

The Merit of English Section

Junior Division

Name of Winner : Ng Si Ting Eunice

Name of School : Diocesan Girls' School

Book Title : *Chinese Cinderella*

Author : Adeline Yen Mah

Publisher : Puffin Books

This book is an autobiography of Adeline Yen Mah, mainly describing her childhood life. As the story goes on, my respect and admiration for the 14-year-old girl rose immensely, and I also started to reflect on the way I should treat others in life.

Born as “bad luck”, Adeline was resented by her father and elder siblings, by standing out and objecting her stepmother’s abuse against her younger sister, she earned a long-lasting hatred from her stepmother. Her stepmother favoured her own kin way over her

stepchildren by pampering her darlings with luxurious meals and stylish clothes, and was especially abusive towards Adeline; every achievement of the latter would be seen as showing off and bragging, and Adeline would be scolded and humiliated by the domineering and cold-blooded woman. What was even depressing was that her father and her siblings did not lend a helping hand or stop her stepmother's brutal acts; rather, they chose to turn a blind eye on her, and her Big Sister and Second Brother even took on their parents' acts and hit and slapped her when no one was noticing.

However, Adeline did not let their cruel words get to her, nor did she lash out on her loved ones, her Aunt Baba and Yeye. She chose to work hard on her studies and aced them, winning the liking of her teachers and respect and support from her peers, who voted for her to be Class President and backed her up when she was abashed. Even when her parents had abandoned her in

Tianjin, a place where everyone else was fleeing from, to punish her, she did not give up on herself or doubt her self-worth. She continued to be a top student in her new schools, and even won first prize in a international playwriting competition, being the first Chinese student to do so. Her father finally recognized her potential in academics, and allowed her to continue studying abroad.

I admire Adeline due to the fact that she strived to become the best of herself, to change her future of having to subject to arranged marriages, to win recognition both in her school and internationally, and finally succeeded in altering her destiny by earning the chance to step out of the conventional, oppressing world she had been in for her whole life, and approach a brighter, better future. In fact, she wasn't just a Chinese version of "Cinderella" in my opinion; Cinderella had help from her godmother and put little effort in pursuing the prince, but Adeline, on the other hand, paved her way

using her bare hands. It was her determination and perseverance that led her to her success.

Another thing I enjoyed about this book was the complexity of its characters. For instance, out of all siblings, Third Brother shared the closest relationship with Adeline. He was the only one to commend on her silver medal that she won on the first week to school; he went out for picnics with her and Yeye and played for hours with her; he attended her beloved duck PLT's funeral and tried to cheer her up. It was undeniable that he was kind and sweet to his little sister. However, flipping the script; he never said a word when Adeline was being bullied by other siblings; he even played a prank on her by tricking her into drinking "orange juice" which was actually the urine of him and his brothers, betraying her trust in him. Although his instinct is to be kind to his sister and treat her nicely, he eventually succumbs to the pressure from his siblings and pranks

Adeline with them. In a way, this also shows the adverse yet tremendous influence of a toxic family on its children. Adeline has always been neglected by her father and hated by her stepmother. Therefore, this way of thinking has been passed on to the next generation, causing everyone to think they can trample on and look down on her. I used to despise Adeline's siblings when reading the story, but now I think back, perhaps I would have done the same thing if I were in their shoes.

I mourn the demise of Third Brother's kindness just as Adeline does. Perhaps if they were born in a loving family, they would be a pair of inseparable siblings, and would have a joyful and carefree childhood life, showered with care and affection.

A Chinese old saying goes like this: "Fortunate people have their whole life protected and healed by their childhood, unfortunate people have to have their whole

life protected and healing from their childhood.” I have truly grasped the meaning of it through this book. Adeline’s childhood was not an enjoyable one, and was even painful and arduous. But after all those years, I do hope she has left behind her pains and fears, and has strode towards her bright future and her happy family. These would be things the 14-year-old girl back then wanted to see, and had truly deserved.