



THE 63RD BOLOGNA CHILDREN'S BOOK FAIR

THE MAIN THEMES OF THE 2026 EDITION: 200 years of Carlo Collodi; the collaboration with the United Nations on topics of gender equality and Fables and Fairy Tales, AI, comics, indigenous language and African publishing

Among the many pressing issues that come to the fore each year at the Bologna Children's Book Fair (BCBF), certain topics that have increasingly become key concerns in contemporary publishing will remain central in 2026. These include artificial intelligence, digital technology as a new medium and tool for reading, the decline in young people's interest in reading, and, furthermore, trends in children's books, issues of gender representation in literature for young people, and the inclusion of traditions and cultures too often marginalised, such as those of South America and African countries. In addition to these are certain trends that are gradually gaining ground in children's literature for which BCBF will be devoting a specific area at the fair and a series of panels respectively: these are poetry and fairy tales as tools for understanding the world.

200 YEARS OF CARLO COLLODI

A standout initiative among the major themes that are the focus of exhibitions, talks and other events at this year's fair is the anniversary of 200 years since the birth of Carlo Collodi. The exhibition dedicated to Pinocchio, **Italian Excellence. Pinocchio's New Clothes** (accompanied by a bilingual catalogue published by Giunti), features around 50 illustrations by both emerging and established illustrators, and is complemented by a series of talks scheduled for Wednesday 14 April, marking a veritable 'Pinocchio Day'. **"Italian Excellence. Pinocchio's New Clothes – Lorenzo Mattotti and the young selected artist Nicole Tecchio"** (15 April, 1–1.40 pm, The Illustrators Café) is a dialogue between Lorenzo Mattotti, master of Italian illustration, and Nicole Tecchio, a young artist selected from the 24 whose works are on display in the exhibition as winners of the international competition dedicated to *The Adventures of Pinocchio*. An encounter to celebrate the continuous reinvention of the famous puppet through the eyes of illustrators past and present. Concluding the series of in-depth sessions dedicated to literature's most famous puppet, and bringing the fair itself to an end, is an event scheduled for Thursday 16: **"La biblioteca di Alessandro. Incontro con Alessandro Barbero"** (Alessandro's Library. A meeting with Alessandro Barbero) (12 midday–12.50pm, The Illustrators Café). What did a great storyteller read as a child? A journey back through the books that shaped Alessandro Barbero's formative years. In conversation with Giacomo Benelli and Ivan Canu, Alessandro weaves personal memories and literary roots into the pages of Pinocchio, Cuore, the novels of Emilio Salgari and other childhood classics.

THE COLLABORATION WITH THE UNITED NATIONS: FABLES AND FAIRY TALES AND GENDER REPRESENTATION

Following the in-depth sessions and exhibitions dedicated to the theme of sustainability in 2025, BCBF continues its **collaboration with UN Publications**: in 2026 the research will focus on **Fables and Fairy Tales**, the special category of this year's BolognaRagazzi Awards, and their ability to convey diverse cultural heritages using a common language that transcends cultural and racial differences, as confirmed by the words of the Swiss scholar Marie-Louise von Franz, an expert in the psychology of fairy tales: *"Fairy tales spread so easily because they transcend cultural and ethnic differences. The language of fairy tales seems to be the language of all humanity, of all ages, ethnicities and civilisations."*

The choice of this focus stems from a desire to highlight and explore a publishing trend that has been growing in recent years, which could be explained as an attempt to find refuge in dark times through a return to tradition.





Fables, fairy tales and myths represent, in fact, a type of narrative that speaks to the deepest aspects of the human condition. They are tools for interpreting the world, which, during troubled times, reveal their full power and potential.

