

Secret international library networks no one has told you about

By Karen Van Drie & Katie Day

Snapshot

Karen Van Drie, Head of Libraries for the International School of Myanmar in Yangon, Myanmar and Katie Day, President of the Singapore International School Libraries Network share the content of their presentation for the ALA International Relations Roundtable webinar. They generously outline a long list of awards, networks and options for global communication, interaction and learning of many kinds.

You all know about [IFLA \(the International Federation of Library Associations\)](#), and if you're a school librarian, you may have heard of [IASL \(the International Association of School Librarianship\)](#), but what about the [Global Literature in Libraries Initiative \(GLLI\)](#)? Or the various networks of international school librarians, living as expatriates and organizing professional development for each other, as well as promoting diverse literature in English while engaging with local libraries within their country of residence?

There are some 'happening groups' out there in Library Land – beyond the national and state library associations, such as SLAV.

We'd like to share some useful resources for discovering literature from around the world, whether for collection development or personal reading enjoyment – as well as highlighting librarians connecting in unexpected places.

Global Literature in Libraries Initiative (GLLI) – Karen Van Drie

Hi, my name is Karen Van Drie. I'm a Yank school librarian serving as Head of Libraries for the International School of Myanmar in Yangon, Myanmar. My friend and colleague, Katie Day, President of the [Singapore International School Libraries Network](#), and I are here to share with you (imagine dramatic music here) Secret International Library Networks No One Has Told You About.

I have to start with a confession. I am constantly listening to book publishers market their books. I often hear them say that 'if you want to create a bestseller, you have to put the word 'secret' in the title.' Okay, I thought I'd give that 'secret' idea a try when Katie and I were putting together a webinar for the American Library Association's International Relations Round Table. We were going to be talking about our two organizations: the [Global Literature in Libraries Initiative](#) and the [Singapore International School Libraries Network](#).

A more accurate title might have been International Library Networks that deserve to be more well known. But this 'secret' idea works! Our webinar had the highest number of registrants of any ALA International Relations Roundtable webinar they had done to date. If you'd rather listen to the one-hour webinar video then read on, as after we discuss our organizations, we've included a link in this article. Now, on to our first secret organization!

The [Global Literature in Libraries Initiative](#) (GLLI) is a grassroots initiative originating in the US, featuring a network of librarians, translators, publishers and authors devoted to getting more of the world's literature into English-language libraries.

GLLI strives to increase the visibility of works in English translation so that more readers can enjoy the amazing diversity of these books and the perspectives they present. We do this by showcasing titles from around the world via reviews and themed months of literature on our organization blog.

In addition, as Executive Director, I frequently present at book festivals and fairs plus library conferences about our activities. Whether you are a children's librarian or a YA literature blogger, a rural library director or a teacher at a large urban school with a diverse student population, we welcome your insights and input as we explore collaborative opportunities to encourage readers to explore beyond the boundaries of their own culture and language.

Who is reading translated literature these days? [New research](#) from the Booker Prizes is showing that global readers are considerably younger than average readers. That's not all. Their research shows that a higher proportion of male readers are buying and reading translated fiction over fiction overall. This is a way to provide value to male members of the community you may not see using your library as extensively as female members.

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One of the reasons it is so important to read globally is that we live in one ecosystem. If you look at the planet from outer space and experience the famous #OverviewEffect, you can see we are one spaceship hurtling through space with a shared planetary atmosphere. What happens in one country may not stay in that country. It could impact people in another country. Do we see any national borders from space, or have we just imagined them? It can be very useful to us as human beings to treat our human literary ecosystem as physically global just as we are now recognizing our global planetary ecosystem looking from space.

A second reason to read translated literature is world peace. Does that sound grandiose? There are conflicts all over the world where people don't understand each other. Perhaps people haven't taken the time to listen to other people and understand each other's differences. Isn't

reading essentially listening to other people? It builds our empathy. It helps us see things from perspectives we haven't been exposed to before.

