

One Hundred Years

A Timeline of the Newbery Medal

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The history of the Newbery Medal is tied to the history of contemporary American children's literature. A little over a hundred years ago, there was a perfect storm of children's book-related firsts that created the fertile ground in which the Newbery took root and grew.

Over the first several decades, changes in Newbery Committee composition and the selection process were made frequently. Until the mid-1970s, members of the ALSC leadership were actively involved in the award committee process itself, which allowed for continual finessing of the terms and procedures, as well as a strong institutional memory. Once the joint Newbery-Caldecott Committee separated into two different award committees in 1979 and, for the most part, began to function independently from the ALSC leadership, few changes have been made to the terms, procedures, or committee structure.

1901 Children's Librarians' Section formed within the American Library Association.

1915 Franklin K. Mathiews, chief librarian of the Boy Scouts of America, concerned about the poor quality of boys' reading, pitches the idea of a national Juvenile Book Week at the American Booksellers Association (ABA) Annual meeting. He suggests that it take place the last week of November or the first week in December to coincide with the Christmas buying season.

1916 Bertha Mahony opens the Bookshop for Boys and Girls in Boston.

1916 With the endorsement of the ABA, Mathiews continues to promote Good Book Week for the next two years.

1918 Anne Carroll Moore from New York Public Library begins publishing critical reviews of children's books in *The Bookman*.

1919 Macmillan appoints the first-ever children's book editor, Louise Seaman.

1919 Building on the early success of Good Book Week, the ABA renames it Children's Book Week and appoints a committee of publishers and booksellers to oversee it, with Frederic Melcher as chair and Mathiews as vice chair. The sole librarian on the committee is Anne Carroll Moore.

1921 At an ALA meeting of the Children's Librarians' Section in Swampscott, MA, Melcher suggests the creation of an award for children's literature to be named after John Newbery, the eighteenth-century British bookseller who was the first to create books specifically for children.

1922 Doubleday, Page and Company hires May Masee to edit children's books.



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1922 The first Newbery Medal is awarded to Henrik Willem van Loon for *The Story of Mankind*. The book was chosen by a popular vote open to all librarians who were members of ALA, and out of 212 votes cast, the book received a resounding majority of 163 votes. All the remaining books that received two or more votes are listed in preferential order as runners-up. The next two Newbery winners are also chosen by a popular vote.

1924 *Horn Book* magazine is founded by Mahony and Elinor Whitney, growing out of the Bookshop for Boys and Girls' recommended book lists. It is the first periodical devoted to reviewing children's books.

1924 The Newbery Medal is presented posthumously to Charles Boardman Hawes, for *The Dark Frigate*, who had died prior to the book's publication. His widow accepts the award on his behalf.

1924 At the ALA business meeting of the Children's Section, Effie L. Power brings forward a resolution to create a special award selection committee for the Newbery, rather than leaving it to popular vote. The Newbery Committee would consist of the Section's Executive Board; all five members of the Book Evaluation Committee; and three-members-at-large elected by the Section. This resolution is adopted by the ALA Executive Board, with the Section's chair also chairing the Newbery Committee. The committee does not meet in person, rather, they work via U.S. mail, and the results of the vote are kept secret until the ALA annual conference in June, where the Newbery winner is announced at a meeting of the Children's Section. In addition to choosing the Newbery Medal winner, the members of the Book Evaluation Committee also choose an annual list of recommended books, later called Distinguished Books of the Year.

1926 At the Newbery Medal presentation in Atlantic City, Melcher introduces Fenton Newbery, the great-great-grandson of John Newbery; the former thanks all assembled for the great honor bestowed on his family.

1927 Will James, too ill to travel to Toronto, becomes the only living author (for *Smoky, the Cowhorse*) who does not accept the Newbery Medal in person. James instead sends a telegram that reads in part, "I am very sorry I can't come to Toronto. Would sure like to have been present and meet you all but as it is, will have to let Smoky take the honors by himself. I only wish I could nicker a thank you."

1928 Dhan Gopal Mukerji (*Gay-Neck, the Story of a Pigeon*) becomes the first person of color and the first Asian American to win the Newbery Medal.