Events on this theme include: **“Across Cultures, Through Stories: The Universal Power of Fairy Tales”** in collaboration with UN Publications, (13 April, 2pm–2:50pm, The Next Chapter Café), a panel discussion exploring the universal power of fairy tales across cultures and generations, and how – whilst remaining open to reinterpretation and adaptation – they continue to convey fundamental cultural values. With Mary E. Glenn (Chief, United Nations Publications, UN Department of Global Communications, USA), Julia Eccleshar (journalist, UK), Katia Canton (scholar, Brazil) and Grazia Gotti (educationalist, Italy).

“Rereading Hansel and Gretel Today” (13 April, 5pm–5:50pm, The Next Chapter Café): Lorenzo Mattotti (artist, Italy) with Ivan Canu (illustrator, Director, Mimaster Illustration, Italy) explores the story of Hansel and Gretel. Starting with the edition published by Orecchio Acerbo, illustrated by Lorenzo Mattotti, and moving on to Stephen King’s retelling, published by Adelphi with illustrations by Maurice Sendak, the session reflects on the contemporary relevance of a fairy tale which, amidst its dark tones and mysterious meanings, can be reinterpreted with an ever-fresh perspective.

Finally, **“Rewriting stories: breathing new life into an old tale”** (14 April, 12 midday–1pm, The Translators Café) explores new “translations” of fairy tales, in a dialogue between text and illustrations. With Fabian Negrin (author and illustrator, Argentina), Cora Presezzi (Adelphi, Italy), Giusi Quarenghi (writer, Italy), Federico Salvan (Edizioni BD & J-POP Manga, Italy) and chaired by Silvia Albesano (translator, Italy).

This year, the BCBF’s collaboration with the UN is also being extended to **UN Women**, and will focus on **gender representation** in books for children and teenagers, continuing its commitment to promoting the 17 Sustainable Development Goals, for which BCBF has become a true global champion. The programme includes the following sessions: **“Who Gets to Be the Hero? Gender Stereotypes in Children’s Books”** (15 April, 2pm–2.50pm, The Next Chapter Café) with **Francesca Cavallo** (author, Italy) and **Alexandre Lordkipanidze** (poet, playwright, novelist, Georgia). A public session, including a 10-minute Q&A with the audience to explore how children’s books can challenge gender stereotypes and inspire a new generation of women, will highlight tangible examples of inclusive storytelling capable of positively influencing the aspirations of girls and boys, and will foster a dialogue between the various perspectives of authors, institutions and the development sector in the fight against gender stereotypes.

Stories that Change Us: Gender Equality through Children’s Literature” (14 April, 12.30pm–1.20pm, The Next Chapter Café), with **Paula Erizanu** (writer, journalist, author of *Courageous Little Hearts by the EU 4 Gender Equality*, Moldova), **Olga Popovych** (Kalamar Publishing House, Ukraine) and **Olga Osaulenko** (Programme Manager, EU 4 Gender Equality programme, UN Women ECA, Turkey). A roundtable discussion on how gender stereotypes are created, reinforced or, conversely, challenged throughout the children’s book industry – from writing and illustration to editing, from publication to distribution – the discussion focuses on shared responsibility, practical challenges and opportunities to transform children’s literature into a driver of gender equality, with the aim of exploring how gender stereotypes emerge in children’s literature, often unintentionally.

Finally, on the same theme but outside the collaboration with UN Women, **“Beyond the Shadow: Gender Narratives and Feminism in Children’s Publishing”** (13 April, 11.20am–12.10pm, The Next Chapter Café): 50 years on from the publication of Christian Bruel’s revolutionary *Julie: the Girl with a Boy’s Shadow*, the narrative around gender issues in children’s publishing has undergone a radical evolution. A discussion with contemporary artists and publishers to look at the future of representation in picture books and comics, featuring **Christian Bruel** (author, France), **Lina Itagaki** (comic artist, Lithuania) and **Maddalena Lucarelli** (editor, Fatatrac, Italy).





