

# 文訊

## WORD POWER

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### 最好的禮物

聖誕剛過，春節馬上又到了。逢年過節，少不免送禮。美國作家歐亨利(O. Henry)的經典之作《聖誕禮物》(The Gift of the Magi)敘述了這樣一個故事：聖誕臨近，一對貧窮的年輕夫婦為了送禮物給對方，一個剪掉秀髮，換成金錶鍊送予夫君；一個變賣家傳金錶，買下愛妻念念不忘的髮飾。陰差陽錯下，兩人得物無所用。雖然如此，歐亨利卻認為他們深諳送禮之道，智慧之高堪比東方三博士。

《聖誕禮物》寫於一九零五年，故事中那對小夫妻假若生活在百多年後的今天，即使智慧再高，買禮物的煩惱也只會增無減。今時今日，夫妻互送禮物的日子可不止於聖誕節。相識邂逅、表白定情、結婚周年……值得紀念的日子不勝枚舉。香港作家朱少璋冷眼旁觀，在〈發展感情這回傻事〉一文寫道：“有了這批‘紀念日’作座標，感情就好像有了定點的發展根據和方向。”紀念日愈來愈受重視，甚至成為考驗雙方關係的小測大考。有些戀情才剛萌芽，便因某一方忘記紀念日而大大扣分；有一些岌岌可危的愛情，卻憑紀念日的名貴禮物勉強過關。

紀念日無禮不歡的現象並非戀人所獨有。現今社會，凡有節慶，似乎總要吃喝玩樂、互送禮物，才稱得上盡興。情人節紀念的是誰？聖誕節又有何意義？這些都在瘋狂的促銷搶購與熱鬧的觥籌交錯間一一被人遺忘，紀念日彷彿就是為了購物、送禮、享樂而生。教宗方濟各多次抨擊聖誕節過度商業化，呼籲世人回歸簡樸生活，把省下來的錢用來幫助有需要的人。對消費至上的節日文化同樣深惡痛絕的，還有提倡設立母親節的安娜·查維斯(Anna Jarvis)。

查維斯經歷喪母之痛後，決定達成母親的遺願：指定一個日子來紀念天下的母親，表揚她們的無私奉獻。經她多方奔走，美國終於在一九一四年把每年五月第二個星期天(最接近查維斯母親忌日的星期天)定為母親節。

查維斯離鄉工作，母女長期分隔兩地，全賴一紙家書聊訴思念之情。她深明紙短情長的道理，鼓勵人們在母親節當天親筆寫信，讚頌親恩。然而，當時大眾慶祝母親節，與其他節日一樣，總離不開消費。與

其花時間寫信，何不乾脆購買賀卡，在預印的詞句旁邊簽名了事？查維斯批評道：“致送預印的賀卡，只代表你對為自己付出最多的人，連寫點東西的心思都沒有。”象徵母親節的白康乃馨平日乏人問津，但一到母親節，價格便會飆升。當白康乃馨供不應求，花商便聲稱白康乃馨只適合紀念去世的母親，若母親健在，應贈以紅康乃馨。母親節日益商業化，查維斯不禁慨歎：“母親節像聖誕等節慶一樣，淪為禮物日，帶來沉重壓力，人人大灑金錢，造成諸多浪費，實非我們所樂見。”

到了二十一世紀，消費主義愈演愈烈。不少人以為在父親節、母親節當天與父母一起上館子，送上名貴禮物，便是孝順；在紀念日、節慶送禮給親友，便能維繫感情。事實上，父母也許更渴望子女陪伴左右；收禮者則為回禮費煞思量，最後人人家中都多了一些棄之可惜的無用之物。

難道表達心意一定得花錢嗎？翻譯家鄭振鐸種了兩株石榴樹，趁果實尚未熟透，用小刀刻上親友和鄰家孩子的名字。果子成熟後，他會找個星期天把孩子叫來，分發石榴，和他們一起玩遊戲、說故事。原本平平無奇的星期天，從此變成大家翹首以待的“石榴節”，永誌在這些孩子心中。

