

## IBBY-Yamada Fund

Project reports 2024

# IBBY Zimbabwe

Empowering new authors for  
young people and children's  
literature

Training programme on children's book writing



Every child has the right to become a reader

# **INTERNATIONAL BOARD ON BOOKS FOR YOUNG PEOPLE**

## **ZIMBABWE SECTION**

**TITLE OF PROJECT: Empowering authors and performers to write and perform Children's literature**

### **Background to the project**

From our interactions with children and young people over the years and visiting many primary schools that have learners whose age groups range from 4 years in ECD (Early Child Development) to 12 years in Grade 7, the last grade of primary education, IBBY Zimbabwe observed that there was an acute shortage of reading material for these grades. This prompted us to take up the challenge to fill this gap, hence the proposed project to encourage both new and old authors to avail new works for the young readers. In our reading exercises over the years we faced challenges of recommending interesting reading material to the young readers whether in school or not and even for purchase by their parents. The problem was compounded by the fact that the established book publishers in Zimbabwe lean towards publishing books with a ready market i.e. textbooks. Many authors are commissioned writers hired by publishers to produce school textbooks for a set curriculum. It is also evident that there is a lot of talent within the communities which needs to be harnessed to produce the desired works. These latent authors have a phobia for writing. Writing is often perceived as a special career for the gifted. It is our hope and belief that this manual will empower the budding authors sufficiently to unlock the hidden talents and give us what we want. The publishers we work with have assured us that they will go out of their way to work with the new authors on their manuscripts. With this, we felt challenged to make a contribution to the effort to make a book available to every child who needs it. be it in the rural or urban settings. IBBY Zimbabwe is grateful that the Amanda Fund has made the realization of this dream possible through their generous grant..

When we were advised that a grant will be made available the Section embarked on a series of planning meetings on how the Project could be implemented. Several meetings were held which included seasoned authors, academics, literal critics, parents and some teachers. It was agreed that two workshops be held to source some inputs from the market for the manual. Prominent discussion leaders were identified to moderate the discussions at the workshops and capture any contributions for the manual.

**The overall basic aims were:** To enable old and new authors to:

- Address under –represented themes, cultures or experiences in children's literature;
- Foster inclusivity and widen children's perspectives of the world around;
- Introduce children in a dynamic way to the pertinent and practical issues in their world to promote new ideas.
- Inform, entertain and engage children in several aspects of life
- Promote more reading and extend their frontiers of knowledge.

### **Reasons for empowering authors**

- Give them confidence to write. develop new skills in writing children's books;
- Provide diversity in children's literature
- Avoid stereotypes and harmful portrayals of issues and characters which may be detrimental to children's growth;
- Incorporate marginalized societies or communities in children's thinking;
- Encourage authors to write from their lived experiences;
- Respect copyright in all their creations.

## **The following topics were covered during the first workshop sessions. :**

**Activity 1:** How to create believable and real characters in a story

**Observations:** The objective was to show participants how to create believable and real characters in a story. The presenter used a published story that allowed participants to study how the writer of the story described the characters in the story. Participants were then invited to comment on how to portray a believable character woman, man or child.

**Achieved outcomes:** Participants were able to discuss the various aspects of characters in stories and how they could be developed.

**Activity 2** How to develop the start and end of a story and its length

**Observation:** The facilitator provided examples on how to start and end a story, and link these two to the beginning and end of the story. There was active discussion on how to determine the length of a story. It was agreed that children's stories should not be too long given that the children's span of attention is short. The story should quickly highlight the major climax of the story. The character's journey should show both the physical and emotional journey. Tangent plots should not dominate the story and distract the main character..

**Achieved outcomes:** Participants were able to provide and discuss interesting prompts for children's stories that would provoke and retain the attention of the young readers provided the story is not too long..

