

Never Let Me Go: Mystery Project X: The Norfolk Exchange

Looking back now, I can see why the Exchanges became so important to us. For a start, they were our only means...of building up a collection of personal possessions. If, say, you wanted to decorate the walls around your bed, or wanted something to carry around in your bag and place on your desk from room to room, then you could find it at the Exchange.

I can see now, too, how the Exchanges had a more subtle effect on us all. If you think about it, being dependent on each other to produce the stuff that might become your private treasures – that's bound to do things to your relationships.

"It's all part of what made Hailsham so special," Ruth said once. "The way we were encouraged to value each other's work."

With the semester winding down, and our *Never Let Me Go* unit consequently drawing to a close, I wanted to give you one last chance to, well, value each other's work. I think that Arcadia, like Hailsham (although it obviously differs in innumerable ways from Ishiguro's fictional institution), is a place where students can come to value and respect each other as artists, as thinkers, and, ultimately, as good, fascinating people.

To that end, I've designed a project inspired by Hailsham's Exchanges. Take a look at the steps to follow, and dive in!

Steps

1. Write your name at the tops of three separate Post-It notes (where the adhesive lies on the other side of the note).
2. On each Post-It, write one creation you'd be willing to produce for another classmate. You have a *lot* of latitude when it comes to what you're willing to make – writings, songs, sculptures, paintings, models, portfolios, films, and so on. I ask you to take the project seriously, particularly because your works are meant to be gifts, and desirable, meaningful ones at that.
 - a. Hopefully, each of the works does what Tommy suspects the Hailsham students' artwork is meant to do, and what Miss Emily later confirms: reveals something about the creator's soul.
 - i. This, by the way, is why it's imperative that you take the project seriously: if you give one of your classmates something shallow, apathetic, or flat-out awful, that reveals something about you, soul or no.
3. Place each Post-It on your Define Me poster, which I've stuck somewhere on one of the classroom walls. If you have no poster, leave your Post-Its on the blank white sheet at the back of the room.
4. Once everyone's placed their Post-Its in the appropriate places, walk around the room and claim three of your classmates' projects for yourselves. Do this by writing your name on the bottom of the pertinent Post-It note, then leave the note where you found it. (**Do not** take the note with you. If you do, the person will not know who their project is for, and likely won't remember what they pledged to produce.)
5. Produce what you pledged, and deliver it to the classmate who signed up for it by the end of class on **Friday, June 1st**.

6. Once you've received all three gifts from your respective Exchange partners, head home and evaluate what you received. **Do this in writing.** How much care, effort, passion, and creativity did your partner devote to his/her work? Does this legitimately impress/move you? Write what sort of insight into your partner the work revealed, assign it a grade, and explain your reasoning.
 - a. **IMPORTANT:** Do not assign A grades without justification. An A-caliber work is something you'd be comfortable keeping for a long time. Something easily discarded/disposed of is, by definition, not exceptional work. (For projects of an ephemeral nature, such as live musical performances and the like: was it something that'll stick in your memory for a long time? Was it touching? Impressive? Mediocre, at best?) You're the one writing the evaluation, so you're responsible for an honest one.
 - i. Your grade for the project comes from a combination of the grades your recipients assign your work and the caliber/thoughtfulness of the evaluations you submit for the gifts you receive.
7. Once you're evaluated all three gifts, collect your three evaluations into a single Word document and upload it to the *Mystery Project X* folder at Turnitin.com by **11:59pm on Friday, June 1st**. (If you receive your gifts earlier, you can obviously finish this earlier.)

A lost corner. *That's what Miss Emily called it, and that was what started it. Because at Hailsham, we had our own "Lost Corner" up on the third floor, where the lost property was kept; if you lost or found anything, that's where you went. Someone – I can't remember who it was – claimed after the lesson that what Miss Emily had said was that Norfolk was England's "lost corner," where all the lost property found in the country ended up. Somehow this idea caught on and soon had become accepted fact virtually throughout our entire year...*

This might all sound daft, but you have to remember that to us, at that stage in our lives, any place beyond Hailsham was like a fantasy land; we had only the haziest notions of the world outside and about what was and wasn't possible there. Besides, we never bothered to examine our Norfolk theory in any detail. What was important to us, as Ruth said one evening when we were sitting in that tiled room in the Dover recovery centre, looking out at the sunset, was that "when we lost something precious, and we'd looked and looked and still couldn't find it, then we didn't have to be completely heartbroken. We still had that last bit of comfort, thinking one day, when we were grown up, and we were free to travel around the country, we could always go and find it again in Norfolk."

I'm sure Ruth was right about that. Norfolk came to be a real source of comfort for us, probably much more than we admitted at the time, and that was why we were still talking about it – albeit as a sort of joke – when we were much older. And that's why, years and years later, that day Tommy and I found another copy of that lost tape of mine in a town on the Norfolk coast, we didn't just think it pretty funny; we both felt deep down some tug, some old wish to believe again in something that was once close to our hearts.

Think of this project as an Exchange set in Norfolk: you'll end up with creative, exciting, or interesting works from three of your classmates, byproducts of their last days as children (and all the days prior).

And hopefully, someday, you can look back at these three things and feel the tug Kathy mentions.

Hopefully, you never let them go.