



The Swedish Institute for Children's Books

The Book Tasting

Summary 2020

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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 (Swedish original works and translated works) the previous year by examining prominent themes and presenting statistics. The Book Tasting consists of lectures and a written report. The lectures are recorded in Swedish and are available for downloading on the institute's website, as is the report. Here we present selected texts from the latest Book Tasting, which is about books published in 2020.

Summary

By the last day of February 2021, the institute had received 2037 printed children's and young adult books published in 2020, which is 180 titles (8 percent) less than in 2019. For the third year in a row, there has been a decrease to the number of books published. The publishing of children's and young adult books reached record highs during the 2010s, which led to discussions of the implications of this development in the industry. This has likely contributed to several publishers now focusing their publication lists around a smaller number of titles.

Although the pandemic is not one of the main factors behind the decrease, it has led to changes in publishing strategies and has also accelerated publishing in digital formats.

When it comes to printed books, the decrease is most noticeable among picturebooks and young adult novels. However, it is mainly the share of translated titles that has decreased. The share of translations has not been this low since the first Book Tasting in 1993 (36 percent). It is most likely the lowest share in the history of Swedish children's and young adult book publishing.

In terms of content, the books of 2020 are largely the same as the previous year. With one exception:

A new category was established in 2020, books with thematic connections to covid-19 and the pandemic.

Four guest writers have been asked to contribute to Book Tasting 2021. Dr Ann Steiner, Lund University, examines the publication of audiobooks and concludes that the number of audiobooks published continue to increase. She notes that while older titles dominate, the development of different formats suggests a gradual change in this respect. Dr Katariina Rejman, Stockholm University, takes a closer look at chapter books and finds two strands: didactically oriented books and books that require an aesthetic reading. She argues that a one-sided focus on reading comprehension risks counteracting the aesthetic reading experience. This, in turn, may hinder both the reading development and the desire to read. Because of the strong orientation towards the contemporary in children's and young adult literature, Dr Andreas Hedberg, Uppsala University, examines how historical themes are manifested in the books of 2020. His overview shows that history is present and that historical events function as important resources both in a narrative and political sense. Cultural studies student Emilia Hellberg writes about and identifies play in the picturebooks of 2020 as a universal and timeless theme that is varied in a number of different ways.

Book Tasting 2020

A decrease to physical texts and an increase to digital works

By the last day of February 2021, a total of 2037 books for children and young adults that had been published in 2020 had been received by Sbi, which is a lower number compared to the previous year by 180 titles (a decrease of 8 percent). This is the third year in a row in which the publication total had decreased, down from the heights of 2017, when 2532 titles had been published. In other words, the publication figure has decreased by around one-fifth in three years (see Diagram 1).

Sbi contacted the ten publishing companies that most decreased their publication numbers during 2020 in order to explore the reasons for this. They are partially the same as the reasons given in previous years. The pandemic has played a small role in terms of the decrease in most cases, but on the other hand, it has also brought about changes to publishers' publication strategies. Above all, it has

accelerated the production of digital works, such as e-books and audiobooks. Olika förlag is one of the publishers that the pandemic has brought about the most consequences for. Olika chose to slow down the publication of physical books and to increase their digital production, which meant that they decreased their number of physical books from 21 in 2019 to 10 in 2020. As is clear in a later section, the pandemic has also meant that there have been more books published about viruses and pandemics (see below for more on this).

Other factors that publishers offer as reasons for the decrease to the publication numbers is that numbers had increased so much over the past few years with circulation figures that were too low as a consequence, which accords with previous conversations within the branch about over-publication (*Bokprovning årgång 2019*, 6). Several publishers describe a situation where they had to focus on a smaller number of titles in order to retain their level of quality and to be able to market them effectively. In one case, they had to temporarily decrease their publication numbers because of being purchased by another company. On 1 January 2020, Nypon and

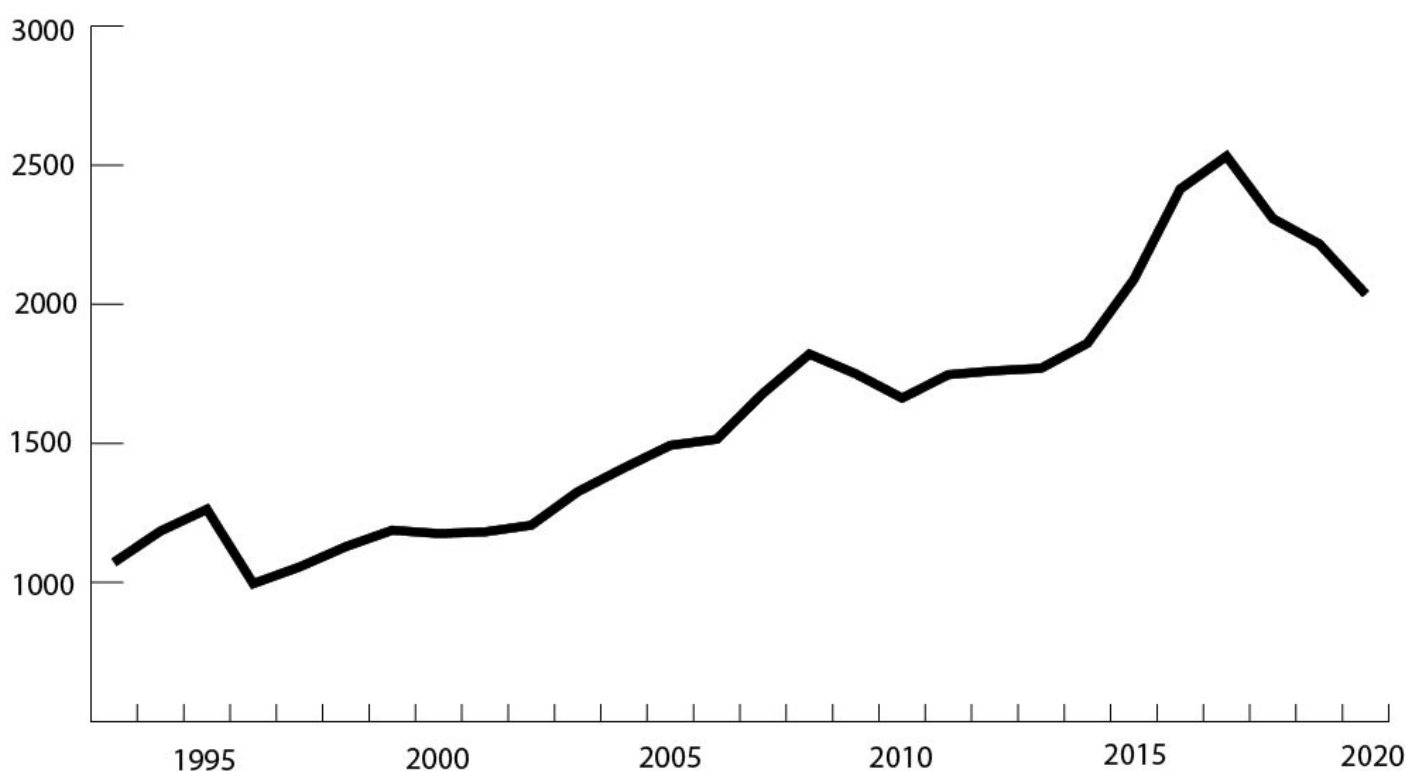


Diagram 1. Children's and young adult books published in Sweden 1993–2020. Source: *Bokprovning på Sveriges barnboksinstitutet: En dokumentation. Årgång 2020, 2021*, p. 38.

Vilja became a part of Studentlitteratur and so their figures were consciously decreased in order to ease the integration process.

At the moment, Sbi does not have the technical capability to collect digital works and as there is no regulation about providing Kungliga biblioteket (The National Library of Sweden, or KB) with copies, KB has no statistics about the field either. Svenska Förläggareföreningen (the Swedish Publishers' Association) provides figures that cover their member organisations' publications. These numbers show that digital publication has continued to rise and that the largest increase was among audiobooks (*Förlagsstatistik 2020*, 15), and this is likely true throughout the branch as a whole. The continued increase to the number of audiobooks produced led to Sbi this year once again requesting literary scholar Ann Steiner to explore the developments in the field for the Book Tasting report (see the section below).

It is still relatively unusual for books for children and young adults to only be published digitally, but on the other hand, publishers are producing more and more older titles in digital format rather than physical. Several of the publishing companies Sbi spoke to before this year's Book Tasting are working on publishing large swathes of their backlist digitally. This has probably influenced the figures for republication in this year's Book Tasting. The republication of printed books continued to decrease during 2020 and have therefore decreased by over one-fifth in two years.

Digital publishing has not only increased in regard to total titles but also in terms of sales. According to statistics from Svenska Bokhandlareföreningen (the Swedish Booksellers' Association) and the Swedish Publishers' Association, which cover more than 80 percent of book sales in Sweden, 2020 was a record year in the number of digital works for children and young adults that were sold. The increase was almost 30 percent in comparison with the previous year and it was largest of all among digital subscription services, where it doubled. On the other hand, this only increased turnover marginally, as the move to digital formats and channels also means that publishers earn a lot less on every copy sold (Wikberg 21, 23, 27).

