



2020: New Year Predictions

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Byline:

What will be the big issues for children's books in the year ahead?

What will be the main talking points and issues for the children's book world in the year ahead? Key figures share their hopes, intentions and predictions.

Cressida Cowell

As **Waterstones Children's Laureate**, I am launching two big campaigns this year: one on creativity and one about school libraries. I hope that everyone feels as passionately as I do about the importance of both. As it says on my Laureate Charter, every child has the right to be creative (without being marked) for fifteen minutes a week. Every child also has the right to read for the joy of it, and to access new books in a well-stocked school library.

2019 was the year that kids around the world marched to protest climate change, and I hope 2020 is the year that the adults actually listen. Every child has the right to have a planet to read on.

Nick Poole, Chief Executive, CILIP, the UK library and information association

CILIP has announced 'Books and Reading' as our theme for 2020 in celebration of the surge of interest in readership and the fantastic work being done by publishers, authors and illustrators.

Libraries today are built around a core offer of 'books, digital and amazing experiences', which is helping us to reach a new audience and give a new relevance to people's daily lives. Our ambition is see a world in which readers can discover great, diverse books through libraries and bookshops, publishers can run successful businesses and authors are recognised and paid for their work - and where we all understand the value each other brings to our 'Nation of Readers'. We hope that 2020 brings us closer to this reality.

It has been good to see the book world starting to think hard about its role in addressing climate change and in making real progress on equality, diversity, inclusion and representation. Here's hoping this leads to real, lasting change in 2020!

Jill Coleman, Director Children's Books

In 2020, **BookTrust** will be publishing an update of our **BookTrust Represents** research. Our previous research showed that, in 2017, under 6% of published children's books were by authors or illustrators of colour. Since then, we have seen a number of vibrant new authors and illustrators being published - Sharna Jackson and Dapo Adeola to name just two of my favourites. There is a real energy around publishing a more diverse range of authors and illustrators to reflect our world, where 32% of school age children are BAME. So I am very hopeful that our new research will show an increase on that 2017 6%. I hope that this energy also signals a wider determination by all of us in the children's book world to stay relevant to modern children and to make sure that reading for pleasure is something enjoyed by all children, not just an increasingly elite few.

Miranda McKearney, founder of EmpathyLab

It's not often that an industry is able to develop a whole new 'why', an articulation of the social good generated by its products. But that's the position I believe the book industry is in, building on the scientific research showing the

empathy-building power of reading. This opens up a new frontier which, in 2020, is going to be very important.

In the face of society's empathy crisis, the industry is poised to drive forward a new empathy movement. This will build on recently developed tools like an annual Empathy Day, and the formation of an Empathy Circle strategy group of nine publishers.

The year begins on 22 January with the launch of EmpathyLab's 2020 Read For Empathy book collection. These 50 books for 4-16 year olds kick start year-round empathy work in schools and libraries.

Fuelled by concerns about our empathy deficit, there has been an explosion in participation from these partners. For instance public library participation has risen 480% since the first Empathy Day in 2017, and now involves 92 library services. School and library staff say they are hungry for new ways to deploy the power of books, and inspired by the vision of raising an empathy-skilled generation, capable of building a better world.

Tom Palmer, recipient of the **2019 Ruth Rendell Award** for the author who has had the most significant influence on literacy in the UK in the past year.

When I go into schools to talk about my books ? and reading in general ? I find myself drawn by the children into discussing the big issues far more than I used to. Children ? from year three to year nine ? want to talk about the environment, about refugees, about war and, particularly, about how the more vulnerable amongst us are treated by everybody else.

I've been visiting schools for fifteen years now and there has been a definite sea change.

I believe that teachers' increasing determination to carve out the time to read whole books in class, then talking about the issues those books raise, is creating this phenomenon. Along with the fact that publishers are publishing more books that ignite and fuel these discussions.

Teresa Cremin Professor of Education (Literacy) at The Open University

Predicting trends for 2020 is like playing the piano as a novice in the dark (and as a pianist I'm a novice!) However, regardless of the election's outcome, uncertainty will persist and major societal issues such as migration, homelessness, poverty, oppression and gun crime will, I suggest, be evidenced in children's books too. We are in an era in which worrying about the world and its longevity ? about climate change and our collective responsibilities - are also to the forefront, as indeed they should be, and authors and publishers will I think embed their attention to these agendas. Young people too are keen to read and discuss such issues. So texts which reflect the realities of the world will continue to grow (for younger readers too) and so they should. Such texts can help us all as we seek to understand complexity and explore responsible ways forward. Books matter.

Fen Coles, co-director Letterbox Library

The impact of the **CLPE's** groundbreaking **Reflecting Realities** report will continue to be felt as it enters its third year of research, with publishers newly motivated to look at the representation of characters of colour in children's books not just in terms of quantity/numbers but in terms of quality - the nuances of authentic and meaningful representation. The upward trajectory of non-fiction anthologies will persist, but mini bio collections of famous men or women will give way to titles which canonise 'everyday' people, in particular young people with their acts of protest and defiance. The words and actions of the iconic Greta Thunberg will be eagerly captured and preserved in children's literature, across every format. Queer characters will finally come into their own. No longer confined to YA as if LGB identities constitute a mature 'subject?'; no longer anthropomorphised into (however adorable) penguins or aardvarks or snails (yes, that happened); no longer diluted into miniature background thumbprints of same-sex couples, designed to give a picture book a flourish of 'modernity' or 'edginess?... In 2020, I feel sure these wallflowers will come out into the light and take centre stage as fully fledged humans in picture books and in that lovely revived format of highly-illustrated first chapter books. I shall look forward to that.

Sue Bastone, SLA Vice-Chair (Chair June 2020)

In recent years we've seen a return to adventure and escapism. The continuing popularity of **Harry Potter** and **Star Wars** and the revival of **His Dark Materials** on the BBC to name just a few, remind us that a good, escapist adventure appeals to all ages. We live in difficult times and, whether adult or child, stories are the way we make sense of our world and understand the fight between good and evil. In Pullman's **His Dark Materials**, the quest for knowledge is key and, in our era of fake news, political lies and slogans, it is vital that our children learn how to find, understand and tell the truth.

The book world can, and already is, setting an example and I hope and expect that this is an issue we will find features more and more in children's books. As Greta Thunberg says: 'no one is too small to make a difference' and we need to empower our children to stand up for the truth.

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