

2026

Hans Christian
Andersen Award
Nominee

FINLAND



ILLUSTRATOR

LINDA BONDESTAM



Table of contents

1. Biographical information	4
2. Contribution to literature for young people . .	8
3. Interviews and articles	12
4. Complete bibliography	20
5. Significant works	24
6. Translated editions	30
7. Awards & Nominations	32
8. Book reviews	33
9. The 5 book sent to jurors	51



1. Biographical information

website: www.lindabondestam.com

Linda Bondestam (b. 1977) is an artist, illustrator, and writer based in Helsinki, Finland. She has studied illustration in the Buckinghamshire and Kingston universities in London, obtaining her BA in Illustration in 2001.

Bondestam is one of the most prominent children's book illustrators in the Nordic countries. She made her debut as a children's book illustrator in 2003. In 2018, Bondestam debuted as a children's author with *God natt på jorden* (*Good night, Earth*) which she also illustrated. She has since authored and illustrated several books of her own. Most recently *Chop Chop* (2024), for which she received Sweden's most important literary award, the August Prize.

As of today, Bondestam has illustrated more than 40 children's books for Finnish and Swedish publishers, and her books have been translated into several languages including Arabic, Belorussian, Croatian, Danish, English, Finnish, German, Latvian, Lithuanian, Norwegian, Russian, Serbian, Turkish and Ukrainian.

Bondestam's illustration work has been exhibited numerous times, both in Finland and internationally, e.g in Germany, Iceland and South Korea. She has also created works of art for public spaces such as libraries, hospitals and community centers both in Finland and Sweden. Bondestam has also worked with animators to create animations of *Silk Monkey's Laughter*, *The Admirable Mr. Happy* and *Say Hey*.

Theater is another important way of artistic self-expression for Bondestam; she is an active member of the theatre group Teater Tapir that creates and performs high-quality children's theatre.

Bondestam holds chair number 11 in the Swedish Children's Book Academy since 2019.







2. Contribution to literature for young people

By Marianna Lammi

As a children's book illustrator, Linda Bondestam has a distinctive, highly recognizable, yet constantly evolving "Bondestamian" style. She works skilfully with contrasts; dark, intense colours that make her happy brights and jewel-tones stand out. Her illustrations are often collage-like in nature, consisting of various textures and techniques: she combines broad brush strokes and bright, wild patterns with drawings of miniature-sized, peculiar, scurrying creatures.

Humour is an integral part of Bondestam's illustrations. Her books allow the readers to dream and share literary experiences together. Her characters are individualized in great detail, each suggesting that they, too, have their own life stories and singular personalities that the reader is free to envision for themselves.



Timeless and highly contemporary themes

Bondestam has illustrated books for various writers across Finland and the Nordic countries. The themes of her books are often timeless and universal, such as grief and loss (*Silkesapans skratt*, 2020; "Silk monkey's laughter" with Annika Sandelin), growing old (*Allan och Udo* 2011, "Allan and Udo" by Minna Lindeberg) and the sheer joy and freedom of imagination (*Djur som ingen sett utom vi* 2016, "Animals that No One Has Seen Except Us" with Ulf Stark).

Bondestam's books also take on highly contemporary topics such as body positivity (*Den ofantliga Rosabel* 2017, "The amazing Rosabel" with Malin Kivelä), family diversity (*Ägget* 2018, "The Egg" with Sanna Sofia Vuori), the environmental crisis (*Mitt bottenliv*, *Av en ensam axolotl* 2020; *My life at the bottom. The story of a lonely axolotl*, written by Bondestam) and the integration process and the internal struggle of a travelling-alone refugee child (*Ni är inte min mamma* 2021, "You are not my mother" with Frank Furu). A recurring, over-arching theme in her artwork and storytelling is the right to be oneself.

In Bondestam's books, the text and the image create a whole new place in the reader's mind, with illustrations adding, contrasting, or twisting the textual content. Such is the case in *Om du möter en björn* ("If you meet a bear" with Malin Kivelä and Martin Glaz Serup) in which Bondestam elevates the barren, matter of fact, and tongue-in-cheek writing with her illustrations. The result is a simultaneously hilarious, terrifying, and thought-provoking book: First, it introduces us to an innocent boy scout and a cunning, devious bear, then a monstrous, roaring bear who flips the horizontal-shaped book into a vertical form for the duration of one spread, depicting the bear standing on his hind legs. In the end, our boy scout runs away as the tranquil bear, the unconquered king of the forest, calmly observes his exit, casually popping pink bubble gum.

Bondestam masters the expression of emotions and feelings through her illustrations, their colours, compositions, surroundings, and tiny details. Thus, she is able to shift the mood in a book rapidly or subtly from one page to another, such as in *Silkesapans skratt*, in which the shared joy and bliss of friendship and love is embedded in unspoken sadness that takes form as the silk monkey falls ill and subsequently dies. The tapir, the silk monkey's most beloved friend, is devastated, angry and sad, but the beauty of the jewel-colored mangrove forest brings comfort to the reader.

The critically acclaimed *Mitt bottenliv* opens with a motive of the planet Earth and a quote stating how fragile life is. From a colourful Eden in the first double-page, the book quickly time travels into a capitalist dystopia with pollution, biodiversity loss, technology addicted people, litter, and multinational corporations invading both the physical and spiritual space.

The eponymous main character lives through similar mood changes from its initial, relative happiness into sorrowful loneliness, as all of its friends leave the waters they have lived in, and climaxes in an apocalyptic storm. In the midst of the darkness, another axolotl, born and raised in a pet shop, emerges, and they end up having 987(!) babies, thus terminating the protagonist's loneliness.

Mitt bottenliv is a biocentric book which focuses on the axolotl, a representative of the species on the brink of extinction in the wild, even though numerous in captivity. The book zooms into the axolotl's home lake and remains with it, never mentioning humans again. *Mitt bottenliv* concludes with another picture of planet Earth and a quote affirming how life has a tendency to prevail. *Mitt bottenliv*, like *Om du möter en björn*, has already attracted a lot of scholarly interest despite both being recently published books.

Bondestam's collaborations

Linda Bondestam has worked together with renowned Swedish children's author Ulf Stark on four books: *Diktatorn* ("The Dictator" 2010), *Allt det här* ("All of This", 2012), *Min egen lilla liten* ("My Little Small", 2014) and *Djur som ingen sett utom vi* ("Animals No-One Has Seen Except Us", 2016). The aforementioned book won the Nordic Councils Children's and Young People's literature prize in 2017.

In the illustrations of the book *Djur som ingen sett utom vi* different colour and shape surfaces as well as thin penmanship are merged in a collage-like manner. Colourful illustrations, along with wildly imaginative animals, paint immersive, beautiful natural landscapes with deep red skies and intense turquoise forests, seas, mountains, and urban areas. Each spread is a work of art in its own right, presenting purely fictitious, imagined animals and their habitats.

In Stark's and Bondestam's most translated collaboration, the picture book *Diktatorn*, the illustration is inspired by retro 1960's and 1970's Soviet imagery: large patterns, stripes, dots, army green and red stars that express the little protagonist's wish to be a dictator, while the wonky perspectives highlight his naivete. The characteristic Soviet ambience is further enhanced by bus tickets, magazines and candy wrappers found in Russia.

Together with writer Minna Lindeberg, Linda Bondestam has published four books including *I en grop i Kalahari* ("In a Pit in the Kalahari", 2007) *Lo fridlyst* (2009, "Lynx, Protected"), *Allan och Udo* (2011) and *Boggan och Kyösti Kekkonen* (2015). Allan och Udo depicts two old men, their love and dreams, loneliness, and growing old. The general



impression in the illustrations is that of light and playfulness. The book is exhilaratingly anarchistic and unconventional, bursting with amusing combinations of graphic shapes and partial photos, funny faces and small observations in a city setting.

Bondestam challenges gender norms in *Boggan och Kyösti Kekkonen* by presenting the big sister as an androgynous character who destroys flowers in a pink landscape, while Little Brother Kyösti plays the flute in a cherry tree. Bondestam portrays a unique, summery picture of nature by combining romantic and grim images. In the book *Den förträfflige herr Glad* (The Admirable Mr. Happy 2004) by Malin Kivelä, Bondestam's joyful and entertaining illustration overflows with sunlight and puts the reader in a good mood, thus matching and further developing the mood of Kivelä's writing. In another book by Kivelä, *Bröderna Pixon och tv:s hemtrevliga sken* ("The Brothers Pixon and the cozy glow of the television" 2013) Bondestam's illustration is dramatic, shifting from dark and gloomy to downright hilarious, showing her diversity as a visual storyteller.

Prominent prizes and nominations

Bondestam has been publicly recognized for her contributions to children's literature numerous times. She has been nominated and awarded several prizes both as an illustrator and for specific books, underlining her importance in the field.

Bondestam has been nominated for Finlandia Junior Prize four times, the Nordic Council's Children and Young People's Literature Prize in 2013, 2017, 2021 and 2022, the August Prize in 2016, 2019, 2021, and 2022. She has received honorable mentions for The Most Beautiful Books of the Year Prize several times. Bondestam was the first recipient of the Vanessa Prize (Vanessapriset) in 2016. She was also nominated for Elsa Beskow prize in 2021. In 2022 she received Alli Paasikivi Foundation's acknowledgment for her ecologically, societally and artistically extraordinary work for families.

