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## **Actions for children's access to reading in France, Africa and the Arab world**

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Paris, France

**Meeting:** 85. Literacy and Reading in co-operation with the Public Libraries and Library Services to Multicultural Populations  
**Simultaneous Interpretation:** Not available

*WORLD LIBRARY AND INFORMATION CONGRESS: 74TH IFLA GENERAL CONFERENCE AND COUNCIL*  
10-14 August 2008, Québec, Canada  
<http://www.ifla.org/iv/ifla74/index.htm>

*This paper describes how the French National Centre for Children's Literature – La Joie par les livres works to support children's access to reading in France as well and in Africa and in the Arab world.*

## **The institution**

La Joie par les livres ("The Joy of reading" : the name is a programme in itself...) was founded in 1962 by a benefactor, Anne Gruner-Schlumberger, and Geneviève Patte who directed it until 2001. The intention was to offer children in a working class neighbourhood a place inspired by the Anglo-Saxon model of public reading : free access to books, readers encouraged to choose books freely, to critical thinking, to autonomy... In a wider sense, the intention was to contribute to the recognition and the development of children's libraries in France.

La Joie par les livres was taken over by the French state in 1972, first by the Ministry of Education, then by the Ministry of Culture. Since January 2008 La Joie par les livres has become part of the Bibliothèque nationale , proving the acknowledgement of the importance of children's literature in France, and the importance given to children's reading. To celebrate this occasion a big exhibition will be held to enhance the collections of children's books in the Bibliothèque nationale : « Harry Potter, Babar et Compagnie, livres d'enfants d'hier et d'aujourd'hui » ; the Library will host another exhibition during the European cultural season, « Tour d'Europe en 27 livres d'images ». 30 people work at La Joie par les livres, which is located in the centre of Paris.

## Missions

The goal of La JPL is to **encourage children's access to books and reading** :

- to promote children's literature of good quality
- to favour the development and propagation of children's libraries in France and throughout the world
- to offer professionals, especially book mediators, information and training on children's books and reading
- to ensure conservation and availability to consultation of the whole of French book production for children and of a choice of the production from all over the world

## 1. Actions in France

### Conservation and documentation : the resource centre



Its **collection of children's books** (250 000 documents) comprises the whole of **French production** since 1960, and books published in Francophone countries in **Sub-Saharan Africa, the Caribbean, the Indian Ocean and the Arab world**, as well as a selection of books from most countries, in a wide variety of languages. It includes a special collection of folktales as well as rare, ancient and precious books, and over 700 titles of journals.

The reference collection on children's books and reading includes 16 000 books, 112 titles of French and foreign journals and more than 6000 documentary files.

The reading room offers free access to more than 20 000 documents and to the whole collection on demand. The Centre is open to all adult readers, from the mere curious to the researcher : librarians, students, teachers... Registration is free of charge.

### The analysis of children's book production

To try to **select the best of book production**, in its richness and its variety of forms : this was the task of La Joie par les livres' reading committees since its creation. This practice of meeting in order to share analysis and reviews of new books is nowadays widespread in the very numerous children's sections of French public libraries (over 2900 municipal libraries and 96 "departmental" libraries<sup>1</sup>).

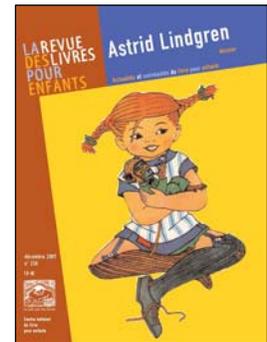
The whole of the book production is analysed and public sessions are held for librarians all through the year, to give critical information on selected new titles – these titles can be found in "pre-choice" lists, available on subscription.

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<sup>1</sup> One « departmental » library for each « department » or province, to which must be added 5 others overseas : Guadeloupe, Martinique, Guyane, Réunion and Mayotte

## Publications

– **La Revue des livres pour enfants** is a reference tool for French professionals. Reviews of new titles are now, as they have been for more than 40 years, an essential part of this review that is published 6 times a year. Most issues explore a theme, through essays, articles, interviews... Among the last themes, "India and children's books", "The writing of novels", "Astrid Lindgren"...



– **Guides**, like *Escales en littérature de jeunesse* proposing an « ideal library », a choice of more than 3000 available titles published in France – but also in Africa and in the Arab world.

- - **Monographs** like *L'Univers de Roald Dahl*, *Le Roman policier pour la jeunesse*, *Repartir la conservation des fonds jeunesse : enjeux et perspectives...*
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  - The series « Lire en V.O. » (« **Reading in the original version** ») : selections of children's books in other languages : English, Spanish, Arab...
  - **Reference tools**, accessible free of charge on the website : *Publishers for children*, *Organisms specialised in children's books in France*, *Journals on children's literature*, *Press for children...*
  - **Book selections** on a particular subject, accessible online free of charge : *Human rights in children's books*, *Israel in children's literature through 42 books published in France*, *65 ways of discovering science...*

## Training

A **training program**, renewed every year, offers **practical courses, seminars, lectures...** to librarians but also to other child and book professionals. The training sessions follow three overall themes : "exploring the heritage of children's literature", "analysing documents", "developing professional practices : from the book to the reader".

Among other sessions of 2008 program : « Creating and organising collections for children", "Multimedia programs in children's libraries", "How to talk about novels", "The history of picture books told by their authors", "Classic novels for young people"... La Joie par les livres also responds to specific training demands and gives training sessions on site.

