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Echoes of Experience: Encountering Children and Childhood in the Canadian History Hall

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Abstract: How are children remembered in public memory? Within most history museums, children are superficially represented in well-worn, overly simplistic tropes overwritten by adult nostalgia, romanticism, and sentimentalism. Rarely are the details of their lives—not to mention their ideas or perspectives—engaged in a substantive and nuanced way. This representation is especially true for racialized children and those from other historically marginalized groups. Children are often presented as examples of a generic type ("ten-year-old boy"), and overwhelmingly as historical victims. But curating traces of children's material and immaterial culture can offer insight into young people's understandings of cultural, political, and social matters—unique and valuable perspectives that deserve closer attention. This article explores the dominant narratives used to represent children as historical actors in the recently revamped Canadian History Hall at the Canadian Museum of History. Focusing on the possibilities and challenges of presenting children's perspectives, experiences, and voices, we take the new Canadian History Hall as a case study, and analyze both the narrative form and content of the many representations of children and childhood found in its three galleries.

Keywords: children, childhood, museum, history, memory, exhibition, Canada

Introduction

Within most history museums, children's lives and perspectives rarely take centre stage in permanent exhibitions,[1] which often rely on a limited range of materials, representational tropes, and superficial engagement. Like many other groups of historically marginalized people, including those who are poor, illiterate, colonized, racialized, disabled, queer, gender non-binary, and female, children's experiences and contributions have not been well-documented, preserved, or collected. Historical museum exhibitions often present children as examples of a generic type ("ten-year-old boy"), and overwhelmingly as historical victims. But children's knowledge, experience, cultural production, and material culture offer insights into understandings of politics and social matters that often provide unique perspectives deserving of closer attention. Such engagement deepens our knowledge about historical periods and events.

Among scholars and museum practitioners, the very question of who is a child, and how they can be identified as such through historical materials removed from their original temporal, cultural, and quotidian context is one which remains decidedly unresolved. Both now and in the past, legal definitions of the child vary significantly.[2] We understand "child" to be a fundamental social category grounded in claims of consensus, hegemonic assertions of universal stages of

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development, and cultural, moral authority about its attributes, despite being an unstable, contested, and contradictory category of identity that has been imposed in uneven ways on young people throughout history. So too has it been understood from presentist perspectives in inconsistent ways. For instance, scholarship has shown an "adultification" bias against Black children in the United States, who are often perceived across the board as being older than they are and less innocent than their white peers (Epstein et al.; Goff et al.). Conversely, people with disabilities of all ages are often infantilized and perceived as younger and less capable than they are (Robey et al.; Safta-Zecheria), and justifications for colonialism have consistently categorized Indigenous peoples as irrational and childlike (Rollo).

This article investigates how children and childhood are represented in the new Canadian History Hall at the Canadian Museum of History (CMH) using textual and visual analysis and explores the possibilities and challenges of presenting children's perspectives, experiences, and voices in history museum exhibitions. Rather than providing an exhaustive survey of all such representations, we touch on a few examples that offer productive opportunities for deeper engagement with the particular complexities that arise when seeking to understand children's experiences and the ways in which constructions of childhood often overwrite them. These considerations must include the ways in which "childness" functions as an elastic attribute, conferring meaning in its manipulations and various applications. For, in spite of multiple attempts to fix and settle notions of childhood across the centuries, it remains a capacious category capable of holding conflicting meanings, and malleable for multiple uses as well.

Methodology

Employing a content analysis approach, our initial attempts to identify the representations of children and childhood throughout the exhibition galleries quickly proved to be a challenging and, at times, arbitrary exercise. We were struck by the sheer number of representations in various forms, and their ubiquity in the historical materials themselves. The types of relevant materials on display varied greatly, from historical photographs to artwork, and archaeological fragments to well-worn toys. The multiple artifacts and images displayed speak not only to the diversity of children's experiences present in the historical record but also to the differing strategies used to integrate these young historical actors into larger narratives.

Our survey of the Canadian History Hall's contents sought to capture the dominant constructions of children, childhood, and youth, the contexts in which they were referenced, the types of physical and visual objects used to do so (for example, photograph, material artifact, text, AV/interactive, or artistic rendering), whether the actors were named or quoted, and what roles they played in the stories depicted (ranging from protagonist, supporting or secondary, incidental, or other). While some sections of the exhibition focus on young people

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in particular, they are more often included in exhibits about historical events or circumstances more broadly, most often appearing in photographs.

While the exhibition contains many labels that identify subjects as children and text panels that discuss aspects of childhood explicitly, we were aware that these identities are not grounded in stable or shared understandings, in the past or in the present. But we also encountered a great deal of visual material that depicted young-looking people without identifying them as children. Looking across different time periods, geographical settings, and cultural contexts, how could we determine who was a child and who was not? In many cases, as with photographs of infants and toddlers, we were confident in our identification, but as the images and recorded ages of historical actors neared the older, subjective, and unstable categories of youth and young adulthood, we became more conscious of the inherent limitations of our interpretations as non-specialists on the specific historical periods and contexts being represented. More contextualized understandings would better recognize the range of factors that contribute to a person's perceived "childness," including mental capacity, grade in school, physical strength and stature, and exposure to and participation in violence, labour, sex, independence, and caregiving, but such evaluations are not always conscious or shared. Thus, a standard universe of cases representing all references to children, childhood, and youth proved impossible to quantify.

As a result, rather than attempting to define and impose a set of criteria for who counts as a child, we apply a wider, more interpretive lens to analyze *how* children and childhood are represented in the Canadian History Hall. The specific appearances we touch on in greater detail were selected primarily as examples of the dominant tropes and narratives of these representations, with attention to geographic, thematic, and temporal variety. In presenting the examples that we do, we explore the strengths and limitations of museological strategies for representing children and childhood, with the hope of offering greater insights into understandings of childhood, children's varied and shifting roles as historical actors, and the epistemological limitations of representing that knowledge in narrative form.

Children and Childhood in Museums: A Brief Survey

Constructions of childhood have historically been rooted in a limited range of essentialist tropes, often casting children as pure and innocent, blank slates, or wicked and evil (Kehily 5). Research on how children and childhood are represented in museum spaces has only recently begun to unpack commonalities across exhibition content. Scholars like Sharon Brookshaw ("Material Culture" 366-368) and Tory Dawn Swim Inloes (6-7) observe that much of what has been collected by museums relating to children's lives is preserved for its ability to conjure a sense of romanticized nostalgia. This sentimental approach remains a popular strategy in both collection efforts and object displays, eclipsing attempts to incorporate a broader range of perspectives that engage with the diversity of

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childhood experiences. In contrast to sentimental museum depictions of historical childhoods, Carla Pascoe notes an alternative tendency to "vilify the past" by painting childhood as a "time of imprisonment in poverty, sadness, and abuse" (211). These dominant constructions reproduce superficial views of childhood in public memory, offering little room for alternative, more multifaceted, or contested experiences.

