

**2<sup>nd</sup> Runner Up of English Section**  
**Senior Division**

**Name of Winner : Lu Siu Tung**

**Name of School : Tuen Mun Government**

**Secondary School**

**Book Title : When Breath Becomes Air**

**Author : Paul Kalanithi**

**Publisher : Vintage**

“Everyone succumbs to finitude.” One could say that this concludes this masterpiece which people from all walks of life should have read at least once in their careers. This book “When Breath becomes air” is certainly an insightful read that you would cherish for a lifetime.

Beautifully written by Paul Kalanithi, “When Breath Becomes Air” is the incredibly sobering memoir of Dr Kalanithi after his diagnosis of lung cancer. Gripping from the start, Dr Kalanithi illustrates a great set of anecdotes

regarding how he grows from a medical resident to a seasoned doctor in the first half of the book. With his honest and transparent writing style, he captured his journey in pursuit of knowledge fueled by his earnest zeal for medicine. Ranging from attending universities and residency training to the shocking diagnosis of lung cancer, Dr Kalanithi has painted a portrait of the picture-perfect life he built for himself. Yet, the brutal reality has repeatedly brought him to the stage of uncertainty and poignant moments. Despite battling with pain and fatigue, he never impedes going back to the operating theatre to save lives from his fatal illness, nor does he stop living in the moment as a husband. This book- an undying legacy- is preserved through his amaranthine words and immortal love for his life.

“When Breath Becomes Air” deeply reignited my passion for exploration and curiosity. The idea of pushing forward through adversity is a central theme of this book which

resonates with me a lot. Life is full of uncertainty. I still vividly recall the most delightful yet tragic day of Dr Kalanithi. Holding his newborn children, he joyfully witnesses the birth of his twins. But just a few pages later, he is confronting the jarring news of the death of both his twins. These distressing moments have beaten him to the hardest, which he identifies as “this flip side of joy, the unbearable, unjust, unexpected presence of death”. These inconsistencies of fate have reminded me of the unpredictability of the future- even the near future- in which both miracle and calamity can coexist.

After probing into this marvellous read, I start to look at life through new lenses. I realize that fortune is fickle, everything can happen within just a second that you can never forecast. Before reading, I have never meditated about death and departure, treating them as a distant and abstract concept, and spending my quality time aimlessly and directionless. Now, I become more aware of my

personal worth and the blessings that I have. Everything, every person, every moment, they are all the gems and jades glimpsing with splendid radiance, impacting each and every corner of my life. I was too unmindful to take them for granted.

“Life is not about what you planned, life is about what you give.” This thought-provoking sentence is still reverberating in my mind. Granted, humans are brilliant planners, we painstakingly plan our careers and foresee all the possibilities to embark on a seemingly promising journey. Notwithstanding, there is no such thing as a perfect trajectory in any walk of life. Things will always change. Just like the merciless Covid-19 pandemic. No one can predict this instant and swift spread throughout the globe. Even though we are all not ready, rolling with the punches is a must anyway. The same rationale can be applied in our daily life. Coming across setbacks and encountering miserable news, why not have a more

optimistic view of our life? Instead of dwelling on the negative and wandering about futile depression, being more cheerful and open-minded isn't a better choice. Difficulties and challenges are inevitable. So why not treat it as a test or gift for personal growth? Tackling it with our endeavour actively is the finest and only solution we have. Stop wasting our time planning every detail in the future or groaning about the tiresome misfortune. Let's live in the moment like Dr Kalanithi!

What's more, I start to be more grateful for what I possess. In fact, we all own a lot of treasure and love. Nonetheless, we always overlook and presuppose them. In this book, each word marks perfectly placed to convey Dr Kalanithi's message of gratitude. His life journey is full of adversity, and the sudden news of his cancer even exacerbates the situation. Yet, instead of moaning, he opts for expressing his genuine love and appreciation to his beloved friends and family. I am truly touched by this

cordial act. He is such a respectable role model! Admiring his great spirit, I am determined to try it out on a daily basis. As I buried myself in academic study and the endless struggle for excellence and perfection, I often neglect the invaluable relationships with my loved ones. Now, I become charier to observing each minor act. Recording every grateful thing in my life and voicing my recitation for them. Surprisingly, my life becomes more fruitful and rich. I now realise will that bonding and love are what matters to me most. Dr Kalanithi's words inspire me that gratitude is like the magic that lightens even the most trivial spot in our life, bringing us immense joy and fulfilment. In the past, we were blinded by the heavy workload and the fast-paced of the city, yet forget this precious asset. So, everyone, don't hesitate to express your love and thankfulness. Time is fleeting! No one can predict the expiration day of our clock. Thus, count your blessings, and don't be closefisted to express! After treating gratitude as a habit, you would surely be

astonished by the vast fortune that you possess, and the merits of the people around you.

Apart from the above, Dr Kalanithi has also enlightened me with his fanatical zeal and tenacity in being a doctor. In hopes of devoting myself to a life of helping others, becoming a doctor has long been the career I dream to embark on. My resolve for being a medical practitioner is further cemented after reading this book. Narrating from a humanistic view of practising medicine, Dr Kalanithi provides readers with a source of inner peace and fortitude. I am truly inspired by his professionalism. Aspired to pull lives back from the gates of death, I would like to make a positive difference and contribution to the medical field of my hometown. I would learn from Dr Kalanithi's passion and experience to serve the public with conscience, courage and a clear heart in the future.

“When Breath Becomes Air” is a profound read that may

impact your entire career. I would definitely recommend this book to anyone and everyone, regardless of their interest or gender. The powerful language and engrossing story of Dr Kalanithi are really a marvel that would keep you up every moment. Its transcendence surpasses any culture and time zones. Don't miss out on this jewel that would enrich and lighten your whole life!

Word Count: 1,148