

Louise Bernikow makes for an interesting discussion through her quote "What is commonly called *literary history* is actually a record of choices." This statement may be quite vague to some people, but after having taken this course and looked at different awards and classics in children's literature, it is easier to see where the different choices are coming from. Literary history is a record of choices, personal choices and committee choices, choices that society tells us to make and choices that society demands us to make. What may seem a simple task, defining what makes a good book, ultimately turns into a series of choices. Personal opinion becomes a huge factor in defining what qualities make a good book. Do you choose to say a good book depends on the illustrations? Is a good book defined by the text? What about how popular the book is? Does this help factor into your choice on what makes a good book? As students, educators, parents and readers, personal opinion and choice ends up playing a huge role in literary history. Personally I think that great children's books are relatable to the child's imagination while inspiring, engaging and relating to them (and their needs) with the use of language and illustrations. As an educator and a student I have learned that other people may agree with me 100% on my opinion of what defines a good book, yet still choose a book that they feel qualifies based on my statement, and I feel doesn't fit. Perception also plays a role in these choices.

Through learning about different children's literature awards, I was able to learn about different awards. As a group, we had the opportunity to really see what defines the Coretta Scott King Award and how award books are chosen. Through my classmates I was able to learn more about the Orbis Pictus Award, Schneider Family Book Award, Sydney Taylor Book Award, Michael Printz Award and the Pura Belpre Award. Through this activity I was able to see more in depth how specific guidelines are put into play when choosing an award book. For example, with the Coretta Scott King Award, the award is given to an African American author and illustrator for outstanding inspirational and educational contributions. Some of the criteria includes: the book must portray some aspect of the black experience, past, present, or future; must be written/illustrated by an African American; must meet established standards of quality writing for youth which include: clear plot, well drawn characters, which portray growth and development during the course of the story, writing style which is consistent with and suitable to the age intended and accuracy. Mabel McKissnick and Glyndon Greer founded the Coretta Scott King Award in 1969 and it was their choice to define this criteria. A committee makes the choice to award one book each year based off these criteria, but it is still a choice they make. I found it very beneficial to look at different award winning books after learning about the

different criteria and see if I felt the book did or did not meet the criteria. I chose to read *Tar Beach* by Faith Ringgold. This book won the Coretta Scott King Award for illustrator in 1992. Through reading the book and looking closely at the criteria set by the committee, it was easy to understand why this book won. However, I do not know which books were up against it at the time in order to fully determine if this book was the best choice.

In looking further into the Newbery Awards and the Caldecott Awards through our activities and discussions, it brought on much debate as to whether the choices made were appropriate for the winning books and how the books chosen fit the criteria of the award. While looking at the Newbery Award, we read *The Secret of the Andes* by Ann Nolan Clark which was the award winning book in 1952 and *Charlotte's Web* by E.B. White which was the runner up. Looking back at this activity really makes me think of the quote again "What is commonly called *literary history* is actually a record of choices." Here we have two books, both defined as distinguished books, one winning the award and one being an honorary award. However, *Charlotte's Web* has lasted longer in the literary world, thus making it more historical. Did the Newbery Award committee make the wrong choice in choosing *The Secret of the Andes* as the award winning book? Why has *Charlotte's Web* succeeded in staying in the hearts of readers for years and *The Secret of the Andes* has been forgotten? I believe this goes back to what we as individuals define as a good book. For me, level of interest was one of the main factors that played a role in my liking of *Charlotte's Web* and my dislike for *The Secret of the Andes*. *Charlotte's Web* is a well written, child friendly book. The text is very conversational, and informal, which keeps the reader intrigued and adaptable through the years. *The Secret of the Andes* is written in a much more formal style and way too descriptive. I found the characters in *Charlotte's Web* more relatable than the characters in *The Secret of the Andes*. I think that at the time, *The Secret of the Andes* was chosen as most distinguished contribution to American literature for children for bringing the themes of family and finding out who you are. The style of writing is very formal, and also at that time very distinguished. It brought culture. *Charlotte's Web* has won the hearts of children and stayed 'alive' longer, thus making it historical, because children can relate to the characters. Children feel more comfortable and can sometimes relate more when the main characters in stories are animals. Children feel safe learning lessons through animals that possess human characteristics. There are so many valuable lessons to be taught through this book, and so it is read year after year. Children are able to relate to the text, themes, style in which it is written, and the characters. It just goes to show how subjective the award process can be, depending on who is on the committee. I think it also means that the award process changes with time. As youth changes, so does the choices that the committee makes. Society changes, perception changes, definitions change and what the committee might decide as distinguished also changes.

As we learned through the Horn Book Reading, the Newbery award has a tendency to be awarded to a story geared towards older children. This is a choice that the committee makes; do they feel only these books are distinguished? Ultimately, the Newbery award does benefit the world of literature for children. There is still much debate on the criteria of the award and how subjective the committee is when choosing a winner. Popularity of the books and how children relate to the books that are chosen as winners and honor books heavily effects how the book will survive. Will it become a historic book in our literary world, or become forgotten? I think it's easy to get sidetracked and discuss popularity of the book rather than the elements of the book, but pop culture does influence children heavily on a day to day basis.

I really enjoyed the activities based around the Caldecott Awards. It was interesting and exciting to look at different Caldecott Award winning books, and apply the criteria of the award to the books. With looking at *Make Way for Ducklings* by Robert McCloskey and *The Ugly Duckling* by Hans Christian Anderson, it was beneficial to critique the books using picture book language. It was also helpful to take the choice winners and critique them with similar a picture book that didn't win. I enjoyed reading the acceptance speech by Eric Rohmann and listening to the choices he made when creating the book. I initially viewed the illustrations as vibrant, well-defined pictures on a double page spread. The frame around the illustrations helped to lock in the overall picture, but Rohmann still managed to create the illusion of his illustrations reaching out to the next page. The page breaks allow the reader to guess what Rabbit will do next. I felt that the characters in the story were well developed and relatable. The reader could really gather a lot of information from their expressions. The illustrations appeared to be done with paint, possibly acrylic, and finished on glossy paper. I felt that the pictures were very comedic and well presented in an illustrated sequence. This book has very few words and the reader could easily deduce what was happening through the illustrations.

