory.

The children would call me "Uncle Josef." Sometimes I wonder if I have become the people I hated the most. I often hated my parents for being as cruel as they were to me; my mother being a terrifyingly ominous presence in my childhood, and my father for trying to rigidly control my life. I hated my parents for being so cold to me, and yet here I am.

Well, it's too late for regrets now. I never hurt anyone, not truly, and it's useless to make amends.