Picturing Canada
The History of Canadian Illustrated Books for Children
An Exhibit on Display from March 8, 2022-May 31, 2022 in RBSC and the Ike Barber Learning Centre
Our exhibition, *Picturing Canada*, is located and situated on the traditional, ancestral, and unceded territory of the xʷməθkʷəy̓əm (Musqueam) people.

**Acknowledgements**

With special thanks to **Dr. Kathryn Shoemaker**, Adjunct Professor at the UBC iSchool, for guiding us on this exhibition journey. She stayed patient and supportive, despite our endless questions.

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And with appreciation to **Hannah McKendry**, Conservation Technician, for displaying our exhibition books.

Our exhibit, *Picturing Canada*, is named in tribute to the book by **Gail Edwards** and **Judi Saltman**, *Picturing Canada: A History of Canadian Children’s Illustrated Books and Publishing*. Their book was an essential resource to the curation of this exhibit. We are grateful for the outstanding scholarship in *Picturing Canada* which served as a guide to curating the collection.

**EXHIBIT CURATED BY JADE BAPTISTA, VANESSA BEDFORD GILL, SUE CHOY, ANGIE GOERTZ, LEÏLA MATT-KACAI, KIRA RAZZO, AND SARAH VAN MOOK**
Curated by UBC MLIS & MAS students:

**Jade Baptista**  
Jade Baptista is a third year MASLIS student at the UBC iSchool. Like many, she never outgrew her love for children's picturebooks, and she has continued to pursue that love for picturebooks in her current studies through librarianship. Her favorite illustrations are from Rashin Kheiriyeh in *Story Boat*.

**Vanessa Bedford Gill**  
Vanessa is a student librarian who drinks copious amounts of tea while reading picturebooks to her four children, even though they tell her that they are far too old for this pastime. She is in the second year of her MLIS, and upon graduation is planning to bother more children with her book talks as a children's librarian. Vanessa spends an unhealthy amount of time admiring the big skies in *Josepha* and wishes she could paint like Murray Kimber.

**Sue Choy**  
Sue Choy is a second year MLIS student and extremely grateful as a settler to be studying on the traditional, ancestral and unceded territory of the Musqueam people. Upon graduating, she is looking forward to pursing Children’s Librarianship with a community-led framework and social-justice lens. Her favourite illustration of the display is from the book, *Birdsong* (can be found in the Indigenous case) written by Julie Flett, where our young protagonist, Katherena first meets and befriends her elderly neighbor, Agnes, outside her home upon a field of snowdrops.

**Angie Goertz**  
Angie is a second year MLIS student and an elementary public-school teacher who loves borrowing children's library books to take along to classrooms she visits. She wants to choose all of the illustrations in the exhibit as her favourite! But, if she had to choose just one book, it would be the "Keep your eyes open, you ever know what's around the corner" feel of *Sidewalk Flowers*.

**Leïla Matt-Kacai**  
Leïla grew up in Montreal, Quebec, but she is currently studying at UBC. She holds a Master of Arts in Children’s Literature and hopes to become a children’s librarian. Her favourite illustrations can be found in *Virginia Wolf* and *Anne’s Kindred Spirits*.

**Kira Razzo**  
Kira is a second year MASLIS student in UBC’s iSchool. Believe it or not, she enjoyed creating the spreadsheets that helped organize the books for this exhibit! Her favourite illustration is from *Circle* by Jon Klassen.