Once again this year, the fair will host a reading of the **United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child** (14 April, 4pm–4.40 pm, The Illustrators Café), presented for this edition in a version rewritten by UNICEF in language suitable for children and teenagers. A public reading by authors, illustrators and publishers attending the fair, each in their own language, for an event as rich and diverse as the languages and cultures filling the exhibition halls at BCBF. In parallel, the session **“Definisci ‘bambino’: letture illustrate dal mondo”** (Define ‘child’: illustrated readings from around the world) (14 April, 4.50pm–5.30pm, The Illustrators Café), in collaboration with Topipittori, will feature some prominent names in contemporary children’s literature: **Beatrice Alemagna** (author, illustrator, Italy), **Adolfo Córdova** (author, journalist, Linternas y Bosques blog, Mexico), **Michael Rosen** (poet, author, United Kingdom) and **Hervé Tullet** (artist, writer, illustrator, France). The event will offer a united response from the world of children’s literature in defence of childhood, in the face of its brutal extermination in conflicts taking place across the globe.

PROMOTING READING AND THE ROLE OF DIGITAL TECHNOLOGY

Significant attention is also being paid to one of the hottest topics in the publishing world today: in light of the discouraging figures on readership worldwide, BCBF and the Italian Publishers Association (AIE) are organising, in collaboration with the French **Syndicat National de l'Édition** (SNE), the **Federation of European Publishers** (FEP), the **International Publishers Association** (IPA) and the **International Board on Books for Young People** (IBBY), **“Building the Future Generation of Readers: Best Practices and Policies for Reading Promotion”** (13 April, 3.30pm–5.15pm, The Illustrators Café). An international conference to encourage the spread of global best practices in promoting reading among children and young people, drawing on exemplary initiatives such as *#ioleggoperché* in Italy, the *quart d’heure de lecture* in France and the UK’s *The National Year of Reading*, and to reflect on the role of European and international policies at an event featuring professionals from around the world, from South Korea to Pakistan, from Belgium to Georgia.

This is perfectly complemented by a focus on **new ways of reading** that are redefining young people’s relationship with the practice of reading, including picture books. At the fair, two events will be exploring digital narrative ecosystems and reading practices in the age of artificial intelligence, organised by BCBF with Associazione Literacy Italia, in collaboration with NORLA and with the support of ITA- the Italian Trade Agency and the Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MAECI). **“Digital Narratives Observatory. Between Literary Experience and Digital Literacies”** (15 April, 11.30am–12 midday, The Next Chapter Café) followed by **“We’re not Digitizing Books, We’re Inventing New Narrative Languages”** (12 midday–12.50pm). Chaired by Pier Cesare Rivoltella (University of Bologna, Italy), Tiziana Mascia (Associazione Literacy Italia, Italy) and Jennifer Rowsell (University of Sheffield, UK), the speakers **Dag Asbjørnsen** (European Commission, Creative Europe (DG EAC), Norway), **Scott Rettberg** (University of Bergen, Centre for Digital Narrative, Norway), **Kate Pullinger** (author, Canada - UK), **Davide Morosinotto** (author, Italy) and **Federica de Quagliatti** (Senior Journal Specialist, Frontiers for Young Minds, Switzerland) will discuss how interactive books, transmedia storytelling, immersive experiences and artificial intelligence are transforming the ways in which stories are read, experienced and shared, whilst exploring what distinguishes high-quality digital storytelling from a literary perspective. In this context, the **Digital Narratives Observatory** – a joint initiative of Literacy Italia and the Bologna Children’s Book Fair – **will be presenting its first report**, mapping emerging trends in digital storytelling for children and young people.

ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE

Again this year **artificial intelligence** will be at the heart of the debate: not only at the **BBPlus AI Summit**, but also through the pursuit of a fresh, open and more proactive perspective on the potential of this new





tool. Featuring **Anna Castagnoli** (illustrator and author, Italy) in the masterclass **“The Augmented Illustrator: Practical Strategies to Turn AI into a Multiplier of Professional Possibilities”** (14 April, 9.50am–10.30am, Designer Studio), the analysis embraces AI as a new design resource, while reaffirming the centrality of the illustrator in a creative process which, despite the evolution of the available tools, remains guided by a unique artistic vision.

