

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

## Children's books in the age of coronavirus: AFCC tackles challenges faced by publishing industry



SINGAPORE, 22 September 2020 – The annual Asian Festival of Children's Content (AFCC) will tackle the challenges as well as opportunities the publishing industry currently faces in a fully digital format from **3-4 October 2020**. Over two days, more than 40 featured writers, publishers and speakers from Singapore and around the world will gather to discuss how the children's books industry is responding and adapting to the global pandemic.



Singapore Book Council

Building Our Imagine-nation

Exploring the theme “Voyages”, AFCC will examine pressing topics such as the import of children's books during a time of crisis; how to build resilience in children through books; the effects of digitalisation on book fairs and festivals; and how to build virtual communities. The festival will also take a close look at the impact of two popular genres – poetry and comics – and how schools can make them part of students' essential reading.

Featured speakers include **Dr Junko Yokota**, head juror of the [Hans Christian Andersen Award](#); award-winning poets **Naomi Shihab Nye** ([Young People's Poet Laureate 2019-2021](#)) and **Mariko Nagai** (two-time [Pushcart Prize](#) winner); **Minh Lê**, US writer and graphic novelist of [Green Lantern: Legacy](#); **Tohby Riddle**, multi-awarded Australian picture book creator; and popular Chinese/Canadian author and illustrator **Trevor Lai**. The festival also features key figures in the media content and literary industry such as **Dexter Ong**, Head of [Wattpad Studios \(Asia\)](#); and **Peter Florence**, Director and Founder of the [Hay Festival](#),

Some of the highlight sessions include:

### **[Opening Session: Children's Books in the Time of Crisis and Change](#)**

Featured speakers: [Junko Yokota](#), [Bijal Vachharajani](#)

In times of crisis and change, how have children's book writers, illustrators, publishers responded to what was happening? What role does literature play in helping children to navigate through such situations? In this session, examine how children's literature have documented pivotal moments in history, and explore how it continues to do so in our current times.

### **[Building Resilience in Children During Crisis](#)**

Featured speakers: [Myra Garces-Bacsal](#), [Patrick Yee](#), [Tohby Riddle](#)



Singapore Book Council

Building Our Imagine-nation

Deep-dive with us and discover how books that deal with socially and culturally sensitive issues can be a source of support for children during challenging times.

### **The Power of Poetry**

Featured speakers: [Mariko Nagai](#), [Naomi Shihab Nye](#), [Deborah Emmanuel](#)

Poetry can be a powerful tool for children to explore their feelings within a simplified form. Explore the poetic form, its functions and potential, and how it can be a quiet, but powerful and inventive medium in writing for children.

### **(A New) Required Reading: Comics and Graphic Novels in Schools**

Featured Speakers: [Felicia Low-Jimenez](#), [Carol Tilley](#), [Remy Lai](#), [Minh Lê](#)

Comics and graphic novels have long been overlooked as potential reading aids for children. With more writers and publishers producing comics and graphic novels for younger readers, learn how to help your children and students cultivate a love for reading through comic books and graphic novels in this session.

### **Building Virtual Communities: Do's and Don'ts**

Featured Speakers: [Dexter Ong](#), [David Liew](#)

The COVID-19 pandemic has drastically changed the way we interact with others, with digital/online interaction now considered the norm for the foreseeable future across industries including creative content and education. This panel will discuss about these changes and how creators and users are building new virtual communities.

### **Digital Festivals and Book Fairs: The New Normal?**

Featured speakers: [Peter Florence](#), [Carolina Ballester](#), [Kamolpaj Tosinthiti](#)

This year's major book fairs and literary festivals have all had a common theme – the conversion of their event from physical to digital. Do organisers consider this as a silver lining or has it affected engagement with audiences? How has the literary industry, whose *modus operandi* is usually physical in nature, adapted to the unusual situation with the use of digital technology, and do they see this as the prime solution moving forward?

AFCC will also hold two masterclasses held on 2 October. They include “Understanding the Editorial Process” by **Joanna Cárdenas**, a senior editor at Kokila, an imprint of Penguin Young Readers. Her interactive masterclass will provide participants with the opportunity to fine-tune their novels and picture books. The other is a partnership with the Australian Film Television and Radio School (AFTRS) on the “Page to Screen Adaptation” masterclass for participants who are interested in adapting their stories for different mediums. The speakers include Peter Herbert and Dr Pieter Aquilia from AFTRS and film producer Lisa Hoppe.

