

Reader's Advisory
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Using Book Awards and Notable Lists to Create a Reader's Advisory Knowledge Base

Craig Clark

I believe it's not a stretch to say most librarians enjoy a robust list or book award, and I am no exception. I have been enamored with book awards and lists since becoming a librarian in 1999. I used awards to expand my knowledge base for literature and nonfiction, create displays and bookmarks, and initiate discussions with patrons and staff to explore reading interests. For novice reference librarians, researching lists and awards is an effective way to develop links within a finite set of books or authors, and as knowledge of genres and styles grows, it will become easier to effectively conduct reference interviews and communicate with patrons. My number-one rule for reader's advisors (RAs): Be curious!

I have compiled a list of awards and booklists curated by judges and committee panels. I prefer these to algorithmic or popular starred aggregations because, well, I'm biased to the human connections of reading titles as a group and having lively discussions with peers to develop thoughtful and meaningful lists that promote reading and outstanding authors.

Starting with the obvious: ALA awards. I may be preaching to the choir, but as I am currently serving on the Notable Books Council and previously served on the Andrew Carnegie committee, again, I'm biased. Readers of *RUSQ* will undoubtedly be familiar with these award committees, so I am including the most current titles in the list at the end of this article, but other than the links in this paragraph, I will forego further explanation.

There are many familiar book awards that receive national exposure and command media attention. The most prestigious awards are listed first, followed by a group of awards that have more specific missions and goals. The article concludes with a list of the most current award recipients at the time of this writing. Also, the focus of this article is literary fiction, nonfiction, and poetry; a future installment will address resources and awards for genre fiction.

The Booker Prize

As noted on the Booker Prize website:

Founded in the UK in 1969, the Booker Prize is the world's most significant award for a single work of fiction. Each year, the prize is awarded to what is, in the opinion of our judges, the best sustained work of fiction written in English and published in the UK and Ireland. The winning book is a work that not

only speaks to our current times, but also one that will endure and join the pantheon of great literature. The winner and the shortlisted authors are guaranteed a global readership and a life-changing increase in book sales. The winner of the Booker Prize also receives £50,000, with £2,500 awarded to each of the other shortlisted authors.¹

A longlist is published in July of a given year, followed by a shortlist of six titles in late September. The winner is announced in early November. The Booker website also includes reading guides and other educational materials for readers and librarians. *Of note to children's librarians: The Children's Booker Prize inaugural award will be announced in February 2027. It celebrates the best in contemporary fiction for children eight to twelve years old.*

The National Book Award

The mission of the National Book Foundation is to "celebrate the best literature published in the United States, connect books with readers of all ages, and champion the literary arts as a vital part of our culture."²

The National Book Award is the most prestigious award for literature published in the United States for a given year. This award, which was first awarded in 1950 and is sponsored by the American Book Publishers Council, the Book Manufacturers' Institute, and the American Booksellers Association, has evolved over the years, adding and changing categories, but it has always focused on literary excellence. Look for longlists in mid-September of a given year, with the finalists being announced in November.

The Pulitzer Prizes

The Pulitzer Prizes are arguably the most recognizable book awards in the United States. The Pulitzer committee accepts submissions throughout a given year, and awards are announced in the spring of the following year. It should be noted that although titles are judged by juried panels, there is a \$75 fee associated with individual submissions, and as of 2026, award recipients receive a \$15,000 prize. The current categories for literature are as follows:

- For distinguished fiction by an American author, preferably dealing with American life
- For a distinguished and appropriately documented book on the history of the United States
- For a distinguished and appropriately documented biography by an American author
- For a distinguished and factual memoir or autobiography by an American author
- For a distinguished volume of original verse by an American author
- For a distinguished and appropriately documented book of nonfiction by an American author that is not eligible for consideration in any other category

The following book awards offer distinct perspectives regarding literary fiction, nonfiction, poetry, and other categories. They are committee and/or membership based, and they often enlist authors, critics, and other influential persons to serve as judges. Also, there are no costs to the authors or publishers to be considered, and in many cases, submissions are requested by the committees, and unsolicited submissions are not considered. The websites offer numerous resources to assist RAs in building a personal knowledge base, finding inspiration for displays or programs, and directly linking readers with valuable and entertaining information regarding acclaimed literature and authors.