Distinctions between how children's culture and youth culture are conceptualized also influence the type of content found on display. Anna Sparrman, Tobias Samuelsson, Anne-Li Lindgren, and David Cardell discuss what they refer to as "child culture," defined as "cultural amenities produced and offered to children by adults" and the "legislation, policy and politics regulating child culture" (256). The authors note that while narratives centring *youth* culture often rely on references to rebellion and subversion, conversations about *child* culture continue to cast these behaviours as antithetical to notions of the innocent child, a trope which has historically dominated constructions of childhood (Bernstein; Garlen). From this standpoint stems a desire to protect children from certain forms of culture deemed unsuitable for their consumption, reflecting what Sparrman et al. believe to be an inability for young children to "contest and struggle with culture" in their daily lives (257). Meanwhile, accounts of youth culture are seen to be more broadly peopled by social and political actors subverting mainstream values and traditions.[3]

In addition to distinguishing between child and youth culture, Sparrman et al. note the difference between "child culture," as something produced largely by adults, and "children's culture," which is produced by children themselves through "[their] own actions and meaning making, that is, how they use the culture produced for them . . . and of course how they use objects *not* produced for them" (258). Similarly, Sharon Brookshaw differentiates between the "material culture of childhood" and the "material culture of children." As Brookshaw notes, much of children's material world is produced and imposed upon them by adults ("Material Culture" 367). This includes toys, games, books, clothing, educational materials, as well as furniture and household objects intended for children. When displayed in museums, these objects—examples of what Brookshaw labels the "material culture of childhood"—often reflect the predilections and sensibilities of adults, particularly in their ability to spark nostalgia in visitors, while more intimate stories of the children who used these items remain mostly absent.

By contrast, Brookshaw defines the material culture of *children* as objects that are created, modified, and manipulated by children themselves, based on their own interests and needs ("Material Culture" 381). These objects do not, however, form their own discrete or pure category, but rather range from constructions made out of materials repurposed for use as toys, to natural materials that have been transformed into extensions of a child's imagination, to existing objects that have been modified or utilized in innovative ways. An example of the latter can be found in Kim Tao's reflections on the Australian National Maritime Museum's 2016 travelling exhibition *On Their Own - Britain's Child Migrants*. In a

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comment posted by former child migrant Nigel Owen on the exhibition's online message board, he recalls covertly keeping a teddy bear named "Hector" with him during his time at Northcote Farm School in Victoria. At the age of six, Nigel "sewed a smile on his face to try and make me happy" (335). In her reflection on this post, Tao observes that "the presence of archetypal childhood symbols such as teddy bears in museums often serves to reinforce nostalgic and sentimental reflections on this period of life" (335). She, however, views Hector the teddy bear as an object that has "traversed the boundaries between the material culture of children and the material culture of childhood," as evidenced by Nigel's choice to transfigure it into a form more desirable and useful to him by imposing a smile on its face (335-336).

While scholars like Sparrman and Brookshaw lay out distinct, binary categories, we caution against drawing too firm a line between prescribed groupings. Nigel's teddy bear, for example, exists simultaneously as both a manufactured object onto which adult sentimentality is projected and as an example of the deeper, more historically contextualized type of children's material culture that is celebrated for its perceived insights into children's lives. As Mona Gleason argues, limiting our recognition of children's agency to pure, unadulterated (pun intended) manifestations of children's intentions, authorship, and cultural production risks missing the more nuanced and complex contributions young people have made across time and space (457). Rather, Gleason proposes that "approaching questions of agency as *relational and contextual* enables historians to move beyond binaried and undifferentiated approaches toward a more fruitful exploration of *how* the social construction of age and social relations of power propelled change over time" (457).

From this standpoint, historians and museum practitioners would benefit from understanding how these distinctions often play into representations of childhood and children. Although categories like the "material culture of childhood" and "material culture of children" will always be overlapping and the boundaries between them sometimes difficult to discern, historians and museum practitioners alike can nevertheless recognize the ways in which the former has so often stood in for the latter, effectively occluding and obscuring children's perspectives and experiences. Doing so helps to deepen and complicate our understandings of the concept of childhood as an abstraction and to push for a more complex picture of the lives of actual children from the past represented in museum collections and exhibitions. As representations of young people's lives have so often drawn on typified examples of nostalgia-inducing content, a diverse range of children's creations, adaptations, and forms of expression—considered broadly—should be prioritized as the valuable historical resources that they are, and collected and displayed more extensively.

Multiple challenges exist, however, for those wishing to collect, exhibit, and interpret children's material culture. The often ephemeral and fragile nature of many of these items makes them difficult to preserve in the rare cases in which they are deemed worthy enough by adults to retain, and by museological

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institutions to collect and exhibit. There also exists an epistemological challenge of interpretation and understanding: in the absence of their interpretive assistance and knowledge sharing, as Ludmilla Jordanova has argued, "it is simply not possible to know what toys [and, we argue, other forms of material culture] mean to children, especially in the past" (27)—or even what objects might have been used by children for what purposes.

Much like other marginalized populations, children have experienced a "triviality barrier" when it comes to the acceptance of their oral traditions, social practices, and ephemeral constructions (Brookshaw, "Personalisation and Playlore" 4), particularly those at the intersection of multiple forms of historical marginalization. Reflected in museological trends, these challenges to collecting and displaying children's material culture have impacted public memory and the ways in which we conceptualize modern and historical childhoods. Moving toward our analysis of children and childhood on display in the Canadian History Hall, these associations will help illuminate some of the dominant constructions and narrative techniques the Museum employs in order to examine how the exhibition fits within traditional approaches to curating childhood and reflect on the accompanying possibilities and challenges inherent in the practice.