### **Free Events at AFCC**

In addition, the public can attend a number of events for free at AFCC with registration, including book launches and the Hedwig Anuar Children's Book Award (HABA) ceremony. The festival will present 14 new titles across nine virtual book launch events on 26 and 27 of September from 11.30am to 5pm and from 1pm to 6.30pm respectively. In commemoration of its partnership with its former Countries of Focus, AFCC will launch *Our Folktales: The All-time Favourite Folktales of Asia*, a regional collaborative anthology that features illustrated folktales from China, India, Indonesia, Japan, Malaysia, Myanmar, Philippines and Singapore. The book launch will be streamed live on AFCC's Facebook on 3 October 6.30pm.

Closing the festival is the Hedwig Anuar Children's Book Award ceremony on 4 October at 6pm. The winner of the biennial literary award, which recognises the best children's literature in English, will be revealed at the livestreamed event on AFCC's Facebook page.

More information about the speakers can be found in Annex C.

For more information, please visit [afcc.com.sg](https://afcc.com.sg).

#### Event details

Date: Digital Symposium on 3-4 October 2020, masterclasses, workshops and pitching sessions on 2 October 2020

Venue: Online live Zoom Sessions

#### Ticketing Information:

Ticketing website: <https://afcc2020digitalpass.eventbrite.sg>

All participants will receive a certificate of participation upon request.

Category	Price	Entitlements
----------	-------	--------------



1 Day Digital Pass (3 or 4 October)	\$30	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- Access to all the live-streamed sessions on the selected day</li><li>- Access to recorded AFCC sessions for 2 weeks post-event (for selected day)</li><li>- 10% off Masterclass tickets for AFCC 2020</li><li>- 15% discount for regular AFCC 2021 passes (any type)</li></ul>
2 Day Digital Pass (3-4 October)	\$50	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- Access to all live-streamed sessions on 3-4 October</li><li>- Access to AFCC sessions for 2 weeks post-event</li><li>- 10% off Masterclass tickets (for AFCC 2020)</li><li>- 15% discount for regular AFCC 2021 passes (any type)</li></ul>
2 Day Digital Pass+ (3-4 October)	\$60	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- Complimentary copy of new AFCC picture book, <i>Our Folktales: The All-time Favourite Folktales of Asia</i> (U.P. \$20+)</li><li>- Access to all live-streamed sessions on 3-4 October</li><li>- Access to AFCC sessions for 2 weeks post-event</li><li>- 15% off Masterclass tickets (for AFCC 2020)</li></ul>



Singapore Book Council

Building Our Imagine-nation

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- Priority booking for AFCC 2021 tickets (early worm)</li><li>- 20% discount for regular AFCC 2021 passes (any type)</li></ul>
Masterclass (2 October)	\$40 per masterclass	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- 10% discount for AFCC 2021 passes (any type)</li></ul>

For media related enquiries, please contact:

Ethan Leong | [ethan@bookcouncil.sg](mailto:ethan@bookcouncil.sg) | +65 6342 5122

###

## **Annex A: 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](http://www.bookcouncil.sg).



## Annex B: 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 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



Singapore Book Council

Building Our Imagine-nation

key literary event in the region, attracting many local and international speakers, as well as thousands of delegates and participants.

AFCC will run online from 3-4 October.

For more information, please visit [www.afcc.com.sg](http://www.afcc.com.sg).

### **Annex C: Full List of Speakers**



Name: Ace Khong

Country: Singapore

Ace Khong studied Graphic Design at LASALLE College of the Arts, where he graduated in 1999. His publications included a picture book entitled *Jurogic*, children illustration books and Mido picture storybooks serial. In 2019, he was the Writer-in-Residence for the Toji Cultural Foundation in Wonju, Korea.



Name: Ahmad Redza bin Ahmad Khairuddin

Country: Malaysia

Ahmad Redza Ahmad Khairuddin is currently President of Malaysia IBBY (MBBY). He obtained his MBA from Ohio University, and a Bachelor Degree in Business Administration from RMIT University, Australia. He has been involved in publishing for more than 20 years, most notably in the publication of educational and children's books.



Name: Ang Ben Wei

Country: Singapore

A Ravenclaw through and through, Ben Wei has always found pleasure in learning. Literature has provided him with ample opportunity for this, and he has spent many lazy afternoons meandering down passionate sentences. When he is of age, he would like to visit Middle-Earth.



