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A Lion, an Elephant and an Occasional Bird: Stories at the Museum

A Project for the Promotion of Reading

The Croatian Government declared 2021 the Year of Reading based on the proposal by the Ministry of Culture and Media. This implemented the measures of the Action Plan of the National Strategy to Promote Reading, adopted in 2017, that contribute to the development of reading culture and encourage reading with pleasure and understanding. The Ethnographic Museum joined the Year of Reading with the project *A Lion, an Elephant and an Occasional Bird: Stories at the Museum*, financed by the Ministry of Culture and Media.

The project was aimed at pupils of lower forms of the elementary school Žitnjak located in the suburban Zagreb city district of Petruševac, who almost never visited the Museum. The project



Picture 1. Narration of African stories, Photo by Nina Koydl

activities included workshops for pupils at the Museum, workshops for parents at the school, and a round table that included the participation of Museum pedagogues, teachers, the school librarian and literature researchers.

In this project, the students became acquainted with the Museum and its Permanent Exhibit of Non-European Cultures through an interactive guided tour, and the oral literature of distant countries of South America, Asia and Africa through storytelling and reading of original short stories. In addition to the way of manner, the storytelling also included the *kamishibai* technique originating from Japan. It is a way of telling stories with a series of pictures in a *butai* wooden suitcase. Today, it is widespread throughout the world and is a frequently used technique that enriches the emotional experience and encourages imagination, creativity and verbal expressiveness in children.

An added value of the project is that, in addition to the development of the pupils' reading competences, younger school children were encouraged to understand and accept their own and other cultures. The project also included parents, who were taught about the importance of reading to children and about the importance of visiting cultural institutions such as museums, which contributes to improving the quality of life of their children and families.

Furthermore, the project contributed to the development of underutilized cooperation between institutions that promote reading, increased networking opportunities between institutions, and aided the inclusion of new practices that promote reading development. It also demonstrated that reading is not only part of the curriculum of teaching Croatian language in school. The project contributed to the attainment of the goals of the National Strategy to Promote Reading, including the goal of fostering cooperation and the implementation of good practices between educational and cultural institutions.



Picture 2. *Kamishibai* storytelling, Photo by Nina Koydl