Historicizing the History Hall

The CMH is a human history museum that has served in various forms as the predominant national history institution since the late nineteenth century. Its origins trace back to the founding of the Geological Survey of Canada in 1842, with exhibits first produced in 1856 (Amyot 9). Initially tasked with identifying mineral and rock deposits across the country for the purposes of development and resource extraction, the survey's mandate broadened from its focus on mineralogy and palaeontology to include national scientific research in the fields of botany, zoology, and anthropology (McCreary and Murnaghan 2-3). The first collections were exhibited in Ottawa in the former Clarendon Hotel in 1879 before the new Victoria Memorial Museum was completed in 1911 (Russell 25). Renamed the National Museum of Canada in 1927, it survived two world wars and an economic depression, created a library, and developed school and public programming during the next two decades (Vodden and Dyck). In 1951, the final report of The Royal Commission on National Development in the Arts, Letters, and Sciences (known as the Massey Commission) was released. It found that Canada was "far from the vanguard" of developing its own national culture and argued for federal support for the arts (Massey 272). Throughout the 1950s and 1960s, increased funding and specialization seeded the development of new departments and facilities, with the National Museum of Man established in 1968 and renamed the Canadian Museum of Civilization in 1986 ("History Timeline"). The museum reopened in its current location in 1989 in Gatineau, Quebec.

Within the Canadian Museum of Civilization, the Canada Hall offered visitors an immersive journey through Canadian history and across Canadian

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geography, from the first European settlement in Canada by the Norse in Newfoundland around 1000 C.E. to increased contact and developments in the Canadian North after the Second World War. It was modelled, in part, on the Epcot Center at Disney World (Phillips and Phillips 697), replete with reproductions of buildings and models of historical figures. Outside of a handful of traditional representations of children within domestic and scholastic realms, their lived experiences were largely unexamined within the exhibition space.[4]

In 2012, the Canadian federal government announced that the Canadian Museum of Civilization would undergo an identity change. Under an amendment to the 1990 *Museums Act*,[5] Prime Minister Stephen Harper's Conservative government proposed a new name: the CMH, and a new mandate. While the previous mandate focused on research production and a broad examination of world history (Aronczyk and Brady 174), the new mandate sought to "enhance Canadians' knowledge, understanding, and appreciation of events, experiences, people, and objects that reflect and have shaped Canada's history and identity, and also to enhance their awareness of world history and cultures" ("About the Museum"). The amendment introduced a more nation-centric mandate, and notably removed the words "research" and "critical" from the statement. This new emphasis on developing public appreciation for Canada's past and the active removal of any references to critical engagement raised suspicion from both inside and outside the academy; worries revolved around what room would be left for unfavourable appraisals, and what groups of people would see their stories celebrated under the new and more provincial mandate (Aronczyk and Brady 166).

After five years and with tensions high, the newly branded Canadian Museum of History opened on 1 July 2017, 150 years to the day after Confederation. Visitors were invited to experience the fully redesigned Canadian History Hall, now separated into three galleries detailing Canadian history in Early Canada (Earliest Times-1763), Colonial Canada (1763–1914), and Modern Canada (1914-Present). While many had reservations about the scope and content of the new Hall, the narrow, nationalist approach to history characteristic of Harper's Conservatives was largely absent from the new displays. Instead, a more varied and nuanced dive into Canada's past is presented, including a notable increase of Indigenous stories and cultures exhibited throughout the three galleries. While reviews of the Hall have pointed out the density of content currently exhibited (Walsh 281; Marshall 6-7), this density leaves room for objects and stories related to Canadian children to receive a more diverse and nuanced treatment than they did previously.

Children and Childhood in the Canadian History Hall

The most frequent form of children's representation in the Canadian History Hall galleries is through their presence in photographs, revealing a wide range of participation within their families and communities. Photographic evidence

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of children does pose challenges for historians of childhood, however, particularly when details about the ages and lifestyles of those pictured are not part of the physical record. As discussed earlier, we often found ourselves unsure of the status of young-looking subjects in photographs. This was not only due to our lack of knowledge about their relevant historical and individual circumstances and our presentist positionings far removed from the original contexts being depicted, but also due to the quality and clarity of the images themselves.

Children and their culture are the sparsest in Gallery 1: Early Canada (Earliest Times-1763). A close analysis of representations of children and childhood in the early sections of this gallery point to much larger challenges relevant to archaeological sources, raising questions about how children are known about and remembered from "prehistory," or the time before written records. As Joanna Sofaer Derevenski has written, "[A]rchaeological children are rarely a focus of attention in their own right but used in a fairly narrow way in efforts to understand the construction of what is implicitly regarded as an 'adult' society"; thus children's material culture is typically understood in reference to adults (8). Furthermore, Sofaer Derevenski argues, in archaeology, the conventions and criteria of physical anthropology are used to define children according to physiological, age-linked attributes "in a naturalised and reductionist manner as a universal biological category, rather than as social beings whose categorisation is a relative concept negotiated through context and the materiality of experience" (8).

In the earliest, largely archaeological sections featuring displays on the Dorset, Haudenosaunee (Iroquois), Inuit, Beothuk, and Anishinaabe (Algonquin), simple line drawings on interpretive panels depict children participating in a range of activities alongside adults: working with stone tools, tending or harvesting crops, playing, helping with food preparation, and more (see Figure 1). While the main emphasis of this gallery is overwhelmingly adult content, these drawings assert that children were present, populous, and integrated into everyday life.

Alongside the presentation of their multiple roles in various forms of labour and sociality, the common trope of children's innocence is a recurring theme, particularly in later depictions of upper-class settler family portraits featuring exquisitely adorned children with gleaming white skin, religious scenes of pious progeny, and pale, plump cherubin flanking maps of "new" colonial territories. But for the close reader of this exhibition, the representations of children and childhood shown here reveal contradictions between romantic renderings and challenging historical conditions that many of them would have faced, not to mention the malleability of the category of "child" itself. Such tensions may be seen in the display on *Les Filles du Roi* ("The Daughters of the King").

