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BOOKS ABOUND FOR BAY AREA KIDS

Organization donates 4,900 books all published by a nonprofit company

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A Los Altos-based nonprofit will be giving the gift of reading to 4,900 children this holiday season.

Hoopoe Books Literacy Program will be handing out the books to organizations in East Palo Alto, Palo Alto, San Jose and Sunnyvale. The donations come as part of a \$90,000 grant the organization recently received from Kaiser Permanente. According to Program Director Sally Mallam the money will also be used for teacher training and the donation of another 5,100 books to Bay Area nonprofits.

The books are titles published by nonprofit publisher Hoopoe Books. According to Mallam, who is the head of both organizations, Hoopoe started in 1998 but a desire to get the group's books to a wider audience of children led to the

founding of the literacy program in 2000. The program provides books and literacy curricula for pre-kindergarten to 8th grade classrooms.

All 11 titles published by Hoopoe and distributed through the literacy program are folk tales from Afghanistan, the Middle East and Central Asia. Over the course of 30 years the stories were collected and translated by Afghani author Idries Shah. Mallam said the stories are hundreds of years old and were passed on orally until being collected by Shah, who died in 1996. Mallam said a few new-titles will be published post-humously in 2009.

Because there were few schools in the regions where the stories originated, they served as a means to teach. Mallam gave the example of story in which a boy goes to a new village only to find the inhabitants are terrified of what they think is a

dangerous animal. In fact the animal is a watermelon. But because the villagers had never seen the fruit before they were afraid of it. In the end the boy teaches the people how to grow watermelon. Mallam said there are many interpretations that can be drawn from the story. Themes of overcoming fear, knowledge and leadership are all in the book. But what people learn from the stories is individual, she said.

Mallam said the stories provide a counterpoint to western children's literature, which can have a lot of emotional ups and downs. The tales, she said, are more gentle in nature. Even the message of the stories is shown and not necessarily told. Mallam said the teaching by example nature of the books is what makes them relevant after hundreds of years.

"They are quite profound little pieces," she said.