



Writing Stories for Malaysian Children

A Workshop Course by Brighton Training Fellow Ruth Wickham at IPGKDRI, Kuala Terengganu.

Trainer's Manual – Introduction and Session 1



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Introduction

This workshop is designed to both encourage and enable IPG lecturers and teachers of Malaysian school children to produce locally relevant English reading materials to increase children's motivation to read in English.

Background and Research

It is well attested that children who read a lot do better than children who do not.

Fernandez states (2011) "The reading habit helps develop multiple skills and to gain useful knowledge besides putting readers on the fast track to enlightenment and awareness."

We want our Malaysian school children to read and enjoy reading.

"A child in Malaysia reads an average of two books a year. According to Social Welfare Department deputy director-general Halijah Yahya, this may be because many children associate reading with educational books, which can be boring for some people." (Lim, 2008)

Fernandez also states: "It is terribly disappointing to often read in the media that Malaysia is hardly considered as a reading society."

Research has been undertaken in 2012 by training fellow Peter Wickham and IPG colleague Hjh Zaliha binti Abdullah into the availability and use of English reading materials in local (Terengganu) primary schools. Their findings point out both a general lack of resources, and poor use of the resources that are available.

Doubtless, the reasons why Malaysian children are not reading well in English are complex. However, one obvious reason is because they are not presented with books that tweak their curiosity and compel them to look inside.

The intention of the "Stories for Malaysian Kids" project is to provide stories in English that intrigue Malaysian schoolchildren because the stories are about themselves (or someone they know or can at least relate to) and because the stories are exciting and interesting.



Works Cited

Fernandez, C. (2011, 8 13). *Why Read?* Retrieved Sept 27, 2011, from Free Malaysia Today:
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Hopkins, K. (2008, Nov 26). *Educational 'gulf' for children on the world*. Retrieved April 18, 2012,
from Guardian News and Media Limited:
<http://www.guardian.co.uk/education/2008/nov/26/education-inequality-worldwide/print>

Lim, A. (2008, Nov 9). *United, we read ...* Retrieved April 18, 2012, from The Star online:
<http://thestar.com.my/education/story.asp?file=/2008/11/9/education/2361484&sec=education>



Objectives

Participants in the course will:

- Come to a better understanding of what and why school children want to read.
- Design/adapt a questionnaire to get to know their students hopes and fears.
- Learn how to fold and create a “Little Book” from a single sheet of (new or recycled) paper.
- Write a short, simplified story in a “Little Book”.
- Learn how to create a “Little Book” story on the computer to print out and fold.
- Understand the basic elements of a good children’s story.
- Use a form to create a story plan.
- Learn to adapt a story to suit the reading age of their students.
- Write a story from childhood and adapt it for students.
- Find images to use as illustrations.
- Create illustrations for their story.
- Create a PDF document and print it as a booklet.
- Upload story to “[Stories for Malaysian Kids](#)” website to share.
- Investigate publishing options for children’s stories.



Materials

- ✓ Participants should have their own laptop with Internet access (dongle), notebook and writing materials. Coloured pencils or markers are needed for illustrating and adding colour.
- ✓ A selection of English language children books should be available for participants to look at and discuss. (At IPGKDRI there is a collection of small Rigby books in the Self Access room.)
- ✓ For the “Little Books” sessions, participants will need blank paper, or one-sided recycled paper, at least four sheets per participant. Participants will need scissors, but these can be shared between 2 or 3 people. (The facilitator should have some examples of ready-made Little Books, pop-up card, and pop-up book.)
- ✓ For several of the modules, participants need easy access to a printer.
- ✓ Participants will be provided with a hard and/or soft copy of the **Participant’s Manual** for the specific session including all relevant notes and worksheets.



Timetable

The 18 hour course is divided into nine 2-hour modules which can be presented in a chosen sequence or as individual workshops.

Note: sessions 2 and 3 should be combined into a 4-hour session about Little Books.

