

The Reading Badge movement – Why not try it globally?

Petra Potočnik

Slovenian Reading Badge Society

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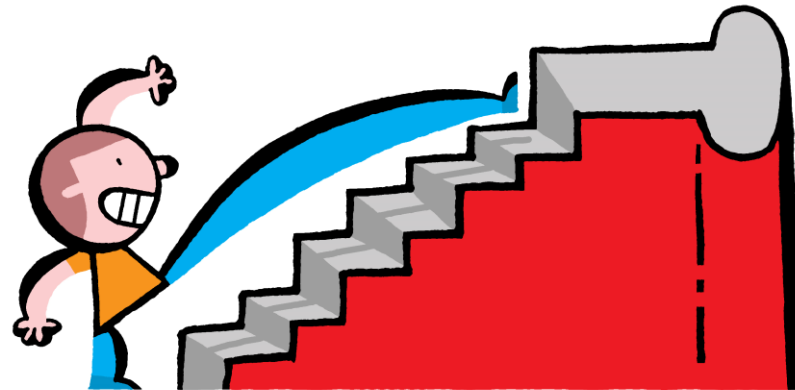




Slovenia?

- Slovenia is a country in Central Europe.
- It covers 20,271 square kilometers (7,827 sq mi).
- Slovenia has a population of 2.1 million.
- At the beginning of the school year 2025/26, approx. 80,000 children were enrolled in kindergartens, 190,000 students in primary and 88,000 students in secondary schools.

The mission of the Reading Badge, supported by schools, libraries and similar organizations, **is to promote lifelong development of reading culture and reading literacy.**

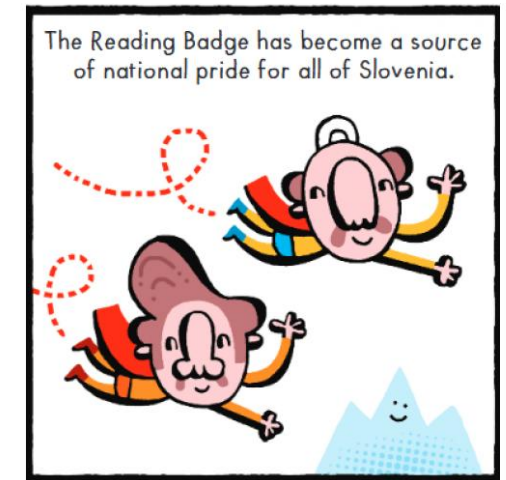


*Ivan Mitrevski**

**All illustrations in the presentation are the work of illustrator and comic book author Ivan Mitrevski.*

What (and Why) is a *Reading Badge*

- The Reading Badge was initially **a mentoring practice** at the Prevalje Primary School (a small town in the north of Slovenia). The movement was founded in the school year 1960/61 by Slovenian language professor **Stanko Kotnik** and author of youth literature **Leopold Suhodolčan**.
- They wished to find an alternative to the formality of school and turned the school's existing reading club into a **“*Competition for the Reading Badge*”**. At the time all kinds of sports competitions were being introduced and this encouraged them to introduce **a new spiritual parallel**.



What (and Why) is a *Reading Badge*?

- Kotnik and Suhodolčan prepared the regulations, setting out the goals, the rules and the procedure of this new activity.
- Collecting **metal pin badges** was a favourite hobby among children in the late 1950s. They turned the badge with the portrait of the writer Prežihov Voranc into a reading “award”.
- Over the next five years, a number of badges were added to the Prežihov Voranc Reading Badge, carrying **the names and portraits of important and popular poets and writers** who lived and worked in different regions.
- Each badge was made in three forms: **bronze, silver and gold**, which motivated the readers and made them aware of their own personal growth.
There was a different badge for each age group.



The Slovenian Reading Badge Society



- Kotnik and Suhodolčan's idea of getting acquainted with literature in a different way proved to be a **new**, attractive **form of literary education**.
- **In ten years**, the Reading Badge **spread** as a movement to improve reading habits and reading culture. Teachers and librarians have found the Reading Badge to be an excellent form and opportunity to make good books popular.

The Slovenian Reading Badge Society

- Owing to its expansion, it was **necessary to link and coordinate** various activities. This task was taken on by the Board of the “**Slovenian Association of Reading Badges**”, which worked within the Slovenian Association of Friends of Youth, a non-government organisation.
- In **2002** the Association became the **Slovenian Reading Badge Society**, a **non-governmental organisation** that was established to head the Reading Badge movement in terms of professional guidance and organisation (still a member of the Slovenian Association of Friends of Youth).
- The **Programme Committee** of the Reading Badge was formed to monitor the movement and to take care of the basic directives of its development.

