

FACTS ABOUT THE NEWBERY MEDAL

In the 18th century England, John Newbery was the first to see a need for books to entertain and please children without attempting to instruct or improve; he felt the books should be attractive and have appeal to young readers. His book store in London dedicated space to “juvenile library” books. Frederic Melcher continued this interest in children’s literature in America; he organized the nationwide observance of Children’s Book Week in 1919 and, in 1922, the Newbery Award was established under his guidance. The following information comes directly from the ALA website.

How the Newbery Medal Came to Be

The Newbery Medal is awarded annually by the American Library Association for the most distinguished American children's book published the previous year. On June 21, 1921, Frederic G. Melcher proposed the award to the American Library Association meeting of the Children's Librarians' Section and suggested that it be named for the eighteenth-century English bookseller John Newbery. The idea was enthusiastically accepted by the children's librarians, and Melcher's official proposal was approved by the ALA Executive Board in 1922. In Melcher's formal agreement with the board, the purpose of the Newbery Medal was stated as follows: "To encourage original creative work in the field of books for children. To emphasize to the public that contributions to the literature for children deserve similar recognition to poetry, plays, or novels. To give those librarians, who make it their life work to serve children's reading interests, an opportunity to encourage good writing in this field."

The Newbery Award thus became the first children's book award in the world. Its terms, as well as its long history, continue to make it the best known and most discussed children's book award in this country.

From the beginning of the awarding of the Newbery and Caldecott Medals, committees could, and usually did, cite other books as worthy of attention. Such books were referred to as Newbery or Caldecott "runners-up." In 1971 the term "runners-up" was changed to "honor books." The new terminology was made retroactive so that all former runners-up are now referred to as Newbery or Caldecott Honor Books.

NEWBERY AWARD--Terms and Criteria

TERMS

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.

DEFINITIONS

1. "Contribution to American literature" indicates the text of a book. It also implies that the committee shall consider all forms of writing - fiction, non-fiction, and poetry. Reprints and compilations are not eligible.
2. A "contribution to American literature for children" shall be a book for which children are a potential audience. The book displays respect for children's understandings, abilities, and appreciations. Children are defined as persons of ages up to and including fourteen, and books for this entire age range are to be considered.
3. "Distinguished" is defined as:
 - o marked by eminence and distinction: noted for significant achievement
 - o marked by excellence in quality
 - o marked by conspicuous excellence or eminence
 - o individually distinct
4. "Author" may include co-authors. The author(s) may be awarded the medal posthumously.
5. In defining the term, "original work," the committee will consider books that are traditional in origin, if the book is the result of original research and the retelling and interpretation are the writer's own.
6. "American literature published in the United States" means that books originally published in other countries are not eligible.
7. "Published . . . in the preceding year" means that the book has a publication date in that year, was available for purchase in that year, and has a copyright date no later than that year. A book might have a copyright date prior to the year under consideration but, for various reasons, was not published until the year under consideration. If a book is published prior to its year of copyright as stated in the book, it shall be considered in its year of copyright as stated in the book. The intent of the definition is that every book be eligible for consideration, but that no book be considered in more than one year.
8. "Resident" specifies that author has established and maintained residence in the United States as distinct from being a casual or occasional visitor.
9. The term, "only the books eligible for the Award," specifies that the committee is not to consider the entire body of the work by an author or whether the author has previously won the award. The committee's decision is to be made following deliberation about books of the specified calendar year.

CRITERIA

1. In 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: Because the literary qualities to be considered will vary depending on content, the committee need not expect to find excellence in each of the named elements. The book should, however, have distinguished qualities in all of the elements pertinent to it.

- b. Committee members must consider excellence of presentation for a child audience.
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2. Each book is to be considered as a contribution to literature. The committee is to make its decision primarily on the text. Other aspects of a book are to be considered only if they distract from the text. Such other aspects might include illustrations, overall design of the book, etc.
 3. The book must be a self-contained entity, not dependent on other media (i.e., sound or film equipment) for its enjoyment.

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.

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