Djur som ingen sett utom vi was awarded the Snöbollen Prize for Swedish Picture Book of the Year in 2016, as well as the Nordic Council's Children and Young People's Literature Prize in 2017. *My Life at The Bottom* was also a pick for the White Raven Catalogue 2021 and *Om du möter en björn* is nominated to Biennale of Illustrations Bratislava for 2023. ♡





3. Interviews and articles

Linda Bondestam's Illustrated Eyes Didn't Appeal to the Germans at First—Now She is One of Finland's Leading Illustrators Worldwide

[Yle, link to original review in Finnish](#)

13.3.2024

By Pia Parkkinen

Translation by Laura Axam

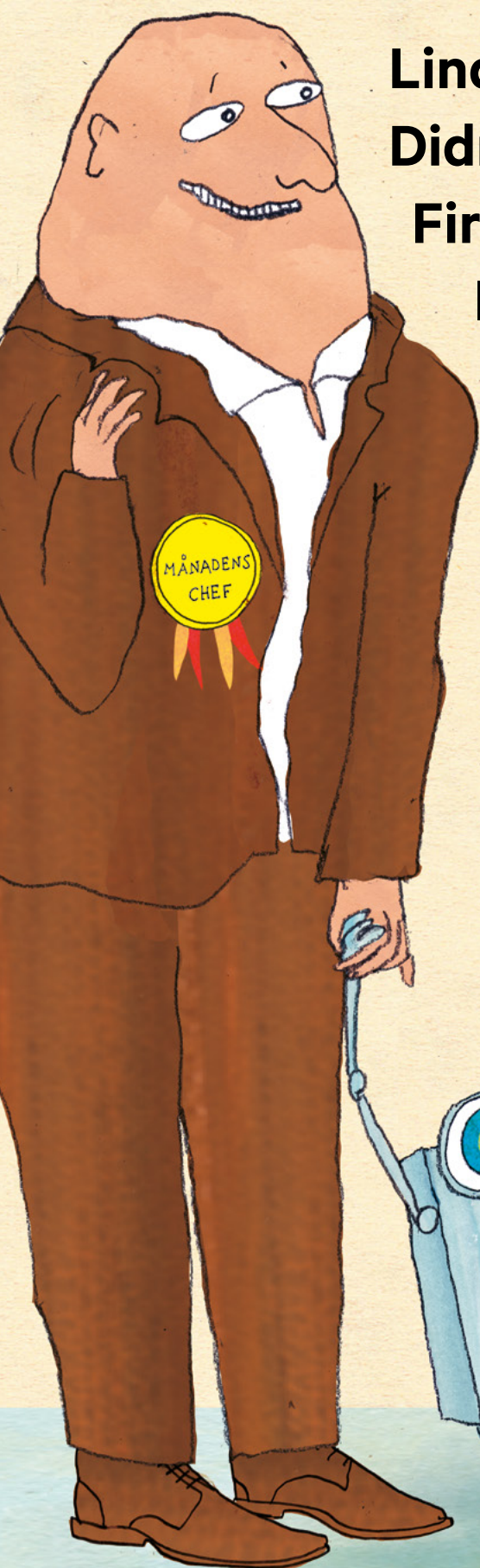
Children's and young adult literature from Finland is gaining momentum internationally. Illustrations and illustrators play a major role in sales.

The pencil rustles on the paper as illustrator Linda Bondestam works on her upcoming children's book. It will be called *Chop, Chop - The Story of a Busy Robot*. It should be ready by the autumn.

Bondestam is one of the Finnish illustrators whose children's books have been exported to the world at an accelerating pace. Almost half (46%) of Finnish literary exports already come from children's and young people's books. This is the result of the latest study commissioned by the Finnish Literature Export Centre, Fili, for the year 2022.

The figures have been collected since 2011. At that time, children's and young people's books accounted for 36% of export earnings. The figures vary from year to year.

In children's and young people's books, the visual aspect is of great importance. This has not always been the case. Bondestam started her career twenty years



ago. Before, publishers put more emphasis on the text and the author.

“Books often had more text, and the illustrations were more decorative than anything. You couldn’t really let loose creatively when making them,” says Bondestam.

Now the situation has changed. The illustrators are considered as important as the authors, and the story is furthered through illustrations as well.

It used to be soft and pale, now it’s artistic

Tiia Strandén, Director of the Finnish Literature Export Centre Fili, says that in the past, the export of Finnish children’s and young people’s books was hampered by the way our visual language was perceived around the world.

“When I entered the industry 12 years ago, I received a lot of feedback that typical Finnish children’s book illustrations were considered a bit old-fashioned and too childish. Now the quality of illustration has clearly changed. Our children’s book illustrations are interesting in and of themselves, and capture the zeitgeist,” says Strandén.

Strandén suggests that we have moved from a traditionally Finnish, slow to evolve, “overly kind, soft and pale” style, to what she describes as “artistic.”

“The role of illustration has also changed. Today, it carries the story forward and is not “just an illustration.”

Finnish illustration has also attracted international attention. Last year, Sanna Pelliccioni won the Plaque prize at the Bratislava Biennale of Illustration with her work Lap-pukaulatyttö.

Illustrator Marika Maijala was featured in a major article in the New York Times last year.

Maijala and Sari Airola were also selected for a major illustration exhibition at the Bologna Children’s Book Fair in April, which will later tour the world. Airola with the illustrations of the book *Voi Viivi!* (oh, Viivi) and Maijala with the illustrations of the book *Taikurin kukka* (The magician’s flower).

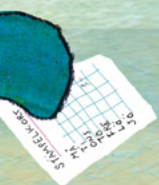
Wildness attracts people around the world

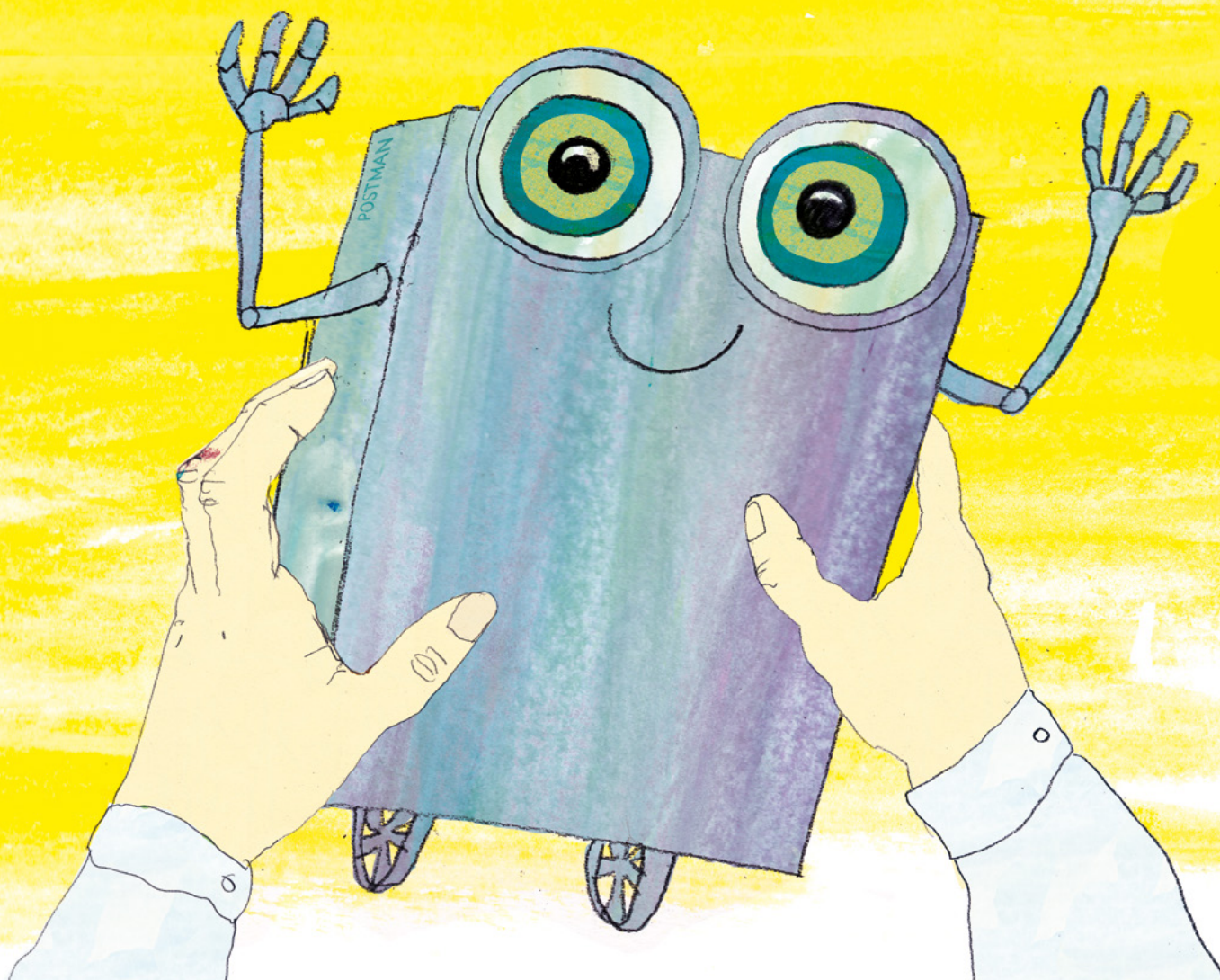
Tiia Strandén thinks that people around the world are interested in Finnish children’s and young people’s literature also because there is no shortage of topics here. Books for children can be written about social issues or problems within the family. It is not obvious everywhere.

“There is a kind of bravery and wildness that is reflected in the illustrations. They too can be wild and challenging,” Strandén says.

Linda Bondestam’s illustrated children’s books have been translated into twenty languages. They include works on topics such as the climate crisis (*My Life at the Bottom: The Story of a Lonely Axolotl*) and what it’s like to be a little dictator (*The Dictator*, co-authored with Ulf Stark).

However, the latter was not initially published in Finnish until Teos decided to publish it a couple of years after the Swedish version appeared.





- People thought it was too radical. Why publish a book about a little boy with a fake moustache and an army uniform? But now it has also been published in many countries with experience of dictatorships. Even adults have found it funny and rebellious,” says Bondestam.

She thinks that its warm-heartedness makes it suitable for readers of all ages. Not for Belarusians, though. According to Bondestam, it was banned in the country shortly after its publication.

“Children’s books can also be considered dangerous,” says the illustrator.

Written and illustrated by Bondestam herself, the book about a lonely axolotl tells the story of a post-climate crisis era in which humans eventually disappear entirely. Despite its topic, the tone is warm and hopeful.

In Germany, the eyes are different

It’s not always just quality that determines what works internationally. It may be that a certain style just doesn’t strike a

chord in a certain country. Bondestam says that in the early days of her career, she was told that she was drawing the wrong kind of eyes in from a German perspective.

- They were too big and cartoonish. They preferred small, dot-like eyes. But nowadays the books I illustrate have also been translated into German.