The Anisfield-Wolf Book Awards

As noted on the Anisfield-Wolf website, "The Anisfield-Wolf Book Awards recognize books that have made important contributions to our understanding of racism and human diversity. Cleveland poet and philanthropist Edith Anisfield Wolf established the book awards in 1935, in honor of her father, John Anisfield, and husband, Eugene Wolf, to reflect her family's passion for social justice. Presented by the Cleveland Foundation, it remains the only American book prize focusing on works that address racism and diversity."³

I was unaware of this prestigious award until I began working at the Cleveland Public Library in 1999. There is a wonderful awards ceremony in Cleveland, Ohio, that showcases the writers, which, until recently, was led by Henry Louis Gates Jr. Currently, Pulitzer Prize-winning author, former US Poet Laureate, and 2021 Anisfield-Wolf nonfiction winner Natasha Trethewey leads the jury of prominent scholars and writers. This award celebrates a diverse group of writers and poets, and the listing of current and past winners on the website is an excellent resource for exploring literary writings and creating book displays and materials showcasing a wide range of social issues. Award recipients receive a \$30,000 prize. The awards are announced in April, and the ceremony takes place in September.

The Dublin Literary Award (Formerly the IMPAC Dublin Literary Award)

As noted on the Dublin Literary Award website, "Since its inception in 1996, the Dublin Literary Award has celebrated outstanding achievements in global literature. Awarded annually by Dublin City Council, this prestigious prize is among the most significant literary honors worldwide, distinguished by its unique nomination process that involves libraries from cities across the globe. The award recognizes a single work of international fiction, whether originally written in English or translated into it, with a generous prize of €100,000. If the winning title is a translation, the author receives €75,000, while the translator is awarded €25,000."⁴

This is one of the most unique literary prizes in the world—and with the 100,000-euro award, one of the most generous. Any major library can apply to submit titles for the award, which are then evaluated by an award committee consisting of representatives from Dublin's library and city council. A longlist is announced and judged by an esteemed group of international authors. The only drawback to the award is that the 2026 award, which will be announced in May of 2026, includes books published between July 1 and June 30 of 2025. However, the breadth of the nominations, author profiles, and extensive annotations make it an award worth looking at for RA suggestions regarding international fiction and translations.

On a related side note, the Dublin Literary Award was my gateway to reader's advisory work when I was a novice librarian. A group of us convinced the deputy director of our library to form an informal committee of readers to nominate books to the award. The application to participate was simple, but the committee had to be led by the administration. Our committee consisted of a lowly librarian (me), the deputy director, the head of the literature department, and a security guard. We met every other month and talked about titles during lunch. Those spirited discussions in an informal setting with a wide range of employees made me appreciate the joy of sharing books with others and collaborating with peers, and I would encourage library staff everywhere to recognize that one of the best tools of RAs is working together both formally and informally.

The National Book Critics Circle Awards

Not to be confused with the National Book Award, “the National Book Critics Circle awards are given each March and honor literature published in the United States in six categories—autobiography, biography, criticism, fiction, nonfiction, and poetry. These are the only national literary awards chosen by critics themselves. In addition, we award two prizes voted on by membership: the John Leonard Prize for the best first book in any genre and the Gregg Barrios Book in Translation Prize, for the best book of any genre translated into English and published in the United States.”⁵

The award ceremony occurs in March and considers books from the previous year. Members of the National Book Critics Circle select and vote on titles, but publishers can send copies to the committee members for consideration. The website provides lists of past winners and finalists and offers a unique perspective on literary awards.