1929 The Children's Librarians' Section is renamed the Section for Library Work with Children.

1929 The Newbery Committee is enlarged to fifteen members, including the four current members of the Section's



Dhan Gopal Mukerji

Executive Board; the ex-chair of the section; and the chairs of all standing committees. Section members are still encouraged to send in their votes for Newbery, but their votes serve only as suggestions to the committee and are not binding.

1930 In perhaps the most unusual publicity stunt in Newbery Medal history, Rachel Field is informed of her Newbery win for *Hitty, Her First One Hundred Years* while flying in a T.A.T. Maddus airplane from Corvis, NM, to Los Angeles. A group of librarians, including ALA President Milton J. Ferguson, flying in a second plane nearby, give her the news via radio.

1931 The first official Newbery dinner is held at the Taft Hotel in New Haven, CT, to honor that year's award winner, Elizabeth Coatsworth. Her editor, Louise Seaman, also gives a speech, describing how each of the last three Newbery winners (all of which she had published) had come to her attention at Macmillan. Two hundred people attend the dinner. The award itself had been officially conferred earlier at a meeting of the Section for Library Work with Children.

1932 Two new resolutions further clarify Newbery Award terms: that the book must be "original, or, if traditional in origin, must be the result of individual research and reinterpretation" and, to encourage an increase in the number of authors writing for children, a previous recipient of the award can only win by unanimous vote of the entire committee.



1930 Newbery winner Rachel Field and ALA President Milton J. Ferguson reenact their mid-air radio communication after landing.

1933 To keep the news of the Newbery winner from leaking, the Newbery chair stops reporting the results of the vote to the committee members. Only the chair, the author, the publisher, and Melcher know which book has won the Newbery until it is officially announced at the ALA annual conference in June.

1933 The first Newbery Award dinner is held during which the winner is announced and the Medal is officially conferred. An award dinner is held again in 1936, and by 1937, the Newbery Award dinner has become part of a regular, ongoing tradition. Once this tradition was established, the dinner was hereinafter referred to as the Newbery Award Banquet.

1934 The committee devises its system of mathematical consensus in voting, with each member voting for their first, second, and third place choice. These votes were tallied by giving each first place vote four points, second place vote three points, and third place vote two points.

1934 The Section for Library Work with Children formalizes a system by which Section members can suggest books for the Newbery through a form to be filled out and returned each year with membership dues.

1934 The Torch Club of the Wilson Teachers College in Washington, D.C., hosts a Newbery Prize Banquet at the Mayflower Hotel, inviting all of the previous Newbery-winning authors as honored guests. Nine of the thirteen attend: Hugh Lofting, Arthur Bowie Chrisman, Dhan Gopal Mukerji, Eric P. Kelly, Rachel Field, Elizabeth Coatsworth, Elizabeth Foreman Lewis, and Cornelia Meigs.

1937 ALA's Library Radio Broadcasting Round Table reports that the announcement of the Newbery Medal winner will be broadcast on three radio networks.

1937 For the first time, the *Horn Book Magazine* publishes the Newbery Acceptance Speech, a practice that continues today.

1937 First Lady Eleanor Roosevelt attends the Newbery Banquet as a guest speaker and writes about it the next day in her syndicated newspaper column. She spells Newbery with two r's.

1937 At the request of the Section for Library Work with Children, Melcher agrees to sponsor an award for distinguished illustration, named for the nineteenth-century British children's book illustrator Randolph Caldecott. The same committee, now known as the Newbery-Caldecott Committee, selects both awards. The first order of business for the joint committee is to decide whether books will be considered for writing or for illustration. A book is not allowed to be considered for both awards.

1937 Another resolution put forward by the Section invites school librarians to participate in the Newbery-Caldecott Committee by suggesting that the chair of the School Libraries Section and four appointed members of the Section be part of the Newbery-Caldecott Committee. The School Libraries Section accepts the invitation. These five members, together with the chairs of three new Section for Library Work with Children committees, raise the number of Newbery-Caldecott Committee members to twenty-three.

1939 The nominating committee suggests that, going forward, the vice-chair of the Section for Library Work with Children chair the Newbery-Caldecott Committee the following year. This will allow the Section's chair to focus on Section business, although she will continue to serve as a member of the Newbery-Caldecott Committee.

1939 Melcher interviews Newbery-winner Elizabeth Enright and Caldecott-winner Thomas Handforth live on the NBC radio network following the national announcement of the Newbery and Caldecott Awards on the air.

