

PORTRAIT OF A RAFFLESIAN

DOING THE WRITE THING

'*The Rock and the Bird*', a story originally written in 2009, and won First Place, Class A in the 2009 Commonwealth Essay Writing Competition, has gone on to win the biennial Hedwig Anuar Children's Book Award 2015. Written by RGS alumna Ms Chew Chia Shao Wei, it tells the story of an unlikely friendship between a timeless rock and a mortal bird, which judges have called a "timeless classic" that cuts across race, religion and culture. We caught up with the third-year undergraduate at Harvard University (she majors in History and Literature), where she talks about her time at RGS and on receiving the award.

Her formative days at RGS

"The learning environment at RGS definitely helped shape and nurture the way I think and write, especially since I was there during some of my most formative years. My teachers also left profound impressions on me, and were essential in contributing to my RGS experience as they were caring, engaged, and committed to drawing out our development as thinkers and people. I always felt that I could turn to one of my teachers with a puzzle, academic or existential that was bothering me and whether or not they knew the answer, they would sit with me, ask me questions and invite my questions. My poor teachers - they really entertained me endlessly! Even though we keep in touch only sporadically (which I still get scolded for sometimes), I am really thankful that they continue to have time for me as I grow far beyond RGS."

The inspiration behind 'The Rock and the Bird'

"I was thinking about how much of a difference a friend makes in one's world, about the depth of another person's ability and inability to fulfil needs that we have. I was also thinking about how different the world looks from the sky and from the seashore, how different the world is to one who flies and one who is fixed, and how different the world is to each one of us and at the same time, how much we share."

Receiving the Hedwig Anuar Children's Book Award

"I feel very thankful for it - it was a real surprise and also a delight. I am honoured to be a recipient of an award that was named after a remarkable woman who is a champion of libraries and loves literature, and is also a champion of women and their rights. I am also really excited about the award's other winner, 'The Mango Tree', written by Hidayah Amin and illustrated by Idris Ali, a book that I happened to pick up in an art gallery one day and found arresting."



Shao Wei (left) with the illustrator for the book, Ms Anngene Neo. (Photo courtesy of Epigram Books)



Shao Wei (extreme left) during her time at RGS. She also encourages her juniors to embrace their experiences in RGS and do as much as they can each day to deserve the privilege they have been conferred.

'*The Rock and the Bird*' is available for purchase at all major bookstores. Shao Wei will also be making an author's appearance at Kinokuniya (Ngee Ann City outlet) on Saturday, 15 August, from 4pm - 4.45pm. [Click here](#) to find out more about the Hedwig Anuar Children's Book Award.