



УНИВЕРЗИТЕТ У КРАГУЈЕВЦУ
ПЕДАГОШКИ ФАКУЛТЕТ У УЖИЦУ

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КУЛТУРА
ОБРАЗОВАЊЕ

Ужице, 2024.

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КУЛТУРА,
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**THE NOVEL “ANIKA DECIDED TO PLAY”
BY MARIA PETROVSKA –
SCHOOL FOR LIFE**

ABSTRACT: In this scientific article we will talk about the novel “Anika decided to play” by the young Macedonian author Marija Petrovska. In fact, the novel will only be our starting point to talk about the optimistic-vitalistic character of children's literature. For this purpose, through the character of the heroine – Anika, and her attitude towards life, her determination to achieve some things in life, for example, to learn to play, in which she succeeds, we will try to show the influence of the altruistic and positivist attitude to the world that surrounds the child. Of course, for this purpose, it is indispensable to show the importance of the close ones, relatives, parents, on the formation of these sides of the child's personality, a child who will become a worthy adult tomorrow.

KEY WORDS: *literature for children, mirroring, emotional intelligence, life goals, Marija Petrovska.*

THE NOVEL "ANIKA DECIDED TO PLAY" BY MARIA PETROVSKA - SCHOOL FOR LIFE

Abstract: In this scientific article we will talk about the novel "Anika decided to play" by the young Macedonian author Marija Petrovska. In fact, the novel will only be our starting point to talk about the optimistic-vitalistic character of children's literature. For this purpose, through the character of the heroine - Anika, and her attitude towards life, her determination to achieve some things in life, for example to learn to play, in which she succeeds, we will try to show the influence of the altruistic and positivist attitude to the world that surrounds the child. Of course, for this purpose, it is indispensable to show the importance of close ones, relatives, parents, on

the formation of these sides of the child's personality, a child who will become a worthy adult tomorrow.

Keywords: literature for children, music, Marija Petrovska.

Introduction

“Anika decided to play” by Marija Petrovska is a children's book that invites young readers into the colorful world of Anika, a witty protagonist who embarks on a journey of self-discovery through the power of decision. Set against a backdrop of play and adventure, this enchanting tale celebrates the meaning of choice and the joy found in embracing new experiences. Through beautiful storytelling, through eighteen short stories and engaging illustrations, the book captures the essence of children's curiosity, resilience and the magic of imagination. Annika's decision to play the synthesizer serves as a catalyst for learning, self-confidence, and exploring new possibilities, encouraging children to follow their instincts and seize moments of excitement.

This captivating story is a testament to the importance of empowerment, courage and the beauty of stepping into the unknown. It aims to inspire young minds to embrace their own decisions, embrace playfulness, and discover the wonders that await when they choose to embark on their own adventures. With its vivid narrative, “Anika Decided to Play” promises to ignite the imagination and leave a lasting impression on its readers, inviting them to join Annika in a world where every decision holds the promise of discovery and joy.

A novel about imagination and perseverance “Anika Decides to Play” by Marija Petrovska is a children's book that follows the story of Anika, an eleven-year-old girl, who makes the decision to pursue music (playing the synthesizer and singing) despite initial hesitations or uncertainties. The narrative revolves around Anika's journey of self-discovery and the importance of making choices. The book emphasizes the importance of determination, courage and decision-making power in a child's life. Anika's decision to play may represent a broader theme of overcoming obstacles, embracing new experiences, or stepping out of one's comfort zone. Through vivid illustrations and a relatable story, the book aims to encourage young readers to take initiative, be adventurous and embrace opportunities for fun and learning. The story is likely to inspire children to trust their instincts, make choices that bring them joy, and highlight the beauty of imagination and creativity in play. The novel can serve as an encouraging and enjoyable read for children, encouraging them to accept their decisions and the experiences that come with them.