Women are often infantilized within their societies—even while being expected to fulfill adult roles—as evidenced by the diminutive linguistic terms used to describe them, and their limited social and economic power and autonomy. As the text panel explains, *Les Filles du Roi* refers to a group of about eight hundred young female emigrants, mainly between the ages of twelve and twenty-five

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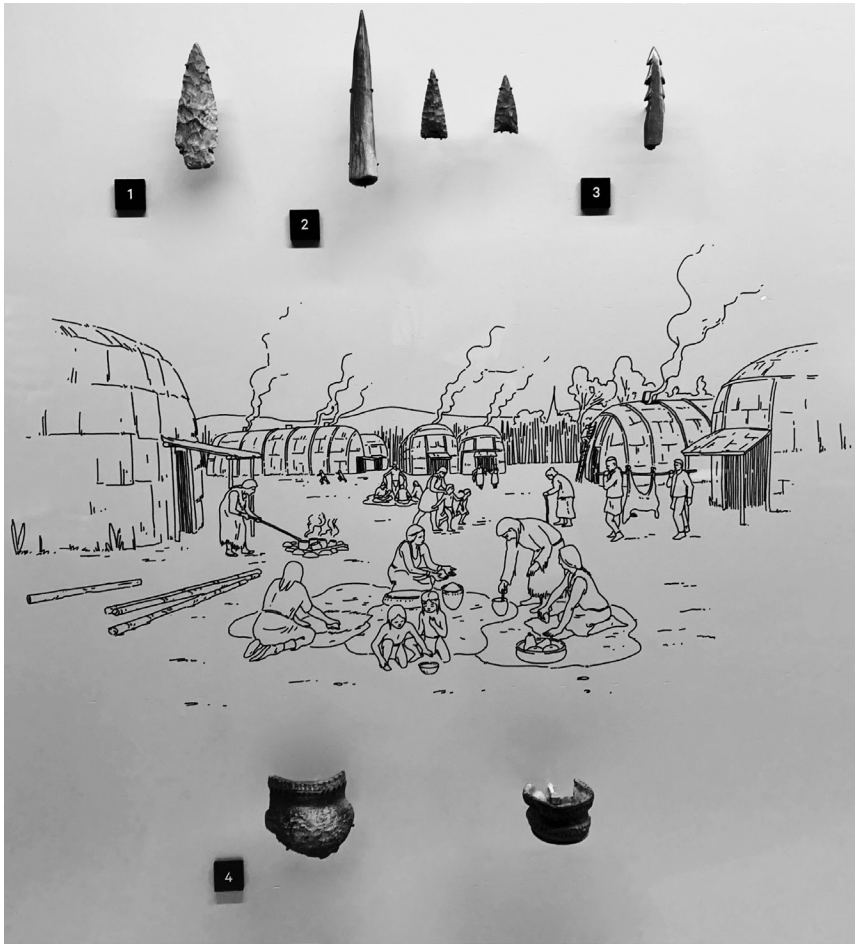


Figure 1: "Iroquioian Village," Gallery 1: Early Canada (Earliest Times-1763), Canadian History Hall, Canadian Museum of History. Photo by Rebecca Friend.

years, who were sent to New France between 1663 and 1673 as part of a program sponsored by King Louis XIV of France. They were expected to marry and bear children as a way of increasing the settler population, and unequivocally met this goal; the number of settlers in New France rose dramatically from about 3,200 in 1666 to about seventy thousand a century later. The importance of these young women and girls is highlighted through the three-dimensional artistic rendering of a family tree identifying the descendants of a specific *Fille du Roi* named Catherine Moitié, whose eleven children, sixty-five grandchildren, and 344 great-grandchildren's names are located on the trunk, branches, and leaves of the tree (see Figure 2). More complex questions about the conceptual and ethical definition of the child and how it relates to issues of consent, sexuality, and

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Figure 2: Catherine Moitié family tree. Gallery 1: Early Canada (Earliest Times-1763), Canadian History Hall, Canadian Museum of History, IMG2017-0043-0027-Dm.

agency, however, are not explicitly addressed in the display. The dearth of historical accounts from young individuals themselves presents a significant challenge to historians and curators. As Sharon Roberts notes, "While we hear a lot about children without childhoods, such displays are often the very opposite: they exhibit childhoods without children" (158).

Nevertheless, traces of children and childhood appear in numerous instances throughout the Hall, predominantly in Galleries 2 and 3. Objects including dolls, cradles, cradleboards, moccasins, an embroidery sampler, toys, and clothes provide material evidence of children's lives. A display on the introduction of compulsory education in the 1800s exhibits a selection of standard schooling materials,

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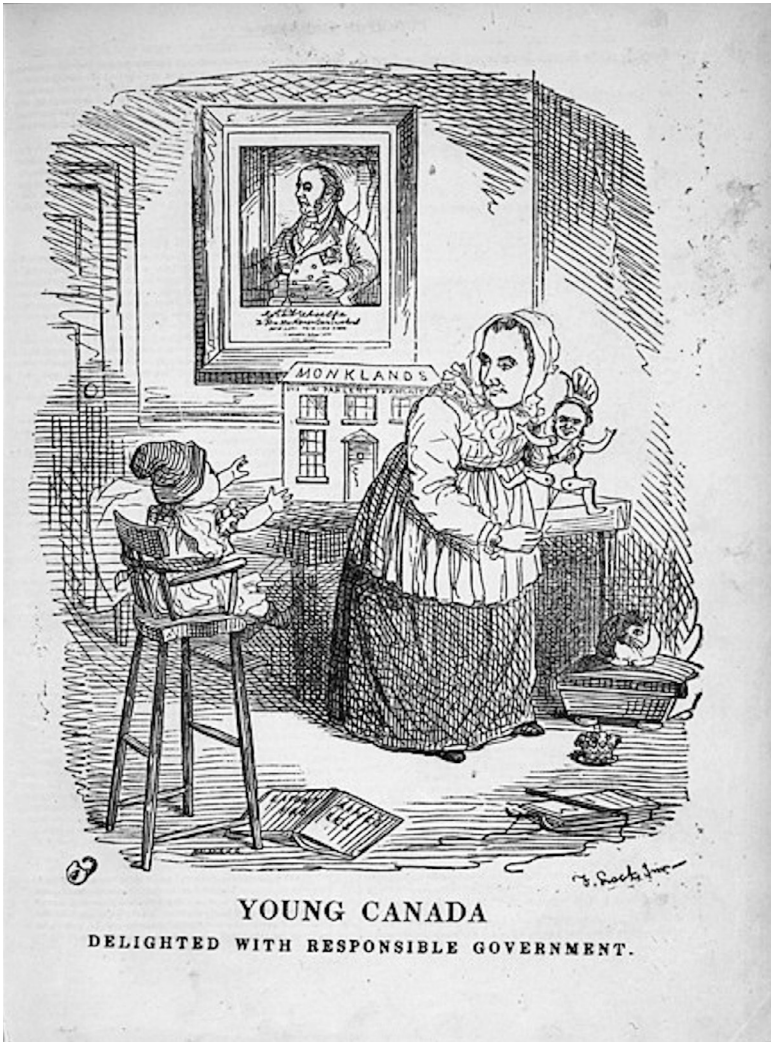


Figure 3: "Young Canada: Delighted with Responsible Government," by Frederick William Lock, *Punch* (Canada), 3 Feb. 1849. Gallery 2: Colonial Canada (1763–1914), Canadian History Hall, Canadian Museum of History. (This image was taken from Wikimedia Commons.)

including a lunch box, school bag, school desk, and an exercise booklet belonging to the student Thomas P. Serviss. The objects in Galleries 2 and 3 are coupled with more documentary forms such as paintings, drawings, and photographs, particularly the large selection of beautifully displayed, backlit reproductions from the Notman studio from the second half of the nineteenth century. The various representations reinforce the elastic nature of how childhood is deployed as a

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Figure 4: "See! Why the dear child can stand alone!", *Canadian Illustrated News*, 23 July 1870, p. 64. Gallery 2: Colonial Canada (1763–1914), Canadian History Hall, Canadian Museum of History. (This image was taken from Wikimedia Commons.)

concept, depicting a diverse range of conflicting categorizations running from romanticized notions of innocence to negative connotations of impetuousness.