紀念日原是年曆上一個平常日子，因記掛惦念而變得意義非凡；禮物本是生活中一件尋常物事，因濃情厚意而變得彌足珍貴。對《聖誕禮物》中那兩口子來說，儘管錶鍊和髮飾失去了實際功用，卻給予他倆攜手面對困難的勇氣和希望。千里送鵝毛，禮輕情意重。只要贈物之人情真意切，哪怕微薄平凡如一顆石榴，已是最好的禮物。





# WE REMEMBER

“Men to the left! Women to the right!”

These eight words would haunt many Holocaust survivors for the rest of their lives. Upon arriving in cattle trucks at Auschwitz, Poland, the deported Jews were put through a selection process right on the unloading platforms that would determine whether they would work or die. In an instant, families were permanently torn apart. There was no time to kiss, to hug, or to say goodbye. On average, only one out of five deportees was selected for forced labour. The rest were taken to gas chambers for summary execution. This is just one gruesome snapshot of the Holocaust, which claimed the lives of approximately six million Jews and millions of others during the Nazis’ rule over Germany and much of Europe.

In 2005, the United Nations General Assembly designated 27 January, the day of the liberation of Auschwitz concentration and extermination camp, as International Holocaust Remembrance Day. But well before that, Jewish teens had gathered every year in Auschwitz since 1988 for a three-kilometre silent march to Birkenau as a tribute to the victims of the Holocaust. In this journey called the March of the Living, tens of thousands of participants march with the survivors and listen to their stories. In this way they become witnesses to the genocide and help carry the torch of memory for the ageing survivors.

Commemoration days and activities are but one of the many ways to keep people remembering the past. Visits to historic sites and museums in person, for instance, create immersive and poignant experiences that will last for a lifetime. The Auschwitz-Birkenau State Museum was officially opened at the concentration camp site in 1947. Almost 80 years have passed since the last survivor was liberated, yet even on a summer day there is still a palpable bleakness in the air, making the Auschwitz-Birkenau tour chilling and painful for both visitors and guide-educators. About 70 kilometres from the death camp, Oskar Schindler’s Enamel Factory now houses a branch of the Kraków Historical Museum and bears testimony to the Nazis’ occupation. One cannot help recalling scenes from Steven Spielberg’s masterpiece *Schindler’s List* upon entering the office of the man who saved over 1,300 Jews. The sight of his writing desk and the floor-to-ceiling showcase of enamelware manufactured by the factory workers makes the catastrophic past tangible and impossible to forget.

When faced with the horrendous memory of the past, some may refuse to look back or simply choose to deny it. For those who have survived the Holocaust, their struggle did not end with the liberation from concentration and extermination camps. They are engaged in a never-ending

crusade—the fight for remembrance. Primo Levi, an Italian Jewish chemist, was arrested and deported to Auschwitz in 1944. After returning to Italy, he felt more than ever compelled to write about what had happened. In a calm and sober voice, his book *If This Is a Man* recounts what he went through and explores humanity amid inhumanity. He writes, “For the survivors, remembering is a duty. They do not want to forget, and above all they do not want the world to forget, because they understand that their experiences were not meaningless.”

Elie Wiesel, a Romanian Jewish journalist, also felt the urge to commit his traumatic past to paper. *Night*, his autobiographical novel, has been translated into over 30 languages and remains one of the most iconic literary expressions of the Holocaust. Giving an account of his ordeals, the book addresses philosophical questions about the Holocaust and human nature. Wiesel was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize in 1986 for being a messenger of peace, atonement and dignity. In his acceptance speech, Wiesel said he had tried to “keep memory alive” and “fight those who would forget”. As for those who perished, he declared, “We could not prevent their deaths the first time, but if we forget them they will be killed a second time. And this time, it will be our responsibility.”

