

The Washington Post

Book Club

Reviews and recommendations from critic Ron Charles.

Presented by [Cambridge University Press](#)



By [Ron Charles](#)

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A Russian missile strike destroyed this school in Bakhmut, Ukraine, in 2022. Books from the library remain scattered on the ground. (Photo by Heidi Levine for The Washington Post).

Tomorrow marks the second anniversary of Russia's invasion of Ukraine. ([Two years of war in Ukraine, seen through its leader's biggest moments.](#))

Last night, I checked in with Maria Deskur, CEO of the [Universal Reading Foundation](#) in Poland. She's been working tirelessly to support

publishers struggling to stay in business in Ukraine and Ukrainian children who have come to Poland to avoid the fighting.

“The war is still very much ongoing, but the world, including us in Poland, has gotten used to it,” she tells me.

“There are 300,000 Ukrainian kids in Polish schools,” she says, but about 200,000 more are not going to school. “They are, in theory, following Ukrainian school online, but in reality nobody knows if they are really getting any education.” Efforts to help these families outside the system have had little success.

“Funds for support have shrunk, and whatever can be raised goes for military purposes: Our efforts to raise money to support literacy in a deeper and strategic way in Ukraine were not successful.”

There have been positive developments.

“We are now working on an important three-year reading promotion program along with the Ukrainian Libraries Association,” she says. “I also took part in an educational conference speaking to Ukrainian teachers and librarians online. This would not have taken place before the war: We simply did not know each other.”

But I sense a new and more profound wariness in her correspondence this week.

“The big picture is that of course we are all in this together: Donald Trump’s more or less clear statements on how to end the war made the news here. War is on everyone’s mouth again — not the Russian aggression against Ukrainians as such, but rather the danger of a possible war generally in the region. It is hard to describe how deeply awkward this feels. We had been

taught at school about the First and Second World War, and how the world and Europe had made sure this would never happen again. Poland joined NATO as fast as we could after 1989. We all believed wars are really only history and part of that time only — and now, all of the sudden, it is becoming a discussed possibility for today.”