“Anika decided to play” by Marija Petrovska is a charming children's book that revolves around the main character Anika and her decision to pursue music despite her initial hesitations. The story begins in the real setting of Anika's family, in which she, as an only child, is the center of attention of parents Marjan and Hristina: “Anika is an ordinary ten-year-old girl with many desires. Her favorite activity when she finishes her duties at school and at home is to imagine. Anika imagines her wishes, or rather their realization, down to the smallest details” (Petrovska, 2019: 5).

The story then unfolds in a vibrant, imaginative world, inviting young readers on Annika's journey of self-discovery, empowerment and the joy of making choices. It's all thanks to Anika's ability to visualize her ideas and then write them down in the pink notebook: "Once Anika started writing down her thoughts in the journal and imagining miraculous events, they started to come true for her. At first, she thought that it happened by chance, but later she was convinced that her diary was really magical" (Petrovska, 2019: 5). Entering the moment of the magical, the miraculous, in fact, introduces the reader into the realm of the fantastic, for which, according to Todorov, the decisive factor is the appearance of indecision in the character/reader (Todorov, 1987). This is indicated by the phrase "she thought", as well as the lexeme "magical" (diary!). And everything Anika writes down as a wish in her diary - comes true. Starting with the desire to play the synthesizer, which she soon gets from her neighbor Menka: "She saw her the day before playing an imaginary synthesizer in front of her friends. She said that she really enjoyed her concert, how convincingly and skilfully she performed it" (Petrovska, 2019: 5). It is music that attracts and fulfills Anika: "Music has always taken her to another world filled with feelings, magic, warmth, and pure joy untainted by the burden and worries of the day" (Petrovska, 2019: 5). It is evident from the narration that this girl has extremely tactile abilities, so when she fantasizes and imagines wishes, her room regularly smells of jasmine and music is heard.

In some of the stories from the book, we see Anika's suggestive power, which, objectively speaking, may be a coincidence, but the possibility of some help from her loved ones in realizing her wishes, which are written in her diary, should not be ruled out, and as such, available for reading. In that context, the short story "Hazelnuts" should be mentioned, where Anika's desire to taste hazelnuts is miraculously quickly realized: "The same day, her mother came home from work with a 100-gram bag of shelled hazelnuts. She thought that it might be good to make a cake with hazelnuts" (Petrovska, 2019: 7). Anika, a friendly and cheerful character, represents the curious and adventurous nature of children. The narrative beautifully portrays her inner conflict before making the decision to play.

Noticing their child's curiosity and desire for music, her parents provide her with a proper musical education: "They hired a girl from the music school to give private lessons to Anika...Soon Anika not only learned better, with more musical embellishments, to she maintains her voice longer, but to her satisfaction, she learned to play more famous songs" (Petrovska, 2019: 9). This key choice lays the groundwork for exploring imagination and creativity, emphasizing the importance of embracing new experiences. And the new experience for Anika is - the neighborhood concert in her performance, when she faces something new for her, but well known to everyone who is in front of a public performance - the fear of failure: "As the time for the concert approached, Anika felt a strong excitement from which she could hardly take a breath. And what if she gets stiff, her tongue gets tied, her fingers get tangled? What if the concert doesn't work out? How will she look into the eyes of all her friends who deeply believed in her and unreservedly supported her?" (Petrovska, 2019: 10). The fear Anika feels is reflected on a physical level: "But she couldn't take a deep breath. It was as if someone had closed two thirds of her lungs and she was unable to fill them completely with air" (Petrovska, 2019: 11).

In those moments of fear of failure, which almost paralyzes her, Anika also feels shame if she fails, fear that she will betray the expectations of her friends. In those moments, when the child feels anxiety that may arise from the desire for perfectionism, the role of adults, parents, teachers is extremely important (Lightner, 2024). In Anika's case, that role will feature her favorite aunt Bibi who talks openly with her. But the most important thing about that conversation, apart from Aunt Bibi revealing to her the technique of square breathing, is that it

