

AWARDS SYNTHESIS AND REFLECTION

After learning about various awards presented in children's literature, I realize how eye opening this module has been and how it has changed the way I view the prestigious awards. As an educator, I thought the award winning books were the highlights to have in every classroom library. However, after all of the readings and team discussions about the various awards presented in children's literature and the way books are chosen for the honors, I realize it is not a perfect process and is very complicated, awarding books can impact the future of authors, and how awarded books should not dictate my book selections for students (or myself).

At the beginning of the module we were introduced to less known awards in children's literature such as the Schneider Family Award or Orbis Pictus Award. I realize much diversity can be found in the content of children's literature and the importance of recognizing and awarding the diversities. I learned there are awards given to books that highlight the life of African Americans and other minority groups or people with disabilities. I had only known about the prestigious Newbery and Caldecott award and was not aware of all the others. However, knowing about the other awards, I will make sure to acknowledge and honor those books in my classroom library as a way to diversify the literature available to my students and for myself. Since I work in a district that is not racially diverse, I can use books as a way to introduce my students to various people, cultures, and environments.

Module one has taught me the process and way books are chosen for awards. Whenever I saw an award stickered on a book, I would pick it up and thumb through the pages without much thought about **why** the book was chosen. However, now I realize there is a long strenuous process that committees must undergo in order to choose an honorable book. Committee members must go through a nomination process of books and submit reasons why the book should be considered for an award. I could only imagine how difficult of a task that would be, with the hundreds of books that are published each year. I always thought books were given the prestigious awards based on popularity or book sales, and never really understood that there was an actual committee of adults who nominated books for the award. After learning about the committees, it still seems odd to me that adults would have a say over what books would be distinguished in **children's** literature. Even though some children may not be able to articulate as well as some adults about reasons why they think a book is influential, engaging, motivating, or just a good story, it does not mean their vote should not be taken into account during the nominating process. I still wonder about the ways children can receive a vote in the whole process, but it seems there should be a way to do it, even if it's a simple ballot. The whole nominating process is extremely complicated, which is why it is important for teachers to be aware of the complexities when they are creating their classroom library so not to only have books with stickers of awards on the cover, but to include a wide range of (other) awarded and non-awarded books.

I was also unaware of the controversies within awarding the Newbery or Caldecott award to some books. After comparing The Secret of the Andes and Charlotte's Web, I realized how subjective

nominating awards can be. The criteria for the prestigious awards can be vague and a matter of personal opinion. There was much discussion over the two novels, especially since The Secret of the Andes was the novel to win the Newbery and Charlotte's Web was an honor book but became wildly successful compared to the winner. Through the team discussions, I realized how subjective and personal reading is. How do you compare books that are completely different in the writing style, plot, characters, setting, and all the literary elements found in novels? Do you choose a book to win the award just because it opened up the audience to a new culture, or choose the book that has relatable characters the reader will adore? This makes it extremely difficult to predict the popularity that could span over decades for a book. As an individual who picks books I will be more conscious that the award is the opinion of a small group of people. What this means to me as a teacher, is that I will have to be cognizant of the type of books I have available for my students to read. Even though I may have loved certain books as a child, it does not mean all of the students in my room will feel the same way. I need to be aware of the selection I offer my students or choose for them to read in order for them to find books they think are interesting or encourage them to continue reading.

Learning about the awards in children's literature not only taught me about the complicated process of deciding on a book to receive an award, but the impact the award has on authors and their work staying in print. Through the many articles assigned in class, the point was always brought up about how the Newbery or Caldecott is a sure way for an author to keep their book in print. I never really took into account the influence the award would have on an author and the future expectations for the author or illustrator. However, I feel that just because a book wins the Caldecott or Newbery it does not mean it is going to be a huge sensation for an author/illustrator. For example, The Secret of the Andes and Charlotte's Web illustrate this point perfectly. Personally, I never heard of The Secret of the Andes, yet it was a Newbery award winner, but Charlotte's Web, the Newbery honor in the same year, was the book that became very popular and had a few movies made from it. Once again, it all comes down to individuals liking a certain type of story. Through the team discussions about the comparisons of these two novels, many of us in the group had been exposed to Charlotte's Web in one way or another, but I do not believe any of us had ever read The Secret of the Andes or had any idea what it was about before this class. I am glad that I was assigned to read the award winner, because it was a very interesting and insightful book, but I probably would not pick it up off the shelves as leisure read. This has taught me that I have an important role as a teacher in exposing my students to new books they normally wouldn't pick off of the library shelves and get them out of their reading comfort zone. It's important to push our students to literature as a medium to explore new people and events.

Creating a well rounded library is very important in any classroom. Many teachers feel the best way to create a successful classroom library is by stocking it with Caldecott and Newbery award winners or honor books. However, this module has taught me that yes these books are wonderful reads, but there is a world full of books available in children's literature. Children's literature has been diversifying itself, especially since the population has become more diverse and our world has become very global and interconnected, through various characters, settings, plots, and other literary elements. As I wrote before, the award process is very subjective to the committee members, which means that just because an award is on the cover it does not equate to all of my students enjoying the book. I used to think

having the awarded books in my library meant I would have a popular classroom library, but I now realize this is not necessarily the case. Diversifying my classroom library is the best way to make it well rounded and to ensure there is something for all of my students. One article from the module discussed how the Newbery seems to choose the same type of books every year as if there is a formula for authors to follow to ensure a nomination for the award. Also, just because a book does not receive an award or honorable mention, does that mean it is not a well written piece of literature? That is definitely not the case, because I have read plenty of non-awarded books that I absolutely loved or my students loved!

Overall, my new insights have come about through classroom discussions with my team accompanied by readings of the articles from class. I enjoyed the articles' perspectives as they presented information in a way that I had not previously thought of, and really challenged me to think about the way I perceive and view awards presented in children's literature. Despite my new findings, there are still some unanswered questions and questions that do not necessarily have simple solutions. For example, how can children be incorporated into the nominating process for the Newbery and/or Caldecott award? I believe children's opinions and ideas about what they are reading should impact the nominating process. After all, the genre is called **children's** literature. I feel adults have a different perspective on a book than a child may have. Adults bring in different background knowledge and the ability to read deeper between the lines, where children are still developing various reading skills. For example, in [The Secret of the Andes](#) I was able to appreciate the subtleties found in the book and apply them to future happenings of the novel, where a student of a lower reading comprehension level may not have that skill or ability to pay close enough attention to various details or apply them to later events. This is why I believe children should have a voice in which books should at least be nominated for the top honors of children's literature. Another question or wondering that I'm still struggling with is the notion of how subjective the award process is. However, every award is subjective to some extent, like the Academy Awards, or even school/classroom awards. There can be guidelines about qualifying for an award, but it's an individual's perception and interpretation of those guidelines that determine what they believe is a winner.

All of these things are very complicated issues that plague children's literature. However, despite the complexities, it still makes for interesting reading and discussions. My goal as an individual and as a teacher is to continue pushing the comfort zones of myself and my students in terms of literature, and exposing myself and my students to different types of books that offer a diverse stance or content that may be missing from our everyday lives, and continue reading and learning from relatable characters. Children's literature and awards is not a simple matter and is something that will continue to have controversies and debates. Our jobs, as teachers, is to keep our students reading books (awards or not) and introducing them to different genres and characters in order to enrich their learning and their imagination.