Youth Services, Competency 2

Competency 2

2. Resources for youth in different formats, including award-winners, classic titles and age-appropriate materials.

Portfolio Development Suggestions

2.2 Investigate three children’s book awards and discuss the criteria for these awards. What books would you nominate for these awards? If you had to create a children’s book award, what would be your award’s criteria?

Evidence

The three children’s book awards that I have chosen to discuss are the Monarch Award, Caldecott Medal and Newbery Medal. These are the three awards that I highlight in the library curriculum at XXX Elementary School.

My favorite of these awards is the Monarch Award. I like the fact that the award is given to the book chosen by the students. Children have their own sense of what they like. Telling a student that a book has had an award given to it may not mean a lot to them unless they have had a chance to participate in the choice of the winning book. What adults tend to pick for children may not always coincide with what children like. Plus, giving the children a chance to vote gives the children a sense of ownership and responsibility in the award. Being a school library, our purpose is not only to foster a love of reading in students but to supplement the school curriculum. The Monarch Award fulfills these two objectives.

The Monarch Award

The Monarch Award is Illinois’ K-3 Children’s Choice Award that is presented annually to the author and/or illustrator of the book voted by students in Illinois in Kindergarten through Grade Three. This award is sponsored by the Illinois School Library Media Association. The purpose of this award is to encourage children to read for personal enjoyment and to read critically.

Nominations of outstanding works of literature for children are sought from school library media specialists, public librarians, teachers and students. After all nominations are acquired, a committee selects a master list of 20 books for the students to pick from. The list has to contain at least three titles of each type of books: picture book, easy reader and chapter book. The list must also include both fiction and non-fiction selections. To be eligible to participate in the voting process, the student must have access to at least 12 of the books and have read or heard at least five of the books.

The criteria for a book to be eligible for nomination for the Monarch Award are:

- The book must be copyrighted within the past five years.
- The book must be in print at the time of selection.
The author/illustrator must be alive at time of selection for the Master List.

The book must be of interest for children in Kindergarten-3rd Grade.

The book must have literary merit.

Only one title per author is allowed per list.

The criteria for this award seem to be well suited for children. Whereas, an adult may like to read an old classic, most young children prefer something new. Also, easy access to the book is essential if a child is to read and vote on it. An old, out-of-print book would not be easy for a child to acquire and read. The requirement that the Master list include fiction and non-fiction, plus the diversity of types of books (picture, easy reader and chapter book) is also a plus. I have found that my students are surprisingly interested in the non-fiction books and even my older students seem to enjoy the picture book selections. Giving the award to an author/illustrator who is alive is good because students will look forward to future books from that author/illustrator. The only criterion that is difficult to grasp is the one that the book must have literary merit. Literary merit is a very subjective term and people will have different ideas as to what books have literary merit.

If I were to nominate some titles for consideration for this award, my choices would be:

1. Bed, Bats & Beyond by Joan Holub. This fiction chapter book is a story that introduces children to various kinds of stories: scary, adventure, romance and bedtime. It is the story of a bat that cannot go to sleep and the stories that his siblings tell him to make him sleepy. An exposure to multiple literary genres increases a child’s reading skills. This book offers this type of opportunity.

2. Class Two at the Zoo by Julia Jarman. Class Two at the Zoo is a fiction, rhyming book about a class trip to the zoo. I have read this book to my Kindergarten – 3rd grade students and they all liked it. During story time, rhyming books provide a crucial phonemic experience to children by allowing them to experience language pattern and repetitive sounds.

3. What Senses Do Animals Have? By Bobbie Kalman. This non-fiction selection compares human senses to animal senses. This informational book provides exposure of written language on a subject that students have a natural interest in and is also in the classroom curriculum.

The Caldecott Medal

The Caldecott Medal was established in 1937 and is awarded each year to the illustrator of the most distinguished American picture book for children published the previous year. This award was established to complement the Newbery Medal Award. Both awards are sponsored by the American Library Association and voted on by a committee chosen for each award.

