Children's literature is a literary genre whose primary audience is children, although many books within the genre are also enjoyed by adults.

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Basic characteristics

There are some debate as to what constitutes children's literature. In general, the term comprises both those books which are selected and read by children themselves, as well as those vetted as 'appropriate for children' by authorities, e.g. teachers, reviewers, scholars, parents, publishers, librarians, bookstores, and award committees.

Some would have it that children's literature is a genre written specially for children; however, many books that were originally intended for adults are now commonly thought of as works for children, such as Mark Twain's The Prince and the Pauper and the Adventures of Huckleberry Finn. The opposite has also been known to occur, where works of fiction originally written or marketed for children are given recognition as adult books: Philip Pullman's The Amber Spyglass, and Mark Haddon's The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-time for example, both won Whitbread Awards, which are typically awarded to novels for adults. The Nobel prize for literature has also been given to authors who made great contributions to children's literature, such as Selma Lagerlöf and Isaac Bashevis Singer. Often no consensus is reached whether a given work is best categorized as adult or children's literature, and many books are multiply marketed in adult, children's, and young adult editions.

There are a number of problems inherent in children's literature: For example

Much of what is commonly regarded as "classic" children's literature speaks on multiple levels, and as such is able to be enjoyed by both adults and children. For example, many people will reread Alice's Adventures in Wonderland or The Wind in the Willows as adults and appreciate aspects of each that they failed to notice when they read the books as children. Many critics regard such multiplicity as having drawbacks, however; an adult may see the darker themes of a book and deem it unsuitable for children, despite the fact that such themes will likely be lost on younger readers.

One example of this is Mark Twain's Huckleberry Finn, throughout which the word "nigger" is used liberally. Many people feel that the word's racist and discriminatory connotations make it unacceptable to use anywhere, and particularly in a book aimed at children. Others, however, claim that to call the book racist because of this usage is to miss its point; Huckleberry Finn was after all one of the first American books in which a black character is portrayed as someone to be emulated, in this case serving as the voice of reason for a cast-off urchin and a middle class white boy. Peter Hollindale, the educationalist and literary critic, applauded the book for being one of the greatest anti-racist texts of all time[1] and T S Eliot called it a "masterpiece".[2]

Parents wishing to protect their children from the unhappier aspects of life often find the traditional fairy tales, nursery rhymes and other voyages of discovery problematical, because often the first thing a story does is remove the adult influence, leaving the central character to learn to cope on his or her own: prominent examples of this include Snow White, Hansel and Gretel, Bambi and A Series of Unfortunate Events. Many regard this as necessary to the story; after all, in most cases the whole point of the story is the characters' transition into adulthood.

Many authors specialize in books for children. Other authors are more known for their writing for adults, but have also written books for children, such as Alexey Tolstoy's The Adventures of Burratino, and Carl Sandburg's "Rootabaga Stories". In some cases, books intended for adults, such as Swift's Gulliver's Travels have been edited (or bowdlerized) somewhat, to make them more appropriate for children.
An attempt to identify the characteristics shared by works called 'children's literature' leads to some good general guidelines that are generally accepted by experts in the field. No one rule is perfect, however, and for every identifying feature there are many exceptions, as well as many adult books that share the characteristic. (For further discussion, see Hunt 1991: 42-64, Lesnik-Oberstein 1996, Huck 2001: 4-5.)

Publishers have attempted to further break down children's literature into subdivisions appropriate for different ages. In the United States, current practice within the field of children's books publishing is to break children's literature into pre-readers, early readers, chapter books, and young adults. This is roughly equivalent to the age groups 0-5, 5-7, 7-11 (sometimes broken down further into 7-9 and pre-teens), and books for teenagers. However, the criteria for these divisions are just as vague and problematic as the criteria for defining children's books as a whole. One obvious distinction is that books for younger children tend to contain illustrations, but picture books which feature art as an integral part of the overall work also cross all genres and age levels (as can be seen with the Caldecott Honor Book Tibet: Through the Red Box, by Peter Sis, which has an adult implied reader).

