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### 3 The canon in practice: Implementation in schools and society

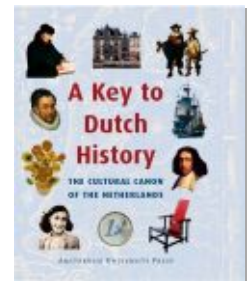
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## CHAPTER 3

# The canon in practice

## Implementation in schools and society

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Education is not filling a bucket, but lighting a fire.

CANONICAL QUOTE, ATTRIBUTED TO – AMONG OTHERS –  
HERACLITUS, PLUTARCHUS AND YEATS

The implementation of the canon proposal requires a great deal of attention from the very outset. A cursory glance alone will not bring our concept to life. This canon is not some ornament to be hung on the wall and looked at; it will have to prove its value in a broad range of practical applications. The most important of these is its natural habitat: the education sector. It is this sector that we will be focusing on most in the following chapter, along with the question of how teacher-training institutes can best equip future teachers to teach the canon.<sup>44</sup> We will then – in the form of suggestions for participation – focus on the broader circle of cultural institutions (including the public broadcasting sector). Finally, we will take a brief look – from an appropriate distance – at the potential for interaction with other parts of society, including the free market.

### 3.1 The canon in the classroom

Again, although the fifty windows are intended as a package that every pupil going through the Dutch education system should be familiar with, they do not in themselves form an elaborate curriculum or a separate subject. They are not intended to be restrictive or limiting, nor are they in any way

44 For this is surely part of the problem: young people in the Netherlands have little knowledge of the canon due to the fact that their teachers have less of a background in this area.

intended to usurp entire lessons in one or more subjects. However, if we want – the starting point for this entire effort, after all – Dutch schools to focus on the canon more effectively, it is the committee’s view that these fifty windows – at a minimum – should be dealt with thoroughly.

Education has a triadic structure: it is the union between teacher, pupil and knowledge that takes place in the classroom.<sup>45</sup> This report places a central focus on knowledge, with an open view to both the pupils and teachers. In the end, it is the classroom where the canon actually takes shape in the education sector. It is the committee’s express wish to leave room for all possible variations. The fifty windows will have to be opened in all sorts of contexts and situations within the increasingly multifaceted education sector in the Netherlands. The most important factor in its success is the teacher, who must bring the canon to life for his or her pupils. This will require more than a wall chart, a website and a treasure chest. The committee is fully confident that teachers are best equipped to judge which form the triad should take when teaching the canon in their class(es). That is why we have consciously steered away from any guidelines regarding the order in which the windows should be dealt with, as well as any far-reaching didactics. If our plea is well received, it would be fair to expect the development of more and more materials and expertise that will allow this canon to flourish in our education system. We only need to point to the wiki function on the website, and the opportunities for publishers and refresher projects. (Chapter 5 contains some specific recommendations.)

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**RECOMMENDATION 4 Support and stimulate initiatives to develop didactics (including stimulating assignments and testing) as part of the canon’s design – Ministry of OCW**

The committee would like to devote a few words to the projected timeframe. To keep silent about this issue would be to ignore what may be the most central issue in modern education: the battle for time. And although the canon is no curriculum, the fifty windows will have to be opened in primary and secondary education curricula. As regards primary education, the committee worked on the basis of the following starting point: an average of three teaching periods per window, to be divided over the four (in general)

45 Imelman 1977.

years of factual subject teaching (i.e. a total of 150 hours). The windows were also designed to function as “lookout posts”, from which to explore broader issues, so there should be sufficient potential for linkage with other curricular material in order to justify this amount of hours.

48 As mentioned, the committee believes the lower forms of secondary education should focus on the repetition and expansion of knowledge, divided between the various subjects or areas of study. This repetition could, for example, be condensed into a brief crash course used in combination with a digital diagnostic test to establish the first-year pupil’s active and passive knowledge. This crash course is used to refresh pupils’ existing knowledge (short words, historical context/timeline, combining pictures with persons/events/developments). In the follow-up to the first two or three lower forms, teachers can then refer to the windows incidentally. Estimating the required amount of hours is much more complex here than in the case of primary schools; one hour per window would seem a reasonable average for a basic orientation. (Enthusiasts will undoubtedly feel this is too little, and the windows certainly have more to offer; however, in view of the practical situation this seems a reasonable estimate.)

One of the most important preconditions for success may well be the training of new teachers, and ensuring they are sufficiently familiar with the canon and its teaching. Teachers must be sufficiently grounded in the canon if they are to present the windows to their pupils in a gripping and stimulating manner. If this foundation is weak, the teacher (and thus the class) will be forced to cling on to a method developed by others, degrading study and workbooks to a collective lifebuoy. The canon, however, cannot remain afloat through third-party teaching materials alone; this is why the committee is so insistent that our teachers should have a solid basis of knowledge. Paragraph 3.2 focuses on this issue in more depth. This section is preceded by a *tour d’horizon* of the various types of schools involved, the subjects they teach with relevance to the canon, and suggestions for dealing with our design within their framework. These comments are merely intended as a guideline for effective use, and do not pertain to be exhaustive.

### 3.1.1 Primary education sector

The canon proposed by the committee basically consists of fifty windows on the Netherlands, as featured on the wall chart. The committee would suggest that this *wall chart* be displayed permanently in a preferably prominent place in the classroom from – at least – primary year 5 (8-9-year-olds) onwards. We would also advocate that every primary school draw up – in consultation – a global *schedule* in order to divide the fifty windows over the various years of study. In our view, there is no need to deal with each subject in a strictly chronological order. We would also suggest leaving a certain amount of room to focus on current developments with links to certain windows. (A school might invite teachers with affinity for a specific topic to act as “guest teachers” in their colleagues’ classes from time to time.) Excursions can also be included in the schedule.

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In its brief to the committee, the Ministry specifically requested that we take into account the revised *attainment targets* for primary school children that came to replace the 1998 targets as from August 2006.<sup>46</sup> We feel that our proposal is fully in line with these targets.

#### History

A large number of the fifty windows primarily fall under the domain of history, a subject that is regarded as one of the factual subjects and is currently part of the area of study known as “Knowing yourself and your world”. Subjects such as megaliths, the sixteenth-century iconoclastic outbreak, Michiel de Ruyter and Anne Frank – to name but a few – are dealt with in the common teaching methods; the greater portion of the windows is part of the standard curriculum.<sup>47</sup> This could lead one to conclude: “But we already do that,” which is true to a certain extent. The committee is therefore not advocating an entirely different approach to history education. The wall chart and website, however, do offer an excellent opportunity to focus more intensively on some of the most important topics – the canon.

One question that keeps springing up is the relationship between the canon and the frame of reference defined by the De Rooy Committee. Due to the fact that the canon has a broader scope than history education alone – the subject to which the De Rooy committee was limited – the ten

<sup>46</sup> See [www.kerndoelen.kennisnet.nl](http://www.kerndoelen.kennisnet.nl).

<sup>47</sup> The committee would like to take this opportunity to extend its gratitude to the educational publishers who either provided or made available for inspection their teaching methods.

periods suggested by De Rooy were not explicitly included in the canon. However, the two are far from mutually exclusive; the windows can easily be fitted into the ten periods.<sup>48</sup> What is more, the windows can actually offer an opening to help bring the main characteristics of the ten time periods to life in the classroom. Recent studies have shown that this poses somewhat of a problem for primary school pupils.<sup>49</sup> An example: the story of William of Orange paints a comprehensive picture of the distinctive aspect “the Uprising and the birth of the Netherlands” (Time period of discoverers and reformers – 1500-1600). There are more examples. The industrial revolution can be made manifest through windows such as the first railroad and child labour, the nineteenth century emancipation movements are embodied by Aletta Jacobs. In short: the windows offer a unique opportunity to provide pupils with a better “grounding” in the abstract framework of the time periods.

