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ABSTRACT

Children are naturally drawn to award-winning books. Those who work with children know that the appeal of these books often comes from the shiny gold, silver, or bronze seals affixed to the covers of these special books. Teachers and librarians, however, need to be aware of the fact that the Newbery and Caldecott, and lesser known awards, are awards based on specific criteria that may or may not always meet the reading needs or appeal of every child. This paper answers the following questions: Why are award books important?; How are award books selected?; What have award books meant to the U.S. bookseller's market?; What trends are being seen in award-winning books?; What can teachers and librarians do individually and collaboratively to promote these award-winning books?; and Where can information on children's awards be located on the Web? The paper discusses the Newbery, Caldecott, Mildred L. Batchelder, and Pura Belpre Awards, as well as the Notable Children's Books, Children's Choices, and Teachers' Choices lists. It also discusses the Paul A. Witty Short Story Award and the Lee Bennet Hopkins Poetry Award. Contains an annotated list of recommended readings and resources. (NKA)

**Selecting and Promoting Young Adult and Children's Award-Winning Books
What This Means for Publishers, Authors, Teachers, Librarians and the Consumer**

by

Margaret Hill, Maureen White, and Carolyn Brodie

Paper presented at the European Reading Conference (12th, Dublin, Ireland, July 1-4, 2001).

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Selecting and Promoting Young Adult and Children's Award-Winning Books What This Means for Publishers, Authors, Teachers, Librarians and the Consumer

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Introduction

With approximately 6000 books published for children and young adults in the U.S. each year, it is a daunting task for teachers and librarians to select books for their classrooms and libraries. Award committees play an important role in the process by choosing the best books for awards or special lists and their recommendations become important to teachers and librarians alike. In addition, with censorship issues prevalent in the United States, it is also important to have endorsements from large professional organizations such as the American Library Association (ALA) and the International Reading Association (IRA). Additionally, some awards, such as the prestigious Newbery and Caldecott awards, promise that these books will remain in publication. Thus, teachers and librarians can count on these books becoming classics and books they want for their collections.

Reading teachers and librarians want to provide the best books for children. Therefore, annual selections of award books and notable books that use the criteria of quality and child appeal are important to these groups. Additionally, IRA publishes a recommended list of books selected by children, "Children's Choices," which are based on personal appeal and Teachers' Choices" based on quality and curriculum use. The IRA has also recently established the Paul Witte Award to honor short stories and the Lee Bennett Hopkins Award to honor a new author of outstanding poetry for children.

Children are naturally drawn to award-winning books. The initial appeal may not so much be for the quality of the book, but those of us who work with children know that the appeal for these books often comes from the shiny gold, silver, or bronze seals affixed to the covers of these special books. Everyone likes an award-winner, at least at first glance. As school librarians we often select these books for our libraries because of the awards or the special designations given. As reading teachers we read aloud or encourage the reading of these special books. However, teachers and librarians need to be aware of the fact that the Newbery and Caldecott, and the lesser known awards, the Pura Belpré and Batchelder, as well as the Notable Children's Books, are awards given based on specific criteria that may or may not always meet the reading needs or appeal of every child. It is the purpose of this presentation to answer these questions:

- Why are award books important?
- How are award books selected?
- What has award books meant to the U.S. bookseller's market?
- What trends are we seeing in award-winning books?
- What can teachers and librarians do individually and collaboratively to promote these award-winning books?

- Where can one locate information on children's awards on the Web?

Newbery and Caldecott Awards

Each country has its own special children's book awards. In the U.S., the oldest and most illustrious are the Newbery, begun in 1922, and Caldecott Award in 1938. Maureen White served on the 1996 Caldecott Award committee and Carolyn Brodie on the 1995 and 2000 Newbery Award committees. The Newbery Award is given for the most distinguished American children's book published in the previous year. The Caldecott Award is awarded annually to the artist of the most distinguished American picture book for children published in the United States during the preceding year. Or, as children would say, the Newbery is for the words and the Caldecott for the pictures.

