Creating Fiction from Experience

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As coordinator of the general elective course GH10 Short Fiction, I have kept in mind that this course is regarded within the university as part of general education. As such, it prepares students more for life than for a specialisation in literature. With this fact in mind, I have designed a course that should help students to read fiction for the rest of their lives with greater insight and enjoyment. However, I am also aware that some students who take GH10 have a strong foundation in literary study. The method of analysis, interpretation, and understanding that students cultivate in the course will appeal to both students who are familiar with literature courses and the general engineering student. One of the aims of the course is to learn both what it means to analyse a piece of fiction, and to understand that whenever we read stories we are always actively engaged in the making a fiction out of our own backgrounds, cultures, belief systems and psychological temperament.

I would like to share with you an engineering student's creative writing assignment detailing the experience (and nervous energy) surrounding his first oral presentation in GH10. I might add that, despite his description, his presentation was both effective and successful.

My Short Fiction class begins in a short while and I must do my class presentation! Nerves tremble with anxiety as the hour approaches. Pacing to and fro along the corridor reciting the necessary lines from memory, sheer dread of what is about to come fills the mind with thoughts that lower morale. Doubts seem to echo from the very air around. At last, the teacher arrives. Waiting students surge through the doorway. After all, everyone wants to get this over with as soon as possible. Doomsday had seemed so far away when the subject had first commenced at the start of the semester. Impressions founded on the experience of the first few classes seem so drastically different from what Chin Sien has to endure at this point in time.

An appreciation of literature at play was what it had seemed to be. The thrills and spills as heroes and villains skit it out in the world of print holds one enthralled for hours and makes doing work or research for the subject a pleasure was the ideal that had crossed his mind at the beginning. While lugging the thick book around for classes didn’t appeal much, it was well compensated by the steep learning curve often demonstrated during the lessons as every individual present comes up with his or her theories of a phrase, action, vocabulary and even the punctuations used in the works of literary art. The class may not be considered vibrant with its uneven mix of boys and girls and everyone being self-conscious, but the teacher overcame that mental barrier with just a mere look at each soul demanding an explanation for the topic in discussion.

Well, anyway things have changed and it's finally here. It is a class presentation in front of complete strangers in more ways than one. Considering the variety of students from different schools and different years present for the lesson, presentations were bound to vary drastically, depending on his or her experience level and skill. The majority of the students enrolled were from communication studies where presentations are a form of daily bread for most of their subjects. Competing with them was definitely not an entertaining idea to behold. Compete with them he must, however for the grades are just as important for a secure future with a degree in hand.

Fortunately, unexpected help was in sight. Anxiously scanning the nominal roll, the realisation that his name was far down gave way to palpable relief as he settled in for a show from other students that would enrich him with the knowledge necessary to improve his own presentation. Having continued on pg 15...