Women’s Prize for Fiction and Non-Fiction (Formerly the Orange Prize for Fiction and the Bailey’s Women’s Prize for Fiction)

Another prestigious award that doesn’t garner enough exposure in the United States is the UK-based Women’s Prize for Fiction (the Women’s Prize for Non-Fiction was added in 2024). The organization’s mission states: “The Women’s Prize Trust is the charity building a better future by championing women’s writing. We improve access to and appreciation of women’s writing for all readers, providing an awards platform that supports brilliant writers and role models while nurturing an engaged, global community of readers and writers”; they also work to “support writers at all stages of their writing journey, providing opportunities to engage with experts, develop the craft of writing, and find a peer group. Our flagship development program for unpublished writers, Discoveries, aims to seek out, inspire and support writers from those early pages to long-term careers.”⁶

Along with the standard lists and winners found on many award sites, the Women’s Prize Trust website includes a searchable database that sorts by genre, author, mood, and year. Winners are selected from publisher submissions from April through March of the following year, and the winners are announced in June. The site is an excellent resource for librarians, writers, and readers.

The following is a compilation of titles related to the various awards mentioned in this article. The lists can be used as a basis for book displays, book discussions, and general knowledge for RA librarians to build on their knowledge base of titles and authors in the fields of literary fiction, nonfiction, and poetry. Remember, two of the most valuable traits of the RA librarian are curiosity and a willingness to explore outside of one’s reading interests, so please explore the websites and take advantage of the resources to better connect readers with their books.

2026 Anisfield-Wolf Winners

- *Born in Flames: The Business of Arson and the Remaking of the American City* by Bench Anisfield (nonfiction)
- *The Hollow Half: A Memoir of Bodies and Borders* by Sarah Aziza (memoir)
- *Death Does Not End the Sea* by Gbenga Adesina (poetry)
- *Make Your Way Home* by Carrie R. Moore (fiction)

2026 Booker Prize Shortlist

- *Flashlight* by Susan Choi
- *The Loneliness of Sonia and Sunny* by Kiran Desai
- *Audition* by Katie Kitamura
- *The Rest of Our Lives* by Ben Markovits
- *The Land in Winter* by Andrew Miller
- *Flesh* by David Szalay

2026 Dublin Literary Award Shortlist

- *Gliff* by Ali Smith
- *In Late Summer* by Magdalena Blažević
- *Live Fast* by Brigitte Giraud
- *Perspectives* by Laurent Binet
- *The Emperor of Gladness* by Ocean Vuong
- *What I Know About You* by Éric Chacour

2025 National Book Award Winners

- *The True True Story of Raja the Gullible* by Rabi Alameddine (fiction)
- *One Day, Everyone Will Have Always Been Against This* by Omar El Akkad (nonfiction)
- *The Intentions of Thunder: New and Selected Poems* by Patricia Smith (poetry)
- *We Are Green and Trembling* by Gabriela Cabezon Cámara, translated by Robin Myers (translation)
- *The Teacher of Nomad Land: A World War II Story* by Levine Querido (young adult)

2026 ALA (RUSA/CODES) Notable Books Council

Fiction

- *Great Black Hope: A Novel* by Rob Franklin
- *Guatemalan Rhapsody: Stories* by Jared Lemus
- *Small Ceremonies: A Novel* by Kyle Edwards
- *The Dream Hotel: A Novel* by Laila Lalami
- *The Emperor of Gladness: A Novel* by Ocean Vuong
- *The Ferryman and His Wife: A Novel* by Frode Grytten, translated by Alison McCullough
- *The Lilac People: A Novel* by Milo Todd
- *The Slip: A Novel* by Lucas Schaefer
- *The Sunflower Boys: A Novel* by Sam Wachman
- *Where Are You Really From: Stories* by Elaine Hsieh Chou

Nonfiction

- *A Flower Traveled in My Blood: The Incredible True Story of the Grandmothers Who Fought to Find a Stolen Generation of Children* by Haley Cohen Gilliland
- *America, América: A New History of the New World* by Greg Grandin

