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## LOOKING AT BOOK AWARDS AND AWARD BOOKS

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Children instinctively crave things that are inspired and attractive. This includes a craving for beautiful illustrations and artistic and effective use of language by which satisfying imaginative and thought-provoking stories are told in books children read or have read to them. According to Abraham Maslow's research, people do not become self actualized people and thus are not free to be themselves until these very basic aesthetic needs are met.<sup>1</sup> Aesthetic needs are not met, however, unless one acquires a preference for excellence, unless one recognizes and prefers the most beautiful in writing, in book illustration, or gallery paintings, in music or whatever. *The development of "good taste" and the ability to recognize what is beautiful is acquired and is dependent upon exposure to the beautiful.* In their search for beautiful and satisfying literature, children will read whatever is at hand. Should they fail to find fine literature among the books which are accessible to them at home or in school or public library collections, their craving for it will soon wane for it is easily squelched. In all probability they will eventually read little if any literature except that which is required of them. On the other hand it is quite likely they will become avid and discriminating readers if satisfying, exciting and quality literary selections are made readily accessible to them. Often times award books reflect these very qualities.

Quality literary selections are not exactly plentiful but many are available if one takes the time to identify them. Among the 2500-3000 library books or trade books<sup>2</sup> which are published in the United States, a small portion of them exemplify literary excellence; many of them do not. In actual fact, one must read many books from among those published in any one year to find even two or three that are well-designed, which contain beautiful graphics and the kind

of language which offer the reader a variety of images and vacarious experiences, plots and themes which will inspire, provoke thoughtfulness and offer satisfying reading fare. In short, there are among the many trade books published each year which reflect literary excellence. When sponsors of book awards designate a particular title or author/artist as a recipient of one of its awards they usually use criteria such as these. If my experience in serving on various children's book awards committees is the least bit typical (and I have no reason to think otherwise), people who designate books for awards must sift and sort many books in order to identify only those few which exemplify excellence in terms of whatever criteria upon which the awards are based. Thus, it would seem quite wise for educators and parents interested in having children become enthusiastic and discriminating readers to take advantage of the fact that someone has already separated the mediocre from the excellent literary selections and include among any other of the books they make accessible to children a generous number and variety of award books. From among the diversity of award books, one will usually find books of interest to any reader regardless of his or her level of reading achievement or the level of aesthetic taste or sophistication s/he has attained.

According to the Children's Book Council's last listing of awards and prizes for children's books<sup>3</sup> there were at least

1. For a complete discussion of the aesthetic needs and the other basic needs which one must have satisfied for self actualization see Abraham H. Maslow, *Motivation and Personality*. Revised edition. (New York: Harper and Row, 1970).
2. A trade book is defined as a literary book - fiction or non fiction - which is intended to be read by an individual rather than by a group. It is not intended to be used as a textbook.
3. Children's Book Council, *Children's Book: Awards and Prizes*. New York: The Children's Book Council, Inc., 1977.



eighty-six (86) honors awarded in the children's book field. These awards represent hundreds of individual titles and include major international and foreign awards of English speaking and some non-English speaking countries. This count does not include general considerations like age groups or subject categories. The awards may be classified various ways but one convenient way is to consider such aspects as illustration or design, literary excellence, designated themes or ideals. That is, some awards may emphasize literary merit while others focus more on whether the literature comments on how things actually are or have been or ought to be. (Actually, neither objective should exclude the other for both are necessarily a part of any literary selection.) Awards are sponsored by professional organizations, social or religious or civic organizations, publishers or publications. They may be awards to persons for over-all contributions to children's literature.