To be considered for the Caldecott Medal, the illustrator must be a citizen of the United States. The illustrations must be original works, must be appropriate for the story, theme or concept and must convey the idea behind the plot, theme, characters, setting, mood or information of the
story. The criteria seem to be very subjective in nature; there really is nothing concrete to judge by. The criteria used are:

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

If I were to nominate a book for this award, The Hat, written and illustrated by Jan Brett, would be a good choice. I love the way she surrounds the main picture with cut-outs that reflect a part of the story—the illustration on the left page showing what Lisa is doing while the illustration on the right page showing what animal will be next in the story. The style and pictorial interpretation of illustrations are appropriate to the story. This gives the children an opportunity to spend time looking at the various parts of the illustrations; it is not a single, simple illustration.

**The Newbery Medal**

Established in 1921, the Newbery Medal is awarded each year by the American Library Association to the most distinguished American children’s book published the previous year. This award is given to books for which children are an intended potential audience (up to age 14).

To be considered for this award the author of the book must be a United States citizen or resident. The committee responsible for selecting the book must consider the following:

- Interpretation of the theme or concept
- Presentation of information including accuracy, clarity and organization
- Development of plot
- Delineation of characters
- Delineation of setting
- Appropriateness of style

They also are to consider the excellence of presentation for a child audience and the book must be a self-contained entity, not needing film or sound equipment, for its enjoyment. Again, the criterion is very subjective. How do you pick a book to be an award winner? Every person who reads a book will have a different opinion of it. It is hard to tell what will become a “classic” and withstand the test of time.

My choices for Newbery Medals would be:

1. **Hatchet** by Gary Paulsen. My experience with grade school students shows this book to be very popular and well-read. One that I feel is bound to become a “classic”. The style of the book is realistic adventure with the plot being a survival story. The main character, Brian, is well developed throughout the story as he grows through his experience in survival.

2. **The Merchant of Death** by D. J. Machale (the first installment in the Pendragon Series). This is a story with a fast-paced plot keeps you interested and waiting to find out what
happens next with a science fiction setting that intrigues children. The characters are well-developed yet the story allows the reader to find out more about the characters as the story goes along.

3. Everything for a Dog by Ann M. Martin. This is a touching story about a boy’s desire for a dog. The story actually has three stories running through it but each story eventually works its way into the others so that at the end you have just one story. An unexpected twist toward the end helps make this book so interesting.

If I were to create a children’s book award, what would it be? My first thought was to design an award along the lines of the Monarch Award but for older readers. However, I found that Illinois has already created such an award: the Bluestem Award. This award is for books that would interest readers in Grades 3-5 and the winner is picked by student votes. I really like the idea of students picking the winning book. Students know what they like to read and/or hear and they are the best judges as to what book should win an award for its appeal to children. I hope to incorporate the Bluestem Award with my classes in Grades 3-5 in the next few years.

If I could come up with an original idea for a children’s book award, it would have to have the following as criteria:

- The books would appeal to children
- The books would have to be in print.
- The books could be new releases or well-known classics
- The winning book would be chosen by student vote.

ISLMA and ALA have both done wonderful jobs of developing and promoting book awards. It is incredibly hard to think of a new award that either group has not already done.

The XXX School’s Reader’s Choice Award

The best I can envision is an award for the fiction books best liked by my particular elementary school students. I could have the students nominate titles of fiction books found on the shelves of our library that they like the best. After receiving all the nominations, I could compile a list of 15-18 of the most nominated books and then give the students time to read most, if not all, of the nominated titles. On voting day, the students would pick the winning fiction books for the honor of being “XXX School’s Reader’s Choice Award”! These books could be given “star status” and displayed for all the students to see. It would be best to have two winning books: one for K-Grade 3 students and one for Grades 4-5 students as this is how my library is divided. Maybe this is something that I can refine and actually incorporate as part of the curriculum in the next few years.