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They light up English lessons

Nine teachers are lauded for their passion, innovation in the classroom

By MALINI NATHAN & LIM POW HONG

IN AN effort to make learning English fun, primary school teacher Matthew Ong developed a game populated by knights and armies that sees his pupils conquer territories on a map.

The game acts as an incentive for pupils, who gain rewards like bigger armies for doing things such as writing the best poem in class.

"I try to get my pupils to see the importance of English and how they can use it to their advantage in different contexts," said the Anglo-Chinese School (Junior) teacher.

Yesterday, the innovation landed Mr Ong, 28, an inaugural Inspiring Teacher of English Award. He joined eight others in winning the first national award to recognise teachers who have helped their students improve their English skills.

Jointly presented by The Straits Times and the Speak Good English Movement, the awards were handed out at a ceremony last night at the National Library. Each winner received a trophy and a cash prize worth \$2,000 from Rear-Admiral (NS) Lui Tuck Yew, Senior Minister of State for Education and Information, Communications and the Arts.

The winners beat 154 other teachers nominated by students, parents and colleagues. They emerged following a rigorous selection process that included classroom evaluations and interviews with judges from The Straits Times, the Speak Good English Movement and the British Council.

Madam Nordiana Sani of Mayflower Primary was among yesterday's winners. The 28-year-old was lauded for getting her pupils to act out - literally - while studying short children's stories.

"I stop at important points in the story and get my pupils to step into the role," she said. "They then think about what the character will do next."

In a speech, RADM Lui said it is not easy for teachers to inspire students when they have so many demands on their time, such as marking. He believes the role of the English teacher is to infuse students with the "excitement of the language" so it will stay with them long after they leave school.

Another winner, Mr Tan Ying Kiat, 34, said the award also works to inspire teachers.

The Nanyang Primary instructor said the honour "will keep me going. It is an indicator that I am on the right track".

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Winning the first national award to recognise teachers who have helped students improve their English skills are (front) Madam Nordiana, (second row, from left) Madam Lim, Mr Tan Ying Kiat and Mrs Nirmala, (third row, from left) Ms Mesenas, Mr Chan and Mr Eddie Tan, and (back) Mr Ong. Ms Hong is not in the picture as she is overseas. ST PHOTO: AZIZ HUSSIN

Nine of the best

■ **Mr Bernard Chan, 37**
Years teaching: 15

Where: Teaches Primary 3 to 5 pupils at Rulang Primary, where he is the head of department for English. He shares his love for literature with his pupils, getting them to understand the nuances of the language.

■ **Mr Matthew Ong, 28**
Years teaching: Three

Where: Teaches Primary 3 to 5 pupils at Anglo-Chinese School (junior), where he used his pupils' love for knights and armies to create a game that acted as an incentive for them to excel in their work.

■ **Madam Nordiana Sani, 28**
Years teaching: Four

Where: Teaches Primary 1 and 2 pupils at Mayflower Primary. She gets them to act out passages from books, putting them in the characters' shoes.

■ **Mrs Nirmala Sharma, 63**
Years teaching: More than 35

Where: Teaches Primary 5 and 6 pupils at Temasek Primary, where she uses short stories to expand their vocabulary. She thinks pupils must enjoy themselves in order to learn.

■ **Mr Tan Ying Kiat, 34**
Years teaching: Four

Where: Teaches Primary 6 pupils at Nanyang Primary. By discussing how a director makes movies, Mr Tan gets pupils to reflect on their storytelling process.

■ **Ms Hong Wee Fui, 34**
Years teaching: Six

Where: Teaches Secondary 3 and 4 students in Peirce Secondary. She uses humour, such as highlighting funny mistakes by students, so they remember mistakes easily.

■ **Madam Lim Boon Siang, 39**
Years teaching: 15

Where: Teaches all levels at Broadrick Secondary. The senior teacher uses newspaper clippings, poems and even jokes to teach language rules.

■ **Mr Eddie Tan, 50**
Years teaching: 28

Where: Teaches all levels at Temasek Secondary. He developed a system in which students take on the role of the teacher to boost learning.

■ **Ms Elizabeth Mesenas, 37**
Years teaching: Seven

Where: Teaches all levels at Millenia Institute. She draws students' attention to larger social and economic issues by discussing personal matters.

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