

South China Morning Post

youngpost



CORPORATE SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY

Engaging Young Hearts and Minds



THEATRE

Musical takes young actors on a journey of self-discovery



SPORT

Rugby builds discipline and positive attitude



SCIENCE

Mentorship programme uncovers young science talent

For Macy Fan Wing-man, there is nothing better than being immersed in the pages of a favourite book. Through the magic of the written word, the nine-year-old who studies at the Hong Kong and Macau Lutheran Church Ming Tao Primary School in Tseung Kwan O, has travelled to the stars and found new heroes and heroines, whose mission is to right wrongs and assist people in need.

Like thousands of other young students in Hong Kong, Fan discovered all these stories after joining the SHKP Reading Club. It is an initiative launched in 2013 by Sun Hung Kai Properties in the firm belief that reading contributes to personal growth and the development of society. In a community-wide effort, the club promotes the pleasure and importance of reading, but especially among children from families which are socially and economically disadvantaged.

Fan now prefers reading to watching television, and she recently won the silver award in junior division of the "A Letter to My Family" writing competition, which is part of the club's "Read & Share" programme.

Using her imagination to the full, she wrote about a book she had read which featured a cat and a princess who face up to life's adversities and put their own challenges to one side in order to help others.

"I decided to write my letter to a pretend sister instead of to my parents because I thought someone of a similar age would like the story," says Fan, who often reads five or six books a week.

Doing that, she believes, definitely helps with her studies at school.

"From reading at home, I have learned about the stars, planets and animals, which are fascinating, but also topics we study at school," she says.

However, most of all she enjoys stories about characters who help others and face up to tough situations. And if it happens that she doesn't like the ending, she simply uses her imagination to come up with an alternative that she thinks would suit better.

Taking part in the Read & Share programme has also been a chance to encourage her friends to experience the fun of reading.

"Some of them thought that reading was only for schoolwork, but when they joined the programme, they found out that's not the case," Fan says.

These days, she chooses books from the selection available at school and regularly visits the public library. She also considers it a highlight when her mother takes her to bookshops, where she takes her time to browse and decide what to buy.

Also an avid reader, Chan Kwan-ho, principal at the Hong Kong and Macau Lutheran Church Ming Tao Primary School, believes the SHKP Reading Club helps teachers by encouraging students to read for pleasure.

This is important at a time when so many youngsters are glued to a mobile phone, computer or television screen.

Chan notes, for example, that travel stories introduce children to geography and those about animals can stir a life-long interest in natural sciences.

To encourage reading, the school has "floating book shelves" located at different points in the building which make it easy for students to browse and exchange books.



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School principal Chan Kwan-ho and Macy Fan Wing-man. Photo: Edmond So

Prize money for winning the SHKP Reading Club's "Most Active Participation Award" has, naturally, been used to buy more books. Moreover, teachers were each given HK\$100 to buy a book to read to their class and then pass around.

With input from various community organisations, every year the club picks a reading theme which can be tied to activities like creative writing, community projects and charity events. To date, more than 200,000 people have taken part in these activities.

In addition, since 2014, the club has worked with the Hong Kong Aided Primary School Heads Association to advance the Read & Share programme.

"We want to play a part in offering young readers the opportunity to broaden their horizons and equip them with knowledge so they can lead a better life and contribute to a better future for Hong Kong," says Carrie Tan, deputy director of corporate communications for Sun Hung Kai Properties. "With proper guidance and opportunities, we believe children can become life-long readers and grow into inspiring, creative and intelligent people. The books we read play a critical role in shaping our personalities and igniting our imaginations."

Feedback from schools participating in the Read & Share programme shows that it definitely promotes active learning. The theme for primary

schools in 2017-18 was "Love Reading, Love Nature", with a series of activities designed to raise environmental awareness. For instance, well-known figures and writers visited schools with a favourite book and spoke about why they found it inspiring. The book was then given to a student, who was encouraged to pass it on to family and friends in order to share the joy of reading.

During the last academic year, 24 authors, playwrights and others made such school visits, also speaking about their own motivation for reading and writing.