

R	P	-	Reading Primers International Newsletter	No	8
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			Published by the Reading Primers Special Interest Group (RP-SIG) of the International Society for Historical and Systematic Research on Schoolbooks		

## □ Editorial

Dear readers,

the future of research in any area is closely linked with the sustained interest of younger generations. This also applies to research in educational media, including historical and comparative research in such old-fashioned objects like printed primers and basal readers. In times of e-books, e-innovation and e-careers: is there any hope that young scholars get fascinated and devote their valuable time to studies in paper-based educational media of the past?

From what we learn through the network of the Reading Primers Special Interest Group we have good reasons to be confident. First, the network is by far not limited to an older generation which still grew up with the printed book as an abiding companion through ups and downs of life. Rather it unites, as Wilhelm von Humboldt wrote in 1810 with reference to his idea of the university, those "who are trained yet already less animated" with those who "yet more neutral audaciously gravitate towards all directions". Second, we are pleased to note that young scientists get more and more actively involved in RP-SIG's activities. Third, considering the doctoral degree as a measure to assure generational continuity and growth in our research area, some younger members of our network have either successfully defended their doctoral thesis recently or are preparing to defend next year.

We wish all our readers, both old and young, that they may vividly and audaciously gravitate towards their objectives in 2013!

Wroclaw/Essen, December 30, 2012

*Joanna Wojdon & Wendelin Sroka*

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## ▣ Collections and exhibitions

### ▣ Poland

#### The adventure with the reading primers

By Renata Zaborska, Warsaw

The author, a librarian teacher in the primary and lower secondary school run by Spoleczne Towarzystwo Oświatowe in Warsaw, has created a collection „Reading Primers of the World”. Zaborska describes how she created her collection and adds some general considerations. The text was originally published in Polish in „Biblioteka” 2010, no. 1, and is available at [http://elementarze.eu/art\\_press/biblioteka\\_nr1\\_2010.htm](http://elementarze.eu/art_press/biblioteka_nr1_2010.htm). The translation of the original text for RPI has been provided by Joanna Wojdon. The illustrations are taken from modern primers published in Poland for linguistic minorities.

Azbuka in Russian, bukvar in Belarusian, elementorius in Lithuanian, Fibel in German and elementarz in Polish: Every pupil in the world most likely remembers his or her first reading primer.

#### The collection's birth

I can still remember the moment when I took an envelope from my mailbox with the first foreign reading primer. Strange letters on the white envelope suggested that the letter came from Greece. The only thing I was able to read was my address. When I looked at colourful pages covered with Greek letters, I came to understand that it was an important moment for all the collection that was being born. It was a good sign, indeed. A postmaster was bringing more and more parcels from different countries. I went to Riga for the Latvian primer myself, the one from Lithuania was brought by a friend of my friend, the Montenegrin one came from a Polish teacher who lived in Croatia, the French one from a friend of mine who went to Paris, and Marzenka, a fan of Iceland despite the fact that she does not speak Icelandic, brought me the one from that country. And it continues to be so that whoever goes abroad often brings me a primer as a gift.

My relations with the reading primers started obviously with the one from which I learned myself. One day I wanted to show my first copybook and my first school textbook to my kids. Unfortunately, I did not have them at home for years. Just like other pupils of my time I had to give these books to the younger pupils. I tried to ask among my family members but to no avail.

With great effort I managed to find the copy published in the year when I went

to school, “The Green Fal-ski” as it is popularly known. And then, when I held it in my hands after so many years, I felt like I went back in time. I was so very happy. I saw myself in the first grade, in the navy-blue uniform with the white collar, sitting at a green school bench with a glass inkwell, in that classroom where I used to learn to read and write from this very primer by Marian Fal-ski.

And like then, I felt the anxiety in my heart, dry throat when I read my first syllables, stiffness of fingers when I scrawled in my copybook. I came to under-



The Lord's Prayer in the dialect of the Bergitka Roma. From Karol Parno Gierliński: *Miri Szkoła. Romano elementaris. Podręcznik pomocniczy dla dzieci z grupy Romów Górskich – Bergitka Roma [My school. Romani primer. Auxiliary manual for children of the group of the Bergitka Roma]*. Illustrations: Krystyna Józwiak, Karol Parno Gierliński, Ferdian Koci. *Kostrzyn nad Odrą: Urząd Miasta w Kostrzynie nad Odrą 2008, p. 20.*

stand that this process happens in the first school grades all over the world. I assumed that the moment when a pupil learns how to read and write, i.e. to communicate with the civilization, is almost sacred. It is a big success for a child, his great discovery and a joyful moment. It is a very symbolic moment of education for every pupil, paying off in all his or her life. This has been happening in the world for ages, thanks to the reading primers! And then I knew it all... I chose these first schoolbooks – reading primers, magic books holding the secrets of words and letters of the mother tongue – for my collection. For so many people it is the most important book, a key to knowledge.

