



**School Library – the Territory of Tolerance**  
(Project *Other. Others. Otherwise* for Children and Multicultural Education)

Presentation of the English version of the Children's Project by renown Russian writer Lydmila Ulitskaya *Other. Others. Otherwise.*

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**Abstract:**

*Russia is a multinational country, so multicultural education and training in tolerance occupy considerable place in its school curricula. Teachers as well as parents and librarians are constantly in search of new methods of work in this direction. Literature and books for children in particular allow to make discussions on complex topics more intelligible to children and give them an idea of the world's cultural diversity. Above all, these books speak directly to the heart of a child because of the powerful potential for emotional impact inherent in them.*

*For these reasons, the particular children's project "Other. Others. Otherwise." was devised and realized on the initiative of renown Russian writer Lydmila Ulitskaya. In 2006 the Institute of Tolerance in cooperation with the Margarita Rudomino All-Russia State Library for Foreign Literature had 4 books on traditions and customs of various nations prepared for publication and brought out by Rudomino and Eksmo publishing houses at their commission. Themes of high interest for children had been selected: national clothes and foods, traditions of family life, cosmogonic mythology. The books are published for the audience of children from 10 to twelve and their parents.*

*This project is an attempt to widen a child's mental horizon by presenting the variety of tenors of life among nations of the world and is ultimately aimed at bringing children up in the spirit of tolerance towards people of other races, creeds, cultural and social strata by means of introducing customs, ways of life and mentality of people belonging to different cultures. The project is meant to promote respect and tolerance towards strange, unfamiliar*

*and difficult for grasping cultural phenomena, to destroy settled negative stereotypes, to arouse positive interest for the world in its diversity.*

*Russian schools willingly included these books in their syllabi and made use of them in the process of teaching. School librarians took active part in propagating and discussing the books. The experience of testing these editions in context of school syllabi has proved the efficacy of the project, so it has been carried on, and 5 new books have been brought out in this series.*

*In view of the wide international resonance of the project, the Institute of Tolerance of the Library for Foreign Literature in cooperation with UNESCO has commissioned translating the first four books into English and publication of their English versions. These books were sent to the libraries of European countries as an example of best practices in promotion of the ideas of cultural diversity, intercultural and religious dialogue, tolerance and prevention of discrimination among teenagers and their parents.*

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For these reasons, the particular children's project *Other. Others. Otherwise* was devised and realized on the initiative of renown Russian writer Lyudmila Ulitskaya. Lydmila Ulitskaya believes that tolerance should be cultivated from early years. Having introduced the project *Other. Others. Otherwise* she has made an attempt to explain to children that all people are different, and cultures and traditions of other people should be treated with respect. The books of the series are devoted to various aspects of life, such as family, religions, cuisines, and clothing. The major aim is to help children understand how diverse the world, and at the same time make it an exciting reading.

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This is what Lyudmila Ulitskaya wrote about the idea of her project: “Dear Reader! I had been long planning to publish a series of children’s books about many things that surround us daily, such as family and food, clothes and relationships, games and professions, and even life and death. At first, I had decided to write all of those books myself, but then changed my mind and offered the task to several friends of mine, each a real expert in her field. Here is the result of our work”.

Four books by the authors Raisa Kirsanova, Vera Timenchik, Alexandra Grigorieva and Anastasia Gosteva do not merely give facts about clothing, families, cuisine and the origin of the Universe (finally this information can be found in encyclopaedia), they also explain that “the other” might have a very different view of usual things and a different way of life. To understand *the other* is the idea of Lyudmila Ulitskaya’s project. And understanding rests upon knowledge.

Differences in habits, clothes, food earlier spread in time and space in today’s world are in a way brought together, and this is why the historical and geographical aspects in all four books are dominating. In contemporary small world where everything is so close in the neighborhood the historical and geographical peculiarities turn out to be of great importance. Diversity has to be treated in some way, it should be accepted. A human life and bringing-up begins with the question “What is the right way to do this?” What is “right” if rules can be different?