Picturebooks, YA books and translations decreased the most

Publication numbers decreased in most categories in 2020, but middle-grade books and graphic texts went against the grain and increased somewhat. The biggest increase was to the category of graphic texts (16 titles). The categories in which the numbers decreased the most were once again picturebooks and young adult (YA) books. Picturebooks decreased from 768 titles in 2019 to 684 in 2020, which is a decrease of 11 percent. YA books decreased even more in terms of percentages, with 21 percent, from 243 titles in 2019 to 191 in 2020 (see Diagram 2). Several of the publishing companies Sbi spoke to say that they lowered the number of YA books they published because it is hard to make a profit in this area. The sales statistics from the Swedish Booksellers' Association and the Swedish Publishers' Association confirm this. When looking at the total sales of literature for children and young adults in 2020, it was YA books that had the lowest sales figures. In terms of copies sold, more than 10 times as many books were sold for the age groups of 3–6 and 6–9 than for 12–15 and 15+ (Wikberg 29).

Several publishers note difficulties in reaching an audience with translated literature. A consequence of this is that publishers are less able to take on the costs involved in big translation projects, as the average print runs have gone down. Over 10 years, Sbi has noted an increased share of original Swedish works and a decreased share of translated literature, but this gap has increased in the past few years. In 2020, the gap increased further. 64 percent (1298 titles) of the total publication figure is now comprised of original Swedish work, while translations are only 36 percent (739 titles). This is the lowest figure of translations that the Book Tasting has found since reporting started. It is probably the smallest number ever noted in the history of Swedish books for children and young adults (see Mählqvist 59; Tellgren 71; Warnqvist 341).

The market for Swedish children's books

The Swedish market for children's books continues to be large. 256 different publishers and others pro-

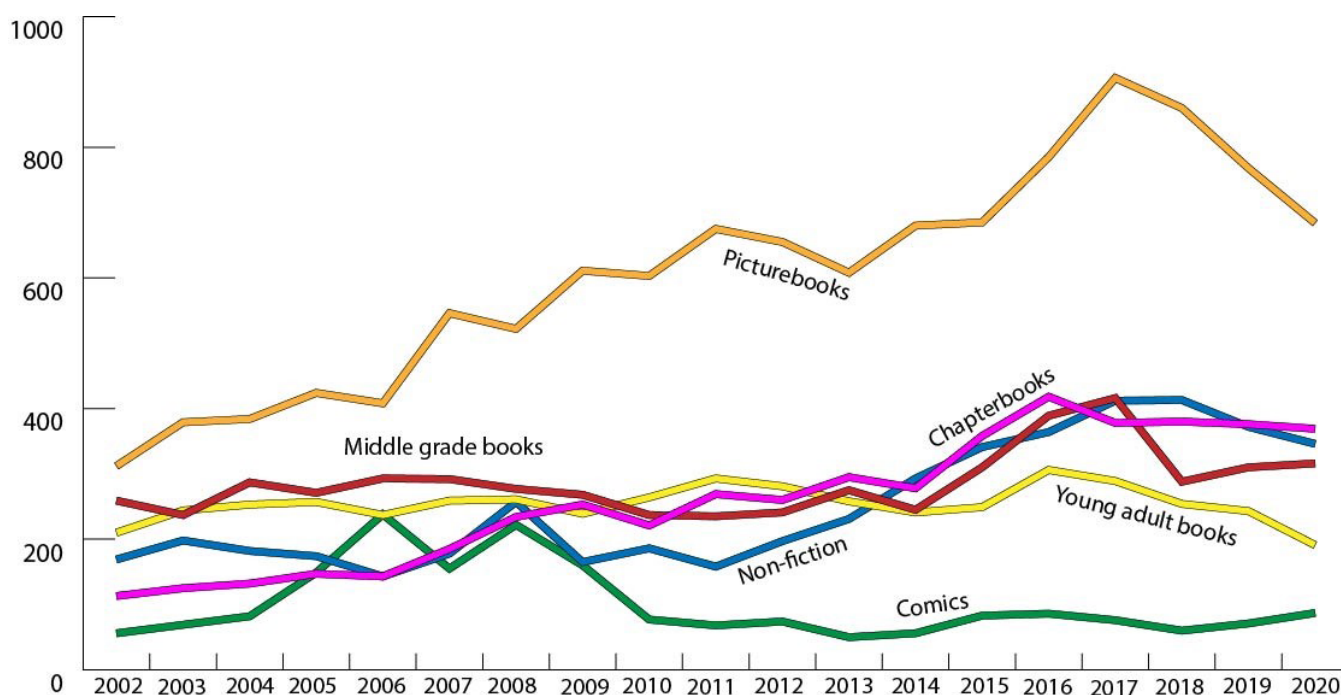


Diagram 2. Children's and young adult books in categories, 2002–2019. Source: *Bokprovmning på Sveriges barnboks-institutet: En dokumentation. Årgång 2020, 2021, p. 38.*

duced printed books for children and young adults in Sweden in 2020, including self-publishers. It is, however, the larger publishers who dominate, in terms of the number of titles. The ten publishers that published the most titles in 2020 were behind 49 percent of the publications, which is an increase compared to 2019, when the figure was 47 percent (see Diagram 3).

The traditional publishers are therefore behind the majority of titles published, but there are also publications for children from, for example, associations, businesses and schools. These last-mentioned ones often distribute their books in ways other than via regular bookshops. It is hard to estimate the number of self-published works, but searches in the database of KB, Nationalbibliografin, shows that the figure has decreased since KB began coding for it five years ago, from around 170 titles in 2016 to around 135 titles in 2020. The figures include publications via publishing services, where the author pays for publication, and this number has increased. What has decreased is the number of books completely produced solely by the author. An explanation for this overarching decrease could be that some of this area of publishing has moved to hybrid publishers, where authors invest in publication against a larger percentage of the profits. Publication via hybrid publishers,

such as Visto and Lumenos, has increased somewhat during the same period.

The three largest publishers of printed works for children and young adults in 2020 in terms of the number of titles published were the same as in the previous year: Bonnier Carlsen (255 titles), Rabén & Sjögren (169 titles) and Tukan (132 titles). Bonnier Carlsen increased their publication figure significantly, by 53 titles, and they were the only larger publisher to do so. The increase was apparent in all the larger categories and is not related to Pixi, or mini-format, books or to republications, but rather first editions. Even some smaller publishers, such as Visto, Beta pedagog, Fenix, Semic and Cobolt, increased their publication numbers, but the majority decreased them during 2020. Among the publishers with the largest reductions to the number of their publications in comparison to the previous year were Nypen, Egmont Publishing, Natur & Kultur, B. Wahlströms and Modernista. Läsrörelsen did not publish any titles at all in 2020, because their collaboration with McDonald's in regard to distributing books ended. IKEA also did not publish any books in 2020.

There are two large publishing groups that publish books for children and young adults in Sweden, Bonnierförlagen and Norstedts förlagsgrupp. The publishing companies that publish books for

young readers within the Bonnier group are Bonnier Carlsen, Bokförlaget Hedvig and Fenix förlag. Hedvig started in 2020 and publishes easy-to-read literature, and Fenix started in 2018 and currently publishes children's books in Arabic and Somali. In total, Bonnier group was responsible for 14 percent of the publications in 2020, of which Bonnier Carlsen alone was responsible for 13 percent. Norstedts förlagsgrupp is owned by Storytel and the publishing companies within the group that publish books for children and young adults are Rabén & Sjögren, B. Wahlströms and, since 2020, Brombergs Bokförlag. In total, Norstedts förlagsgrupp was responsible for 10 percent of the publications in 2020, and Rabén & Sjögren alone was responsible for 8 percent.

The publication of audiobooks for children and young adults 2020

Guest author: Ann Steiner

The fact that 2020 was a year marked by the pandemic meant that the audiobook market for children and young adults experienced a large upswing in

terms of sales and distribution across various digital channels. This involved access via public and school libraries as well through commercial subscription services. This is not a new development but rather an amplification of changes already occurring in regard to how children and young people read and listen to books. In schools, the clearest trend has been e-books and digitally published platform material, while at public libraries and for home usage via subscription services, it has mainly been about audiobooks and also, to a certain extent, hybrid books (audiobook plus e-picturebook).

This amplified interest has led to a significant increase to the number of published audiobooks and there is a real mixture here of republications, new works published at the same time as a printed version, original publications in audio format and different types of hybrid books. It is, however, evident that republications dominate. There is no list of audiobooks published for children. Svensk Mediedatabas (the Swedish Media Database), which is part of Nationalbibliografen, catalogues publications that are produced in a physical format on disc. In terms of

