

Focus IBBY

by CAROLINA BALLESTER

We are just back from the Bologna Children's Book Fair, where the IBBY annual press conference was held in an exciting atmosphere, as it concluded with the announcement of the winners of all three IBBY international awards, the IBBY-Asahi Reading Promotion Award, the IBBY-iRead Outstanding Reading Promoter Award, and the Hans Christian Andersen Award.

Winners Galore!

2024 IBBY-Asahi Reading Promotion Award

The 2024 Asahi Reading Promotion winner is **ATD (All Together in Dignity) Fourth World's Street Libraries**, nominated by IBBY France. Established in 1968, over sixty street libraries offer accessible opportunities for participation simply by using colorful blankets to establish spaces for reading and responding to books in



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2024 IBBY-Asahi Reading Promotion Award winner: Street Libraries by ATD

public areas. Targeting opportunities for children to break the cycles of poverty through nurturing a desire to learn and developing creativity, the French Ministry and Depardieu Foundation have offered 88,000 euros of support. The jury was impressed with how replicable this project is due to the limited requirements, and how communities could get involved through training offered through digital opportunities.

2024 IBBY-iRead Outstanding Reading Promoter Award

Basarat Kazim from Pakistan and **Irene Vasco** from Colombia are the winners of the 2024 IBBY-iRead Outstanding Reading Promoter Award.

Nominated by IBBY Pakistan, **Basarat Kazim** is described as a “selfless committed humanitarian, an educator, a children’s writer, social activist and die-hard advocate of reading in youth”—“an ordinary person doing extraordinary work.” Starting in 1978 with 500 students and one library, Basarat’s innovative efforts have converted Alif Laila Book Bus Society into an entire movement with over 7,000 libraries, benefiting 1 million children and training



Basarat Kazim, 2024 IBBY-iRead Outstanding Reading Promotion Award winner

1,000+ teachers. Among many awards bestowed on her, Basarat was honored with the 2023 Inspiring Woman Awards with the reputation of being one who turns everything into a children’s library because of the belief that every child in Pakistan should read. She converted camels, yaks, rickshaws, boxes, bicycles, and motorbikes all into libraries with her motto “Sky Is the Limit.” Her influence can be seen in having trained 500 teachers, 1,000 teaching interns, 20 creative practitioners, and 200 master trainers. It is inspiring to note that Basarat has

consistently been of aid to her country during times of devastation and destruction among much poverty.

Irene Vasco's nomination, submitted by IBBY Canada, shows that since the 1980s she has been a "Colombian children's literature expert, lecturer, writer, and reading promoter.... Her participation in conferences throughout the South American continent and Spain has



Irene Vasco, 2024 IBBY-iRead Outstanding Reading Promotion Award winner

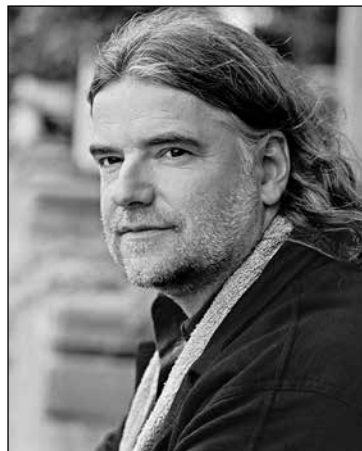
made her an international authority in reading promotion and a renowned author of children's and young people's literature in Colombia and beyond." Irene is an influential heroine who faces challenges, reading to children in indigenous or dangerous areas, carrying books as her talisman. She collects stories of women, even on a bus. Her work is characterized as well-coordinated and well-conceptualized. She has shown innovation in numerous ways, from how she established "community home" village little libraries to how she uses a printing press to understand alphabetic code. Irene is inspiring in her dedication in sharing her knowledge with others, including publishing several books about reading promotion.

2024 Hans Christian Andersen Award

The 2024 Hans Christian Andersen Award goes to **Heinz Janisch** from Austria for writing and **Sydney Smith** from Canada for illustration.

Heinz Janisch maintains that "nothing is

too small for literature." He was born in 1960 in Burgenland, not far from the Hungarian border, and now lives in Vienna. According to the jury, Heinz is a master of the short-form story that leaves room for the reader's imagination.



© Brigitte Friedrich

Heinz Janisch (Austria), winner of the 2024 Hans Christian Andersen Award for Writing

Although many of his works are humorous, even sometimes absurd, he has a philosophical element to his writing that often makes his books profound. His simple texts are meaningful, and the saying "less is more" can be applied to the 2024 author winner. His writing is



© Steve Farmer

Sydney Smith (Canada), winner of the 2024 Hans Christian Andersen Award for Illustration

universal, and it appeals to children and young people everywhere. Additionally, his contribution to literature is enormous, not only through

his writing, but also by his many readings and workshops on literary and creative writing for children and adults, including creative workshops for young artists with disabilities. Heinz's writing is nuanced with many layers, which makes it universal, as well as uplifting.

