



CHILDREN'S LITERATURE

A brief history of children's literature

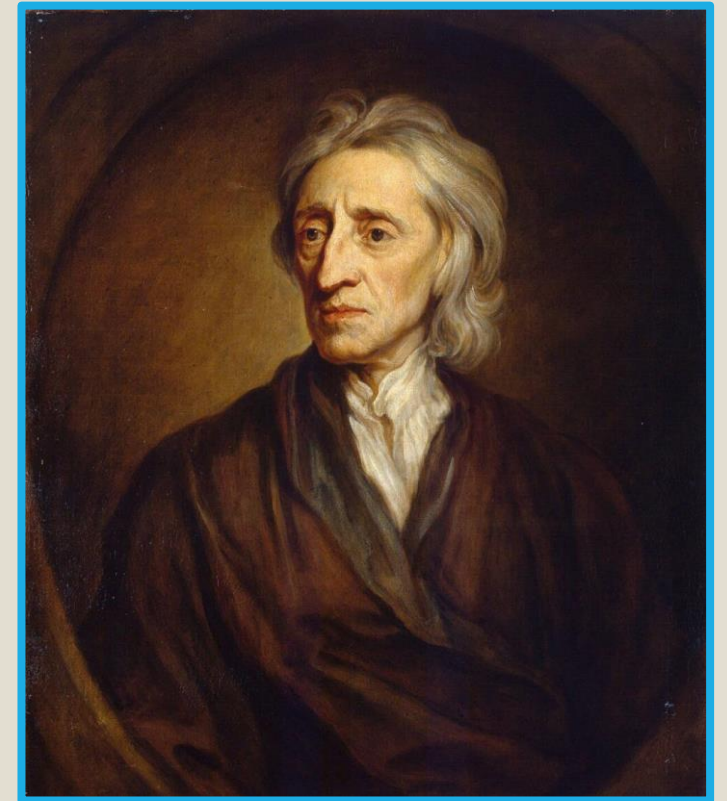


17TH CENTURY

The Concept of Childhood

From small adults to children

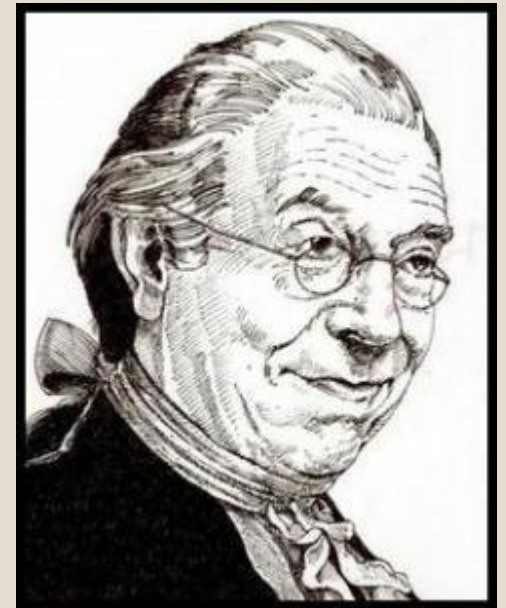
- Before the 17th century, children were seen as **small adults**: this view began to shift towards the end of the 17th century as **John LOCKE** developed a new theory in *Some Thoughts Concerning Education* (1693). According to the philosopher, children **could acquire knowledge through experience** because they were a « blank slate » (littéralement une « ardoise vide », une « page blanche » en français).
- During the **Enlightenment** (les Lumières) and **Romantic** periods, childhood started to be viewed as a **time of innocence**, distinct from adolescence and adulthood.



John LOCKE

Literature as an educational tool

- The beginning of children's literature can thus be traced back to the **17th century**. At that time, children's books were mainly **didactic**: they had to *teach* them values and shape their behavior.
- **John NEWBERY** (1713-1767), a British publisher, is said to be the « **Father of Children's Literature** ». He published *A Little Pretty Pocket-Book*, his first children's book, in 1744. About **one-fifth** of the books he published were children's stories.



John NEWBERY



19TH CENTURY

The Blossoming of Children's Literature

Fairy Tales

- Before the 19th century, fairy tales were not meant for children, they were even seen as **inappropriate for kids**. Fairy tales were fashionable **among adults** in the French court at the end of the 17th century (**Charles PERRAULT** published his fairy tales at that time).
- When **Jacob** and **Wilhelm GRIMM** published their two-volume collection *Kinderund Hausmärchen* (1812–1815) in Germany, things started to change.
- **Edgar TAYLOR** translated the tales into English as *German Popular Stories* (1823–1826) and revised and redirected the tales **for children**.
- Fairy tales became very popular after the publication of **Hans Christian ANDERSEN**'s *Tales, told for children* (1848 in English), and many authors tried to replicate the fairy tale style.

