

# BĂLCESCU- PAST, PRESENT AND FUTURE



***COLLEGE ENGLISH MAGAZINE***  
***Brăila, May 2014***

**ISSN 2539-9278**  
**ISSN-L 2539-9278**

***BĂLCESCU- PAST, PRESENT AND FUTURE  
COLLEGE ENGLISH MAGAZINE  
2nd edition***

***Contents:***

***Students' work***

- 1. Let's open the gate to what our students create***
- 2. Press release-international essay competition***
- 3. Winning essay – Sustainable Living***
- 4. Creative writing competition: BĂLCESCU- PAST, PRESENT  
AND FUTURE winning entries***

***Teachers' methodological corner***

- 1.Exam preparation by Luminița Mocanu***
- 2.Ideas come knock knock with the Discussion Clock by Aurelia  
Cristiana Șerban***
- 3.Presentations using the word processor by Monica Claudia Ciurea***
- 4.Teaching patterns by Gabriela Barnovschi***
- 5.How to stay fresh as a teacher by Paula Claudia Ghețu***

***Cover illustration by Nicoleta Olteanu***

# Students' Work

1.

Let's open the gate to what our students create

## Germ

*A girl is simply made of this:  
A wish, a sparkle and a look to stars  
A heart, her hair, her teenage wars:  
The girl wants to be loved.  
For her smile, for she is a child  
For her innocence, for she is wild.*

*A lady only thinks about the act,  
About the show she puts on everyday  
About every of the words that she would say:  
A lady wants to be perfect,  
Perfect posture, perfect way to be  
Smart, mysterious, sipping from her tea.*

*A strong female is not so hard to recognize  
Her high heels on, her lips too red,  
Her bleached blonde hair, her walk so mean and bad  
A strong female wants to be adored.  
Yet, she won't shed a tear, won't break her heart  
She'll be herself should she be dancing in the dark.*

*What about a poet? What does the poet want or need?  
A poet needs its art.  
A poet needs a heart.  
A poet needs to think and to be smart.  
A poet needs a muse,*

*A poet is confused.  
A poet has its shine, it has its way  
To be. To be for real.  
A poet's sometimes not allowed to feel  
But the purest expressions of self,  
But the freezing wind;  
Sometimes a poet should think  
A poet should think about the world,  
Should lock self in the black lights shining cold.  
Yet, a poet only needs to love  
To love the things around  
To adore every sound  
And everyone:  
A poet has so many to be done.*

By Ion Roberta, clasa a XI-a A (teacher Monica Ciurea)

## **Sunrise**

It caught me with my gentle stroll through the humid darkness of the park, eternal habit of one who wishes to surprise the sleeping wilderness of the big city. Unlike all of my such wanderings, I was yet to witness the great awakening, of which I had more than once dreamed, but never actually saw because of rather tyrannical working hours.

How was I to know that such tranquility, never-ending, powerful, almost universal could ever be distorted by a gradual set of conversions-shadow to ray, silence to noise, freshness to cough? Surroundings were rhythmically altering, the glass-steal-concrete colossus brought to life through warmth of star, moving its fractal-body, lazily bending its joints.

Spectacular beyond description was not the restless shiver, increasing along with an echoing murmur, nor the authentic smell of heating dust rising from a disturbed pavement, but the shape-shifting horizon, a ghostly figure, half-pale skinned, half-coral, and, of course, the radiant eye, uncovering its circle, trying to escape the sting of antennas. Through its arousal, heavens regained their glow, healing the ill, charcoal area, until there was nothing left but yellow radiance, destined to emerge into deep blue.

A world was exposing its infinite body, dressing in light and absorbing new scents, warming a still cold crust, on which agitated crowds of people walked on, people who were either late or simply hurrying to sustain the specific tension of busy life. It was a harmony unspoiled in the view, a somewhat ordered chaos, the kind of picture that would inspire even the most unfortunate of beings a sense of meaning, a dynamic overlook. The feeling was sudden and new to me, carrying deep within its roots a powerful addiction, for I couldn't think of a more desired action, but to spend eternity watching countless hordes marching through the vivid landscape, carrying on with their busy lives, mentally reviewing lists of duties while exposing distorted faces; some of them exchanging laughter, some desperately trying to hide their obvious uneasiness while talking to unpleasant companions, in a large, colorful palette of gestures and mimics.

They all seemed fascinating, beautiful in the embrace of morning light, as if the sky itself was radiating life, emerged from the early bulbs of dawn.

By Raluca Iordache, promotia 2011 (teacher Luminița Mocanu)

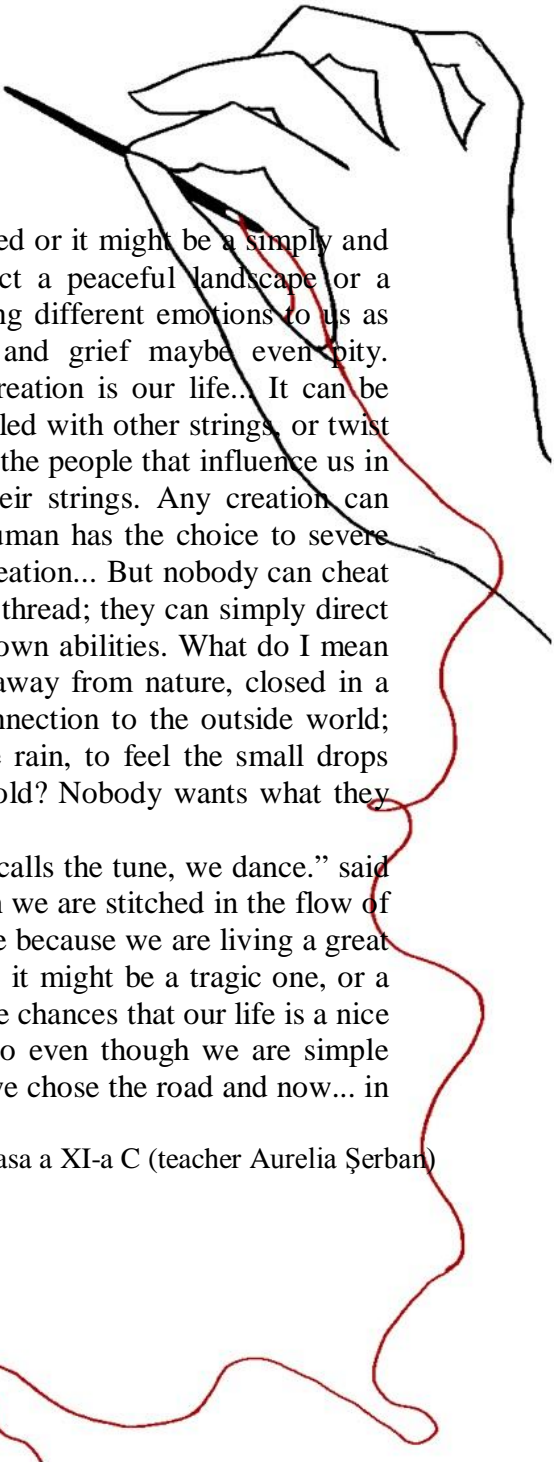
### **Red String Stitch**

**Fate:** The course of someone's life, or the outcome of a situation for someone or something, seen as outside their control... and this is just a definition written and through by a simple minded person working within the limits of his own making so he can help the herd (the community) to cope with what they are living.

This notion appears everywhere: in art as tradition and digital, in literature or poetry even movies, serials or documentaries or simply in our everyday routines when we say "This is just a coincidence" It is not. As Napoleon Bonaparte once said "There is no such thing as accidents, it is fate misnamed." Even though his fate was to lose one of the most important wars he had because of some buttons, it doesn't mean that what he said isn't true.

Destiny is abstract... it can be or it cannot... who knows? But when it is right in front of us how can you believe that what you do is by your own bare hands. From my point of view fate, unlike what our independence makes us believe, it is not made... it is followed. An individual can be blinded by their own pride and prejudice but truthfully they are swimming in what for some might appear as a river that flows swiftly and sure in just one direction when for some it might be like an ocean in storm.

But, from what my innocent and hindered mind can imagine, fate is a thin red thread... if followed, it can create an embroidery, a finished piece that



can be beautiful, vast and complicated or it might be a simply and uninteresting creation... it can depict a peaceful landscape or a thrilling captivating art that can bring different emotions to us as happiness, hope, sadness, despair and grief maybe even pity. Anything that turns up from that creation is our life... It can be connected, the thread might get tangled with other strings, or twist and turn or simply touch... those are the people that influence us in some way or another, those are their strings. Any creation can come to an end at its peak... any human has the choice to sever that thread and stop the course of creation... But nobody can cheat their way if they don't have enough thread; they can simply direct it for a bit but to the extent of their own abilities. What do I mean by that... can people that were cut away from nature, closed in a confined place with no tangible connection to the outside world; wish to pet a dog, or to stay in the rain, to feel the small drops sliding on their skin, chilling and cold? Nobody wants what they cannot conceive.

Another quote for the ending. "Life calls the tune, we dance." said by John Galsworthy. So even though we are stitched in the flow of life we should keep on being positive because we are living a great new book that nobody ever read it... it might be a tragic one, or a drama maybe a horror... but there are chances that our life is a nice romantic story with a happy end. So even though we are simple twists of a thin and frail red string, we chose the road and now... in life, we are following it.

Ana Maria Merticaru, clasa a XI-a C (teacher Aurelia Șerban)

## Life as I know it

I may be quite young, yet I often ask myself the following question: is life the most difficult exam? And how do all the other people face it? Today I'll tell you how I see life. In my opinion, it is I the one who makes it through due to my own willingness. Even if there are my loved ones who teach me what to do. To my mind, people have a never ending habit not to genuinely and fully comprehend people near them, because they are frightened of the idea of a true connection that may be lost. This is because they don't figure out that life really needs someone who is there for you, no matter what.

