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COMPARISON OF THE NEWBERY AND BLUEBONNET
AWARDS IN CHILDREN'S
LITERATURE

by

KINSLEY MUNOZ

Presented to the Faculty of the Honors College of
The University of Texas at Arlington in Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements
for the Degree of

HONORS BACHELOR OF ARTS IN EDUCATION

THE UNIVERSITY OF TEXAS AT ARLINGTON

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November 20, 2015

ABSTRACT

COMPARISON OF THE NEWBERY AND BLUEBONNET AWARDS IN CHILDREN'S LITERATURE

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The University of Texas at Arlington, 2015

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Teachers are presented with an increasing amount of quality children's literature for their classrooms. The Newbery and Bluebonnet book awards are two reputable awards that serve as resources for teachers in selecting books to use in their classrooms. This study sought to determine what features teachers could expect to find in either award, thus helping them narrow down their search for quality children's literature. The researcher looked at features including theme, genre, text features, text length, readability, and interest level. The study found that the Bluebonnet Award winners are usually lighthearted, shorter, and of lower readability and interest level. Their Newbery Award winning counterparts are usually longer works with higher readability and interest levels, which deal with bigger issues. The differences discovered among these books, coupled with the criteria for each award, give teachers an additional resource to use in

the search for quality children's literature for their classrooms.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

| | |
|-----------------------------------|------|
| ACKNOWLEDGMENTS | iii |
| ABSTRACT..... | iv |
| LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS..... | viii |
| LIST OF TABLES | ix |
| Chapter | |
| 1. INTRODUCTION | 1 |
| 1.1 Research Question | 1 |
| 1.2 Significance of Research..... | 1 |
| 2. LITERATURE REVIEW | 2 |
| 2.1 Overview..... | 2 |
| 2.2 Award Criteria | 2 |
| 2.2.1 Newbery Award..... | 2 |
| 2.2.2 Bluebonnet Award | 3 |
| 2.3 Relevant Research..... | 4 |
| 3. METHODOLOGY | 6 |
| 4. DISCUSSION..... | 8 |
| 4.1 Themes | 8 |
| 4.2 Genre..... | 14 |
| 4.3 Book Length..... | 17 |
| 4.4 Text Features..... | 1 |

| | |
|-------------------------------|----|
| 4.5 Interest Level | 22 |
| 4.6 Readability Level | 24 |
| 5. CONCLUSION..... | 27 |
| REFERENCES | 30 |
| BIOGRAPHICAL INFORMATION..... | 35 |

LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS

| Figure | | Page |
|--------|--|------|
| 4.1 | “Big Issues” in the Newbery Award..... | 9 |
| 4.2 | Bluebonnet | 10 |
| 4.3 | Book Length..... | 19 |
| 4.4 | Text Features Present in Awards | 20 |

LIST OF TABLES

| Table | | Page |
|-------|--|------|
| 4.1 | Book Titles across the Bluebonnet and Newbery Awards | 15 |

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Research Question

Many teachers are using children's literature as a supplement to their classroom curriculum. These teachers may or may not have a background and strong foundation in children's literature, so they may need a guide to choose appropriate literature to complement the topics and themes presented in their curriculum. Many teachers are unfamiliar with the major awards in children's literature and the criteria on which the books are chosen. An increased knowledge of the awards available would help teachers select age-appropriate books that are aligned with their curriculum. Two major book awards of interest to Texas teachers are the Newbery and Bluebonnet book awards. This research seeks to identify the similarities and differences between those awards.

1.2 Significance of Research

The results of this research will help teachers to familiarize themselves with the awards as well as the selection criteria. They will be able to see the benefits of selecting and using books from each award within their classrooms. The teachers will have more access to the information they need to link their curriculum to relevant, award-winning, quality books. Having all of this information in one place will allow teachers to spend less time searching for books and more time with their students. Teachers will be able to use this as a classroom resource regardless of their background in children's literature.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Overview

Children's literature has come a long way since John Newbery started the first printing press which would print only children's books in 1744. Since then children's literature has grown exponentially; some children's books are competing with adult literature (Tunnell & Jacobs, 2013). This trend has not gone unnoticed by teachers, who are increasingly using literature across the curriculum. By integrating literature into other content areas, teachers are able to effectively supplement the curriculum. The Newbery and Bluebonnet Award lists can be used to help teachers select quality literature for their classrooms. The Caldecott Medal, another distinguished award in children's literature awarded by the Association for Library Services to Children (ALSC), will not be discussed here, as it is outside the scope of this research. The Caldecott medal is awarded to the illustrator of a picture book rather than the author, and therefore is not relevant to the study.

2.2 Award Criteria

2.2.1. Newbery Award

The Newbery Award was the first children's book award, which was first awarded in 1922. The award is voted on by a 15-person committee elected/appointed from the membership of the Association for Library Services to Children (ALSC). According to the Newbery Medal Manual, books must be by an author who is a

citizen/resident of the United States, have been published in the last year, and be a “distinguished contribution to American literature” in order to be eligible for the award. Books can be suggested for the award by the ALSC membership and committee members can select books they would like to review themselves. Authors often send committee members copies of their books, suggesting they consider them for nomination. Each member nominates seven total books for the award; these books are all discussed at the midwinter selection meeting. During this meeting there are a series a ballots that are tallied using a point system, and the winning book must have an eight-point lead over all other books. The winner is announced during the annual American Library Association Youth Media Awards Press Conference.

