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## PLAYS FOR TEACHING SUSTAINABILITY IN CROATIAN LANGUAGE TEXTBOOKS

Original paper  
<https://doi.org/1059014/YBIA4281>

### Abstract

This paper explores the role of children's playlets in Croatian language textbooks for young learners as a means of promoting sustainability in the school context. Special attention is given to the analysis of dramatic situations, character roles, and thematic motifs, as well as their contribution to shaping students' ecological, social, and ethical awareness. The study is based on a combination of literary-theoretical and methodological approaches, considering the children's playlet both as a literary form and as a teaching tool. Through a detailed analysis of selected playlets, the paper examines the methodological possibilities for their application in Croatian language instruction, including the development of competencies necessary for responsible and sustainable action, such as empathy, critical thinking, the ability to anticipate consequences, and social sensitivity. The paper connects theoretical approaches from ecocriticism, drama pedagogy, and contemporary Croatian language methodology, emphasizing the importance of experiential and participatory learning, student collaboration, and creative expression in early school years. The analysis demonstrates that children's playlets, due to their interactive and dialogical nature, not only facilitate a better understanding of literary and dramatic principles but also actively promote the development of competencies required for sustainable thinking and behavior. The study contributes to both theoretical and practical understanding of the function of children's playlets in education for sustainable development and highlights their potential role in shaping the values, attitudes, and behaviors of young students in accordance with international guidelines for education for sustainable development.

**Keywords:** *textbooks, children's literature, children's playlets, methodology, sustainability*

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## Introduction

Sustainability has in recent decades become a key paradigm in global educational policy, with its significance extending beyond purely ecological dimensions to encompass social justice, cultural identity, economic development, and the competencies required for responsible and critical participation in the community. In the broader educational context, the concept of sustainability includes the individual's ability to perceive cause-and-effect relationships, act in accordance with moral and ethical principles, and contribute to the sustainable development of both the community and the environment. In the school setting, particularly in the lower grades of primary education, the formation of values, attitudes, and patterns of behaviour begins at an early age, thereby establishing the foundation for later civic, ecological, and social responsibility, while simultaneously fostering the development of pupils' emotional and social literacy.

Children's literary texts have traditionally served as a means of developing moral, social, and cognitive competences, and their selection and use in the teaching process play a key role in shaping young readers' worldviews and internal value systems. Within the subject of the Croatian language, readers provide a structured, curriculum-defined framework through which pupils encounter literature, and the selection and organisation of texts shape their attitudes, moral orientation, and critical-thinking abilities. Among various literary forms, children's playlets occupy a special place due to their dialogic and performative characteristics, which enable active, experiential, and participatory learning. Through children's playlets, pupils gain direct experience in role-taking, dialogue, cooperation, problem-solving, and improvisation—elements central to the development of competences necessary for thoughtful and sustainable action in real life.

This paper analyses the ways in which children's playlets included in Croatian language readers for early primary education can contribute to the understanding and adoption of the concept of sustainability. Special attention is devoted to examining dramatic situations, character roles, thematic motifs, and the methodological possibilities of using children's playlets in teaching. The aim is to explore how dramatic texts foster pupils' ecological, social, and ethical sensitivity and what values and attitudes related to sustainability they convey through their literary and performative dimensions. The study is guided by the following questions: In what ways do

children's playlets in readers shape pupils' ecological and social awareness? What values and attitudes regarding sustainability do literary texts communicate, and how can they be integrated into the teaching process with the goal of developing competences necessary for sustainable action?

The paper adopts an interdisciplinary approach that connects ecocriticism, drama pedagogy, and Croatian language teaching methodology, emphasising the importance of active, experiential, and collaborative learning in early schooling. By analysing children's playlets, the paper contributes to the theoretical understanding of the role of dramatic texts in education for sustainable development and identifies methodological guidelines for their more effective application in the school context.

## Theoretical Framework

### *Children's Playlets and Dramatic Elements*

A children's playlet may be defined as the performance of a simple text, that is, a short theatrical piece intended for staging, most often adapted for children and for educational contexts (Anić, 1991). As a particular form of drama, the children's playlet retains the fundamental dramatic elements but is characterised by a simplified structure, shorter duration, and a smaller number of characters, which makes it accessible and performable for younger primary-school pupils. Drama, in the narrower sense, denotes a literary work written in dialogic form and intended for theatrical performance, distinguished by the seriousness of its plot and the complexity of its emotional experience (Anić, 1991; Solar, 2001). Etymologically derived from the Greek word *drâma* (action), drama encompasses all literary texts of a specific type intended—directly or indirectly—for stage interpretation.

Dragutin Rosandić (1988) states that the definition of drama includes three fundamental aspects:

- a) a literary genre in dialogic form intended for stage performance,
- b) a specific type of literary text intended directly or indirectly for performance on stage,

c) a poetic-stage (or poetic-performative) complex consisting of three essential components: the text, the actor, and the audience (Rosandić, 1988, 577).

These criteria can also be applied when defining the children's playlet, taking into account its specific characteristics: it is designed for stage performance, clearly distinguishes text, actors, and audience, and simultaneously enables pupils' active participation in the processes of dramatization and interpretation. Compared to classical drama, the children's playlet represents a simplified form of dramatic structure which, through dialogue and monologue, enables children to understand basic narrative and social relationships and to develop the ability to adopt different characters' perspectives.

In dramatic texts, dialogue serves as the primary communicative instrument, allowing characters to directly express different viewpoints, attitudes, and intentions. Monologue, on the other hand, is used to portray a character's inner states, emotions, plans, and reflections. By combining dialogue and monologue, dramatic texts achieve diversity in character speech, dynamic plot development, and the stimulation of pupils' interpretative skills (Solar, 2001).

From an educational perspective, the children's playlet within Croatian language teaching enables pupils to develop linguistic, social, and emotional competences through dramatization, improvisation, and performance. Active participation in children's playlets promotes empathy, critical thinking, and responsible behaviour, making them an effective method in education for sustainability. Furthermore, the interactive nature of children's playlets creates a safe, experiential environment in which pupils can explore moral dilemmas, social relationships, and ecological challenges, thereby achieving an integration of literary and practical learning.

## Methodology and Dramatic Approaches

In the teaching of the Croatian language, dramatic texts, including children's playlets, may be approached through two principal methodological frameworks, which complement one another and together support the holistic development of pupils' linguistic, social, and emotional competences.

The first is the literary approach, in which the dramatic text is viewed primarily as a literary object. The emphasis is on interpretative reading, analysis of dialogue, characterisation, understanding of plot structure, and the identification of thematic motifs. The teacher guides pupils through the text, encouraging reflection, discussion, and critical engagement with the content. This approach enables pupils to develop literary competences, understand literary language and structures, and recognise moral, ethical, and social values embedded in the narrative (Rosandić, 1988).

The second is the theatrical (performative) approach, which uses the dramatic text as a basis for stage performance. In this approach, pupils actively participate in shaping the performance, including acting, character interpretation, scenography, costume design, and directing. Such a participatory method fosters creativity, independent thinking, improvisation skills, and group collaboration. Beyond developing social skills, the theatrical approach allows pupils to experience the situations presented in the text, recognise the consequences of their actions, and feel the emotional impact of dramatic conflict—elements that directly contribute to developing competences for sustainable behaviour.

