

Honoring the “Honor” Books

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Each year when I find out the title of the latest Newbery Medal winner, I immediately go to Amazon.com and order it. I then consume the book fully, as soon as it arrives, thinking of how it might be integrated into my future classes and even scholarship. I’m sure many of you, our readers, do the same. Most English and language arts teachers as well as teacher educators are familiar with the Newbery Award and the affiliated Newbery Honor books.

The Newbery Medal, according to the Association for Library Service to Children (ALSC) website, “is awarded annually by the Association for Library Service to Children, a division of the American Library Association, to the author of the most distinguished contribution to American literature for children.” In addition to the medal, the association also names two to four “Honor books” which it finds worthy of high praise, but not the medal itself. While planning this issue, we agreed that while we love the medal winners, we also consistently enjoy reading the Honor books—sometimes even more than the medal winners. So, we decided to dedicate this issue of *FOSR* to these Honor books.

For this issue we asked reviewers to tackle Newbery Honor books from 2015 and 2016. The books chosen address topics including disability, race, language, ethnicity, and coming of age—all topics of great interest to young readers. The five books included in this issue seem to have some commonalities, namely a focus on character or characterization and how the young protagonists survive and grow in a demanding, and even confrontational, world. How do the young protagonists come to terms with differentiating from friends (*Roller Girl*), physical disabilities (*El Deafo* and *The War That Saved My Life*), racial prejudice (*Brown Girl Dreaming*), and religious persecution (*Echo*)—all the while just trying to become happy and functioning adults? These challenges are difficult for the most mature and secure among us; they are nearly overwhelming for the young teens in these novels. However, despite the odds set against them, in each text the young protagonists learn, survive, and even thrive despite the world’s many obstacles.

We hope you enjoy reading the first opinions and second reactions in this issue and are inspired to reach for even more Newbery Honor books in the future—in addition, of course, to those amazing medal winners.

Works Cited

ALSC. “Welcome to the Newbery Medal Home Page!” ALA, <http://www.ala.org/alsc/awards-grants/bookmedia/newberymedal/newberymedal>