

Wai Nam Chan (Coco)

Kelly Crosby

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Literacy History Project: Brushstrokes of Words

As I picked up a pen, I began to wonder why it makes me feel so differently from a paint brush. They are both regular sticks used to create art, but the pen just does not seem to connect with brain. Compared to the intimidation and frustration that I get from a pen, I always get a rush of excitement and the desire to create from a brush. Every time I receive a writing homework, I really wish I could draw something instead.

One day when I was in primary school, the English teacher assigned the class a descriptive writing assignment. However, unlike the usual argumentative writing, the teacher told us to bring a photo of a scenery to class to let her check our choices. Then we would have a week to write a descriptive essay on the scenery. I like the idea of the photo, but, not the writing. I was so excited, thinking of all kinds of landscapes, the sea, the botanic garden, the volcano, and more, that I could find; though, I had a hard time deciding on one. So, I asked myself, if I were to do a painting, which scenery should I choose? The answer was simple: the one that means the most to me - the sunrise that I woke up every morning with. He was my beloved morning buddy. As I prepared for school and ate my breakfast, he would be there for me. I would miss him when it rained or when it was cloudy. Our connection was strong. Surely, all those magnificent landscapes are great to write about, but do they really mean anything to me? Probably not. Therefore, none other could represent me as much as the sunrise could. I have made my decision to make the sunrise as the superstar of my assignment.

I woke up earlier than usual, even before my buddy, so that I could take a good shot of him when he woke up. I hoped he did not mind. His woke was not spectacular, but dreamy and made me feel at home. I was bouncing and skipping to school holding this portrait of my buddy. The teacher checked our photos one by one. All of them had photos of breathtaking landscape sceneries, such as the great canyon, the coral reef, and famous architecture, including the Eiffel tower, and more. The teacher looked at my photo with a puzzled look and said “You might want to choose another photo. I don’t think you can write a decent description with such a normal sunrise.” I was furious. This was a direct insult to my dear friend. The sound “okay” barely blurted out from my puffing chest. Why would this sunrise be inadequate? In paintings, anything, even an apple, can become amazing through the magic of a brush. Can the pen be incapable of so? I believe in the magic of the pen, and I will prove this to the teacher.

Although I still felt uncomfortable about writing, I have decided to do whatever I could to make the teacher drop his jaws. I woke up in the dark every morning so I can record every detail of the sunrise, the colour, the wind movement, the clouds, the landscape... Every sentence in the essay was a brush stroke. Altogether made up a grand painting. I started writing “The sun slowly rises from the meadows and creates variety of colours in the sky.” I felt that something was missing. This did not reflect the beauty of my morning buddy. If this did not move me, for sure it would not move the teacher, let alone his jaws. The physicality was not his only asset, the emotion that it conjures was what astounded me. Claude Monet uses unrealistic or impressionistic colours to recreate the atmosphere, which meant that I could also add figurative language in my writing to help me convey my feelings. I rewrote “The powdery hue of the colour gradient in the sky. Layers of soft pastel one after another. The sun rises diligently from

the blanket of dark trees, stretches gently upwards into the air. Intensifying all the colours as if trying to catch my attention and say 'good morning'. The heartwarming sensation is like floating on a warm milk bath." I went on...

Long awaited due day. I was excited about my new writing style but also anxious if the teacher would like it. When the teacher handed back our essays, he came towards me and said, "Do you mind if I read your description to the whole class?" I did not know why at that moment. Was my essay that bad? Or was it really good? I did not even have the time to give a proper answer, the teacher already stood in front of the white boards and announced "I would like everyone to listen closely. This description, written by Coco, is very impressive. I would like all of you to learn from it." Like most kids, I could not stand listening to my own writing. So, I hurriedly volunteered to take the register to the office so my ears would not get even more flaming. Although it was totally embarrassing, I was proud and content. I stood outside the classroom and waited until the reading was finished. The teacher told me that he was sorry for doubting my photo, and that he really liked my poetic writing style. He even suggested to submit to a newspaper, but, unfortunately, he left the school before he could do so.

This was the first time that I treated writing as painting. I had never thought that I could transform my visual creativity into words. I genuinely enjoyed writing this descriptive writing. I could not wait to write or "paint" about another topic. I want to work on my writing skills just as how I want to improve my painting skills: the expression of ideas, the organisation, fulfilment of the purpose, etc. I must say I still love painting more than writing; however, I am no longer afraid of writing. Though I may not be a great writer, I learn to accept it and simply enjoy expressing myself through words. There is, in fact, not much of a difference between a pen and a

brush.