

Exploring a World of Treasures at Munich's Internationale Jugendbibliothek/International Youth Library (IJB/IYL)

Jamie Campbell Naidoo, PhD
University of Alabama, USA

This article describes the history of the Internationale Jugendbibliothek/ International Youth Library (IJB/IYL) in Munich, Germany and highlights various activities and outreach programs hosted by the library. There is a particular focus on the ways that school librarians, school library educators, or school library researchers can benefit from these services. The research fellowship programme offered by the IYL is also emphasized along with the author's experiences as one of the library's research fellows.

Introduction

"In many parts of the world children were holding books in their hands and meeting over a bridge of children's books. And all this was only a start. The possibilities were without limit" (Lepman, 2002, p. 154).

One of the roles of school libraries around the world is to promote cultural literacy through high-quality print and digital materials celebrating global diversity. The aforementioned quote from educator, author, and librarian Jella Lepman creates the visual of children's books serving as messengers of peace and the conduit for fostering intercultural understanding. In contemporary society, digital picture books, digital apps, and social networking tools focusing on diversity equally hold the same potential for creating bridges of understanding, particularly when used with outstanding selections of international children's literature in the school curriculum. Unfortunately, it is often difficult for school librarians to access children's and young adult literature published in other countries and to find opportunities to see these books used with students in lessons or library programs. Enter the Internationale Jugendbibliothek/ International Youth Library (IJB/IYL) in Munich, Germany. This one-of-a-kind resource provides opportunities for school librarians to interact with international children's and young adult books as well as world scholars of children's literature.

This article describes the history of the IYL in Munich and highlights various activities and outreach programs hosted by the library. There is a particular focus on the multiple ways that school librarians, school library educators, or school library researchers can benefit from these services. The research fellowship programme offered by the IYL is also emphasized along with the author's experiences as one of the library's research fellows.

Historical Overview of the International Youth Library

In 1936, Jewish journalist Jella Lepman fled Nazi Germany with her family. Nine years later under the direction of the U.S. military, she returned to Munich to establish cultural programs for

children in an effort to retool them for a new Germany not controlled by Hitler. Lepman fervently believed children's books could serve as messengers of peace, teaching German children about the larger world and creating bridges of understanding between them and their peers in other countries (Lepman, 2002). She solicited children's books from international publishers and opened the first global exhibition of books for children and youth in 1946. This exhibition included books from 20 different countries and was the beginning of the IYL. Three years later, she publically opened the IYL to offer hands-on educational programs to children and teens, and provide cultural opportunities for them to connect to the world through global literature. In 1983, the IYL moved to an historic Bavarian castle, *Schloß Blumenburg* (<http://www.blutenberg.de/>), on the outskirts of the city, which was especially restored for the purpose of hosting the international collection of youth literature and its educational programs.

Today, the IYL houses the world's largest collection of youth books and research materials on children's literature with more than 250 professional journals, 30,000 international volumes of secondary literature from children's literature scholars, and over 600,000 children and young adult books written in more than 130 languages and spanning 400 years (IJB, 2017; Reusch, 2009). The children's book castle attracts international scholars interested in exploring intercultural understanding through children's and young adult books, and offers a variety of programs and services to Munich residents as well as the larger research community.

International Youth Library Programs and Services

The IYL's local lending library provides Munich families with access to children's and young adult print and digital materials in numerous languages, and offers youth outreach programs that foster 21st century literacy skills. These programs engage children and teens in creative writing opportunities, traditional and digital storytelling, art classes, poetry slams, book clubs, English and French language courses, and various other activities that correlate with the castle's collection or current exhibitions of international children's literature. Programs are held in German or English, providing opportunities for students to further develop their English language acquisition skills. School librarians visiting the IYL could observe and even participate in some of these programs by sharing stories from their culture or assisting in the development of specific programs for the students that focus on their particular country. For instance, a school librarian from Sweden might share stories as part of the St. Lucia day program at the library or help select materials to use in a program meant to teach children and teens about Sweden. The lending library's programs provide the unique opportunity for school librarians to see German children participating in programs fostering multiliteracies and to make connections with their own instructional approaches related to literacy skills.