In an interview with professor Deirdre Baker in April 2022, **Sydney Smith** said "listening...is more in line with how I approach stories" when he is illustrating the texts of others as well as his own stories. Sydney was born in 1980 in rural Nova Scotia and has now returned to the province with his family after living for several years in Toronto. The jury noted that Sydney's work is like a visual narrative or a short musical memory, which echoes his statement that listening is how he approaches stories. He uses seemingly simple techniques to tell the story—really a result of intense practice. His modest but authentic characters are sympathetic as well as gentle. He uses color to introduce nature, smells, and drama to each book. The saying "less is more" can also be applied to every one of his works as he strips away the superfluous to express emotions. Sydney is a truly universal artist.

Julinda Abu Nasr in Memoriam

It is with great sadness that we received the news of the passing of Dr. Julinda Abu Nasr on March 5, 2024.



© Lebanese American University

Julinda Abu Nasr presenting her book at the Lebanese American University, May 2011

Julinda was a professor of developmental psychology and early childhood education at IBBY.ORG

the Lebanese American University in Beirut, Lebanon, for thirty-four years. A highly recognized academic and restless reading promoter, she combined her work for women with that of children, and excelled in both. She was a pillar of the Lebanese Section of IBBY (LBBY), which she established in 1980 and nurtured with passion and dedication for over three decades, despite the wars and crisis. Julinda Abu Nasr received the 1994 IBBY-Asahi Reading Promotion Award for a project of portable libraries developed with the Institute of Women's Studies in the Arab World. She was an IBBY Honorary Member since was nominated to the IBBY-iRead Outstanding Reading Promoter Award in 2020.

"I remember Julinda Abu Nasr fondly and with great respect. She was a dynamo, fast and furious and inspiring and influential with a great sense of fun. She embodied IBBY's aims and ideals through her tireless devotion to the promotion of children's education and international understanding through books for children from all over the world."

Leena Maissen, former IBBY executive director and IBBY honorary member

"Julinda Abu Nasr was one of my dearest and most admirable IBBY friends. We served together on the IBBY EC from 1996–2000. It was a first time for each of us. Together with then president Carmen Diana Dearden from Venezuela (the first woman president and the first from what we now call the Global South), and with the support of Peter Schneck, we fought to ensure that IBBY would truly become an international organization. We might have occasionally seemed obnoxious in our constant complaining about IBBY's very Euro/North America/Japan orientation. But in the end, with Julinda as a leader, I think we made a difference. And furthermore, in many ways, Julinda's work in Lebanon during the war

was fundamental in establishing IBBY's work with children in crisis. Plus we had so much fun! I will miss her so. And so will IBBY miss our great role model."

Patricia Aldana, former IBBY president

Shereen Kreidieh, currently president of the Lebanese Board on Books for Young People, kindly provided the meaningful letter, written by Julinda in 1992, which is transcribed below. Not only does it show her visionary spirit, it is also an inspiring testimony on the birth and growth of an IBBY section.

A stick is my pen

Mud is my slate

I am a wanderer groping in the abyss of ignorance

Who will lead my footstep

Who will quench my thirst for knowledge?

Who will answer the many questions that I have?

Who will give me book to read?

Who will give me a brush to paint my dreams?

*Who will tell me a story to transport
me to the land of fantasy?*

*My quest for books and knowledge and
those of many children like me have urged a
group of educators to come to my rescue.*

In 1974, LIBBY [the Lebanese Board on Books for Young People] was founded inspired by a Seminar conducted by Hans Halby, the president of IBBY who came to Lebanon as the guest of the Institute for Women's Studies in the Arab World and the Goethe Institute.

The ascent was remarkable, but the war came in 1975 and continued throughout 16 years, to curtail its growth and hinder its development. But in spite of it all, a number of things were accomplished, and LIBBY continues to grow, defying the many obstacles on the way.

Our first task was to see what books were available on the market. To this end a team of educators, members of LIBBY, reviewed the books in print to select the most appropriate for our children.

Books on violence, hate, revenge, prejudice and

bitterness, which abound, were left out. We couldn't afford exposing our children to more of these negative feelings. They had enough live examples on the streets to identify with.

Different types of heroes were sought after. Here's when we turned to books. Lists of selected books in Arabic, English and French were prepared and distributed free of charge to parents, teachers, children, libraries, book stores, publishers and others.

How to promote interest in reading was another concern of LIBBY.

"Children hardly ever read" complained parents. "Children have no time to read. They have to complete their school work", commented teachers who place great emphasis on text book knowledge and hardly leave any leisure time for children to read. "Books are expensive"; "TV is more interesting"; "Reading takes time"; "Books are boring"; "The language in books is difficult to understand". These and other remarks were made by children upon raising the issue of reading with them.