2.2.2. Bluebonnet Award

The Bluebonnet Award was established in 1983. The award is voted on annually by children in grades three through six. The children are given the Bluebonnet Master List, which is released in January of each year; the list contains up to 20 books that are eligible for the award. The Master List is created by a selection committee (made up of adults) that takes suggestions from the public year round. The books must meet several criteria in order to be suggested, including having been published in the United States within the last three years, having a living author, and being relevant/appealing to those in grades three through six. Once a title is suggested and meets the criteria, the selection committee will read it and vote on which books make the Master List in October of each year. Children who have read/heard at least five of the 20 books of the Master List are eligible voters. Voting takes place in January and the winner is announced in February at the annual Texas Bluebonnet Award luncheon.

2.3 Relevant Research

Classroom teachers have many options when they begin to choose children's literature for their classroom. Each teacher must find a book that addresses his or her topics, is quality literature, and will provide connections for their students. With so many options, teachers are left on their own to filter through the titles until they find what they are looking for. Many teachers do this by looking at the winning and honor books for various children's awards, reading book reviews, and completing a book walk. Teachers may also use their librarians and fellow teachers as resources for quality literature. As teachers narrow down their search to a few titles, they then read them to decide which books would be most appropriate for their students and the topics they are covering.

Some research has been done regarding which awards are preferred, as well as whether or not the awards still accomplish their goals. A study entitled "Which award would you buy" (Storey, D. 1990) sought to determine which award would be more likely to be purchased by a library or media specialist. The study found that 60% of Texas library and media specialists would buy the Bluebonnet Award over the Newbery Award. The study also looked at why the specialists would make these choices. According to the article, "In relation to the Newbery winners, those participants who would buy the state winners would do so because Newberys "don't draw," Newberys "gather dust," and the Newberys are too difficult to read" (p. 8). These specialists are supporting the conclusions that the researcher found while comparing the two awards. The Newbery winning books are harder to read, due to readability level and text length, and therefore the children are more drawn to the Bluebonnet Award winners.

Another article entitled, “Has the Newbery Lost its Way?” asked a question that many may be asking after seeing the Newbery Award compared to the Bluebonnet Award. This article stated that the more recent Newbery Award winners “have been particularly disappointing” (Silvey, 2008 p. 40). The award winners have not had the same sales as the previous Newbery winners, some of which were still selling 200,000 or more copies per year in 2008 (p.40). The article, which was published in the *School Library Journal*, cited a critique who claimed, “They appear to be hunting for a special book—one with only a few readers, rather than a universal book.” This is supported by the high interest levels of some of the books that would only appeal to a few children within the applicable age range (up to age fourteen).

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

In order to compare the Newbery and Bluebonnet Awards, the lists of award-winners were accessed from the respective award websites. This study went back ten years, looking at the books that won the award from 2006-2015. The materials associated with the awards, which include the criteria, selection process, and other pertinent information, was accessed and thoroughly reviewed. After an understanding of the awards and their backgrounds was developed, the researcher moved on to reading each of the twenty award-winning books, one book from each year of both awards. While reading and reviewing each book, the researcher coded and counted the themes presented. The researcher chose three overarching themes from each book through a code system (Merriam, 2014). Then the themes were cross-referenced against themes found in reputable book reviews of the winning books. The codes were then categorized, in order to analyze the patterns.

After all the books were evaluated the researcher created several graphs showing the themes present in each award-winning list. There is a graph showing the themes presented in the Newbery and Bluebonnet Awards respectively. These graphs will help teachers who want to find quality literature focused on a specific topic or theme. The researcher then drew a conclusion from the graphs regarding which themes are more common to each award. The researcher also studied the effects of how the book awards

are selected and who selects the awards on the themes that were presented within the books. Gathering and analyzing all of this information and drawing conclusions led to the development of a document that will help teachers to more easily and effectively choose literature to supplement their curriculum.

CHAPTER 4

DISCUSSION

4.1 Themes

Upon starting this research, the researcher expected to find an overarching theme for each award. After reviewing the themes present in each award, the researcher found more than ten themes present in each award. Though a few themes, such as fitting in/growing up, family/community, and animals did stand out as slightly more prevalent than others across both awards, they were not highly concentrated in either award. Through this finding, the researcher decided to expand the scope of the project to include the genres, book length, text features, reading level, and interest level. After including these additional measures, the researcher was able to find some commonalities and difference in the Bluebonnet and Newbery Awards.

The themes presented in each book varied greatly. However, there were a few notable findings. The researcher initially noticed that the Bluebonnet Award carried more lighthearted themes while the Newbery Award often dealt with “big issues.” The researcher categorized several theme codes into the category of “big issues” these can be seen in the pie chart below.