The modules are:

1. What do my students want to read? (2 hours)
2. and 3. Little Books – as a planning tool, for individual children, for a short story, on the computer, as a pop-up book, for children to write stories. (4 hours – 2 x 2 hours)
4. Elements of a good children's story. (2 hours)
5. A story from your childhood. (2 hours)
6. Adapting stories to suit reading and language ability. (2 hours)
7. Illustrating a story. (2 hours)
8. Printing a story booklet. (2 hours)
9. Wrap up: Create and share a new children's story. Publishing. (2 hours)



Session 1: Introduction: What do my students want to read? (2 hours)

In this 2-hour session participants will examine:

- What is available in school libraries and bookshops for children to read
- What children are / are not reading, and why
- Ways to discover what children would be interested in reading
- Places to find story ideas

Objectives

Participants will

- Complete a questionnaire about availability of English reading materials for Malaysian school children, and consider other research in this area.
- Discuss and share about problems observed and about positive availability of resources observed in this area.
- Examine a number of English children's books, and consider their suitability for Malaysian school children learning English.
- Consider a questionnaire for Malaysian school children (in English and BM), and devise their own to use in their particular situation.
- Share ideas with other participants.

Materials

Participants should have their own laptop, notebook and writing materials.

A selection of English language children books should be available for participants to look at and discuss. (At IPGKDRI there is a collection of small Rigby books in the Self Access room.)

Participants will be provided with a hard and/or soft copy of the **Participant's Manual** for this session including the following notes and worksheets.



Procedures

1. Discussion of the problem (30 mins)

Participants should read and consider the following articles and extracts:

This **extract** is from recent research in Terengganu by Fellow Peter Wickham and IPG colleague Hja Zaliha binti Abdullah (Wickham & Abdullah, 2012, p. 7):

Research into Terengganuan Schools and Their Reading Material

The need for greater availability of suitable English language reading material in schools in Terengganu was recently discovered by the authors of this paper. Survey results from a sample of (30) primary and secondary schools in Terengganu revealed a singular lack of suitable titles available to students, and a correspondingly poor record of student borrowings of library books. Some schools appeared to have no library and/or no librarian. Although it was revealed that many schools had well-appointed and decorated libraries, it was equally as common that these libraries contained fewer than 500 English language fiction books to service up to 1000 students. Similarly sized schools in Australia contain in excess of 20 000 English language fiction books as well as periodicals. Incidental reports of case studies indicated that Terengganuan students rarely take school library books home to read. Australian primary school students generally compulsorily visit their school library in a scheduled visit once a week and are generally required to borrow library books on a regular basis.

Samples of reading materials available to students in Terengganuan schools were observed to be often mismatched with student interests and cultural norms. Authentic reading material with topical interest for Terengganuan students, and pitched at their reading age, were observed to be in short supply in the survey sample. The few books based on Malaysian culture were typically folk tales with disjointed story-lines and obscure references to mythical characters. The majority of books available were centred on Western themes such as the four seasons, pets, swimming at the beach, playing in the snow, picking wildflowers, life in suburbia and major sporting events; all of these would all be familiar scenes for Western students, and as such, areas of interest that could be expected to attract a student to read on the topic. Food references tended to centre on Western fruit and vegetables, Western cuts of meat and a bread or potato based diet. Little reading material appeared to reflect a Malaysian way of life or correspond to an Asian world view. The view that reading materials observed in Terengganuan schools would offer little interest for Malaysian students appears to be supported by the fact that very few borrowings of library books were in evidence, either from a check of library records or from incidental conversations with teachers, students and parents.

The **questionnaire** used for this research is included here in **Appendix 1**.

Participants should consider how they would answer the questions with relation to a local or school library they are familiar with.



- Consider the statements made in the following recent **news article** from The Sun Daily (Chun, 2012):

'Poor English a result of patriotism'

The deteriorating standard of English among Malaysians is the result of an assumption that learning the language is unpatriotic, Malaysian English Language Teaching Associations (Melta) royal patron Raja Zarith Sofiah Almarhum Sultan Idris Shah said today.

"We did not see the problems we are facing today because we were filled with a sense of patriotism, and so we concentrated on the use of Bahasa Malaysia."

- Consider these extracts from the news article "**United, we read ...**" (Lim, 2008)

A CHILD in Malaysia reads an average of two books a year. According to Social Welfare Department deputy director-general Halijah Yahya, this may be because many children associate reading with educational books, which can be boring for some people.