Literature is certainly a powerful tool to introduce a new generation to one of the darkest chapters in human history, but survivors have other ways to bear witness for the dead and for the living. Edward Mosberg, who saw Holocaust education as his moral mission, often donned a reproduction of his striped concentration camp uniform with matching cap in public, and wore a bracelet showing his prisoner number every day. He said, “As long as I live I have to go and talk about this so the Holocaust will never be forgotten.” The old man kept his words. He appeared in documentaries, gave talks, joined the March of the Living, and remained active in Holocaust commemoration until he died at the age of 96.

January 2024 marks the 79th anniversary of the liberation of Auschwitz. On the International Holocaust Remembrance Day, wreaths will be laid and prayers will be offered to the victims. We might never be able to fully fathom the horror of the Holocaust or understand the despair of those who suffered. Yet, it is important for us to refresh our memory of their suffering. As the oft-quoted aphorism goes, “Those who cannot remember the past are condemned to repeat it.” With a wave of hatred, xenophobia and racism hitting the world, it is more pertinent than ever to remember what happened. Perhaps only when we and the world remember the past can we learn from history.







# 一日看盡長安花

貞元十二年(公元796年)初春二月，長安城的杏花開得正盛，又是一年一度進士放榜的日子。天還沒亮，許多士子已經趕到禮部南院外，在料峭春寒中默然佇立，等待決定命運的一刻。

黎明時分，黃榜甫貼上東牆，現場頓時人聲鼎沸，人人爭相擁擠上前，想要看個仔細。一名老叟好不容易擠到前面，反覆看了好幾遍，還是找不到自己的名字。他雙目空洞無神，喃喃自語：“不中，還是不中……”旁人把他推開，並不在意他有多失望。唐代有諺語謂“五十少進士”，意思是五十歲能考上進士已算年輕，可見皓首蒼顏仍未能登第乃尋常事。每年有一千多名舉子應試，進士名額頂多二十餘，注定大多數人只能黯然落第。

人羣中，有一名中年男子，兩鬢斑白，神色焦慮，一身麻布衣洗得發白。那人把目光投向榜上兩個字，滿懷希望，卻又不敢確定，暗忖：“那兩字……是‘孟郊’嗎？”

孟郊，字東野，以苦吟著稱的中唐詩人，一首《遊子吟》更是千古傳誦。然而，在一千多年前放榜之際，他也不過是個忐忑不安的舉子。

這已經不是孟郊第一次考進士了。五年前，四十一歲的孟郊赴長安應考，與二十多歲的韓愈和李觀結為莫逆之交。那一年錄取進士二十三人，韓李皆榜上有名，獨欠孟郊。他在《長安旅情》寫道：

盡說青雲路，有足皆可至。  
我馬亦四蹄，出門似無地。  
玉京十二樓，峨峨倚青翠。  
下有千朱門，何門薦孤士。

唐代科舉試卷不會糊名。考官閱卷評分時，還會考慮考生的才情聲望，以及各方名人的舉薦。因此，高門望族往往佔盡優勢，而寒門庶子沒有人脈，自然舉步維艱。或許孟郊也知道想要廣結人脈，必須交際應酬。可是，他為人孤高，不屑逢迎。韓愈的《孟生詩》這樣描述孟郊：“異質忌處羣，孤芳難寄林。誰憐松桂性，競愛桃李陰。”孟郊也形容自己“萬俗皆走