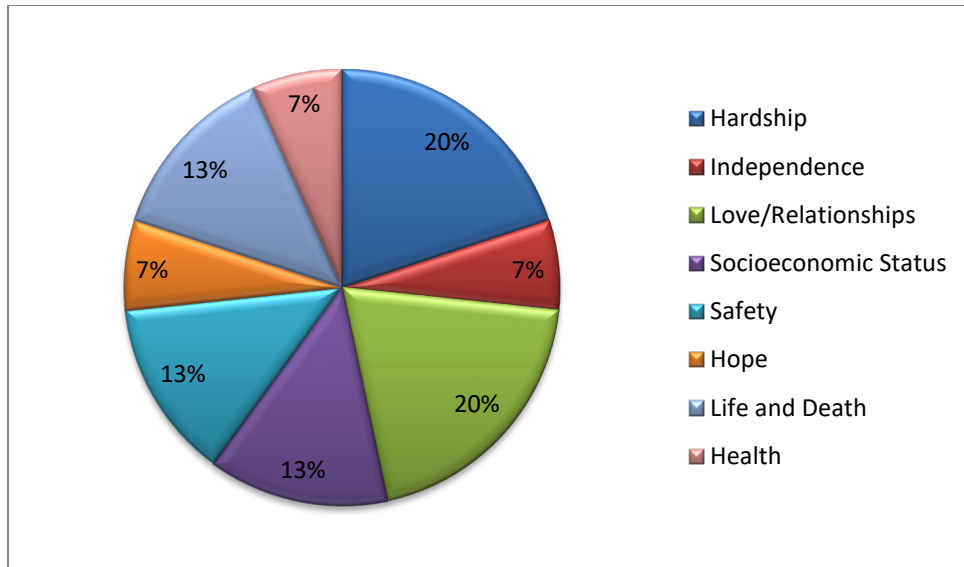


Figure 4.1: “Big Issues” in the Newbery Award

Though these themes were showcased primarily in the Newbery Award winners, it is important to note that the themes hardship and independence each appeared once in the Bluebonnet Award winners. Family/community, fitting in/growing up, and animals were themes which presented themselves across both awards. At least one of these themes presented itself in 80% of the award winning books. The Bluebonnet Award when looked at individually appears to have a large variety of themes. Further analysis revealed some trends emerging over time.

The Bluebonnet Award showed a progression of themes. From 2006-2011 two-thirds of the award winners concerned family and animals. The theme of fitting in was present in all of the Bluebonnet Award winners from 2011 to 2014, and emotion was a common thread present throughout all of the Bluebonnet Award books. It was present in 40% of the Bluebonnet Award winners, but is still notable because it stood the test of time and was present throughout the ten-year span. The other themes that were present in the Bluebonnet Award can be seen in the pie chart below.

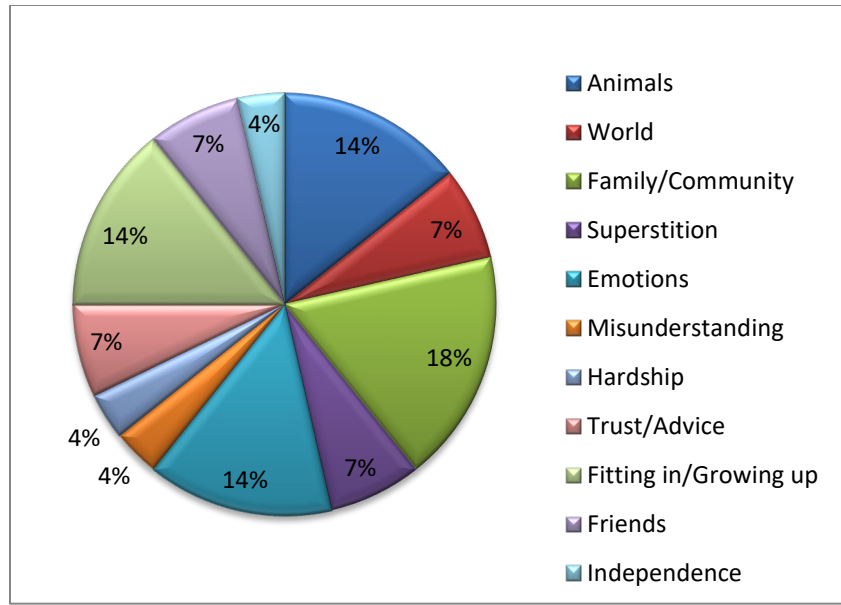


Figure 4.2: Bluebonnet

The chart shows that the Bluebonnet Award had several other themes, that were less noteworthy and therefore will not be discussed.

The first theme to be discussed in depth is family which was found in the following books: *Seadogs: An Epic Ocean Operetta*; *Ghost Fever/ Mal de Fantasma*; *One Potato, Two Potato*; *The Uglified Ducky*; and *Ten Rules You Absolutely Must Not Break if you Want to Survive the School Bus*. Family was showcased in a variety of ways throughout the books. In *One Potato, Two Potato* an elderly couple finds a pot that will duplicate things, but when the wife falls in, they realize they must duplicate the husband as well. After duplicating the husband, the couple and their duplicates live happily ever after in their small house as one big family. The theme manifests through sibling relationships in other books, as can be seen in this quote from the beginning of *Ten Rules You Absolutely Must Not Break if you Want to Survive the School Bus*:

It was the first day of school, and my brother, James, was walking me to the corner where the school bus stopped. I'd never taken the bus before, and to be honest, I was a little nervous. But James was a school bus expert, and he'd promised to help me out. (Grandits. 2014. P. 1)

Kyle's older brother is trying to "help him" understand the school bus. James frightens Kyle into thinking that the school bus is scary, but after breaking all of the rules James gave him, Kyle learns that the bus really isn't so bad. Kyle realizes that he shouldn't listen to everything James says. This is very different from *One Potato, Two Potato*, and shows the variety in family relationships. A possible reason for this theme being so popular is that family is something common among the United States population. The authors of these books can represent the family dynamic in many different ways that accurately represent the United States population. The variety of ways that authors approach these books allows for the entire population to relate well to the themes and may be a contributing factor to why the children choose these books.