will allow her to look at things from a different angle: “Now you're not doing the concert to show how much you've learned and what a good musician and singer you are. You do it because you want to uplift your listeners, give them cheerfulness, a good mood, music that inspires and heals... Let that feeling and that energy guide you. You can do it Ani” (Petrovska, 2019: 11-12). That moment is a real revelation for Anika, because Aunt Bibi knows her nature, her desire to constantly help others. And her positive energy will also be felt by her friend, the boy Daniel, when Anika helps him overcome his fear of wearing short sleeves even after the greatest heat: “Anika was happy that she helped her friend. But she didn't think she did anything special. It just encouraged him to see himself as a beautiful, wonderful child” (Petrovska, 2019: 15). Although our heroine Anika does not know the reason for such behavior of Daniel, from the scattered clues, the adult reader can easily discover the background of Daniel's mysterious behavior and closedness. The first such clue is the fact that is placed right at the beginning of the story about Daniel's recent moving to town: “One day, Anika met a shy boy, two years younger than her, who moved into the building near her residence” (Petrovska, 2019: 13), and then the suspicion of Daniel's mother that his behavior was a consequence of the changes in his life: “He didn't know if it happened with the change of environment and the change of teachers and friends...” (Petrovska, 2019: 14). The fact is that changing the place of residence, changing the school environment can sometimes be very stressful for children, who lose their old friends and have to create new friendships (Anderson, Leventhal, Newman, & Dupéré, 2014). Readers are not told the reason for Daniel's family's move, but rather see the obvious consequences that affect his mental health. And the consequences for Daniel can be seen in his behavioral development, because the fact that his obsession with bugs, which are disgusting to most children, as well as the fact that he always wears long sleeves, ie. "covered", indicates his inner stress, fear of the new environment, desire to hide and protect himself, etc. Hence, it can be said that the author Petrovska successfully spoke about another problem faced by parents and children who experience a family move. In that process, often the least attention is paid to the impact that this significant life event has on children (Tiesler, Birk, Kohlböck, Koletzko, Bauer, Wichmann, 2013). Many studies address the impact that family relocation can have on children. According to them, the steps that parents/teachers must take in developing stress reduction for children who move include (a) recognizing the impact that moving has on children, (b) recognizing the signs of stress that children show, (c) ensuring as much stability as possible in children's lives, and (d) facilitating the child's adjustment to the new environment (Matter&Matter, 1988).

Anika's development in the further course of action is a development that can be followed in any child if there is adequate support and guidance. That support for Anika is her aunt Bibi, who shares her plans and wishes with her, but also teaches Anika how to have good emotional relationships with other people: “Aunt Bibi, Anika's favorite aunt, often in conversations with her, she gently and patiently directed her how to win people over. Aunt Bibi told her that what will help her a lot is mirroring people's movements” (Petrovska, 2019: 16). Thanks to those tips, Anika had the affection of both teachers and peers. Adopting and perfecting this practical skill, Anika managed to preserve old friendships with her friends (so that jealousy does not arise between them), to create new friendships, but also to get to know new cultures: “We do this unconsciously when someone really means something to us, but if we do it consciously, even with strangers, we will create a feeling of sympathy, connection, affection on the other side” (Petrovska, 2019: 16).

In fact, Aunt Bibi reveals to Anika and instructs her in the basic postulates for establishing successful communication with other people. That, to begin with, implies informal and even non-verbal communication with other people. In his study, Gabor emphasizes that these techniques can first be used in familiar situations, and then in situations in which we have

felt anxiety or fear. According to him, these include: body language, hand position, facial expression, body position (leaning forward or backward), touch, eye contact, nodding in approval, etc. It is in Gabor's book that the technique of mirroring people's movements, which Aunt Bibi talks about, is mentioned (Gabor, 2011).