The combination of these two approaches provides a comprehensive educational framework, as it simultaneously develops cognitive, affective, and practical dimensions of learning. The literary approach offers an analytical perspective on the text and fosters critical thinking, while the theatrical approach provides an experiential and practical context, enhancing creativity, empathy, and collaborative abilities. This integration of methods is particularly relevant in the context of education for sustainability, as pupils engage with dramatic activities that encourage the recognition of ecological, social, and ethical values, the development of a sense of responsibility, and active participation in group projects or symbolic situations that promote awareness of sustainable behaviour.

This combined approach also offers teachers flexibility in choosing didactic strategies. For example, simple children's playlets can be used in the first grade as a means of developing basic social and linguistic skills through group activities, whereas more complex dramatic texts in higher grades can serve to explore ecological dilemmas, moral conflicts, and issues of civic responsibility. Integrating literary and performative methods thus enables the systematic and progressive development of pupils' competences

in accordance with the goals of education for sustainability, establishing foundations for critical thinking and responsible action later in life.

## Children's Playlets and Child Development

The children's playlet represents a specific dramatic form intrinsically connected to children's play and to learning through experience. Through play, children actively use speech, acting, and symbolic interaction, which supports the development of imagination, creativity, social skills, and emotional and cognitive literacy (Ladika, 1970). The children's playlet is therefore not only a literary or performative text, but also a medium of socialisation and experiential learning that simulates both real and imaginary worlds.

Written children's playlets may differ according to typology and purpose, with the following types most commonly identified: puppet plays, fairy-tale plays, action plays, fantastic plays, and humorous plays (Skok, 1985). Each type contributes in distinct ways to children's development:

- Puppet plays use puppets as their central stage element. Through manipulating puppets, pupils develop acting skills, creativity in visual presentation, expressive movement and speech, and the ability to coordinate group performance (Šimunov, 2007; Coffou, 2004). Puppet-based children's playlets are particularly effective in the lower grades of primary school, as they allow children to identify with characters and situations while reducing potential social anxiety associated with public performance.
- Drama games and improvisation allow pupils to explore various situations, roles, and interpersonal relationships freely. Through improvisation and guided dramatic activities, children develop independent thinking, problem-solving abilities, social empathy, and teamwork (Čečuk, Dević, Ladika, 1990). Active engagement in drama games also encourages metacognitive reflection, as pupils analyse characters' actions, reconsider decisions, and examine the consequences of particular behaviours—preparing them for critical thinking in real-life contexts.

The children's playlet, therefore, serves multiple functions: beyond providing aesthetic and literary experience, it develops linguistic competences, emotional and social maturity, and foundational skills necessary for responsible and sustainable behaviour. The application of different types of children's playlets in Croatian language teaching and across other subject areas may be adapted to pupils' developmental stages, thematic goals, and educational content, underscoring its significant role in comprehensive upbringing and education for sustainability.

### **Children's Playlets and Education for Sustainability**

Within the teaching of the Croatian language in the early years of primary school, the children's playlet represents a particularly effective tool for fostering education for sustainability, as it enables the integration of ecological, social, and ethical themes into the educational process. Through dramatization, children assume the roles of characters from nature, the animal world, or human communities, creating the conditions for the development of empathy, critical thinking, responsibility, and social sensitivity. Such experiential activity allows pupils to explore causal relationships and moral dilemmas through symbolic play, and to consider the consequences of their actions in a safe and structured environment (O'Toole, Haseman, 1988; Way, 1967).

The interactive nature of children's playlets ensures the active involvement of every pupil in the learning process. By taking on different roles, children develop the ability to view problems from multiple perspectives—an essential competence for sustainable action. For example, dramatizing a story in which characters symbolise a river, a forest, or animals allows pupils to experience the effects of environmental pollution, irresponsible behaviour, or the neglect of shared resources. These constructed situations establish links between fiction and real life, encouraging critical reflection and consideration of ethical and ecological values.

Children's playlets also contribute to the development of cognitive, social, and emotional competences. Cognitively, pupils learn to analyse situations and develop solutions; socially, they learn to collaborate and communicate within a group; emotionally, they cultivate empathy and the ability to recognise the feelings of others. In this way, children's playlets become a

means of integrated learning that encompasses pupils' intellectual, social, and moral development, thereby directly contributing to the competences for sustainable behaviour defined in international frameworks for Education for Sustainable Development (ESD) and UNESCO guidelines (UNESCO, 2019, 2021).

The use of children's playlets in educational contexts provides teachers with flexible methods for integrating sustainability-related themes into everyday practice. Through planned and structured dramatic activities, pupils are encouraged to think independently, investigate, and propose solutions to challenges in the community, the natural environment, and interpersonal relationships. Thus, children's playlets are understood not merely as literary or performative texts, but as a means of active learning, the development of social responsibility, and the preparation of children for conscious and sustainable participation in society.

## **The Role of Children's Playlets in Developing Sustainability Education**

Within Croatian language teaching in the early years of primary education, children's playlets occupy a special place, as they enable active pupil participation and the development of key competences for a sustainable lifestyle. Their specific dramatic structure and interactive character make them an effective method for cultivating ecological, social, and ethical awareness.

### **a) Development of Social and Emotional Competences**

Through children's playlets, pupils engage in various situations and problems that reflect real-life contexts. By assuming roles, children develop empathy, the ability to understand different perspectives, collaboration, and a sense of responsibility towards the community (Bolton, 1984; Neelands, 1992). The portrayal of characters from nature, animals, or social situations allows children to experience both emotional and cognitive dimensions of scenarios beyond their immediate daily lives, thereby fostering critical thinking and moral reflection (Ladika, 1970; Kunić, 1990).



### **b) Ecological and Social Awareness**

Through the dramatic form of the children's playlet, pupils are introduced to sustainability topics, including environmental protection, responsible behaviour towards nature and animals, and cooperation within the community. Stories addressing these themes serve as a bridge between fiction and reality, enabling children to apply learned values in concrete situations. The personification of animals, plants, or natural elements encourages the development of ecological empathy, as pupils reflect on the consequences of human actions on the environment (Way, 1967; Solar, 2001).

### **c) Active Experiential Learning**

As a dialogic and performative dramatic form, children's playlets facilitate experiential learning, in line with the "learning-by-doing" principle in drama pedagogy (O'Toole, Haseman, 1988). Pupils learn to recognise the consequences of their actions through character discussion, decision-making, and the simulation of various scenarios, developing responsibility and the ability to critically evaluate social and ecological issues. This promotes the development of systematic and ethically grounded thinking, which forms the foundation for sustainable action.

### **d) Development of Linguistic and Communicative Competences**

Beyond social and ethical development, children's playlets significantly contribute to linguistic competence. Through dialogue, monologue, and the performance of stage directions, pupils learn to express themselves clearly and precisely, develop creativity in speech, and expand their vocabulary. Interpretation and improvisation further encourage argumentation skills, the ability to articulate opinions, and the capacity to reflect on and express views related to social and ecological matters (Čečuk, DeviĆ, LadiKa, 1990; Šimunov, 2007).

