



Report on ChLA 2025 Virtual Conference

Several years ago, to encourage global participation, help offset rising costs, and reduce our environmental impact, ChLA's Executive Board decided to alternate between virtual and in-person meetings. The Board also assumed the task of planning, designing, and administering the conference. The 2025 meeting of the Children's Literature Association—our fifty-first annual conference—was held virtually from June 10 to 14, with pre-conference activities beginning on June 9. In June 2026, the meeting will be held in Pittsburgh, and 2027 will return ChLA to the virtual realm.

The 2025 theme, "Shortcuts and Tesseract: Time/Space in Children's Literature and Culture," "encourage[d] interrogation of the intersections found in young people's texts between physics and metaphysics, phenomenon and the phantasmagoric" and the CFP invited papers to "subvert and rework these limitations" of time and space. The call circulated in early fall with a proposal deadline of Nov. 15. Acceptances went out by early March, with the schedule following soon after. Consisting of seven Board members, plus Elizabeth Leach-Leung and Leah Phillips, "Team Virtual" oversaw the planning process with help from the full Board, members of ChLA's Membership and Accessibility Committees, and ChLA's Association Manager Cate Langley.

The conference was conducted using the Whova conference platform plus Zoom, with five dedicated Zoom rooms. Participants were invited to present work either asynchronously or synchronously—a significant advantage of the virtual format. Those participating asynchronously submitted their talks in advance, and those talks were made available to all participants during and after the conference. Those presenting synchronously attended morning or afternoon sessions designed to capture an array of time zones. Live presentations were also recorded and made available.

To accommodate the virtual format, some changes were made to the traditional conference schedule, among them: 1) the membership/business meeting was moved up earlier in the week, to encourage involvement, and included a ChLA Awards spotlight; 2) the presidential address was recorded and made available throughout the conference; and 3) the Francelia Butler Lecture was collaboratively delivered by three speakers (Derritt Mason, Angel Daniel Matos, and Katharine Slater). Such changes aside, the conference featured many of the usual events, such as the Editors' Roundtable and the Syllabus Swap. The Global Committee took advantage of the online format by hosting a session called "Let's Build a Bibliography" while the two Phoenix Committees hosted a remarkable four authors in their combined session. Nearly all the events were recorded and kept available to attendees for a month following the conference.

The conference was a great success based on responses to the post-conference survey, with an overall satisfaction rating of 4.6 out of 5. The virtual format made possible both the continuation of regular conference features and various innovations in format and content. Participation was robust and energetic, with session attendance strong across the board and comparable to attendance at in-person conference sessions. 294 people registered for the conference, including presenters. A number of first-time attendees joined us, and the overall cohort was decidedly more international than usual. Each panel had both a moderator and an IT host, all of whom underwent training provided by the Accessibility Committee. The Accessibility Committee provided guidance for all attendees, and most presenters followed accessibility best practices, further enhancing the collective access. The Butler Lecture was met with great excitement, due to the quality of the presentation and the collaborative format itself.

The post-conference survey reflected the very positive satisfaction ratings. Participants noted, among other things, the high quality of presentations, the ease of access, the affordability, and the opportunity to network through Zoom and the Whova platform. On top of that, the conference ran a small profit of about \$5,000, a good development given that we often lose money on in-person conferences due to venue expenses. While we look forward to meeting in person next year, we are encouraged by the advantages and success of the virtual meeting and are already planning for 2027.