
Seventy-one Years of Distinguished Books: An Analysis of the Newbery Award Winners 1922-1992

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One of the most prestigious awards for contributions to children's literature in the United States is the Newbery Medal. Under the sponsorship of the American Library Association, the award was first made in 1922 and is the oldest award for excellence in children's literature. The annual award, aimed toward encouraging writing for children, goes to the American author who writes the most distinguished contribution to children's literature published during the previous year (See appendix for complete listing of Newbery Medal winners). A committee of 15 members makes the selection. That committee may also select one or more Honor Books. Winners are announced in January of each year at the midwinter meeting of the American Library Association.

Selected Facts about Newbery Medal Winners

Call it information about Newbery Medal winners--or call it trivia. A review of the 71 winners--from 1922 through 1992--reveals some interesting facts:

Genre

The 1992 winner, Van Loon's *The Story of Mankind*, is the only one of the 71 that can be classified as informational. Thirty-one winners have been realistic fiction, another 16 historical fiction, and 13 fantasy. Six were biography, and two were poetry. One each can be classified as folk tale and fable.

Birthplaces of Newbery Winners

Though a requirement for receiving the Newbery Medal is that the author must be a citizen or resident of the United States, persons born in other countries become eligible if they move to the United States. Eleven winning titles were written by people born in other countries: England (3); Holland (2); China (2); India (1); Canada (1); Hungary (1), and Poland (1). Of the first five winning titles, three were written by persons born in countries other than the United States. Though two titles are listed as having been written by a person or persons born in China, the writer—two-time winner Katherine Paterson—was the daughter of American citizens living in China at the time of her birth.

New York was the birthplace of 14 of the Newbery Medal winners; Massachusetts of six; California of five; Illinois, Ohio, and Pennsylvania of three each; Michigan, Connecticut, North Carolina, New Jersey, and Virginia of two each. One writer was born in each of 12 states: Maryland, Montana, Idaho, Indiana, New Mexico, West Virginia, Utah, Oklahoma, Mississippi, Oregon, Wyoming, and Hawaii. One writer also was born in the District of Columbia. More than one-third (a total of 27) of the winners were born in the Northeastern part of the United States.

Repeat Winners

So far, three writers have won the Newbery Medal twice. Joseph Krungold received the award in 1954 for *...And Now Miquel* and again in 1960 for *Onion John*. Elizabeth George Speare received the Newbery Medal in 1959 for *The Witch of Blackbird Pond* and again in 1962 for *The Bronze Bow*. Katherine Paterson won the award in 1978 for *Bridge to Terabithia* and in 1981 for *Jacob Have I Loved*.

Changing Odds of Winning the Newbery Medal

More children's books are being published today than in 1922 when the award began. In 1920, 410 new children's books were published in the United States. By 1990, the number of new titles totaled 5,172. Obviously, the odds of a writer winning the Medal decrease with each year. The figures cited, taken from Bowker annuals, include *all* new titles—picture books eligible for consideration for the Caldecott Medal as well as those eligible for consideration for the Newbery Medal.

Titles in Print and Best Sellers

With the exception of two, all winning titles are still in print. *Dobry*, the 1935 winning title, and *Daniel Boone*, the 1940 winner, are out of print.

According to an article in the October 27, 1989 issue of *Publishers Weekly*, seven winning titles are among the top 100 all-time best selling paperback children's books. The top 100 all-time best selling hardback books contain no winners. The seven best-selling paperback books were: *The Witch of Blackbird Pond* (2,445,000); *A Wrinkle in Time* (2,246,000); *Johnny Tremain* (2,242,000); *Island of the Blue Dolphins* (1,876,000); *From the Mixed-Up Files of Mrs. Basil E. Frankweiler* (1,335,000); *Roll of Thunder, Hear My Cry* (1,262,000); and *Souder* (1,197,206). Interestingly, *Charlotte's Web*, not a winner but an Honor Book, sold 4,607,131 paperback and 1,828,019 hardback copies.

