

The Champion of English Section

Senior Division

Name of Winner : Cheng Hoi Yan
Name of School : Heep Yunn School
Book Title : One Hundred Names
Author : Cecelia Ahern
Publisher : Harper Collins Publishers,
New York

Cecelia Ahern has yet again created a world we can delve into for many hours where everything is magical and enthralling. *One Hundred Names* is a captivating tale of something simple but poignant; profound but thought-provoking. Yet, at the same time, it is laced with insight, wit and humour. For a good portion of the book, I found myself grinning and chuckling at the characters' jokes and banters. When the situation gets serious and the tension

becomes unbearable, the humour is still subtly there which acts as an ice-breaker in some sort. I found it strangely reassuring and soothing. I guess there is really something magical in the way Cecelia Ahern strings her sentences together.

This is no exaggeration, nor is it mere empty words of void compliments. What makes Cecelia Ahern's books different from the other authors' is how she is able to convey a meaningful message to the readers by presenting a light-hearted story with occasional witty puns, plus the powerful in-depth descriptions of characters through various twists and turns, and also the individual transformation and growth of the main protagonist. It's the communication between the writer and the readers. It's the way she makes readers realise the importance of the message and how it's actually magically relatable to

everyone.

Frankly speaking, I was uncertain about how the story would pan out at first. How could Cecelia Ahern write a book with one hundred different people's stories in? How could she even go in depth of a few of them without the story getting over-complicated? Could the main idea or rationale of the story be clearly conveyed with such a complex storyline? Yet, after the first few pages, I came to realize that Cecelia had it all planned out wonderfully. That turned out to be an understatement, as it really is enchanting, so much that the pages almost turn themselves.

Moving on to the plot, *One Hundred Names* is a heart-warming read about an enthusiastic journalist who has lost her way in life's crossroads due to a huge mistake that made her infamous overnight.

Kitty Logan has always been profoundly curious as a

child, trying to see through facades and uncovering secrets that people hide away as they feel the secrets meant something, yet in reality they probably don't mean anything to others. She has that burning desire to unveil the layers of a person and get to the heart of what is real, in its rawest form. Her love for people has brought her to Etcetera as a reporter, and perhaps, it is also this love for people that has brought her into the disaster she gets involved in: On the TV show *Thirty Minutes* and in front of the entire country, she accuses a well-respected teacher, Colin Maguire, of sexually abusing two students and fathering a child. And she is wrong.

She then visits Constance, her best friend and mentor who has guided her and taught her everything she knows, in the hospital. By her bedside, Kitty asks her a question: What was the one story she had always wanted to write, but

for whatever reason never wrote? The answer lies in the list of one hundred random names with no synopsis, no explanation and no outline. Little does she know, the moment she places her hands on this list of names, her life is going to be completely rewritten.

One of the brilliant highlights of the book is the clear and well-demonstrated transformation of Kitty. At first, Kitty pursues her dream as a journalist due to her love for people. Yet as I read, I gradually felt that this love for people had turned into distrust, a need to know what others were hiding from her. Her usual simple conversations of understanding and mere curiosity had turned into a game-playing of trying to get people tell her things without them actually realizing it. I felt that she was a self-centred person who cared not a fig for her friends' opinions and urges as she went about telling stories in a completely different way

than she had used to. Even after committing such a huge mistake that a journalist should never have made, she was only concerned how her career was destroyed, how her position was threatened, how her reputation was devastated, and how she had become public enemy number one. She ruined an innocent man's life, yet she never stepped into his shoes and looked at things from another point of view. It was all about her herself.

However, the more I read, I could feel her growing as a character. As the saying goes, 'An overcome difficulty is a turning point in success.' At the beginning, scandal has derailed Kitty's career, and her life is in total tatters and ruins. The setback is soon compounded by an even more devastating loss – Constance's death. However, everyone makes mistakes, some bigger than the others, in order to learn and grow as an individual. Sometimes, such mistakes

may even help one to understand or rediscover something important that has been missing in their lives.