Science also testifies that the phenomenon of alignment is an extremely important aspect of social interaction. Hayson and Frith's study emphasizes that interactions with other group members can fundamentally shape the way we behave in the world, and conformity is a ubiquitous feature of such interactions. Alignment facilitates cultural learning, culture maintenance, and group cohesion. One example of matching they point to is the automatic mimicry of body posture, mannerisms and facial expressions during face-to-face interactions (the chameleon effect), (Hasson&Frith, 2016) something we recognized in Aunt Bibi's advice. Unconscious and automatic imitation of others' motor processes, called mimicry, is hypothesized to modulate emotional understanding through muscle feedback to the brain (McGarry & Russo, 2011). Human social behavior is complex, and the biological and neural mechanisms that underpin it remain debated. A particularly interesting social phenomenon is our ability and tendency to synchronize with other people. Our ability to coordinate actions and goals relies on the ability to differentiate between ourselves and others, but also to integrate ourselves and others, which when disrupted can lead to disastrous consequences (Heggli, Cabral, Konvalinka, Vuust, & Kringelbach 2019).

Hence, Aunt Bibi's advice to the eleven-year-old Anika is extremely important, especially during their joint trip to Egypt, which turns out to be quite successful. On that trip, Aunt Bibi realizes her imagined professional goals and plans, but she also leads Anika in various adventures filled with wonder and excitement. Whether it's exploring that fantastically beautiful land, or befriending interesting indigenous characters like Kenna, a girl who sells handicrafts, every moment underscores the transformative power of her choices. Even when, at the invitation of the hosts, she will organize a concert, which will then be the starting point for diving into new challenges, such as recording her own album. In doing so, she again faces a moment of hesitation, considering whether to step into the unknown or stay in her comfort zone. Along the way, Anika forms friendships with the characters she meets during her adventures. These newfound relationships enrich her experiences and teach her valuable lessons about friendship, resilience, and creativity. In that context, mention should be made of Omar whom she met in Egypt and who encourages her to attend a concert in an Egyptian restaurant, but also encourages her to record an album. His motivation and support that he gives to her have a deeper social, but also subjective basis: "My mother had a beautiful voice and a dream to become a singer. She died with that desire. The reason is the restrictions of my country. Everything I asked about you felt like I was asking about my mother. I didn't know how to resist then. Now I know. If someone has a dream, he should live it" (Petrovska, 2019: 34).

In pursuing her dream, Anika learns important life lessons, especially the one about setting goals in life: "It's one of the most important things you need to learn to succeed in life. The school won't show you that. You won't have a *Objectives* course at university either. It's something you have to master yourself to achieve what you want... (...) If we have an accurate, detailed picture of what we want to achieve, it will be easier to get there. The problem is that most people have vague desires floating in the air rather than precise, concrete goals. Because when we know the exact goal, we can decide which small steps we will take to move towards their realization" (Petrovska, 2019: 37). Locke and Latham provide a well-developed theory of motivation for goal setting. The theory emphasizes the important relationship between goals and their achievement. Research supports the prediction that the best results are achieved when

goals are specific and challenging, when they are used to evaluate performance, and when they are linked to performance feedback. According to Locke and Latham, in that case, greater commitment and acceptance of goals is ensured (Locke, & Latham 1990).

It is precisely the setting of higher goals that orients Anika towards self-improvement in music, but also encourages her to motivate others around her. On the way to achieving her goals, after not getting the expected help from the famous singer, Anika does not give up. Her talent will be recognized by a famous music composer, the uncle of her friend Petar: “One day, after the lesson, Petar came from the neighboring class and asked Anika if he could talk to her. Ani was always kind to her friends and told him that she could, that she listens to him... Ani was flattered by her friend's efforts and was surprised how he supported her so strongly even though they don't hang out that often” (Petrovska, 2019: 44) . It is Anika's kind and correct behavior towards everyone around her that is the key to her success and the fact that she makes friends very easily, even when visiting exotic Egypt. She discovers the joy in embracing new experiences, the power of imagination, and the rewards that come from making choices that initially seem daunting.