For example, two political cartoons in the early part of Gallery 2: Colonial Canada (1763–1914) depict the nascent nation of Canada as an infant in need of oversight and management from older "adult" nations. The first, from 1849, depicts Canada's electorate as a "reckless and immature" baby, desperately grasping for a puppet representation of responsible government, as a copy of "Lafontaine's Fables"[6] lies strewn on the floor next to their highchair (see Figure 3). A similar image published in 1870 features Canada as a toddler holding a bayonet and testing out his independence as he stands atop a table (see Figure 4). A benevolent Uncle Sam and smiling Mother Britannia stand on either side, holding out their arms protectively to catch him if he falls. The infantilization of Canada in the nineteenth century was often portrayed in satirical strips which converged perceptions of the gullible innocence of childhood with the birth of a new nation. These cartoons thus call attention to some of the ways childlike qualities can not only be romanticized but also employed pejoratively, as European politicians and satirists often did in depicting colonized nations as children (Mills and Lefrancois;

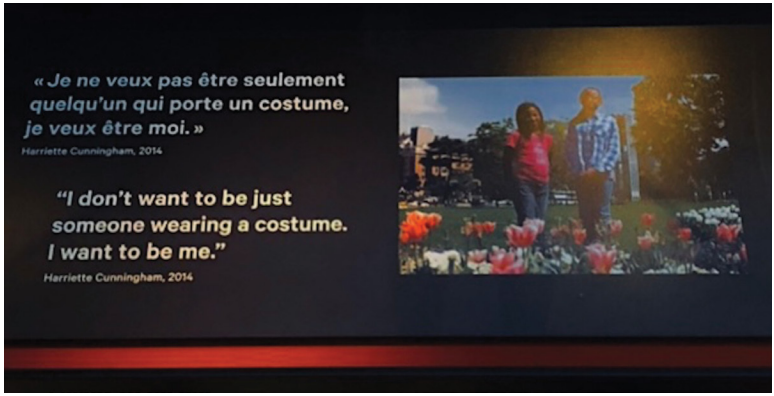


Figure 5: "I don't want to be just someone wearing a costume. I want to be me." Transgender rights activist Harriett Cunningham, 2014. Display on LGBTQ Canadians, Gallery 3: Modern Canada (1914-Present), Canadian History Hall, Canadian Museum of History. Photo by Monica Eileen Patterson.

Sintos Coloma). But highlighting childlike qualities can also work as a sentimentalizing strategy that articulates and extends affection and attachment. Such was the case in Gallery 3 with the pleas to protect "Our Boys" on the front, displayed in photographs of (often quite young) men going off to fight in the First World War.

The greatest number and most diverse range of representations of children appear in the third and final gallery of the History Hall, Modern Canada (1914-Present). This is also where the greatest number of children and young people are individually named. A general shift may be noted in earlier depictions in the Hall that foreground the vulnerability of children and the suffering they experienced (for instance as "Home Children": Orphans and victims of the Great Depression) to a more agentive and empowered presence as social actors and even leaders, (although this is not a strictly linear progression within the exhibit). The shift from passive representations of children and childhood more broadly to specific children's voices and perspectives in particular (see Figure 5) reflects broader changes in society, scholarship on children, and museological practice that have recognized children as contributing members of society whose ideas and voices should be heard (Patterson, "Children's Museology" and "Toward"; Patterson and Friend).

In Gallery 3: Modern Canada (1914-Present), we see children as participants in and witnesses to historical events, including the internment of Japanese Canadians, the Expo 67 Canadian centennial celebrations, international disaster relief and development projects, and the arrival and welcoming of Syrian refugees. Children and youth are also presented as leaders and political agents, for example as Idle No More activists, transgender rights advocates, participants in the Y Penguins swim team for physically disabled children and their able-bodied siblings, fundraisers for UNICEF's global work, and proponents of the Ottawa Treaty[7] and its reiteration by a group of Chelsea, Quebec elementary school

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children as "the Kids Treaty." This gallery is where one may also find the most evidence of individual children's perspectives, presented in attributed quotes and artistic productions, particularly in the displays on post-war childhood, Canadian flag submissions, and Indian Residential Schools.

Post-War Childhood(s)

One of the History Hall's most direct examinations of young Canadians' lives and the circumstances that shaped them features in Gallery 3, in the context of the baby boom. A text panel on the "Booming Suburbs" describes Canada's post-war population growth and the idealization of suburban life, noting that children "grew up in a world of new ideas about parenting, family, and childhood" and later "created and consumed a distinctive youth culture." The introductory panel sets the stage for this brief but direct examination of childhood and youth culture, explaining that while children were subjected to the new ideals of the period, it was not until they became youth that they were able to actively negotiate with these principles and forge their own distinct cultures. This interpretation aligns with dominant constructions of children as passive bystanders and youth as assertive actors, effectively occluding the forms of agency children do exercise. It also reflects the limitations of historical sources, as the material culture of youth and evidence of their agency are more frequently preserved in historical archives over those of younger children, making examples of their agency more visible to historians and the public. In its adjacency to both children and adults, the liminality of youth demonstrates the intertwined nature of children, childhood, and adults' nostalgic investments in both, particularly as articulated through memory, historical interpretation, and museological display.

A display meant to evoke the bedroom of a 1960s teenager, complete with clothing, a sound system, and a telephone, presents an archetypal reflection of Western, middle-class teenagedom. The accompanying panel describes how "parents were encouraged to give teenagers their own space" because "for many middle-class teens, their bedroom became a sanctuary where they could listen to their new rock music" ("Teen Culture and Spaces"). Instead of including examples of Canadian teens' own experiences and voices, this panel produces a distancing effect, one in which teens and "their" interests are referred to from an adult-centric perspective. An opportunity to feature young voices on a topic relevant to their lives is thus missed in this section, the Museum choosing instead to prioritize an adult perspective on young Canadians' lives.

