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The Newbery Medal is awarded annually to the most distinguished contribution to children's literature. Since its creation in 1922, the Newbery award has been the topic of debates over the criteria used to make the decision and the actual choices made. This study describes a survey given to a random sampling of elementary school media specialists in North Carolina's public schools. The survey questioned whether media centers have all Newbery Medal winners; if not, why decisions were made not to hold some of these titles; and how the award and award winners were promoted by the media specialists. The majority of elementary media specialists interviewed do promote Newbery winning books, but many choose not to keep all of the award winning titles on their shelves. The primary reason not to have a title is because it is written for an audience older than elementary school students.

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THE ROLE OF NEWBERY AWARD WINNING BOOKS IN ELEMENTARY
SCHOOL MEDIA CENTERS

by
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INTRODUCTION

In recent years the world has seen a boom in children's publishing, partly due no doubt, to the extreme popularity and lucrative nature of the Harry Potter books. As new titles and series are brought into the public arena, librarians, scholars, teachers and parents may question the value of some of the titles flooding the market. Various awards are given for different areas of children's and young adult literature and a plethora of awards are now available. The American Library Association (ALA) and its divisions are responsible for a wide range of awards from the Batchelder, recognizing outstanding children's titles that have been translated into English, to the Alex Awards which are given annually to 10 adult titles that appeal to young adults.¹

School media specialists have a complex job as they work to both support the curriculum and encourage a love of learning and reading. The Newbery award is given annually to the most distinguished contribution to children's literature. Does a book designated as the "most distinguished" by adults (more specifically by a small group of librarians) have a place of importance in the school libraries themselves? Is there a divide between practice and theory? Perhaps this does not matter, as popularity is not a factor when making the award decision. If books are distinguished should they be used in the school library even if not initially popular?

The realm of children's books has not always been such an active area of the publishing world. However there has long been concern for identifying positive

contributions to the genre, and the Newbery award was created for this purpose. The Newbery “is awarded annually by the Association for Library Service to Children, a division of the American Library Association, to the author of the most distinguished contribution to American literature for children.”² Even as other awards have been designated for certain areas of children’s literature, the “Newbery Award has long been considered the premier award for children’s literature.”³

Debate has often been waged over the Newbery award. Are these choices the best ones, the most appropriate for children? Are the “best” books ones that children enjoy and should popularity be a consideration? Do the choices reflect the shifts and changes in social trends and in the world outside the books? The Newbery is important to the area of school libraries if only because it represents children’s literature. As the award winners and those being considered for the award have changed, so has the arena of children’s publishing. School media specialist’s concern for what is being published for children can be reflected in their attitudes towards the Newbery award.

As it is important to understand the issues surrounding the Newbery award and its role in a school media center, a look must first be taken at what the award is designed to be. Then a brief look will be taken at some of the issues that have surrounded the award and its treatment in the literature of the topic.

THE NEWBERY AWARD

History

The Newbery award was proposed by a man named Frederic G. Melcher in 1921. Melcher was coeditor of *Publishers Weekly*, chairman of the board of directors of the R.R. Bowker publishing company and chairman of the American Booksellers Association (ABA).⁴ He suggested the award to the Children's Librarians' Section of the American Library Association (ALA) along with a possible name for that award: the Newbery, in honor of John Newbery.⁵

John Newbery, a bookseller in the 1700s, was known for his publication of children's books. (Ironically he was English, while only American citizens and residents are eligible for the Newbery Medal.) He "firmly believed that there was a growing market for and interest in the publication of books specifically designed for and read by children of all ages."⁶ Newbery is remembered for his work in publishing literature for children, and as such is a worthy namesake for an award designed to encourage the publication of laudable literature for the young. According to Edwards, "He made people aware of the importance of children's books for both educational purposes and enjoyment."⁷

Current Terms

Though the process for choosing the winner of the Newbery award has undergone numerous changes throughout the years, the basic premise for the award itself has remained the same. According to the terms set out by the American Library Association:

- “1. The Medal shall be awarded annually to the author of the most distinguished contribution to American literature for children published in the United States during the preceding year. There are no limitations as to the character of the book considered except that it be original work. Honor Books may be named. These shall be books that are also truly distinguished.
2. The Award is restricted to authors who are citizens or residents of the United States.
3. The committee in its deliberations is to consider only the books eligible for the award, as specified in the terms.”⁸

The ALA continues by defining certain aspects of the terms. For example, one definition that has been the cause of much debate and consternation among children’s librarians is the ALA’s definition of children as “persons of ages up to and including fourteen, and books for this entire age range are to be considered.”⁹

ALA further explicates the ideas of the award by addressing the criteria for

“identifying ‘Distinguished Writing’ in a book for children,

a. Committee members need to consider the following:

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

Note: The committee should keep in mind that the award is for literary quality and quality presentation for children. The award is not for didactic intent or for popularity.”¹⁰

Some of the controversy over the Newbery award is over the choices that are made each year. However, some of the problems stem from the criteria themselves (such as the age range for which the award is intended and that popularity is not a factor in

choosing the award) and expectations of the award itself rather than specific books chosen.

How then is the medal awarded? Because what is discussed during the deliberations over titles is not to be revealed, the process has retained an air of secrecy. Karen Cushman, the winner of the 1996 Newbery award for her book *The Midwife's Apprentice*, commented on the process for an article in *Journal of Youth Services in Libraries*. "Now that I know more about the awarding of the Newbery Medal, I think of the Newbery procedure as the American equivalent of electing the pope: no nominees or frontrunners, closed meetings, sacred pledges, secret and mysterious, until the white smoke goes up the chimney, a telephone rings somewhere at dawn, and someone's life is changed."¹¹ Perhaps the procedure is not quite as dramatic as Ms. Cushman says, still it is to some extent shrouded in this kind of mystery. What is said in the voting room must indeed remain a secret and the choices are announced with some fanfare.