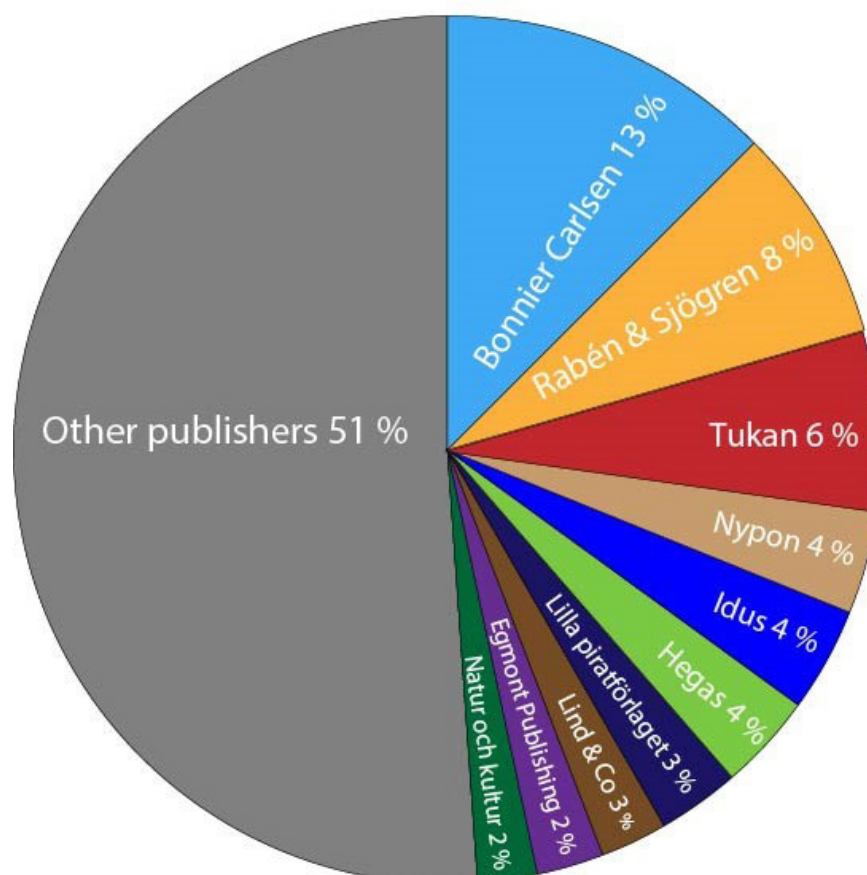


Diagram 3. The ten largest publishers in comparison to the other publishers. Source: *Bokprovning på Svenska barnboksinstitutet: En dokumentation. Årgång 2020, 2021, p. 55.*

audiobooks as digital files, there is no national register. Anyone interested in information about audiobook publications instead will have to look at the statistics of the Swedish Publishers' Association, which only cover some of the publications, or to carry out searches in, for instance, sales databases.

The Swedish Publishers' Association collects information from its members and it has since 2013 included the category of digital audiobooks in its annual statistics. The statistics for 2020 cover a total of 65 publishers, of which 17 had publications for children and young people, and this includes most large companies, but not, for example, books produced within the Danish Saga group for the Swedish market or the productions from Sony Music (see Table 1). These two companies are major actors within the production of audiobooks and were responsible for 309 titles in 2020, which is around 30 percent of the year's publication of digital children's books available for sale.

Table 1. The publication of audiobooks for children and young adults 2013–2020 by members of Svenska Förläggareföreningen (the Swedish Publishers' Association).

Year	Digital files	CDs
2020	539	20
2019	418	24
2018	325	36
2017	429	30
2016	229	11
2015	102	16
2014	151	14
2013	32	18

Source: *Förlagsstatistik 2020* [Publication Statistics 2020], Stockholm: Svenska Förläggareföreningen (the Swedish Publishers' Association), 2020, p. 15.

The available data from the Swedish Publishers' Association needs to be complemented and as a method of doing this, I use the internet bookstore Adlibris as a database (see Table 2). Still, even this has limitations, and there are probably both duplicates and also published titles that are not available for sale via this channel. Another problem is that the registration of published digital titles can be delayed. Since the primary distribution channels for digital audiobooks are subscription services, the publishing companies are not as fast at registering them in Adlibris, where they have fewer unit sales. An analysis of Adlibris as a database carried out in February every year will

therefore suggest a lower number than it should, but how low is impossible to know. Every analysis becomes a sort of snapshot of a moment in time. This year's analysis, carried out in February 2021, showed, for example, a significantly higher number of publications in 2019 than was reported in the Book Tasting in 2020 (and the research behind that report was carried out in February 2020). This could mean that titles produced in 2020 still have not been registered by Adlibris, which in turn unfortunately shows that even sales databases have faults, and that it would be valuable to have better access to data. Nonetheless, it is clear that publication has increased during 2020 (see Table 2).

Table 2. The publication of audiobooks for children and young adults 2017–2020, registered in Adlibris online bookstore.

Publisher/year	2020	2019	2018	2017
Rabén & Sjögren	152	187	81	76
Saga Egmont (incl. Storyhouse Egmont)	167	193	208	105
Bonnier Audio and Bonnier Carlsen	111	97	113	106
B. Wahlströms	34	58	23	31
Nypon	77	79	170	–
Hegas	66	51	40	40
Storyside	66	12	36	70
Modernista	83	–	–	–
Sony Music Entertainment	142	–	–	–
Other publishers	254	220	214	148
Total	1 152	897	885	576

Source: Adlibris database.

That new actors are entering the field of audiobooks for children and young people is evident from the examples of Modernista and Sony Music Entertainment. Modernista is a traditional publishing company that publishes printed books and e-books, while Sony Music is a music company that has developed a system for publishing sound, and children's books have become a new area for them.

In the last year's Book Tasting, three clear patterns were discerned: the dominance of recordings of older titles; the fact that it had become more common to have original audiobooks; and that boundaries between different forms of media, such as audiobooks and other formats, were dissolving. These three trends have expanded further this year. Most

audiobooks published for children continue to be, as noted, recordings of older titles. Many new titles are also published as audiobooks, but the older ones completely dominate. This is because they are a large source of material and also because publishers often have shared copyright with the authors. The significance of copyright in regard to audiobook production also serves to explain the fact that most audiobook titles are Swedish originals. For members of the Swedish Publishers' Association, around 82 percent of the publications were Swedish originals (*Förlagsstatistik 2020*, 15).

Original audiobooks, podcasts, radio plays and other audiobook-like works for children and young people are examples of how ideas about books and literature are changing. Storytel is the company that has focused the most on original audiobooks, and database searches show that so far Storytel is the only larger actor to produce original audiobooks for children and young adults. In 2019, they started a collaboration with the humour group IJustWantToBeCool and in 2020, they published, among other things, *Sommarjobbarna* [The Summer Workers] in four parts. In 2020, the trio was responsible for seven of the ten most listened-to titles among children and young adults in subscription services. Other examples of original works written for audiobooks include the ten parts of the non-fiction series *Kul med koll* [Fun to Learn] by Fredrik Berling, with wildly varying subjects such as parkour, the Vikings and snakes. It is also worth mentioning Katharina Vittenlind's five-part Christmas series, *Magiska julsagor* [Magical Christmas Stories], not least because it connects to another common phenomenon within sound for children, the Christmas radio show *Julkalendern* [The Christmas Calendar] on Sveriges Radio (Swedish Radio) has been running since 1957 and is a combination of original work and dramatizations of published works, but because of the way it is broadcast on the radio, it has never been seen as an audiobook. But when children today can listen to the Calendar on apps in the same way as they can listen to audiobooks, the similarities have become larger than the differences. One example is the 2020 Christmas radio show *Knäckarbanketten* [The Feast] by Sara Bergmark Elfgren, directed by Eva Staaf and

with music by Frida Johansson (it was published as a book in 2019 with pictures by Emil Maxén).

That audiobooks exist in so many different formats can possibly be explained by the fact that audiobooks are part of an ever more medialised book industry. This has, among other things, caused non-traditional publishers to publish work, and also made ideas about who can do what change quickly. As already mentioned, the music company Sony Music produces audiobooks, and this is a concrete example of new types of actors in the industry, but there are also small companies such as Ullebomagic, which initially was an audio production company but now also publishes classics, or Boksmart, which is focused on children's audiobooks, and published seven titles in 2020. There is an openness for blended media formats in the publication of works for children and young adults that can also arouse curiosity. One of this literature's foremost attributes is that it is often experimental and inquisitive, and willing to try new things.

The publication of easy-to-read books and beginning readers

As Sbi has noted in previous Book Tastings, the publication of easy-to-read books – that is, books adapted for people with reading difficulties – and beginning readers – that is, training books for those who are learning to read – has increased significantly in the last decade. This increase and the fact that Sbi has asked researcher Katarina Rejman to study this year's chapter books – the category where easy-to-read-books and beginning readers are most common – call for a brief overview. The first easy-to-read book in Sweden was published in 1968, an easy-to-read version of Per Anders Fogelström's *Sommaren med Monika* [Summer with Monika], published by Läromedelsförlaget. In 1987, Centrum för lättläst (The Centre for Easy-to-Read Material) was started and in 1991, they decided to publish easy-to-read works through a particular publisher, LL-förlaget. Today, this is managed by Myndigheten för tillgängliga medier (the Swedish Agency for Accessible Media, or MTM). Since the LL-förlaget was started, a number of additional publishers have been established that focus especially on easy-to-read works, such as Hegas

Table 3. The publication of easy-to-read books and beginning readers 2011–2020.

	Easy-to-read books and beginning readers in Swedish and other languages	Easy-to-read books and beginning readers in Swedish	Only easy-to-read books in Swedish	Only beginning readers in Swedish
2020	269	255	203	52
2019	287	245	203	42
2018	292	236	196	40
2017	330	262	217	45
2016	316	255	199	56
2015	285	241	153	88
2014	219	185	124	61
2013	196	179	146	33
2012	189	173	109	64
2011	129	122	68	54

Source: Svenska barnboksinstitutet (Swedish Institute for Children's Books) library catalogue, genre/form terms easy-to-read books and beginning readers.

(started in 1983), Argasso (2002), and Nypon (2010). In 2020, Hedvig became the newest addition to the easy-to-read publishers.

It was around 2010 when the production of easy-to-read books and beginning readers really got going, and it has more than doubled since then. As Table 3 shows, it is the publication of easy-to-read books that has increased the most, especially in Swedish, which has increased from 68 titles in 2011 to 203 titles in 2020. The publication of beginning readers in Swedish is approximately as large today as it was ten years ago. In total, the publication of easy-to-read books and beginning readers increased from 122 to 255 titles in the last decade, and if easy-to-read books in other languages are also included, then the equivalent figures are 129 and 269 titles. This large increase took place during the first half of the 2010s. In the past five years, the figures have stayed pretty much the same. The production of easy-to-read books is largest amongst chapter books, where it is around twice as large as it is in the following categories (middle-grade books, non-fiction books, and YA books).

