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Get Booked:

Fostering a Love of Reading and Learning



Cultivating a Love of Reading

In an age of ever impressive advances in technology, the challenge to cultivate both a love of reading books has become more arduous than ever. The good news is though, it is not impossible; and one way is the inspiring, territory-wide competition, Battle of the Books.

What initially seemed unfeasible, turned out to be the best surprise a teacher could have. I joined the competition in 2018, I was slightly taken aback at the difficulty and length of the books; they were authentic children's novels that native speakers would read and were not 'learning-to-read' books for second language learners. My local colleagues creased up at the mere idea of our students being able to manage these titles, some of which were 300-plus pages long. My students however, could be sold on the idea.



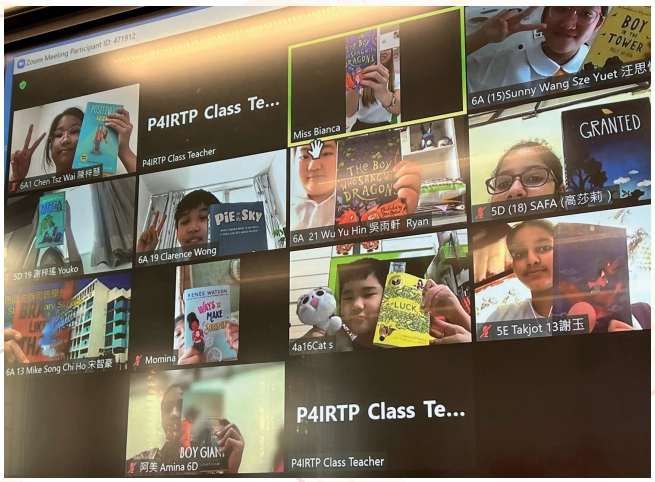
If you can sprinkle on some teacher magic, some good old-fashioned enthusiasm, you will be able to pave the way to a picture of your students' adorable faces, desperate to tell you that they have finished their current title and ask whether they can now grab the next book immediately. I even had a student run up to me to show me a book that they had asked their parent to buy them from the same series as the one on the competition book list – it was a career first for me I had finally succeeded in cultivating a love of reading.

Helping students to form a habit of reading is not something that can be rushed; you nurture their reading abilities in Key Stage One and assess their reading levels regularly and systematically in order for them to borrow and read the right 'learning-to-read' books and once the ability is there, all you need is a slight affinity. Training for the Battle of the Books competition may not be for everyone but pedagogically, the concept can work for any class, club and teacher, willing to lead the horse to water. A book club would work just as well and you could even compete in-house.



Being in the competition, however, offers several great advantages. For instance, having a book list to read from creates a true purpose for reading and training for the questions that come up, is very fun and engaging as students get to work in teams to answer questions within a short time limit. The key to the competition, is that the design and format makes it very feasible for even local students (as the original competition came from international schools); the answers are only ever the titles and authors from the book list. And from this, the competition bears another fruit: students are introduced to many great authors of modern fiction and may develop an interest in their other titles and works too. This opens a door into the realm of literature for primary students as they prepare for secondary school and its growing demand for students' reading appetites.





Time for a disclaimer: I ended up as co-chair of the Modified Primary Section of Battle of the Books HK. In my own 5-year journey of discovery from participant to organiser, I found that what is lasting and conclusive, beyond the teaching and the competition, is that both my students and I have read more books than ever before, we loved the books together and we still love reading today.

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