

OXFORD FORWARD

October 2016

Instilling qualities of mind



Forward Foreword



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A new school year opens up new opportunities for both students and teachers. It is also the time when we renew our belief in learning and reiterate our commitment to 21st century education. This means education that provides the environment for young people to develop not just functional skills, but also qualities of mind. These qualities include creativity, collaboration and innovation, critical thinking, and mental flexibility.

Education also helps students convert the information they are constantly bombarded with into knowledge. As knowledge is also acquired through reading books, it is essential for schools to cultivate a love of reading. Books make it easier to understand the world around us and better integrate into society. They create a world of imagination and show that everything is possible.

The way we read is also important. Good teachers encourage their students to think about the different ideas and opinions, and understand the writer's points of view before accepting or rejecting them. As students continue to read and reflect on new thoughts, they start forming their own beliefs and values, and come up with new ways to solve problems. Reading books is also vital for learning new languages. Exposure to words used in context can dramatically improve second-language learners' speaking fluency and writing skills.

Uniquely positioned to create great books and engaging educational content, we at OUP are committed to education, opportunity and learning. We work with parents, teachers and other educators, enrich lives by fostering passionate readers and learners, and prepare young people for the challenges of the 21st century.

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Dr V. Gasper
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Media interview: Professor Louise Richardson, Vice-Chancellor of the University of Oxford

Oxford Forward attended the group media interview with Professor Louise Richardson, Vice-Chancellor of the University of Oxford, Ms Mei-mei Ng, General Manager of Oxford University Press (China) and Mr Adrian Mellor, Managing Director of Asia Education, Oxford University Press, held at the business centre of the Mandarin Oriental. Journalists from *Apple Daily* and *Hong Kong Economic Times* were keen to know more about one of the most prestigious universities in the world and its 272nd Vice-Chancellor.



Professor Richardson took up her post on 1 January 2016 and made her first visit to Hong Kong as Vice-Chancellor at the beginning of September. She is also the first woman to head the university in its more than 800-year history; however, she wishes that this was not considered newsworthy. Although she doesn't deny the symbolic significance of her appointment, she looks forward to the day when gender is not considered relevant and adds that it is equally important for people to realize that 'leadership comes in all shapes, forms, colours'.

When asked about the main challenge ahead of her, Professor Richardson's response reflects the University of Oxford's commitment to maintaining its global position in today's rapidly changing world. To achieve that, she argues the university has to be 'flexible and adaptable, to always look for opportunities and respond to them, to adapt to the forces of globalization and new technologies'.

Her opinion on the secret of Oxford's success is clear: 'it's all about people— attracting the best academics, the best students, the best staff'. And her responsibility is to 'create an environment in which they can best work'.

On equipping future leaders with the skills they need, Professor Richardson believes universities must ensure that students know how to think critically, how to analyse and argue, and be flexible. She argues that universities are educating young people today for future jobs that we cannot even imagine so they will need 'qualities of mind rather than particular skills'. She explains that acquired functional skills will have to be re-learned over time as technology changes, but the 'qualities of mind' that we need to instil in students will be a constant. 'And those qualities are belief in evidence, ... the confidence to always question, be prepared to speak truth to power, ... to think reasonably and rationally, and be open and willing to change.'



'These are qualities of mind rather than particular skills. And those qualities are belief in evidence, ... the confidence to always question, be prepared to speak truth to power, ... to think reasonably and rationally, and be open and willing to change'

Professor Richardson also argues that it is the mark of an educated person to be 'willing to change ... in the light of evidence or argument, and that is essential for a responsible citizen and the hallmark of leadership'.

The interview moves from leadership skills to education and its power to transform lives. 'This is what makes the work of Oxford University Press so important because it expands the reach of the university,' she adds passionately. 'We have 22,000 students at Oxford University, all in the UK, whereas the work of OUP expands the educated world. Their success feeds into the institution's success.'



When asked about the Hong Kong contingent at Oxford, Professor Richardson acknowledges that although small, it has always been fairly constant. She doesn't separate students by their nationality, and firmly believes that any student coming to Oxford is 'very smart, very hard-working, very hard-driven and very ambitious'.

As a political scientist, Professor Richardson has written widely and lectured on international security and defence policy, and the interview focuses on her work on terrorist movements. She is asked about what suggestions she may have for ordinary Hong Kong students so they can better understand the political situation. Her response is animated and straightforward: they should read a lot and interact with people who are different from them. That is why she thinks studying abroad will have a very positive impact. She also recommends learning other languages and highly praises the work of OUP on teaching English as a foreign language. She firmly believes that 'learning languages helps you get into the mindset of another culture and appreciate

how other people see things, ... realize that the world is a complicated place'.