Their mistake is that they concentrate too much on how they can earn and spend money, thinking that it can make them feel invincible, cherishing, chasing and hunting till they lose everything. Some believe that poor people are happier than the rich ones. Yet, I consider life a sandy beach where I'm looking for shells, but for pearls as well. It can be what I fight for, even if it's not that glamorous.

This will help me to a certain extent. After that, the essentials are: my own dreams and, in addition to that, my cleverness and power. Life consists in plenty of people who never see what's important, what they should focus on, so as to stay in my comfort zone. But I see life as an easy game where my lives and weapons are countless. Some say that life is difficult without even trying to cope with it; this is because the society teaches people to trust that life can get easier in exchange for obedience.

One thing I'm sure of is that you can't hide, you must experience life even if it's a nightmare. It's necessary to believe in something that's real, that can make me struggle for the better.

I agree that a difficult part for me is to accept the fact that sometimes I don't excel and all of my dreams are just a blot. But despite that, my existence gives me the huge chance of knowing myself and the overwhelming fountain of knowledge. Seeing all around me people who don't know what to do with their lives or simply giving up, I only wish they could realize where they are, what they are doing and for what.

Realise life is all about questions and answers. The more questions I ask, the more I evolve as an individual.

Above all, the most challenging part is to be proud of myself and never regret my 'marks'. I judge myself, but not with harsh words and I carefully weigh what I should do next.

In brief, were anyone to tell me that life is difficult and challenging, I wouldn't agree. It's all about my personal choices. The multitude of experiences I must face and the variety of people I encounter all contribute to the process of my personality development. As my mother says: 'Look at the snowflakes: none is like the others and so are all your experiences and the exams you have to pass. But I trust you'll prevail. And I will.

Ana Circiova, IX G, winning speech -third prize –Public Speaking 2014 Competition- county heat, coordinating teacher Aurelia Șerban

## **Concurs județean de eseuri în limba engleză “Toate pânzele sus”,**

**Ediția a IV a - 2014**

### **Premiul I**

**Task** *Imagine you are a famous navigator. Write about your amazing discoveries over the seas (250 words)*

## **A T F U L L S A I L !!!**

From my verily childhood I was fascinated by the song of the river's golden waves which were constantly whispering like a great magician – “come along with me, come to see the boundless world ... “ and other attempting things like these. Its infinite flow coming from the womb of the Earth, passing through the clouds of Heaven and going to the seas and the oceans of the world made me think that to travel as a drop of water could be the most interesting thing in the world.

Not a long time after this adventurous invitation which I received and preserved deep into my hart, I had the opportunity to come into existence my dream. Here is my story:

One day, as I was wondering on the wharf looking for a job, a grumpy hoarse voice shouted to me:

‘You, kid, do you want to get some money?’

‘Yes, sir, I rushed to reply happily.’

‘What are you ready to do for it?’

‘I know how to row a boat, I know to wash a deck, I can transport heavy cargos on my shoulders, I can feed the steam engine with charcoal, I know how to maintain the course from the rudder, I can help in a kitchen, I know how to fish, I can swim ...



‘Yes, you know everything, don’t you?’ answered the grumpy to me, seeming that my words were amusing him. How about catching crocodiles, have you ever seen one?

I was ready to do a lot of things but not yet this one, therefore the first think passing through my mind was to get away. Instead of this I heard myself asking proudly and self-confidently:

‘How much, sir?’

Now definitely he was no more amused but laughing with a savage roaring.

‘Ha, ha, ha, that’s my boy, he loves money more than his life, this is the man I need. Welcome aboard kid, there is a plenty room for you on my boat. You are a member of the crew right now.’

His conclusion that “he loves money more than his life” was really confusing me and I was ready to find out where it came from, when I suddenly realized that I was hired.



‘I am hired!’ and step forward to thanks to ... to whom? My benevolent master was standing in a dark shadow while I was looking against the sun so that I couldn’t see him at all. His appearance was preceded by some sounds, something like “hirsh – boc, hirsh – boc” and here is my hero! Or maybe not? A very strange creature had appeared, having a hook as a hand and a stick as a leg, with lots of scars and wearing a scarf to cover an eye. He looked great standing impressive in a light of the sun. Firmly stiffed on the deck of the Dundee Crocodile steamboat, with the sunshine beams surrounding him like a holy aura, he seemed to me as magnificent as a king, as natural as a shepherd among his sheep and as cruel as a corsair. It was the second time in a minute when all my instincts commanded to me a hastily retreat and the second time when I acted on contrary. The “unknown” is always mixed with “danger”, so, if I want to discover the world, I have to accept the perilous, too. This is a very philosophical explanation I had for my stupidity.

I looked backward for a second but nothing and nobody was there to hold on to me. Why not then? Hit the road! I jumped on the boat and I put

my life in the only hand of Captain Hook. He watched me with full satisfaction and said to me:

‘You are mine, kid, you are mine!’ and immediately after that, his voice burst into a prolong command:

‘Raise the anchor! At full sail!’ .....

‘What happened next?’

‘Oh, look at me! I am still alive. Neither crocodiles, nor truly corsairs, and nor even stormy waters could defeat me, standing shoulder by shoulder with Captain Hook.’

‘If I am scared? Yes, of course I am, very often, but this is a part of the party.’

‘What am I doing now? Well ..., I am sailing, cross the sky, cross the sea; I am sailing stormy waters, to be near You, to be free, oh Lord, to be near You, to be free.’

Cîineanu Andrei, Clasa a VII-a B  
coordinating teacher Monica Ciurea

### Flurry

Ideas only help us to advance in life with great leaps. Call them as you like: **thought, muse, imagination, rumination**, sometimes **conjecture**, also **sentiment**, even **worry**, then **philosophy, principle, dream and reverie, belief, rack one’s brains, including, caprice**, and hope. They are *food for thought* as it could well be agreed upon. I see ideas as something **automatic, neverending**, and that is extraordinary, proving how complex the brain is. So we defend ourselves with the commonly harmless weapons, that is ...ideas, things so simple and yet so sophisticated.

We do not, however, take advantage of ideas, we are **unaware** of their power, **disregarding** that all we need is in our head. Ideas are not only our greatest weapons, but the only ones to help us defeat the devils that try to choke good thoughts. Life itself is founded on ideas, as on other abstractions. I am *marvelled at the flurry of ideas* floating around us, some as common as doves –from writing my homework, obeying my parents, up to having my own family and doing my job properly-; others as **ungraceful** as ravens –disturbing my neighbours, playing a prank that goes wrong, shoplifting and the like-; and others as outstanding as falcons –conjuring up

a project for which you be promoted-, or as perfect as swans –be a hero, save someone’s life, help somebody in big trouble-.

And maybe they can never define what we really feel if we do not pluck up courage to seize and buckle down the sheer brilliant flurry of ideas. I think of Disney, yes, **the very** Disney whose **mesmerising** ideas are the greatest weapons against children’s boredom and outshine even videogames. I recall the series of Home Alone, so fantastic ideas that simply steal the show and never become old-fashioned. The designers of entertaining parks and funfairs so finely embellish our young age and seem great weapons against the dull urbanised-mechanized neighbourhoods.

Spark, **muse, rumination, care, tenet, fancy, whim**, hope the neverending stream of ideas, the necklace of life.

*Public Speaking* International Contest, County Heat, 2012-2013

Student: MATEIU Patricia          Juniors’ AWARD: 3rd Prize

Coordinating Teacher: Gabriela Barnovschi

### **What Happens After High school**

I am inclined to believe that, although education is the primal factor in what concerns an individual’s development, academia is not always connected with one’s success in the career area. Of course, by this I refer to the positively inspired business tycoons, artists and so on, the small, fortunate group of rebels who did not digest school education as essential in their evolution, and built their success more independently than institutionalised. Of course, such outcomes imply not only inspiration, a strong sense of self security and seeking opportunities, but are often the products of specific circumstances-being in the right place at the right time. Surely, this relatively rare combination is not fully comprehended by the young ones who do not acknowledge studies as basically the best chance of success, but dream that they



will be the ones “breaking the system”, to put it roughly and achieving greatness by unconventional means.

I am thus in favour of the idea that completing a university launches the individual in a, if not satisfactory, then promising position. Furthermore, a person who only has his/her high school diploma as recommendation is very likely to receive a job without any career prospects, thus keeping them to a poor, or average level, without the possibility of that “one step further”, simply because they are not qualified. In our country, this is clearly illustrated by the all-too-common situation of the middle-aged man seeking to combine job, family and university, in order to engage the possibility of promotion.

Therefore, choosing to continue studies after high school increases dearly the probability of a happy outcome in one’s career, while fortunes without the academic fuss, although possible, are less likely to happen. It is my belief that, once these facts are presented to students, along with professional orientation counselling, (to help them discover which are the most suitable universities to apply at, according to their skills and aspirations) the prospect of an academic experience will be firmly contoured.

Article by Raluca Iordache (teacher Luminița Mocanu)

### **Bonds between dream and destiny**

There is nothing more pleasant than seeing our dreams accomplished. Everyone has a wish for something which is more or less easy to fulfill, but if our passion for that thing we enjoy the most is a powerful one, that dream may come true. Regardless if we discuss about the dream job, the person we love the most or just a dream about getting a phone, a car or even a house we want to possess in the near future, it could influence our destiny.