Anastasia Gosteva’s book ***Big Bang And Turtles*** is about the Universe and its order. The book begins as a captivating tale for children: a mysterious house, eccentric professor and a boy named Cyril who out of curiosity gets into the strange dwelling. The eccentric professor turns out to be a Coordinator and his mission is to watch peoples, keep them from quarreling because of their Gods. The professor’s home is crowded with mythological objects, plants and creatures. While Cyril studies all he sees, the professor very briefly tells myths of different cultures: it occurs that the belief in Darwin’s ideas is not different from believing in shaman cults. This is a true lesson of tolerance.

The second lesson is in Vera Timenchik’s book ***Families. Ours And Theirs***. The story is about friendship of the Russian boy Cyril with an Abkhazian boy Da’ut. And again everything is written very delicately. The author sees Da’ut’s family through the eyes of Cyril who is amazed by strict patriarchy, and looks at Cyril’s family through Da’ut’s eyes.

Imagine how bizarre situation in Cyril's family might be for an Abkhazian teenager: Cyril's mother (divorced) brings a new boyfriend home. In the course of the story the reader learns about different family principles and traditions, including bigamy and homosexual marriages.

In the ***Traveling Across Dinner-Tables*** by Alexandra Griegorieva one will read about the most extravagant dishes, various diets and transgenic products enmity towards which the author considers to be xenophobic. Incidentally, this is the book which draws the borders of tolerance. Among various "*possibles*" the main "*impossible*" emerges: *human beings should not eat human beings* either in direct or figurative meaning. All other eating habits are equal.

***Ribbons, Lace And Dainty Shoes*** by Raisa Kirsanova is as you might have guessed about the history of costume. And here is a quote from the afterword written by Lyudmila Ulitskaya: "People all over the world wear quite different clothes. Distinctions in national clothes depend on the local climate, customs, history and religious beliefs of people. So any clothes different from we accustomed to see should cause neither sneers, nor irritation: let everyone wear what is common and convenient to him, and we also shall wear whatever we like".

This project is an attempt to widen a child's mental horizon by presenting the variety of tenors of life among nations of the world and is ultimately aimed at bringing children up in the spirit of tolerance towards people of other races, creeds, cultural and social strata by means of introducing customs, ways of life and mentality of people belonging to different cultures. The project is meant to promote respect and tolerance towards strange, unfamiliar and difficult for grasping cultural phenomena, to destroy settled negative stereotypes, to arouse positive interest for the world in its diversity.

Russian schools willingly included these books in their syllabi and made use of them in the process of teaching. School librarians took active part in propagating and discussing the books. The experience of testing these editions in context of school syllabi has proved the efficacy of the project, so it has been carried on, and 5 new books have been brought out in this series.

Schools and in particular school libraries have an infrastructure allowing to carry out enlightening work concerning various aspects of tolerance. They could be used as centers of education in the sphere of intolerance prevention.

In order for school librarians could effectively conduct classes on intolerance prevention they should be equipped with relevant knowledge and resources. One of such resources could be the project *Other. Others. Otherwise*. School libraries hold a strategically advantageous position which helps them inculcate in students knowledge and life skills, and in particular form a tolerant awareness among children with the help of the books.

In view of the wide international resonance of the project, the Institute of Tolerance of the Library for Foreign Literature in cooperation with UNESCO has commissioned translating the first four books into English and publication of their English versions. These books were sent to the libraries of European countries as an example of best practices in promotion of the ideas of cultural diversity, intercultural and religious dialogue, tolerance and prevention of discrimination among teenagers and their parents.

**Electronic versions in English are presented on the web-site of UNESCO Headquarters:**

A.GRIGORIEVA. TRAVELING ACROSS DINNER-TABLES

<http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0015/001591/159187e.pdf>

V.TIMENCHIK. FAMILIES. OURS AND THEIRS

<http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0015/001590/159019e.pdf>

R. KIRSANOVA. RIBBONS, LACE AND DAINY SHOES

<http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0015/001591/159184e.pdf>

A.GOSTEVA. BIG BANG AND TURTLES

<http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0015/001591/159182e.pdf>

Also visit the web-site of the UNESCO Moscow Office at:

<http://www.unesco.ru/eng/articles/2004/ampar24072008170029.php>