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# LANTAU LITERATI

Kayla Lee, Janice Ho and Sienna Bertamini, the finalists in this year's *Around DB* and *Life on Lantau* Young Writer's Competition, sit down with *Sam Agars* to discuss penmanship and inspiration



*The finalists: Sienna Bertamini, Kayla Lee and Janice Ho*

**A** love for writing as an escape from the pressures of school and daily life is something shared by the three finalists of this year's *Around DB* and *Life on Lantau* Young Writer's Competition (YWC). Kayla Lee, 13, from YMCA of Hong Kong Christian College, Janice Ho, 13, and Sienna Bertamini, 14, both from Discovery Bay International School (DBIS) were the three standouts this year, and all highlighted the role writing plays in ensuring they live a balanced life.

Tackling the challenging topic of telling a story from the

point of view of a famous historical figure, the three finalists delved deep into the minds of complex individuals with skill and imagination.

It was then up to judges Peter Sherwood (Sienna), Sharon Lesley Le Roux (Janice) and Trisha Hughes (Kayla) to mentor their selected finalists and help them shape their work.

Making their selection from entries across seven schools, the judges also chose three runners-up – Micah



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

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, Tung Chung resident 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.lifeonlantau.com/articles](http://www.lifeonlantau.com/articles), and Kayla's winning story on page 30, 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."

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.

"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.

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."

**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.

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 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, it's a place for other people to see it. I really like what writing can do." 🌐

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I never imagined I would find solace in my solitude on the shores of Argentina. The warm feeling of golden sand fades as I step into the midmost mulch, and I search for my homeland over the horizon, millions of miles away. The waves beckon to me, seemingly willing to wash away any traces of so-called sin. The bitter tang of salt on the wind and the ominous calls of seabirds worsen the explosions in my head, elevating them from mere fireworks to nuclear demons at full velocity.

Nobody here knows me. There are no admirers here to sing my praises. It irritates me to think that there are people in the world who go to sleep at night without worries, people who have never known the great deeds I've done for them.

### The first day at Auschwitz

My head is pounding, so unlike my heart. It does no good to follow the heart. I am a sadist, and rightfully so. Kindness would have gotten me nowhere in these times. I was respected – feared, even, by the strongest of my subordinates. I had the power of life and death in my hands, the power to either condemn prisoners to a painful end or reach out to them as a saviour. I was Julius Caesar and they were the slaves. Or rather, I was the Angel of Death, cold and aloof, separated from mortal woes.

I remember the first day at Auschwitz, the hordes of bewildered, trembling creatures herded like cattle. Mothers clutched their children and husbands as if their lives depended on it. Not that it mattered – most of them would have been dead within the year, if not for my intervention. They stank like the dead, and looked halfway there.

Those foolish soldiers were too idiotic to realise the potential that the prisoners had as my lab rats. All they cared about was their bloody glory. They never realised the full extent I would go to in order to help them, and all of my fellow Nazis.

This was my gateway to greatness, and my chance to raise myself above the pawns. And with the earnings that have been hard won by myself, I've managed to give my family a good life and future. Rolf, my dear son, will never have to struggle for food nor money.

### There is a beast in every one of us

I am strangely calm as the tainted water envelopes me, seeping through my nostrils and into my lungs. I get up with an aching body and iron will, and tread deeper.

And speaking of Rolf, was he the same as all the gypsy twins who called me Uncle Josef? Could they have been just as human and innocent as he was in infantile form, just as susceptible to pain? Did Irene shudder at the thought of my work when Rolf asked what his father did to ensure the both of them were safe and well? Did she think of me as a monster not unlike the ones from my own son's childhood tales? Or was I a hero to her just as much as I was to Rolf, another man fighting to win the war?

No. They were vermin, rightfully exterminated. They would have poisoned the pure bloodlines, and manipulated the innocent Aryans

into thinking that they deserved the right of German citizens.

Liquid has replaced the air. I breathe involuntarily. The migraines have finally left me, long enough for me to have my final thoughts. I hope it ends quickly for me.

Will the world know all there is about me? No, I think, as I sink to the bottom, lungs screaming for air as the merciless waves batter me bruised. There is one more thing they don't know.

I am no monster. It was my duty to contribute to science in the grand scheme of the world. But there is a beast in each and every one of us, and it is futile to struggle to cage it.

The bubbles stream from my mouth as I smile for the last time. There is no light at the end of the tunnel. Nor are the cruel clutches of hellfire waiting to hold me in their grasp – the end I had once accepted. It's too late for regrets now. ☹️

In the *Around DB* and *Life on Lantau* Young Writer's Competition 2017, DB and Lantau secondary school students were asked to write from the point of view of a famous historical figure. Congratulations to the winner Kayla Lee, to Janice Ho, who placed second, and to Sienna Bertamini, who placed third. A well-deserved shout-out also goes to the three runners-up: Micah Zirkelbach, Seo Jin Park and Maika Ono. To read all about this year's competition and the talented writers involved, turn to page 26. For photos from the YWC prize-giving, sponsored by Bookazine, turn to page 6.



Kayla Lee,  
YWC 2017 winning writer