First of all we have to think very carefully before we are to do what needs to be done and then make a balance between the pros and cons. In case we succeed on the task proposed we would be the happiest person in the world for some time, or just for a moment, because after that, we would move forward to the next wish, until we will be contented. In case we fail, it would feel like the biggest failure and if it was a big dream, we would never forget about it and live the rest of our life in displeasure. We would never

know if destiny has a connection in all of the aspirations, but I think it does, and this has a big implication. Who knows... perhaps destiny made us to fail the first time because we had something better in store for us, but it would come after a while and all we have to do is wait and hope that better times will come.

We shouldn't place our preferences second, especially if we want them very much because we are born to be someone or do something in this world no matter what others would say. As long as we enjoy the results of bringing the dream to reality, then we can consider that we chose the best path in life.

By Puîşor Oana, clasa a X a C (teacher Paula Gheţu)

## DESCRIBING A CHARACTER

### Uncle Pecos

Indeed have I watched an outrageous number of cartoons, all of them with a poisonous interest, more or less suitable for my age. The prospect of unlimited control on the shape, size and personality of the figures, oh-so stimulating and dizzying always intrigued me, for there is no end to curiosity-“what will they come up with next”-where there are no boundaries in creation.

It is therefore difficult to choose a generous number of characters, since they differ immensely, not to mention rewarding only one of them with a well-deserved title of most “catchy”.

After a bit of revision of the cartoon episodes of my childhood, though, I can say that my mind is made up for one specific little fellow. Surprisingly enough, he did not play an important role in the cartoon, appearing only occasionally. But, to my mind, this feature is exactly one of those things which made him grow on my child heart as the ultimate loveliness, sharing bits of his humorous charm.

He would be Jerry's uncle Pecos, from the insanely famous cartoon “Tom and Jerry”. His creation was a stroke of genius since the character himself can conquer any type of person just as he sings his first note, for you see he is a singer, and not a very talented one. His specialty is closer to one's of a comedian, but not quite. Put aside his singing, and you have the ever-lasting effect of the miniature (cuteness at its peak), in a positively

striking mixture of defying the oversized and the over raged (Tom, the cat-in Pecos' version-“kitty, kitty”) in cowboy boots. This, the swing of his long, long moustache, and the famous gesture of replacing his broken guitar strings with Tom's whiskers-either naivety so deep it's irresistible, or sheer proof of a lion-hearted Texan mouse (and maybe a pinch cruelty for the helpless cat)-one way or the other, the contrast makes him as original and appealing as they can be.



of

He will forever bring joy to the eyes watching the little creature with his guitar, an unexpected instrument of torture for frustrated Tom-all in the name of impromptu singing.

By Raluca Iordache (teacher Luminița Mocanu)

Task: *What makes a book a work of literature?* –article

### **A ticket towards one's mind**

In our fast-paced world, reading a book that it's considered a work of literature has become somehow ...outdated or uncool. Reading good literature seems to become obsolete and more children aren't interested in reading and discovering a new world in these books. This because most of people are inmates in a "gadgetry world". They spend all the time with smartphones or navigating on the internet so who has time for this? Better yet, why should we find the time? Why is it necessary to read? Well, just imagine how the world would be without books. Let me give you a clue... blind.

Have you ever read a book that changed your life? Literature is one of the most common arts we get to admire day by day as it leaves space



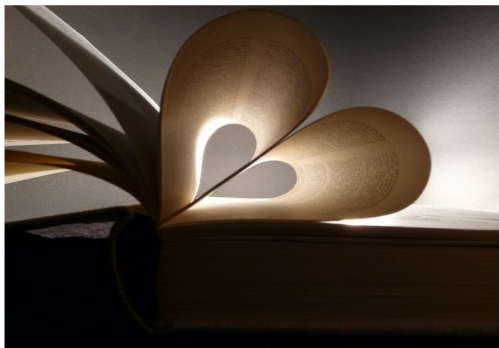
for interpretations from all kinds of perspectives. It is also a gateway to the writer's care, to his/her feelings, to his desires and beliefs. However, not any book gets the same amount of readers and this may seem strange. By this I mean that a lot may think all books have characters and action; how does it happen that certain stories receive more credit? What makes a book a work of literature? A work of literature means the innovative creation or idea

transmitted from heart and feeling with the help of the letters. This may be considered the equivalent of a good book.

A true book, a true work of literature that could stand the test of time needs to be filled with feeling and emotions, it has to send a message and a lesson, to make anyone that is reading it to ask themselves what life has to offer,

what he could or couldn't do, to question life and faith itself; it has to become a different realm altogether and transpose the reader in it. Not to mention that you develop your vocabulary through the process of reading, as well as your imagination and knowledge about life. A work of literature must boast a complete vision that is thought-provoking.

First, the title should attract the readers. For it and for the entire book as well, originality is a key factor. If you write a story that is obviously a copy of some great work of fiction, I don't think it really qualifies as literature. An original story is hard to write, and we can recognize that it has certain key elements of a masterpiece. Second, great literature gives the reader something to ponder. Many great writers, such as Charles Dickens, write plots and ideas that make the reader think. Pieces of literature stand the test of time, so no matter when you are reading that book, it should be classic. A masterpiece is also a book that's held in high regard by most people, readers and critics alike.





Other prerequisites of a good book are the trigger of the action and the characters; these should have complex abilities and relationships to stimulate reader's attention. Also, their reactions are vital to form a correct opinion. The climax should be shocking to maintain the reader's interest. What happens to the character is essential for a book to be named a work of literature, so even though their final is tragic, it is important to keep the individuals interested.

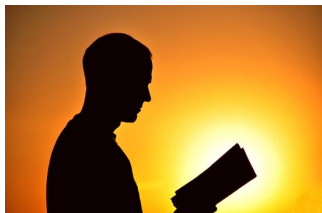


Why is it so necessary to read at least a work of literature in our days? An excellent response is that such books develop your imagination and your vocabulary. Or the author writes so impressively that you cannot read the plot without learning something new and opening your mind. Besides this, a work of literature will always have some hidden meanings and advice or messages which help you to improve your life experience. My view is that you will not understand the benefits of a successful work of literature until you hold one in your own hands, until you found yourself immersed in it you forgetting about the world around you till you breathlessly and avidly read the last lines.

To sum up, an idea of a plot that has imprinted on your mind and changed your vision about life can really be named true work of literature. Eloquent ideas and easily understood actions can really improve the impact that a book can have on you. Such a masterpiece must abound in feelings and emotions, it has to send a message and a lesson, to make anyone wonder what life has to offer, to question life and faith itself, i.e. it has to become a



different realm altogether and transpose the reader in it. A true piece of art has to become an example for future generation. A true book has to picture everything an age has to offer, it has to be like a time machine and capture the reader into that era just as Shakespeare managed to create with Hamlet or Romeo and Juliet. These will make it possible for a book to be stored in the labyrinth of the human mind.



Article by 11 C students: Victorița Andrei, Cosmin Chirilă, Cristina Ciulea, Constantin David, Horneț Bogdan, Jiru Cristian, Elena Larion, Ana Maria Merticaru, Alexandra Moise, Mara Perianu, Ambra Puia; edited by teacher Aurelia Șerban

## 2.

### Press release-international essay competition

#### PRESS RELEASE

24 April 2014



### NICOLAE BALCESCU NATIONAL COLLEGE STUDENT : A FINALIST IN INTERNATIONAL SCHOOLS ESSAY COMPETITION

The Trust for Sustainable Living, based in the UK, is delighted to announce that Mihaela Maria LUPU of Nicolae Balcescu National College has received an Honourable Mention in the Trust for Sustainable Living 2014 International Schools Essay Competition – Secondary School age category. Children participating in the competition were invited to write an essay outlining what ‘sustainable living’ meant to them, and the steps they believe their respective country should be taking in order to achieve it.

Mihaela has been invited to receive their certificate at the International Schools Debate and Awards Ceremony, at which the overall winner of the competition will be announced, alongside the 1<sup>st</sup>, 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> place winners for the Primary (ages 7-11) and Secondary (ages 11-17) categories.

Karl Hansen, Director at The Living Rainforest (Trust for Sustainable Living), said:

“As organiser and one of the judges for the International Schools Essay Competition & Debate, I would like to thank all of the students who entered. This year, we received more than a thousand essays from students in over 70 countries around the world, a great many of which contained a huge array of imaginative ideas for sustainable living, in addition to being of excellent quality and composition.

“The Trust for Sustainable Living’s 2014 International Schools Essay Competition & Debate has a very strong international perspective which gives students the opportunity to work with some of the best young minds around, drawing inspiration from others, sharing knowledge and fostering cooperation. We therefore very much hope to see Mihaela and the Nicolae Balcescu National College participating in our International Schools Debate which will take place in the United Kingdom in July.”