Copyright Changes Made in Reprinting of Newbery Medal Books

Until 1976, the copyright law of the United States registered a new work for 28 years, and that work could be registered for an additional 47 years, making a total of 75 years. The current law registers a work for the life of the author plus 50 years. Winning Newbery titles published before 1948 have all been recopyrighted with, in most instances, no changes in the text. The following provides a brief look at some of the changes.

The 1922 winning title--*The Story of Mankind*--has been revised twice adding chapters to bring the history up to date, updated first in 1967 and a second time in 1984. The changes represent additions. In contrast, the introduction to the revised edition of the 1923 winner--*The Voyages of Doctor Dolittle*--states that slight changes were made to remove offensive matter. Some illustrations were also changed from the original.

The 1971 revision of *The Dark Frigate*, the 1924 winning title, added an introduction by Lloyd Alexander while deleting nine full-page pictures as well as small illustrations. The text itself remained unaltered.

In the revision of the 1925 winner--*Tales from Silver Lands*, each chapter a short story, shifts a few chapters, and two full-page pictures, originally in color, were reprinted in black and white.

An interesting change occurred also in *Caddie Woodlawn*, the 1936 winner. Kate Seredy provided the original illustrations, whereas the revision included illustrations by Trina Shart Hyman. Kurt Wiese originally illustrated the 1933 winner--*Young Fu of the Upper Yangtze*. Ed Young illustrated the 1973 version. In that reprint Pearl Buck wrote the introduction.

Minor changes were noted in comparing later editions with the earlier editions of some titles. These usually were changes in illustra-

tions, such as a full page illustration made into a part-page illustration, or the reverse. Occasionally, a color illustration was changed to black and white. Of course, paperback reprints almost always had smaller pages with changes in front and back pages. In most cases, the text remained the same.

Themes and Characters in Books Published before 1960

Growing up, overcoming fear, searching for acceptance became easy-to-identify themes in the early award winning books. Illustrated in several titles are the times of trial and courage associated with the Depression (*Thimble Summer*), the Civil War (*Rifles for Waite*), and the Revolutionary War (*Johnny Tremain*; *Amos Fortune, Free Man*). Slavery, freedom, religious intolerance, and women's rights are addressed in a number of books where realistic characters and conflicts reflect the time period (*Miss Hickory*; *Amos Fortune, Free Man*; *The Witch of Blackbird Pond*).

Although several titles published before 1960 depict characters with respectful attitudes toward the elderly, the handicapped, and the Indian, a number of selections show bias toward minorities. *Roller Skates* and *Matchlock Gun* present the reader with unacceptable stereotypes, Indians are called "savages" and girls can't expect to be president in *Caddie Woodlawn*, patronizing discussions of slavery appear in *Amos Fortune, Free Man*, and *Johnny Tremain* minimizes the women's importance.

Themes and Characters in Books Published After 1960

Books published and honored after 1960 reflect societal realism when confronting issues for young people and minority groups. Unlike earlier publications, post-1960 selections introduce young readers to the complexities of an adult world filled with controversy and conflict (Peterson & Solt, 1982). They include characters making significant and difficult decisions relating to love, violence, courage, abuse, handicaps, race, and death, among others.

Changes in the adult world did not immediately translate into changes in books published for young people. It wasn't until 1969, for example, that the Newbery winner *Sounder*, depicted the inhumanity of the Black sharecropper's world; in 1976 Mildred Taylor, the African American writer, author of *Roll of Thunder, Hear My Cry*, portrayed the impact of the civil rights movement and the indifference of the white world toward Blacks. To date, none of the Newbery winning titles deals with the controversial Vietnam War.

