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COVID-19

Book educates on virus



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An online book aimed at educating children about the coronavirus and how to stay safe under the current pandemic restrictions and protocols has been downloaded more than 5 000 times.

Created as part of the successful Oaky range, developed by Cape Town-based, non-governmental organisation (NGO) Read to Rise co-directors Taryn Locke and her husband Athol Williams, *Oaky and the Virus* is a free-to-download online book that explains how life has had to change now that "a dangerous new virus has come to town".

Through the adventures of its two characters, Oaky and Oaket, children learn the importance of social distancing, covering your face and thorough hand washing.

The book also comes with a catchy instructional song, which has become quite popular with more than 5 300 views on YouTube.

"A number of parents have posted videos of their children singing the *Oaky Virus* song from the book, which they sing while washing their hands. Parents say that the book is simple for children with cute illustrations and it helps them to read and understand how they can avoid the virus," says Locke.

"I love working with children, they are our future. It is so important that we do all that we can for our children now so that our country's future is brighter. To ensure that more South African children can read the story and learn from it, the book is also available in multiple languages."

Roscoe Williams, Read to Rise project manager, says the book has already been translated into eight languages.

"Both the book and song have been shared widely in school, early childhood development (ECD) and community groups via WhatsApp and email and have been used as homework reading assignments and even a puppet show. Over 50 000 children have benefited," says Roscoe.

"As it is an unknown pandemic that we are dealing with, our book and class visits have helped learners to understand what a virus is and how they can avoid it. During the lockdown period, we really needed to



Oaky and the Virus educates children about Covid-19 and the need for pandemic protocols.

think outside of the box. We made some adjustments to our programme and came up with an Oaky care pack. It costs R100 to sponsor a child. The care pack consist of the *Oaky and the Virus* book, *Oaky and the Virus* activity book, face mask, juice, snack and hand soap," says Roscoe.

The book has also been made available in hardcopy as part of a seven-book range. The organisation focuses on reading and literacy

development in primary schools, donating free books to schools in underprivileged areas.

"Our main focus is 45 primary schools in Mitchell's Plain and 30 primary schools in Soweto. Over the past seven years, working in these areas, we have given out over 200 000 brand new books and (more than) 95 000 children have benefited," says Roscoe. The books are written and illustrated by

Locke and Athol, the latter of whom is a renowned poet originally from Mitchell's Plain.

To purchase a hardcopy book at R100, visit Read to Rise's website.

The full set of seven books retail at R600. Proceeds help fund the NGO's literacy outreach initiatives.

Download *Oaky and the Virus* for free from www.readtorise.co.za or from its Facebook page.