

# MAKING AUTHORS & ARTISTS Come Alive

How a motivated teacher got her kids excited about the books they were reading.



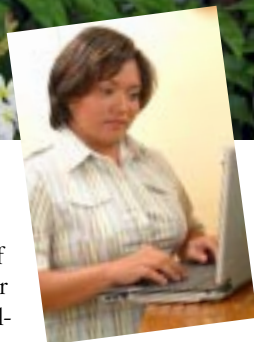
Grade 4 students and teachers proudly display the email messages sent to them by their new idols, the authors and illustrators of their favorite storybooks.

**M**alou Abuel had only been teaching for a total of three years—two years at her current post in Kalumpang Elementary in Tayabas, Quezon—when the Sa Aklat Sisikat Foundation (SAS) chose her school to be part of its Reading Program. Little did she know that this would add quite a bit of excitement in her life.

In January 2004, Kalumpang Elementary received a total of 120 children's storybooks, 60 different titles for each of the school's two Grade 4 sections. With training and tools from SAS, Kalumpang Elementary then launched the Reading Program under the supervision of Malou, co-Grade 4 teacher Mrs. Imelda Dimaala, and the school principal, Mrs. Elvira Unson.

## NEW IDEAS

To motivate about a hundred children



*Malou learned to surf the Internet through self-study, paying an Internet café P30 per hour. Originally a way to communicate with friends, it's now a way for her to help her students.*

to read 60 books in 31 days, the teachers conducted a series of fun activities, even getting some of their students to do storytelling sessions for the whole school after flag ceremony. At the end of the Reading Program, the entire Grade 4 participated in a Living Gallery parade dressed up as their favorite storybook characters. Even the shy ones were brought out of their shells. "*Labat ng mga bata, kabit yung di napapansin, nakapagsalita,*" Malou relates.

When her class had finished reading all the SAS books, Malou devised a plan. An Internet café regular, avid chatter and Friendster.com addict, she decided to try to communicate with the creators of the storybooks through email.

She noticed that her students enjoyed checking out the pictures of the author and illustrator at the back of the books; the kids wanted to learn more about them. Would they respond?

## EMAILING THE AUTHORS

It was worth a try, she decided. In class, she instructed her students to look in the "About the Author/Illustrator" section of the books, see if they could find words ending in ".com" and to take them down, since these were most likely email addresses. She then challenged her students to form groups based on their favorite authors and illustrators and write to them as a group. She compiled the letters, went to her favorite Internet café, and got to work writing and sending emails.

To Malou's surprise, a number of people wrote back! The first to respond was Augie Rivera [*to learn more about Augie, turn the page for his Writer Q&A,*

who wrote separate letters to her and to the children. Then came emails from Becky Bravo, Jason Moss, Jomike Tejido, and Lyra Abueg Garcellana. All were enthusiastic and happy to know that their books were actually being read and appreciated by children. Malou, too, was ecstatic: "*Di ko na-expect na magrepley talaga sila!*" And when she read the letters out loud to her class, students stood, whooped, and clapped whenever their names were read out. "*Sikat ang mga nakatanggap ng sagot,*" Malou explains. The school principal even read the letters out to the entire faculty, who were all equally thrilled.

## LEARNING FROM EXPERIENCE

Without intending it, Malou's simple project had quite an impact on her students and the authors and illustrators she emailed. She learned how important it is to build relationships, and how students need to be exposed to new things in order for them to keep learning. Now, she would take them outdoors for storytelling sessions under the trees or allow them to sit on the floor when doing creative activities.

"From the Reading Program, I learned about passion," she shares. "Everything I do now is out of love for my students. I'm not doing this because it's required, or to please anybody, or because the SAS Foundation told me to do it. *Kabit madaming ipagawa sa ating trabaho* as long as *magbe-benefit ang mga students kayang tapusin yan!* *Kabit na pagod na pagod ka na, merong joy in your heart. Yun ang masap na feeling!*" ★



Dear Ate Becky,

Marami po kaming natutunan sa sinulatnyo na book tulad ng Rooster in the Sun. Dapat pong huwag kaming may abang. Magaling po kayo talaga. Thanks po!

From: Jerson D., Romel M., Roman D.



Dear Tita Becky, Gusto rin po naming maging katulad nyo paglakinamin. Natutuwa din po kami sa mgapicture nyo na nasa likod ng book. God bless po!

From: Marianne S., Andrew A.

Through the SAS Reading Program, Malou was able to discover students' hidden talents. "Some of them were good in storytelling and writing, some were good in drawing na ngayon ko lang talaga nakita. Kahit yung ibang bata na mahina sa academic ay magaling pala sa ibang area."

Dear Ate Be, Alam mo po, ang ganda po ng mga kuwento mo. I dol ka po namini! Sana po marami pa kayong magawang kwento. Favorite po naming ang mga books mo!!!

From: Erwin E., Mark Anthony L., Christopher

To Miss Malou and her students Jerson, Romel, Roman, Marianne, Andrew, Anna bel, Alvin, Erwin, Mark Anthony, Christopher, Gerryann, Jasmin and Aiko:

Thank you very much for giving me such a wonderful surprise by letting me know that my book has made it all the way to your school in Tayabas, and that it was one of your favorites. Natutuwa po ako na nag-abala pa kayo na sumulat sa akin, at nagpapasalamat na mayroon kayong natutunang ara mula sa aking kuwento. I hope you guys will keep on reading books, and I hope you will always try to do your very best in school. Whatever your talent is, be it in academics, sports, or the arts, don't ever let it go to waste. Always enjoy yourself with it, and always keep practicing. The best to you all—

Becky Bravo

dear mr. augie,

Hello! I'm Ms. Malou Abuel of Kalumpang Elementary School in Tayabas, Quezon. Our school was chosen as one of the participants of Sa Aklat Sisikat where your book was one of the sixty books given to us. My students and I enjoyed reading it. We liked the story very much, as well as the illustrations. My students learned so much from your book. As in idol na nila kayo!!! That's why we decided to write you a letter since your address was in the book.

We want you to know that you are touching the lives of many students in our school, especially in Grade Four. You are their inspiration and you are part of their learning. Madami kaming pinadalhan ng letter and I'm so excited to read your response. As a teacher siguro mas magiging masaya ako kung may babasahin akong letter sa mga students ko na galing sa yo!!!

I'm looking forward and will be waiting for your reply. Thank you and God bless!

Malou A.

Dear Ma'am Malou,

Thank you! Thank you! Thank you for your wonderful email!

I am deeply touched and humbled to know that my books are being read by my target audience. It's always a delight and an affirmation for me that I did make the right choice when I decided to concentrate on writing children's books and children's television. May I know your school's mailing address? Salamat po uli at sana'y ipagpatuloy ninyo ang pagtangkilik sa mga Pinoy na autor at ilustrador ng mga librong pambata. Mabuhay kayo!

Augie Rivera