Is the easy easy and the hard hard? A didactic-aesthetic reading of 2020's chapter books

Guest author: Katarina Rejman

Children's literature has often been caught in the intersection between the didactic and the aesthetic, the educational and the entertaining. The didactic

and the aesthetic describe qualities within the books, but can also be viewed as phenomena that have an importance for the meeting between the text and the reader. A fruitful meeting can be described as a match between repertoires, when the book's repertoire in terms of range, language, motifs and themes matches the reader's repertoire, which is the reader's expectations, knowledge and experiences (McCormick). If the distance between these two is too large, there is a resistance to reading, while a distance that is too small does not challenge the reader. No new thoughts are aroused and reading is experienced as boring or meaningless. The meeting with the text, the reading experience itself, is therefore central in order to arouse the reader's interest, but also for the development of reading skills. Qualities such as openness in the text, literary language and exciting plots offer an aesthetic reading practice (Rosenblatt), a kind of reading that is empathetic and subjective, where the reader connects the text to their own experiences. Reading can activate a number of complex mental and cognitive processes, but literary fiction in particular challenges the reader's abilities to make inferences, to interpret and to read between the lines. Talking to others about texts stimulates readers to try out interpretations and understand others' thoughts, which is experienced as meaningful (Vischer Bruns).

An ongoing discussion in society about the decreased interest in reading among young people and about schools' role in regard to this (Nordlund and

Svedjedal) means that chapter books are interesting to study from a didactic-aesthetic perspective. The category is broad and sprawling. Within it is encompassed everything from short, simple tales to advanced novels with complicated narrative structures. Adaptations to the audience reflect the intended reader's development, and there are books that are appropriate for reading aloud, books that are appropriate for first, independent readings, and books that are appropriate for those who read a lot and have developed further in their reading skills. Such adaptations are seen in the language, range and narrative structure, but the distinction between easy-to-read books, which are intended for readers who have challenges with reading and writing, and beginning readers is not always clear. Motifs such as friendship, bullying and starting school, along with themes such as the struggle between good and evil or being one-self, are recurrent. There are also books in a number of different genres: fantasy, thrillers, realistic stories, fairy tales, horse books and football books.

Two lines in the books published can be detected: books with clear, didactic ambitions and books where the literary and aesthetic qualities are more prominent. But it must be noted that a number of the didactic books also have aesthetic qualities. In the same way, there can be a didactic streak among the more literary works.

The group of didactic books is large and broad. Didacticism is noticed in works that are clearly aimed at the beginning reader. Frequent words and short sentences ease reading, which at this stage is perhaps still slow and stumbling. Other recurrent features are short chapters, short sentences and text written in capital letters. The story itself is short and simple, too. *Lisen och skuggan* [Lisen and the Shadow] by Cecilia Sundh and Anna Nilsson is an example of a short but cohesive tale with moments of tension in it, where the reader is supported not just by funny pictures but also by short chapters that end in cliff-hangers, which drive the reader on.

In books such as *Illustratören* [The Illustrator] and *Snickaren* [The Carpenter] by Anna Hansson and Emelie Stigwan, the didactic is more explicit in the text. The reader learns about different jobs and learns specific words in connection to them. Other typical

didactic elements are word lists, maps and questions about the text. The group of more literary texts have exciting plots, deeper characterisation, humour, and motifs that are interesting and current for the target age group and that are handled without being overly explicit in their opinions or value judgements. These are books that are often undemanding in terms of technical reading skills but that provoke thoughts and conversations. An example are the books about the Monsterson family by Mats Wänblad and Pelle Forshed, which were published in 2020 as a collected volume along with a new book, *Pappa Monsterson fyller år* [Dad Monsterson Has a Birthday]. The reading experience lies in the way the message of the pictures contrasts with and complements the text in a clever way, like a funhouse mirror, which here happens because two genres, the everyday and the horror story, meet. This requires an aesthetic reading, where the reader has to pause in order to experience the story's characters and environments.

Jo Salmson and Åsa Ekström's fantasy stories about Tam, which were published in 2020 in the collected volumes *Tam och de åtta drakarna* [Tam and the Eight Dragons] and *Tam och den nya draken* [Tam and the New Dragon], can serve as an example of books that are more challenging in regard to language and narrative technique. The text's literary shape demands inferencing skills, while the typography, illustrations and exciting story have the potential to capture the reader. The language, which has a semantic depth, contributes to the excitement and the atmosphere. In one section of *Tam och de åtta drakarna* [Tam and the Eight Dragons], it says that Tam "ran", "rounded", "avoiding running directly into", "turned the corner", and "rushed" (54). In combination with the pictures, the reader is pulled along. The dragons' names Sky, Bleke, Röde, Letta, Moln, Smaragd, Svärta and Bella (Sky, Pale, Red, Letta, Cloud, Emerald, Black, and Bella) evoke images of the colour scale the dragons represent.

Överallt och ingenstans [Everywhere and Nowhere] by Oskar Kroon and Joanna Hellgren portrays everyday life with realism and depth, and it is both sad and exciting. The careful depictions, such as the scene where the protagonist Sillen cannot help taking a beautiful glass owl when she is watering her neigh-

bour's flowers, even though she is afraid of that neighbour, offers the reader the chance to identify with her, whereby the reader is drawn into the fictional world. Sillen is a thinker and she ponders classic philosophical thought experiments. The book therefore does not underestimate its reader in terms of linguistic choices or motifs.

In *Maryam och mormorsmålet* [Maryam and Grandma's Language] by Minoo Shams and Katarina Strömgård, the reader meets the refugee girl Maryam, who does not want to speak Swedish, both as a protest and out of fear that she will forget the language she has in common with her grandmother, who is still in Iran. Her experiences of school and life in Sweden are thought-provoking. It is also exciting to see what happens: will Maryam agree to learn Swedish in the end?

Among the chapter books, we also find works that are reminiscent of comics and digital media: typography with special characters interspersed within it, different fonts and font sizes, speech bubbles and other multimodal elements. Such texts place certain demands on the reader, including a willingness to read a non-linear text. Here, simplified language and other types of simplification can lead to a lacking narrative and loose plot and thereby hinder an empathetic reading.

A concluding reflection here is that the number of simple, thin books is large, which leads one to ask whether this is due to a "reading panic" (Martinsson) that is a result of reports showing decreasing reading comprehension among children and young people. Lists of questions at the end of the books and other accompanying didactic material encourages a strategic reading with the aim of supporting reading comprehension, which can be measured and is therefore in line with the culture of evaluation that rules in schools now (Widhe). But a unilateral focus on reading comprehension risks counteracting the subjective, aesthetic reading experience that researchers suggest contributes to making young readers keen to read (Nordberg).

Thus, what can appear easy can de facto hinder the desired development, while that which is more demanding has the potential to capture and challenge the reader, and therefore contribute to beneficial development and a genuine interest in reading.

A forgotten or hidden story? Historical themes in books for children and young adults 2020

Guest author: Andreas Hedberg

During the last decades, it has been shown that the number of books for children and young people with historical themes has decreased. In previous Book Tastings, Sbi has noted an apparent focus on contemporary times, and literary scholar Helene Ehriander has shown that the decline to historical children's literature started during the 1990s (*Bokprovning årgång 2017*, 9–12; Ehriander 77–78). An analysis of 2020's publications shows, however, that there are plenty of children's books that explore historical phenomena. But one has to adjust one's view somewhat to catch sight of them.

In order to explore historical themes in today's literature for children and young people, one can not only look at traditional historical novels. There is also a large number of books that take on history in other ways, often with a certain amount of experimentalism and playfulness. For example, there are hybrid genres such as historical fantasy, or books where the protagonists themselves carry out historical research. In terms of the latter, in 2020, there are books where this happens with the help of ghosts (as in Cecilia Rojek's middle-grade book *Poltergeisten* [The Poltergeist]), time machines (as in Ann-Sofie Jeppson and Örjan Modén's middle-grade book *Framtidsfararen Göteborg* [The Time-Travelling Gothenburg]), and magical libraries as in Hanna Blixt and Jessica Söderholm's chapter book *Lönndörrens hemlighet* [The Secret of the Hidden Door]. These books, with children as a sort of history detectives, take place both now and in the past. They can therefore be called diachronic depictions of history, as opposed to traditional historical novels, which take place in one point in time and can be referred to as synchronous.

It is easy to name differences between, on the one hand, hybrid books and diachronic narratives and, on the other hand, historical novels, but there is of course much that they have in common. Even historical fantasy can be written based on comprehensive research, and even traditional historical novels can combine fact and fiction.

In 2020, around a hundred books were published that contain some type of historical theme. Around half of them are non-fiction. Among the fictional works, historical themes are most common in middle-grade books, followed by chapter books and YA books. They are uncommon in other categories. Books for small children tend to take their subjects and environments from contemporary times, while the foremost audience for books with historical themes are children between the ages of nine and twelve.

The border between non-fiction and fiction is flexible in these books. For example, there are didactic elements in many of the fictional texts. In some cases, the literary text is complemented by fact boxes, as in Anna-Karin Andersson and Elin Jonsson's chapter book *Bronsåldern* [The Bronze Age] and Åsa Storck's middle-grade books *Sana och Taj Mahal* [Sana and the Taj Mahal] and *Itai och örnen* [Itai and the Eagle], with pictures by Anders Végh Blidlöv and Mattias Sköld.

