

Allatta (Let's write)
-working together to get the literature we are missing

Mette Laustsen

Children's library, Nunatta Atuagaateqarfia / Central and Public library of Greenland, Nuuk, Greenland

E-mail address: mette@katak.gl.



Copyright © 2014 by Mette Laustsen. This work is made available under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution 3.0 Unported License: <http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/3.0/>

Abstract:

A look at the Allatta project which took place in Greenland mid-2012 to mid-2013.

Allatta was a project between NAPA (The Nordic Institution in Greenland), NUIF (a youth organization in Nuuk), Nunatta Atuagaateqarfia (Central and Public Library of Greenland) and Milik publishing.

Allatta was a short story writing competition for young people between 15 and 25. The ten best would be picked to go on a writing workshop and the short stories would be published in an anthology.

The overall goal was to get young people to write and hopefully sow the ground for new Greenlandic literary voices.

The goal for the library was to be able to give the Greenlandic youth books written for them in their own language. To put more young and modern Greenlandic voices on our shelves.

The project was a success. Afterwards some of the newly published authors have begun sharing their voices and helping developing more voices by for example arranging poetry slam and doing public poetry workshops.

Keywords: Greenlandic literature, youth literature, Allatta project, young writers, writing competition.

Background on Greenlandic children's and youth literature.

The Greenlandic children's and youth literature (not including picture books, easy readers or nonfiction) fills about 9 m shelves in all in the children's library at Nunatta Atuagaateqarfia / Central and Public Library of Greenland (by far the biggest public library in Greenland). And they only fill that much because we keep about 5 copies of each book on the shelves.

At the children's library we buy all Greenlandic fiction for children and young adults that get published. But we still only have 174 titles. Of the 174 titles 35 was published in 2004-2014. The rest is older. The oldest title is from 1973. Greenlandic books do not get reissued. The covers on the older books often reveal their age, so they don't appeal to the young Greenlander's taste in 2014. And the stories of the books seem outdated to the modern reader.

But we keep them on the shelves, because the Central and Public Library of Greenland can't only have 35 titles for children and young adult.

It is very difficult to get the Greenlandic children and young people to leisure read in their own language, when the selection is so slim and for a big part dated also. It won't take an avid reader very long to have read the whole selection, and that is including the books the reader might not find interesting. It is really a very few titles that are borrowed again and again, because those are the few that attract the children and young people wanting to read in Greenlandic. But the avid readers mostly read the Danish books, because the selection is so much bigger and books new and modern. Greenlandic is not among young people thought of as an interesting literary language. It is the language they speak, but not the language they choose when reading leisurely.

Niviaq Korneliussen and Sørine Steenholt, two of the young writers who participated in the Allatta competition say that they mostly only read Danish books, and as a writer Niviaq says that she can only get inspiration in other countries. There are too few books in her own language that she can get inspired by. The content in most of the Greenlandic literature doesn't interest them. Too much is qajak literature (meaning books taking place in the good old days) or literature describing the political development in Greenland. Two different subjects but both subjects that aren't too appealing to most modern young Greenlanders. In school children and young adult have to read about those subject which just enhance their distaste for those kinds of books. They are boring and for school reading. Not for leisure reading. Among the Greenlandic youth Greenlandic literature has gotten the reputation of being boring and uninteresting.

Sørine says that Greenlandic literature needs other angles and other genres to get the young people re-attracted to Greenlandic literature. At least more angles than two. To strengthen and maintain interest in reading Greenlandic literature a wider selection is needed. One can't get young people to read more by telling them to, because then it will be a chore like school and not a want. It has to be a desire in them, something that they want to do. It is important that young people have the desire to leisure read, so reading for them isn't only school, boring and something they have to do. And to strengthen young Greenlanders desire to read Greenlandic literature it is important to change the reputation of the literature. Change it from boring homework to something they might find interesting to read and work with.

Allatta (Let's write)

In 2012 NAPA (the Nordic Institute in Greenland), Nunatta Atuagaateqarfia (Central and Public Library of Greenland), NUIF (youth club in Nuuk) and Milik publishing launched a short story competition. The name Allatta was chosen. Translated to English Allatta is let's write. The name was chosen for the simple reason that it was what we wanted to do. Let's write the stories we are missing.

After choosing the name for the competition we needed a theme. We wanted a broad theme to let the young authors be free. Let them write exactly what they wanted. But it was still important for us that the resulting book could help fill the gap we have in books for young people. So we wanted the theme to be young people, to kind of choose the intended audience for the resulting book, but otherwise the young writers should be free to write whatever they wanted. Write what fit their lives being young in Greenland and being young in the world. The aim was to stimulate young people's interest in writing fiction on topics of concern to

young people today. We wanted to begin changing Greenlandic literature's reputation among the young people of Greenland. 'Young in Greenland – Young in the World' were chosen as the theme for the competition.

