

The Merit of English Division
Junior Division

Name of Winner: Wong Ching Yin Ariana

Name of School: Heep Yunn School

Book Title: The Midnight Library

Author: Matt Haig

Publisher: Canongate Books

"The Midnight Library" is an introspective and thought-provoking novel that explores the infinite possibilities of life.

The story centers around Nora Seed, a British woman in her mid-30s who struggles with deep depression. One night, her despair reaches a peak and she commits suicide. However, this unexpectedly sends her into a library that exists between the realms of life and death. As time stands still, Nora gets

to sample countless lives she could have lived, such as marrying her ex-fiancé, Dan, or becoming an Olympic swimmer. Nevertheless, she must ultimately decide whether she wants to return to her old life or choose a new path that holds the promise of a brighter future.

Personally, one particular lesson that I have learnt from this book is that dwelling on regrets only holds us back. Although the novel's start is quite melancholic and perhaps a little hard to take, the sombre beginning is essential to feel the relief of Nora's transformation. Throughout her life, Nora harbored numerous regrets and in each regret, she sees a wasted opportunity for success or happiness. However, when she gets to undo those regrets and see where they would've led her, she realizes those paths would not have

brought her joy and satisfaction after all. It is typical that when we have regrets, we like to imagine that our lives would be better if we'd made a different choice because it's easier, less painful, and more comforting to think about the "what-ifs" instead of confronting the harsh realities in the present. For instance, some students often blame themselves for making many careless mistakes in their exams or regret not studying hard enough. Despite that, regret is just a never-ending cycle that causes self-hatred, misery, and stagnancy—it will never lead to anywhere good. We can't change the past, but we can choose our futures. Therefore, rather than staying in an endless and unalterable loop of regret, we should leave those regrets behind and move forward. Then, perhaps, we can achieve a happy and fulfilling life.

Another issue that is presented in this book is depression, which Nora, the main character, experiences. Feeling not wanted by the world and facing countless hardships in life, she takes an overdose of sleeping pills. Last year, the renowned Hong Kong-born singer-songwriter Coco Lee died at the age of 48 after committing suicide at home and this has undoubtedly drawn my attention to this topic. In the modern era, depression is an universally recognized mental problem. Estimated that 5% of adults suffer from the disorder from all around the world, this mental disorder can be triggered by stressful events, childhood trauma, and various other factors. Moreover, it has many deleterious effects on our well-being, such as causing feelings of misery or hopelessness, angry outbursts, and sleep disturbances. Upon reading this book, I hope that individuals suffering

from depression can remember one thing — there is always a reason to stay alive. The author of this book, Matt Haig, himself has likewise experienced depression before but he has ultimately chosen to live. Hence, to all those currently battling depression, it is possible to overcome this disorder and there are always people willing to help you.

Overall, I thoroughly enjoyed “The Midnight Library”. The character development, setting, and plot are engaging, creating a rich tapestry that immerses readers in a captivating narrative experience. It also discusses significant themes such as mental health and regret, which is helpful in overcoming the challenges in the present and realizing the mental status of those with depression. I would definitely recommend this novel to teenagers and adults alike as it is a

short yet meaningful read that will leave you pondering long
after you finish the last page.