As a general rule the implied reader of a children's or young adult book is 1-3 years younger than the protagonist. (counter example: Orson Scott Card's Ender's Game, not necessarily written for children, but co-opted by a child and young adult audience)

Authors and artists
Children's books are often illustrated, sometimes lavishly, in a way that is rarely used for adult literature. As a rule of thumb, the younger the intended reader (or commonly pre-literate children), the more attention is paid to the artwork. Many authors work with a preferred artist who illustrates their words; others create books together, achieving "a marriage of words and pictures."

Many authors and illustrators belong to the Society of Children's Book Writers and Illustrators (SCBWI).

Popular contributions to children's literature
in chronological order -

- Lewis Carroll (1832–1898), real name Charles Lutwidge Dodgson: English clergyman and children's author, world-famous for Alice's Adventures in Wonderland and Through the Looking-Glass. He also wrote other books, such as the long poem The Hunting of the Snark.

- Beatrix Potter (1866–1943): British author of The Tale of Peter Rabbit, who used her love of nature and the English Lake District countryside to give life to her anthropomorphic animals in her series of 23 little Tales.

- Arthur Ransome (1884–1967): a British author whose Swallows and Amazons series of children's books tell of adventures in the Lake District, the Norfolk Broads and at sea, sailing, fishing and camping. The books still fuel a tourist industry in the English Lake District. Swallows and Amazons was followed by Swallowdale, Peter Duck, Winter Holiday, Coot Club, Pigeon Post. We Didn't Mean To Go To Sea, Secret Water, The Big Six, Missee Lee, The Picts And The Martyrs, and Great Northern?

- Enid Blyton (1897–1968): British author of such children's books as The Famous Five, The Secret Seven and The Man in the Moor. She is claimed to be the best-selling author in the history of children's literature. Her books have been translated into ninety different languages and have sold over 400 million copies.

- C.S. Lewis (1898–1963): 95 million copies of his Chronicles of Narnia series have been published worldwide since The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe debuted in 1950.

- E.B. White (1899–1985): American author whose three children's stories, Charlotte's Web, Stuart Little, and The Trumpet of the Swan, have been considered some of the most influential of the twentieth century.

- Antoine de Saint-Exupéry (1900–1944): a French writer and aviator whose books include The Little Prince. He disappeared during the Second World War while flying over German lines.

- Dr. Seuss (1904–1991): American author who revolutionised beginning reading primers with The Cat in the Hat, featuring rhymed nonsense stories. Seuss also wrote Green Eggs and Ham How the Grinch Stole Christmas and One Fish Two Fish Red Fish Blue Fish.


- Astrid Lindgren (1907–2002): Swedish children's book author, whose many titles, including the Pippi Longstocking books, were translated into 85 languages and published in more than 100 countries.

- Roald Dahl (1916–1990): British author (of Norwegian origins) of The BFG, Matilda, Charlie and the Chocolate Factory and Fantastic Mr. Fox. His books have won notable awards such as the Children's Book Award for Matilda and The BFG. His books have sold over 90 million copies to date, including 1 million books sold annually in the UK.

- Beverly Cleary (born 1916): American author, has over thirty books published in fourteen languages.
Her best known characters include Henry Huggins, Ribsy, Beatrice (Breezus) and her sister Ramona Quimby, and Ralph S. Mouse.

Jane Yolen (born 1939): A respected and well-known American author, Jane Yolen is one of the most prolific children's writers today. Her books are frequently translated and have won many awards.

Jacqueline Wilson (born 1945): author of the much-loved Tracy Beaker series, Jacqueline Wilson is one of the best-known children's authors in the UK. In 2004 she replaced Catherine Cookson as the most borrowed author in Britain's libraries, a position she retained the following year. Her books have won a range of prestigious awards and nearly 20 million copies have been sold.

Rene Villanueva (born 1954): award-winning Filipino writer, who has written books and plays for children. He is the only Philippine nominee to the Hans Christian Andersen Award.