Bondestam thinks that in many countries, Finnish literature appeals because people like the Nordic depiction of childhood.

- It conveys what it is like to be a child. Children are at the centre. They are strong and capable. That is of great significance.

Bondestam’s work has been acknowledged, among other things, with the Nordic Council Literature Prize for Children and Young People in 2017 for the book *Animals No One Has Seen Except Us*, written in collaboration with Ulf Stark.

Bondestam is now looking forward to the Astrid Lindgren Memorial Award, which will be presented on 9 April. She is one of eight nominees from Finland. ↵

Let's Talk Illustrators

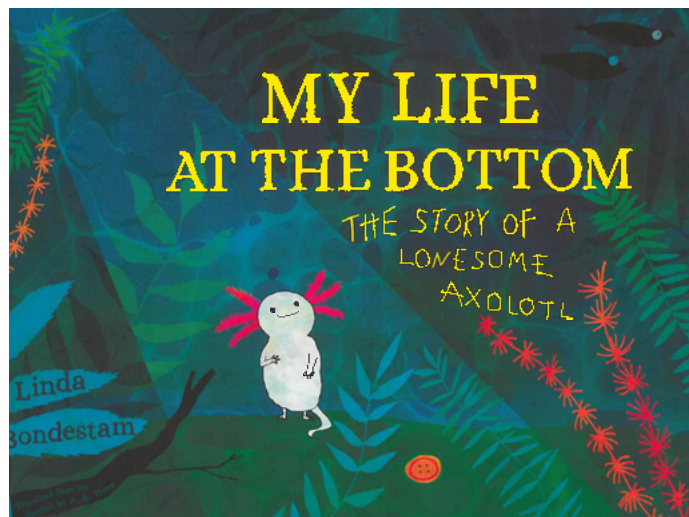
#218: Linda Bondestam

Published on the blog Let's Talk Picture Books

July 26, 2022

By Mel Schuit

[Link to original article with pictures](#)



I feel super lucky that I got a chance to talk to Finnish author-illustrator Linda Bondestam about her illustration and story processes for *My Life at the Bottom: The Story of a Lonesome Axolotl*! I hope you enjoy our conversation about this special book, which highlights the critically endangered (but incredibly friendly) axolotl.

About the book:

In a forest of seaweed there was ME, a rare and beautiful little axolotl, going for my first-ever swim.

*So graceful, and yet so lonesome--out of 987 eggs, mine was the only one that hatched.
Who knows, maybe I was the last axolotl in these waters?*

At the bottom of a lake in Mexico City, our axolotl narrator goes to underwater school, collects treasures tossed away by the big lugs on land, and has dance parties with tiger salamander friends. Life is good!

But as the world gets hotter and hotter, the water gets murkier. Friends become harder to find, and the lonesome axolotl grows even lonelier. Until one day when, out of the blue, a colossal wave carries the axolotl into a surprising new future...

Let's talk Linda Bondestam!



LTPB: Where did the idea for *My Life at the Bottom* come from?

LB: It was a long process, but everything started in Italy many years ago when I saw a photo of a very strange creature, an axolotl. It was like a mixture of an alien and a smiling baby – very strange and almost cute. I immediately understood that I had to make a book about it. The axolotl actually first appeared in my book *Good Night, Earth*, but that was really just a warm up!

LTPB: Can you talk about your research process for this book, including your visual research of axolotls? What challenges did you encounter?

LB: I read a lot about this little animal and it was a shock to understand that it might already be extinct in the wild. I understood that the climate crisis fitted smoothly into the story, and I read many books on the topic. The axolotl is a fantastic creature and just like our planet it has the ability to regenerate if it gets hurt.

I also watched many nature documentaries – I wanted the reader to get close to the axolotl in the book and interested in nature in the same manner as when watching a film by David Attenborough.

My biggest challenge when making the book was how to end it. I wanted the book to be hopeful and warm despite the seriousness of the theme.

I really wanted the reader to feel close to the axolotl and get more interested in nature.

LTPB: What did you use to create the illustrations in this book? Is this your preferred medium? How does your process change from book to book?

LB: I used a lot of different media when creating the book: pencils, watercolors, ink pens and collage etc. I always try to find a style that suits the story I'm working on at the moment. In the end I still put together my pictures in Photoshop, which I really enjoy. It's like a magician's hat, so many tools you can get creative with and it also helps me organize my work and control the colors in the book.

I found some marbled papers that were perfect for making the lake in the book. Many surfaces are hand painted with watercolours.

I really enjoy drawing my characters in sketchbooks using simple line drawing. Quite often I draw different body part separately to be able to colour in a more convenient way in Photoshop.

LTPB: What are you working on now? Anything you can show us?

LB: I've just finished a picture book by a Swedish writer named Mimi Åkesson, it's a book that makes the reader think a lot about different kinds of groups and belonging. The book has hundreds of characters so it was a huge job!



LTPB: If you got the chance to write your own picture book autobiography, who (dead or alive!) would you want to illustrate it, and why?

LB: Actually, I realized *My Life at the Bottom* has a lot of autobiographical elements. But it is just the first part of my life so it will have to be continued.

There are so many good illustrators out there, it would be hard to choose. Maybe I would pick Jenny Lucander or Lena Frölander-Ulf who are not only great illustrators but also my great friends. We also share a theater group and we've been through a lot so I think they would know what they are working on. At the same time I have a feeling I would have to do it myself because all my storytelling starts with pictures.

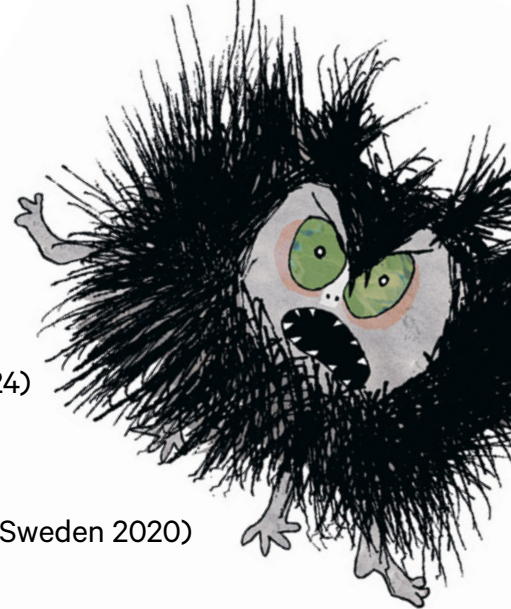
Thank you so much to Linda for talking to me about this book! *My Life at the Bottom: The Story of a Lonesome Axolotl* published earlier this year from Yonder! ♡







4. Complete bibliography



Author & Illustrator

- **Chop Chop – En tapper jordbos berättelse** (Förlaget/Teos, Finland 2024)
Chop Chop – The Story of a Busy Robot
- **God morgon rymden** (Förlaget, Finland 2022) *Good Morning Space*
- **Mitt bottenliv – av en ensam axolotl** (Förlaget/Berghs/Teos, Finland & Sweden 2020)
My Life at the Bottom
- **God natt på jorden** (Förlaget/Berghs/Teos, Finland & Sweden 2018) *Good Night Earth*

Illustrator

- **Konkarongen**, words by Laura Ruohonen (Förlaget/Otava, Finland 2023) *The Whole Caboodle*
- **Här är alla andra**, words by Mimi Åkesson (Förlaget/Natur & Kultur, Finland & Sweden 2022)
Here is Everyone Else
- **Ni är inte min mamma**, words by Frank Furu (Förlaget/Berghs, Finland & Sweden 2021)
You Are Not My Mother
- **Om du möter en björn**, words by Malin Kivelä and Martin Glaz Serup (Förlaget/Berghs/Jensen og Dalgaard, Finland/Sweden/Denmark 2021) *If You Meet a Bear*
- **Silkesapans skratt**, words by Annika Sandelin (Förlaget/Berghs, Finland & Sweden 2019)
Silkmonkey's Laughter
- **Mustekala löytää trikoot**, words by Sinikka Nopola (Tammi, Finland 2019) *The Octopus Finds Tights*
- **Yokos nattbok 3: Nattsvart och underbart**, words by Annika Sandelin (Förlaget, Finland 2019)
Yoko's Night Book 3: Pitch Black and Wonderful
- **Mielikutitusystävä**, words by Aleksandra Salmela (Teos, Finland 2019) *The Imaginary Tickle-friend*
- **Ägget**, words by Sanna Vuori (Förlaget/Berghs, Finland & Sweden 2018) *The Egg*
- **Den ofantliga Rosabel**, words by Malin Kivelä (Förlaget/Berghs, Finland & Sweden 2018)
Rosabel – The Marvellous Pony
- **Säg hej**, words by Annika Sandelin (Förlaget, Finland 2017) *Say Hey*
- **Yokos nattbok 2: Pinsamt och livsviktigt**, words by Annika Sandelin (Förlaget, Finland 2017)
Yoko's Night Book 2: Embarrassing And Super Important
- **Djur som ingen sett utom vi**, words by Ulf Stark (Förlaget/Berghs, Finland & Sweden 2016)
Animals No-One Has Seen Except Us
- **Boggan och Kyösti Kekkonen**, words by Minna Lindeberg (S&S, Finland 2015)
Boggan and Kyösti Kekkonen
- **Min egen lilla liten**, words by Ulf Stark (S&S, Finland 2014) *My Little Small*
- **Yokos nattbok**, words by Annika Sandelin (S&S, Finland 2014) *Yoko's Night Book*
- **Simo ja Sonia ja ujo mummo**, words by Sinikka & Tiina Nopola (WSOY, Finland 2014)
Simo, Sonia and the Shy Grandma

