



CONFERENCE ON LITERACY  
KONFERENCA O PISMENOSTI  
LJUBLJANA 2026

# 65 Years of the Reading Badge: Shaping a Culture of Lifelong Reading



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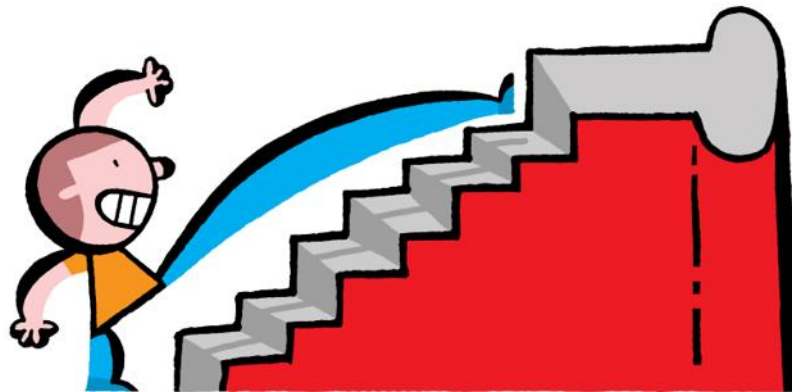


# ***Slovenija***

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- 20,270 km<sup>2</sup>
- 2,108,977 people
- Slovenian language + 2 official languages (where the minorities live)
- 1991 independence
- 1992 recognition

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



# 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**.



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.



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.

# 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 **pilot programmes and projects** for different age groups (e.g. a programme of *Intergenerational Reading, Reading Tea Parties*).



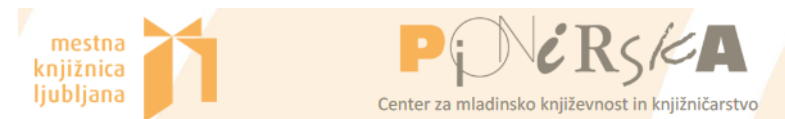
# The Reading Badge today

- **The Reading Badge has developed into a successful, sustainable model of encouraging leisure reading, which can be used in different age groups, in different cultural environments and school systems, in all languages... as 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, to the reader within their specific time, social, and cultural framework.**

# The Reading Badge today

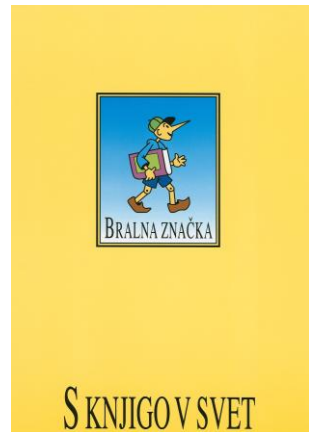
- We estimate that annually around **140,000** readers participate (mostly preschool & primary school level, but also some secondary school pupils and adults), which is a very high number for Slovenia with a population of 2 million.
- Reading Badge participation is highest in primary schools where around 60 % of pupils take part.
- Only at primary school level, over **7,000 mentors** are involved (teachers, educators, librarians).
- *The Reading Badge* is also presented among children of Slovene minorities living beyond national borders, among children of Slovene emigrants in Europe, the countries of the former Yugoslav Republic, and in other parts of the World.

*The Reading Badge* is a movement, that takes place at schools, kindergartens or libraries, mentors are mostly teachers and librarians; but it also **collaborates** with experts in the field of youth literature, libraries, the **Pionirska - Centre for Youth Literature and Librarianship** (Ljubljana City Library), the magazine **Child and Book** (Maribor Public Library), with the **Slovenian Section of IBBY**, the **Reading Association of Slovenia**, the **Slovenian Writers' Association**, the **Association of Slovenian publishers**, with **publishers** and **libraries**, mass media, cultural and educational institutions and also with the **Ministry of Culture**, the **Ministry of Education** and the **Slovenian Book Agency**...



# Motivational material

- Gradually, the metal pin badge lost its attraction as the main linking thread for newer generation, therefore 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 23 years with the support of sponsors and other collaborators.
- Almost 800,000 books have been given as gifts.



