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Get better Literature teachers

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NOW that Literature has become a component of the Penilaian Menengah Rendah and Sijil Pelajaran Malaysia examinations, I wonder how many English language teachers are competent enough to teach this subject.

This came to my mind one evening when I found my son reading Shirley Lim's magnum opus Monsoon History. The poet makes use of bug imagery to create a natural setting in her writing.

One of the lines reads - "Or silver fish tunnelling/The damp linen covers/Of schoolbooks". It came as a shock to read the note my son wrote beside the line - that a silver fish is a fish with colourful tails (sic) found in the drain. When I questioned my son, he told me that it was the teacher's explanation.

His teacher does not seem to realise the quirkiness of the English language that a silver fish is not a fish but an insect that lives in damp pages of books. The teacher should be able to make an educated guess that it is not possible for a fish to be found in a book!

If an English language teacher holding a degree from a United State college can make such a blooper, I shudder to think what havoc lesser teachers have wrought in their literature lessons.

Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad's call for meritocracy in education cannot be more timely than now.

Just imagine, due to the incompetence of one teacher, a class of 40 will grow up believing a silver fish is a fish.

By the way, a ladybird is not a bird or a lady who has been transformed magically into a bird with colourful plumage but, like a silver fish, a bug!