

Merit of English Section

Senior Division

Name of Winner : Li Cheuk Yiu, Trudie

Name of School : Pui Ching Middle School

Book title : Call Me by Your Name

Author : André Aciman

Publisher : Farrar, Straus and Giroux

“If he knew, if he only knew that I was giving him every chance to put two and two together and come up with a number bigger than infinity.”

Call Me By Your Name is a coming-of-age novel set in 1980s Italy when an American doctoral student Oliver came to the home of a 17-year-old Elio as a summer guest to help Elio’s father revise a manuscript before publication. Elio was almost

immediately drawn to Oliver, while it took some time for the latter to realise his feelings towards the young lad. The two shared an intimate summer together, with Oliver leaving without a word after their trip together in Rome. The two met each other a few times after the departure, but the relationship never rekindled. Oliver eventually had a family of his own, but Elio never moved on from what he had with the elder. The story ended with the two main characters sitting on a big rock, talking about twenty years ago, showing a heartbroken, but forever grateful Elio.

The book successfully portrayed the mind of a 17-year-old in love. The way their crush is considered the most important element in their lives, and the way even the finest little detail meaning the world to them may sound exaggerating when written, but is exactly what happens in the young mind. In the

book, in the night Oliver did not come home for dinner, how Oliver's dinner place setting was removed was almost unbearable for Elio to watch, quoting the book 'The removal was performed summarily, without a hint of regret or compunction, the way you'd remove a bulb that's no longer working, or scrape out the entrails of a butchered sheep that had once been a pet, or take off the sheets and blankets from a bed where someone had died.' Elio was devastated by the fact that Oliver's silverware was no longer present on the dining table, which may seem funny and delusional for some, but is exactly how an adolescent would feel when such an important person is missing. To some of us who has experienced this strong, blossoming love towards a certain someone at some point of our lives, this book helps us revisit the raw, unpolished side of teenage love.

Through the same scene, the book also portrayed the fear of separation in teenage love. The fragility of a blossoming first love is what makes it beautiful, but it's also what we fear the most. This is also seen in the book, where Elio would avoid counting the remaining days that Oliver has to spend with him, given that Oliver is only a summer guest, and would have to leave inevitably after summer. The 17-year-old Elio never dared to count, leaving himself in denial when Oliver eventually left without a word. However, later when Elio went to visit Oliver in his lecture hall, he claimed to have always known it had been exactly fifteen years since Oliver left. What broke Elio the most back in the day turned out to be the method he used to cope with the sudden split. This depicted that separation is not something that we can always avoid, and that learning to embrace it may be the best solution to both parties.

Besides the dreamy, almost naïve side of love from Elio's point of view, the book also discussed the conflicts between love and reality through Oliver's side of the story. In the book, it was Oliver who told Elio that what he wants, and what he feels is completely ok, quoting the book "And yet, he had shown me that what I wanted could be given and taken so naturally that one wonders why it needed such hand-wringing torment and shame." It was Oliver who had pressed Elio against the wall of via Santa Maria dell'Anima, making Elio be all over the moon, but it is also Oliver who chose to have a wife, to have children and live a 'normal' life without Elio after their summer together. To Oliver, this may be the best solution, as he would eventually become a university professor, and LGBTQ+ people were seen as inferior back in the day when this book was set. Oliver figured that it would be the betterment for both of them if he backed off first, so he did, and he broke Elio. It is revealed later in the book that

Oliver has not forgotten any of the moments they spend together. He has moved on, but not completely. This book perfectly illustrated the pain of having to choose reality over love because of external forces. He loves, but the reality does not allow him to.

Some may argue that the book is overly explicit for young readers, and I think that it is undeniable that some of the themes discussed in the book are mature. However, such themes, like the exploration of sexuality, are something that everyone of us, regardless of age, may experience personally. Some scenes from the book may seem vulgar at first glance, but behind those seemingly inappropriate wordings often hides a beautiful meaning. The Peach Scene, for example, illustrates how Elio was still questioning his sexual identity even after an intimate night with Oliver, and how Oliver

accepts Elio, no matter which sexuality he identifies as, by eating the peach. In the scene, the two main characters connects emotionally. Elio was in tears. Tears of gratitude, tears that enhanced the relationship between the two men, quoting the book “I was crying because no stranger had ever been so kind or gone so far for me.” This is such an important scene, yet wrapped in language in a way that people claim as inappropriate. The way the author used to portray this scene may not be the most family friendly, but we should not ban the younger generation from reading this book without first acknowledging the underlying meaning shown between the lines.

Overall, as a queer adolescent myself, this book broke me in every way possible. The choice of words, the detailed description of the characters’ emotions, the inner conflict

every character has dealt with truly touched my soul, and I recommend anyone, no matter who you are, to give this book a go.