

Adventures in the Soviet Imaginary: Children's Books and Graphic Art

Twenty years after the demise of the Soviet Union, its culture continues to fascinate and mystify. Like other modern states, the Soviet Union exercised its power not only through direct coercion, but also through a vast media system that drew on the full power and range of modern technologies and aesthetic techniques. This media system not only served as a tool of central power, but also provided a relatively open space where individuals could construct their own meanings and identities.

Children's books and posters were two of the primary media through which a distinct Soviet imaginary was created, disseminated, and reinterpreted. Benefiting from the energy of young artists and from technological innovations in production, both media provided attractive and affordable products in huge print runs, sometimes reaching the hundreds of thousands. Despite the massive scale of production, their direct address and interactive construction encouraged a sense of individual autonomy, even as they enforced a sense of social belonging.

Soviet images were unusually intensive, communicating enormous amounts of cultural information with immediacy and verve. But they were also extensive, achieving broad distribution through society, constantly being copied, reiterated, and transposed from one medium to another. While elite artists continued to exercise leadership in traditional media, professional graphic artists brought formal and thematic innovations into such mundane spaces as the workplace, the barracks, the school, and even the nursery. Thus Soviet cultural identity was shaped not only through state ideology and propaganda, but also through everyday activities that could be edifying, productive, and even fun.

“Adventures in the Soviet Imaginary” examines both the intensive and extensive dimensions of Soviet posters and children books. By viewing the images and exploring connections between them we gain insight not only into what it meant to be Soviet, but also why this was a plausible, at times even an attractive proposition for generations of Soviet citizens.

This exhibition and the accompanying publication and Web exhibit (<http://www.lib.uchicago.edu/e/webexhibits/sovietchildrensbooks/index.html>), were created by the collaborative efforts of eight graduate students, one undergraduate and two faculty members at the University of Chicago. The other contributors are: Radoslav Borislavov, Kathryn Duda, Leah Goldman, Matthew Jesse Jackson, Michelle Maydanchik, Daniel Phillips, Katherine Reischl, Flora Roberts, Claire Roosien, and Andrey Shlyakhter.

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B. Bilopil's'kyi. *S.R.S.R. – nasha bat'kivshchyna!* Lithograph poster, ca. 1930.
Dr. Harry Bakwin and Dr. Ruth Morris Bakwin Soviet Posters Collection.

A multinational group of Young Pioneers (with their motto “Always prepared!”) recognizes the USSR as their common fatherland, the one historical bastion of a universal desire. The combination of photomontage and vibrantly-colored volumes captures the notion of communism as bridging reality and vivid imagination.

N. V. Tsivchinskii. *Pobeda piatiletki – udar po kapitalizmu.* Lithograph poster, 1931.
Dr. Harry Bakwin and Dr. Ruth Morris Bakwin Soviet Posters Collection.

Posters were conceived as contributing to the creation of a new Soviet citizenry through direct appeal to individuals. The depiction of a few iconic images in a spatially symbolic arrangement conveys a compelling and unequivocal voice. Many posters break their two-dimensional frame with forceful physical gestures—like this pounding fist—which drive home their ideological point and contribute to the physical momentum of revolution.

Dmitrii Naumovich Babichenko. *Komsomolets! Bud' gotov k oborone SSSR! Uchis' streliat' metko!* Lithograph poster, 1932.
Dr. Harry Bakwin and Dr. Ruth Morris Bakwin Soviet Posters Collection.

A member of the Young Communist League addresses viewers individually with a call to arms: individual skill is vital to national defense. The vertical orientation of the poster strengthens the insistence of the instruction. Although the medium of the poster is customarily regarded as propaganda (a concept exemplified in the posters by Viktor Deni and Dem'ian Bednyi), the direct appeal to an affective response by the viewer makes many Soviet posters more a form of agitation. Unlike top-down propaganda, agitation breaks down the opposition between performer and audience, allowing consumers of the image to construct meaning democratically.

Viktor Nikolaevich Deni (1893-1946). *Gnus.* Lithograph poster, ca. 1930.
Dr. Harry Bakwin and Dr. Ruth Morris Bakwin Soviet Posters Collection.

This collaboration between artist Viktor Deni and poet Dem'ian Bednyi excoriates the Social Democrats' alleged appeasement of the National Socialists in Germany:

Here he is, with greased-down hair, all “cultured à la Europe”;
In unbridled baseness, in naked treachery,
The SD bug has slavishly lowered his dirty standard
Before the Fascist jackboot.

Soviet citizens in the 1930s were expected to take a close interest in foreign affairs, even as they faced enormous tasks at home.

Da zdavstvuet vsemirnaia sotsialisticheskaia revolutsiia! Lithograph poster, ca. 1930.

Dr. Harry Bakwin and Dr. Ruth Morris Bakwin Soviet Posters Collection.

Graphic artists frequently combined a heroic depiction of Soviet forces with grotesque caricature of enemies. Here a colorful plume of Soviet might and pageantry explodes against a black-and-white background of craven capitalists and imperialists. Soviet posters often gesture towards other media. One can easily imagine this scenario being transposed to the stage or as a fireworks display.

Viktor Nikolaevich Deni (1893-1946). *Rot Front*. Lithograph poster, 1932.

Dr. Harry Bakwin and Dr. Ruth Morris Bakwin Soviet Posters Collection.

The raised fist and the exclamation mark epitomize the gesture of defiance encouraged in the text. The multitude of red banners replicates the gesture on a mass scale. By illustrating a particular model of behavior against an idealized global horizon, the poster uses a singular visualization to convey a directive to a mass audience.

*“Rot Front!” is the workers’ universal battle cry,
A threat to the whole band of bankers and stockbrokers.
The brokers have nary a day of peace,
Constantly faced with this.
They would attack us, but they’re afraid:
What an insult they’d get! Thunder strikes in our response:
“Hail the worldwide ROT FRONT!”
And no cannon or tanks will save the bankers then.
Their exchanges and banks will never withstand
The charge of the Rot-Fronters!
And the stockbrokers’ remains will fly
To the garbage heap!*

I tut, i tam, i skriz’—buduemo sotsiializm. Lithograph poster, ca. 1930.

