

Is it Time to Listen to the Children – For Real?

2,308 children's and young adult books were published in Sweden in 2018, and for the first time since 2010 there was a decrease in the number of titles published compared to the previous year. A considerable number of the books published in 2018 strive to draw attention to injustice, make visible social and economic differences, and encourage children to participate in protest actions.

During the 2000s the annual number of children's books published has more than doubled, but in 2018 this number decreased for the first time since 2010. On February 28 2019 the Swedish Institute for Children's Books had received 2,308 children's and young adult books published in 2018. That is 224 titles (nine percent) less than in 2017. However, the decrease is not the result of a general reduction in titles published, but is instead primarily due to changes in publishing strategies made by individual publishers. The statistics also show that the Swedish originals continue to dominate among the children's books published in Sweden.

In recent years, social issues have been a common theme in Swedish books for children and young adults, and in 2018 this was more prominent than ever. These stories primarily focus on drawing attention to injustice, making visible social and economic differences, and questioning power structures. Children's role as citizens with rights is underlined, and children are encouraged to actively engage in issues that concern them. Put together, these children's books raise an important question: is it time to listen to the children – for real?

Picturebooks continues to be the biggest category. The picturebooks of 2018 include a number of titles where the depiction of the body plays a central role. This is especially noticeable in the Swedish originals. The emphasis on body shapes and norms is characteristic of the socially oriented picturebook, which aims to highlight and normalize different types of bodies. For example, this includes the portrayal of skin colour, disabilities, body size, and age.

In this year's Book Tasting we also take a closer look at horse stories, and in particular themes of violence and cruelty to animals in horse stories, stories that address suicide and the death of a loved one, as well as works that reinterpret or allude to classic fairy tales.

What is the Book Tasting?

The Book Tasting is an annual event arranged by the Swedish Institute for Children's Books. The aim is to give an overview of the children's and young adult books published in Sweden the previous year by exploring prominent themes and presenting statistics. The Book Tasting consists of lectures and a written report, and it also includes an exhibition displaying the children's and young adult books published in Sweden the previous year. The exhibition can be seen in the institute's library, and the report is available for downloading on the institute's website.

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