

Reaching out to young readers

Library board broadens its reading campaign to include a book list for those aged seven to 14

Huang Lijie

For the first time, younger readers can participate in the National Library Board's annual Read! Singapore campaign.

The programme, into its eighth year, is expanding its reach to include readers aged seven to 14. As part of this move, there is a new reading list featuring stories for the younger set.

This initiative will complement other programmes by the board to encourage regular reading from a young age.

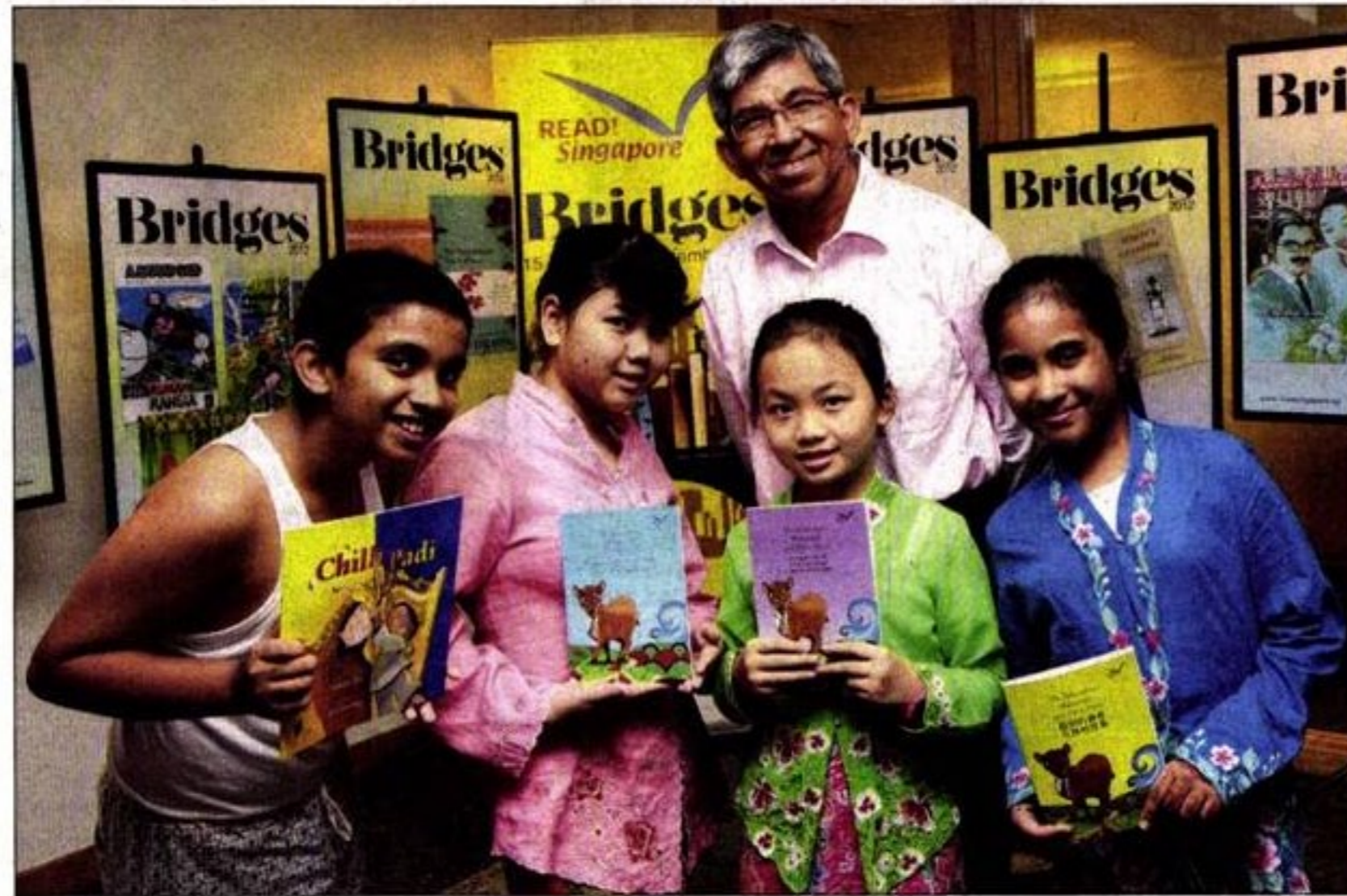
At yesterday's launch, guest-of-honour Yaacob Ibrahim, Minister for Information, Communications and the Arts, announced plans to form a committee of students to recommend books for youth.