Occasionally one book is recognized for distinction for more than one honor or award. Such is the happy fate of *Anno's Alphabet* by Mitsumasa Anno which was cited in 1977 for its graphic excellence by the Brooklyn Art Books for Children Citations, the Children's Book Showcase, Christopher Awards and the New York Times, Choice of Best Illustrated Children's Books of the Year. Likewise, the literary excellence, *A Hero Ain't Nothin' But a Sandwich* by Alice Childress was acknowledged when it was identified as the Lewis Carroll Shelf Award, the National Book Award, and the Woodward School (Brooklyn, N.Y.) Annual Book Award. It is not unusual for a title or an author or artist to be cited for an award in more than one country or nation. This cosmopolitan quality in contemporary children's books was demonstrated quite dramatically to me this last September when I participated in meeting of the International Research Society for Children's Literature held in Exeter, Devon, England. People from all over the world were reporting children's responses to literature and many of the titles they reported having used in their studies were books or works of authors and/or artists which were recipients of awards in several different countries. Cited in some of the research papers or discussed later in small group sessions

were international award winning publications by such people as Maurice Sendack, Alan Garner, Mitsumasa Anno, E.B. White, Lisalotte Schwarz, Alois Carigiet, Ezra Jack Keats and Don Freeman. Few people failed to recognize most of the award winning titles by these authors or artists.

Over a period of years our standards change. We may change our standards for "literary excellence," for the "acceptable" or even "proper" image of one or another minority people. Even our standards or definitions for "childhood" or "children's literature" may change with the passage of time. So we see that a book awarded an honor because it was designated as excellent and well worth reading in one era may not be considered so worthy in another era. Contrarywise, a book rejected by literary critics in one era may be declared a superior literary selection in another era. The American Library Association via the Book Re-evaluation Committee reviews and reappraises the books on their notable book lists after a five year period. They hope that this re-evaluation procedure will help them identify more accurately the ultimate and enduring best in children's books, books "worth their keep." This year the American Library Association published *Notable Children's Books 1940-1970*, an annotated booklist containing critical reappraisals of Notable Children's Books selected by the ALA Committees during the years cited. It is available from the ALA Order Department in Chicago. Along this same line of thinking, recognizing that our standards for excellence tend to change somewhat over time, *The Horn Book Magazine* will offer periodically a feature article entitled "A Second Look." Discussed in this feature are titles which were published many years past are probably forgotten by most book selectors but deserve to be revived and made available to children because they meet today's standards of literary excellence. Books honored recently by *The Horn Book* in "A Second Look" include such memorable books as *The Year of the Racoon* by Lee Kingman, *Ballet Shoes* by Noel Streatfield, *Clever Bill* by William Nicholson, *The Yearling* by Marjorie Rawlings, and *Gilgamesh: Man's First Story* by Bernarda Bryson. In the past each of these books were declared excel-



lent literature for some reason during the course of time they lost favor with book selectors. Yet when re-evaluated, using contemporary standards they are again being cited for their literary excellence.

Let us look briefly at some recent recipients of a few major awards for children's books and consider the literature some of these awards highlight or reward.

**Awards for Illustration and Book Design.** There are numerous awards which acknowledge excellence in book illustration and various aspects of graphics. Four such awards issued in the United States and Canada are the Children's Book Showcase, the Caldecott Medal, the Amelia Francis Howard-Gibbon Medal and the Imperial Daughters of the Empire Award. David Macaulay won awards for his pen-and-ink drawings in *Underground* and *Castle*. *Underground* is an original book containing factual architectural drawings that help one see what is under a city street - from spindly foundations of a skyscraper to snaky pathways of sewer pipes and subways. It was included in the 1977 Children's Book Showcase an award sponsored by the Children's Book Council for books which exemplify particularly thoughtful and creative approaches to book and graphic design. In *Castle* this talented author/artist combines social history with technical expertise in architectural matters. The reader of *Castle* becomes immersed in the life of the community in 13th century Wales with the people who built the castle, lived in the town and eventually had to defend it from attack. *Castle* was named in 1978 a Caldecott Award Honor Book. This award named after Randolph Caldecott, is sponsored by the American Library Association and is awarded to the illustrator of the most distinguished picture book for children published in the United States during the preceding year. Both *Castle* and *Underground* are read widely by children and adults for the wealth of information they contain and the beautifully elegant way that information is presented.

