



SYDNEY WRITERS' FESTIVAL

A Day at the Sydney Writers' Festival

The Year 12 English Extension 2 course is all about giving students the freedom to explore their ideas, priorities and creative expression in a single, long-term project. The outcome is a polished piece of literary work – a short story, anthology of poetry, critical essay or other extended writing – that is assessed for their HSC. It is the pinnacle of secondary English study, bringing together everything students have learnt in their English Advanced and English Extension 1 studies, as well as drawing on their experiences of life and literature more broadly.

Our excursion to a Secondary School Day of the Sydney Writers' Festival was therefore an important opportunity to further expand their literary horizons and gain some insights into the writing process from some established professionals. On Monday, 23 May, we attended The Concourse at Chatswood for the occasion.

Students heard from a novelist, Kay Kerr, who was diagnosed with autism during the writing of her first novel. She has since come to regard this as something of a niche perspective for her. The next speaker and writer, Dr Jared Thomas, came at fiction from an indigenous perspective. He was able to paint a vivid oral picture of the different experiences that motivated his writing. Thirdly, successful Australian sci-fi and fantasy writer, Amie Kaufman, provided some surprising examples of how to experiment with storytelling from within such well-known genres. The day then closed as we heard from a Lebanese Australian writer, Dr Sarah Ayoub. She focused on her motivation for writing, which originally revolved around feelings of being misunderstood and having to apologise for her background, in the 2000s.

In their different ways, each speaker provided valuable materials for our students' compost. This

was a fruitful metaphor offered by Kaufman. Everything a writer takes in is ultimately jumbled together and fermented in the layers of the mind, and it is from this compost that ideas and stories grow. Here are three students' views on the value of the materials they gathered together on the day:-

The Sydney Writer's Festival was a great opportunity for me to get into the minds of other writers and readers. Particularly as I am writing a critical response, rather than a strictly creative work, it was extremely helpful to get some insight from authors about their writing processes and creative inspiration. One thing I can definitely see myself using in my own work is Kay Kerr's use of her characters to construct her unique writing voice. Instead of using her voice to dictate character tropes and actions, she lets her presuppositions of characters in her writing expose a dynamic voice. I was also reminded that as a writer, I need to undertake practical research when writing — as a writer, I still need to read. - Brielle

We listened and learnt about authors, the process of writing and how different authors utilise their personal contexts to craft engaging stories for young adults. Throughout the sessions, each author gave different insights into how they creatively express themselves through the craft of writing and how this can be seriously inspired by personal themes such as autism, racism or gender inclusion, or fantastically inspired by magical elements of space, dragons and sci-fi. This assisted my understanding and crafting of my own major work short story as I was able to take on techniques from each author to build complex characters, distinct narrative voices or adopt alternate forms, such as emails and advertisements, to enhance my creative writing skills. And we were told to simply start writing! To take images of the world and expand on minute details and layers of research, to share our own stories and inspire others through a fun, magical and literally otherworldly creative outlet. - Makayla

Our English Extension 2 class had the honour of attending the Sydney Writers Festival, an event both enjoyable and inspirational. Hearing from a diverse range of authors, their experiences that informed their writing and the processes leading to the publication of, for some, multiple novels, inspired me to dive back into writing. Although I am composing poetry for my major work, dedicating a day to fully immersing myself in the minds and ideas of real authors inspired me to go home and write myself. Truly an insightful and enjoyable experience! - Sofia