- **Bröderna Pixon och tv:ns hemtrevliga sken**, words by Malin Kivelä (S&S, Finland 2013)
The Pixon Brothers and the Cosy Glow of Television
- **Allt det här**, words by Ulf Stark (Söderströms & Schildts, Finland 2012) *All of This*
- **Papupiilokas**, words by Eppu Nuotio (Otava, Finland 2012) *The Hiding Bean*
- **Businnan blir kär/Retkuliina rakastuu**, words by Annika Sandelin (Söderströms/Teos, Finland 2011)
Miss Mischevous Falls In Love
- **Gekko ja Puupponen ja suloinen Rose**, words by Sinikka & Tiina Nopola (WSOY, Finland 2011)
Gekko and Puupponen and the Sweet Rose
- **Allan och Udo**, words by Minna Lindeberg (Söderströms, Finland 2011) *Allan and Udo*
- **Gekko ja Puupponen**, words by Sinikka & Tiina Nopola (WSOY, Finland 2010) *Gekko and Puupponen*
- **Diktatorn**, words by Ulf Stark (Söderströms, Finland 2010) *The Dictator*
- **Gnatto Pakpak**, words by Stella Parland (Söderströms, Finland 2010) *Gnatto Pakpak*
- **Simo ja Sonia eli kadonnut Kerala**, words by Sinikka & Tiina Nopola (WSOY, Finland 2009)
Simo and Sonia or the Lost Kerala
- **Lo fridlyst**, words by Stella Parland Minna Lindeberg (Söderströms, Finland 2009) *Lynx, Protected*
- **Businnan**, words by Annika Sandelin (Söderströms/Teos, Finland 2009) *Miss Mischevious*
- **Anna ja Talven outo viivytys**, words by Sinikka Nopola (WSOY, Finland 2008)
Anna and the Strange Delay of Winter
- **Vem är rädd för ... Berättelser om vargen, antologi** – *Who is afraid of... Storys about the wolf* (anthology, Finland 2008)
- **I en grop i Kalahari**, words by Minna Lindeberg (Söderströms, Finland 2007) *In a Pit in the Kalahari*
- **Min bror Lev**, words by Mikaela Sundström (Söderströms/Tammi, Finland 2007) *My brother Lev*
- **Milja och grannarna**, words by Annika Sandelin (Söderströms/Tammi, Finland 2006)
Milja and the Neighbours
- **Delirium – romanen om en hund**, words by Stella Parland (Söderströms, Finland 2004)
Delirium – The Tale of a Dog
- **Den förträfflige herr Glad / Великолепный Господин Весельчак**, words by Malin Kivelä (Söderströms 2004 / Samokat 2007 / Teos, Finland 2010) *The Admirable Mr Happy*
- **Katastrofer och strofer om slummer och stoj**, words by Stella Parland (Söderströms, Finland 2003)
Disasters and Strophes of Slumber and Fun
- **Linnéa och Änglarna / Linnea ja äiti enkeli**, words by Mikaela Sundström (Söderströms/Tammi, Finland 2003) *Linnea and the Angels*



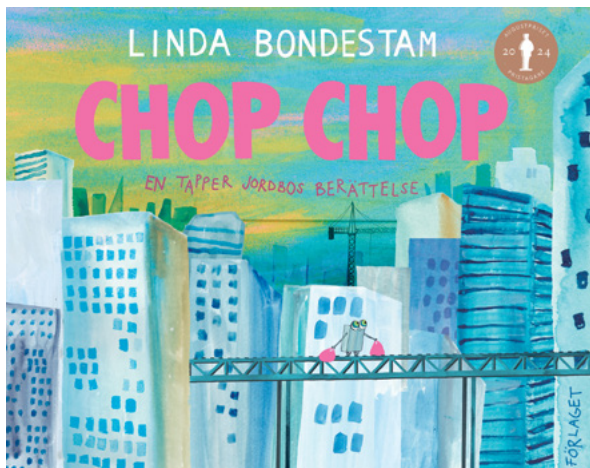




Illustrations from
If You Meet a Bear

5. Significant Works

The following ten books have particularly gained attention and appreciation from readers and critics alike.



1. *Chop Chop - En tapper jordbos berättelse* **Chop Chop – The Story of a Busy Robot**

(Förlaget/Teos, Finland 2024)

AUGUST PRIZE WINNER – SWEDISH CHILDREN'S BOOK OF THE YEAR 2024!

It's late on earth. But all temporary workers are still busy delivering parcels, chopping trees, and cutting hair. Standing at the assembly line in the chicken factory. Looking after children. Clearing mines. All rushed by a boss with the common phrase: "Hurry up, chop chop!"

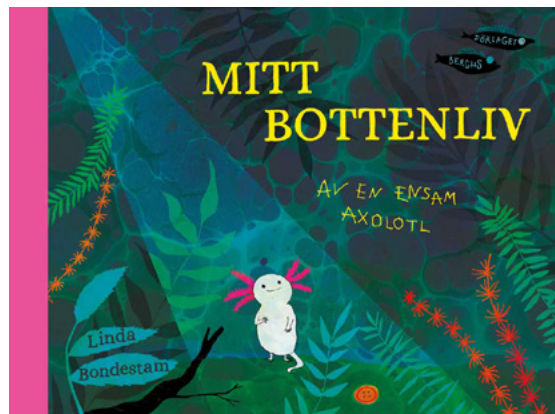
"Chop Chop, that's me", thinks the little robot.

Chop Chop is programmed to do everything. The pace speeds up – Chop Chop delivers. Chop Chop always does his best. But it's never enough.

Chop Chop. The Story of a Busy Robot is Linda Bondestam's fourth solo picture book. Here, a dose of civilisation critique is combined with humour and melancholy. What happens to the world when the wheels roll at turbo speed?

Linda Bondestam pushes the boundaries of the picture book format, both in terms of scope and theme, with this dystopian robot epic.

– AUGUST PRIZE JURY, AWARDING BONDESTAM THE LITERARY AWARD FOR CHOP CHOP



2. *Mitt bottenliv – av en ensam axolotl* **My Life at the Bottom**

(Förlaget/Berghs/Teos, Finland & Sweden 2020)

2020 August Prize Nominee and a selection for the White Raven Catalogue 2021!

An enchanting story about the ongoing climate change, as told by a lonesome axolotl.

Each year, several species go extinct, disappearing from the surface of the earth forever. A unique and perfect being, the result of millions of years of evolution, suddenly no longer exists. With this in mind, Bondestam has written an engaging tale about one particular, endangered species: The axolotl.

An axolotl is a tiny, smiling amphibian that lives its entire life at the larval stage, which means that it never really grows up. In this picture book, we meet what might be the last of its kind. He thrives in his own pool where he hangs out with tiger salamanders, collects treasures, and spies on the peculiar two-legged beings on the beach. But as it gets hotter, the pool gets cloudy, and everyone disappears. The poor axolotl is left all alone. Then one day, a giant wave sweeps everything away, and the axolotl embarks on a journey to the unknown.

Linda Bondestam's happy, ecological, and existential book tells us about life on earth – it is so fragile, but at the same time robust. A surprising and moving story about climate change, and about just how dull it is to play alone. A touching story combined with beautifully detailed illustrations of the wonders of the underworld.



3. *Om du möter en björn* **If You Meet a Bear**

Words by Malin Kivelä and Martin Glaz Serup
(Förlaget, Finland/Sweden/Denmark 2020)

A quirky field guide on what to do if you encounter a bear in the forest. This book encourages dialogue about the relationship between humans and animals. A must-read for every aspiring outdoor adventurer!

This amusing picture book attempts to offer advice about what to do and not do if you come upon a bear while venturing into the forest. Should one run away, climb high – or maybe just offer your honey jar to the bear?

Up north, as we go camping, hiking or berry picking, we are quite aware of the possibility of bumping into a bear on our adventures. In this book filled with offbeat humor, the authors attempt to advise a child who actually encounters one. This laugh-out-loud, how-to guide is brought to life by Bondestam's expressive artwork that captures the contrast between the dangers of the dark forest and the exuberant, cheerful storytelling.



4. *Ni är inte min mamma* **You Are Not My Mother**

Words by Frank Furu
(Förlaget/Berghs, Finland & Sweden 2021)

A wistful picture book depicting a little refugee girl's emotional journey.

Aysha is on her own in a strange new place, Finland. Together with other children she lives at a reception centre. Sometimes in school, when her classmates say something silly, she can't seem to find the words to respond and frustration takes over.

The adults around her do their best to look after and comfort her. They are friendly, they cook and eat together with Aysha, talk to her and stroke her hair. But they are not her mother, heartbroken Aysha thinks to herself as she dreams of the scent of breakfast canjeeros and longs for her life back at her home village. Some days are good and some gloomy, but there is always someone to comfort her and a lap to sit on. Aysha is not alone.

This is an important and stopping story based on real events. A touching narrative by author Frank Furu combined with illustrator Linda Bondestam's delicate colour palette.





5. *Silkesapans skratt* Silkmonkey's Laughter

Words by Annika Sandelin
(Förlaget/Berghs, Finland & Sweden 2019)

This much-needed book, set in Bondestam's wonderfully jewel-coloured jungle, opens up the difficult theme of death in a gentle and caring way, suitable for children and adults alike. The text carries strong feelings, but it is accessible and healing at the same time.

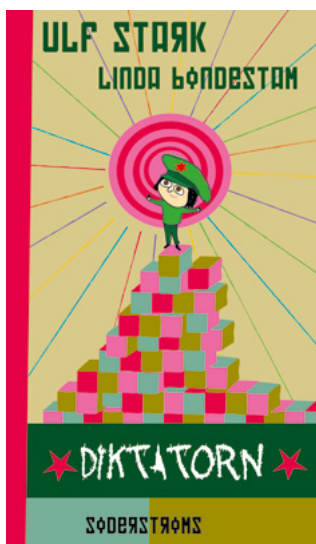
Deep in the jungle, the Tapir sees his best friend Silkmonkey getting sick and fading away. Once she is gone, he is angry, sad and confused. He gets upset with everyone around him, even though all other animals – Sloth, Parrot and Bear – try to make room for him in his sorrow. Little by little, Tapir accepts his loss and realizes that he is not the only one who misses Silkmonkey.



6. *Djur som ingen sett utom vi* Animals No-One Has Seen Except Us

Words by Ulf Stark
(Förlaget/Berghs, Finland & Sweden 2016)

Author Ulf Stark's and illustrator Linda Bondestam's book about animals that no one has seen has been called a modern classic. This brilliantly illustrated book presents 27 very peculiar species, which no-one but their creator has ever seen – in splendid colors and with ingenious rhymes.



