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EMBRACING CHANGE: EMANCIPATING THE LANDSCAPE OF RESEARCH IN LINGUISTIC, LANGUAGE AND LITERATURE

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LIVING THE HARDLIFE

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ABSTRACT:

Being in an intercultural marriage or relationship is not easy, it is an experience of a lifetime. However, it comes with a lot of hardships as having a partner with different beliefs and cultural backgrounds could be a challenge, condemnation from the in-laws, racism from the dominion race, and a lot more. This study aims to expose the readers to the hardships faced by an intercultural family in a fun and enjoyable way; in the form of an e-flip storybook that also comes with a read-aloud feature. Along the process of making the book, a survey was conducted to get the readers' opinions in order to come up with a storyline that suits their preference. As a result, an e-flip storybook was created with characters and storyline that were based on the results of the survey.

Keywords: intercultural marriage, hardships, Asian, racism, e-flip storybook

1. INTRODUCTION

Storybooks have been everyone's favourite type of literature for ages, especially among youngsters. Back in the day, people mostly only wrote storybooks for children's folklore and other entertainment purposes. However, writers have taken the initiative in educating people by using this form of writing as a way for them to deliver important messages and lessons in a fun and enjoyable way. As the technology advances, people have become more creative with their inventions and even use their skills to come up with digital form of physical books, which are called e-books. An eBook is a book that has been converted into a digital format that is non-editable and reflowable, readily viewed on any digital gadget, including computers and mobile devices (Jordan, 2018).

Racism has been an ongoing global issue for centuries. It happens when the minor race in a country is treated unfairly and faces discrimination from the dominant one. Although the issue is quite common for the adults, we could not say the same for children. Hence, it is not surprising to see kids portraying actions or behaviour which are considered racist that they are unaware of. For example, some Malaysian elementary students were heard calling their friends using the racist slur "nigga" without them knowing the true meaning of it. Therefore, I am called to address this issue for my project.

Chinese culture is one of the oldest cultures in the world which dates back thousands of years. Ceramics, architecture, music, literature, martial arts, food, visual arts, philosophy, and religion are all significant aspects of the said culture. As for the people, some Chinese parents can be a bit too particular in determining the future of their children. Most of the time, they want and demand their children to have professional occupations such as doctors and lawyers. However, this high expectation could be a burden to some of the children as they might wish to

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pursue their own dreams.

Therefore, in the book, it will highlight two hardships faced by the characters which are racism and high expectations of an Asian family.

1.1. Project Objective / Purpose

This project aims to educate the youth, especially children at the age of upper elementary up to middle school about racism to create awareness in them, and also to encourage people to pursue their goals and dreams even though they might face oppression from their parents.

1.2. Entrepreneurial Opportunities

E-books are getting a lot of attention nowadays as they are more convenient and easier to obtain. By adding some interesting features to the e-book such as digital imagery and read-aloud features, it provides an opportunity to promote the product and stand against other e-books that do not include such features. Promoting the e-flipbook on online platforms that are in trend right now, such as Shopee and Lazada, would be a source of income generation and possibly to continue other series of the said book.

1.3. Project Methodology

A survey was conducted via Google Forms to set the characters and the flow of the storybook. 24 people participated in answering the survey in which 33.3% from upper elementary school students age between 10-12 years old, and the remaining 66.7% middle schoolers age between 13-15 years old. The results of this survey will be further explained in detail in the result and discussion section.

1.4. Literature Review

There are two topics being highlighted in the story: Chinese culture and racism. To ensure that all the facts inserted in the story are correct, some research on the Chinese people, traditions, culture and on racism were made before the book was created. It came upon the decision to highlight the Chinese culture and traditions because it was found that the Chinese have one of the most compact traditions and rules that its people must abide by until now, even for the modern living Chinese family.

In Chinese culture, table manners and etiquette are very important. The way you hold your utensils could be considered offensive if you do it wrongly. For instance, chopsticks are the main utensils in the Chinese culture. According to Mike (2021), in his article about Chinese chopsticks, around 1200 BC, during the Shang Dynasty, chopsticks were first utilised. They were mostly used for cooking and were made of bronze. Chopsticks were introduced for eating after the Han Dynasty (206 BC–220 AD), and its use quickly expanded to other Asian nations such as Japan, Vietnam, Korea, and Thailand. There are some taboos in using the utensil: do not point the chopsticks at others as it is considered a sign of disrespect. Besides, chopsticks shouldn't be crossed or overlapped. Chopsticks should never be crossed when dining with others. Chopsticks left crossed are viewed as unwelcoming or an indication of dissatisfaction (Mike, 2021).

