



Building a Kid-Friendly Library

Make your school library a place where students can discover how much fun learning is. **BY NEIL PALABRICA**

Library services for children have never been as important as they are today. An effective children’s library can offer kids lifelong learning and literacy skills. After all, nothing compares to the abundance of ideas offered by a library.

THE ROLE OF CHILDREN’S LIBRARIES

Libraries should meet the information, cultural—and of course, entertainment—needs of their “clients,” in this case, your students. Libraries catering to children have the special responsibility of supporting the process of learning to read. They must also ensure that every child is familiar and comfortable with their library and can find their way around. When these kids move on to high school and college, they’ll have the confidence to tackle and effectively find information in larger libraries because of their experience with your library.

How can you make your library more kid-friendly? Here are some tips:

MAKE ATTRACTIVE DISPLAYS

Make the library an inviting, attractive place with happy colors and fun designs. Use rugs, pillows, picture frames, and kids’ furniture. Turn it into a venue where kids can let their imagination fly and discover new things. Display as many books with their covers showing as you can.

Hang mobiles. String inexpensive and lightweight toys together with fishing line and hang across the top of the shelves. Mobiles can even act as markers for those who are looking for something in particular. A floating rocket ship, for example, will quickly lead students to the science and space section.

Why not turn one library wall into a forest, a meadow, or a comic strip? If painting a mural isn’t possible, you cut and paint Styrofoam or art paper into shapes and letters and arrange these on your wall instead.

PAY ATTENTION TO LAYOUT

Children should be able to move around independently and easily. Allow them to access as many materials as possible. “Keep out” signs discourage curious minds.



Now that’s entertainment! Make reading fun for kids by providing the right environment as well as activities and discussions that will capture their imagination.

A key element of children’s spaces is the creation of small, unusual nooks that they can call their own. Why not create small “rooms” using bookcases as walls? You can then house similar books inside each “room.” For example, you can have a “Fairy Tale Nook” or an “Easy Reading Corner” that can be decorated according to the theme.

DIFFERENT AREAS FOR DIFFERENT ACTIVITIES

Many students think that libraries are only for serious reading, studying and research. Let them know that it’s more than okay to curl up with a book just for the sheer pleasure of it. An enclosed area with a rug and throw pillows can be the designated spot for quiet reading as well as storytelling sessions by the librarian and teachers.

A discussion area can be set off for those who want to do group work, play together or discuss a story. This section can also double as a homework section.

For libraries that offer computer services, the librarian must ensure that at least three children can sit side by side while using the device, as they tend to use computers in groups of twos or threes.

HOST EVENTS AND ACTIVITIES

The library can be the host special events and activities that promote reading, learning, and library use from an early age. Library activities should promote interaction among the children themselves and between them and the librarian/teachers. You can hold storytelling sessions,

PHOTOS BY ERICK CHUA. SHOT ON LOCATION AT THE ALABANG ELEMENTARY SCHOOL READISCOVERY CENTER.

book-hunting games that promote knowledge of the library, on-the-spot drawing contests, spelling bees, creative writing workshops, and so on. Involve parents, too!

PROVIDE ADEQUATE SERVICES

The librarian must deal with children as she would any adult. Since they're the primary "client," they should be treated with importance and respect. The library should meet children's needs by providing the basic library services: lending materials, answering queries and providing information, helping children find and select materials from the shelves. Students can even be involved in the selection of materials and development of future library services by asking them for suggestions, offering training in library skills and information literacy, and creating a student volunteer program.



Create an area where kids can do homework and group discussions.

By offering a place that's conducive to learning, a wide selection of materials and activities that motivate and inspire, your library can provide kids with the chance to discover new worlds and experience the joys of learning that they'll carry with them throughout their lives. ★

ABOUT THE WRITER:

Neil Palabrica holds a degree in Library Science from the University of the Philippines. He is the associate publisher of two magazines, *Entrepreneur Philippines* and *T3 Philippines*. As a kid, he loved to read *Hardy Boys*, and he still does from time to time.

WRITER Q&A: Grace D. Chong



AUTOGRAPH CORNER:

NAME: Grace May Vergara Dacanay Chong, or Grace D. Chong, for short.

BIRTHDAY: July 20

SCHOOL/S: University of the Philippines; Columbia College (USA); Art Institute of Chicago

HOBBIES: Painting, playing the piano, beadwork

FAMILY: Husband, Tony (President of Prime Advertising Systems); son JC (software designer); son JB (physician) married to Gianina (training consultant); son JR (sophomore, Ateneo Law School)

PET: Gordy (a dalmatian)

DESCRIBE YOURSELF: *Pinakbet*. I am a concoction of varied ingredients—tangy as tomato, bland as eggplant, biting as *bagoong*, acerbic as *ampalaya*, mushy as okra, and sweet as *camote*. No matter where I travel in the world or how I reinvent myself, my homespun values are true-blue Ilocano.

BOOKS WRITTEN BY GRACE D. CHONG

FOR CHILDREN: *The Boy Who Had Five Lolas; The Magic of Apo Mayor; What's for Breakfast?; Fly, Malaya, Fly!*; The "Oh, Mateo!" series: *Half and Half, When Flowers Bloom, Big Eyes Small Eyes, Teo's Trash Can, and The Growling Tummy*; The "Hello God!" series: *Children's Prayers for All Occasions, Children's Prayers for Every Mood, Children's Prayers for Special People*

(Two of Grace's children's books won first prize in the Don Carlos Palanca Memorial Awards, one was nominated in the National Book Awards, one was a finalist in the Catholic Mass Media Awards)

Q Mateo, the main character of many of your books, seems so real. Is he based on a real boy?

A It is based on the three Mateos in my life: my late father (Sr.), my brother (Jr.), and his son (III). I integrated into one the endearing traits of all three.

Q Are the other characters in your stories based on real people?

A Yes, all the characters in my stories bear resemblances to people I know well. *Apo Mayor*, for instance, was inspired by an eccentric old man who was always impeccably dressed in white. People said he was crazy but as a kid, I loved talking to him—he spoke good English and knew the encyclopedia inside out. I had to exaggerate his physical appearance, though, to dramatize his character.

Q Teo lives in a farm town called Umingan, which is a real place in Pangasinan. Are you originally from here, or did you live there before?

A I was born in Agoon, La Union (my dad's hometown) but I grew up in Umingan (my mom's). I can still taste the fun in stretches of rice fields, orchards, streams and rivers, riding the carabao, climbing trees, getting baked in the sun or soaked in the rain, roasting fresh corns and *bito*, chasing butterflies and *tutubi*, catching bugs and fireflies, and playing games like *patintero*, *piko*, and *sipa*.

Today, my family and I still visit the town on occasion. Although the church and schoolhouse are intact, it isn't the Umingan of my youth. The farms have shrunk, now hidden behind housing subdivisions. My favorite river and stream have dried up. I don't ▶