7. *Diktatorn* The Dictator

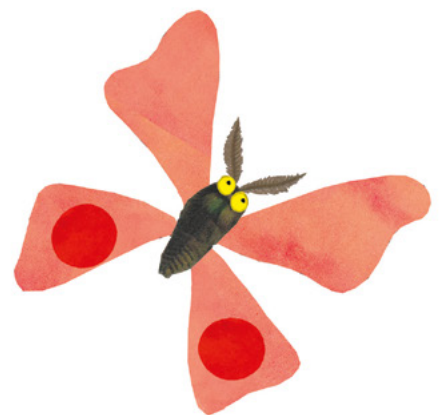
Words by Ulf Stark
(First published by Söderströms, Finland 2010.
Current edition: Förlaget/Berghs, Finland/Sweden)

This is a revolutionary picture book about a very small dictator.

Dictators decide on everything. They must check that the sun goes up and the moon comes down. In Kindergarten, they decide who gets to play with what. You absolutely cannot kiss a dictator. There is a lot to think about when you are a dictator – particularly yourself.

But as it turns out, some people do not like dictators. Some people do not want to play with dictators in Kindergarten. Perhaps being a dictator isn't so fun after all.

A quirky, poignant and hilarious picture book about stubbornness and learning to play nicely.





8. *Den ofantliga Rosabel* **Rosabel – The Marvellous Pony**

Words by Malin Kivelä
(Förlaget/Berghs, Finland & Sweden 2018)

A delightful story of Rosabel, a sturdy little pony, who is teased by the beautiful show horses at the stables she shares with them and her mother. But Rosabel chases after her dreams, and when given the chance she gallops into the forest in search of freedom. She finds a very special friend, who teaches her that not everybody needs to be a show horse.

With delicious artwork and dark humour, this is an uplifting story about finding your own self-worth. The book was nominated for Runeberg Junior Prize in 2018.



9. *Konkarongen* **The Whole Caboodle**

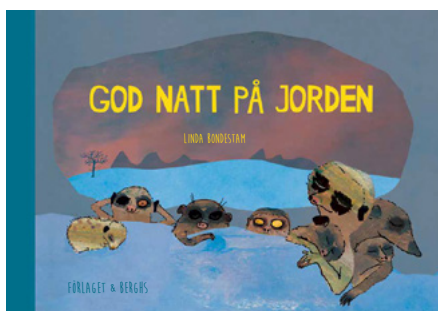
Words by Laura Ruohonen
(Förlaget/Otava, Finland 2023)

A whole caboodle of animals arrives on an island for an adventure. Their guide greets them, but how do you manage to keep a whole, wild bunch like this together?

The readers get to follow along on relentless adventures up in the air, above volcanoes, down into underwater caves, out on narrow cliff jumps, and straight into the desert. Toys, socks, and friends fall and disappear into all kinds of holes – but in the end everything is found, and much more than you could imagine.

This brilliant new rhyming book walks in the footsteps of Tove Jansson's classic *The Book about Moomin, Mymble and Little My*. Like the classic, this book has cut-out holes through which the journey goes. Laura Ruohonen has written the lively and fun adventure, and it is brought to life with breathtaking pictures by Linda Bondestam.

Join these original characters on an adventurous reading journey through wonderful cut-out pages!



10. *God natt på jorden* **Good Night Earth**

(Förlaget/Berghs/Teos, 2018 Finland & Sweden)

Every night, all children go to sleep peacefully. Or do they?

Under the water, in the jungle, in Antarctica, in the big cities, and on other planets – every evening, little creatures are tucked in and expected to go to sleep for the night. But going to sleep looks a little different for everyone. Bondestam provides a sweet look into different bedtime routines of animals all around the globe.

For the special bedtime moments, this is Linda Bondestam's first book written and illustrated by the artist. It is a simple, cozy, and beautiful bedtime story that stands out with its visual storytelling. We are treated to Bondestam's distinctive choice of colour, a dash of humour, a varied landscape, and several surprises along the way.





6. Translated editions

- **Chop Chop – En tapper jordbos berättelse, Chop Chop – The Story of a Busy Robot**
 - Spain, Spanish, Catalan: Takatuka. Year of publication tba.
 - Denmark: Jensen & Dalgaard. Year of publication tba.
- **Konkarongen, The Whole Caboodle**
 - The Netherlands: Scratch Books. Year of publication tba. Translation by Petri Hoogendijk.
 - Sri Lanka, sinhalese: Dedunna Books. Year of publication tba.
- **Hemligt och himla normalt – Yokos Nattbok 4, Yoko's Diary 4: Secretive and Very Normal.**
 - Persian: Daad Bokförlag. Year of publication tba.
- **God morgon rymden, Good Morning Space:**
 - USA, English Worldwide: Restless Books. 2025. Translation by A.A. Prime.
- **Om du möter en björn, If You Meet a Bear**
 - Hungary: Skandináv Ház Alapítvány. 2024. Translation by Dávid Veress.
 - Italy: Iperborea. *Se incontri un orso*. Mars 2023. Translation by Maria Valeria D'Avino.
 - The Netherlands: Hoogland & Van Klaveren. Not yet published
- **Djur som ingen sett utom vi, Animals No-One Has Seen Except Us:**
 - Italy: Iperborea. *Animali che nessuna ha visto tranne noi*. 2021. Translation by Laura Cangemi.
 - Lithuania: 700 eilučių (Social Innovation Institute). *Žvėrys, kurių niekas nematė, tik mes*. 2022. Translation by Elžbieta Kmitaitė.
 - Denmark: Lamberth. *Dyr som ingen andre har set*. 2019. Translation by Lena Lamberth.
 - Norway: Cappelen Damm. *Dyr som ingen så unntatt vi*. 2018. Translation by Anne Østgaard.
 - Latvia: Liels Un Mazs. *Zvēri, kurus neviens nav redzējis, tikai mēs*. 2019. Translation by Juris Kronbergs.
 - Belarus: Koska. *Звяры, якіх ніхто не бачыў, апроч нас*. 2019. Translation by Alesia Basharymava.
- **Mitt bottenliv – av en ensam axolotl, My Life at the Bottom**
 - Denmark: Carlsen Nord (Lindhart & Ringshof A/S). *Mit liv på bunden*. 2022. Translator unknown
 - Korea: Jakkajungsin Publishing CO. Not yet published
 - Germany (Worldwide): Limbion Ug. Not yet published
 - USA (Worldwide): Restless Books. *My Life at the Bottom*. 2022. Translation by Annie Prime.
 - Faroe Islands: Bókadeild Føroya Lærarafelags. *Mítt botnlív*. 2022. Translation by Sanna A. Dahl.
- **God natt på jorden, Good Night Earth**
 - USA (worldwide): Restless Books. *Good Night, Earth*. 2021. Translation by Galit Hasan-Rokem.
 - Korea: Jakkajungsin Publishing CO. Not yet published

- ***Ni är inte min mamma, You Are Not My Mother***
 - Denmark: Carlsen Nord. *I er ikke min mor*. 2022. Translator unknown
- ***Min egen lilla liten, My Little Small***
 - Italy: Iperborea. *Piccolina tutta mia*. 2022. Translation by Laura Cangemi.
 - USA: Enchanted Lions. *My Little Small*. 2018. Translation by Annie Prime.
 - Germany: S. Fischer Ferlage. *Graugrau und Fünkchen*. 2016. Translation by Birgitta Kicherer
- ***Katastrofer och strofer om slummer och stoj, Disasters and Strophes of Slumber and Fun***
 - Russia: Detgiz. *Катастрофы и строфы о дрёме и шуме*. Translation by Mikhail Yasnov
- ***Diktatorn, The Dictator***
 - Spain (Spanish & Catalan; worldwide): TakaTuka. *El dictador*. 2022. Translation to Spanish by Carolina Moreno Tena and to Catalan by Meritxell Salvany.
 - Ukraine: Osnovy Publishing. *ДИКТАТОР*. 2018. Translation by Galina Kirpa.
 - Russia: KompasGuide Publishing House. *ДИКТАТОР*. Translation by Maria Ludkovskaya.
 - Italy: Lantana editore sr. *Il dittatore*. Translation by Camilla Storskog.
 - Latvia: Liels un mazs. *Diktators*. Translation by Uldis Bērziņš.
 - Serbia: Fabrika knjiga. *Diktator*. Translation by Slavica Agatonovic.
 - Lebanon: Dar al Saqi. *الدكتاتور (Al diktatur)*. Translation by Maria Pakkala & Sampsa Peltonen.
 - Turkey: Altın Kitaplar. *Diktatör*. Translation by Özkan Mert.
- ***Simo ja Sonia eli kadonnut Kerala, Simo and Sonia or the Lost Kerala***
 - India (English, Hindi, Malayalam, Telugu, Kannada, Bengali): Sampark Publishing. Translator unknown
- ***Yokos nattbok, Yoko's night book***
 - Sweden (Persian): Daad Bokförlag Handelsbolag. Translator unknown
- ***Yokos nattbok 2: Pinsamt och livsviktigt, Embarrassing And Super Important***
 - Sweden (Persian): Daad Bokförlag Handelsbolag. Translator unknown
- ***Yokos nattbok 3: Nattsvart och underbart, Yoko's Night Book 3: Pitch Black and Wonderful***
 - Sweden (Persian): Daad Bokförlag Handelsbolag. Translator unknown



7. Awards & Nominations

AWARDS

- 2024: The August Prize
- 2022: Family Initiative Prize - Alli Paasikivi foundation
- 2017: Nordic Council Children and Young People's Literature Award
- 2016: Snöbollen – Swedish picture book of the year

NOMINATIONS

- 2025: Runeberg junior
- 2024, 2021, 2019, 2014, 2003: Finlandia Junior
- 2022, 2021, 2019: Runeberg Junior award
- 2016–2022, 2012, 2010: Astrid Lindgren Memorial Award
- 2021: Biennial of Illustrations Bratislava (for *My Life at the Bottom*)
- 2021: White Raven Catalogue
- 2021: Elsa Beskow award
- 2021, 2020, 2016: August award
- 2021, 2020, 2013: Nordic Council Children and Young People's Literature Award
- 2020: Arvid Lydecken award



8. Book reviews

Spot-On Social Commentary in Groundbreaking Dystopia Chop Chop – but Humour and Hope as Well

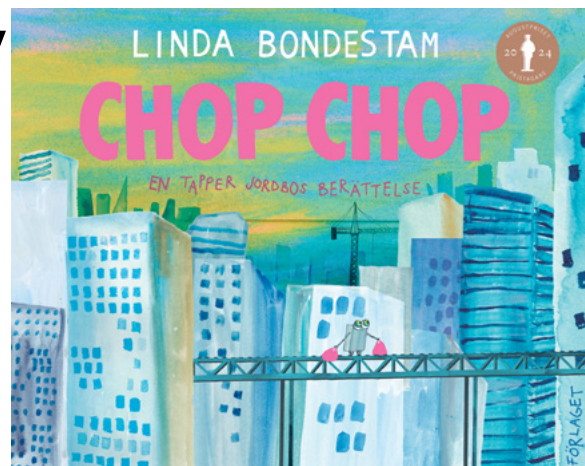
Vasabladet

Written by Katrina Åkerholm

Translation by Josefin Öst

23.10.2024

[Link to original review in Swedish](#)



With her new picture book, *Chop Chop*, Linda Bondestam confirms her place as one of the Nordic's most innovative and brave picture book artists.