### **e) Integration of Competences for Sustainable Development**

The combination of social, emotional, linguistic, and ecological learning within children's playlets enables the systematic development of competences identified in international Education for Sustainable Development frameworks as essential: critical thinking, responsible action, social sensitivity, empathy, and the ability to anticipate the consequences of one's actions (UNESCO, 2019; Rieckmann, 2018). In this way, children's

playlets become a powerful tool for integrated education, allowing pupils to internalise principles of sustainability through active participation and reflection in everyday life.

## Methodological Premises and Analytical Framework

The corpus consists of a representative selection of *children's playlets* included in Croatian language textbooks for grades 1–4 of primary school. The selection was guided by criteria of literary and pedagogical relevance: the presence of fundamental dramatic components (characters, situation, dialogue), thematic and structural appropriateness for young pupils, the inclusion of motifs related to the understanding of natural and social phenomena, and a recognisable role in fostering communication competences.

The analytical procedure was conducted in three complementary stages.

First, a thematic analysis identified recurring thematic patterns and value orientations conveyed to pupils through the playlets.

Second, a discourse analysis of dialogue was carried out, focusing on lexical, syntactic, prosodic, and interactional elements that contribute to the development of pupils' spoken language and communication skills.

Third, the pedagogical potential of the playlets was examined, in accordance with existing theoretical insights into the role of dramatic play in children's learning and development (Nemeth-Jajić, 2008; Pokrivka, 1985; Šimunov, 2007).

This interdisciplinary methodological framework allows the playlets to be regarded simultaneously as literary-artistic forms, instruments for linguistic development, and pedagogical tools, providing a broad and theoretically grounded approach to analysing their impact on early language and cognitive education.

## Analysis of Selected Children's Playlets from Croatian Language Textbooks for Early Primary Education

As demonstrated in the previous chapter, the children's playlet in Croatian language teaching for young learners plays a key role in developing

competences necessary for sustainable action. Through play and role-taking, pupils cultivate empathy, responsibility, collaboration, and critical thinking. To identify and further strengthen these competences within the school environment, it is necessary to conduct a detailed analysis of selected playlets included in textbooks for the early grades of primary education.

The analysis of playlets is carried out through a dual approach:

1. Literary-theoretical approach – The playlet is examined as a form of dramatic text for children, with particular attention to thematic content, characterisation, relationships between characters, and the ways in which dramatic elements (dialogue, monologue, plot, conflict) convey values related to sustainability, including environmental care, social solidarity, and ethical behaviour.
2. Methodological approach – The playlet is viewed as a teaching tool aligned with curricular values and educational objectives. Special emphasis is placed on the didactic possibilities it offers teachers: how to engage pupils in active participation, and how to foster critical thinking, creativity, and problem-solving skills through the performance of dramatic texts.

In this chapter, the selected playlets are analysed through the lens of contemporary theories of children's literature, drama pedagogy, and education for sustainable development. The analysis focuses on the following aspects:

1. Thematic content – how the playlet addresses ecological, social, and ethical themes, and how these themes can encourage pupils to reflect on sustainable behaviour.
2. Characters and dramatic situations – which roles pupils may assume and how interaction with characters fosters social and emotional competences.
3. Dramatic elements and performative possibilities – dialogue, monologue, conflict, as well as stage elements, movement, and improvisation are analysed in the context of active learning and the development of sustainability awareness.
4. Didactic implications – how teachers can use playlets in the classroom to promote the development of attitudes and behaviours associated with responsibility toward the community and the environment.

The aim of this chapter is to demonstrate how the content and performative elements of *children's playlets* enable pupils, through experiential learning, to develop attitudes and skills essential for sustainable living. By linking the theoretical framework, the analysis of dramatic texts, and methodological possibilities, the contribution of playlets to the development of values, attitudes, and competences related to ecological, social, and ethical responsibility becomes clearly evident.

## Theoretical Framework of the Analysis

### *Children's Playlet as a Literary and Performative Form*

According to Rosandić (1988), dramatic structure consists of three fundamental elements: the text, the actor, and the audience. In the context of children's playlets, these elements appear in a simplified form, adapted to the abilities and experiences of young school-aged pupils. The playlet text contains the basic plot and dialogue between characters but remains shorter and simpler than conventional drama, which makes it easy for children to understand and perform.

The actors—namely the pupils—actively participate in interpreting characters, allowing them to adopt different perspectives and express emotions through performance. The audience, typically their classmates or the teacher, contributes to the performative situation and motivates pupils to reflect on the effects of their actions and spoken words.

Solar (2001) emphasizes that dramatization and the dialogic structure of the playlet help children develop the ability to take another person's perspective, which is a key component of emotional literacy. Through dialogue, pupils learn to articulate their own views while also listening to and understanding opposing perspectives, supporting the development of social awareness and critical thinking. Although monologues are rare in simple children's playlets, they allow pupils to verbalize characters' inner thoughts, fostering introspective and interpretive skills.

Despite its simplicity, the playlet includes several fundamental dramatic components:

- Conflict – typically mild and pedagogically structured, conflict forms the basis of the plot and teaches problem-solving. In the

context of sustainability education, conflicts often symbolize ethical dilemmas, such as human–nature relationships, responsible vs. irresponsible behaviour, or tension between individual interests and collective cooperation.

- Dialogue – enables direct character interaction, supports language development, and expresses diverse viewpoints on ecological, social, or moral issues.
- Rhythm – creates performance dynamics and helps children follow plot progression. Variations in tempo, movement, or staging hold pupils' attention and encourage active engagement.
- Motivation of action – each scene and exchange carries a clear purpose and internal logic, helping pupils understand cause-and-effect relationships and recognize the consequences of decisions—key elements in learning about sustainability and responsibility.

In sum, even in its simplified form, the children's playlet incorporates essential dramatic elements tailored to pupils' developmental levels. Through these components, children not only understand the story and characters but also develop emotional, social, and ecological literacy, preparing them for conscious and responsible action in everyday life.

### **Drama Pedagogy and the Development of Children's Competencies**

Drama pedagogy theorists (Way, 1967; Bolton, 1984; Neelands, 1992) highlight the multiple benefits of dramatic forms for children. Through children's playlets and related dramatic activities, pupils develop imagination and creativity, enabling them to explore new ideas, perspectives, and strategies for solving problems. Participating in dramatic situations fosters empathy: by taking on roles with diverse experiences and values, pupils learn to recognize others' feelings and viewpoints.

Dramatic forms also support the development of key social skills—communication, cooperation, negotiation, and conflict resolution—which are essential for responsible and inclusive behaviour within the community. Through playlets, children can practically explore social norms in a safe and structured environment, experimenting with different behaviours and learning to recognize their consequences. Dramatic activities

simultaneously encourage problem-solving, as pupils encounter situations requiring thoughtful, strategic, and ethical responses.