The Caldecott committee and Newbery committee are composed of 8 elected member, including the chair who must have served as a committee member previously, and 7 selected members. The 7 selected members are chosen by the president of the ALA division, the Association for Library Services to Children (ALSC). Both fifteen-member committees labor for one year; reading, discussing, and finally balloting to select the winner. Secrecy is important, with some committees electing not to even use e-mails or faxes to recommend books to other committee members.

Criteria are important to understand, especially for teachers and librarians. A common complaint of a Caldecott selection, e.g., *Golem*, the 1997 Caldecott Award Book, is that the book is too old. Although it was written on a 7th grade readability level, most criticism was leveled at the subject of the story. Picture books seem to be considered by many to be only for young children, and this, of course, is not true. Part of the problem comes because ALSC has defined children for all of its awards as "persons of ages up to and including fourteen." The same criticism of Newbery Award books is often heard, but what is forgotten that books are considered for the entire range, e.g., the 1997 Newbery Honor book, *A Girl Named Disaster*. Criteria for both awards emphasize "distinguished" and "child appeal." There are three important points to remember about these two awards: (1) awards are for quality; (2) the age of the reader is 0 through 14; and (3) award books are not selected for didactic intent or for popularity.

The Newbery Award criteria asks committee members to consider the following:

- Interpretation of the theme or concept
- Presentation of information including accuracy, clarity, and organization
- Development of a plot
- Delineation of characters
- Delineation of setting
- Appropriateness of style
- Excellence of presentation for a child audience.

The committee considers books with "child appeal" as having to appeal to some children not necessarily all children. Newbery books are at times for the gifted child or older reader within

the age of through 14 years, e.g. the 1997 Newbery winner, *The View From Saturday* or the 1996 Newbery winner, *The Midwife's Apprentice*. See <http://www.ala.org/alse/newbery.html> for additional information on previous Newbery Awards and the terms and criteria of the award.

Similarly, Caldecott committees are asked to consider a distinguished picture book in these terms:

- Excellence of execution in the artistic technique employed
- Excellence of pictorial interpretation of story, theme or concept; of appropriateness of style of illustration to the story, theme or concept; of delineation of plot, them, characters, setting mood or information through the pictures
- Excellence of presentation in recognition of a child audience.

It is very difficult to select the winner from among so many outstanding picture books published in a year. After considering the criteria, the important elements that separate the winner from the Honor books is the ability of committee members to booktalk or sell their book. Having served on the 1996 Caldecott, it became obvious that many hours of reading, preparation and research preceded the final selection. Both Newbery and Caldecott Awards are selected through a special process. After booktalking every book selected for final consideration, a written ballot is prepared on which each member selects a first (4 points), second (3 points) and third (2 points) place choice. Two members of the committee count the ballots. If a book does not receive at least 8 first place votes and have a total of 8 more votes than the book with the second most points, additional rounds of booktalking and voting take place until a winner is selected. For more information on previous Caldecott Awards and Terms and Criteria, see <http://www.ala.org/alsc/cmedal.html>.

The Mildred L. Batchelder Award

Cultural diversity is shared among children in the U.S. when the best books from other cultures and languages are published in English for children in our country. The Batchelder Award promotes cultural diversity in that it is given to the American publisher for a children's book considered to be the most outstanding of those books originally published in a foreign language in a foreign country and subsequently translated into English and published in the United States. The Award was established in 1966, and since 1979 it has been annually awarded. Since 1994, the committee may select honor recipients. Maureen White served on the 1992 and 1998 Batchelder Award committee. There are five committee members from ALSC appointed to the committee by the president of ALSC. Folk tales and books that are primarily picture books are not considered eligible for consideration. Several outstanding Batchelder Award books that have been especially successful with children have been the 1997 Batchelder Award, *The Friends*, a Japanese translation; the 1994 Honor Book, *Anne Frank Beyond the Diary*, a Dutch translation, and the 1996 Batchelder Honor Book, *Star of Fear, Star of Hope*, a French translation See <http://www.ala.org/alsc/batch.html> for an overview of the award and a complete listing of recipients.

