

# ANALYSIS OF QUALITY STANDARDS FOR DIDACTIC DESIGN OF TEXTBOOKS USING THE EXAMPLE OF A FABLE IN THIRD GRADE PRIMARY SCHOOL READERS

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**Abstract:** This paper analyzes quality standards for didactic design of textbooks, using the example of readers for the third grade, published by Klett, before and after curriculum changes resulting from the alteration of legal frameworks defined by the Regulation on the Curriculum for the Third Grade of Primary Education: 5/2019-6, 1/2020-1, 6/2020-1. By means of content analysis, the reader published by Klett and used in teaching until the 2020/21 school year will be analyzed, as well as the reader approved for use in accordance with the new recommendations, serving as a Serbian Language textbook in the Republic of Serbia from the 2020/21 school year.

The analysis of the quality standards for didactic design of textbooks has been carried out according to the general quality standards for textbooks (Ivić et al., 2009) and legislative regulations (Law on Textbooks, Official Gazette RS, Educational Gazette 68/2015, 27/2018–13, and the Regulation on Quality Standards for Textbooks and Guidelines for Their Use, Official Gazette RS, Educational Gazette: 42/2016-11, 45/2018–40), which define the quality framework for textbooks and textbook sets. This analysis is conducted using the example of the fable “The Tortoise and the Hare” by Aesop, which is part of the curriculum. A comparative analysis of the realization of standards within the domain of didactic design will provide insight into the alignment of curriculum requirements and textbooks, both the previous and newly approved ones, using the fable as an example. Additionally, it will examine the encountered qualitative didactic adequacy of the reader as a component of the textbook set.

This paper will highlight possibilities for enhancing the existing didactic-methodological apparatus that accompanies the fable, aiming to expedite the process of educational interpretation of the work.

Keywords: textbook, reader, fable, textbook quality standards, didactic-methodological apparatus, Social Sciences, and Humanities.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

The textbook is an important factor in the education process – a teaching aid and a cultural product defined by legal frameworks. It is the subject of numerous multidisciplinary research efforts. According to the Law on Textbooks, a “textbook is a fundamental didactically designed teaching aid, in any form or medium, used in educational activities in schools to acquire knowledge, skills, shape attitudes, encourage critical thinking, enhance functional knowledge, and develop intellectual and emotional characteristics of students and learners, whose content is determined by the curriculum and teaching program” (Law on Textbooks, 68/2015, 27/2018-13).

Rajčević and Krujleva (2020) define an elementary school textbook in their Dictionary of Didactic Terms as a “basic, main, and mandatory school book with a specific didactic-methodological apparatus, designed to help the student learn new content, teach them how to learn, and stimulate the development of their independence, significantly contributing to the student’s ability for self-education” (Rajčević and Kruj, 2020: 119). On the other hand, Ilić Rajkovićeva and Senić Ružićeva (2016) emphasize that “a textbook is not a homogeneous and uniform entity but a complex composition and combination of textual units” (Ilić Rajkovićeva and Senić Ružićeva, 2016: 563). In order to define the textbook more precisely, it is necessary to determine its “genre characteristics” (Pešić, 2005: 377), that is, the features that each piece of writing must fulfill in order to be accepted as a textbook. According to the author, “the minimal genre requirements that are set for a textbook in terms of educational design are: that the knowledge sample from a specific field is structured as a knowledge system, and that through didactic processing of that content, the learning process is adequately guided and directed” (Pešić, 2005: 377).

Numerous studies in the field of textbook quality standards have enabled a connection with the

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Active Learning project (Ivić et al., 2003), which aimed to shift the focus of the education process from teaching to "learning processes in students" (Ivić et al., 2003), i.e., their engagement during the class. The concept of active learning is strongly embedded in the conception of textbook quality standards, particularly in the D-group standards (D- group of quality standards for didactic design of textbooks), specifically in standards D7–D11. These standards directly relate to assignments, questions, and exercises intended for student activity, as well as the didactic-methodological apparatus of lessons (Perišić, 2022: 87).

