

“To Be Continued...”

“To Be Continued...” – A Year of Interactive Reading Experience in a Hong Kong Primary School

Dr Peter Lee reflects on a unique diverse learning experience offered by his serving school promoting English reading and performing.



Introduction

“Diverse Learning Experiences” has been an important feature of the school I am serving. Each year, we have a different cross-curricular learning theme that goes through the entire school year. Last school year (2021-2022), the theme was designed as “To Be Continued...” (TBC), which was a very philosophical one and required a lot of imagination and interpretation when designing learning activities based on it. One of the ideas was to have a single story, named “To Be Continued...”, released chapter by chapter as a motivation or prompt in students’ course of learning. A big open book was installed at the school entrance, and projected texts of this story would appear on

it as a symbolic decoration. From September 2021 onwards, students had got to learn about the three young heroes of Forgottenland – Bong, Chi-yin and Hinson, who followed the Old Wise Man’s words in their special quest in the multiverse.

The Story

The narrative itself may not be of the award-winning quality but surely, I put a lot of effort into it, especially when it needed to fulfill certain criteria – it needed to be accessible and appealing to students ranging from Primary One to Six (age 6-12), include elements from different subjects (Chinese, English, Maths, Science, Arts, Music, and Sports) and contain a cliffhanger in every

chapter so that readers/viewers would always long for the next episode, to say the least. In the end, this 8-chapter story about three young boys having to search for sacred items in order to defeat an evil power was created. Approximately, one chapter was released per month from September 2021 onwards. Students could view the animated version or the text-only version online. In some occasions, students could attend the “premiere” of a video episode in the school hall.


Activities

As a school theme, it had to produce meaningful learning experiences and opportunities for students. Related to the TBC series, my department (English Department) came up with a few interesting tasks implemented throughout the past school year. In the following, four of them are discussed.

1) Sharing of thoughts on the English Department website (Q & A)

When every video was released, there would be a blog page on the English Department website that introduced it with screenshots, a link to the video and some thought-provoking questions about the chapter. Primary 4 to 6 students were encouraged to view those questions and post their responses into the comment box of the associated webpage. Teachers would also respond to some of the interesting ideas to enrich the discussion.

Although this task was not compulsory, nor were there model answers, we were glad to see the many responses posted and most of them were of very high quality in content.

 You may scan this QR code to have access to the links to all the blog pages of the videos, questions and the students’ responses.

2) English Time – Presented by Forgottenland (video sharing)

I made use of the three main characters and recruited three students to act them out in some videos. An English video programme called “English Time – Presented

by Forgottenland” was initiated, with each episode introducing one topic of English. And one of the “heroes” would host an episode. In fact, the videos here do not relate much to the TBC story except that the hosts identify themselves in character. But having these characters talk about English materials did attract students’ attention and they enjoyed watching them. After each episode, viewers were invited to leave feedback following the given questions. Plentiful great responses were submitted to the department website.

A total of four videos were produced in the end. The first three were about tongue twisters, sports and special words respectively. The last episode, Episode 4, is my favourite as it involves a side character, Bo Bo the merboy, too. In this episode, Bo Bo and Hinson continue with their journey of poem writing, as part of what happens in Chapter 5 of TBC, and they talk about 4-line poems. The episode ignited viewers’ interest in writing quatrains and many students posted interesting and meaningful work to our website.

You may find all four episodes of “English Time” here (ep. 1-4 from left to right):



3) Why are the three heroes chosen? (verbal presentation task)

This TBC series never explains how the three heroes are chosen, and I used this “loop hole” as an opportunity to ask the Primary Four boys for the reason why these heroes were picked for their roles. The boys were taught how to do a short presentation and then they went home to record the video of their responses (since Hong Kong students were still asked to wear masks during lessons).

All students of this level needed to submit this video presentation. A good number of them showed fantastic presentation skills and contents and thus, I put together a video compilation to show the entire school our Primary Four boys’ intriguing thoughts.



Please find the video compilation here

4) Reading tips and reflection of the TBC series (verbal presentation task)

Towards the end of the school year, students of Primary Five and Six who were deemed outstanding in English reading were shortlisted for a special prize. These students were then asked to do a video presentation on their way of reading and their thoughts on the TBC series (any comments were allowed and encouraged). These shortlisted boys demonstrated remarkable reading and presentation skills and finally, 10 winners were chosen. I again put together a video compilation showcasing the work of these 10 brilliant presenters.

While the offered reading tips were nothing too surprising, we teachers were very impressed by their analyses of the TBC series, be they appreciative or critical. They did show sophisticated thinking skills and I loved how they could express themselves maturely and in an organized manner. I was particularly moved and delighted when hearing one of them say he felt the story was very well connected as if the writer had already thought up the ending at the start. But the truth is that I only had a rough picture at the start and I did take a step at a time in the creative process, without knowing where I was heading!



Please find the video compilation here

Concluding Remarks

2021 - 2022 was certainly another very challenging school year. The pandemic causing the mask policy, half-day school, school suspensions and social distancing did very little to help in the teaching and learning process. Yet, we teachers are the ones responsible to solve the problems creatively. Like what the theme represents, regardless of the situation, lessons are always being unfolded as if we were reading a story. The

TBC story went cross-curricular to light up students’ imagination and anticipation. Whilst the above introduces some of the English tasks for specific year groups, other students and teachers of other subjects certainly did something else as inspired by this tale too. And it was truly a year of interactive reading in my school which I had never experienced.

A full-colour and well-illustrated giftbook of “To Be Continued...” (not for sale) was produced in the end, together with some students’ winning entries from another associated writing task, to conclude this year-long project.

Sincerely, I thank our farsighted principal, Dr Sylvia Chan, for coming up with this idea and trusting me for the writing job; gratitude must also be given to all my colleagues for supporting the production of the story, particularly the graphic designers for the videos and publication; of course, I thank all those boys who kept asking me what would happen next in the story. I have totally enjoyed the very special learning atmosphere in the past school year. After all, word still matters!

Literature Cited

Lee, H. C. (2022). To Be Continued.... In C. M. M. Ma (Ed.), *To Be Continued...* (pp. 11-82). Hong Kong: Ying Wa Primary School.



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His poetry and short stories have appeared in a range of journals. For speech and drama, he has completed his ATCL, LLCM(TD) and FLCM qualifications. He currently chairs the English Department of Ying Wa Primary School where his team strives to create for the students a positive learning experience in language arts. He also runs BALLOONS Lit. Journal, a free international literary journal for young people.