The Pura Belpré Award

Established in 1996, the Pura Belpré Award is presented to a Latino/Latina writer and illustrator whose work best portrays, affirms, and celebrates the Latino cultural experience in an outstanding work of literature for children and youth. The same age criterion, through age 14, applies as with the Caldecott, Newbery and Batchelder Award. Award and Honor Book Awards are given biennially for both narrative and illustration. Maureen White served as one of three members of the committee representing ALSC for the 1998-2000 term. Those members selected from ALSC continually learned more about the culture and what is accurate and pleasing to the three members and chair who were members of the Latino library affiliate of ALA, REFORMA, the National Association to Promote Library Services to the Spanish Speaking. Three Award books that have proven especially effective and popular with young children have been the 2000 Belpré Award book for illustration, *Magic Windows*; the 1998 Belpré Honor book for narrative, *Laughing Tomatoes and Other Spring Poems*; the 1998 Belpré Honor book for illustration, *In my Family*; and the 1996 Belpré Award book for illustration, *Chato's Kitchen*. See <http://www.ala.org/alsc/belpre.html> for an overview of the award and a complete listing of recipients.

Notable Children's Books

The Notable Children's Books committee of the Association for Library Service to Children (<http://www.ala.org/alsc>) a division of the American Library Association, is charged to select, annotate, and present for publication annually the list of notable children's books of the preceding year. Carolyn Brodie (1997-1999) and Maureen White (2001-2003) have served on the Notable Children's Books Committee.

Notable is defined as worthy of note or notice, important, distinguished, outstanding. As applied to children's books, notable should include books of especially commendable quality, books that exhibit venturesome creativity, an books of fiction, information, poetry and pictures for all age levels (through age 14) that reflect and encourage children's interests in exemplary ways. The evaluative criteria to be used are:

- Originality of text and illustrations
- Clarity and style of language
- Excellence of illustration
- Excellence of design and format
- Subject matter of interest and value to children
- The likelihood of acceptance by children.

To be eligible for consideration, a book must (1) be a book for which children are a potential audience; and (2) have been published in the United States during the year preceding the Midwinter Meeting at which the selection is made. There is no limitation in format. A book may be in hard or paper covers, spiral bound, in portfolio, etc. It is expected that books will have a collective unity of story line, theme or concept, developed through text or pictures of a combination thereof.

The Chair and ten members are appointed to the committee by the President of the Association for Library Service to Children. Committee terms are for two years with half of the membership

appointed each year. The Committee meets twice each year. The first time at the summer meeting of the American Library Association with usually two-three discussion meetings. The second and most crucial set of meetings takes place at the ALA Mid-winter conference held in January or February each year. During these meetings a discussion list* is provided and oral discussion by the members of the committee takes place in a public forum. The public does not participate in the discussion.

The discussion list is generated by committee members. Several times a year these compiled lists of are sent to individual members as a reading list. The books on these compiled lists are then voted on and each must receive 6 of 11 votes to stay on the primary discussion list of those titles that will be discussed at the ALA meetings. Toward the end of the year the list becomes more complete and will usually number 150-200.

After all books have been discussed at the meeting at the ALA Mid-Winter Conference, committee members receive a ballot and can vote for 50 titles from the primary discussion list. A book must receive 6 of 11 votes at this point to be part of the "Notable" list. The list usually ranges from 40-70 titles.

The Notable Children's Books list is an annual list of the books selected from the publishing of a particular year. The list is intended for children: to assist them in selecting books to read, and to encourage them to seek out those that are considered notable among the many books available in bookstores and libraries. While it is not expected that every child's librarian will necessarily select all of the books listed, it is hoped that nationwide, through library networks and bookstores, children will find these books accessible.