**Activity 3** How to create catchy, engaging and exciting characters in the stories

**Observation:** Participants were shown how to create catchy, engaging and exciting characters. Children's books are expected to have characters that excite children. The facilitator helped participants on how to create fascinating characters in a book. An author of a children's book should strive to create a character that is real, that the children can identify with. A character they can like or dislike.

A writer should do a character sketch or check list, and live with the character throughout the whole book. The check list should include the name, age, appearance, likes, dislikes, temperamental, and what the character thinks about oneself and the character's mannerism.

**Outcomes** The participants were able to create their own characters after the presentation of the topic. It was a shared experience among the participants on how to create a catchy, engaging and exciting character in a children's story book. Illustrators who were among the participants were able to give a verbal visualization of the facilitator's description of the characters given in the earlier examples..

**Activity 4** How to take the book beyond the book itself into the real world.

**Observation:** A story should reflect true and real examples of the real world. Children should be able to relate the story and its characters to the real world in a simplified way for them to understand events that occur around them everyday. Participants gave different views of events which were narrated in the opening story to this program. The writer should think beyond the book which traditionally used to be the print, radio, screen and stage play. The writer should be aware of one's rights include copyright and moral rights.

**Outcomes:** Participants were able to identify events that can be used in children's books taking into account their age, social status, culture family and economic background. Children's worldview is dependent on what happens at home and at school. It was agreed a writer should be able to use the children's experiences to develop a story. This would take a book beyond the book itself.

**Activity 5** How to plan for a new book after the above activities

**Observations:** The major aspect in this presentation was on encouraging writers to first plan on what one wants to write about. The second activity of a writer is to RESEARCH on what they want to write about. Research is critical for one to develop a story that will be exciting, interesting and easily understood. A writer should have the target audience in mind all the time. Focus on the time and location of the story, the writer's timeline, time scheduling of one's writing, not the forget the mundane things: one's resources, laptop, cellphone, paper, pen etc. Primary focus should be on producing a draft before worrying about editing, finding an illustrator, publisher etc. some of these things can be delegated.

**Outcomes** Participants brainstormed on the methodologies researching for a theme, topic and even the story itself. The contributions were very enlightening. Objective is to be aware of pitfalls attempting to re-invent the wheel.

**Questions and answers::** Many questions were raised on the covered topics. Participants confirmed that there were many aspects of writing they were not aware of and applauded the importance of sharing ideas on book writing.

**The following topics covered during the Second workshop sessions.**

**Activity1** How to handle dialogue in a tragedy, romance, comic, and adventure in writing a story or performing the story.

**Observation:** The facilitator presented different types of dialogue especially the outer and inner dialogues. Outer dialogue is when a character talks to another character in the story. Inner dialogue is when a character talks to oneself. Participants were expected to identify persuasion dialogue, inquiry, information seeking dialogue, and discovery dialogue. In children's story books, a writer should be able to show when a character is talking to someone else or to themselves using any of the variants of dialogue construction. Dialogue could be in a tragedy, romance, comic or adventure, and also in a play/drama for performing arts.

**Outcomes:** Participants were encouraged to study various fiction books and see how dialogue is developed and relate this to children's books. Dialogue for children in early childhood age group have different styles as compared to children at the age of twelve years. This is knowledge writers are expected to have when writing for children.

This was a challenging discussion for participants to fully comprehend. The leader used role playing from among the participants to drive the point home. This was fully appreciated. It was emphasized that the skill matures from constant practice and that children love it.

**Activity 2** How to handle descriptions and suspense in a story itself.

**Observation:** A writer should be able to create and handle suspense in a children's story book. This was amply highlighted under this topic. Participants were encouraged to bring out natural feelings in a character. This is often done through action or dialogue or through other senses (sight, hearing, touch, smell, and tasting). A writer should give a story a pace. It should not be monotonous but must vary as the story develops. Lastly, a writer must decide on whether the story is going to be in the first person or third person. This will help the writer to effectively narrate the story without mixing the actors in the story.