On the other hand, based on a few research made on the topic of racism, there are several factors that cause people to be racist. An article by Sandra (2020) compiled a few factors that contribute to racism that were identified by Stanford psychologists. Initially, when people are perceived as similar to them and part of their "ingroup," both adults and children tend to feel and act more positively toward them. This implies that they will likely have less favourable attitudes

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toward people who are not part of their social network. Next, is hierarchy, which gives people the licence to feel, think, and act in racist ways. Besides that, racism is also regulated at both global and micro levels by power. Lastly, media that normalises idealised and overrepresented depictions of the dominant race such as White Americans while marginalising and undervaluing people of colour (Sandra, 2020).

2. METHODOLOGY

The e-flip storybook entitled "Living the Hardlife's" was produced based on the need analysis survey conducted via Google form. A questionnaire with a total of nine questions was prepared and revised before it was being shared to the public. The survey was conducted to understand and focus on readers preferences prior to the book's production. After a series of proof reading and editing, it was shared among students aged between 10 to 15 years old via WhatsApp (a messaging application).

There were a lot of discussions made to come up with the storyline. The initial plan was to make the story about a Malay family who struggled in everything they did. However, it turned out the story was missing out on intercultural elements. Hence, the characters were changed to a Western male and an Asian female who had an intercultural marriage and later had an Asian-White son. For the plot, the issue of racism was mentioned in the book as the main hardship faced by one of the characters, Jackson, who faced discrimination from his in-law and racism in his workplace. In addition, for the other two characters, high expectations from their relatives were made to become the element of hardship within the family.

Next, the storyline was written in Microsoft Word prior to Canva (an online design and publishing platform). Canva was used to create the cover page and to add animated background of the e-book. This online platform was chosen because of its user-friendly features and there are a lot of graphic templates that we can choose from.

Upon completion of the e-book content and graphics, it was then converted into a flipbook via a website called "*publuu.com*". In order to do this, the pages that were designed on Canva first need to be saved into *Portable Document Format* or PDF before they could be converted into a flipbook. This feature was added to give readers the real experience of reading a book as if they are reading a physical book by inserting the motion and sound made when a page is flipped.

Last but not least, a read-aloud feature was also inserted into the e-flipbook using a website called "*fliki.ai*". It is a website where users can convert texts into audio videos with artificial intelligence or A.I voices. This website allows users to choose the voice and age of the A.I based on the main character's point of view (e.g: Australian, girl). With this feature, readers will feel a lot closer or more personal to the main character of the book while improving on their pronunciation at the same time.

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3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

3.1: Age of the Respondents
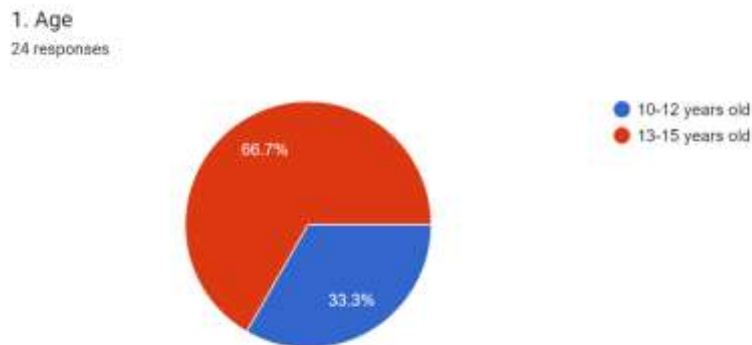
Figure 3.1 shows the age group of the respondents

The pie chart shows that the majority of the respondents are middle school students. This might be because elementary school students mostly do not own a mobile phone at their age. Hence, they do not have the access privilege (unless with parents' consent) to answer the survey.

3.2: Respondents' Knowledge of the Listed Books
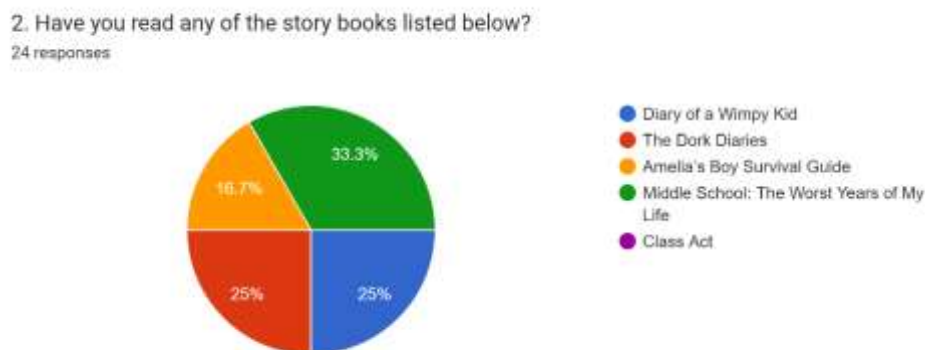
Figure 3.2 shows the respondents' knowledge of the listed books

The result shows that most of the respondents have only read the book "*Middle School: The Worst Years of My Life*" as it received the most votes which are 33.3%. On the other hand, the number of respondents who have read "*Diary of a Wimpy Kid*" and "*The Dork Diaries*" is reciprocal which is 25%. Only a small fraction of the respondents has ever heard of the book "*Amelia's Boy Survival Guide*" as it only received 16.7% votes. However, none of them has read "*Class Act*" as it received no votes. In conclusion, the difference in the result might be due to the popularity of the books in Malaysia as the top three books which received majority of the votes are quite popular in our local bookstores.