Dr. Harry Bakwin and Dr. Ruth Morris Bakwin Soviet Posters Collection.

The structure in the background is representative of the new socialist life and provides a vista onto the future world. In the foreground, an instructive figure seems to step out of this idealized worldview and into the presently-existing world. The poster intimates that, if the lead of this figure is followed, the bridge between present and future worlds can be traversed.

Media

Soviet society is frequently represented as a vast, continuous superstructure of information that makes sense of and helps to transform the material world. Children's books prepare children to become able consumers of media and to take an active role in shaping their media environment.

Lev Abramovich Kassil' (1905-1970). *Tseppelin*.

Illus. Fedor Kondratov. Moscow: Molodaia gvardiia, 1931. 2nd ed.

The boy Peika hears of the arrival of a German Zeppelin from his father, who works a Linotype machine at a newspaper printing plant. Conflating the two wondrous technologies, Peika dreams of the “Linozep” as a grotesque aircraft that paints a huge celestial newspaper with its exhaust.

Elizaveta Iakovlevna Tarakhovskaia. *Radio-brigada*.

Illus. by Evgeniia Abramova. Moscow: OGIZ, Molodaia gvardiia, 1931.

Vladimir Shukhov's 1922 tower for the radio station of the Comintern served as a literal and metaphorical beacon of Soviet leadership in the international revolutionary movement. Tarakhovskaia's book urges children to help install radio receivers in villages so that everyone can hear the voice of Moscow.

Translation of text displayed above:

*Moscow speaks for the Octoberites
about how to raise chicks,
about how to plant radishes in the garden,
about how to play at the playground.*

*Moscow speaks to the pioneer detachments
about how to do gymnastics,
about strikes at Berlin's factories,
about fascist atrocities in the south of Italy.*

*Moscow speaks about grain and sowing.
Moscow speaks to everyone, everyone, everyone!*

A. Gromov. *Trafarety*.

Moscow: OGIZ, Molodaia gvardiia, 1931.

Ekaterina Zonnenshtral'. *Ia pechatnik*.

Illus. by Konstantin Vasil'evich Kuznetsov.

Moscow: Molodaia gvardiia, 1932.

With the interest in practical know-how it is not surprising to find books that teach children how to construct posters and other printed matter using common household materials.

Sergei Mikhalkov (1913-2009). *Moia ulitsa*.
Illus. by Vladimir Vasil'ev and Iurii Ivanovich Pimenov.
Moscow: Gos. izd-vo, 1943.

Mikhalkov's wartime book instructs children how to view propaganda posters:

*Here they display TASS Windows
For the entire city to see.
The people rush along the streets
But everyone still stops to read
The funny window-poster.*

*I see Hitler's portrait
And I know he is a cannibal.
But I do not shake from fear;
I simply laugh it off.
I hold daddy by the hand
And I do not fear the Germans!*

Osip Kolychev. *Deti Sovetov.*

Illus. by Elena Afanas'eva and I. Kuleshov.

Moscow: Molodaia gvardiia, 1931.

The illustrations in this book urging political activism incorporate Gustav Klutsis's striking design for a 1930 electoral poster, an example of how the creators of children's books occupied a mediating role between vanguard artists and the mass media system.

Partial translation, text displayed above:

Light and merry

Looks the school building;

It is all dressed up

In red banners.

[...]

And bright posters

Gaze from the rafters.

The delegates enter

From factories.

Here, under the school's roof,

For an important discussion,

Several workers

Decided to meet.

Postcard reproduction of Gustav Gustavovich Klutsis (1895-1944).

Vypolnim plan velikikh rabot.

Moscow: Kontakt-kul'tura, 2008.

On loan courtesy of Robert Bird

Klutsis used a similar design for a poster in support of the Five-Year Plan, which reads "We will fulfill the plan of great projects."

Internationalism

Like the posters, many Soviet children's books of the 1920s and 1930s express an ambition for the global spread of communism. Such books were to educate young Soviet citizens about the plight of children in capitalist societies around the world and prepare them to participate in the liberation of these societies. Some books portray foreigners as helpless "little brothers" whom the Soviet citizen is obliged to rescue from hunger, poverty, and oppression. The Soviet Union was actually involved in the political determination of some of these countries, such as Mongolia. Other books depict international resistance movements independent of Soviet intervention.

A. Gelina. *Gassan arabskii mal'chik.*

Illus. by A. P. Mogilevskii. Moscow: OGIZ - Molodaia gvardiia, 1932. 2nd ed.

Hassan, a nomadic boy in British colonial Arabia, dreams of imitating his revolutionary uncle Rashid and someday liberating his people from the oppression of the merchants and colonialists.

Agniia Barto (1906-1981). *Bratishki.*

Illus. by Georgii Echeistov. Moscow: OGIZ, Molodaia gvardiia, 1931. 4th ed.

Little Brothers, by A. Barto, describes children around the world in terms of physical features, linguistic caricatures, and the family's work. The Indian child's father works in the fields under the watch of a harsh overseer; the East Asian boy's mother works in a textile factory. Only the Russian boy's father works "for himself."

Oleg Shvarts. *Slet*. Moscow: Gos. izd-vo, 1930. 2nd ed.

Of the children attending the international Young Pioneers conference in Moscow, two hail from the United States: Elmar MacDonald, the son of an imprisoned Irish strike leader; and an African American boy named Shelly Strickland who suffers under segregation.

G. Al'ner. *Pioner i politsiia*. Moscow: OGIZ, Molodaia gvardiia, 1932.

The Pioneer and the Police purports to have been written by a “young German worker.” It tells about the twentieth-century German Pioneers movement. A disclaimer on the back cover of the book says the book was published despite its “schematic and stylized” illustrations, which did not correspond to Soviet standards.