Name: Barry Toa

Country: Singapore

Barry is an Assistant Lead in Mediacorp's English Audience segment with more than eight years of experience in the media industry, specialising in audience growth, monetisation and content partnerships. He is currently working on numerous projects which include Mediacorp's kids and digital audio strategy.



Name: Bijal Vachharajani

Country: India

Bijal Vachharajani is a senior editor at Pratham Books where she leads a team that creates open access picture books. She is a journalist with over 19 years of experience in writing, communication, and education for sustainable development.



Name: Bobby Hu

Country: China/Singapore

Bobby Hu (Qiaohua) is ten years old and he comes from China. He is currently a Year 6 student studying in Dulwich College Singapore. He likes to read all kinds of books such as animal books, adventure books, and mystery books. His favourite writers include Andy Griffiths, and J.K. Rowling.



Name: Carlene Tan

Country: Singapore

Carlene Tan is Director of Original Production & Development at WarnerMedia Kids APAC. She is responsible for identifying new IP and producing original series for Cartoon Network, Boomerang and POGO in Asia Pacific. She oversees the region's current slate of originals that include the International Emmy-nominated *Lamput*.



Name: Carolina Ballester

Country: China – Spain

Carolina Ballester holds an MA in Political Science from the Madrid Complutense University and university degrees in Chinese and Arabic languages and cultures from the French National Institute of Oriental Studies (INALCO). Since 2013, she is international programme manager for the Shanghai International Children's Book Fair.



Name: Carol Tilley

Country: USA

Carol Tilley (Associate Professor, School of Information Sciences, University of Illinois) studies the social and cultural history of comics and readers with special attention given to the nexus of libraries, comics, and youth. Tilley was a 2016 Eisner Award judge and is a past president of the Comics Studies Society.





Name: Clelia Gore

Country: US

Clelia Gore is Vice President of Martin Literary & Media Management, where she is also a literary agent. She is currently on an expat stint in Singapore, but calls Seattle, Washington home. She represents authors of children's and young adult books for the U.S. market, including best-selling and award-winning books.



Name: Daphne Lee

Country: Malaysia

Daphne Lee is the fiction editor at Scholastic Asia. As a writer, Daphne is interested in Malaysian and Asian myths, legends and fairytales. She recently published *Bright Landscapes*, a collection of short stories inspired by local supernatural beliefs and folklore. She is currently working on her first novel.



Name: David Liew

Country: Singapore

David Liew has illustrated *Ellie Belly*, *The Adventures of Squirky* and *The Plano Adventures*. His adventures in children's literature continue with *The Change Makers* and *Eye Spy* series released in 2020. He is the Regional

Advisor to the Society of Children's Book Writers and Illustrators in Singapore.



Name: Deborah Emmanuel

Country: Singapore

Deborah Emmanuel is a Singaporean poet, performer and professional speaker. She has written three books, two one-woman shows and countless poems. When not writing, Deborah tours internationally, makes theatre, plays music and meditates a lot.



Name: Dexter Ong

Country: Hong Kong

Dexter Ong is Head of Asia for Wattpad Studios, based in Hong Kong. He oversees Wattpad Studio's expansion in Asian markets, working with local entertainment studios, producers and writers to turn Wattpad stories into film, television, print and digital projects.





Name: Felicia Low-Jimenez

Country: Singapore

Felicia has worked in bookselling and publishing for over a decade. She is one half of AJ Low, the writing team behind the best-selling Sherlock Sam series and Publisher at Difference Engine, an independent comics publisher. She believes that stories have the power to change the world.



Name: Goh Chun Hoong

Country: Singapore

Goh Chun Hoong is co-founder of DarkBox Studio, with more than 20 years' experience in the media industry as a multimedia designer and animator and 3D artist. He has been involved in several international animated TV programmes and is currently managing an online comic + motion comic publishing platform.



Name: Jai Zende

Country: India

Jai heads Content for Audible India since before its launch in 2018. He is responsible for all audiobook and original content for the services. Originally, a banker, Jai entered the spoken-word space in 2010, through his venture, booksTALK audiobooks, which was India's first major audiobook business in multiple Indian languages.



Name: Joanna Cárdenas

Country: US

Joanna Cárdenas is Senior Editor at Kokila, an imprint of Penguin Random House. She has worked on many award-winning books including *The First Rule of Punk* by Celia C. Pérez as well as the highly-anticipated *Stand Up, Yumi Chung!* by Jessica Kim.



Name: Joanna El Mir

Country: Lebanon

Joanna El Mir started working in publishing in 2001 as the Art Director at Samir Editeur. For the past 12 years, she has been building the children's book list, publishing original content and translating some of the most renowned children's authors.



