

# Read-ready

What do you do when your kids abhor reading? **Intan Maizura Ahmad Kamal** finds out

**I**STRUGGLE to get my second daughter to pick up a book, let alone read. She can just about muster the energy to lift her school books out of her bag.

You can see her body visibly stiffen and her pupils dilate in fear at the mere suggestion that we're heading within a 10km radius of a bookshop. Unfortunately for her, reading is a passion in our household, even if it is just newspapers for my hubby, so she normally loses out when it comes to voting where to spend a fruitful Saturday afternoon.

I'm sure I'm not alone in this predicament. There are many parents out there who worry that their kids are not reading enough. Then there are those who worry that the books their kids are reading aren't good enough. And there are probably many who worry about both.

"It's OK," said Dr Elsie Chin, CEO of Cambridge English For Life (CEFL), one of the leading providers of English language courses in Malaysia, when I shared my concern during a recent chat about tomorrow's Unesco World Book and Copyright Day, also known as International Day Of The Book. CEFL is organising a series of educational activities in conjunction with the annual event, which aims to promote reading, publishing and copyright.

The mother-of-two says reassuringly: "I'm sure she's reading different things. Choices of reading material have progressed and evolved. So while kids may not be reading the kind of books we hope to see them read, they're still reading, whether it's comics or news online. These are just different materials and different ways of reading."

If you want to see your children holding a book, you need to know what interests them, advises Chin. Be sure to offer them a variety of options.

"Take them to bookshops and let them browse to their heart's content. Once they get into the habit of holding a book and training their eyes on print, then that's where they'll discover the joy of flipping through pages and reading. That's the beginning of their discovery," explains Chin.

Her two sons started reading the popular *Lord Of The Rings* books while in secondary school.

"I took them to bookshops very often when they were growing up," recalls Chin. "Once in the bookshop, they were free to explore and read whatever they liked. I used to stand at the corner just to see what kind of books children enjoyed reading, especially those who came with their parents."

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Dr Elsie Chin

them to read, or those which they think will delight their children, says Chin.

"Often, reading gets associated with one format — usually fiction and chapter books. Some kids respond better to other formats such as magazines, non-fiction and even how-to manuals."

Another thing is, never force children to read. "If you pressure them too much, you'll turn them off. Try not to make reading seem like a chore. Instead, you want them to read voluntarily because they see the fun and benefit of it," says Chin.

What's the biggest challenge in getting kids to read? "Getting the adults to read with them!" replies Chin swiftly.

If the adult is a natural reader, the child will be able to see the value in doing it, she explains.

"It will be a challenge to expect the child to read and to discover the joy of reading when the parent doesn't read. The best teacher a child can have is the parent. Even if you just read Reader's Digest or the newspaper, the child must see you reading."

Sipping delicately on her latte, Chin says reading had always been her childhood passion. Growing up in her grandparents' house in Penang, she was bombarded with *Othello*, *Romeo And Juliet* and the like, as most of her aunts and uncles were students of literature.

"They were written in English that I could never understand," she says with a giggle. "But the person who inspired me to read was a visually impaired teacher who taught me in my teens. He could visualise things that he read on the braille. He used to tell us about the joy he derived from reading. I think we need to train kids to find joy between the lines."