圓，一身猶學方”。孟郊既無顯赫家世，又是個落落寡合之人，際遇難免不如人意。

翌年，孟郊重新振作，再次應試，卻又再度名落孫山。冠蓋滿京華，斯人獨憔悴。他徹夜無眠，揮筆寫成《再下第》：

一夕九起嗟，夢短不到家。  
兩度長安陌，空將淚見花。

長安一次又一次拒絕了這名落魄書生。他獨立風中，承受着求而不得之苦，耳邊傳來朱門大宅裏的宴樂聲，使他倍感悲涼，憤然寫下《長安道》：

胡風激秦樹，賤子風中泣。  
家家朱門開，得見不可入。  
長安十二衢，投樹鳥亦急。  
高閣何人家，笙簧正喧吸。

寒窗苦讀數十載，始終一無所得。孟郊心灰意冷，本想放棄，卻還是抵不住慈母百般相勸，遂於貞元十二年再赴長安，又一次站在榜下。

前排的士子看過中試名單後，大多垂頭喪氣地走開了。孟郊使勁往前擠，眯着雙眼，細看榜單。他沒有看錯，自己的名字赫然在列，金榜題名。

這是孟郊人生中最光輝的一天。年屆四十六，他終於實現了母親的夙願，進士及第，光耀門庭，半生的困頓和鬱結彷彿一掃而空。同一座長安城，昨天還是“萬物皆及時，獨余不覺春”，一片愁雲慘霧，此刻卻是春光明媚，繁花似錦。他欣喜若狂，完全用不着苦吟，揮筆疾書，以一首《登科後》記下人生巔峯的一刻：

昔日齷齪不足誇，今朝放蕩思無涯。  
春風得意馬蹄疾，一日看盡長安花。

孟郊或許憧憬着雁塔題名之後，就能鯤鵬展翅，扶搖直上青雲路。哪會想到，這只是上天事先給他的一點補償。先前的落第失意，與日後的辛酸磨難相比，簡直微不足道！不過，那又是另一個故事了。

錦瑟無端五十弦，一弦一柱思華年。

李商隱《錦瑟》



Three military helicopters are shown in flight against a hazy, light-colored sky. The helicopters are silhouetted, and their rotors are visible.

# 365 DAYS

Publishing a critically acclaimed best-seller should be eminently satisfying for most writers, but not for Dr Ronald Joel Glasser. In fact, he wished his extraordinary debut *365 Days* could never have been written.

It all started in September 1968 when the 29-year-old paediatrician was assigned to Camp Zama Army Hospital in Japan. Originally tasked with taking care of children of military officers, Glasser ended up treating injured soldiers from the front line of the Vietnam War. Most of them were not much older than his young patients. Feeling compelled to tell what he had seen and heard, he began writing war stories, 17 of which were published in 1971 under the title *365 Days*, a reference to the length of a military tour of duty in Vietnam.

In war literature, courage is a common theme that is usually embodied in the act of soldiers fighting against great odds to triumph over their enemies. Yet, it is portrayed differently in Glasser's short stories, some of which feature non-combatant men and women as the main characters. Among them are "Dust Offs"—helicopter teams landing at battle zones amid heavy fire for medical evacuation—and medics of the front line, who would limit their own food and water so that they could carry more medical supplies. Easily overshadowed as their roles might have been, the actions of these medics are testimony to the fact that bravery could come in the form of saving lives rather than taking them.

Courage is also seen in the uncomplaining endurance of the wounded at the army hospital. One of them was David Jensen, a 20-year-old patient in the burn unit. To avoid bacterial infection in his wounds, he had to soak himself in a bathtub every day. Painkillers were not used, out of concern that this would result in addiction. Painfully suppressing his groans, he silently endured the sight of large and small pieces of burnt skin peeling off from his body.

In describing the sacrifice, suffering and struggle of military personnel, Glasser does not romanticise or glorify combat. "Going for something they didn't believe in or for that matter didn't care about, just to make it 365 days and be done with it," he writes of the young conscripts. The soldiers

had no illusions about the cause for which they were supposedly fighting. They obeyed orders and performed their duties in the field, with the ultimate goal of making it through just 365 days. Yet many could not make it. And for those fortunate enough to return home, life would never be the same.

