

Dr. Kenneth Kidd
LIT 5335
T E1-E3
Fall 2000

Office: TUR 4214
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Hours: T 6-7; R 8
& by appointment

The Newbery Medal Books

Texts

William H. Armstrong, *Sounder*
Ann Nolan Clark, *Secret of the Andes*
Elizabeth Coatsworth, *The Cat Who Went to Heaven*
Esther Forbes, *Johnny Tremain*
Russell Freedman, *Lincoln: A Photobiography*
Karen Hesse, *Out of the Dust*
E. L. Konigsburg, *From the Mixed-Up Files of Mrs. Basil E. Frankweiler*
Hugh Lofting, *The Voyages of Doctor Dolittle*
Cornelia Meigs, *Invincible Louisa*
Robert O'Brien, *Mrs. Frisby and the Rats of NIMH*
Katherine Paterson, *Bridge to Terabithia*
Ellen Raskin, *The Westing Game*
Elizabeth George Speare, *The Witch of Blackbird Pond*

and additional texts to be selected by students, plus miscellaneous essays and articles (to be distributed in class). Texts are available at Goering's (Books and Bagels) – except for *Johnny Tremain*, which (like all of these books) is available around town in bookstores and libraries and through Amazon.com.

Overview

On June 21, 1921, publisher Frederic G. Melcher (of *Good Housekeeping* fame) proposed to the American Library Association that a medal be given for the most distinguished children's book of the year, suggesting that it be named in honor of the eighteenth-century bookseller, John Newbery. Since 1922, the Newbery Medal has been awarded to 78 books of assorted themes, genres, narrative complexities, and ideological orientations (with several hundred titles selected as runner-ups or Honor Books over the years). The first such award in the world, the Medal has had a profound impact on the field of children's literature, on K-12 education, and on children's publishing. The winners constitute a canon of modern-day children's classics; they stay in print for decades (some have never been out of print), and influence as well as document our social values and national priorities – some consistent, some not. For instance, in the 1920s and 1930s, when America was ostensibly less "imperialist" and more domestically inclined, eight of the first eighteen Medal books addressed foreign cultures or indigenous groups in the Americas. In the 1940s, the winning books were often patriotic and militaristic in theme; both *Daniel Boone* (1940) and *Johnny Tremain* (1944) share a fascination with the frontier and manifest destiny. Utopian/dystopian fantasy and science fiction became more popular after the 1950s, and since the late 1960s and the rise of "New Realism" in young adult writing, family drama and dysfunction have taken center stage.

Weirdly, there has been almost no research on the Newbery canon and its influence and significance in our culture, and that larger issue will be our primary concern in this class. We'll read a fair sampling of the books, and make use of a range of secondary materials as well. We'll

also explore the role of the Newbery books in the K-12 curriculum, since many are taught or recommended as supplemental reading.

Because we are a small class, we have the opportunity to work together closely and share resources. I'd like everyone to feel free to bring in related material and to think of the class not only as a seminar, but also a collaborative venture. Please do come to class prepared. I'm really looking forward to the class.

A complete list of the Newbery Medal Winners and Honor Books can be found at the following website of the American Library Association: <http://ala.org/alsc/newbpast.html>

Assignments and Grading

Four short reports	40%
Final essay	40%
Participation	20%

Your grade will be based entirely on your writing and participation; there are no quizzes or exams. We may want to make some changes, but here's what I envision now:

Over the course of the semester, you will write four short reports of 3-4 typed, double-spaced pages each. In each of these papers, you will evaluate a Newbery Medal book of your choosing from the decade we're studying or from a different period, but the same genre or author. You may concentrate on any aspect(s) you like; you need only to provide some kind of assessment or argument and to support your interpretation. You may want to offer a comparative analysis, or to bring in other primary or secondary sources. Some biographical information is fine, but these reports should be evaluative or critical in focus. You may choose not only the books you'd like to examine, but also the weeks you'd like to turn them in – whenever the schedule below says "Reports." (But only one a week, please.) Please bring these to class and be prepared to talk about your work – also, please make copies of your reports for the other class members as well as me. These reports should be as polished and error-free as possible, but they do not have to be definitive or formal; it's fine to speculate, to use first-person voice, and to experiment with style if that helps deliver the message. You may also include other material, such as excerpts from acceptance speeches, related readings, lesson plans, etc.

The final essay will be a shortish seminar paper, on the Newbery topic of your choice. Any critical approach is fine, as long as you offer a sustained argument or narrative. Your final essay may grow out of a report, or your response to someone else's report; that's great. For graduate students, the essay should run 15-20 typed, double-spaced pages. For undergraduate students, 8-10 typed, double-spaced pages will suffice. (Undergrads: you will later be registered under a different course number since you can't receive graduate credit. Thus the difference in essay length.)

Any changes in policy will be put in writing and distributed to everyone.

Tentative Reading Schedule

August

21 Introductions.

September

- 5 1920s. Lofting, *The Voyages of Doctor Dolittle*. Nodelman, "History as Fiction..."
Rita Smith, Curator of the Baldwin, will join us.
12 1930s. Coatsworth, *The Cat Who Went to Heaven*; Meigs, *Invincible Louisa*.
Selection from J. Radway's *A Feeling for Books*.
19 1940s. Forbes, *Johnny Tremain*. Reports.
26 1950s. Clark, *Secret of the Andes*; Speare, *The Witch of Blackbird Pond*.

October

- 3 1960s. Konigsburg, *From the Mixed-Up Files....* Reports.
10 1970s. Armstrong, *Sounder*; O'Brien, *Mrs. Frisby and the Rats of NIMH*.
17 1970s cont. Raskin, *The Westing Game*. Paterson, *Bridge to Terabithia*.
24 1980s. Freedman, *Lincoln: A Photobiography*. Reports.
31 Reading(s) TBA. Reports.

November

- 7 1980s cont. TBA/Reports.
14 Reading(s) TBA/Reports. We can continue with contemporary works, or return to
earlier periods/genres/issues.
21 1990s. Sachar, *Holes*? Reports.
28 Hesse, *Out of the Dust*. Reports.

December

- 5 Curtis, *Bud, Not Buddy?* **Final essay due.**