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International symposium and book fair aims to spawn new generation of young readers

Good literature can be an amazing inspiration for children, firing a passion for reading and even dreams of becoming a writer. Step forward two Thai bookworms, who turned to writing aged 14 after being enchanted by the Harry Potter books.

"I got started on Walt Disney cartoon books at the age of three," said Tawara Siripipat, 24, a sci-fi fantasy writer who wrote his first story not long after his 14th birthday.

"Books were a familiar sight at home and my mother gave me a variety to try," says Praekarn Nirandara, 15, who penned her debut tale a year ago.

Both have read hundreds of books and say the Harry Potter series inspired their own fantasy stories.

Tawara's "The White Road", written under the pen-name Dr Pop, is a best-seller but bookshops also stock his "Girls & a Doll", "The White Road Spirit (Re-birth)" and "The Series of Sion".

"Reading classics of literature gets my imagination working and helps me think outside the box," he said. "And reading books in English gives you a head start at school."

Praekarn's first book - "The Mermaid Apprentices", written under the pen-name Pieretta Dawn - will be launched next month.

Let kids choose books

"Don't force books on your children," she recommends, adding that kids should be allowed to choose their favourites from a selection. It helps if the adults set an example by reading too, she says.

Tawara and Praekarn were speaking at the press conference for "Enter the World of Reading through World Literature", being held on December 2 and 3 at the Church of Christ in Thailand, Bangkok. At the symposium, librarians and education chiefs from around the country will learn about new methods being used successfully here and abroad to get kids in to reading. Open to the public, the event also features a discount book fair.

Suwadee Chongsatitwatana, managing director of Nanmeebooks, who initiated the symposium with the backing of Unesco, the Basic Education Commission, Alliance Francaise, the British Council and the Goethe Institut, said the event was being held in response to the government's campaign to promote reading and to the United Nations declaration of a Decade of Literacy from 2003.