Though changes have been made over the years (in the past for example, the Caldecott award to the artist of the most distinguished picture book was chosen by the same group of people as the Newbery) the system is now specifically laid out. There are fifteen members on the committee that chooses the award. Eight of those are elected by the members of the Association for Library Service to Children (ALSC), the division of the ALA that is now responsible for choosing the award. Seven are appointed by the president of the ALSC.¹² All members of the committee read numerous books, including all those nominated for the award, and then together they discuss the various merits of different books. A vote is taken with each person picking a first, second and third place choice with a score of four, three and two points respectively. In order for a title to be

chosen, it has to receive at least eight first-place votes and at least eight more points than the next highest ranked book.¹³

LITERATURE REVIEW

Controversy and Debate

One only has to look at a story told by Beverly Cleary about her own experience upon winning the Newbery (for *Dear Mr. Henshaw*) to see that the award inspires extreme opinions and passion in many (in some cases to an inappropriate degree). She said, “The first thing that pops into my head when I think of the Newbery Award is the librarian standing beside me as I nervously waited to enter the ballroom for the awards dinner. She said in a penetrating voice as she looked straight ahead, ‘That book should never have won the Newbery.’”¹⁴ Imagine the extreme feelings that must have been evoked by the award in order to elicit such a rude response.

In addition to debate over individual titles, certain issues have proved particularly divisive.

Age Appropriateness

A few issues are raised by the designations that the ALA sets out for this award. Many librarians are bothered by a children’s book award that allows a title to be chosen for a child up to and including the age fourteen. To many, this has moved beyond the world of childhood to that of a young adult. Titles that may be appropriate for a fourteen year old would not necessarily have a place in the elementary school library.

Is the Newbery's designation as a children's award for books written for an audience that goes up to and includes fourteen-year-olds appropriate? Who do we as a society consider children to be? Lyn Lacy argues that "elsewhere in society, children are usually defined as those persons up to and including age twelve rather than age fourteen."¹⁵ The designation for "children" by the ALA identifies students up to fourteen – which in many school systems would now include high school students (ninth graders.) Should one award reflect the needs of both a fourth grader and a ninth grader? Many have argued that it should not.

In fact, in 1971 *School Library Journal* printed a portion of a petition drafted by librarians from Ohio arguing that this practice should not continue. The portion printed read: "We...respectfully request that the Committee consider for this year's Award only those books intended primarily for children of elementary school age. We also suggest that a new award category be established, and that this category encompass those books usually designated as young adult."¹⁶ In fact, since that time the Young Adult Library Services Association (YALSA) has designated an award for young adult books with young adults defined as being between the ages of 12 and 18.¹⁷

What is the age appropriateness of the titles for children? Research has addressed the age groups for which these titles have been written in several studies about the "readability" of titles.

A study by Paul J. Schafer of the reading-grade level of Newbery Books evaluated those titles that won awards from 1940-1973. This study used two readability formulas to assess the books: Botel Predicting Readability Levels (based mainly on vocabulary) and the Fry Formula (a combination of number of sentences and number of

syllables). Of the thirty-four books, nine fell within the fourth and fifth grade range while the remaining twenty-five fell in sixth through eighth.¹⁸

In a 1975 article, a study of the readability of twenty-five Newbery books (winners from 1949-1973) was done by Alden J. Moe and Richard D. Arnold. The Fry Formula and the Lorge formula were used. (The Lorge formula utilizes length of sentences, and the numbers of prepositional phrases and difficult words to determine readability). The methods were presented separately, and several passages were measured in each book. The mean estimates of both methods were presented. Twelve of the books indicated levels for fifth grade according to the Lorge method, and the remainder were higher. When using the Fry method, one title had a third grade level, four had fourth grade and five had fifth grade.¹⁹

A more recent readability study, done in 1998 by Dorothy J. Leal and Julia Chamberlain-Solecki, again used the Fry formula. This study addressed all 76 Newbery winners to that point in time. The overall average grade-level was 6.8. Their findings showed that only 9 books had a readability level of fourth or fifth grade; the rest were higher.²⁰

There were differences in these individual studies; after all, these methods do only examine portions of the books. However, all the findings indicate that the Newberys tend to fall on the high end of the ALA's definition of "children." Of course, students can read books outside of their grade level. These studies also do not address the appropriateness of the issues in the books to different age levels, only readability.

Those who complain that certain titles chosen as Newbery winners are really young adult titles, rather than for children may have some agreement for this in the

community of those concerned with literature for young adults. In January 2001, Hipple and Maupin investigated three titles in order to determine “What’s Good About the Best?” What was the reason that these three titles were chosen? Not only were all three Newbery award winners (*The Giver*, *Out of the Dust*, and *Holes*) but all three were also chosen as the three best young adult novels of the 90s by the Assembly on Literature for Adolescents.²¹

Popularity

The ALA specifically states that the Newbery award is not to be chosen based on popularity citing in a note under the heading, Criteria, “The award is not intended for didactic intent or for popularity.”²²

Many people concerned with children’s literature have a problem with this portion of the award. The Newbery award is held as a standard for what is good and desirable in the world of children’s literature. When the titles that are chosen are not ones that children actually enjoy, is this a disservice to children, the very people that these librarians are supposed to serve?

