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## A Record Book

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Ma'aleh Adumim schoolchildren join together to make the biggest volume in Israel.



Photo by: Adam Ross

The universal language of “ooohs” and “aaahs” filled the room as the cover of an enormous book was unveiled at Ma’aleh Adumim’s Nofei Hasela School last week.

The Giant’s Book is a 294-word story about a giant who can’t find a book big enough for him to read. When it’s finished, it will measure almost two meters tall and more than a meter wide. The 34 Nofei Hasela sixth-graders at the kickoff event each received one word to decorate for the book.

Pupils at another dozen area schools will get their own words to add when they turn in their forms for the seventh annual read-a-thon sponsored by AHAVA, a locally based English literacy program. The acronym, which spells the Hebrew word for “love,” stands for Anglit Hanilmedet B’Shita Hativit (English learned in a natural manner).

“The heart of what I’m doing is to make learning English fun,” says AHAVA director Gaila Cohen Morrison, a Ma’aleh Adumim resident who made aliya from Montreal 30 years ago and has been teaching various subjects for 34 years. Its easy reader, Reading Rocks, is used by English teachers and tutors for third-graders to adults all over the country.

“In our curriculum and book and programs, I try to make everything as simple as possible, so children can go step by step without big gaps of knowledge between one lesson and the next. That’s the key to good education,” says Morrison. “We also try to make reading English fun, interesting and relevant. It has to make sense and follow a smooth progression.”

Founded in 2000, AHAVA is the only non-profit organization in Israel dedicated solely to promoting English literacy for children, she says. Standard English language instruction in Israeli

schools often is not sufficient to prepare schoolchildren for higher education, which makes extensive use of English materials, or for future opportunities such as overseas fellowships and conferences.

“English is crucial for children to learn well at school,” says Morrison. “It opens up a world of wider reading and opportunities for them later on in life.”

According to 2010 statistics on the AHAVA website, less than half of all eligible Israeli 12th-graders even attempted the English matriculation exam, and less than a third of all high-school students (32 percent of Jewish Israelis and 11% of Arab Israelis) go to college.

While Morrison offers training in Jerusalem so that teachers from all over Israel can implement AHAVA’s curriculum and techniques to help kids learn English more easily, the month-long read-a-thon is mainly limited to schools in Ma’aleh Adumim, Mitzpe Yeriho and Kfar Adumim for logistical reasons: the culminating party, scheduled this year for March 15, takes place in a Ma’aleh Adumim community center. Everyone gets a free book and favors, and participating schools get 15 books for their libraries.

Children who log the greatest number of books in several divisions - native English-speakers and native Hebrew-speakers, categorized by grade level - win prizes such as jeep and horseback rides, bowling vouchers and book certificates. The Ma’aleh Adumim Municipality sponsors the AHAVA read-a-thon along with the local branches of Bank Hapoalim, Steimatzky, Re/Max, Burgers Bar and Aroma, as well as Janis Design, Midbar Yehuda Ranch, the Castel Museum Café and the Nof Hayarden event hall.

“We try to encourage reading from every angle,” says Morrison.

The unveiling of the huge book cover, drawn by children’s book illustrator Netanel Epstein, was planned to create a buzz for the event.

“By making Israel’s biggest book, we hope to capture the imagination of local schoolchildren and to inspire more interest and enjoyment of reading English,” says Morrison, who read the story to the Nofei Hasela kids during their “English Day.”

The Giant’s Book will be displayed at the local municipality and in the area schools once it’s complete.

“Making a giant book does lead to some logistical questions, including where we are going to store this book,” says Morrison. “We may have to build a giant library!”