The heart-wrenching part of *365 Days* lies not merely in the loss of lives, but in seemingly insignificant moments that indicate the loss of innocence among the young, who were already comfortably numb with violence. In one story, a group who had carried out a night ambush returned to their base in the morning. Waiting for their breakfast, they recounted the blood and gore of the killings overnight and talked about a comrade killed in action. Despite the heaviness of these topics, there was a startling lack of emotion in the conversation. No sorrow, no grief, no anguish. At the end of the tale, one of them flied into a fit of rage only because there were no more cornflakes left.

Although not a single story is written from the perspective of Vietnamese civilians, their agony is obvious. Glasser tells of a village being blown up because a single sniper round was fired from that general direction, and an old Vietnamese man casually shot simply because he refused to hand over a carton of cokes on his bicycle. In one of Jensen's treatment sessions, to distract him from the pain, his medic asked him of his impression of women in Vietnam. Jensen replied that he had not met any local people, adding casually, "We killed 'em all." In various ways, the book suggests that war atrocities were common, with trivial matters easily escalating into violent deaths, and civilian casualties accepted as nothing more than collateral damage.

Today, when strife seems to be too easy to escalate into fights and then into battles, *365 Days* gives a lasting reminder of wartime brutality and its aftermath. In the preface to the second edition of this classic of war literature, Glasser notes, "If there was a lesson in the experiences of Vietnam ... I was convinced it could come only from the recounting of the individual acts of those who had paid the price." With lessons from the past in mind, we might finally be able to take a slow but steady step towards the day when peace prevails.







# 紀·念·日



(小篆)

“紀”的本字是“己”。“己”字最早見於甲骨文，以象絲繩之形，本指把散亂的絲縷編結在一起的絲繩。“己”後來借用作表示自身，又代表天干第六位，失其本義。篆文出現後，“己”加上義符“糸”而成“紀”，以表示甲骨文中的本義。“紀”用於約束絲縷，因此也引申指制約行為，以表達紀律、綱常等義。

“紀”除法度外，尚有年歲、世代等義。“紀年”、“年紀”、“世紀”等詞中的“紀”，字義相當清晰，用法不難掌握。如何區分“紀錄”與“記錄”，則較令人困惑。大體而言，表示載錄、記載時，“記”與“紀”相通。話雖如此，兩岸三地的語用習慣不盡相同。台灣以詞性區分，“記錄”為動詞，“紀錄”為名詞。在內地，除指某個時期或範圍內最佳成績（“破紀錄”）和專門報道某人某事的影片（“紀錄片”）用“紀錄”外，其他情況一般用“記錄”。在香港，“紀錄”與“記錄”同樣普遍，以政府公文而言，記述會議內容的文書多寫作“會議記錄”，簡錄式的記錄則通常寫作“會議紀要”。



(甲骨文)

“念”字見於上古時期的甲骨文，較“紀”字為早。“念”的下半部為“心”字，取心臟之形。在金文中，“念”上半部與英文字母“A”十分相似，學術界普遍認為這是一個朝下的口。“念”就是心中所想，口中念叨之意。

“念”是心裏所思所想，作動詞用有“想到、想起”之意。詩人善感多思，把心念化為辭章：“念武陵人遠，煙鎖秦樓”，李清照念的是即將遠行的夫君；“念昔植者勞，願言留勿剪”，皇甫泌念的是前人栽樹的辛勞；“念天地之悠悠，獨滄然而涕下”，陳子昂念的是人在無垠時空下的渺小和孤獨。

《說文解字·心部》：“念，常思也。”正如白居易在《夜雨》一詩云：“我有所念人，隔在遠遠鄉。我有所感事，結在深深腸。”惦記老家的父母，思念異地的戀人，懷想遠方的故友。想念、掛念、惦念，牽腸掛肚盡在不言中。紀念卻往往付諸行動，以慶祝或追悼的方式，向所愛所敬者表達心意。甜蜜如情侶交往百日，沉重如國殤公祭，簡單的一束鮮花、一個鞠躬，都為這一天賦予特別的意義，使人永誌不忘。



(甲骨文)