**Sarah Van Mook**  
Sarah van Mook is a second MLIS student with a background in Art History and Visual Culture. She was very excited to create an exhibit that combines her favourite things: books, history, and art! Sarah grew up reading the Zoom trilogy by Tim Wynne-Jones, making her favourite book in the exhibit *Zoom at Sea*. The fantasy adventures of Zoom are so exciting, while Zoom himself is the cutest cat she has ever seen.
PICTURING CANADA

INTRODUCTION

Picturing Canada is an exhibition that will take visitors on a journey from the earliest published Canadian illustrated children’s books to current ones. Commencing with Northern Regions, published in 1825 to On the Trapline, a 2021 award winning picturebook, nearly 200 years of children’s books in Canada are covered. This exhibition explores the changing historical and cultural aspects of Canadian identity through the lens of children’s illustrated books. This exhibition is a testament to the artists, authors, publishers and ultimately readers, who shaped and continue to shape, children’s literary culture in Canada. The Picturing Canada exhibition can be thought of as a tapestry of over 120 Canadian children’s books, with each thread made up of our curated individual book selections. We could not hope to include every book and many threads were left out of the display, mostly due to space constraints. However, we encourage the visitor to celebrate the books we have chosen and ponder how they might picture Canada at different points in history.

Starting in 1825 with children’s books published in London, each display case chronicles distinct chapters in the history of children’s illustrated books. Early Canadian illustrated books, imported from England, often contained stories and illustrations of Canada as a land of snow and log cabins. These books about Canada were, more often than not, written to amuse British children. Anne of Green Gables let the world see a different side of Canada in 1908, as children and adults not only fell under the spell of Anne, but also Prince Edward Island. From a pop-up dollhouse to a graphic novel, publishers continue to celebrate all that is Anne Shirley. Up until 1970, under sixty children’s books were published each year in Canada. In the 1960’s French Canadian children’s picturebooks transitioned from a realistic style to a playful Montreal style. Experimentation by Quebecois authors and illustrators continued to see the creation of unconventional material during the last 50 years. Tundra Books, founded in 1967, emphasized the picturebook as a work of art and often published books with difficult themes.
Alligator Pie in 1974 was very successful, but it was not until the publishing house Annick received manuscripts from Robert Munsch in 1979 that book sales started to flourish. Kids Can publishing house, also established in the 1970’s, saw commercial success with the Franklin titles. Small, regional publishers began to establish themselves in the world of children’s books, such as Nimbus in Newfoundland, which focuses on Maritime stories. Groundwood Books was founded in 1978 to create a body of Canadian children’s literature, while highlighting the child’s point of view. The development of Indigenous children’s publishing began in the 1980’s with Theytus Books and Pemmican Publishing which allowed First Nations and Metis creators to tell their own stories. Prior to this, illustrated stories were often retellings of oral ones by non-Indigenous authors. More contemporary Indigenous books address issues of trauma, healing through language and cultural revitalization.

Picturebook artists began to receive some serious recognition with the establishment of the Governor General Awards for illustrated books in 1987. A rise in the publication of picturebooks with diverse content started to occur at the beginning of the twenty first century. Positive representation of BIPOC children as well as the LGBT2S+ community was welcomed in response to the underrepresentation for so many decades. Twenty-first century picturebooks encapsulate the idea of radical change. Whether it was original formats, themes or diversity, these new styles of picturebooks are quite different from their twentieth century cousins.

Thank you for joining us on a journey to explore this tapestry of Canadian illustrated books for children.

Please note that throughout this exhibit the books are listed in the chronological order of their publication to convey a sense of their place in the history of Canadian illustrated books.
Early Canadian

Of the eight books selected for display in this case, six were published in London between 1825 and 1868. Only two were published in Canada, *Little Grace* and *The Illustrated Maple Leaf*. These early Canadian illustrated books for children were created in an imperial era. Expatriate authors, or even those who had been armchair travellers to Canada, were creating literature, primarily for British children. Canadian children would have had to be content with these imported books which provided a filtered view of Canada.

These illustrated chapter books depicted a romanticized ideal of exotic and unfamiliar landscapes, peoples, and animals while also employing a stereotypical depiction of a settled Canada as a land of log cabins and ice. For example, the illustration of the iceberg in *Northern Relations* looks akin to a British Christmas cake resplendent with royal icing!

