

Diversity through International Youth Literature

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What Is International Youth Literature? Why Does It Matter?

International youth literature—translated books and English-language imports first published outside of the United States—can be the missing link in diversifying collections. Our diversity discussions tend to focus on multicultural literature that is originally published in the United States. At first glance diverse books from here and abroad can seem indistinguishable since they may have a similar focus or setting—that is, by race, ethnicity, ability, socioeconomic status, etc.—so it is not surprising that international books are often mistaken for multicultural books. Sometimes only a close look will reveal that a book has been translated or was first published in English abroad. Reading international youth literature moves us to the margins for a change and is an opportunity to see what the rest of the world thinks. By paying attention to this literature, we broaden our perspectives and validate international voices.

Baseline Data, Overviews, and Trends

When considering research on international youth literature, it is useful to start with baseline data. What are the titles? Where are they published? If a translation, what is the language of the original? Collectively, the Bridges to Understanding book series of five annotated bibliographies, sponsored by USBBY (the US chapter of IBBY, the International Board on Books for Young People—see Resources sidebar), answer these questions. In order of publication, they are Carl Tomlinson's *Children's Books from Other Countries* (covers imprints 1950–96);¹ Susan Stan's *The World through Children's Books* (1996–2000);² Doris Gebel's *Crossing Boundaries with Children's Books* (2000–2004);³ Linda Pavonetti's *Bridges to Understanding: Envisioning the World through Children's Books* (2005–9);⁴ and Annette Y. Goldsmith, Theo Heras, and Susan Corapi's *Reading the World's Stories: An Annotated Bibliography of International Youth Literature* (2010–14).⁵

Each book also contains a selected list of resources such as awards and organizations as well as several essays about international children's literature. Essay topics include Tomlinson's historical introduction to international youth literature;⁶ Stan's advice on using international books with children;⁷ information on publishing markets and mores from Stephen Roxburgh, Jeffrey Garrett, and Simon Boughton;⁸ Andrea Cheng's personal look at worldwide influences on her work along with Barbara Lehman's discussion of pairing international books with US titles;⁹ and variations from Anne Pellowski, Beverley Naidoo, Marianne Martens, and the three editors on the theme of connecting children with international books through the power of story in spite of the challenges facing publishers.¹⁰

To keep on top of trends in international children's publishing, follow the *Publishers Weekly* "Children's Bookshelf" e-newsletter reports from the

A Sampling of International Youth Literature Libraries and Networks

International Board on Books for Young People (www.ibby.org) and United States Board on Books for Young People (www.usbby.org)

“The International Board on Books for Young People (IBBY) is a non-profit organization which represents an international network of people from all over the world who are committed to bringing books and children together.” USBBY is one of 75 national sections. Consider attending the next USBBY conference, October 20–22, 2017, at the University of Washington Information School in Seattle! For conference details, check the USBBY home page.

International Youth Library (www.ijb.de/en/about-us.html)

The IYL—housed in a castle, Schloss Blutenberg, near Munich—is the world’s largest library for international youth literature. Their work is guided “by the conviction that children’s and young adult books are an essential part of the cultural life of a society and of a country, and as such must be preserved, documented, and shared.” Check out their online catalog: <https://ijboz2.bib-bvb.de/webOPACClient.ijbsis/start.do?Login=wojib00&BaseURL=this&Language=en>.

International Children’s Digital Library (<http://en.childrenslibrary.org>)

Housed at the University of Maryland, College Park, the ICDL has a catalog of royalty-free scanned books from around the world that are freely available online. Their mission is to “promote tolerance and respect for diverse cultures by providing access to the best of children’s literature from around the world.” Current holdings include 4,619 books in 59 languages. A unique feature of the ICDL is the involvement of children as design partners.

Worlds of Words (<http://wowlit.org/>)

WOW “builds bridges across global cultures through children’s and adolescent literature.” The physical collection at the University of Arizona College of Education holds 35,000+ books. “Free resources include a searchable data base, a journal of critical book reviews, a journal of classroom vignettes, a weekly blog, book conversations, and a section of resources in response to these needs.”

Global Literature in Libraries Initiative (<https://glli-us.org/>)

Facebook group (www.facebook.com/groups/globallit)
Twitter feed (<https://twitter.com/GlobalLitInLibs>)

A new translator-led group “strives to raise the visibility of world literature for adults and children at the local, national, and international levels.” GLLI works with librarians to provide resources that help them select and use translations, encouraging “readers to explore beyond the boundaries of their own language and culture.” Many librarians are involved—you can be, too!