'Learning languages helps you get into the mindset of another culture and appreciate how other people see things, ... realize that the world is a complicated place'

Professor Richardson comments on the fabulous range of fiction and non-fiction written by people in different parts of the world. And her advice, based on her personal experience, is straightforward: just expose yourselves as widely as you can. She acknowledges the dangers of the Internet and argues that it is very important for educators to train young people on 'the difference between information and knowledge, not to mention wisdom'.

When asked to name one book that has influenced her a lot, Professor Richardson finds it very hard to answer as, in her opinion, there are so many wonderful books. She reads a lot despite her busy schedule and demanding lifestyle. She also reads a lot of fiction to stay sane and

loves to escape to the fictional world of stories every night. Her love of reading started in her childhood and she made sure her children grew up surrounded by books and passionately committed to reading. 'There is nothing more important for children than reading,' she is adamant. Her message to all parents is very clear: 'If a parent can do one thing for their child, instilling a love of reading to me is more important than all the lessons and training and everything else.'



Jasper Tsang and the English Language

On 21 July, The Hon Jasper Tsang, President of the Legislative Council at the time, took to the stage at the Hong Kong Book Fair to discuss his highly anticipated title 《英語・人生 曾鈺成》 and rhapsodize about his relationship with English throughout his childhood and illustrious career. He chatted with long-time friend and distinguished literati, Mr Tsim Tak-lung, and OUP Publishing Director, Ms Christine Chau, about all things English: his gratitude towards English teacher John Eynon, being crowned 'Grammar Prince' in school, Hollywood songs, the challenges of Chinese-English translations and vice versa, the distinct personality of every English word and the importance of 'knowing the rules and memorizing the exceptions' in language usage. The speakers' scintillating exchange provided the audience with a personal glimpse into the world of this political luminary and concluded with a flurry of media coverage.

《英語・人生 曾鈺成》is the third instalment in Oxford's 閱讀英語系列, a series established with the aim of providing enriching and empowering reading experiences. If you haven't got your copy yet, 《英語・人生 曾鈺成》, brimful of eloquent prose and humorous reflections on the English language, is sure to make a delightful autumn read.



Inspiring a love of language

Oxford Forward recently met with Simon Winchester, OUP author and acclaimed British writer, journalist and broadcaster, to talk about the exquisite joys and powers of reading, the delicate art of writing and his love of the extraordinary language that is English.



Speaking from the breakfast lounge at the Mandarin Oriental, the author and journalist's ventures and conversance with the East and West have no doubt influenced his literary approach and allure. Those who have read his books would agree that Simon's narration of history and science offers readers a traveller's thrill of discovery, bringing readers down the rabbit hole, into the core of something remarkable, complex and bizarre.

We took the opportunity to ask Simon about the origins of this curiosity to see the world and his first steps into those incredible journeys.

Never lose your sense of wonder

The writer credits his geography teacher with opening his eyes to the grandeur of the outside world. When he was young, his mother would tell him about France and Belgium, where she grew up. Having spent the bulk of his early years in Dorset in South West England and in North London, however, Simon had little access to the rest of the world. 'My geography teacher would tell stories and read us accounts of things that happened in exotic faraway places,' he says. He cites Rudyard Kipling as the author his teacher championed, and recommends any teenager to read Kipling's book,

Kim, in English. 'It's a great adventure story, beautifully told by a writer who has a wonderful command of the English language. And because everything occurs in India, in the Himalayas, it opens your mind to the world at large.'

After graduating from the University of Oxford with a degree in geology, Simon took up a mining job in East Africa. It was during this time that he came across a book by another OUP author that inspired him to make the switch to journalism.

'I was 23 at the time. Before then, my world was circumscribed by things scientific. That book made me see how beautiful and powerful writing can be,' he says. So Simon wrote to the author of *Coronation Everest*, James Morris (now Jan Morris), and told him that he really wanted to write. 'And James Morris gave me these pieces of advice, the first of which was "never lose your sense of wonder".'

'As journalists we travel all over the world. We meet many different people. Some of them are very nice, some of them horrible. We're involved in wars and in all sorts of trouble, and it is easy to become very cynical and blasé. James Morris just said, "Try and resist this. Try and wake up every day feeling positive and happy. The world is a remarkable and wonderful place.'

And you're very privileged, as a writer, to be interpreting that for people to read.' So I try to live like that,' he says.