### Geography

The canon contains a number of geographically-oriented windows that fall within the domain of geography, a subject that is regarded as one of the factual subjects and is currently part of the area of study known as “Knowing yourself and your world”. Due to the fact that geographical subjects are generally taught in a thematic order, the inclusion of the geographical windows does require a certain amount of creativity. The 1953 flood, for example, can be dealt with in the context of the fight against water as featured in the teaching method, but it may prove more appropriate to teach this window on 1 February, or – for even more dramatic effect – just as a storm is swirling around the classroom and the news reports the closing of the Oosterschelde storm surge barrier and the Maasland water defences.

It should be pointed out that traditional geography themes offer sufficient starting points for education on the canon. Mineral deposits are dealt with on a regular basis (gas pocket). The same applies to the Dutch landscapes (polder landscape: Beemster; harbour landscape: Port of Rotterdam).

<sup>48</sup> We feel we must state our objection to the name and dating of one of the ten time periods, namely the “Age of monks and knights”, spanning from 500 to 1000. This is a (previously identified, but never corrected) flaw in the – otherwise excellent – design by the De Rooy Committee. There were no knights in Europe prior to the year 1000. Medieval Studies places the genesis of knighthood somewhere during the eleventh century. In an effort to spare coming generations confusion in this area, our committee has taken the liberty of calling for rectification, through amendment of either the periodisation (500-1200?) or the designation.

<sup>49</sup> See the study by Wagenaar & Van der Schoot 2004, p. 110-116, and Pols 2004a, p. 15.

Focusing on the history of cartography as well as old maps and atlases (the Blaeu atlas) allows the teacher to transcend instrumental topography and instil the pupils with a greater love of and sense for maps. (We can identify a clear parallel with the role of the *Hebban olla vogala* window in language teaching; see hereafter.)

### Dutch language

Primary education devotes a great deal of time to language teaching, which we can only applaud. Helping pupils gain a good command of the Dutch language deserves the highest priority.<sup>50</sup> At the same time, it is also good to impress upon young people that language is more than spelling, grammar and receptive reading alone. This is why the committee would like to make a plea – in the absence of a De Rooy committee on the subject of Dutch – for a bit more focus on language-based games and general language studies in order to help our children increase their skills and become more sensitive to language in general.<sup>51</sup> Viewed from the perspective of the canon, it is also important that we realise just how much the history of the Netherlands is interlinked with the Dutch language. This was also at the basis of our decision to opt for the *Hebban olla vogala* window (and the windows dealing with the Authorised Dutch Version of the Bible, Multatuli and Annie M.G. Schmidt). Getting children to write the sentence *Hebban olla vogala...* on the blackboard and asking whether they know what this means offers a good starting point for delving into such issues. Written Dutch is a thousand years old! (And was once written with a quill, which can then be produced from the chest.) Creative teachers can use a plethora of methods to get pupils to “play with language”, especially in combination with the mother tongues of new Dutch nationals. The comparison between various languages (“What would you call that in...?”) provides all pupils with insight into the workings of language and offers a beneficial “side effect” for pupils of non-Dutch origins, namely the realisation that they have a skill that is special and (presently) unattainable for Dutch children.

There are many ways of delving into the subject of “language” (etymology, possibly in relation to the pupils’ own first and last names,

50 We would like to refer to the plea (a notion we strongly support) regarding the importance of language in every subject by Van Beek & Verhallen 2004.

51 A (reading) book for children of age 10 and up, written and illustrated with infectious enthusiasm: *Waarom een buitenboordmotor eenzaam is...* (Van Leeuwen 2004).

names of towns and cities; proverbs (the Breughel painting!)<sup>52</sup> in a playful manner; ask grandmother, uncles and brothers about the Dutch dialect from their birthplace, old words their families used to use; listen to dialects from Friesland, Zeeland, the polder areas, Limburg, etc. Focusing on the rhyming style used by Annie M.G. Schmidt can help instil a very special sense of enjoyment and insight in children. Our committee believes that a greater focus in schools on these aspects of language would provide an extremely constructive impetus, generating more positive energy for both the Netherlands itself and the Dutch language than any nitpicking over the official spelling.

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Obviously, Dutch education at primary school level largely consists of reading (out loud) education. The reading of Saïdjah and Adinda during the Max Havelaar window is – apart from other, content-based values – a ready opportunity to introduce children to the “magic of words” as the best possible preparation for more advanced literature education in secondary school.<sup>53</sup> Each of the windows was designed in an effort to bridge the gap between the canon and children’s books (and films). An initial inventory, which will require regular updates, is featured on the website. If these books are available in the school library, they can be utilised both individually and in class. We should point out that the committee is concerned about the state of school libraries in the Dutch primary education sector. Public libraries go to considerable effort to support literary education; in an unfortunate side effect, many schools feel this discharges them from the responsibility of undertaking anything. Many school libraries have suffered as a result, a development worsened further by tighter budgets. Although we did not conduct any additional research in this area, the signs are not good,<sup>54</sup> despite the fact that having enough good books close at hand – no disrespect intended to all public libraries at cycling distance and library buses – can still mean so much to children.

**RECOMMENDATION 5 Assess the condition of school libraries and provide support if necessary – Ministry of OCW**

52 Please refer to the wonderful educational tool featured at [www.literatuurgeschiedenis.nl](http://www.literatuurgeschiedenis.nl).

53 Our thanks go out to Theo Witte.

54 One of the saddest incidents we came across was a primary school that felt compelled to hive off its core library, as it had not been brought up to date with the latest spelling rules and had no funds for a new one.



## The Arts

According to the attainment targets, the area of study known as “orientation in the arts” is partly aimed at obtaining “some knowledge of and appreciation for aspects of cultural heritage”.<sup>55</sup> The canon offers a sheer endless amount of starting points to this end. Obviously, the relationship between the canon and the arts is highlighted in the windows on the great painters and De Stijl, with all the vistas they contain. (Unfortunately, the committee was not able to afford Music and the Performing arts such a prominent position due to its strict selection procedures; we should point out that the website does contain numerous other references to music. However, we are saddened by the omission of an art form at which the Netherlands has excelled for decades: ballet. If only for this reason, please read Recommendation 6.) The canon also contains a number of windows that offer a direct view of some of the most vital cultural heritage in the Netherlands: megaliths, the *Ridderzaal* [Hall of Knights], the Amsterdam canal ring, the Blaeu Atlas and country mansions, as well as the various churches built both before and after the sixteenth century iconoclasts.

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**RECOMMENDATION 6 Assess how creative subjects such as Culture and the Arts (CKV) can be anchored even more firmly in the design, in terms of both content and didactics – Ministry of OCW**

## Man and society

According to attainment target 38, pupils must be taught about “the essentials of the various religions that play an important role in Dutch multicultural society”. Religion, and – as a logical consequence – especially the Christian religion, makes up an important theme in the story of the Netherlands and – consequently – the Dutch canon. The windows on Willibrord, the *Beeldenstorm* [sixteenth century iconoclastic outbreak], the *Statenbijbel* [Authorised Dutch Version of the Bible] and Diversity in the Netherlands can be used as starting points in dealing with the influence of religion on culture in the broadest sense of the word, and the constantly developing tradition of religious freedom.

<sup>55</sup> Attainment target 56 from the *Voorstel herziene kerndoelen basisonderwijs*. This orientation should start as early as possible, according to the thesis *Kunsteducatie met kleuters* by Gabriëlle Struijk (Hogeschool InHolland Rijswijk, 2006). The SLO [National Institute for Curriculum Development] is also working to develop curricula for education in the arts in the first years of primary education.