3.3: Respondents' Preferred Book Genres
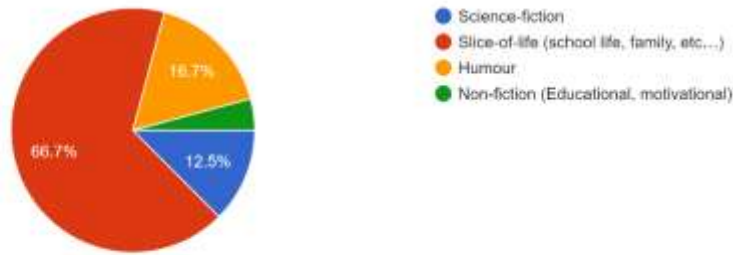
Figure 3.3 shows the respondents' preferred book genres

Figure 3.3 proves that a lot of the respondents like to read books about slice-of-life as it received the most votes compared to other listed genres, which is 66.7%. On the contrary, the respondents are not really interested in reading non-fictional books as they received the least number of votes. We can conclude that most of the respondents love a genre that they can relate to (e.g: school life).

3.4: Respondents' Preferred Numbers of Characters

Figure 3.4 shows the respondents' preferred numbers of characters

The pie chart shows that most of the respondents prefer to have 1-3 characters in a book that consists of parents and a son more than a book of parents and a daughter. This is probably because most of them love a boyish characteristic more than a feminine one.

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3.5: Respondents' Feedback on the Characteristics of the Father

5. What would be the characteristics of the father? (2 or more)
24 responses

Figure 3.5 shows the respondents' feedback on the characteristics of the father

The result shows that the respondents want the father to be protective and hard-working as they received the most votes compared to th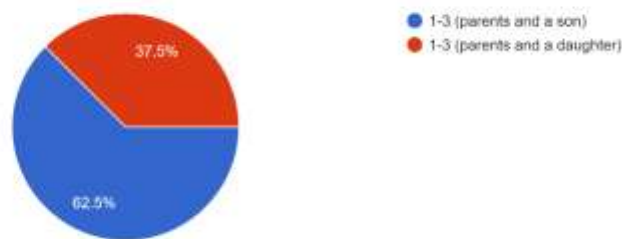e other characteristics; protective 75%, hard-working 70.8%. This is because they are common good traits that a father needs to have to protect his family.

3.6: Respondents' Feedback on the Characteristics of the Mother

6. What would be the characteristics of the mother? (2 or more)
24 responses
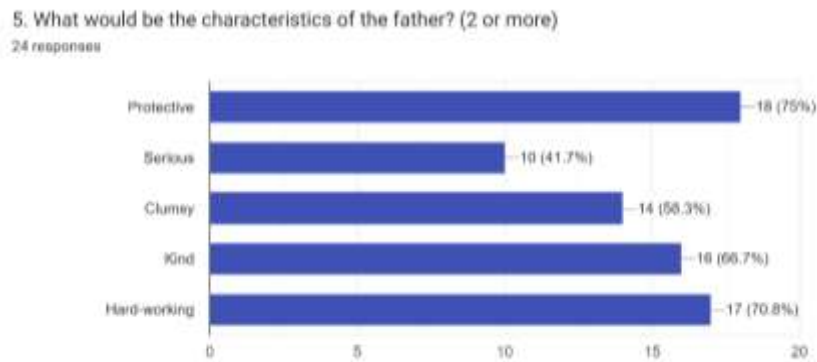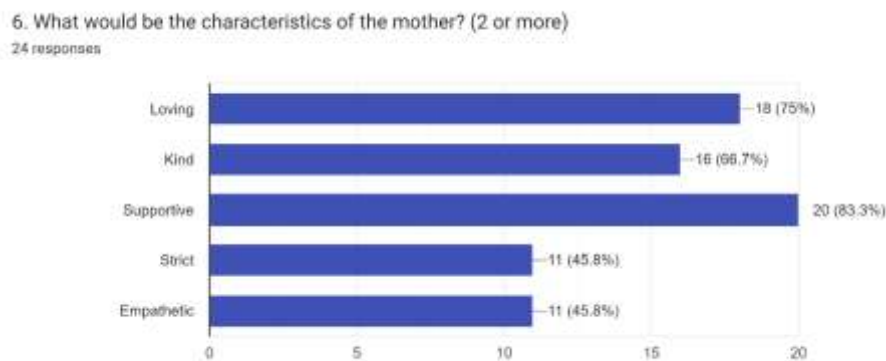
Figure 3.6 shows the respondents' feedback on the characteristics of the mother

It is shown that the respondents want the mother in the story to be supportive and loving as they received the most votes; loving 75% and supportive 83.3%. We can conclude that they like to read books with a character of a mother that has soft characteristics.

