

**Children's Testimonies.
Unveiling historical and art-historical archives.**

**Conference at the University of Bonn/Center for Slavery and Dependency Studies (BCDSS)
Oct 22nd -24th 2026**

The conference addresses the question of how children, as historical actors, recount and bear witness to their experiences. These often include physical and psychological violence, as well as experiences resulting from separation, war, and displacement.

The field of testimonial research has been gaining importance in historical research for several years, although children and young adults are often overlooked in these contexts.¹ This is particularly true for the pre-modern period, as the available sources are considered insufficient. We, on the other hand, argue that they should be considered untapped. For this reason, the declared aim of this conference is to develop cultural-historical archives that could close the postulated source deficit. This also applies in particular to archives on visual culture, which have grown steadily in recent years and are still awaiting systematic development.

Historically, children underwent a radical reevaluation in the early modern period. This applies to both Europe and non-European, colonial contexts. To name just two examples: children's statements in early modern court practice have been unjustly marginalized, while recent dependency research has reevaluated the importance of children and young people as laborers. This opens up perspectives for a new history of interdependence that is methodologically and epistemologically relevant to the concept of the conference. The aim is to broaden the view beyond Europe in order to bring together research areas that have previously worked in isolation from one another and to respond to the call for a decolonization of the history of childhood and children.² At the same time, non-textual sources in particular are the focus of interest. Examples include music, drawings, and evidence of material culture, to name but a few.

The aim of the conference is to synthesize perspectives from historical and art-historical research and to (finally) take children seriously in their role as witnesses. We welcome methodologically reflective contributions that deal specifically with children as contemporary witnesses or with children's testimonies in the early modern period. Entanglement-historical perspectives, including interdisciplinary ones, can be considered, as can disciplinary discussions on the important question of material, visual, oral, and textual archives, with contributions from the perspective of memory history and memory theory being particularly welcome. Proposals from a psychological-historical perspective are also very welcome.

Please send your proposals (max. one page) with a short academic CV by March 28, 2026, to the conference organizers:

claudia.jarzebowski@uni-bonn.de (Claudia Jarzebowski) and bmuench@uni-bonn.de (Birgit Münch).

¹ Goodman, Gail S. "Children's Testimony in Historical Perspective," *Journal of Social Issues* 40, no. 2 (1984): 9-31; Yuille, John C. "The Systematic Assessment of Children's Testimony," *Canadian Psychology/Psychologie Canadienne* 29, no. 3 (1988): 247-262.

² Niewenhuys, Olga: Theorizing childhood(s): Why we need postcolonial perspectives. In: *Childhood* 1/20 (2013), S. 3-8.

Notifications will be sent out by April 22nd 2026. A (limited) budget is available for reimbursement of travel expenses.