Name: Jochen Weber

Country: Germany

Jochen Weber is Head of Language Sections at the International Youth Library in Munich, Germany. He is also responsible for the IYL's Iberian and Ibero-American Section, and is the editor of "The White Ravens", the Library's annual recommendation list of international children's books.



Name: Junko Yokota

Country: US

Junko Yokota is Director of the Center for Teaching through Children's Books and Professor Emeritus at National Louis University (Chicago). Her research focuses on picture book illustration and translation,

multicultural and international literature, and digital storytelling.



Name: Kamolpaj Tosinthiti

Country: Thailand

Kamolpaj Tosinthiti was born in Thailand, and grew up in her family-owned bookstore. After graduating in French language and literature, she started working at Silkworm Books, where she is currently Associate Publisher. She is currently Vice-president of International Affairs on The Publishers and Booksellers Association of Thailand (PUBAT) board.



Name: Khim Loh

Country: Singapore

Khim Loh is one of Asia's most established producers, with a wealth of industry experience. She co-founded The Moving Visuals Co. and as Executive Producer, her work includes over 100 productions for both local and international broadcasters. Khim is currently President of the Association of Independent Producers (AIRPO) Singapore.



Name: Leila Boukarim

Country: Singapore/Lebanon

Leila Boukarim was born in Lebanon, raised in several countries, and resides in Singapore. She spends her time writing stories that encourage meaningful discussions between children and caregivers. She has published eight picture books to date and has worked with publishers such as Marshall Cavendish and Penguin Random House SEA.



Name: Lisa Hoppe

Country: Australia

Lisa is the Writer and Producer of *H is for Happiness*—a family feature film which won the CinefestOz Film Prize. Lisa's extensive experience as writer, script editor and script producer has seen her work featured across a range of genres and formats.



Name: Lynette Teo

Country: Singapore

Lynette Teo is an assistant editor at Epigram Books. She has an interest in working with authors for early reader board books, children's picture books and early young adult novels. Lynette is also a published picture book author, making her debut with the book *X and O are BFFs!*



Name: Maria Russo

Country: US

Maria Russo is the co-author of *How to Raise a Reader* and the Editorial Director of min edition US, where she acquires and edits picture books from creators. She has been the Children's Books Editor at the New York Times and a writer and editor at the Los Angeles Times.



Name: Mariko Nagai

Country: Japan

Mariko Nagai is an award-winning writer and a sought-after speaker on poetry for children. She is the recipient of UNESCO-Aschberg Bursary for the Arts, amongst many others. She is the author of *Dust of Eden* (Albert Whitman 2014) and *Under the Broken Sky* (MacMillan USA 2019).





Name: Minh Lê

Country: USA

Minh Lê is the award-winning author of *Drawn Together*, *Let Me Finish!* and *The Perfect Seat*. He is also writing *Green Lantern: Legacy*, a graphic novel for DC Comics. In addition to writing books, he has written for a variety of publications, including the New York Times, NPR, and HuffPost.



Name: Myra Garces-Bacsal

Country: UAE

Myra Garces-Bacsal is the Assistant Dean for Research and Graduate Studies for the College of Education at the United Arab Emirates University. She served as Chair of the Programmed Committee for the Asian Festival of Children's Content (AFCC) from 2011-2019 and currently serves as the International Advisor-at-Large for the AFCC.



Name: Naomi Shihab Nye

Country: US

Naomi Shihab Nye is the Young People's Poet Laureate for the United States (Poetry Foundation) and the editor of the New York Times magazine poems. She is on faculty at Texas State University and has written or edited more than 30 books.



Name: Nora Nazerene Abu Bakar

Country: Singapore

Nora Nazerene Abu Bakar is the executive editor at Penguin Random House SEA, responsible for discovering and publishing different voices across the region. With over 12 years of experience in the publishing industry she possesses a key network of relationships and keen knowledge of the region.



Name: Patrick Yee

Country: Singapore

Patrick Yee is one of Singapore's leading illustrators, with more than 180 children's books. He received the Most Prolific illustrator award from the Singapore Book of Records in 2016. He is actively involved in the local arts scene and teaches at various tertiary educational institutions.





Name: Paul Rockett

Country: UK

Paul Rockett has over 20 years' experience of working in publishing with roles as diverse as art directing, authoring, and leading imprints within market leading organisations, such as BBC Worldwide, Pearson and OUP. He is currently publisher of the educational imprints Franklin Watts and Wayland at Hachette Children's Group.