- *Everything Is Tuberculosis: The History and Persistence of Our Deadliest Infection* by John Green
- *Is a River Alive?* by Robert Macfarlane
- *Looking at Women Looking at War: A War and Justice Diary* by Victoria Amelina
- *No More Tears: The Dark Secrets of Johnson & Johnson* by Gardiner Harris
- *One Day, Everyone Will Have Always Been Against This* by Omar El Akkad
- *Original Sins: The (Mis)education of Black and Native Children and the Construction of American Racism* by Eve L. Ewing
- *Strangers in the Land: Exclusion, Belonging, and the Epic Story of the Chinese in America* by Michael Luo
- *There Is No Place for Us: Working and Homeless in America* by Brian Goldstone
- *Things in Nature Merely Grow* by Yiyun Li
- *Valley of Forgetting: Alzheimer's Families and the Search for a Cure* by Jennie Erin Smith

Poetry

- *Becoming Ghost* by Cathy Linh Che
- *Gaza: The Poem Said Its Piece* by Nasser Rabah, translated from the Arabic by Ammiel Alcalay, Emna Zghal, and Khaled Al-Hilli
- *Resting Bitch Face: Poems* by Taylor Byas
- *The Opposite of Cruelty: Poems* by Steven Leyva

2026 Andrew Carnegie Medals for Excellence in Fiction and Nonfiction

- *A Guardian and a Thief* by Megha Majumdar (fiction winner)
- *The Unworthy* by Agustina Bazterrica, translated by Sarah Moses
- *We Do Not Part* by Han Kang, translated by E. Yaewon and Paige Aniyah Morris
- *Things in Nature Merely Grow* by Yiyun Li (nonfiction winner)
- *Baldwin, Styron, and Me* by Mélikah Abdelmoumen, translated by Catherine Khordoc
- *There Is No Place for Us: Working and Homeless in America* by Brian Goldstone
- *Things in Nature Merely Grow* by Yiyun Li

2025 Pulitzer Prize Winners

- *James* by Percival Everett (fiction)
- *Combee: Harriet Tubman, the Combahee River Raid, and Black Freedom During the Civil War* by Edda L. Fields-Black (history)
- *Native Nations: A Millennium in North America* by Kathleen DuVal (history)
- *Every Living Thing: The Great and Deadly Race to Know All Life* by Jason Roberts (biography)
- *Feeding Ghosts: A Graphic Memoir* by Tessa Hulls (memoir)
- *New and Selected Poems* by Marie Howe (poetry)
- *To the Success of Our Hopeless Cause: The Many Lives of the Soviet Dissident Movement* by Benjamin Nathans (nonfiction)

2026 The Women's Prize for Fiction Longlist (shortlist not published until after article submission)

- *Gloria Don't Speak* by Lucy Apps
- *Paradiso 17* by Hannah Lillith Assadi

- *Moderation* by Elaine Castillo
- *Flashlight* by Susan Choi
- *Dominion* by Addie E. Citchens
- *The Benefactors* by Wendy Erskine
- *The Correspondent* by Virginia Evans
- *The Mercy Step* by Marcia Hutchinson
- *The Others* by Sheena Kalayil
- *Kingfisher* by Rozie Kelly
- *Heart the Lover* by Lily King
- *Audition* by Katie Kitamura
- *A Guardian and a Thief* by Megha Majumdar
- *Wild Dark Shore* by Charlotte McConaghy
- *The Best of Everything* by Kit de Waal
- *A Beast Slinks Towards Beijing* by Alice Evelyn Yang

2026 Women's Prize for Non-Fiction Shortlist

- *The Finest Hotel in Kabul: A People's History of Afghanistan* by Lyse Doucet
- *Art Cure: The Science of How the Arts Transform Our Health* by Daisy Fancourt
- *Artists, Siblings, Visionaries: The Lives and Loves of Gwen and Augustus John* by Judith Mackrell
- *Hotel Exile: Paris in the Shadow of War* by Jane Rogoyska
- *Mother Mary Comes to Me* by Arundhati Roy
- *Nation of Strangers: Rebuilding Home in the 21st Century* by Ece Temelkuran

References

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