Other windows, such as Erasmus and Spinoza, can be used to accentuate these themes further.

### **The local canon in primary schools**

As we explained in the previous chapter, we feel that primary school teachers should deal with historical events in the most concrete and expressive way possible in order to help bring the past to life. This is why the committee would again like to voice its strong support for a local canon as a parallel project. It is essential, after all, that the national canon never obscures local cultural heritage. Over the past few years, a number of appealing initiatives have been developed in this area which we feel are deserving of further support.<sup>56</sup> In accordance with the idea of the fifty windows on the story of the Netherlands, primary schools could work in concordance with their municipalities (especially the archive and the Archaeological Department) and local experts to develop a local canon – which could also be illustrated by means of a map and/or website – of important facts, people and locations from the area.<sup>57</sup>

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#### **RECOMMENDATION 7 Local canon initiatives in collaboration with educational and heritage institutions at the local level – Erfgoed actueel and VNG**

### **3.1.2 Secondary Education sector**

One significant advantage of a canon for the primary education sector is that secondary school teachers will be able to build on an existing level of basic knowledge. Such a common frame of reference offers great didactic advantages in comparison with the vague prior knowledge of today's average transition class. The challenge for secondary school teachers will be to build on this basic knowledge, partly by revisiting the subjects – repetition and recognition are fertile didactic principles after all – and partly as an expansion of the fifty

56 See for instance the sites [www.datbewarewe.nl](http://www.datbewarewe.nl) (heritage site for the primary education sector), the wonderful example [www.drentsarchief.nl](http://www.drentsarchief.nl) and [www.monumentenzorg.nl](http://www.monumentenzorg.nl), initiator of a “monuments treasure chest” for the first years of secondary education that can be rented from the provincial heritage associations.

57 In a later stage, the website [entoen.nu](http://entoen.nu) could be supplemented with a blank map. Individual schools could then access this map by means of a login code, and fill it in with local and regional windows.

windows. As we mentioned before, the committee suggests that this expansion should be guided by the principles of greater congruence (from stepping stones to cohesive storyline); a more international perspective (from the Netherlands in the world to Europe and the world); a greater focus on abstractions and processes; and a greater focus on individuals and groups in the shadow of the canon.

As of 2006, schools will be allowed to let go of the way in which subjects are structured in the lower forms of secondary education. The law merely prescribes the attainment targets, while schools are free to determine how these are then made concrete in educational programmes (subjects, areas of study, projects, etc.). In order to allow schools the leeway to set out their educational programmes as they see fit, these attainment targets were consciously formulated in broad, general terms. As of yet, it is unclear how these developments will play out, but it seems as though many HAVO and VWO schools are sticking with their existing structures, while many VMBO schools are adopting cross-curricular areas of study.

These changes may have both positive and negative effects with regards to the canon. Teachers that are not accustomed to thinking in terms of the "parcelling out of subjects" will be more inclined to adopt a cross-curricular canon, that transcends individual subjects. Under the new framework, the proposed fifty windows would correspond with the following areas of study: Dutch language, "man and society" (containing the subjects history and geography, as well as elements of social studies, ideologies and general economics) and "art and culture" (containing elements from the disciplines of music, dance, drama, handicrafts, drawing, textile arts and audiovisual education). In order to ensure that the canon does not become too fragmented and/or become so much of a "common property" that it no longer belongs to anyone, it would be advisable to appoint a group of teachers within the school as special custodians (cf. Recommendation 28).

The committee is concerned with regard to the purely thematic structure of many new educational methods designed for the areas of study mentioned above. "Man and society", for example, is taught by means of themes such as "my neighbourhood", "living together", and "rich and poor". No matter how prudent this choice of subjects is, structuring the curriculum along entirely thematic lines will make it difficult for pupils to gain a sense of order, oversight and coherence with regard to their knowledge of the history and culture of the Netherlands in the world. Knowledge of the chronology of events and geographical perspective will suffer most, which leads us back to

the complaints that led to the establishment of the canon committee. Yet another reason, in other words, to ensure the (wall chart with the) fifty windows remain an integral part of our secondary education systems.

Due to the fact that many schools are set to maintain the existing structure in the lower forms of secondary education and the current system will definitely continue in the upper forms, we have formulated a number of additional considerations and suggestions with regard to the canon below, divided over the two stages of secondary education and the relevant subjects.

## 56 LOWER FORMS

### History

As we pointed out in Chapter 1, history teaching is seeing a shift towards more chronologically anchored knowledge and less ordering along thematic lines. The accumulation of orientational knowledge has (once again) become an important objective. This is not a return to soulless cramming, but the reevaluation of an intelligent form of acquiring knowledge that also requires historical skills.<sup>58</sup> Naturally, the fifty windows can play an important role in building up such orientational knowledge. Assuming that primary school pupils will have become sufficiently familiar with the fifty as such, teachers in the lower forms of secondary education can then focus on building on this knowledge. History lessons in secondary education are generally taught from a European perspective (with strong Dutch accents), with an occasional foray into other continents. The fifty windows on the Dutch story will only require a limited amount of the available teaching periods. The committee does not advocate introducing a stronger national accent in history education. It does, however, suggest that cross-references be made with developments across Europe and the world from the starting point of the (partly already existing) knowledge of fifty core elements of Dutch history and culture. This will allow pupils to expand and add to their knowledge in a step-by-step manner. Suggestions to this end can be found following the windows in the B-section. Also see our special comments on the desirability of designing – in addition to this Dutch version – an international canon in Chapter 4 and Recommendation 27.

<sup>58</sup> The De Rooy report from 2001 is especially relevant in this regard.

A suggestion: awaiting the actual design of an international canon, a nice project for secondary school classes or even entire schools (lower or upper forms, on an either subject-specific or cross-curricular basis) would be to design a map with fifty windows on European and/or world history!

## Geography

With regard to geography, the abstract new attainment targets for the lower forms specify that pupils must build up a “geographical world-view”. With regard to traditional school subjects, this intention is taking the shape of a focus on themes and areas on various geographical scales, ranging from global to local. Naturally, the Netherlands is one of the most obvious scale measures, offering a wide range of options for repetition, in-depth focus and contextualisation of the canon windows.

Lessons on the Netherlands generally deal with subjects such as: city and countryside, economic core regions, water issues, nature and the environment, Dutch landscapes, population geography, relations with Europe. The links to elements from the canon are evident: the ring of canals in Amsterdam, the Port of Rotterdam, the great flood, the gas deposits, the Beemster polder, diversity in the Netherlands, Europe. From a geography perspective, it would seem obvious to create *links* with other scale levels – an example would be the Port of Rotterdam in the perspective of global transport flows – and make *comparisons* with areas in other parts of the world – our modest influx of immigrants compared with the enormous regional refugee movements in conflict regions. Collaboration between history and geography create additional possibilities to focus on the canon in-depth: examples include the geography of the Netherlands in the industrial age or the geography of the colonial world.

Map and atlas reading skills, regarded as highly important in the lower forms, are often taught along instrumental lines: the main focus is on learning to read, analyse and interpret present-day (atlas) maps. (A memory of the window with the Blaeu Atlas will also help stimulate “geographical awareness” at a meta-level.

