

Focus IBBY

by CAROLINA BALLESTER

Dear IBBY members and friends around the world,

Happy New Year 2025!

2024 was a very busy year for IBBY, marked by a lively (and lovely!) Congress, thrilling awards, a record-breaking Honour List, and book fairs galore to meet old and new friends. But it has also been a difficult year for many around the world. With a new solar cycle, let's renew our commitment to support our IBBY colleagues and the children suffering from the pains of war, social injustice, and natural disasters.

2026 Hans Christian Andersen Award Jury Announced



The Hans Christian Andersen Award is all set for a new cycle in its 2026 edition. The IBBY Executive Committee selected the ten members of the international jury upon the recommendation of Shereen Kreidieh, who was elected jury president. The full jury composition, which was revealed in December 2024, is as follows:

- **Brenda Dales*** from the United States of America is an independent scholar and professor emerita from Miami University, Ohio.

- **Nadia El Kholy** from Egypt is a professor of English at Cairo University and president of the Egyptian Book Council for Young Readers.
- **Giorgia Grilli** from Italy is a children's literature professor at the University of Bologna and cofounder of the Italian Centre of Research in Children's Literature.
- **Diana Laura Kovach*** from Argentina is a language and literature teacher in secondary schools and at the Teachers' Training Institute, Buenos Aires.
- **Shailaja Menon** from India is lead for the Center of Excellence in Early Literacy and anchor for the Early Learning Network of India (Tata Trusts).
- **Mare Mürsepp** from Estonia is a primary school teacher and lecturer of children's literature at Tallinn University.
- **Margaret Anne Suggs** from Ireland is an accomplished illustrator and head of the Illustration Centre at Ballyfermot College of Further Education, Dublin.
- **Tan Fengxia*** from China is a professor in the School of Literature at the Nanjing Normal University.
- **Holly Tonks** from London, United Kingdom, is the editorial director at HarperCollins Children's.
- **Morgane Vasta*** from France is a mediator specializing in children's literature and a lecturer on novels for children and teenagers at the University of Sorbonne Paris Nord.

* Indicates a second consecutive term.

The Hans Christian Andersen Jury will start working after the formal announcement of the candidates on March 30 at the Bologna Children's Book Fair.

Echoes from the IBBY Sections: 50th Anniversary Celebrations in Japan and Cyprus

Japan

The Japanese Board on Books for Young People (JBBY), founded in 1974, celebrated its fiftieth anniversary in November 2024. JBBY, which started fifty years ago with twenty-eight indi-



vidual members and twenty-eight corporate members, now has over six hundred individuals and sixty-two corporations.

We planned four major commemorative projects to celebrate the fiftieth anniversary.



1. Exhibition: The ILCL (International Library of Children's Literature) of the National Diet Library and JBBY co-organized an exhibition introducing all the winners of the Hans Christian Andersen Award to date. We also produced an exhibition about the fifty years of history of JBBY encompassing a chronology, publications, video clips, and photos. Over the weekend, many books were displayed, and the event was enlivened with storytelling sessions and games for children.
2. Lectures: A series of lectures were held on the five Japanese winners of the Hans Christian Andersen Award. Editors who were close to Sukeichi Akaba (1980 winner for illustration),

Mitsumasa Anno (1984 winner for illustration), and Michio Mado (1994 winner for writing) shared their precious episodes, while Nahoko Uehashi (2014 winner for writing) and Eiko Kadono (2018 winner for writing) attended the celebrations in person and talked about their overflowing passion for creation and their love for children's books.

At a special symposium titled "How Children's Books Relate to the World Today," twelve authors from overseas shared video messages and three Japanese panelists took the stage. Although the authors were from different environments and standpoints, they all expressed their earnest wishes for peace for children and their sincere commitment to children's literature creation in a spirit of hope.

An online event involving the participation of twelve picturebook authors, all of them JBBY members, took place at the end of 2024. It was full of fun for adults and children, including an impromptu drawing game and a relay talk connecting them from their ateliers.

3. Publications: JBBY published *JBBY 50 Year History*, which includes messages from forty-five people from Japan and abroad, along with a detailed chronology and other substantial materials retracing the work of JBBY. It will serve as an encyclopedia about the organization.