Kunić (1990) and Ladika (1997) particularly emphasize the educational potential of the children's playlet, noting that through role-taking children do not merely observe how things are but also explore how things **could be**. This capacity for imaginative projection is fundamental to sustainability, which relies on envisioning alternative futures, reflecting on consequences, and making responsible decisions. Through playlets, pupils can experiment with different behavioural patterns related to nature, community, and social norms, fostering the competencies needed for sustainable action.

Thus, drama pedagogy not only contributes to pupils' cognitive and emotional development but also builds social and ecological responsibility, positioning the children's playlet as an effective tool for integrating education for sustainable development into Croatian language instruction.

## **Theoretical Foundations of Education for Sustainable Development**

Education for Sustainable Development (ESD) is grounded in key international documents and guidelines, including UNESCO recommendations (2019, 2021) and the global Agenda 2030 framework. These documents emphasise the need for education that equips pupils with competencies for responsible societal engagement, environmental stewardship, and the promotion of social justice. Age-appropriate competency models (Biasutti & Frate, 2017; Rieckmann, 2018) further point out that sustainability competencies cannot be developed in isolation; instead, they require an integrated approach that encompasses cognitive, affective, and practical learning dimensions.

The foundational competencies for sustainable development include:

1. Critical thinking – the ability to identify the causes and consequences of environmental and social issues.
2. Responsible action – expressed through thoughtful decision-making in everyday contexts.

3. Anticipatory competence – recognising the short- and long-term effects of one's behaviour on the environment and community.
4. Social sensitivity – readiness to collaborate, understand others, and respect differences.
5. Empathy and community-oriented care – the capacity to recognise the needs of others and the motivation to act in alignment with sustainable values.
6. These competencies are particularly effectively fostered through dramatic pedagogical forms such as playlets. Pupils are not positioned merely as observers; rather, they actively experience, explore, and co-construct situations. Through role-taking, interaction, and improvisation, they examine alternative courses of action and their potential outcomes, thereby developing critical and anticipatory thinking as well as a sense of moral responsibility. This aligns with the principle of learning by doing, central to drama pedagogy (O'Toole & Haseman, 1988), which emphasises experiential learning supported by reflection and creative problem-solving.
7. Within the context of Croatian language teaching in the early grades, playlets thus become a powerful medium for integrating ESD. They link the literary dimension (story, character relations, moral dilemmas) with practical, experiential learning and the development of value-based attitudes. Through such dramatic forms, pupils learn to reflect on their thoughts and actions in relation to nature, the community, and society, contributing to the gradual formation of comprehensive competencies for sustainable development.

### **Methodological Approach to the Analysis of Children's Playlets**

The analysis of children's playlets in Croatian language textbooks for younger school pupils requires a systematic and multilayered approach that integrates literary-theoretical and methodological perspectives. Such an approach enables the playlets to be examined simultaneously as literary forms and as pedagogical tools that support the development of

sustainability competencies. The analytical procedure is structured into several key steps:

1. Identification of Dramatic Elements – This step involves recognising the fundamental components of the children's playlets: characters, conflicts, dialogue, occasional monologues, and the motivational logic of the plot. Even the simplest playlet contains conflict and dialogue, which encourage pupils to consider different perspectives and adopt various roles. Within the framework of education for sustainability, such conflicts often symbolise real-life challenges in social and natural contexts, such as tensions between responsible and irresponsible behaviour or between individual needs and the common good.
2. Thematic Analysis – This step identifies ecological, social, and ethical themes and the values conveyed through the playlets. Special emphasis is placed on motifs that explicitly or symbolically foster awareness of sustainable behaviour, empathy toward nature and other people, and critical reflection on the consequences of one's actions. Thematic analysis helps teachers recognise the educational potential of the playlets and align classroom performance with broader curricular objectives.
3. Assessment of Pedagogical Potential – The playlets are evaluated in terms of their possible integration into teaching practice. This includes considerations of how to ensure participation for all pupils, how the texts support the development of linguistic and social competencies, encourage cooperation, and strengthen responsibility. Assessing pedagogical potential enables teachers to plan activities that foster communication skills while cultivating behaviours aligned with sustainability values.
4. Interactivity and Performance – A key aspect of the analysis concerns how dramatization and performance influence pupils' emotional and social engagement. Active involvement in role-play within playlets enables learning-by-doing, a principle central to drama pedagogy, allowing pupils to experience situations rather than merely observe them. Performance activities develop empathy, promote reflection, and deepen understanding of cause-and-effect relationships in social and natural environments.



By combining literary-theoretical and methodological approaches, children's playlets are analysed both as literary works with a distinct dramatic structure and as effective teaching tools for developing sustainability competencies. This integrated perspective supports the systematic planning of teaching activities that include creativity, social interaction, and reflection on ethical and ecological questions, thereby encouraging responsible and conscious behaviour in line with the principles of sustainable development.

From a curricular perspective, analysing children's playlets in textbooks for lower primary grades demonstrates how these pedagogical guidelines are realised in classroom practice. Through playlets, pupils develop language skills, social and emotional competencies, and engage with cultural and moral values. At the same time, dramatization allows for an exploratory and experiential approach that connects classroom content with real-life contexts, in accordance with curricular goals of holistic pupil development.

The following section provides a detailed analysis of children's playlets from first to fourth grade, highlighting thematic diversity, character construction, pedagogical potential, and possibilities for classroom implementation. This analysis offers insight into the development and role of playlets throughout the early primary years and their contribution to competence development and curricular implementation.

### **Curriculum and Children's Playlets in Croatian Language Teaching**

The curriculum for teaching the Croatian language in the lower grades of primary school focuses on the development of pupils' linguistic, social, emotional, and cultural competencies. Its objectives include fostering communication skills, encouraging creative expression, promoting reading and comprehension of literary texts, and shaping positive attitudes toward learning and collaboration. Within the curriculum, the importance of interactive and creative teaching methods is emphasized, with children's playlets occupying a central place.

In Croatian language classes, children's playlets are used as a means of linking theoretical content with practical language use. They enable pupils to actively participate in learning through dramatization, character

interpretation, and dialogue, while also developing social skills such as cooperation, empathy, and responsibility. Through playlets, pupils practice expressing their own emotions, recognizing the feelings of others, and developing critical thinking and problem-solving skills.

The curriculum further emphasizes connecting classroom content with real-life contexts and the local community. Playlets addressing themes from everyday life, nature, culture, and local customs encourage an investigative approach, stimulate curiosity, and motivate learning. In this way, playlets serve as a bridge between curriculum goals and practical teaching, enabling the integration of linguistic, social, and cultural competencies.

The inclusion of children's playlets in the teaching process aligns with expected learning outcomes, as pupils not only develop language skills but also acquire abilities for teamwork, creative problem-solving, and literary interpretation. Therefore, within the curriculum, playlets are not merely a form of entertainment but an essential pedagogical tool contributing to the holistic development of pupils.