1940 At the Newbery-Caldecott Banquet, just after the Newbery and Caldecott presentations, Melcher delivers a speech called "What's Ahead for Children's Books," in which



The 1937 Newbery Banquet. Eleanor Roosevelt is seated 8th from the left and to her left is Frederic Melcher.



From left, Elizabeth Groves (Children's Library Association chair), William Pene du Bois (Newbery winner), Frederic Melcher, and Virginia Chase (Children's Library Association vice chair), circa 1948.

he addresses the criticism that the Newbery Medal books have become "too feminized."

1942 The Section for Library Work with Children is renamed the Children's Library Association (CLA).

1943-1945 No annual ALA conferences are held during the war years, so the Newbery and Caldecott Awards are given

at regional conferences, twice in New York and once in Cleveland.

1949 *Story of the Negro* is a runner up for the Newbery Medal, making Arna Bon-temps the first African American author to receive recognition from the committee.

1949 Due to the difficulty of keeping the winners of the awards a secret until the banquet in June, the Children's Library Association decides to announce the winners soon after the ballots are tallied in March each year. The Newbery-Caldecott Awards Publicity Committee is responsible for getting the word out to libraries and the media. Meanwhile, Melcher hosts a small private party in New York each year to quietly confer the medals to the Newbery-Caldecott Award winners soon after the public announcement. The medals are then taken back and held by the Newbery-Caldecott chair until they are given out publicly at the ALA Annual Conference in June.

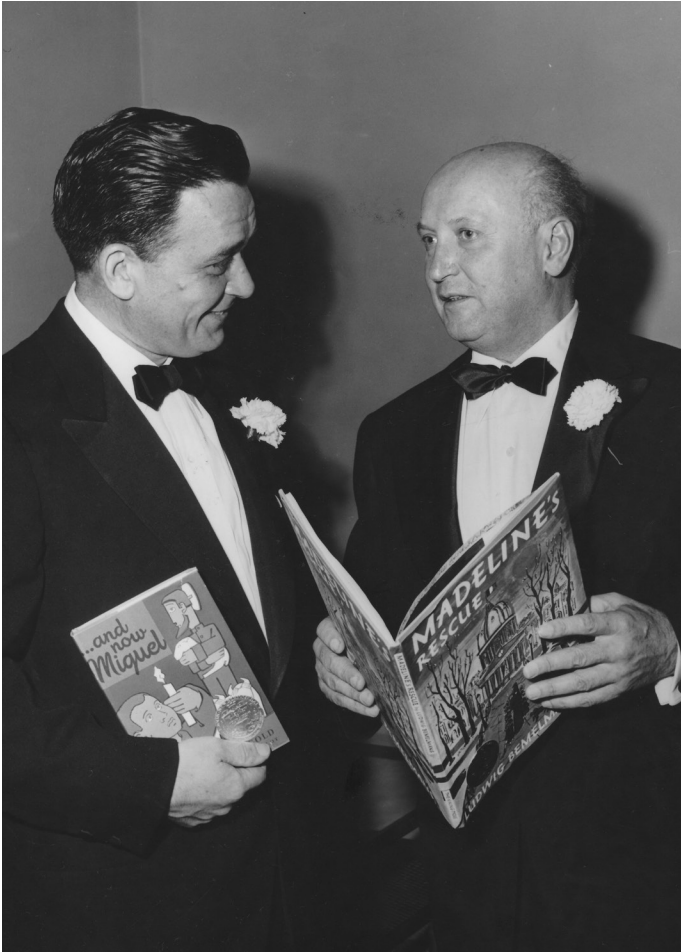
1952 Effie Lee Morris of the Cleveland Public Library becomes the first African American member of the Newbery-Caldecott Committee.

1952 The Newbery-Caldecott Banquet is held in the Grand Ballroom of the Waldorf Astoria Hotel in New York City. The ticket price of ten dollars is seen as so "staggering" that the Children's Library Association Board offers suggestions for raising money to attend the banquet, including asking library staff who are not attending to contribute to those who are, asking local PTAs to contribute, or simply saving one dime a day from March until July 1.

1954 Sixteen of the twenty-three members of the Newbery-Caldecott Committee in attendance at ALA Midwinter hold a special committee meeting to make its final decisions. Although the decision is made in January, the results are announced in March from Melcher's office in

New York City, and then widely publicized by the CLA Publicity Committee.

