INTERNATIONAL YOUTH LIBRARY

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[The genesis, finance, habitation and the sections of the International Youth Library in Munich are described. Its service to children, industries, publishers and authors also are described. Its value as a pilot project and the International Board on Children’s Books are also referred to. The author is American Library Consultant.]

1 Genesis

The International Youth Library was established in Munich to develop international understanding through children’s and youth books. It developed from an exhibit organized in 1946 by Mr. Jella Lepman, who realized that the children of war-scarred Germany needed food for their minds as well as food for their bodies. With gifts from generous publishers, libraries, Brownie troops, and individual donors, it opened September 14, 1949, and in the five years of its existence it has grown to a representative collection of 25,000 volumes from 39 countries. It is international because in Mrs. Lepman’s words:

“Every child has a feeling for his fellows in other lands; it is not necessary to build a common world for children for it exists already”. She quotes Goethe: “There comes a point where hate between nations completely disappears and where one stands as if it were above and outside nationality, where the sorrows and joys of one’s neighbours are felt as though they were one’s own.”

11 Finance

A grant from the Rockefeller Foundation has been supplemented by funds from the Federal Republic at Bonn, the Bavarian State Government, the city of Munich and other German sources. In 1953 the Library was affiliated with UNESCO.

12 Habitation

Under Mrs. Lepman’s direction a heap of rubble, all that remained of a once beautiful house in a garden, was transformed into a library and a center for activities connected with books-exhibits, book clubs, French, English and Italian classes, writing and producing
children’s plays and marionette shows, looking at motion pictures, painting pictures, and listening to music.

121 LITTLE CHILDREN

On the ground floor are reading rooms always gay with bright curtains and fresh flowers. In one room are picture books for little children from many countries. A fascinating collection of alphabet books is displayed in one corner. Here the French *ABC de Babar* stands near *All around the town* and the *City and country ABC*, the Italian *ABC degli animali* and the Portuguese *Alphabeto para os pequeninos*, with other titles from many other countries.

No matter what the child’s native country is, he discovers from the pictures that “e” stands for elephant, and “z” for zebra for children in many parts of the world. An older reader observes with interest the way in which the distinctive characteristics of each country are revealed by the format of books, in type, color and style of illustrations.

122 OLDER CHILDREN

In other rooms on the ground floor are collections for readers of 7 to 12 or 13 years; for boys and girls still older in the catalog room. An unusual section shows many editions of Grimm, Andersen, *Pinocchio, Heidi, Robinson Crusoe, Treasure Island* and *Tom Sawyer* in different languages.

2 Exhibition Room

On the floor above are offices, the collection of library periodicals and the exhibit room. Here are displayed annually the book of the year. In November and December 1953, 2,500 books for children and young people from 26 countries were shown. From these, 605 were selected for a travelling exhibit which was sent to Vienna, Zürich, Istanbul and Bonn. Wherever the books are shown authors, illustrators, publishers, booksellers and librarians examine them and get ideas for new publications. Other exhibits, such as photographs of children in the Far East, school newspapers, or children’s paintings from Israel are set up from time to time.

Art Room

Above on the top floor of the house is a large room for many different activities. Three days each week easels are put in place
and groups of children ranging in age from 5 to 15 paint under the
direction of a skilful art teacher. In addition to their individual
paintings the children collaborate on murals, large paintings
that cover the wall of a room. These may picture a village scene
in Bavaria, a city street, a fair or a holiday festival. In planning
and painting such a picture, the children learn to work together. This
is excellent preparation for life in a democracy. On Saturdays the
easels and paint boxes disappear; chairs are set up, and motion pic-
tures are shown. At other times plays written by the children are
presented, or marionette-shows for which they have made puppets.

4 Reference Service

Children flock into the library singly or in groups. Often
between 200 and 300 children come in a single afternoon to read,
to review books or take part in the language classes, and to take
books to read at home. The librarians give individual guidance to
children if they wish it, but many boys and girls who have been coming
to the library for several years know how to use the catalog and can
find books for themselves.

41 Children

Typical of the books discussed in groups is this schedule for
the month of October 1954:

Group I (10-12 years) Rote Vogel Uber gelbem fluss, von
Radko Doone, by Radko Doone
(from the America)

Group II (11-13 years) Hand in hand, by Betty MacDonald
(English)

Group III (12-14 years) Maritza, ein Mädchen Jahrbuch

Group IV (12-14 years) Reiter unterm Nordlicht by Bernhard
Stokke (from the Norwegian)

Group V (12-14 years) Rätsel der Urwaldhölle, by Schulz-
Kampfhenkel

Group VI (13-15 years) Männer schiffe, ozeane, by Adolf
Ahrens

In the English classes the children read such books as “Dick
and Patty” by K.Weigert; “Das kleine Bilderlexikon” by Susanne
Ehmcke, with words in French, English and German; “The whole

240
world singing” by Edith Lovell Thomas.

The look at the American *Let's look under the city* and other picture books and talk about city life. The leader reads or tells part of a story and the children read the rest of it for themselves. Older boys and girls discuss more difficult books.

