

Jennifer Renee Luyckx 5.1 Awards: Synthesis and Reflection

I still wonder how an award winning book is determined. I realize that I have read about the criteria that the book must meet but I am still puzzled on what the committee uses to pick that final book. In looking at all of the books that won awards and those that were given honors I will say that some of the honor books are more appealing to children and adults than perhaps the actual winners are/were. A wonderful example of this is Secret of the Andes and Charlotte's Web. Charlotte's Web has been a favorite for many years and I still don't quit understand how Secret of the Andes won the award that year. I am sure that the committee has other reasons other than the actual guidelines and criteria that a book must meet. To me it would be interesting to know why they chose the books that they did. Did the book fit more with the times it was written, was it more cultural and educational, or was the winning book simply the personal choice of the majority of the committee members? Does the geographic location of the committee members determine the winner? I am sure that a committee member from a more mountainous region would relate to Secret of the Andes but a farmer would relate more to Charlotte's Web. This is one of the questions that were not answered for me and I still am very curious to know the answer to. How much does ones personal preference of children's literature play into determining who the award winners are?

One thing that I did learn more as a teacher is that in helping a child pick out a book it is important not to look for the award winners but to look more at the content of the book in relation to the child. I also learned that just because I think a book is a "good book" that the children in my classroom may not. Not only do I

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need to consider this while picking out books for the children in my classroom, but also for my own boys at home. I can probably pick a dozen or two books on their bookshelves that they refuse to let me read because they don't look like a "good book" to them. In relation to this, it is often hard to "judge a book by its cover" as the saying goes. From my own personal experiences in my classroom and at home, I have found that just because a cover is appealing does not always mean that the content of the book will be. The reverse can also be said in respect to the saying, just because the cover of a book is not appealing does not mean that the content will not be. I think that it is important to skim a book to see what the content is before helping one decide on a book and most important is to consider the interests of the child or group of children instead of ones own interests.

I really enjoyed the research on the Caldecott Medal Award. In terms of illustrations I knew that they were important in a picture book but I really did not evaluate their importance to the book as a whole, but just as the illustrations. In saying this I mean that a picture truly is "worth a thousand words". In teaching first grade I have a variety of different reading levels and a few of my students will often use the pictures to read the words. I can't imagine them being able to do this with books that did not give very detailed pictures or pictures that were so busy that they could not possibly tell what the words on the page might be. I think that a good illustrator will use their pictures to tell the story so that if there were no words at all the same story and meaning would be told or portrayed. I also learned that with the illustrations that the colors, paper, and view points

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really help set the tone for the story. This was made evident in “The Ugly Duckling”. When I read the original version to my students they sat back and listened to the story without much involvement. When I read them the newer version of the same story they were much more involved with the story. After reading both versions to them I showed them that they were the same story but with a different illustrations. We then compared the illustrations of both stories and they told me that they could “understand” the newer illustrations better than the original illustrations. Isn’t that the purpose of a “good book” with “good illustrations”? Shouldn’t the children you are reading to fully enjoy, understand, and relate to the illustrations? Shouldn’t they appreciate the story as a whole? My response would be yes, otherwise are you really reading to them or are you just reading to say that you did it?

I can not believe how much information I learned in just the first four weeks of this course. I knew that I would walk away with some more in-depth knowledge of Children’s Literature but I did not know how much I would discover about my own self as an educator and a parent. I know I will now look at books in a different way; not only picking a book based on it being an award winner, which I never really did but assumed that all award winners were the “best of the best”, but really looking at the illustrations and skimming the text to determine if it is a good choice for a child or myself. If I am going to take the time to read a book to my own children or my class, I want to make sure that they are going to enjoy the book and taking the extra time to discover that is worth it to me.