



“POPULAR” VS. “AWARD-WINNING” LITERATURE FOR CHILDREN

Mercedes Lyn Jorgensen (Lauren Aimonette Liang)
Department of Educational Psychology

As the field of children’s literature has grown and evolved over the past several years, an increasing number of awards have emerged to recognize quality children’s books. The award lists are developed by committees of adults, but previous research (Lehman, 1991; Nilsen, Peterson & Searfoss, 1980; Ujiié & Krashen, 2002) has shown evidence of a large gap between adult and child preferences in literature. This study seeks to gain an updated picture of the discrepancies between adult-selected “award-winning” literature and literature that is “popular” with children, particularly given the appearance of new awards aimed more at specific age groups and formats. Books from the Newbery Medal, Caldecott Medal, Sibert Medal, and Geisel Award lists from 2010 to 2014 were examined and coded based on several characteristics and compared to top selections on the International Literacy Association’s “Children’s Choices” Award lists for the same years, in order to determine crossover and differences in adult and child literature preference.

The study examined differences in genre, major topic, and other structural characteristics of books between the two general types of awards. In addition, the study looked at possible differences that relate to diversity as there has not been an examination of its presence in child-selected awards in particular, nor consideration of how that may differ from diversity present in adult-selected awards. The results of this study suggest that children and adults continue to express different preferences in their selection of literature, in both literary characteristics and formats. Differences exist for both literary characteristics (tone, genre and protagonist characteristics) and formats (series and type). Selection of individual titles markedly showed the differences; only two titles in the over 150 books examined won both an adult-selected and a child-selected award. No noticeable differences emerged related to presence of ethnic diversity in child-selected vs. adult-selected awards. There was a significant lack of diverse authors, illustrators and characters in both the child- and adult-selected awards, thus mirroring the current lack of diversity in books published in the United States (Horning, Lindgren & Schliesman, 2015). Overall this study suggests that there are considerable differences in what children prefer and what adults select, something that educators, parents and community agencies (e.g. librarians) alike should keep in mind when deciding on books for use with children.

Horning, K. T., Lindgren, M. V., & Schliesman, M. (2015, March). A Few Observations on Publishing in 2014. *CCBC Choices 2015*, 10-12. Retrieved from <http://ccbc.education.wisc.edu/books/choiceintro15.asp>

Lehman, B. A. (1991). Children's Choice and Critical Acclaim: A Unified Perspective for Children's Literature. *Reading, Research and Instruction*, 30(Spring), 1-20.

Nilsen, A. P., Peterson, R., & Searfoss, L. W. (1980). The adult as critic vs. the child as reader. *Language Arts* 57(5), 530-539.

Ujiié, J., & Krashen, S. (2002). Are prize-winning books popular among children? An analysis of public library circulation. *Knowledge Quest*, 31(1) 36-37.