The theme of animals was seen through *Seadogs: An Epic Ocean Operetta*; *Down Girl and Sit: On the Road*; *Help Me, Mr. Mutt!*; and *The Uglified Ducky*. Animals have long been popular in children's books. This explains why the theme appears popular among winners of the Bluebonnet Award. The theme of fitting in and growing up is one that has stood out more recently. From 2011 to 2014 all of the Bluebonnet Award winners had this theme, representing a cultural trend. During this time the anti-bullying movement was gaining popularity, and this likely caused an increase in the number of authors who incorporated similar themes and the number of teachers who introduced similar books

within their classrooms. The anti-bullying movement likely had a lot to do with the theme of fitting in and growing up being so prevalent over the last five years.

The final theme that needs to be noted within the Bluebonnet Award is that of emotions. Emotions were prevalent in *Down Girl and Sit: On the Road* (2008); *Help Me, Mr. Mutt!* (2011); *Ten Rules You Absolutely Must Not Break if you Want to Survive the School Bus* (2014); and *The Day the Crayons Quit* (2015). Jealousy was the most prevalent emotion in both *Down Girl and Sit: On the Road* and *Help Me, Mr. Mutt!*. In both books, the jealousy was between dogs and cats. *The Day the Crayons Quit*, takes the form of a series of letters from a boy's crayons describing their various emotions. The books regarding emotions were spaced out over the ten-year span and incorporated a variety of other themes. This theme wove its way through the books and through the Bluebonnet Award itself.

The Newbery Award also had an overarching theme that stood the test of time. Most winners dealt with "big issues," as earlier defined, including socioeconomic status, life and death, and health. Ninety percent of the Newbery Award winners over the last ten years contained such a theme. *The Graveyard Book* is the only book which lacked a big issue as one of the top three themes, but the theme was definitely present within the text. The book is the story of a young boy whose family is murdered, and then goes to the graveyard. There the ghosts protect him from the man who is trying to finish the job, until he is an adult. These issues hold weight with a lot of adults because they are relatable. Much like with the Bluebonnet Award winners further research is needed to determine whether the authors are choosing these themes because they are relevant to most readers, or if it is simply coincidence that these themes are appearing repeatedly.

The big issues manifested themselves differently each time, even if the issues were similar. In *The Crossover*, Josh's dad dies right after he has won the championship, presenting a bitter-sweet moment, especially when his brother gives him his dad's championship ring they have always wanted. Death is seen in a much more positive light in *Dead End in Norvelt*, because Miss Volker is waiting for the Norvelt originals (those who grew up in Norvelt) to die so she can write their obituaries and move to Florida with her sister. Even though both of these books touch upon the same big issue, they are handled and presented in completely different lights. It does not appear that the selection committee is being biased towards any particular issue or style.

As earlier stated, the Newbery Award winners, like the Bluebonnet Award winners, showcased family/community, fitting in/growing up, and animals more often than other themes. Like most, these themes didn't stand alone, but were often intertwined with others that were common to the award. For example, in *The Higher Power of Lucky*, Lucky is trying to cope with her mom's death (big issue), they have fallen on hard times (big issue), and she is unsure if her guardian is going to remain with her or leave her to return to France (family). The big issues that are being dealt with in the Newbery Award winners can surround the themes that are seen in both awards, while the Bluebonnet books take a more lighthearted approach at the same issues.

Overall, the themes that are presented in the awards are widespread. The common threads seem to be family, community, fitting in, growing up, and animals. These are present throughout, but are tackled differently depending on if you are reading a Bluebonnet or Newbery Award winner. The Newbery Award tends to stand strong and take on the "big issues," which of course vary over time. On the other hand, the Bluebonnet

Award deals with themes in what appear to be cycles, each theme holding strong for a few years before the next one moves in. The only common thread throughout the Bluebonnet Award winners that is not common to the Newbery Award is the theme of emotions, which appeared throughout the ten-year time span.

4.2 Genres

The researcher used Scholastic Book Wizard to find the genre of each book. For some books that were not listed in the Scholastic Book Wizard, the researcher used reputable book reviews and their knowledge of the books to determine an appropriate genre. Only one genre was chosen for each book for simplicity purposes, even though the book might cross other genres. The books and their accompanying genres can be seen in the chart below.

| Comedy and Humor | Folktale | Fantasy | Adventure | Realistic Fiction | Historical Fiction | Verse |
|--|-------------------------|-------------------------------|----------------------------------|---------------------------|-----------------------------|---------------|
| Ten Rules You Absolutely Must Not Break if You Want to Survive the School Bus* | The Uglified Ducky* | Ghost Fever/ Mal de Fantasma* | Flora and Ulysses | The One and Only Ivan | Moon over Manifest | The Crossover |
| The Day the Crayons Quit* | One Potato, Two Potato* | | Seadogs: An Epic Ocean Operetta* | Dead End in Norvelt | When you Reach me | |
| Postcards from Camp* | | | The Graveyard Book | The Higher Power of Lucky | Good Masters! Sweet Ladies! | |
| The Strange Case of Origami Yoda* | | | | Criss Cross | | |
| Help Me, Mr. Mutt!* | | | | | | |
| Down Girl and Sit: On the Road* | | | | | | |
| *Bluebonnet Award winners | | | | | | |