Name: Peter Florence

Country: UK

Peter Florence (MBE) is a festival director, most notable for founding the Hay Festival with his father, Norman Florence. He holds honorary doctorates from The Open University and The University of Glamorgan, and is a Fellow of Hereford College of Arts and The Royal Welsh College of Music & Drama.



Name: Peter Herbert

Country: Australia

Peter Herbert is the Head of Screen Business and Producing at the Australian Film Television and Radio School (AFTRS). Peter is a writer, producer and executive producer for many international companies including Crawford Productions, PBL Productions, Taffner Ramsay, Beyond International and Granada.



Name: Pieter Aquilia

Country: Australia

Dr Pieter Aquilia is a scriptwriter, script editor and director, who has combined her practice with a career in academia. Pieter completed her Doctor of Creative Arts in Scriptwriting at the University of Technology Sydney. Her research publications cover Ethnic and Gender Representation on Screen, and the Media in Asia.



Name: Rasyidah Angullia

Country: Singapore

Rasyidah Angullia is an Associate Librarian from the Children & Teens team in the National Library Board (NLB), Singapore. She works with primary and secondary schools to build and sustain strong reading cultures through outreach programmes and literary packages for students.



Name: Remy Lai

Country: Indonesia/Australia

Remy Lai writes and draws stories for kids. Her books include graphic novel/prose hybrids *Pie in the Sky* and *Fly on the Wall*, and two upcoming graphic novels—*Pawcasso* and *Bima the Elephant*. She lives in Australia, where she can often be found exploring the woods with her dogs.

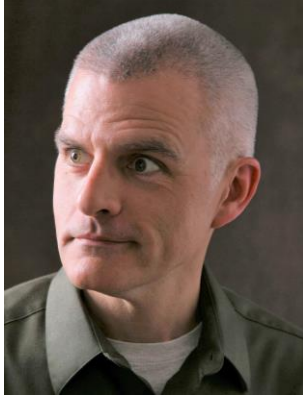


Name: Robert Alejandro

Country: Philippines

Robert Alejandro is a graduate of Fine Arts from the University of the Philippines, an award-winning graphic artist, an illustrator, a painter, and one of the pillars of Filipino arts and design shop *Papemelroti*. He is a

founding member of *Ilustrador ng Kabataan* (INK), an organisation of children's book illustrators.



Name: Rushton Hurley

Country: USA

Rushton Hurley is the founder and executive director of Next Vista for Learning, which houses a free library of videos by and for teachers and students. Rushton regularly works with school leaders on professional development, school improvement, and change strategies.



Name: Sayoni Basu

Country: India

Sayoni Basu was the cofounder of Duckbill Books, an indie children's publishing house, which is now an imprint of Penguin Random House India. She has earlier worked in Penguin, Scholastic and OUP. She likes everything about books, apart from dusting them.



Name: Swetha Senthilkumar

Country: Singapore

Swetha Senthilkumar is a 16-year-old who proudly calls herself a book dragon, being an avid reader. She writes both poetry and prose and has won awards in advocacy competitions. Her works have been published in the World of Apu magazine and in the anthology *Love and Life at the Gallery*.



Name: Tay Tze Ern

Country: Singapore

Tay Tze Ern studies at Anglo-Chinese School (Junior). He reads any book that catches his eye. He loves history and science fiction, and one of his favourite authors is Eoin Colfer. He grew up listening to audiobooks and now loves listening to podcasts about myths, mysteries and murders.



Name: Tina Narang

Country: India

Tina Narang is the Children's Publisher at HarperCollins India, having joined in 2017 to launch the children's imprint, HarperCollins Children's Books. Previously, Tina was with Scholastic India from 2005-2017. This is her third

time at AFCC, the first being in 2015, followed by the more recent one in September 2019.



Name: Tohby Riddle

Country: Australia

Tohby Riddle is a multi-award-winning picture book creator. His books have been published in many languages – one even translated by Haruki Murakami. His new book is *The Astronaut's Cat*.



Name: Trevor Lai

Country: Canada/China

Trevor Lai is an award-winning entrepreneur, author-illustrator, and the founder of Up Studios, one of the leading animation studios in China. Trevor has written and illustrated over 25 children's books, including the *Piggy* and *Tomo* series. Trevor has presented over 1,000 creative workshops and industry event keynotes internationally.

-----  
-----

Full bios of the speakers and their images can be downloaded [here](#).