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3.7: Respondents' Feedback on the Characteristics of the Son

7. What would be the characteristics of the son? (If you pick son for the previous question) (2 or more)

22 responses

- Curious/Loves challenges — 16 (72.7%)
- Nerd — 11 (50%)
- Cheerful — 14 (63.6%)
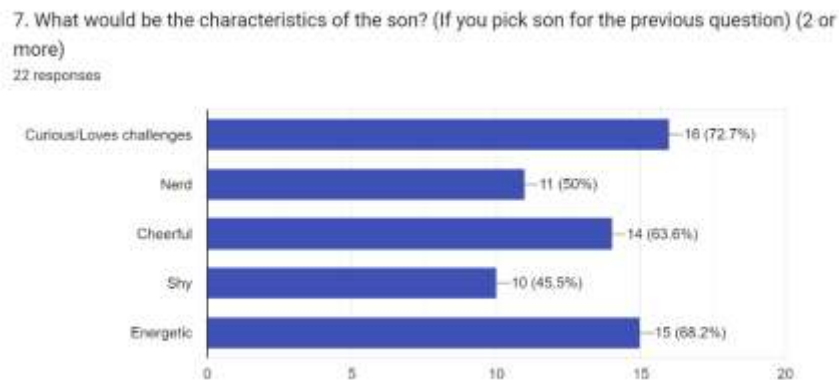- Shy — 10 (45.5%)
- Energetic — 15 (68.2%)

Figure 3.7 shows the respondents' feedback on the characteristics of the son

The figure above shows that most of the respondents who picked a son as one of the characters, wanted him to love challenges and be energetic; love challenges 72.7% and energetic 68.2%. This might be because these are expected characteristics of a boy.

3.8: Respondents' Feedback on the Characteristics of the Daughter

8. What would be the characteristics of the daughter? (If you pick daughter for the previous question) (2 or more)

20 responses

- Intelligent — 16 (80%)
- Passionate — 12 (60%)
- Sensitive — 12 (60%)
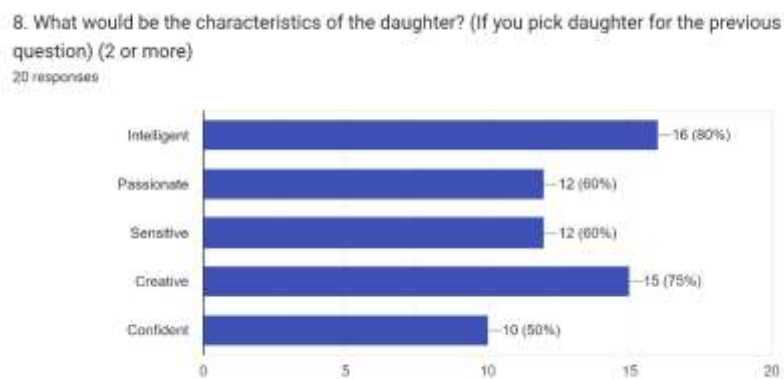- Creative — 15 (75%)
- Confident — 10 (50%)

Figure 3.8 shows the respondents' feedback on the characteristics of the daughter

The figure above shows that most respondents who picked a daughter as one of the characters, wanted her to be intelligent (80% votes) and creative (75% votes). This shows that the respondents like a adolescent female character that has elegant characteristics.

4. CONCLUSION

All in all, using the topics of the Chinese culture and issue of racism as the points for this e-book has been an amazing endeavour. There is a need to be very particular in conducting research on them (culture and racism) to avoid the sensitivities of other ethnic groups. Addressing Chinese parents' high expectations on their children, need to be done in a very thoughtful manner before translating them into words as it could sound prejudice or bias towards the culture which we have no intention of doing so.

The need analysis really helped in choosing the best storyline for the e-book. By following the results of the questionnaire, we can ensure that the book suits our readers' preferences. We hope that both parents and children will have more awareness towards the topic being addressed which is racism and learn that such act of discrimination should never be uphold

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nor practised. We also wish that readers who read the book will enjoy the story, illustrations and other features inserted, and at the same time receive the message in a light-hearted and fun way.

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