Scholastic Malaysia general manager Selina Lee said that reading opens doors and minds.

"To give a child a book is to arm him for any challenges that he may face in the future," said Lee, at the launch of the event.

"I enjoy reading books about teenagers," said Siti Aishah Zainal Abidin, a Year Six pupil from SK Putrajaya Presinct 8 (1) who participated by reading *The Wind in the Willows*.

"I love to read: I usually do so outside school hours," she said.

Another book lover is her schoolmate, Faiqah Nelli Mohamad Fauzi, who said that she often goes to the school library to read during recess.

"Very few schools actually allocate time for recreational reading. Many students leave school without a love for reading because they have only read textbooks, which is a different thing altogether.

"By getting them to read books of their choice, we hope to send out the message that reading can be fun," she added.

Group Work

Together examine and discuss the sample children's books.

Discuss:

- Is there really a problem?
- What is the cause of the problem?
- What solutions could there be?
- What sort of books would motivate children to read – if they were readily available?
- How suitable are the sample books? If there were more of these available, would the problem be solved?



2. Finding out what children want to read (30 mins)

The questionnaire in Appendix 2 was given to children at the IPGKDRI Teaching School. It was translated into Bahasa Malaysia because it was not intended to be a test of children's English skills. Even so, children in the lower level classes had difficulty completing it. Classroom teachers administered the questionnaire to all students in year 4 – year 6, and they were asked to allow children to write whatever they wanted and not to scold children who did not give "correct" responses.

Please look at the questionnaire in Appendix 2

- a) Try filling in the questionnaire for yourself as you are now. How do you think you would have answered when you were a child?
- b) Consider the questions that were posed. Discuss:
 - Are they useful questions – would they provide answers that would be a good starting point for a story?
 - Are the children likely to be honest in answering these questions?
 - Do you already know what answers the children in your care would give to these questions? (All, or just the loud children?)
 - How will girls' and boys' answers differ? Should they have different questionnaires?
 - Is the questionnaire too difficult?
 - Are there any extra questions you would like to ask?



3. Design a questionnaire (30 mins)

Write a questionnaire that you consider would be suitable for your particular students.

- Write in English and/or BM.
- Make sure the questions are simple enough for the children to answer.
- Don't make too many questions and overwhelm the children.
- Don't expect children to do too much writing.

4. Share and Compare (30 mins)

Share your questionnaire and ideas with your group, and discuss the advantages and disadvantages of asking various questions.

Consider possibilities other than a questionnaire. Consider asking children to draw a picture to express their interests. What topic would you give as stimulus? How could you use the pictures afterwards?

Upload your questionnaire or question ideas to the [Stories for Malaysian Kids](http://storiesformalaysiankids.weebly.com) website on the 'Your Involvement' page.

(<http://storiesformalaysiankids.weebly.com>)



Appendix 1: Libraries survey Questionnaire for Malaysian school librarians

The following questionnaire relates to opportunity that is given to Malaysian students to gain access to English language reading matter. Research is being conducted at Institut Pendidikan Guru Kampus Dato' Razali Ismail with a view to increasing this exposure. Although your identity (and that of your school) will not be revealed without your permission, your details are appreciated should it be necessary to contact you. Please gain permission from your school principal before returning this survey form.

Sebuah kajian sedang dijalankan di IPG Kampus Dato' Razali Ismail, Kuala Terengganu untuk menyelidiki peluang yang diberikan oleh murid- murid di sekolah untuk mengakses buku buku bacaan dalam Bahasa Inggeris. Nama responden dan nama sekolah tidak akan didedahkan tanpa meminta izin dari pihak sekolah. Sila mohon kebenaran pihak pengurusan sekolah sebelum mengisi borang ini. Didahulukan dengan ucapan terima kasih.