J.K. Rowling (born 1965): British author, J.K. Rowling is probably the best-known children's author today and also the most successful. Being the author of the extremely successful Harry Potter series, her books have been sold in more than 300 million copies worldwide and are translated into more than 63 languages. She is also the first billionaire-author.


Lemony Snicket (born 1970): American author whose real name is Daniel Handler author of A Series of Unfortunate Events, a popular children's series.

History

Because of the difficulty in defining children's literature, it is also difficult to trace its history to a precise starting point. In 1658 Jan Almós Komenský published the illustrated informational book Orbis Pictus; it's considered to be the first picture book published specifically for children. John Newbery's 1744 publication of A Little Pretty Pocket-Book—sold with a ball for boys or a pin cushion for girls, is considered a landmark for the beginning of pleasure reading marketed specifically to children. Far as folktales are concerned the Brothers Grimm, Jakob and Wilhelm of the early nineteenth century were responsible for the writing down and preserving of the oral tradition. Previous to Newbery, literature marketed for children was intended to instruct the young, though there was a richoral tradition of storytelling for children and adults; and many tales later considered to be inappropriate for children, such as the fairy tales of Charles Perrault, may have been considered family fare. Additionally, some literature not written with children in mind was given to children by adults. Among the earliest examples found in English of this co-opted adult fiction are Thomas Malory's Mortes d'Arthur and the Robin Hood tales.

See also Children's Literature Timeline and Children's Literature Canon.

Series and genres

The success of a book for children often prompts the author to continue the story in a sequel, or even to launch into an entire series of books. Some works are originally conceived as series: J.K. Rowling has always stated in interviews that her original plan was to write no fewer than seven books about Harry Potter, and some authors, such as the prolific Enid Blyton and R. L. Stine, seem incapable of writing a stand-alone book. In several cases, series have outlived their authors, whether publishers openly hired new authors to continue after the death of the original creator of the series (such as the case when Reilly and Lee hired Ruth Plumly Thompson to continue The Oz series after L. Frank Baum's death), or whether the pen name of the original author was retained as a brand-nom-de-pine for the series (as with Franklin W. Dixon and the Nancy Drew series, and V. C. Andrews and the Flowers in the Attic series). Sequels and series are of course also popular in adult writing, where they are most common in genre novels such as crime fiction, thrillers, and so on. Genres in children's literature include pony stories (e.g. the Pulein-Thompson sisters and Pat Smythe) and school stories (e.g. RoderickKelley's Staky and Co. and Angela Brazil's oeuvre). More genres would include modern fantasy, contemporary realistic fiction, historical fiction, picture books, picture story books and traditional literature. However, each genre has many sub-genres as well. For example, traditional literature includes folktales, fables, myths and legends. Genres can also be classified by two organizational methods which are length and complexity as well as content.

Scholarship

In recent years, scholarship in children's literature has gained in respectability. There are an increasing number of literary criticism analyses in the field of children's literature criticism. Additionally, there are a number of scholarly associations in the field, including the Children's Literature Association, the International Research Society for Children's Literature, the Library Association Youth Libraries Group, the Society of Children's Book Writers and Illustrators the Irish Society for the Study of Children's Literature, and Centre for International Research in Childhood: Literature, Culture, Media (CIRCL), and National Centre for Research in Children's Literature.

Popular Attention

In addition to formal scholarship, other forms of cultural focus have been turned on children's literature. For example, some museums and galleries now host exhibitions on the subject. Seven Stories is a centre for children's literature, for the public, rather than for scholars. There are also podcasts on Children's literature including Just One More Book!, Storynory, Childrensbookradio and Swimming In Literary Soup which feature book reviews and interviews with authors, illustrators, editors, publishers, librarians and teachers.
Quotes about children and children's books

"Good children's literature appeals not only to the child in the adult, but to the adult in the child." - Anonymous

"Every book is a children's book if the kid can read." - Mitch Hedberg from the album Mitch All Together.