From learning about awards we went to defining classics. This is also mostly a subjective process and draws from a lot of personal opinion. My initial choices for classics were *Winnie-the-Pooh* by A.A. Milne, *The Very Hungry Caterpillar* by Eric Carle, *The Cat in the Hat* by Dr. Seuss, *Where the Wild Things Are* by Maurice Sendak, and *The BFG* by Roald Dahl. I chose these books for their ability to draw out children's imaginations, for their lovable, relatable characters, for their beautiful themes and events throughout the story, their imaginative, catchy language used and overall for their ability to relate to children. As a group we also came up with some criteria for classics. Our group discussions led us to the realization that there are many components that form together in order to create a classic book. These components include that the story has a timeless quality, invokes strong feelings, are relatable to the reader, have an element of fantasy in them, and a little something extra that may be unexplainable. We really tried to break down what exactly it means to be timeless and whether or not it matters

how long a book has been around when considering it as a classic. While some of us would consider classics books that are able to show that they have stood the test of time. Some of us also believe that if a story has the qualities of a classic book, and if they think it will stand the test of time, it is a classic. We ultimately concluded that while some books have been around for longer periods of time, it is not an ultimate deciding factor. Timeless to us, is not about how long ago the book was written. We consider books that are timeless, classics, because they would be relatable 50 years ago, now, and in 50 years. These timeless qualities lead to a universal message and relatable theme that no matter when an individual reads the story (either in the past, present, or future) they would find meaning within the story. The ability to escape reality and enter a fantasy world with magic, magical beasts, talking animals, and various challenges are appealing and hold the overall ability to spark the imagination. Stories that facilitate children's imaginations and at the same time are able to invoke strong feelings and emotions through well developed characters and plots are more likely to stick with us as the years go on. We notice that we had several similarities with the classic authors and books that we chose. This conveyed to us that there is a certain quality of writing that also exists within certain authors to create classics. These stories often times are relatable through either the character qualities or the problem in the story. Classic stories have plots that are familiar to all readers, whether a character wants what they can't have, loses the one they love, or is challenged by their journey in life. The more relatable the story is to the general public, the more popular it will be. Of these stories, the ones that are able to continue to be relatable despite time (past, present or future) we consider classics. The last component of the criteria that we consider to be part of a classic is a certain "je ne sais quoi." This is a book that makes you feel real emotion and stays in your heart. It's a book that you can read a hundred times and still want to read again. It's a book that has something indescribable about it that you cannot put into words. Classics are books that even though we might not be able to verbalize why it's so amazing, it is able to stand on its own and speak for itself.

In reading a lot of the postings, and through our discussions, we have come to the agreement that teachers and parents keep classics alive. I find that popular culture has a huge effect on the process as well though. Some people mentioned the Twilight and Harry Potter series in their postings. I do feel that these could be considered classics, if not now then maybe someday down the road. How much influence did pop culture have in helping the books? How many people got into the books once the movie or propaganda promoted it? How many books might have been kept alive simply for the fact that a movie was made from it? I personally would not name The Wizard of Oz (book) a classic. In talking about the themes and lessons presented through the book, it really is quite gruesome, and not much like a children's book today. However, the book has mainly 'stayed alive' due to the movie, in my opinion. Maybe this is the case for others. In keeping along the same lines, how influential is technology and society in keeping a book 'alive' and helping to turn it into a 'classic'? This is a huge answer

to Louise Bernikow's quote "What is commonly called *literary history* is actually a record of choices." It is the parent's choice, teacher's choice, and child's choice, ultimately the reader's choice that helps a book become historic. Regardless of whether or not it was given an award, literary history is a combination of the book being well written, having a timeless effect, being appealing, and obtaining that certain quality that just makes you want to continually read it over and over again.

In the course of reading a classic, reading the scholarship articles and watching the movie versions of *Little Women* it gave me the opportunity to see how perception, personal opinion, personal values, beliefs, culture and life's experiences as well as likes/dislikes all factor into the definition of *literary history*. People's definitions of classics change over time as well as their ability to relate to and critique them. As times change, so does the relevancy of books. Certain books hold more meaning to readers than others, and it's because of the choice to continue to read them that new readers become exposed. I think overall a classic book has to be taken into context with the situation when using it to teach. The book has to relate to the age group reading the book and relate to the reader on some personal level. The books should be taught in fun, energetic ways in order to help children receive the full benefits of the book. When children are younger, most times they should be reading classic books of their own choice. In a class these books can be introduced to coincide with their interests. Overall, when done properly, teaching and incorporating classic books into a child's library of knowledge can help to provide positive experiences for young children.

"What is commonly called *literary history* is actually a record of choices." Louise Bernikow really does make a powerful point in this statement; choices that come from within, choices that come from the authors and illustrators, choices that the characters make in books, choices that society makes and demands, and choices that readers continue to uphold to read the books. Choices of definition, choices of what qualities make a good book, choices of likes/dislikes, perceptions, opinions, values, beliefs and life's experiences all combine to help us define *Literary history*. It really is a record of all of these choices, these choices combined that help to make a book and keep a book 'alive'. It is in the history of books written long ago, the books written today, and these choices will be a part of the writing process of books to come.