In addition, the "Recommended Books" that JBBY has selected and issued annually since 2016 were collected and published as a single volume. It is now available in bookstores and libraries across Japan, and we hope that many people will pick up this book guide containing 350 titles and discover interesting books they did not know about.

4. Celebration party: More than 170 members gathered for the birthday party of JBBY. It was an opportunity to meet each other after a long time. The hall was packed with memories and our joint convictions that the beliefs of IBBY and JBBY have not faded away or lost strength through the ages!

Yukiko Hiromatsu
Children's book critic,
member of the board of JBBY

Cyprus

On the occasion of the fiftieth anniversary (1974–2024) of its establishment, the Cyprus Children’s and Youth Book Association (CYBBY) organized a major conference in collaboration with the Ministry of Education, Sports and Youth, the Pancyprian Organization of Greek Teachers (POED). The event was sponsored by the Deputy Ministry of Culture. The conference was followed by an action called “Literary Journeys Awaken Memories.”



The anniversary conference was held on Friday, November 15, 2024, with great success, under the title “Bright Pages of Cypriot Children’s/Young Adult Literature: 50 Reasons for Our Children to Read It.” It aimed to promote Cypriot children’s and young adult literature by sharing good practices and tools to incorporate these texts into education. Kyriakos Charalambides, the most acclaimed Cypriot poet, delivered the keynote speech. Educators from all grade levels, authors, illustrators, librarians, students, and people who love children’s books participated. The event was honored with the presence of the deputy minister of culture, the



director of public primary education, the deputy director of the Cyprus Library, the Teachers’ Union president, and a representative of IBBY Greece.

On Sunday, November 17, 2024, at 10:00 in the morning, a fully packed bus left the Ledra Palace barricade—a separation point and crossing with symbolic power for the reunification of Cyprus—to start a special literary journey through collective memory. As exactly fifty years have passed since the founding of the Cyprus section of IBBY and the Turkish invasion that divided our country, CYBBY organized a literary journey to awaken memory. We collaborated with the Cyprus Writers Union and the Teachers’ Union and secured funding from the deputy ministry of culture. Driving along the green line and making stops at key points of the dividing line that still provokes so much suffering, we gazed at our divided homeland. Cypriot poets and authors on the bus shared poems and prose to send messages of freedom, reunification, and peace. Because the power of literature unites and changes us and the world.

Christina Christodoulou
IBBY Cyprus vice president

2025 International Children’s Book Day

We are pleased to present the theme, message, and visual of International Children’s Book Day (ICBD), sponsored for the very first time in 2025 by the Dutch Section of IBBY.

The project was selected on the basis of its attractive visual and rich program of events, which includes a drawing contest, to which all children worldwide are invited to participate. Visit the IBBY-Netherlands (<https://www.ibby-nederland.nl/>) website for more information.

The theme of the ICBD 2025 is the Freedom of Imagination. In high-quality children’s books, the reader’s imagination is kindled and developed. These books help children to explore their imagination, to develop their creativity, and to see the world in a new way. Good books invite readers to interpret the words for themselves, making the story their own.

Accompanying this inspiring theme, the

motto of the celebrations—“These words belong to you even though they came from me”—is extracted from the message below.

The Language of Pictures

By Rian Visser

Translated in English by Emily Watkinson

*Can you draw pictures
for the words,
for the things I say?*

*Then draw
part of the picture,
cold,
wind,
a lump in your throat
or tough luck,*

*draw a cough,
a sigh,
the scent of fresh bread,
time,
a moment,
the beginning or the end
of a plan,*

*draw the place wherever,
the place where never,
the place where soon
something is going to happen,*

*draw the pain of a push,
the taste of the sea.*

*There is so much
that I want to see,
like love,
one day,
and maybe for me.*

*Make pictures
for my poem,
and please feel free:
these words
belong to you
even though they came from me.*

The message was composed by Dutch children’s book writer and poet Rian Visser. She writes funny and exciting books that are a perfect match for children’s interests. Together with the illustrator Janneke Ipenburg, she has created the poetry collections *Alle wensen van de wereld* (*All the Wishes in the World*; 2021), from which the message is extracted, and *Het is een zachte dag vandaag* (*It’s a Mild Day Today*; 2024). In 2022, Visser won a Zilveren Griffel and the Gouden Poëziemedaillon (Gold Poetry Medal).

