A Newbery Time Line

The hits! The misses! The highs and the lows of the Newbery over 100 years.

By Betsy Bird

You don't get to 100 without witnessing monumental changes over the years. When the Newbery Award premiered in 1922, the world was a different place. That year, the Tomb of Tutankhamun was uncovered in the Valley of the Kings in Egypt. Mussolini and the Fascist party came to power in Italy. The Bolsheviks won the Russian Civil War. And here in the United States, a New England bookseller by the name of Frederic C. Melcher helped foment the world's first literary prize for a children's book Until the moment Melcher first stood before members of the American Library Association (ALA) in 1920 and proposed an award for the best-written American books for kids, no literary prize for children's literature existed anywhere.

Since its inception, the Newbery Award has seen its share of highs and lows. Here, then, is a time line that may give you a sense of some of the Newbery's best, worst, and lesser-known moments in literary history.

ILLUSTRATION BY JOHN S. DYKES

Hitty, Her First Hundred Years by Rachel Field is the first Medal to be bestowed upon a female writer. Since then, women have taken the award 65 times. Men have claimed the remaining 35.

Daniel Boone by James Daugherty takes the only Newbery Award winner to go out of print content and perpetuation of stereotypes.

On her way to the stage to deliver her Newbery acceptance speech for Ginger Pye, Eleanor Estes pulls a "Jennifer Lawrence" and tumbles after author Will Lipkind's chair leg snags her skirt. At the podium, Estes declares, "All my life since I was a child, and I knew I wanted to be a writer, I have dreamed of winning this award. And what do I do? I fall flat on the floor."

Medal. The book is the due to extreme racist







Out of 212 nominating votes cast,

163 "librarians engaged in at least

part-time work with children," accord-

ing to Leonard Marcus, vote for Hendrik

Willem van Loon's The Story of Mankind

to win the first Newbery Medal.



Will James wins for Smoky, the Cowhorse. James was one of the few Medalists to serve time—in a Carson City, NV, jail for cattle rustling. Later winner Jack Gantos (Dead End in Norvelt, 2012) served in a federal prison for drug running, chronicled in his 2003 Printz Honor memoir, Hole in My Life.

Dhan Gopal Mukerji is the first Indian American author to win the Medal, for his book Gay-Neck, the Story of a Pigeon. He believed vehemently in Indian emancipation from foreign rule. It will be 47 years until another person who isn't

white wins the award.

The Caldecott Medal is established, Initially, the 22 librarians who select the Newbery also decide the Caldecott. This changes in 1980, when separate committees for each award are formed.

Though it received rejections from 26 publishers. A Wrinkle in Time by Madeleine L'Engle is the rare science fiction fantasy with religious overtones to take a Medal.

1948

Marguerite Henry's Misty of Chincoteague takes an Honor, and the real-life Misty is the first pony to attend ALA. Misty was invited to the convention in Grand Rapids, MI, and rode the elevator to the seventh floor of the Pantlind Hotel for a party in her honor. Misty also dropped by meetings and lectures.

1971

E.B. White writes a friend, "I just heard that 'The Trumpet of the Swan' failed to win the Newbery Award, and that the award went to a book-hold your breath -called 'The Summer of the Swan'.....How's that for a near miss? I just got one word wrong!'

After a more than 40-year gap, a work of nonfiction earns a Newbery Medal. Russell Freedman's Lincoln: A Photobiography takes home the gold.

Anita Silvey publishes "Has the Newbery Lost Its Way?" (bit.ly/3GI75Ur) in SLJ, sparking a debate as to whether Newbery winners are kid-friendly enough. Silvey previously penned "Could Randolph Caldecott Win the Caldecott Medal?" in 1986 in the Horn Book Magazine.

1975

Winning the Newbery for M.C. Higgins, the Great, Virginia Hamilton notes, "I am the first black woman and black writer to have received this award. May the American Library Association ever proceed."

The Caldecott honored 14-vear-old Chinese American creator Plato Chan in 1944, but an Asian American author didn't win a Newbery Honor until 1976. The book? Dragonwings by Lawrence Yep.

Christopher Paul Curtis takes the Medal for his novel Bud, Not Buddy. This is the first time a Newbery is awarded to a Black male writer.

The 90-Second Newbery Film Festival is established (90secondnewbery.com). It features mini films by kids from around the country summarizing Newbery Medal and Honor titles. Standouts: Ramona and Her Father as Bond flick, a Minecraft-inspired Millions of Cats, a "Real Housewives" Good Masters! Sweet Ladies!, a musical of The Twenty-One Balloons.



1979

Robert C. O'Brien (real name: Robert Leslie Carroll Conly) wins for Mrs. Frisby and the Rats of NIMH but is so shy that he asks Jean Karl, his editor, to read his words of acceptance.

Ellen Raskin wins the Medal for The Westing Game. This marks the first time that the cover artist of a Medal book (A Wrinkle in Time) wins for her own book as well.

Susan Patron's winning The Higher Power of Lucky includes the word "scrotum" on its first page. The New York Times proclaims, "With One Word, Children's Book Sets Off Uproar."

Margarita Engle's verse novel The Surrender Tree earns an Honor. It's the first year a Latinx author is honored by the committee.

Jamake Highwater, a writer of eastern European Jewish descent, passes himself as Cherokee. His book Anpao: An American Indian Odyssey wins an Honor. His racial misrepresentations are exposed in 1984 by Hank Adams (Assiniboine-Sioux).

Holes by Louis Sachar wins the Medal, making this the last book to date to win both a National Book Award and a Newbery Medal. Previous dual winners include M.C. Higgins, the Great by Virginia Hamilton (in 1975) and A Gathering of Davs by Joan Blos (in 1980).

Jerry Craft wins for New Kid, the first time the Medal goes to a graphic novel. In October 2021, a local petition to ban Craft's award winner resulted in the postponement of his appearance at a Texas school. Craft responded on ALA's Intellectual Freedom Blog by saying, "I hope that readers of all ages will see the kindness and understanding that my characters exhibit and emulate those feelings in their day-to-day lives."

Betsy Bird blogs at "A Fuse #8 Production" (slj.com/fuse8).