### **Contacts for further information:**

Karl or Jan

The Trust for Sustainable Living – The Living Rainforest

Tel: +44 1635 202444

Email: [diary@livingrainforest.org](mailto:diary@livingrainforest.org)

### **1. Additional Background Information**

Essays received	300	885	831	1094
International	2011	2012	2013	2014
Essay Competition countries & schools	2 countries (82 schools)	59 countries (499 schools)	65 countries (374 schools)	73 countries (420 schools)
Geographical scope	UK + Dubai UAE only	International	International	International

2. Detailed information about the International Schools Essay Competition can be found on the website: [www.livingrainforest.org/explore/schools-debate](http://www.livingrainforest.org/explore/schools-debate)
3. Details of the judging panel for the International Schools Essay Competition can be found on the website: <http://www.livingrainforest.org/explore/schools-debate/judging-panel-2/>
4. A full list of all Finalists and Honourable Mentions is available on the website: [www.livingrainforest.org/explore/schools-debate](http://www.livingrainforest.org/explore/schools-debate)
5. Electronic copies of individual essays are available upon request from [diary@livingrainforest.org](mailto:diary@livingrainforest.org)

### **About the Trust for Sustainable Living**

The Trust's mission is to communicate sustainability issues to public and specialist audiences, to enable positive engagement for a sustainable future. In addition to running the International Schools Essay Competition and Debate, the Trust for Sustainable Living operates the Living Rainforest educational visitor centre in Berkshire, which attracts around 80,000 visitors a year. The centre inspires visitors to connect local with global issues and offers a unique rainforest experience, with 700 plant and animal species, including rare and endangered species of global biodiversity value. More information: <http://www.livingrainforest.org/charity/>

### **3.**

#### ***Winning essay – Sustainable living***

**THE LIVING RAINFOREST,**

***HAMPSTEAD NORREYS, BERKSHIRE, UK***

***INTERNATIONAL AWARD: HONOURABLE MENTION***

*Nicolae Balcescu* National College, Braila, Romania

Surname and name: **LUPU Mihaela Maria**, Form: 8th B School year: 2013-2014

Coordinator Teacher: Gabriela Barnovschi

### **A Long Sweet Life**

"Everybody dreams of having a sustainable life but nobody wants to grow old" once said Jonathan Swift. To begin with, there are three main rules: no cigarets, no alcohol, no fast-food outlets which we hardly abide to. Then,

are we prepared to take Shank's pony to the supermarket instead of alluding to our car? Would we be ready to fly much less and to call it a day at 8 o'clock in the evening only to save some energy? Who could do this? What we need is will, joint will. Just like with everything, if there's a will, there's a try, otherwise we are at a standstill.

Our coursebooks are packed with sensible examples of how to preserve and to provide sustainable living. Furthermore, most of our homework topics are related to aspects of enduring living, from being nature's friend, to being pollution's fiend and a foe of ill-manner.

One facet of enhanced living which is at hand for everybody is a sprightly existence. Though, the downside is that generally people do not practice any sport. They would sooner take the elevator than climb the stairs, people prefer loitering in front of the tv or going to the gym instead of merely walking through the city or jogging in the park. With the comforts we have today which minimize human effort, the importance of weight gain and its effects cannot be ignored. People and especially children, who have all their lives ahead, ought to be well cared for and offered more alternatives and guidelines for a healthy living. So what about sports classes which could be made more entertaining by inviting famous sportspersons in the area to stir children's interest, or arrange sports centers with free entrance where people of all ages could choose their favourite sport, from canoeing, tennis to athletics or swimming.

It is certain that charity begins at home. But how many of us are willing to forsake our state-of-the-art living – it is not possible and again not advisable. I myself could hardly relinquish any vogueish item. What I would like to emphasize is self-teaching ourselves how to be moderate and how to act with reason, candour and dutifully, for the benefit of ourselves, that is for me, for our fellows, thereby for the forthcoming ourselves. For instance, when we go on a shopping spree aiming at purchasing the most refined woolen cardigan, we topple the bunch of items until we find the most perfect one, with no napped thread in the fabric; later on, after wearing it several times it becomes fluffy – the same happens with our Earth in the aftermath of our activities.

We have forgotten to stop to take a deep breath and to admire and cherish nature for itself not only for the boundless benefit that it bestows upon us. I would like to see outlets where from I could buy a tree whose price ought to be fixed by its would-be owner and then have a site in the surroundings of the city where I could plant it. It may become a citizen's duty to plant a tree near one's residence. If conspicuous consumption and technological advances are irreversible, then earthlings could perform a verdant-lungs transplant upon dear Earth.

All in all, life and health of both the macro-universe, our planet and of the micro-universe, our entity, depend solely on us. We are the engine of these devices called body and the Earth, and our aim is to shield them.

#### 4.

#### Creative writing competition - winning entries

**The following is a selection of winning compositions in the creating writing contest entitled BĂLCESCU- PAST, PRESENT AND FUTURE**

#### **A Prestige High School, NBNC**

15<sup>th</sup> September, 2035. My first day of high school at *Nicolae Bălcescu* National College. I would say it was my most exciting and amazing experience until now.

Yesterday I was extremely nervous and confused because I thought that my life would definitely change. I was to meet new people: teachers and pupils alike, but the most frightening thought was going to a new school.

*Nicolae Bălcescu* National College is the most prestigious school in Braila, dating back to 1863 and being the first sciences-profile high school from Romania. It has a reputation for its results in competitions, where the students have always turned up trumps. Over the years, here noted personalities have been shaped -such as scientists, members of the Romanian Academy and other Academies.

My heart was pounding when I arrived in front of the school, but my absurd ideas vanished at once at the sight of the huge superb school, seemingly hidden behind the limes which foretold that it was autumn. Once I entered I felt more relaxed, seeing around me children as excited and frightened as myself. All

of us were wearing uniforms and on their faces I could read curiosity and hope. Suddenly, I felt lucky because I realized what it actually meant to be one of them.

The atmosphere became calmer and calmer as we began to get to know each other and we also made a tour of the school. The court is huge and it has amazing tennis courts and football pitches. Indoors, it has over 50 classrooms and modern fully-equipped laboratories and gyms. The school has been recently renovated so that it looks great. Each classroom has its own design, all of them are painted in breathtaking colours, expressing hope and the happiness of a new beginning. In each classroom, every pupil has his own iPad. All over, there are chandeliers which make the connection between past and present. I would say that both, interior and exterior, confer us the best place for us to study.

We also met the teachers. They surely are well prepared and they seem to want to do their best to teach us all they know. They are experienced teachers who treat us as their partners, and are trying to maintain the tradition of the school, recording educational performance with their students. One of the most interesting things was that for the foreign languages we also had teachers from other countries. That seems amazingly useful for our language development.

Finally, I consider my school one of the most modern and highly appreciated school in the country, one of the few schools which has managed to maintain its tradition of being in the top of the best high schools

from Romania. I could say that I am very proud being one of the best students in the area and I am sure that in the years ahead my school will keep up...

Ionescu Violeta, first prize, Prof. îndrumător: Gabriela Barnovschi

Illustration by Nicoleta Olteanu



## *Ongoing lessons*

Nicolae Balcescu once said: "There can't be happiness without freedom, there can't be freedom without strength." Not in vain is the high school where I study called *Nicolae Balcescu*. Students are guided by certain moral values like discipline and the importance of studying, to become the best. Sometimes, because I didn't guide myself by these values at times I had a lot of troubles to experience but I learnt the hard way that in a student's life there are ups and downs. What is really important is to know how to get up when you fall down and start over and over again.- "You won, go on! You lost, go on!" This is one of the most known proverbs that I saw for the first time written on a Math book, when I was just eleven.

Now, after seven years in the same school I can say that my school, my teachers, my class, my colleagues and all the events that happened in my student life have changed me from being just a child to being a person with firm principles and strong moral values. Certainly I couldn't be who I am now without my teachers. Some are more demanding, others more gentle, but each one has something to teach you for the real life. I still remember how much I cried when I took the first F in Physics or how scared I was before the Math classes. Then I hated those feelings but now I realize how much it helped me to grow up and reach adulthood.

I feel that there haven't been so many changes between generations, maybe just the fact that students this year skip classes more often. This affects their performance in school but I am sure that this problem will be solved in time. What I like the most about Balcescu High School is that it is an institution from where a lot of children learnt to be real people, happy, free and strong. It is exactly what I wish for me to be after I graduate and I sit the University Entrance Exam: a person with a strong character and principles but also happy and free.

To put it in a nutshell, with a few small changes Balcescu High School is the same, at least from the inside, like it was 5-6 years ago, when I was just a frisky child, perhaps even more.

Lorena Danila, first prize, Prof. îndrumător Mocanu Luminita

## *I think it's time*

The candle on the table starts burning weakly as my heart starts beating faster. This dark room becomes a shadow of the home that it used to be... I think it's time. A flame enters through the room for one moment, lightening the old, dusted desk. In this moment I can swear I hear my mother's voice. But that's impossib...



Suddenly, I wake up in a bright, large classroom. The blackboard in front of me looks like an endless sea, with the words written on it swimming like coloured fish searching for treasures. Sweet highschool years with so many emotions, eternal friendships, cold tears, scared looks, cordial smiles, thousands of pieces of chalk, tones of dust breathed, miles of walks took in the school yard, a mountain of testpapers, millions of quotes hastily underlined in the books finished when the sun almost rose, hundreds of notes sent to the boy I loved . All the memories from these years flash through my mind and warm my heart and eyes. A teardrop falls



down on my cheeks and when it touches the floor, the entire room breaks in a thousand pieces, then they stick back together as in a jigsaw puzzle.

This time, I'm in the front of the class sitting at a bigger desk, holding a huge, heavy catalogue. Hundreds of names walk in front of my eyes, bringing to my mind familiar smiles. The uniform I was wearing turned into a formal suit, my ponytail is styled tight, severe bun. I remember walking in the empty classrooms after finishing the classes and staying there for awhile, dreaming with my eyes wide open. Sometimes, I had the feeling that the walls could talk to me. Their whisper became the echo of my love. All my life was stuck between these lonely walls. I was a prisoner of my own in that old building I loved so much. All the laboratories, the big lobby, the huge paintings and inscriptions on the walls were all that I needed to feel truly fulfilled.

Now that I'm here again... All the years bringing back to me sweet memories... I just feel like I've got back an old friend. I run to the roof and look on the sky for one last time: it's so cloudy, as if God poured his goblet full of flashes on it. A storm of white butterflies breaks out on the dark blue sky, flying away with all my tears.

I'm back in the old room, but the candle had burnt up. I hear the butterflies' wings ripping and tearing close to my year... I think it's time.