# 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.

# Selections, lists, recommendations

- **Different and individualised selection of reading material:**
  - a relatively **extensive** list of recommended reading material for each age group (20-30 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**, and they can read them **in any way they wish**.
  - the national lists are prepared on the basis of expertise from Pionirska – the Centre for Youth Literature and Librarianship at the Ljubljana City Library.
- Comprehensive recommendation lists, lists according to target groups, and collections, thematic lists, awards for youth literature, currently popular artists...



# 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** are also important.
- **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.



# Education

Traditional forms:

- The main *Reading Badge* **symposium** – on the 1<sup>st</sup> 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*).
- **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).



# 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





# The Reading Badge Movement Today

**Some Reading Badge programmes go beyond Slovenian borders and reach Slovenian communities globally:**

- **in Slovenian minorities in neighbouring Italy, Austria, Hungary, Croatia and**
- **among Slovenian emigrants in the world.**

**We are proud that the Reading Badge also “works” in Italian and Hungarian minorities in Slovenia.**





# Recommendation Room

- Presentation of the latest good-quality youth books (including educational ones).
- Over **600 articles on books**, published in recent years.
- The selection helps teachers and librarians in their work with pupils, and families in choosing books for their children, grandchildren...
- Reading incentives, useful for possible further work with books and motivating young readers.
- **READER OPINIONS**
- Readers can rate books that are presented, and also note their opinions.
- **Mentors, young readers and parents can all rate and comment on the books.** (Comments are not made public.)
- Before rating a book, users have to sign in. Each book can only be rated once.

# National Month of Reading Together

- The Slovenian Reading Badge Society is one of the initiators of the **National Month of Reading Together**, which intends to promote reading and literacy in all age groups.
- The National Month of Reading Together is traditionally associated with a public media and poster national campaign **Reading Together**, led by the Slovenian Reading Badge Society and its partners.



# The Reading Badge has received several awards

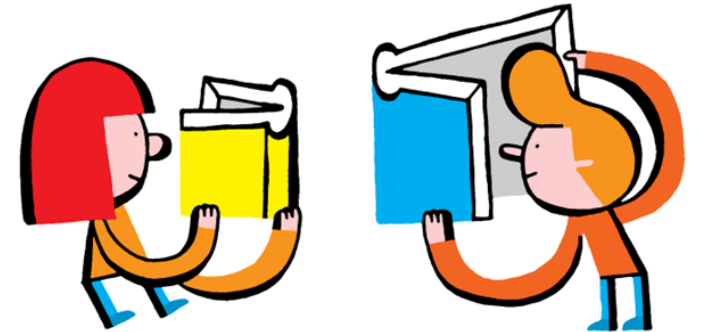
2011 – **Gold Order of the Republic of Slovenia** – on the occasion of its 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary.

- Since 21 March 2019 the *Reading Badge Movement* is registered in the **national register of intangible cultural heritage**.
- 2020 – **Slovenian Section of IBBY Award** for exceptional achievements in the field of promoting youth literature and reading
- 2022 – **International Award for Innovative Practices in the Field of Promoting Reading Culture** – bestowed every two years by FELA (the Federation of European Literacy Associations).
- Is a member of the Slovenian Association of Friends of Youth
- A member of the Slovenian Section of IBBY
- A member of the Federation of European Literacy Associations FELA.



# Conclusion

- The main goal of the Reading Badge movement is to inspire students to read good literature and teach them to live with books even after finishing school.
- The movement tries again and again to find new ways to motivate children and young people to read, and to help them find beauty and values in the rich world of literature.
- At the same time, we are building on tradition, because it turned out that the beginning of the movement, as Kotnik and Suhodolčan had set it, was the right direction, as everything they recorded in their initial goals is still in use.





- We believe that the high number of participants each year is in itself an attestation to the programme's success, since participation is voluntary.
- The vibrant cooperation between readers, mentors and authors related to reading, literature, and books, reminds us how special and valuable our movement is.
- And the future? We will continue to build on tradition and constantly adapt to new challenges in the field of reading and the demands of social changes.



**A big thank you to all those cooperating with the Reading Badge for their notes, thoughts and materials that helped in preparing today's presentation!**

### Sources:

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Publication Slovenia Loves Reading: <https://app.groove.cm/groovemember/download/nsokg66993dbe8d80d31c48d02c42b0a14304>.

Photographs from the Slovenian Reading Badge Society archives.

Illustrations: Ivan Mitrevski

# ***We love reading!***

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