### **Application of Analytical Approaches to Selected Children's Playlets**

Applying theoretical and methodological frameworks to the analysis of selected children's playlets from Croatian language textbooks allows for a comprehensive understanding of these dramatic texts and their educational functions. Through a literary-theoretical approach, the basic dramatic elements—characters, conflicts, dialogue, and plot motivation—are identified and assessed in terms of their appropriateness for children's perception and developmental stage. Conflicts in playlets reveal pedagogically structured situations in which values and ethical principles are confronted, such as human interactions with nature, responsible versus irresponsible behavior, or cooperation versus lack of collaboration. These scenarios allow pupils to develop critical thinking, emotional literacy, and a sense of responsibility through active dramatic experience.

From a methodological perspective, the analysis evaluates the pedagogical potential of playlets. Particular attention is given to opportunities for pupils' active participation through role-taking, dialogue interpretation, and engagement in staged scenarios. The applicability of playlets in different

teaching contexts is also considered, including their role in developing language skills, collaborative abilities, and social awareness.

By combining literary-theoretical and methodological perspectives, children's playlets are understood not only as literary texts but also as effective teaching tools. This dual perspective creates a bridge between theoretical analysis and classroom practice, providing pupils with opportunities for experiential learning and the development of competencies necessary for sustainable thinking and behavior.

## **Analysis of Children's Playlets in Croatian Language Textbooks for Early Primary Education**

### *Theoretical Framework of Analysis*

The analysis of children's playlets in textbooks for early primary education is based on a combination of literary-theoretical and methodological approaches. The playlet is viewed as a simple dramatic form that allows students to actively participate and explore different situations and characters. According to Rosandić (1988), the dramatic structure includes three fundamental elements: text, actor, and audience, which in the playlet are manifested at a simplified level adapted for children. Solar (2001) emphasizes that dramatization and the dialogical structure help children develop the ability to take another's perspective, a key component of emotional literacy.

Even in its simplest form, a children's playlet includes basic dramatic components that support the development of students' social, emotional, and cognitive dimensions:

- Conflict – often mild and pedagogically structured; in the context of sustainability, it appears as a conflict of values: human ↔ nature, irresponsible behavior ↔ responsible behavior, lack of collaboration ↔ cooperation. Such conflicts encourage students to reflect and critically assess the consequences of their actions.
- Dialogue – enables the expression of different character perspectives and the development of communication skills.
- Rhythm – the alternation of scenes, dialogues, and actions creates dynamism and maintains students' attention.

- Motivation of action – each element of the plot follows a logical sequence and has pedagogical purpose, facilitating understanding and interpretation of dramatic events.

Dramatic pedagogy (Way, 1967; Bolton, 1984; Neelands, 1992) emphasizes the development of imagination, creativity, empathy, and social skills through play and dramatization. Vladimir Kunić (1990) and Zvezdana Ladika (1997) particularly highlight the educational potential of children's playlets, as children through role-play learn not only how things are, but also how things could be, which is of great importance for education for sustainable development.

Sustainability principles are based on international documents such as UNESCO guidelines (2019, 2021) and the Agenda 2030, while student competencies include: critical thinking, responsible action, the ability to foresee consequences, social awareness, and empathy (Biasutti & Frate, 2017; Rieckmann, 2018). Through children's playlets, students experience these competencies in a safe and experiential context, enabling more effective application in real-life situations.

## Overview of Children's Playlets in Textbooks

Croatian language textbooks for early primary education include a significant number of children's playlets that differ in thematic focus, form, and methodological function. They represent an integral part of teaching materials and serve not only as literary content but also as tools for active learning, fostering students' linguistic, social, and emotional competencies.

### Thematic groups of playlets:

1. Social sustainability – promoting collaboration among students, developing friendships, emphasizing helping others, and practicing sharing and community. Dramatic situations place students in roles that require joint action and mutual respect, thereby enhancing empathy and social awareness.
2. Environmental awareness – fostering a responsible attitude toward nature and the environment. Characters in playlets often care for animals, plants, or natural resources. By identifying with

these characters, students gain an understanding of the ecological consequences of human actions, promoting critical thinking and reflection on sustainable behavior.

3. Moral and ethical values – shaping attitudes toward responsibility, respect, empathy, and collective well-being. Conflicts and dilemmas in playlets reflect real-life situations, helping students develop judgment, decision-making skills, and reflection on the consequences of their own actions.

### **Forms of playlets:**

- Puppet playlets – develop visual presentation and motor skills, enabling work with puppets, movement, and music.
- Fairy-tale playlets – stimulate imagination, creativity, and symbolic play.
- Humorous playlets – foster social and affective competencies through play and laughter.
- Action playlets – strengthen coordination and teamwork skills.

The selection and adaptation of children's playlet forms according to grade level allow for the gradual development of competencies. Lower grades are introduced to simpler, dialogue-based playlets, while higher grades incorporate more complex conflicts, moral dilemmas, and ecological themes. An overview of playlets in textbooks provides a clear map of teaching materials, serving as a foundation for a systematic grade-by-grade analysis.

### **Analysis of Children's Playlets by Grade Level**

Analyzing children's playlets according to grade level provides a detailed insight into the gradual development of students' competencies through Croatian language textbooks. In the lower grades, simple dialogue-based playlets prevail, structured so that students develop social and emotional competencies through conversation and short scenes. These playlets often depict everyday situations at school, at home, or during play, encouraging recognition of basic moral and social values, such as cooperation, sharing, helping, and respecting others. Typical scenarios involve students assuming the roles of friends, teachers, or animals, thereby fostering empathy and the ability to consider others' perspectives.

In the upper grades, more complex conflicts and moral dilemmas are introduced, frequently linked to ecological and social themes. Characters become more diverse, and their decisions and actions require students to engage in critical thinking, reflection, and independent judgment. This gradual increase in the complexity of dramatic situations allows students to be progressively introduced to more challenging social and ethical contexts, enhancing their capacity to assess the consequences of actions while reinforcing empathy, responsible behavior, and sustainability awareness.

In this context, the children's playlet functions as a tool for integrating theoretical knowledge with practical experience, as students do not merely observe situations passively but actively engage in them. Dramatic play enables experiential learning through role assumption, dialogue participation, conflict resolution, and peer cooperation. Through this active engagement, the key pedagogical value of playlets is realized—the development of competencies necessary for sustainable thinking and action across linguistic, social, and emotional domains.

Furthermore, analysis by grade level highlights the progression of content and complexity: from simple, mildly conflictual dialogues and situations in lower grades to more elaborate scenarios featuring multiple conflicts, moral dilemmas, and ecological issues in upper grades. This progression reflects children's developmental needs while demonstrating how Croatian language textbooks deliberately foster students' values, attitudes, and competencies in alignment with educational objectives related to sustainability.

### **Analysis of Children's Playlets for the First Grade**

The analysis of children's playlets in Croatian language textbooks and primers for the first grade demonstrates a clear connection between dramatic content, children's developmental needs, and the objectives of education for sustainable development. Through playlets, students actively participate in situations that foster social sensitivity, empathy, critical thinking, and responsible behavior. Most first-grade playlets are adapted to the students' language level, emphasizing short dialogues, rhyme, and visual cues.

