

The 24th Annual Book Report Competition For
Secondary School Students

The Champion of English Junior Section

Name of Winner	: Chui Tung Yi, Antonia (St. Stephen's Girls' College)
Title of Book Read	: The Host
Author	: Stephenie Meyer
Publisher	: Sphere

The Host portrayed the life of a young woman, Stryder and her struggle with her usurper, Wanda. When the reign of humans over the world ended, Wanda, a soul that possessed Melanie Stryder's body, tried eight different planets to find a living place but in vain. She was in desperate hope for a purpose of living. In the story, souls are little strands of silvery substance that possesses a human body. They invaded earth and took control of some humans. Wanda was one of the souls. Usually, when a soul takes over a human's body, the human's mind fades away. But Melanie Stryder was strong. She refused to fade away. She stayed in the back of Wanda's mind, waiting. This element of suspense sustains readers' interest to the end.

The portrayal of Wanda was exquisitely imaginative. Her hollowness and emptiness instills a good sense of mystery in the story. How she struggled to settle in the human world makes me reflect on my very existence in this world. I was drawn deeply into meditating in what ways were Wanda's struggle to accept reality mirrors my hardship in making sense of what I do every day. Wanda's disgust towards the human survivors resembles my resentment of staying away from people whom I don't like. But the gradual development of trust between Wanda and the humans she came across conveyed the importance of letting time be the victor of all things - that it can overcome barriers and establish relationships.

The intense love and hate relationship between Melanie and her boyfriend, Jared was intriguing. It is natural for people to live in constant fights over matters that they can not solve between them. Wanda's body coveted Jared but she herself wanted Ian, a man among the survivors. Later on, Wanda decided to teach the human survivors how to remove a soul and set a human free. She then forced a doctor among the survivors to set Melanie free, of which she had learned to love. Jared was extremely happy but Ian was heartbroken. The very titillating plot and complex character portrayal have made my reading journey a very pleasant one.

At first, I hated Wanda. I had a strong prejudice against her since I was a human myself. I wished she would leave and let Melanie have her body back. However, as I read on, I understood her better and more. Wanda's reluctance to be a parasite demonstrates how ironic it is for human beings to keep something that they don't like. Perhaps letting things happen naturally is an answer to many human conflicts and struggles. Using violence is never a good choice. Violence never solves any problems but will create more problems. That is also something I have learned from the book

The Host makes me ponder on some issues that I have never thought about before, for example, compassion for others. Because of the depth of feelings expressed in the book, I cried for Wanda a lot in the course of reading her adventure. I wept with Melanie as well as with Jared. The writing has deeply touched my heart. Watching Wanda break her promise made me feel wretched. In some twisted way, I couldn't imagine anything more uplifting than reading this book.

The book conveys a lot of truism about life. We can be kind, brave and loyal but at the same time we can be greedy, cowardly and treacherous. Greediness stops us from seeing the truth. The souls in the story claimed that they lived in the human world to save the Earth. They are not evil creatures as we may have imagined. They wanted to save the Earth from being destroyed by humans. But they had used the wrong way. This twisted idea is thought provoking to me.

The main themes of the book are conflict and understanding. Jared and Ian fought for the love of Melanie and Wanda. It hurt me to see Wanda not being able to be with Ian but it equally hurt me to see Melanie being forced to stay with Ian. Wanda couldn't satisfy both of them. And when Jared touched Wanda, Melanie's hurt would flare. I couldn't decide whom should I give my sympathy for. Should Wanda be with Ian or Jared? I was completely confused how entangled love relationships were.

Other themes - sisterhood and love - are recurrent in the story. Wanda was ready to sacrifice herself for Melanie, and vice versa. The rivals learned to love each other like sisters. The connection they had was unique as they shared memory as well as a body. When I was reading the part of Wanda relinquishing her control over Melanie's body, I suddenly felt ashamed. I asked myself, "Can you do that?" My answer mortified myself.

The Host has deeply inspired me. What was my purpose in life? Am I just a hollow living case that does the essential? Wanda was lost at first until she found Ian, Melanie and her home. She found her purpose in life and I am still wondering about mine. Because of *The Host*, I started searching and I think the truth is starting to surface.

As I have said before this book was one of a kind but the perspective of how to look at life in *The Host* was simply different. It was from a soul, an alien. The way Stephanie Meyer portrayed her was extremely inspiring. Wanda's heart was always in a good place and she was always so calm and peaceful. Not a single ugly thought leaked into her immaculate mind. It was the first time I have ever experienced a book so differently.

The Host will last decades. Perhaps, twenty years later, I would pull this book out of the bookshelf and be engrossed in it all over again.

Just like a sapphire, no matter how long you look at it, *The Host* remains beautiful.