"Fairy tales are more than true: not because they tell us that dragons exist, but because they tell us that dragons can be beaten." - G.K. Chesterton

"The destiny of the world is determined less by the battles that are lost and won, than by the stories it loves and believes in." - Harold Goddard, The Meaning of Shakespeare

"There is no substitute for books in the life of a child." - Mary Ellen Chase

"There have been great societies that did not use the wheel, but there have been no societies that did not tell stories." - Ursula K. LeGuin

"The tale is often wiser than the teller." - Susan Fletcher, Shadow Spinner

"Children are made readers on the laps of their parents." - Emilie Buchwald

"In our time, when the literature for adults is deteriorating, good books for children are the only hope, the only refuge." - Isaac Bashevis Singer

"In every generation, children's books mirror the society from which they arise; children always get the books their parents deserve." - Leonard S. Marcus

"The humble little school library...was a ramp to everything in the world and beyond, everything that could be dreamed and imagined, everything that could be known, everything that could be hoped." - Lee Sherman editor of Northwest Education

"Adults are only obsolete children." - Dr. Seuss

"When it comes to telling children stories, they don't need simple language. They need beautiful language." - Philip Pullman

"We don't need lists of rights and wrongs, tables of do's and don'ts: we need books, time, and silence. Thou shalt not' is soon forgotten, but 'Once upon a time' lasts forever." - Philip Pullman

"Children also hate being talked-down to but, alas, they are very used to being patronised." - Dianna Wynne-Jones

"We must meet children as equals in that area of our nature where we are their equals...The child as reader is neither to be patronized nor idolized: we talk to him as man to man." - C.S. Lewis

"We need metaphors of magic and monsters in order to understand the human condition." - Stephen Donaldson

"I doubt the imagination can be suppressed. If you truly eradicated it in a child, that child would grow up to be an eggplant." - Ursula K. LeGuin

"Imagination has brought mankind through the Dark Ages to its present state of civilization. Imagination led Columbus to discover America. Imagination led Franklin to discover electricity. Imagination has given us the steam engine, the telephone, the talking-machine, and the automobile, for these things had to be dreamed of before they became realities. So I believe that dreams--daydreams, you know, with your eyes wide open and your brain machinery whizzing--are likely to lead to the betterment of the world. The imaginative child will become the imaginative man or woman most apt to invent, and therefore to foster, civilization." - L. Frank Baum

"Sometimes we think we should be able to know everything. But we can't. We have to allow ourselves to see what there is to see, and we have to imagine." - David Almond

"The worst attitude of all would be the professional attitude which regards children in the lump as a sort of raw material which we have to handle." - C.S. Lewis

"A writer is a person who cares what words mean, what they say, how they say it. Writers know words are their way towards truth and freedom, and so they use them with care, with thought, with fear, with delight. By using words well they strengthen their souls. Story-tellers and poets spend their lives learning that skill and art of using words well. And their words make the souls of their readers stronger, brighter, deeper." - Ursula K. LeGuin

"I write in a very laborious kind of a way. I write and rewrite. And rewrite. And rewrite. Well, the thing of course is if you're doing it well, when you finish your 30th rewrite, or something, it should sound like you've just written it completely, freshly once. Because sometimes what happens when you write and rewrite and rewrite, is you suck the life out of something. It's difficult. But I find that I do that because it's amazing -- the rhythm of the book, or what I call the music of the book -- how you read it. How you're carried along by the words and the subject -- is as important as the meaning. In fact, you can't have one without the other. " - Norton Juster

"It's never perfect when I write it down the first time, or the second time, or the fifth time. But it always gets better as I go over it and over it." - Jane Yolen

"I love revision. Where else can spilled milk be turned into ice cream?" - Katherine Patterson
"You must write for children the same way you write for adults, only better." - Maxim Gorky

"I believe that good questions are more important than answers, and the best children's books ask questions, and make the readers ask questions. And every new question is going to disturb someone's universe." - Madeleine L'Engle

