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Intergenerational stories are also "wings that help you soar every day"

The Reading Badge is a Slovenian reading movement that celebrated its 60th anniversary in the 2020/21 school year. It is widespread across Slovenia, with some programmes even extending beyond the country's borders to reach Slovenian communities abroad. Thanks to its high level of professionalism and quality, the Reading Badge movement is a candidate for the IBBY Asahi Promotion Award this year.

Intergenerational reading is a successful project of the movement, involving young people (primary and secondary school students) and adult readers (parents, teachers, librarians, readers from senior clubs etc.); they read the same children's and young adult books and discuss them together. The intergenerational exchange of opinions on the same book creates "a new story", approached from different angles and in many details. Moreover, in discussing books in a pleasant reading atmosphere, young and elderly readers get to know one another and their interpersonal relationships deepen, which can be a special 'story' of its own. Unique bridges are built between readers of different ages and books, as well as between readers themselves.

This paper will present various forms of intergenerational reading meetings, including those during the time of the pandemic. It will review a small selection of books (contributed by the Slovene Reading Badge Society, the Slovenian Book Agency and some Slovenian publishing houses to the project) that advance knowledge of various life problems and elicit compassion, understanding, and similar emotional responses. Intergenerational stories "are wings that help you soar every day", as this year's ICBD slogan states.

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INTERGENERATIONAL STORIES ARE ALSO “WINGS THAT HELP YOU SOAR EVERY DAY”

38th IBBY World Congress, Putrajaya, Malaysia, 5-8 September 2022:
The Power of Stories

The Reading Badge Society

The Slovenian Reading Badge Society is the NGO heading the Reading Badge movement in terms of professional guidance and organization. It celebrated 60 years of activity in the 2020/21 school year.

The mission of the Reading Badge, supported by schools, libraries and similar organizations, is to promote lifelong development of reading culture and reading literacy. The movement's initiatives today bring together about 140,000 readers each year. Reading is supported by numerous mentors – librarians, teachers and other experts, as well as authors and publishers; children are also encouraged to read by their families.

The Society implements various programmes that encourage children and young people – as well as adults – to read in their free time. It is widespread across Slovenia, with some programmes even extending beyond the country's borders to reach Slovenian communities abroad. Due to its significant role in national culture the Reading Badge is listed by the national Register of Intangible Cultural Heritage.

Thanks to its high level of professionalism and quality, the Reading Badge movement received the award of the Slovenian section of IBBY in 2021, the Award for Innovative Literacy Promotion in Europe 2022 from FELA (Federation of European Literacy Associations) and is a candidate for the IBBY Asahi Promotion Award this year.

Intergenerational Reading of Young Adult Books

The project Intergenerational Reading of Young Adult Books (IG Reading) was developed by the Slovenian Reading Badge Society in collaboration with the Slovenian Book Agency during the 2014/2015 school year.



Through this project we aim to connect groups of young readers from primary schools and secondary schools with adult readers at the same school, in a nearby public library, in their hometown, etc.

As part of the project, various groups began to form, e. g. students from different years, two generations of teachers, students and parents of the same grade with the class teacher, etc. We leave the composition of the groups to the mentors; the number of readers is not specified or important, nor is the number of meetings during the school year.

The main goals of the project are: to promote more reading and more readers, foster intergenerational relationships and mutual understanding, encourage intergenerational reading of literature, and enhance the quality of Slovenian young adult literature.

The books are contributed by the Slovenian Reading Badge Society (from the Gold Reader Collection¹) and the Slovenian Book Agency (from the project Growing Up With a Book²). Some books are donated to us by Slovenian publishing houses.

The essence of the project consists of meetings and exchanges of opinions and views on the selected book. During the COVID-19 pandemic the groups connected online and continued to interact: they met online, participants wrote letters to one another, one of the groups organized an interactive art exhibition, they met outdoors, and so on. In these two years, younger readers were also included in the project, the project was expanded through family reading, etc. Classes of students of different ages at the same or different schools, in different places, etc. also began to link up. Unfortunately, some older readers dropped out, due mainly to poorer digital literacy.

Each group is led by a coordinator who encourages participants to read and organizes group meetings. They work according to their own ideas, based on the preferences and interests of the group. The coordinator sends a short report to the national project manager after each meeting. Based on these reports, we produce a final report at the end of each school year, which includes the following: the number of young and adult readers; the number of books read, the forms of reading meetings, opinions on the books read, both by young people and adults, opinions of coordinators on the course of the project, etc.

