



Asia Education Foundation

**Asia Literacy  
Ambassadors**  
Partnering Businesses & Schools

## Author and Asia advocate

### The Southport School, QLD and Simon Higgins

*Founded in 1901, The Southport School has nearly 1,400 students. It provides prep to Year 12 classes for day students and boarders. It is the only boys' school and boarding school on the Gold Coast.*

When Asia Literacy Ambassador Simon Higgins arrived at The Southport School, he was an instant hit with the students. It wasn't just the fact that he appeared in full Samurai costume but also the fact that he clearly lived the role, writing on an almost daily basis about the warrior culture and related traditions of mediaeval Japan.

“My impression was that I had their attention from the start. It's quite challenging to have a medieval warrior with a sword in your midst. The kids and teachers are intensely aware of the body language and the coiled power. I think one of the things people get out of my visits is a deepening of their view of martial arts. I think they see them in a new way, as part of a more complicated view of the world. There's lots of testosterone in action, especially in boys' schools, but I demonstrate that you don't have to be aggressive if people annoy you. It can be a life-changing lesson.”

It was a teenage interest in martial arts that prompted Simon to learn more about Asia, and Japan in particular. He has since immersed himself in the ancient traditions of the Japanese people and spends several weeks each year in the region. He has also spent time in Singapore, Indonesia, China and Vietnam.

As a well-known author of works for junior and teen readers, he regularly visits schools around Australia, but usually it's to talk about the craft of writing and storytelling. Becoming an Asia Literacy Ambassador has brought a different dynamic into play. He says, “I feel able to talk less about books and more about being a friend of Asia, and there is every reason for future generations of Australians to know and understand these cultures rather than having that simplistic ‘oh, they're very different’ approach.”

**Asia Literacy:** knowledge, skills and understandings about the diverse countries of Asia  
[ambassador.asiaeducation.edu.au](http://ambassador.asiaeducation.edu.au)



### **Embedding Asian language programs**

For Lisa Miller, head of languages at The Southport School, there couldn't have been a better match. "We are trying to build the Asian language programs at the school, so having an Asia Literacy Ambassador was perfect for us. We want to encourage students and teachers to see languages as something that's cross-curriculum, and Simon helped us with other activities as well as talking to language classes about Japanese culture.

"He took part in the assembly for the whole school. He helped some students in drama choreograph stick fighting to make it look exciting, and he got involved with their monkey magic show.

### **Inspiring travel tales**

"The students found it really interesting, especially when he told them stories about travelling around the region and meeting amazing people. He spoke to Year 9 about manga artwork and graphic novels, and to Year 11 about his experiences in Vietnam."

Simon also found it a good experience. "I had a boy come up after lunch to thank me on his own – he wasn't the boy who was officially supposed to thank me – and he said he got a lot out of the talk. That's really rewarding. And I hope there will be people, students and maybe teachers, who will feel inspired to start their own journey to Thailand, China, Indonesia, Japan."

Further visits by Simon are planned, but Lisa has also identified two more Asia Literacy Ambassadors – a local businessman and an old boy from the school – to help her increase the focus on Chinese studies. The ambassador scheme has been a big hit with everyone at the school.