Brezuică Adela, 9 C, first prize, prof. îndrumător Mocanu Luminita

Illustration by Ana Maria Merticaru

### **Rewarding journeys**

December! The first month of winter is here and personally I consider this season very depressing. It's a period of changes because nature, bored of its yellow brown clothes decided to wear a new outfit, something like a wedding dress.

This day was no different from the rest. The same rain that has conquered the city from some days now woke me up when I was having the most deep and relaxing sleep. Rain drops were falling down my window as if they were racing for "Olympics". I was trying to wake up but the dream world was not letting me go. It was a struggle that was finally ended by the alarm - a final sound of battle. I could already see the day in my mind: same classes that make me falling asleep sometimes, especially when it was raining.

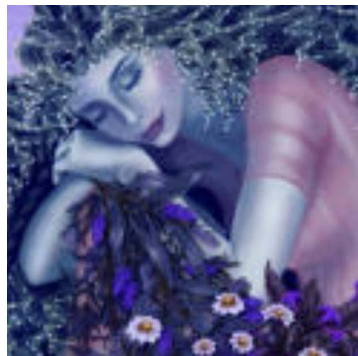
It took me about an hour to finally arrive to school. History class had already begun but I slipped through my classmates to my place which was expecting me. I was trying so hard to pay attention to the teachers' words but the rain was making so much noise that it hypnotized me, I couldn't control my mind anymore. The teacher's words were like a background sound and I could only hear words that together seemed unrelated. Something about National College "Nicolae

Balcescu” and the year 1912 were constantly being repeated in my mind. Without even realizing, my eyelids became heavier and heavier; I was about to fall asleep.

Suddenly I woke up. I heard my name called by the teacher who had noticed that I was sleeping.

-George, George Russell! I hope you did pay attention to what I’ve just said! This lesson is part of your test paper. Because of your rudeness, Ms. George, you will have a special task to do. Today, after classes you will present the project you have been working on in front of the entire high school. Your speech will be awarded if it is good enough for the judges.

Before I could say something the teacher left me there with a confused expression. I didn’t understand what was happening to me, because there was something very odd that disturbed me. I was in the same room, at the same desk, I just attended history class, but who were all those people in my classmates’ places and what happened with Ms. Richard, my history teacher? I was extremely confused and on a verge of looking for answers. I was able to notice that my desk was a little bit different from the one I was used to. This one was more like an antique- similar to those in the high school’s museum. The charts and maps we had hung on the wall were replaced with posters about school plays and opera. One after another I could see that the smart board we bought at the beginning of the year was now like the old blackboards. I thought I was dreaming or I was sleepwalking and somehow I ended up in the museum. One thing was still the same, my place near the window through which I could see one side of the boulevard, where people were either hurrying or in the mood for a walk. At least the rain had stopped!



Searching for reasonable explanations for my journey, I left the room, once again to be shocked. All students were wearing uniforms, which in my school had been abolished. I was wearing one of these elegant clothing: a white shirt with the school blazon and a striped tie covered with a red checkered jacket and a pair of black trousers. It was incredible! This couldn’t have been the museum because I was walking through the corridors full with people I did not recognize at all but who seemed to know me very well because they were greeting me in the most friendly and respectfully way, something I was not used to .

The school was practically the same, nothing but small details like the painting of the walls or small pieces of furniture like chairs or benches. There were the same rooms with their tall white double doors. Nothing different so far, but when I went

outside the first building I realized that what we call the 'B' building had not even been erected, and the gym was two times smaller. The high school backyard seemed another one. Seating on a bench I was thinking about what could possibly have happened when a thought crossed my mind: what if I have travelled in time in 1912? I remember that this year and the high school name were constantly repeated in my mind. It looked unbelievable but judging after all the signs it did appear logical. I needed a proof to see that my theory was right, then I found a newspaper which said: 6 December 1912, School's name celebration. My mind was twisted and different questions without a logical response were jumping up and down in my head: How was this possible? Why me? And how that is no one wonders who I am?



Before I could react in a way or another I saw everybody getting to one direction: the amphitheater. I followed the crowd and I saw in front of the entrance a big poster with the title: "School competition! Present your high school in your own way". Then I remembered that there was one time when my grandfather told me how he won the prize for the best school speech; it was the time when he and my grandmother became a couple. This must be all this mess! I had travelled in time, in my papa's place. Nobody could see the difference because he and I are like two peas in pod.

While I was recalling all of these memories my name was called from the stage. It was my presentation time. I couldn't speak about anything regarding the present from that past moment, but I started to describe the high school from my present. Everyone thought that I was just imagining things and they admired my imagination, no one actually knowing that in about a century all these will become true. That day I won the gold medal, handed by the principle in person. I couldn't have felt more proud than that day because I had never felt like that before in my life. Everybody was congratulating me.

The next class was about to start and we all went back in our classes. I don't know if it was either habit or a mysterious force that drove me back to my place because I was too happy to realize what I was doing. Unfortunately the rain started again and I felt again in some sort of trance. I fell asleep!

-George Russell! I heard my name one again. This time I was back to the present, in my class, next to my classmates, where Ms. Richard was scolding me,

saying I am the most impolite person in the class, and of course, because of this I was punished to make a presentation in front of the school in the school's competition. Why do these things sound familiar to me? Then I remembered about my dream, and everything that happened back then. At first I thought it was a dream, but then, when I saw the medal attached to the jacket, I realized that it was more than that, but unexplainable.

I attended the contest and surprisingly I won first place. Now, when I recall all of these memories I am thinking that the faith played with me that way in order to find my true value. I still keep the medals from both competition and every time I look at them I remember that God has a power we cannot understand.

Gheorghe Oana, first prize, Prof. îndrumător: Șerban Aurelia

Below illustration by Buzatu Andreea Sabina, clasa a VII-a A



## **Interviews**

Over the years, our school has been the best in town. It accomplished national performance. Great personalities and renowned scientists studied in our school as Ana Aslan-endocrinologist and Mihail Sebastian-novelist, all were members of this National Academy. Our school produced both scientists and men of letters have had brilliant careers.

I talked with the doctor Eugeniu Iancu and Evelina Dumitrascu teacher at School number 23 and a graduate of Academy of Economic Studies and they told

me about their period of study at my college. The first contact with the college was fearful and upsetting. They felt responsible not to disappoint and wanted to stand out in front of teachers, desiring to confirm their studies. They did not want to know failure but only triumph in the high school. Being so afraid of his school at first, I went backwards in the past talked to my ex Romanian teacher, a former graduate of this college. She said that when she became a student here, she too assumed the burden of responsibility not to disappoint, and she confirmed her results by personal effort and exceptional results as a student in time. She met people who imposed respect through attire and attitude. She told me that if I wanted a solid general culture, this college is perfect for me. Mrs. Dumitrascu told me that her period of study in this college was marked by adolescence exuberance that made the difficulties that she might have faced fade away. Then, almost cheerful, I wanted to know more and more about this institution of learning and I found out that it is almost "star-studded" with personalities. So I interviewed another generation, this time the one that celebrated their 40th year of the graduation. I discovered even more amazing things:

Mr. Eugeniu Iancu, a doctor, class 1972 told me that in his period of study the teachers particularly imposed respect not only through their behaviour and attitude, but also by dedication. Initially he had a circumspect attitude and he had a sense of withdrawal and fear at times at theoretical subjects, that is.

Miss Lavinia Lazar, graduate of Academy of Economic Studies told me that her first sight of the college was the building which was imposing and stately. Her contact with the teachers were nice while the feeling of apprehension and anxiety had been wiped out by the warmth of teachers' attitude to children. She liked Romanian and French languages and she graduated from high school with a 9.8 average.

Mrs. Evelina Dumitrascu told me again that despite the fact that she attended a theoretical profile she loved Romanian language and she became a teacher of Romanian language. Her passion for this language was developed by her former teacher as a role model. This has been the strength of this college, to open windows of opportunity for all students in their careers no matter the profile of studies.

I am paying more attention to my teachers now, and I listen to everything that they say. I wish I could create them a good image of myself. The teachers both in the past as well as the present have surely something in common, which is this college as a bridge between generations, then, now and more to come. They are very trained for the job they do and speak so that all the students can understand easily. Then as always they have been demanding and severe with their students, are entirely gifted in their profession of their subject. Through the severity of the teachers and capacity of students, our college reaches performance. Only with

dedication and passion can we be the best in everything and we fight hard for every step of the podium.

Sabin Lazar, first prize, Prof. îndrumător Mocanu Luminita

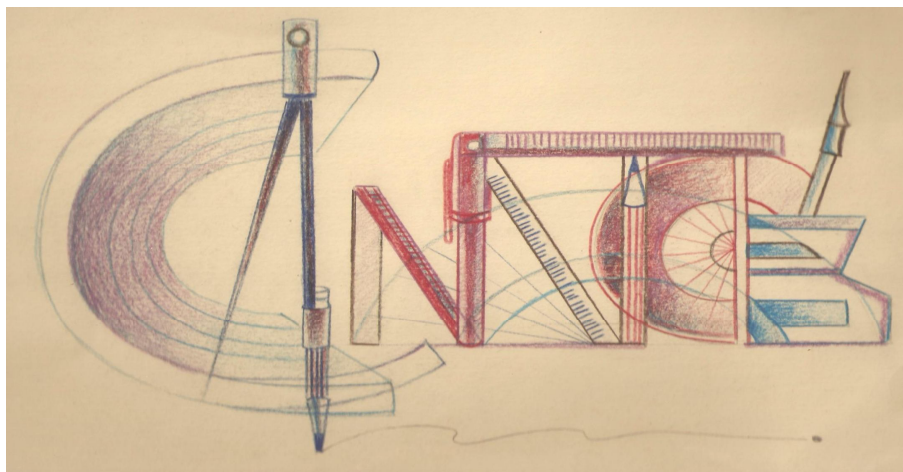


Illustration by Ritzi Ana-Maria ,clasa aIX-a E

### Anno 2830

Year 2830...I remember like it was yesterday. 36 years after humanity managed to conquer Fox galaxy, and 5 after the Babel Tower was built. Yes, the Babel Tower: even then, like today, its real purpose was not to get to God, but to find a way to reach the Moon. Back then, this thing was impossible, but these days the Moon and Earth are related by this “passage” made of a very strong metal found on Giant-Steps galaxy, on planet M6502. The tide is not like it was before, but it was made a satellite that takes Moon’s place and makes a smaller tide, but don’t think that people can’t surf anymore; there are some machines that can make even a 200 meters high wave.