We can also imagine new ways of thinking when we've been exposed to new ideas and other people's points-of-view. We don't have to come up with every new idea in our own culture. People are innovating everywhere. What ideas can we incorporate into our own culture that come from other cultures? For example, do we have translated literature in our libraries from the nations where our largest immigrant populations come from? Wouldn't that help us, not only understand better their home context, but also, what innovations they might bring to our community?

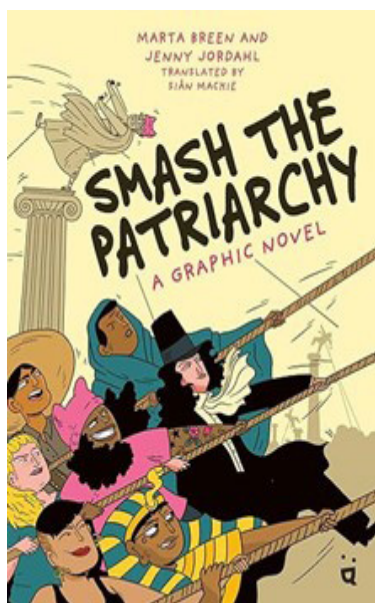
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How can we as librarians help build understanding of markets abroad that matter to our own community's economy? Wouldn't locals with some context of another nation's culture via reading literature from there have a better chance of connecting with new clients and companies knowing more about that place. Do I have books from my community's largest trading partner nations? Could that be useful to people in our own communities working to understand communities where they would like to connect?

Here's a challenge for librarians: why not aim to have at least two books in your collection from every country on the planet? That's less than 400 books! Need to start smaller? How about two books from every one of your country's neighbours. Or two books from every country on a particular continent?

GLLI reviews children's and young adult literature every Wednesday from around the world. We call it [#WorldKidLit Wednesday](#). Every September, we share children's literature from a particular country for #WorldKidLitMonth (for September 2024, our #WKLM country of focus will be Taiwan). Use these reviews to add titles to your collections. During May, we also celebrate young adult literature from all over the world for #IntLYALitMonth, an annual

literary celebration we started to recognize the best books for young adults ages 12-18 from all around the world. These books are both written in English and also translated so you'll probably see Australian books in the mix!



The GLLI Translated YA Book Prize

The 2024 Global Literature in Libraries Initiative

Translated Young Adult Book Prize Winner:

Smash the Patriarchy: a Graphic Novel

Written by Marta Breen; illustrated by Jenny Jordahl

Translated from the Norwegian by Siân Mackie (ISBN: 978-3039640188)

The flagship activity of Global Literature in Libraries Initiative is our Translated Young Adult Book Prize, started in 2019. Awarded every spring, the [GLLI Translated Young Adult Book Prize](#) honours the best translated young adult fiction from around the world for ages 12-18. An annual short list is announced, along with honour books and an eventual winner judged by

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world-class librarians, translators, and book reviewers. This year's jury was led by Katie Day, president of the International School Librarians Network in Singapore. All titles and jury members for the last six years are listed under our Prize tab on our website. The books are so good!

In addition to our regular weekly offerings like #WorldKidLitWednesday, and monthly offerings like #WorldKidLitMonth, #IntLYALitMonth, and #WITMonth every year, here are some of our custom blog themes we have done to help librarians discover books from around the world:

[#ChineseLitMonth](#) – curated by translation cooperative Paper Republic (Feb. 2017)

[#TurkishLitMonth](#) – curated by librarian Karen Van Drie (Aug. 2017)

[#SouthAfricanWomxnWriters](#) – curated by author Jen Thorpe (Jan. 2021)

[#OlderWomenInFiction](#) – curated by book blogger Caroline Lodge (Aug. 2019)

[#ExileLitMonth](#) – curated by public librarian Lesley Williams (Nov. 2020)

[#KiwiLitMonth](#) – curated by teacher librarian Amanda Bond (Mar. 2020)

[#GlobalPRIDELitMonth](#) – curated by librarian Anita Fata (Jun. 2020)

[#NepaliLitMonth](#) – curated by author Sangita Swechcha (Nov. 2019)

[#QatariLitMonth](#) – curated by librarian Abeer S. Al-Kuwari (Aug. 2021)