Across from the teen culture display, a large glass case contains a Boy Scouts uniform and a Girl Guides uniform, as well as a small selection of toys (see Figure 6). The display case is divided down the middle along gender lines, with a soft red wallpaper serving as the backdrop for the Girl Guides uniform, two dolls, and a toy stove, while the Boy Scouts uniform is presented against a blue backdrop celebrating white settler masculinity through a "Wild West" motif, accompanied by a child-sized Royal Canadian Mounted Police costume and

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Figure 6: "Children's Culture" Display, Gallery 3: Modern Canada (1914-Present), Canadian History Hall, Canadian Museum of History. Photo by Rebecca Friend.

an NHL tabletop hockey game. While the descriptive text calls attention to this gendered split in citing how "children's toys and games were both big business and a reflection of social attitudes about appropriate gender roles" ("Children's Culture"), the corresponding display reproduces this divide. As Inloes discusses in her analysis of children's voices and perspectives in California history museums, when exhibiting childhood, museums often oscillate between dualistic comparisons of boys to girls and rich to poor, and frame their content with a nostalgic bent (6-7). While some visitors to the History Hall may feel encouraged to reflect on gender constructions after reading the display's descriptive text, a cursory glance would nevertheless situate this particular presentation of Canadian childhood within traditional approaches to both curating and thinking about gender.

The exhibition of toys and their accompanying descriptions is another example that feeds into discussions concerning perceived distinctions and intersections between Brookshaw's "material culture of childhood" and "material culture of children" ("Material Culture" 367). For instance, although the text panel is titled "Children's Culture," the displayed toys' mass-produced nature and lack of immediately recognizable modifications would likely see scholars like Brookshaw classifying them as representative of the material culture of child*hood*. The toys themselves, however, show signs of use and wear, raising important questions about how we perceive children's manipulations, and how we might tease out less evident contributions to an object's history. Anne Jodon Cole and Eva Petersson Brooks note how within a museum setting, toys become "a collection for adult viewing," representing "preserved adult nostalgia" (294, 299). This nostalgia is also referenced in the exhibition text, as visitors' attention is drawn to the displayed examples of "popular toys, games, and children's organizations from

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the period," and they are asked, "Are any of them familiar to you?" ("Children's Culture"). While young visitors may be able to note some resemblances to contemporary toys, this question nevertheless promotes traditional pulls to adults' sentimentality and nostalgic memories. An opportunity for a more child-centred engagement is missed here, in the prioritization of the adult visitor's experience.

What is commendable about this section is the curatorial team's choice to not present the objects on display in their most pristine forms, detached from the lives of real Canadian children. Instead, visitors see Boy Scout and Girl Guide uniforms that were worn by actual, named children, alongside historical photographs of them in these uniforms. While not accompanied by any reflections about what these organizations meant to them, the curatorial choice to include a personal connection to specific individuals nevertheless helps counter the typical presence of children as nameless abstractions and imbues the display with an aura of authenticity (Benjamin).

Canadian Flag Submissions

Another example of children's culture can be found on display in an interactive module featuring a selection of Canadian flag proposals designed by children. These drawings were submitted from across North America in 1964 for consideration by a multi-partisan Special Committee of parliamentarians established by Prime Minister Lester B. Pearson to choose and adopt an official Canadian flag.[8] Children either were directed to submit proposals by their teachers and parents or, along with thousands of adults, submitted designs more independently. At turns symbolic, historical, intertextual, and ludic, the children's design proposals exhibited here demonstrate the varied ways in which Canadian children engage with pressing political discourse and are aware of societal tensions. A caption written by the child artists accompanies each of the digitized drawings in the display, elevating children's voices and providing museum visitors with a glimpse into the world of Canadian childhood during the politically tense 1960s.

The maple leaf has long been established as a symbol of Canadian nationalism.[9] It figures prominently in six of the eleven submissions on display. While we were not able to survey the designs the Museum excluded, or the criteria used for selecting those they chose to display, the inclusion of the maple leaf demonstrates the receptivity of at least some Canadian children to symbolic signs of national identity—images often displayed in schools, homes, and during relevant holidays. Jill Preston, age ten from Weston, Ontario, gave the maple leaf a place of central importance, along with a rainbow to represent Canada's many nationalities. Preston's understanding of Canadian national identity as grounded in plurality provides visitors with a first-hand account of how children understand, employ, and amend national symbols to advocate for their own priorities and interests.

In the displayed flag submissions, Canadian children are also seen engaging with Canadian politics, a connection often unexplored in museum settings.

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Figure 7: "Imagining a Canadian Flag" Display, Gallery 3: Modern Canada (1914-Present), Canadian History Hall, Canadian Museum of History. Photo by Monica Eileen Patterson.

Nine-year-old Matthew Stoody from Hamilton, Ontario, included images of Parliament, a *fleur-de-lis*, maple leaf, and beaver, writing that he believes his flag will "even make the French happy," in an attempt to ameliorate, poke fun at, or perhaps stoke the historical discord between French and English Canada. Similarly, Guelph, Ontario, eighth-grade student Jane Teeter strategically preempts possible interprovincial resentments that the adoption of a new official flag might cause by including a red map of all of Canada's territory emblazoned with the phrase "LAND OF LIBERTY" (see Figure 7). Teeter writes, "There would be no argument in any of the provinces about not being represented because [her submission] includes all." But crucially missing from Teeter's narrative and proposal is any acknowledgement of Canada's colonial history of genocide and the vast unceded territories of First Nations, Métis, and Inuit that the nation currently occupies, not to mention the racial violence enacted toward BIPOC children and youth more broadly, both historically and into the continuing present. Although the range of perspectives is limited, the Museum's display of these submissions, along with details about and from the artists who produced them, present children as active negotiators of complex concepts and reflect their roles as co-constructors of the settler nation, instead of relying on more traditional representations of children as anonymous, passive bystanders to historical moments.