He said: "More than ever, Read! Singapore holds an important place as we want to encourage our youth to experience the joy of reading against the pervasiveness of social media and online games."

He added that it is important to identify reading materials that are interesting and relevant to young readers.

The committee, to be set up by the library board, will comprise 12 upper secondary school and junior college students. It will select books for younger readers at next year's Read! Singapore.

Students who form the committee will have to be passionate about reading.



Dr Yaacob Ibrahim, Minister for Information, Communications and the Arts, with the National Library Board's junior reading ambassadors (from far left) Eshand Jagatheesan, 11, Sharafa Malihah, 11, Wee Jia Qi, 10, and Freya Keertikar, 12.
PHOTO: COURTESY OF NATIONAL LIBRARY BOARD, SINGAPORE

For more details on the Read! Singapore campaign, go to readsingapore.nlb.gov.sg

They will also need to be able to communicate and interact well with younger readers, serving as reading ambassadors for the campaign.

The library board's chief executive, Ms Elaine Ng, said students older than the target group of seven- to 14-year-olds will form the committee as they can be relied on to think responsibly about books that would be interesting and good for their younger compatriots, and to be role models.

She noted that the selection process can draw from various sources, such as its pool of dedicated youth volunteers.

This year, to get the ball rolling, a group of librarians drew up the list of youth books.

The recommended reading list for younger readers includes four short stories in English, written by students in secondary school and junior college. The student writers, Clarisa Madilao, Angela Leong, Cheang Kit Lea and Rishabh Dat-

ta, wrote the tales for the annual Science Chronicles science-fiction writing contest, organised by A*Star's Institute of High Performance Computing.

Other recommended titles include *Chilli Padi*, a tale about Peranakan culture by best-selling author Adeline Foo; *Where's Grandma*, a story by Edmund Lim about a family coping with Alzheimer's disease; and Asian folktales and legends from the book *The Singing Top*, edited by noted storyteller Margaret Read MacDonald.

MacDonald will be here in August for storytelling sessions and workshops.

The books were selected based on this year's theme, Bridges, to highlight the bond between people of different cultures, societies and generations.

The reading list for older readers includes *The Help* by Kathryn Stockett, about racial divisions in 1960s America, and the English translation of Japanese writer Yoko Ogawa's *The Housekeeper And The Professor*, about an unlikely friendship. In total, the list features eight international and local novels, two each in English, Chinese, Malay and Tamil, as well as 12 short stories and four poems.

The selected short stories on both reading lists have been published as separate anthologies and in the four official languages. The books will be available for loan at 24 public libraries.

An enhanced version of the library's MobileRead application, which allows users to access selected novels, stories and poems from the campaign, was also unveiled yesterday. The free application is also available to Android phone users, besides iPhone and iPad users. It also provides updates on Read! Singapore events.

Since the MobileRead application was introduced in June last year, it has attracted more than 63,000 eBook downloads.

More than 400 activities, including a reading carnival, have been planned for this year's campaign, which runs until Sept 28.

Damai Primary pupil Eshand Jagatheesan, 11, said he is interested to read the recommended science-fiction stories for youths. "The books sound interesting and since they are recommended, I will definitely take a look."

✉ lijie@sph.com.sg