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Cooperation is needed to hone kids' passion for reading–ibby

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DEVELOPING children's love for reading is the way to boost their critical-thinking skills, said the International Board on Books for Young People (IBBY) Philippines.



IBBY Philippines president Kristine Mandigma reads for young kids at the storytelling sessions during National Children's Book Day. NONOY LACZA

"It has to be a [total effort from civil] society and government," said Kristine Mandigma, who is the president of IBBY— an organization dedicated to promoting international understanding through kid's books— during the sidelines of their puppet show and storytelling activities at the celebration of National Children's Book Day (NCBD) held at the SM Aura Book Nook last July 16.

According to her, such cooperation is needed to help improve the country's ranking in a global benchmarking test conducted by the Organisation for Economic Co- operation and Development for 15- yearold learners.

The 2022 cycle of the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) has the Philippines at 77th spot among the 81 countries. It produced the lowest proficiency for young pupils in reading, mathematics, and science.

In reading, specifically, Filipino learners' literacy score increased by seven points from PISA 2018 to 347 points, yet they are still below the global average reading score of 476.

"At IBBY, we want to work with local governments to run target literacy programs through classroom intervention with teachers, or...concrete methods to improve reading because if there's no grasp of reading, critical thinking is difficult to achieve," Mandigma said. "Before critical thinking, there should be the ability to read and understand text. And then, from there, interpret text critically."

She revealed that they are working on a literacy initiative in partnership with a local government unit in Metro Manila: "It's really focused on Grades 1 to 3 students, because that's really the formative stage. It's called in Deped [Department of Education] as ' Key Stage One.'"

"The program is really meant to make sure that kids in that age range have the ability to understand text— to read, and then interpret," she explained. "It's not yet finalized. But I hope it will be launched in the Manila International Book Fair, within Metro Manila in September."

A community to promote reading

AS most children have become digital natives nowadays, insofar as learning or gaining information is concerned, Mandigma called for the public and private sectors, as well as parents, to partner and develop the youth's passion for reading.

"It's something we need to address. That's why we really want to make sure that with SM Book Nook and activities like the NCBD, kids still understand and appreciate the power of the written

words using books," she said. "I think if you expose them at an early age, that won't fade away among them."

Marked every third Tuesday of July, the NCBD celebrates the publication of Jose Rizal's "Un Mono y Una Tortuga" (The Monkey and The Turtle). This occasion promotes the joy of reading and the importance of kids' literature in the country.

This year, IBBY Phi lippines has tied- up with the Quezon City Public Library, SM Book Nook, SM Cares, and Barangay East Rembo in Taguig City as they treated some Grades 4 to 6 students to a puppet show, storytelling, and read- aloud sessions.

Since kids seemed more familiar to Western children's books that mostly incorporate cartoons or other enticing visuals, the IBBY Phi l ippines president bel ieves that the activities they conducted could encourage the youngsters to read more local stories by Filipino authors.

"I think, in terms of familiarity, as long as they see it in media, they also remember the book," Mandigma said. "In Philippine children's literature, we need to synchronize media and literature in order for them to read and, at the same time, see or watch the story."

On the part of book publishers and authors, she recommended for their active participation to more activities that foster reading, in cooperation with the national government, LGUS, nonprofit and nongovernment agencies to reach out to parents and their children.

She suggested that the love for reading should start at home to inspire and educate children. This passion must be honed not only digitally, but also through physical books.

"Screen time is unavoidable. Exposure to social media or video is inevitable. The message really is to balance the proportion of screen time and book time. It's important for parents to read aloud, especially to younger kids," Mandigma pointed out. "Based on research, reading [a story aloud for children is also a bonding moment, and it gives them good memories and experiences]."