Also, her empathy and emotional intelligence are at a high level, so she easily notices the unusual behavior of her cousin Lina, caused by the jealousy she feels because of Anika's successes: “Sometimes she would quietly whisper how happy Anika is and how blessed she is, how everything is going like clockwork for her... She was bored at home that everyone was saying such nice things about Anika, and where was Lina in the whole story? Didn't she deserve praise? Didn't she deserve to be successful with all the hard work he put into doing math assignments? It wasn't fair” (Petrovska, 2019: 49). Walling et al. (2010) define jealousy as a complex of affects, behaviors, and cognitions that an individual experiences after a perceived loss or threat to self-esteem and/or loss or threat to a valued relationship by a rival. For example, a jealous individual may cognitively interpret a loved one's affectionate behavior toward a rival as betrayal and as a result feel anger and act accordingly with aggression. Conversely, if the jealous person interprets the threat as losing the relationship, they may express feelings of sadness and consequently withdraw from social interaction. Each of these potential patterns of affective, behavioral, and cognitive responses constitutes a jealousy complex and is no more or less valid than the other (Volling, Kennedy & Jackey, 2010). As can be seen from the previously quoted passage from the book, cousin Lina is jealous of Anika's success, but her jealousy is not malicious because she is a failure. She feels like a failure because of the instant attention and fame Anika, with whom they grew up, is experiencing. Otherwise, as we learn, she inherited her talent and inventiveness from her father, and she constantly yearns to use them for the good of people: “In her crazy fantasies, Lina invented smart devices that made people's lives easier. She secretly followed all the innovation shows she could find on the internet. She thought of what would be nice for people to have, and which she, with her engineering skills like her father, would be able to give them” (Petrovska, 2019: 49-50). Her behavior changes drastically, which doesn't go unnoticed by Anika, who immediately takes steps to improve their relationship: “Somehow, lately, Ani felt tension in her relationship with Lina and she didn't know what it was due to. She still loved her like a sister. Everything seemed to be fine, but something was not right. Anika could not put her finger on what... Anika began to remind herself of her own failure to realize her dreams” (Petrovska, 2019: 49). The lurking jealousy and disappointment cause changes in the behavior and even in the mental health of the girl Lina: “She was so embarrassed by Anika's success, that is, her own failure compared to Anika, that she gave up on her studies, became more silent and withdrawn, lost her appetite and desire to go out to play” (Petrovska, 2019: 50).

Then, Anika will show her maturity and understanding: “She started to say regularly the four sentences of the ho’oponopono method: I love you Lina, Thank you Lina, I’m sorry Lina, Forgive me Lina” (Petrovska, 2019: 50). This method originates from the territory of the United States, or rather from the understanding of the natives of the American continent, the Indian tribes, for the peaceful resolution of conflicts and the achievement of balance and harmony (Meyer, 1995). Although it may sound a little unusual and unlikely that an eleven-year-old girl knows and practices the Hawaiian method of conflict resolution, however, it is also acceptable considering the fact that Anika has her beloved Aunt Bibi as her moral support all the time, so her influence cannot be ruled out. After managing to restore friendly relations with her cousin by including her in the technical support team at the studio where she records her music album, Anika succeeds in changing Lina’s behavior: “Lina cheered up again, realizing that we all have different goals and missions in life, and that our task is to live our mission in life to the best of our ability, not someone else’s. Feeling the synergy of the team, where there was mutual help, consultation and encouragement, she realized that the success of one is never the success of only one because behind that one are many others in the shadow who help him, cheer him on, give him their technical support and knowledge” (Petrovska, 2019: 51).

As the story progresses, Anika’s journey becomes a celebration of resilience, courage, and the joy that comes from accepting one’s own decisions. The book’s conclusion leaves a feeling of fulfillment, emphasizing the positive results that come from stepping outside of one’s comfort zone and choosing to explore the world with an open heart and mind. All in all, “Anika Decided to Play” is a beautiful and powerful narrative that resonates with children, inspiring them to embrace their decisions, discover their passions, and find the beauty in the endless possibilities that open up when they choose to play and explore.

The story of the girl Anika in Maria Petrovska’s novel ends with Anika thinking about her journey. It embraces a newfound confidence, a sense of fulfillment, or a deeper understanding of the value of friendship, charity, humanity...

