

The Commonwealth Essay Competition: reflections across generations

Vincent and Joshua Chin both received commendations for their submissions to the Royal Commonwealth Essay Competition. This father and son team wrote their essays nearly 25 years apart and we asked them to reflect on their experience.

Vincent:

When I first came across the competition, some 25 years ago, I was thrilled to learn that there exists a forum for all students of the English Language to articulate their perspectives on a common topic. Then, as now, schools would select a handful of students whom they feel had views to put across and could say it well to represent their institution and country. Naturally, it felt special and I went about writing my essay with much enthusiasm.

With the passage of many years since then, I recognise that the competition also serves many other important objectives. First and foremost, the competition allows the Society as one of the custodians of the language to have a pulse on the standards of the language amongst the young and best English speakers (in Commonwealth countries). Secondly, the Society gets an opportunity to understand the evolving views of our young. Personally I feel that our youth are able to grasp more complex issues younger and find ever more creative solutions.

Earlier this year, 12-year-old Joshua was selected by his school to write an essay which centred on the theme of swimming. His unconventional take on the subject of Olympian Michael Phelps' lack of desire to return to the pool (and this was authored before his scandal on inhaling drugs was made known) is an example of how our young understand the physical and mental demands on a champion.

Joshua:

I feel the Commonwealth Essay Writing Competition is a platform that allows some of the top writers within the Commonwealth to come together and put their creativity to use and do up great essays. In my view, I feel this is important, as it gives pupils a chance to shine, as their writing talents may not be noticed in school or at home. Some of these students come from humble backgrounds, but they may have vivid experiences, that they can write about in great detail.

For me, I wanted to take part in this competition to benchmark myself among the many others who have high standards of writing. I read the winning entry in my category, and I was amazed at how the writer had a whole new interpretation of the title, it was quite interesting.

In Singapore, most schools have provided their students with sufficient education about creative writing, and also provide us with opportunities to take part in competitions. The same may not be true for children studying in other countries, so for some, this competition is their only chance for their talent to be recognized and rewarded.

The Commonwealth Essay Writing Competition also serves to open the eyes of pupils to the world around them by introducing them to new topics, and getting them to research about these topics and write about them.