



## A wonderful warm welcome!

by  
Ilke Verhelle,  
projectmanager Hikkies.

[leuven.bibliotheek.be](http://leuven.bibliotheek.be)

A wonderful morning to all of you and on behalf of the Library of Leuven and ZB Planbureau and the Library of Zeeland, I wish you a very warm welcome to this international celebration of the bibliobus. Today is a celebration of 30 years Bibliobus Leuven and 50 years Bibliobus Middelburg. Today is a celebration of reading and the pleasure it brings to all of us equally.

Let me start, ladies and gen....hold on...wait a minute .... I cannot...I'm sorry, I seem to be stuck...

I was going to say: "Let me start, ladies and gentlemen by quickly introducing myself," but I cannot limit my address to "ladies and gentlemen". I cannot reduce you, audience, to these two genders. Certainly not on a day like this where we focus – among other things – on diversity and literature. What about the non-binary genders? The trans, the fluid, the queers or a third gender? Surely you didn't think that diversity was limited to ethnicity or culture, did you?

Of course diversity is also about different cultures, but it is also about gender, age, language, socio-economic background, education, religion, big and small, skinny and fat. Diversity is about all the shapes and forms that our bodies come in. Diversity is also about all the shapes and forms that our minds come in. To prove my first statement: aren't we, as professionals, dealing with forms of the body? Do we not care, for instance, about giving opportunities to the blind to enjoy the pleasure of a good book?

Isn't bibliobus trying to reach out to the disabled or not so mobile elderly persons? Off course we are. And to argue for my second point, do we not reach out to children or adults with autism, dyslexia or simply people who are still learning the language or even people who are still learning to read? Yes we do!

Diversity can be endless. And diversity does not only apply to the people. It also applies to the story itself. It is a typical western perspective to view a story as a book. But a story can also be a play that is being performed on the stage, a story can also be a poem that is being recited. A story is also a song. Remember who won the Nobelprize for literature in 2016? Exactly: Bob Dylan.

Stories are plentiful, manifold, but they share one thing: they want to be heard. Writers never write a story for themselves alone. No, they want their story to be passed on from one friend to the other and from one friend to someone who isn't a friend...yet. Many of you professionals present here today, whether you work in a library, in the bibliobus or with an organization in the socio-cultural field; you see this as your main task: to help pass on the story from one to the other, to an ever increasing group of friends. The people who are gathered here today are working every day to bridge the gap from the writer to their audience, from the library to the reader, from me to you and from you to you and from us to them.

Can you imagine a world in which everyone, instead of looking incessantly on their phones would be telling the stranger on the train about the story they were reading last night. Imagine that bullets were poems or that we would argue in rhyme. Yes, you're right this is only my imagination. But I need not convince this audience of the potential power of imagination.

With all of this, dear friends, I still haven't introduced myself. So let me do that before I take a step aside to give the floor to the many interesting speakers that BIB Leuven invited here today. My name is Ilke Verhelle and I volunteer for a project that is called Hikkies. Together with a team of writers, illustrators and other volunteers we make shortstories for teenagers from diverse backgrounds. For free. We go by the slogan children need mirrors and windows. Some children always see themselves reflected in a story and they need to look at the world through a window more, while other children never see themselves portrayed, they need stories that function like mirrors.

Now with the final minute that I have left I want to give a special thank you, for making this bibliobus celebration possible to The city of Leuven, Museum M, the colleagues from ZB Planbureau and the Library of Zeeland, and the colleagues of the Library of Leuven for the programming today.

May you enjoy every minute of this wonderful, sunny day!