Lifespan is longer than ever : 300 years. There are people who have even 50-60 children. Humanity expanded on very many planets. We can’t know the number of people out there, because there are millions of people who rode their spaceship and went to explore the universe. These days, only the richest people live on Earth. It’s like a residential district. Why is that? Because it is the only planet that has history. Most institutions haven’t changed their name for centuries.

Schools are a lot different from your time: there are no more teachers. Now they are called “implanters”. There are two kinds of implants: by hypnosis and by chips. By hypnosis it takes more time to receive information but it is safer than



brain surgery. But both kinds are dangerous because the implanters can do anything to your brain. Even these kind of schools are “graduated” by the majority of the people, because they say : “time means money”, there are also some kind of old-fashion schools. Such a school is “Nicolae Balcescu”, one of the 100 of this kind on the planet. Even here the teachers are called differently; they are called “grandmasters”. A teacher is specialized in one department, but a master is specialized in all departments and even more. That’s the reason they are called so.

“Nicolae Balcescu” has only 13 grandmasters, almost the fewest from all the other 99 same kind of schools ( another 10 schools have 11 grandmasters, and 5 schools have also 13; others have even 33 grandmasters), but also, you must spend here 40 years to graduate, the longest time of all the other ones. Every grandmaster chooses 13 pupils (169) after an interview. Every 10 years 39 pupils are sent home; so only 52 pupils manage to graduate the school. Only 13 of these 52 will become grandmasters, replacing their old grandmasters. These ones remain in the school for at least another 4 years to see if their pupils are doing well, and only after this they can leave.

You would ask me why somebody would want to graduate this kind of school. Well, they don’t have only information, but also experience, they will have so much money, they could buy a planet...but let me tell you what they actually do during these 40 years: in the first 10 years you must memorize a certain amount of information-the last 3 student go home. If you pass, you will spend the next 10 years meditating, learning to control every inch of your body-the last 3 students leave. In the next 10 years you will learn to do telekinesis and telepathy-the weakest 3 students also leave. The last students will learn to do astral journeys.

This is very dangerous; if you are not prepared, you may not be able to manage to stay alive. To do an astral journey means to be able to detach your soul from your body and then come back to your body. While you travel you will find good and bad spirits who can give you good or bad information, but any kind of information is a lot different and also more important because is not from our reality. If you spend too much time outside your body, you may not be able to find your way back, so in the last 10 years you are trained to be better prepared in these journeys.



You can see now why so few become grandmasters and also why “Nicolae Balcescu” is one of the best schools of all times....

Anian Cursaru, second prize, Prof îndrumător Ciurea Monica

### **The Past and the Present, two generations**

Our high school's history has been an important matter for me and my classmates since we chose to come here and we have assumed the responsibility to attend at such a prestigious college. Driven by our curiosity, we have decided to imagine how other people see us and how our school had looked like before we came here.

Unexpectedly, all the answers we needed to find out came from my father, a former student here, at “Nicolae Balcescu”. A long, long time ago our high school seems to have been an extremely different school from ours. There were way many rules and some really harsh ones. The ordinary student three decades ago lived a quite hard life compared to ours. For example, then students had to follow a strict uniform, nevertheless an individual code that defined them as students here.

Another dissimilarity regarding our school now and then is the amount of time students really spared with important matters such as learning. I have noticed that now children devote school less and less time, which is slightly paradoxical. As I have already stated before, then there was a strict system which imposed its children to grant more and more time in studying things that were not eventually learned in the class.

Finally, I would like to end my speech with an observation regarding the uncommon points between two generations. Of course, we have needed to adapt in this harsh times but I consider we, generally speaking, could try a little more to be like the ones that were here before us.

Jiru Cristian, Gontariu Paul, second prize, Prof. îndrumător Serban Aurelia

### **Glimpse of school life**

My relationship with „Nicolae Balcescu” National College is an old one. To be honest, in the 7th grade I knew exactly that I would apply at the best high-school in Braila. And I did it!

Since then, I was sure that it will be a very difficult way to take, but I knew that it was worth it. After long hours of studying, of writing, of dreaming about the future, I managed to be a student at my desired school.



On the first day of school I was very nervous and afraid of what was going to happen. Also, as I am from the countryside, I missed my home a lot. Even now I suffer from this problem, but time is always ticking away and everything is coming up roses.

Now, the teachers are more severe and the classmates are well-prepared. Every day is a new challenge and I must bring the house down in every single moment. It is difficult but if there is a will there is surely a way.

Time has flown, and now, in the 11th grade the huge, cruel but always right high-school has transformed in a friend, an elder brother. This blessed friend always assures me that I will be a doctor with flying colours, that the success is right there, round the corner.

I do not have the words to describe what these years have represented for me. Endless sleepless nights, thousands of pages written and learned, hundreds of new worlds, new possibilities that are waiting to be dreamed.

Thank you, National College „Nicolae Balcescu”.  
Balan Mara-Cristiana, third prize, prof. îndrumător Ciurea Monica

### **Transcending Time**

*Our thoughts get us in the future,  
We try to see how things could be,  
We dream that everything will change  
But will it really happen?... Maybe.  
We hope to use technology  
While we will try to study  
And everything should change  
As we evolve in history.  
We may think that past won't matter  
But we don't know how wrong we'll be.  
Let's take a look before  
At the beginning of this!  
Being taken aback in time  
We see how others have got by  
As we complain we have too less  
But is it fair to ask for more?  
We see the students from back then  
They managed to find their own way  
Even if they had restrictions  
And things that held them back.  
They've put up with all the demands*

*Trying to keep their hope alive  
That someday they will be the ones  
To lead and make the rules.  
As we are looking back at them  
We can see what they've become:  
Scientists, teachers, directors.  
They knew what they want from their life  
Even if they were confused at the start.  
So we can now think of ourselves  
"If they could make it, we will make it!"  
Great personalities are being remembered  
Just by saying the name of the school.  
We need just a minute to watch  
In order to see how much was done.  
But that is enough with the past!  
What had been had been.  
We should now live in present  
And see what life can give us!  
Sometimes we can see all the opportunities  
Which have been given to us  
But this is just a reason  
To make us study hard.  
Of course dreams are needed  
And hopes and aspirations...  
But we should know what we have now  
And be glad we can be tough.  
The concern about the future  
Should always be present  
Thus, we need to stay focused  
And get ourselves educated.*

Andreea – Gabriela Capbun ,first prize, prof. îndrumător Gabriela Barnovschi

### **Lines of past and present**

*The album of high school memories  
Incessantly reveals itself before my eyes,  
Whenever I look at the verdant boulevard.*

*The school is still vivid in my mind  
With its majestic statue at the entrance*

*Of light resplendent.*

*Knowledge and invaluable lessons  
Are forever handed down to generations,  
And here I long to be a student again  
In the greatest and oldest high school in town.*

Claudia Alina Tutulan, prof. îndrumător Gabriela Barnovschi

# Teachers' methodological corner

---

## EXAM PREPARATION

By **Luminița Mocanu**, teacher of English,  
National College 'N.Bălcescu'

Exam classes of English are special, they have a more concrete focus and require preparing students for dealing with specific exam tasks. The role of chunks in some exam tasks is then of utmost importance. In my exam classes when preparing my students for the Cambridge Esol exams (FCE, CAE), especially for Paper 3 called English in Use or Use of English, I find **chunking** and **collocation** are the basis on which some tasks are written and how distracters are generated. Making the students aware of that helps them to perform better and understand why the given answer is correct. I would like to use a few examples all taken from the FCE and CAE Handbooks (CUP). The FCE multiple choice test is lexical but more often than not it tests the student's knowledge of collocations. Eg:

*The London Tea Trade Centre is a centre of an industry of.....(1)  
importance in the ..... (2) lives of the British.*

- |            |           |            |         |
|------------|-----------|------------|---------|
| 1 A high   | B wide    | C great    | D large |
| 2 A common | B typical | C everyday | D usual |

The way to choose the correct answer is to recognize the two chunks : *of great importance* and *everyday lives*. Students often argue that *high* or *large* are correct answers and use their bilingual dictionaries to prove they mean the same as great. So here we teachers face the possibility of students claiming the dictionary is 'wrong'. The students may not believe it, especially if we are a non-native teacher. A teacher who is a native speaker of the language may get away with: *We don't say that*. However, any teacher versus a dictionary wins when saying: *This is a popular, high frequency chunk*, and then can support the statement with an example from a monolingual dictionary based on the Corpus analysis of English language.