In explicating the process of choosing a Newbery (as it was in 1966) one author specifically addresses the issue of popularity when discussing the decision to give the award to a book that was published the same year. “A full year’s use of a book before voting would make its popularity or non-popularity with the children an inevitable factor in the decision and influence a librarian’s critical judgment. This is no true test of distinction. The Newbery-Caldecott awards are not the results of a popularity contest.”²³ This last statement may not be entirely true, for in fact both awards are to some extent a

popularity contest – but one chosen by librarians rather than children. The contest does not solely revolve around “Does someone like this book?” but presumably around the reasons (literary reasons, no doubt) that someone likes the book.

Journal articles have also been written by those who agree with the Newbery’s role as something other than popularity contest. Dorothy M. Broderick argued that “It is the rare occasion in history when that which is distinguished is also the most popular, and we should be ever conscious of this when discussion of prizes occur.”²⁴ She looked to the historical implications of choosing what was popular by addressing a time period before the award was initiated. “Let us turn for a minute to the latter part of the 19th century and see what would have happened had we had a Newbery Medal given, as so many of our present day librarians would like, to a popular book... Horatio Alger and Oliver Optic were selling by the thousands and Mark Twain was being banned by librarians as trash.”²⁵ (Though the point is well taken, if librarians did in fact deem Twain’s work trash, they would not have chosen it as Newbery worthy whether or not his titles were popular.)

A popular children’s author was allowed to weigh in with an article, “Why I Will Never Win the Newbery Medal” in the Fall 1979 edition of *Top of the News*. (The author, though purportedly “anonymous” was Paula Danziger.) She commented, “The Newbery awards have been given to fine choices. But why are there so many books that kids love but that never even get nominated?...It would be wonderful to be acknowledged by an award, one that affirms that to be popular with kids is to be a fine enough writer to have touched them.”²⁶

Multiculturalism and Gender

The Newbery award as it has been set up (both as to age group and to whether the popularity of a book should be a contributing factor) is not the only area on which controversy has revolved.

The Newbery award was begun in a much different world than the one we live in today. Many things have changed, and since much of the literature reflects society, Newbery winners have changed as well. Newbery winners would not be the only books of their time periods that treat race, culture and gender much differently than works today would, but often the very fact that they won the awards has made them endure when their counterparts did not.

The issue of multiculturalism and the way that race and ethnicity have been addressed in Newbery award winners has two different components: the historical and the contemporary.

The Newbery award has been around since 1922. When looking at books from the early part of the Newbery's history, it is obvious that the treatment of people from a variety of different cultures and ethnic backgrounds is representative of a different time period.

One example is *Caddie Woodlawn* which was "later criticized for its treatment of Native Americans; but at the time there were few voiced objections."²⁷

The article "A look at the Newbery Medal books from a multicultural perspective" examined the award winners from each decade to find multicultural aspects. The authors reminded librarians to "read the books carefully to determine whether the portrayal of characters is culturally conscious."²⁸ This is important because they "may

find that rather than portraying a character as a complex human being, some of the Newbery Medal books portray the characters in a stereotypical light.”²⁹

Even in recent years, there has been some question of the representation of a variety of cultures in Newbery award winning books. One editorial from 1996 noted that “While several honor awards have been given to nonwhite authors since 1986, the big prize has, for almost twenty years now been out of reach.”³⁰ (Since the time this article was written, *Bud Not Buddy*, a novel by African American author Christopher Paul Curtis was the recipient of the Newbery award.)

Gender is also a subject of some debate in historical terms. Historically females have been treated differently than males in the world outside of books, so logically some of this would be apparent in the treatment of girls in books of the times.

One study analyzed sexism in the award winners from 1977 to 1984. The results of this study were compared to the results of a study in 1971. The 1984 study found that “Eighteen books presented positive images of females, while only six presented negative images.”³¹ The conclusion of the authors of this study speaks to the nature of the effects of the changing world on the Newbery award itself. “From this survey it would seem that authors are observing society as it is and evolving stories and characters that fit into it.”³²

This brings up an interesting point. If, in older Newbery winners topics such as race and gender are treated in a manner that would be considered unacceptable today, should they remain on the shelf? The books were awarded the Newbery at a time when far fewer children’s books were being published. Perhaps the number of high quality children’s books was not as high then, so competition was not as stiff. Are older Newbery winners still relevant and worthwhile for today’s students? Is the very fact that

they won this award enough to make them worth keeping around? In her paper on the use of the Newbery in schools in 1968, Hazel Stephenson surmised that “in the case of several of these books it may well be true that they have outlived their usefulness.”³³ If this was the case more than 40 years ago, imagine how these titles will seem to today’s students.

Use and Value

In addition to the areas of debate and controversy that surround the topic of the Newbery awards, there is a body of literature that makes suggestions for how to use the Newbery books to great effect in the library or media center.

The media specialist may question if these titles will actually be used by students if they are not promoted in some fashion in the media center. One teacher addressed this by having her students review Newbery award winners. She discovered through her evaluations that “Distinguished literature does not have to be popular to be appreciated. When such books are called to the attention of students they will be receptive.”³⁴

So how does a concerned librarian bring these books to the attention of his/her students? Several articles and books have been written in an attempt to answer just this question.

