

National Library of Canada — Children's Literature Service

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History and Purpose

The possibility of employing a consultant at the National Library to advise on children's books was first proposed in 1969 by Elinor Kelly, Chairperson of the Canadian Association of Children's Librarians. In the following years, the Canadian Library Association and the former Association canadienne des bibliothécaires de langue française (presently the Association pour l'avancement des sciences et des techniques de la documentation) assembled a brief that was presented to the Secretary of State. They advocated that the position of Children's Literature Librarian/Consultant be established at the National Library to provide professional services to librarians, publishers, government officials and agencies, specialists and the general public using the resources of the National Library. In 1975, the National Library established the recommended position of Children's Literature Librarian/Consultant and in 1979, the service was renamed the Children's Literature Service/Service de littérature de jeunesse in order to reflect the growth and extension of its services. The service performs a number of functions all relating to children's literature and children's libraries, and these may be characterized as resource building, advisory, bibliographic and reference and promotion.

Resource Building

Since 1953, current Canadian publications have been received under the legal deposit regulations. The Library also endeavours to acquire older and rare Canadiana since its aim is to develop as comprehensive a collection as possible. Guidelines for augmenting the Library's holdings of children's literature, that is, 1 to 16 years of age, were formulated in 1975 in keeping with the overall guidelines as established by the Collections Development Branch. They are: Canadian children's materials, in English, French and other languages, which include books published in Canada, books written or illustrated by Canadians, whether published in Canada or abroad, and books dealing with Canada that are published abroad. The Children's Literature Service is also building an extensive collection of professional children's literature which also includes material on young adult literature, as well as a representative collection of non-Canadian award-winning children's books so that patrons at the Library can have the opportunity to document their research as fully as possible and also

be aware of major contributions, elsewhere, to the field of children's literature.

Since it is a comprehensive collection of retrospective and current materials in English, French, and other languages, the National Library collection constitutes a major source of information for researchers. The collection is primarily a research collection although books are lent, on request, through the intermediary of a local library.

It was apparent from the time of the inception of the children's service that the establishment of a separate children's collection, as opposed to the practice of integrating the children's books in the general collections, would be very useful. It would provide easy access to the children's books and ensure efficiency in the control of the reference and bibliographic services. It would also provide the means with which to compile a retrospective bibliography of Canadian children's books. In 1978, work began on the transfer of the children's books from the stacks to a room fitted with shelving units to accommodate the collection. Barring unforeseen circumstances, the retrieval process should be completed within the next two years if work can continue to proceed on a regular basis. To date, the collection comprises 14,500 books, including duplicate copies. It will not be possible to make an accurate assessment of how many children's book titles in English, French, and other languages there are in the collection until it is all assembled.

Services (Advisory, Reference and Bibliographic)

The reference and bibliographic services are offered in both official languages. Some of the requests pertaining to libraries are answered in consultation with the National Library's Library Documentation Centre. They come from across, as well as outside Canada, and include inquiries on topics such as the planning of children's activities in public libraries, storytelling techniques, multilingual programming in Canadian children's libraries, and recommended aids for book selection for a school library.

The requests on children's literature come from a variety of sources: librarians and teachers, authors and illustrators, publishers and booksellers, government and non-government agencies, children's literature specialists, children's book centres, universities and the general public. They cover a wide spectrum of information on subjects such as the National Library's children's book collection, all aspects of Canadian children's literature, professional children's literature and children's book awards. Consultative services often involve assessment of manuscripts or evaluation of books.

To provide the maximum assistance to researchers, review journals, assorted files on subjects relating to children's and young people's literature and libraries and books on professional children's and young people's literature are available for consultation purposes in the office area of the Children's Literature Service. Although most of the bibliographic requests are for the booklists that the Children's Literature Service compiles, it also receives special queries on themes

or genres in children's literature, for example, historical fiction, Indian and Inuit folktales, community life, non-sexism, and French books as a second language.

Through the service's own publications, the National Library plays a role in providing bibliographical access to Canadian children's literature. Booklists, especially annotated booklists, can furnish an excellent opportunity to promote a country's literature and encourage its wider distribution. The service has eight children's books still in print.¹

Promotion

Information about the collection and the services offered by the Children's Literature Service is communicated through an outreach programme that includes visiting libraries, participating in conferences and meetings in Canada and abroad, arranging exhibitions of Canadian children's books at the National Library, preparing catalogues or descriptive pamphlets to accompany the exhibits and arranging for Canadian participation in international displays of children's books. International contacts with different agencies such as the International Board on Books for Young People and IFLA's Round Table of Librarians Representing Documentation Centres Serving Research in Children's Literature are maintained. The growing demand for Canadian materials, in one form or another, emphasizes the fact that services and bibliographies are greatly required.

NOTES

¹*Animal world in Canadian books for children and young people/Le monde animal dans les livres de jeunesse canadiens.* 1983

Mystery and adventure in Canadian books for children and young people/Romans policiers et histoires d'aventures canadiens pour la Jeunesse. 1983

Notable Canadian children's books — 1980 supplement/Un choix de livres canadiens pour la jeunesse — supplément 1980 1982.

Notable Canadian children's books — 1981 supplement/Un choix de livres canadiens pour la jeunesse — supplément 1981. 1984

Notable Canadian children's books — 1982 supplement/Un choix de livres canadiens pour la jeunesse — supplément 1982. 1984

Pictures to share: illustration in Canadian children's books/Images pour tous: illustration de livres canadiens pour enfants. 1979

Sources of French Canadian children's and young people's books/Sources d'information sur les livres de jeunesse canadiens-français. 1984

Sports and games in Canadian children's books/Livres canadiens sur les sports et les jeux pour la jeunesse. 1982

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