



ART COURTESY OF © LITTLE TIGER GROUP

Inspired reading

LITTLE TIGER GROUP PUBLISHES CHILDREN'S BOOKS THAT TEACH IMPORTANT LESSONS



BY ANNIE MAKOFF

"I'M A daydreamer and I absolutely love stories," says Tom Truong, publisher at children's book specialist Little Tiger Group. It's just as well, because without these traits, as well as his genuine passion for storytelling and book creation, it would be difficult to head up three of the company's four imprints. "We all pour our hearts into everything we create," says Truong, describing the people he works with. "The team really loves making books."



Tom Truong

COURTESY OF LITTLE TIGER GROUP

Even the company name hints at its creativity and its independent nature. "The name Little Tiger came from a character in one of our early picture books, *I Don't Want to Go to Bed!* by Julie Sykes," Truong explains. "Tim Warnes created the illustrations, and they formed the basis for the company logo.

It's lovely, because Tim has been with us for the

duration, so he's been on the entire journey with us as a group."

From humble beginnings

And what a journey it's been. Initially launched as Magi Publications 30 years ago, the company published just one book, *Naughty Bini* (1987), that first year. Today, it publishes somewhere between 130 and 150 titles annually and has expanded over the years to launch other subdivisions, each one focusing on new genres for young audiences. Caterpillar Books, which covers novelty and preschool titles, launched in 2003, followed by Stripes Publishing in 2006, with its focus on fiction for 5-year-olds through to teens and young adults.

Last year, the Little Tiger Group launched its latest publishing imprint, 360 Degrees, the brainchild of Truong himself. It features illustrated nonfiction titles such as *Hello World*, by Jonathan Litton and illustrated by L'Atelier Cartographik, which looks at how people across the world greet each other, and wordless books like *Story Worlds: Nature*, by Thomas Hegbrook, which encourages children to make their own interpretations from pictures.

New directions

"Creating new imprints has been about developing our expertise," says Truong,

"Our growth has been pretty organic. It's come about every time we've spotted an opportunity or gap in the market. Our CEO [Monty Bhatia] has an innate entrepreneurial spirit, so he gets excited about new projects and ventures and encourages us to pursue new avenues."

You might think that Truong's 4-year-old son would be a prime target for testing these new avenues and ideas, but you'd be only partially right. While Truong admits his son is "a rich source of inspiration," so too are events in the wider world that align with the company's ethos of representing diversity and difference. There is, he argues, a "big market hole" when it comes to diversity, and he mentions an industry-wide concern that there's not enough of it in publishing. Little Tiger Group breaks this trend, not just because it happens to be run by an Indian family, but because so many of its titles focus on diversity.

For example, the complex issues surrounding the European Union referendum gave Truong the idea to create a book that celebrates global differences and diversity. The resulting book, *Everybody's Welcome*, by Patricia Hegarty and illustrated by Greg Abbott, tells the story of a group of homeless animals who are seeking refuge. One little mouse encourages them to work together to build a home for everyone.

"The story and characters were created



*Opposite page: Illustrations from **When We're Together**, by Claire Freedman (top), and **Click Clack Crocodile's Back**, by Kathryn White (below).*

in a measured, age-appropriate way to give the message of working together, despite differences," says Truong. It's the book he's most proud of, although, he insists, it's a tough call singling out any one book because so much love, effort and talent are put into creating every single title.

A creative approach

While there's no dearth of great story ideas, you might wonder how Little Tiger Group goes about finding the talent to create such books. The company receives submissions through its website and through agencies, as many publishers do, but Truong says Little Tiger Group has also been known to track down people via Pinterest or Twitter if it happens to be in need of someone with particular skills. Even an exceptional window display can be enough to pique interest in someone's artistic skills.

The company searches for the right kind of talent because at the heart of every book it publishes, says Truong, there has to be beauty, wonder and love—love of reading, love of the book itself, love of the final product. And people can only produce these kinds of books if they possess the right kind of creativity. For Truong in particular, reading—especially for children—should be about shared experiences, a concept that he says is "at the heart" of everything Little Tiger Group creates.

"We really embrace the idea of shared experiences at Little Tiger," he says. "Our wordless titles in particular are aimed at children who can't yet read, so we are asking them to read pictures instead. What can they see? What do they think is happening? What do they think might happen? There's a massive element of imaginative play and an element of analysis and critical thinking." The books themselves, he says, are simply a starting point for conversations between children and adults. Truong and his team want to extend "beyond the books," opening up new worlds to inquisitive young minds.

"We consider the whole reading experience when making a book," Truong notes. He says the company puts everything into ensuring its books are beautiful, tactile, interactive, informative, fun to read and, above all, that they leave the reader feeling satisfied. And they absolutely do. Little Tiger Group titles touch on themes of loyalty in friendship, finding hope in the face of challenges and the need to learn empathy for others. The books are lively and fun, as well as informative at times. And most importantly, every book the company publishes has an important place in a child's life. **C**

Annie Makoff is a freelance writer who reads children's books to her 4-year-old daughter at their home in Rochester, Kent, in the UK.

ORNAMENTS © D3IMAGES / SHUTTERSTOCK

COMPANY PROFILE

COMPANY
Little Tiger Group
YEAR ESTABLISHED
1987
CEO Monty Bhatia
HEADQUARTERS
West London, England
WEBSITE littletiger.co.uk



PRODUCTS AT COSTCO

Three 15-book box sets, including *Box of Bedtime Stories*, *Box of Animal Stories* and *Box of Busy Stories* (Little Tiger Assortment, Item #1203398)

QUOTE ABOUT COSTCO

"It's always a pleasure working with Costco because we share common values: quality content, brilliant packaging and good value for money. Often we create products specifically for Costco, with their customers in mind, and we do it because we love working with them."

—Tom Truong,
Little Tiger Group publisher

*Illustrations from **Eddie and Dog**, by Alison Brown (left), and **Nobody Laughs at a Lion**, by Paul Bright (below).*