An important program organized by the IYL is The White Ravens Festival for International Children's and Young Adult Literature (WRF). Created in 2010, this biennial summer celebration (<http://www.ijb.de/en/white-ravens-festival.html>) provides six days of activities for the local community and international literature scholars and librarians focused on the work of global children's book authors and illustrators. Author readings, storytelling events, exclusive live interviews, and writing workshops for youth are only a few of the activities occurring throughout the week. Invited book creators present at the IYL and in schools and libraries throughout Bavaria. These authors and illustrators have published works recognized by the IYL's annual international book list, the White Ravens (<http://whiteravens.ijb.de/list>), which highlights the best children's and young adult books published the preceding year in countries around the world. School librarians

and researchers fluent in German could benefit from attending the WRF and making connections with other international scholars as well as the award-winning book creators. In addition, school librarians unable to travel to Munich can take advantage of the White Ravens booklist to make curricular connections with authentic literature published around the globe. Using the booklist as a springboard, educators and school librarians could participate in a program such as the Sister Library Program (<https://www.ifla.org/node/1746>), developed by the Libraries for Children and Young Adults Section of the International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions (IFLA), to connect with school or public youth librarians in countries represented by books on the White Ravens booklist. This program connects libraries from around the world in an effort to get children reading international literature and participating in international library programming that will foster cultural competence and intercultural connections. School librarians can partner with their sister librarian to share and receive lesson plans celebrating each particular culture and thematically focusing on the particular White Raven titles from their country.

The IYL also creates elaborate in-house exhibitions of children's literature, children's artwork, and book illustrations from across the globe. These displays are meant to engage library visitors and researchers to think critically about the power of children's materials to share common, cultural messages and build cross-cultural connections. In addition, the library offers free, professional museum-quality, traveling exhibitions of collections and artwork that can be sent to libraries, schools, cultural centers, and museum around the world. Exhibitions foster an international exchange of ideas on relevant topics in children's literature and promote the mission and collection of the IYL. School librarians could work with local organizations and cultural centers in their communities to bring one of these informative traveling exhibitions to their libraries and then host special viewings and curricular projects for students and teachers related to the theme of the exhibition. A listing of exhibition topics is available on the IYL website (<http://www.ijb.de/en/ausstellungen/auf-wanderschaft.html>).

Fellowship Programme

One service offered by the IYL that is of particular interest to school librarians, school library researchers, or school library educators is the international research fellowship programme. This fellowship provides financial support for librarians, teachers, reading specialists, book creators, professors, and scholars to use the unique collection of the IYL to complete a given project: work on specialized curricula, collect data, finalize a publication, or identify materials for international exhibitions or publication projects. Generously supported by the Auswärtiges Amt der Bundesrepublik Deutschland (Foreign Ministry of the Federal Republic of Germany), the research programme annually awards approximately fifteen prestigious fellowships to individuals from around the globe working on a project broadly related to children's literature. Recipients can study at the IYL anywhere between six weeks and three months. While the fellowship does not cover travel to the IYL, it does provide a stipend that can cover most living expenses. And, if funding is available, it offers travel for recipients to attend the Frankfurt Book Fair in the fall or the Bologna Children's Book Fair in the spring with IYL staff.

I received word in December 2013 that I had been chosen as one of the stippis (the affectionate name library staff use for fellowship recipients) at the IYL during the Fall 2014 semester. What follows is a glimpse into my time at the IYL with the intent that these experiences may spark potential research ideas for school library scholars interested in visiting the IYL. Additional information about the IYL and founder Jella Lepman, including a lesson plan, can be found in Appendix 1.

