

Executive Summary

I. Context.

The so-called communications age has long held the promise of empowering people and facilitating the exchange of knowledge, and most recently the Internet has emerged as a powerful tool for uniting people across borders, cultures and walks of life. Nevertheless, all over the world, we continue to witness manifestations of violence, xenophobia, fundamentalism and exclusionary world-views that represent a clear failure to achieve this promise.

At Fundación La Fuente¹ we believe that culture –and literature in particular- has been vastly underestimated as a means for bridging the gaps that divide nations. We believe that by encouraging children to read about cultures and experiences beyond their own local and national borders, they might have a chance to become adults who resolve conflicts through peaceful, civilized negotiation rather than violence.

Books are expensive to publish. They are even more expensive to translate. It is because of this that often the best children's books –those that might change the way people think—do not reach the international audiences they deserve. In an ideal world, cultural ministries and book publishers might work together to achieve this goal. But the reality is that few governments view culture as an agent for change, and children's book publishers, as they compete with movies, TV and digital games for children's attentions, frequently overlook culturally valuable books in their quest for profits. It is this solution that *Reading Across Borders* (RAB)² addresses.

II. Our Project.

RAB is, in essence, quite a simple idea: a virtual library of thought-provoking, inspiring, entertaining, engaging children's books and stories from all around the world, translated from and into a variety of different languages, and made available through an Internet-based system that represents a paradigm shift in the way literature circulates, but which also ensures that the legal rights of author, illustrator and translator will be protected.

III. Implementation.

RAB will be a collection of children's books and stories from Europe, the Americas, Africa, Asia and Australia representing a diversity of experiences, traditions and cultures. The texts will be selected by an international council of advisors that will include experts in children's literature, educators, book editors, librarians and international institutions already working in this field, such as UNICEF, UNESCO, the International Research Society for Children's Literature and IBBY. In its initial phase, RAB will assign the translation of its

¹ www.fundacionlafuente.cl

² www.readingacrossborders.org

texts into the six official languages of UNESCO publishing, but the goal is to add more languages as the project matures. For the launch of the project, we will work with texts for readers from 7 to 10 years of age. RAB will negotiate with authors, publishers, and illustrators to secure the rights to publish the selected texts for the exclusive purposes of this project, which is expressly non-commercial in nature. The texts will reside on a digital platform and will be available in three different formats, for three user categories: *User One* may view texts online, free of charge, in read-only format; *User Two* will select a text, complete an online user agreement and pay a nominal fee for the right to download a PDF enabled for one-time-only printing of the text, paying a single fee for each individual text. Technological protection measures will be implemented to prevent copyright abuse and to ensure compliance with the user agreement. The *third user* category is represented by governmental and non-governmental institutions wishing to pay for the right to print an RAB text as a bound book and distribute it for non-commercial purposes. Users in this category will negotiate with RAB to establish a print run, fees, and other terms and conditions. Upon execution of the sublicense agreement, RAB will release a high-resolution, print-ready digital file.

We have structured the project so that it may begin on a small scale, with a limited number of texts and a limited number of original and target languages, but as time passes, it can easily be expanded in various ways: by adding original and target languages, by adding age groups, by creating collections oriented around specific themes. There are many possibilities for expanding this project, and they will depend primarily on the response we generate with the first collection we produce.

IV. Why is RAB a digital project?

The digital aspect of this initiative is essential for two main reasons. Firstly, RAB's main objective is to establish a treasure trove of great stories from around the world that will encourage reading and promote cultural understanding among young people. But RAB will only have meaning if it is seen and used by as many people as possible, and the economic realities that affect the cost of publishing, exporting, and storing bound books make the digital enterprise infinitely more attractive, especially in countries where book prices are prohibitive for most. By offering the option of a read-only text free of charge as well as a downloadable, printable version for a nominal fee, we can accommodate the needs of many different potential users.

Naturally this kind of internet-based project presents a number of challenges—technological, logistical, and legal, among others. We know this. But we also know that the Internet, when used wisely and intelligently, can be a powerful tool for effecting positive change. It is quite clear that the future of culture, and of literature, will have a home on the Internet and we want to be pioneers in that movement. As of yet, the book industry has not quite figured out how to use the Internet as an effective, viable platform for publishing, and though there are many unknowns to be contended with, RAB is a first step in that direction, in the hope of bringing great books and stories from all over the world to children who might otherwise have no way of reading about and, hence, understanding the lives and experiences of their global neighbors. That, to us, is a change worth trying for.