Military Preparedness

The need for military preparedness was communicated in children's books in three ways: through the history and implied lessons of the Russian Civil War; through models of pre-military training and war games; and through assertions of the Soviet Union's current military might, usually with an emphasis on the continued threat of war and need for vigilance. These books dealt with violent themes, but they did so in a way that made war fun.

**Aleksandr Ivanovich Vvedenskii (1904-1941). *Konnaia Budennogo*.
Illus. V. I. Kurdov. Leningrad: Molodaia gvardiia, 1931.**

The most heroic aspect of the Civil War was the legendary cavalry of Semyon Budyonnyi, here shown attacking a train. The propaganda value of the fierce and awesome Red Cavalry is suggested by the poster reproduced in this illustration.

Ivan Korshunov (b. 1903) and L. Notkina. *Bud' gotov k oborone, voennaia igra v ochage*. Illus. by G. Petrov. Leningrad: OGIZ, Molodaia gvardiia, 1931.

Korshunov and Notkina offer younger children an alluring model for playing at war, with deceptively simple instructions for constructing a castle, cannon, horses, and tents out of cardboard and plywood. A swastika flutters over the enemy fortress, surmounting the flags of other nations hostile to the USSR (Poland, Finland, France, Romania, Latvia, and the United States). Thus, even as they are having fun, children are being educated in the complex relationship between capitalism, imperialism, and Fascism.

S. Isakov. *Krasnaia konnaia.*

Moscow: OGIZ, Molodaia gvardiia, 1931.

Though the Red Cavalry was notoriously swashbuckling, here they are depicted undergoing political instruction by various means, including posters, radio, and cinema. Past glories do not mitigate the need for constant vigilance and training.

Ia. Miller. *Grazhdanskaia voina.*

Illus. by Alisa Poret. [Moscow?]: Gos. izd-vo, 1930.

Gift of R.R. Donnelley & Sons Company

The most heroic moment of Soviet military history was the Civil War (1918-1921), when the young Red Army repelled multiple enemies. These pages depict combat with the anarchist warlord Nestor Makhno (1888-1934) and a defining victory at Perekop over counter-revolutionary forces led by general Petr Vrangeli' (1878-1928).

The Future's Style

Every Soviet child was destined to live in a world that did not yet exist, a world very different from the one familiar to Soviet adults, including the illustrators of children's books. With the harrowing and tumultuous experiences of war and revolution still recent memories, artists engaged in the production of children's books during the 1920s and 1930s inhabited a paradoxical creative environment: the child-reader could not be shown the world as it *really* was, but only as it shall be. In order to be effective, Soviet children's illustrations needed to exist simultaneously on several different planes of experience.

***Mar'ia Morevna*. Illus. by Ivan Iakovlevich Bilibin. [St. Petersburg, Russia]: Izd. Ekspeditsii zagotovleniia gos. bumag, 1903.**

In the collectively anticipatory atmosphere of the Soviet state, the illustrations of famed pre-revolutionary artists, such as Ivan Bilibin (1876-1942), could serve only as negative examples. The traditional visual register of Russian children's books—comforting and comfortable pictures of mythical creatures, cozy cabins, and picturesque forests—simply had no place in the new representational order.

Nikolai Fedorovich Denisovskii. *Zoloto*. Moscow: OGIZ, Molodaia gvardiia, 1931.

Elizaveta Iakovlevna Tarakhovskaia. *Bei v baraban!* Illus. by Nikolai Fedorovich Denisovskii. Moscow, 1930. 3rd ed.

The Soviet illustrator learned to place a protagonist's activities in a kind of empty space, a zone dominated by boldly-rendered figures acting within an expanse of immaterial whiteness. In illustrations such as Nikolai Denisovskii's for *Zoloto* (Gold) and *Bei v Baraban!* (Bang the Drum!), the juvenile reader encounters a radically dis-incarnated world of bodies and objects lodged in barely imaginable landscapes.

Samuil Marshak (1887-1964). *Vchera i segodnia*.

Illus. by Vladimir V. Lebedev. Leningrad: OGIZ, Molodaia gvardiia, 1931. 5th ed.

Samuil Marshak (1887-1964). *Bagazb*.

Illus. by Vladimir V. Lebedev. Leningrad: Molodaia gvardiia, 1931. 6th ed.

Samuil Marshak (1887-1964). *Raznotsvetnaia kniga*.

Illus. by Vladimir V. Lebedev. Moscow: Gos. izd-vo detskoi, 1947.

One of the leading illustrators of children's books was Vladimir Lebedev (1891-1967), a prominent avant-garde artist and a master of Soviet pedagogical minimalism. Comparison of Lebedev's work over time clearly shows the evolution of Soviet style, particularly the emergence of a new visual idiom in the years before and after World War II. In his illustrations for Marshak's *Raznotsvetnaia kniga* (The Multicolored Book, 1947) Lebedev abandons the generic, generalizing tone of his earlier work for a warm, welcoming visual grammar.

Viewing and Learning

Soviet children's books made use of their distinct perceptual effects and anticipated modes of reception in order to realize pedagogical goals. Unlike posters, which endeavored to communicate their agitational messages as widely and instantaneously as possible, children's books were oriented toward individual consumption, encouraging a personalized and participatory mode of viewing. This was accomplished largely through a durational effect enabled by the books' multi-page design and narratives. The books' horizontal orientation and tactile construction also facilitated an interactive and individualized experience akin to a guided self-education, as opposed to the posters' mass directives. The books steered their viewers, but in a manner that consumes a longer span of time and requires a greater deal of interpretive activity.

First

I'll draw

A house

as I

want it.

The main thing

Is to draw

A marvelous

house,

Alive as if.

This is

the front,

It's called the façade.

Anyone

can make this out:

this is the bath

and this the yard.

The plan is ready,

around it

a hundred tasks

for a thousand hands.

