

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

AFCC highlights diversity, inclusivity and mental wellbeing through children's books



SINGAPORE, 14 June 2021—The Asian Festival of Children's Content (AFCC) wrapped up its second digital edition on 30 May 2021, drawing more than 3,000 cumulative views over its four-day run. AFCC would continue with its VOD offerings until 30 June.

Originally planned as a hybrid festival, the organisers Singapore Book Council had to turn it fully virtual after a surge of COVID-19 infection cases in Singapore. Festival attendees had over 70 sessions to choose from 27–30 May, which featured more than 100 local and international speakers. The festival invited

the attendees to look into the future of children's content, and delve into a range of topics, including the benefits of reading; accessibility; mental health; translation; and the environment.

The festival also launched a Co-Translation Project with Thailand, as part of its Country of Focus: Thailand showcase. In partnership with the Publishers and Booksellers Association of Thailand (PUBAT), the project would translate two selected children's book titles from each country into Thai or English. The books would be made available to the children in each country free through their local reading initiatives. Please refer to Annex B for the full list of translated titles.

Key topics at AFCC 2021

The festival opened with an examination of its theme "Reimagine. Rebuild and Reignite." POPS worldwide CEO Esther Nguyen reminded children's content creators that while "COVID-19 has accelerated the acceptance of...different forms and mediums, there are always two audiences [in children's content]; the parents and children". Either audience should not be excluded in edutainment for children.

Speakers at AFCC also touched on diverse representation in books, translation, inclusivity and mental health for children. Australian-based Filipino writer Kristyn Maslog-Levis shared that "one way to build empathy in the minds of children is to show them the lives outside of their own," reinforcing the importance of ethnic and cultural representation in children's books. Literary translator Lawrence Schimel also debunked Anglocentrism: "Children live in the world, and anything that is in the world is something that children can understand". There were also discussions revolving around children's mental health. Psychiatrist Dr Ong Say How supported reading as a vital activity for children during the pandemic. "[Reading] reduces stress levels and makes [children] feel empowered to learn...from reading. It causes depressive symptoms to go

away as well. Reading keeps the brain active and prevents cognitive decline as well."

Free programmes for the public

The Book Illustrators Gallery (BIG), a favourite at AFCC, returned for its second online exhibition. 2021's edition saw a new record of 370 submissions for the gallery, aided by the digitalisation of the gallery. 124 illustrations by 34 artists from 12 countries are featured in this year's edition of BIG. BIG also features over 40 illustrations from Thailand, including the works of award-winning illustrator Kampanart Sangsorn, who was commissioned to design the festival's key visual this year. The digital exhibition is available to the public and can be visited [here](#).

The public were also invited to participate in the GIF + Comic Cover Challenge, a collaboration between Puttnam School of Film & Animation (LASALLE College of the Arts) and Singapore Book Council. The participants took challenges to create an animated GIF or illustrate a comic cover inspired by AFCC speakers' books.

Children's Book Awards Announce call for submissions

An open call for submissions to the Scholastic Asian Book Award (SABA) 2022 was also announced during the festival. SABA is a joint initiative between the Singapore Book Council (SBC) and Scholastic Asia, which recognises children's literature of Asian origins. "At a time where children are unable to travel to discover the world and social connections are so limited, we believe story books play a critical role in giving them an outlet for imagination and a window to the world. Children's literature is vital in bringing to life the richness of different cultures, anecdotes and experiences, and SABA continues to be the platform for Asian authors to keep the Asian heritage alive. Through this flagship

initiative, we hope to continue our commitment in promoting diversity and inclusiveness by championing more Asian voices in children's literature", shared Selina Lee, Vice President of Scholastic Asia.

Joel Donato Ching Jacob's *Wing of the Locust* emerged as the winner among 78 submissions from 11 countries for the last iteration of SABA. The winner of the award, who will be announced in AFCC 2022, will win a prize of S\$10,000 and a plaque, along with an opportunity to have their manuscript published by Scholastic Asia.

From 28 June to 27 August 2021, an open call for submissions for the Hedwig Anuar Children's Book Award (HABA) 2022 will also take place. HABA recognises excellence in children's literature written by a Singapore citizen or Permanent Resident. More information about HABA is available on AFCC's website [here](#).

The next edition of AFCC is scheduled to take place from 26 – 29 May 2022. Participants who are interested in being featured at AFCC may now submit a proposal for their presentation [here](#).

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Annex A: What the attendees said

“AFCC 2021 is worth attending with diverse and timely topics to learn, relearn, and [unlearn] from.”

— Besy Agatawa (Philippines)

“She (speaker Sunanda Vera) was very inspiring in sharing stories of real life heroes who fought against all odds to reach their dreams”

— Boey Yoke Ching (Singapore), on “Stories of Strength: The Courage of Action”

“Thank you for sharing about your journey as a writer and your advocacy - very inspiring especially for a Filipino like myself who writes stories for children as well.”

— Glenda Oris (Philippines), on “Culturally Diverse Middle Grade and YA books as the Future of Content”

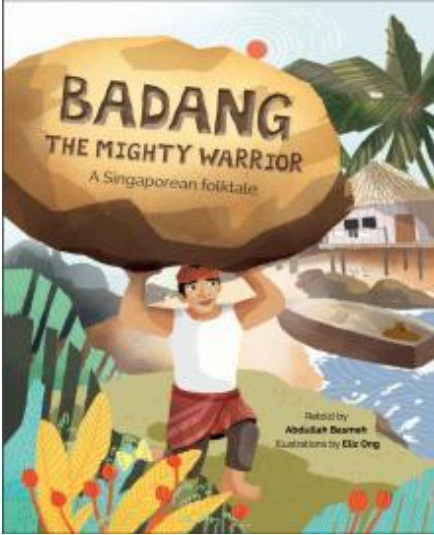
“Thank you for this session! It is very heartening to see such caring and intelligent educators and parents in our society”


— Helen Wang (UK), on “Building an Inclusive Classroom”


“Reading for pleasure is the best! At home, our kids have been reading local author David Seow's picture books for pleasure in the evening. The kids just love them!”

