

INVENTIONS THEME IGNITED STUDENTS' IMAGINATIONS

The young people of this part of the world showed extraordinary talent in tackling the challenge set by contest organizers this year. And they overshot their target in the best way possible.

The theme we set was Chinese inventions. What does that mean to you? Most adults, whether they live locally or elsewhere in the world, have a vague knowledge that China invented paper, and a few other things – gunpowder, was it? Some adults might know the quartet sometimes listed as “the big four”: the compass, papermaking, gunpowder, and printing.

The young people who entered the competition, we're delighted to say, did a bit of research and outdid the sort of answers we'd expect from adults.

COPY-PASTING WIKIPEDIA!

Not everyone made the same amount of effort, of course, but most did. Out of about 1,400 entries, only one student took the easy way out – simply cutting and pasting the Wikipedia page on Chinese inventions into an essay format!

The vast majority of other competitors, we are delighted to say, took the theme as a starting point and took readers on an interesting journey.

Some of them focused on “the big four” but researched them well, and uncovered the extraordinary human stories behind them. For example, the students who did a lot of research learned that the man who realized that you needed to create pulpy material to make paper, came to that conclusion watching wasps making soft material for nest-building.

Others noticed the long, winding journeys that inventions took before becoming successful. So, for example, the way that compass points always align on a north-south axis was used in feng shui for hundreds of years before people realized that it could be used for direction finding by travellers.

Others told great stories about inventions that are not on the big four list. Tales about the invention of the kite were particularly well told. Others wrote about some of the more intriguing creations, such as the device that could allegedly detect earthquakes, and the man who made it.

FROM PAST TO FUTURE

Other students decided to bring the concept of Chinese inventions up to the present day. These efforts were not entirely successful. Some chose topics such as e-commerce and electric vehicles. While China may be world “number one” in these categories, it's a stretch to designate these as Chinese inventions.

More successful were students who took the concept further, looking at likely inventions in the future—an interpretation of the theme that allowed students to be super-creative.

And of course, while the topic most easily lends itself to the non-fiction essay format, the majority of students stretched their wings and used it as inspiration to create fictional stories, a number of which showed highly impressive storytelling skills, as well as superb flights of imagination.

LITERARY SKILL

As we have noticed before in this competition, there are always students who show an extraordinary level of literary skill, producing complex works of multi-layered fiction that would not be out of place in the world's best literary journals.

And then of course there are the poets. This year, the poetic entries ranged from humorous doggerel to thoughtful pieces of writing in complex poetic forms.

But what struck the judges most about the works this year, is that they allowed students to have a bit of fun—the broadness of the topic seemed to ignite people's imaginations.

And if a piece of work is fun to write, it will usually be fun to read! And happy judges will always be willing to give higher grades to pieces of work.

As always, the judges salute the entries – the vast majority of works created showed both effort and talent, with the cover design entrants being particularly impressive this year.

Thanks to teachers and parents for helping make this happen, and congratulations to all the students who participated.



Nury Vittachi
Chief judge
Hong Kong 2024