

Children's Right to Culture

Children have a right to culture. That's easily said, but what do we really mean? When Sweden takes the opportunity to showcase Swedish children's and young adult literature at the world's largest children's book fair, **we intend to put children at the centre of our programme**, even though the event is a trade fair for adults.



We often regard childhood as something transitory, as a preparation for real life. But when does real life begin? Is it acceptable to let people live almost a quarter of their life before they count? **Children's right to culture is intertwined with children's right to play a part in society. To express themselves. To have access to various means of expression. To be heard and noticed. To have access to art, culture and information.**

Literature occupies a special position in children's culture – and children occupy a special position in literature. Under the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, all signatory countries must encourage the production and distribution of children's books. Daily news reports in the media often portray children as vulnerable, as victims of natural disasters and accidents. Occasionally children in a schoolyard are allowed to speak for themselves, but usually the media talk about children rather than talking to them. Children's and young adult literature helps give children a voice. Most children's writers and illustrators have a genuine child's perspective. They make children and children's issues visible – both to children themselves and to adults. Of course, this ability is not unique to Swedish authors – just look at the list of **ALMA** laureates over the past decade.

However, not all children's literature is relevant. There is always room for discussing the quality, purpose and content of children's books. By children's right to culture, we also mean children's right to art, to participate in artistic and cultural life, as the Convention on the Rights of the Child puts it. To be presented with challenging art. Different perspectives. A diversity of expression. Relevant, fun, surprising, inquisitive art. Children's right not to be dismissed as cute but unimportant. Not to be laughed at indulgently. **Children are human beings, fellow citizens.** Slightly shorter, slightly less experienced. But they are living in the here and now. They are not simply waiting to grow up. We cannot predict their needs 20 years hence. But **we can listen to them and find out what their needs are right now.**