One of the most common categories among non-fiction books is what can be described as women's stories or feminist depictions of history. Together with the always prominent category of dinosaur books, this type of book is actually the most common out of all the non-fiction works published in 2020. The phenomenon can be explained in part by the enormous success of Elena Favilli and Francesca Cavallo's non-fiction book *Good Night Stories for Rebel Girls*, which was published in Swedish in 2017, translated from English by Hans-Jacob Nilsson and Åsa Jonason. The book presents 100 historical women who have accomplished things in their lives and are presented as role models. Several of 2020's non-fiction works are clearly influenced by Favilli and Cavallo's choices and style, such as Annika Meijer and Helena Frank's *Curie & Co. Coola kvinnor som fått Nobelpriset* [Curie & Co: Cool Women Who've Received the Nobel Prize], and Birgitta Ohlsson and Lina Bodén's *Lev som du vill. Tio svenska kvinnor visar vägen* [Live as You Want: Ten Swedish Women Show the Way], which contain the same sort of miniature biographies as Favilli and Cavallo's book. The format was developed further in Elin Hägg's book *Dömda kvinnor. Förbryterskor i Sveriges historia* [Sentenced Women: Criminals in Sweden's History], which explores women who can be called neither heroes nor role

models, while at the same time the book shows how the definitions for what can be understood as criminal have changed throughout history.

The protagonists in literary books with historical themes are, as a rule, children themselves. As middle-grade books dominate the field, protagonists are often 9–12 years old. They are regular children on the periphery of events, rather than the historical personages themselves. Additionally, the books are nearly always about *competent* children, children who solve problems and mysteries without the help of adults, as in Camilla Lagerqvist's middle-grade book *Flykten till Amerika* [Journey to America], about the orphaned emigrant Ingrid, or in Patric Nyström and Per Demervall's middle-grade book *Hotet ombord* [The Threat On-Board], one of several works in a series about Lisa and Max and their adventures with historical inventors.

Violence, accidents and oppression are common themes. The protagonists' task is often to avoid danger or to act for good values, such as freedom and peace. So, in this way, the books are progressive. There is also a clear sense of forward movement in them. The children in the books are actors who strive to improve the world, as in another book by Camilla Lagerqvist, the middle-grade work *Pärllor av glas* [Glass Pearls], where fourteen-year-old Nessa has to confront the limited roles for women in the 1920s.

For authors, historical events are therefore a resource both in a narrative and political sense. Authors often find obstacles in history for their characters. And without obstacles, it is hard to write literary fiction; if everything is perfect, stories end quickly. But authors also turn to history when they want to write progressive narratives about how injustices can be fought. This is also part of the explanation for why certain historical periods are more popular than others. The wars and witch hunts of the 17th century attract many authors, as do the world wars of the 20th century.

Children's books with historical elements are thus not as uncommon as one might think, but there is much variation among them. History is a source for challenges, adventures and obstacles. It teaches us about people's dark sides. But in literature with historical themes, we also find strength, comfort and the ability to change.

Pandemics, viruses and the importance of washing hands

In the spring of 2020, books connected to the new pandemic were already beginning to be published. Several of them specifically refer to covid-19, but there are also books about pandemic-related subjects such as viruses, illnesses and hygiene. There are also books that probably were written before the pandemic became a reality, but which have become more current due to their content. It is hard to know when these books were written and whether they are based on covid-19 or not. In total, there are around 20–25 such titles, the majority of which are connected to the pandemic. Looking at the publication dates shows that many publishers reacted quickly after the pandemic broke out in March. A number of the books were published in the period between April and August.

There are both non-fiction and fiction books with pandemic-related themes. The literary ones are aimed mainly at younger children and many of them are picturebooks. There is a clear pedagogic touch to many of them. The authors explain what covid-19 is, what a pandemic is, and how you can avoid getting ill. Instructions on how to best wash your hands appear in many of the books. In the picturebook, *Corona och elefantavståndet* [Corona and the Elephant Distance] by Eva Lohmann and Dorothea Tust, the reader follows Selma and her family who are in quarantine and practice social distancing. Selma's parents tell her how the illness is spread and about the importance of keeping one's distance, ideally a distance that is the size of an elephant.

Last spring, the media reported about how people around the world were stockpiling toilet paper and how the shop shelves were empty. Lisa Kärmander and Emmelie Salomonsson used this as their starting-point for *Clara & viruset. Jakten på toapapper* [Clara and the Virus: The Hunt for Toilet Paper]. Clara, her big sister and their father go to the store to shop, but all the toilet paper is gone because a woman has taken it all from the shelf. In the book, the family talks about a virus, but covid-19 is not specifically mentioned in the text. On the other hand, the word "CORONA" is in capital letters on the newspaper that is on the book's cover.

Nor is covid-19 mentioned in the picturebook *Lär dig tvätta händerna* [Learn to Wash Your Hands] by Millis Sarri. In this book, a preschool is visited by doctor Anders, who tells them about bacteria, viruses and bacilli. Although covid-19 is not mentioned, there is an allusion to the pandemic as doctor Anders has the same name as Sweden's national epidemiologist, Anders Tegnell. Washing hands and having good hygiene is also something Pelle Svanslös teaches in two stories from the Pelle Svanslös school that Bonnier Carlsen published in response to the pandemic. The chapter book is called *Sjukdomar, virus och att tvätta händerna* [Illnesses, Viruses and Washing Hands] and was written by Maria Frensborg, with pictures by Ingrid Flygare. It was published in April in several languages. One of the stories, "Friskus blir sjuk" ["Friskus Gets Sick"], was published again a few months later as a Pixi book, that is, in mini-format, as *När Frallan blev sjuk* [When Frallan Got Sick].

In two of the books about pandemics, the reader is invited to draw a virus at the end of the work: the picturebook *Maja & Viruset* [Maja & the Virus] by Lena Algeskär talks about the change for Maja and her family that occurs when the pandemic breaks out, and in the picturebook *Covve och tvålen. En barnbok om Covid-19* [Covve and the Soap: A Children's Book about Covid-19] by Marlène Tamlin, we learn more about the virus monster Covve. The latter book was published first as an e-book and there were also other e-books that came out about the pandemic. Alfabeta publishers published the non-fiction book *Coronavirus. En bok för barn* [Coronavirus: A Book for Children], by Elizabeth Jenner, Kate Wilson and Nia Roberts and with pictures by Axel Scheffler, translated from English by Barbro Lagergren, as a PDF, and Nypon publishing company did the same with an easy-to-read non-fiction book, *Fakta om covid-19* [Facts About Covid-19] by Pernilla Gesén. Gesén's book has also been published in print format in 2021. Another work that came out in PDF format was the picturebook *Coronaboken* [The Corona Book], with illustrations by Louise Winblad, published by Apotek Hjärtat. It is also worth mentioning a project started by the International Board on Books for Young People

(IBBY) in China. Life Tree Books offers a number of picturebooks about the pandemic in PDF format in 18 different languages, although not Swedish.

Among the non-fiction works are books that refer to covid-19 but also offer a broader range of information about pandemics, viruses and other related topics. *Fakta om pandemier* [Facts About Pandemics] by Frida Bejder Klausen and *Virus* [Viruses] are both easy-to-read non-fiction books. *Fakta om pandemier* [Facts About Pandemics] gives an overview of earlier pandemics, such as the black death and the Spanish flu, but quite a bit of it is about covid-19. *Virus* [Viruses] focuses on viruses, what they are and how people can protect themselves. Susan Schädlich and Katharina J. Haine's non-fiction book *Mikrovärldens liv* [The Micro World], translated from German by Katharina Nahlbom has the subtitle *Allt om corona, virus, bakterier och hur vi kan skydda oss* [Everything About Coronavirus, Viruses, Bacteria and How We Can Protect Ourselves]. Some of the non-fiction books offer information about vaccine research, both historically and today. It is also worth referring to the republication of the non-fiction book *Piller och baciller. En liten bok om läkemedel* [Pills and Bacilli: A Little Book About Medicine] by Fredrik Brounéus and Nina Erixon-Lindroth, which was published for the first time in 2008. The 2020 edition was published in Swedish as well as in French, Spanish and English. The book describes the history of medicine, viruses and why people get ill, along with other topics.

Among the fiction books, there are no titles that have a plot that completely centres on covid-19. On the other hand, "corona" is mentioned in two books, both by the author Emi Gunér, *Nina i ettan* [Nina in Year One] and *Allas vän* [Everyone's Friend], with illustrations, respectively, by Loka Kanarp and Maja Säfström. Both works are chapter books, respectively about Nina and Paola's everyday lives. Nina is sitting and talking with some classmates one day when one of them says her mother has had "corona" (100). Meanwhile, Paola sits in her classroom and thinks about how it would be to live in a time before "corona and global warming" (23). Neither book is otherwise impacted by the pandemic and its restrictions. For example, Nina's pregnant mother goes to the swimming

pool, and her father has been to Spain on a work trip. Both books were published in the summer of 2020.

Three fictional works that were published in 2020 that do not mention the pandemic but that have become increasingly current because of their themes are Magnus Nordin and Lars Gabel's first two books in their YA series *Zonen* [The Zone], *Röd zon* [Red Zone] and *Grön zon* [Green Zone], and the middle-grade book *Sara och spanska sjukan. En berättelse om att överleva influensan 1918* [Daisy and the Deadly Flu: A 1918 Influenza Survival Story] by Julie Gilbert and translated from English by Marie Helleday Ek-wurtzel. Nordin's books take place in Stockholm in 2063, when the city has been divided into different quarantine zones after outbreaks of pestilence and war. Some young people turn out to carry a gene that makes them immune and it is their fight for survival that the reader follows. *Sara och spanska sjukan* [Daisy and the Deadly Flu] also has parallels to covid-19. Here it is the Spanish influenza that is ravaging, in 1918 in Minnesota. First World War is taking place and it affects the family in the book. At the same time, the Spanish flu is part of the story as it affects the town where the protagonist lives. It is easy to draw parallels between the worry the Spanish flu causes in the book and the worry people are experiencing with covid-19 today.

