

INDIANA'S CHILDREN'S BOOK AWARD: THE YOUNG HOOSIER BOOK AWARD

by Lee Ann Kee



What do the books *The Monster Who Ate My Peas* by Danny Schnitzlein and illustrated by Matt Faulkner, *Ghost Cadet* by Elaine Marie Alphin, and *The Sisterhood of the Traveling Pants* by Ann Brashares have in common? They were all 2004 winners of

the Young Hoosier Book Award. The Young Hoosier Book Award Program (YHBA) allows children throughout the state of Indiana to read a variety of books and vote for their favorite one.

Members of the YHBA committee select the twenty books that will be on each reading list. In order to select the books, committee members read all of the eligible books that have been recommended. They then meet to select the books and prepare the activity books that are available at each level. This is my second year as a member of the YHBA committee. I enjoy having the opportunity to read a wide variety of books and participate in selecting the books that students will read.

THE PURPOSE

“The purpose of the Young Hoosier Book Award Program is to stimulate recreational reading among elementary and middle school/junior high school children and to encourage cooperation between administrators, school media specialists, teachers, public libraries, and the community in providing reading experiences for Indiana school children” (“Young Hoosier”). The Association for Indiana Media Educators (AIME), a division of the Indiana Library Federation (ILF), sponsors the award. Students throughout the state of Indiana are eligible to participate.

According to Kristi Boyd, General Chairman of the committee, the main goal of the program is to encourage kids to read: “By participating in this program, they get a chance to vote for the books they like best and at the same time they are exposed to a variety of high-quality literature for children.”

THE HISTORY

The Young Hoosier Book Award program began during the 1974-1975 school year. It was originally designed as an award for chapter books. In the first year, 4,861 students across the state of Indiana voted.

The first winner was E. B. White’s *The Trumpet of the Swan* (“Young Hoosier”). Kristi Boyd stated that before 1986 there was only one category and one winner. In 1985 the YHBA committee decided to create two lists, one for fourth - sixth grade students and another for sixth - eighth grade students. This allowed there to be two winners, one at each level. In 1992, the committee decided that younger students also needed to be able to participate. The Picture Book category was added, allowing students in Kindergarten – third grade to vote for their favorite book.

In 2003, the names of the categories were changed to Picture Book, Intermediate, and Middle Grades. This change allows schools to choose the list that they feel is most appropriate for their students. According to Kristi Boyd, 27,276 students voted for their favorite books in 2003. The increase in the number of participants is a testament to the success of the program.

HOW THE PROGRAM WORKS

Students, teachers, parents, librarians and media specialists can recommend books for the Young Hoosier Book Award program. Information about the program and how to recommend books is available on the YHBA page of the Indiana Library Federation website. (<http://www.ilfonline.org/Units/Associations/aime/Programs/YHBA/yhba.htm>). In order for a book to be eligible, it must meet the following requirements:

1. The author or illustrator of a nominated book will be restricted to one work in any particular year.
2. The author or illustrator of a nominated book must be living and currently residing in the United States.
3. The book must have been published within the last five (5) years.
4. The book must be in-print at the time of selection.
5. The book cannot be a previous nominee.
6. The book cannot be a Caldecott or Newbery Medal winner. Honor books are acceptable. (AIME)

Members of the YHBA committees read all of the selected titles that meet the requirements and choose the twenty books that will be on the reading list. The list for the following school year is made available at the AIME conference in the fall.

In order for students to participate in the program, they must read twelve of the twenty titles for the Picture Book Award or five of the twenty titles for the Intermediate and Middle Grades Awards. After reading at least the required number of books, they are eligible to vote. All votes are sent to the Indiana Library Federation by April 15th. Each individual vote is tallied, so every student's vote counts. According to Kristi Boyd, "Over 1000 Indiana schools and public libraries are registered as places students can vote. If their school does not participate in the program, we encourage students and parents to talk with their public librarian who can also register and submit votes for students."