Name and address of school(<i>Nama dan alamat sekolah</i>)*	
Name of respondent, email address and phone number(<i>Nama responden,alamat email dan no.telefon</i>)*	
Approximate number of students in school.(<i>Bilangan murid di sekolah</i>)*	
Position of respondent (eg Librarian)(<i>Jawatan responden</i>)*	
How many books in total are held in your school library (in all languages)? (<i>Jumlah dan bilangan buku di perpustakaan</i>)	*
How many English language books are held in your school library?(<i>Bilangan buku dalam Bahasa Inggeris di perpustakaan</i>)	*
How many books in total are held in your school but NOT in your library?(<i>Bilangan buku bacaan di kelas atau mana-mana ruang bacaan</i>)	*
How many English language books are held in your school but NOT in your school library?(<i>Bilangan buku bacaan Bahasa Inggeris di kelas atau mana-mana ruang bacaan</i>)	*
How many English language fiction books are held in your school library?(<i>Jumlah Bilangan buku fiksiyen dalam Bahasa Inggeris di sekolah</i>)	*
If possible and convenient, please provide a list of their titles.(<i>Sila senaraikan nama-nama buku fiksiyen Bahasa Inggeris yang berada dalam koleksi sekolah</i>)*	
How many individual students have borrowed English language books from your library for the year 2011?(<i>Bilangan pelajar yang meminjam buku dalam Bahasa Inggeris pada tahun lepas 2011</i>)	*
What grants does your school have currently for the purchase of English language books? (<i>Namakan geran yang diterima sekolah untuk membeli buku-buku dalam Bahasa Inggeris</i>)*	
Which booksellers or Book Clubs do you deal with?(<i>Namakan pembekal /penjual/ kelab buku yang berurusan dengan pembelian buku-buku perpustakaan</i>)*	



Appendix 2: Children's Questionnaire (English and BM)

Questions for School Children

This is NOT a test! Please answer as much as you can.

My name is

I am years old.

I am a boy girl

I like school because

I DON'T like school because

I live with my

mother

father

brother(s) (how many?

sister(s) (how many?

grandfather

grandmother

Others. Who?.....

We live in

What is fun?

What do you hate doing?

Who is your best friend?..... Why?

What Super Power would you like to have?

If you had 3 wishes, what would they be?

.....

What do you have bad dreams about when you sleep?

Which country would you like to live in?

What kind of house would you like to live in?

Who is your hero / heroine?

What is something funny that happened to you?



.....

What is something frightening that happened to you?

.....

What is something sad that happened to you?

.....

What is something embarrassing that happened to you?

.....

What are you really good at?

.....

What is something naughty that you have done?

.....

Would you like to read a book with exciting stories about you?

.....

Ini **bukanlah** satu ujian. Sila jawab di ruang yang disediakan. Sila tandakan dalam kotak yang berkenaan.

Nama saya ialah _____

Saya berumur _____ tahun.

Saya ialah seorang lelaki perempuan

Saya **suka** ke sekolah kerana _____

Saya **tidak** suka ke sekolah kerana _____

Saya tinggal dengan

ibu

ayah

saudara lelaki : _____ orang

saudara perempuan: _____ orang

datuk

nenek

lain-lain : Siapa? _____



Saya tinggal di _____

Apakah yang membuatkan anda rasa seronok? _____

Apakah yang anda paling tidak suka buat? _____

Siapakah kawan baik anda? _____

Kenapa anda suka berkawan dengannya? _____

Apakah kuasa luar biasa yang anda inginkan? _____

Jika anda berpeluang membuat 3 permintaan, apakah permintaan itu?

Apakah mimpi buruk yang pernah anda alami? _____

Di negara manakah yang anda ingin tinggal? _____

Bagaimanakah rupah rumah idaman anda? _____

Siapa 'hero' (adiwira) atau 'heroin' anda? _____

Apakah perkara yang paling melucukan pernah berlaku pada anda?

Apakah perkara yang paling menakutkan pernah berlaku pada anda?

Apakah perkara yang paling menyedihkan pernah berlaku pada anda?

Apakah perkara yang paling memalukan pernah berlaku pada anda?

Apakah perkara yang paling baik dapat anda lakukan?

Apakah perkara nakal yang telah anda lakukan?

Adakah anda ingin membaca buku yang menceritakan tentang anda?

Terima kasih di atas ker jasama yang diberikan.