"You have to write whichever book it is that wants to be written. And then, if it's going to be too difficult for grown-ups, you write it for children." - Roald Dahl

"Above all, watch with glittering eyes the whole world around you because the greatest secrets are always hidden in the most unlikely places. Those who don't believe in magic will never find it." - Roald Dahl

"A writer who waits for ideal conditions under which to work will die without putting a word to paper." - E.B. White

"Words must be weighed, not counted." - Polish/Yiddish proverb

"Writing is long periods of thinking and short periods of writing." - Ernest Hemingway

"Never mistake motion for action." - Ernest Hemingway

"Words must be weighed, not counted." - Polish/Yiddish proverb

"You have to write for children the same way you write for adults, only better." - Maxim Gorky

Awards

Some noted awards for children's literature are:

- Canada: the Governor General's Award for Children's Literature and Illustration (English and French).
- The Philippines: The Carlos Palanca Memorial Award Medallion for Literature for Short Story for Children in English and Filipino Language (Maikiling Kathang Pambata) since 1989. The Pilar Perez Medallion for Young Adult Literature (2001 and 2002). The major awards are given by the Philippine Board on Books for Young People. They include the PBBY-Salanga Writer's Prize for excellence in writing and the PBBY-Alcala Illustrator's Prize for excellence in illustration. The Ceres Alabado Award for Outstanding Contribution in Children's Literature; the Gintong Akat Award (Golden Book Award); The Gawad Komisyong para sa Kuwentong Pambata (Comission Award for Children's Literature in Filipino) and the National Book Award (given by the Manila Critics' Circle) for Outstanding Production in Children's Books and Young Adult Literature.
- United States: the major awards are given by the American Library Association Association for Library Service to Children. They include the Newbery Medal for writing, Caldecott Medal for illustration, Sofia Margaret Kirk Award for work by an African-American writer, and the Belpre Medal for work by a Latino writer.
- United Kingdom and Commonwealth: the Carnegie Medal for writing and the Kate Greenaway Medal for illustration; the Nestlé Smarties Book Prize; and the Guardian Award for impact over time.
- Internationally: the Hans Christian Andersen Award, and the Astrid Lindgren Memorial Award.

References


See also

Children's Literature Portal
External links

- Children's Literature Collections at the National Art Library
- The Anne Nixon Center for the Study of Children's Literature
- Children's eTexts at Project Gutenberg
- More Children's eTexts at Project Gutenberg
- Baldwin Digital Library of Children's Literature
- Just One More Book! Children's Literature Podcast
- A Fuse 8 Production Children's Literature Podcast
- Swimming In Literary Soup Children's Literature Podcast
- Book Directory and Podcast
- The most honored Children's books
- The Society of Children's Book Writers and Illustrators (SCBWI)

Results from FactBites:

**Children's Literature** (1213 words)

- A quick definition is "literature written for African children by African authors either in the vernacular or in a foreign language" (Meniru 1992:43).
- During the colonial period African children in government and missionary schools were introduced to children's literature that was alien to their experience.
- The South African Children's Literature Collection at UCT [see the same page for their historical Children's Literature Collection]: "Books published in South Africa from 1989 and exhibited annually by the Children's Book Forum of the Western Cape make up the core of this collection, apparently the only one of its kind in the country.

**Children's literature - Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia** (1996 words)

- Often no consensus is reached whether a given work is best categorized as adult or children's literature, and many books are multiply marketed in adult, children's, and young adult editions; a prominent example of this is the Harry Potter series, which was published in separate editions for children and adults.
- Byars is perhaps one of the best-known children's authors in America and in she received the Regina Medal, for lifetime achievement, from the Catholic Library Association.
- Previous to Newbery, literature marketed for children was intended to instruct the young, though there was a rich oral tradition of storytelling for children and adults; and many tales later considered to be inappropriate for children, such as the fairy tales of Charles Perrault, may have been considered family fare.

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