



Holiday Celebrations

Storytelling for EFL Young Learners

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Edited by
Tjaša Dražnik and Tina Matić

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FOREWORD

**Karmen Pižorn, Milena Mileva Blažič,
Mateja Dagarin Fojkar, Jurij Selan**

This illustrated picture book was put on paper on the initiative of future teachers, undergraduate students of the Primary Teacher Education study program at the Faculty of Education, University of Ljubljana. As part of their course on English language skills, the students wrote stories about New Year's celebrations in the United States of America and in Slovenia for young learners of English. The idea emerged to illustrate the stories, publish them in an illustrated book, and present them to the public through the students themselves. The Embassy of the United States of Slovenia wholeheartedly embraced the proposal and the project "Storytelling for English Foreign Language Young Learners: Holiday Celebrations" was launched.

Eight stories were selected and later illustrated by students of Art Pedagogy at the Faculty of Education, University of Ljubljana. This picture book is intended for independent reading or as a teaching aid in English classes. As part of this project, the students have also used it as a teaching tool for reading workshops they have organized at various primary schools in Slovenia. In this way, they have gained their first experience of storytelling in the foreign language and at the same time helped to stimulate young pupils' interest in learning English as a foreign language. An additional benefit of the project is the development of intercultural competence in young learners, as the texts and activities designed by the students for the reading workshops promote different aspects of New Year's celebrations in Slovenia and in the USA.

The coordinators of the project are **Tjaša Dražnik** and **Tina Matić**, teaching assistants for English in Education. The idea for the publication was proposed by **Miha Babič**, a student of Primary Teacher Education. Associate Professor **Jurij Selan**, Assistant Professor **Mateja Dagarin Fojkar**, Professor **Milena Mileva Blažič** and Professor **Karmen Pižorn** provided expert assistance in carrying out the project's tasks. The project is funded by the

U.S. Embassy in Slovenia under the Cultural Grants Program, which supports such cultural and educational projects that serve to strengthen U.S.-Slovenian relations.

Karmen Pižorn, Professor of English in Education

The collection brings together eight texts that are short narrative prose or short contemporary fairy tales. The authors, students of Primary Teacher Education at the Faculty of Education in Ljubljana, have written on the theme of holidays and celebrations, focusing on the celebration of Christmas in various cross-cultural contexts. Most of the texts are short and have a typical structure with an introduction, a body, and a conclusion. The main literary characters are primarily children and/or personified literary characters with functional or folk names (Ally, Barnie, Bean, Daisy, Don, Jake, Max, Sophie, etc.). Personified animals (e.g., Ally the Mouse, Bean the Dog), personified objects (Bell, Candy Cane, Ornament), or toys (Barnie the Bear) appear in some texts. Santa Claus is a Christian-themed character (Santa's Hat), who in the texts is more of a fairy tale character or a personified fairy and elf (Don the Elf).

All the selected texts are short and take as their starting point an attractive psychological condition or the motif of loneliness and/or the desire for companionship, devotion and self-realisation. Most of the literary characters live in permissive families and abundance and have their basic needs for food, security, etc. met. However, they are also guided by the law of desire (S. Žižek), they are home alone (Home Alone) or struggle to make a living and/or have no friends (How Jake Got a Brother); they want to play, to be socially connected, they want to achieve self-actualization by making others happy, which is an interesting motif of self-actualization and emotional (Merry Christmas, Bean) and social literacy (The Most Beautiful Gift for Christmas).

The solidarity of the students, mentors and other participants is a characteristic feature of the whole project, which emerged during the 2020/21 pandemic. The texts express the spirit of the times, even if they would look different in another context, and although the present texts also represent a monocultural celebration (Christmas), it is set in a cross-cultural context. The students' texts, which mainly depict Christmas, contain themes of geographical

interculturality in different worlds (cages, desert, North Pole, etc.). The parallelism between isolation during the pandemic and the texts is found in the motif fragments “animal shelter, desert, disability, lost, small cage” which vividly reflect the internal landscape. An additional advantage of the texts is the formulation of smaller social motifs that express a literary universality – the desire and need for the elements of a new humanism.

Milena Mileva Blažić, Professor of Humanities, Literary Studies and Comparative Children’s Literature

Stories are all around us, their power is immense. They take us far away and show us other traditions. They broaden our horizons and introduce us to new friends. They inspire empathy and connect us. Stories are our basic tool for learning and living. In addition to these benefits, stories in a foreign language develop vocabulary and all four language skills. They help learners hear the natural rhythm of the language and acquire the new language in context. They are close to the children’s world and as such are very motivating for them. Each of us is a storyteller, however, it is the crucial task of teachers to pass on the stories to children with love and care, so that they always remain a part of our lives.

Mateja Dagarin Fojkar, Assistant Professor of English in Education

We gladly accepted to participate in the preparation of this picture book with my third-year students of Art Pedagogy, who actually first came into contact with illustration as an art form in the third year of their studies, as part of our Graphic Design 1 course. The purpose of the illustration is not merely to repeat what has already been communicated with the text, but to supplement the substantive and associative aspects of the written story and thus form a new semantic whole formed by the text and the illustration at the same time. Students have prepared illustrations that are extremely diverse both in terms of design and in terms of the use of art techniques. It is this diversity and variety of illustrations that gives the picture book its charm and complexity as well as complements and upgrades the richness contained in the texts of the stories.

Jurij Selan, Associate Professor of Art Theory

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