The scaffolding scrapes

the very sky.

Aleksandr Nikolaevich Abramov. *Konveier*.

Illus. by Aleksei Mikh. Laptev. Moscow: OGIZ, Molodaia gvardiia, 1932.

This conventional book utilizes the extended space of the book format to depict progress in two ways. On a two-page spread, the process of building a car is illustrated in a sequential zig-zag across the pages' plane to allow the viewer to follow the steps of the assembly line. The remaining pages illustrate the gradual, collaborative process of creating a three-dimensional construction out of paper.

Nikolai Troshin. *Khlebozavod No. 3*.

Illus. by Ol'ga Deineko. Moscow: OGIZ, Molodaia gvardiia, 1931. 2nd ed.

The book's foldout format manipulates the temporal possibilities of reading to illustrate the production and distribution of bread, a crucial staple in the Russian diet. The outer flaps of the foldout section depict the first and last stages of the factory's procedure, mirroring the night and morning scenes presented at the start and end of the book. The four-page spread within portrays the complete process of baking loaves of bread.

Nikolai Asanov (b. 1906). *Domna*.

Illus. by Georgii Echeistov. Moscow: Gos. izd-vo, 1930.

The illustrations invite viewers' individual interpretations by presenting a number of disparate scenes or images in various perspectives, angles, scales, and in somewhat different styles. This is evident throughout the book and even within a single page.

Vladimir Mayakovsky (1893-1930). *Kem byt'?*

Illus. by Nisson Shifrin. Moscow: OGIZ, Molodaia gvardiia, 1932. 4th ed.

Nisson Shifrin's design offers disjointed and versatile views of particular professions by compiling images from a number of distinct, decentered scenes or representations in incongruous scales and perspectives across the books' pages. The skill of creative reading is paralleled by the anarchic style of the buildings designed by the architect, one of the featured professions.

Konstantin Vasil'evich Kuznetsov (1886-1943). *Druzhnaia rabota*.

Leningrad: Gos. izd-vo, 1930.

The Collective and the Individual

Russian revolutionary theorists emphasized the concept of the collective, both as a tribute to the movement's populist roots and a means to stabilize and build a new society. During the Cultural Revolution (1928-1932), these "cultural-enlightenment workers" turned to children's literature to spread their message. Children were often the first literate members of their households. Moreover, it was believed that this first Soviet generation, uncorrupted by the past, would imbibe the revolutionary gospel of the collective without reservation, teaching it to their elders and eventually their own children, creating a clean break with the past and a firm beginning for the new, collective future.

The collective's power lies in its ability to perform work as a single, harmonious unit, within a trade or across society. While many books focus on collective labor, others address workplace specialization, softening its individualizing tendency by portraying unified brigades laboring together. Relaxation can also bring society together. Children are encouraged to join society's collective labor, particularly through the Young Pioneers, a service-oriented scouting group. Finally, cautionary tales warn against aloofness.

As the Soviet Union's parallel industrialization and collectivization drives gained pace from the late 1920s through 1930s, the need for exemplary workers to push their peers ahead quickly became apparent. Soviet iconography turned to portrayal of individual heroes: the model citizen, with proper values and behavior, and the "shock worker," who exceeded production targets in prodigious feats of labor. These heroes, outstanding members of the collective, would lead society forward into the bright future through their strength, ironclad work ethic, and fearless intelligence.

In children's books the hero was frequently a child himself, usually male and endowed with superlative physical prowess. This child-hero welcomed opportunities to display his abilities, teaching others by example that even the greatest feats are achievable for true scions of socialism. Though the child-hero's project might fail, such visionary tales instructed readers to continually push forward, to become future leaders, always to the greater glory of the collective. Finally, because even exceptional children need guidance, some stories featured adult role models, either archetypal worker-heroes or real life leaders.

Mikh. Ruderman. *Subbotnik*.

Illus. by K. Kuznetsova. Moscow: Gos. izd-vo, 1930.

Factory workers and children labor together voluntarily after the workday is done to unload a train filled with potatoes sent to feed the community, illustrating the good will created by and further facilitating the collective ideal.

V. Alfeevskii. *Park kultury i otdykha*.

Illus. by Tat'iana Alekseevna Mavrina. [Moscow]: Gos. izd-vo, 1930.

This joyously drawn picture book teaches that labor is not the only thing that can bring the new society together. In illustrations bursting with brightly colored, unindividuated bodies, it depicts the many pleasures available to good workers, who benefit from other's company at work and play.

Konstantin Vysokovskii (1896-1967). *Pionery v kolchoze*.

Illus. by M. Shtern. Leningrad: OGIZ, Molodaia gvardiia, 1931.

On a day trip to a collective farm, eager Young Pioneers join in the collective labor, distributing school supplies and working alongside their elders installing a radio, plowing, sowing, milking, and collecting recyclable material.

Aleksandr Ivanovich Vvedenskii (1904-1941). *Kolia Kochin*.

Illus. by Iurii Syrneva. Leningrad: OGIZ, 1930.

Naughty Kolia prefers his own fantastically incorrect answers to those learned as one by his peers. As a result, he is cast out absolutely from the warmth and camaraderie of their collective. They welcome him back only when he finally repents and asks them to help him study, thus becoming one with the others.

Elizaveta Iakovlevna Tarakhovskaia. *Bei v baraban!*

Illus. by V. Ivanova. Moscow: Gosudarstvennoe izd-vo, 1932. 4th ed.

The entire social collective—workers, children, Young Pioneers, and more—joins together to celebrate May Day. Hypnotic chants, swirling colors, and endless ranks of marchers envelop the reader entirely in the overwhelming atmosphere of a true Soviet holiday.

Aleksandr Ivanovich Vvedenskii (1904-1941). *Volodia Ermakov.*

Illus. by Konstantin Vasil'evich Kuznetsov. Moscow: OGIZ, Detgiz, 1935.