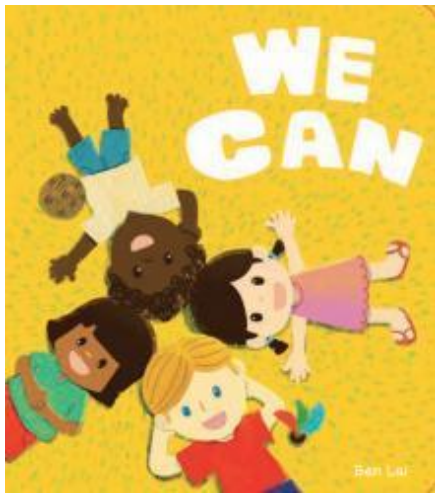
— Julie Samra (Singapore), on “Reading for Pleasure: Antidote to Digital
Distraction”

Annex B: Co-translation project titles

Book Title	Synopsis	Author/Illustrator
<p><i>Badang The Mighty Warrior</i></p>  <p>(Part of <i>OUR FOLKTALES</i>, World Scientific Publishing, 2020)</p>	<p>Badang, a poor labourer, uses his wits to gain super strength and freedom from his master. The Raja of Singapura hears reports about this strongman, and summons Badang to his kingdom. With his quick mind and strength, Badang becomes legendary as the undefeatable royal warrior, defending his King and country's honour. Among his many challenges, Badang lifts a gigantic boulder, and hurls it to the mouth of the Singapore River.</p>	<p>Reteller: Abdullah Basmeah</p> <p>Adaptor: Ruth Wan</p> <p>Illustrator: Eliz Ong</p>

<p><i>The Mice That Ate The Old Iron Scales</i></p>  <p>(Hello Kids)</p>	<p>Naduk, a once rich merchant, fails in his business and leaves the city to find his fortune in a new land. All that he has left is a heavy iron beam, which he decides to ask his good friend, Laksman, to keep for him until he returns.</p> <p>Naduk soon becomes wealthy again and returns to the city, asking his friend for his iron beam. Laksman, instead returning the beam, says that mice ate the scales. Naduk then understood what was going on in Laksman's mind. In return, Naduk hid Laksman's son and told him that the hawk had swooped down and carried the boy off.</p>	<p>Illustrator: Kampanart Sangsorn</p>
<p>กระต่ายกับพระจันทร์ (The Rabbit in the Moon)</p>	<p>This is the story of a little rabbit who searches for the missing moon, to bring back the light to everyone as before. The picture book lets children learn about the</p>	<p>Author: Narit Sookmark</p> <p>Illustrator: Preeda Punyachand</p>

 <p>(Pelangi Publishing)</p>	<p>importance of the common good rather than their own.</p>	
<p>We Can</p>	<p>Join Ah Girl in her day-to-day interactions with her family and friends. Discover local culture and icons while exploring the many ways we can achieve more when we work and play with others. An illustrated glossary at the end of the book provides a perfect prompt for a search-and-find exploration of the previous pages.</p>	<p>Author: Ben Lai</p> <p>Illustrator: Ben Lai</p>



(Epiphany Arts, 2018)

Annex C: About Singapore Book Council

The Singapore Book Council (SBC) is an independent charity with IPC status. Established in 1968 to support Singapore authors and literature, SBC aims to Build Our Imagine-nation by developing creativity, imagination, original thought and empathy. Our programmes focus on creative writing, reading, illustration, translation and storytelling. We are committed to developing a multicultural, diverse literary arts sector through our festivals, training workshops and courses, as well as book awards to recognise excellence.

Vision: International recognition for quality, diverse Singapore literature.

Mission: To develop, support and advocate a multicultural literary arts sector.

SBC is currently chaired by Ms Claire Chiang, co-founder of Banyan Tree Hotels and Resorts.

The Book Council develops and advocates Singapore's books and literary arts scene by organising a variety of festivals, including the annual Asian Festival of Children's Content (AFCC); giving out prestigious awards such as the biennial national award Singapore Literature Prize; supporting community outreach through the #BuySingLit movement; and building professional capacity through our Academy programmes.

Because it all starts with a story.

SBC is supported by the National Arts Council of Singapore under the Major Company Scheme for the period from 2019 to 2021. For more information, please visit www.bookcouncil.sg.

Annex D: About Asian Festival of Children's Content



The Asian Festival of Children's Content (AFCC), organised by the Singapore Book Council, is the leading festival in Asia focusing on children's books and stories and young adult (YA) fiction. Targeted at writers, illustrators, translators, publishers, parents, teachers and media producers, this one-of-a-kind festival offers a series of exciting panel discussions, workshops, lectures, masterclasses, pitching sessions, networking events and public activities promoting the



Singapore Book Council

Building Our Imagine-nation

creation and appreciation of quality children's literature and YA with a focus on Asian themes. Over the past 10 years, the AFCC has grown to become a key literary event in the region, attracting many local and international speakers, as well as thousands of delegates and participants.

For more information, please visit www.afcc.com.sg.