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JEANISHA Wan had been sitting on this particular dream from the time she was a teenager: She wanted to create a space where stories could come alive, where words leap off the pages and take on other colourful forms like storytelling, workshops, dance, song and movies. A place where people who love stories and believe in the power of imagination could gather.

Wan has finally made her dream come true. Welcome to The Story Book at Plaza Arkadia in Kuala Lumpur, a newly-launched event space dedicated to running book-themed events and performing arts activities.

"I love reading and writing and I love books, so I used to spend a lot of time in libraries and bookshops," the 40something says at a recent interview at The Story Book.

"Books were a luxury to me then, as my family was not well-off. The only books we could read were either borrowed or given by kind-hearted relatives and family friends."

But she had a knack for telling stories, reciting them to her father who recorded them, as it turns out, for posterity.

After graduating, Wan ventured into the world of banking and finance, before moving on to sales and marketing. She started her own marketing consultancy in 2010, which eventually evolved into a public relations company.

"It evolved into PR quite accidentally, but mainly because I love storytelling, and PR is a form of storytelling," she says.

Wan's love for storytelling never left her, and today she is determined to provide a space for people to discover – or perhaps for some, rediscover – their love for reading.

"Bookstores are no longer able to capture the attention of young people like how they did during my time. People now consume stories quite differently. I realise if we want to make young people fall in love with stories from books once again, something has to change. That was how an event space came about," she shares.

The Story Book, located near dance and music schools, a tuition centre and schools, is also home to a pop-up store by indie bookstore Bookalicious, and retails ice cream and buns from food partners. The space can be rented out for private and corporate events and workshops as well.

Ultimately, though, Wan hopes that The Story Book will help to change the way people think about books and reading.

"Our education system has failed this generation, they have been taught to excel in their studies by memorising text rather than nurturing their curiosity for learning.

# Where stories come to life

This new event space takes stories beyond books to capture the imaginations of a new generation of readers.



Wan is hoping to spark a love for books with The Story Book event space. — SIA HONG KIAU/The Star

To many students, a book is something they have to go through instead of a door to a world of discovery. What do they miss out on? A whole wealth of knowledge and imagination.

"But it is never too late," she says.

Wan hopes that there will come a day when people will stop thinking of book lovers as nerds or bookworms.

"It is the love of stories that can help the future generation to be curious, imaginative and intelligent. And to get people to fall in love with stories from books once again, the stories have to come alive to them – not just to be read, but to be experienced with all their senses," she explains.

By letting people experience instead of just read a story, through watching a movie or listening to storytelling, she hopes it will lead them to discover the millions of stories that lie hidden in bookstores.

"Hopefully, through this, we will start seeing more people wanting to read books again and discover the world they offer," she adds.



Students from Universiti Putra Malaysia at the Reading *Romeo And Juliet* event held at The Story Book on Valentine's Day this year. — The Story Book

Visitors to The Story Book will be greeted by recorded voices of book characters, they can listen to audio books or browse the selection of books available. There will be movie screenings and events, such as the upcoming *A Rabbit's Tale* on April 7, which combines storytelling (*The Tale of Peter Rabbit*) arts and crafts.

As to what is her favourite story-book character, Wan has a hard

time deciding. But at the moment at least, she feels a special kinship with Frodo of J.R.R. Tolkien's *The Lord Of The Rings* series – a hobbit with no training in combat, a small figure on a big mission.

(Briefly, in Tolkien's fantasy world inhabited by hobbits, elves and wizards, Frodo is a hobbit chosen to carry a powerful ring into the heart of a dark land so he can destroy it before evil comes to rule

over Middle-earth.)

"It does not make sense how he could accomplish his mission. Maybe when he took it on, he had no idea how difficult the task ahead of him would be," Wan muses.

"Throughout his journey, there were moments he almost lost hope and wanted to give up. This is pretty much my journey too. How will my journey end and will I be able to accomplish my mission? I honestly have no idea, but I like what Galadriel (queen of the elves) said to Frodo," she says.

The conversation in question? Galadriel: "This task was appointed to you, Frodo of the Shire, and if you do not find a way, no one will."

Frodo: "I know what I must do, it is just that I am afraid to do it."

Galadriel: "Even the smallest person can change the course of the future."

Like the steadfast Frodo, Wan knows what she must do. And she is determined to see it through.

Check out The Story Book at [thestorybook.my](http://thestorybook.my).