Table 1: Book Genres across the Bluebonnet and Newbery Awards

The chart shows that the books chosen for the Bluebonnet and Newbery Awards come from a variety of genres. The Texas Bluebonnet Award policies and procedures state that in creating the Master List:

An effort will be made to include titles from all major genres. Any category may be omitted if titles from a particular genre are not nominated. Major genres include, but are not limited to, animal stories, informational books, biography, mystery, realistic contemporary fiction, historical fiction, science fiction, humor, sports stories, etc... (Texas Library Association, 2012. P. 11)

While the Bluebonnet Award tries to incorporate all genres including nonfiction, the Newbery Award doesn't have any requirements as to the genre of the selection. The

interesting part about this is that 60% of the Bluebonnet Award winners over the last ten years have fallen into the genre of comedy and humor. The Newbery Award winners have mostly been in the realistic and historical fiction genres (70%).

The Bluebonnet Award should, in theory, be more spread out among the genres rather than focused so strongly on comedy and humor. The Master List contains twenty books that are supposed to represent a variety of genres, yet the comedy and humor genre is chosen 60% of the time. The other notable genre found in the Bluebonnet Award was folktales. There have been two folktales chosen as award winners in the last ten years, *The Uglified Ducky* (2011) and *One Potato Two Potato* (2009). These books both are retellings of classic folktales that many learn as children. *The Uglified Ducky* is a retelling of Hans Christian Andersen's *The Ugly Duckling*. In this version it is a moose who thinks he is a duck. His whole "family" makes fun of him until one day he finds other moose in the woods and finally fits in. *One Potato, Two Potato* is a lesser known Chinese Folktale about a magic pot that causes things to double. Folktales have been proven to stand the test of time, and possibly get more classroom exposure because of that. The heightened exposure could be one of the contributing reasons that the children vote for these books to win the Bluebonnet Award.

The Newbery Award on the other hand, seems to be much more generically diverse. The Newbery Award doesn't have any non-fiction winners, but it is said "[that the] committee shall consider all forms of writing—fiction, non-fiction, and poetry (Association for Library Service to Children, 2009 p. 10)." The Newbery Award has had one winner over the past ten years that was written in verse, *The Crossover* in 2015; however, all other books have been under the umbrella of fiction. The books have been

40% realistic fiction and 30% historical fiction. *Good Masters! Sweet Ladies!* is a book to note because it covers both realistic and historical fiction very well, though for the purposes of this study it was considered historical fiction. The book was written as a series of monologues that represent what life was like in medieval times from a variety of perspectives. The variety of perspectives, peasants, nobles, stable hands, etc. allow for everyone to relate to this historically accurate book. The winning books have been mostly realistic and historical fiction, which may be attributed to the ability of adults to relate to the situations that are presented in these books. The adults who are choosing these books may relate to the experiences and events set forth in these books and therefore they often choose winners in those categories. Further research is needed to determine the strength of this correlation between the genres selected and the adults who are choosing them.

4.3 Book Length

Upon first looking at the physical copies of the award winners, it was clear that the Bluebonnet Award books were significantly shorter than their Newbery Award-winning counterparts. On average, the Newbery Award winning books over the last ten years were 200 pages longer than the Bluebonnet Award winners. The longest Bluebonnet Award winner was *The Strange Case of Origami Yoda* (2012), by Tom Angleberger, at 141 pages. The Newbery Award winners range from 91 pages in *Good Masters! Sweet Ladies!* to 346 pages in *Moon over Manifest*. The Bluebonnet Award winners have an average length of only 52 pages, while the Newbery Award winners average 252 pages in length. The length of the books must be attributed to something, whether it is attributed to who chooses the winner, or the choices that voters have (ex. Bluebonnet Master List).

The explanation could be that the awards are selected by different audiences, the Newbery by adults and the Bluebonnet by children. An adult reader would be able to read the books significantly faster than a child reading the same book. This might lead to the adults choosing longer books. Another reason the children choose shorter books could be because they are required to read five books to vote on the Bluebonnet Award. If they are just trying to read their five books as quickly as possible, they may be drawn to the shorter books without regard to the subject matter. After sampling some of the Bluebonnet Master Lists to determine whether or not the children were presented with longer options, one can see that the books on the Bluebonnet Master List have an average length of 176 pages for the years sampled. This implies that the students are choosing some of the shorter books on the Bluebonnet Master List as the winner each year.

The greater length found in the Newbery Award winners can be closely tied to the higher readability level and interest level. The length may also be associated with the themes present in the books. The books of longer length may have themes that appeal less to the children, and more to the adults. This would cause longer works to be better suited to the Newbery Award than the Bluebonnet Award. The graph below shows the text lengths of the award winners by year.