1955 The Local Arrangements Committee of the CLA creates a new seating plan for the Newbery-Caldecott Banquet. It places librarians, publishers, authors, and illustrators at each table to encourage lively discussion. Twelve-hundred guests attend.



Newbery winner Joseph Krumgold chats with Caldecott winner Ludwig Bemelmans at the 1954 Banquet.

1955 *Horn Book* publishes its first compilation of Newbery acceptance speeches, *Newbery Medal Books, 1922-1955*, edited by Bertha Mahony Miller and Elinor Whitney Field.

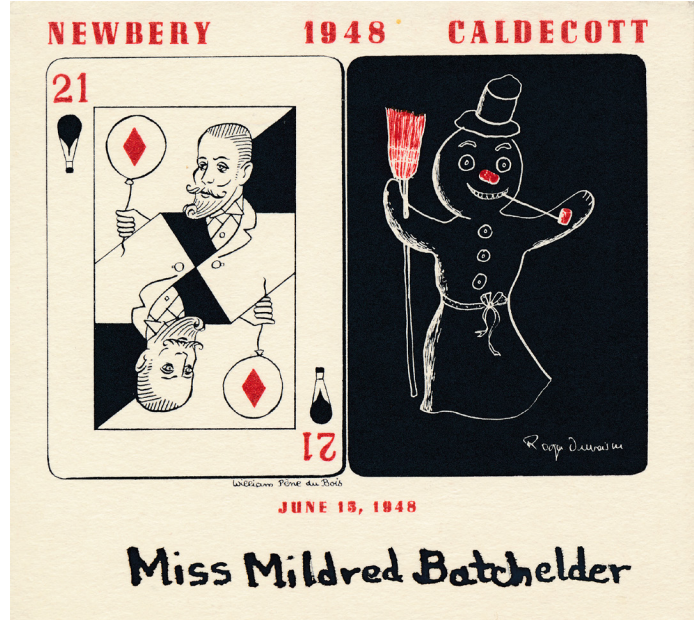
1957 Charlemae Rollins becomes the first African American to chair the Newbery-Caldecott Committee.

1957 Former Newbery-Caldecott chair Irene Smith publishes *A History of the Newbery and Caldecott Medal Books* with Viking Press.

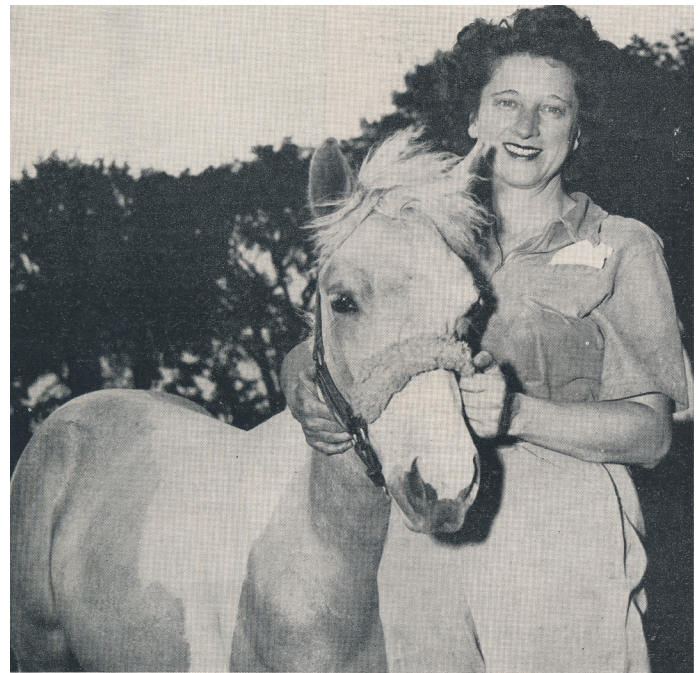
1958 The Children's Library Association is renamed the Children's Services Division (CSD).

1958 The entire Newbery-Caldecott Committee meets in person for the first time to discuss the award contenders. The actual voting is still done by mail in March. Most of the committee's meeting is devoted to reviewing the award terms.