Le mot juste

Simon explains that there are three things he considers important when attempting to write: a good idea, a good structure and good writing. He stresses the significance of the structure in particular. 'You can have a beautiful idea, you can write it out beautifully, but if its structure is wrong, people will just go to sleep. And so I bend over backwards to try and come up with an interesting structure,' he says.

Regarding the quality of writing itself, the author notes, 'The nuances of the English language are so formidable. Every word is fit for a specific purpose, and synonyms are a tiny, tiny number.' He introduces the French phrase 'le mot juste', translated to mean 'the right word', to illustrate his point and emphasize that choosing that right word is a skill that learners of English should practise unrelentingly.

'Every word is fit for a specific purpose'

'I tell you what writer I think is important for students to read, and that's George Orwell. And the reason is that he had a dislike of English words



that came from the Romance languages, such as French and Latin. He liked Saxon words—English words that are English at their roots. You should look at Orwell with that in mind,’ he says.

The author is also keen to recommend Georges Perec’s *Life a User’s Manual*. ‘It’s a very unusual book and one that I think everyone should read.’ A special mention goes to Perec’s *A Void*, a novel spanning 300 pages and written without using the letter ‘e’. ‘You look at the page, and you do think there’s something missing. Of course, it’s that he never uses the letter “e”,’ says Simon. He suggests a similar lipogrammatic approach for those who have trouble sleeping: take a well-known speech and reconfigure it in their minds without using the letter ‘e’. ‘One way to translate “to be or not to be” would be “living or not living”. Then take it from there. By line three, you’ll have gone to sleep.’

Stories encourage you to turn the page. And that’s the crucial thing

Continuing on the topic of books and stories, we ask Simon whether he has any advice for educators on cultivating a love of reading for pleasure in English.

‘Surely, the best way to encourage reading is to expose students to a variety of recommended texts that you know they’ll adore to read,’ he says. ‘Graphic novels can be appropriate too, if they’re intelligently done. That said, some texts are dauntingly difficult and will put people off.’

‘To inspire students’ love of a language, give them a story—a story that they really want to know the ending to’

‘When I was a schoolchild, there were a lot of adventure stories about. Of course, I come from a different generation, and stories that we enjoyed then are probably no longer fashionable.’ Simon cites British pilot Captain W.E. Johns as one of his favourite authors, who wrote a series of books about an air force pilot called Biggles. ‘Biggles had this aeroplane, went all over the world in it and had amazing adventures. So it taught us not only about comradeship and flying, but also about geography and the world,’ he says. ‘Stories encourage you to turn the page. And that’s the crucial thing.’

The author goes on to talk about his enjoyment of audio stories and brings our attention to one penned by British writer Frederick Forsyth. ‘Forsyth is a great storyteller, and this story of his, called *The Shepherd*, is so compelling and beautiful. It’s about an aeroplane that’s lost in the fog. I won’t tell you how it works, but any child who listens to it could not possibly stop listening. You also admire the cadence and rhythm of the language,’ he says.

The Shepherd has

been broadcasted annually in Canada on Christmas Eve since 1979.

‘It’s a long answer to your question, but to inspire students’ love of a language, give them a story—a story that they really want to know the ending to.’

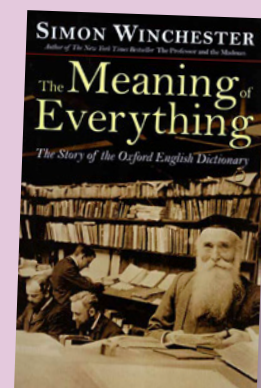
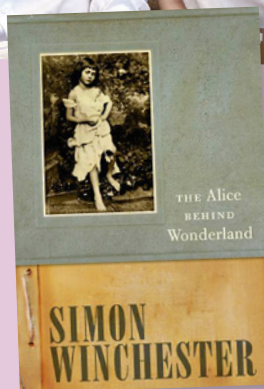
It’s a beautiful, beautiful language

Simon comments on the exam-focused culture in Hong Kong’s education system. ‘Exam-dominated instruction seems to me very rigid. And with something like English, which is so wonderfully flexible a language, I much prefer students to read something and write an essay on their understanding of it,’ he says. The writer recalls his experience of teaching creative non-fiction at the University of Chicago, and assigning a thousand-word essay on the difference between dusk and dawn. ‘The subject made my students think about the nature of light and behaviour in the morning and in the evening. They loved it, and the essays they produced were wonderful.’

‘English. It’s an extraordinary language that we have,’ he says. ‘It gives us a wonderful medium to read, to write and to listen. It’s a beautiful, beautiful language. It’s truly a joyful thing.’

