

**Ávarp forsetafrúar
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Á barnabókmenntahátíðinni
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Good morning everyone; Góðan daginn, góðir gestir. It's an honour to be invited here to the Nordic House to deliver these opening remarks for you today.

As some of you may know, I am fortunate enough to be the mother to four children who are now, 3, 5, 7, and 9. My father is a retired English teacher, my mother a former pre-school teacher, and Guðni's parents were both teachers as well. It's fair to say that there were many books in our homes growing up, and there are many books in our house today [possibly too many, as I discover now that we're unpacking from our most recent move to Bessastaðir!]. Reading together and imparting to our children a joy of reading is an important priority for us both.

We all have fond memories of the stories we enjoyed as children and teenagers: Growing up in Canada, I learned to read with the popular "Mr Men" series from Britain, and moved on quickly to many other collections, from learning about the Kings and Queens of England [like a dutiful Commonwealth citizen!] to the timeless, Canadian stories of Anne Shirley, heroine of *Anne of Green Gables* and several other books. Incidentally, the story of Anne of Green Gables or "Anna í Grænuhlíð", has been extremely popular in Iceland and Leitir, the library catalog, lists many editions in Icelandic, published by no less than five different publishers throughout the decades.

All these stories comfort us, entertain us, teach us, and introduce us to a world larger in time and space that we could otherwise reach.

The theme of the discussions today is appropriate, since children's books obviously have a lot to do with the building of our self-image. Children's books are also to some extent a mirror of the world at a given moment; they reflect the world-view of the authors and their times.

Some stories that were once considered classics are now seen as marked by perhaps racial or gender prejudice. The fact that we do not want our children to be brought up with these antiquated perspectives reminds us of the important influence that these tales have on shaping our own world views, and help motivate us to tell stories we hope will both entertain and help to share positive messages.

My children – our children – are fortunate enough to be growing up in a bilingual environment. So, next to the Mr Men and Roald Dahl are well-worn copies of the monster stories by Áslaug Jónsdóttir, the entire football series by Gunnar Helgason, and of course the adventures of Jón Oddur and Jón Bjarni by Guðrún Helgadóttir, this year's guest of honour and one of Iceland's best loved children's authors.

Children's literature was also important for me as I began to learn Icelandic. I think "Einar Áskell og galdramaðurinn" was the first book I "studied" back at Univ College London in the UK, and here in Iceland we worked on declining all of the nouns in "Blómin á þakinu." Since I have lived here in Iceland, I have always been impressed – as I am with so much about this country's rich literary tradition – with the range and breadth of books for children and adolescents that have been written in Icelandic. Icelanders are a storytelling people, and this begins early on.

This is why it is only appropriate that this well respected international children's literature festival is held here in Reykjavik. I happen to run an annual literary event, and we have worked with the Nordic House for our public reading; this location is a wonderful centre for the promotion of Nordic culture and events, not least those in the literary vein. I hope that those of you visiting Iceland will have some time to explore the library and exhibitions in this bright space.

I wish you all a productive day of discussion and learning, but most of all, I hope that you have *fun* here during this special festival that celebrates children's literature.

Thank you.