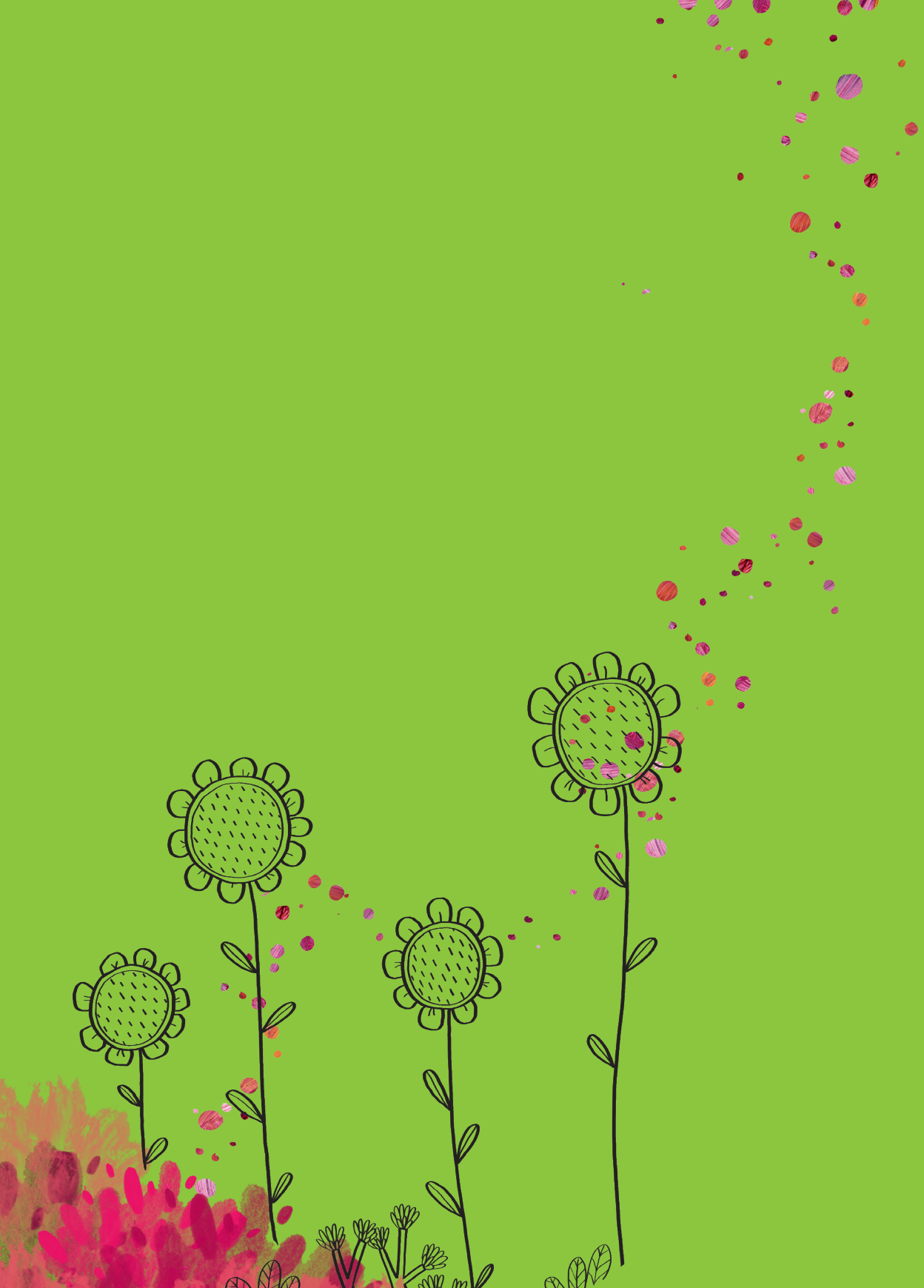




Plant stories, and the world will bloom

Manual for young “gardeners” based
on the International Children’s Book Day Message for 2026





International Children's Book Day Message for 2026

"Plant stories, and the world will bloom"

Once upon a time, a child was born, longing to live better than the heroes of fairy tales—who only lived happily ever after.