The illustrations in *Prairie Boy's Summer* by the late William Kurelek are oil paintings on masonite and are in the naive art style. This book, like Kurelek's earlier published companion picture book entitled *Prairie Boy's Winter*, is a uniquely

perceptive and detailed pictorial and verbal record of what Kurelek experienced in his childhood, before the days of technical slickness. He focuses on the several aspects of summer on the Canadian prairie. This is truly a remarkable picture book and was named recipient of the Amelia Frances Howard-Gibbon medal. Comparable to the Caldecott Award, this award is given by the Canadian Library Association for outstanding illustrations in books published in Canada. The Toronto Chapter of the Imperial Daughters of the Empire named *Prairie Boy's Summer* the Best Children's Book of the Year. This award is issued by the Toronto Library Association. This book was also included in the Children's Books Showcase.

**Awards for Literary Excellence.** This year the Newbery Medal, which is the American Library Association's award to an author for writing a book reflecting literary excellence, was given to Katherine Paterson for *The Bridge to Terabithia*. The British Library Association's Carnegie Medal went to Jan Mark for *Thunder and Lightnings*. Both books trace with sensitivity the growing friendship between two children. Paterson's book deals with the friendship between a boy and girl; the Mark book deals with the friendship between two boys. Both stories are rich in human feeling and both evoke sincere emotional responses to aspects of the human condition - life, death, wealth, poverty. Both authors highlight the need to respect and encourage individuality and imaginative and creative thinking.

The Canadian award which is comparable to these two awards is the Canadian Library Award Book of the Year for Children. It is given to the author of outstanding children's books, one in English and one in French. Mordecai Richler received this award for *Jacob Two-Two Meets the Hooded Fang*, a fun-filled satire about the pecking order of people. This, by the way, is a good book to read aloud to children in the ten through twelve year age range. One of the best animal stories of all times, perhaps, is *The Incredible Journey* by Sheila Burnford. It was recognized for its literary excellence by the Canadian Library Association and its author was presented with this award.

**Awards for Books in Translation.** With improved means of transportation and



communication and the implementation of the new international copyright laws, all parts of the world have become quite accessible and people's accomplishments and problems and assorted life styles have been made known to others more quickly than in past eras. It is not surprising that people have become more cosmopolitan in their perspectives. Consequently, there are very few books if when translated, are not understood, appreciated and enjoyed by readers from many different countries. Invariably, when choosing books for translation, publishers will make their selections from the award books in a given country. The Mildred Batchelder Award, given annually by the American Library Association to an 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 published in the United States during the calendar year preceeding the appointment of the members of this jury committee. Last year, Atheneum Publishers was the recipient of this award for a book written by Cecil Bokder an author who received the coveted international Hans Christian Anderson Award for his significant contribution to the children's literature field. His book which was named this year by the Batchelder committee is entitled *The Leopard* and was translated by S. Deressa and G. Poulsen. *The Leopard* is an outstanding and unusual adventure story depicting the battle of wits between a young African cowherd and a man he thinks is a cattle thief pretending to be a leopard who devours cows. The African setting is vividly brought to life.

**Awards Sponsored by Professional and Social Organizations.** Numerous professional organizations identify children's books they consider worthy of recognition. For example, the International Reading Association names each year an author who shows unusual promise in the children's book field. This past year the recipient was Nancy Bond for her first novel *A String in the Harp*. Set in Wales, this is a fascinating fantasy. With the help of an ancient harp-turning key, the children in this exciting story (and the reader, too) get to see Taliesin, the great sixth century bard, accomplish his great deeds. The range of Welsh characters, the Welsh scenery and climate (the relentless rains,

the sea and the mountains) are graphically described and provide the perfect background for the mood and action depicted in this story of suspense and intensity. The first author whom IRA named for this award was T. Degens, author of *Transport 7-41-R* a story set in post-war Germany. Since receiving this award Ms. Degens has indeed fulfilled their prophecy and continued to create more excellent literature for young people. Her latest novel is a realistic fiction set in the United States and is entitled *The Game on Thatcher Island*. It is an explicit, exciting and thought-provoking portrayal of early adolescents vulnerability to peer pressure.

### CONCLUSION

There are of course many other kinds of awards which were established to honor excellence in literature for children. Some acknowledge excellence found in a single selection, others consider the total accomplishments of an author or artist and thus recognize him/her for the contributions s/he has made to the field of literature for children. There is a refreshing variety of awards. They vary in purposes, criteria, type of literature and age of reading audience. This diversity should make it possible for educators to make available to young readers some of the finest books on practically any topic, in any genre, on any readability level. The more of the best books children read or have read to them the more likely they will learn to enjoy reading and read enthusiastically worthwhile, satisfying literary fare.