Although fantastical, the illustrations are not without colonial interjection. Indigenous cultures and peoples are anthropologically othered and the landscapes are depicted as needing to be tamed by the adventurers and settlers of the stories.

The illustrations in *Little Grace* appear more nuanced and the author, Miss Grove, would have sketched them while living in Nova Scotia. It is interesting to note that four of the books are written by female authors and *The Illustrated Maple Leaf* has a female editor too. Whether it was hunting, exploring, or documenting life at home, these books highlighted the differences between life in Canada and England.

**IN THIS CASE:**

1. Harris, John. *Northern Regions: or A Relation of Uncle Richard’s Voyages for the Discovery of a North-West Passage and an Account of the Overland Journeys of other Enterprising Travellers*. London: Cox and Baylis, 1825.


1900-1970

Canadian Children’s Library Services Expand but Their Books Are Primarily from British and American Publishers

This period in the timeline of Canadian children’s illustrated books was marked by significant development and change.

Before WWI, the domestic market for children’s books remained low; children’s books primarily focused on moral education, and only wealthy families could afford children’s books for amusement. Canadian creators wishing to become published faced many difficulties, largely because of the high cost of materials, and unknown success due to low demand. Children’s books were often a popular choice for gift giving, but those available to consumers were largely imported from Britain and the United States. Canadian publishers began to experience financial stability when Canadian-owned agencies started to act as distribution centres for British and American children’s book publishers in exchange for exclusive distribution rights, because they could bypass high start up costs and begin to take risks publishing original Canadian works. It took time to develop a strong list of Canadian-authored titles that rivaled the range issued in Britain and the United States. Canadian authors and illustrators who managed to be published internationally faced challenges of articulating Canadian themes and images.

The 1920s brought an expansion of children’s collections in centrally located Canadian urban public libraries with the addition of separate rooms for children’s materials. The Canadian public became more aware of Canadian authors and illustrated during this time. Books with clear curricular links were most likely to be selected for publication because the interwar period was marked by scarcities in resource and printing experience, and financial restraint. The Great Depression nearly crumbled the existing small domestic market, thus Canadian publishers still relied on imported children’s books to remain economically viable.

The formation of the Canadian Association of Children’s Librarians in 1939, brought professional recognition to children’s librarians along with the expansion of children’s services in public libraries, which further encouraged writing and publishing within Canada. When demand for illustrated books created in Canada began to increase in the 1940s, with many families experiencing stable employment opportunities, content was still highly nationalistic, with inauthentic stories featuring a romanticized past of Canada, relying on whimsical aspects of childhood. At this time, very few Canadian publishers could afford to focus only on children’s books.

In the postwar period (after 1945), librarians were tasked with identifying and valorizing “literature of enduring quality” (Edwards & Saltman, 2010, p. 51). As the domestic market grew, librarian reviewers like Sheila Egoff, Toronto Public Library (TPL), maintained a strong commitment to high standards in selection and purchase of children’s books for the TPL collection, to ensure published works rivaled those from other countries. Lillian Smith, head of TPL’s Boys and Girls Division, believed “only the best is good enough for children” (Edwards & Saltman, 2010, p. 51). As school libraries developed more fully throughout the 1950s and 1960s, children’s books still did not receive serious attention largely because of the uncertainty of making a profit.

Perspectives of children’s literature began to change in 1965, with the publication of Literary History of Canada. Through funding support from Canada Council and Humanities
Research Council of Canada, Canadian literature started to be taken more seriously. As Canadian publishing transitioned from trade books, with a general readership primarily focused on travel stories, into specialized picturebooks, the content began to resemble more realistic depictions of daily life with a strong focus on Canadian identity to “create a shared national consciousness” (Edwards & Saltman, 2010, p. 53).

Used primarily by librarians and teachers, *In Review*, the first Canadian library journal to review children’s books from 1967 – 1982, played a critical role in “connecting various communities of readers” (Edwards & Saltman, 2010, p. 67). By the end of the 1960s, Canadian picturebook design looked much different. The mantras of excellence in presentation, style, and structure, supported by early librarian reviewers guided the development of new domestic publishers who began to focus solely on children’s books in the 1970s.