Young people between 15-25 years were asked to write a short story. All the country's youth institutions from Gymnasiums to primary schools and youth clubs were involved in the competition and encouraged to incorporate the short story competition in their daily lessons.

The entries could be written in Greenlandic or Danish. We didn't want to exclude anybody due to language.

We received 37 entries. All 37 novels were submitted to a jury consisting of author association's President Hans Anthon Lyng, Associate Professor Birgit Kleist Petersen, poet Katti Frederiksen and artist Jessie Kleemann. The jury then selected the 10 winners of the competition.

The winners received 2500 DKK each and a stay at a writing workshop (boot camp) in Kangerlussuaq planned and implemented by the artist Jessie Kleemann and author Mette Moestrup.

There are no writing schools or writing courses in Greenland, so the boot camp was an important part of the project, because it helped develop and better the young writers. It gave them an opportunity to get a short writing education. The boot camp was a 3-day course in Kangerlussuaq with Jessie Kleemann and Mette Moestrup. During the three days everybody developed their skills in reading their own text and providing textual criticism. The course was alternated between textual criticism in plenary and individual text review. Several of the young writers said afterwards that the boot camp made a big difference for them and were eye-opening in terms of their dream to keep writing.

The project: result.

Inuusuttut – nunatsinni nunarsuarmilu / Ung i Grønland – Ung i Verden was published June 2013 bilingual Greenlandic / Danish. September 2013 a Swedish / Greenlandic version was published.

The book is illustrated by the students at the art school in Nuuk to let the young artistic voices be a part of the anthology as well.

The 10 winners were sent on a Nordic inspiration journey to Denmark and Sweden where they participated at the Gothenburg Book Fair 2013. Afterwards the young writers visited various institutions in Denmark and Sweden. They gave readings of their short stories and heard various presentations by other authors. Cooperation with institutions in Denmark (Author School, Thestrup "Højskole" and The Greenlandic House in Copenhagen) and Sweden (Litterär gestaltning, the writing group Panthers, Clandestino Institute and publisher Kabusa Böcher) went really well. All were cooperative, professional and very accommodating. The young writers got a taste of the possibilities for an author education in the Nordic region.

The book is proof that the modern young Greenlandic literary voice is out there, and that there are Greenlandic writers that can put Greenlandic literature's boring reputation among

the young to shame. The young Allatta writers have shown that one can write a modern youth story in Greenlandic. The modern young Greenlander can be found in Greenlandic literature. Are the short stories perfect? Of course not. They are written by young writer starting their road to become Greenlandic authors. A start is never perfect, but for Greenlandic youth literature this start is invaluable. A start for, hopefully more books and authors to come and inspire even more Greenlandic youth to write for themselves, for their peers and for giving and recording a glimpse into the modern Greenlandic youth lives.

After Allatta.

KNR (the Greenlandic National broadcasting company) radio has subsequently recorded the stories and made a program series on the book with interviews with the 10 young writers.

After the Allatta project was finished some of the ten winners have continued their literary journey:

- Two of the young writers even took the initiative to travel on to BUK in Finland after the Gothenburg Book Fair. They wrote an article for the Greenlandic newspaper AG about their experiences on the trip.
- Two of the participants were involved in the txt.ville project in Denmark in 2014, where they among other things held a workshop about Greenlandic literature.
- Greenland's first poetry slam was being held in November 2013 organized by two of the Allatta writers. Another of the writers participated, read his poems up on stage and won the competition. Greenland's second poetry slam will take place end of May 2014 and are organized by the same two Allatta writers.
- The poetry slam organizers have also held a poetry workshop at Nunatta Atuagaateqarfia (the Central and Public Library of Greenland).
- Some of the participants have subsequently written Christmas stories that were published in a Christmas booklet with the magazine Neriisaaq in Greenland. KNR radio has made a program series on the book.
- Two participants have sought and been granted grant from the Government of Greenland so they can focus on their writing.
- The contacts were forged at the Nordic inspiration journey is now being cared for and future projects are underway. The young writers have forged valuable (for their continued literary development) connections and some are working together with Danish and Swedish authors on different projects.

In short, the project spread far beyond the expectations.

The future

The Allatta 2 project has been started and will take place from September 2014 to September 2015 including all activities. This time Sorlak will replace nuif. Sorlak is national youth organization with good contacts in the smaller towns and villages in Greenland. Our hope is that even more will participate and show their literary voice.

The theme will be Allatta 2040, because we want to know how the Greenlandic youth see the future for Greenland and how they see their own future.

We hope to work with the Greenlandic National theater school to dramatize some of the Allatta 2 short stories and with that maybe get more young writers writing for the theater also. To inspire and to show what writing also can be. As Sørine Steenholt said: "We need more different angles and genres to attract the young Greenlanders to write and read Greenlandic".

Acknowledgments

NAPA, nuif, milik publishing and my employer Nunatta Atuagaateqarfia for great collaboration on the Allatta project.

Sørine Steenholdt and Niviaq Korneliussen for interviews.