Adventures in Munich and the Children's Book Castle

I began my research fellowship at the beginning of October, arriving in Munich on the last day of Oktoberfest and finding my way to Langweid, a rural community a few miles from the IYL, where I rented a renovated apartment in an old farmhouse surrounded by fields sprinkled with remnants of sunflowers leftover from warmer weather. Upon the urging of my landlady, I ventured into downtown Munich, using the super efficient public transit of buses and trains, to experience the fleeting moments of Oktoberfest. Afterwards, my days in Munich fell into a routine of brisk twenty minute morning walks to Schloß Blumenburg via fields, residential neighborhoods, and the Würm River. Along the way, I would often meet other commuters cycling or walking as well as the occasional hedgehog. In the evenings, after a day of in-depth research at the IYL, I would explore the city or run errands, which allowed me to further immerse myself into Bavarian culture.

The scope of my research at the IYL was focused on lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, or queer (LGBTQ) children's literature published in languages other than English to determine how the topics of homosexuality and gender nonconformity are portrayed in children's books published in other countries and the social messages these hold for readers. At the same time, the goal of my project was to add to the limited English-language scholarship on the topic of homosexuality in children's literature (books representing children ages birth to twelve years old). I specifically focused on picture books and a few novels for young children that feature gender nonconforming children or families with two moms, two dads, a gay uncle, a lesbian aunt, gay/lesbian grandparent, bisexual or transgender caregiver, or a child who identifies as homosexual or transgender. This project was a follow-up to my previous book, *Rainbow Family Collections: Selecting and Using Children's Books with Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, and Queer Content* (2012), that highlighted U.S., other English-language, and Spanish-language children's picture books, informational books, and novels with LGBTQ content published prior to 2011.

My work at the IYL expanded my research to include English language books published since 2011 as well as non-English language children's books not previously covered. I identified, critically examined, and archived over 70 titles written in Czech, Danish, Dutch, French, German, Italian, Portuguese, Spanish, and Swedish. While in the castle's study library, I discovered the most useful gem for my research: *Famiglie: Papà, Mamme, Fratelli, Zii, Nonni, Cugini e Amici*, a booklet from an international LGBTQ picture book exhibition organized by Cooperativa Culturale Giannino Stoppani at the 2013 Bologna Book Fair. This booklet provided an outstanding foundation for learning about the common publishers and authors of LGBTQ children's literature in several European countries. I also took advantage of the various *lektorats* or language experts at the library who assisted me with identifying titles that I had overlooked or better understanding the cultural nuances in particular texts. The reference librarians helped me locate materials as well as someone to translate information about Hebrew children's books with LGBTQ content. Through the extensive secondary resources at the IYL, I further identified over 130 additional children's books outside the IYL collection to use for my research project. The bulk of my research will be published in the forthcoming professional book *A World of Rainbow Families: Children's Books and Media with Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, and Queer Themes from Around the Globe* (2018).

While at the IYL, I had the opportunity to network and engage with children's literature researchers from Australia, Ireland, Iran, Sweden, and Georgia working on their respective research projects. Together we formally and informally discussed multiple aspects and social characteristics of children's books from around the world. I also met German and Austrian authors of LGBTQ children's picture books, and communicated with Italian and Dutch librarians and

researchers about international exhibition and collections of LGBTQ children's literature. Through conversations with the other stippis at the IYL, I was able to identify notable international children's titles that I can use in class lectures for the multiple courses that I teach to practicing and preservice school and youth librarians. Interacting with these scholars renewed my passion for children's literature and broadened my worldview to acknowledge the number of amazing books from other countries that we never see in the U.S. Books that I have shared with students in my courses and with librarians and teachers via presentations at professional conferences.