The relationship and mutual conditioning between active learning and quality standards for didactic design have been discussed in several studies and numerous scholarly works by researchers and creators of textbook quality standards (Pešikan and Janković, 1998; Pešikan and Antić, 2003; Marinković, 2004; Pešikan and Antić, 2007). Given the rich research experience in our country regarding textbook quality and its enhancement, we have the opportunity to utilize existing resources to improve the overall educational policy, primarily the concepts of creating, printing, and delivering textbooks, as well as scientific evaluation, teacher training for textbook use, and approval of publishers and their textbook proposals.

As observed, these educational policy activities are conditioned by textbook quality standards. The authors of the study "Guide to Good Textbooks – General Quality Standards for Textbooks" (Ivić et al., 2009) emphasize that textbook quality standards are "requirements (norms, criteria, standards) that textbooks, which can be used in schools in Serbia based on a public procedure and defined criteria, should meet" (Ivić et al., 2009: 45).

## 2. D-GROUP OF QUALITY STANDARDS FOR DIDACTIC DESIGN OF TEXTBOOKS

Quality standards for didactic design of textbooks are the second largest group of standards in terms of quantity and pertain to the didactic scope of textbooks, addressing the conditions that a textbook must fulfill for its content to be organized and adapted to students according to their psychophysical abilities. The didactic form of a textbook pertains to both the structuring of scientific content and the didactic apparatus. To elaborate on the standards concerning assignments, questions, and exercises within a textbook, we have isolated the standards from the D-group that directly determine the didactic-methodological apparatus, its design, and function.

The D-group of quality standards for didactic design of textbooks is one of the groups with the highest number of standards. The number of standards does not indicate a greater significance of these standards compared to others, but it does reflect the complexity of the didactic design of textbooks. This group consists of 13 standards, with the first six related to "didactic presentation of scientific data, meaningful connections in content, effective ways of presenting values in the textbook," while standards D7 to D13 are directly related to the didactic-methodological apparatus and its definition and more precise determination (Perišić, 2022: 89).

In the further part of the paper, we will present an analysis according to the D-group of quality standards for didactic design of textbooks, following Ivić et al., 2009 (D1. Definition of specialized terms; D2. Functional use of iconic expression; D3. Didactic value of examples; D4. Basic meaningful content connections; D5. Sequences of content integration; D6. Successful ways of presenting values in the textbook; D7. Existence of questions, tasks, and assignments in the textbook; D8. Meaningfulness of questions, tasks, and assignments in the textbook; D9. Diversity of questions, tasks, and assignments; D10. Questions, tasks, and assignments and different learning methods in the textbook; D11. Questions, tasks, and assignments for progress monitoring in the textbook; D12. Support for creative thinking and behavior, and D13. Support for the development of critical thinking) using the example of a fable, as a part of the Serbian language curriculum for the third grade of elementary school, within the didactic design of lessons in readers published by Klett, through a comparative analysis.

## 3. COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF DIDACTIC DESIGN OF READERS FOR THE THIRD GRADE OF ELEMENTARY SCHOOL PUBLISHED BY KLETT

The 2020/21 school year was marked by the use of textbooks according to the Regulation on the Curriculum and Teaching for the Third Grade of Elementary Education: 5/2019-6, 1/2020-1, 6/2020-1. Therefore, the subject of our analysis is the didactic-methodological apparatus of the textbooks "Reka reči – Čitanka za treći razred osnovne škole" [Third grade reader] (Žeželj Ralić, 2018) and "Iskrice reči – Čitanka za treći razred osnovne škole" [Third grade reader] (Žeželj, 2020). For the purpose of comparative analysis, we provide the didactic-methodological apparatus of the fable that is present in both textbooks

under analysis (Žeželj Ralić, 2018: 94–95) and (Žeželj, 2020: 54).