[#SouthAsianLit in Translation](#) – curated by author/translator Jenny Bhatt (Dec. 2020)

[#BrazilianLitMonth](#) – curated by Comparative Lit Scholar Basak Bingol Yuce (Apr. 2020)

[#SpeculativeFictionInTranslation](#) – curated by author Rachel Cordasco (Apr. 2021)

[#MadagascarLitMonth](#) – curated by poet/diplomat Abhay K. (Dec. 2021)

[#BulgarianLitMonth](#) – curated by book blogger Thomas Hubner (Jul. 2018)

[#SyrianLitMonth](#) – curated by ESL teacher and refugee Nuri Al-Khalif (Mar. 2018)

Here are some examples of themed months curated by International school librarians:

[#SDGLitMonth](#) – curated by teacher librarian Katie Day (Mar. 2021)

[#DutchKidLitMonth](#) – curated by teacher librarian Kim Tyo-Dickerson (Sep. 2021)

[#SingKidLit](#) – curated by teacher librarians Barb Reid & Kim Beeman (Oct. 2019)

[#IndiaKidLit](#) – curated by book jury members Katie Day & Karthika Gopalakrishnan (Sep. 2022)

[#IntYALitMonth](#) – curated by teacher librarian Linda Hoiseth (May 2022)

[#TasmanianLitMonth](#) – curated by teacher librarian Bec Taylor (Apr. 2023)

Where can you follow Global Literature in Libraries Initiative on social media?

[@GlobalLit on X](#) (where we share the most)

[@GlobalLit on Facebook](#)

And to receive every blog post, input an email address into our 'Subscribe' field on the blog.

International school librarian networks – Katie Day

An important ally of GLLI is the informal network of Anglophone international school librarian networks around the world, where international schools are schools which cater to [third-culture kids](#) or [transnational youth](#) (depending on which definition you prefer), often serving as an oasis for expatriate families in transit.

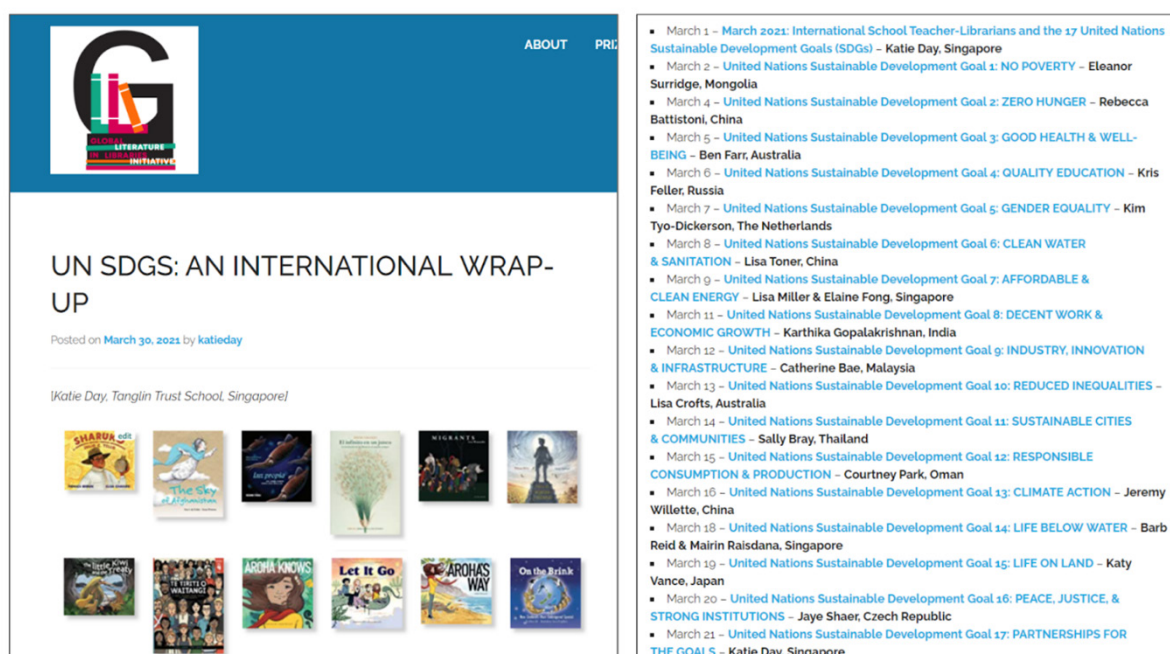
Such schools tend to fall into two camps. Some offer a curriculum including a national focus, e.g., the Australian International School of Singapore, or my employer, Tanglin Trust School in Singapore, which offers 'British-based learning with an international perspective.' Others are not associated with any particular country, e.g., they have their own curriculum, often using the PYP and MYP frameworks of the International Baccalaureate Organisation (IBO) as well as the IBO Diploma programme.