### Thematic Orientation

Most first-grade playlets address situations close to children's everyday experiences, such as family, school, nature, friendship, and caring for others. Examples include:

- Social sustainability: Playlets such as *Dvije lopte* (S. Kireta-Babić) and *Koji je prst najvažniji* (N. Sabadi) encourage cooperation, community, and mutual respect among students.
- Ecological awareness: Playlets *Djevojčica i drvo* (M. Gavran) and *Začudeni mjesec* (J. Balaško) develop understanding of natural processes and the consequences of human actions on the environment.
- Moral and ethical values: Playlets *Božićna želja* (J. Čunčić-Bandov) and *Proljetno buđenje* (J. Čunčić-Bandov) promote judgment, empathy, and awareness of collective well-being.

### Types of Playlets and Methods of Performance

Children's playlets appear in various performance forms, allowing the development of different competencies:

- Puppet playlets (*Učena sova*, *Torba kraj puta*) develop visual perception, motor skills, and teamwork.
- Fairy-tale playlets (*Zeko i snjegović*, *Dvije pahuljice*) stimulate imagination and creativity.
- Humorous playlets (*Jooj, šala!*, *Lav i žirafa*) foster social and affective competencies through play and laughter.
- Action playlets (*Proljetno kreketanje*, *Oblačni razgovor*) strengthen coordination and active participation in groups.

### Didactic Activities

Most playlets include methodological tasks that enable students to actively experience situations rather than merely observe them. Examples of tasks include:

- Transforming the text into a puppet show (*Proljetno buđenje*, *Radoznali gujcek*).
- Movement and musical interpretation (*Dvije lopte*, *Zeko i snjegović*).

- Creative tasks such as drawing or creating puppets and stage settings (*Lav i žirafa, Božićna jelka*).
- Linking playlets with learning and everyday life – recognizing emotions, responsibility, and appropriate behavior (*Tiše, tiše, bit će kiše, Prvašić i budilica*).

### Characters and Structure

In the lower grades, characters are usually stereotypical – animals, objects, or children – facilitating identification and emotional accessibility. Over time, more complex conflicts and moral dilemmas are introduced, promoting the development of critical thinking and the ability to consider consequences. The structure of first-grade playlets is clear: initial situation – conflict – resolution, with rhyme and repetition supporting memory and language perception.

### Pedagogical Potential

Through children's playlets, students develop fundamental competencies for sustainability:

Critical thinking – analyzing conflicts and character decisions (*Djevojčica i drvo, Kako doći bliže Suncu*).

Responsible behavior – recognizing and practicing appropriate actions in various situations (*Božićna želja, Uskrsna zgodica*).

Ability to consider consequences – reflecting on character reactions and personal behavior (*Lav i žirafa, Tiše, tiše, bit će kiše*).

Social sensitivity and empathy – experiencing others' emotions through role-play (*Dvije lopte, Učena sova*).

Care for community and environment – developing awareness of nature and mutual responsibility (*Začudeni mjesec, Djevojčica i drvo*).

First-grade children's playlets represent a key tool for integrating literary content with methodological activities. Through them, children actively explore, interpret, and express themselves, enabling systematic development of linguistic, social, emotional, and ecological competencies. Incorporating playlets into lessons not only increases student motivation and engagement but also lays the foundation for more complex forms of learning about sustainability and social responsibility in later grades.



## Analysis of Children's Playlets for the Second Grade

The analysis of children's playlets in Croatian language textbooks and workbooks for the second grade demonstrates a clear connection between dramatic content, children's developmental needs, and the objectives of education for sustainable development. Through playlets, students actively engage in situations that encourage creativity, social sensitivity, empathy, and responsible behavior. Most second-grade playlets are written in rhyme, include stage directions, and clearly defined roles, facilitating performance and understanding of the characters.

### Thematic Orientation

Second-grade playlets cover broader topics related to children's experiences and their environment, including nature, family, social situations, customs, and moral dilemmas. Examples include:

Social sustainability: Playlets such as *Obitelj Ježičko* (J. Čunčić-Bandov) and *Dvije lopte* (S. Kireta-Bebić) promote cooperation, teamwork, and mutual respect among students.

Ecological and natural science awareness: Playlets such as *Kućica za leptire* (J. Balaško) and *Potočnice* (J. Čunčić-Bandov) encourage reflection on nature, animals, and the importance of environmental preservation.

Moral and ethical values: Playlets such as *Nemoguća ljubav* (L. Puček) and *Blago i lijek* (L. Puček) invite students to think about friendship, love, respect, and responsible behavior.

Customs and tradition: Playlets such as *Nikolinje* and *Uskrsni medo* (J. Čunčić-Bandov) introduce children to cultural customs and holidays, encouraging creativity and participation in shared activities.

### Types of Playlets and Methods of Performance

In the second grade, children's playlets appear in various performance forms, supporting the development of multiple competencies:

- Puppet playlets (*Nikolinje*, *Uskrsni medo*) develop motor skills, visual perception, and teamwork.
- Fairy-tale and animal playlets (*Zaljubljena žaba*, *Lav i žirafa*) stimulate imagination, creativity, and identification with characters.

- Humorous playlets (*Pijetao bez posla, Maskenbalske šale*) foster social and affective competencies through play and laughter.
- Didactic and action playlets (*Usnula jesen, Kiša na jelovniku*) strengthen coordination, reading comprehension, and active group participation.

### **Didactic Activities**

Most playlets include tasks that allow students to actively experience situations:

Transforming the text into a puppet or theater performance (*Snjegović u kaputu, Obitelj Ježićko*).

Movement, musical interpretation, and expression of emotions (*Dvije pahuljice, Lav i žirafa*).

Creative tasks – drawing, making puppets, or designing stage settings (*Cvijet i bubamara, Bubamara i krijesnica*).

Linking playlets with learning and daily life – recognizing emotions, behaviors, and moral decisions (*Nemoguća ljubav, Na raskrižju*).

### **Characters and Structure**

Characters in the second grade become more complex compared to the first grade. Children encounter stereotyped animals and objects, but also human characters with clear motivations. Conflicts and situations in the playlets develop critical thinking and the ability to consider consequences. The structure of the playlets remains clear: initial situation – conflict – resolution, with rhyme and repetition supporting memory and language perception.

### **Pedagogical Potential**

Through children's playlets, students develop fundamental competencies for sustainability:

- Critical thinking – analyzing conflicts and character decisions (*Nemoguća ljubav, Blago i lijek*).
- Responsible behavior – recognizing appropriate actions in different situations (*Nikolinje, Lav i žirafa*).
- Ability to consider consequences – reflecting on character reactions and personal behavior (*Na raskrižju, Proljetne sveznalice*).

- Social sensitivity and empathy – through roles where students experience others' feelings (*Dvije lopte, Obitelj Ježićko*).
- Care for the environment and community – developing awareness of nature and mutual responsibility (*Kućica za leptire, Potočnice*).

Second-grade children's playlets represent a key tool for integrating literary content and methodological activities. Through them, children actively explore, interpret, and express themselves, supporting the development of linguistic, social, emotional, and ecological competencies. Incorporating playlets into lessons fosters creativity, teamwork, social and moral sensitivity, and lays the foundation for more complex learning in higher grades.