The child grew and changed, read, and became Don Quixote, battling windmills;

Alice, bringing wonder to life;

Robin Hood, saving the forests;

a wolf, gathering moon-singing packs.

Years passed, but the world remained untouched by the change once dreamed of.

Yet—the child managed to put together a brand new world within a garden courtyard, filled with everything dear to the heart.

More years passed.

And as books whispered wisdom into the soul, the child knew what had to be done.

When autumn came, the earth was tilled and seeds were planted.

Winter arrived.

The child waited patiently for the white sheath to melt, nurtured by the company of budding books.

Then it was spring. Tender leaves shot out from the stems.

Trunks thickened, branches stretched, buds sprouted.

The child's soul blossomed, filled with colours and scents.

And summer?

It was the time of boats, sailboats, hot-air balloons, bicycles... the time of travelling far and wide!

Now the child knew—without a doubt:

This was the way to change the world: by becoming a planter.

A planter of magical stories, sowing words, cultivating images, harvesting wonder, watering imagination.

And so stories began to grow and spread.

Then?

The child pruned with love, gifting bouquets to passersby.

Bouquets of peace, hope, strength, and faith in the impossible.

Bouquets of small miracles, for each and everyone.

Every spring, on the second of April, the stories the child had sown set the world ablaze with bloom.

Oh, and through the gardening workshops, reaping wisdom was passed on to young and old alike.

And the child's garden became the Garden of Love, the courtyard, the Courtyard of Wonders, as the magician always held his ground unspooling red threads of storytelling into the breeze.



Elena Perikleous

International Board on Books for Young People

The **International Board on Books for Young People** (IBBY) is a non-profit organization, representing an international network of people from all over the world who are committed to bringing books and children together.

It was founded in Zurich in 1953. Today, it is composed of 85 Sections across the world. It aims at bringing children into contact with quality books, based on the philosophy of its founder, Jella Lepman, that books can be bridges between people and cultures.

The **Cyprus Board on Books for Young People** (CYBBY) has participated in IBBY since its inception in 1974 as the Cyprus section of this international organization.

www.ibby.org

Cyprus Board on Books for Young People

CYBBY is the official section of **IBBY in Cyprus**. For the past **52 years**, it has worked steadfastly for the promotion of literature for children and young people, fostering a love of reading and enriching the literary culture of children and young people in Cyprus.

As a non-profit organization operating entirely on a voluntary basis, CYBBY organizes and participates in important initiatives with both national and international impact: events for children, authors, illustrators; conferences; book exhibitions; publications, and contests that highlight the island's literary production and connect it with the rest of the world.

www.cybbby.org



International Children's Book Day

Since 1967, the **International Children's Book Day** (ICBD) is celebrated across the world on **2 April**, the birthday of the Danish fairy-tale author, Hans Christian Andersen.

Each year, a different IBBY Section sponsors the ICBD by preparing a message and a poster that are distributed around the world, to inspire a love of reading, underscore the importance of children's books, and promote international collaboration in the development and dissemination of literature for children and young people.

In every country, this day is celebrated by children, authors, illustrators, translators, librarians, publishers and teachers through imaginative events held in schools, libraries, bookstores and public spaces, as an expression of their love for books and their commitment to reading.

"Plant stories, and the world will bloom"

International Children's Book Day - ICBD 2026

For **2026**, CYBBY, **IBBY's Section in Cyprus**, is the sponsor of the **International Children's Book Day**.

The selection process for the text and image of the ICBD 2026 poster broke new ground: for the first time, both the message and the image were chosen by children themselves rather than through the usual practice of direct assignment. This innovative initiative by the Cyprus IBBY positively influenced the IBBY Executive Board's decision to select CYBBY's proposal for the creation of the poster.