Note, there is also a difference between countries that allow local students to attend international schools (e.g., Vietnam, China, and Thailand) and those which reserve international schools only for expatriate children (e.g., Singapore). As a consequence of that restriction, Singapore international schools are like a bubble within the bubble that is Singapore in the region. Regardless, international schools have diverse student populations, both culturally and

**...think of us
like trees in a
huge forest,
communicating
via an extensive
root system.**

linguistically, and as teacher-librarians we need to consider which books in our collections are mirrors and windows for our particular community.

When Karen asked me to guest edit a month of posts on the GLLI blog in March 2021 dedicated to [books supporting the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals \(SDGs\)](#) with an emphasis on books NOT from the typical US and UK publishing sphere, which tends to dominate the market, I immediately said yes. As a teacher-librarian who has lived overseas from my native USA for almost forty years, I knew there were plenty of international school teacher-librarians I could tap to write posts to illuminate fantastic books that support the 17 goals. In the end we involved 25 international school librarians from 16 countries: Singapore, Mongolia, China, Australia, Japan, New Zealand, Japan, India, Malaysia, Thailand, The Netherlands, Russia, Oman, Vietnam, the Czech Republic, and Peru.



UN SDGS: AN INTERNATIONAL WRAP-UP
Posted on March 30, 2021 by kateday

[Katie Day, Tanglin Trust School, Singapore]

The post displays a grid of 12 book covers, including titles like 'SHARON', 'The Sky at Night', 'The Little Prince', 'The Boy Who Swam to England', 'The Boy Who Swam to England', 'The Boy Who Swam to England', 'The Boy Who Swam to England', 'The Boy Who Swam to England', 'The Boy Who Swam to England', 'The Boy Who Swam to England', 'The Boy Who Swam to England', and 'The Boy Who Swam to England'.

The post also includes a list of 17 Sustainable Development Goals with corresponding book recommendations and authors from various countries:

- March 1 – March 2021: International School Teacher-Librarians and the 17 United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) – Katie Day, Singapore
- March 2 – United Nations Sustainable Development Goal 1: NO POVERTY – Eleanor Surridge, Mongolia
- March 4 – United Nations Sustainable Development Goal 2: ZERO HUNGER – Rebecca Battistoni, China
- March 5 – United Nations Sustainable Development Goal 3: GOOD HEALTH & WELL-BEING – Ben Farr, Australia
- March 6 – United Nations Sustainable Development Goal 4: QUALITY EDUCATION – Kris Feller, Russia
- March 7 – United Nations Sustainable Development Goal 5: GENDER EQUALITY – Kim Tyo-Dickerson, The Netherlands
- March 8 – United Nations Sustainable Development Goal 6: CLEAN WATER & SANITATION – Lisa Toner, China
- March 9 – United Nations Sustainable Development Goal 7: AFFORDABLE & CLEAN ENERGY – Lisa Miller & Elaine Fong, Singapore
- March 11 – United Nations Sustainable Development Goal 8: DECENT WORK & ECONOMIC GROWTH – Karthika Gopalakrishnan, India
- March 12 – United Nations Sustainable Development Goal 9: INDUSTRY, INNOVATION & INFRASTRUCTURE – Catherine Bae, Malaysia
- March 13 – United Nations Sustainable Development Goal 10: REDUCED INEQUALITIES – Lisa Crofts, Australia
- March 14 – United Nations Sustainable Development Goal 11: SUSTAINABLE CITIES & COMMUNITIES – Sally Bray, Thailand
- March 15 – United Nations Sustainable Development Goal 12: RESPONSIBLE CONSUMPTION & PRODUCTION – Courtney Park, Oman
- March 16 – United Nations Sustainable Development Goal 13: CLIMATE ACTION – Jeremy Willette, China
- March 18 – United Nations Sustainable Development Goal 14: LIFE BELOW WATER – Barb Reid & Mairin Raisdana, Singapore
- March 19 – United Nations Sustainable Development Goal 15: LIFE ON LAND – Katy Vance, Japan
- March 20 – United Nations Sustainable Development Goal 16: PEACE, JUSTICE, & STRONG INSTITUTIONS – Jaye Shaer, Czech Republic
- March 21 – United Nations Sustainable Development Goal 17: PARTNERSHIPS FOR THE GOALS – Katie Day, Singapore