1958 On the recommendation of the Newbery-Caldecott Committee, the Children's Services Division Board votes to remove the requirement that previous winners must be the unanimous choice of the committee in order to win the award



Place card from the 1948 Newbery-Caldecott Banquet.



In 1948, Marguerite Henry brought Misty, the subject of her Newbery Honor Book, to ALA

a second time. The feeling is that there is no longer the need to encourage new authors and illustrators to enter the children's book field.

1958 The CSD Board changes the make-up of future Newbery-Caldecott Award Committees of twenty-three members as follows: eight members elected at large; the five members of the Book Evaluation Committee; the four CSD officers (president, vice-president, past president, and treasurer); and six members appointed by the CSD president.



Left: Newbery chair Barbara S. Moody presents the 1962 Newbery Medal to Elizabeth George Speare. Right: Newbery chair Ruth Gagliardo presents the 1963 Newbery Medal to Madeleine L'Engle.

1958 The CSD Board votes to change the name of the Distinguished Books of the Year (selected each year by the Book Evaluation Committee) to Notable Children's Books of the Year in order to clarify that the Committee's selection process is separate from that of the Newbery-Caldecott Committee, even though the entire Book Evaluation Committee also serves on the Newbery-Caldecott Committee.

1958 The Board also recommends further study on the provision concerning the eligibility of joint authors for the Newbery Award and the requirement that authors and illustrators be residents of the United States.

1959 The CSD general membership protests that the December due date for their Newbery-Caldecott voting does not give them enough time to read all the possible contenders, so the CSD Board moves the deadline to the first week in January. The results of the membership vote are then given to the Newbery-Caldecott Committee at the Midwinter meeting to inform their own discussion and voting.

1960 Spencer Shaw makes history as the first man to serve on the Newbery-Caldecott Committee.

1960 The Newbery-Caldecott Committee continues to meet in person at the ALA Midwinter meeting to discuss all

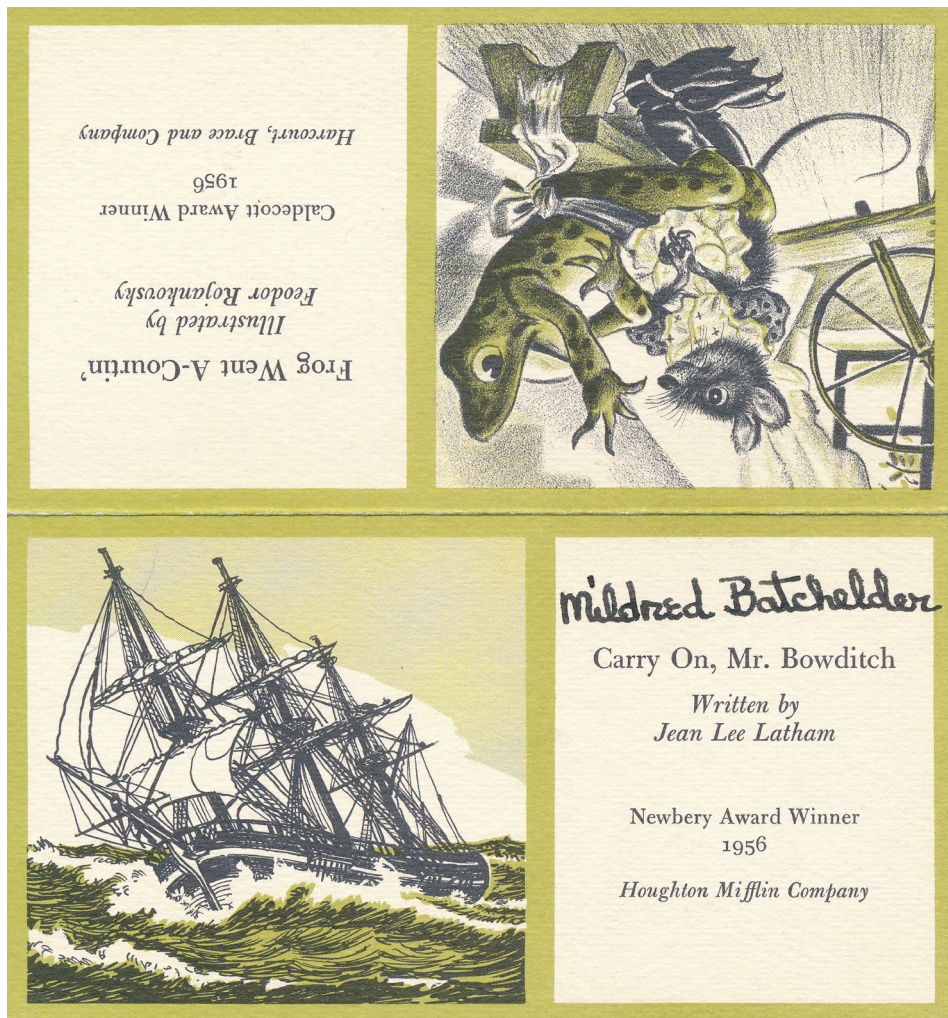
the contenders for the award, and for the first time, begins the voting procedure directly after the book discussion, staying in session until a final decision is made.