## Dutch language

Our plea for more language studies, linguistic sociology and language-based games at primary schools also extends to mother-tongue education in the secondary education system. This has increasingly shifted towards the teaching of language skills over the past few years, practised mainly by means of

exercises based on matter-of-fact texts (both oral and written). Reflection and artistic notions have taken a backseat, while it seems likely that precisely these aspects can contribute significantly to the accumulation of these language skills. In the view of the committee, the same applies to literature, which has an undisputable formative value in terms of pupils' language skills. Obviously, literature education also goes right to the heart of the canon. At primary school level, we felt the windows need not look further than the unique triad *Hebban olla vogala – Multatuli – Annie M.G. Schmidt*; the literary canon must then be further expanded upon in secondary education. There is a reasonable amount of consensus as to the exact contents of this canon;<sup>59</sup> the real problem is the didactic methods used to impart it upon today's young children. Wouldn't a seventeen-year-old in this day and age find *Joe Speedboat* more relevant than *Max Havelaar*? The committee is not prone to any rearguard battles (which are, incidentally, easily decided with pupils simply downloading book reports from the Internet), but would nevertheless like to see serious efforts being made to preserve the authors and texts that have traditionally been regarded as canonical. We will be making a number of comments with regard to this issue in subsequent sections dealing with the upper forms of secondary education, which includes the majority of these lessons as well as a separate exam on the subject of literature.

As a prelude, the lower forms of secondary education could deal with good children's books, and introduce pupils to the most important Dutch poetry<sup>60</sup> and various anthologies, introductions and texts developed especially for schools. (Why haven't we seen a modern-day version of the old illustrated *Classics*, containing classic stories from around the world?)<sup>61</sup> The success of the *Tekst in context* series – the most popular of which are the "canonical" instalments *Karel en Elegast* and *Reinaert de vos* – prove that the possibilities in this area are greater than is often assumed, if one is willing to make the effort. (The same and more is undoubtedly proven on a daily basis across the country, by enthusiastic, creative teachers who inspire their classes.

59 Please refer to the unequivocal results of the *De Nederlandse klassieken anno 2002* survey, held amongst members of the Maatschappij der Nederlandse letterkunde, which can be found at [www.dbnl.org](http://www.dbnl.org).

60 In anthologies such as *Domweg gelukkig in de Dapperstraat* (Aarts en Van Etten 1990).

61 The committee is aware that cartoon books could be a powerful medium in this regard. Several users responding through the committee website indicated that they had gained most of their historical overview from the series *Van nul tot nu*. In the past few years, Dick Matena has created cartoon versions of Gerard Reve's *De avonden* and Jan Wolkers' *Kort Amerikaans*.

The wiki function in the canon site leaves room for users to share such success stories.)<sup>62</sup> The future of *Max Havelaar* may well lie in the teaching of *Saïdjah en Adinda* at primary schools, followed by a short lesson according to the *Tekst in context* formula. Linkage to new media also offers perspectives in this regard.

### **Art & culture**

The attainment targets for the new lower forms now include an area of study known as art & culture, an amalgamation of drawing, handicrafts and music. A solid cultural foundation can then be laid on this basis. The formulation of the attainment targets is very cautious. The committee recommends that attainment target 50 (“The pupil learns to look at art, listen to music and watch and listen to theatre, dance and film on the basis of background information and prior knowledge”) be implemented in a robust manner. Though pupils will naturally benefit greatly from the sense of participation (either through active participation or as a visitor), this does not mean knowledge should be taboo.

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### **UPPER FORMS AND SECOND STAGE**

After the lower forms, the secondary education system becomes extremely differentiated. In view of the reasons outlined in Chapter 1, the committee feels its responsibility with regard to the specified target ends here. This is all the more justifiable in view of the major reshuffle currently underway in the landscape of educational subjects, and the pending reports from the Veldhuis subject cluster committees in 2007. (We now know from informal consultations with these committees that there is no danger of any major discrepancies between those proposals and this report.) Nevertheless, our committee would like to offer some points for consideration with regard to the canon in the context of the Second Stage. These are points that arose in the process of gathering our thoughts, and cannot purport to be in any way comprehensive. In the upper forms of VMBO, HAVO and VWO, subjects such as geography and history are either elective subjects or mandatory for pupils with a specific subject cluster. These subjects offer plenty of opportunities to build on the knowledge of the fifty windows accumulated during the first phase. However, in view of the fact that some pupils will not have access to these subjects, we

62 Such tips and tricks have been exchanged through the educational communities in the digital school (see [www.digischool.nl/ne/community](http://www.digischool.nl/ne/community)) for some time now.

feel it would be wise to leave it at this observation and make a few comments with regard to the three subjects that are mandatory for all pupils: Dutch language (literature in particular), culture and the arts, and social studies.

**RECOMMENDATION 8 Further reflection on the place of the canon in the upper forms – Ministry of OCW**

**Dutch language**

60 The VMBO study programme syllabus for Dutch includes “fiction-education”, focusing on genres such as poetry, short stories, (children’s) novels, comics, television series and films. The possibility of choosing for canon-related fiction would seem obvious in this regard. For an example, see the Rijksmuseum publication from 2006: *Gedichten over Rembrandt* [Poems on Rembrandt], the novel by Theun de Vries and many children’s books on Rembrandt, as well as the current musical.

Literature makes its entrance in the form of a subject with an (final) examination grade during the Second Stage of HAVO-VWO.<sup>63</sup> This means a significant part of the traditional canon must be dealt with during this period. This is not a bad thing in itself, as a great deal of canonical literature requires a certain amount of maturity in the reader. However, the canon committee would suggest that the lower forms of secondary education and even primary education provide more of an introduction to the appearance of “real” literature later on; see our suggestions to this end in the previous section. Our committee would also suggest that – as is already the case at certain schools – the required reading list for Second Stage literature education – which specifies at least eight books for HAVO pupils and at least twelve for VWO pupils, at least three of which must be from before 1880 – should be bound to certain clauses. This will help guarantee a certain share of canonical works/authors, without predetermining the list to an unacceptable degree. One option would be to require that pupils choose at least four books from a predetermined – and regularly updated – list of canonical authors from the period between 1880 and the present (such as W.F. Hermans, Reve, Mulisch, Claus, Haasse; this could then be expanded for VWO pupils to include the period before 1880 with a selection from works such as

63 However, the separate grade for Literature Studies is in danger of being abolished, according to the 2007 proposal of alteration. Schools can decide that the grade should be “given back” to language subjects such as Dutch, English, etc.



Reinaert, Muiderkring, Vondel and Multatuli. The Digital Library of Dutch Literature (dbnl) could develop a special domain to this end – “the canon in Dutch literature”).<sup>64</sup>

**RECOMMENDATION 9 Develop digital domain “the canon in Dutch literature” – Digital Library of Dutch Literature**

We feel a basic active knowledge of the main developments in literary history should be required of every pupil: at a minimum, VWO pupils should be familiar with the names and profiles of the *rederijkers* (rhetoricians), Huygens, Potgieter and the *Tachtigers*. We would also like to point out that the tapestry of the canon could be interwoven more intricately by means of literature. Naturally, fine literature is interlinked with World War II in countless ways; however, other windows could also be enriched through works such as *Oeroeg*, *Bezonken rood*, *Indische duinen*, or – for the more adventurous – *De Vuuraanbidders*, Bloem’s essay on the Panorama Mesdag and almost all works by Thomas Rosenboom.

61

It should be pointed out that quite a few of those teaching literature, including those with a grade one teaching qualification [all levels of secondary education], are ill equipped for the task. This is hardly surprising in view of the drastic cuts in university reading lists since the introduction of the Two Tier Structure in 1982. Knowledge of the canon has also undeniably suffered from the increasing trend towards text-experience education, which allowed a great deal of room for the pupils’ own preferences, even when these verged on laziness; the Internet could then be used to fill in the gaps. (One pupil could be overhead saying to another: ‘Did you actually read that entire extract?’<sup>65</sup>). Another reason for the “underperformance” of this subject may be the fact that it is only examined by means of school exams rather than the central written exams. However, this latest suggestion is well beyond the mandate of this committee.

64 This idea was suggested by Dutch (and CKV) teacher Willy van Wetter of the OSG West-Friesland in Hoorn. Cf. the plea for a “cultural knowledge canon” in *Raad van Cultuur* 2005, especially p. 7-8.

