

Diary of success

Adeline Foo's new book about a boy's diary entries has stayed on the local bestsellers list for 10 weeks

Magdalen Ng

Home-grown writer Adeline Foo is flushed with success.

Her latest book, *The Diary Of Amos Lee - I Sit, I Write, I Flush!*, went into a third print run a few weeks ago. Including the book's first run in April, that adds up to 11,000 copies published.

Sales have been good enough to keep her book on *The Straits Times'* bestsellers list for 10 weeks, although other hit children's books by local authors have racked up higher sales figures.

The *Mr Midnight* series by James Lee, for example, has sold more than 30,000 copies.

Foo's book takes the form of a diary written by 10-year-old Amos. His mother has forced him to start writing it to improve his English, and he writes about the things most children his age are likely to be engaged with, such as food and the painful process of saving up for a Playstation Portable.

If Amos is believable, it is because he is inspired by a real boy. "Twenty per cent of Amos is my son, Benjamin. The remaining

80 per cent would be what I imagine the average kid to be," says Foo.

The 38-year-old author has published 12 picture books and says her writing has evolved as her three children - Benjamin, nine, Tessa, six, and Jeremy, four - have grown.

"My maturity and growth as a writer mirror the growth and development of my eldest child," says Foo. "At nine, he doesn't want to read picture books anymore."

The impetus for her to write a proper book targeted at older kids came late last year, when the Ministry of Communications and the Arts approached her to write a book which could be distributed to children at the Singapore Day held in London earlier this year.

Drawing inspiration from Sue Townsend's famous *Adrian Mole* series for young adults, she created Amos. While it still contains many illustrations, *The Diary Of Amos Lee* has more text.

Through Amos' "funky and smart aleck-y" voice, Foo could also send lessons to her readers without sounding "preachy like a mother".

"I wanted to convey the message to children living both in London and Singapore that there is much to be grateful for growing up here," she says.

The saga of Amos will continue as the next instalment is likely to be released at the end of the year.

In this new book, a "foreign talent" in class will bring out the competitive streak in Amos.

"He's afraid that his teachers will have higher expectations of him when they find out I'm an author."

ADELINE FOO, on keeping her identity a secret from her son's school



Adeline Foo (left) with book illustrator Stephanie Wong. Foo says her eldest child, Benjamin, was her inspiration for Amos.

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There will also be more focus on his relationships. Foo says: "Amos might even fall in love some time."

Calling her book the "joint effort" of her family, she says her husband, the executive vice-president of airport management at the Changi Airport Group, would chauffeur her to and from her classes at New York University's Tisch School Of The Arts

Asia, where she is studying for a master of fine arts in dramatic writing, and photocopy materials for her.

Benjamin would offer jokes for her books.

But she has to keep her identity a secret from Benjamin's school, she says. "He's shy, especially when his friends ask him if I wrote the book."

She adds with a laugh: "He's also afraid that his teachers will have higher expectations of him when they find out I'm an author."

songyuan@sph.com.sg

The Diary Of Amos Lee (\$13.90) is available at major bookstores.