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6.1 Final Paper

Through the past six weeks we have learned many things about books and why some have been looked at as great classics, award winners or just good books. This week we have been given a quote that we need to focus on which is by Louise Bernikow; she says, "What is commonly called literary history is actually a record of choices." This is a perfect quote I feel for what we have learned and studied over the past five modules. This statement holds truth to what I have found out about how awards are given, what makes books classics. It is not about the awards or recognition is about how a book is chosen by a reader and how that reader can connect with that book and that in return makes a book a long lasting classic.

In the first week we were introduced to many awards that are given out in the area of children's literature. The awards that I focused on were the Jane Addams, Schneider Family, Orbis Pictus, and the Scott O'Dell Awards. I was asked to look at these awards and see what a books needs to be in order to be considered to be the book chosen. When I researched these awards I found out that these as well as many others that my classmates researched are given to books for many different and unique reasons. For instance my awards that I researched were given for books that speak out against prejudice, deal with children with special needs, were written with a setting of the Americas and about individuals who have made a difference in the world. After researching these books I had the opportunity to read a few of the books that were chosen for these awards, These books that I read are now part of the history of children's literature because the were chosen above others that were written in the same year. For instance I read a great book called, "The Pirate of Kindergarten". In this book a young girl is forced to wear an eye patch because she has a lazy eye. The question is why was this book awarded the Schneider Family Award when there were so many choices out there. That is what makes the history of great books in children's literature so unique.

In all of the awards were learned in Module One there were a group of individuals who have been chosen to be the say for what book is the best. These individuals have a huge say in the world of children's literature. The power that is held is greater than many would think but if you think about it in this light that whatever book is chosen as the "best" will now forever be looked at as a "great" book. Individuals; especially teacher go out and by the books that have been given awards because of the mere fact that the book must be really good because it won the award. We all know that there are thousands of books published every year but we only read a few. Books can really make it through the test of time and find a reader only if they are chosen. It really helps a book when it gets publicity but it doesn't mean that it will last through the ages and will still be chosen as a "great" book to read as we found out in the next week with "Charlotte's Web" and the "Secret of the Andes".

In Week 2 we were introduced to the Newberry Award and the criteria that is set in place for books to be eligible to win this award. The Newberry Award is given to the book that contributes the most to Children's Literature. In this week we discovered that this award even though it is given to the "best" book doesn't always mean that the book is truly the "best" When thinking about the quote earlier the Newberry Award truly fits within it. The Newberry Award chooses the best book and that book like other awards are labeled in history as the "best" of that year. Even though it is given the title does not truly make the book the best choice for children.

We read two books in this Module; *The Secret of the Andes* and *Charlotte's Web*. When given this task I was excited because I was given the chance to read one of my favorite books; *Charlotte's Web*. In my mind before this class I never noticed that the medal that was on the front cover of this book was just an honor award and not an actual award. I was shocked when I discovered this new found truth and was shocked to see that the other book that I was to read was the actual winner. In my mind award winning books have to be the "best" and if *Charlotte's Web* is such a great book then this other book should blow my mind. I read *The Secret of the Andes* and I did enjoy the book but when I started to question why that book won and discussed this over a few days with my group members I truly started to see that these awards are really not the best choice of finding a great book for myself. In the quote it says that history of reading is all about choices and that is what it is. In this case the Newberry panel chose *The Secret of the Andes* because they felt it was the best piece of literature in that year. As you look now in 2011 the only recognition that this book still has is the history of it winning an award in the past. When you look at *Charlotte's Web* you see more than just a choice and an award. You see a piece of literature that has passed the times and is still relevant to readers of today. I have never heard of *The Secret of the Andes* but on the other side you have *Charlotte's Web* that has now become so popular that there have been two movies created to depict this long lasting story.

The question that I have now is, should history in literature be rewritten to make sure that books that are not recognized get the recognition that they deserve. When thinking of this question I would have to say that the answer to it should be a no. History of literature is about choices but these choices do not have to be made by award panels; children and adults who read these books for the joy of reading can make these choices. *Charlotte's Web* didn't need to be chosen by a panel to be a part of the history of great children's literature. Its readers chose it as a book that the readers could relate to and learn from. This module has shown me more than ever that the history of children's literature is created more by the passion of readers than the medals of panels.