Finally, La Joie par les livres participates in the Library School courses at the University of Paris X and at the Ecole nationale supérieure des sciences de l'information et des bibliothèques.

## Exhibitions

La Joie par les livres mounts exhibitions, some of them travelling exhibits that can be rented.

Two new exhibitions will take place at the Bibliothèque nationale de France in 2008 : Harry Potter, Babar et Compagnie, livres d'enfants d'hier et d'aujourd'hui » and « Tour d'Europe en 27 livres d'images »

The website, [www.lajoieparleslivres.com](http://www.lajoieparleslivres.com)

The Resource Centre catalogue is online, as well as the « Ideal Library » and numerous publications (digitalised periodicals, documentary tools, bibliographies...)

The website also offers news from the world of children's books : new publications, exhibitions, meetings, training sessions ...

Visitors can register to benefit from a personal work space, and subscribe to a choice of news.

## 2. International Actions

La Joie par les livres has always worked on an international level. The Ministry of Cooperation, then the Ministry of Foreign Affairs have supported this work.

**a.** On one hand, La Joie par les livres is the **French section of IBBY** (International Board on Books for Young People). It promotes French literature for children abroad and especially it **promotes literature from other countries in France**, through

- a collection of books for children published all over the world
- a seminar every March, dedicated to children's books and reading in a particular country (the host country at Paris Bookfair)
- the series of booklets « Lire en V.O. » (« Read in the original version ») recommending a choice of children's books in a given language

**b.** On the other hand, JPL has developed close working relationships developed with colleagues in countries where the French language is spoken : **Subsaharan Africa, the Arab world, the Caribbean and the islands in the South West Indian Ocean**. A special department was created in 1986 to **support the development of libraries and of book publishing** in these countries. This department also advises those in France or elsewhere who are partners of libraries in these countries

This support to public reading and publishing is done through :

**A special collection of books and journals for children published in Africa, the Caribbean, the Arab world and the Indian Ocean**, in French but also in the other languages of publishing : Wolof, Bambara, Arab, the different Créoles... The catalogue of these collections is online.

### **Book selection, promotion of reading and local publishing**

On one hand, these books in French and Arab are reviewed ; selections of books are proposed three times a year to French librarians so that they consider them for their purchases.

On the other hand, the fundamental programme of this department of La Joie par les livres is the **network for children's book reading**. It was created in 1988 with librarians in different African countries and was joined over the years by librarians in Haiti and in the Arab world : 100 libraries were part of the network in 2006. The network works as follows:

- Once a year La Joie par les livres selects some twenty books published in the countries in question and in France, of different kinds and for different reading levels. This selection is sent to the member libraries. Their book collections are thus enriched with quality, recent books.
- Librarians propose these books to young readers, in various ways, and note children's and their own reactions and comments in reviews they send to La Joie par les livres, who then publishes them in the journal Takam Tikou.
- These exchanges allow a better knowledge of children's reading needs and wishes, so that they can be taken into account by anybody choosing books for library purchases. either in the countries themselves or by French or other partner libraries or NGOs. The network thus promotes local publishing for children, in the country in question and abroad.

## Publications



An annual journal, **Takam Tikou**<sup>2</sup>, is dedicated to children's books and reading in these regions : extensive reviewing of books newly published locally, news, articles on the life of libraries but also on the creation, publishing and distribution of children's books.

Aside from the regular sections, each issue treats a subject : Training of book professionals (librarians, writers, illustrators, booksellers...), Babies' and toddlers' reading, Africa and the novel, Books and reading in the Caribbean...

Takam Tikou is distributed free of charge in the countries concerned, sold elsewhere.

Issues 1 to 12 are online ([www.lajoieparleslivres.com](http://www.lajoieparleslivres.com), Bibliothèque numérique).

**Directories** are published on books and reading in Africa, the Arab world, the Caribbean and the Indian Ocean : publishers, booksellers, libraries and associations. These « address books » are online ([www.lajoieparleslivres.com](http://www.lajoieparleslivres.com) Bibliothèque numérique, Outils documentaires).

## Training

La Joie par les livres gives **seminars on African and Arab literature for children** and **training sessions on library services for children**, on demand in the various countries, and also in France.

A **Guide for self- and group-training in library work for children** has been published, How to make a children's library alive : a librarian's guide This guide is particularly adapted to African contexts; a different version will be available in 2009, in Arab, close to the realities in the Arab world.

## Exhibitions

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<sup>2</sup> «Takam Tikou», in Wolof of Senegal, is part of the riddle formula «-Takam takam (=Guess!), - Takam tikou (I have guessed!) ». If pronounced slightly differently, it is what you say when you have liked your food : « This is good, I want some more! ». And it is the title of one of the books by Fatou Ndiaye Sow, the Senegalese writer and publisher for children.

Several exhibitions were realised in order to promote children's books published in these countries. Among them :

« mabhuku» (« ooks» in Zulu), the central exhibition at Bologna Children's Book Fair in 1999, showing original works by illustrators from Subsaharan Africa.

« Kan ya ma kan («Once upon a time”) : The Arab world in 100 children's books», being shown in Arab countries and in France

### **Advice**

La Joie par les livres is advisor to libraries and NGOs partners of African libraries in France and elsewhere. It also offers advice to publishers and organised several programmes of support to the publishing of children's books in Africa.

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