A Golden Age

- The **Victorian era** (1837-1907), corresponding to the reign of Queen Victoria in England) is seen as a golden age for children's literature.
- **Lewis CARROLL's** *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* (1865) was very popular during that period. It is believed that children's literature started to shift **from instruction to delight** with this novel, although it is not the sole cause.
- Children's books then represented the **separate spheres for men and women** (typical of the era): some books were clearly aimed at boys, others at girls.



A Golden Age

- Stories for girls were often **domestic** and celebrated the **family life**:
 - Louisa May ALCOTT's *Little Women* (*Les Quatres filles du Dr. March*) (1868)
 - Charlotte YONGE's *The Daisy Chain* (1856)
 - L. T. MEADE's *The World of Girls* (1886).
- Stories for boys encouraged them **to have adventures**:
 - *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer* by Mark TWAIN (1876) and its sequel *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* (1884)
 - Robert Louis STEVENSON's *Treasure Island* (1883)
 - Rudyard KIPLING's *Kim* (1901)
- There were also animal tales, such as Anna SEWELL's *Black Beauty* (1877) and KIPLING's *The Jungle Book* (1894), which delighted both girls and boys.

A Golden Age

- Children's literature truly **blossomed** in the second half of the 19th century: books were **mass produced** and more and more children could read.
- Children's literature began to adapt to the **social classes** the young readers belonged to: **penny dreadfuls** for working-class kids, high-minded literature for children of the middle and upper classes.
- Books were highly **illustrated** in the 19th century, and **picture books** slowly started to appear as the printing methods evolved.

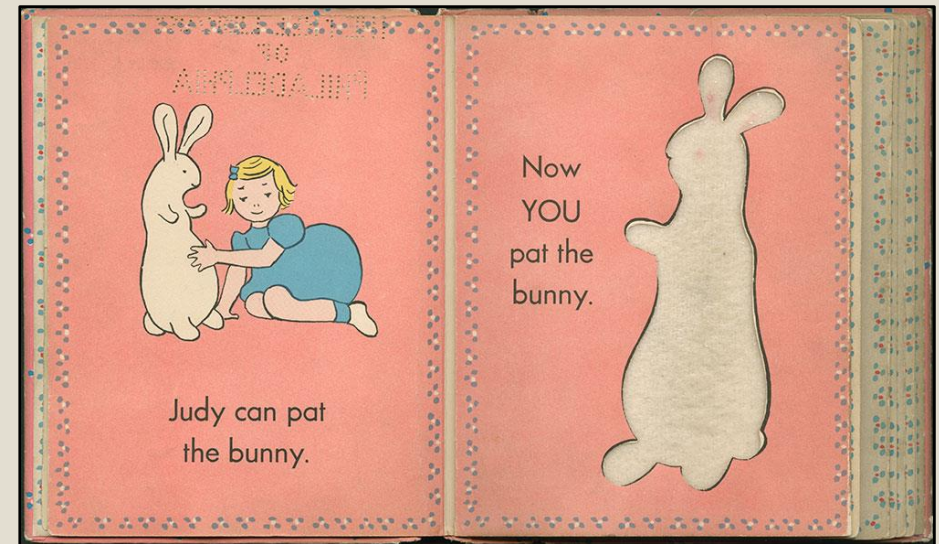


20TH CENTURY

Picture Books and Series Books

The rise of picture books

- In the 20th century, children's books began to be written for distinct readerships: children were now divided into **different categories according to their age**.
- The **shapes** of the books also changed: pop-up books, shaped books, and tactile books became widely popular.



Dorothy KUNHARDT, Pat the Bunny

Series books

- **Series books** became popular in the 20th century, even though it was frowned upon by the critics:
 - **L. Frank BAUM**'s Oz series, begun with *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz* (1900)
 - **Lucy Maud MONTGOMERY**'s Anne series, which started with *Anne of Green Gables* (1908)
 - **Laura INGALLS WILDER**'s Little House series (1st book = *Little House in the Big Woods* in 1932)
 - **C. S. LEWIS**'s Chronicles of Narnia (1950–1956), which started with *The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe* (1950)
 - **Anne MARTIN**'s Baby-Sitters Club series, begun with *Kristy's Great Idea* (1986)
 - **R. L. STINE**'s Goosebumps (Chair de Poule) series, begun with *Welcome to the Dead House* (1992)
 - The **Nancy Drew** (Alice en français) series by fictitious and collective author **Carolyn KEENE** from 1930 to 2003.



RESOURCES

Articles

- [« Children's Literature »](#)
- [“A Brief History of Children's Literature”](#)
- [« Children's literature »](#) (*Britannica*)
- [« Children's Literature »](#) (*Internet FAQ Archives*)

Videos

- [Children's Literature: A Very Short Introduction](#)
- [Children's Literature | The Very Short Introductions Podcast](#)
- [Genres of Children's Literature](#)
- [What is unique about children's literature?](#)