

The Merit of English Section

Junior Division

Name of Winner : Lam Yui Hei

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

Book Title : *A Street Cat Named Bob*

Author : James Bowen

Publisher : Hodder

A Street Cat Named Bob is a biography written by James Bowen, narrating a story about the life he led in the streets of London in the 2000s and the cat who changed it for the better. This is a tale of two underdogs enduring hardships on the streets, gradually undergoing a life-changing journey and taking their second chances they have given each other.

The story starts when James, a recovering heroin

addict met an injured stray in a stairway to his flat. Pitying the tom, James nursed him back to health and named the ginger tom Bob. The cat quickly took a liking to James, who decided he couldn't feed one more mouth. Bob, however, was insistent on staying. Locked out of the flat by a desperate resort to kicking him out, the clever feline stalked James as he busked. James finally gave up to Bob's unwavering determination and kept him.

It was not long after when James found out the charismatic tom was attracting attention like a magnet. Bob's charming presence drew notice to James as he busked, allowing him to more money. His luck soon came to an end when he was caught illegally busking. James found a new job as a licensed Big Issue seller to keep them safe.

After a few bumps along the road, James decided to

take a leap to reduce his reliance on drugs. He succeeded thanks to Bob's support. He even visited his estranged family in Australia and managed to reconcile with them. The story ends with James musing about how he and Bob transformed each other's life.

The most apparent themes of the book are second chances and healing. Before they met each other, Bob and James lived miserable lives in the streets as a young stray in an unforgiving environment and a neglected teen who grew into a drug addict and busker. Meeting each other, James got the companionship he craved for and Bob got safety and warmth. The chapter 'Road to Recovery' means more than Bob's healing of his physical wounds. It hints about the hardships that had left a mark on James and the first steps of a long journey to cure these invisible scars. In the end, both of them took their second chances and worked together towards leading better lives.

The book also explores the way we treat the disadvantaged and the marginalised. As a recovering heroin addict once homeless, James had taken the brunt of our prejudice and indifference. In one of James' flashbacks about his younger days, it was revealed that James had gotten a job in a restaurant only to be fired for being homeless. As a busker, he was nearly invisible to the crowd in the bustling streets. It was only because of Bob's magical presence that James was not treated less than a human. It was, as James himself puts it, as if Harry Potter's invisibility cloak had come off his shoulders. Despite this, throughout the story, the pair was still met with unnecessary alienation and cold shoulders from time to time. Not everyone has a cat like Bob, but that doesn't mean they deserve to be shunned, outcasted and deprived of basic respect and humanity.

In addition to exploring how we treat the ostracised, our relationship with animals is also discussed. One of

my favourite scenes in the book is when a lady offered to buy Bob because she thought life on the street was miserable for him. James refused and said Bob was like his child and was therefore priceless. James and Bob also seemed to have a tacit understanding, proving that the two share an unbreakable bond and that James treated Bob as a soulmate and an equal. In an early part of the story, James had to take an injured Bob to an RSPCA centre when the cat was just taken in. There, they met several teens getting medication for their dogs' wounds, which had been inflicted in fights for entertainment. The scene was neatly written to contrast the difference between James and those teens. Despite having been traumatised by prejudice and injustice, he still cared for the weak and showed sympathy for the mistreated animals. Perhaps we can take it from James and Bob, learning to treasure and respect life in all its forms.

This book is not only a heart-warming tale of a man

and a cat bonding and healing the scars their tough lives had left on them. It also provides a chance to peek into the lives of the underdogs of society, their hardships and how we can make it better for those whose voices are not loud enough to be heard. After all, all lives matter, even those who don't have a cat like Bob.