Award winning titles published in the last thirty years present characters in non-conventional relationships and/or characters that resist, with good reason, convention and established rules (*A Wrinkle in Time*; *Shadow of a Bull*; *From the Mixed-up Files of Mrs. Basil E. Frankweiler*; *The Slave Dancer*; *Sarah, Plain and Tall*; *Number the Stars*; *Shiloh*; among others). Several books depict characters accepting those who are different (*Up a Road Slowly*; *Summer of the Swans*; *Dacey's Song*) or characters dealing with death or impending death (*Island of the Blue Dolphins*; *The Bronze Bow*; *Sounder*; *Bridge to Terabithia*). Several writers present characters taking positive action to overcome great difficulties (*Island of the Blue Dolphins*; *A Wrinkle in Time*; *Julie of the Wolves*; *Lincoln: A Photobiography*; *Number the Stars*; *Shiloh*).

Several honored selections address issues of slavery, prejudice, and race relations (*I, Juan de Pareja*; *Sounder*; *The Slave Dancer*; *Roll of Thunder, Hear My Cry*; *Maniac Magee*). A number of outstanding books focus on living in harmony with the environment and acceptance of the personal environment (*Island of the Blue Dolphins*; *It's Like This, Cat*; *Mrs. Frisby and the Rats of NIMH*; *Julie of the Wolves*; *Bridge to Terabithia*; *A Gathering of Days: A New England Girl's Journal, 1930-32*; *Jacob Have I Loved*; *Dacey's Song*; *Dear Mr. Henshaw*; *Sarah, Plain and Tall*; *Maniac Magee*; *Shiloh*).

A Concluding Note

The Newbery Medal honors distinguished writers of children's literature published in the United States. A review of the books so honored indicates that the winners, for the most part, wrote realistic fiction; other types of literature, however, were represented among the medalists. Three authors received the Newbery Medal twice, however, the odds of a writer receiving the award decrease as the number of new children's literature titles published each year increases. Numbers have increased more than twelve times since 1920.

Award winning books add to children's appreciation of people and the problems that they face. The issues and themes in books most recently published reflect, more so than the early honorees, the concerns of society in general and the belief that young people can sort through the complexities of the adult world.

John Newbery Medal (1922-92)

- Alexander, L. (1969). *The High King*. Holt.
- Armer, L. A. (1932). *Waterless Mountain*. Longmans.
- Armstrong, W. H. (1970). *Souder*. Harper and Row.
- Bailey, C. S. (1947). *Miss Hickory*. Viking.
- Bios, J. (1980). *A Gathering of Days: A New England Girl's Journal, 1830-32*. Scribner's.
- Borton de Trevino, E. (1966). *I, Juan de Pareja*. Farrar, Stratus and Giroux.
- Brink, C. R. (1936) *Caddie Woodlawn*. Macmillan.
- Byars, B. (1971). *Summer of the Swans*. Viking.
- Chrisman, A. B. (1926). *Shen of the Sea*. Dutton.
- Clark, A. N. (1953). *Secret of the Andes*. Viking.
- Cleary, B. (1984). *Dear Mr. Henshaw*. Morrow.
- Coatsworth, E. (1931). *The Cat Who Went to Heaven*. McMillan.
- Cooper, S. (1976). *The Grey King*. Atheneum.
- Daughtery, J. (1940). *Daniel Boone*. Viking.
- de Angeli, M. (1950). *The Door in the Wall*. Doubleday.
- DeJong, M. (1955). *The Wheel on the School*. Harper and Row.
- du Bois, W. P. (1948). *The Twenty-one Balloons*. Viking.
- Edmonds, W. D. (1943). *The Matchlock Gun*. Dodd.
- Enright, E. (1939). *Thimble Summer*. Rinehart.
- Estes, E. (1952). *Ginger Pye*. Harcourt Brace.
- Field, R. (1930). *Hitty, Her First Hundred Years*. Macmillan.
- Finger, C. (1925). *Tales from Silver Lands*. Doubleday.
- Fleischman, S. (1987). *The Whipping Boy*. Greenwillow.
- Fleischman, P. (1989). *Joyful Noise: Poems for Two Voices*. Harper and Row.
- Forbes, E. (1944). *Johnny Tremain*. Houghton Mifflin.
- Fox, P. (1974). *The Slave Dancer*. Bradbury.
- Freedman, R. (1988). *Lincoln: A Photobiography*. Clarion.
- George, J. C. (1973). *Julie of the Wolves*. Harper and Row.
- Gray, E. J. (1943). *Adam of the Road*. Viking.
- Hamilton, V. (1975). *M.C. Higgins, The Great*. Macmillan.