The age of robots is here. Eight years into the future, robots have outmanoeuvred humans in the workforce. They are stronger and faster, and they need neither lunch breaks nor wages or rest. In Linda Bondestam's picture book *Chop Chop. The Story of a Busy Robot*, the reader meets a cheerful and helpful robot who thinks that the boss's orders, "chop chop", is his name. He works diligently: "More quantity, more capacity, work is my favourite thing!" But as an even more efficient robot takes over, Chop Chop gets fired and reprogrammed for a new job.

Linda Bondestam has established herself as one of the Nordic's foremost picture book artists, with more than 30 picture books and a string of award nominations. *Chop Chop*, which is the fourth book that Bondestam has both written and illustrated, was recently nominated for the August prize in the category of Swedish Children's and Young People's Book of the Year.*

Chop Chop contains several thematic and visual parallels to Bondestam's *My Life at the Bottom – by a lonesome axolotl*, where an endangered amphibian is the main character of an apocalyptic tale. In *Chop Chop*, the robot's worldview instead creates an alienating effect, challenging our habitual thought patterns. The picture book, which was published simultaneously in Finnish under the title *Hopi Hopi*, raises questions regarding the fast pace which characterizes our time. In its new warehouse job, Chop Chop sorts through boxes of fast fashion and workout gear. "Is this the newest model?", his co-workers inquire. Humankind is constantly searching for something new, better and more efficient in an ever-faster spinning merry-go-round of consumerism.



This picture book is characterized by playfulness, both in text and illustration: “Job-a dabba doo”, and “I like it best in office landscapes”, Chop Chop sings as he works away. With great sensitivity, Bondestam combines humour with spot-on social criticism, engraved in every layer of the book. When Chop Chop gets a job as a picture book illustrator he plagiarizes older art, and Bondestam draws herself into the book, holding a sign protesting AI. When Chop Chop gets a job in a chicken factory, he tries to get the chickens to lay eggs: “Pretend that you run on solar energy! That you are egg machines! That you are robot hens!” But neither hens nor humans can be robots.

The colour scheme is skillfully employed to evoke the different ambiances of the book. The light-hearted opening in bright yellow, as cheery as Chop Chop’s temper, is strikingly juxtaposed against the dirty hues following the outbreak of war. The newspaper headlines shout out: “Get rich from the war”, and Chop Chop is dragged into the profitability industry of the war – until the bomb falls. Bondestam skillfully utilizes the full storytelling potential of the picture book, particularly when it comes to illustrating the passage of time: The light of the atomic bomb is blindingly white and that short instant dominates an entire spread, while the following nuclear winter is depicted in frames, showing time passing, and passing, and passing.

Chop Chop is a work of art that poses deeply existential questions, a reminder of the impermanence of life. But Bondestam does not leave the reader in the darkness of doom. Just as in *My Life at the Bottom*, hope and humour are present throughout. The skies clear up, Chop Chops’ solar-powered batteries start charging again, but the humans are gone. “I will fix this!”, the robot cheerfully exclaims, and Bondestam turns the apocalyptic tale into a sort of high-tech creation story. Thanks to Chop Chop, humankind is reprogrammed – hopefully things will turn out better this time.

This all might seem thematically heavy, but *Chop Chop* is a picture book that challenges, amuses and moves. It is a brave book that disregards the limitations (and dimensions!) of the picture book medium, and even more firmly establishes Bondestam as a groundbreaking picture book artist.

Who is this picture book for then, one might ask? My answer: It is for everyone. ↵

Katarina Åkerholm is a Literature Phd student with an interest in children’s and young people’s literature.

**Chop Chop would later go on to win the August prize, translator’s remark*

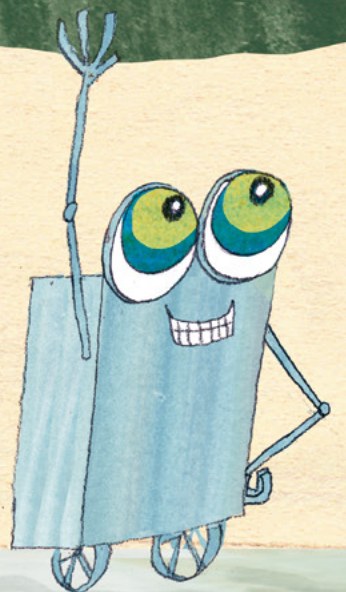
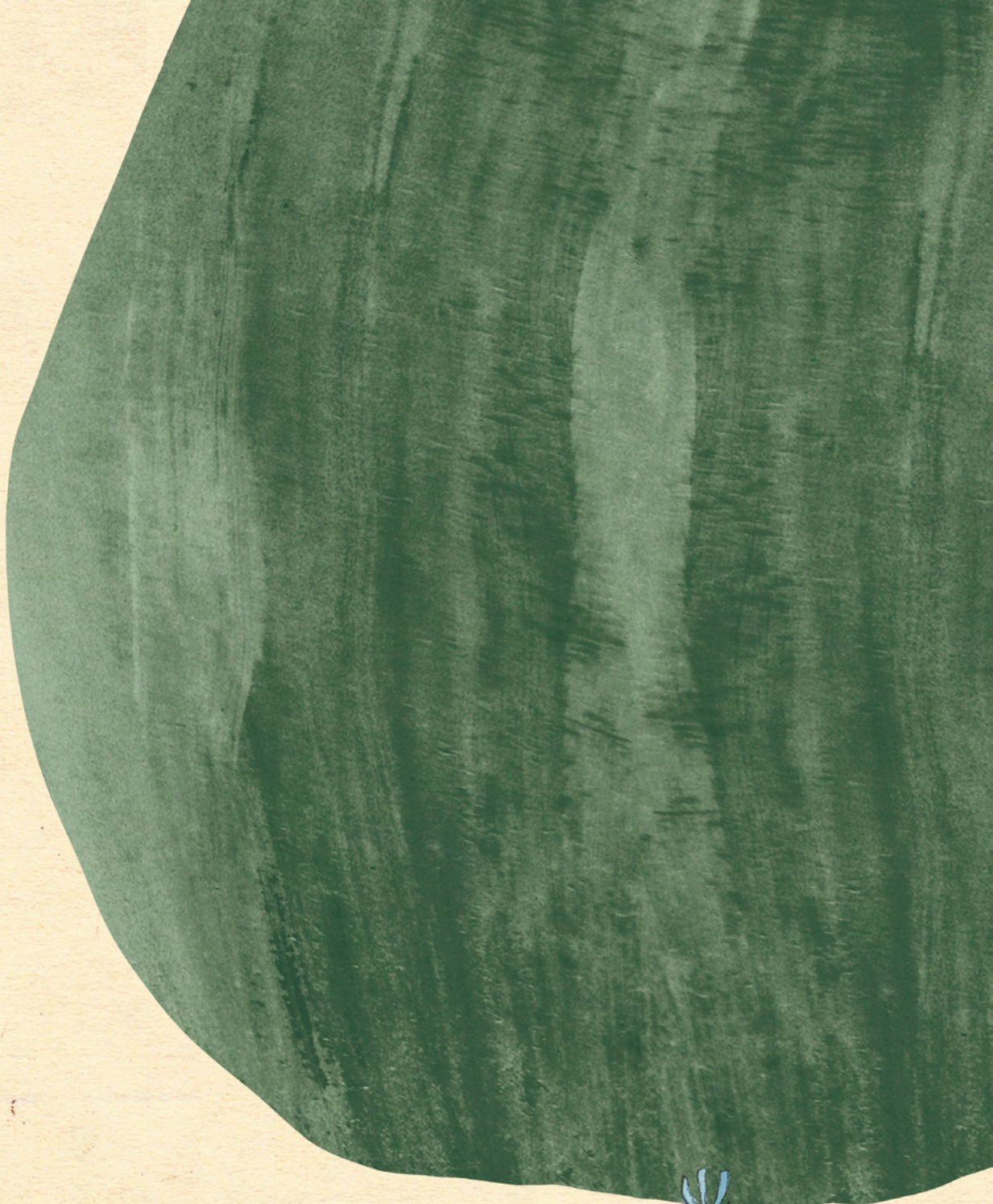


“In this exceptional picture book, a tireless little robot meets the pests of the modern world from abusing the workforce to arms race and nuclear war. Quirky and insightful illustrations and the viewpoint of the innocent robot’s journey depict human life with astonishing sharpness. Despite the heavy themes, the book is ultimately full of hope and even a catastrophe will sprout a new and perfect life.”

– FINLANDIA PRIZE JURY 2024 ABOUT CHOP CHOP







The Whole Caboodle

“At last!’ readers will want to shout. At last, Laura Ruohonen, one of the best-known Finnish children’s poets, and Linda Bondestam, one of Finland’s most famous illustrators, have teamed up to create a picture book together. It tells the story of a motley group of travellers: the whole shebang, aka »Konkkaronkka«. After passing through a fairytale portal, the group and their guide (complete with umbrella) end up in some kind of wonderland: a green jungle, sharp cliffs, bubbling volcanoes, and deserts where the vultures are already lurking. A holiday? Tsk. An adventure! The book’s theme and style (including the cut-outs) clearly refer back to Tove Jansson’s classic »Hur gick det sen« (The book about Moomin, Mymble and Little My, 1952), in which Moomin and his friends drift through a psychedelically colourful world. Just as bright and effervescent is this reminiscence by Laura Ruohonen and Linda Bondestam – fantastically imaginative in both text and images.”