### 42 Service to Publishers

A very important aspect of the work of the library is its service to publishers. Not only at the time of the annual exhibit but throughout the year publishers come to the library to see the books of various countries or they write for suggestions of titles for translation. As a result of recommendations from the library, one German publisher has published translations of ten outstanding books from other countries, thus bringing to German children the opportunity of widening their horizons. Writers of magazine articles, or doctoral dissertations find the books, bibliographies and source material they need in the library.

### 5 Extension Service

#### 51 Kinder-UNO

The Kinder-UNO is a stimulating group. For this miniature United Nations, boys and girls choose the country they wish to represent; they may be delegates from any country they prefer and each delegation selects its own speakers. Much serious work in the library gives the delegates the necessary background for speaking on current questions at the General Assembly, where they sit in a semi-circle on benches with painted signs indicating their countries. They range in age from 12 to 16, although younger children are sometimes mature enough to take part. Recently their discussion was given successfully over the radio.

#### 52 Industrial Houses

Another important project is the library’s work with the large German industrial firms. These firms have libraries for their apprentice and other employees. For a meeting of the German librarians in such plants, the Library prepared an exhibit of a model youth library with a bibliography of selected inter-national books. The IYL is constantly giving advice and assistance in establishing
such libraries so that factory workers can take home suitable books for their children.

53 Model Centre

German library schools give thorough preparation for library work with adults and now are realizing the need for training children's librarians. They send students to the IYL for practice periods of three months. Librarians from other countries come to Munich to work in the IYL as member of the staff. They bring experience and knowledge of the books of their own lands and they gain a wider understanding, through examination of the IYL collection and from working with the cosmopolitan clientele of the library.

6 Organisation of Books

61 Classification

Simple, practical methods of cataloging and classification were devised for the library. A band of color at the base of the spine of each book indicates its standard and the room where it is shelved. Red indicates a book for little children in the picture book room; green marks books for children aged 7 to 12; blue for older boys and girls; and yellow, the adult books. The international auto symbols (GB for Great Britain, D for Germany, DK for Denmark, SG for Switzerland, etc.,) indicate the country of publication. Short numbers from the decimal classification show the subject of the book, and the first three letters of the author's name ensure regular alphabetical sequence of the books on the shelves. For example all copies of Andersen's Fairy tales have a green band at the bottom of the spine of the Book.

The Danish *Udalgte Eventyr* is marked

- DK
- 398
- And

The American edition is marked

- USA
- 398
- And

The Belgian *Keur van Spookjes* is

- B
- 398
- And

The Portuguese *Historia dum Soldadinho de Chumbo* is

- P
- 398
- and
All books are cataloged with the main entry under author. These cards are arranged first under country of publication, then alphabetically by the name of the author. Another catalog includes title cards for all books in the library arranged by title in one alphabet, without country or language subdivisions. A third systematic catalog brings cards for books in all languages together by subject; e.g., for books about birds, rocks, trees, fairy tales, airplanes, trains, or ships. These cards are arranged according to the Decimal classification numbers.

7 Self-Portrait

One of the most dramatic inspirations conceived by Mrs. Lepman was the exhibit of children’s self-portraits. Children from all over the world, literally from China to Peru, painted pictures of themselves. These, each with a photograph of the young artist, his age, home address, and other details based on a questionnaire made with the advice of the University, were sent to Munich and judged by a jury of distinguished psychologists, educators and artists. From the 4,000 portraits submitted, 300 from 30 countries were selected for the exhibit. In a charming little book *Ich Selbst, Myself, Moi Même* the exhibit is described and its basic psychological principles explained, with forewords by Jella Lepman, Emil Preetorius and Erich Kastner. On the cover is the self-portrait of Daniel Otake, a nine-year-old Peruvian boy and included are colored reproductions of the portraits of other children from New Zealand, China, Finland, Australia, Japan, Italy, India, Sweden, Mexico, Austria, Canada, England, Germany, France and the United States. The exhibit has been shown in Paris, in various cities in the United States and India, always drawing attention from psychologists and teachers of art.

8 International Board

An extension of the work of the IYL is the International Board on Books for Young People (Internationale Kuratorium für das Jugendbuch). At a meeting held in Zürich in 1952 problems connected with the publication of books for children and young people were discussed by representatives from the western European countries,
and experts from the International Bureau of Education in Geneva and from UNESCO. The main tasks of the Bureau are

1. To group and maintain on the international level all bodies interested in children's books.
2. To help in the publication and diffusion of good literature for youth.
3. To create institutes for scientific investigations of good literature for youth.
4. To bring to bear all available influence in all cultural fields where a stimulating—or retarding—action can be exercised on children's books, especially children's periodicals, radios, cinema and television.
5. To collaborate closely with the IYL and to found new International Youth Libraries as centers of action for the International Board.

Since the idea of international collaboration is nowhere more firmly rooted than in Switzerland, Zürich was chosen as the permanent center for the Board.

9 Pilot Institution

Words give only a partial view of the dynamic activities carried on by the International Youth Library. Its influence is shown in the appreciative response of the boys and girls who explore the world of books and of ideas within its walls. Still wider is the library's influence on book production through its relations with publishers in many countries. As the first International Youth Library in the world, it serves as a pilot institution, offering an inspiration to other countries.