Following a procedure that ensured both quality and anonymity – with the identities of the artists revealed only after voting had concluded – children from 19 schools chose the message of multi-award-winning author Elena Perikleous and the design of acclaimed illustrator Sandra Eleftheriou. The two had worked separately on the poster, using CYBBY's motto as inspiration.

Action:

"The Garden of Stories in the Courtyard of Wonders"

Stories as seeds for change. Just like the Planter (the protagonist of the message, p. 3) grows stories, children too can be creative, sharing and "planting" stories that blossom and bring hope, imagination and empathy.

Aim: to cultivate creative writing, imagination and empathy through a multisensory literary experience in which the story is interwoven with earth, light, colour, and life.

Structure of the Action:

1 Narration

The action begins with a theatrical/dramatized narration of the text.

2 Planting the seeds of words

Each child writes on a "seed" (a piece of paper) a word he or she would like to "plant" in the world: words such as **hope, friendship, freedom, hug, play**. The children decorate the words and symbolically plant them in small pots along with real seeds.

Continuation: children take the pot home with them to nurture it.

3 Planting stories (creative writing activity)

Children write a brief story (microstory), creating their own **garden of stories**. The microstories are written on a cardboard sheet featuring a flower. The title and development of the story are written within the flower's petals, leaves and stem, driven by 5 questions (who, where, when, what, why). This creative writing activity is structured around the 5 floors of imagination:



“5 floors of imagination”

Who? (The hero/ heroes)

- Which person, animal, object or imaginary creature will be at the centre of the story?
- They may have a distinctive trait or secret.

Where? (The place)

- In which setting does the story take place? In the real world, in a school, in the woods or in a completely imaginary place?

When? (Time)

- Today, in the past, in the future, in a non-existent time or during a “moment” that only lasts for a few seconds?

What? (The event/action)

- What happens to trigger the story? Is it a mystery, a revelation, a problem that must be solved, an unexpected meeting?

Why? (The meaning/incentive)

- Why does this happen? What does the hero want? What’s behind the story? What kind of message, feeling or question will it leave the reader with?

Microstory: a very brief narrative (usually no more than a few lines or paragraphs) that presents a complete incident, scene or image with a beginning, middle, and end. Its aim is to evoke emotion, provoke reflection or create surprise through the density and economy of its language.

4 The Courtyard of Wonders: All brief stories and/or “paper seeds” are incorporated in a large collage or other installation in the classroom (or in any other central space within the school).

5 The Garden of Stories: A true Garden of Stories is created within the school. Each plant is accompanied by the children’s words-wishes or their brief stories written on the paper flowers, which may be affixed to sticks and then “planted” alongside the real plants.

6 The Day when Stories Blossom: “Story Bouquets” Parents and grandparents are invited to the school, where children share their own stories by offering guests their “bouquets of words/stories”. The paper “bouquets” are made using flower-words (e.g. peace, friendship, hope)



and microstories. The children distribute the bouquets among parents, teachers, guests or even people they met through organized visits outside the school. Just as the Planter offers bouquets, the children give away their own “flowers”.

7 The Magician and the Wonders: The magician unspools the red thread of the stories, and the children write down or draw the wonders they wish for our world. They then tie the pieces of paper to the red thread, which can be unfurled in an open-air space, like an installation, where school guests may add their own “wonders”.

8 I become my own Hero and change the world: Children choose a hero from a story they love and, after studying him or her, create his or her profile. They then select one of the wonders attached to the red thread that they would like to help make real, and either write or tell a story.

9 Role play: “Transformations” I become the hero of my heart! Children “become” the message’s Don Quixote, Alice, Robin Hood or Wolf. Through role-play, they realize how heroes can help them change the world.

10 Core/Final act: “The Garden of Stories–The Courtyard of Wonders” A collective creative and experiential act.

Stage set: A large garden is created (either indoors or in an open-air space). At its centre stands a Tree of Stories (an installation made of branches or paper). Around it are small flowerbeds or pots with seed-words and “flower stories” that the children have already made.

