

The Merit of English Section

Senior Division

Name of Winner : Lam Wing Hong

Name of School : Carmel Divine Grace Foundation

Secondary School

Book Title : The Fault in Our Stars

Author : John Green

Publisher : Penguin Group

“You don’t get to choose if you get hurt in this world... but you do have some say in who hurts you.” The Fault in Our Stars is one of the most poignant, heartbreaking, and yet thrilling and thought-provoking work by John Green. I laughed, I cried with characters, and then I came back for more. This book has the power to reach the deepest side of the heart in the most natural way, a smartly crafted story that draws the readers in so deeply before they even noticed it. I swooned on almost every

page and I re-read it over and over again. It is teary but no words can be used to describe the feeling of reading this book more accurately than pleasure. I like my choice of letting the story hurt me as the writer might put it, but I genuinely believe every reader does.

In fact, I despised romantic stories. Never had I ever had the slightest idea that I would relish any tales of love, of which I deemed to be tedious, picturing glorious fantasies or histrionic tragedies to glorify love, until I read this book. I didn't feel like I was reading a book still in front of my desk. Instead, I felt as if I was drawn into a world John Green had created, experiencing the ups and downs of the characters and witnessing their transformations. This book isn't an average love story portraying cliché romance; it is about love that makes readers meditate on questions about life and death.

The Fault in Our Stars is an aching beautiful story

about a teenage girl, Hazel Grace Lancaster, who is diagnosed with stage 4 thyroid cancer which has spread to her lungs, and a teenage boy, Augustus Waters, who is cancer-free after his leg is amputated.

Their star-crossing love story starts in a cancer patient's support group. Hazel can't help but fall in love with the charismatic, humorous, and shining Augustus and she introduces her favourite book, *An Imperial Affliction*, to him.

An Imperial Affliction, a novel about a cancer girl named Anna, is described to be Hazel's personal bible. Hazel reckons that it is the only book that can illustrate the reality of cancer patients authentically and match her experiences and feelings meticulously. Yet, Hazel is discontent about how the story ends midsentence. She has a longing desire to find out what happened to the characters after the story ends.

Hazel realizes she really likes Augustus deeply. However, she also acknowledges the fact that she will induce unbearable pain to Augustus when she dies. Therefore, she refers to herself as a grenade that will explode and cause harm when she is gone. It makes me wonder what I would have done if I were Hazel. Despite her struggle over her feelings for Augustus, Hazel agrees to go to Amsterdam to meet Van Houten with Augustus to obtain answers to her questions before she dies.

Lamentably, Hazel finds out that not only is the writer not a sage genius that she has pictured him to be, but he is indeed a vulgar alcoholic is not able to answer her questions. Not allowing Van Houten to vitiate their journey, Hazel and Augustus enjoy their days in Amsterdam. A few days later, Augustus confesses that he has recurrence and cancer has spread to all parts of his body. Another revelation is that he has given up treatment to make this trip happen. This highlights the

climax of the story. For the first time in Hazel's life that someone around her becomes the grenade instead of herself. She quickly realizes how unwise her thought about minimizing her harm due to her death to other people by isolating herself is.

For me, the most agonising scene in the book is when Augustus holds a pre-funeral with his friends. Hardly can I hold my tears when Hazel gives her eulogies. There are no fancy words, but the legitimate feelings of Hazel, that she is willing to bear the pain rather than having peace at the expense of never meeting Augustus.

Augustus has always been pondering the meaning of life. What makes a life meaningful? I believe it is a question everyone must have asked themselves not only once. In fact, we may not even know the answer when we die. Augustus thinks that doing something heroic will make his name be remembered so that it will be a

meaningful life. But Hazel points out that every creature is not immune to death. Eventually, humanity will disappear and everything we have achieved will have been for naught. The book explores existentialism. Hazel reckons that it is not the significance of our actions that define the meaning of life, but it is the relationships we form with other people that matter.

Augustus's health deteriorates quickly and he dies 8 days after the pre-funeral. The novel concludes with the letter from Augustus, admitting it is inevitable to get hurt, but we can choose whom to hurt us. He is happy with his choice, and hopes Hazel is too. The novel ends with Hazel saying "I do".

The story revolves around cancer patients and spontaneously leads to the topic of suffering. The most prominent pain is the affliction caused by the death of loved ones. The more I read this book, the more I

understand there is some pain that shouldn't be avoided. Avoiding pain caused by death means we have to hold back our love towards people we care about because love is what induces the anguish we will experience when they die. Even so, the book points out that the joy love brings is much greater than the sadness we will feel about death. That's why Hazel won't trade her love towards Augustus for anything. She has grown from an altruistic girl who is afraid to show her love to a person who is willing to love and to be loved. Death won't stop us from loving. This book has given me a new perspective about life and death: much as death is irrevocable, we get to choose how to live out the best.

Having cancer may not be easily understood by teenagers, but what makes this book so relatable is the sorrow and struggles the characters experience. The name of this book is inspired by *Julius Caesar*, one of Shakespeare's plays, in which a character, Cassius, said

“the fault, dear Brutus, is not in our stars. But in ourselves.” Stars symbolize our fate. The writer wants to argue that though sometimes we cannot navigate our lives the way we want, we can change our perspectives towards misfortune and write our own stories upon the stars. Were Hazel not sicker, nor Augustus healthier, they would not be able to meet each other and write their love story.

The Fault in Our Stars is a sophisticated story presented in a simple yet brilliant way that allures me to keep reading. The writer invites the readers to explore the most difficult topics from a different perspective. This book is funny yet heart-wrenching. I assure you will feel the same way and fall in love with this book.