- Hawes, C. (1924). *The Dark Frigate*. Little, Brown.
- Henry, M. (1949). *King of the Wind*. Rand.
- Hunt, I. (1967). *Up a Road Slowly*. Follett.
- James, W. (1927). *Smoky, the Cowhorse*. Scribner's.
- Keith, H. (1958). *Rifles for Waite*. Crowell.
- Kelly, E. P. (1929). *The Trumpeter of Krakow*. Macmillan.
- Konigsburg, E. L. (1968). *From the Mixed-up Files of Mrs. Basil E. Frankweiler*. Atheneum.
- Krumgold, J. (1954). *...And Now Miguel*. Crowell.
- Krumgold, J. (1960). *Onion John*. Crowell.
- Latham, J. L. (1956). *Carry on, Mr. Bowditch*. Houghton Mifflin.
- Lawson, R. (1945). *Rabbit Hill*. Viking.
- L'Engle, M. (1963). *A Wrinkle in Time*. Farrar, Straus and Giroux.
- Lenski, L. (1946). *Strawberry Girl*. Lippincott.
- Lewis, E. F. (1933). *Young Fu of the Upper Yangtze*. Winston.
- Lofting, H. (1923). *The Voyages of Doctor Dolittle*. Lippincott.
- Lowry, L. (1990). *Number the Stars*. Houghton Mifflin.
- MacLachlan, P. (1986). *Sarah, Plain and Tall*. Harper and Row.
- McKirley, R. (1985). *The Hero and the Crown*. Greenwillow.
- Meigs, C. (1934). *Invincible Louisa*. Little, Brown.
- Mukerji, D. G. (1928). *Gayneck, the Story of a Pigeon*. Dutton.
- Naylor, P. R. (1992). *Shiloh*. Atheneum.
- Neville, E. C. (1964). *It's Like This, Cat*. Harper and Row.
- O'Brien, R. C. (1972). *Mrs. Frisby and the Rats of NIMH*. Atheneum.
- O'Dell, S. (1961). *Island of the Blue Dolphins*. Houghton Mifflin.
- Paterson, K. (1978). *Bridge to Terabithia*. Crowell.
- Paterson, K. (1981). *Jacob Have I Loved*. Crowell.
- Paterson, L. K. and Solt, M. L. (1982). *Newbery and Caldecott Medal and Honor Books: An Annotated Bibliography*. G. K. Hall.
- Raskin, E. (1979). *The Westing Game*. Dutton.
- Sawyer, R. (1937). *Roller Skates*. Viking.
- Seredy, K. (1938). *The White Stag*. Viking.

- Shannon, M. (1935). *Dobry*. Viking.
- Sorensen, V. (1957). *Miracles on Maple Hill*. Harcourt Brace.
- Speare, E. G. (1959). *The Witch of Blackbird Pond*. Houghton Mifflin.
- Sperry, A. (1941). *Call It Courage*. Macmillan.
- Spinelli, J. (1991). *Maniac Magee*. Little, Brown.
- Taylor, M. D. (1977). *Roll of Thunder, Hear My Cry*. Dial.
- van Loon, H. W. (1922). *The Story of Mankind*. Liveright.
- Voight, C. (1983). *Dacey's Song*. Atheneum.
- Willard, N. (1982). *A Visit to William Blake's Inn: Poems for Innocent and Experienced Travelers*. Harcourt Brace Jovanovich.
- Wojciechowsky, M. (1965). *Shadow of a Bull*. Atheneum.
- Yates, E. (1951). *Amos Fortune, Free Man*. Aladdin.