Play in 2020's picturebooks

Guest author: Emilia Hellberg

Children's play is something very commonplace. For this reason, it is easy to take it for granted. For example, literary studies do not do much research around play's function in children's literature. However, there are plenty of depictions of play, most of all in picturebooks. Since Sbi began presenting the most common subject words in the Book Tasting in 2009, play has almost always been among the top three for picturebooks, while it has at the same time been absent from the other age categories. This does not mean that play is not featured in books for older children, just that it does not have as prominent a role in the narratives so as to become a subject word. On the other hand, picturebooks' shorter time scales suit play as a motif as well as the spontaneity of play.

In the picturebooks from 2020, both adults and children play, and so do animals, often with anthropomorphised characteristics. Play most often takes place in the home, at preschool or in school, or outdoors. As a possible sign of play's everydayness, there are many examples of picturebooks where play takes place in the background and does not contribute to the plot in general. In contrast to this, there are a few examples where play becomes the main theme of the story, as in Per Gustavsson's picturebook *Den nya lekplatsen* [The New Playground], where two children on their way to a new playground play a game of pretend. Pretend play is about playing that something or someone is completely different. *Kalle och Elsa sover över* [Kalle and Elsa Have a Sleepover] by Jenny Westin Verona and Jesús Verona depicts a game of pretend between two friends. The way picturebooks can depict a fantasy landscape in images allows for the portrayal of a game of pretend, which is the sort of game that occurs most often in 2020's picturebooks. Beyond that, there are also lots of games with objects such as toys as well as social games such as hide-and-seek.

Children's literature often reflects the time it is written in, but there are exceptions. In a society where tech gadgets are taking up more and more space in both children's and adults' lives, there is a palpable lack of play depictions with, for example, mobile phones or tablets in these works. One exception is the debut work from Kristina Collén and Emmelie Salomonsson, *Den magiska mobilen* [The Magical Mobile], where the protagonist Mika and her dog find a magical mobile phone that rings with tasks that are to be carried out.

It is also worth noting the large number of adults who actively participate in games. In previous Book Tastings, Sbi has noted the absence of adults in children's literature, but in 2020's picturebooks, there are many adults playing with children. Most often, the adults are the parents or grandparents, but sometimes there are other adults, such as in *Vem kan hitta Putte?* [Who Can Find Putte?] by Ester Roxberg and Elisabet Ericson, where the playmate is a neighbour. In some cases, the grown-ups play only out of pleasure, as in Emma Adbåge's *Naturen* [Nature], in which everyone plays the games of seasons, but in other

cases, it is obvious that the adult has an aim to their play. For example, in *Nella har inte tid att gå och lägga sig* [Nella Doesn't Have Time to Go to Bed] by Peter Kvist and Astrid Tolke, Nella just wants to play, but her father manages to get her to go to bed by steering the game towards the goal: bed.

Among 2020's picturebooks, there are also examples of conflicts that can arise within play. *Bosse & Bella – syskon och bästa vänner* [Bosse & Bella – Siblings and Best Friends] by Måns Gahrton and Amanda Eriksson depicts an argument between siblings that leads to their parents stopping their games. There are also examples of a protagonist not wanting to play, as in *Jag bestämmer!* [I Decide!] by Ingrid Olsson and Anete Melece, where they explore how it feels to be forced together with other children against one's will. The few times the protagonist does not want to play, there is always a turning point that leads to them finally realising that it is fun to play. This shows that play is considered an ideal by adults: children *should* play.

Another perspective on the play ideal is seen in 2020's picturebooks: there is a greater tendency to depict playing alone, or to depict the lack of having someone else to play with. A recurrent scenario, such as in *Nattsyster* [Night Sister] by Karin Jacov and Mattias Andersson and *Alla utom Allis* [Everyone But Allis] by Eva Staaf and Clara Dackenberg, is that the protagonist wants to play but has no one to play with. When a playmate is found, the child can finally play. This is a category in which anthropomorphised animals are often the protagonists, as in the dogs who are looking for friends in *Doris – världens viktigaste jobb* [Doris – The World's Most Important Job] by Anna Holmström Degerman and Christel Rönns and *En egen flock* [A Flock of One's Own] by Maria Nilsson Thore.

A final recurring category in 2020's picturebooks is where play is a way for the person in the story to work through something, such as a fear or something they have just learned. This is particularly common in picturebooks for the youngest readers. In *Vera borstar tänderna* [Vera Brushes Her Teeth] by Katarina Ekstedt and Lovisa Blomberg, Vera learns about cavities and then plays tooth fairy. In *Vem vågar?* [Who Dares?] by Stina Wirsén, little Hund overcomes fears about playing on an outing by helping a baby not be frightened.

Playing is a universal and timeless phenomenon that has been reflected in children's literature since its beginning. Maybe this is why it is tricky to capture it in a particular historical context. The picturebooks from 2020 reveal many ways to depict children playing. Throughout, however, there is a tendency to use play as a way of saying something else, such as exploring difficult subjects, such as loneliness or fear. Rather than which games are played, perhaps it is the way that games are used that reflects the time.

Narrative techniques and forms

Most books for children and young adults published in Sweden follow well-established Western formulae for narratives, such as having a linear story with a happy ending. There are some exceptions, particularly among picturebooks, which often experiment with narrative techniques and forms.

Among the picturebooks from 2020 that play the most with linear story-telling is David Sundin and Alexis Holmqvist's *Boken som inte ville bli läst* [The Book That Did Not Want to Be Read], in which, as the title implies, a reader reads a book that does not want to be read. There are different strategies the book takes in order to avoid being read, such as changing or removing letters from the pages, coming up with new words, making the text bigger or smaller and refusing to finish when the reader says it is finished.

Several picturebooks also experiment with form. An example is Åsa Lind and Emma Virke's *Kom dagen, kom natten* [Come Day, Come Night], which is an expandable book that can be unfolded. One side of the book is about the last day of the summer, and the other side is about the night and its dreams. The picturebook *Lille Nö och Minsta Mo* [Little Nö and the Smallest Mo] by Hanne Kvist, Hanne Bartholin and Maria Lundén should be read with the spine upward. This means that exploring the story about the little elephant, who is considering whether there really are river monsters, has to be read forwards and not from right to left. The book also has several spreads that can be opened to double-size. In Maria Dek's *Korsåtvärsarna* [Crossings], translated from Polish by Julian Birbrajer, the pages are divided and cut into three equally-sized pieces. Each page depicts a person and the text on the three flaps says who the person is, that

the person is doing something and what the person is doing, such as "Speedy Henrik tracks wild animals" and "Friendly Emma tickles her lazy cat". The reader can then turn one or two of the flaps and combine people to make new stories. *Godnatt alla katter* [Good Night to All Cats] by Bàrbara Castro Urío, translated from Catalan by Linda Widman, is also interesting in terms of form, as it introduces colours and shapes to the young reader. The narrative involves saying good night to twelve differently coloured cats, who one-by-one go into the white house, which dominates all the spreads. When each cat goes into its room, the next spread shows a new window-shaped peephole through the board book. In the new peephole, the same colour shines that the cat has. Finally, on the last page, there are twelve windows in as many different colours.

A common way to work with the dynamics in picturebooks is to have the words and images saying different things. This results in what picturebook researcher Maria Nikolajeva calls counterpoint: that is, the images and words contradict or question one another, often in an ironic way (27–30). One type of counterpoint in 2020 is in Eva Lindström's picturebook *Bron* [The Bridge]. A pig is on its way northwards in a car and gets stopped by a wolf who says the bridge ahead is closed. Since the repairs will take a while, the wolf offers for the pig to come over for a snack. While the text is about the congenial meal, there are threatening signs and symbols in the pictures – the wolves' looks and leers; an axe on a chopping block, which is seen through the window of two pictures; a light that is on at first and then off once the meal is over – and they imply things will go badly for the pig. Then there is a surprise when the pig leaves after the meal and the wolf says, "Have a safe journey". On the last page, the pig stops and asks a bird about the bridge. The bird says, "There is no bridge here". Although several images implied the opposite, the wolves really just wanted to have a meal together, which adds a new twist to the classic story about the wicked wolf and the three pigs.

Technological developments are beginning to impact narratives in children's and young adult works more, not least how readers read the books. Digitalisation has the potential to expand fictional worlds in

many different ways. For example, fictional worlds can live a parallel life as websites alongside the book pages. In the last years, we have also seen many examples of books that include QR codes that can lead the reader to broadened experiences, such as by Augmented Reality (AR), which direct-sends realistic environments in 3D, often together with sound. An example from 2020 is the non-fiction book *Dinosaurier. Den ultimata boken* [Dinosaurs: The Ultimate Book] by Chris Barker, translated from English by Marie Helleday Ekwurtzel, where on several pages the reader can scan a QR code and then use an app to see dinosaurs in the environment they were thought to live in.

Most prose works for children and young adults are told in first- or third-person, but there are exceptions. In Karl Modig's YA book *Slagsmål* [Fight], the protagonist Conny flees into violence and fighting as a way of breaking from his past. The novel is told in second-person and is directed at a "you", the jealous partner Conny has broken up with. Also in the novel, time shifts between then and now.