**Outcome:** Participants engaged in practical exercises in which they created short suspense parts (a sense of excitement and expectation of what was going to happen next) in stories and appraised each other. In the end participants were able to create suspense and know where to place it.. Participants were able to practice the use of the first and third person narration.

**Activity 3** How to handle culture, politics, religion and gender issues when writing or performing a story.

**Observation:** This was a difficult but interesting topic due to the diversity of views from the different participants on how culture, politics, religion and gender issues should be handled. It was indicated that this is what make writers. Established writers often have distinct view which they are identified with Even publishing houses have editorial policies they are identified with although they give disclaimers here and there. Under copyright this is considered embedded in the author's moral rights. A writer should not make their position

obvious but that can be deduced from their works. Writers need to be sensitive when handling issues relating to culture, politics, religion or gender. . A good book should be read in all markets.

**Outcomes:** Participants came up with different views on how to handle culture, politics, religion and gender issues. Participants agreed that writers need to be extra sensitive when writing for children

**Activity 4** How to take note of opportunities and challenges when writing books for children's.

**Observation:** Participants were advised to be alert on the activities in their environment in order to capitalize on any opportunities that may arise. These could come in form of new policies by Government that benefit children. Or initiatives in collaboration with cooperating partners such as UNESCO on research etc. that are aligned to children. Writers should always be on the look out for anything they can benefit from and take the lead where necessary. In some instances writers can even provoke by drawing attention to observed gaps such as shortage of leisure and entertainment books to take children off the streets. This might invite sponsors to fund such projects. The need to complement on going activities by Book Aid International and the effective use of Community libraries may find traction with parents and produce opportunities for writers. Writers should always think outside the box and be leaders in knowledge creation and dissemination.

**Outcomes:** Participants came up with numerous novel ideas which need to be pursued.

**Activity 5** How to avoid copyright violation and plagiarism and appreciate the value of copyright in promoting creativity..

**Observation:** Participants were made aware of the local Copyright and Neighbouring Rights Act (Chapter 26:05) that protects literary works.. Writers were made aware of what is protected under the Act i.e. books, journals, manuals, speeches, poems and novels. Writers were also made aware of the duration of copyright and related rights and that this can be applied internationally. Infringement of their works should be the least fear of any creator. Intellectual dishonesty through plagiarism has damaged the potential of many writers.

**Outcome:** The participants gladly embraced the new knowledge and expressed confidence to concentrate their efforts and leave the more complex issues to the experts.

**Programme conclusion and certification.**

Participants were awarded certificates of attendance and challenged to see how many of them would have produce a book in the next two years..

## **Programme evaluation**

It was considered that the two workshops provided a platform from which IBBY Zimbabwe will produce a comprehensive writing manual that will be a useful resource to established and new authors..

### **Benefits to the participants**

The program benefited the participants in the following ways:

- Using research as a tool for meaningful and relevant authorship as illustrated in the presentations.
- Creating believable, real, catchy, engaging and exciting characters in a story.
- Knowing how to plan before writing a book.
- Knowing how to handle culture, politics, religion and gender issues that are real and current in the world around them.
- Being professional writers who are aware of Copyright and Neighbouring Rights, and continuous avoidance of plagiarism

### **Resources availability**

The program was adequately funded for the agreed objectives but there were pressures from participants to transform the workshops from fact gathering into training sessions. It would be useful in future to take similar sessions to other parts of country We are equally indebted to the team leaders who availed their time and expertise to make the exercise rewarding and successful.

### **PLANS FOR 2025**

- Ensure the writing manual is widely distributed to libraries and writers' organization.
- Make follow ups and establish the impact of the manual in the short terms.
- Continue the reading exercises with selected schools
- Arrange radio air time for drama audios from the previous project
- Run a distribution of books for Book Aid International
- Respond to inquiries to hold writing workshops in other towns.

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**Harare, 7 February 2025**