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" What is commonly called *literary history* is actually a record of choices." --Louise Bernikow

Over the past 12 weeks, I have had a great chance to examine literary history and the choices that have affected that history. I have been able to get a more complete look by getting a different slice of the pie each week. Beginning by examining what I considered a good book. While at first glance, I thought this was quite a simple assignment it was quite personal and introspective. This gave me an inside look into my own literary history. Then we moved to the awards, which have greatly influenced the literary history. The Newbery, Caldecott, Pura Belpre, Michael L Printz, and the Coretta Scott King awards to name a few, these children awards have helped acknowledge quality pieces of literature. Then on to the "classics" and even with a group consensus to create criteria, classics have something that is indescribable. We examined all of this work, which has led me to the fact that "It takes a great deal of history to produce a little literature." - Henry James

From the beginning of the class we began by examining our choices of what a good book was to us. These were clearly very personal choices and it was interesting to read everyone's choice all different and for very specific reasons. The discussion of good books made it clear to me, the important role that family plays in my own literary history and determining the choices I make. In addition, I saw the influence of education and the positive impact it had on my views and experiences with literature early on. My own upbringing has had a great impact on the way I see and encounter literature.

Our literary history has been greatly influenced by the addition of awards to the field of children literature in 1922 with the creation of the Newbery medal. It began with the Newbery and then the Caldecott and so many others to follow. These choices for winners have influenced the books teachers select to share with their class, books mothers select to read to their children, and the books that stores decided to sell. The decision to create different awards such as the Coretta Scott King, Pura Belpre, and the Michael L. Printz were done with great awareness. The literary world saw the lack of diversity in children's literature and made a choice to include and

honor this important part of our literary history. They have also thrust multicultural and diverse literature into the spotlight. It was clear that different committees selected based on a specific standards. These books are then singled out with a shiny emblem on the front cover. Early on it was clear from the awards research that the choices that the committees made were very subjective. I found this award was the most controversial and with just cause. The Newbery made that very apparent, after reading Parravano and Strauss' article. They both questioned the relevance of the Newbery to today's reader. I found both of these articles quite valid and made me question the Newbery. Parravano at the end states "Ultimately what's important isn't the one book chosen each year by a particular committee. It's that they choose at all, and that they use the highest literary standards to do so. It's that we all care so passionately that the best book be chosen, whatever the "best" is for each of us." The committee was trying to "encourage original creative work in the field of books for children." Early on in the field of literature there weren't many books for children. This award helped fuel literary history for children by putting forth extraordinary works of literature to the forefront every January. When my group examined the Secret of the Andes and Charlotte's Web, it was clear that we unanimously picked Charlotte's Web as our favorite. That choice is probably why Charlotte's Web has become a beloved classic and The Secret of the Andes is a dated book that no one remembers. I think that when I reflected on the Newbery, I focused to heavily on the choices that the committee made and the fact that the choices of adults didn't blend with the choices that children would make. I think that it is important to remember the point of the Newbery medal. When I looked at the Newbery I needed to look beyond what my favorites were and the books that I enjoyed, and examine the books that were chosen as winners. I think that there are distinct differences between award winners and classics, which are why most of the time the two, don't merge. The reason books live on and become classics is because they are loved, read, and shared. Bernikow's quote is speaking to the choice that was made to single out exceptional pieces of literature that represented literature that were of literary merit.

I was able to gain a greater knowledge of each award when I examined Small Steps by Louis Sachar, a Schneider Family award winner, New Year at the Pier by April Halprin Wayland illustrated by Stephane Jorsch, a Sydney Taylor award winner, Book Fiesta by Pat Mora and illustrated by Rafael Lopez, a Pura Belpre award winner, and Tar Beach by Faith Ringgold, a Coretta Scott King award winner. I was thoroughly impressed with each of my selections and found that other

than the novel each book would become a great addition to my classroom library. I knew that when the committee selected these books it was done with careful consideration for addressing the sometimes-touchy issues of race, cultural diversity, and living with special needs. Even though I thought these issues to be beyond my students, another group member stated that these would make for a great springboard to discuss sensitive topics deeper.

When looking at the Caldecott I was impressed with the array of different types of illustration techniques. I was amazed that I didn't know what the Caldecott award was chosen for the best illustrations. I found that many of the choices for winners and honors are part of our literary history. Book such as *Madeline*, *Make Way for Duckling*, *The Snowy Day*, *Where the Wild Things are*, *Swimmy*, and *The Polar Express*. I find myself selecting these books to purchase with little knowledge about the book, just on the basis that they had won. I chose to share these books with my class. I tend to gravitate towards these books with seals and emblems on them because I feel that they must be quality pieces of literature.

It was fascinating taking a closer look at the elements of illustrations. My group had a discussion of the choices that illustrators had to make to depict their vision of the book. The book I examined *House in the Night* by Beth Krommes. It was amazing the creative license that the authors give some of the illustrators to depict their vision of the story. *House in the Night* was a chance for me to examine the choices that an illustrator is faced with when illustrating a book. The use of different illustrative techniques can make a big difference between a book being part of our literary history- a Caldecott winner and just being another pretty picture book. The chance to read the acceptance speech offers the reader insight into the choices, depth, and thought that the illustrator provides. I was unaware of the many layers that an illustrator uses each time when I am I select a book to read to my class or at home to my son.