65 Teacher Hannes Minkema was kind enough to share this anecdote with us.

## Culture and the Arts (CKV)

The relatively new and mandatory (for all pupils) subject CKV (CKV 1 in the Second Stage) offers a great deal of potential in terms of the canon. However, the subject is in its early stages and is still trying to establish its own identity, standards and form. According to pupils, the general atmosphere during lessons is often that of those endless “active holidays” Jan Blokker once described as typical of Dutch education.<sup>66</sup> This is most likely one of the reasons that many CKV teachers are still insufficiently qualified: teachers from other subjects that have been roped in to help in spare hours. The good news is that many teachers with a pioneering spirit and sense of enthusiasm are getting involved.<sup>67</sup>

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From the canon’s perspective, the further development of this subject should ideally involve a little more knowledge and substance. (As the cultural sector in general might do well to emulate its colleagues from the exact sciences more often.) Canonical Dutch art from the The Hague School to Breitner (and from there to photography) is certainly deserving of attention, as are the Dutch representatives of major international movements (Koekoek as a romantic). CKV is currently oriented towards internationalism and modernity. The recent study on musical education by Bevers showed that while the key period between 1700-1850 (with all its major composers) is extremely dominant across Europe, the Netherlands is unique in terms of its focus on post-1950s music – which is to say: pop music.<sup>68</sup>

## Social studies

Mandatory subject social studies are represented by a modest number of hours in the upper forms of VMBO, HAVO and VWO. There are significant differences between the way in which the subject is taught at VMBO on the one hand and HAVO and VWO on the other. VMBO lessons focus on themes such as culture and socialisation, social inequalities, power and control, image formation and stereotyping. Though this is certainly substantive subject matter, the focus is mainly on the here and now; any links with the canon are indirect at best.

66 See, for example, Geldermans 2005.

67 Also see *Onderwijsraad & Raad voor Cultuur 2006*, Paragraphs 5.3 and 5.4.

68 Bevers 2005, especially p. 42-44. It is interesting to note that the results of the same survey with regard to the visual arts are much more consistent: the twentieth century is dominant in all four countries.

The subject is dealt with in a different manner at HAVO and VWO level. The plans for 2007 and beyond are based around the concept of citizen training (consisting of the themes rule of law, parliamentary democracy, the welfare state and the pluralistic society), with a clear focus on the historical dimensions. This offers many possibilities for linkage with some of the windows dealt with in primary education and the lower forms of secondary school. Canonical themes can be discussed and questioned, in keeping with the pupils' burgeoning development of their sense of judgement. What was the relationship between the royal Orange family and the birth of parliamentary democracy in the Netherlands? Which role did Hugo Grotius play in developing today's international law? Does Dutch society truly have a strong tradition of tolerance, or is this a questionable hypothesis? What exactly did Einstein mean when he claimed to believe in "Spinoza's God"? Clearly, there are a wealth of opportunities here for truly preparatory higher education on the basis of the canon.

### 3.1.3 Higher education

Despite the fact that this area is even further removed from its mandate, the committee would like to take the liberty of making a number of comments with regard to higher education. Here too, it might be advisable to focus more on general education, in addition to normal disciplinary training. The committee would tend to agree with Paul Scheffer who, in his speech at the opening of the academic year in 2002 at the University of Amsterdam, referred to the university as the "most advanced school of citizenship", and called for a more robust (and broad) intellectual basis, through the curricula.<sup>69</sup> The committee invites universities and professional education institutes (see recommendation 10) to take up their social responsibility in this area by assessing what could be done to improve the general development of their students – the future elite of the Netherlands – and strengthen their academic environment.<sup>70</sup>

69 Scheffer & Noorda 2002, especially p. 10-11. See the excellent dissertation by Schuyt 1998.

70 Cf. Zie ook onder *Mozes* (Van het Reve 1988) and the dictionary inspired – in part – by this work, *Nieuw cultureel woordenboek*, the latest edition of which was published in 2006. With thousands of categories, the book is an extensive canon in many areas of knowledge.

Incidentally, the canon not only deserves a place in the teaching at universities (and professional education institutes), but also in their research projects. The *Paradoxes of De-Canonization: New Forms of Cultural Transmission in History* project at the Erasmus University plays a pioneering role in this respect.<sup>71</sup> The committee is pleased to see that the “Cultural dynamics” programme of the Dutch organisation for scientific research (NWO) has devoted attention to processes of (de-)canonisation. This also serves as a prime example of the considerable societal significance of humanities studies.

**RECOMMENDATION 10 Higher education: assess how the concept of “the most advanced school of citizenship” can be given concrete form – VSNU, HBO council**

### 3.2 Teachers and their “baggage”

Are all our teachers sufficiently qualified to provide canonical education? Although we did not commission any systematic study in this area, a number of specialists from various areas of expertise did convey their concerns to us, especially with regard to the younger generations.

Professional knowledge has devaluated sharply in comparison with skills over the past few decades. Teaching methods also played a less significant role in the past. It was teachers – often potential intellectuals who had not been able to gain entry to university due to their backgrounds and had worked themselves up the ladder by means of teaching certificates – who took centre stage.<sup>72</sup> Since that time, a diametrically opposed development has taken place: teacher-training institutes are suffering from a brain drain in the direction of universities and business. The consequences are further exacerbated if teacher shortages are addressed by lowering entry qualifications. In parallel to these developments, schoolbooks became more important and voluminous (and more expensive!), while teachers’ professional knowledge deteriorated considerably.

<sup>71</sup> See [www.fhk.eur.nl/onderzoek/paradoxes](http://www.fhk.eur.nl/onderzoek/paradoxes).

<sup>72</sup> Cf. Van Essen 2006. Despite arguing against the idealisation of teaching in the past on page 349, this book also contains many such examples. The final remarks (p. 350) place a greater focus on knowledge and cultural “baggage” as the main preconditions for improvement of teacher training institutes. The same point was stressed in the *Koersen op meesterschap* report by the HBO council in 2004. Also see Onderwijsraad 2005a, especially Chapter 4 and Onderwijsraad 2005b.

These days, the method dictates the lessons; at first sight, there may be nothing wrong with taking a tried and trusted course. However, teachers now find themselves in a position where they have few options but to follow the direction pointed out by the book, especially where the route has to be harmonised at departmental level. In addition, the lesson schedules schools impose upon their teachers and pupils often leave so little breathing room that flexibility is almost or entirely out of the question. The overriding sense is that of too much subject matter in too little time, within a strictly-regulated, inflexible system. In the week following the death of Gerard Reve, Dutch lessons at a “gymnasium” [pre-university school] failed to even touch upon his work, despite the endless stream of newspaper eulogies; teachers most likely felt they could not diverge from their goose step along the trim little pre-designated path.

These developments – common in some form or another throughout the entire education sector – are having the greatest impact in the areas with the greatest relevance to the historical and cultural canon. Many of the partners consulted in preparation for this report spontaneously burst into praise of that one inspiring teacher from their own school days. (Never mentioning, it should be pointed out, that wonderful schoolbook!) Despite the fact that nostalgia can be somewhat distorting, teachers were keen to impress upon us that stories from the heart are the best possible way of enthusing children. Younger teachers, however, have less storytelling skills and less “baggage” from which to derive stories in the first place.

The canon is not some huge chunk of knowledge to be consumed through private study; a guide, a broker is required. This can be the neighbour from across the street, a books salesman or professor Henk van Os; the cases in which teachers have played this role are innumerable more frequent, though. As schools are the only place children are more or less guaranteed to come into contact with the canon, they still have the greatest task in this regard. Ideally, teachers should be equipped to bear this responsibility, both in cognitive terms and as regards the study programme. If we are to entrust this task upon them with a clear conscience, it is essential that we invest more in our teachers.<sup>73</sup> An oft-heard comment in discussions on education is:

73 Cf. Onderwijsraad 2005a, Onderwijsraad 2005b and CPB 2006.

give the subject back to the teacher. To which we would like to add: give the teacher back to the subject.