The creation of the Canadian Children’s Book Centre 1977 was instrumental in raising public and professional awareness of Canadian children’s books. The Children’s Book Festival, revived in 1977, and book creator tours funded by the Canada Council, proved to be invaluable to Canadian authors’ and illustrators’ careers and thus Canadian children’s book publishing.

**IN THIS CASE:**


Children’s Publishers


At the start of the 1970s, not many publishers in Canada were ready to take a risk on children’s publishing. Thus, while Canadian divisions of Oxford University Press and McClelland & Stewart produced critically acclaimed books over that period, few other publishers were ready to follow their lead. However, by the end of the decade, things had changed and the production of children’s books in Canada doubled, passing from 30 to 60 books a year to 60 to 100 books a year.

The publishing house, Annick, began in 1975 by producing books written BY children FOR children. However, by 1979, the company had changed its focus, choosing instead to publish books which reflect the point of view of their child audience. The Annick approach to children publishing is best represented by Robert Munsch, a picturebook author who wrote many stories for the publishing house, his irreverent and anti-authoritarian style matching perfectly with Annick’s focus on child empowerment.

While the publishing house Kids Can began with similar ideals as Annick’s, the two houses have long since taken different paths. Beginning in 1973 as a ten-person collective of artists and writers, Kids Can published books which taught children notions of equality. It was not until the publishing house was sold and became a private enterprise that its focus changed. Although Kids Can has and continues to publish many artistic books, worthy of awards, the company is also very much interested in marketability. Their first commercial success, Paulette Bourgeois’ Franklin in the Dark (1989), the first of the Franklin series, remains their largest success to date.

This case looks at the history of Canada’s children publishing’s industry starting in the 1970 onward with a deeper look at Annick and Kids Can and their important contributions to Canadian children’s literature history.

IN THIS CASE:

**ADDITIONAL BOOKS:**


Regional Publishers

Everyone Has a Story to Tell

For many authors, including those new to writing and up-and-comers, it can be difficult to break into the world of published children’s books. Larger publishers are often reluctant to take on authors who do not have previous publications, as it is hard to know if their work will do well when they have not yet established themselves. And for those writing on very specific and niche material, their books might lack appeal for publishing houses that usually work with more general content.

When a large publisher is reluctant, a regional publisher may be interested. Regional publishers have been around as long as large publication houses, and usually specialize in works specific to the region they are located in, or authors from that area. Publication on a small scale does not necessarily mean that a book will receive less attention. Numerous authors have found large scale success through regional publishers, including Sue Ann Alderson, author of the Bonnie McSmithers series. Alderson had been having issues getting published by large publishers, who were reluctant to sell a series about a single mother. She sent her books to Tree Frog Press, a small publishing house willing to take a chance on her.

Sometimes authors may be looking for a publisher that publishes specific content. Theytus Books, specializing in Indigenous materials by Indigenous authors, and Nimbus Publishing, which focusses on Maritime stories and authors, are two examples of regional publishers which produce specific content (being located in British Columbia and Newfoundland, respectively). Similar to Nimbus, Peanut Butter Press also publishes books by authors from their location, Manitoba.

IN THIS CASE:

Founded in 1967 by May Cutler, Tundra Books is Canada’s oldest English publishing company for children and young adults. Tundra Books is known internationally for publishing high quality, award-winning books. Early in Tundra’s beginnings, based in her home of Westmount, Quebec, Cutler focused on publishing books of enduring value; those that would appeal to readers beyond a ten-year life span.

Cutler personally sought out illustrators to create “picturebooks as works of art” (Edwards & Saltman, 2010, p. 160). She often pitched story ideas directly to professionally trained artists, though some of the artists published by Tundra in the early days were self-taught; most had never been published before (O’Reilly, 2007).