How the act unfolds:

- **The Red Thread:** A red thread held by the “Narrator-Magician” is passed from child to child, and then to parents and grandparents. Each time the thread passes, participants share the seed-word they had written on a piece of paper (e.g. “hope”, “love”, “peace”) which they will later plant.

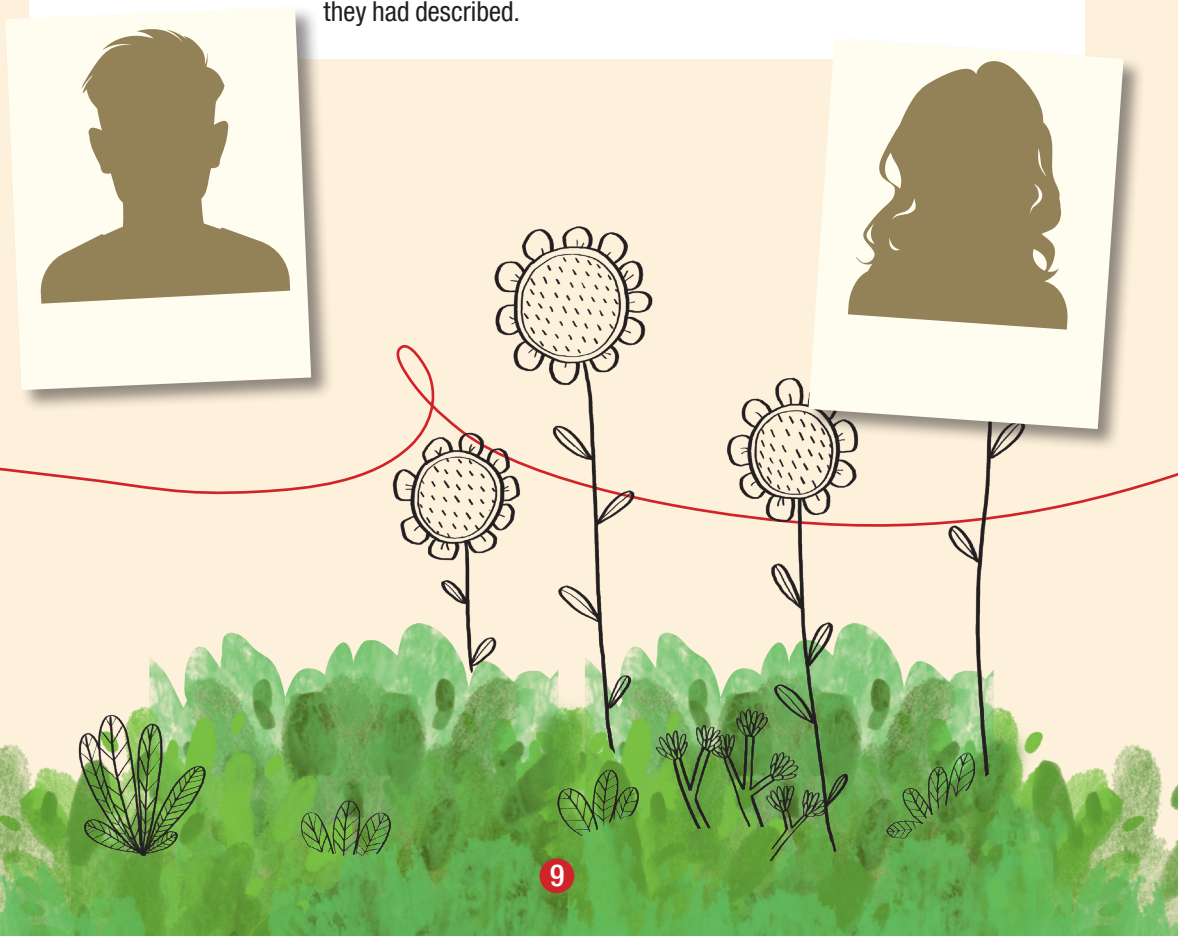
- **The Transformations:** Groups of children come onto the stage and briefly “transform” into the heroes featured in the message, e.g. Don Quixote, Alice, Robin Hood, the moon-singing Wolf, demonstrating, through short enactments, how stories change us.