Akin to Kitty, she gradually understands the art of writing a good story from her exchanges with Constance – ‘To seek the truth is not necessarily to go on a mission all guns blazing in order to reveal a lie, neither is it to be particularly ground-breaking – it is simply to get to the heart of what is real.’ She then realizes that her job is not to uncover a secret or find something earth-shattering from the one hundred people listed, it is simply to listen to their truths. She reflects on how the stories she has told used to be told for the sake of telling a good story, but not exposing people or setting people up for the mere purpose of high ratings of her show. She had got lost in the drama, the excitement, and her opportunity to move from sweet harmless stories to the big time. Yet in her search for the

truth, she reports a lie, a lie that has ruined a man's life. In retrospect, she repents what she has done. She then rediscovers her genuine love and curiosity for people, which is long-lost as she climbs the career ladder. By the end of the book, I felt like Kitty was a completely different person. I loved being on Kitty's journey and experience the transformation that she went through.

Life has never been easy. As a teenager myself, I believe it is hard for us to hold our ground and maintain our opinions at a time when all ideals are being shattered and destroyed. It is difficult to face the reality and stand up for ourselves when life is not going as planned. It is normal for us to be dubious of ourselves and don't know if we are going on the right paths of our lives when we make mistakes. However, we cannot let those mistakes rule our lives. Crying over spilt milk and dwelling over them

forever will never help to alleviate the problems. I really felt for her as I identify a part of myself in Kitty.

One Hundred Names is also an exquisitely crafted tale about finding the beauty that lies within the ordinary.

Very often, I found myself feeling depressed for not being able to do something for the others to make their day. I felt that even though I had bent over backwards to strive for certain goals in lives, I just didn't have the ability to. Looking around, many people have already made plentiful of achievements in certain aspects that they excel in. I couldn't help feeling discouraged that I was just a nobody in this world, with no interesting stories and experiences of my own.

Yet, by uncovering the different fascinating stories of the characters with Kitty Logan, I gradually understand that just because we aren't doing ground-breaking or earth-

shattering things, making eye-catching headlines, or winning awards which everyone desires, doesn't make our lives boring and unremarkable. Yet, the truth is that we all do something amazing, something fascinating, something that only we can do and should be proud of. We just never realise it ourselves. We don't need to be like Bill Gates who left school half-way and successfully established his very own company of Microsoft, or Li Ka-shing who escaped poverty and became the wealthiest person in Hong Kong. Every single ordinary person has an extraordinary story to tell. The message brought forth is truly thought-provoking and heart-warming.

Jedrek Vysotski, one of the hundred names on the list, is a cogent instance. He is an ordinary husband and father of a cosy family of four. Yet, he's also a courageous and optimistic man who wanted to prove to the world that he

was worth something, that he could make achievements, even if the world was telling him he couldn't. To him, one's dignity may be assaulted, vandalized and cruelly mocked, but cannot be taken away unless it is surrendered. He eventually successfully completes a task under many people's witnesses and is given permission to be in the Guinness World Records after a year's practice. When you first get to know this character, you may just think he's merely an ambitious family man. Yet, there's more to him. His dedication and fortitude is extraordinary, his talent is impressive, and his love to his family is heart-warming. He is a man of worth.

The entrance of the six characters from the list of *one hundred names* is astounding, with an abundance of rich description. They all made an indelible impression on me. Every one of them is intricately and delicately written, with

a very important and special role to play in the story, and all these bits and pieces put together creates something truly breath-taking. I enjoyed meeting these new characters, delving into a bit of their life stories, seeing how their lives get intertwined and change Kitty's for the better.

Yet, they are not only there to help Kitty conclude the meaning behind the list of names, which is the main message conveyed. They are all very different characters with distinct personalities and fascinating backgrounds, and their stories all convey an individual message of their own. For instance, from Ambrose Nolan, I have learnt that we are beautiful just the way we are and we need not be ashamed because of our flaws. Nobody's perfect after all. From Mary-Rose Godfrey, I have learnt that sometimes, our mere presence or just a simple blissful conversation with the others already has the ability to bring people joy.

We are all special to somebody. As for Bridget Murphy, I felt that her character of positivity, courage and determination has really shone from the pages and brought the story alive. Needless to say, such heartfelt writing is the work of a genius.

Cecelia Ahern has a knack of getting to the heart of human emotions. Sometimes the storylines of her books may seem a bit unrealistic, but she has the gift of making the unrealistic attainable, rational even. She always finds a way of hitting just the right spot in the telling of a story. Reading her books is like having none other than Life himself drop by for a visit to give you a reality check. At times, they may be a little cheesy, or a little convenient, or a little this, or a little that, but I'm willing to suspend disbelief for a beautiful story that tugs at my heartstrings like no other author does. I promise you, if you do not have

a heart of stone, you would love it as much as I do.