From the very beginning, Tundra Books published books that tell personal yet universally appealing stories that sometimes delve into difficult and dark themes (e.g., A Child in Prison Camp, by Shizuye Taskashima). The emphasis on exposing children to a wider variety of topics contrasts from the content of earlier Canadian children’s books which primarily sought to educate children about morality and/or parts of Canadian cultural history.

To offset initial high costs of first prints in Canada, Cutler opened Tundra Books of Northern New York in 1971, expanding Canadian picturebooks into American editions. Sales from American editions were vital to Tundra’s economic success as were visits to international book fairs by staff, authors, and illustrators. Edwards and Saltman noted the challenge of Canadian publishers in predicting which books would be best sellers in a competitive market.

Several Canadian editors experienced trial and error during the early years in children’s book publishing, which lead to strong mentorships as younger generations entered the field of book publishing.

The 1980s were marked by rapid expansion in children’s book publishing in Canada. Lower production costs and increased financial support (e.g., Canada Council Block Grant funding for publishers) were met with limited technology availability, which lead publishers to seek out international companies to complete book processing. This access to expanded technology capabilities dramatically changed Canadian picturebook design.

Though some early books found international popularity (e.g., A Prairie Boy’s Winter, by William Kurelek), success in one country did not guarantee success in another. As Canadian publishers expanded into the international marketplace, they sometimes faced difficulties in appealing to wider audiences due to differences in cultural norms. For example, Children of the Yukon by Ted Harrison was turned down by German publishers because of the lack of facial features in the illustrations. At the same time, Cutler also turned down international books because of Canadian cultural norms.

In 1995, Tundra Books was sold to McClelland and Stewart, operating in Toronto as a separate imprint under the direction of editor Kathy Lowinger. Lowinger expanded the list of genres, including fiction for young adults, non-fiction, and expanded the traditional notions of picturebook length (e.g., The Killick, by Geoff Butler). Currently under the editorial direction of

IN THIS CASE:


ADDITIONAL SIGNIFICANT BOOKS IN TUNDRA’s EARLY YEARS:


Groundwood Books

Canada Publishes Canadian

Prior to the 1980s in Canada, it was difficult to find Canadian-published children’s literature and most books available for purchase were either publications from the United States or the United Kingdom. The lack of publishing opportunities subsequently resulted in few purely Canadian publications in the children’s literature market. This gap was recognized by Patsy Aldana who, in 1978, founded Groundwood Books with the belief that Canadian children were entitled to find their own lives and experiences in their books.

Groundwood Books strove to publish books distinct in their quality, content, and national identity. They were unafraid to tackle difficult stories and represent voices that historically had been underrepresented or marginalized by other publishing houses. Aldana served as editor, publisher, and art director alongside co-art director Michael Solomon, ensuring that the illustrations visually communicated the stories while intimately connecting to the text.

Aldana was successful in creating a canon of Canadian children’s literature, publishing classics such as Tim Wynne-Jones’ Zoom trilogy, and Betty Waterton’s A Salmon for Simon. Many Groundwood Books publications have received accolades for their contributions to Canadian children’s literature including the Amelia Francia Howard-Gibbon award for illustration and the coveted Governor General’s Award for English-language children’s literature.

IN THIS CASE:

Lucy Maud Montgomery was born on November 30, 1874, in Clifton (now New London), Prince-Edward-Island. After the death of her mother, when Maud was still an infant, she was left in the care of her maternal grandparents by her father who moved away to Saskatchewan. Much like her most famous heroine, Maud found herself, an only child being raised by an elderly couple on Prince-Edward-Island, and much like Anne, Maud discovered a taste for reading and writing from an early age, beginning to write her own poetry at the age of nine. This early love for the literary world culminated in 1905, when Montgomery wrote the manuscript for her first novel, *Anne of Green Gables*.