The progression in Vvedenskii's work from hero-type (*Winter All Around*) to hero-icon parallels the shift toward individual heroes in Soviet imagery at the time. Child-hero Volodia volunteers for daunting physical challenges, impressing other children with his exceptional abilities and boldly leading them into the socialist future.

Iakov Trakhtman (b. 1902). *Tri shchetki.*

Illus. by Nina Kashina. Moscow: Gosudarstvennoe izd-vo, 1930.

Child-hero Marusia is exceptionally devoted to cleanliness. One of the few female stars of the genre, she proudly proclaims her ownership of a toothbrush, clothing brush, and shoe brush, and demonstrates their use, so proper children will follow her lead.

Aleksandr Ivanovich Vvedenskii (1904-1941). *Zima krugom.*

Illus. by Lev Vol'shtein. Leningrad: OGIZ, Molodaia gvardiia, 1931.

A pair of Young Pioneers (the Soviet equivalent of Cub Scouts), hearty and impervious to chill temperatures thanks to their vigorous physical activities, encourage a pair of ordinary children who dream of becoming such heroes themselves—and achieve their goal.

Natalia L'vivna Zabala (b. 1903). *Bumazhnyi zmei.*
Illus. by Iosif Daitis. Kiev: Molodoi bol'shevik, [1933].

A visionary child-hero attempts to build a kite to soar to the heavens. The string snaps and he falls to the ground rather than flying on to the cosmos. Nevertheless, he has taken an important first step towards realizing his true ambition of becoming a fighter pilot and perhaps even leading Soviet flight into outer space.

Kornei Chukovskii (1882-1969). *Kradenoe solntse.*
Illus. by Iurii Vasnetsov. Moscow: Detizdat, 1936.

A bear saves the collective from darkness by defeating the selfish alligator who swallowed the sun. The wise, all-powerful bear rules over the forest and its grateful, loving denizens, who greet him with words that echo contemporary Stalinist rhetoric: "Thank you, grandpa, for the sun!" It is difficult not to see the bear as representing Stalin himself.

Modeling the New World (Do-It-Yourself!)

As the putative builders of a future world, children needed to be taught how existing things work and how new things come to be. Both tasks required the skill of modeling, which children's books encourage in numerous ways. Some display such exemplary modelers as architects, designers, and genetic engineers. Others confront young readers with concrete modeling activities. These books were essentially left unfinished, requiring the reader either to complete the book or to re-assemble it in a new form. At the same time, the visual strategies adopted by the artists introduce children to the power of artistic form to remold the world. Stalin once called writers "the engineers of human souls"; these books take his suggestion literally.

Do-it-yourself books are an interactive medium that invited children not only to enjoy reading, absorb information, and reflect on the world, but also to stimulate practical activity. Their topics were numerous—from industrial technology and military preparedness to voting and toy-making—but they were overwhelmingly geared toward the achievement of practical goals at hand and the acquisition of useful skills. Even as they seek to empower their audience, do-it-yourself books direct these powers to clearly defined social and economic ends, teaching their users to be productive members of Soviet society. Addressing their users as autonomous subjects of a complex social mechanism, do-it-yourself books exemplify the power and the limits of the Soviet imaginary.

Leonid Savel'ev (1904-1941) and Vladimir Aleksandrovich Tambi. *Chto my stroim? Tetrads' kartinkami*. Leningrad: Gosudarstvennoe izdatel'stvo, 1930.

Listing major construction projects, Savel'ev and Tambi leave space for children to add more objects as they arise and are reported in the media. The interactive design underscores the point that the Soviet map was fundamentally open-ended and subject to change. Thus, children were encouraged to imagine leaving their mark on the landscape.

**Petr Miturich (1887-1956). *V pitomnike Michurina*.
Moscow: Molodaia gvardiia, 1931.**

Ivan Michurin (1855-1935) was an experimental botanist who genetically engineered fruits and other plants to create genetic strains better suited to Russia's northern climate. Miturich's illustrations not only hold Michurin up as an exemplary hero and represent his experiments for children; they appear to establish a parallel between Michurin's creations and the new generation of Soviet youth.

**A. Laptev (1905-1965). *Stroim iz kartona*.
Moscow: OGIZ "Molodaia gvardiia", 1932.**

One difficulty faced by authors of do-it-yourself books was the scarcity of materials available to children. Aleksei Laptev's book teaches children to build toys from cardboard. Examples include grain elevators and oilrigs, which echo major themes of Stalin's Five-Year Plan (the subject of another book by Laptev on display nearby).

See a mock-up of a grain elevator made according to Laptev's instructions.

**Model grain elevator constructed by Claire Roosien according
to instructions in Laptev's *Stroim iz kartona*.**

**L. Iudin. *Iz bumagi bez kleia*.
Illus. by Vera Ermolaeva. OGIZ, Molodaia gvardiia, 1931.**

Aimed at young readers from the countryside, this book teaches children how to make models of familiar objects "from paper, without glue." The illustrations, by a prominent vanguard artist, also serve to familiarize children with the new, abstracting vision required for the redesign of their world.

**Mikhail Ivanovich Pankov. *Mel'nitsa*. Illus. by Lidiia Popova and
Boris Matveevich Nikiforov. Moscow: OGIZ - Molodaia gvardiia, 1932.**

"Have you seen a windmill in your village? Do you want to build one?" The book teaches children how to build a variety of objects through the example of the little boy Leva. Such narratives are not common in do-it-yourself books.

F. Kobrinets. *Knizhka-kino-seans o tom, kak pioner Gans Stachebnyi Komitet spas.* Illus. by Isaak Eberil'. Leningrad: OGIZ, Molodaia gvardiia, 1931.

F. Kobrinets not only teaches children to appreciate the cinema as a source of information and understanding; he also urges them to shape and even produce their own stories out of the materials he provides. Don't get carried away, though: while the book ends with the suggestion that children create their own films and show them to their friends, it also reminds its young readers to be aware that the films they will be making are not real.

