

Meet Book the Future founder Andrea Liao, a Bellevue high schooler honored for her work in the literacy field

Jan. 25, 2021 at 6:00 am Updated Jan. 25, 2021 at 7:48 am

When she was little, Andrea Liao carted huge book hauls home from frequent trips to the library and soaked up her grandmother's stories about growing up in China during the Cultural Revolution.

“The fact that she can't read even though she knows all these amazing stories really shaped the way I think about literature and literacy,” Liao said. As she got older, Liao realized that many kids today still don't have access to books. Determined to put books in the hands of young readers, Liao started Book the Future when she was a high school freshman.

Now a senior at Interlake High School in Bellevue, Liao was honored in January by the International Literacy Association as one of the “[30 Under 30](#)” young leaders working for universal literacy. The 18-year-old received the award in recognition of her work as the founder and president of [Book the Future](#), a project that involves book drives, youth literacy workshops and a digital magazine.

“Books have always been such an inspiration for me and my mission with Book the Future has always been to share my love of literature. Literature is an avenue for youth to forge their own futures. By providing these literacy resources, I hope to expand their horizons, I guess, and just empower them to achieve new things.”

In the beginning, friends and neighbors donated books, but soon Liao began partnering with bigger donors like Half Price Books. Now she has books stockpiled in her garage and works closely with recipients to supply books that match the ages and needs of the children they serve.

Liao rarely donates books to the same organization twice in order to reach the most kids. And although the organization has distributed more than 4,000 books through 18 drives, Book the Future still operates without any budget. All books are donated, and all labor is volunteer — including Liao's mom, who delivers the books in her own car since Liao doesn't know how to drive. The only fundraising Book the Future has ever done was for the African Library Project, which requires \$500 for shipping the donated books.

Liao doesn't always get to interact with kids during book drives, but she has developed and taught literacy lessons through summer reading programs at schools and writing camps at Seattle's [Bureau of Fearless Ideas](#).

When Liao realized that her own early writing attempts didn't feature characters from her own culture and that children's books overwhelmingly feature white protagonists, she became passionate about representation in literature. She started a new initiative called Represent the Future.

“Represent the Future is trying to collect multicultural texts for the book drives. During events like writing workshops, we discuss representation in literature, why it’s important, and also have kids share out a book that resonated with them and that they saw themselves represented by,” said Liao.

Liao has been contacted by many other students who want to get involved in Book the Future. Locally, Interlake High School junior Sabine Wood has become a partner in the project, helping with book drives and managing the organization’s [Instagram account](#). Other youth have used Liao’s advice and teaching resources to form independent chapters around the world.

Since the pandemic started, Liao hasn’t taught any workshops but has continued the book drives. Last summer, Book the Future partnered with the school meals program to include books with the free lunches provided to students in the Bellevue School District.

After graduation, Liao plans to attend college in the fall.

“I definitely want to pursue a career at the intersection of education and the arts, using the arts as a force of change,” she said. If that takes her to a college out of state, she says she will leave the original Book the Future in Wood’s hands and will start a new chapter wherever she goes.

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