

# Teachers spin tales to spur love of English

Two new books will add local flavour to pique pupils' interest

By AMELIA TAN

PRIMARY school pupils will be reading more homespun stories that pass on values, celebrate Singapore memories and inspire them to love the English language.

A dozen stories by Singapore teachers, published in two books, will be used to teach English in primary schools from next year.

The books are *A Meal To Remember And Other Stories*, and *My Pasar Malam And Other Stories*.

The 12 stories were selected from about 200 sent in by teachers for Stories Teachers Tell, a creative writing competition for teachers organised by the Ministry of Education (MOE) and the

Academy of Principals.

Education Minister Heng Swee Keat launched the books yesterday at Greenridge Primary in Bukit Panjang.

Speaking at the launch, he said the advantage of using stories with a local flavour is that they preserve memories related to Singapore, pass on values and encourage pupils to improve their command of English.

He said: "When children can imagine themselves as having something in common with the characters in the stories they read - that these adventures could happen to them - they become more engaged with what they read."

"This positive engagement is a crucial step in building fluency, comprehension and critical appraisal of what is read."

Primary schools are moving towards using stories instead of textbooks to teach English under the Strategies for English Language Learning And Reading



(Stellar) programme.

The texts for primary school pupils include local poet Edwin Thumboo's poem, *Adnan And Comrades At Bukit Chandu*, but most of their other texts are by authors from the United States and Britain such as E.B. White and Roald Dahl.

The works of local authors such as Catherine Lim and Ho Minfong are used in secondary schools.

In class, pupils who have read these homespun tales will work on exercises based on the stories which test their grammar, vocabulary and comprehension; they



## STELLAR STORIES

Greenridge Primary pupil Kenneth Jeremy Prajogo (above), 10, reading one of the two books launched yesterday. Teachers Trinity Wang (far left) and Kelvin Koh were among the 12 teachers who had their stories published.

Entries for Stories Teachers Tell can be sent by e-mail to [stories@aps.sg](mailto:stories@aps.sg) by May 31

may also act out the roles.

Mr Heng announced that the Stories Teachers Tell competition has been relaunched to milk more stories - this time from the public as well. The Education Ministry hopes to attract stories suitable for preschools and upper secondary schools.

In his speech, Mr Heng praised

the 12 published teachers for their creativity and imagination and for using a diverse range of themes and narrative techniques in their stories.

Academy of Principals dean Belinda Charles said: "The competition is a way to capture the colloquialism that is distinct to Singapore. I don't mean Singlish, but the sights, sounds and history, which are unique to us. It is also a way for our teachers to express their creativity."

The 12 teachers teach subjects such as English, history and biology at the primary, secondary and junior college levels.

The story by St Anthony's Primary English teacher Kelvin Koh, *A Meal To Remember*, tells of a boy's encounter in a hawker centre with a man who said he had been abandoned by his children.

Referring to his pupils' difficulty with foreign concepts in books by writers from elsewhere, Mr Koh said he noticed that some of his Primary 5 pupils were using the word "attic" to refer to the storeroom in their HDB flats; "convenience store" was also a concept which puzzled them.

Mr Koh said: "They had heard of these words, but did not understand them fully. I feel that sometimes stories by foreign authors may not engage them as much."

"But when I tell them stories of my life or my childhood, I see that they are very interested."

Greenridge Primary English teacher Trinity Wang, who wrote *The Reunion Plate*, said: "My story is about how the world is changing rapidly but family is an anchor. By telling stories, I feel I'm not only teaching English, but also passing on values to my pupils."

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