To meet these challenges, LIBBY in cooperation with the Institute for Women's Studies in the Arab World college library, were alerted to action. Training workshops were planned with IBBY members for talented young people from different Arab countries in writing and illustration. Lectures were scheduled at different occasions and articles appeared in many local newspapers emphasizing the importance of reading—the impact of modelling to influence the youth.

Plays, puppets shows, exhibits, storytelling sessions were at different times and places with the sole aim of bringing books to children and children to books.

The attempts were satisfying but the outreach was limited to the city. What about rural areas? How could dislocated children be reached? What about refugee camps and other settlements?

To meet this end we borrowed the idea of the portable library from Somboon Singkamman. Contacts were made pleading our cause and seeking assistance. Donations were sought from different sources, including individuals, organizations, companies, other IBBY chapters, libraries, publishing houses, authors and illustrators. The response was limited due to the miserable economic situation in the country, but the little that came in was greatly

appreciated and wisely used.

Books were carried in these portable libraries far and wide to different parts of Lebanon bringing happiness and thrill to the hearts of many children. The impact of LIBBY was felt and publishers sought advice and consultation in their selections and manuscripts. Parents and librarians requested book lists. Teachers brought students to plays and exhibits demanding more reading books that had the LIBBY stamp on them.

These were a few of the accomplishments that LIBBY can claim. However, there is a lot more to be done. We have but scratched the surface. Nevertheless with the help and the support of believers in the power of written word and through the affiliation with IBBY we are determined to make books and children friends, thus filling their hearts with joy and their minds with knowledge and wonder.

Julinda Abu Nasr, Beirut, August 24, 1992

Obituary

In the first quarter of 2024, we also deplored the passing of Bolivian writer, researcher, and founder of IBBY Bolivia Gaby Vallejo, to whom an article will be dedicated in the next Focus IBBY, as well as Syrian artist Loujaina Al-Assil, who was an individual member of IBBY since 2003.

“Loujaina Al-Assil was a great artist, a loving mom and a caring friend. I had the privilege of collaborating with Loujaina on the Halazone Series, a series of ten picture books, started in 1999. As at the time the internet was not available in Syria, we exchanged ideas and updates through phone calls and faxes. Well before I met her in person, I was already amazed to discover that, according to the children who read our stories, the illustrated mother character bore a striking resemblance to me. I attributed this curious occurrence to our spiritual connection.

The Halazone Series is still much loved by children and is one of our bestsellers. After completing her art studies, Loujaina embarked on a career as an abstract visual artist and had over 200 of her paintings displayed in museums around the world. However, it was her contributions to children’s literature that truly cemented her status as an icon in the Arab world. Her delightful and heartwarming illustrations captured the hearts of children all over the Arab world. Overall, she illus-



Loujaina Al-Assil

trated and designed more than 70 children’s books from different parts of the Arab world. Loujaina also lent her artistic skills to various advertising campaigns, theatrical productions, and children’s television shows, and children’s magazines. However, Loujaina’s impact went beyond her artistic accomplishments. She dedicated herself to training both professional and amateur artists in the art of children’s book illustrations, ensuring that her legacy would continue for generations to come. Loujaina’s contributions will always be remembered and cherished. May you rest in peace my dear friend.”

*Taghreed Najjar, publisher,
member of IBBY Jordan*

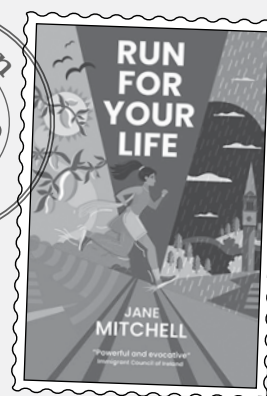


Carolina Ballester was born in Paris and studied in Spain and France, obtaining an MA in political science from the Madrid Complutense University and degrees in Chinese and Arabic from the French National Institute of Oriental Studies (INALCO). She worked as a translator and as cultural attaché at the Consulate of Spain in Shanghai. In 2013, she joined the Shanghai International Children’s Book Fair team as program manager, and over ten years she promoted and developed international interest in children’s illustration as well as served on juries for children’s illustration catalogs and contests. Carolina brings to IBBY an interest and wide knowledge in children’s literature and illustration, as well as international experience and fluency in several languages, including French, Spanish, English, and Mandarin. Carolina joined IBBY as executive director on September 1, 2022.

Azari’s life has been split in two “and the halves are as different as lemons and mangoes.” Her reason for having to flee her home country is gradually revealed, as Azari and her mother try to settle in this confusing new country, Ireland. The “direct provision” accommodation where they find themselves—provided by the Irish state for asylum-seekers—is comfortless. Azari’s mother is racked with grief, but Azari knows she has to adapt and learn what it is to be Irish, to fit in at school and make friends.

Jane Mitchell’s story is tender and gripping and her prose is absolutely stunning. She has been nominated for the Astrid Lindgren Memorial Award.

Valerie Coghlan,
President of Bookbird Inc.



Run for Your Life

Jane Mitchell
Dublin, Ireland: Little Island
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