

## Performing Kamishibai in Malaysia

By Mazni Md Ramly, MBBY Member and IKAJA International Member



I was first introduced to kamishibai by IKAJA in a one-day workshop at Malaya University during Children's Literature Festival 2012. This event was successfully organised by a collaboration of Malaysian Board on Books for Young People (MBBY), Kota Buku and the Faculty of Literature and Social Science of the university. Due to an amazing interest shown, MBBY invited the IKAJA team in 2013 for a two-day workshop. It was attended by more than 30 participants.

Since then, those who participated in the second workshop have become registered IKAJA members. MBBY has also set up a Malaysian Kamishibai Storyteller group of our own. In Malay, we called it Kumpulan Panggung Cerita Kamishibai Malaysia. This group is coordinated by Hajah Alimah Abdul Salam and is supervised by Datuk Ahmad Redza Ahmad Khairuddin, the president of MBBY. Amongst the kamishibai performers are Dr Faridah Idris, Dr Shahidatul Munirah Zaidun, Rafidah Othman and myself.

I love working with children. I think that is one of the reasons I turned from being a novelist to being a children's picture book writer, an illustrator and last but not least a storyteller.

For a long time, due to being a shy person, I always admired storytellers from afar and never expected to fit in their shoes. But learning kamishibai has melted away my shyness. Its simplicity and joyful way has captured my heart. What I especially love about it is that the audience concentration is not focused on the storyteller but rather on the development of the story in the *butai*.

Over a year, our group was invited to perform in various events. These included the International Islamic and Art Culture Festival in Putrajaya, Children's Literature Festival held at the Kuala Lumpur Tower, Kuala Lumpur International Book Fair, Al-Hijrah Family Day, Petrosains Science Festival in KLCC, and the Science Festival of National Science Centre, Kuala Lumpur.

It was a wonderful experience to venture into the kamishibai world with our Malaysian audiences. Our aim was to share the joy of different stories. Introducing kamishibai to Malaysians is a bit of challenge though. While the children really enjoy our performance, the adults are more interested in the technical part of it.

I remembered being asked, "Why do you use black cloth under the stage? Are you a magician?" Some of the adults told me that children should be surrounded with colours and black is not one of them. However, the moment they saw the wonderful and striking illustrations of kamishibai, they finally understand why the cloth has to be black. The performance guidelines from IKAJA really help our audience to focus.