

A SINGAPORE SUCCESS STORY

Adeline Foo, 38, wrote her first book *Ben's Friends from the Rainforest* to amuse her own children, Benjamin, 9, Tessa, 6, and Jeremy, 4. She submitted it for the 2006 First Time Writers & Illustrators Publishing Initiative award – and won. This gave her S\$8,000 towards the publication costs for her first book.

The book sold well and was also adapted into a TV cartoon. This provided Adeline enough ammunition to approach independent publishers. She has now published 13 books for kids aged four to 12, and has plans to write four books a year.

Her latest, *The Diary of Amos Lee* is a best-seller – it has sold close to 7,000 copies since its launch in April this year.

SUCCESS TIP: FOCUS ON THE IDEA

"Getting the spark of that first idea is the toughest part of the process," Adeline reveals. "To get inspired, I spend time with kids and that focuses me on what they really like and dislike. I also look at lot of different kinds of kids' books so I know what is out there."

Adeline's 15 years in corporate PR taught her to "listen to what the market wants". So her books have to appeal to parents as well as kids.

"Everyone wants their money's worth, so my books have got to be worth the S\$10 parents spend to buy them," she points out. "Teachers are also a big market so it helps to add on an element that means your book can also be a teaching aid."

To this end, Adeline's books have a strong Southeast Asian focus; *Ben's Friends* features animals found in Singapore, while *The Beaded Slipper* books are set in a Peranakan background. Plus each book has information at the back that teachers can use for class work.

SUCCESS TIP: DO IT FOR LOVE

Although stories for children are just 800 to 1,000 words – about the length of a letter, they take more than an afternoon's work. Adeline takes about one month to research and write each



tale. After this, it takes two months for the artist to illustrate the story, and a final month to organise technical details about layout and design.

Although she's sold 13,000 copies of all her books so far, Adeline cautions that writing is not a get-rich-quick scheme. "I sell each book for S\$12 and make five to 10 per cent in royalties, depending on the publisher," she reveals.

"I am not delusional about my

status as a children's book writer," she says honestly. "I want to educate and inspire. Singapore does not have the market capacity to support the success of a JK Rowling. Writing kids' books is my sideline, not something that will feed the family."

She adds, "However, writing children's books can be supplemented by other forms of writing, like freelancing for advertising agencies, and so on."