A graduate of the University of Oxford, Simon Winchester began his career as a foreign correspondent in 1967 and has covered such stories as the Ulster crisis, the creation of Bangladesh, the Watergate affair and the Falklands War, mainly for *The Guardian* and *The Sunday Times*. In 1998, he made his literary breakthrough with *The Surgeon of Crowthorne*, a sensational account about the men behind the first *Oxford English Dictionary*. Now an accomplished author, Mr Winchester continues to publish articles and books on travel, literature, history and geography. His works include *The Meaning of Everything: The Story of the Oxford English Dictionary* (2003), *The Alice Behind Wonderland* (2011) and *Pacific: Silicon Chips and Surfboards, Coral Reefs and Atom Bombs, Brutal Dictators, Fading Empires, and the Coming Collision of the World’s Superpowers* (2015).

Simon Winchester was awarded an OBE in 2006 for his services to journalism and literature. He was elected an Honorary Fellow of St Catherine’s College, Oxford, in 2009.



WORD PLAY!

Can you name the portmanteau?

A portmanteau word is a word that is invented by combining the beginning of one word and the end of another, while keeping the meaning of each. For example *vlog* is a portmanteau word that is a combination of *video* and *blog*.

Can you work out the portmanteau from the two component words?



Components

Portmanteau

web + log



smoke + fog



drama + comedy



electronic + mail



emotion + icon



hungry + angry



iPod + broadcast



pocket + monster



Did you know?

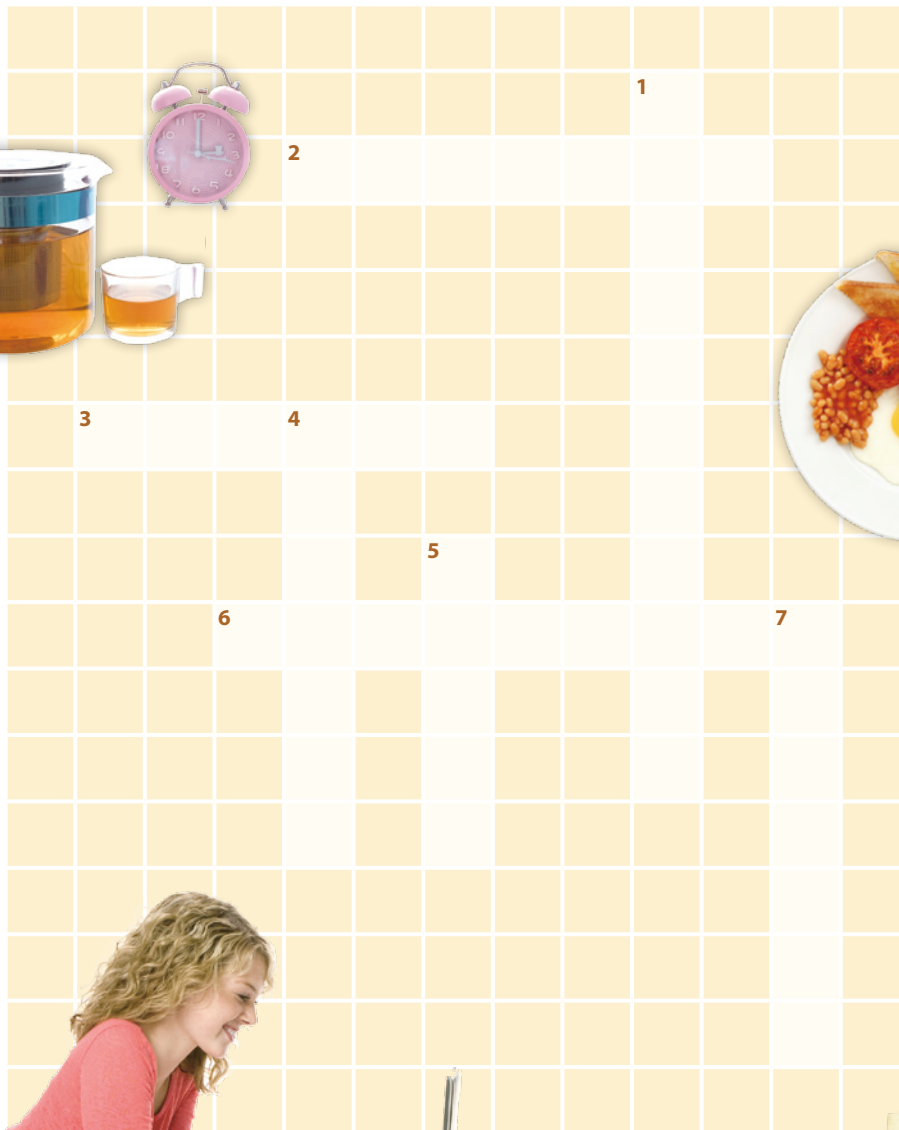
Portmanteau, in this sense, was coined by Lewis Carroll in *Through the Looking Glass* (1871). Alice approaches Humpty Dumpty to ask him about the meaning of the word 'slithy' in the nonsensical Jabberwocky poem. Humpty Dumpty replies:

'Well, "slithy" means "lithe" and "slimy". "Lithe" is the same as active. You see it's like a portmanteau—there are two meanings packed up into one word.'