66 The relationship between teaching methods and subject content at teacher-training institutes for primary and secondary education is subject to considerable fluctuations. Based on the analysis of a series of study guides, the Education Council concludes that the percentage of PABO and second-grade teacher-training institute curricula devoted to subject content has declined from around 80% in 1980/1981 to less than 40% in 2004/2005.<sup>74</sup> This constitutes a significant change; at present, the PABO is mainly a vocational training institute for the education sector. The consequences of this development can be felt even more clearly in the second-grade training institutes: here, students study to become “general teachers”, without specialising in any given subject. This development is underpinned by a conscious choice, rooted in the competency-based teaching methods that have been so prevalent in the education sector of late.

If we compare the current situation with that of twenty-five years ago, the amount of face-to-face time teachers can offer at an average PABO has declined severely. As a consequence, we must surely doubt whether new generations of teachers are sufficiently equipped to teach the historical and cultural canon. Such education requires a surplus of knowledge, rather than a deficit. This is why the committee recommends that the curricula at teacher-training institutes should prioritise subject content. This applies to both PABOs and second-grade teacher training institutes.

**RECOMMENDATION 11 A greater focus on subject content at PABOs and teacher-training institutes – managements of PABOs and teacher-training institutes, and Ministry of OCW**

This recommendation could be interpreted as being negligent with regard to the interests of general teaching methods and educational theory within the teacher-training institute; however, this is not our intention. Although a common occurrence in practice, neither subject content nor teaching methods deserve to be set against one another. Good “classroom management” skills, as they are referred to in modern education, are just as vital to a good teacher as his or her expertise with regard to subject content. Having made this

74 Onderwijsraad 2005a, p. 47. The 1998 De Wit commission also identified this trend.

assertion, though, one must also recognise that old imbalances have merely been swapped for new ones.<sup>75</sup> The fact that Dutch children know too little of their own (cultural) history nowadays seems to have been caused in part by the fact that their teachers also lack the necessary knowledge.

It may also be time to further harmonise the entry levels, ambitions, and study duration at the various teacher-training institutes. VWO graduates taking up a university study in the field of, for instance, physics (often with 9 out of 10 marks for the subject at their final examination) are unquestioningly expected to invest five years in full-time study. Perhaps intake pupils from the MBO – who make up 40% of the total PABO population these days – are simply undereducated by the time they finish their four years of PABO, in view of the demands we currently make of our teachers?

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### Refresher courses

Upgrading teacher-training curricula in terms of subject content alone will not suffice. Firstly, it will take some time for such curricular changes to yield results at school. In addition, new views, questions and possibilities that are also of great relevance to the current generation of teachers will continue to pop up. This canon design is but one example. This is why the committee has chosen to advocate additional *refresher courses* based around the canon. We would suggest – amongst others – practical courses on both general teaching of the fifty windows as well as the teaching of specific target groups. Canonical education within the multicultural context, for example, brings up a whole new set of questions. There is a need for more knowledge on the possibilities for trans-cultural exchanges with regard to the canon; for further exploration of the “global canon” (cf. Recommendation 27), and training for teachers that have little familiarity with this way of thinking and working.<sup>76</sup>

In an effort to increase teachers’ “proficiency” in terms of the recently approved *Education Professions Act*, we would suggest that school management invest in both teaching skill and content-based refresher courses.

75 This is why the advisory report by the Education Council (2005a, p. 62) recommended a fifty-fifty ratio.

76 Here too, we would like to stress that the issue is opportunities as much as it is problems. It may, for example, prove fruitful to demonstrate how certain western developments occurred earlier in history in other parts of the world: paper and the printing press in China, as well as the early form of humanism taught in Arabic schools. For this last reference, see Makdisi 1981 and 1990.

These refresher courses must be well facilitated for the teachers in terms of both time and money. One way of achieving this would be to hold the courses on workdays at the schools themselves.<sup>77</sup>

**RECOMMENDATION 12 Develop refresher courses – National educational centres in cooperation with the Ministry of OCW**

### 3.3 Cultural institutions

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Schools are not the only platform for the canon. Museums, libraries, all sorts of other cultural institutions and the media can – each within the framework of their own responsibility and expertise – all play a significant role in engendering knowledge and enthusiasm in this area. In accordance with the prime directive, the canon committee has focused mainly on the canon for and in the education sector; however, if we are to paint a sufficiently broad overall picture, we must also devote some attention to the way in which the various cultural institutions relate to our concept. This was (justifiably so) a part of our broader objective. The following section delves into this topic, listing a broad range of current initiatives that (could) tie in with our subject and a number of projects we would like to see in development. As this *grande parade* clearly illustrates, the canon is a phenomenon with a broad reach, which is (re)generating interest from across the board, and has a great potential to increase its appeal further still. We hope the recommendations in the following section can inspire certain institutions and individuals to undertake canon-related activities.

**RECOMMENDATION 13 Further the debate on this report and the issues it raises within the cultural and heritage sector**

#### Collaboration with schools

If we are to achieve the greatest possible degree of relevance – and we are pleased to see this happening more and more often – cultural institutions should seek out schools, and vice versa. Dutch schools organise *excursions* to museums on a regular basis. The Muiderslot alone is visited by some

<sup>77</sup> As of 1 August 2006, the Education Professions Act (BIO) has become effective. Under this act, teachers, school managers and others working in the primary and secondary education sector are obliged to maintain and update their “skills” (See, amongst other sources, [www.lerarenweb.nl](http://www.lerarenweb.nl)).



20,000 Dutch school children annually (schools prepare for these visits by means of a learning package). Naturally, a visit to this castle (especially after it was recently renovated for far greater visitor access) is a much more vivid experience than any wall chart or website could ever hope to offer, just as the Archeon gives visitors a sense of daily life in a medieval city, Neeltje Jans provides the most acute sense of the flooding disaster and the physical sensation of writing with a quill in the scriptorium at the Meermanno museum opens the distant window to *Hebban olla vogala* once and for all. The canon committee strongly supports such hands-on experience of the past, and has set up a special section on the *entoen.nu* site with tips for excursions and visits to historic locations for each window.

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**RECOMMENDATION 14** **Link excursion sites to entoen.nu**  
**– Netherlands Museum Association**

The committee would be pleased to see an easing of the restrictions on such external activities: at present, these restrictions are often of a financial nature in the case of primary schools, and related to time-constraints in the case of secondary schools. Much more can be achieved in this area with appropriate financial support and goodwill. The highest classes of all primary schools in the municipality of Nunspeet are all guaranteed an annual visit to the Rijksmuseum, thanks to a private fund – of far-from astronomical proportions.<sup>78</sup>

**RECOMMENDATION 15** **Studies with regard to excursions in**  
**Primary and Secondary Education – Ministry of OCW**

Conversely, the canon can also come to schools; the committee sees great potential in this area for *guest speakers in the classroom*. The formula used by *Schrijvers-School-Samenleving* [Writers-School-Society] in introducing school children to literature (by means of visiting writers; this method is now also being applied in primary schools, with the help of children’s authors) is suitable for broader application. The recent “Veterans’ Stories” project was set up along the same lines. Evidently, such stories from eyewitnesses and others able to recount historical events from firsthand experience can be extremely

<sup>78</sup> Thanks to the Veluvine Molijn de Groot Foundation.

effective in the classroom. Although this is rather obvious with regard to World War II, there are many more possibilities for opening up both local and national canonical windows with the help of such “historical interpreters”. There is undoubtedly a lot of activity in this area through private initiatives; teachers working with well-known (grand)parents or locals; however, the committee could envisage the creation (via *entoen.nu*?) of a digital market place to facilitate the harmonisation of supply and demand for classroom talks related to certain windows. Such visits would also be extremely beneficial in stimulating contact between the generations, and almost form a goal in themselves as such.<sup>79</sup>

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**RECOMMENDATION 16 Exploration of “eyewitnesses in the classroom” project – Ministry of OCW**

The committee is also an outspoken proponent of effective cooperation at municipal level between *archive services, archaeological services, local museums/monuments and schools*. This is even a *sine qua non* where the local canon is concerned, but there are more benefits on offer here. As an added advantage, coming into contact with such institutions helps school children gain some conception of what it takes to preserve our cultural heritage. The technology this involves nowadays can also help lend this interaction with the past a unique, modern flavour instead of a caricatured mustiness.