One body of literature provides suggestions for booktalking Newbery award winners. One such article celebrated the 75th anniversary of the Newbery award by sharing booktalks for some recently awarded books. The author preceded her booktalks by writing “You may be surprised at the wide range of topics, genres, and time periods”³⁵ (suggesting a diversity of books with which others might disagree). *The Newbery*

Companion: Booktalk and Related Materials for Newbery Medal and Honor Books by Gillespie and Naden provides information about important themes and subjects, plot summary, incidents that would make interesting booktalks, and suggested related titles.³⁶

Other articles make suggestions, such as reading other titles by a Newbery author or listening to the award winner on tape. There are also suggestions to visit the author's website, or a related site for more information about a topic presented in a Newbery book.³⁷ Carolyn S. Brodie has written several such articles for *School Media Activities Monthly* in which she discussed ways to promote the Newbery and celebrate Children's Book Week.³⁸

Another article described an ultimately successful program in which students read the Newberys and provided their opinion on what they read. Those who read ten Newberys became members of the Newbery Award Club.³⁹

One of the most telling aspects of these articles and books is simply that there are so many. Many people think the Newbery is valuable enough to encourage children to read the winners. Although articles have been written about the problems that people have with this particular award, many others have been written about the benefits of the award. Even as controversy has swirled around it, the medal has remained a vital part of the world of children's literature. The very fact that it has sparked so much debate points to part of its value – drawing attention and interest to the area of children's literature.

One librarian defined this value that is often placed on the Newbery, perhaps without even realizing it. "The Newbery winners are the books that are presented to children by teachers and librarians with the unspoken mantra: 'These are the books that represent all we adults hold good and true, and contain the values we wish to inculcate in

our youth. These represent what we perceive to be good writing, unlike those Goosebumps books we wish you weren't reading. These are our legacy to you.”⁴⁰

Use in the Public School Library

One study done in 1968 addressed the role of the Newbery award in public school libraries in North Carolina in particular. Hazel L. Stephenson's "The Reception of the Newbery Award Books in the Public School Libraries of North Carolina" asked media specialists to indicate which Newbery titles were held in their libraries. Stephenson then studied aspects of the book (such as type of book, reading level, decade awarded, popularity) as well as aspects of the schools (size, location, grade levels.) The questions in Stephenson's survey asked if individual titles were held in each library. Sixty-six percent of Stephenson's respondents indicated that it was their policy to buy all books that won the Newbery award and 96% indicated that they brought the books to the attention of the students through programs, displays and other methods.⁴¹

SURVEY

Methodology

In order to get a random sample of public elementary school media specialists, (working in schools that are K-5 or PK-5) North Carolina's Department of Public Instruction's website was used.⁴² Public schools are listed there by county with website information. The middle and high schools were removed from the list. Using information from the site, all elementary schools that did not fit the requirements (of being K or PK-5) were removed from the list. A final number of 984 elementary schools was reached. However, when searching school websites, it was discovered that a few had been mislabeled on the website and were marked as K-5 when in fact they were not. These schools were eliminated.

A list of 200 elementary schools was created on a TI83 calculator's random integer generator. Repeated numbers were removed and replacements generated. Using information from North Carolina's State Board of Education site, individual school sites were visited in order to search for email addresses for media specialists.⁴³ As all sites did not provide this information, more random numbers were generated in order to achieve a sample of 200 media centers with valid email addresses. Ultimately, 500 randomly generated numbers for schools led to the final 200 schools to which surveys were sent. Although there is possible sampling bias due to the fact that those surveyed were only those with viable school websites and listed email addresses, there is no reason to expect

any significant difference in the area of measurement between those in the sampling frame and those left out because the email address was unavailable.

The letter and survey were approved for distribution by the University of North Carolina Academic Affairs Institutional Review Board. An email was sent to each media specialist. Several emails were sent at once, but all were blind carbon copied so that their identities would remain anonymous. (See Appendix A for the email text.) A link in the email could be followed to complete the survey. The survey itself was set up via phpESP, “a set of PHP scripts to let non-technical users create surveys, administer surveys, gather results, and view statistics, all managed online after database initialization with a MySQL database backend.”⁴⁴ Using this program, the survey was put online and results were gathered.

Survey Overview

If all of these topics are being discussed in the literature that relates to the field of elementary school media centers, what is actually happening in the media centers themselves? This study looks at public schools in North Carolina (so as to address a set of schools with similar backgrounds, curriculums and goals). Do these issues affect the use of the materials in the schools? A study was done of whether all Newbery titles are held in the library, how the media specialist presents the material and the reasons a media specialist might have for holding a certain set of Newbery winners on the shelf. See Appendix B for the survey as it was presented to the participants.

Several of the questions raised in the research, such as those on age appropriateness and popularity of the items, address the functionality of the award. Do award winners work well in the real world of children’s literature, or are they just being

addressed theoretically by adults? For this reason the study asks related questions of the librarians in the field. These questions are for those people who are actually working with the titles in the manner for which they were intended – being read by children (however one may define “children”).

The study does not address specific issues, such as the problems with gender and multiculturalism. The problems of age appropriateness and popularity are at least obliquely touched upon since survey respondents are asked if they would keep a book out of the library because they felt it was too old for their students and if they would keep a title on the shelves even if it were not being used.

Also, the media specialists were asked how they use the titles as a way of addressing how the materials are being presented to the students.

While many of the topics of controversy and research may not be explicitly questioned by this particular survey, it is important to be aware of the issues in understanding the current literary climate in which these responses were made.

The questions in this study address the collection of Newbery titles as a whole, rather than individually. For the purpose of this study the respondents were asked to limit their responses to Newbery award winners only, not Newbery Honor winners.

FINDINGS

Of the 200 surveys sent out, 52 were returned. Eleven email messages were bounced back by their servers. Below are the questions and a summary of the responses to each.

Questions 1-3 were open-ended. Categories were created for the sake of readability.