It is important to note that the "Čitanka" [The Reader] (2020) has a similar concept to the textbook that was in use until the 2020/21 school year. In the 2018 textbook, the assignments, questions, and exercises were grouped into categories such as "Tvoj svet", [Your World] "Kaži mi, kaži" [Tell Me], "Šta misliš?", [What do you think?], "Zadaci", [Assignments], "Svet književnosti", [World of Literature], "Hajde da stvaramo!", [Let's create together], "Za radoznale" [For the Curious Ones], "Narod je rekao", [The People Have said], and "Rečnik" [Dictionary], the last of which the author notes can be found at the end of the textbook. When looking at the concept of the "Čitanka" (2020), one can observe sections: "Tvoje iskrice" [Your sparks] (The thoughts often spark and illuminate our minds while we think about the world around us. Speak freely about your sparks because they are only yours), followed by "Iskrice znanja" [Sparks of knowledge] (We say that knowledge is never enough. These sparks will lead you into the world of language and literature and help you better understand the work you are reading) and "Iskrice izazova" [Sparks of challenge] (For those who love challenges, additional tasks are offered in the form of various types of rebuses and crosswords). The "Narod je rekao" [People have said] section has been renamed to "Mudro slovo" [Letter of Wisdom]. The new "Čitanka" [Reader] also includes a dictionary at the end. The other sections ("Kaži mi, kaži," "Šta misliš?," and "Hajde da stvaramo!") [Tell Me, What do you think, and Let's create together] are also present in the new third grade textbook.

*"The Tortoise and the Hare" by Aesop*

*"River of Words" - Reader for the Third Grade of Elementary School, 2018.*

*Tell me*

*Who are the protagonists of this fable?*

*Was the tortoise aware of its own qualities? And the hare's?*

*What did this lead the tortoise to do?*

*How did the hare evaluate its opponent?*

*What do we say about such behavior?*

*How does the fable conclude?*

*What do you think?*

*Why did Aesop choose the tortoise and the hare for this fable?*

*What caused the hare to lose the race?*

*Due to which qualities did the hare experience failure?*

*How did the hare feel at the end of the fable?*

*What does this fable teach us? Read the part that is the moral of the fable.*

*Assignments*

*Tell the fable from the tortoise's point of view. Dwell on her thoughts before and during the race.*

*Describe the race from the hare's point of view. Imagine, then tell how the hare felt after losing the race. If you haven't already, watch the cartoon "The Tortoise and the Hare".*

*Let's create together!*

*Imagine the situation: a race is a math test. The hare is a student who is talented in mathematics but does not practice, and the tortoise is a girl who has no special inclination towards mathematics, but solves mathematical problems every day. Think about what their results would be. What would you like to be, a tortoise or a hare? Explain why.*

*The World of Literature*

*The writer shapes the plot and characters through words. In a comic book, the plot and characters are primarily expressed through images. Text is not mandatory, and if present, it's usually concise and brief.*

*People have said*

*"Do not leave for tomorrow everything you can do today."*

*"Sparks of Words - Reader for the Third Grade of Elementary School, 2020."*

*Your sparks*  
*What is perseverance?*  
*Tell me*  
*Who are the protagonists of this fable?*  
*Was the tortoise aware of its own qualities? And the hare's?*  
*What did this lead the tortoise to do?*  
*How did the hare evaluate its opponent?*  
*What do we say about such behavior?*  
*How does the fable conclude?*  
*What do you think?*  
*Why did Aesop choose the tortoise and the hare for this fable?*  
*What caused the hare to lose the race?*  
*Due to which qualities did the hare experience failure?*  
*How did the hare feel at the end of the fable?*  
*What does this fable teach us? Read the part that is the moral of the fable.*  
*Let's create together!*  
*Tell the fable from the tortoise's point of view. Dwell on her thoughts before and during the race.*  
*Describe the race from the hare's point of view. Imagine, then tell how the hare felt after losing the race.*  
*Utilize imperative speech.*  
*Letter of wisdom*  
*Everything you can do today, don't leave for tomorrow.*  
*Happiness follows the brave.*  
*The hardest victory is over oneself.*

