

# **The 1<sup>st</sup> Runner Up of English Section**

## **Senior Division**

**Name of Winner : Chung Chi Lun**

**Name of School : Queen's College**

**Book Title : *The Midnight Library***

**Author : Matt Haig**

**Publisher : Canongate Books**

### **A Discovery On The Acceptance of Life**

A Book Report on Matt Haig's novel *The Midnight Library*

With the world experiencing turbulent times during the ravaging pandemic, people in lockdown lose their jobs, their loved ones, and their freedom in their daily lives, thereby driving up the pent-up mental pressure of the public. Some of us may think that such a dire

predicament leaves no hope for living, or even reach an extent of questioning whether our lives are worth living. *The Midnight Library* tells a story of similar portions of grief, yet by delving into the contents of the book, it lets us find our reasons for not giving up, accept our present situations, and allows us to dust ourselves off and stand up from where we've fallen and succumbed to grief and despair.

Meet Nora Seed, failure extraordinaire, who wanted to die at the start of *The Midnight Library*. A young woman on the verge of making a terrible choice. She'd lost her job, her best friend, and her brother. Her relationships are in shambles, and her cat is dead. More importantly, she is just deeply, seemingly irretrievably, sad. She can't imagine a day on Earth that is better with her in it. Living has become nothing but a chore. It was then she decided to end her life with an overdose of antidepressants and wound up in a purgatory-type space

her brain defines as a library at exactly midnight. The Midnight Library is the place where Nora gets to dip into and sample lives in different timelines where she made different choices, with the ultimate goal of erasing regrets she's made in her life and finding a life she's comfortable with, hence finding back her will to live.

Throughout the story, events are straightforwardly delivered without sharp twists or turns. Haig subtly mentioned the reason why chess was used in the book as a metaphor for straightforwardness: the rook is a piece that people normally would not watch out for as it could only go straight, yet it is often the rook that delivers the fatal blow. The straightforward is never quite what it seems. The author's writing style is an honest recreation of such an illusionistic straightforwardness and believes that such a story of acceptance can be delivered straightforwardly but leaving much room for thought at the same time. Though being straightforward, the story

took my emotions on a rollercoaster ride, bringing me from sharing Nora's depression to feeling the fascination and knowledge from her adventures, to the final relief when she is able to become strong and continue living on.

Nora is a good person on the inside, charitable and caring for lives that share similar magnitudes of misfortune with her, yet she isn't a confident person on the outside and isn't willing to voice her opinions and to fulfill her own dreams and wishes. During her childhood, her choices of extra-curricular activities were governed by her father, who hoped she can have a future in swimming, hence when she has to make a decision on her own without the help of her family, such as choosing to becoming a songwriter in her brother's band or quitting the job for the man she loved, she becomes uncertain, scared and guilt-ridden after making her decision as she cannot satisfy the interests of both sides.

She is also too people-oriented, hoping to achieve the dreams of others and worrying about their difficulties while overlooking her own feelings and dreams, hence having regrets after making a huge decision in her life.

Nora's background is extremely relatable as we all mourn over the lives we aren't living, the choices we didn't make and the people we didn't know when we look back on our lives at some point in time. Moreover, we are frightened of the unknown outcomes our decisions bestow upon us, hence struggling in the midst of indecision and uncertainty. Equidistant. Not aligned to any choice at the crossroads, not knowing which path to commit to without regret in a life of multifarious possibility.

Throughout her adventures of living alternate lives thanks to the library, Nora starts to slowly gain her confidence in her decision-making and in her own

abilities and potential, and learnt to voice out her own opinions. Apart from that, she understood that “the sky’s the limit” when it came to life, as infinite opportunities await her in the future as long as she doesn’t give up on her abilities and potential. She accepted her fallacies and is willing to change for the better, and her newfound confidence and optimism is a very important tool for us during these challenging times. We mustn’t dwell on our past failures and regrets, but should instead move on and make the best out of what we have.

The story explored the theme of regrets and difficulties in life and presents a moral that the life you may live based on unmade choices may not actually be the ideal life or the life you yearn to live. For example, Nora’s dream of becoming a world-famous swimmer came true in an alternate timeline, but it came at the expense of a broken family with her mother’s death. Uncertainties cloud these alternate realities and they will

always lack something you take for granted in your current life.

Apart from that, the story teaches us to accept and not downplay our importance and value in this world. We don't necessarily have to do everything we are ordered to or be everything people want us to be. We are unique with infinite, multifarious possibilities in our future, and the ideal life must be one that you like, one that is of your own will. Even if we are as insignificant as a rook in this world, we should always embrace our role as a rook, and remember that the rook, with humble beginnings, is the most special piece on a chessboard. It may look weak at first, but it is a queen-in-waiting, or it can become a sneaky bishop. Think about the possibilities it possesses! All we have to do is to find a way to keep moving forward, until we reach the other side of the chessboard and unlock our full potential.

*The Midnight Library* is a thought-provoking read that tells us to look forward and not immerse ourselves in irrecoverable despair. As Frank Sinatra said in his song *That's Life*,

'I've been a puppet, a pauper, a pirate, a poet  
A pawn and a king  
I've been up and down and over and out  
And I know one thing  
Each time I find myself layin'  
Flat on my face  
I just pick myself up and get  
Back in the race'

We should never give up on our will to live, and even if artistic fate delivers misfortunes upon us, we should remember that our future still has endless possibilities, and we must find the light at the end of the tunnel.