

EDUCATION

Book takes kids on MRT learning journey

Mindy's First MRT Adventure creators (from left) Debra Thang, Chin Yu Teng and Wendy Yee put the book together as part of a literacy module at Singapore Institute of Technology Wheelock College's early childhood course. They realised that there were hardly any books for young children about local topics, such as the transport system. ST PHOTO: JOYCE FANG



It teaches pre-schoolers about using public train system and imparts values like courtesy

Sue-Ann Tan

Mindy the orang utan made her debut yesterday to teach children the finer points of taking the MRT.

She is the creation of a trio of young teachers, including Ms Debra Thang who realised that there were hardly any books for young children about local topics, such as the transport system, when teaching at a pre-school after graduating from Ngee Ann Polytechnic.

So, the 24-year-old, together with project-mates Wendy Yee, 24, and Chin Yu Teng, 22, put together a book about the MRT just for pre-schoolers as part of a literacy module at Singapore Institute of Technology Wheelock College's early childhood course.

Through their research, they discovered that educators in general had to use materials on freight and carriage trains, which the children could not relate to since these were far different from Singapore's MRT system. The trio graduated from Singapore Institute of Technology in June. Ms Yee and Ms Thang are now pre-school teachers. Ms Chin is helping out at her family's laksa stall.

Yesterday, 10,000 copies of Mindy's First MRT Adventure were made available at the Downtown Line 3 Open House. Children collected bookmarks at the 16 new stations and redeemed the books at Fort Canning, MacPherson and Expo stations.

The book is for children aged four to six years old and tells the story of Mindy riding the MRT for the first time with her father. The story focuses on imparting values such as public courtesy and consideration for others.

Along the journey, Mindy learns not to swing on train handles or eat on board. She also learns to give up her seat to others who need it more.

Said Ms Thang: "Non-fiction books can be quite boring for children, so we didn't want it to be just a fact sheet about the MRT. We also realised that they do not like books that feature an authoritative voice talking down to them. So we tried to incorporate lessons as part of the storyline rather than a list of dos and don'ts."

Ms Yee added that they chose an orang utan because children love animal characters. "It took us a long time to settle on the orang utan, but eventually we decided that it is an iconic animal here thanks to the late Ah Meng."

The book also reminds the trio of their own childhood experiences on the MRT. Ms Yee said: "MRT rides were such a big part of our lives growing up. As a kid, I loved sitting by the window watching everything go by. By riding the MRT, you can see all of Singapore."

Ms Thang also felt that the MRT book was unique compared with other stories about similar transport systems, such as London's Tube or New York's subway.

"We have lots of food stores at stations, which is reflected in the book when Mindy gets candy. We also have yellow arrows telling you where to stand along the platform, the reserved seats and courtesy campaigns, all of which are special to us. These are the little details in the illustrations that kids can point to and learn about."

Ms Thang pitched the idea to the Land Transport Authority (LTA) late last year, because she felt it was worth expanding the school project on a larger scale to help pre-school teachers.

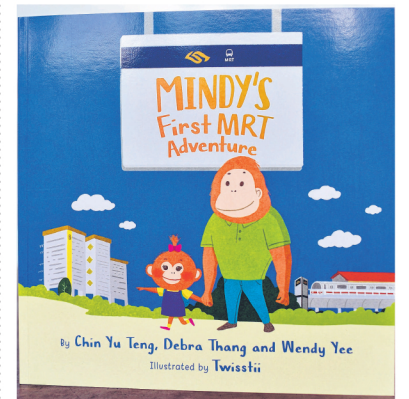
Ms Helen Lim, group director of corporate communications at LTA, said: "We saw great potential in this book to educate our young about our MRT system and values of courtesy and graciousness in action as we move towards a car-lite Singapore."

LTA said that towards the end of the year, bookmarks will be distributed to children who apply for the child concession card. They can use these bookmarks to redeem a copy of the book at the LTA Knack-stop store at its Hampshire office.

LTA will also work with the Early Childhood Development Agency and Ministry of Education to distribute a few copies of the book to all pre-schools for educators to use during lessons.

There will be copies of the book at the National Library Board for public loan.

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ANIMAL APPEAL

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MS WENDY YEE, 24, on choosing an orang utan because children love animal characters.

TEACHING POINTS

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MS DEBRA THANG, 24, on what was unique about the MRT book compared with other stories about similar transport systems, like London's Tube or New York's subway.