– WHITE RAVENS ISSUE 2024 JURY ABOUT *THE WHOLE CABOODLE*



“The colours, the holes, the shapes, the rhymes - everything is there, in Linda Bondestam and Laura Ruohonen’s picture book. There is also a sharp dose of social criticism. (...) Bondestam acts as the ultimate stage designer and provides each new scene with a new exciting environment, a herd of characters and astonishing twist and turns. It is a colour fest like no other. (...) The centerpiece of *The Whole Caboodle* are the holes in the book pages. (...) The holes create a momentum throughout the book, and Bondestam excels in allowing them to look both forwards and backwards. (...) The theme of our broken relationship with nature is highly topical.”

– MARIA LASSÉN-SEGER, HUFVUDSTADSBLADET NEWSPAPER
ABOUT *THE WHOLE CABOODLE*



Good Night, Earth

03/04/2021

[Link to review](#)

Told from the perspective of a green alien family on a faraway planet, Bondestam's endearing solo debut offers a peek into the fictional bedtime routines of animals from around the world. Young readers will learn the habits of familiar animals (Little Chimp needs his mother to play at least 73 songs on the ukulele) as well as less well-known creatures (the axolotl "reads his favorite book," the cover of which matches this one). Offbeat humor permeates the text ("Jump into your beds,"/ Papa Kiwi hollers./ But no! He has to play flying raisins for hours") and accompanies Bondestam's quirky, multipatterned collage-style illustrations. The penultimate bedtime routine will resonate with parental readers, while the final spreads offer a last laugh for young ones. Ages 3–6. ↵

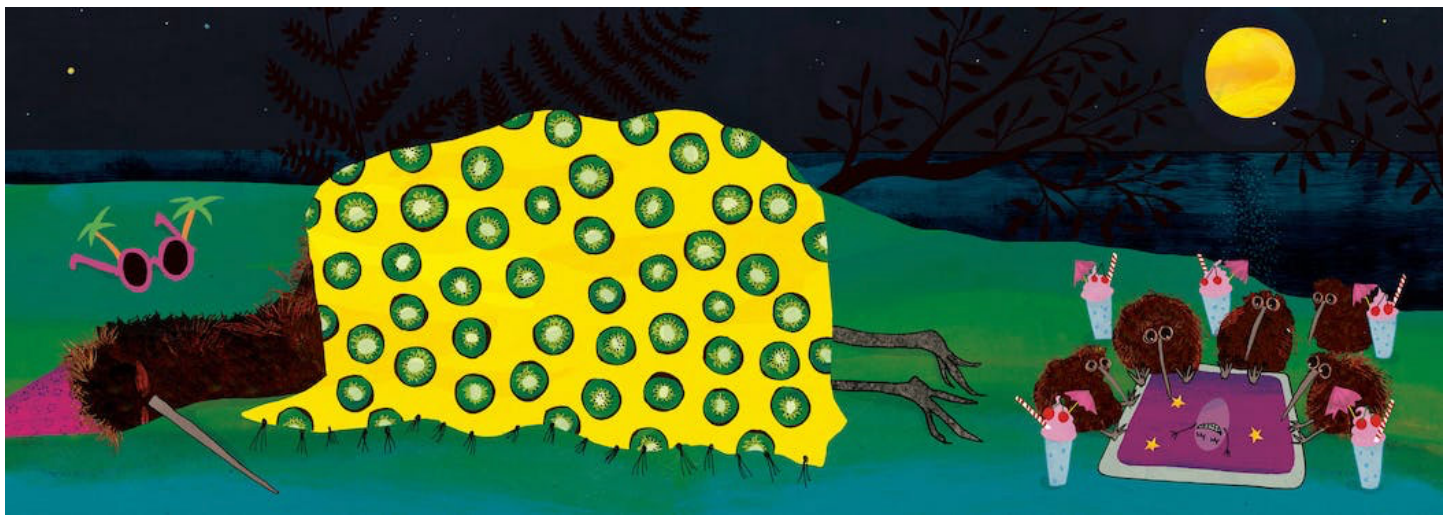


Review: ‘Good Night, Earth,’ by Linda Bondestam, Translated from the Swedish by Galit Hasan-Rokem

By Laurie Hertzler Star Tribune

April 30, 2021

[Link to review](#)



The meerkat family gets ready for bed with a few evening yoga stretches. The baby kiwis don't want to go to bed; they bounce around until papa kiwi falls asleep and then they play some more. The owl family, on the other hand, falls asleep just as everyone else is waking up.

In “Good Night, Earth” (Restless Books, \$20, ages 3-6), Finnish artist Linda Bondestam's funny and beautiful picture book (translated from the Swedish by Galit Hasan-Rokem), a couple of lumpy green creatures from a faraway planet spy on the baffling bedtime habits of Earthlings.

Bondestam's mixed-media illustrations — drawing, painting, paper and Photoshop — are wonderfully detailed, and she picked unusual creatures (an axolotl, a tarsier, those meerkats) to depict, giving them all vivid expressions. Some look demonic, some worried, some deeply suspicious, some (the kiwis) slightly crazed. It's the eyes. They all have great, expressive eyes.

This is a fun book for anytime you want to be reminded (or remind your child) about the wonderful varied creatures of this planet. ↵

Silkmonkey's Laughter

“This picture book covers a heavy subject in a delicate and sensitive manner. Death is hard to accept, but this story beautifully depicts how animals collectively remember their deceased friend. Sharing makes sadness gradually subside, or at least change its form. Bondestam’s images are stunning and multicoloured, enabling the reader feel like they’re entering an enormous jungle themselves.”

– HELSINGIN SANOMAT NEWSPAPER ABOUT
SILKMONKEY’S LAUGHTER



“In Silkmonkey’s Laughter both the text and illustration offer a chance to reflect on grief as well as anger when a loved one passes away... This is a beautiful and low-key story of death and life, without frills. Both children and adults can relate to this.... The large images created with Linda Bondestam’s collage technique are moving and filled with emotion.”

– NY TID MAGAZINE, FINLAND ABOUT
SILKMONKEY’S LAUGHTER

If You Meet a Bear

“Not at all obvious and even less reassuring, unsettling and acute, the Scandinavian book warns against the dangers of the forest with irony and intelligence, inviting the reader – whom the text addresses already with the title – to take on the role of the unwary wanderer.

For our little local explorers, sometimes overprotected, it will be a wholesome read, thanks to a skilful dance of figures and words that humorously chase each other through the pages.”

– PREMIO STREGA RAGAZZE E RAGAZZI NARRAZIONE PER IMMAGINI JURY ABOUT *IF YOU MEET A BEAR*



“With an exquisite rhythm in the pictures, a wicked humoristic warning story about a child walking out into the wilderness and colliding with a bear, is presented. The meeting with the wild takes place through the informative lens of a factbook, ingeniously undermined by plays of features, fast-paced situations of danger and changes in tempo. The proportions are monumental when the bear roars and the forest is drawn out. If you meet a bear takes the most out of the full potential of the picture book format. Malin Kivelä’s and Martin Glaz Serup’s text alongside Linda Bondestams illustrations skillfully challenges our view of the wild and of ourselves.”

– AUGUST PRIZE JURY 2021 ABOUT *IF YOU MEET A BEAR*

Rootless but Not Voiceless

Hufvudstadsbladet

Written by Mia Österlund

Translation by Josefin Öst

14.10.2021

[Link to original review in Swedish](#)

You are all right, but you are not my mother. Could it get more gripping than that? Mia Österlund reads a children's book about an unaccompanied refugee child.

"You are not my mother". This line is repeated over and over, like a chorus, in this picture book. Frank Furu skilfully navigates the us/you constellation that is inevitable when a unaccompanied refugee child is to acclimatize into Finnish society. A notable trend in picture book publishing is experimenting with addressing the reader. More picture books are now told in the first person, something that was previously regarded as tricky. This book also employs a first-person narrator, and she is putting her foot down. Her source of pain is palpable: You are okay, but you are not my mother. Could it get more gripping than that?

Pictures that carry and anchor

Literary debutante Frank Furu has a decade of experience of working with refugee children. He has now been given a golden ticket into picture book publishing. Having your story illustrated by one of Finland's and the Nordics', even the worlds, biggest picture book illustrators gives you an edge. Linda Bondestam chooses the horizontal-oriented landscape book format in order to utilize a wide picture surface, and the picture rhythm she creates is exquisite. Even the supporting characters are masterfully drawn and are given their own interweaving storylines for the reader to follow.

The narrator never loses her otherness. "Sometimes they forget that I am different. We just play, and nobody notices. And yet, somebody always notices." Her body becomes "all tangled and black", everything gets bottled up. Bondestam visualized this convulsive feeling of inadequacy by having an enormous, roaring tiger burst out of the child's mouth. The Ostrobothnian fields and small-town milieus are dazzlingly depicted in the illustrations: A well-known, local sausage vendor and a closed-down bank office provide some humor



for the grown-up reader. Furu's writing is suitably bare and minimal, leaving it to the illustrations to create mood and colour. The side characters are mainly depicted through the illustrations. The social workers are sensitively depicted, always patient and present.

Aysha is battling the trauma of having left or lost her family. She acts out her loss by kicking her plush Moomin toy, provided to her for comfort, and sending it flying through the air. Stiff-legged and stark white, the Moomintroll now lies on her bed as a symbol of whiteness and of a cultural heritage Aysha has not yet acquired. No matter how kind and caring everyone is, she still misses her mother. She hardly even allows herself to have fun, because her longing encapsulates her: "I don't want to feel good, not without my mother". The time it takes to slowly heal, even slightly, is beautifully depicted in sequences of waiting, stillness and return. As a nod to the Somali-speaking reader, there is a line of text under an illustrated photo of Aysha's family, saying in Somali that the photo is for her. In daydream sequences, Aysha is once again back in her home country, sensing familiar tastes, scents and presence.





