

# **The Merit of English Section**

## **Junior Division**

**Name of Winner : Ng Wing Tung**

**Name of School : Carmel Divine Grace Foundation  
Secondary School**

**Book Title : *The Science of Breakable Things***

**Author : Tae Keller**

**Publisher : Random House**

*The Science of Breakable Things* is a novel written by Tae Keller, telling the story of a girl named Natalie, who hopes to help her mother's sudden shift in attitude by finding the Cobalt Blue Orchids. Together with her friends, Natalie begins an uplifting journey to discover the science of hope, love and miracles.

The story begins with Natalie having a science lesson with her new teacher, Mr Neely. After some wacky

hijinks with her best friend Twig and her former friend Mikayla, Natalie returns home. It is here where the readers are told that Natalie's mother seems to be suffering from a "condition" and all her father tells her is that she should "give her some space" while holding up a forced smile. Natalie soon recalls a rare flower named the Cobalt Blue Orchid that she and her mother used to grow together. Natalie comes to the conclusion that after her mother was fired, she gave up on science itself, and if she could give her another Cobalt Blue Orchid, everything would go back to normal once more.

Unfortunately, the flower was in another country and it would never be feasible for them to pay a visit. All hope seems to be dashed until Mr Neely approaches her with an egg drop competition. If she won, she could take her mother to see the Cobalt Blue Orchids. She signs up and works on the contraption with her best friends.

At the same time Natalie is starting to feel more neglected by her family and her views on her mother start changing. She starts believing that her mother simply does not care enough about her. In the buildup to the climax, readers can see her getting increasingly desperate for everything to finally go back to normal as her views of her mother keeps getting challenged to the point where she is not sure of much anymore. The day of the egg drop competition has come and the egg cracks! Natalie's father and friends all try to comfort her but on her mind, it is nothing but a cracked dream, much like the egg.

In a snap decision, Natalie decides to bust into her mother's former laboratory and just get the Orchids. It is at this point where it is revealed that her mother is never fired; she quit at the first place. This revelation shocks Natalie so much and she is unsure what to think of her mother anymore. However before she could even process

this they are found. Here, readers get to know that her mother has depression and this is not her first time suffering from this.

What intrigues me is that the writer chooses a very mature way of talking about depression and its effects on both the bearer and the ones close to them. Even after the ending Natalie's mother needs time to heal, because depression does not just go away with one event. The scars must slowly but surely heal. Throughout the story Natalie's thoughts and actions might have seemed selfish to the readers. However, when we are not told anything about someone we hold close, it is easy to see why she would go to such lengths. The writer manages to cultivate compassion among readers and that impresses me a lot.

Another important theme in this story is the incorporation of science. Aside from the obvious egg

drop competition, the story also includes a lot of cool scientific diagrams and even a list of materials and procedures for the things the characters are doing in each chapter. It is clever of the writer to seamlessly blends both deep important lessons and charming science projects into a great story.

Above all, the most important theme in this story is the theme of change. Throughout the journey, Natalie is determined to find a way to change her mother back into her normal self that she never pauses to realise that the status quo is already the new normal. The writer tells readers through this story that change is inevitable while it sometimes can hurt a lot and we would like it to just all go back to the way it was. Life continues, and we have to as well. As the end of the story, it reads “Science is asking questions. And living is not being afraid of the answer.”

This book does not only serve as an emotionally charged story, but it also touches on elements most teenagers would have never even heard of. It not only teaches readers that depression is not a taboo and one should not be ashamed of it, but also how change is natural and the fact that we just have to accept it and keep going with our lives.