

**YALSA Board of Directors Meeting
ALA Annual Conference, Anaheim
June 22 – 26, 2012**

Topic: Nonfiction Award Committee Manual

Background: In their 2012 Midwinter report to the YALSA Board, the Awards & Lists Evaluation Taskforce recommended the establishment of a taskforce to develop a manual for the Nonfiction Award Committee. The board approved this recommendation and the committee has submitted a first draft of the manual for board consideration.

Action Required: Discussion

**YALSA Award for Excellence in Nonfiction for Young Adults
Chair's Manual
DRAFT**

Definition

An award for the best nonfiction book published for young adults (ages 12-18) during a January 1 - December 31 publishing year.

Purpose

The award will:

- Item #1. Recognize the best in the field of nonfiction books for young adults
- Item #2. Promote the growing number of nonfiction books published for young adults
- Item #3. Inspire wider readership in the genre
- Item #4. Give recognition to the importance of the genre
- Item #5. Position YALSA as an authority in the field of nonfiction for young adults

Committee Charge

To annually select the best nonfiction title published for young adults between January 1 and December 31 of the current year, available in English in the United States and, if desired, to also select honor t

The Committee shall consist of a chair, eight members, a Booklist consultant, and an administrative assistant if the Chair requests. The Chair and four members will be appointed by the President-Elect of YALSA. The remaining four members will be elected by the membership of YALSA.

Members serve a twelve month term beginning February 1 through the announcement of the award at the next Midwinter. Some members will be elected in May and some appointed in the following months.

In consultation with the Chair, YALSA's President-Elect may appoint an administrative assistant for the term. The administrative assistant is not a voting member.

Committee members will begin reading titles when their term begins on February 1, including titles published in January of that year. The announcement of winners will take place at the Midwinter twelve months from that point.

All members are required to attend all Award Committee meetings held during the selection process. In the event a member is unable to complete her/his term, the President of YALSA shall appoint a replacement from among qualified YALSA members.

The chair is a voting member of the committee with all the rights and responsibilities of other members. In addition, the chair presides at all meetings of the committee and serves as a facilitator of both discussion and committee business. As such, the chair must serve as a list owner of an electronic discussion list created through the YALSA office solely for use by the committee, and take responsibility for list maintenance. The chair (and the administrative assistant) have sole responsibility for any contact with publishers. The chair is also encouraged to attend the ALA Annual Conference and/or any YALSA event where the Award winner will be honored.

Committee Calendar

November	In-coming chair reviews committee ethics, policies, procedures and manual in preparation for coming year
December	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Chair reviews committee roster and initiates committee member introductions• Chair sets expectations with the committee and explains his/her management style• Chair recommends reading and other preparations, as appropriate, to prepare the committee members for their task, providing particular support to members who have not served on an award committee before
January	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Out-going & in-coming chair touch base to share information and

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late October/early November	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Set up conference call times with Nichole Gilbert, and share procedure with committee members.• Chair may be asked by <i>YALS</i> editor to write an article for the spring issue about the award.
November	

- ! The chair, with assistance from designated YALSA staff, is responsible for verifying the eligibility of all requested, received, and nominated titles.
- ! The award will be presented to the author(s) of the winning and honor titles at a ceremony at an ALA or YALSA conference.

Criteria for Excellence in Nonfiction
(see Appendices 1-3 for more detail)

Excellent narrative writing (plot is well developed, strong characterization and character development, rich sense of time and place)

Excellent descriptive writing (strong images depicted through vivid sensory details)

Excellent expository writing (clear, readable language that communicates ideas and concepts effectively)

Excellent persuasive writing (sound logic and reasoning, clear progression of ideas)

Excellent book design (distinctive interaction between text and illustrations)

Excellent organization (logical sequence that promotes the material of the book)

Excellent authority (using the conventions of research and scholarship, the author transparently documents the accuracy of their sources and provides a trail for readers to further explore content)

A text need not have all of these features, but should contain excellence in those criteria which are pertinent to it.

Confidentiality

There will be no announcements of nominated titles until the announcement of the finalist titles in early December. When the winning title and honor titles are announced at the ALA Midwinter Meeting, the vetted list of nominated titles will be published as well. All committee meetings and discussions, including electronic discussions, are closed to YALSA membership and the general public.

Suggestions for Reading and Nominating

Committee members suggest titles beginning in February. Suggestions for committee reading should be sent through the listserv and include the following information: author, title, publisher, ISBN and publication date. The chair and administrative assistant will request from the publishers that suggested titles be sent to the committee.

Committee members must keep up a consistent schedule for reading throughout the committee year. As members read titles suggested by the committee or received from publishers, they should recommend any that are award-worthy to the committee as a whole for further evaluation. These recommendations should be made as titles are discovered, and listserv discussion should be encouraged throughout the year. This allows committee members to reflect on what their peers consider to be award-worthy titles and narrows the list, leading to more efficient and productive meetings.

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Throughout the year, committee members nominate titles they believe should be considered for the award. Nominations made before June 1 (or a date determined by the Chair) are to be discussed in person at the Annual Conference meetings. Nominations after that date will be discussed during the first November conference call.

Nominations should be made using the official online form available on the YALSA Award for

ALA Connect

narrative arcs, while *Amelia Lost*, on the other hand, uses a tightly crafted nonlinear plot, alternating narrative strands, and cliffhangers to heighten suspense.

Character

Characterization refers to the degree that characters resemble real people (that is, that characters talk and think and feel as real people do), while character development refers to the way that characters grow and change over the course of a story. Character is a particular strength of the nonfiction genres of memoir and biography.