*Sparks of knowledge*  
*"If you have not already, watch the animated movies 'The Tortoise and the Hare' and 'The Cricket and the Ant'."*

For the purposes of a more detailed comparative analysis of didactic-methodological apparatuses from both Readers, we point out the observed, evident state. The sections 'Tell me' and 'What do you think?' in both textbooks consist of identical questions, instructions, and assignments, while the content of the section Assignment in the Reader (2018) has been renamed to 'Let's Create!' with modification. The assignment from the Reader (2018) 'If you have not already, watch the animated movie 'The Tortoise and the Hare'' has been replaced with the assignment 'Use imperative speech,' as can be observed in the didactic-methodological apparatuses presented above. 'Wise Word' is the counterpart to the section 'People Have Said,' while 'Sparkles of Knowledge' contains content that was previously part of the Assignment section. Looking at the above, it becomes evident that substantial changes in the didactic design of the content have not occurred, allowing us to perform an analysis of the didactic-methodological apparatus accompanying the fable 'The Tortoise and the Hare' by Aesop, referring to the textbook 'Sparks of Words - Reader for the Third Grade of Elementary School' (Ralić, 2020)."

Within the lesson, there are no new, unfamiliar terms that need explanation. Looking at the didactic-methodological apparatus from the previously used textbook, a section is observed which is not included in the new one. This refers to the "World of Literature," a section that assumed familiarity with "basic knowledge of language and literature" (Žeželj Ralić, 2018: 6) and aimed to introduce students to the concept of comics and its basic characteristics in the case of the fable under analysis. Since the current textbook does not include this section, we believe that an opportunity to explain unfamiliar terms has been omitted (D1. Definition of specialized terms).

According to D2. Functional Use of Iconic Means of Expression, illustrations must have a clear role and contribute to the process of interpretation. The illustration in the Reader (2018) depicts the fable through four images, while the illustration in the 2020 textbook captures the plot of the fable in a single image. We conclude that both illustrations meet the criteria of technical and artistic arrangement and follow the plot of the work. Based on our observations, the advantage of visual representation lies with the 2018 textbook, as it features more abundant illustrations that enhance the literary-artistic work.

Examples for the analysis of the fable "The Tortoise and the Hare" are diverse, indicating the values of the literary work and expediting the process of educational analysis, as can be observed through the analysis of the sections "Tell me," and "What do you think?" In these sections, the author of the textbook delves into the fable from various angles with diverse instructions and assignments that provide students with support in comprehending the literary-artistic values (D3. Didactic Value of Examples).

As the "What do you think?" section includes an assignment related to the moral of the fable, as well as the "Wise Word," while in "Tell me" section, questions are posed regarding the characteristics of characters and the plot of the fable, we highlight the possibility of forming meaningful connections between the mentioned concepts, acquired in previous and current grades (D4. Fundamental Conceptual Connections).

Upon examining the content of the 2020 textbook, the presence of the "Sparks of Challenges" section becomes apparent, which provides students with a systematic organization of material in an accessible and engaging manner. In contrast, the 2018 Reader includes sections with folk literary works at the end of each thematic section, accompanying the "World of Literature" and "Assignment" sections. While these sections are certainly useful for introducing folk literature, it is necessary to note that their presence does not create conditions for systematic organization, indicating a far better concept in the new textbook (D5. Sequence of Material Integration).

The presentation of values in the textbook is achieved through the valuable messages contained within the fable "The Tortoise and the Hare," representing a unique system of ethical and aesthetic values of the work. The questions, instructions, and assignment through which this value system is presented are rich and diverse, enabling the connection of its values with students' experiences. The didactic-methodological apparatus offers activities through which students can nurture social skills (D6. Effective Ways of Presenting Values in the Textbook).

The presence of practical activities in the textbook indicates that the fable "The Tortoise and the Hare" is accompanied by apparatus as already mentioned (D7. Existence of Questions, Instructions, and Assignments in the Textbook).