Portmanteau puzzle

Use the clues to complete the crossword. Each answer is a portmanteau word.



Clues

Across

- 2 to calm down (7)
- 3 late morning meal (6)
- 6 extremely large (9)

Down

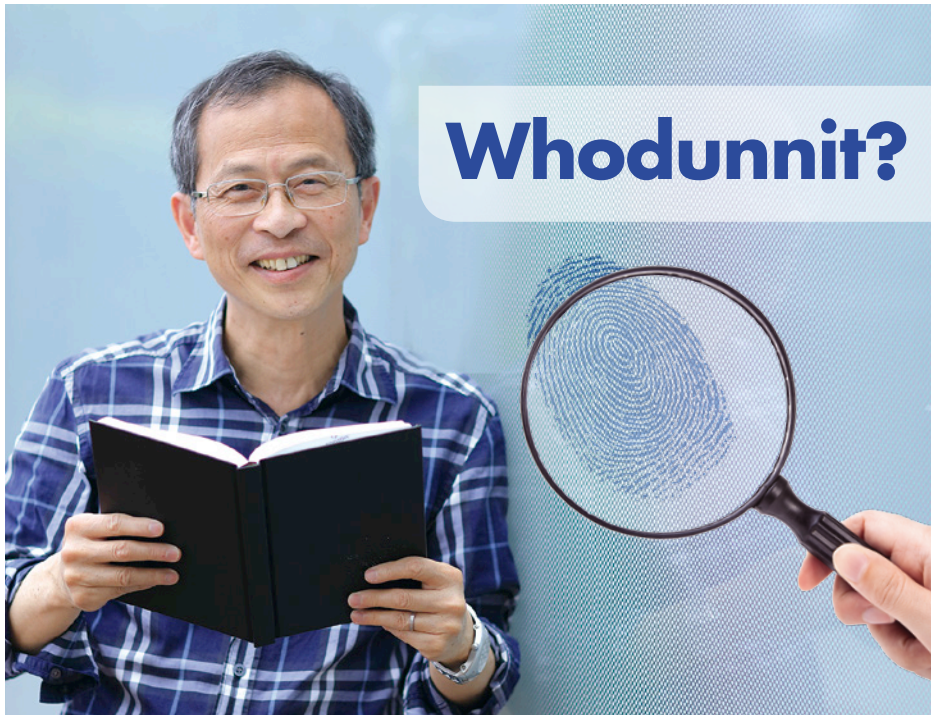
- 1 marvelously good (11)
- 4 a person online (7)
- 5 lodging with a place for a car (5)
- 7 to spend extravagantly (7)

Watch this space

Things to look out for in the coming months



Oxford English Writing Competition (Junior Secondary)



Oxford University Press (China) is organizing a detective story writing competition to help junior secondary students cultivate an interest in English writing and stimulate their creativity.

We are honoured to have ex-President of the Legislative Council, Hon Jasper Tsang, write the beginning of the detective story. Participants in the competition will write the rest of it. There are three writer awards (Champion, First Runner-up and Second Runner-up) and five merit awards. The Champion will win a place on a UK study tour in summer 2017 and all winners will have a chance to dine with Mr Tsang. The school with the highest number of entrants will be given the Most Active Participation Award.

The submission period will be from **7 October 2016 to 13 January 2017** and the results will be announced in March 2017. We hope that the competition will serve as a motivational event for students and foster their love for writing in English.

In the next issue of *Oxford Forward*

- More news, interviews and students' activities

Look out for the next issue of *Oxford Forward* in February 2017

Word Play (Answers)

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- | | |
|------------|-----------|
| 1 blog | 2 smog |
| 3 dramedy | 4 email |
| 5 emoticon | 6 hangry |
| 7 podcast | 8 pokemon |

Page 7

- 1 fantabulous (fantastic + fabulous)
- 2 chillax (chill + relax)
- 3 brunch (breakfast + lunch)
- 4 netizen (Internet + citizen)
- 5 motel (motor + hotel)
- 6 ginormous (gigantic + enormous)
- 7 splurge (splash + surge)