Out of the plethora of flag submissions in Library and Archives Canada's collection chosen for display in the Canadian History Hall, the selection of these particular flags not only offers visitors an encounter with a unique set of historical artifacts but works to frame children's experiences as intersecting with a host of issues typically reserved for adult narratives. Showing a range of concerns,

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the flag submissions are aesthetically pleasing, creative, and in some cases even humorous, as in the collaborative submission from Murray Freeman's class that features a banana alongside a Union Jack, a beaver, and an oak leaf. They also highlight children's awareness of politics beyond their own national borders, and their contributions as global citizens, as exemplified in the submissions from Pennsylvania resident Tori Anderson, whose mother wrote that "one of my children has become so concerned with the flag issue, that she begged me to send you the enclosed three sketches," and Irene Klees in California, who stated that she "read in the paper that you need a new one." These examples of children's material culture further prompt visitors to question and consider how children process such subjects as politics, nationalism, and representation—a discussion often lost in typical displays of their toys and clothing.

At the end of this interactive module, visitors are prompted to design their own Canadian flag using pre-set layouts, colours, and symbols. The final designs are then projected onto a screen for passersby to see and effectively (if ephemerally) contribute to the exhibition content. This juxtaposition of historical children's perspectives with contemporary visitors' crafted flag designs helps reinforce the imaginative nature of the submissions presented and allows for greater interaction with the display of children's material culture. In theory, visitors—including children, who can easily access the low-level interactive display—can see themselves directly reflected in the exhibition and tangibly connected to the children whose designs they just perused, although the centring of settler-colonial history is likely more comfortable and affirming to some than others.

Residential Schools

One of the museum's most challenging displays is the section in the Modern Canada Gallery on Indigenous peoples' struggle for their rights and the preservation of their cultures. It not only ruptures romantic renderings of childhood as a period of play and protection but also the nationalist narratives that obscure the violence and genocide at the heart of Canadian history from its earliest days through the present. By focusing on the systemic, sustained assault on Indigenous peoples in Canada, this section forces visitors to confront the stark differences in lived childhoods, fractured along racial (and other) lines. In particular, the discussion of the Indian Residential School system is populated with historical evidence of First Nations, Métis, and Inuit children forcibly removed from their homes by the state and put into government-sanctioned, church-run "Residential Schools," where their hair was cut, their clothes were taken, and they were forbidden to speak their mother languages or practice other forms of their culture. The first Residential Schools in Canada were established in the 1840s, and the last one closed in 1996.

The primary roles of the schools were ostensibly to convert Indigenous children to Christianity and to "civilize" them, but students were also forced to do

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different kinds of physical and industrial labour. As reported in the final report by the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada (TRC), schools were sites of abuse (sexual, physical, emotional), forced conversion to Christianity, overcrowding, poor sanitation leading to the spread of diseases like influenza and tuberculosis, inadequate heat, extensive use of isolated confinement and corporal punishment, forced sterilization, and medical and nutritional experimentation on the effects of withholding food among Indigenous populations (Mosby). As articulated by Deputy Superintendent of Indian Affairs Duncan Campbell Scott in 1920, "Our object is to continue until there is not a single Indian in Canada that has not been absorbed into the body politic" (TRC 3). This forced assimilation has been recognized as a cultural genocide (TRC). It is estimated that government officials removed at least 150,000 First Nation, Inuit, and Métis children from their communities and forced them to attend Residential Schools, where more than four thousand children died according to the TRC's final report (3). It is important to note, however, that at the time of writing (August 2021), that number has been surpassed by the recovery of 1,343 unmarked graves at five former Residential School sites (Assembly of First Nations; Hopper). The number of confirmed deaths (including murders) will rise significantly as investigations continue at the 139 Residential Schools and residences that operated across Canada (TRC 3).[10]

In this section visitors encounter many traces of children from the past, mainly through photographs of children, their families, schoolmates, and communities. The images, objects, and interpretive panels provide powerful proof of not only the horrific abuses the Canadian government and affiliated churches perpetrated against Indigenous peoples, but also their strength and resistance (see Figure 8). Photographs document love, happiness, and affection, but also suffering, hardship, and abuse. Many of the images are anonymous, revealing the ways in which the violence of erasure is embedded in the colonial archive. The pain caused by children's forced removals is shown to ricochet across families and communities, who were usually unable to protect them despite sustained attempts to do so, as shown in the circa 1885 photograph of a family's temporary camp built outside the gates of the Fort Qu'Appelle Indian Industrial School in Lebret, Saskatchewan, where their children were in residence, and a grandmother's retold memory of the saddest day in her life, when she "went outside and there was no longer the sound of children playing in our community. There was silence because all of the children had been taken away to residential school" ("Leaving Home").

An interactive video kiosk titled "Survivor Art and Experiences" further highlights the ways in which childhood experiences, and particularly childhood trauma, are not easily contained or compartmentalized. It showcases a group of artworks produced between 1959 and 1966 by children at the Alberni Indian Residential School on Vancouver Island with video testimony from the adult survivors they grew into (see Figure 9). These paintings are valuable historical sources that offer glimpses into children's experiences, creativity, and perspectives. They

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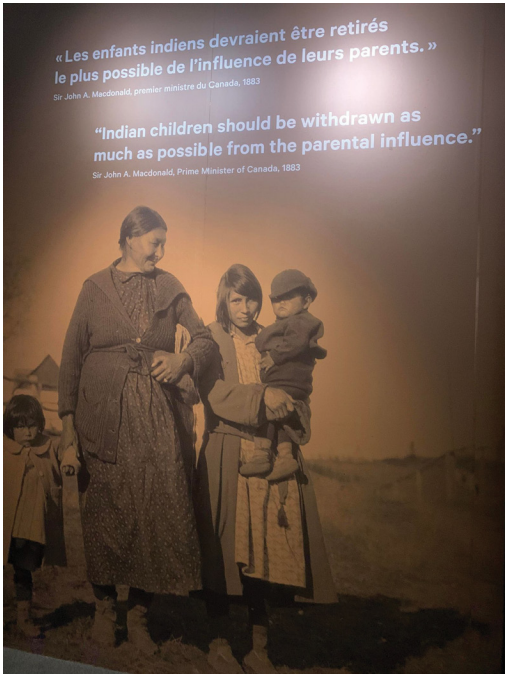


Figure 8: "Indian Residential Schools" Display, Gallery 3: Modern Canada (1914-Present), Canadian History Hall, Canadian Museum of History. Photo by Sylvia Dreaver.



Figure 9: "Survivor Art and Experiences" Display, Gallery 3: Modern Canada (1914-Present), Canadian History Hall, Canadian Museum of History. Photo by Monica Eileen Patterson.

