



**Join us for a journey through Islamic Art**

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**Meeting:**

**158. Library Services to Multicultural Populations**

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**Abstract:**

*What I have just described for you is the setting for all the stories and activities contained in the exhibition "The Magic Cloak". I would like to give you some information on the objective of the exhibition, what it consists of, how it can be used, and finally our own experiences with using it. But first of all, I will give a brief outline of the demographics of Norway and the Multilingual Library, which I represent.*

**The demographics of Norway**

Norway is a long and narrow country situated at the very Northern edge of Europe. Oslo, Norway's capital city is home to just over 500,000 people. Immigrants make up almost 10 % of the population of Norway, and in Oslo as many as 25 % of the inhabitants have a non-Norwegian background. The largest groups are people originating from Poland, Pakistan, our neighbouring country Sweden, Iraq, Somalia and Vietnam. In other words; immigrants in Norway come from all over the world – from 210 nations in all. They come to Norway as asylum seekers, refugees, migrant workers, or in connection with family reunion. Norway allows a large number of refugees and asylum seekers in relation to the number of inhabitants.

**The Multilingual Library**

The Multilingual Library (MLL) is a subdivision of Deichmanske bibliotek, Oslo Public Library as well as a government institution with an overall national responsibility for library services to the multicultural populations of Norway. This means that the division is a professional competence and guidance centre for libraries. Further, it is the purchasing and cataloguing department, as well as a central for inter-library loans of media in the major minority languages. The Norwegian society is multilingual and multicultural, and this should of course be reflected in our libraries! It is our responsibility that this actually takes place!

What is a travelling exhibition?

I understand that the term ‘travelling exhibition’ may not be clear to all of you, so I will give a brief introduction to the concept. ‘The Magic Cloak’ is an exhibition travelling from place to place in Norway, only accompanied by the cases it is packed in, thorough written instructions for how to set it up, and an online contact by telephone and email to the responsible person at The Multilingual Library.

MLL organizes the transport and sees to it that the exhibition gets to the right place at the right time. When we send the exhibition off to a library we send them an email message and give them a phone call to ask if they need any assistance. On receiving the exhibition, the library staff tick off on an attached list of all the parts of the exhibition, and they do the same when they pack the exhibition down again and send it on. Every six months it is returned to us so that we can check its content and condition. Our experience so far is that this works out miraculously well.

### **General terms**

The exhibition with all its contents can be used free of charge by anyone wanting to borrow it. It can stay for four weeks at each library.

Our main objective is that the exhibition should be a supplement to other public library services. The public library may also co-operate with a school library, in which case we require that the exhibition

- Should be placed in the school library and used jointly with the school library
- Should be placed in the public library if this is in the immediate proximity of the school

### **The contents of the exhibition**

The travelling exhibition “The Magic Cloak” is not really an exhibition, nor is it a story telling grotto. It is, however, a piece of art and an activity pavilion with numerous possibilities and with the story as the natural basis.

The idea comes from two Swedish librarians – from Stockholm – Fisksätra and Rinkeby and is based on the bilingual picture book “A Journey through Islamic Arts”, published by the English publisher Mantra Lingua.

The original exhibition is produced by Stockholm County Museum in collaboration with two libraries and the Swedish Travelling Exhibitions.

The pavilion was made by the Iranian/Swedish glass artist Teymor Zarré and the accompanying music was composed by the musician Coste Apetrea.

The pavilion is no more than 1 metre square – small enough to fit into any library. A lot of equipment comes with it, which may be used wherever possible and where there is enough room for it.

With the pavilion there are floor cushions and small, beautiful carpets to sit on, as well as music equipment with headphones, so that one can sit inside the pavilion and listen to music from the Middle East (Turkey).

## The Magic Cloak – A Journey through Islamic Arts

The book comes in 22 languages in parallel with English and is also published by MLL in co-operation with Mantra. Therefore there is also an edition with text in Norwegian in parallel with Persian, Arabic, Somali, Kurdish, and Urdu.

- A set of this book for the whole class comes with the exhibition – so that all the children in the class can read it together.
- 22 copies in other languages also accompany the exhibition, so that children with a linguistic background of any one of these 22 languages may read their own copy.

Furthermore, the exhibition consists of

- detailed instructions for teachers to help them plan the lessons
- the cloak which the storyteller puts on when reading or telling the stories
- music and headphones, as mentioned before
- pictures from the book and of the Arabic alphabet and numbers to help elucidate the content of the exhibition
- a folder containing information and instructions making up a good documentation of the whole exhibition.

All the activities in the exhibition are based on

- the pavilion,
- the music,
- the magic cloak. Last, but not least, the exhibition contains a beautiful “magic” cloak, which the librarian wears when she reads to the children from “A Journey through Islamic Arts”, where The Magic Cloak allows the main character to fly from place to place in the Muslim world.
- The book: A Journey through Islamic Arts

The magic cloak turns everybody into storytellers.

