

Education

[Home](#) > [News](#) > [Education](#)

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Stories have the power to shape us



I recently attended the 35 IBBY (International Board on Books for Young People) International Congress, held in Auckland, New Zealand.

The main aim of the event was to explore the excitement and challenges of literary education in a rapidly changing world.

It was a congress that I had no idea about. Still, I attended to gain knowledge and expand my horizons in creative writing, mainly writing stories for young people.

The congress was an eye-opener for me in many ways. I could relate my own field, Moral Education and Citizenship Education, with the power of stories.

The first keynote speaker was Joy Cowley, a renowned children's author for more than 40 years in New Zealand.

She spoke aptly about the power of stories.

She shared that stories can help children to become agents of change in a positive way or vice-versa.

Cowley's stories were based on New Zealand and had humour which made children then and now, simply love and enjoy her stories.

She ended her talk with a story that spoke about a little boy taking his pet tiger to the school dental nurse for a toothache.

The nurse extracted the tooth and reminded the boy that his pet should not eat sweets and instead eat what tigers are supposed to eat.

The tiger ate the nurse. There is simple but understandable humour in this powerful story which even adults can relate to.

However, my thoughts brought me back home to Malaysia.

Will such a story be acceptable or will individuals judge what is being presented?

We have to adhere to a strict set of rules and regulations when writing stories in Malaysia; the need to be sensitive to other ethnic and religious groups, no subversive issues and the list goes on.

There are positive and negative impacts with such conditions.

The positive aspect is that stories become proper and look great on print.

However, when children read such books, they become bored with the stereotyping.

They would prefer to read funny, exciting, controversial, sensational stories sent by others through their apps and mobile devices or the stories they read online.

The downside is when children are influenced by negative values instilled from young with thoughts that are supported by negative individuals around them.

This would not help in the process of nation- building or character formation.

It is time we have stories that will help our children put on their thinking cap.

Most of the stories that were popular at the event were about children from countries they had to leave. They had to start life anew in another country which they were unfamiliar with.

Stories of refugee children, stories of sexual disorientation, and stories of ancient wisdom were popular as were stories about the current state of affairs around the globe.

Young people were able to relate to them in their own daily lives.

I see great potential in telling stories of our beloved Malaysia with all its authentic charm.

People from other nations will have so much to learn from our land and culture.

Many countries are only becoming multicultural now, but we started off as a multicultural nation.

That in itself says something about us as a people and country.

We certainly stand tall where multiculturalism is concerned.

Happy Malaysia Day!

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