*Anne of Green Gables* was published in 1908 by L.C. Page & Company, a publishing house in Boston, and the story of Anne Shirley, a red-haired orphan girl sent by mistake to live with a pair of elderly siblings who had requested a boy in her stead, took the world by storm, becoming an instant bestseller. To this day, *Anne of Green Gables* remains one of Canada's most popular novels and is considered a classic of Canadian literature.

Montgomery married the Reverend Ewan Macdonald in 1911. The couple moved to Ontario where Montgomery continued to write novels and short stories like *The Story Girl, Emily of New Moon*, and *The Chronicles of Avonlea*. Maud Montgomery Macdonald died in Toronto, Ontario on April 24, 1942. She is buried on her beloved island in the Cavendish cemetery.

**IN THIS CASE:**


French Canadian

‘The Montreal Style’

This case encompasses Canadian children’s picture books from French and Québécois authors and illustrators. Within this case we distinguish the development of art styles and narrative differences over time between francophone authors and illustrators in Quebec and anglophone authors and illustrators in the rest of Canada.

Earlier French-Canadian children’s picturebooks were products of an emerging publishing industry for children that was heavily influenced by the Catholic church. These earlier books could be characterized by their focus on realism and their transitioning from black and white illustrations to a colored illustrations with a basic palette.

After WWII and into the 1960s, the emphasis on realism evolved into an emphasis on aesthetics. The illustrations became more diverse, graphic, abstract, and playful, culminating in a distinct style - ‘the Montreal style’ – which drew on cultural and artistic preferences. Inspirations for illustrations can be found in European styles of illustration and contemporary art movements. From the 1970’s and into the present, this exploration and experimentation is carried out not only in the illustrations of children’s books but also in the narratives, expressing a willingness to take more unconventional risks than English Canadian children’s literature.

While we feature authors like Marie-Louise Gay and Isabelle Arsenault whose influences are seen across the French-Canadian children’s picture book industry, we also include exceptional authors, illustrators, and books from the 1930s to the present.

IN THIS CASE:
From “Vanishing Indian” to #Own Voices

In the history of Canadian children’s illustrated publications since the late 19th century, there has been no shortage of depictions of Indigenous peoples of cultures. However, when we view these early publications with a contemporary lens, it is obvious that these works were inaccurate misrepresentations that were offensive, patronizing, and problematic. Written by non-Indigenous settlers, Indigenous peoples and cultures were largely romanticized notions of the “Noble Savage” or “Vanishing Indian” with the intent of erasing Indigeneity and firmly placing Indigenous cultures and peoples in the past.

The body of illustrated Indigenous stories written prior to the 1970s were typically “retellings” of well-known traditional oral stories by non-Indigenous creators for non-Indigenous audiences, with the ironic viewpoint that the stories were being “saved” from being lost and polished with western literacy sensibilities. This case starts with such an example with a retelling of a Mountain Goats of Temlaham, that has been intentionally included to first, remind us to view books containing Indigenous content with a “critical Indigenous lens”, and secondly, to mark its importance in this history as the first Canadian picture book and the path it paved for the emergence of authentic Indigenous representations.

From the 1970s to 1980s, we begin to see a shift in the landscape with a more critical perspective on cultural appropriation and the challenges of translating orality into textuality, questions of authenticity, and the marginalization of Indigenous voices. The first two Indigenous owned and operated publishing houses, Theytus Books and Pemmican Publishing emerged in the 1980s that focused on providing First Nations and Metis creators a platform to tell their own stories in their own terms that reflected their experiences and cultural protocols.

The books in this case were selected to highlight and celebrate Indigenous storybooks in “own-voices”. Within them, you will find Indigenous creators who frame traditional stories in contemporary settings; speak their truths of attending residential schools while sharing their stories of healing through language and cultural revitalization; and highlight the importance of intergenerational relationships and their connection to the land. We hope that it provides an enjoyable and thought-provoking experience!