View the complete book on the gallery wall.

Digitized version of F. Kobrinets. *Knizhka-kino-seans o tom, kak pioner Gans Stachebnyi Komitet spas.* Illus. by Isaak Eberil'. Leningrad: OGIZ, Molodaia gvardiia, 1931, with translations by Claire Roosien.

Ivan Korshunov (b. 1903). *Detmashstroï, samodel'nye igrushki-mashiny.* Illus. by L. Kapustin. Leningrad: OGIZ, Molodaia gvardiia, 1931.

The variety of toys showcased here is striking—from semaphore and turbine to tractor and seesaw. Having been given partial examples, children are encouraged to continue working and construct the remaining parts of a tractor. While it explains how turbines work and how a simple toy turbine can be constructed, the book also reminds its readers that a “real turbine is made of steel and is quite complex.”

E. Kondiain. *Zheludi i spichki.* Leningrad: OGIZ, Molodaia gvardiia, 1931. 2nd ed.

Building simple toys from acorns and matches is something that every little Soviet boy and girl can do. Numerous examples and pictures teach children how to make animals by making holes in the acorn and inserting matches in them.

L. Sinitsyna. *Prygaiut, letaiut.* Illus. by Mariia Siniakova. Moscow: OGIZ Molodaia gvardiia, 1931.

Deineka

Born in 1899 in Kursk, Aleksandr Deineka studied at the Kharkiv Art College and participated in the defense of Kursk by the Red Army during the civil war following the 1917 revolution. Besides his work as an illustrator, Deineka painted scenes of both the heroic Soviet present and its hoped-for future, as well as providing similar designs for the ceiling mosaics of the Maiakovskaia station of the Moscow Metro, completed in 1938. Deineka died in 1969.

Deineka briefly studied at VKhUTEMAS, a center of the post-revolutionary avant-garde, but left that group in order to pursue his belief in the continued relevance of figurative painting to revolutionary culture. The work displayed here, though conservative by some standards in its commitment to figuration, nevertheless shows a familiarity with avant-garde (or more broadly modernist) tropes: the grid, the incongruent space of the compositions creating an effect akin to collage or photomontage. These elements disappear in much of Socialist Realism, including some of Deineka's own later work, which appealed more to nineteenth-century models.

Aleksandr Aleksandrovich Deineka (1899-1969). *V oblakakh.*

Moscow: OGIZ, Molodaia gvardiia, 1931. 2nd ed.

Gift of R.R. Donnelley & Sons Company

Here Deineka presents images of the kinds of aerial technology and physical prowess which one might aspire to use and develop. In this image, a sea plane flies in front of an urban landscape, while the lithe bodies of rowers exert themselves on the sea below. Throughout his career Deineka would return to the athletic body as a subject for his art.

Boris Ural'skii. *Elektromonter.*

Illus. by Aleksandr Aleksandrovich Deineka. Moscow: Gos. izd-vo, 1930.

The tower, power lines, and workers' bodies are a play of line that represents electrification through a general sense of dynamism, rather than through the delineation of logical relationships. We have no idea where this tower is or how it might be supported and connected to the ground. The desire to figure and represent the future stands in tension with its fundamental unknowability.

Like the ever-reliable postman of American lore, the electrician is a model laborer from whom all can learn:

Whatever the weather

Swift in his mission

Through the streets goes the electrician!

Semen Kirsanov (1906-1972). *Vstretim 3-i!*

Illus. by Aleksandr Aleksandrovich Deineka. Moscow: Gos. izd-vo, 1930.

Aleksandr Aleksandrovich Deineka (1899-1969). *Parad Krasnoi Armii.*

[Moscow?]: Gosudarstvennoe izd-vo, 1930.

Nikolai Nikolaevich Aseev (1889-1963). *Kuter'ma, zimniaia skazka.* Illus. by

Aleksandr Aleksandrovich Deineka. Moscow: Gosudarstvennoe izd-vo, 1930.

Playing with Photography

Photography provided new ways of seeing and documenting an entirely changed political and social reality. Avant-garde artists experimented with the capabilities of the photographic medium, defamiliarizing the everyday with extreme close-ups, as well as cutting and reassembling photographs into new collaged and montaged worlds. In particular, the artistic group Oktiabr' (October), which included Aleksandr Rodchenko, stressed a formal approach to photography: the striking close-up, diagonal composition, or shooting sharply from above or below the subject. Alongside the October group's formalist approach to the photographic subject, others—mainly photojournalists—focused primarily on conveying ideological information: straightforward documentary photographs with a clear narrative. In some cases these two approaches were combined, as is visible in the dynamically composed space of both large format photographic journals and small-scale children's books.

Vladimir Griuntal' and G. Iablonovskii. *Chto eto takoe?*
Moscow: OGIZ, Molodaia gvardiia, 1932.

The “snapshot-puzzles” (“snimki-zagadki”) in the first half of this book ask the reader to guess at what is being pictured in stylized black-and-white photographs and, at the same time, to solve a seemingly unrelated arithmetic problem. In the latter half of the book, numerical answers are revealed alongside more familiar views of the objects.

Nikolai Mislavskii. *Magnitogorsk.* Moscow: Molodaia gvardiia, 1931.

Narrative and documentary photographs present a straightforward account of the construction of the new industrial center Magnitogorsk. Unlike *Chto eto takoe*, the focus of this Socialist Realist work is not on objects, but the people who wield them.

Max Alpert. “The Giant and the Builder,” *U.S.S.R. in Construction*.
[Moscow]: State Publishing House of the R.S.F.S.R., 1931. No. 1, Jan. 1932.
Regenstein Library, General Collections

Max Alpert’s and Arkadii Shaikhet’s photo essays were frequently published in large format magazines. Alpert’s “The Giant and the Builder” documents a few years in the life of the young model worker Viktor Kalmykov as he works in the rapidly industrializing model city Magnitogorsk (Magnet-Mountain) during Stalin’s First Five-Year Plan. The journal *SSSR na stroiike* (USSR in Construction) was published in Russian and circulated abroad in English, French, and German.