Question 1: How old is your library? (in years)

# of Years	# of Responses	Percent
5 years or less	6	12.8
6-15	9	19.1
16-30	21	44.7
31-50	9	19.1
Over 50	2	4.3
Total	47	100

The oldest library was 65 years old and the youngest, 1 year. An older library might be more likely to have older titles than one that has just opened. This question did elicit one email response that indicated that the question was unclear. One person did answer the question “1995” while another said “775,” but other than this the respondents seemed to have no problem with the question.

Question 2: How long have you been a media specialist? (in years)

# of Years	# of Responses	Percent
0-2	9	17.6
3-5	10	19.6
6-10	11	21.6
11-15	6	11.8
16-20	6	11.8
21-25	4	7.8
26-30	5	9.8
Total	51	100

The media specialists spanned a range of experience from 0 to 30 years.

Question 3: How long have you been the media specialist for the library in which you currently work? (in years)

# of Years	# of Responses	Percent
0-2	14	26.9
3-5	16	30.8
6-10	12	23.1
11-15	8	15.4
16-20	1	1.9
21-25	1	1.9
Total	52	100

The answers for this question ranged from 0 to 23 years.

Question 4: Do you have all of the Newbery titles?

Responses	# of Responses	Percent
Yes	5	9.6
I'm not sure, I think so	10	19.2
Most of the recent titles, (1980 on)	24	46.2
Only select titles	8	15.4
No	5	9.6
Total	52	100

A substantial number (19.2%) said, “I’m not sure, I think so.” One likely explanation is that even though these librarians also value the award, they have not checked each individual title to ascertain if they have every one.

The fact that 9.6% of those surveyed know that they have all of the Newberys probably indicates the level of importance that is placed on this award. The media specialists are very aware of the award and of the materials in their own libraries that support the award.

Almost half of the respondents, 46.2%, indicated that they have most of the recent titles (1980 on.) Many of the media centers are not terribly old. It would be reasonable to expect that the facility may have the titles that have been published recently and certainly during the lifespan of the media center, but that collection development may not have extended to titles published in the past.

As indicated in later answers, many of the media specialists have reasons not to include certain titles in their collection and this may be reflected in the following answers: 15.4% said they hold only selected titles and 9.6% said “no” when asked if they have all of the Newbery titles.

Question 5: If you do not, is this a deliberate omission?

Responses	# of Responses	Percent
Yes	24	49.0
No	25	51.0
Total	49	100

Three people chose to omit this question. Of the remaining 49, it was split nearly evenly between those who deliberately do not have Newbery award winners in their

library, and those who have not deliberately done so. For many of these media specialists, they are not the first who have worked in the library so the decision not to include certain titles may have been made by a predecessor. As indicated in the answer to the previous question, about half of the respondents have the majority of recent titles so a lack of older titles may be reflected in this answer.

Question 6: What are the reasons titles are not in your collection? (check all that apply)

Responses	# of Responses	Percent
I chose not to include them because I felt they were written for an older audience than our students	24	46.2
I chose not to include them because I felt that they contained inappropriate subject matter and/or language	12	23.1
I discarded titles because they were damaged and did not replace them	9	17.3
I chose not to include them because I felt they were not actually high quality titles	1	1.9
I weeded titles because they were not getting used	1	1.9
Other: Books lost; not enough funds to replace old ones and keep current with new ones	1	1.9
Other: I am still developing the collection in this media center since it is my first year here. If I feel Newbery titles are age-appropriate and well-written, I order them.	1	1.9
Other: lost/taken	1	1.9
Other: some were unavailable at the time the school opened	1	1.9
Comments: Collection was damaged and is in process of being replaced	1	1.9
Comments: I think that the district should buy the Newbery and Caldecott award winners for each school library on a yearly basis. Wishful thinking, but our allocations, especially if you are a small school are not enough to cover their purchase each year, especially if we are required to purchase core and Open Court materials. Also, my media program is being driven by AR. If there is not an AR test for these books, they don't get used.	1	1.9

All 24 of the respondents who indicated that they had made a conscious decision not to include certain Newbery award winning titles in their collection also stated that one reason they made this decision was because they felt they were written for an audience older than their students. This certainly speaks to the research that indicates that many titles chosen for this “children’s” award are really intended for an audience older than elementary school students.

The issue of inappropriate subject matter or language was also addressed as 23.1% of respondents indicated this was a reason they had not purchased a title. This could be the reason that someone thought the titles were intended for older students, but it could also be a separate issue. Respondents could indicate as many answers as they felt applied to their own decision making.

Titles were discarded by 17.3% because they were damaged and did not replace them. If an older title gets damaged, it may be more difficult to replace than a more recent one.

Only one person said they had not bought titles because they thought they were not “high quality titles.”

Only one person had weeded a title because it was not getting used.

Spaces were included for respondents to add other reasons for not including titles in the media center. The four people who listed an “other” reason gave explanations that basically fell into two categories. The first was that titles were lost and not replaced. Much like a title that has been discarded because it was damaged, this answer does not indicate that something about the particular title kept it from being included in the collection. This question should have been included in the survey. The next “other”

category was explained as “some were unavailable at the time the school opened.” This answer does not indicate whether the media specialist would have included the title or not; the respondent can not include titles because they are not available. Also “I am still developing the collection in this media center since it is my first year here. If I feel Newbery titles are age-appropriate and well-written, I order them.” This answer raises the possibility that one or more of the books may not be well-written, in that media specialist’s opinion. This comment was not made by the same person who indicated that s/he had chosen not to include a book because it was not a high quality title.