1960 The Newbery-Caldecott Committee considers a suggestion that there be two Newbery Awards—one for fiction and one for nonfiction, but the committee unanimously votes it down due to their concern that there are already too many awards.

1960 *Onion John* wins the Newbery Medal, making Joseph Krungold the first author to win the Newbery twice. He had previously won in 1953 for *And Now, Miguel*. Both were published by Thomas Y. Crowell.

1962 The Committee discusses the "perennial problem" of age-level concerns as to what defines a children's book, an issue frequently raised by the CSD general membership. They note that the CSD Bylaws define that the Division is responsible for "library services to children from preschool through eighth grade," and therefore the Committee understands its responsibilities to consider a wide variety of books that fall into that same age range.

1963 The CSD Board votes that "joint authors shall be eligible" for the Newbery Award.



Newbery-Caldecott Table Tent, 1956

1963 Melcher dies a month before what would have been his eighty-fourth birthday. The Children's Services Division devotes a special issue of their journal *Top of the News* to him. His son Daniel takes over the role as Newbery Medal donor and advisor.

1964 The Children's Services Division stops announcing and listing the runners-up in preferential order to give all of the books equal standing.

1969 For the first time, the Newbery Medal winner is announced at the ALA Midwinter conference, soon after the decision is made, at a reception hosted by Daniel Melcher. Lloyd Alexander, author of the winning book, *The High King*, is present and is allowed to briefly hold his medal before it's whisked away and kept to be officially conferred at the Newbery-Caldecott Banquet the following June.

1971 The term used to designate Newbery runners-up is changed to Honor Books and is applied retroactively to all past runners-up. The CSD Board also approves silver facsimile seals for placement of the jackets of Newbery Honor Books.

1972 A group of Ohio librarians presents a petition to the CSD Board, asking that the Newbery Medal lower the age level to books for children in elementary school. The Board, once again, reaffirms that the audience definition should correspond with the age level served by the Division's members.

1972 The CSD Board launches an experiment that publishes all the preliminary nominations of the Newbery-Caldecott Committee in the library press in the fall, to stimulate local book discussions and to publicize a longer list of good books. This practice continues until 1977, when the Board quietly votes to discontinue it.

1973 The twenty-three member Newbery-Caldecott Committee composition changes once again by a CSD Board recommendation put to a vote of the general membership. The CSD president and first vice president / president elect will no longer serve on the committee so they can focus of Division business and be available to other committees. The immediate past president and second vice-president continue to serve, along with twelve members elected at large by the CSD membership, and nine members appointed by the first vice-president / president-elect. The

Newbery-Caldecott chair is elected from a slate of two by the CSD general membership, and is counted as one of the twelve elected members.

1975 Virginia Hamilton becomes the first African American author to win the Newbery Medal, for her book *M. C. Higgins, the Great* (Macmillan).

1975 The CSD lengthens the Newbery-Caldecott Committee's length of service so that now members are elected or appointed prior to the beginning of the year in which they will serve. Before 1975, committee members were elected/appointed midway through the year in which the books they considered were published.

1976 Members of the Newbery-Caldecott Committee are now required to be present at the ALA Midwinter meetings for in-person discussions of the award contenders. Each committee member nominates three books in October and three again in December, with a written rationale for each nomination. Committee members are also required to read all books nominated by the CSD membership in December.



From left, Newbery winner Betsy Byars chats with Newbery-Caldecott committee member Dorothy Anderson and Caldecott winner Gail Haley at the Banquet in 1971.



