

## Being Better with Books

By Jade Spallina

Reading is one of the most important things a child learns in school. Literacy is a valuable tool that will benefit children for the rest of their lives. Many young students struggle with reading and reading fluency, which leads to more difficulty with higher reading, other school work, and creates a less enjoyable school experience. Additionally, it fosters a dislike of books that will prevent students from having the motivation to read.

The solution to this issue is Book Buddies. Book Buddies is an after school program that encourages the love of reading and helps develop better reading comprehension. The program will partner a middle school or elementary school student with a high school student. After school, three times a week for half an hour, these students will meet and read books together.

The goal of Book Buddies is to encourage a love of reading that will transcend the program. Younger kids look up to their older peers, and having a friend who encourages reading will positively reinforce the idea that reading books is a fun and engaging pastime.

I babysit an eight-year-old neighbor who really struggles with reading. Her fluency is choppy and she often does not understand what she reads. These problems have led to her being uncomfortable about her difficulty, so she tries to avoid reading. She loves it, however, when I read to her. She immerses herself in the story, and we talk a lot about the plot and the characters. After a few months of us reading together, her mom mentioned that there had been an improvement in her English grades and that she has started checking out books from her school library.

Clarence T.C. Ching was an avid supporter of education. As a member of the Chinese Literacy Improvement Association, Mr. Ching was keenly aware of the importance of being able to read. He devoted his life to helping students get an education through his numerous donations and through his foundation, helping many schools, including Damien Memorial School, Kaimuki Christian Church and School, and Sacred Hearts Academy. I want to continue his devotion to education for everyone through Book Buddies.

The goal for Book Buddies is to nurture children's love of books and to increase their ability to understand them. Over time, the students will not only enjoy reading and discussing books, but they will also build relationships with one another. Instead of children putting challenging books back on the shelf, they will go to their Reading Buddy to ask for assistance. Students will bond over books and will genuinely love to read. By the year 2045, Book Buddies will have helped students of all ages improve their literacy and their reading proficiency.

Mr. Ching believed that children have the power to change our society for the better. He understood that a strong reading foundation is vital to success. Through Book Buddies, we can give our keiki the tools they need to make a difference in Hawaii and around the world.