- **The Tree of Stories:** The children affix their “paper leaves”, containing hopeful, awakening and comforting words, to the Tree of Stories, which gradually fills with colours, words and stories.

- **The Bouquet in Bloom:** Once the tree is fully decorated, the children distribute to the audience “Bouquets of peace, love, hope” with flower-stories.
- **The Courtyard of Wonders:** The space is symbolically transformed into a “Courtyard of Wonders”. All participants plant real plants with their seed-words, affixing nearby the flower-stories that the children have created and distributed with the bouquets. In this way, “The Garden of Stories” is put together in an open-air setting.
- **Closing:** The Narrator closes with the reminder that with every story we plant, the world begins to bloom.

11 “Seeds for Tomorrow – Time Capsule of Dreams”: During art class, children paint their own portrait as they imagine themselves when they are older (e.g., at age 30) and write details about that future self: what they dream of achieving, what they will be doing, where they will live, and their family situation. The texts may be written in the first-person and in the present tense, to make them more vivid.

An “exhibition” of the children’s works is then organized, during which children read their texts – in other words, their dreams for tomorrow. Their voices may also be recorded so that QR codes can be attached to their works; by scanning the code, one can hear the children’s voices describing their dreams for the future. This functions as a time capsule of dreams: each child keeps their portrait along with their narration and can listen to it even when they have grown beyond the age they had described.



For high schools, lyceums

Action:

“Plant stories, and the world will bloom”

Stories as seeds for change. Just as the Planter (the protagonist of the message, p. 3) grows stories, teenagers too may “plant” stories filled with meaning, contemplation, and a vision for a better world.

Aim: to cultivate a love of reading and to develop a personal voice of expression through creative writing, with an emphasis on social and existential reflection.

Structure of the Action:

- 1 **Sowing Journals:** Students keep a journal of inspiration, recording ideas, verses, images and observations that may inspire the story they will “plant”.
- 2 **Seed-Words:** Students reflect on what words like light, imagination, struggle, vision, mean to them individually.
- 3 **Sowing Texts:** Students write haikus, manifestos, and microstories.
- 4 **The Planter’s Workshop–Creative Writing:** Creating stories, poems or editorials on the theme “Imagination changes the world”.
 - Employing creative writing techniques (change of perspective, metaphor, time shifts).
 - Assembling a story with 3 random seed-words (e.g. *root*, *connection*, *wings*) or even using the sowing texts.
- 5 **The Planter as Symbolism:** Analysis of the text/message; the idea of the Planter as metaphor.
 - Symbolisms and values behind the figure of the Planter.
 - How/Who would the Planter be? Writing a personal monologue (and theatrical adaptation).
- 6 **“Light and Darkness within me”:** Reading and interpreting parallel excerpts from well-known authors and poets, inspiring students to lend their own voice to words and to ponder how imagination and narration can change the world.

Source of inspiration

- “Deep down I’m a question of light”. – Giorgos Seferis, Upon a winter sunray.
- “But you must know that only he who fights the darkness within, will the day after tomorrow have his own share in the sun”. – Odysseas Elytis, *The Axion Esti*.

Proposed Steps for Activity 6.

PART A

– Thinking –

What is darkness to me?

What is light to me?

PART B

– Creating –

My Darkness

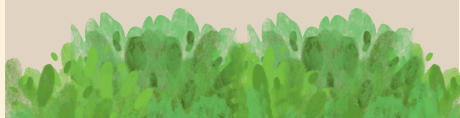
Begin with the phrase:

“Inside me, darkness is...”