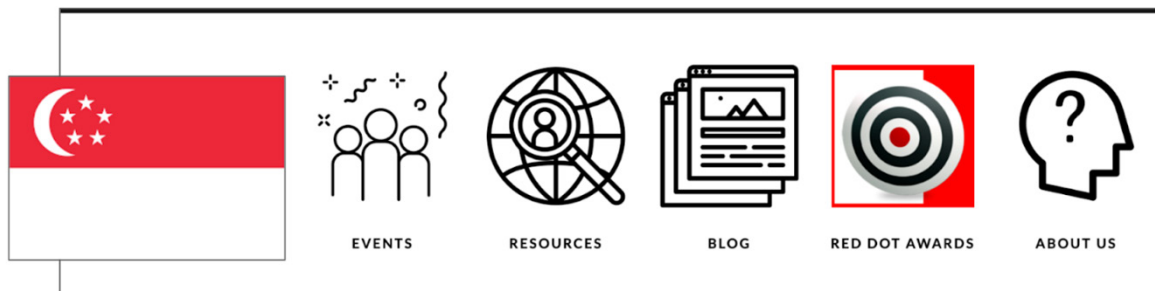
Librarian networks are important, no matter where you live, but it's especially true for people working far from home. In Myanmar, Karen has maybe four other English-speaking teacher-librarians to connect with, while here in Singapore I am president of a highly organized network – [ISLN](#) – where we get up to thirty teacher-librarians showing up to a meeting.

Similar networks of teacher-librarians exist in Kuala Lumpur, Hong Kong, Shanghai, Beijing, Japan, Vietnam, South Korea, Dubai, etc. We are in contact with each other online via WhatsApp (e.g., [The Librarian's Peace](#)), Facebook (e.g., [Int'l School Library Connection](#), started in 2016 by Aussie Dianne McKenzie, who lived in Hong Kong for many years), and LinkedIn (e.g., [IntTLlead](#)) – as well as meeting up in person whenever possible at regional conferences, e.g., the [Librarians Knowledge Sharing Workshop](#) (started in 2012), a two-day event hosted by a different school/country each year. Last year it was in Jakarta, Indonesia, and this November it will be in Penang, Malaysia. Next March a similar network-run conference will be held in

London – [International School Librarians in Europe](#). There is also a librarian strand to the annual 21st Century Learning conference in Hong Kong – [21CL Library Connection](#).



<http://isln.org.sg>



I think of us like trees in a huge forest, communicating via an extensive root system.

The most valuable aspect of our shared awareness is our book award programs – with annual shortlists and students voting for a winner – together with their related initiatives (e.g., Battle of the Books or Readers Cup competitions). Having our own local awards is very powerful, especially for schools without a national affiliation.