Additional comments were made as well. One person commented that as the collection was damaged it was in the process of being replaced.

Another comment was quite interesting: “I think that the district should buy the Newbery and Caldecott award winners for each school library on a yearly basis. Wishful thinking, but our allocations, especially if you are a small school are not enough to cover their purchase each year.” This person finds the Newbery and Caldecott to be important enough that the district should make sure that each school has these titles. S/he goes on to explain that it is difficult to make this purchase “especially if we are required to purchase core and Open Court materials. Also, my media program is being driven by AR. If there is not an AR test for these books, they don’t get used.” Open Court is a program that “combines a systematic phonics program with literature. Though its name may imply flexibility, Open Court is known for its extremely structured--and thus controversial--approach. Each day's instruction reads like a script, with moment-to-moment directions for the teacher, every day of the week. Classes in every grade cover the same material at the same time.”⁴⁵ AR or Accelerated Reader is a program that tests

students on the books that they read. If there are no tests available for a book it may make it less likely that it will be purchased. For this media specialist, restrictive programs in the media center and school place limitations on the types of books that can be ordered. Perhaps Newbery titles are not being ordered because other titles have precedence. It would be interesting to discover how many of the Newbery award titles are actually included in programs such as Accelerated Reader. Do the people who run these companies consider award winners when they create their tests? It might be beneficial for them to do so if media specialists are wishing to buy award winning titles, but know that they have to get titles that fit with the tests.

Question 7: If you have not already, would you weed a Newbery award winner?

Responses	# of Responses	Percent
Yes, if it was not getting used	10	19.2
No, I would keep a Newbery award book in the collection even if it was not getting used	33	63.5
I don't know	9	17.3
Total	52	100

The issue of weeding in a media center is one that can be touchy anyway. Does a media specialist get rid of titles that no longer serve the needs of the library? Some libraries find themselves short of space so the need to weed unused titles becomes more pressing.

Should titles be weeded if they are not getting used? This is particularly interesting when considering the Newbery award. Should the fact that a title is an award winner and has been designated as worthwhile by a committee be enough to keep it on the shelf even if no one is using it?

When asked if they would weed a Newbery award winner (if they had not done so already,) the majority of media specialists (63.5%) said that they would keep the title even if it were not getting used. Nineteen point two percent said they would indeed weed a title if it were not getting used. It would be interesting in future studies to find if those who said they would weed a title provided their reason, if for instance they would only discard a title if they felt that space was particularly tight or if instead they thought that the title should be treated like any other even though it had won the award. A slightly smaller number of respondents (17.3%) did not know if they would weed a Newbery award winner if it were not getting used.

Question 8: How are Newbery award winners marked in your library? (check all that apply)

Responses	# of Responses	Percent
With a gold medal sticker	24	46.2
With a spine label	21	40.4
They have no special designation	17	32.7
They are shelved in a special section	5	9.6
Other: in our OPAC	1	1.9
Other: in the catalog with the medal designation as a subject heading	1	1.9
Other: marked in the Electronic Card Catalog	1	1.9
Other: There is no designation on the spine because we color-code all AR titles and there isn't room for another spine designation. I do write whether a book is an award winner in the back inside cover at the top in ink, with the year the award was given.	1	1.9
Other: yellow dot; for av. AR test	1	1.9
Comments: unit of study on Newberys	1	1.9

This section of the survey addressed how the Newbery award winners are marked as such in the library. How would someone such as a student or teacher know that the

title was an award winner? In part this addresses the issue of whether the librarian thinks the award is important enough to inform the patrons when a title has won the medal.

Almost a third (32.7%) had no special designation for the Newbery award. In those media centers, a patron could be unaware that this title was a Newbery winner.

When sold in stores, Newbery winners have a gold sticker attached that is designed to look like the Newbery Medal. Of course, before a book wins the medal it comes without such a designation. Some libraries get these stickers to add to the titles that win. The medal sticker is a distinctive indicator of the award. Almost half of the respondents (46.2%) use the gold medal sticker to indicate that a title is a Newbery winner; Newbery Honor books get a similar silver medal. Hill and White mention the power of the award sticker when addressing the promotion of award winning books: “Children are naturally drawn to award-winning books. The initial appeal may not so much be for the quality of the book, but those of us who work with children know that the appeal for these books often comes from the shiny gold, silver, or bronze seals affixed to the covers of these special books.”⁴⁶ Media specialists may be promoting these titles just by attaching a sticker to the cover.

Spine labels are another oft used method of providing information for patrons, especially young patrons. These sometimes show the subject matter of a book, such as fantasy or mystery, but they can also designate award winners. A spine label is used to show a Newbery winner by 40.4%. The spine label would mark a Newbery winner even when the book is shelved, whereas the gold sticker would not show while the book is lined up on a shelf with other books.

A relatively small number of respondents (9.6%) indicated that they actually shelve Newbery winners separately in a specially designated section.

There were several other designations added by those being surveyed for this category. Three respondents included an “other” that was basically three ways of saying the same thing – the Newbery is marked in the electronic card catalog or OPAC to indicate to a searching patron which books have won this award. A total of 5.7% indicated that they did this. However, since this was not part of the survey question, other respondents may do this as well although they did not volunteer it.

The issue of AR (Accelerated Reader) was raised again. Two respondents indicated that they color coded books for AR tests. One specifically said, “There is no designation on the spine because we color-code all AR titles and there isn’t room for another spine designation.” This respondent went on to say that s/he does “write whether a book is an award winner in the back inside cover at the top in ink with the year the award was given.” Perhaps this is not terribly time-consuming, as only a few titles a year would need this done for Newbery or Newbery Honor books. However, it still shows a certain dedication to informing patrons that a book has received the award and therefore places some importance on the award.