Not everyone is expected to agree with the committee's decision on the notable books. However, disagreement can lead to sharpening one's own critical sense and can be used as the basis for discussion in a group situation. The current Notable list is posted at <http://www.ala.org/alsc/nbook01.html> with other notable lists for video, audio, CD-ROMs and web sites available at <http://ala.ala.org/alsc/awards.html>.

Children's Choices and Teachers' Choices

Each year since 1975, some 10,000 school children from different regions of the United States read and vote on the newly published children's and young adults' trade books that they like best. More than 800 books are sent to 5 review teams located in different regions of the U.S. Each team consisted of a children's literature specialist, one or more classroom teachers, school librarians, and 2,000 children. Throughout the school year these books were read to or by children. Children's votes were tabulated in March, and the top titles were announced at the IRA Conference in May. An annotated and books are grouped by reading levels, Beginning readers (ages 5-6), Young readers (ages 6-8), Intermediate readers (ages 8- 10), and Advanced readers (ages 10- 13). Children's Choices is published annually in the October issue of *The Reading Teacher*. This list is designed for use not only by teachers, librarians, administrators, and booksellers, but also by parents, grandparents, care givers, and everyone who wishes to encourage young people to read for pleasure. Children's Choices is a project of a joint committee

supported by IRA and the Children's Book Council (CBQ). See <http://www.cbcbooks.org/choices/title.htm> for more information on this list, tips for parents, primary care givers, and educators, and a complete listing of the Children's Choices for 2000.

Each year since 1989 the IRA's Teacher's Choices project has identified outstanding U.S. books published for children and adolescent that teachers find to be exceptional in curriculum use. Some 300+ new books are submitted by publishers and sent to seven regional coordinators, field leaders, teacher reviewers who try out the books in classrooms and libraries to select books for Primary (K-2), Intermediate (Grades 3-5), and Advanced (Grades 6-8). Criteria for selection include:

- Books reflect high literary quality
- Books that might not be discovered or fully appreciated by children without introduction by an adult
- Books that have potential use across the curriculum.

Following selection of the books for this list, annotations are written for Teachers' Choices and published annually in the November issue of *The Reading Teacher*. See <http://www.readingonline.org/reviews/choices/choices.index.html> for a complete list. However, the list is written in a PDF format and a copy of a reader, such as Adobe's *Acrobat Reader*, must be loaded on your hard drive in order to read the file.

Paul A Witty Short Story Award and Lee Bennett Hopkins Poetry Award

The International Reading Association honors many writers each year. Two important writing awards are for poetry and short stories. The Lee Bennet Hopkins Promising Poet Award was presented this year to Craig Crist-Evans for *Moon Over Tennessee: A Boy's Civil War Journal*. Criteria for the award require that the entire publication be authored by the same author, not a collection from other authors, and that the poetry is appealing to a reader audience to 14 years of age. This award for a first time published author of poetry is presented every three years and is judged on originality, creativity, and child appeal. The runner-up for this award was *My Name is Jorge: On Both Sides of the River* written by Jane Median, illustrated by Fabricio Vanden Broeck

Other nominations for this award were as follows:

Fly with Poetry written and illustrated by Avis Harley

Flicker Flash written by Joan Bransfield Graham, illustrated by Nancy Davis

Lemonade Sun and Other Summer Poems written Rebecca Kai Dotlich, illustrated by Jan Spivey Gilchrist

Rabbit's Bedtime written and illustrated by Nancy Elizabeth Wallace

Marshmallow Kisses written by Linda Crotta Brennan, illustrated by Mari Takabayashi

Polka Bats and Octopus Slacks written by Calef Brown

The Low-Down laundry Line Blues written by C.M. Miller, illustrated by

Christine Davenier

Dutch Sneakers and Flea Keepers written by Calef Brown

Gilbert de la frogpond: A swamp story written by Jennifer Rae, illustrated by
Rose Cowles