Annual book awards run by international school librarian networks



Singapore



Japan



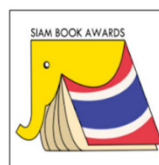
Hong Kong



Vietnam



China



Thailand



Korea



Switzerland



India



Europe
(Belgium, Czech, Hungary, Greece,,
Luxembourg, Netherlands, Germany)



Africa

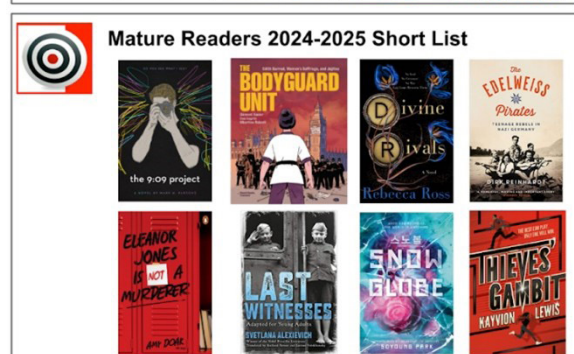
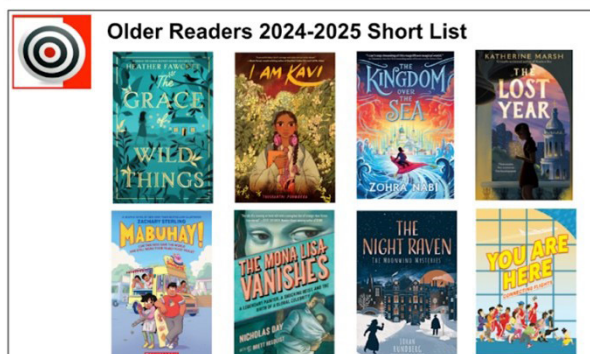
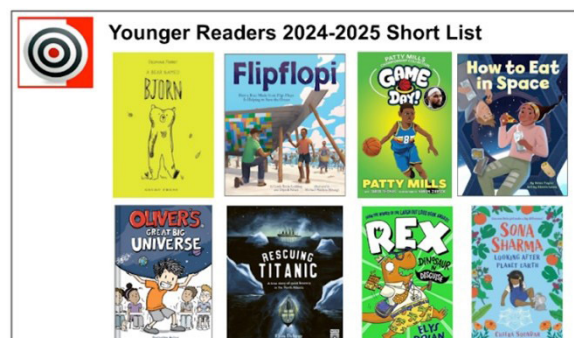
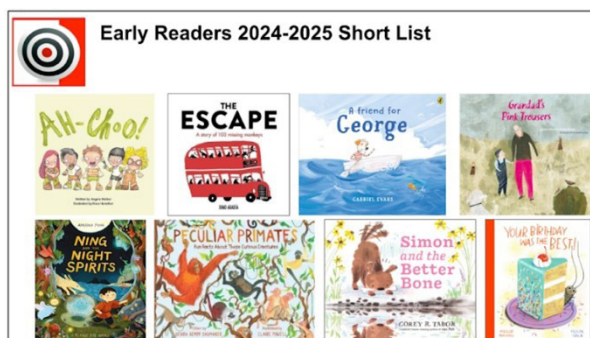
Japan was the first with its [Sakura Medal](#), followed by the [Panda Awards](#) in China. Singapore was next with the [Red Dot Awards](#) in 2009 (note: 'red dot' is a proud epithet after the President of Indonesia once dismissed Singapore as 'just' a little red dot on the map!).

Now there are the [Golden Dragon Awards](#) in Hong Kong, the [Siam Book Awards](#) in Thailand, the [Morning Calm Awards](#) in South Korea, the [Gold Star Awards](#) in Vietnam, the [Golden Cowbell Awards](#) in Switzerland, the [Jarul Book Awards](#) in India, the Nile Book Awards in Africa, and the [Iris Awards](#) representing international schools in seven countries in Europe (Belgium, Czech, Hungary, Greece, Luxembourg, Netherlands, and Germany). Every year we watch each other's long lists and short lists like hawks, on the lookout for books we might have missed.

In coming up with our shortlists each year, we are seeking the best recently published global literature for our students, with an eye to books that could be (regional) mirrors for our students (and if we can find a book that includes third-culture kids, that is a big win). The process of selecting the shortlists each year is some of the best professional development our network offers, as we recommend, discuss, and evaluate titles and have to come to a group decision, striving for a balance of cultures, formats, genres, and themes.