Beremo skupaj

Nacionalni
mesec
skupnega
branja

Együtt olvasunk

Čitamo zajedno

Geinas khetaun

Leggiamo insieme

jaz in ti
in mi vsi
Beremo skupaj

k u p a i s j

Wir lesen zusammen

Reading Together

- The **Slovenian Reading Badge Society** implements various programmes that **encourage children and young people** – as well as adults – **to read in their free time**.
- The movement's initiatives today bring together **about 140,000 readers** each year.
- Reading Badge participation is highest in primary schools where around **65 %** of pupils take part.
- Reading is supported by **7,000 mentors** (this number includes only primary schools) – librarians, teachers and other experts, as well as authors and publishers; children are also encouraged to read by their **families**.
- The Reading Badge programmes even **transcend Slovenian borders** to reach Slovenian communities abroad.
- Due to its significant role in the national culture, the Reading Badge is listed by **the National Register of Intangible Cultural Heritage**.

The main objectives of The Slovenian Reading Badge Society

- **Provides guidelines** for the selection of reading materials and develops the tools needed for their use.
- **Shares expert knowledge** on the development of modern strategies for encouraging reading.
- **Informs** about the development of reading, writing and literary culture.
- **Ensures efficient and quick integration** of the network of participants and an unimpeded flow of information.
- **Organizes programmes** of specialised education and exchanges.
- **Coordinates** visits of Slovenian authors.
- **Provides** motivational **book gifts** and works to improve the quality of youth literature.
- **Prepares motivational** materials and certificates.
- **Develops** various **programmes and projects** for different age groups (e.g. a programme of *Intergenerational Reading*, *Reading Tea Parties*, *10 minutes to read*).



The Reading Badge today

- The Reading Badge has developed into a successful, sustainable model of encouraging leisure reading.
- It can be used in different age groups, in different cultural environments and school systems, in all languages...
- Its work is based on the understanding that in order to successfully develop the promotion of lifelong reading, this needs to always be adapted to the specific group of readers within their specific time, social, and cultural framework.

Reading for the Reading Badge

- The Reading Badge **encourages** schoolchildren (mostly) in primary school (between 6 and 15 years old) **to read in their free time**.
- The **process** is carried out by **teachers and mentors** together **with** the **school library**.
- A young reader, who decides to take part in the Reading Badge movement, is offered **guidance by their teacher/mentor**.
- The **teacher/mentor suggests** the best and most suitable **books from a list**.
- The reading is then followed by **conversations** or some **other kind of presentation** that is **guided by the mentor** (a literary circle, a school magazine, young reporters, etc.).
- In **secondary** schools, Slovenian Reading Badge Society encourages reading, **conversations** about the books and literary creativity. These activities take place at **debate clubs**, at **meetings with authors**, at **literary performances**, etc.



Selections, lists, recommendations

The timetable for implementing the programme is usually linked to the duration or the dynamics of each school year.

The required number of books* is structured at the **national level** according to each **age group** – mentors take into account the specificities of each age group or the individual abilities of readers in their group.

*From grades** 1 to 3 (and kindergartens), at least 4 books, including one poetry collection;
from grades 4 to 7, at least 5 books, including one poetry collection;
from grades 7 to 9, at least 6 books, including one poetry collection.

**The Slovenian education system has 9 grades of elementary school.



Selections, lists, recommendations

We propose:

Different and individualised selection of reading material:

- a relatively **extensive list of recommended reading material for each age group** (30-40 works),
 - constant inclusion of **contemporary, high-quality** books,
 - material **that is diverse in type and genre, original and translated works by various authors, fiction and educational material...**
- Readers can **choose books from a list** (the national lists are prepared on the basis of expertise from Pionirska – the Centre for Youth Literature and Librarianship at the Ljubljana City Library), or they **choose books freely**.

If they read freely, we recommend that they also choose from:

- books from home libraries;
- fiction and non-fiction in (children and youth) magazines
- storytelling.

We encourage the children of families where they don't understand or/and speak Slovene (immigrant, Romani,...) **to read texts and records in their native languages.**

Challenges

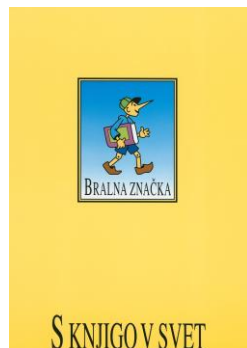
- How to **encourage** young readers to **read voluntarily** and to **find books** that **match their interests**?
- How to **keep young readers interested** in reading and reading-related activities?
- How **to stay in touch** with reading even when our programmes **end**?

AND

- How to keep **teachers/mentors interested** and **motivated**?



Motivational material



- Gradually, the metal pin badge lost its attraction as the main linking thread for newer generation, therefore an alternative forms of motivational materials have been introduced.
- Promotion of Slovene illustrators.



The Golden Reader Project

- From the early days of the Reading Badge movement, the prize for the most loyal readers was a book.
- We still follow this tradition today. One of the many projects we run in our Society is **The Golden Reader Project**.
Since the 2003/2004 school year, each student has been given a picture book at the beginning of primary school, and thousands of faithful readers were presented with a book at the end of their primary schooling.
- The books are considered **a gift and a motivational tool**. They promote family reading, help develop reading habits and reading culture, and help raise young readers who will love and enjoy reading all their life.
- The **collection of books *The Golden Reader*** is one of the most important projects of our Society. We have been building it for 22 years with the support of sponsors and other collaborators.
- Almost **800,000** books have been given as gifts.





