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## Views and Reviews: Children's Literature

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# VIEWS AND REVIEWS: CHILDREN'S LITERATURE

by Jane Bingham  
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Have you introduced your pupils to this year's Newbery and Caldecott Award Winning Books? The American Library Association's Newbery Medal for the most significant yearly contribution to literature for children was presented to Betsy Byars' *THE SUMMER OF THE SWANS* (Viking). This year's Caldecott Medal for the most distinctive contribution to children's picture book illustrations published during 1970 was *A STORY*, *A STORY* (Atheneum). In this Caldecott winner, Gail E. Haley retells an African folktale about Ananse, the Spider Man; and the colorful woodcuts compliment her telling.

The majority of Newbery Medal books are most successfully introduced to upper elementary and junior high school aged children. The *SUMMER OF THE SWANS* with a girl heroine, Sara, thirteen or so is no exception. Sara's younger brother is mute and mentally retarded; it is his desire to see again the swans Sara had shown him and his getting bewilderingly lost in search of them that leads to the climax. Through Charlie's rescue by her boyfriend and much soul searching, Sara grows in self esteem and understanding.

Unlike Newbery books, many Caldecott Medal Books can be profitably introduced to children of varying ages. Older children often enjoy reading old favorites to themselves or hearing their teacher read them. Younger children (PS - K) may find the concepts in this year's picture book winner, *A STORY*, *A*

*STORY*, too difficult to understand completely, but they may very well enjoy the rhythm of the language and the large bright illustrations which subtly introduce them to African designs and details of African village life. Most early primary children (1-2) will be eager to follow the action of the story and will be delighted by Ananse's success in performing such seemingly impossible tasks as capturing "the-leopard-of-the-terrible-teeth" and "the-hornet-who-stings-like-fire." Middle grade (3-4) children are likely to find such names as Osebo, Mmboro, and Mmoatia delicious sounding and fun to say. They will enjoy and appreciate Ananse's cleverness and persistence in trying to earn the Sky God's Stories. Older children (10-14) will enjoy comparing this African tale to other folktales and myths that they know or can find. They will also appreciate the more subtle aspects of the story.

How fine it is that this year's Caldecott Medal was presented to a book which included an African main character in its illustrations! The only other Caldecott book which included a black main character is *A SNOWY DAY* (Viking, 1962) by Ezra Jack Keats. While ethnicity alone certainly should not be the deciding factor in the awarding of a literary prize, it is heartening for the cause of brotherhood and peace to see various ethnic groups represented in quality literature that our impressionable searching pupils (future leaders) are urged to read.

Unfortunately the American Indian has never been included in a Caldecott Medal book, but has been represented in several Newbery Medal Winners and also in one of this year's Runners-Up for the Newbery Award, *SING DOWN THE MOON* (Houghton), by Scott O'Dell who also wrote the *ISLAND OF THE BLUE DOLPHINS*. Two other Newbery Award Runners-Up this year are *ENCHANTRESS FROM THE STARS* (Atheneum) by Sylvia Louise Engdahl and *KNEE KNOCK RISE* (Farrar) by Natalie Babbitt.

There were three Runners-Up for the Caldecott Award this year: *THE ANGRY MOON* (Atlantic-Little) retold by William Sleator and illustrated by Blair Lent; *FROG AND TOAD ARE FRIENDS* (Harper) written and illustrated by Arnold Lobel; *IN THE NIGHT KITCHEN* (Harper) written and illustrated by Maurice Sendak.

Maurice Sendak's *WHERE THE WILD THINGS ARE* (Harper) won the Caldecott Medal in 1964 and most children, parents, and teachers have enjoyed the book immensely. Sendak's *IN THE NIGHT KITCHEN*

is also an exceptional book, but may cause a stir among some people who would object to a naked, male child being pictured in a children's book. The *New York Times* called it one of the most important children's books of the decade and a significant milestone in Sendak's career. Sheldon Root, editor of "*Books for Children*" in *Elementary English* (February, 1971), admits the importance of *IN THE NIGHT KITCHEN* to Sendak's career, but questions its significance and its use with the very young children for whom it was ostensibly designed.

Lists of Newbery/Caldecott Award Winning Books and Runners-Up from 1922-1968 can be purchased from *The Horn Book Magazine, About Children's Books and Reading*, 585 Boylston Street, Boston, Massachusetts, 02116.

Suggestions for ways to present stories and poems to children may be found in many excellent source books; one particularly practical source is Robert Whitehead's *Children's Literature: Strategies for Teaching* (Prentice-Hall).

(Editors Note: Views and Reviews will be a regular feature of the Michigan Reading Journal. The addition of a column on Literature for Children will make a significant contribution to the publication. Jane Bingham brings an excellent background, as a teacher and scholar, to the teachers and children in Michigan.)