COMICS

The **comics** sector also reaffirms its central role in 2026, a position it has acquired in recent years. Several discussion panels at the fair will delve into the most topical aspects of the sector, starting with the **boom in serialised formats** in children’s comics, explored in **“Graphic Novel Bestsellers: The Secret Behind Hit Series for Young Readers”** (13 April, 10.30am–11.20am, The Content Café), featuring two artists who have become global phenomena, **Jamie Smart** (comic artist, UK) and **Diane Le Feyer** (author, France).

Growing in popularity, and closely linked to the serial format, is the rise of **comics designed as first independent reads**: in **“Reading Like a Grown Up: Comics for the First Independent Readers”** (15 April, 12.30pm–1.20pm, The Content Café), **Liliana Cupido** (Canicola, Italy), **Arthur Derrouaz** (rights manager, Jungle, France), **Yolanda Dib Cabello** (marketing and international rights sales manager, Grafito Editorial, Spain) and **Antoine Dole** (artist, France) discuss how comics can support this important transition and speak to those who are discovering the pleasure of reading “like a grown-up”.

Next, a look at some **huge success stories** and the secrets behind their popularity, from the most mainstream titles to the most successful independent experiments: **“Out of the Ordinary: The Authorial Revolution in Children’s Comics”** (14 April, 2.30pm–3.20pm, The Content Café), featuring authors behind real-life case studies, such as **Lorenzo La Neve** (art director, Gigaciao, Italy), **Sabine Lemire** (writer, Denmark) and **Rasmus Bregnhøi** (cartoonist, Denmark), who explore the path to bringing original and sophisticated content to a wide audience.

Meanwhile, **“USA Comics for Young Readers: From Series to Graphic Novels”** (14 April, 11.30am–12.20pm, The Content Café) examines how to capture the attention of young readers within an ever-changing media landscape. Featuring **Zachary Clemente** (founder and publisher, Bulgilhan Press, USA), **Tucker Stone** (executive director of communications and marketing, Fantagraphics Books, USA), **Patrick Crotty** (founder and publisher, Peow! Studio, USA) and chaired by **Nicola Peruzzi** (Panini Comics, Italy).

Last but not least, a look at the **specific characteristics of regional productions**: every year, BCBF dedicates specific geographical focuses on markets outside the usual “routes” of the comics publishing industry. This year, Asia takes centre stage in the following panels: **“The New Wave of Asian Comics”** (15 April, 9.30am–10.20am, The Content Café), a journey to discover the “new wave” of Asian comics, featuring independent publishers and visionaries from Japan, China, Vietnam and the Philippines discussing experimentation, digital storytelling and new market models. Featuring **Quynh Than** (Du Bút Books, Vietnam), **Toni Velasco** (Black Ink, Philippines), **Kunihiro Mishima** (Founder, Mishimasha, Japan) and chaired by **Kuo-Yu Liang** (Founder and President, Ku Worldwide).

This is followed by a look at the Norwegian comics scene, in tribute to the Guest of Honour country, in **“Norway Guest of Honour: Norwegian Comics. The Fun and the Furious”** (14 April, 9.40am–10.20am, The Content Café): a dive into one of Europe’s most innovative comics scenes. With **Nora Dåsnes** (comic artist, Norway), **Kjersti Sinneva Moen** (comic artist, Norway), **Håkon Strand** (founder, Strand Comics, Norway), **Tonje Tornes** (editor, TNT, Norway). Moderated by **Hans Ivar Stordal** (comics editor, Strand Forlag, Norway).

There will also be a preview of Poland as Guest of Honour Country in 2027, with **“Spotlight on Poland: The Emerging Scene of Polish Comics”** (15 April, 2.30pm–3.20pm, The Content Café) featuring some of the country’s most





interesting artists: **Przemek Trusciński** (cartoonist, Poland), **Jacek Świdziński** (comic artist, Poland), **Tomasz Kontny** (comic artist, Poland) and **Krzysztof Gawronkiewicz** (comic artist, Poland), chaired by **Szymon Holcman** (Head of PR Department, Kultura Gniewu, Poland).