Family reading

- **Developing family reading** and the programmes for the youngest readers is an important task of the Reading Badge ...
- In the last twenty-five years, the Reading Badge has also spread to Slovene **kindergartens** and **general libraries** as the **pre-school reading badge**, which encourages especially parents to read to their pre-school age children.
- Family reading is a very important form of support at least until the end of the first three years of primary schooling.
- Family reading programmes, which bring together family members of different ages, also include a project of **intergenerational reading**, which has been running for over a decade.

Appearances by creators

- **Creators of books** and systemically **ensuring the availability of high-quality contemporary literary material**.
- **Meeting with creators** – encouragement for reading since the beginnings of the Reading Badge.
- Normally, meeting the creators of a book is for the readers and their mentors the **highlight of their entire active reading**, exploration, recreation, and can also be seen as encouragement, motivation, an introduction to the reading period.
- **Promotion and recognition of Slovene authors and contemporary Slovene (youth) literature as well as illustration**.
- Coordination and cofinancing of appearances.



Intergenerational reading

- Books from the *Golden Reader* project, cooperation with the Slovenian Book Agency, the *Growing up with a book* collection, and Slovene publishers.
- Participation by young and adult/older readers.
- Project leader: Tilka Jamnik



Education

Traditional forms:

- The main *Reading Badge* **symposium** – on the 1st day of the Slovene Book Fair (November).
- **Regional seminars** – organised based on the needs of local organisers / environments (e.g. cooperation with societies/associations, individuals...).
- **Workshop seminars** – practice, work with materials (e.g. *The importance of including parents in the reading development of children and parents*).
- **Reading Tea parties**: a series of eight reading parties per year which take place monthly over ZOOM (and are free and accessible to anyone wanting to join).



Some suggestions of how to adapt the Reading Badge in other cultural environments

- The Reading Badge movement is well-established in Slovenia.
- If we wanted to transfer it to other countries/cultural environments, we would need to **consider their specific contexts and traditions**.

- **1. Language and Literature**

In each country, it would make sense to **include works by national/local authors** in order to promote national/local literature. At the same time, **translations** of world literature for children and young people **could be added**, so that readers gain insight into global literary heritage.

- **2. Cultural Specifics**

When selecting books and shaping the programme, it is important to **respect the values and traditions of each country/cultural environment**. The program could highlight themes that are particularly relevant to the country, such as history, children's rights, or diversity.

- **3. Implementation**

The **name** „*Reading Badge*“ should be **selected** in such a way that it is **attractive and interesting** to young readers whom we want to include in the program. The same applies to symbols, motivational materials, and other forms of rewards. It would be also worthwhile to include appearances by creators. Appearances by creators work in any environment.

- **4. Cooperation with Schools and Libraries**

Since every country has its own school system, it would be necessary to **find the right place for implementation** - whether as part of regular lessons, an extracurricular activity, or a school/library etc. project. **Close cooperation** between schools, libraries, and parents would be essential regardless of how the programme is organised.

- **5. International Dimension**

To add further value, the program could include an **international module**, where children read translated works from other countries, including Slovenian authors. In this way, participants would broaden their cultural horizons and strengthen their sense of global connectedness.



Conclusion

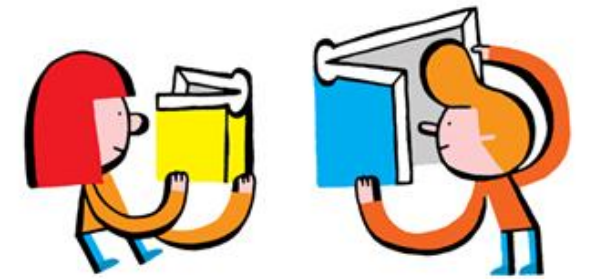
The Reading Badge **encourages** children and young people **to read regularly** and develops their reading and critical thinking skills.

At the same time, it fosters pride in national/local culture by **including works by domestic authors**, while broadening horizons through **international literature**.

The program promotes **creativity, connects** schools, libraries, and families, and **motivates** participants with rewards, fostering lasting reading habits and including all children, regardless of their abilities or cultural background.

We believe that this approach to promoting reading, as a good practice, could also **be successfully implemented** in other cultural contexts.

Give it a try 😊





Sources:

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- The Slovenian Reading Badge Society: Vse kar bi radi vedeli o Bralni znački v osnovni šoli: <https://www.bralnaznacka.si/assets/Uploads/VSE-KAR-BI-RADI-VEDELI-O-BRALNI-ZNACKI-V-OS-21.pdf>
- The Slovenian Reading Badge Society: presentation: <https://www.bralnaznacka.si/sl/o-nas/predstavitev/>.
- Publication Slovenia Loves Reading: <https://app.groove.cm/groovemember/download/nsokg66993dbe8d80d31c48d02c42b0a14304>.
- Photographs from the Slovenian Reading Badge Society archives.



We love reading!

info@bralnaznacka.si

www.bralnaznacka.si

www.bralnaznacka.si/en