太陽照耀大地，長養萬物，亙古不變。“日”字象太陽之形，字形從古至今，變化甚微。《山海經》裏有一則關於人與大自然爭勝的神話。夸父想要追上空中永不停歇的太陽，於是邁開雙腿飛速奔跑，最終渴死於道上。成語“夸父追日”喻人不自量力，向來帶貶義，巴金卻在散文《日》中歌頌夸父為追尋理想無畏無懼：“我懷念上古的夸父，他追趕日影，渴死在曠谷。為着追求光和熱，人寧願捨棄自己的生命。”夸父大抵不會在乎世人認為他是愚是勇。從他不顧一切追逐太陽那一刻起，他的生命便不再一樣。

地球自轉產生晝夜交替的周期為二十四小時，西方天文學稱之為太陽日，中國傳統稱之為一日。“日”字後又引申為時候、時代、日子。古人除了嫁娶、祭祀、殮葬等人生大事外，就連沐浴、剃頭、裁衣等日常小事都要翻皇曆擇好日。今人為求子女一生順遂平安，乾脆擇定吉日吉時剖腹產子，趨吉避凶，不讓古人專美。其實，日子過得如何，雖與造化際遇有關，但更重要的還是心態。是天堂還是地獄，可能也只是一念之間。哪怕人生路上磕磕絆絆、平平淡淡，若心存善念，常懷感恩，也可像雲門祖師文偃禪師所言：“日日是好日。”

人的一生當中，有兩個生日，一個是自己誕生的日子，  
另一個是真正理解自己的日子。

松浦彌太郎《最糟也最棒的書店》





# Happy Literary Holidays

Literature transports us to different worlds, evokes emotions, challenges established beliefs and even alters the course of our lives. To commemorate the profound impact of the written word, literary holidays are created by bibliophiles to show their affection for their favourite authors or book characters. Here are two of the most popular literary holidays in the world and some tips on what you can do to celebrate them.

## Towel Day

The first Towel Day was on 25 May 2001, two weeks after the untimely death of Douglas Adams, the author of *The Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy* series. In loving memory of the comedy science fiction writer who had the answer to life, the universe and everything, fans were encouraged to carry a towel as a token of remembrance of and gratitude for the whimsical world that he created. Since then, celebrating Towel Day has become a tradition for readers across the universe.

But why a towel? According to *The Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy*, the fictional electronic travel guide for galactic hitchhikers, a towel is "about the most massively useful thing an interstellar hitchhiker can have". What's more, "any man who can hitch the length and breadth of the galaxy, rough it, slum it, struggle against terrible odds, win through, and still knows where his towel is, is clearly a man to be reckoned with." Carrying a towel not only pays tribute to Adams, but also embodies the wit, imagination and perpetual sense of humour that permeate his works.

Presumably no one recognises the significance of a towel to interstellar travellers as much as astronauts do. On Towel Day in 2015, Commander Samantha Cristoforetti read the *Guide* aloud aboard the International Space Station, and threw out a towel at the conclusion of her reading to pay homage to the remarkable book series and its author. In the following year on the same space station, Major Tim Peake displayed a towel embroidered with the words "DON'T PANIC", a phrase emblazoned on the cover of the *Guide*.

So, if you are looking to commemorate Towel Day this year, you could take a moment to stick up your thumb in a bid to hitch a ride on a spacecraft, read or re-read any of the five books in the series, or simply carry a towel with you wherever you go. The key message conveyed by this literary holiday is crystal clear: DON'T PANIC. No matter what the galaxy throws at you, take heart from the fact that you have your trusty towel with you.

## Mad Hatter Day

Celebrated annually on 6 October, Mad Hatter Day is dedicated to the Hatter, a famous character in Lewis Carroll's *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*. The Hatter is described as "mad" in the book and becomes popularly known as the Mad Hatter.