### **The objective of the exhibition**

A. The objective is first and foremost to communicate and visualize a positive image of Islamic arts. Inter-cultural communication is promoted through the exhibition, providing a basis for further dialogue between those seeing the exhibition independent of their age, ethnicity or religious background. At the same time it combines arts, music, literature and learning. It appeals to all the senses; seeing, hearing, touching, smelling and tasting. In other words, it may be used for pleasure and relaxation, as well as for creative and inspired learning.

The target group is children between the age of 4 and 11. However, the exhibition is also very suitable for family activities with several generations taking part.

B. Having a set of the book available in many languages for the whole class makes it possible for teachers to use it in their work to

- stimulate reading
- teach reading
- teach languages; be it English, Norwegian or different minority languages.

And not to forget: Father and Mother can read it aloud in their own tongue.

C. The educational instructions offer:

- Hints on workshops for arts and crafts subjects (stencils are included with the exhibition)
- Hints for cookery and health education subjects (with a few recipes)
- The Arabic alphabet – seeing another alphabet than the one you're used to
- Hints on how to organize storytelling
- Educational instructions in storytelling techniques made by professionals for those who want to learn how to tell stories that inspire and attract the listeners
- Instructions that examine every picture in the book and lists tasks to each of them. Here is a lot of information which can be used in different subjects, such as Religion, History and Geography
- Useful information about the two artists
- Ideas for arts and crafts
- Examples from libraries that have staged the exhibition

D. Three stories, all in Norwegian, Polish and Somali, enable the librarian/teacher to tell exciting stories for different age groups

- The Magic Cloak (we follow Aisha on her journey with the magic cloak). A beautiful story stimulating a positive self-image. That was the one you heard here today.
- Ali's House, for young children between 4 and 7
- Laki's Dream, for older children between 7 and 11

These are stories that we have had specially written and produced in co-operation with the multicultural communication institution The Story-telling House.

All the stories are also available on CD as sound books.

### **Our experiences:**

The exhibition is an unconditional success. Our experiences are solely positive. It works in even the smallest library and everybody can communicate its contents on their own level with the help of the instructions for teachers. The children are very enthusiastic; they love to sit in the pavilion and listen to the music. Arabic speaking children use the poster with the Arabic letters to teach Norwegian speaking children to write their names in Arabic. The pavilion and the story also touch the emotions of parents who come along with the children. The result is often that parents talk about their own experiences and their own memories of the places mentioned in the book. The exhibition arouses their curiosity and enthusiasm and helps make contact between individuals. There is a diary on our website where anyone borrowing the exhibition has to write, and where all these experiences can be read by others. Unfortunately, this diary is in Norwegian, so it would be difficult for many of you to read it. However, there are pictures there giving a good impression of how the exhibition works.

## **Example of how the exhibition is used**

The exhibition was staged at the library of Stor-Elvdal, a small Norwegian municipality with many immigrants. The event was organized with students of the Adult Education, which among other things is a centre for teaching newcomers to Norway. The Adult Education students introduced Islamic arts by taking the pupils from nursery and junior school along on a journey. "Lheyla" – dressed in the magic cloak – presented the journey in Arabic, while another student translated it into Norwegian. Then food was served, made by local people originating from the Middle East. There were also local musicians presenting music and dance from Islamic dominated areas. In other words, the exhibition's visit turned into a big event involving many local people and making contact between the newcomers and those who have always lived in Stor-Elvdal.

The exhibition is much sought after and many are on our waiting list; so many, in fact, that we have actually bought another copy of the exhibition so that we now have two travelling at the same time.

## **The future:**

Because a large amount of teacher instructions accompany the exhibition and because we see that the exhibition could easily be used by the school system we have always wanted to communicate the exhibition to schools and to school libraries. We have therefore started up collaboration with a Norwegian county to try out whether the exhibition could be used in a national effort called "The Cultural School Bag". The main objective of The Cultural School Bag is to disseminate arts and culture to all school age children in a professional and positive manner. One of the objectives is for all cultures represented in Norway to be exposed, and this is where we see the mission of "The Magic Cloak" exhibition. When looking beyond our own country boundaries it is our vision that this exhibition be communicated to the rest of Europe through an EU project. But that is a long way into the future and requires a large effort that today we don't have the capacity to do.

On this note I would like to thank you for your attention and hope that you have all been given some inspiration to start story times when you return from Milan. I would strongly recommend it!

## **Useful web links:**

The book has been recorded in many languages. To listen, go to:

<http://ideskola.skolutveckling.se/talbok/>

MLL's homepage:

<http://www.dfb.deichman.no/>

Diary from libraries who have staged the exhibition:

[http://dfb.deichman.no/index.php?str=small&sti=den\\_magiske\\_kappa&sti2=minnebok](http://dfb.deichman.no/index.php?str=small&sti=den_magiske_kappa&sti2=minnebok)