

Incredibly thrilling chairs

Writing an article for this magazine is frightfully intimidating. "Whenever possible," the *inCite* guidelines say, "Choose the active voice. Sentences like 'comfortable chairs were purchased' are much more dynamic when worded 'we purchased comfortable chairs'."

Although I share your interest in the thrilling world of furniture acquisition, I have something else to talk about. Stick with me, and I promise a chair joke at the end.

I'm one of the ambassadors for the Indigenous Literacy Project, founded in 2004 by Brisbane bookseller Suzy Wilson, which has grown to provide specially-chosen books each year to hundreds of kids in remote Aboriginal communities. Other ambassadors include Kate Grenville, Sam Watson, David Malouf, Andy Griffiths, Anita Heiss, and Geraldine Brooks. The Project invites readers, writers, publishers, and booksellers to help close the 'literacy gap'.

Many disadvantages combine to impose very low literacy levels for these kids. English could be their third or fourth language, they usually have no books at home, they live in geographical isolation, and many of them have significant hearing loss. (For more details, please see the FAQ section of the Project's website, coming up.)

The Project is run by a specialist crew from The Fred Hollows Foundation, a trusted name in communities because of its health work. We ask kids, teachers, parents, and elders what sort of books they'd like and which ones need translation. This is well-received because there's consultation and respect, the policy doesn't change, and books are delivered as promised for toddlers and school-kids, for their very own.

As a professional, you know how important it is to choose carefully. You can't just randomly chuck a book at somebody, hoping it's going to be enjoyed, and that it's not culturally offensive. (Imagine: a truck slows while passing a home in the outback and a Joan Collins novel is hurled out the window. Have these people not suffered enough?)

I've visited communities and schools in the Northern Territory and I'm proud to see what's being done with the books provided by the goodwill of publishers and the money raised at concerts and book events.

And that's how you can help. You can host an easy-peasy, booky-squeezy, one-off fund-raising event in your library. To host a Great Book Swap you just let people know a day and time they can come and swap one of their favourite books for somebody else's, and make a gold coin (or bigger) donation. Indigenous Literacy Day for 2010 is Wednesday 1 September but any other day is fine.

To see how to host a Great Book Swap and share around the love of books, please go to the website. Or I'm coming over to sit on you, and I'll use the active voice.

The website: indigenoussliteracyproject.org.au

Why did the philosophy professor give top marks to a girl who spent only 10 seconds on the answer to the set essay topic, "Prove that the chair I'm sitting on doesn't exist"?

Because the girl wrote: "What chair?"

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