



THE LAST WORD

A Compilation of Our Contributors' Favorite Newbery Books

Choosing one's favorite Newbery is like choosing a favorite child . . . but here are some favorites of our CAL contributors.

The 1996 Honor Book *The Watsons Go to Birmingham, 1963* by Christopher Paul Curtis. I marvel at this book, which deftly moves from hilarity to despair and then to an emerging sense of connection as a way forward. I also love *Flora and Ulysses* (2014), which was the book that won the year I was on the Newbery Committee. I love so many of the books!

—Susan Polos, Middle School Librarian,
Greenwich Country Day School

A tie between *The Westing Game* (1979) by Ellen Raskin and *The Giver* (1994) by Lois Lowry, the former for its joyful and clever creativity and the latter for its chilling transformation into dystopian horror.

—Steven Herb

The books I “hand sell” most at the library are two, albeit very different, Newbery winners: Neil Gaiman's *The Graveyard Book* (2009), for its clever creepiness, and Kate DiCamillo's *Flora and Ulysses* (2014), a masterpiece of playfulness and creating memorable characters.

—Sharon Verbeten

The High King (1969) by Lloyd Alexander, and my top Honor Book, *The Black Cauldron* (1966), come from the same series. I read the Chronicles of Prydain at age eleven or so in the early 1970s, and it clearly stands the test of

time for me. I've re-read them every five years or so ever since. As a child, these might have been the most serious books I had read up to then, with agonizing choices (the brooch or the Cauldron?) and beloved characters actually dying (every time I get to “The Red Fallows” chapter, I have to brace myself). The books are also funny, thrilling, and filled with wisdom and insights that have stuck with me for decades.

—Steven Engelfried

The 1988 winner, *Lincoln: A Photobiography*, is a favorite of mine because it shows so convincingly that historical writing can rise to the level of art. By shaping facts into stories and stories into a tautly constructed, continuous narrative, Russell Freedman performed the real magic trick of taking a fabled figure down from the marble shelf and putting young readers eye to eye in his—Abraham Lincoln's!—presence.

—Leonard S. Marcus

I appreciate a good surprise in the Newbery winners. One of my favorites is *Last Stop on Market Street* (2016) by Matt de la Peña, illustrated by Christian Robinson. Winning the Newbery Medal and a Caldecott Honor in the same year had to be an unbelievable experience for this team, and I love how the Newbery drew attention to a picture book as a classic work of children's literature.

—Mary-Kate Sableski, PhD, Associate Professor,
University of Dayton

Got a great, lighthearted essay? A funny story about children and libraries? Books and babies? Pets and picture books?

A not-so-serious look at the world of children's librarianship? Send your Last Word to Sharon Verbeten at childrenandlibraries@gmail.com.