The revised CAE exam brings another task involving chunks called: Gapped Sentences. There are three sentences from which one word has been removed. For all the three sentences it is the same word used as the same part of speech;Eg:

A

*Melanie practised her lines each day after school, getting increasingly nervous as the date of her audition ..... even closer.*

B

*Although Tim had been in the lead for most of the race, as they reached the final bend, Graham ..... level and threatened to overtake him.*

C

*On an impulse, Laura..... all the money out of her bank account and went to London, intending to spend every last penny of it.*

The word is: *drew*, and in order to find it the candidates need to know a number of the uses of the verb *to draw*: *the date drew closer, smb. drew level with smb. and drew money from the bank*. The way the chunks are chosen seems to be the principle that there is a chunk students learned at lower levels ( pre-intermediate, intermediate – sentence C), at higher levels (upper intermediate, advanced – sentence A) and at very advanced level (proficiency - sentence B).They are chunks containing the same word but they are chunks of different frequency. One thing is clear, however, and that it is what corpus analysts observed:reaching proficiency level is meeting old words in new chunks.

I have given examples from Paper 3 in the Cambridge Esol exams. However the role of chunks is involved in testing receptive skills and productive skills. For example, in the Reading paper in some tasks

students need to find the correct answer by spotting certain wording in the question and find similar meaning worded differently in the text, for example in multiple matching or multiple choice questions. What is more they need to do it fast because there is a time limit. In the Listening paper students may have to listen for a chunk and write it down or its part on the answer sheet. Receptive skills involve a lot of chunking too, listening for instance involves a lot of collocations and chunking. Therefore I am entitled to suggest some activities to make it student-friendly:

- I give students tapescript with some key collocations blanked out. They listen again and complete the spaces.
- I listen texts that can be used to provide a model for pronunciation, for example, the stress pattern of chunks. I ask my students to identify the stress and drill the whole chunk.
- Songs are a useful lexical resource. Before listening, I give students words of a song with some collocations blanked out. I ask them to work in pairs to predict how many words have been blanked out from each space. They then listen for the exact words. If there are any patterns in the song (for example, a number of second conditional sentences), learners can be asked to identify these sentences, and write more sentences using the same structure which fit the theme of the song.

Students are unlikely to remember chunks after seeing them just once, so it will be necessary to recycle them in subsequent classes. A few minutes before the end of a class, I ask students working individually to write down all the new collocations / chunks they've seen in that class. They can then compare together, or if there's enough time, give definitions for their partner to guess the chunks. This could also be done at the beginning of a class to recycle language from the previous class.

It is important to be aware that this kind of development takes time and teachers and our students won't see instant results. However, in the longer run, working in this way can not only increase our students' vocabulary, and the degree of accuracy with which they use it, but it can also develop their abilities to 'notice' patterns in language and so become more autonomous learners.

### **Key words:**

Collocation=A collocation is two or more words that often go together. These combinations just sound "right" to native English speakers, who use them all the time

Lexical chunks=a lexical chunk is a group of words that are commonly found together. Lexical chunks include collocations, but these usually just involve content words, not grammar

## **Ideas come knock knock With the Discussion Clock**

By **Aurelia Cristiana Șerban**, teacher of English,  
National College 'N. Bălcescu'

If at first, the idea is not absurd, then there is no hope for it. ~Albert Einstein

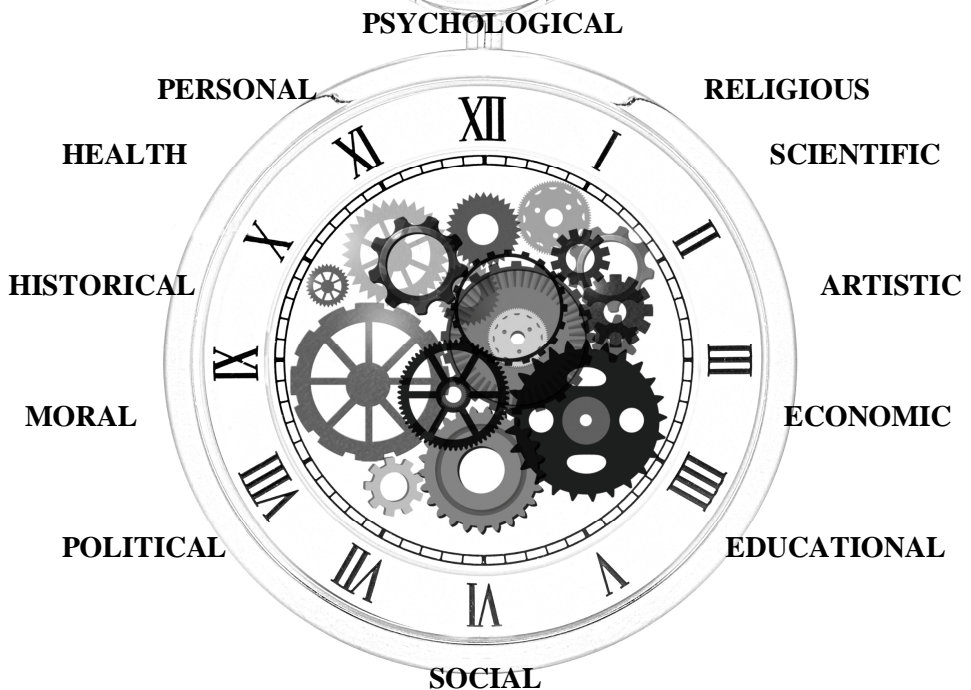
The essay. Such simple and short a word, yet such a long road to the last full stop in the perfect one. To my mind, it is the journey that matters, not the destination itself. Whether it is for the wide range of exams "looming" on them or for class work, essay writing is one task students are to tackle. They see it either a daunting challenge or an opportunity to put their knowledge of English to excellent use, in Cambridge, Toefl or Ielts exams; the essay is a chance to consider both sides of issues and express their opinions by putting forward their ideas in a formal way; those who are taking into account studying at a university abroad must do almost everything but indite the feared "personal statement", which weighs much more than merely fulfilling an English class assignment, i.e. their application to a highly-regarded foreign university depends on it. For all these categories, there is an invaluable tool: the discussion clock.

Plainly put, the discussion clock aims to help students come up with ideas when they have none. Even the easiest essay topics may pose the challenge of the students becoming short of topic or supporting sentences, either in for and against essays, opinion essays or other types. Hence the usefulness and the need of the discussion clock.

It consists of a variety of areas of discussion to tackle when confronted with a topic; yet, some might say that students at secondary level definitely possess the necessary advanced vocabulary and the ability to view a topic from various standpoints; that may certainly be true, but why not enrich the body proper of the essay with plentiful vocabulary and points of view that will add a great amount of genuineness, valid and supported arguments, abundance of documented examples and, last but not least, extra points in the assessment process due to the wide range of structures and vocabulary made use of.

As Virginia Evans puts it, the discussion clock is a useful “brainstorming” tool, as it helps examine a topic from numerous perspective and then decide on ideas/points to tackle in your essay (1998:59).

The discussion clock portrayed below can be introduced to students as early as ninth grade, when they are first taught how to write successful essays. Evans suggests the following areas of discussion to be used:



Yet, the students along the years and I have added more domains to the clock, more perspectives to be taken into consideration when dealing with essays. Our clock has more than 12 areas of discussion. Our domains are not all “shaped” as adjectives, so as to offer variety of language used; we have brainstormed others such as: legal, career/employment, ethical, spiritual, ecological/environmental, technology, traditions, family.

Evans proposes the following language to put the clock into good practice: As far as.....is concerned, From a .....standpoint/viewpoint, As for the .....aspect, With regard to .....matters (1998:59). We could also pinpoint the areas that interest us or are significant to our topic of discussion with other expressions: Looked at from a/an.....perspective, In terms of .....significance, With reference to the.....aspect, Concerning the .....perspective.

Why is it called e clock? And how does it work? Does it need winding? Well, let’s say I have to give my opinion on whether *it is worth studying abroad*; of course, I want to write/present as many interesting and well-documented arguments as possible; therefore, I will slowly move clockwise through all the areas in the Clock in order to identify those which best suit my subject. In no time, I will be able to introduce in my piece of formal writing (or speech) such arguments and justifications as the following:

*Deciding to further my studies in a foreign environment has certain advantages; from an educational perspective, my studies will be an in-depth practical focus on the area I am interested in, as it is a well known fact the emphasis in our educational system could be placed a bit too much on the theoretical aspect; additionally, regarding the social aspect, I will benefit from a more diverse learning environment while making friends from various backgrounds and of different nationalities. With regard to career matters, I believe I will have more opportunities to find a suitable job to fit my domain if I am awarded a diploma from a university overseas, for instance.*

*However, looked at from a personal perspective, spending at least four years in a foreign environment does pose its challenges; by this I mean that I will definitely miss my family, as they have been the constant axis for support in my life; even if I am to keep in touch via technological*



*means such as videocalls, nothing can replace the proximity and closeness gained or maintained when I can visit my family once a week, for example, as I would be able to do were I to go to university in my native country.*

This sample analysis of how the discussion clock can be used may abound in language related to the Clock, but this emphasis is mostly to underline the various instances in which it can be put to good use. It is clear from the above example, also, that the Clock is extremely useful when considering a topic from opposing views. This turns a discussion clock into an invaluable yet readily available tool for discussing pros and cons related to less or more troublesome issues . Also, as Evans reminds us, *a topic may not relate to all the aspects presented in the discussion clock(ibid, p 59).*

Ending in a noteworthy note (worthy of a strategy for essays indeed), I will give the readers something to consider: have you ever thought you can use this clock for Speaking topics too? It's not even a debatable subject! It is an understatement. In fact, a plethora of responses to many a speaking task can be enriched when you make use of the Clock. Consider this speaking topic – discussed with my students this school year in March: *Should schools encourage competition from an early age?* Eleventh graders have come up with various arguments making use of the Clock :

*Regarding the educational aspect, competition is a key to success. Through competition, students work hard to obtain better grades than their rivals. So, if they start studying a lot when they are young, it will be easier for them when they have to overcome obstacles. (Bianca).*