VIPs at the 1975 Newbery-Caldecott Banquet from left: Children's Services Division President Barbara Rollock, Caldecott winner Gerald McDermott, Newbery-Caldecott Chair Bette Peltola, Newbery winner Virginia Hamilton, and editor Susan Hirschman.

1976 The Children's Services Division is renamed the Association for Library Service to Children (ALSC).

1979 The ALSC Board votes to create two separate award committees, one fifteen-member committee to select the Newbery winner, and another fifteen-member committee to select the Caldecott winner. Each fifteen-member committee includes a chair elected by the general membership from a slate of two; seven members elected from a slate of fourteen; and seven members appointed by the vice president/president-elect.

1980 The last joint Newbery-Caldecott Committee, chaired by Barbara Moody, selects *A Gathering of Days* by Joan W. Blos for the Newbery and *Ox-Cart Man*, illustrated by Barbara Cooney, for the Caldecott Medal.

1981 Ginny Moore Kruse chairs the first Newbery Committee, which selects *Jacob Have I Loved* by Katherine Paterson, after the split from the joint Newbery-Caldecott Committee.

1981 After years of complaints about the cost and exclusiveness of the Newbery-Caldecott Awards Banquet, ALSC tries something different by honoring the winners at a free program at which the winners give their acceptance speeches. A ticketed event follows for those who want to mix and mingle, and enjoy food and beverages at a less formal event.

1982 For the first time, the Newbery Medal is awarded to a picture book *and* to a work of poetry, for *A Visit to William Blake's Inn* by Nancy Willard (Harcourt). The book also receives a Caldecott Honor for its illustrations by Alice and Martin Provensen, making it the first book to be recognized for both Newbery and Caldecott.

1982 The alternative to the banquet once again offers a free program to hear the award acceptance speeches, this time followed by mummer's band leading a parade to a "Philadelphia Block Party" in a nearby hotel where, for \$25.50, attendees can enjoy Hoagies, cheese-steak, beer, and popcorn served from pushcarts.

1983 ALSC returns to the formal Awards Banquet, but scales back the multi-tiered head table to just one head table where the winners, chairs, ALSC president, and ALA president are seated. After the dinner, anyone who wants to come in to listen to the speeches is allowed to do so, seated at chairs in the back of the room.

2000 The ALSC Board appoints a task force to consider the eligibility of e-Books for ALSC awards and accepts the task force's recommendation that books only available electronically be excluded from consideration, since they require some sort of reading device such as a computer or a tablet that's not readily available to all children.



Two-time Newbery honor winner Walter Dean Myers with editor Linda Zuckerman.



Newbery Committee Chair Rose V. Treviño presents the 2009 Newbery Medal to Neil Gaiman for *The Graveyard Book*.



The awards committees went virtual in 2020 due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Pictured is 2020 Newbery chair Krishna Grady (bottom, center) and her committee presenting the Newbery Medal via Zoom.

2006 The ALSC Board appoints a task force to consider the U.S. citizenship or residency requirements for award eligibility for Newbery and Caldecott. After surveying ALSC membership, past committee chairs, and publishers, the task force unanimously votes to recommend that the Board limit eligibility to U.S. citizens and residents. The Board accepts the task force recommendation.

2007 The ALSC Board votes to make the Newbery and Caldecott chairs appointed positions by the vice-president/president-elect.

2009 The ALSC Board votes to increase the number of rounds and nominations from two rounds of three books each to three rounds of nominations, with three nominations in October, two in November, and two in December.

2010 Rose Treviño becomes the first Latinx Newbery Medal Chair.

2016 Matt de la Peña becomes the first Latinx winner of the Newbery Medal for his book, *Last Stop on Market Street* (G. P. Putnam's Sons), which is also the first picture book narrative to win the award.

2020 For the first time, the Newbery Medal is awarded to a graphic novel, Jerry Craft's *New Kid* (HarperCollins), and due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the award presentation happens via Zoom.

2020 Because of the pandemic, the 2021 Newbery Committee conducts all its meetings via Zoom, and the award presentation to Tae Keller for *When You Trap a Tiger* (Random House) also occurs remotely.

2022 *A Snake Falls to Earth* is named a Newbery Honor Book, making Darcie Little Badger the first Native American author to be recognized by the committee. &