

**The Merit of English Division**  
**Junior Division**

**Name of Winner: LI Sum Yuet Adelaide**

**Name of School: St. Mary'S Canossian College**

**Book Title: The Dictionary of Lost Words**

**Author: Pip Williams**

**Publisher: Ballantine Books**

The Dictionary of Lost Words by Pip Williams is an intriguing historical fiction novel that explores the power of words and the importance of having a voice. It is set in the late 19th and early 20th centuries and follows the story of Esme Nicoll, a young girl growing up in the Scriptorium. This is where her father and other lexicographers are working on compiling the first Oxford English Dictionary.

Since she was young, Esme has been fascinated by words. She soon discovers that not all words make it into the dictionary, as some are considered unimportant or unsuitable. This sparks her interest in collecting these discarded words and creating her own dictionary of lost words. The words include the language used by women and marginalized communities, which have been largely ignored and left out from the official dictionary.

As Esme grows older, she realizes the significance of language and how it can shape our understanding of the world. She becomes aware of the limited perspectives and biases that exist in the dictionary-making process. Esme's journey is intertwined with the suffragette movement, a

crucial time in history when women were fighting for their rights. This adds depth and historical context to the story.

One of the things I really enjoyed about this book is the well-developed characters that make the story more interesting.

Esme, the main character, is relatable and her passion for words is infectious. Supporting characters like Lizzie, a servant in the Scriptorium, and Tilda, a suffragette, provide different viewpoints and add complexity to the story. Lizzie offers insight into marginalized lives, while Tilda represents the struggle for women's rights. These characters help me understand themes like gender inequality and the power of language better.

Moreover, the inclusion of lost words that have been forgotten for centuries adds a captivating element to the book. One of these words is "bondmaid," which holds significant meaning. Esme discovers this word while observing the conversations and work of the men in the Scriptorium. As the daughter of a lexicographer, she notices that words related to women's experiences and perspectives are often left out of the dictionary. Words like "bondmaid," which refers to a female servant or slave, are excluded, showing the biases of the lexicographers.

Esme realizes the importance of preserving these lost words and the stories they represent. She secretly collects and documents them, creating her own dictionary of lost words. "Bondmaid" becomes the first word in her collection,

symbolizing the experiences and struggles of women in a society dominated by men.

The inclusion of the word "bondmaid" in Esme's dictionary represents the themes of gender inequality and the marginalization of women that are present throughout the novel. Its inclusion challenges the erasure of women's voices and emphasizes the need for a more inclusive understanding of language and history.

Through her dictionary of lost words, Esme aims to give a voice to those whose words have been silenced. She understands that language plays a significant role in shaping society. By reclaiming and celebrating these forgotten words,

she hopes to challenge the status quo and bring about social change. Esme's journey becomes a metaphor for the broader struggle for equality and the recognition of diverse voices.

The novel skillfully explores themes of gender, power, and the evolution of language. It highlights how language has been used to suppress and marginalize certain groups, especially women. By focusing on the lost words, Williams sheds light on the hidden stories and experiences of women and other marginalized communities, showcasing their resilience and their fight for recognition.

The book also demonstrates the power of language to shape perception and influence societal norms. By drawing

attention to these lost words, it encourages readers to reflect on how language can both oppress and empower different groups within society.

The Dictionary of Lost Words is not only an engaging story but also a thought-provoking exploration of language and identity. After reading it, I started questioning how language can be used to both empower and oppress. It highlights the importance of inclusivity and the recognition of diverse voices.

In my opinion, this book is a beautifully written and thought-provoking novel that uncovers the untold stories and forgotten words of women and marginalized communities.

Through Esme's journey, it showcased the power of language, the fight for equality, and the significance of giving voice to those who have been silenced. It serves as a powerful reminder of the importance of inclusivity and the ongoing struggle for social change.