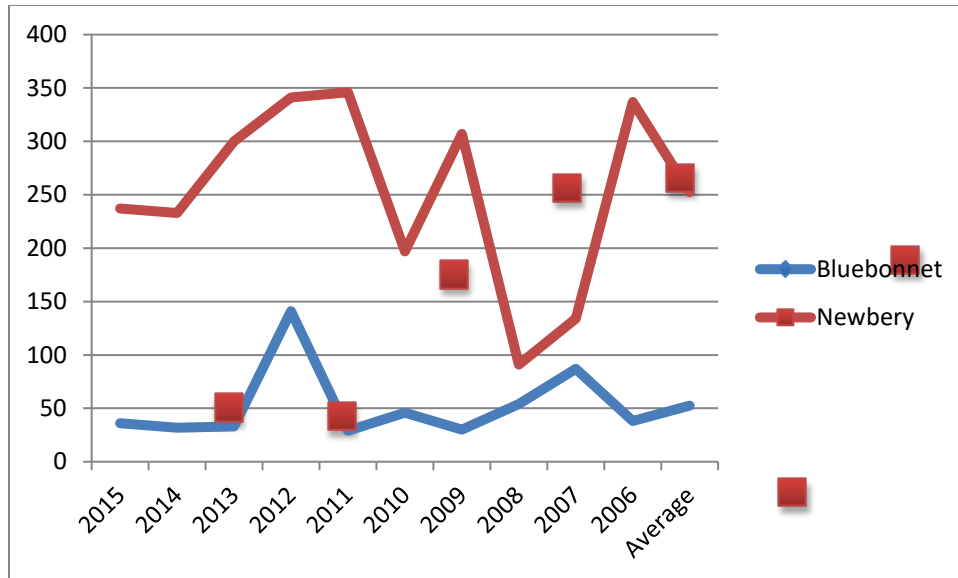


Figure 4.3: Book Length

The graph shows that the Bluebonnet Award winners are usually well under 100 pages, while the Newbery Award winners are typically much higher in page number. This plays into the types of books that are chosen. Being that 70% of the Bluebonnet Award winners chosen over the last ten years have been picture books. None of the Newbery Award winners have been picture books, although picture books are technically eligible for both awards.

4.4 Text Features

Another difference between the two awards is that the Newbery Award winners tend to be traditional literature, while the Bluebonnet Award winners are less traditional and more innovative, mainly through their text features. For these purposes, an untraditional book will be defined as a book with two or more unusual text features, or one unusual text feature that in present throughout the entire book. An unusual text feature is anything that would not be seen in a typical book including, but not limited to: monologues, letters/newspaper articles, verse text, comic strips, bilingual side-by-side, alternative point

of view, or interactive pages. If readers were to flip through both sets of award winners looking for unusual text features, they would quickly notice that the Bluebonnet Award winners have significantly more of these.

The graphic below depicts the various unusual text features found in each of the awards.

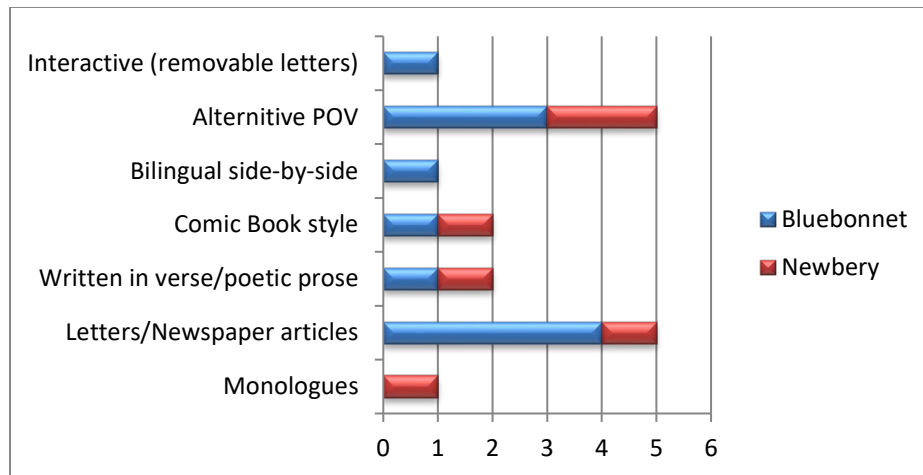


Figure 4.4: Text Features Present in Awards

The Bluebonnet Award books have had a total of eleven unusual text features over the past ten years, while the Newbery Award winners only had six. Readers will notice a notable difference between the two awards through the text features alone. The Newbery Award features many very traditional books including *Criss Cross* (2006), *When you Reach me* (2010), and *Dead End in Norvelt* (2012). Although *Dead End in Norvelt* did have obituaries, these are not considered an unusual text feature, as they were set into the work, usually read aloud by a character. The 2015 Newbery Award winner *The Crossover* was written entirely in verse, so it is an untraditional work. *Good Masters! Sweet Ladies! Voices from a Mediveval Village*, the 2008 Newbery Award winner presented a collection of monologues, serving as a way for a teacher to create a play where “no one wanted a small part” (Schlitz. p.VIII). The final untraditional Newbery Award winner is *Flora and*

Ulysses: The Illuminated Adventures (2014). The book is at times told from the point of view of Ulysses, a “superhero” squirrel, and sporadically uses comic strips.

