



Andrea Liao: A Teenager Championing Global Literacy

You don't have to be an expert at something or have a higher degree of specialization to impact positively on those around you. All you need is passion.

The passion for reading and literature, and the belief that helping others with an aim of improving society have been dear to Andrea Liao, a teenage American girl who started a literacy organization to promote the reading culture.

Through the organization - Book the Future - that she founded in 2017 to eradicate illiteracy among children and youths, Liao has created an impact that transcends her country.

Under the slogan "A Book for Every Child, A Story for Every Student", Liao oversees the organization's activities, workshops and educational campaigns in addition to editing a magazine about promoting reading and literacy. She talked to Flashes' Abdullah Mezar about her initiative and the reasons that made her choose a challenge such as literacy and enhancing reading among children and adolescents. Below are excerpts:

Could you introduce yourself to the readers?

My name is Andrea Liao. I am a high school student from the Greater Seattle Area. I am the founder and president of Book the Future, an organization dedicated to youth literacy with an international impact. I believe that providing diverse books for children is a crucial step towards giving them the agency to improve their futures.

What motivated you to take on a big challenge like literacy?

I spent my childhood between the pages of my favorite books and I was raised between bookshelves of local libraries. I have always been able to find solace in my favorite literary worlds and characters. As a result, I believed in the importance of literacy from a young age; I was inspired to advocate for youth literacy due to my own love for reading.

How did you start your organization? What are its aims?

I began my work for youth literacy by holding local book drives. I formally founded my organization in order to support global youth literacy and encourage youth activism. The mission of Book the Future is to increase accessibility to education. I seek to work towards a future in which every child is able to grow up in an environment with ample access to reading resources. I run book drives, lead workshops, speak at events, manage the magazine, and communicate with partner organizations.

Do you face any challenges?

Initially, the greatest challenge was taking an initiative in outreach. As a high school student, it is difficult to seek support from established organizations. Furthermore, I have faced disregard for being a young woman of color. Upon presenting my cause and my work, I would often be dismissed by adult leaders. I was able to overcome this challenge as my experience accumulated. From creating book lists to coordinating delivery times, I learned that



communication is especially crucial to running a successful book drive. Furthermore, by demonstrating my passion and my accountability, I was able to establish partnerships with various local libraries and bookstores, which now regularly provide book donations for my book drives.

How do you get support for your organization?

For book drives, Book the Future receives donations from libraries and bookstores as well as individuals. For events and workshops, Book the Future collaborates with community organizations to promote literature, arts, and youth activism. Book the Future also mobilizes the support of local volunteers, including both teens and adults.

Do you have local partners? Do you have plans for working in more countries?

Thus far, Book the Future has established 40 community partners and 11 affiliates in eight countries. My organization continually expands through the addition of international affiliates, including school clubs, regional chapters, and reading groups.

Do you have plans for literacy campaigns in the Middle East? What are your future plans?

I hope to begin international affiliates in the Middle East in order to support youth literacy. Recently, Book the Future partnered with the World Literacy Foundation on the Sun Books Initiative which merges technology and education through the development of solar-powered educational tools. These innovations serve as an alternative to physical books, thus enhancing literacy in support of children who do not have ready access to educational resources.