My Life at the Bottom: The Story of a Lonesome Axolotl by Linda Bondestam

By Stephanie Tournas

May 9, 2022

[Link to review](#)

My Life at the Bottom: The Story of a Lonesome Axolotl by Linda Bondestam. Translated from the Swedish by A. A. Prime. Restless Books, 2022.

Rating: 1-5 (5 is an excellent or a Starred review) 5

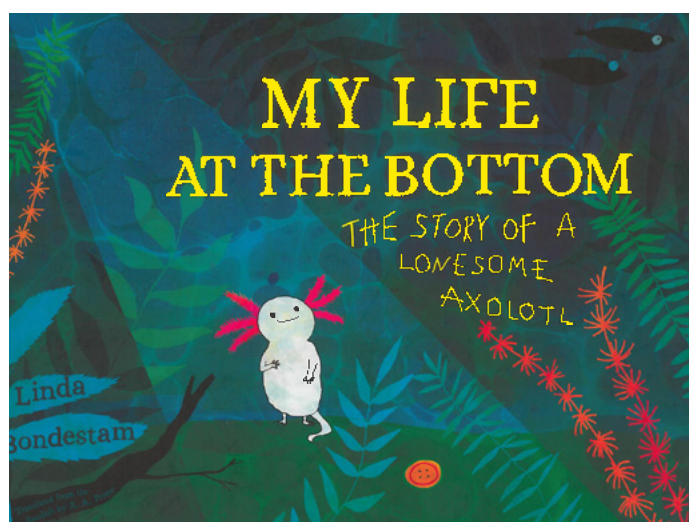
Format: Hardcover

Genre: Fantasy picture book

What did you like about the book? A little axolotl, living at the bottom of a murky lake, narrates a story about love and pollution. At first the axolotl finds plenty to eat, and enjoys friendships with fish, tiger salamanders, and snails. They pass the time playing, going to school, and finding treasures – garbage and lost items that the “big lugs” pollute the water with. But, as more and more pollution muddies the water, there are fewer and fewer of his friends left. Axolotl is lonesome. One day there is a catastrophe – the waters explode, and the earth is flooded. When the catastrophe is over, there is another axolotl! They become friends, and eventually they are parents to 987 little axolotls! His life at the bottom “had become the tops!”

Bondestam’s signature wry humor and quirky art are on display in this longer picture book which reads like a tongue in cheek memoir. It’s also a cautionary tale about how human pollution can affect even the hardiest little creatures. Readers will learn a bit about axolotls (they can regenerate limbs!) and get a sense of how our life styles – fast food, phones, inattention to the life around us – can impact other species. The mixed media art – pen and ink, collage and more – has so much fun detail. Little readers and their parents will enjoy cataloguing the many ‘treasures’ that the little axolotl finds, especially when he finds a smartphone and delights in watching videos online.

I liked the front and end quotations. The quotation at the beginning is from Michael Collins, an Apollo 11 astronaut, which mentions how fragile earth seemed from space. At the end, NASA astronaut Ed Lu’s quotation talks about how



robust life on Earth seems to him! Kids and their parents can talk about which view they agree with. ↵

Anything you didn’t like about it?

No

To whom would you recommend this book?

For kids ages 5-7 who enjoy longer picture books.

Who should buy this book?

Elementary school and public libraries

Where would you shelve it?

Picture books

Should we (librarians/readers) put this on the top of our “to read” piles?

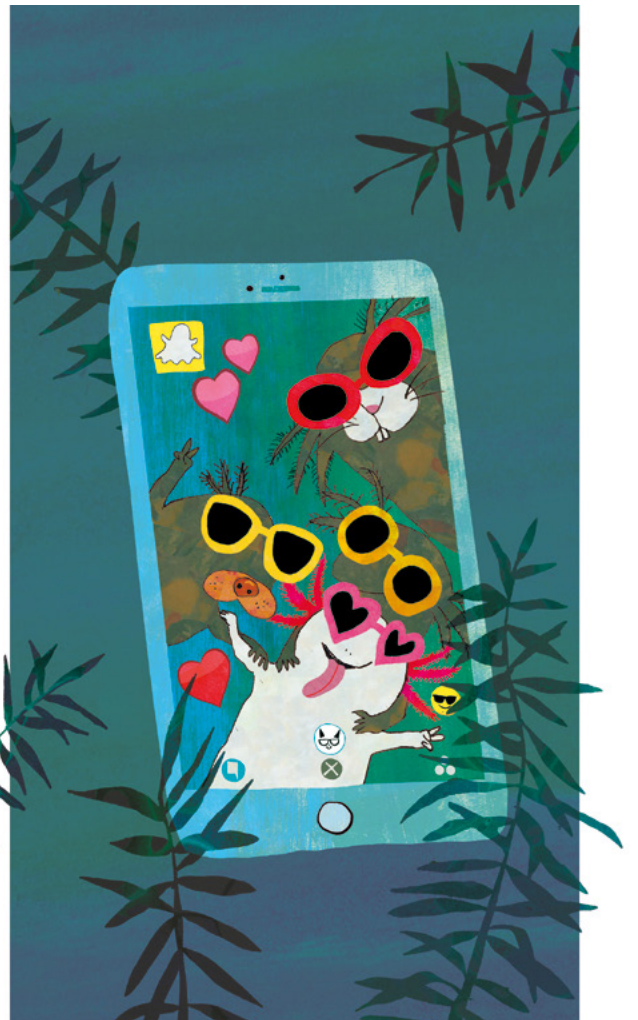
Yes

Reviewer’s Name, Library (or school), City and State:

Stephanie Tournas, Robbins Library, Arlington, MA

Date of review:

May 9, 2022

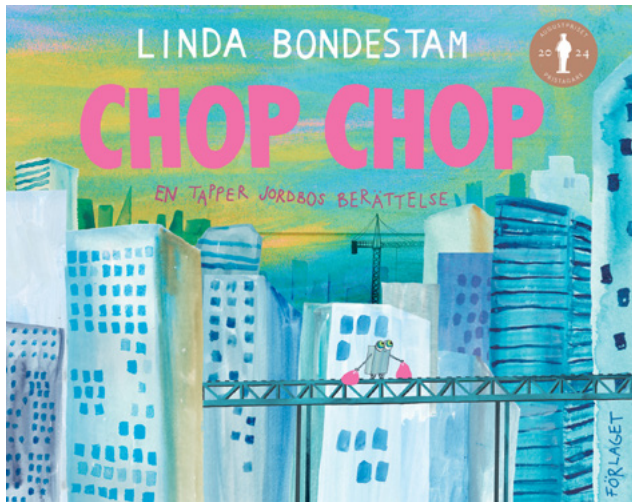


“The soft palette and mottled textures of the water contrasted against the more angular and crowded human world make striking visuals... The initial playfulness invites young viewers to see the world as the axolotl does so when disaster (after disasters) strikes, they understand the stakes.”

– KATE QUEALY-GAINER, THE BULLETIN OF THE CENTER FOR CHILDREN’S BOOKS
ABOUT MY LIFE AT THE BOTTOM



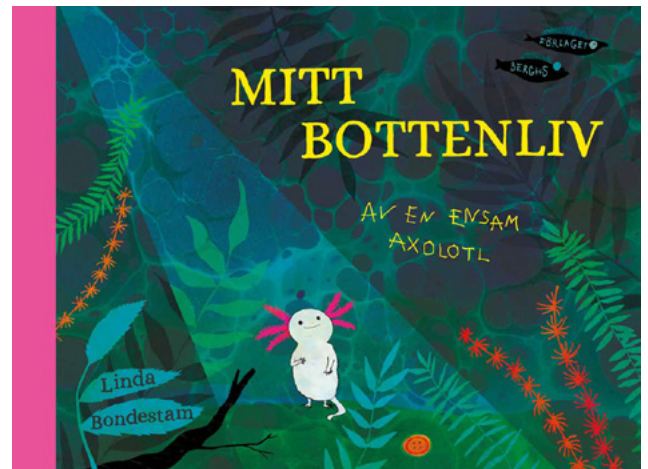
9. The 5 books sent to jurors



1. *Chop Chop - En tapper jordbos berättelse*

Chop Chop – The Story of a Busy Robot

(Förlaget/Teos, Finland 2024)



2. *Mitt bottenliv – av en ensam axolotl*

My Life at the Bottom

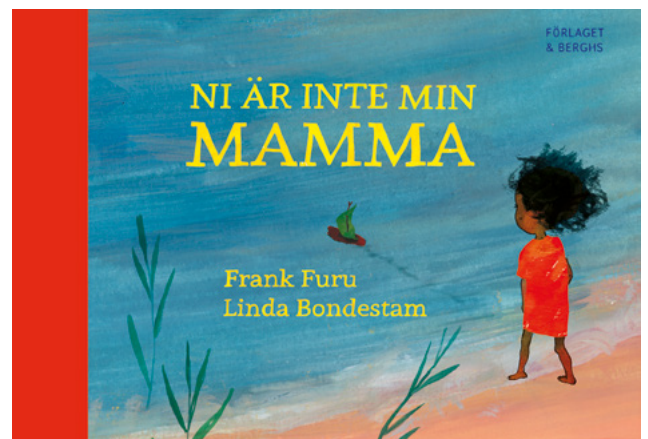
(Förlaget/Bergths/Teos, Finland & Sweden 2020)



3. *Om du möter en björn*

If You Meet a Bear

Words by Malin Kivelä and Martin Glaz Serup
(Förlaget, Finland/Sweden/Denmark 2020)



4. *Ni är inte min mamma*

You Are Not My Mother

Words by Frank Furu
(Förlaget/Bergths, Finland & Sweden 2021)



5. *Silkesapans skratt* Silkmonkey's Laughter

Words by Annika Sandelin
(Förlaget/Berghs, Finland & Sweden 2019)





LINDA BONDESTAM
NOMINATION FOR THE HANS CHRISTIAN ANDERSEN AWARDS 2026

Cover and illustrations by Linda Bondestam
Edited by Josefin Öst/Förlaget
Design & layout by Linnéa Sjöholm/Studio Sjöholm
Photo by Niklas Sandström

Ibby Finland
www.ibby.fi





Illustration from
Chop Chop