In Week 3 we were introduced to the Caldecott Award and the criteria that it sets forth to choose its book winner. In this module we were given the opportunity to look at the difference between two books that had the same story line but different illustrations. The Caldecott as I learned this module is given to the book with the

most outstanding illustrations in a children's book. In the assignment we had to see what made a certain book "better" than another just based upon how the illustrator used different methods of art. I learned a lot from this week in this area of methods that illustrators use from mediums, page design, views of characters and tones. All of this is put into play when the Caldecott judges have to pick a winner. The problem that my group and myself discovered with this is that if a book has great illustrations than it can beat a book that may have a greater story line, message or teaching. For example we were asked this question and I really thought the book, "The Man Who Walks the Towers" should have won because first it did have great illustrations but also because it had a great story that was relevant as it came out a few years after 9-11 occurred. This is where the quote from Bernikow comes back into play. The book that won the Caldecott same year as the "Man Who Walks the Towers" came out just won the award and now will forever be recognized as a "winning" book but in reality that may be all that it is remembered for. On the other hand the Twin Towers book did not win the main award but may be read more by children and used in classrooms by teachers to teach a lesson in History of America's past. So just because the history of literature is chosen by a few doesn't mean that a book that wasn't chosen by a few will last longer and make a bigger impact on the lives of children.

Also in this week I was asked to pick a picture book to focus on and the one I focused on is the book, "The Lion and the Mouse" written by Pinkney. This book won the Caldecott Award and in my mind is truly deserving. The book had a great message of friendship and trust and the illustrations were beautiful. This book was chosen by the panel but unlike other books that have won awards this one I feel will be a book that one day will be labeled by many as a "Classic" book in Children's Literature.

In Week 4 we were asked to think about what makes a children's book more than just a book but a "classic". As a class we were asked to list the books that we feel are classics. When looking at that list my group and I decided what we felt were the criteria that made a book a classic book. We then dove into the classic book, "The Tale of Peter Rabbit". We had to see if this book met the criteria that we created and discuss why it was a classic. "The Take of Peter Rabbit", in my mind is a classic and it was made into a classic in a way that is different than other books that have won awards. This book has been labeled a classic because it has been around since the 1800's and has stayed relevant to children and adults even when the world around the book has changed. The phrase that this paper is focused around speaks of how the history of children's literature is a record of choices and it is so true and in this module we learned how the readers who read them choose books as classics. That is what sets these books apart from others. We read Charlotte's Web and the majority of the class chose that as a classic book as well. Charlotte's Web just like The Tale of Peter Rabbit have a few things in common that make them great books even though the times in which they were written is much different then the world we live in now. Both of these books are: well known, moved through generations, story and characters are relevant to children, enjoyable to read, teachable, written with high quality. That is what makes them chosen as a classic book and that is why when you

ask anyone from the past, today and in the future if these books are “classics” they will say yes. These books are some of the greatest books in the history of children’s literature and that is because readers have chosen them because they meet criteria that make books enjoyable to read and books that you just don’t want to put down.

Also in week 5 and through week 6 we also were looking into another classic book, “Little Women”. This book like *The Tale of Peter Rabbit* was written and published in the 1800’s. I was pleasantly surprised when I read *Little Women* because to be honest when we were given the task I was not very pleased that this was the book we were going to be studying because I thought to myself how can I connect to this book? I guess the reason that my questions of how I can connect was answer over and over again as I read the book shows me that this book truly is a classic. I have always heard of the book and movie, *Little Women* but have never had the desire to read a “girly” book as I thought it was. Earlier I stated the criteria that my group had established to see if a book was truly a “classic”. After I have read *Little Women* I truly see why it is a classic because not only did it meet the criteria it exceeded it tremendously.

I did exactly what the Bernikow quote states, I have chosen this book to be a classic just like thousands of readers have done through the past century. *Little Women* truly is on top or near the top of the greatest book in the history of Children’s Literature. This book even though from the exterior looks like a book just about the growth of sisters is much more than that. This book is so relevant to ever reader out there because it teaches so many lessons to it’s readers, plus the characters in the book are so easy to relate to that you really feel the things that they are going through. *Little Women* has changed the lives of readers over and over again and now my life included.

This book just like *Charlotte’s Web* has made such a huge impact on the readers that have read them that Hollywood has turned these books into movies. Film directors have chosen these books to display on film because these stories are so amazing and now that they have hit the big screen more individuals have been aware of these books and have opened up their pages and have seen what so many others have seen; a great classic story. Because of this awareness more individuals have chosen this book to read and that is what makes them a huge part in the history of children’s literature.

Bernikow has hit the nail on the head on the statement that we are focusing on. “What is commonly called literary history is actually a record of choices.” This quote as I have shown you in this paper is so true because the history of literature has been laid out for us based upon what individuals on award boards, master’s classes and young readers have chosen as best. Some books are chosen by boards and others by readers but no matter how they are chosen, if they are “great” books that make connections with their readers and whose themes run true even when the world around them changes then they will become part of the history of children’s literature. This class has really opened my eyes to the world of Children’s Literature

and all of the things that it is composed of. Before this class I looked at children's books as no more than just that; books. Now I have found that these books are more than that, they are tools for teaching students in the classroom and out. Books like Little Women and Charlotte's Web have and will continue to teach children lessons that will further them in their lives .As these young readers continue to find new books and new joys of reading then they will continue to chose books that will change the history of Children's Literature in one way or another.