

The Merit of English Section

Senior Division

Name of Winner : Hon Ka Fung Ryan

Name of School : Carmel Secondary School

Book Title : *A Christmas Carol*

Author : Charles Dickens

Publisher : Simon and Schuster

When it comes to Christmas, what is the first thing that pops up in your mind? Gifts? Christmas cake? Christmas parties? “*A Christmas Carol*”, the book that I have read, has given readers new perspectives on societal issues and correct lifestyles through a story about Christmas. The protagonist of it is Ebenezer Scrooge, an old, penny wise, and high-handed man. As the title implied, the story began on the Christmas Eve, centring on his journey from a penny-pincher to a compassionate and big-hearted person. So rude and stingy was Scrooge

that he exploited his office clerk, ignored his affable nephew, and refused to give to charity, even at Christmas time. It was against this backdrop that he had been having a life of solitude. As the story unfolded, he encountered the ghost of his business partner and three Christmas ghosts. The first Christmas spirit, the Ghost of Christmas Past showed Scrooge the scenes of his friendless childhood and early adulthood. Soon after, he was visited by the Ghost of Christmas Present that manifested the life of the underprivileged. The last Christmas Spirit, the Ghost of Christmas Yet to Come told Scrooge the torments that he would face in the foreseeable future, warning him to see the errors of his way of living. Experiencing so much with the spirits, he evolved into a kind-hearted and selfless person and hence he was willing to lend others a helping hand at the end of the story.

The theme of the book can be boiled down to two

parts. To commence with, the story sheds light on the problem of disparity between rich and poor. It serves as a cautionary tale, warning us not to turn a blind eye to this thorny issue. Before meeting the three Christmas Spirits, Scrooge is abysmally uncharitable. The scene showing the way he treats his office clerk, Bob Cratchit, reveals how mean Scrooge is. Ebenezer and Bob are working together on Christmas Eve and it is freezing outside. To keep the office warm, coal is used to light a fire in the fireplace. So tight-fisted is Scrooge that he keeps most of the coal in his room, sharing only a tiny piece with Bob. No less heart-rending is that he turns away a gentleman seeking donations and claims that the poor should be put in prisons and workplaces. The interactions between Scrooge and others clearly illustrate his hard and sharp exterior which causes pain to others. Furthermore, it symbolizes the rich being cold-hearted in our society. As of now, it is deeply distressing to see the deep and increasing divide between the haves and the have-nots in

Hong Kong. As an illustration, the city's Gini coefficient is one of the highest in Asia. Despite living in an out-and-out capitalist society, I believe that we should not only act in our interests. The onus is on everyone to help the needy. From now on, I will donate part of my pocket money to the charity on a regular basis. We can all take small yet consistent actions to make a difference. Also, it is earnestly hoped that the upper classes will put themselves in the shoes of the lower classes and act swiftly to promote equality in society. For example, when it comes to a company's management, entrepreneurs should show respect to employees' rights and allow them to have a say during decision-making processes. The government plays an important, if not indispensable, role in mitigating the problem through manifold redistributive measures, like social welfare, as well. The book was written long ago, but the warning still applies.

Not only does the novella highlight the problem of disparity between the well-off and the grassroots, but it also gets across the message that one should never ruthlessly pursue his goals. It does not pay to sacrifice our bonds of friendship and family only for meeting our targets, such as money and fame. In the fiction, Scrooge's main aim in life is apparently to accumulate a large amount of wealth. His encounter with the Ghost of Christmas Past is a starting point for the transformation of his mentality. Showing Scrooge the scenes of his past life, the ghost reminds him of Frances (his sister), Mr. Fezziwig (his first employer), and Belle (his former fiancée). As a result, Scrooge is filled with nostalgia, realising that he has been obsessed with material wealth and leaving out the people who care about him. Only after being utterly isolated does he realise that the obsession backfires on him. Thanks to the three Christmas spirits, he eventually acknowledges the dangers of greed and indulgence. In real life, as in the

story, sometimes we may become rather aloof while sparing no pains to achieve our goals, being wrapped up in ourselves and neglecting the people that surround us. Looking back, I used to put too much emphasis on my target as Scrooge does. Endeavouring to ace tests and hence get a decent job, I was always having my head buried in a book. Seldom did I engage in dialogue with my friends and family members, and therefore I was gradually estranged from them. To me, one of the biggest takeaway points from the book is that I should strike a balance between studying and nurturing relationships with others. Looking forward, I will devise a timetable every day to achieve effective time management, ensuring sufficient time with my family, as well as doing revision. Only by juggling them properly can I avert the fate suffered by Scrooge.

Arguably, the character that I find most captivating is Ebenezer Scrooge. I am impressed by the author's masterful portrait of this character – the author does not

only depict Scrooge's discourteous and stingy personality, but he also lets readers learn about the vulnerable side of Scrooge. This ensures that the character is not static. A case in point is Scrooge's encounter with the Ghost of Christmas Past, which presents the readers with his miserable past life. Although he seems to be nonchalant towards everything, he is moved to tears by the scenes. These unpleasant experiences have left a deep psychological scar on him. What's more, there is a lesson to learn from Scrooge – it is never too late to mend our ways. After being told the repercussions brought by his misbehaviours, he makes changes straight away, for example, donating a great deal of money to help the underprivileged. I believe that we should all take a leaf out of his book, thus seeing the error of our ways and kicking our bad habits, such as staying up late, as soon as possible. Timely reflections can be timely reminders.

In a nutshell, the book has reignited my passion for

reading. I cannot rate this book any higher on grounds that it has inspired me so much with the social problem and the appropriate life attitude. The food for thought that it gives and the tactful portrait of Scrooge are what make it a worthwhile read. I will highly recommend this book as it is incredibly powerful in the sense that it influences the way we think about the aspects just mentioned, and the messages conveyed will certainly stay in the memory of readers.