Question 9: What special events, programs or displays have you done in your library concerning the Newbery? (check all that apply)

A majority of the respondents (73.1%) use a poster that displays the Newberys.

A special lesson and/or unit on Newbery award winners is done by 59.6%. This is a fairly large portion of the respondents. Even though award winners as a category are

not part of North Carolina's Standard Course of Study over half of the respondents felt they were still important enough to teach. Although Newberys are not a part of the Standard Course of Study, a knowledge of literature certainly is and so teaching the Newbery could still fit into the types of skills that students are obliged to know.

Responses	# of Responses	Percent
Poster	38	73.1
I do a special lesson and/or unit on Newbery award winners	31	59.6
Display	21	40.4
Announcement to classes when winner is chosen	21	40.4
No special marketing	3	5.8
Other: Book Talks	1	1.9
Other: booklet of covers as a search tool	1	1.9
Other: I mention the Newbery award when I am talking about fiction in general with my classes	1	1.9
Other: I worked with third grade teachers this year who developed a Newberry unit	1	1.9
Other:include in unit/lesson correlating with Goal 2	1	1.9
Other: Work with 5 th grade teacher who requires Newbery book reports	1	1.9
Comments: I have done Newbery units, but not every year	1	1.9

Some type of display of the Newbery is done by 40.4%. Again, the survey does not address the specifics of the display, but could be anything from simply books that have won the award set on top of shelves, to a more involved and intricate display that explicates a certain aspect of the award or award winners.

An announcement to classes when the winner is chosen is made by 40.4%. This is a fairly easy way to promote the award by making the announcement at a time when teaching something else.

A small portion of the respondents (5.8%) say that they do no special marketing of the Newbery.

This category drew several responses of other ways that media specialists promote or draw student attention to Newberys. Two people mentioned that they collaborate with teachers who are doing projects with the Newberys. In one case, the media specialist “worked with third grade teachers this year who developed a Newberry [sic] unit.” Another works “with a 5th grade teacher who requires Newbery book reports.”

The use of the Newbery with the North Carolina Standard Course of Study is probably what is being referred to when one media specialist said s/he includes “in unit/lesson correlating with Goal 2.” Goal 2 of the English Language Arts Curriculum is: “The learner will develop and apply strategies and skills to comprehend text that is read, heard, and viewed.”⁴⁷

Yet another respondent indicated that s/he mentions “the Newbery award when I am talking about fiction in general with my classes.” This would have been another good question for the survey, as different genres are one aspect of North Carolina’s Standard Course of Study and would therefore most likely be part of what is taught in the media center. This would be a good opportunity for a media specialist who believes the Newbery award is important to mention these titles. This answer is interesting on a different level, as the Newbery is not only given to fiction titles, although historically this has primarily been the case. Biography and poetry titles have also won, but this librarian, according to the statement on the survey, seems to think of fiction in conjunction with the award.

DISCUSSION

The results of this study are by no means exhaustive. They do suggest that media specialists hold the Newbery award books important enough to consider when choosing what books to keep in the collection. However, not all media specialists accept these awards as suited to the needs of their particular community simply on the recommendation of the award. This does not mean that those media specialists who have all of the Newbery winners and would keep them on the shelf even if they were not being used are not also considering the needs of their users. It is possible that having all of the Newbery winners does serve a particular community, and the media specialist has considered this. This study has opened several avenues for further exploration and study.

Questions for Further Study

One possible direction for further study is an exploration of the Newbery Honor Books. The Newbery Honor Books make up a much more extensive, and arguably more diverse, list. Some researchers have concluded that the Honor Books alleviate some of the controversial problems that have arisen around the award itself.

One such topic is the issue of age appropriateness. At least in the past, researchers have indicated that even if the award itself was designated for an older “child” the honor books were ones that elementary school librarians could count on to be relevant for their students. In 1979, Lyn Lacy addressed the Newbery awards from the

point of view of an elementary educator and said, “As the Newberys moved steadily away from our library shelves and onto the junior high and high school shelves, we could still find at least one Honor Book selection each year for our readers aged twelve and under. Through the Honor Books we hoped to see the ALA award ‘for the most distinguished contribution to American literature for children’ returned to those we think of as ‘children.’”⁴⁸ It would be interesting to see a study done addressing the readability of the Honor Books in relation to those chosen as award books.

The issue of multiculturalism, according to research, is also different in the Honor Books. More titles that revolve around multicultural characters are to be found in the Honor rather than award books. “Oh, the places you will go with Newbery Honor books! The potential number is triple, and settings that are omitted from medalists of the last twenty-five years are visited. Urban settings become more frequent... These urban settings all include ethnic minority populations and varying glimpses of their cultures.”⁴⁹

Another avenue for further study would be a more in depth look at the titles that elementary school media centers actually have. This could be accomplished by addressing the collections from a variety of directions. How does the collection appear when considering reading levels of books? Circulation statistics that show how many times certain titles are being checked out would show if those more advanced titles are actually being used. This could be an interesting area to study since so many of the media specialists indicate that they would retain a Newbery award winner even if it were not getting used. Are the titles actually not getting used and still being kept?

A further study on the circulation records of the Newbery winners by age of publication would provide information about how these titles have stood the test of time, or if, indeed, they have.