Other regional focuses include: **“Comics? Manga? Picture Books? Comparing European and Japanese Concepts”**, on the success of Japanese manga; and **“Forest for the Trees: Reflections on Canadian Illustration”**, featuring internationally renowned illustrators such as **Geneviève Després, Matt James, Pierre Pratt** and **Sydney Smith**, and chaired by **Simon de Jocas**, the event will explore the influence of the Canadian landscape on personal artistic practice and the search for our roots within a North American context.

AFRICA

Once again, this year BCBF is promoting direct interaction between African creatives and the international illustration community with the aim of supporting the development and emergence of new voices and new publishing houses from parts of the world that have hitherto been excluded from various international contexts.

As part of The Illustrators Survival Corner, portfolio reviews and live painting sessions will be held, led by illustrators **Issaba Bâ** (Senegal), **éf** (Madagascar), **Franck N'Zila Malembe** (Congo) and **Constantin Adadja**, as part of a programme of activities developed in conjunction with the **Ressources éducatives** (2020–2026), implemented by **UNESCO** and **Institut Français** to strengthen the role of children’s books in African countries by supporting the professionalisation of industry practitioners, promoting access to books for young readers in all formats (print, audio and digital), and encouraging the development of national policies in support of books.

Pursuing the same objective is the second edition of the **online workshop** dedicated to 25 illustrators from Nigeria, promoted by BCBF and organised by Mimaster Illustrazione in collaboration with the Book Buzz Foundation, as part of “The Nigeria Picture Book Project”, a collaboration between the Book Buzz Foundation and the European Union. The course, led by illustrator **Elenia Beretta**, takes the form of weekly sessions, each dedicated to exploring a key technical and creative element essential to the design of a picture book (colour, composition, storytelling, character design, etc.).

Also scheduled to take place at the fair is the panel **“African KidLit: From Scarcity to Innovation”** (15 April, 10.30am–11.20am, Next Chapter Café), in collaboration with ADCF Africa, chaired by **Agnès Debiage** (ADCF Africa, France) and featuring **Sandra Tamele** (Editora Trinta Zero Nove, Mozambique), **Lola Shoneyin** (Book Buzz Foundation, Nigeria), **Joan Onyando** (Ekitabu, Kenya), **Anja Ravakiniony Tahirimihamina** (Editions Karné, Madagascar), and **Fatou Diomandé** (Éditions Calebasse, Ivory Coast). The speakers will share their respective experiences as publishers and builders of cultural ecosystems, reflecting on how they nurture readers within their local contexts whilst also taking advantage of platforms such as the Bologna Children’s Book Fair to expand opportunities for African stories, creators and markets for children’s content. The panel will also see the announcement of the shortlist for the second edition of the **Prix de l'édition jeunesse africaine**, launched by eKitabu, which aims to boost the visibility and circulation of French-language books published by African publishers on the continent and beyond, and to foster greater exchange between Francophone and Anglophone Africa. Finally, alongside the programme of events, BCBF welcomes eleven publishers from ten African countries to its **World Lounge**, providing an opportunity for professionals to discover publishing traditions and markets, and to showcase their own.

INDIGENOUS LANGUAGES

The fair will also be shining a spotlight on **indigenous languages** and publishing in **Latin America**, as a vibrant hub of cultural innovation that is redefining established norms. Against a backdrop of political and economic instability, Latin American publishing is undergoing a period of profound renewal, thanks to the emergence of small





independent publishers and a new generation of authors and illustrators capable of bringing indigenous, Afro-descendant and minority perspectives to the forefront. This shift has already been evident in recent years at BCBF and this edition will be explored in greater depth through dedicated meetings and panels.

