



**Bringing the Joy of Books to All Children:  
The “Barrier-free Picture Books from Around the World” Traveling Exhibitions**

JBBY (Japanese Board on Books for Young People)

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**Abstract:** For several years JBBY has made sets of barrier-free books from the collection of the IBBY Document Centre of Books for Disabled Young People available for loan and sponsored numerous exhibitions. The independent initiatives of the organizers have generated lively events inspired by the exhibitions and we have been able to work together with the organizers to break free of the various barriers that prevail in the world of children’s books. We are keenly aware of the immense value and role of this IBBY project.

**Key words:** barrier-free books, disabled, exhibition set.

JBBY has organized traveling exhibitions of the IBBY Outstanding Books for Young People with Disabilities since 2003 under the title “Barrier-free Picture Books from Around the World”.

-“The Best of Books for Young People with Disabilities IBBY Jubilee Selection 2002” was held at 45 locations (2003-2005)

-“The 2005 IBBY Outstanding Books for Young People with Disabilities” was held at 17 locations (2006-2007)

-“The 2007 IBBY Outstanding Books for Young People with Disabilities” was held at 12 locations (2008-2009).

-“The 2009 IBBY Outstanding Books for Young People with Disabilities” has been held at 7 locations and continues at this writing.

### **Changing Public Awareness**

Japanese children grow up in a rich reading environment. But as in many other countries, many children with disabilities cannot participate in the pleasures of reading, and books that they can enjoy are not to be found in bookstores or libraries. Children with



disabilities are denied the joys of books not only because of their own disabilities, but also because of the barriers set up by books themselves. They need books with various reading supports that respond to special design, language, layout, and graphic needs and are also of good quality as literature and as art. Disabilities are of various types, so just one kind of book cannot address all the problems. But once we grasp an effective approach, we can make use of it in publication and reading activities.

In Japan there is no public support for books for children with disabilities, so the hurdles in their production and sale are overcome through the efforts of many dedicated people concerned. Through these exhibitions, we have worked to spread awareness more widely in Japanese society of these special needs and bring to public attention the efforts being made to meet them. We also hope the exhibitions will also encourage publishers to produce and translate new books.

Another important aim of the traveling exhibitions is to familiarize people with books with sign-language illustrations and easy-to-read books, two types that were virtually unknown when these exhibitions began.

The sites for the exhibitions were as a rule decided by open invitation, but we made a purposeful effort to hold them at regular public libraries, regular schools and places where ordinary children gather rather than at venues focused on organizations for persons with disabilities, special education facilities, and welfare programs. We wanted to show these books above all in venues where all children and adults gather. We have committed ourselves to this policy because in Japan, particularly in the education system, the idea of the inclusive society, in which the disabled and non-disabled nurture each other, has yet to take hold. Few Japanese children have opportunities to grow up in close association with the disabled.

We believe that children's books are capable of overcoming all of the various borders that people draw between themselves.

### **How the Exhibitions are Held**



Exhibition sets are created in response to a request from an organizing venue to hold an exhibition. The set consists of the following:

- The IBBY collection of books
- Translations into Japanese
- Captions with accompanying Braille
- Explanatory panels
- Catalogue (original version/Braille version/Japanese translated version).
- Audio service (using the Touch Memo digital voice labeler)
- Bookstands
- The “Apple Tree Tapestry” (Wall hanging designed to give children visiting the exhibition something to touch, feel, and play with).

In some cases Japanese books related to the exhibition are also added.

JBBY continues to invite organizers to host the exhibit. Organizers are requested to shoulder the costs of exhibition handling and shipping. Since the content of the exhibition is left up to the organizers, they can make the exhibit part of distinctive projects of their own planning.

Most of the exhibitions have been held in regular public libraries and at schools. Often the organizers see, read and hold these books in their hands for the first time when they hold the exhibition. It makes them aware of the existence of children with special needs in books, as well as of the fact that such children cannot experience the joy of books because of the various barriers presented by ordinary books as found in bookstores and libraries.

Using the “Barrier-free Picture Book” exhibition as a pivot, the organizers hold all kinds of unique events planned at their own initiative. In most cases lectures, symposiums, or workshops are scheduled to coincide with the exhibit. As illustrated by the lectures given by Bror I. Tronbacke (Director of the Centre for Easy-to-Read in Sweden) and by Heidi Boiesen (Director of the IBBY Documentation Centre of Books for Disabled Young People), speakers from overseas have also been invited as part of these events.



Through these exhibitions we have also made contact with and established good relationships with people in different parts of Japan who have been working steadily over the years to find ways to give children with disabilities access to books and reading. The exhibition has also been held as part of conferences or events for cultural understanding, student-planned university festivals, and big events such as the annual Japan Library Conference, etc. In Japan, there are many libraries called *bunko* run by private individuals to give children better access to books. Often the exhibition is held at these *bunko* through the volunteer efforts of local mothers.

### **The Impact of the Exhibitions**

Evidence confirms the impact of the exhibitions. Indications are that they have worked to change attitudes in the communities where they were held and have brought concerned people together, enabling them to connect with each other.

-Where there are books for children with disabilities, places (libraries or bookstores) become places where all children, even those with disabilities, can come and participate. This realizes one objective of the IBBY Document Center philosophy, which is to encourage participation in society through books.

-Following the exhibition, purchase by local libraries of the books exhibited.

-Publication of six or seven related books following the launching of the exhibits.

-The founding and continuation of study groups and other activities relating to barrier-free books for children.

-Story-telling sessions for children of all kinds have been organized and attention has been focused on what is best for children with various kinds of needs. Particular attention has been paid to the story-telling sessions in sign language and the Animacion method that won the IBBY-Asahi Reading Promotion Award in 1993.

-Continuation of original barrier-free book exhibitions.

The IBBY collection is an important world asset; it represents the wisdom and innovation of thoughtful, sensitive people all over the world.



People cannot help but be moved when they know the story of the creation of each and every book and the depth of the feelings that are invested in those books. We hope that this collection will be fostered all over the world for the sake of extending the joys of reading to each and every child.

