

## Recommended Venue: The Finnish Institute of Children's Literature

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Figure 1. The Finnish Institute of Children's Literature (Photo by Paavo Pykäläinen, 2016)

The Finnish Institute of Children's Literature (Figure 1) is an internationally recognized professional organization located at the heart of Tampere, Finland. Its primary mission is to publish, research and provide resources related to children's and young adult literature by providing a specialist library of 65,000 volumes of literature, an active network of professionals of children's literature, and a wide range of services and collections of children's literature artwork and research for anyone interested in the rich world of children's and young adult literature. Through its expansive library, services and dedicated staff, the Finnish Institute of Children's Literature is a champion of this field both nationally and internationally.

### **The Library and the Publication Work of the Institute**

The bedrock of the library's collection was the 8,000-volume collection of Raija-Leena Tikkanen, a librarian based in Kuopio, Finland. The city of Tampere enabled the purchase of the collection in 1971, and since then it has grown considerably. While the first

additions to the collection were made up of books removed from other libraries, today donations are the primary source of additions. The oldest items in the collection are from the eighteenth century, and new publications are added almost fresh off the press.

The Finnish Institute of Children's Literature is a wonderful treasure trove of literature not only in Finnish, but also in minority languages, as the library (Figure 2) hosts material in Sami languages (Northern Sami, Skolt Sami and Inari Sami) and other minority languages, such as Romany, Meänkieli and Karelian. The library collection includes literature originally published in Finnish or Swedish (Finland's Swedish), literature translated into Finnish, literature by Finnish authors that has been translated into other languages and published outside of Finland and literature printed in Finland in languages other than Finnish.



Figure 2. The library and patrons (Photo by Paavo Pykäläinen, 2016)

The Institute maintains the Onnet database, which records both printed research publications as well as children's and young adult literature. Each publication is carefully index worded, which is significant because public libraries make use of this database as well. The research library is the most expansive of its kind in Finland, and it serves its patrons nationwide. The research library hosts 5,900 research publications, reference works, Master's theses and doctoral dissertations. These are available to be loaned out,

with the exception of the reference library items. A list of new acquisitions is published twice a year.

The Finnish Institute of Children's Literature has its own publication series, in which 33 publications have appeared to date. In addition, the Institute publishes its own journal, *Onnimanni*, which offers book reviews, suggestions for educators on how to include literature in language education and reviews of recent research. Under the editorship of Dr Päivi Heikkilä-Halttunen, it is currently the only print journal to regularly publish numerous reviews of children's literature in Finland. The journal offers a valuable national forum for the field as it offers a place to exchange views and share information on awards, events and phenomena.

### The Specialist Collections

Some of the most asked-after features of the Institute are its specialist collections. An absolute gem is the set of more than 4,500 original illustrations created for children's literature. These illustrations can be compiled into numerous different kinds of exhibitions, and have been made into postcards and posters (Figure 3), which can be purchased at the Institute. The largest sets of illustrations are by Camilla Mickwitz and Maija Karma.



Figure 3. Postcards from the collection of illustrations (Photo by Jani Ikonen, 2019)



The specialist collections also include the personal libraries of 18 people and two societies, received as donations, including the home library of Tove Jansson (Figure 4), which readers can freely explore online. The Institute also has a collection of newspaper and magazine clippings on children's and young adult literature dating back to 1948.



Figure 4. Tove Jansson's home library (Photo by Paavo Pykäläinen, 2016)

It is particularly delightful how the Institute brings together people who share a love of children's and young adult literature. One example of this is the Institute's godparent library, which was founded in 1993. At the time, 172 people, institutions and communities donated funds in order to support the Institute. In return, the patrons were allowed to choose particular books, often beloved childhood favourites, to which they became godparents. The funds were used to establish the Institute's support fund, and the books were put on displays both at the Institute and online.

While the majority of the volumes in the library are written in languages spoken in Finland, the specialist collections do include sets of literature written in English, Swedish and German. These have been helpful especially for students of translation studies, among others. The lists of works in these collections can be accessed through the Institute's website.