From the focus **“IBBY-UNESCO Collection of Remarkable Books for Young Readers in Indigenous and Endangered Languages”** (15 April, 3pm-4pm, Translators Café), a project created to support lesser-used languages as a strategic resource for fostering dialogue between people and cultures by advancing the ideals of peace and sustainable development, promoted by IBBY and UNESCO and also involving the United Nations and CEATL.

The panel **“Children’s Publishing in Latin America: Landscape and Key Challenges”** (15 April, 3pm–3.50pm, The Next Chapter Café) will feature **María Celina Alonso** (Founder and Editorial Director, Lecturita Ediciones and the Lecturita Book Club, Argentina), **Hazel Hernández Astorga** (Regional Coordinator, IBBY Latin America and the Caribbean, member of the IBBY Executive Committee, Founder and Executive Director of Fundación Leer / IBBY Costa Rica, Costa Rica), **Nat Cardozo** (author, illustrator, Uruguay), **Anabella López** (author, illustrator, Argentina), **David Unger** (author, Guatemala) and **Paloma Valdivia** (author and illustrator, Chile) and will be chaired by **Dolores Prades** (Founder and Director of Instituto Emília, BCBF consultant, Brazil).

FASHION

Building on the exhibition ***The Fabulous Wardrobe and the Never-Ending Thread***, taking place at the eXtraBO venue in the city, a series of events at the fair will explore the theme of fashion in relation to literature and children’s illustration: **“The Fabulous Wardrobe of Albertine: the Great Defilè of Picturebook”** (15 April, 9.50am–10.30am, The Illustrators Café): Albertine Zullo (illustrator, Switzerland) and Giulia Rossi (fashion semiologist, Italy) explore Albertine’s artistic universe, spanning fashion, illustration, design and imagination. **“The Fabulous Wardrobe: Beatrice Alemagna and Paola Caridi. Fabric Tales”** (13 April, 1pm–1.50pm, The Book Lovers’ Café), is a multi-voiced reflection from various perspectives on childhood, stories, care and fabric. **“Il guardaroba favoloso e gli innumerevoli intrecci: fiaba, moda, arte, fili e albi”** (The Fabulous Wardrobe and its Countless Intertwining Threads: Fairy Tales, Fashion, Art, Threads and Picture Books) (15 April, 5pm–5.50pm, The Book Lovers’ Café), will see international authors and illustrators discuss how fabric and fashion intertwine in their picture books: Steven Guarnaccia (USA) relates fashion to the classic fairy tale, for Sophie Benini (Italy) thread tells a story of childhood, Vittoria Facchini (Italy) presents her fabulous inventions, whilst Viktoria Semikina (Russia) illustrates the art of weaving and Kristin Roskifte (Norway) counts the characters in the illustrations like the stitches in a knit.

POETRY

Finally, following the success of the 2025 edition, poetry for children and young people returns to take its place at the fair thanks to the **Poetry Corner**, organised by the Junior Poetry Cultural Association. The space will host a packed **programme of presentations, talks and readings** dedicated to the finest poetry publications, as well as “Open Mic” sessions dedicated to reading poetry aloud: among these, **“VOTE FOR POETRY!”** (13 April, 12 midday–1pm, Poetry Corner) a poetry reading in many languages by the two authors María José Ferrada and Michael Rosen, finalists for the H.C. Andersen Award, with Jorge Luján (poet, Argentina). A sector experiencing strong global growth, as demonstrated by the numerous poetry books nominated for the BolognaRagazzi Awards this year, of which a **selection of 100 titles is on display here**.

Events include **“Women Poets from Latin America”** (14 April, 2pm–2.45pm, Poetry Corner), a focus on Juana De Ibarbourou, Gabriela Mistral and Alfonsina Storni. Speakers include: Alicia Baladán (illustrator, Uruguay), Mónica Bergna (publisher, Mexico), Flor Burgos (illustrator, Argentina) and Ángeles Quinteros (author and publisher, Chile).