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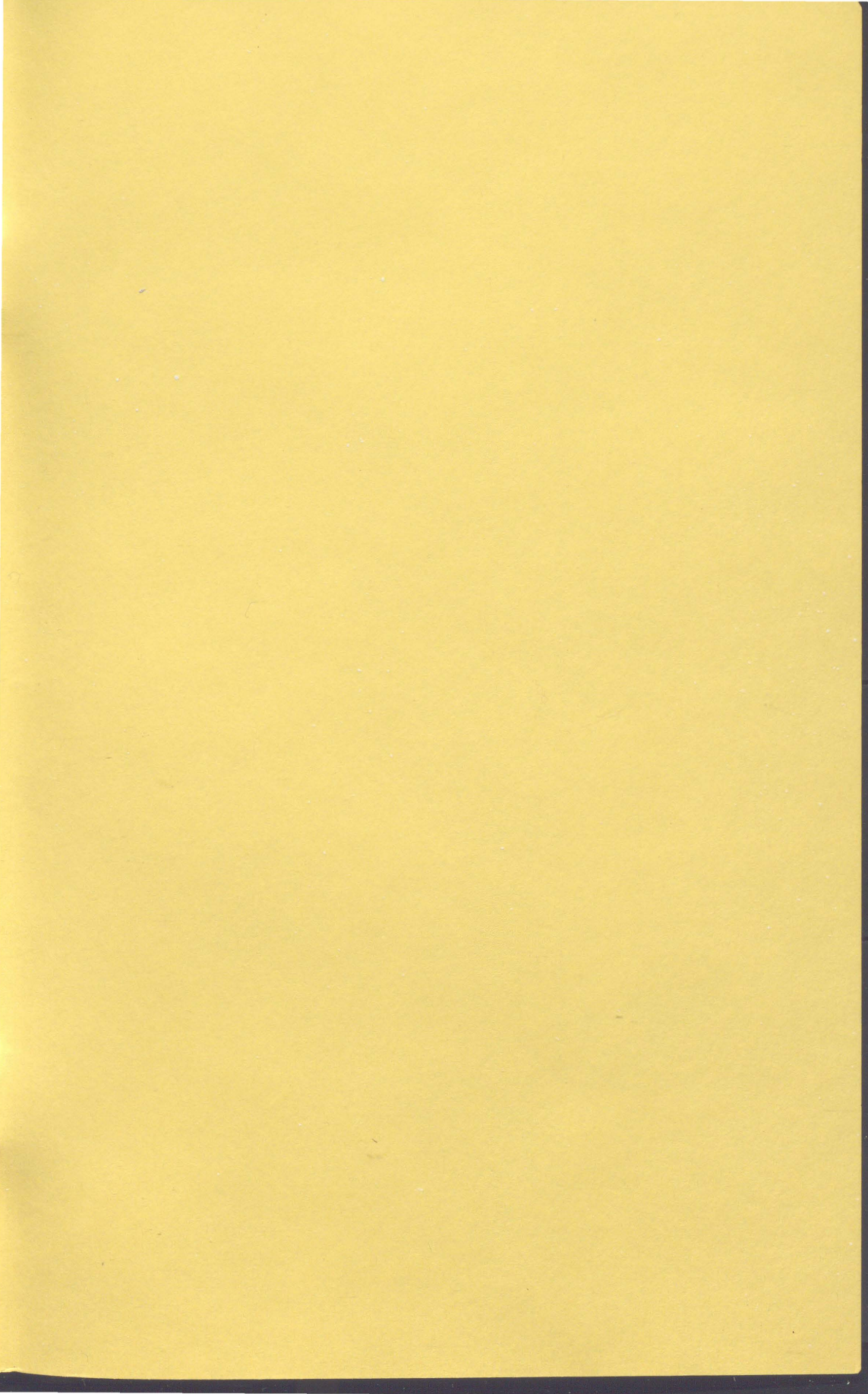


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