I have just returned from a meeting about the Australian Curriculum, which is to be implemented, finally, in 2013. Mrs Koopman, in whose position I am currently acting, has almost completed her term’s sabbatical, during which she has been investigating ways in which our Middle School offerings fit with the expectations of the national curriculum model.

As we might expect, most of what we do in the Middle School already fits with the Australian Curriculum, and the challenge that we are now working on is to marry our Middle School Curriculum Map with the three strands: Literacy, Literature and Language.

Certainly, our students are enriched by their experiences of language at Pembroke, from listening to professional storytelling to hearing published writers talking about their works. In August our Year 7 and 8 students heard stories retold in vivid and compelling detail when professional storyteller Andy Wright came to Pembroke. He literally had them jumping out of their seats with his horror story about Mr Fox. For a performer to keep a young audience interested in one, long narrative, the telling of which took over 30 minutes, is testimony to his skills and to the fact that, despite everything, there is still great power in the spoken word.

Maris from Year 8 wrote: ‘I think the Year 8s enjoyed the horror in the story and Andy was the most skilled storyteller that I have ever seen. It was also fascinating to hear about his family’s eye disease, and how that influenced his storytelling.’ Jess, also from Year 8, agreed that it was an entertaining performance: ‘I felt like I was part of the story, as if he was trying to lead you in to it. When he told the story you really could picture it.’

A number of students have had the honour of having their work published during this semester. The Advertiser Young Writers Award saw both Year 11 Karyn and Rebecca from Year 10 gain a first prize, and Ranindu in Year 10 recognised with a third prize, for their short stories.

In Pembroke’s own Year 10 Short Story Competition, a group of volunteer Year 11 students judged a range of quality entries and gave first prize to Jacqui, second prize to Ranindu and third prize to Alexander. The older students enjoyed the challenge of reading and judging the stories once again this year.

The South Australian English Teachers Association (SAETA) publish their Spring Poetry Anthology this month, and several Pembroke students will be represented in the volume: Karen (Year 11), Elliott (Year 10), Jacqui (Year 10), Bridget (Year 10), Elana (Year 9), Trudy (Year 9), Sabrina (Year 8), Liam (Year 8), Matthew (Year 8) and Eleanor (Year 5). Students from all over the state enter this competition, and it is an honour to be chosen for publication.

Students from all Commonwealth countries received prizes for their writing in the Commonwealth Essay Competition this week and, once again, Pembroke students were successful this year. Greg received a Silver Class award, while Mitchell, Emma, Nicole, Thomas, Emma, Flyn and Stephen all received Bronze awards. It is terrific to see that students’ work reaches this wider audience, and it is also a credit to their teachers for inspiring them to write so well.

Earlier in the year about 70 of our Year 9 students attended the Meet the Writers Festival, an annual event organised by the SAETA. Students read the works of writers whose sessions they will attend, and go along to hear these authors talk about their work. Students certainly responded with enthusiasm to the day, as the following comments attest:

‘I thought that the Meet the Writers Festival was a great way to learn about the behind-the-scenes stories of many popular novels. The festival also gave good tips to aspiring writers, and how a career in writing can be a surprise to authors themselves. It was a great way of getting people interested in reading and creative writing, and showing the true importance of telling stories.’

Elana

‘Meet the Writers was a fantastic day full of fun and laughter. In particular, Archie Fusillio and Nick Earls were both extremely amusing. It was great to be able to put a face to a name and meet those authors.’

Trudy

Next term the Year 9s and 10s will attend a talk by poet Steven, while the Year 7s and 8s will hear Vlanga, whose experiences of life in apartheid Africa always enthral and entertain. Earlier in the year the Year 9s and 10s were impressed by the performances of a troupe whose show ‘Shakespeare on Trial’ gave them a whole new perspective on Macbeth and Romeo and Juliet.

It is our heartfelt belief that all these experiences, some of which take students out of the classroom, are extremely worthwhile. Presenting writing to a wider audience, watching performances and listening to writers all bring the language to life in a myriad of ways. There are always challenges ahead, and the implementation of the Australian Curriculum will see us review and rework aspects of our own curriculum just as the introduction of the New SACE has done. But I have great faith in the resilience of our students and their Teachers, and I know that the foundations are already strong, partly because we seek, each day, to engage students in their language in so many ways.

Ms Rice
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