The final reports convey the wealth of experiences of the participants in the project, their opinions on numerous books and also on the forms of reading meetings. They are available on the home page of the Slovenian Reading Badge Society:

<https://www.bralnaznacka.si/sl/medgeneracijsko-branje/>

The 2021/2022 school year was the eighth season for the project: around 40 groups or about 2,100 readers were included, half of them young people and half adults. Although these numbers are modest (Slovenia is a small country with 2 million inhabitants, and 140,000 young readers read for the Reading Badge), we have

¹ "Gold Reader" is a project of the Slovenian Reading Badge Society in which readers from all over Slovenia as well as Slovenian communities abroad that have earned a reading badge in every year of primary school are gifted with books.

² "Growing Up with a Book" is a national project of the Slovenian Book Agency for the promotion of reading culture. Its purpose is to motivate students of the last three years of primary school and secondary school students to read young adult literature by Slovenian authors and to encourage them to visit public libraries.

gathered important experiences in the course of the project that can be usefully applied to other forms of reading promotion.

Experiences of readers of different ages in the IG Reading project

Reading of the same book by readers of different ages has been shown to contribute to a deeper understanding of the literary work, with light shed on it by two generations: readers tend to perceive the work based on their age and life experience, as well as their different reading experience and interests. Through sharing feelings and understandings of literary works, it is as if a new work is being created. (Experiencing and understanding arises from the interaction between the text and the reader's response; the more readers there are, the more complex the response).

Through conversation about books, readers also get to know and become closer to one another: adults and the elderly can more easily understand young readers and young people the elderly; interpersonal relationships are deepened. Because reading meetings are relaxed and informal, students and teachers – in the absence of the expectation that certain skills will be assessed (as in school lessons) - get to know each other as readers and as people, without awkwardness and with respect and admiration. Children and parents often talk more honestly about problem novels and the difficulties their characters encounter than directly about problems at home.

Likewise, through educational books, younger and older readers share different views on the same fields of knowledge, develop their understanding and expand it through other sources of information. They think about the problems presented and, above all, about possible solutions to them. Through books that present the natural and cultural heritage of the country, both age groups learn about our foundations, think about their inclusion in the present and plans for the future. Above all, not only younger but also older readers learn, become aware of their roots and culture, develop a respectful attitude through increased knowledge, which is reflected in their attitude towards tradition and the environment and also in interpersonal relationships. Sometimes such IG reading meetings are connected with post-reading activities, perhaps carried out in a natural or cultural heritage site, such that reading is connected with an excursion, a visit to a museum, outdoor activity, exploration, etc. Even more often, this kind of reading encourages various activities later at home with family members (thus expanding family and intergenerational reading outside of IG meetings).

In encouraging IG reading, we also ensure that readers encounter a variety of reading materials (books are combined with digital material, AV materials, etc.) and different literary genres and types, sample prose and poetry, picture books, comics, encounter the same literary texts in different forms, etc. Here, too, younger and older readers exchange opinions and assist one another in receiving and experiencing the texts. During the pandemic, many older readers were enthusiastic about the possibility of online conversations (via Zoom, etc.), and many younger readers enjoyed writing longhand.

Throughout all of this, readers of different ages also enjoy socializing at these reading meetings: tea and biscuits are often served, coordinators enliven the meetings in different ways, make use of games, etc. Sometimes they are enlivened with music, short videos, special surprises prepared by one of the younger or older

participants, etc. Both young and adult readers enjoy the reading meetings and look forward to them. The pleasant experiences at meetings affect their relationships with their classmates, in the family and even in the wider community (when young and adult readers of IG groups meet on the street, in a shop, etc. they meet, greet and even chat).

A very important role in promoting reading and MG reading meetings is played by the group coordinator, who is receptive to the wishes and interests of both young and adult readers and provides advice on book selection, prepares the format of the meeting, uses different reading strategies, suggests post-reading activities, etc. Most of all they lead the group in such a way that readers are relaxed and enthusiastic.

This year's message on 2 April, International Children's Book Day, entitled *Stories are wings that help you soar every day*³, among other things says that *reading lets you see our world in a new way*. This view is demonstrably much more diversified when it comes to intergenerational reading, and the intergenerational exchange of opinions about what has been read in some way creates very special *stories that help you soar*. For this reason we also promote IG reading as part of the National Month of Reading Together (in 2022 it will be held from 8 September to 9 October) and in the Reading Together campaign (this year Let's Read Together – to learn and to have fun!)

³ This year's message was prepared by the Canadian section of IBBY. It was written by Richard Van Kamp and translated into Slovene by Katja Zakrajšek, and is available on the home page of the Slovenian section of IBBY: <https://ibby.si/mz-2-april>