This study has focused on the use of the Newbery award books in the school media center. It would be interesting to see how the books are treated and used in the public library. Are all the books kept in the children's department or are some designated as young adult? Do public librarians do the same type of programs as media specialists? School media specialists have somewhat of a captive audience – for instance one of the ways that survey respondents incorporated use of the Newbery into lessons was by mentioning it when the award was announced. A public librarian might not be guaranteed an appropriate audience when the award was announced.

In addition to the public library, the middle school media center would be another avenue for study. Since so many seem to believe that the Newbery award winners may be appropriate for an older age group, how are they used with the older kids?

Another direction for further study that was indicated by the responses for this study, would be the Newbery in relation to such reading programs as Accelerated Reader or Reading Counts. One person commented that since her/his program was driven by AR, if a book does not have an AR test then the book is not bought. It would be interesting to see how many Newbery award winners (and possibly Honor books) have available tests through this type of program. Since an AR driven library is a current reality, this could affect the treatment of the Newbery in the school media center.

Limitations

As mentioned previously, the fact that the study was sent only to those with an available email address could be somewhat limiting. Schools who did not have viable websites may have fewer resources than schools that are more technologically advanced. This could limit the results of the study.

Another limitation of this study is in a particular area of the literature review. The age appropriateness of the Newbery winners was discussed but primarily in regards to their readability levels. Research on the age appropriateness of the issues and topics discussed in the books would be an additional area of study.

Conclusion

The Newbery award is treated differently in various North Carolina elementary schools. Certain schools have all of the Newbery titles and many more would keep a title on the shelf just because it has won the award even if it was not circulating. A poster is the predominant means of marketing the award (73.1% of respondents use a Newbery poster).

Although many seem to value the award, there are also a substantial percentage of media specialists who are considering the needs of their individual populations and deciding that all award winners do not fit those needs. The most common reason not to order a Newbery Medal winner was that the media specialist felt that the title was for an older audience than the students in that particular school. Almost half (46.2%) of the respondents have not ordered titles for this reason.

The literature about the Newbery award may debate its claim to being the most distinguished children's book, but the fact remains that it is a hot topic for conversation.

If one aim of the award is to bring more attention to and work in the field of children's literature, then controversy over award winners fuels that interest.

Undoubtedly Newbery Medal winners will continue to be loved and debated, disliked and lauded, accepted and removed from shelves. And perhaps in the end, the role of the Newbery in any library is to help focus the attention of those concerned with children on the essential nature of literature.

Notes:

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- ¹² Ellen Fader, "If You Only Knew," *School Library Journal* 45, no. 8 (August 1999): 34.
- ¹³ Gillespie and Naden, *The Newbery Companion*, xiv.
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- ³⁴ Clare Celsus Lawler, "An Analysis and Evaluation of the Newbery Award Books by a Selected Group of Junior Reviewers" (Masters Thesis, Kent State University, 1961), 37.
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APPENDIX A: Email to Media Specialists

You are invited to participate in this research study of the role of the Newbery Award in the elementary school media centers. This study is being conducted for a master's paper as part of the completion of the Masters of Library Science degree at the University of the North Carolina at Chapel Hill.

The two hundred possible participants in this study were selected randomly as a sample of the elementary media specialists for public schools (K-5 and PK-5) in North Carolina.

The completion and submission of this survey is implied consent.

Participation is voluntary and if you choose to participate, you are free to withdraw at any time. You may choose not to answer any questions for any reason. The study will be anonymous and responses will be aggregated. At the conclusion of the study, the responses will be destroyed.

If you have any questions or concerns please contact me at (phone number omitted) or growe@email.unc.edu, or my advisor Evelyn Daniel at daniel@ils.unc.edu or (919) 962-8062.

The Academic Affairs Institutional Review Board (AA-IRB) at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill has approved this study. If you have any questions about your rights as a research participant in this study, please contact the AA-IRB at 919-962-7761 or at aa-irb@unc.edu.

Thank you for your time,
Gundry Rowe

To take this survey please go to:
<http://www.ibiblio.org/dls/newbery/survey.php>
and log in as user "newbery" with password "newbery"

APPENDIX B: Questionnaire

Created to honor the most distinguished contribution to American literature for children, the Newbery Award has been granted annually since 1922.

For the purposes of this survey, the questions refer to the winners of the Newbery Award only, NOT to the Newbery Honor books.

1. How old is your library? (in years) _____
2. How long have you been a media specialist? (in years) _____
3. How long have you been the media specialist for the library in which you currently work? (in years) _____

4. Do you have all of the Newbery titles?

- yes
- I'm not sure, I think so
- most of the recent titles, (1980 on)
- only select titles
- no

Comments

5. If you do not have certain Newbery Award titles, is this a deliberate omission?

- yes
- no

6. If you answered yes to question 5, what is the reason the titles are not in your collection? (Check all that apply)

- I chose not to include them because I felt they were written for an older audience than our students
- I chose not to include them because I felt that they contained inappropriate subject matter and/or language
- I chose not to include them because I felt they were not actually high quality titles
- I discarded titles because they were damaged and did not replace them
- I weeded titles because they were not getting used
- other _____

Comments

7. If you have not already, would you weed a Newbery award winner?

- Yes, if they were not getting used
- No, I would keep a Newbery Award book in the collection even if it was not getting used
- I don't know

Comments

8. How are Newbery award winners marked in your library? (Check all that apply)

- with a gold medal sticker
- with a spine label
- they are shelved in a special section
- they have no special designation
- other _____

Comments

9. What special events, programs or displays have you done concerned with the Newbery award? (Check all that apply)

- poster
- display
- announcement to classes when the winner is chosen
- I do a special lesson and/or unit on Newbery award winners
- no special marketing
- other _____

Comments