

Media Release

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SIX TEACHERS AWARDED THE INSPIRING TEACHER OF ENGLISH AWARD 2013

Six English teachers from primary and secondary schools and junior colleges were awarded the Inspiring Teacher of English Award this year. The winners received a trophy, certificate and cash award from Guest of Honour, Ms Indranee Rajah, Senior Minister of State, Ministry of Education and Ministry of Law, at the award ceremony today. A complete list of winners can be found in the Annexes.

The Inspiring Teacher of English Award, now in its sixth year, is jointly presented by the Speak Good English Movement and The Straits Times and supported by the Ministry of Education. The Award honours outstanding teachers of English Language, English Literature and General Paper.

Since the Award started in 2008, a total of 42 teachers from the Primary, Secondary and Junior College levels have been recognised for their passion in making English interesting and their unique ability to kindle in each student a love for the language.

Mr Goh Eck Kheng, Chairman of the Speak Good English Movement, said, "Teachers are role models to their students of good English and, in particular, teachers of English should set the benchmark in the use of English in their schools for students and colleagues."

This year, 105 teachers were nominated by their students, parents, or their peers, and endorsed by their principals. All nominated teachers will receive certificates of commendation.

For Mrs Anne Kingsley-Lee of CHIJ St Theresa's Convent, a love for language can be nurtured and cultivated once it has been seeded. This is the guiding principle behind the lessons Anne prepares and conducts. Every lesson is an opportunity to create an interest in English in her students. Her techniques involve using 'language artefacts' that are relevant to her students; this can take the form of everyday objects, prose and even paintings, among other things. Through these artefacts, she highlights to her students the many possibilities of the English Language. Anne aims for her students to have an appreciation of English, a sound understanding of the basics of good English, be it spoken or written, and the ability to share their opinions without fear.

When it comes to General Paper, Ms Lauren Toh advocates inquiry-driven approaches that are tailored specifically for her students. For example, while her Science students at Catholic Junior College can relate to discussions of issues that deal with Science and Technology with ease, her Arts students tend to be more detached from such discussions. She would then turn to Literature to make the topics more relatable to them, such as drawing parallels between mythological devices such as Prometheus's Fire and Pandora's Box and concepts such as harms and benefits. By reconciling the students' interests with the topics being discussed, they become more engaged and are able to come up with arguments and viewpoints that are well thought through.

"Learning (and mastering) a language should start with a strong grasp of the foundations," says Mr Tan Wah Jiam from Hwa Chong Institution (College Section). With this philosophy, Wah Jiam focuses on ensuring that students are competent in basic grammar and vocabulary first. He believes that the words they have will form the concept they know and the more words they have in their arsenal, the larger the range of ideas they can conceive and express. To write well, he emphasises on clarity, accuracy and precision as these are the core criteria for expressing ideas. His preference for real-world tasks instead of abstracted grammatical exercises also reflects his strong belief in building a foundation in the basics. While he does use abstracted exercises at the early stages of learning, he quickly moves his students on to practical and applied activities so as to help them achieve eventual appreciation and mastery of the language.

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About the Inspiring Teacher of English Award

The Inspiring Teacher of English Award acknowledges teachers who have been instrumental in igniting a love for the English language and are effective in helping their students speak and write better. These teachers are passionate about making English interesting and relevant to their students, and are innovative in engaging their students to help them learn English better. The Award salutes these teachers for their continual learning and constant efforts to upgrade themselves to benefit their students and schools. For more information, please visit www.goodenglish.org.sg.

WINNERS OF THE INSPIRING TEACHER OF ENGLISH AWARD 2013

PRIMARY	
NAME	SCHOOL
Mrs Sangeetha Sivanesan	Da Qiao Primary School
SECONDARY	
NAME	SCHOOL
Mrs Anne Kingsley-Lee	CHIJ St Theresa's Convent
Ms Vanessa Heng	Nanyang Girls' High School
JUNIOR COLLEGES	
NAME	SCHOOL
Mr Patrick Sum	Anglo Chinese Junior College
Ms Laureen Toh	Catholic Junior College
Mr Tan Wah Jiam	Hwa Chong Institution (College Section)

WINNERS OF THE INSPIRING TEACHER OF ENGLISH AWARD 2013

1. Mrs Sangeetha Sivanesan (Da Qiao Primary School)

To Sangeetha, every child can learn and flourish. She uses cooperative learning strategies such as “Round Robin” and “Think Pair Share”, as well as formative assessment strategies that allow for peer evaluation and students to reflect on what they have just learnt.