...international schools have diverse student populations, both culturally and linguistically... as teacher-librarians we need to consider which books... are mirrors and windows...

For example, in this year's Red Dot 32 titles (eight titles in each of the four audience categories) ([link to slides](#)) the following countries are represented in some way: Australia, New Zealand, the USA, the UK, Canada, France, Kenya, Singapore, the Czech Republic, Sri Lanka, the Philippines, Sweden, Ukraine, Korea, Germany, and Belarus. There is at least one translation per category.



This is where our work intersects with the GLLI project – especially the [GLLI Translated YA Book Prize shortlists](#). So many books that are labelled ‘diverse’ are only diverse from the perspective of immigration into an Anglophone country, like the USA.

The goal is to choose books that we can justify buying multiple copies of because if the library buys them for our book awards, then the extra copies can be used to freshen up the classroom libraries the following year.

If you know of other international school library networks or other global book awards run by teacher-librarians, please let us know.

In terms of other resources, I trust you are familiar with IBBY (the International Board of Books for Young People) and its Hans Christian Andersen Award for authors and illustrators, as well as the biennial [IBBY Honour Lists](#) and [IBBY Selection of Outstanding Books for Young People with Disabilities](#) booklist. Their [biennial congress](#) is well worth attending, and IBBY is always a big presence at the annual [Bologna Children’s Book Fair](#).

Note: [Australia](#) has an IBBY chapter, though funnily enough, Singapore doesn’t (yet).

The Singapore Book Council hosts the [Asian Festival of Children’s Content](#) (AFCC), with a different country of focus each year. Last year it was the Philippines, next May it will be South Korea.

Are you interested to know about the best children’s books coming out of India? Follow the [Neev Book Awards](#) which are announced at the annual (free) [Neev Literature Festival](#) in Bangalore.

Here’s a challenge for librarians: why not aim to have at least two books in your collection from every country on the planet?

A new website was unveiled this year at the American Library Association (ALA) annual conference – [Building a Global Youth Literature Collection 101](#) - with a [Starter Kit](#) of booklists and a [Hub](#) of even more online resources related to global literature for young people than we have mentioned here. Do go explore it!

Comments? Questions? Please reach out to me (katie.appleton.day@gmail.com) or Karen (worldlibraries@yahoo.com).

Note: This article is based on an online webinar the two authors did for The International Relations Round Table (IRRT) of the American Library Association (ALA) on June 8, 2023. A recording of it is still available via this archive site [HERE](#)

Karen Van Drie (<https://twitter.com/worldlibraries>) is a USA expatriate Head of Libraries for an international school in Yangon, Myanmar, having previously lived in Prague and Istanbul. She has about run through her library bucket list: library student association president, engineering research librarian for a driving simulator, founder of a public library foundation, public library board trustee & president, business & investment librarian, branch manager, public library director, school librarian, expat librarian, book prize committee member, defended intellectual freedom and kept books from getting banned, named in a book acknowledgement, ALA award winner, and since 2019, Executive Director of *Global Literature in Libraries Initiative* (<https://twitter.com/globalitin> <http://facebook.com/globalitinlibs>). She asks, 'Have I missed something cool? Tell me before it's too late! I don't want to miss it!'

Katie Day (<https://twitter.com/librarianedge>) is an international school teacher-librarian who has been living overseas for almost 40 years, including the UK, Hong Kong, Vietnam, Thailand, and Singapore. Originally from Maine, her undergraduate degree was in Russian Civilization, her masters in Library Science (as well as a teaching qualification) was earned from Charles Sturt University in Australia, and she completed a masters in Children's Literature at the University of Surrey in the UK. Currently president of ISLN (*International School Libraries Network*) in Singapore, she has been involved in organizing regional librarian conferences and managing book awards for many years, including school librarian network ones such as the *Red Dot Book Awards* in Singapore and the *Siam Book Awards* in Thailand – as well as now serving on the jury for the *GLLI Translated YA Book Prize* and the jury of the *Neev Book Awards* in India.