### Analysis of Children's Playlets for the Third Grade

The analysis of children's playlets in Croatian language textbooks and workbooks for the third grade shows an expansion of thematic and content range compared to lower grades. Through playlets, students continue to develop social, emotional, and cognitive competencies, while third grade introduces elements of critical thinking, an investigative approach, and connections to the real world. Playlets remain adapted to the students' language level, but dialogues become longer, and themes more complex, including ecological, moral, health, and cultural content.

#### Thematic Orientation

Third-grade playlets cover a wider spectrum of topics and situations that encourage students to think critically and explore the world:

- Seasons and nature: Playlets such as *Sve u svoje vrijeme* (K. Grozdanić) and *Dolazi proljeće* (M. Kušec) develop awareness of natural processes and the importance of environmental preservation, exploring changes in nature and phenomena such as pollution and climate change.
- Healthy nutrition and health care: Playlets *Iz poljskog svijeta* (S. Kireta-Bebić) and *Vitamini i minerali* (S. Petrov) encourage reflection on dietary habits and responsibility for personal health.
- Moral and ethical values: Playlets such as *Nezadovoljna gljiva* (J. Čunčić-Bandov) and *Darovi svetog Nikole* (A. Kraljević) develop

recognition of traits such as envy, pride, and generosity, strengthening social sensitivity and empathy.

- Cultural heritage and customs: Playlets *Karnevalska veljača* (A. Kraljević) and *Božićne želje* (J. Čunčić-Bandov) introduce students to customs, holiday traditions, and local variations in celebrations.
- Interactive learning and exploration: Playlets *Puž muž kaži roge van...* (V. Zemunić) and *Sujetionik i brod* (J. Balaško) include investigative tasks, encouraging students to connect the content of the playlets with real-world information.

### Types of Playlets and Methods of Performance

Third grade includes a variety of playlet formats, supporting the development of multiple competencies:

- Puppet playlets: *Rasparana slikovnica* (Ž. Horvat-Vukelja) and *Čarobni recept Djeda Božićnjaka* (N. Šarić) develop motor skills, coordination, and teamwork.
- Playlets in verse: Most playlets, such as *Vitamini i minerali* and *Muke zbog jabuke*, are written in rhyme, facilitating memorization and developing rhythmic and language perception.
- Didactic playlets: *Domaći kruh* (L. Puhec) and *Pliva patka preko Save* (D. Grundler) include tasks such as drawing, making puppets, and dramatization, linking creativity and practical application of knowledge.
- Thematic interactive playlets: *Nezadovoljna gljiva* and *Pismo jeseni* (J. Čunčić-Bandov) allow students to explore moral dilemmas, emotions, and interpersonal relationships through play.

### Characters and Structure

Characters become more diverse and are typified according to their function:

- Animals and plant characters: Bees, snails, ants, mushrooms, pines, and ducks help understand the natural world and ecological awareness.
- Children and humans: Characters such as Tomica, Ivana, Renata, and Sveti Nikola connect students with cultural and social aspects of life.

- Objects and abstract characters: Lighthouse, spoon, fork, and vitamins encourage symbolic thinking.

The structure of playlets continues to follow a logical sequence: introduction – conflict/problem – resolution, often with rhyme and repetition, facilitating understanding and memorization.

### **Pedagogical Potential**

Third-grade children's playlets contribute to the development of the following competencies:

- Critical thinking: Analyzing conflicts and character decisions encourages reflection on consequences (*Nezadovoljna gljiva, Muke zbog jabuke*).
- Responsible behavior: Students practice responsibility through tasks such as planning nutrition or caring for the environment (*Vitamini i minerali, Dolazi proljeće*).
- Social sensitivity and empathy: Participation in roles helps students understand others' emotions (*Darovi svetog Nikole, Slon i bubamara*).
- Ecological and health awareness: Playlets provide learning about nature, climate, nutrition, and health through interactive tasks (*Sve u svoje vrijeme, Iz poljskog svijeta*).
- Cultural and local heritage: Playlets connect students with customs and traditions, fostering an investigative approach and sense of belonging (*Karnevalska veljača, Božićne želje*).

Third-grade playlets expand the function of dramatic expression from play and rhythmic learning to an investigative, socially aware, and culturally conscious approach.

### **Analysis of Children's Playlets for the Fourth Grade**

The analysis of children's playlets in Croatian language textbooks and workbooks for the fourth grade shows a further expansion of thematic range and complexity compared to lower grades. Students continue to develop social, emotional, and cognitive competencies, with additional emphasis on critical thinking, investigation, creative expression, and reflection on personal experiences. Dialogues become more complex, and

themes include ecology, moral and ethical dilemmas, cultural heritage, health, and interpersonal relationships.

### Thematic Orientation

Fourth-grade playlets cover topics that connect literary texts with the real world and students' experiences:

- Nature and seasons: *Kako prebroditi hladne dane* (K. Grozdanić) explores the lives of animals in winter and the importance of caring for the environment.
- Health and nutrition: *Vitamini i minerali* (S. Petrov) introduces students to the functions of vitamins and minerals and the importance of healthy habits.
- Moral and ethical values: *Ne sudi knjigu po koricama* (K. Grozdanić) and *Najveće blago* (V. Karoglan) develop critical thinking, empathy, and recognition of the values of friendship, family, and personal virtues.
- Cultural heritage and customs: *Domaća zadaća za Dane kruha* (C. Goluža), *Bajka o Orašaru i Mrvici* (S. Škrinjarić), and *Morska ravnica* (K. Grozdanić) familiarize students with cultural customs, local traditions, and dialects.
- Interactive learning and investigation: Playlets such as *Zanimanje mama* (K. Grozdanić) and *Oblak, pahulje i vjetar* (J. F. Radulović) encourage students to explore media, create stories, and design new scenarios.

### Types of Playlets and Methods of Performance

Fourth grade features diverse playlet formats, enabling the development of multiple competencies:

- Classic playlets: *Miš i div* (V. Huljić), *Život naglavačke* (L. Pukey), *Telefonska zbrka* (S. Beraković) develop character interpretation and dialogue comprehension.
- Playlets in verse and rhyme: *Muke po bajkama* (K. Barić) and *Bajka o Orašaru i Mrvici* facilitate memorization, rhythmic perception, and emotional expression through voice and movement.
- Didactic playlets: *Domaća zadaća za Dane kruha* and *Vitamini i minerali* include practical tasks, drawing, set creation, and creative dramatization.

- Thematic interactive playlets: *Tri smijeha i mali smješko* (S. Petrov) and *Morska ravnica* allow students to explore emotions, interpersonal relationships, and natural phenomena.

### Characters and Structure

Fourth-grade characters are diverse and typified according to their function:

- Animals and natural characters: Birds, squirrels, dolphins, and forest and marine creatures promote ecological and environmental learning.
- Children and adults: Characters such as Lovro, Petar, Filip, mama, baka, and učiteljica connect students with real-life experiences.
- Objects and abstract characters: Vitamins, books, cloud, snowflakes, and wind symbolize abstract concepts and stimulate symbolic thinking.