As we moved on to the module that dealt with classics, it was obvious that these books were guided by choices. The choice to pick up the book, the choice to read it, the choice to talk about and discuss the book, and the choice to then share this book with students, siblings, and children. Readers decide what makes a classic. I think a book reaching classic status is tied to the group of people and culture, who are selecting the literature. I think that our literary history probably looks much different from the literary history of other countries. This is because we select books that we relate to and I found this apparent

because all of the students in my group came from similar backgrounds, thus affecting the similarities in the books that we selected. I found it noteworthy looking at the books that everyone chose as their classic literature. The list was long and with few exceptions I agreed. I also liked reading the reasons why they considered these books classics. Then our group worked together to figure out criteria for how these books become part of literary history. We all agreed on books that were 10 years or older, timeless, universal story with a moral, and it exists in other forms of media.

We examined Peter Rabbit with my group's newly formed criteria for what makes a classic. Peter Rabbit has become part of our literary history because it has had something to offer generations of children. This book with its universal themes, existing in other forms of media, timeless, and a story with a moral helped make this book qualify as a classic. The strategy that Beatrix Potter used to make her book continue on, she was one of the first authors to commercialize her book through the use of merchandise. While now a days this is the norm with Eric Carle's The Hungry Little Caterpillar bedroom sets, Dr. Seuss' Cat in the Hat bathroom décor, and Curious George clothing. This helped Peter Rabbit live on to become "the" book that children and adults associate with Easter.

Then we examined a classic in a different form, Little Women. This book was all encompassing; it possessed all of our classic characteristics. This book has continued to live on and become part of our literary history because of its numerous timeless themes. While at first look this book harks back to a time period, which feels dated. However at second look this book because of its themes, universal appeal, and the emotional reaction one feels has made Little Women discussed, reviewed, and lived on through its scholarship. Whether it was good or bad, people continue to discuss this book. It has lived on through many different film interpretations.

It was interesting comparing the two movies with the times in which they were released. It was apparent that the movies were changed to fit with the norms of society at the time. The choice of the directors to alter the movies has made them more agreeable with the audience of the time, thus making viewers more interested in Little Women. This continued Little Women in our literary history.

Little Women was rich with many universal themes, which was one of our criteria for a classic. I chose to focus on family duty vs. personal growth. This theme was way ahead of its time in the 1860s. While

Louisa May Alcott depicts a girl who bucks the times by being her own person, in the end she ends up following her womanly duty to be a wife and mother instead of an author. Alcott struggled with depicting the Jo that was an activist, early feminist, and an author a lot like herself and the Jo that was acceptable at the time, a wife and mother.

By examining all of the articles about Little Women over time, it was clear that this book stuck around for a reason. There were different opinions to explain why whether it was for its sentimentality like Brophy states or for the fact that readers became almost obsessed with Louisa May Alcott like Barrett states in her article. It was interesting to see how perspective changed just like the times had changed. It has become part of our literary history because so many people have chosen to continue reading and sharing this classic.

Toward the end of this class we had to choose a pairing of an award winning book and a classic piece of literature. My group chose *Monster* and *The Adventures of Huckleberry Fin*. Both books of which I had never read and probably wouldn't ever have chosen to read. Both books are tales of boys growing up through a journey that they have to make. We examined these books through the use of Literature Discussion Groups. This allowed me to examine the books from different perspectives. I was able to see *Monster* through my own personal eyes and react as such. I was able to view *The Adventures of Huckleberry Fin* through my eyes as an educator. These activities gave me a chance to examine the use of Literature Discussion Groups and how I could use them as a reader and as a kindergarten teacher. The group discussion was fueled by poignant and well thought out questions posed from each perspective offered our group a chance to dig deeper and examine the books.

How does this class apply to me as a kindergarten teacher? I think that it has made me more aware of the role that I play in my student's history with literature. I need to share books that I find to be good books in order to expose my students and allow them to form an opinion of what they consider good books. I need to expose my students to award winning books and offer them information about the awards, especially the Caldecott and the multicultural awards such as the Coretta Scott King medal. I know that I have shared these winners with my students but I haven't provided them with any information on what was the seal's significance. Another duty after participating in this class is to introduce my students to classic children's literature. These types of literature still have many things to

offer readers of today. My students are part of literary history and the choices they make will influence the history of children's literature.

When thinking of Bernikow's quote, it makes me reminisce on the many choices and decisions that have been made to get us to what we now consider children's literature. The reason that the Newbery was created was because there was a lack of literature for children. I grew up in a household with a variety of different children's books. I can't imagine a world in which there isn't ample selection of literature for children. I think of "a record of choices" when I think of the "classic" literature I have encountered in this course. I think about the fact that some books continue to be picked up and continue to be read. I think of the known criteria we made for what makes a "classic" and the unknown qualities that these books possess. The fact that they are continued to be chosen; they have changed a book's status from a good book to a "classic."

"Books are divided into two classes, the books of the hour and the books of all time." John Ruskin