Stylistic experiments in prose primarily exist in YA literature, and are more uncommon in chapter books and middle-grade books. As an example, there is Seluah Alsaati's YA book *Inte din baby* [Not Your Baby], a depiction of a relationship that centres on protagonist Samira's destructive relationship with her controlling boyfriend. Both the author and Samira are rappers, which influences the narrative. The language in the book has aspects of rap and includes many slang expressions as well as unusual word order. In Elizabeth Acevedo's YA book *Poet X*, translated from English by Yolanda Aurora Bohm Ramirez, the protagonist's interest in language and rhythm also affects how the book is written. The novel is about Xiomara, who grows up in New York, with immigrant parents from the Dominican Republic, and it is written in verse. Xiomara discovers writing and finds that she likes poetry, especially slam poetry.

Environmental issues and pollution

In last year's Book Tasting, Sbi asked Lydia Wistisen to study the multitude of books from 2019 that explored environmental issues. The tendency to fea-

ture the environment is almost as strong in the books from 2020 for children and young adults. Around thirty books have been given subject words related to environmental issues and pollution, but the theme also appears in books whose main subjects are something else.

Wistisen explored the climate and environment as prominent themes in 2019's books and argued that the topics appeared throughout the year's production, both in non-fiction and fiction works for all ages. The same tendencies are evident in 2020. There are, for example, non-fiction books about climate change and its consequences, such as *Virrigt väder! Varför förändras klimatet?* [Confusing Weather! Why Does Climate Change?] by Laura Ertimo and Mari Ahokoivu, translated from Finnish by Bo Samuelsson and *Hur mår livet under ytan? En bok med fokus på havets miljö* [How is Life Under the Surface? A Book that Focuses on the Seas] by Nellie, Annika and Klas Malmberg.

As was the case last year, this year there are also a number of books that aim to teach children and young people that they can contribute to change through having a more eco-friendly lifestyle. This can include decreasing food waste and cooking environmentally conscious food in order to decrease the mountains of rubbish or the use of plastic. Some examples of non-fiction books that tackle these subjects are *Fakta om matsvinn* [Facts About Food Waste] by Simon Randel Søndergaard, translated from Danish by Tomas Dömstedt, *Göra gott. Kokbok för unga miljöhjältar* [Make it Tasty: A Cookbook for Young Environmental Heroes] by Malin Landqvist and Victoria Voss, and *Uppdrag plastkampen* [Kids Fight Plastic] by Martin Dorey and Tim Wesson, translated from English by Malin Davidsson.

Another thing in common with last year's production is that the school-strike activist Greta Thunberg is mentioned in or said to be the inspiration for several works. Thunberg has, for example, inspired the picturebook *Greta och jättarna* [Greta and the Giants] by Zoë Tucker and Zoe Persico, translated from English by Marie Helleday Ekwurtzel. Also in 2020, a non-fiction work was published about her, *Greta Thunberg* by Maria Isabel Sánchez Vegara and Anke Weckmann, translated from Spanish by Elsie Formgren and Sten Sundström.

The fiction titles that raise environmental issues directly or indirectly include books about deforestation and littering, but also several dystopian narratives about how life is after pollution or other things have destroyed the world. Some books also explore the threat of destruction in different ways. One of those is Cecilia Lidbeck's middle-grade book *Familjen* [The Family], which is about life in a sect that has chosen a more extreme way of handling the destruction of the environment. Ella lives with the Family on a farm where one of their foundations is ecological thinking. They live off what they cultivate and they earn money by sewing patchwork quilts. The worldview that the children absorb at the farm is that humans have poisoned the earth with their chemicals and their way of life and that therefore the big Collapse is near. The adults say that by living in harmony with nature, the Family can survive, but that the people who live outside the fence that rings their farm are lost. The totalitarian regime and the ideas that rule within the Family are, in the end, depicted as problematic, but interestingly, from an environmental perspective, the sect members live in a way that many of this year's environmental books generally see as ideal.

Another example of a book that is about collapse, but in a different way is Linda Bondestam's picturebook *Mitt bottenliv. Av en ensam axolotl* [My Life at the Bottom: By a Lone Axolotl]. The little, endangered axolotl has a good life in its corner of the sea, but humans pollute the sea and this finally leads to a fire. The deluge that follows environmental destruction means that nature can take over again and the axolotl's reproductive abilities are repaired: from being the only young that hatched out of 987 eggs, the axolotl has 987 young with another axolotl. It is a happy ending for nature and animals, but maybe not for the reader, whose existence must end in order for the natural cycle of life to return. Humans are the greatest threat in Emma Adbåge's *Naturen* [Nature] too. When the people in one village shift from appreciating to getting fed up with and destroying nature in different ways, nature fights back with extreme weather.

As is clear from this analysis, much is similar to previous years, and the biggest difference is perhaps

not in the content but rather in how works are produced. In her analysis, Wistisen noted that around half of the ecocritical works were self-published or published by micro or hybrid publishers. Her analysis of this was that it revealed a lag among the established publishers in capturing the interest for books for children and young adults about the environment. In 2020, there were significantly more titles published by the established publishers, which suggests they have now caught up.

Bodies and norms

In many of the recent Book Tastings, Sbi has discussed themes related to the body, often connected to some form of problematising around how a human body should look and work. These are subjects that, to a large extent, continue to engage authors of literature for children and young adults.

In 2020's books, there are example of titles that aim to make disabilities and variations to abilities visible. An example is Kicki Polleryd and Håkan Gidebratt's chapter book *Vidar. En bok om ADD* [Vidar: A Book About ADHD], which is about Vidar, who has difficulties with attention and concentration. Another is Feridun Oral's picturebook *Lika men ändå olika* [Similar But Still Different], translated from Turkish by Hamdi Özyurt about a goat kid who is born with weak front legs. The shepherd who takes care of the goats makes a wheelchair for its front legs, so the kid can move like the other goats. The first three books of Karin Erlandsson's quartet of books about the Legend of the Pearl, which started with *Pärlfiskaren* [The Pearl Diver], were also published by a Swedish publisher in 2020. The protagonists Miranda and Syrsa both have ability variations in that they have both lost an arm when diving for pearls. As opposed to Polleryd and Gidebratt's book, whose aim is to refer to and problematise the difference in ability, this is nothing that is commented much on in Erlandsson's books. There are also other books where there are children and adults with disabilities or differences in ability and this is not discussed in the story itself. An example is Karin Cyrén's picturebook for small children *Hej hej hej!* [Hello Hello Hello!], in which an adult walks through the city with a child in a pram, meeting different people and dogs. Among those

is a person in a wheelchair. In Moa Wall Kubilius and Heidi Kosenius' picturebooks *Mamma och Liten fjällvandrar* [Mama and Little One Hike in the Mountains] and *Mamma och Liten på cykelsemester* [Mama and Little One on a Biking Holiday], there is a child with an insulin monitor on their arm, but diabetes is not mentioned in the text.

Several books published in 2020 connect to the body-positivity movement and seem to aim to show body types in different colours, shapes and sizes. An example of a pronouncedly body-positive book is Annika Leone and Bettina Johansson's picture-book *Bara rumpor på stranden* [Bare Bottoms on the Beach]. This is the second book about Mira, who this time goes on a train trip to Italy with her parents. They look for a beach that her father has heard is supposed to be nice and it turns out to be a nudist beach. On the book spreads, there are naked bodies depicted in all possible shapes, colours and genders. A book that more indirectly is body-positive is Baek Heena's photographic picturebook *En fe på badhuset* [A Fairy at the Bath House], translated from Korean by Sun-Kyoung Choi, in which the pictures are of dolls photographed in different scenes. A girl visits the bathhouse with her mother and meets an older woman that she starts to play with. 'The figures' naked bodies are depicted realistically, from the child's rounded tummy to the aging body's hanging breasts and rolls of fat. Fat or round people also are seen in, for example, Anete Melece's picturebook *Kiosken* [The Kiosk], translated from Latvian by Juris Kronbergs, and Julia Hansson's picturebook *Billie, Korven och havet* [Billie, the Sausage and the Sea]. In *Kiosken* [The Kiosk], the protagonist wears her kiosk as a shell, like a snail, as she is too large to get out of it. But it is not an obstacle for her having adventures.

The picturebook *Pappor ska va tjocka* [Dads Should be Fat] by Nils Andersson and Erik Svetoft has a very different attitude to the question of body sizes. It can be seen as a satirical criticism of the trend for dieting. The mother in the book thinks the father is too fat and tries to get him to exercise and diet. She finds out he has cheated and indulged in a restaurant, but it also turns out that she has read in the newspaper that the new style for men is to be round and soft. So his diet can be cancelled.

Another type of depiction that connects to topics around body norms is narratives where trans people's experiences are explored. Five such titles were published in 2020. Narratives about trans people often focus on the problems these people have every day, such as bullying and a lack of acceptance from their family and others close to them. This is true, for the most part, of 2020's books as well. In Line Baugstø's middle-grade book *Vi skulle varit lejon* [We Should Have Been Lions], translated from Norwegian by Helena Stedman, Leona is new to the school in order to get a fresh start after having been bullied in her last school, but here too, the trans part of Leona's identity is initially a problem. In John Boyne's *Min bror heter Jessica* [My Brother's Name is Jessica], translated from English by Anna Thuresson, Jessica contends with a lack of acceptance from family members. In both cases, the narrator is someone other than the trans person themselves and in both cases, the people around them change their perspectives during the course of the story.