There was nothing to wait for, I acquired the addresses of different schools and I wrote lots of letters and e-mails to unknown recipients. Every method was good to reach the primer. Friends and family also helped. Oddly enough, my passion found understanding and support from strangers, both individuals and institutions that I had no affiliation with. Had it not been for the help of the donors, there would be no collection, and no exhibitions and meetings (so many!) where pupils could see the numerous reading primers from all over the world. As a result of this great help of many benefactors I was able to gather a collection of several hundred textbooks from almost a hundred countries. In the meantime, the collection has attracted many visitors. It was shown e.g. at the Polish Ministry of National Education, during the national and international book fairs in Warsaw, at the "Meetings with a Children's Book" in Poznan, and also at various galleries and libraries.

*What do I collect the primers for?*

The main idea of the collection "Reading Primers of the World" is to show the first educational steps of a pupil. When you hold a reading primer from a country in your hands, you can imagine for a moment a reading lesson in the hot Greece or Spain, cold Lapland or the remote Iceland. It can remind you how difficult it is to combine the syllables into words for the first time, or to write the letters, shapes and lines. Thanks to the reading primers one can see how different and how similar at the same time the children's world is in many countries. A plethora of pictures found there represents the world of a child and the elementary values. Although there are different alphabets in the primers, different languages and methods of learning, every child in the world overcomes the same barrier: from near ignorance to knowledge. And it all happens thanks to this special book and to the help of the patient and understanding teachers. A reading primer is special, because it is the first and elementary book of knowledge about the mother tongue. It binds generations. One has to first learn from this so simple and at the same time so difficult primer in order to read the wise sophisticated encyclopaedias in the future.



Witold Bòbrowsczi / Katarzëna Kwiatkòwskò: *KaszëbscZé AbecadŁo. Twój pierwszy elementòrz* [Kashubian ABC. Your first primer]. Illustrations: Jolanta Mąkosa / Joanna M. Kołyszko. Gdańsk: Wydawnictwo Jaskółka 2007, title page.

*My collection*

I collect textbooks that demonstrate this magnificent process of exploring the native language in different countries of the world. I particularly like the books that bear the evidence of having been used by a pupil, carried in a bag or backpack, even lined or a little soiled. Those directly from a bookshop unfortunately did not "experience" any lesson. In the marks left by students one can notice the burden and toil of acquiring the knowledge and learning. Of course, I cannot eyewitness this process but as I work with children at school, I can imagine lessons even in Japan, China, Morocco or Brazil. And even easier that I myself a couple of years ago was learning the kana symbols taught by master Atsusi in a Japanese school in Warsaw by writing them with a brush and black ink on white rice paper. One sign occupied the whole sheet, and how many were unsuccessful... Like in the first grade, my hands were shaking, I feared a mistake and teacher's opinion. I am really pleased with the copy- and exercise-books filled in by a child's hand writing the first circles, curves, untrained letters and first words in pencil, pen or brush. If there is a teacher's grade and his signature under the exercise I feel as if I did this pupil's homework.

I collect contemporary reading primers. I do not collect math, nature or other textbooks though I receive them, too. I am also interested in the primers for national or ethnic minorities in different countries and the primers for pupils with disabilities. Among the primers from Poland I have a Kashubian, Silesian, Lemko, Tatar, Romani, Belarusian, Ukrainian, Slovak, German and a Greek one as well as a primer for the blind, deaf and visually impaired. I also try to obtain reading primers for minorities published in other countries. There are primers published for Hungarians in Romania, for Romani in Paris, for Lapps in Finland in my collection. For those bilingual children it is more difficult to overcome language barriers at school. The reading primer is their friend and guide to the two worlds in one country.

*The future of reading primers*

It is more and more difficult to find one universal book for all the children in one country which would comprise a reader and a pattern of calligraphic writing. In Poland there is not such a book since the 1990s. In other countries the traditional textbook also gives way to the extended exercise books or multimedia toys. The age of a child who starts to learn how to read and

write also changes. It differs from country to country – from 4 to 7 years old, and it is not so rare that the reading instruction starts already in the kindergarten. The traditional reading primer becomes a relic. In Poland the primer by Marian Falski is remembered by many generations. In 2005 the reprints were published of its post-WWII editions that attracted most attention. The traditional primer is a magic book, present in the minds and hearts of the whole generation, the one book that can move to tears and bring back the school memories. It reveals the secrets not only of the native language but also of learning. And even though today information technology supported, digital, computerized, media alphabetization awaits us and is unavoidable, we will not move to another era of education without the real alphabet.



Front cover of a Silesian primer, Tarnowskye Góry: Wydowca Przy mierze Śląskie 2010.

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