Roman Karmen. *Aerosani*. Moscow: Molodaia gvardiia, 1931.

Written and photographed by the Soviet documentary filmmaker Roman Karmen, *Aerosani* documents the inaugural trip of a new aero-sleigh, or “airplane without wings,” as it travels from Leningrad to Moscow.

Transportation

During the twentieth century, the spread of trains and the rise of new, more rapid transit technologies (such as automobiles, mass transit systems and airplanes) piqued the interest of adults and children alike. Picture books about transport became popular around the world. Whether imaginatively animating life or thoroughly explaining new technologies, these books encouraged excitement in the limitless potential of machines. The hope was not only to demonstrate the benefits which technology offered contemporary society, but also to empower the young reader as a member of society. At times, however, the books appear to abandon all pretense of utility in a celebration of the anarchic energy of the imagination.

Watty Piper. *The Little Engine That Could.*
Illus. by Lois L. Lenski. New York: Platt & Munk, 1930.

The potential of new machines was an international phenomenon. The American classic *The Little Engine That Could* succinctly combined fascination with transportation with the theme of empowerment in the little blue engine's words: "I think I can." The book first became famous through the 1930 edition with Lois Lensky's illustrations. A similar story of a train overcoming distance is dramatized without words in N. Shifrin's foldout book *Poezd idet.*

Rudyard Kipling (1865-1936). *40 nord—50 west.*
Illus. by David Shterenberg. Moscow: OGIZ "Molodaia gvardiia", 1931.

Sometimes Western children's stories were adapted for Soviet use. This book adapts Rudyard Kipling's poem "Forty North Fifty West" in Samuil Marshak's translation.

Nisson Abramovich Shifrin (b. 1892). *Poezd idet.*
Moscow: Gosudarstvennoe izdatel'stvo, 1929.

Samuil Marshak (1887-1964). *Kolesa*.
Illus. by Vladimir Aleksandrovich Tambi.
Leningrad: Molodaia gvardiia, 1933.

Wheels,
Wheels –
An obedient
Lot.
You gladly turn
Any way.
To the right,
To the left,
Straight on,
To the side, –
Wherever your axle
Turns.

Daniil Kharms (1905-1942). *Igra*. Leningrad: Gosudarstvennoe izd-vo, 1930.

By identifying the new technologies with the boys, Daniil Kharms animates the liberating nature of new machines – a barge, a car, and a “Soviet airplane.” The illustrations in *Igra* discourage one from thinking that the boys’ transformation is literal, but Kharms’s words are ambiguous. When the boys encounter a cow, a tension arises between their imagination and the cow’s materiality. Unusually for Soviet children’s books, the imagination seems to win.

Evgenii Shvarts (1896-1958). *Stop!*
Illus. by Konstantin Ivanovich Rudakov. Leningrad: Molodaia gvardiia, 1931.

Daniil Kharms’s anarchic spirit infected other writers, like Evgenii Shvarts (1896-1958), a prolific author and dramatist who in *Stop!* teaches children how to behave safely on the street: “Up to the middle of the street look left; after the middle – look right,” one page instructs. But how is one to understand the caption on the facing page: “Everyone, everyone, everyone, stop riding the sausage!” ? The book’s accomplished illustrator made no effort to represent this instruction pictorially.

A. Savel'ev. *Vozdushnye rabotniki*.
Illus. by Vladimir Aleksandrovich Tambi. Leningrad: OGIZ, 1934.

Nationalities

The years of the “great transformation” from 1928 to 1932 witnessed what one scholar describes as “the most extravagant celebration of ethnic diversity that any state had ever witnessed.” The Soviet policy on nationalities, or national minorities, was based on Lenin’s belief that, alongside the “bad” nationalism of predatory colonialist nations, there existed a “good” nationalism of oppressed states yearning for freedom. The formula “nationalist in form, socialist in content” meant that minority languages, local customs and traditions, ways of life and dress could be inscribed with the same socialist meaning. The central authorities encouraged the use of local languages, often in new scripts devised by Soviet linguists. However, though all nations were equal in theory, some were decidedly “backward” and needed special help from their “Great Russian brothers.”

Grigori Ryklin (b. 1894). *Evreiskii kolkhoz.*

Illus. by S. Boim and B. Sukhanov. Moscow: OGIZ, Molodaia gvardiia, 1931.

Set on the “Ne unyvai!” (“Don’t Lose Heart!”) collective farm, this book debunks the stereotype that Jews are incapable of farming. The former craftsmen even turn their hands to swine breeding.

Evgenii Shvarts (1896-1958). *Buriatiia.*

Illus. by A. Iakobson. Leningrad: OGIZ, Molodaia gvardiia, 1931.

This book celebrates aspects of traditional Buriat culture, including butter-making and wrestling; its cover features stylized Buriat script, based on the classical Mongolian alphabet. However at this very time the script was being replaced by a Latin-based alphabet, which was in turn replaced by Cyrillic in 1940—a sign of the rapid modernization and assimilation to which non-Slavic ethnicities were being subjected.

A. Petrova (b. 1896). *Ot Moskvy do Bukhary.*

Moscow: OGIZ, Molodaia gvardiia, 1931.

Thanks to distant Moscow, a new lifestyle is rapidly gaining ground in Uzbekistan: trains replace camels, canals are dug by heavy machinery, and tractors accelerate the cotton harvest. A mosque has been re-labeled “Museum,” an electric tram has appeared, and new buildings—including a high school—have sprung up to replace the old.

O. Gur'ian. *Khuriat iz Bukhary.*

Illus. by A. Petrova. Moscow: Gosudarstvennoe izdatel'stvo, 1931.