IFLA Libraries for Children & Young Adults Section (www.ifla.org/libraries-for-children-and-ya)

This section of the International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions “support(s) the provision of library service and reading promotion to children and young adults throughout the world. Its main objectives are to promote international cooperation in the fields of library services to children and young adults, and to encourage the exchange of experience, education and training and research in all aspects of this subject.” Their project, *The World through Picture Books*, www.ifla.org/publications/ifla-professional-reports-136?og=51, now in its second edition, lists children’s librarian-recommended picture books from around the world and is intended as “a tool for building bridges and developing understanding between countries.”

Bologna Children’s Book Fair at www.publishersweekly.com/pw/by-topic/childrens/. In this interview with US editors, a heightened interest overall in diversity is noted.¹¹

Awards and Honors

Our major international youth literature awards are the Batchelder Award for translations (www.ala.org/alsc/)

awardsgrants/bookmedia/batchelderaward); the USBBY Outstanding International Books list, an annual list of about 40 translations and English-language imports (www.usbby.org/list_oibl.html); the Hans Christian Andersen Medal for world authors and illustrators (www.ibby.org/254.0.html); and the IBBY Honour List for outstanding recent books from member countries (www.ibby.org/1562.0.html). The International Youth Library's White Ravens (www.ijb.de/spezialbibliothek/white-ravens-2015.html) list of books deemed worthy of translation is also important.

Of all these awards, it is the Batchelder that gets the most attention from researchers. Kasey Garrison and Sue Kimmel's "Trends in Translations: The Mildred L. Batchelder Award from 1997–2013" analyzed characteristics of Batchelder titles in terms of format, genre, topic, sex of protagonists, original language, and settings.¹² They found that the languages and settings are mostly Western European, and that fiction dealing with a serious subject predominates. In this they are largely in agreement with trends identified by earlier researchers, and urge further investigation of children's publishing in Asia, Africa, and South America, continents that are currently underrepresented by the award. They also urge librarians to read and use the Batchelder winners and honor books despite the limitations identified, and we heartily concur!

The quarterly *Bookbird: A Journal of International Children's Literature* (www.ibby.org/index.php?id=1035), the journal of IBBY, devotes a special issue to the biennial Andersen Award nominees. Vol. 54, no. 2 features the 2016 nominees.¹³ These one-page profiles with selected bibliography provide an excellent introduction to the world's best writers and illustrators.

Bookbird also does theme issues on the literature of different countries. The latest, vol. 54, no. 3, focused on New Zealand, Australia, and Oceania to coincide with the IBBY Congress held in Auckland, August 18–21, 2016.¹⁴

If you aren't already familiar with international youth literature, use these resources to diversify your collection!

Notes

1. Carl M. Tomlinson, ed., *Children's Books from Other Countries* (Lanham, MD: Scarecrow, 1998).
2. Susan Stan, ed., *The World through Children's Books* (Lanham, MD: Scarecrow, 2002).
3. Doris Gebel, ed., *Crossing Boundaries with Children's Books* (Lanham, MD: Scarecrow, 2006).
4. Linda M. Pavonetti, ed., *Bridges to Understanding: Envisioning the World through Children's Books* (Lanham, MD: Scarecrow, 2011).
5. Annette Y. Goldsmith, Theo Heras, and Susan Corapi, eds., *Reading the World's Stories: An Annotated Bibliography of International Youth Literature* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2016).
6. Tomlinson, *Children's Books from Other Countries*, 3–28.
7. Stan, *The World through Children's Books*, 27–37.
8. Gebel, *Crossing Boundaries with Children's Books*, 14–20.
9. Pavonetti, *Bridges to Understanding*, 9–15.
10. Goldsmith, Heras, and Corapi, *Reading the World's Stories*, 3–19.
11. Diane Roback, "Bologna 2016: Agents Talk Children's and YA Trends," *PublishersWeekly.com* (March 11, 2016), www.publishersweekly.com/pw/by-topic/international/trade-shows/article/69644-bologna-2016-agents-talk-children-s-and-ya-trends.html, accessed August 13, 2016.
12. Kasey Garrison and Sue Kimmel, "Trends in Translations: The Mildred L. Batchelder Award from 1997–2013," *Bookbird: A Journal of International Children's Literature* 52, no. 4 (2014): 30–44, <http://dx.doi.org/10.1353/bkb.2014.0157>.
13. "The Hans Christian Andersen Awards 2016," *Bookbird: A Journal of International Children's Literature* 54, no. 2 (2016), <http://dx.doi.org/10.1353/bkb.2016.0020>.
14. *Bookbird: A Journal of International Children's Literature* (New Zealand, Australia, and Oceania issue) 54, no. 3 (2016), <http://dx.doi.org/10.1353/bkb.2016.0083>.

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