

HOUSTON CHRONICLE

Bear Creek teachers hope pupil-run store catches on Program gives children access to affordable books

By HELEN ERIKSEN, Houston Chronicle Correspondent

Thanks to teachers *Karen Baker* and Yvonne Ludden, Bear Creek Elementary pupils are getting real-life lessons in business by running a bookstore.

The store improves access to children's literature for the community by offering books at bargain prices and allows pupils to become acquainted with the free enterprise system.

The two teachers began sponsoring the venture to boost childhood literacy eight years ago after they read an article in Parade magazine about a way to deliver books to pupils at a reduced cost.

Most of the books come from Schoolwide Inc., a New York-based firm that supplies discount children's books. Other books and materials come from Scholastic Books. Gift certificates and bookmarks also are available.

Novelty Book Store carries chapter books for grades 1-8 and picture books for those in preschool through third grade. Publications include nonfiction, poetry books, biographies and folk tales for all age groups. Many are popular award-winning titles from Newbery, Caldecott and Texas Bluebonnet competitions.

"Students, teachers, staff, parents and community members pay \$1.25 for any book regardless of the list price," Ludden said.

"The goal has never been to make a profit, and all earnings go toward purchasing more books to put in the hands of children," Baker said, "because some children will never have the opportunity to visit a traditional book store and would not be able to afford a book from one."

Baker, a reading specialist, and Ludden, who teaches English as a second language, used a \$1,000 PTA donation to get the only pupil-operated store in the district up and running.

The store is a small room with five bookshelves extending from the floor to the ceiling. Books are categorized and inventoried on a computer for quick reference for customers, and the store operates every morning before school begins.

Just like any other bookstore, customers can browse and read before making a purchase. Pupils help out by giving customers bookplates and bookmarks, which come free to anyone who purchases a book.

Normal store hours are 8-8:20 a.m. every weekday and special hours are 9 a.m.-noon every Wednesday in June and July. The store also opens for special occasions and holiday shopping.

Baker and Ludden are showing other Katy schools how to get in on the act.

Gay Lambert, a reading specialist at Sundown Elementary, was impressed with the store's concept, especially seeing that children were operating it with little supervision.

She already has begun laying the groundwork to open a store at Sundown in December and has ordered the first \$1,200 worth of materials to start it using funds from a grant.

"Sixty percent of Sundown pupils are low-income and may not have the resources to buy new books," Lambert said. "This will encourage them to read more."

Call **Baker** or Ludden at 281-463-5600 to learn about starting a student bookstore.

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DETAILS

To learn more about starting a student-run bookstore, call **Karen Baker** or Yvonne Ludden at 281-463-5600.