

17th IBBY Congress, Prague 1980

"The International Board on Books for Young People", (IBBY), was founded in 1951, thanks to the efforts made by Jella Lepman, a British social worker who worked in Germany in the aftermath of World War II and there developed the idea that children's books could serve as a foundation for international understanding. With this purpose in mind she founded the International Youth Library (an associated project of UNESCO) in Munich in 1949. In 1951 she organized a meeting which she called "International Understanding through Children's Books" and, two years later, the first General Assembly of the "International Board on Books for Young People" was held in Zurich.

As stated by Jella Lepman, the Board aims primarily to promote world understanding by using children's books to encourage international friendship and to do away with racial prejudice and misunderstanding. It encourages the establishment of national and international libraries, the continuing education of those involved with children and children's literature and the publication of imaginative and challenging books for young people.

The Board consists of 45 national sections from over 40 states of the world, representing both East and West. An Executive Committee is elected from the National Sections during IBBY's biennial congress (taking place every two years). This Executive Committee serves as a coordinator, collects information, prepares the congresses and acts as an advisor to publishers and institutions in the field of children's literature.

Main Activities of IBBY

1. International Children's Book Day is observed each year throughout the world on April 2, Hans Christian Andersen's birth date.

2. The Hans Andersen Medal is awarded by IBBY every two years to a living author, and to an illustrator as well, whose complete works have made an important contribution to children's literature.

3. A Hans Christian Andersen Honor List of one excellent children's book from each represented country is presented. The medals, the honor list, together with lectures and discussions focussing on a particular aspect of children's literature, are also presented at the biennial congress of IBBY.

The Prague Congress, 1980.

The 17th IBBY Congress was held in Prague, Czechoslovakia, between 28-9-1980 and 4-10-1980, on the occasion of the granting of the Hans Christian Andersen Gold Medal to the Czechoslovakian writer for children, Bohumil Riha. A gold medal was also awarded at the Congress to the Japanese illustrator, Suekichi Akaba.

Lecturers from the U.S.S.R., Czechoslovakia, U.S.A. and German Federal Republic presented papers on the principal topic treated by the Congress, namely, "Contemporary Trends in Children's Literature". Lectures were followed by discussions from the 280 participants who represented 41 countries from all parts of the world and included delegates of IBBY sections.

The lectures and discussions revolved around the emphasis that should be given to the reading book for the child versus audio-visual aids like films, television, video and other recorded material. The book has the advantage of stirring the child's mental faculties. It is his principal means of learning his mother tongue and forming his literary taste.

While in the first half of this century, educators recommended factual literature and science stories for children instead of fairy-tales, the new trend has recently taken an opposite course. Myths, fairy-tales, poems for children, are recovering their former importance, and are being presented in new forms which adapt them to modern needs. The overwhelming domination of technology is at the root of this change. Myths give readers a refreshing escape from sombre reality. Yet their function is not limited to entertainment. They are used to present facts in an entertaining and original way.

Other topics of interest in contemporary children's literature are: children of the Third World, their conditions, their needs and the necessity of knowing and understanding them; disabled children, their need of our friendship and help; our environment and the necessity of preserving its resources and beauties, and protecting its scenery, its fauna and flora, its monuments and art treasures, from injury and pollution.

Original illustration of children's books is receiving special attention. Illustration should not be only a means of ornamentation or explanation of the text, but they should add something to it, and present creatively expressed ideas which arouse the child's interest and imagination.

The Congress leaders and lecturers also recommended an increased search for the folklore of Third World countries with the aim of adapting them to modern needs, besides using them as a stepping stone to a better understanding of the natives' mentality and character.

Mr. Knud-Eigill Hauberg-Tychsen, (Denmark), president of IBBY, paid tribute in his opening speech to the efforts displayed by Czechoslovakian authors and illustrators in the field of promoting children's literature in their country and elsewhere. Children's libraries are encouraged; moppet shows, circuses and theatrical performances are receiving a new impetus. Prizes are granted by various organizations to prominent writers and illustrators. The success of the 17th IBBY Congress was due to the successful cooperation and coordination between the Executive Committee and the Czech national section of IBBY.

One of the items presented at the Congress was the creation of three new national sections of IBBY in Lebanon, Mexico and Turkey, during the year 1979.

The Lebanese section was represented for the first time, at this biennial congress, by three of its members, Rose Ghurayyib, Julinda Abu Nasr and Lina Matta. The experience gained from attending the meetings, the reports and other printed material brought by the delegates, will hopefully serve as a guide and incentive to the members of the newly formed section.