A trans person who speaks for themselves in first-person is Månne in Ylva Karlsson and Sofia Falkenheim's chapter book *Månen, varelsen och jag* [The Moon, the Creature and Me]. The protagonist Månne is non-binary and uses a gender-neutral pronoun. Månne's YouTube channel serves as a diary, where they talk about life as a trans person and about the anxiety caused by not being understood and accepted. The story is like many other trans narratives for children and young people in that it is from the trans person's perspective and has the aim of telling the reader about being trans, but there have not been many books that have depicted a non-binary protagonist before.

The subject of gender identity is also explored in the non-fiction work *Boken för dig som är tjej. Ellen och Ninas guide till puberteten* [The Book for Girls: Ellen and Nina's Guide to Puberty] by Nina Brochmann, Ellen Støkken Dahl and Magnhild Winsnes, translated from Norwegian by Marianne Mattsson, along with other themes related to girls and puberty, such as menstruation, sex and sexuality.

Translations and depictions of other cultures

One of the most remarkable changes in 2020 is the continued decline of translations. Even though original Swedish publications also decreased in 2020 (by 4 percent), it was translations that were responsible for the majority of the decrease to the figures. Translated titles decreased by 15 percent, and this was after the number had already been decreasing in principle throughout the 2010s. This in turn means that the share of Swedish originals is at a historically high level. 64 percent (1298 titles) of the total published in 2020 is made up of original Swedish titles, while translations are only 36 percent (736 titles) (see Diagram 4). The gap is larger than it probably ever has been in the history of Swedish literature for children and young adults (see Mählqvist 59; Tellgren 71; Warnqvist 341). As was explained above, an explanation is that it is hard to reach an audience with translated literature and that the profitability in larger translation projects has disappeared as average print runs have decreased (see the section above entitled Picturebooks, YA books and translations decreased the most). As noted in last year's Book Tasting, other contributing factors are that publishers feel there is high quality work among Swedish authors and illustrators and that it is easier to have a close relationship with them, plus young people who know English often prefer to read English texts in English (*Bokprovning årgång 2019*, 19).

Non-fiction books and graphic works are the categories where the number of translations are the highest. 55 percent (189 out of 346 titles) of the non-fiction titles are translations and 83 percent of the graphic works are (72 out of 87 titles). 64 percent of the translations come from English, which is a couple more percent than in previous years. Otherwise, translations mostly come from the larger European languages, French and German, and from our neighbour languages, Danish and Norwegian. Very few titles are translated from other parts of the world than the West, which means that the absence is striking in terms of the lack of depictions of other cultures and narratives from South America, Latin America, Africa and Asia. When they do exist, they are almost always only in picturebooks (see Diagram 5).

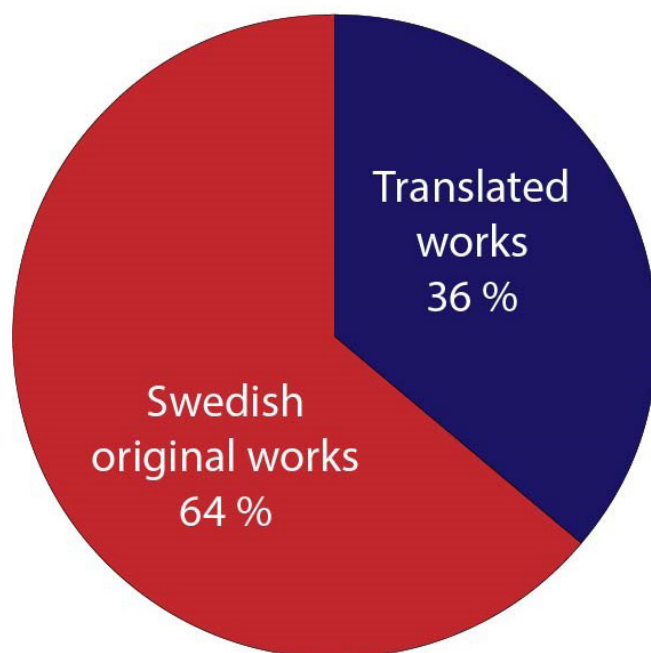


Diagram 4. Comparison between Swedish originals and translated children's and young adult books published in Sweden 2020. Source: *Bokprovning på Svenska barnboksinstitutet: En dokumentation. Årgång 2020, 2021*, p. 40.

It is above all small publishers that focus on publishing works from other parts of the world than the West, such as Mirando bok, and specialised publishers such as Hjulet and Trasten. The latter focuses on titles and authors from Africa, Asia, Latin America and other parts of the world that are poorly represented among the publications generally. Their publications expand the Swedish market for children's and YA books in terms of narrative and image aesthetics but above all in regard to perspective. Swedish originals seldom offer perspectives other than Western ones and when it does happen, it is almost exclusively depictions of immigrant children's or refugees' lives in Sweden, or Swedish children's perspectives on life in other countries. Peimaneh Mollazehi's middle-grade book *Den riktiga solen* [The Real Sun], for instance, is about cultural clashes when Salman goes with his mother and father to Baluchistan in Iran and meets a completely different culture than what he is used to in Sweden. In his parents' home village, there is no electricity and no school, the residents live in huts, and women and girls have limited rights.

During 2020, some titles by internationally renowned picturebook authors and illustrators from Asia were published. The Chinese artist and illus-

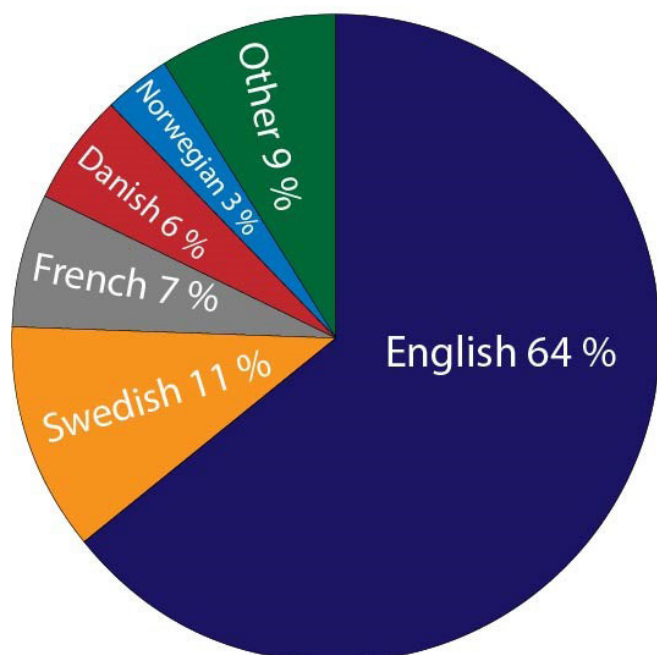


Diagram 5. The five largest source languages for children's and young adult books published in Sweden in 2020. Source: *Bokprovning på Sveriges barnboksinstitutet: En dokumentation. Årgång 2020, 2021, p. 45.*

trator Xiong Liang was inspired by older Chinese ink paintings in *Drakjägarna* [The Dragon Hunters], translated from Chinese by Anna Gustafsson Chen, the first of his approximately thirty picturebooks to be published in Swedish. The book is about a tribe who in past times lived off hunting dragons and still hope to find one today. In 2020, three books from Korean were published. JiHyeon Lee's *Dörren* [The Door] is a mostly wordless book, with a fictional language employed when some of the creatures speak, and with images in ink and chalk. A boy who lives in a sombre world depicted in black and white finds a key that fits into a door that has been overgrown. Behind it, there is a new community waiting in a colourful world. And two of South Korean author Baek Heena's picturebooks have been published in Swedish, the already-mentioned *En fe på badhuset* [A Fairy at the Bath House] and *Magiska godiskulor* [Magic Candy Balls], both translated from Korean by Sun-Kyoung Choi. Baek Heena received the 2020 Astrid Lindgren Memorial Award and her picturebooks are characterised by detailed images in which clay figures are photographed in miniature settings. *Magiska godiskulor* [Magic Candy Balls] is about a boy, Dondong, whose lonely existence is changed when he buys a bag of candy balls that make it possible for him to hear animals', people's, and things' thoughts.

From Farsi, for example, there is the picturebook *Vem känner herr Rosa?* [Who Knows Mr Pink?] by Mojgan Kalhor and Reza Dalvand, translated from Persian by Namdar Nasser, a story about colours that also offers a perspective on diversity. Anastasia Qarawani and Maja Kastelic provide a low-key tale in sepia-toned ink drawings about the loss of a beloved cat in the picturebook *Min katt Koozy* [My Cat Koozy], translated from Arabic by Elisabet Risberg. A few titles have been translated from Polish, such as the Polish children's classic about Mr Klex's magic school from 1946, *Herr Klex akademi* [Mr Klex's Academy] by Jan Brzechwa, translated from Polish by Tomas Håkanson, which in this edition has been illustrated by Swedish Jenny Berggren.

It is an exception when books from underrepresented areas come to Sweden via English or one of the other larger European languages, but that is the case with Marita van der Vyver and Dale Blankehaar's picturebook *Antifanter på taket* [Rhinocephants on the Roof]. It was translated from English by Ulla Forsén and comes from South Africa. John Kilaka's picturebook *Snabba Hare* [Fast Hare] is based on a folk tale from Tanzania and is painted in the African ting ting style with naïve images in intense colours. It was translated from German by Ulla Forsén.

Finally, there is an example of how even anthologies can offer an international perspective. In *Snäll* [Kind], translated from English by Barbro Lagergren, Axel Scheffler has gathered 38 well-known illustrators from different parts of the world to illustrate short texts by Alison Green, a project that aims to collect money to help refugees. The text offers universal messages about what it means to be kind and it was originally written in English, but the book as a whole is global, in the true sense of the word.

Translated by B.J. Epstein

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