I read the Picture Book nominees to all of my kindergarten through second grade students, making all of these students eligible to vote. They have fun voting for their favorite book and anxiously wait to see if their favorite book is chosen the winner. I also make the books on the Intermediate and Middle Grades lists available to my older students, giving them the option of reading the books. Several students enjoy participating each year.

The annual AIME conference provides an opportunity to meet the previous year's winning authors. The authors sign books at the conference and speak at the Young Hoosier banquet. Often, the authors will also visit schools or participate in events where students can meet them. At the annual conference in November 2004, the winning authors from 2003 will be presented with their awards. Due to the author's busy schedules, the award is always presented the year after it was awarded. The winning authors from 2003 that will be at the conference are:

Maryanne Cocca-Leffler for *Mr. Tannen's Ties*
(Picture Book)

Kate DiCamillo for *Because of Winn-Dixie*
(Intermediate)

Jerry Spinelli for *Stargirl* (Middle Grades)

THE COMMITTEE

The Young Hoosier Book committee consists of three sub-committees, one for each level. The General Chair (currently Kristi Boyd) coordinates the efforts of the three sub-committee chairs. Each subcommittee consists of approximately twenty members. The majority of the members are media specialists, librarians or teachers. While there is much work involved, it is fun and rewarding to be on the committee.

In order to be on the committee, you need to make a two-year commitment and be a current member of ILF and AIME during the years of committee participation ("Young Hoosier"). Committee members have several responsibilities and obligations that include:

- Reading and responding to (as needed) all correspondence.
- Attending the Reading Kick-off Meeting.
- Spending the summer reading and completing book evaluation forms.
- Attending and participating in the Book Nominee Selection Meeting.
- Assisting in the development of an activity book.
- Volunteering, as needed, at the annual AIME conference.
- Supporting and promoting the sale of YHBA related items.

The committees are set up in December. The kick-off meeting usually takes place in March or April. At this meeting, reading lists are distributed and everyone goes over what they need to accomplish before the second meeting. Some publishers will provide free copies of their books and these books are distributed among the members before the end of the meeting.

Throughout the summer, the committee's main job is to read, read, read! Each committee reads approximately 60-80 books. Committee members complete an evaluation form for each book that includes information such as book talks, author information, discussion questions, suggested activities, subject correlations and related web sites. Many of the books are wonderful to read, while some are a challenge to get through. It is best to read as many of the books on the list as you can, in order to make informed decisions about the books for the list.

The book nominee selection meeting usually takes place during the beginning of September. This meeting lasts most of the day, as members have to choose the twenty books and alternates that will be the nominees for the following school year. This can be an exciting and interesting day, as the members debate the books they feel most deserve to be on the list. They take into consideration genre and topics, so there will be a variety of books on the list. After the committee determines their list of books, they use the information sheets to put together an activity book. The activity books are available through ILF.

I enjoy being on the Young Hoosier Book Committee. I have the opportunity to read many children's

books that I might otherwise not pick up. One of the perks of being on the committee is the opportunity to sit at the author table during the Young Hoosier banquet at the AIME Conference. Last year, I had the opportunity to sit with Gloria Skurzynski and Alane Ferguson, authors of the 2002 winner, *Cliffbanger*. It was so interesting to be able to meet the authors and spend the evening talking with them. The banquet offers a wonderful opportunity to hear all of the award-winning authors speak.

If you are interested in more information about the Young Hoosier Book Award or are interested in serving on the committee, please see the Indiana Library Federation Website at <http://www.ilfonline.org/Units/Associations/aime/Programs/YHBA/yhba.htm>.

REFERENCES

Young Hoosier Book Award. (n.d.) Retrieved May 19, 2004 from <http://www.ilfonline.org/Units/Associations/aime/Programs/YHBA/yhba.htm>.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Lee Ann Kee (lkee@strichardsschool.org) is a Librarian at St. Richard's School in Indianapolis.