My Light

Begin with the phrase:

“Deep down, I am a question of light...”



PART C

– Picturing –

Draw your circle here:

-“Darkness” to the left”

-“Light” to the right

At the centre write down a phrase
of your own, connecting the two.

PART D

– Sharing –

Write down a phrase about the kind of
light you want to offer others:

Aim: To discover that inside me there is
both darkness and light and that I can
turn my struggle into power and light,
for me and others.

7 Poetic Bouquets–Poetry for the Common Good: Students create poems/verses that become “bouquets” and are distributed in the community.

- Composing poems on paper-flowers or handmade cards.
- Public readings, or posting on school walls or on social media (#icbd2026 #cystorybouquets #cyprusibby #cybby).

8 The Digital Garden of Stories: Creating a collaborative website or digital platform featuring stories, reflections, podcasts and videos.

- Illustrated narration, podcast “Stories that Bloom”.
- Tools may include Book Creator, Canva, Padlet, Spotify.

9 Spring Festival: Performing Stories

- Performance of selected works.
- “Open mic” readings or presentations.
- Planting a symbolic plant from each class, with excerpts hanging from its branches.

“Seeds for Tomorrow – Time Capsule of Dreams”. Students create a “Time Capsule”. Inside they place their texts: seed-words or “poetic bouquets”. Each student writes on a paper-seed: “The dream/vision I would like to see growing in the world is...” The pieces of paper are placed in a metal box and planted with a tree/plant in the school grounds. The “Time Capsule” is sealed with a predetermined opening date (e.g. in 1 or 2 years).

Examples of Microstories

1. Seed-word: Hug

The hug that sprouted

On the edge of a town square, as people rushed by, a strange tree sprouted. It had no leaves and no flowers, only arms. Open arms, reaching towards every passerby. The tree was asking for a forgotten thing: a hug. At first everyone walked right past it. But as the days went on, some paused. They laid their burdens, their tears, their anxieties at its roots. And the tree silently held them in its arms. Time passed. The tree became a meeting point, a refuge. Those who hugged it said it held many stories within it: grandmothers waiting for their grandchildren with warm food and fairy tales. Friends who forgave and loved; children growing up to fulfill their dreams. No one knew who had planted the tree. Only a few children said that they had seen it sprout from a story someone had told: a story about a magic hug.

2. Seed-word: Flame

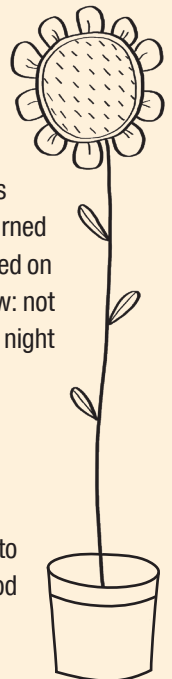
The flame that didn't burn

Once, in the night of a forsaken place, a different kind of flame lit up. It could not burn trees or destroy rooftops. It was quiet, sweet, deep. Unseen by eyes but felt by hearts. The flame slipped softly into houses inhabited by grief, where darkness reigned. From wherever it passed, what was small became grand and meanness turned to kindness. Grief smiled and the darkness shone. The flame needed no fuel, for it lived on the people's will to change. Those who met the flame, carried it within them like a vow: not to become fire that hurts, but to be a flame that enlightens. And so, little by little, one night at a time, the heart of the world warmed up without burning.

3. Seed-word: Book

The child with the Lifesaving Books

In a town with gloomy streets and hurried people, there lived a child who didn't want to grow up without purpose. Every morning, the child went out to the town square, stood by a chest filled to the brim, and sang a song like an incantation:



"With sun and rain across life's journey, we feel joy and sorrow.

"We go through envy, anger, pain, until we reach tomorrow.