These text features, are not what the Newbery Award selection committee is looking for, but they likely appeal to children more so than the more traditional books. The high number of Bluebonnet Award winners with unusual text features supports this conclusion, because the Bluebonnet Award is voted on by children. From the 2006 Bluebonnet Award winner, *Seadogs: An Epic Ocean Operetta*, to the 2015 winner, *The Day the Crayons Quit*, the text features stood out. For ten years the children have chosen picture books with everything from comic book style poetry in 2006, to letters written from the crayons point of view in 2015. The children appear to be drawn to these unusual text features. However, further research is needed to determine if they are drawn to the text features or the themes that are commonly paired with these text features. The most unusual text feature found was in *Postcards from Camp* (2012), which contained letters and postcards that could be removed and read. Readers have something hands on to do while they read, making this book more exciting and likely aiding its journey to winning the Bluebonnet Award.

Another notably unusual text feature was the bilingual side-by-side text displayed in the 2007 Bluebonnet Award winner *Ghost Fever/Mal de Fantasma*. This text likely gained votes because of the large Spanish-speaking population in Texas, giving it a much wider appeal. School libraries in Texas often have a large section of bilingual books, but these books are not usually on the Master List for the Bluebonnet Award. The two unusual text features that were most common throughout the award winners were the alternative point of view and letters/newspaper articles. The alternative points of view were used in a

variety of ways. For example, *Down Girl and Sit: On the Road* presented a dog's perspective on various car rides, while in *Flora and Ulysses* the squirrels' point of view was used to show that he was almost always thinking about food. Letters are used to support the flashbacks that Miss Sadie tells Abilene in her stories in the 2011 Newbery Award winner, *Moon over Manifest*. In the 2010 Bluebonnet Award winner, *Help Me, Mr. Mutt!*, the letters are from dogs writing about their "people problems" to Mr. Mutt, to which he responds in his newspaper advice column. The unusual text features found throughout these books are used differently each time, but appeal to the children who vote on the Bluebonnet Award and the adults voting on the Newbery Award.

4.5 Interest Level

The interest level of a book is something that teachers often examine to determine whether or not the students in their class will enjoy it. The surprising thing about the interest levels of the books chosen for the Bluebonnet and Newbery Awards is that they differ from what one would expect. One would expect that the Bluebonnet Award have a range of interest levels from third through sixth grade, as those are the students that are voting. The Newbery Award would be expected to have a larger range of interest levels, since the award is defined as for children up to age fourteen. Scholastic Book Wizard was used to determine children's interest levels in the books. It was chosen because it has been around for so long and is very broad, containing almost all of the books in the study. Scholastic did not list an interest level for *Help Me, Mr. Mutt!* or *The Uglified Ducky*; these interest levels were obtained from the Accelerated Reader (AR) BookFinder.

The Bluebonnet Award winners' interest levels ranged from kindergarten through eighth grade, with a high concentration in kindergarten through third grade. This was

followed closest by an interest level at a fourth and fifth grade level, with only one book, *Ghost Fever/Mal de Fantasma*, appealing to sixth through eighth grade. The most notable result seen here is that the children are focused on books that have an interest level that is lower than their grade level. After further examining the voting results, it does appear that most of the voters are in third and fourth grade, with just slightly fewer fifth grade students. The number of sixth grade students voting is greatly reduced as only one sixth grader votes for every four to five third grader who votes each year. The higher concentration of voters in the lower grades may explain why the students aren't choosing books with sixth grade or higher interest levels. It does not completely account for the high number of books being selected at the low levels.

The Newbery Award winners show a different result. Whereas the Bluebonnet Award winners show a lower interest level than expected, the Newbery Award winners show a higher average interest level than expected. The majority of Newbery Award winning books were found to be of interest to grades six and seven, with some slightly higher or lower. The John Newbery Award Committee Manual (Association for Library Service to Children, 2009) contains the following guidelines:

If a book is challenging, and suitable for 13-14-year-olds but not for younger readers, is it eligible? Yes; but it can be given an award only if it does what it sets out to do as well as or better than other, younger books that are also eligible. (p. 69)

The Newbery Award committee is expected to examine books for children through age 14, but the fact that the award has been given only to higher interest level books implies one of two things. Either, the selection committee tends to choose higher interest level books because of their own age, or that they are finding the higher interest level books to be of

stronger quality. Whichever the case, it does not appear that all interest levels are represented equally throughout the award.

4.6 Readability Level

The readability of a book for this study was taken from a variety of sources including the Scholastic Book Wizard, Accelerated Reader (AR) BookFinder, and Lexile Quick Book Search. It is important to note that each source lacked the readability levels of some of the books. For this reason, the researcher averaged the results of the Scholastic Book Wizard and Accelerated Reader BookFinder, both of which provide readability based on grade levels. The Lexile scores are a little different, and their website states that the scores do not directly correlate to any particular grade, since reading levels can vary greatly by grade (Metametrics, 2015).

The readability levels of the books in this study were closely correlated to the text length and the interest level. Like the other two measures, the readability for the Bluebonnet Award was slightly lower than expected, with an average (Scholastic and AR) of 3.67 and a Lexile average of 662.5, roughly equivalent to grades three through five. The Newbery Award winners had a slightly lower readability level than expected as well; based on the high interest levels of these books which averaged in the sixth and seventh grades. The average readability was 5.12 (Scholastic and AR), while the Lexile measured 776.25, roughly grades four through seven.