Playlet structure follows a logical sequence: introduction – conflict/problem – resolution, often with rhyme, song, or repetition to facilitate interpretation and memorization.

### Pedagogical Potential

Fourth-grade children's playlets contribute to the development of the following competencies:

Critical thinking and reflection: Analyzing characters' decisions and behavior encourages reflection on consequences (*Ne sudi knjigu po koricama*).

Responsible and active behavior: Students practice responsibility through care for animals, the environment, and personal health (*Kako prebroditi hladne dane, Vitamini i minerali*).

Social sensitivity and empathy: Participation in roles develops understanding of others' emotions (*Najveće blago, Bajka o Orašaru i Mrvici*).

Ecological and health awareness: Playlets provide interactive learning about nature, climate, nutrition, and health (*Oblak, pahulje i vjetar*).

Cultural and local heritage: Familiarity with customs, traditions, and dialects fosters a sense of belonging and an investigative approach (*Domaća zadaća za Dane kruha, Morska ravnica*).

Fourth-grade children's playlets expand dramatic expression toward more complex, research-oriented, and socially aware activities. Through playlets,

students interpret texts, connect them with the real world, develop creativity, and complete tasks independently, supporting the development of competencies important for social, moral, and cultural awareness.

## Discussion

The analysis of children's playlets demonstrates that their pedagogical and literary function extends beyond merely illustrating thematic units in textbooks. As a specific type of dramatic discourse designed for children, playlets integrate experiential, emotional, cognitive, and linguistic learning, creating conditions for constructing personal interpretations of the world. They function as spaces where students actively engage in meaning-making through dialogue, role play, and interaction with peers.

From a methodological perspective, these findings indicate the potential for further interdisciplinary research on playlets, particularly studies that incorporate developmental psychology, communication studies, and reception theories. Future research could include comparative analyses of different textbook editions, changes in the conceptualization of playlets in curricular documents, and empirical observation of students' responses to playlets in classroom practice.

The theoretical contribution of this work lies in understanding playlets as a hybrid genre that combines literary dimensions, communicative functionality, and pedagogical purpose. Within the context of the contemporary Croatian Language Curriculum, playlets are confirmed as a text type that simultaneously develops speaking and interpretive competencies while fostering imaginative and experiential learning.

Although the corpus analyzed is limited to select textbook editions, the identified trends indicate stable patterns in depicting the world and interpersonal relationships in playlets, suggesting avenues for broader empirical research.

## Development Across Grades

The analysis of playlets in textbooks for the first four grades of Croatian language illustrates a gradual introduction to playlets through simple narrative situations, short dialogues, and expansion of thematic scope, character complexity, and pedagogical potential.



- First grade: Students recognizable characters—often animals or children. These playlets develop foundational linguistic and social competencies, allowing children to practice communication, emotional expression, and basic moral values through play and dramatization.
- Second grade: Playlets broaden thematically to include moral, ecological, and cultural content. Characters and dialogues become more diverse and complex, fostering critical thinking, responsible behavior, collaboration, and empathy. Features such as rhymed verses, repetition, and stage directions enhance comprehension, memorization, and performance.
- Third grade: Playlets further expand pedagogical and content potential. Students encounter moral dilemmas, ethical values, and questions of responsibility (*Nezadovoljna gljiva*, *Darovi svetog Nikole*). Playlets include investigative and interactive tasks connecting literature to real-world contexts, while characters grow in complexity, including abstract concepts and symbolic representations. Performance methods involve puppetry, didactic exercises, and thematic interactive playlets, supporting creativity, teamwork, and independent reflection.
- Fourth grade: Playlets enrich cognitive, social, and cultural competencies. Themes become increasingly complex, covering ethical dilemmas, cultural heritage, family and social situations, and scientific or practical content (*Morčić*, *Vitamini i minerali*). Characters include humans, animals, objects, and abstract concepts; dialogues are more elaborate and may feature dialectal or stylistic variation, enhancing linguistic flexibility and social awareness. Stage directions and performance instructions encourage creative and investigative approaches, integrating literary, artistic, and curricular learning.

Across all grades, there is a clear progression from simple narrative playlets to complex dramatic texts requiring active student engagement, independent thinking, research, and creative interpretation. Playlets foster linguistic and literary literacy, emotional intelligence, empathy, social skills, and a sense of community belonging. Integrating cultural, ecological, and health-related topics makes lessons interactive, motivating, and relevant to students' everyday lives.

## Conclusion

Playlets in textbooks and readers for the lower grades of elementary school represent a powerful pedagogical tool that gradually develops students' linguistic, cognitive, social, emotional, and cultural competencies. From the first to the fourth grade, there is continuous progression in the complexity of characters, dialogues, and thematic scope. Early grades emphasize play, rhythm, and simple comprehension, while higher grades cultivate critical thinking, an investigative approach, real-world connections, and symbolic thinking.

Through active participation, dramatization, and creative interpretation, students acquire new knowledge, develop responsible behavior and moral values, and become familiar with cultural heritage and traditions. The use of playlets in teaching enriches not only literary experience but also overall student development, integrating educational, social, and cultural dimensions into a unified and stimulating pedagogical context.

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## ODRŽIVOST KROZ IGROKAZE U ČITANKAMA HRVATSKOGA JEZIKA ZA MLAĐU ŠKOLSKU DOB

### Sažetak

Rad istražuje ulogu igrokaza u čitankama hrvatskoga jezika za mlađu školsku dob kao sredstva za razvoj održivosti u školskom kontekstu. Posebna se pažnja posvećuje analizi dramskih situacija, uloga likova i tematskih motiva te njihovom doprinosu oblikovanju ekološke, socijalne i etičke svijesti učenika. Rad se temelji na kombinaciji književnoteorijskog i metodičkog pristupa, pri čemu se igrokaz sagledava i kao književna forma i kao nastavno sredstvo. Kroz detaljnu analizu odabranih igrokaza, istražuju se metodičke mogućnosti njihove primjene u nastavi hrvatskoga jezika, uključujući razvoj kompetencija potrebnih za odgovorno i održivo djelovanje, poput empatije, kritičkog mišljenja, sposobnosti sagledavanja posljedica te socijalne osjetljivosti. Rad povezuje teorijske pristupe ekokritike, dramske pedagogije i suvremene metodike hrvatskoga jezika, naglašavajući važnost iskustvenog i participativnog učenja, suradnje među učenicima i kreativnog izražavanja u ranoj školskoj dobi. Analiza pokazuje da igrokazi, zahvaljujući svojoj interaktivnoj i dijaloškoj naravi, ne samo da omogućuju bolje razumijevanje književnih i dramskih principa, nego i aktivno potiču razvoj kompetencija potrebnih za održivi način razmišljanja i djelovanja. Rad doprinosi teorijskom i praktičnom razumijevanju funkcije dječjeg igrokaza u obrazovanju za održivi razvoj te naglašava njegovu potencijalnu ulogu u oblikovanju vrijednosti, stavova i ponašanja mladih učenika u skladu s međunarodnim smjernicama za obrazovanje za održivi razvoj.

**Ključne riječi:** čitanke, dječja književnost, igrokaz, metodika, održivost