Upon examining the questions, instructions, and assignments that accompany the fable "The Tortoise and the Hare" by Aesop, it becomes apparent that there are no meaningless, unrealistic, or ambiguous formulations for student activities (D8. Meaningfulness of Questions, Instructions, and Tasks in the Textbook).

The diversity of practical activities is reflected in the differentiation of levels of difficulty and the number of participants involved in solving them. Through analysis of the didactic-methodological apparatus accompanying the fable in both textbooks, it has been established that there are no questions formulated at different levels of difficulty, nor are there any assignments, questions, or tasks specified for working in pairs or groups (D9. Diversity of Questions, Instructions, and Tasks).

D10. Questions, instructions, and assignments, as well as various learning methods in the textbook, imply a didactic-methodological apparatus that supports learning with understanding ("Tell me"), acquisition of social skills ("What do you think?"), creative learning and practical skills acquisition ("Let's Create Together!"), while questions, instructions, and assignments for cooperative learning are absent.

D11. Questions, instructions, and assignments for assessing progress in learning are an integral part of the didactic-methodological apparatus through the section "What do you think?" ("What does this fable teach us? Read the part that is the moral of the fable"), while the sphere of understanding, analysis, and synthesis is realized through both sections - "Tell me" and "What do you think?", and creative production through "Let's Create Together!"

Within the section related to creativity ("Let's Create Together!"), we notice an assignment that enables creative interpretation of the fable "The Tortoise and the Hare" by Aesop. The task ("Tell the fable from the tortoise's perspective. Focus on its thoughts before the race and during the race. Describe the race from the hare's perspective. Imagine and narrate how the hare felt after losing the race. Use imperative speech.") indicates encouragement of students to create a literary product, with the possibility of developing critical thinking due to independent engagement with the given task. This assignment can also be defined as an "open-ended task that encourages the search for alternative and original paths of solution and stimulates alternative solutions/answers to a given problem" (Ivić et al., 2009: 119), as it provides students with opportunities to individually shape the fable. This implies the realization of D12. Support for Creative Thinking and Behavior, a standard aimed at fostering divergent thinking and behavior.

D13. Support for the development of critical thinking using the example of the fable "The Tortoise and the Hare" by Aesop includes involving students in independent activities that can contribute to the development of critical thinking. Students can develop a critical approach to literary works, for instance, through the work task provided in the "Let's Create Together!" section, as well as the questions in the "What do you think?" section. The title of the section "What do you think?" implies freedom of thought and expression.

## 4. CONCLUSION

In order to establish valid criteria that a textbook must meet, which includes scientifically organized content tailored to children's needs, knowledge, age, and mental capacities, the textbook should be approached and adjusted according to quality standards. These standards are adopted as national standards and are applied during textbook accreditation in the Republic of Serbia. Quality standards of Group D (Quality Standards for Didactic Design of Textbooks) are the second-largest group of standards and pertain to the primary aspect of textbooks as a genre.

In our case, the literary text under study was the fable present in the third-grade textbooks published by Klett. The analyzed fable was "The Tortoise and the Hare" by Aesop. The analysis unequivocally established that, in the case of the apparatus accompanying the fable, ten standards were fully met, partial realization of standard D10. Questions, Instructions, and Assignments, as well as Different Learning Methods, was present, and there was a complete absence of standards D9. Diversity of questions, tasks, and assignments, and D1. Definition of Specialized Terms. These identified shortcomings relate to the lack of a section for explaining specialized and unfamiliar terms within the reading activities in the textbook that has been in use since the 2020/21 school year. Additionally, there were deficiencies in the diversity of work activities in terms of the number of students solving them and the levels of difficulty.

The relevance of analyzing the above mentioned work tasks, questions, and assignments that accompany the fable lies in presenting the existing qualitative state of the apparatus and the readiness level of the textbook for literature teaching. The aim is to serve future creators of readers, teachers, and students as a starting point for its methodological improvement and high-quality educational purpose.

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