Visser is very active in education. She designs digital lessons about creative writing and reading promotion, which teachers can use for free. She was officially appointed Dutch Children’s Laureate for the biennial 2024–2026.

The ICBBD 2025 poster is signed by Visser’s longtime collaborator Janneke Ipenburg. In addition to her work as a children’s illustrator, Ipenburg has worked on a number of animation films, and she is currently working as a character designer on a large Chinese stop-motion animation. In 2023, she was on the long list of the World Illustration Awards.

Obituaries

One Year without Gaby Vallejo Canedo
(Cochabamba 1941–2024)



On January 20, 2024, Gaby Vallejo, pillar of the Bolivian Section of IBBY, passed away. One of the most important literary voices of her generation in Bolivia, Gaby was engaged in multiple fields of actions around children’s literature and reading advocacy. More importantly for IBBY, she was one of the main artisans of IBBY-Bolivia’s fruitful path in the organization

since the mid-1980s. IBBY invited Isabel Mesa, Bolivian children's writer, academic, and founder of the Academia Boliviana de Literatura Infantil y Juvenil, to pay a tribute to Gaby Vallejo.

To speak of Gaby Vallejo Canedo is to speak of a woman who has dedicated her life not only to the production of children's and young people's literature, but also to its dissemination and, in addition, to the promotion and encouragement of reading. She has been the link between the pioneers of Bolivian children's literature and modern literature, challenging and transgressing the thinking of her time. She teamed up with teachers across her country, who became precursors in the dissemination of reading strategies by creating small libraries in squares, markets, and prisons. She founded the Th'uruchapitas s Library, the most important library of children's literature in the country, and participated in congresses and seminars with remarkable research works that contributed to the knowledge of Bolivian literature.



Gaby Vallejo emerged as the referent of Bolivian children's literature in the '80s and remained so the next twenty years. In her writings for children we can see her concern for the problems that arose in the country in these two decades; situations that are part of her literature, and that she sometimes expresses very harshly. Her first works denounced child abuse, which she maintained in her plots as a cross-cutting issue. She also offered young reader stories that boast history, myths, and legends of Andean cultures with

the purpose of rescuing the elements that identify them. In the '90s she reclaimed the obsolete practice of behaviorism and vertical education, and anticipated the 1994 educational reform that proposed an intercultural and bilingual education. Gaby Vallejo's literature followed the evolution of Bolivian society, and at the beginning of the twenty-first century, she got involved in the life of adolescents and wrote about gangs, tattoos, love, discrimination, and sexual violence.

Beyond her extensive production for children and teenagers, Gaby Vallejo deserves to be considered as a great promoter of children's books, a task she carried out from the time she was president of IBBY-Bolivia, which established its headquarters in Cochabamba in 1975. She founded the Taller de Experiencias Pedagógicas (Pedagogical Experience Workshop) in the early 1990s, where she trained teachers to read children's literature and improve their classroom strategies. To this end, she created the Th'uruchapitas s Library in 1991, which currently has more than 10,000 copies thanks to her association with international organizations dedicated to the support of children's books.

Within her passion for books, Gaby Vallejo has also conducted several research works. She has written articles published in various Bolivian and foreign magazines, and has been a speaker at conferences and seminars in Bolivia and abroad. A tireless promoter of reading and with a great contribution to the research of children's literature, she won several awards and recognitions, and paved the way for many Bolivian authors to be known inside and outside the country.

Isabel Mesa

An extensive tribute to the work of Gaby Vallejo can be found (in Spanish) on the web page dedicated to IBBY-Bolivia on the IBBY website: <https://www.ibby.org/ibby-worldwide/national-sections/bolivia>



IBBY also deplores the recent passing of **Yoko Inokuma**, who served JBBY for nearly twenty years, being the vice chair of the 1986 IBBY Congress held in Tokyo. Yoko was also a former IBBY Executive Committee member (1980–82) and IBBY vice president (1982–84). She received the IBBY honorary membership in 2004.



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. She 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. She joined IBBY as executive director on September 1, 2022.