



**ADVENTURES**

IN THE

# SOVIET IMAGINARY

**CHILDREN'S BOOKS  
AND GRAPHIC ART**

EDITED BY ROBERT BIRD

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**IN THE**  
**SOVIET**  
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**CHILDREN'S BOOKS  
AND GRAPHIC ART**

**EDITED BY ROBERT BIRD**

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**MODELING THE NEW COLLECTIVITY**

Theorists of the Russian revolution placed heavy emphasis on the collective, both as a tribute to their own populist roots and as a means to stabilize and build a new society from the ashes of the Civil War. Not only were many Soviet children the first members of their households to achieve literacy, it was also believed that children's minds, uncorrupted by the influences of the previous era, would imbibe the revolutionary gospel of the collective and even teach it to their elders (as well as, in time, their own children), thus creating a clean break with the past and a firm beginning for the new, collective future.

In an illustration of the good will created by and further facilitating the collective ideal, the characters in Mikhail Ruderman's *Subbotnik* (Saturday Work, 1930) voluntarily toil together on their day off, unloading sacks of potatoes from a train.

In Konstantin Vysokovskii's *Pionery v kolkhoze* (Pioneers on the Collective Farm, 1931) Young Pioneers (members of the Soviet organization for children aged ten to sixteen) go on a day trip to a collective farm, where they work eagerly alongside their elders installing a radio, ploughing, sowing, milking, and collecting recyclable material.



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The title character of Aleksandr Vvedenskii's *Kolia Kochin* (1930) initially prefers his own games to joining collective tasks. The text makes clear that such a child will be cast out from the warmth and camaraderie of the collective. Fortunately for Kolia (and all other naughty individualist children), the collective remains welcoming to those who surrender themselves to its will.

The dynamic and exuberant style used to represent the collective reaches its apogee in Vera Ivanova's illustrations to the 1932 edition of Elizaveta Tarakhovskaia's *Bei v baraban!* (*Bang the Drum!*), whose swirling colors, floating secular icons, and ranks upon ranks of marching, shouting, rejoicing citizens draw the reader into the giddy, overwhelming atmosphere of a true Soviet holiday.



## MODELING THE NEW INDIVIDUAL

As the Soviet Union's parallel drives toward industrialization and collectivization gained pace from the late 1920s through the 1930s, Soviet iconography turned to individual heroes: the model citizen, with proper values and behavior, and the shock worker, who exceeds production targets in prodigious feats of labor. The individual hero is drawn brightly and with detailed, clean lines, and a fully-realized face. His identity is never in question, marked either by his prominence in the scene, his distance from, and often ahead of, the others, or others' worshipful stance relative to him. Still a member of the social collective, the Soviet hero is unmistakably first among equals.

The hero is often an exceptional child, like the hale and hearty Valia Ermakov, the protagonist of Evgenii Shvarts and Vera Ermolaeva's *Kupat'sia, katat'sia* (Swimming, Riding, 1931). In this vibrantly illustrated telling of a real-life story, the ailing Valia is sent to a sanatorium to recover from illness. He quickly puts on weight, regains his strength, and leads various physical activities, taking time to help the other children develop the abilities that come to him without effort.



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Iakov Trakhtman's *Tri shchetki* (Three Brushes, 1930) tells the story of Marusia, a girl with exceptional hygiene. A rare female star, Marusia proudly proclaims her ownership of a toothbrush, a hair brush, and a shoe brush, and demonstrates their use for other children.

Adults can also be heroes for children.

Petr Miturich's *V pitomnike Michurina* (In Michurin's Nursery, 1931) tells the story of experimental Soviet botanist Ivan Michurin, explaining his contributions to Soviet science as he leads a group of acolytes through his brightly colored garden. This book includes a note to teachers and parents emphasizing the importance of Michurin's story for children.



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