The Mad Hatter first appears in Chapter 7 "A Mad Tea-Party". While having tea with the March Hare and the Dormouse, he asks Alice, "Why is a raven like a writing-desk?" The riddle was meant to be unsolvable. However, after being badgered by readers one too many times, Carroll offered an answer in the preface to the 1896 edition of the book: "Because it can produce a few notes, tho they are very flat; and it is nevar put with the wrong end in front." The purposely misspelled word "nevar" is "raven" written backwards, i.e. with the wrong end in front.

It seems natural to associate the eccentric Mad Hatter with the idiom "mad as a hatter", which describes someone perceived to be insane or prone to unpredictable behaviour, but the expression was already in common use before the book was written. Many believe that it alludes to the mercury-maddened hat makers in the 18th and 19th centuries. It has also been suggested that this idiom may have evolved from the expression "mad as an atter", "atter" being the Anglo-Saxon form of "adder" (a type of poisonous snake).

While the exact origin of the simile remains obscure, the Mad Hatter certainly has a distinctive look. In the original illustrations by John Tenniel, the Mad Hatter wears a hat with a price tag marked "In this Style 10/6", which means a hat in that style costs 10 shillings and 6 pence. Taking inspiration from this, fans have come up with the idea to act in the style of the Mad Hatter on 6 October.

Celebrating Mad Hatter Day is simple. Just take a break from your usual routine and indulge in some laughable, absurd or even crazy things to bring out your silly side. You may throw a tea party, wear a top hat of some kind for the whole day, ask ridiculous riddles, propose new solutions to the Mad Hatter's classic riddle, and so on.

Literary holidays not only give us the chance to immerse ourselves in the world of literature, but also add a bit of literary twist to our celebration routine. When marking this year's calendar with birthdays of your loved ones and important anniversaries, remember to leave some time for yourself to enjoy the pleasure of reading and rekindle your love for books.



Memories are our strength. When night attempts to return,  
we must light up the great dates, as we would light torches.

Victor Hugo





# The English Tutorial

Fred Chau  
Transport Department

It was approaching 1997 when Chris Patten, the last governor of Hong Kong, visited Kowloon City, during which I served as his interpreter for ten minutes. Determined to do a better job should there be a next time, I started to create my own English immersion course.

After venturing out to chat with a few English-speaking strangers at the Avenue of Stars in Tsim Sha Tsui, I concluded that this wildcat approach should morph into a more systematic one. So the venue shifted to Mong Kok, a place perhaps less glamorous yet bustling with local life.

In a tiny booth in an old commercial building, I sat face to face with a British young man.

“Sorry for the stuffy air. I’m Richard, your new English tutor,” he introduced himself cheerfully.

“Nice to meet you. Where’s Margaret?” I asked.

“Who?”

“The lady who sometimes showed off, you know, advertised her ...”

“Oh, she’s left for the Mainland,” he said.

“Please don’t get me wrong. This is MK and everything is ...”

Before I finished, he laughed, “You can say that again.”

I smiled.

Richard had been teaching in Oxford—not the university, but an English tutorial centre in the district. We not only talked about the English language, but also touched on works by George Orwell and Franz Kafka.

As friendship grew, our lessons were no longer confined to the tutorial centre. Walking down the street, he would tell me there were no such things as “private cars” in English, nor was there much happening in the streets back in many parts of Britain. Once, we drank rounds of beer gleefully in a pub, dipping ourselves into the bubbly culture. As I groggily tottered towards the bathroom, I overheard him telling his beer pal, “Fred has translated for the Governor.”

“It’s the Gardener!” I shouted to correct him, borrowing a leaf out of Patten’s book of humour.

A learner crazier than me, Richard even carried a secret gadget around to record people’s daily conversations in

Cantonese. He would ask me to decode slang and jargon for him. One day, he came up with an ambitious plan: to publish a book on Cantonese learning.

The flat Richard rented was in an old tenement in Jordan. On the first day that I walked down its dimly lit corridor, I heard a child crying in his neighbour’s flat. Richard said there had been some kind of domestic violence next door the night before. This was where our project took flight.

