



The Adventure of the Blue Carbuncle

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My twin sister and I lived with our parents for eight years in a small town about one hour away from London. We attended local British schools. As a result of this experience, when we finally came back to Japan, we realized that we could speak English even better than we could speak Japanese.

We enrolled in this school in part because we figured we would have many chances to use and keep our English. This has proven to be the case. This past year, my sister and I have been reading literature with the Headmaster. We meet once or twice a week to discuss stories or novels that we are reading. We have read dozens of short stories and four novels written in English in the course of the year. We sometimes write short papers about what we are reading.

The Headmaster has asked me to write a short review of one of the

stories or novels that we have read. I have chosen to write about “The Blue Carbuncle” by Arthur Conan Doyle. This story features the famous detective Sherlock Holmes and his trusty sidekick Dr. Watson.

The story is set during the Christmas holidays. A policeman named Peterson interrupted a scuffle involving a pack of bullies and a victim. All fled upon Peterson’s approach. The victim dropped his hat and a goose. Peterson took the goose home and his wife cooked it. To her amazement, there was a blue carbuncle in the throat of the goose. A carbuncle is a gem called a garnet. It’s usually red, but this one was blue and quite rare and valuable. Peterson took the gem and the victim’s hat to Holmes, who had read an article in the newspaper about a missing blue carbuncle. The gem had vanished from the hotel room where a certain Countess was staying. Holmes made deductions



from observing the hat, put an advertisement in the newspaper and located the victim, a man named Henry Baker. Baker bought the goose in question but did not have anything to do with the crime. However, he gave Holmes valuable information that allowed the detective to locate the person who put the carbuncle in the goose’s throat, a man named James Ryder. Ryder was clearly sorry for his crime, so Holmes allowed him to go free on condition that he leave the country. Holmes explained to Watson that it was Christmas and he was not required to remedy the deficiencies of the police.

The reason why I like this story is because Holmes is so clever. For example, just by looking at the victim’s dropped hat he makes a series of incredible deductions. He says that the owner of the hat was

once wealthy but has fallen on hard times. He is out of training and sweats a lot. He is an intellectual. He has cut his hair recently and applies lime cream to it. He has not turned on the gas in his home, and his wife has ceased to love him.

Watson is amazed by these deductions, as is the reader. However, when Holmes explains how he came to these conclusions, it seems very obvious and logical. In fact, Watson and the reader actually blame themselves for not reaching the same conclusions!

Reading stories featuring Sherlock Holmes is infectious. You always want to read more and discover how unobservant you are. It’s a thrill to be in the company of someone who can see what you yourself cannot. This is the real secret to the appeal of these stories. ☑

GLOBAL VISION

Intercultural Literacy



Alfred North Whitehead once wrote: “The gain from foreign study is more than an additive: it is a transformation.” More than ever we need to teach our young people how to acquire and value intercultural literacy. If they are to help create a stable and peaceful pluralistic global society in the future, this skill is clearly vital. It therefore profits those of us who teach and study in today’s schools, particularly those that call themselves international schools, to note the attitudes, competencies, habits, understandings, identities and experiences that our young people need for global citizenship.

In the narrowest sense, the word “literacy” refers to the ability to read and write. However, in a broader sense, it means the ability to understand and appreciate an entire field of inquiry. One thinks

of the phrases “math literacy” or “computer literacy”.

The American educator E.D. Hirsch popularized the term “cultural literacy” in an infamous book of that name. In it, he outlined the “core knowledge” that all Americans must have if they are to communicate effectively with one another and succeed within an American mainstream culture. His book caused controversy. Many critics claimed that he was defining culture in a way that was not inclusive and privileged the majority culture in a pluralistic society.

The term “intercultural literacy”, by contrast, defines literacy not in terms of knowledge only, but in terms of attitudes and skills. On this reading, the term “intercultural literacy” refers to the dispositions and skills necessary to live successfully in a

second culture and to engage its unique products and practices from a vantage point of tolerance, sympathy and understanding. In other words, unlike Hirsch’s definition of cultural literacy, the emerging notion of “intercultural literacy” is inclusive.

The ability to communicate in a common language like English is crucial to achieving this kind of literacy, because this skill allows the student to acquire, manage and understand information acquired while interacting with people of another culture.

The question naturally arises why some students view intercultural experiences as unimportant or negative while other students view these experiences as positive and develop intercultural literacy. What can an international school like ours do to facilitate positive intercultural contact?

In the first place, it’s important to provide institutional supports for this contact. By placing a premium

on English instruction, for example, we give our students an important tool that they need to avoid debilitating culture shock. By exposing our students to a large cadre of Native English teachers from all over the English-speaking world and by encouraging them to study abroad, we help them to understand other cultures and to examine critically their own mono-cultural assumptions.

Students who enroll in our school do so because they want to learn the skills and attitudes that they need in order to become confident actors on the international stage. They relish their contacts with people from other cultures—either doing homestays in Canada or New Zealand, doing service work in the Philippines, visiting our sister schools or hosting students from abroad. As one student recently remarked: “I lose nothing of my Japanese identity when I communicate with and try to understand people from other cultures. It makes me a better human being.” ☑

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THE FRONTIER TIMES

[ザ・フロンティア・タイムズ]



中学3年生ロンドン語学研修 セントポール大聖堂前にて

[The International Year of Water Cooperation]

Since the early 1990s, the United Nations has focused on the issue of water cooperation. It has been all too keenly aware that our water supplies are dwindling and are polluted. The United Nations declared a World Day for Water, an International Year of Freshwater, a World Water Day and a ten-year International Decade for Action, “Water for Life”(2005-2015), which had the ambitious goal of reducing by half the number of people who do not have reliable access to safe drinking water. Recognizing that progress on this front was sluggish at best, several years ago, the United Nations voted to declare 2013 the International Year of Water Cooperation, a testament to its conviction that access to clean water is the most crucial issue for the survival of the human species.

Water is critical for sustainable development. It is also critical for the eradication of hunger and poverty. Human health and survival depend upon reliable access to clean freshwater. There is no way that the United Nations will reach its millennium goals unless it can get some traction on this issue. That is why we have to take it so seriously

Related to the issue of the quality and quantity of fresh water, stressed by the demands of a burgeoning human population, is the issue of sanitation, which has been a twin concern of the United Nations.

In a famous conference in Rio de Janeiro in 1992, the United Nations articulated a new policy called

Agenda 21. This resolution, which passed with unprecedented support from the member countries, stressed that humanity is at a crucial crossroads and that we need to pay special attention to our environment if we are to remain viable as a species. Agenda 21 was particularly adamant about the need for the richer countries to help less developed and politically tumultuous countries reach common goals.

This year, at our annual Frontier Cup English speech contest, we invite elementary school students to study, learn and recite a speech about the International Year of Water Cooperation. This is a first and important step in learning about how to deal with a very real crisis that humans face.