

Award-Winning Children's Books as Choice Books

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When I taught young adult literature here at Purdue for many years, I usually scanned the lists of award winners before choosing texts: The Newbery, the Michael Printz, the Coretta Scott King Award. I often ended up choosing at least one of these books for my students to read. My thinking was that if an award committee liked the book, then it is surely worth reading and studying. Sometimes when we actually dug into the text, the class did see it worthy of such praise; other times there was disagreement with the award committee's decision. Regardless, the fact that the book was an award winner heightened its status and raised conversation about it to a new, and more complex, level. What was it about the text that made it award worthy? How might effective illustrators create new knowledge? And what would the intended readers of the text—children and young adults—think about it? Would they agree?

The theme of this winter's issue is award-winning children's illustrators. These diverse illustrators have been recognized because their wide-ranging artistic talents and skills provide new cultural and experiential insights through images. Many of the books in this issue have been awarded the esteemed Caldecott medal; others have received the Pura Belpré, the Asian/Pacific American Award, or the Coretta Scott King illustrator award. One, *The Lion & the Mouse* illustrated by Jerry Pinkney, has received multiple awards. The reviewers of these texts discuss in colorful detail how the books' illustrations convey emotion, revelry, selflessness, and hope. Even without words, some of these texts are able to communicate exceedingly complex human states of being. Clearly, the illustrators in question—Collier, Lopez, Hoshino, Blackall, and Pinkney—are masterful artists who understand how images can become narration. Through strokes of the pen, splashes of color, or depictions of characters both human and animal, these illustrators are metaphorically, if not literally, authors, narrating events that inspire and educate through pictures.

There is a great deal of research in the field of education about the importance of images when young children are learning literate behaviors. They tend to both produce and consume images ravenously and effectively (for examples, see Kress, Alvermann, and Cope & Kalantzis). This research tends to use words such as "multimodality," "multiliteracies," and "social semiotics." If you are interested in the research behind the literate practice, I encourage you to investigate these resources and terms. However, even if you choose not to pursue additional academic study, I am confident that the reviews in this issue will prompt you to seek out some of the beautiful, powerful books they describe and immerse yourself, and children you know, in them.

Even though book awards are clearly created and given by adults, and the books reviewed herein are written for an audience of children, such awards can help teachers and parents select

wonderful books when there is not unlimited time for unstructured reading. Awards signify something special, and these books are certainly that: quite special.

Works Cited

- Alvermann, Donna E., and Kathleen A. Hinchman. *Reconceptualizing the Literacies in Adolescents' Lives: Bridging the Everyday/Academic Divide*. 3rd ed., Routledge, 2011.
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- Kress, Gunter R. *Literacy in the New Media Age*. Routledge, 2003.