The first Nonfiction Award winning books—*Charles and Emma*, *Janis Joplin*, and *The Notorious Benedict Arnold*—are all biographies and thus, not surprisingly, they all feature excellent nonfiction models of characterization and character development.

Setting

Setting refers to the time and place of a story. Since many nonfiction books prominently feature photographs and illustrations, it is not uncommon for the setting to be developed in both words and pictures.

Sometimes the setting is such an integral part of the fabric of a story that it is inconceivable that it could have happened in another time and place (such as *Almost Astronauts* or *Claudette Colvin*), sometimes a book is as much about the setting as it is about the plot or the characters (such as *Bootleg* or *They Called Themselves the KKK*), and sometimes the setting plays a crucial supporting role (such as *The Great and Only Barnum* or

Style

Style refers to the sentence level writing in a book that gives it a distinctive voice. Style is of paramount importance in excellent descriptive writing and excellent expository writing and will be discussed in greater detail in those sections.

Theme

Theme refers to the recurring motifs in a story. It is often confused with subject and message. To illustrate the difference, we might take a book—*Charles and Emma*, for example—and ask: what is it about? On one level, it is about the relationship between Charles and Emma Darwin; this is its subject. On another level, it is about love conquering all; this is its message. And on yet another level, it is about the conflict between religion and science; this is its theme. In nonfiction, the distinction between the three sometimes becomes very tenuous.

Indeed, the words “theme” and “concept” are often used interchangeably, although the latter often connotes an organizational principle as well. For example, both *The Dark Game* and *Every Bone Tells a Story* are made up of individual episodes that are connected by the concepts that are telegraphed in their respective subtitles: *True Spy Stories* and *Hominin Discoveries, Deductions, and Debates*.

DESCRIPTIVE WRITING

The descriptive domain of writing is concerned with presenting strong images through vivid sensory details. To this end, descriptive language can include metaphors, similes, figurative language, and rich vocabulary. The opening paragraph of *The Notorious Benedict Arnold*, for example, reads thus: “It was a beautiful place to die. The sky above the woods glowed blue, and the leaves on the trees were a riot of fall colors: sunshine yellow, campfire orange, blood red.” Note how these sentences play to the visual sense, especially in their depiction of color with the use of a metaphor (“a riot of fall colors”), strong verbs (a blue sky so bright it “glowed”), and nouns-as-adjectives to further denote a particular shade of color (“sunshine yellow, campfire orange, blood red”).

Note also that while this is an excellent example of descriptive writing, it also serves the narrative domain as well: this paragraph establishes the setting, but “blood red” coupled with the first sentence—“It was a beautiful place to die”—also establishes a darkly ominous tone and foreshadows events to come.

EXPOSITORY WRITING

The expository domain of writing is concerned with explaining information. Obviously, the presentation of information—the way a book is organized and designed—can significantly impact this. Another important factor is the logical progression of ideas, including (but not limited to) cause and effect, analogies, and patterns (abstract to concrete, simple to complex, general to specific).

Language is the final piece of the expository writing puzzle. Some genres of fiction and poetry prize language that does not yield a full appreciation on a first reading, but exemplary expository writing is not among them. Rather, expository language should be stimulating, but also lucid and readable.

PERSUASIVE WRITING

DESIGN

In the best design there is a symbiotic relationship between the text and the graphics such that the total is greater than the sum of its parts. The most obvious element of design is the inclusion and placement of visual elements—such as maps, charts, tables, photographs, and illustrations.

But design also extends to the production values of a book: trim size (the height and width dimensions of the physical book), paper stock (matte or glossy), ink color (color, sepia, black and white), and typography (font type, font size, line spacing).

employ a very specific microcosm to convey general information? Surely, these are nonfiction despite their slightly fictionalized constructs.

A text need not have excellence in every single criterion, but it should be excellent in those criteria which pertain to it. A book should be evaluated holistically and appreciated for what it is rather than what it is not. This is all part and parcel of the messy business of evaluating books on their own merits and comparing and contrasting those merits to an entire field of books. Each

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Organization				
Design				
Authority				

Appendix 4 Recommended Reading

I. Recommended Nonfiction published for Young Adults

Please see the list of Winner and Honor Titles for the YALSA Award for Excellence in Nonfiction for Young Adults, available on the YALSA website.

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Horning, Kathleen T. (2010). Chapter 2: Books of Information (pp 23-44) in *From Cover to Cover: Evaluating and Reviewing Children's Books Revised Edition*. New York: Collins.

Isaacs, Kathleen T. (2011). The Facts of the Matter: Children's Nonfiction, from Then to Now. *The Horn Book Magazine* 87, 2, 10-18.

Isaacs, Kathleen T. (2005). Truth in Information Books. *School Library Journal* 51, no. 7, 28-29.
http://www.schoollibraryjournal.com/slj/printissuecurrentissue/870022-427/truth_in_information_books.html.csp

Nilsen, Alleen Pace and Donelson, Kenneth L. (2009). Chapter 9 Nonfiction: Information, Literary Nonfiction, Biographies, and Self-Help Books (pp. 277-310) in *Literature for Today's Young Adults, 8th edition*. Boston: Pearson.

Sheinken, Steve (2012). Acceptance Speech for the *Notorious Benedict Arnold* at the Boston Globe-Horn Book Awards. *Horn Book* 88, 1, 19-23.
<http://www.hbook.com/2011/12/news/boston-globe-horn-book-awards/the-notorious-benedict-arnold-acceptance-speech/>