Sangeetha also feels it's important to encourage pupils to participate in non-academic language activities in order to instil a love for the language in them. She made full use of the opportunities as an EL Coordinator and Library Coordinator to organise such activities. Among many of her well-received efforts are the Spelling Bee competition, the “DQPS Amazing Race” and a poetry recital performance by primary two pupils.

2. Mrs Anne Kingsley-Lee (CHIJ St Theresa's Convent)

Anne's philosophy of teaching is in making every student understand that their viewpoint matters. To this end, she uses questions to draw links between every student's contributions to class discussions and helps them verbalise their thinking. While doing so, she also looks for ways to lay the foundation for critical thinking and help students grow their capacity for reasoned argument.

To help facilitate this, Anne ensures that she always has an idea of how she can strengthen the quality of reasoning that goes on in lessons before stepping into the classroom. This involves preparing questions or activities that provoke thinking and hold students accountable for their views. Anne hopes that students will leave her classroom with an understanding of how such questions can be used in the larger conversation of life.

3. Ms Vanessa Heng (Nanyang Girls' High School)

Vanessa believes that reading and talking about stories encourages one to be more attentive to a writer's craft. Literature thus becomes a way for one to learn about language. It is this idea that reading good writing is the precursor to learning how to write well that helps her to prepare her Language Arts lessons.

As some students might struggle to understand the deeper motivations of the characters that they are analysing during Literature classes, Vanessa makes use of excerpts from their own favourite books to show how similar motivations can be found in characters they are familiar with. In doing so, they pick up new skills in class and find new meanings in old stories. By cultivating her students' interest in stories, she encourages them to take a greater interest in writing about their own experiences and finding truth and meaning in them.

4. Mr Patrick Sum (Anglo Chinese Junior College)

Patrick has sought to make his GP classroom a safe and laughter-filled space where students can grow in confidence and skills as they find their personal voices with informed opinions about an increasingly complex world.

While teaching, Patrick always holds the assumption that each of his students has some background knowledge that they can bring into the discussion. And by sharing the way he or his own family and friends respond to different issues, he hopes to scaffold his students' own ideas and help them gain perspectives as they come together in small groups to share their own reflections.

Patrick firmly believes that any pedagogical innovation must be relevant to his students. For example, General Paper shares several linguistic comprehension skills with the Humanities, especially Literature. Hence, for his students who are more inclined towards the Sciences, he would adapt certain Scientific and Mathematical approaches to help them engage with language and issues with greater ease. Some of the ways that he has come up with include correlating vocabulary with Chemistry's pH scale to improve their paraphrasing skills, or by making use of mathematical symbols or Venn diagrams to demonstrate how geopolitical and social issues often overlap in their causes, impacts and consequences.

5. Ms Laureen Toh (Catholic Junior College)

Laureen is an advocate of approaches that are inquiry-driven, inductive and anchored on concepts. She achieves this by organising panels for her classes, where external guests would come into the classroom and discuss various topics with them. For example, a discussion on issues dealing with Media would involve journalists. As a result, her students become fully engaged in exploring different perspectives.

Laureen also guides her students to always examine their own thinking and challenges them to confront and justify their views by ensuring that they are willing to ask "what makes you say that?" or "what significance does this have in relation to our society?". By doing so, she situates what goes on in the classroom to a much wider context, thus helping her students become transformative thinkers.

6. Mr Tan Wah Jiam (Hwa Chong Institution – College Section)

Wah Jiam's philosophy of teaching English revolves around three concepts – the love of language, a strong foundation in basics, and practical application. While teaching, he takes the opportunity to highlight intriguing features of the English Language and tries to convey to his students a sense of joy in using the language well.

In terms of having a strong foundation, he emphasises having a wide vocabulary as a key factor of mastering the language. He believes that having more words at one's fingertips would mean that one can better conceive and express ideas.

Wah Jiam also prefers using real-world tasks in teaching English, as compared to abstracted grammatical exercises. His belief is that while abstracted exercises tend to be useful in the early stages of learning, achieving mastery would involve learners moving on to practical and applied activities.