*A book in hand for comfort, we turn to birds and trees;
we grow roots and wings".*

At first, passersby laughed, then paused and eventually extended their hands. One by one, they took the book offered to them and left. They read the book and then closed it within their hearts like a promise. Bit by bit, the town changed. And in the Country of After, born from the child's incantation, people walked around with lifesaving books in their hands. They became trees with roots that reached deep into kindness. They became birds with wings of imagination. They discovered who they were. They began dreaming of better worlds and then, slowly at first, more decisively later, they began building these worlds themselves.

You may send 3–4 photos* of your activities to the following email:

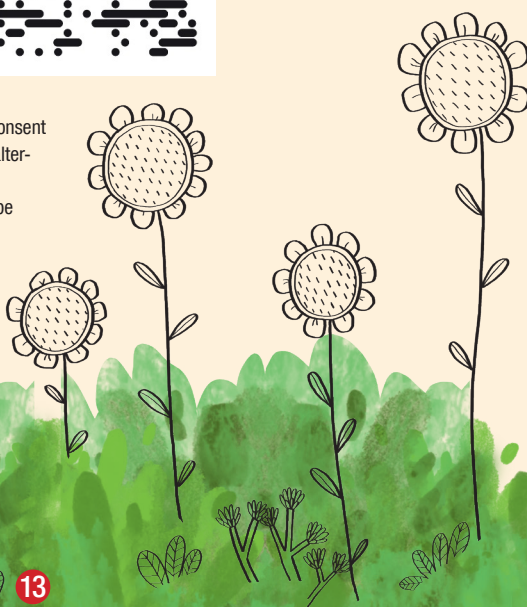
icbd2026@cybby.org

The photos must be accompanied by the name of your school or foundation and may also include a brief description (up to 50 words).

By scanning the QR code below, you can view all activities on the website created specifically for this purpose.



* The school or organization submitting the photos must obtain consent from the individuals depicted, or from their legal guardians, or alternatively submit photos with faces redacted. CYBBY and the Ministry of Education, Sport and Youth, cannot be held responsible for any violation of privacy.



Elena Perikleous

Commissioner for Children's Rights of the Republic of Cyprus, Author

Elena Perikleous was born with an itch – a restless urge for discovery. As a child she picked up words, pondered on silence, and listened to stories whispered to her by trees and book pages. She studied Education and obtained a Master's degree in Environmental Education because she believed that nurturing nature and nurturing a child are communicating vessels of sensibility. Today, as the Commissioner for Children's Rights, she steadfastly serves the vision of a society that listens to children's voices with understanding and respect. Through her work in education, culture and literature, she defends every child's right in life, expression, participation and access to art and culture. She has published twenty-eight books for children, adolescents and grownups, many of which have garnered State Awards and accolades by literary institutions in Cyprus and Greece. She believes that every story is a seed; when planted with love, the world blooms.



Sandra Eleftheriou

Sandra Eleftheriou studied Graphic Arts. She has been an illustrator since 2004, working with several publishing houses. Her work has received numerous accolades: a six-time winner of Cyprus's State Award for Illustration, she represented her country on the IBBY Honour List in 2012 and was a candidate for the Andersen Award in 2020. She has served on the State Juries for Best Book Illustration in both Cyprus and Greece and was nominated for the Madame Figaro Women of the Year Award in 2018 and 2022 in the "Artist" category. She is also an accomplished writer: The book *From the city I come...*, co-authored with Fytoula Vakana, was awarded by the Cyprus Board on Books for Young People – the Cyprus IBBY. Her play *The return of the lost prince* received a commendation from THOC-Cyprus's State Theatre. Her book *The keeper of 8ight – the beginning...* won Cyprus's State Award for Books for Young People.

In 2021, her dream of illustrating her own stories became true through a collaboration with Metaichmio Publications, resulting in the book *The teacher hates me!* In 2022, her book *You are a star!* was again published by Metaichmio.



Pancyprian Creativity Contest for Students

“Plant Stories, and the World will Bloom”

For more information and to see how children
can take part in the contest,
scan the following QR code.



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