**RECOMMENDATION 17 Discuss the options for activities geared to this design – Royal Association of Dutch Archivists, National archive, provincial and municipal archives**

When the plans surrounding the fifty windows were presented to the teaching staff of various primary schools, there was an immediate call for support by means of *Schooltv*, preferably in the form of short, attention-grabbing films (approximately fifteen minutes in length) that could be used to introduce lessons on windows. Perhaps *Teleac/NOT* could create such a series as an

79 As one participant at a KNAW meeting on “Human aging” put it: (19 June 2006): if senior citizens do not learn about young people’s perspective on the world on a regular basis, they become “immigrants in time”; young people, conversely, then become “historyless”. A wonderful plea for the value of “generativity” can be found in Kees Schuyt’s book (2005, p. 86-88) *De stuifzandsamenleving*.

accompaniment to the fifty windows. Such an initiative would certainly be an incredible help in implementing the canon.<sup>80</sup>

**RECOMMENDATION 18 School television: a series of programmes on the canon with a length of approximately fifteen minutes per window – Teleac/NOT**

The enormous video and radio archives at the Netherlands Institute for Sound and Vision (the former National Audiovisual Archive) can also play a supporting role in teaching the canon at schools. Especially via the educational application Teleblik, which makes these audiovisual archives accessible in the classroom.

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**RECOMMENDATION 19 Link digital media-archives to the canon site – Netherlands Institute for Sound and Vision (NIBG), archive and library sector**

The proposals highlighted above are ideally suited to the Culture & School programme, an initiative born of the merger between the departments of Culture and Education in 1994, aiming to bring cultural and heritage institutions in contact with schools.<sup>81</sup> One of the main objectives was to reach young people who do not regard history and museums as part of their natural environment, in order to ensure that cultural facilities become a familiar part of their lives. The committee regards Culture & School as an important medium in the further development of the canon in school and society.

**RECOMMENDATION 20 Assess (potential for) collaborations between schools and cultural institutions, and stimulate these where possible – VNG, Culture & School**

### **Cultural institutions and the canon**

Schools need not always play a central role in the canon-related activities of cultural institutions; independent initiatives can also be just as effective. Museums are a case in point in this regard, playing a vital part in increasing

80 This is in line with a scheduled Teleac/NOT project: a nationally accessible visual library that can be used for years to come, free of charge, by non-profit institutions such as museums, libraries and schools.

the visibility of the Dutch canon. In addition, they also work to increase its scope and diversity, thus helping to open up the canon – not just for school children, but for parents and other adults, including a great many non-Dutch nationals. Charting this horizon properly would require a separate report. We will limit ourselves to a general comment, with regard to the attention museums devote to their “permanent collection” in addition to – and sometimes versus – special exhibitions. The latter seem to be the most effective way of attracting a broad audience, as witnessed by the unprecedented number of visitors queuing up for Repin and Akhenaton. Such exhibitions can play an important role in the rediscovery of forgotten historical figures, showing the public there is more under the sun than Tolstoy and Tutankhamun. This approach has now become so dominant that permanent collections are almost regarded as being “a bit mundane”. Without wanting to be too patronizing, the committee would recommend that museums assess whether – and if so, how – the basic story of their collection (which, after all, represents their canon) could be presented more effectively, in order to make sure the focus of attention does not shift overly towards the hypes. Two examples of our proposed approach are the Rijksmuseum’s current process of reinvention and the ongoing renovation of the Letterkundig Museum.

The renovated Rijksmuseum will open its doors in a few years time. The new layout is based around a concept whereby future visitors will follow a route leading from 1200 to the present day. The integration of art in cultural history plays an important part in this concept, as does the representation of related areas such as the history of architecture, literature and ideas. The new layout was also designed to showcase the relationship between the Netherlands and other nations, while reaching an international audience, the traditional Dutch audience and the potential audience of recent immigrants alike. To this end, the Rijksmuseum will strive to base its exhibitions more around the historical context of art, rather than any specific stylistic framework.

The Letterkundig Museum is also currently involved in a drastic remodelling effort. The current overview exhibition, starting in 1750 and limited to the Netherlands, is scheduled to make way for a selection of 100 “heroes of the mind” – from Spinoza to Bomans – from the post-medieval period in the Netherlands and Flanders.

No matter how different, the main thrust of both renovations has a great deal in common with the philosophy behind our design: the character-

istic selection, a sincere focus on landmark pieces; the chronological order; a focus on the story and a contextual approach. Obviously, the two projects are yet to be realised, but other museums are also adopting new strategies in line with the essence of the canon committee’s design. One example in this regard would be the Nieuwe Land Museum in Lelystad, where engineer Lely unfolds his dream of the Netherlands in the year 2000 by means of a convincing virtual play; the Arnhem Open Air Museum, where visitors will now be able to find a Moluccan barracks camp inbetween the farmhouses and potato starch plant; the Tropenmuseum, with its popular and much-acclaimed permanent collection on Dutch colonialism; and the Jewish Historical Museum, which opts to educate its visitors by emphasizing that the building was once used as a synagogue. In line with these and similar examples, the committee would like to propose the development of various strategies in order to apply the canon in a museum-based context.

**RECOMMENDATION 21 Hold consultations on the development of relevant initiatives – Netherlands Museum Association**

In line with the above, we would also like to devote some attention to the current initiatives with regard to the – possible – construction of a museum of Dutch history.<sup>82</sup> We understand the broad appeal of such an initiative, and are well aware of its correlation with the proposals we are presenting here. Despite the broad range of alternatives and the different obstacles each may involve, we are pleased to see broad political support for such an initiative. A fundamental decision in terms of the formula and location should be taken in the short term; pending such a decision, however, an assessment can be made as to the best way of interweaving the canon into the design of the preferred alternative.

The committee regards the (alternating) exhibition “Legacy of the Netherlands”, currently being organised by the Royal Library of the Netherlands in collaboration with the National Archive as a good example of the way in which *libraries* can apply the canon. At a local level, public libraries (in collaboration with local archives) might consider organising similar

81 One of the Culture & School projects is a voucher system for the subject of Culture and the Arts, set up in collaboration with the *Cultureel Jongeren Paspoort* foundation.

82 On 27 June 2006, the Lower House of the Dutch parliament approved – across party lines – a motion to establish a museum for Dutch history.

initiatives based around the local canon. They could certainly strive to visibly present material for use in school assignments and talks on the subject of canonical windows, both locally and nationally. Whether or not they should dedicate special display cases with books and multimedia to the fifty windows and/or canonical Dutch literature is entirely up to them. Although this could serve as an attractive eye-catcher and an “anchor”, the committee does not, under any circumstances, wish to isolate our canon from the rest of the collection or try to hype it up as a “brand”.