13 Monsters Who Should Be Avoided written by Kevin Shortsleeve, illustrated
by Micheal Austin

The Paul A. Witty Short Story Award is presented yearly. This award must be an original short story (not a retelling of a folk take, legend, or myth) appearing in a young children's periodical that regularly publishes short stories for children up to age 14. The short story must be submitted during the calendar year of publication; thus a story will be considered but one time. A story may be entered into the award competition by its publisher, an IRA member, the subcommittee or the authors themselves. Both fiction and nonfiction stories are eligible. Short stories will be judged on the following characteristics:

- presents the creation of a believable world for readers,
- tells a truthful and/or authentic presentation of information,
- serves as a literary standard
- encourages young readers to read by providing them with an enjoyable reading experience.

The Paul A. Witty Award for short story in 2001 was awarded to G. Clifton Wisler and Boys' Life magazine for "The Orange Armband." Dr. Margaret Hill chaired the Paul A. Witty and Lee Bennet Hopkins Poetry Award committee in 2000 and 2001. The 14 member committee receives nominations by the December 1st deadline and then reads and ranks the nominations with a decision made by January 10th. See <http://www.reading.org/about/whatwedo/awards/witty.html> and <http://www.reading.org/about/whatwedo/awards/capoetry.html> for more details.

Recommended Readings and Resources

Association for Library Service to Children. (May 1995). *Mildred L. Batchelder Award Selection Committee Manual*, 3-4. Chicago: ALA.

Complete listing of criteria for the Batchelder Award.

Association for Library Service to Children. (2001). *The Newbery and Caldecott Awards: A guide to the medal and honor books*. Chicago: ALA.

Consists of articles on the origin, criteria, committees, and description of the medals; an annotated list of Newbery and Caldecott Award and Honor Books by year; and a listing of the media used in Caldecott books by year. Updated annually.

Beitler, R White, M.(1998). Outstanding translated children's books: Birth of a bibliography by committee. *Journal of Youth Services in Libraries*, 11(3), 263-272.

Provides an annotated bibliography and set of criteria for selecting outstanding translated children's books. Includes picture/easy-to-read books, fiction, historical fiction, folklore, nonfiction, poetry and collections.

Chamberlain, J., & Leal, D. (1999). Caldecott Medal books and readability levels: Not just "picture books." *The Reading Teacher*, 52, 900-902.

Readability levels are given for each Caldecott Medal book as well as suggestions for using these books with a wide range of age groups.

International Reading Association. (2000). Children's' choices for 2000. *The Reading Teacher*, 54(2), 191-205.

Provides an explanation of how the books are selected, an annotated listing by age/grade of students, and tips for using for parents, primary care givers, and educators.

International Reading Association. (2000). Teachers' choices for 2000. *The Reading Teacher*, 54(3), 260-276.

An explanation of how the books are selected, an annotated listing by primary, intermediate, and advanced level, and suggestions for use within the curriculum are provided.

Parravano, M.V. (1999). "Alive and Vigorous": Questioning the Newbery. *Horn Book*, 75, 434-444.

Discusses the need for more children's book awards, especially for beginning readers, while still maintaining the highest literary standards.

Staerkel, K. Hackett, N. & Callaghan, L.W. (1994). *The Newbery & Caldecott mock election kit: Choosing champions in children's books*. Chicago: ALA.

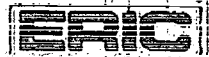
Plans, examples, and certificates for holding a mock election for the Newbery or Caldecott Award.

White, M. (1997). Children's picture books from abroad: Valuing other cultures. Eric Document ED412962.

A comparison of 1992-1997 Caldecott Medal Award winners and outstanding translated children's books provide insights into their similarities and differences. A bibliography of 54 recommended translated children's books is provided, organized by year with genre and approximate interest level listed.



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