As part of the fellowship experience, I attended the Frankfurt Book Fair to learn more about international publishing in general, meet international children's book creators, and examine children's book illustrations from around the globe. While at the Book Fair, I, along with the other stippis, assisted with the IYL program and explored an unfathomable world of exquisite global children's and adult books. I also met with a Spanish author to further discuss LGBTQ children's picture books in Spain and South America and to learn of new resources to use in my current research. After the Book Fair, the stippis explored various cultural venues throughout Frankfurt. I chose to visit the Struwwelpeter Museum (<http://struwwelpeter-museum.de/>), which is dedicated to the book *Struwwelpeter* by Heinrich Hoffmann, to learn more about this classic piece of German children's literature and its sociopolitical influence on the global world of children's media, including propaganda literature from the US and Britain. I have since integrated information from my visit in class lectures related to propaganda and social messages in children's materials. School librarians could similarly visit the museum to brainstorm and design lessons where students in their home countries select a historic piece of children's literature and examine the various iterations and influences of it within their own culture as well as other countries.

Another interesting aspect of the IYL research fellowship are the impromptu activities generously organized by the librarians and lektorats at the castle. These included historical tours of Munich, jaunts to special library collections within the city, visits to traditional Bavarian restaurants, explorations of the breathtaking Christmas markets, and outings to various *kaffee* (coffee) and *küchen* (cake) venues around town. My favorite place for the latter was the Café Katzentempel (<http://www.cafe-katzentempel.de/>), which features several cats to engage with while kaffee und küchen is being consumed alongside vegan or vegetarian dishes.

A particularly educational and exciting place in Munich was the Sammlung Puppentheater part of the Münchner Stadtmuseums (<https://www.muenchner-stadtmuseum.de/sammlungen/puppentheaterschaustellerei.html>). This puppet museum features an outstanding collection of over 13,000 puppets from Germany and other places in Europe, Africa, and Asia, as well as a selection of automatons and other pieces from carnivals around Germany. Some of the displays include sets from educational television programs with puppets, as well as information on how puppets have been used throughout Germany for educational purposes. One engaging exhibition described 50 years of the *puppenbühne der verkehrspolizeiinspektion* program in Munich. This program, offered by the traffic police, used puppets to teach children about various aspects of safety like looking both ways before crossing the street. Similar programs have also been used throughout Bavaria to teach children about social concerns such as taking care of the elderly. This exhibition as well as the entire puppet collection is particularly useful for school librarians and school library researchers interested in projects related to cultural artifacts of play used for educational purposes. Researchers could draw parallels from their own country's historic use of puppets and that of Germany. School librarians interested in this topic might also find Wolfgang Till's book *Puppentheater: Bilder, Figuren, Dokumente* (1986) beneficial as it documents many of the items in the puppet museum's collection.

A Lifetime of Connections

The IYL's research collection is unparalleled and the opportunities to engage in cultural activities at the library or throughout Munich are immense. The professional staff at the IYL is extremely supportive and generous with their time, welcoming researchers from all parts of the world. The IYL Fellowship Programme is an amazing experience that any researcher or educator in the area of school librarianship could find beneficial. My IYL experiences have certainly enriched my teaching and research, and left a strong desire to return to delve deeper into the vast treasures of the library. Like numerous other stippis, I have already returned to the IYL to conduct additional research and plan to make another visit in years to come. Perhaps I will see you there!

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Author Note

Jamie Campbell Naidoo, Ph.D. is the Foster-EBSCO Endowed Professor at The University of Alabama School of Library and Information Studies. A former elementary school librarian and public youth librarian, Naidoo's research interests include library services to diverse populations and diversity in children's print and digital media. He has authored numerous books, research articles, book chapters, and professional publications related to library programs and services for specific culturally diverse groups.

Information About the International Youth Library & Programs

- International Youth Library/Internationale Jugendbibliothek official website (English version): <http://www.ijb.de/en/about-us.html> and IYL Blog (in German and English): <https://ijbib.wordpress.com>
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Appendix 1: More information on the International Youth Library and the work of Jella Lepman