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are an example of children's material culture in the form of cultural production, but when the collection that had been saved by Alberni IRS art teacher Robert Aller was first discovered, it was limited to the works themselves. Through decades of ongoing collaborative efforts of survivors, CMH staff, and scholars, multiple layers of meaning and context have emerged through research, curation, ceremony, and public presentation. Moreover, these engagements have contributed to healing, education, the reclamation of culture, and community building (TRC 285-286). The displayed works are now accompanied by interpretations, memories, and historical contextualization from the survivors themselves, offering a powerful example of how collections and exhibitions can extend and reorient our engagements with the past and its meaning in the present, particularly for uninvited guests living on this land, and the valuable contribution that children's material and intangible culture can make to these efforts.

Conclusion: Future Growth and Possibilities

Museological evidence of children's lives in the form of material culture is marked by certain densities: an excess of girls' dolls have been collected, in addition to children's toys, cradles, books, and clothing. Less common is evidence that reflects children's own perspectives in the form of artistic expression, writing, or reflection. Further undermining efforts to define or stabilize the category of children is the age-old problem of sources for many of the materials exhibited at the museum. As historians of childhood have written, most children have not left a great deal of evidence documenting their lives. This is particularly true of illiterate, poor, colonized, female, queer, disabled, racialized, neurodivergent, and/or other multiply marginalized children from the past. Of the evidence that remains, there is often a dearth of documentation *about* the historical sources that could aid in interpreting such materials in the contemporary moment. Another limiting factor that challenges our capacity for historical analysis is the ephemeral nature of much of children's cultural production. Children's drawings, for instance, are often rendered illicitly on walls or in books, on poor-quality paper, or in sand or dirt. Until recently, the vast majority of children's artistic production has been discarded, and only very rarely collected and preserved in archives or museums. And of the small portion that has been saved, an even smaller fraction will ever be publicly displayed.

Recent museum scholarship reflects a transition from traditional, top-down approaches centring expert knowledge to sharing authority between museum professionals, museum visitors, and community stakeholders. Sustained calls to democratize and decolonize museum collections, exhibitions, audience, and staff have led to more inclusive and reflexive museological practices and increased opportunities for self-representation by members of historically marginalized communities (Golding and Modest; Kadoyama; Kinsley; Sandell). These

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opportunities have rarely been extended to children, even though they often compose a significant part of a museum's core audience, and many programs and exhibits are developed to pique a child's interest (Inloes 14; Patterson, "Children's Museology"; Patterson and Friend).

As Patterson notes in her call for a "new, critical children's museology," ("Toward"), the relative absence of children from museum operations and content "misses an opportunity to explore content and programming *by* and *with* children, who may have unique contributions to make drawing from their own expertise, capabilities, and capacity for creativity and innovation" ("Children's Museology"). It also perpetuates the belief that children's historical experiences and contributions matter little and their existence has minimal impact on the shaping of our contemporary world. While the Canadian Museum of History draws from a substantial collection supported by national funding in order to solicit and maintain the large quantity of children's material culture featured in the Canadian History Hall, not all museums have immediate access to such resources. They must therefore make an active commitment to researching, collecting, preserving, and exhibiting children's material and immaterial culture, and recognizing its importance for public historical knowledge more broadly (Patterson and Friend). In doing so, future generations of museum practitioners and visitors will better recognize the small, but significant footprint children have left behind.

Notes

1. Notable exceptions include the *Remember the Children: Daniel's Story* exhibit at the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, the War Child Museum in Sarajevo, and the child-centred approaches being employed by the Museum of Childhood Ireland Project Group and the Cape Town Museum of Childhood in South Africa.

2. For instance, in Canada, the age of majority is eighteen years in six provinces and nineteen years in four provinces and three territories. Three provinces and three territories also define a "child" as a person under the age of sixteen (Canada, Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada). Meanwhile, the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, ratified by Canada in 1991, defines the child as a person below the age of eighteen (United Nations).

3. Of course, these more agentive representations can also be stereotypical and narrow, presenting youth as often, if not exclusively, rebellious, resulting in equally romanticized conceptualizations.

4. A virtual repository of the Canada Hall's content demonstrates how children's histories were relegated to mentions of their contributions to the family unit in a section detailing the lives of Métis Bison Hunters in the early nineteenth century, and shared within a reconstruction of a 1940s schoolhouse central to a community of Black Americans who settled in Amber Valley, Alberta in the 1910s (Canadian Museum of History et al.).

5. National museums are governed by the *Museums Act*, which came into force in 1990. It establishes the Canadian Museum of History as a Crown Corporation, which also

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oversees the Canadian War Museum and the Virtual Museum of New France. As a Crown Corporation, the Museum is beholden to parliament by way of the Minister of Canadian Heritage, who also oversees amendments to the Museum's mandate and the appointment of the Museum's Board of Trustees and Chief Executive Officer, with approval from the Governor in Council.

6. The reference to Lafontaine works as a double entendre, referring to Louis-Hippolyte Lafontaine (1807–1864) a Canadian political figure who served as the first leader of a Responsible Government in Canada, but also Jean de La Fontaine's *Fables*, a popular collection of stories written in French and published in multiple volumes between 1668–1694. Originally written for adults, the collection was later embraced as a classic text for children.

7. Formally known as the Convention on the Prohibition of the Use, Stockpiling, Production, and Transfer of Anti-Personnel Mines and on their Destruction, this treaty was signed by 122 countries at the Second Ottawa Conference in December 1997.

8. The Great Flag Debate took place over six months in the House of Commons, bitterly dividing Canadians over what to include on the new national flag. For more on the debate, see Fraser; and Wright and Contreras.

9. For more on the maple leaf and Canadian emblems, see Blake and Hayday.

10. Unmarked graves containing the remains of 215 children were uncovered at the site of the former Kamloops Residential School in Tk'emlúps te Secwépemc First Nation on 28 May 2021. Remains were also found on 24 June 2021 by the Cowessess First Nation near what was once the Marieval Indian Residential School in Saskatchewan (751 unmarked graves), on 30 June 2021 by the Lower Kootenay Band in British Columbia near the site of the St. Eugene's Mission School (182 unmarked graves), on 13 July 2021 at the Kuper Island Industrial School by the Penelakut Tribe in British Columbia (160 unmarked graves), and, earlier in 2019, thirty-five unmarked graves were uncovered at the site of the Muskowekwan Indian Residential School by the Muskowekwan First Nation in Saskatchewan.

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both digitally and in print, and her co-curated exhibition *Morsels of Memory: A Taste of Ottawa's Food History* was covered by both CBC Radio and CBC News. Friend has served as a research assistant on the Canadian Children's Museum Renewal Project at the Canadian Museum of History and as a Young Canada Works in Heritage Organizations program officer with the Canadian Museums Association.

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