

## **Championing the Nation's Stories: the Canadian Children's Book Centre**

**Gillian O'Reilly**

Four decades of publishing in Canada – that's what you see when you enter the library at the Canadian Children's Book Centre (CCBC) in Toronto. Framed illustrations by renowned Canadian artists are prominently featured on the walls and the bookshelves are overflowing with picture books, fiction and non-fiction titles by Canada's authors and illustrators from the last 40 years and beyond.



Meghan Howe, library coordinator, at the CCBC

Founded in 1976, in the flush of national pride and cultural excitement, the CCBC brought together a wide array of people from the, albeit still small, Canadian children's book world. The founders wanted to bring together writers, illustrators, publishers, booksellers, librarians and academics. In doing so they hoped to foster the publishing of books that reflected Canadian children's worlds and gave voice to Canadian writers and artists.

Authors, academics, illustrators and booklovers visiting the Toronto office can explore the riches of the collection: tracing the development from black-and-white stapled picturebooks to glorious full-colour hardcovers; looking at the growth of innovative and

engaging non-fiction; and discovering the increasing sophistication and quality of fiction for middle-grade readers and teens. The collection also contains some treasured books from previous decades bequeathed to the CCBC by its founder Irma McDonough Milnes.

You don't, however, have to be in Toronto to access the resources of the CCBC. The books can also be found in four regional collections, housed in universities in Halifax, Nova Scotia; Winnipeg, Manitoba; Edmonton, Alberta; and Vancouver, British Columbia – all accessible to members of the public. The CCBC also publishes two very informative publications – *Canadian Children's Book News* and *Best Books for Kids & Teens*. The former is a quarterly news magazine featuring author and illustrator profiles, industry news, book reviews and more. The latter is the CCBC's semi-annual selection guide to the best Canadian books for children and teens. Both of these publications are available by subscription and/or membership to the CCBC.

The CCBC website ([www.bookcentre.ca](http://www.bookcentre.ca)) plays host to a number of online resources that anyone can access from anywhere. This includes an authoritative and exhaustive list of Canadian children's book awards, both current and discontinued (the Centre itself administers seven book awards, handed out at an annual gala event), and bibliographies and recommended booklists featuring themes such as World War I, outer space, black history, LGBTQ, poetry and more. Visitors to the website can also access back issues of *Canadian Children's Book News*, lists of Canadian publishers and wholesalers, related book organizations and publications. As well, there is the opportunity to sign up for a free teachers' e-newsletter and to gain access to the Teachers' Book Bank ([bookbank.bookcentre.ca](http://bookbank.bookcentre.ca)), a database of fiction and non-fiction titles with historical themes compiled in conjunction with Historica Canada whose site offers lesson plans for these subjects.

Since 1977, the CCBC has staged TD Canadian Children's Book Week (originally called Children's Book Festival), sending authors, illustrators and storytellers across Canada where they give readings and workshops in schools, libraries and community centres. A different theme is celebrated each year and a Canadian illustrator is commissioned to create the artwork for the accompanying poster, bookmarks and theme guide. This year's theme – Hear Our Stories: Celebrating First Nations, Métis and Inuit Literature – features striking artwork by Cree-Métis artist Julie Flett. The free

downloadable theme guide features over 80 books with annotations, activities and author interviews. Information on Book Week can be found at [www.bookweek.ca](http://www.bookweek.ca).



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The CCBC library is open between 9:00 am and 5:00 pm, Monday to Friday, but visitors should contact the office in advance to make sure it is not being used for a class. Information about the regional collections can be found online at [www.bookcentre.ca/library/regional\\_collections](http://www.bookcentre.ca/library/regional_collections).

**Gillian O'Reilly** is the editor of *Canadian Children's Book News* and the author of two non-fiction books for young readers.