Richard collected excerpts of different radio programmes such as horse racing, current affairs phone-ins and midnight advice offered by an agony aunt, who we both agreed had a beautiful voice. It was strange for me to hear a Briton commenting on a host of local issues though. I had no difficulty translating political terms, but was overwhelmed by bookmaking terms like double quinella and triple trio. Apparently a trip to Happy Valley was in order.

Leaving the copyright issue for the future, we experimented with all sorts of translation and bantered about the ridiculous ones. When we were drained of ideas, Richard would play the double bass, allowing the day to linger a little longer.

There is always a time when good things come to an abrupt end. Several weeks after our last contact, my phone rang. It was Richard. He told me that he had just recovered from chickenpox and was going to leave on the coming Saturday. No farewell please.

What had gone wrong? Was it because I had not worked hard enough for the project; or was I not caring enough for a friend who had succumbed to chickenpox thousands of miles away from his home country? Even today I have no answer for it.

Many years later I received a letter from him. He told me that he played music on an ocean cruiser before returning to Britain. He was now settled, with a happy marriage and a job in computer translation. Still, he did not forget about the radio recordings. Sure, that’s the Richard I knew, always full of life and undeterred enthusiasm. I was more than happy for him.

As years passed, the chance to co-author a book with Richard has long gone. Indeed, as many things have changed, I would rather leave the project to gather dust. But occasionally when I look back on those days, something still glimmers, striving to come out and shine in that corridor.



What matters in life is not what happens to you, but what you remember and how you remember it.

Gabriel García Márquez



No matter how well and how long we live, our time on earth will inevitably come to an end. Yet, through their exceptional works, writers are able to live on and remain fondly remembered by future generations. Find out interesting facts about special days dedicated to some of the most popular literary figures by answering the following questions.

- World Book Day is celebrated annually on 23 April, the anniversary of the death of a British playwright and poet. Who is he?  
\_\_\_\_\_
- Every year in the third week of July, fans of an American novelist hold a look-alike contest on the island of Key West in Florida. Who is this literary legend?  
\_\_\_\_\_
- Read Across America Day is celebrated each year on 2 March, the birthday of children's literature writer and illustrator Theodor Geisel, who is best known by one of his pseudonyms. What is it?  
\_\_\_\_\_
- Burns Night is celebrated every year on 25 January in honour of the birthday of Robert Burns. Traditionally, which poem of the Scottish poet is sung at the conclusion of the celebration?  
\_\_\_\_\_
- International Children's Book Day is set on 2 April as a homage to a Danish fairy tale writer born on this day. Who is he?  
\_\_\_\_\_
- J. R. R. Tolkien is known for his fantasy novels *The Lord of the Rings* and *The Hobbit*. The birthday of two hobbit characters is now celebrated as Hobbit Day. Which day of the year is it?  
\_\_\_\_\_
- Biographer's Day is set on 16 May to commemorate James Boswell's first-ever meeting with the subject of his biographical work back in 1763. Who is this person?  
\_\_\_\_\_
- Cultural activities are held around the globe on 16 June every year to mark the day immortalised by James Joyce in his novel *Ulysses*. What is this day known as?  
\_\_\_\_\_

Please send your entry by fax (2521 8772) or email (csbolrs@csb.gov.hk) to the Editorial Board of *Word Power* by **29 February 2024**. Watch out for our coming issue to see if you get all the answers right, and better still, if you are one of the lucky ten to win a prize. The Editorial Board will have the final say on the answers.

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- 上水
- 油塘
- 太古
- 春花落
- 美善同道
- 圓洲
- 天逸/天悅
- 太子道
- 嘉道理道
- 避寒中心

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二零二四年七月第九十六期主題：最後

Contributions from colleagues are welcome. Please click [here](#) for details.

歡迎同事投稿，細則請按這裏。

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