*Looked at from a psychological perspective, competition will promote the idea that you have to learn to be independent and not rely on others; thus, encouraging a sense of competition will develop their self-esteem. Concerning the career perspective, children will get used to the idea that they have to fight against others competing in the job seeking process. (Diana).*

*As far as the educational aspect is concerned, I believe competition is beneficial, because it makes everyone learn more and eager to work. However, with reference to the psychological aspect, the pressure can get be too much for to cope with the child, leading to stress, anxiety and low self confidence (Dragoş).*

*Some people say that from an educational point of view friendly competition is extremely productive, especially if it is dealt with in a fun and encouraging way, because it stimulates children to work in order to achieve great results. Concerning the moral aspect, a lot of parents argue that schools should be a place where kids are to acquire knowledge, not a continuous fight for being the best, where children who don't have the courage to speak up are left behind or fall behind (Alexandra).*

*As far as psychological progress is concerned, competition is vital for the development of some qualities such as intelligence or self confidence. Yet, from a social perspective, I consider children should learn how to share ideas and accept new views they couldn't have thought of. This way, kids communicate and interact, thus finding out they are part of a group, so they can reach a higher level in their relationships (Remus).*

Reference:

Evans, V. (2002) *Successful Writing Proficiency*. 2<sup>nd</sup>.edn. Newbury: Express Publishing

*Clock drawn by Ana Maria Merticaru*

## **Presentations using the word processor**

**By Monica Claudia Ciurea**, teacher of English, National College 'N.Bălcescu'

Microsoft Office PowerPoint is usually used for making presentations. You can use it as a classroom tool to support input lessons for areas such as grammar or functional language. Diagrams, examples or lists of exponents that you would usually draw or write on the board can be replaced by electronic slides. This makes it possible to move backwards and forwards through your slides or introduce elements to an individual slide one at a time. This might be useful, for example, when adding sentences to a time-line.

Using the presentation software does not prevent you from also using a traditional board at the same time. If you are projecting your electronic

slides onto a white board, you can press the W key on the keyboard and the projected screen will become white allowing you to write on the board without interrupting the flow of the prepared presentation or switching off the data projector. (Pressing the W key again will return you to the presentation.)

As well as using the software to create presentations for your own purposes, your learners can also use the software to create their own presentations. For some learners, such as those from or about to enter the business world, this is a real-world task. For others, presentations are the culmination of a longer research task or creative task using the language. If you are unfamiliar with presentation software, there are one or two things to be aware of.

New users can get very carried away with all the many options that a program offers then sound effects, slide transition effects, patterned backgrounds and so on. These not only result in noisy, multi-coloured presentations, but, for language learners, they can absorb vital preparation time which should have been spent focusing on the language to be used.

The temptation of using long presentations with vast tracts of texts in order to impress the audience is totally false. Teach your students that in order to keep their receptors awake, they should make short and concise presentations. An average recommended is between 10 and 15 slides. Of course, they can be shorter than that but not too long. Another recommendation is “DON’T READ THEM”. Everybody can do that. Having worked on them, students should be able to present just the important information. Otherwise, they will have to face the yawning audiences.

It is more attractive, students are eager to explain things seen on the screen and give examples. Moreover, you needn’t write so many blackboards and breathe in chalk powder while standing with your back towards the class while your students chat or take a nap, being bored of so many things to write in their notebooks.

You can also incorporate links into the slides. You can create links to other slides within the presentation or to slides on another presentation stored in a particular place on a computer, a network or a CD-ROM. The result is the presentation can be navigated in a controlled but non-linear manner. This allows you to create a learning maze through which

learners can progress on the basis of decisions they are asked to make or questions they have to answer.

Learner mazes can be used for a wide range of subjects, for example, to raise awareness about grammar topics, introduce functional language, help learners to assess their own knowledge about topics such as self-study techniques, and explore a topic such as the customs and traditions of the country where they are staying during their studies.

This interactive way of teaching is a blessing both for you and for your students. The only thing you have to do is to prepare your presentation in advance. The inconvenience is that it takes time but the reward is double: you can use it every time you teach that lesson in the future and you'll be very appreciated by your students being a 'COOL' teacher.

## **Teaching patterns**

By **Gabriela Barnovschi**, teacher of English,  
National College 'N.Bălcescu'

John Dewey wrote "education is not a preparation for life; education is life itself".

The prevalent approach has generally been one closely following the core syllabus by direct exposure to merely presenting and explaining in detail all the odds and ends of each grammar, lexical ... aspect, ensuing feedback and drills. Just like the French are renowned for their conservatory imprint which ensures refinement, the same occurs with classical, traditional teaching. As a matter of fact TBL (that is, a task-based pattern) has been naturally meant to be everyone's language. I am of opinion that TBL is the foundation onto which PBL embroiders its own genuine, state-of-the-art theory patches.

In support of this conviction stands the multifarious peer level within a class. Even the most advanced students, not only the (very) beginners need a mighty layer of structures and notions which are furthermore to be blended into a modern wrapper. This occurs with PBL, and which also ensures its success. It even sciences in which unless the students is well-acquainted and juggles with the table of formulae, symbols and theorems, they are hardly to register progress. Especially the advanced students need from time to time a reminder of the traditional presentation, for knowledge without

practice becomes feeble at times. Concerning the beginners, to secure clear good understanding PPP is essential, then little by little incorporate TBL.

As man has been in continual progress, in this regard PBL is accepted as one more step forward. More and more classes are constructed on two facets, the one of the very advanced, even proficient students and the other of the rather novices in the field. There is a wide array of levels in a class whose prerequisite is that the teacher focuses almost on each and every student. Hence, the sedulous teacher type has felt the need to cater for all class levels. One may wonder how can that be possible? The teachers appear geared up with a handful of materials, worksheets for as many tiers as required. For instance, chunks of Idioms or Phrasal verbs. This is firstly presented to the class by means of a lead-in plus a traditional approach, that is either a set list of such expression the teacher assigns to students, or the students themselves are to search and jot down some of these by using the dictionary, followed by the drills in the workbook part of which are to be carried out during that class, the rest remaining as homework. The state-of-the-art approach would entail teacher's worksheets on idioms and phrasals practice, or even acting out brief exchanges highlighting the meaning and usage of the fixed expressions under consideration. Well, instead of acting out, the beginner students may take to merely drawing and adding a couple of brief repartees in this respect. Needless to mention is the wide selection of contests, also ensued by the TBL or the PBL and requiring special attention and training during classes. The task is made known to the students, then they come up with one or more enhanced drafts following the teacher's indications, till the refined version is ready to be submitted. And yet, even though these patterns of teaching are among the significant riveting ones, one question springs to mind: is the 50-minute span enough for both the compulsory and the added materials? It is conspicuous that most of the times the syllabus and the further materials are winding.

In a nutshell, no approach suffices by itself, but a mixture, according to the teacher's diagnosis, an anamnesis of the class levels. Still the best approach, which is to enhance even more the wider use of TBL, respectively PBL, is the smaller amount of students comprised by a class, either preserving a mixed-ability one, or one divided onto distinct levels, only beginners, or only mastery tier. Teachers ought to be the craftspersons of their classes, though it does not always happen; in general the essential aspect is to use what works best for one and one's learners. Not in vain have there been conceived groups for language learning, or one-to-one tuition, aspect which could be mimicked for all subjects of study primarily for the benefit of the learners. Smaller classes record a much higher sense of achievement.

# **How to stay fresh as a teacher**

By **Paula Claudia Ghețu**, teacher of English, National College 'N.Bălcescu'

Teaching methods are changing day by day and we, the English teachers, must keep up with the times and try to make our classes very interesting and efficient for our students.

So what can be done in order to stay on top with the new methods of teaching?

## **Try to take continuing education classes**

Teachers can be students, too, and one of the best ways to stay fresh is to continue your education. Many teachers are required to earn a specific number of continuing education credits each year, but it's important to pick the right classes to take. Classes should expand the teacher's tool set rather than reviewing existing skills. Both online and traditional colleges offer continuing education diplomas and certificates. These programs take around one year complete, depending on the number of credit hours. A great way to find the best programs is asking colleagues what they have taken.

## **Try to improve Lesson Plans!**

Teaching the exact same lessons every year can lead to listlessness, so take the time to improve lesson plans on a regular basis. After knowing the material so well and teaching it so many times, it's easy to get stuck in a rut. One useful exercise is to start from scratch on a lesson and rethink the best way to teach the material. Better yet, build on your experience so far, i.e. brainstorm lesson plan ideas that could work relying on the individuality of each group, on their previous responses and reactions, on their preferences when being taught something. Or, connect with a fellow teacher who may teach at a different school, and compare and improve on your current lesson plans!

## **What about technology?**

We must admit that technology is one of the best ways to connect with students these days. Many teachers have already made the switch from overhead projectors and blackboards to slideshow presentations, and laser pointers, but there's always more to add. Smart Boards help

teachers create interactive lectures that students can access from their own computers later, and many teachers are finding ways to let students use their smart phones to vote on polls or collaborate on projects.

### **You can brainstorm with other educators!**

Colleagues are sometimes the best places to get ideas, particularly if they work at the same school or type of school. Picking someone else's brain can provide tons of ideas on how to incorporate new techniques to connect with the students and help them learn more effectively. It can also help refresh educators who are feeling burned out or discouraged. Most teachers rely on all of these methods of continued education at some point during their career, but to find the one that's most important now, teachers should ask where they feel like they're falling behind.

Some teachers feel like they can't always connect with kids or might feel like they've lost particular skills and expertise. Being selective in what methods used helps us take advantage of limited time.

Remember, you live and breathe education!



Coordonatori revistă: Șerban Aurelia Cristiana, Mocanu Luminița