Additionally, the specialist collections include a set of ABC books which can be read at the Institute. The illustrators of the ABC books represent the best-loved contemporary artists, such as Rudolf Koivu, Martha Wendelin and Maija Karma. There are several editions of some of the books, and a complete list of the items can be found on the Institute's website. While the Finnish National Archive has laboured to preserve the ABC books by digitizing them, the books are a true delight in their material form, too.

### **Services, Events and Resources for Educators, Parents, Children and Young Adults**

One of the core missions of the Institute is to bring literature into the hands of children and young adults. A shining example of the work the Institute does to this end is the Lukemo web portal, which is a database of the newest children's and young adult literature available. The portal was made public in the spring of 2019, and its purpose is to not only provide reading suggestions, but tools for developing literacy skills, information on publications, databases and actors in the field. Furthermore, the Lukemo portal contains a host of activities to accompany and expand reading which, together with the Lukuliike (*Reading Movement*) project, aim to encourage children and young adults to read literature. The portal also provides links to numerous other projects on children's and young adult literature and literacy work.

The Finnish Institute of Children's Literature also grants two awards. The Onnimanni Award was established in 1993, and it is awarded for supporting children and young adults' literature or its position in the community. The Punni Literature Award has been awarded between 2017–2020 to first-time authors for addressing challenging topics through children's and young adult literature.

The Institute is also a major organizer of the children's literature and word-art festival, Kirjalitta, which is held annually in November. In addition, the Institute organizes writing competitions and workshops tailored for children and young adults and maintains a database of materials for employing children's literature in phenomena-based learning. This database currently contains 161 sets of material. The Institute collaborates with a wide range of professionals and organizations in the field, including the Tampere Municipal Library, with whom they have created reading diplomas by compiling lists of texts for a wide range of beginning to advanced readers.

## Professional Services

One of the things that makes the Institute such a notable actor in the field in Finland is the way it brings together both the public and professionals in the field, functioning as a meeting place for all. This is effectively accomplished through their public database of professionals, which includes the experts' contact information and key areas of specialization.

The staff at the Institute maintain a blog, in which they reflect on current events and phenomena in the field. This has been an excellent forum for reflecting on the statistics the Institute collects annually on the published and translated children's and young adult literature (Figure 5), and how the statistics compare to, for example, the Swedish Institute for Children's Books. The Institute is currently investigating the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on children and young adults' reading of audio and e-books.



Figure 5. Kirjakori display (Päivi Nordling, 2020)

The Finnish Institute of Children's Literature also carries out numerous projects and initiatives in the field with the support of external funding. During 2018–2020 the Institute received funding from the Finnish Cultural Foundation for a project to bring greater visibility to children's books. The Lukemo portal was one outcome of this project. Currently, the Institute is compiling a bibliography of Finnish children's literature

illustrators to be published as an open database. This project is funded by the Jane and Aatos Erkko Foundation.

### Looking Ahead

While there is so much the Institute has accomplished since its founding, the happy labour of bringing literature into the hands of children and young adults is never fully finished. Reflecting on the future of the Institute, the director of the Finnish Institute of Children's Literature, Kaisa Laaksonen, hopes that in the years to come 'the Institute can serve research into children's and young adult literature even better, so that the position of the research field in Finland is strengthened. In the future, I hope for even closer collaboration with local and national actors in the field, perhaps within new premises, which would allow for better collaboration on-site and for wider and more permanent exhibitions to be in place'.

### Further Information

Report on annual statistics of Finnish children's and youth literature of 2019: [website](#)

Lists of literature in English, Swedish and German at the Institute: [website](#)

Illustrations exhibitions: [website](#)

Tove Jansson's home library: [website](#)

Godparent library online: [website](#)

List of the ABC book collection: [website](#)

*The Journal Onnimanni* summaries in English: [website](#)

In English – What is Lukemo? [website](#)

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