The readability of the Bluebonnet Award winners was right on target for the third through fifth grade students who voted; based on the Lexile measure, the average of the Scholastic and the Accelerated Reader came out a little lower. The Lexile Quick Book Search will provide the Lexile measure and occasionally provides a code as well. Fifty

percent of the Bluebonnet Award winners prompted the code “AD,” adult directed. The Lexile website states:

Picture books are frequently considered for an AD or "adult directed" code because they are usually read to a child, rather than a child reading them independently... Although seemingly easy reading, picture books can still present a challenging independent reading experience to an age-appropriate reader for reasons of text difficulty and book layout or design. (Metametrics, not paged)

Perhaps these books are being selected for the Bluebonnet Award so often because they are adult directed books and often read aloud by the teacher to the class. If these books are being read aloud to the class at a higher rate and getting more exposure, they are more likely to be one of the five (minimum) that the children have read before they vote. Since these books likely have more exposure that may explain their high frequency; however, further research is needed to determine the strength between the correlation of adult directed books winning the Bluebonnet Award and the number of times they are read aloud in classrooms.

A Newbery Award winner is likely to have a longer length, which is associated with being a more challenging book with a higher readability level. Keep in mind that adults are the ones voting on this award, which is for children up to age 14. An adult reader is likely at a higher reading level, and therefore sees the books as easier than a child who, theoretically, is at a lower reading level. This may explain why the Newbery Award winners have a higher readability level than their Bluebonnet Award counterparts. As noted earlier, the Newbery Award criteria states that a book only has to be applicable to part of the population, not the entire age range. The Newbery Award winners are not going to be

at a readability level suitable for everyone up to 14; however, they are looking for quality literature that falls somewhere within the age range. The adults who vote on the award are going to be less cognizant of the readability level than children who vote on the award would be. For this reason, the readability level may not correlate to the interest level.

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSION

The Newbery and Bluebonnet Awards have differing structures and criteria that result in differences within the winners selected. The difference that has the most impact on the awards is who chooses them. The Newbery Award has a selection committee of adults. The Bluebonnet Master List is selected by an adult committee, but children are then able to vote on the Master List titles. The intended grade-level range of each award also affects the selection of award winners. The Bluebonnet Award is voted on by children third through sixth grade students, and the Master List is selected according to those ranges. The Newbery Award is chosen by adults but is defined as literature for children up to age fourteen. The definitions of the award can be interpreted by each committee in various ways, though they are outlined in depth in the manuals of each award.

Although the criteria for the Newbery Award states that the winners can be for children up to fourteen, the lowest interest level over the past ten years was third grade, which is around age eight. This shows that either lower level books aren't eligible or they aren't surpassing the higher level books in terms of quality. The Bluebonnet Award winners have an average reading level of third through fifth grade according to the Lexile measure. A book with a lower interest level, short text length, and slightly higher readability level often implies a picture book. These picture books are what Lexile has defined as adult directed, books that are for children but often too challenging and

therefore should be read aloud by adults. Picture books are often selected as the Bluebonnet Award winners, seventy percent over the last ten years, but have not shown up at all in the Newbery Award winners over the time period studied, though they are technically eligible. The discrepancies among the readability levels, interest levels, and text lengths are connected as they often fall in similar ranges. The shorter, “easier,” lower level books are often selected by the children as Bluebonnet Award winners, but not by adults for the Newbery Award.

The themes and genres presented in either award also tend to reflect the group who selects the award. The Bluebonnet Award features lighthearted themes and genres such as comedy and humor, whereas the Newbery Award features “big issues” such as socioeconomic status, health, and safety. The two awards exemplify the innocence and playful spirit of a child, which diminishes as the child grows into an adult who now looks at life through a different lens. The adults who chose the Bluebonnet Master List know that their target audience is third through sixth grade students. Therefore the Master List contains books that would appeal to children at any point along that spectrum as well as students who are slightly above or below. The children then tend to lean towards the books with a lower interest level, readability level, and shorter length.

The Bluebonnet and the Newbery are both distinguished awards in children’s literature which have been around for decades. The Bluebonnet Award winners, chosen by children, have proved to be what the children and librarians prefer. The Newbery Award winners, chosen by adults, have been longer, more challenging works that children are less drawn to. Both sets of award winning books have their own distinct features and can serve a valuable purpose both in and out of the classroom. The Newbery and Bluebonnet Awards

have both evolved over time and would likely show different qualities if this study were revisited ten years from now. The study found that the two awards, though distinct in their own ways, provide a selection of quality children's literature for parents, teachers, and children.

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BIOGRAPHICAL INFORMATION

Kinsley was born on March 1, 1995. She graduated at the age of 16 from Burleson High School, then continued on to Hill College, where she earned credits before transferring to the University of Texas at Arlington. At the University of Texas at Arlington, she is a member of the Honors College and Kappa Delta Pi, and most recently became a McNair Scholar. She is pursuing a Honors Bachelor of Arts in Education/Interdisciplinary Studies, with an elementary teaching certification (K-6). Kinsley has interned with Breakthrough Fort Worth, and is looking forward to teaching in the Dallas/Fort Worth area after graduation. She hopes to continue onto earn a Master's and Ph.D. after teaching for a few years.