The ancient city of Bukhara was a particularly exotic setting for children's stories, having been annexed only in 1920 when its Emir was driven out by the Red Army. Khuriat spends her days doing household chores and waiting on her father hand and foot. One day she meets a group of happy, independent children who live in a Soviet children's home, and they invite her to live with them. She joyously accepts the offer and embarks on a brave new life, with toy planes and trains to play with and plenty of pencils and paper to learn with.

***Turkestanskii khlopok.* Illus. by Mikhail Rankov and Elena Rodova.**

Moscow: OGIZ "Molodaia gvardiia", 1931.

The juxtaposition of new technology and the camel was ubiquitous in contemporary representations of Central Asia.

Samuil Marshak (1887-1964). *Nekhtn un baynt.*

Illus. by Meer Moiseevich Aksel'rod. Moscow: Shul un bukh, 1927.

This is a Yiddish-language edition of Marshak's *Vchera i segodnia* (Yesterday and Today). Marshak's poem, first published in 1925 with Vladimir Lebedev's illustrations, highlights the difference between the old pre-revolutionary and the new Soviet ways.

The Five-Year Plan

In 1928 Stalin introduced an economic policy based on a cycle of Five-Year Plans. The First Five-Year Plan called for the collectivization of agriculture and the expansion of heavy industry, like fuel extraction, energy generation, and steel production. Also known as the Great Leap Forward, the First Five-Year Plan was intended as a break with the semi-capitalist economic policies of the preceding several years (known as NEP) and as the commencement of a broad cultural revolution. The innovative construction of this picture book makes the goals of the First Five-Year Plan vividly present to the child's imagination.

Aleksei Mikhailovich Laptev. *Piatiletka*.

[Soviet Union]: Gosudarstvennoe izdatel'stvo, 1930.

Beginning from the front cover, the reader finds three maps: for the electrification of the country, the construction of factories, and the collectivization of farms. Through these maps, young readers become familiar with a synchronic view of the Five-Year Plan.

Starting from the back cover, the reader is presented with targets for ten aspects of Soviet industry including electricity, factory construction, bread production, transportation, and culture. By opening a multitude of flaps, the reader unfolds a diachronic view of the dramatic changes the Five-Year Plan will bring about in each of these industries.

Gender

The establishment of the Soviet Union brought drastic changes for women in the societies of the former Russian Empire. Some children's books of the 1920s and 1930s portray women doing work that was newly available to them thanks to policies including paid maternity leave, institutional childcare, and liberalized divorce law. However, most books portray women performing several gender-circumscribed jobs, such as childcare, sewing, and nursing. A significant portion of children's books focuses on women in the Central Asian republics, where veiling and the seclusion of women were some of the most significant issues in Soviet policy.

N. Sakonskaia. *Mamin most.*

Illus. by T. Zvonareva. Moscow: Molodaia gvardiia, 1933.

N. Sakonskaia depicts women at all kinds of jobs, from difficult factory work to complex architectural planning. Throughout the book, a little girl watches and imitates her mother at work.

Nadezhda Sergeevna Sher. *Chadra Giul'zarchi.*

Illus. by Vera Ivanova. Moscow: OGIZ, Molodaia gvardiia, 1932. 2nd ed.

A young Central Asian girl is caught along the road without her veil. At the insistence of an older woman, she dons the veil again, but the children of her town soon convince her to cast it off forever in honor of the newly established Women's Day, which is celebrated on March 8th.

Mapping

Upon visiting Moscow in the winter of 1926-27 Walter Benjamin observed, “The map is almost as close to becoming the center of the new Russian icon cult as is Lenin’s portrait.” Like other kinds of models, maps not only informed Soviet citizens where things were and how they worked; by presenting nationwide and global processes on a miniature scale, they also served as propaedeutic devices for the vast redesign of the world—and its people—by Soviet power.

Ye. Shabad. *SSSR, zapad, sever, vostok, iug.*

Illus. by Vtoroi kollektiv Izogiza. Moscow: OGIZ, 1932.

This cruciform book allows the child to discover the riches – ethnic, natural, agricultural and industrial – by unfolding it in the four directions of the compass. The map comes alive in the process of being read.

right

novich Babichenko. *Komsomolets! Bud' gotov k oborone 'streliat' metko!* Lithograph poster, 1932.

Young Communist League addresses viewers individually with a call to skill is vital to national defense. The vertical orientation of the poster insistence of the instruction. Although the medium of the poster is rded as propaganda (a concept exemplified in the posters by Viktor Deni dnyi), the direct appeal to an affective response by the viewer makes ters more a form of agitation. Unlike top-down propaganda, agitation opposition between performer and audience, allowing consumers of the ct meaning democratically.

***et vseмирnaia sotsialisticheskaia revoliutsiia!* poster, ca. 1930.**

requently combined a heroic depiction of Soviet forces with grotesque mies. Here a colorful plume of Soviet might and pageantry explodes nd-white background of craven capitalists and imperialists. Soviet posters vards other media. One can easily imagine this scenario being transposed s a fireworks display.

ievich Deni (1893-1946). *Rot Front.* poster, 1932.

nd the exclamation mark epitomize the gesture of defiance encouraged in litude of red banners replicates the gesture on a mass scale. By icular model of behavior against an idealized global horizon, the poster ualization to convey a directive to a mass audience.

it?" is the workers' universal battle cry,
o the whole band of bankers and stockbrokers.
rs have nary a day of peace,
y faced with this.
ld attack us, but they're afraid:
nsult they'd get! Thunder strikes in our response:
worldwide ROT FRONT!"
nnon or tanks will save the bankers then.
anges and banks will never withstand
e of the Rot-Fronters!
tockbrokers' remains will fly
buge heap!

ievich Deni (1893-1946). *Gnus.* Lithograph poster, ca. 1930.

n between artist Viktor Deni and poet Dem'ian Bednyi excoriates the s' alleged appeasement of the National Socialists in Germany:
s, with greased-down hair, all "cultured à la Europe";
ed baseness, in naked treachery,
no has slavishly lowered his dirty standard