

The BRAINWAVES Club

Semester 1 2019: Tolkiens – Years 4, 5 and 6

Venue: Bondi Public School

It's a Wonderful World

When Lee Lin Chin retired from SBS World News, she gave an interview to the Big Issue magazine declaring, “literature was the only part of [her] life that meant anything to [her].” She planned for her newfound free time to be filled with reading good books. It sure sounds as though books mean something incredibly significant to Chin, and for her, literature is an eye-opener. For others, it's a life saviour, an escape, pure entertainment, inspiration or a way to understand relationships and humanity. There are thousands of reasons for readers to read books. Thousands? Yep, thousands! Once you join our Tolkiens tribe this semester, we will go from poetry to fantasy, from Shaun Tan to Jackie French, from La Fontaine to you (yes, *you*), to define what literature is and what underpins our reasons for reading.

February 23

Meeting 1 – We Have a Dream

Scope: Manifestos

Before exploring why literature is so important to others, we need to define what literature is and what it means to you. After all, Tolkiens is *your* club and it's only fair we ask you first, don't you think? We will get some inspiration from famous readers and writers all around the world including Shaun Tan, Jackie French and Jean de la Fontaine. We will interview each other to keep our synapses working while we're brainstorming ideas. The end result? Our Tolkiens Manifesto, or published declaration to the world of what literature means to us!

March 9

Meeting 2 – “That's exactly how I feel!”

Scope: Adventures

Have you ever read a book and thought: “That's exactly how I feel!” or “Wow! I am not alone, someone else thinks the same as me!”? Books have this amazing power of making the reader connect to a specific story or a character. Take *The Mysterious Benedict Society* by Trenton Lee Stewart. It tells the story of four gifted children who meet in a special school, the Learning Institute for the Very Enlightened, where the only rule is that... there are no rules! They are soon given a secret mission to accomplish, a mission only the most intelligent and resourceful children could complete... Sound familiar? This club meeting will see us explore the style of the novel and whether there is anything about the story or characters that we can relate to. After this, it will be our turn to work on character description that will make *our* readers assert: “That's exactly how I feel!”.

Please read *The Mysterious Benedict Society* by Trenton Lee Stewart. Available in local libraries or online for purchase via Booktopia.

March 23

Meeting 3 – Who is the animal?

Scope: Ethics and illustrated stories

In his latest book, *Tales from the Inner City*, Shaun Tan imagines a world where animals appear in urban spaces that are usually devoted to humans. In his illustrated stories, deer live on the upper floors of skyscrapers or eagles suddenly fly into airports. He uses his amazing talent as an illustrator and a storyteller to reflect on our relationship with animals and how we destroy their environment. Is it possible to live in harmony with animals and nature? Or are humans doomed to destroy their surroundings? In doing so, aren't we destroying ourselves? Is it possible to survive without nature? These philosophical and ethical questions are some of the few we will raise. After this, it will be time to imagine our own urban animal story and then illustrate it with a drawing, a collage, or a photograph.

Please read *Tales from the Inner City* by Shaun Tan, available for purchase online via Booktopia.

April 6

Meeting 4 – A picture is worth a thousand words. Or is it?

Scope: Telling stories through photographs

A few years ago, a Chicago collector found a pile of pictures taken by an unknown photographer. After some research, he discovered the name of the photographer: Vivian Maier. She was a nanny who used to take pictures whilst minding the children in her care. The pictures were very powerful, they were posted on the Internet and soon went viral. Each of them tells a story that is very moving and special. Is it true that a picture is worth a thousand words? What can words add to a photograph? In our meeting today, we will write a short piece inspired by our favourite photographs from Vivian Maier and prove that words can indeed change the way we look at a picture.

Please bring your favourite photograph from Vivian Maier. You can find them via this link:

<http://www.vivianmaier.com/>

May 11

Meeting 5 – 2119 is only 100 years away

Scope: Fantasy

Can books delight and teach important lessons about life at the same time? There are books that are so good at doing both, that they are still read 100 years after they've been written! Can you think of any? How about *The Magic City* by Edith Nesbit, written in 1910? A magical story about a giant model city that becomes real, fountains of hot chocolate, adorable talking dogs and the like. But there is more to it: it's also a very powerful story on how to grow up and make friends. Let's embark on a quest to write a story both entertaining and useful. A story so delightful and powerful at the same time it will still be read in 2119. Will our story also serve as a true prediction of the things to come in 100 years time?

Please read *The Magic City* by Edith Nesbit, available for free online: <http://www.gutenberg.org/ebooks/20606>

May 25

Meeting 6 – Singing? I'm glad of that; why now then dance!

Scope: Fables

Do you know the story of the cicada who, having sung all summer, had nothing to eat when winter came? Or the fox who lost his camembert to the crow because of his vanity? Or the frog who wanted to become as big as an ox? These are a few of the animals French writer Jean de la Fontaine uses in his famous fables to criticise some of our most terrible human traits: laziness, vanity, arrogance. And to think he did all this while using rhymes... What? You think you can do the same? Rhyming? I'm glad of that; why now then dance.

Please read one of Jean de la Fontaine's following fables: *The Cicada and Ant*, *The Crow and Fox* or *The Frog and Ox*. You can find them online: <http://www.la-fontaine-ch-thierry.net/onegramu.htm>

June 15

Meeting 7 – She Shakespeare

Scope: Plays and fiction

Imagine Shakespeare's plays re-written from a female point of view. Impossible? In literature, anything is possible, and Jackie French can prove it! In *Ophelia, Queen of Denmark*, she rewrites the famous play *Hamlet* and makes Ophelia the main character, a woman who dreams about justice and the making of delicious cheeses. She even imagines a happy ending in lieu of the tragedy of the original play. Sacrilege or literary freedom? You can make up your own mind after we work on this new version and as we explore famous Shakespearean plays that could do with a little feminism!

Please read *Ophelia, Queen of Denmark* by Jackie French. Available in Sydney libraries or for purchase via Booktopia.

June 29

Meeting 8 – Love, love, love

Scope: Short films

What better way to end our exploration on books than a short movie celebrating... the love of books? In the anime *The Fantastic Flying Books of Mr. Morris Lessmore*, Mr Morris is a bibliophile (a lover of books of course!) who ends up taking care of a library of flying books. A beautiful declaration of love to our favorite objects - books, and an endless source of inspiration to write our own declaration of love, in the form of a poem, a graphic novel, a short story, a fable or a storyboard. After all, love comes in many forms...

Please watch *The Fantastic Flying Books of Mr. Morris Lessmore* by William Joyce and Brandon Oldenburg. You can find it here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ad3CMri3hOs>

What to bring:

Please bring a notebook and a well-stocked pencil case to each meeting as well as a hat, drink and snack for the break (no nuts please).

About the Club Leader: Anna Jahjah

Anna Jahjah has a Master's Degree in British and American Literature and Civilisation and a Bachelor in Arabic Literature and Civilisation from Aix-en-Provence University, in France. She has been teaching storytelling and creative writing techniques to French and Australian children for over 10 years. She also owns her own theatre company and directs plays from all over the world, including but not limited to... murder mysteries!