

Changes, Changes: *First Opinions, Second Reactions* Documents Its Second Year

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At a certain point this year, Janet and I began to think about the problems with our editorial style. Both of us are always looking for new ways to approach literature written for an audience that ranges from birth to high school graduation. And we have both always been concerned about hearing what teachers, librarians, and parents have to say about the current publications for the children and young adults they are involved with daily, whether they are teaching them or are guiding their reading selections at home. Whenever we get together, our first question is “What if?”—and sometimes that causes us to innovate when we should be pragmatic. This double issue for our second year is a result of our inquisitive style. We could argue that this issue is a good product for our approach. We tried something new in our approach, and we learned a lot.

Janet and I decided early in the year that we wanted to consider having paired books reviewed so that we could see how one topic could be addressed in divergent ways. It fit with our idea of “first opinions, second reactions.” We believed that combining books for our reviewers could easily fit this approach in every issue of this e-journal. Once we began gathering books and reviewers for this issue, we realized that the idea is harder to perfect than we imagined. For one thing, teachers in the schools do not have enough hours in their classrooms to share several pieces of literature that have just been published. They are asked to meet the needs of state and national standards, and they often have to place literature on the back burner. That slows down the process for the school librarians and teachers who are working on second reactions. And, since we privilege those interactions in our conversations, we wanted our e-journal reviewers to have the time to share the books they were sent. The “first opinions” cannot enlighten us—and you—about the reactions of the publishers’ first audiences unless they are combined with those “second opinions” that show us what happens to the books when they are shared with real children and young adults. At the same time, we noticed that we were burdening the teachers and librarians we turned to, and we learned that we cannot expect to have an issue like this every time.

We also tried asking authors and artists whose books are reviewed in this issue to comment on our topic for the issue. This, we believe, has been successful. As you read Andrea Warren’s commentary, you will find much insight on the personal interactions that can cause an author to research and write about a certain topic. We also discovered that not every author or artist has the time to answer our call for a “think piece” about the creative process. We have been privileged to have Eve Tal and Christopher Cheng on

our Editorial Board, and they have always been willing to suggest topics for discussion, find teacher/librarians in their countries for reviews, and submit pieces to the journal. We thought this would always be true, but it is not. While other authors and illustrators might not have the time we ask, some have been most helpful. Therefore, we will pursue this insight into publishing children's and young adult literature for every issue.

Finally, Janet and I began to realize that we need the input of more readers. We have only had one "final word" in our first two years, and this is a commentary we had hoped would happen often and with vigor. We were excited to see Philip Nel weigh in on *The Dangerous Alphabet*, and we hope to see more commentaries like this. We also hope that teachers and librarians will contact us and help us as contributors of second reactions in our issues next year. We know lots of people we trust, but we want a larger voice in our e-journal. We hope you will contact us.

This double issue is actually very appropriate to the field at this moment. In 1991, Suzanne Rahn explained that historical fiction and nonfiction for children began "flowering" after World War II (13), and she argued that historical fiction must be written so that its readership could "enjoy the past" (23). The books selected for this issue, we believe, brought history to life because they used actual documents from history to frame their discussions and/or illustrations. We hope that some of our "first opinions, second reactions" cause you to turn to the books discussed and cause you to write a "final word" that addresses those pieces of documented history embedded in the books reviewed.

References

Rahn, Suzanne. "An Evolving Past: The Story of Historical Fiction and Nonfiction for Children." *Lion and the Unicorn*. 13.1 (1991): 1-26.