

Call for Papers: The Sixth International Children's Literature Symposium (ICLS)
Hosted by the University of Antwerp
In collaboration with the University of Pittsburgh and Ocean University of China
25-26 June, 2026

The Citizen-Child: Global Perspectives on Children's Literature and the Making of Modernity

Featured Keynote Speakers: Shih-Wen Sue Chen, Nina Christensen, Kai Harne Hanson, Zhu Ziqiang

Around the world, children's literature has been both an engine and a product of national and transnational processes of modernity/modernization, including the circulation of new philosophical, political, and educational ideas about childhood. As nations have sought to define themselves and their futures, they have often looked to an idealized child citizen—or a citizen *imagined* as childlike—as a symbol of innocence, potential, revolution, and innovation. At the same time, modern children's literature and childhood reflect modern realities as much as ideals, and global/transnational movements as well as national ones. Children across the globe have participated in the modern world as learners, consumers, workers, activists, and creators. Modern children's books reflect and are shaped by global circulation and adaptation, technological innovation, publishing markets, censorship laws, and educational policy.

With these complexities in mind, we invite papers that address the active role that children's literature and children themselves have played—and continue to play—in modernity and modernization around the globe. We are particularly interested the roles that children and children's literature have played in different countries' modernities; how/whether children's literature drives the process of global modernization; how modernity has created transnational relationships, collaborations, and movements around children's literature; and how children's literature and child activists react to the challenges that stem from modernity. We anticipate that this topic will allow for rich comparative and interdisciplinary conversations.

We welcome submissions that explore (but are not limited to) the following topics:

- Global modernity and its diverse forms, including how children's literature in different countries portrays and/or engages with significant historical periods, ideas, and literary forms related to modernity or modernization
- Comparative analysis of how different cultures have depicted the “modern child”
- The citizen-child, both as a national/transnational/global symbol of modernity and a living participant in national/transnational/global modernities
- The movement of modern ideas and texts across borders, including the role of translation, adaptation, and cultural exchange in shaping children's literature and literary canons globally
- The impact of technological advancements on the creation, dissemination, and consumption of children's literature, including their uneven adoption and how this might influence literary forms and children's access to books

- The geopolitics of children's publishing, including how economic and political forces such as international publishing markets, censorship laws, or intellectual property rights influence the content and availability of children's books in a modern global context
- How children's literature has reflected driven social, political, and cultural movements during different periods of modernity, including nation-building, social reform, education, industrialization, decolonization, and evolving gender roles
- The representation of global crises of modernity, such as environmental disasters, war, diseases, technological changes, and social inequality, in children's literature from different parts of the world
- The experiences of marginalized children, including indigenous children, child workers, and child migrants, refugees, and asylum seekers, as reflected in children's literature that thematizes aspects of modernity
- Decolonial and postcolonial perspectives, including how children's literature from and about formerly colonized nations engages with modernity, and how traditional views of childhood are represented or challenged
- The use of children's literature as a tool for propaganda and/or social commentary in a modernizing world
- Children as agents of global change; including how child activists and their representation in literature and media contribute to or challenge global narratives of progress
- Children's voices on modernity, such as how children express views on the modern world through their own writing, activism, or media
- Counternarratives to modernity as reflected in children's literature and children's activism

We welcome submissions of individual papers and pre-formed panels with 3 papers. Submission of complete panels is especially encouraged and is likely to increase the acceptance rate.

Completed panel proposals should be submitted by the panel chair and include:

- Chair's name, affiliation, and a brief biography (100 word max)
- Panel Title
- Summary of Panel (250 word max)
- Individual paper abstracts (250 word max)
- Panelist's names, email addresses, affiliations, and brief biographies (100 word max)
- 3-5 relevant keywords
- Note: We strongly encourage panel organizers to ensure they have a diverse set of panelists. Given the theme, we especially invite you to consider geographical representation on your panel.

Individual paper proposals should include:

- Presenter's name, affiliation, and a brief biography (100 word max)
- Abstract (250 word max)
- 3-5 relevant keywords

Deadline for Submissions: December 1, 2025

Notice of Acceptances: December 20, 2025

Contact: Courtney Weikle-Mills, caw57@pitt.edu

There will be a companion special issue of Children's Literature Association Quarterly (ChLAQ) on the conference topic, edited by Courtney Weikle-Mills and Xu Derong. Completed manuscripts of 20-30 pages will be due August 8, 2026. Please see [this page](#) for further submission guidelines. Send inquiries to Courtney Weikle-Mills at caw57@pitt.edu.

The International Children's Literature Symposium, launched by Ocean University of China, began in 2012 as a transnational dialogue between Chinese and American children's literature scholars. In 2016, it expanded to its current international format, inviting all colleagues in children's literature from around the world to present on their research.

Previous symposiums were organized at:

- Ocean University of China (2024)
- Newcastle University (2023)
- Ocean University of China (2021)
- Princeton University (2018)
- Ocean University of China (2016)
- University of South Carolina (2014)
- Ocean University of China (2012)