**IN THIS CASE:**

For new and old readers alike, it will probably be apparent that readers of children’s books struggled to find diverse representation of characters and topics. Historically this was due to blatant discrimination and prejudice related to systemic societal problems. Although there are some older examples of children’s literature which challenge these pervasive (and often harmful) biases, they were not the norm.

There has been a significant turnaround in the last three decades, particularly in the 2000s, which has seen an explosion of diverse content. This includes dynamic, positive representation of folks with mental and physical disabilities, Black, Indigenous, People of Colour (BIPOC), and the LGBT2S+ community, who have been drastically underrepresented in children’s books. These books present wonderful stories of positivity and empowerment for readers who may have not seen themselves represented in the past.

“Diverse” content in the past was often conveyed by creators who should not have been disseminating them, good intentions or otherwise. And, although these older proto-diverse works helped lay the groundwork for the diverse content we see now, it is important to remember that much of it does not come from and is not endorsed by the communities it is meant to represent. Newer publications have elevated creators within these communities, allowing them to present their stories their way. When interacting with older material, it is important to keep in mind who it was created by, and who it was created for.

Here you will find examples of both old and new diverse content. Characters and subject matter vary widely and include nuanced depictions that some readers may have never seen or experienced before.

**IN THIS CASE:**


The Governor General’s Award

The books in this case are all winners of the Governor General Award Young People’s Literature – Illustrated Books category. These nine books span 35 years of the award, and our aim is to highlight different artistic styles over the last four decades. Each book is unique, and the illustrations judged to be of high artistic merit.

The purpose of the Governor General Awards is to recognize Canadian authors and illustrators in the book industry. The literary prizes were established in 1936 and the Canada Council for the Arts assumed responsibility for the awards in 1959. It is only in the last 35 years that illustrations in picture books have been recognised. From 1987 to 2015 the award was referred to as the Children’s Literature categories, but it has now been changed to two distinct categories: Young People’s Literature - Text and Young People’s Literature - Illustrated Books. The winners each receive $25,000.

Each year, peer assessment committees form the Canada Council’s decision-making process. The committees are composed of writers, illustrators and independent book professionals who choose a winner and four finalists. The committee evaluates the text and illustrations for the Illustrated Books category, and how well the two components complement one another. The committee is also encouraged to consider the values and concerns of the Canada Council, which include decolonization, equity and diversity. This is to ensure that award winning books contribute to the evolution of the Canadian arts and literary scene.

The first winner in 1987, illustrated by Mary-Louise Gay, is displayed in the case as is the 2021 winner, illustrated by Julie Flett. Although we are only able to display the illustrations of 9 of

IN THIS CASE:


The picture books in this case are all books that have been published in the 21st century and, while it is difficult to try to encompass the evolution of contemporary Canadian children’s picture books in the breadth of so few books, we have tried to capture a sense of the incredible scope of Canadian children’s picture books that have been published in the last 22 years.

These are books that can be distinguished and set apart from those published in the 20th century based on a combination of attributes, such as the extensive variety and blend of genres, themes that are more mature and characters that are increasingly diverse, and illustrations that don’t just mirror the text but that may even act as the only means of storytelling. They are products of a ‘Radical Change,’ as Dr. Eliza Dresang claims, in Canadian children’s literature characterized by originality - a kind of originality that engages with new forms and formats, changing perspectives that include diverse voices and experiences and changing boundaries that explore topics previously ignored or shied away from - and we turned to these areas of change throughout to inform our choices.1

While this case does encapsulate books published within the 21st century and attempts to include a range of books about contemporary interests, topics and issues, it is meant to provide a general overview of such books and highlight some of the most prominent areas of change. We likewise based our choices on the works of some of the most popular and prominent Canadian children’s books authors and illustrators today, such as Jon Klassen and Kyo Maclear, who have become mainstays within the picture book world of Canadian children’s literature.

IN THIS CASE:


ADDITIONAL BOOKS:


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