A story that leaves a lasting message

The narrative of the children’s novel “Anika Decided to Play” by Marija Petrovska is woven with colorful illustrations and engaging storytelling, capturing the essence of childhood wonder and the transformative impact of accepting one’s choices. “Anika Decided to Play” serves as a celebration of the imagination, courage and joyful exploration that comes with entering the world of play.

In the final lines of the novel, the story gets a fulfilling denouement. Anika’s decision to get involved in charity work by organizing a charity concert to help a school friend whose house burned down develops into a wonderful journey of self-discovery about the desire to help people. Her desire stems from the help and support she was given on the path of growing up and maturing, embodied in the characters of Aunt Bibi, her father, the classmate who helps her record her album, etc... The novel acquires the character of a guide through life, but not only for children, but also for parents, and, in general, for all adults. The book also teaches adults how to help children develop a sense of gratitude, how to gain much-needed self-confidence in the process of growing up when they are faced with many new knowledge and challenges. The book also talks about how to cultivate in themselves that optimism and life hedonism (Kitanov, Marjanovič, 2007), characteristic of every child, without fear of the outside world in which there is a place for everyone’s success.

After all, the significance of this work lies in its representation of a choice made by a child - a decision that may seem small, but has enormous importance in the story. Anika's choice serves as a catalyst, sparking a series of imaginative escapades, playful discoveries, and personal growth. This piece is not just about Anika, but symbolizes the courage to step outside the comfort zone, embrace curiosity and the willingness to explore the unknown. Anika's decision to play is only the beginning of her deeply suggestive nature in positively influencing everyone around her. That is why, not at the end of the novel, readers will not be surprised by the fact that Annika hires a financial advisor to properly invest the money earned, after thanking her loved ones for their support: "She remembered Aunt Bibi's desire to start a school for life for all adults, children included, who wanted to learn skills to navigate life more easily... She also wanted to take his parents on a trip to Spain. Spain was her mother's favorite country, Mama Christina, and she spoke Spanish fluently... Anika also planned to buy gifts as a thank you for her friends... She thought about what she could do personally. Maybe to open a school for musical talents. To prepare the children together with other teachers for performances, to teach them solfege, to teach them to read notes, to play... To make the world a better place to live" (Petrovska, 2019: 58-59). But still, in the final sequence of the novel, it is emphasized that children are just children, and that the joy and cheerfulness of children's play should not be taken away from them too soon, or it should be burdened with worries that are too heavy for their weak shoulders. Anika will also remember that: "You are only a child once. So she called Lina and Dani to jump on the trampoline and laugh and have fun" (Petrovska, 2019: 59). Through this work, Anika learns, grows and discovers the wonders of her imagination. It encourages young readers to embrace their decisions, trust their instincts, and find joy in exploring the endless possibilities that come with making choices that may initially seem uncertain or challenging.

The author, Marija Petrovska, skilfully weaves the compelling story with vivid illustrations, creating an extraordinary and enchanting world for young readers. The book not only entertains, but also subtly gives valuable life lessons. It encourages children to trust their instincts, take risks and enjoy the magic found in playfulness and exploration.

РОМАН "АНИКА ЈЕ ОДЛУЧИЛА ДА СВИРА" МАРИЈЕ ПЕТРОВСКЕ - ШКОЛА ЗА ЖИВОТ

Апстракт: У овом научном чланку говорићемо о роману младе македонске ауторке Марије Петровске „Аника је одлучила да свира“. У ствари, роман ће нам бити само полазиште да проговоримо о оптимистично-виталистичком карактеру књижевности за децу. У ту сврху, кроз лик јунакиње - Анике, и њен однос према животу, њену решеност да постигне неке ствари у животу, на пример да научи да свира, у чему она успева, покушаћемо да прикажемо утицај алтруиста. и позитивистички однос према свету који дете окружује. Наравно, у ту сврху неопходно је показати значај блиских, сродника, родитеља, на формирање ових страна личности детета, детета које ће сутра постати достојна одрасла особа.

Кључне речи: књижевност за децу, музика, Марија Петровска.

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