**RECOMMENDATION 22 Hold consultations on the development of relevant initiatives – Association of Public Libraries**

74

The organisation *Anno* has been working to stimulate historical interest amongst a broad audience since 2001. It does so through various means such as the website [www.anno.nl](http://www.anno.nl), a periodical “centrefold” in the free newspaper *Spits*, travelling exhibitions in shopping centres and libraries, and organising the Week (including a special Night) of History. The Anno website features an extensive section aimed at supporting history education in the VMBO sector. The website – often referred to on *entoen.nu* – offers supplementary materials on almost all of the canon’s historical windows. If our proposal is accepted, it would seem evident to opt for a closer form of collaboration.

The relationship between the *public broadcasting service* and the canon is a precarious one. In addition to producing documentaries in this area on a regular basis, the public broadcasting service also has a range of excellent series on history, classical music and the visual arts (literature and television have always been somewhat uneasy bedfellows, which is strange in light of the strong literary tradition in the Netherlands). However, the broadcasting sector has indicated that it will become increasingly difficult to find sufficient means and good timeslots for this type of subject matter in the future. The committee finds this somewhat surprising, to say the least; in our view, this should be the main focus of the public broadcasting sector, which aims to be more than just a diluted version of the commercial channels with extra added bureaucracy.<sup>83</sup> Although it may be somewhat of a cliché to use the BBC as an example, it must be pointed out that they did – once again – deliver in this respect: Simon Schama was commissioned to make a spectacular television

83 Cf. Zeeman 2002, p. 31-32.

series – now available on a DVD with additional material and special features – on the history of England from 3000 BC to the present day.

**RECOMMENDATION 23 Hold consultations on the development of relevant initiatives – Public Broadcasting Service**

### 3.4 Market and society

Our committee has even less of an overview with regard to the application of its design in the market and broader society than it does in the case of the cultural institutions. Nevertheless, we would like to take this opportunity to offer a few suggestions with regard to initiatives in these sectors.

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#### Market

Despite the prevalent scepticism in the cultural sector, the free market regularly proves itself willing to take the canon further than the elite had ever thought possible. The Kruidvat drugstore chain, for example, has promoted and sold the works of Mozart, other classical composers, various Russian writers (albeit not the classic Russian canon) and the collected works of Couperus. Out of the three future scenarios for “high culture” in the Netherlands in the year 2000 as projected by the Social and Cultural Planning Office – marginalisation, consolidation or reappraisal – the second and third options can clearly not be ruled out by any means.<sup>84</sup> This is in no way limited to an older audience; a marketing survey conducted in Sweden several years ago showed that history is by far the most popular theme for new games and toys.<sup>85</sup> The Netherlands has also seen a number of historically-oriented games and toys released in the market over the past few years.<sup>86</sup> On a slightly more reflective level, the *Plaatsen van herinnering* project (Bert Bakker publishers) offers a more essayistic form of *entoen.nu*. Finally, we would like to point to a

<sup>84</sup> Van den Broek and De Haan 2000.

<sup>85</sup> Information provided by Fine Trossèl, former marketing manager at Jumbo.

<sup>86</sup> This includes the Jumbo card game *Vroeger of Later* [Sooner or Later] (which can now be played online via [www.vroegeroflater.nl](http://www.vroegeroflater.nl)), *Kwartetspel Vaderlandse geschiedenis* [Dutch History Happy Families] from Verloren, the *Indisch herinneringskwartet* [Dutch East Indies Commemorative Happy Families] from Stichting Pelita, the *Werelderfgoedkwartet* [World Heritage Happy Families] from Unesco, the *Het Grote Geschiedenis spel* [Great History] board game from Scala Leuker Leren. We were not able to find a historical memory-game (with 2 x 50 cards?) among the products on offer.

plan recently unveiled by producer Joop van den Ende, who is seeking to revive classic plays in his Dutch theatres. In the view of the committee, this plan in and of itself is a positive sign as to the canon's continuing relevance and potential for modern-day appeal. We are especially pleased to see the general sentiment that gave rise to this initiative, which was also the basis for the establishment of our committee: a renewed focus on the past and the great wealth it has to offer.

We would not be so bold as to make any further recommendations in this area, but are eager to see how the free market responds to our proposals. The fact that educational publishers may be expected to study our canon design and develop relevant initiatives is almost too obvious to mention here.

**RECOMMENDATION 24 Hold consultations on the development of relevant initiatives – Educational publishers**

**Society**

The canon permeates our society in more ways than we could list here, even if we were to limit ourselves to the fifty windows included in our proposal. We hope *parents* will also take our design to heart, and express their views as to how the canon is dealt with at school. However, it is essential that canonical learning is not limited to the classroom. Ideally, we should see its reflection throughout the public domain, both as a learning tool and a source of enjoyment. To give but one rather literal example: *signposting* in the Netherlands. One need only travel the highways of Belgium, France and Germany to find references to the canon; striking signs referring to important regional events, historical figures or monuments. Our committee feels this is an excellent way to stimulate awareness of the historical and cultural dimensions of the world around us. It is perhaps typical of the Netherlands' rather poor sense of its own history that we do not have something similar in this country, at least not in the form of an organised, nationwide initiative. We would like to see the ANWB [Royal Dutch Touring Club] come up with an appealing, not too faint-hearted Dutch version.

**RECOMMENDATION 25 Explore the possibilities (local and national) for canon-related information on signposts along the Dutch road network – Ministry of Public Works, Transport and Water Management, ANWB**



### 3.5 Willem van Oranje Fund

The committee has over the past few years been approached frequently by individuals, companies and institutions in the process of developing initiatives to promote varying aspects of the canon. They all hoped to gain the committee's support, either in terms of content or on an idealistic and even financial basis. The committee has taken a reticent approach in this regard, as it was not mandated to assess such requests and has yet to find out whether its own work will stand the test of political, educational and societal criticism. The committee would support – on the analogy of funds such as the *Fonds voor de Letteren* [Literature Fund], the *Fonds Stimulerend Culturele Omroepproducties* [Cultural Broadcasting Productions Incentive Fund], the *Fonds Bijzondere Journalistieke Producties* [Special Journalistic Productions Fund], the *Nederlands Fonds voor de Film* [Dutch Film Fund], etc. – the establishment of an institution with sufficient funds and expertise to provide an effective response to any qualified plans and enthusiastic initiatives based around the canon. This is why the committee would like to propose the establishment of a fund for projects with a nationwide scope aimed at promoting knowledge of and involvement in Dutch history and culture in the primary, secondary and tertiary education sectors and among the general public.<sup>87</sup> Support from the fund should benefit both the supply and demand side of the spectrum, in other words; both creative project developers as well as groups of schools and teachers seeking to do something special with the canon.

One advantage of this approach would be that the government would then facilitate a broad range of valuable societal initiatives without taking on too much of a regulatory role. The formula also prevents the monopolisation of canon management by a single institution, and does justice to the diversity characteristic of any vital canon, which can continually generate new plans and initiatives. A swift implementation of this proposal would be advisable. The canon debate has sparked a great deal of ideas and plans that can now begin to yield their benefits.<sup>88</sup> At minimum, the fund should be allocated an annual budget of 10 million euro.

87 Provinces could then set up funds for projects with a regional (or even local) scope. It goes without saying that any such project would require close consultations with the Prins Bernhard Fund in order to ensure a clear allocation of responsibilities.

88 From John 4:35; for the biblical canon and Dutch heritage, see [www.bijbelencultuur.nl](http://www.bijbelencultuur.nl).

The committee would recommend naming this fund after the only Dutchman truly deserving of the predicate “the greatest”: Willem van Oranje [William of Orange].

**RECOMMENDATION 26 Establish and stimulate Willem van Oranje Fund – Parliament in collaboration with the Innovation Platform**