



## THE JANE ADDAMS CHILDREN'S BOOK AWARDS: TOWARD A PEACE AND JUSTICE CURRICULUM

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I teach in a public school in south central Wisconsin. My teaching partner and I call our two-class community, "The Learning Place." Our reading and writing work with our fifty fourth- and fifth-graders exposes the children to traditionally silenced or marginalized voices, to the historic struggle for equality through fiction and non-fiction and to great multicultural literature. All the while, the children are engaged in rigorous, authentic reading and writing tasks. They are busily comparing and contrasting themes and writers' craft. They are analyzing literary merit. They are supporting their own points of view. And they are meeting the Common Core Standards for English Language Arts.

The students in our program, in tandem with other children in far flung places around the country, assist in determining winners of the Jane Addams Children's Book Award. Their response to books contending for the award informs and contributes to the deliberations of the adult award selection committee. Each January, we tell our students that their opinions and perspectives are valued and sought. We pose a central question, regarding the picture books and chapter books that we will explore over three months time: *Is this an important book for children to read or have read to them? Why?*

The children work to develop their own answer to this question and to defend it with evidence from the text themselves. Ultimately, they decide which book(s) among the 20 or more contenders they would choose to give the award. Through much conversation, we attempt to come to consensus and ultimately we vote. We frame this work as participatory democracy.

The Jane Addams Children's Book Award has been given annually since 1953 and acknowledges books for children ages 2 to 12 published in the U.S. during the previous year. Books recommended by the award address themes and topics that engage children in thinking about peace, justice, world community and/or equality of the sexes and all races. The books must meet conventional standards of literary and artistic excellence. The award's namesake, Jane Addams, was a premier social reformer, co-creator of Hull House in Chicago, recipient of the 1931 Nobel Peace Prize for her work with underprivileged and oppressed woman and children, particularly immigrants and founder of Women's International League for Peace and Freedom. Women's International League, along with The Jane Addams Peace Association, sponsors the book awards.

### Choosing the Jane Addams Award-Winning Books

As a selection committee member, in late December, I receive a list of children's books published during the year just ending that are potential Jane Addams award winners. I procure most of the titles from my county library system. Others, including some multiple copies of selected chapter books, I purchase with a generous standing grant from our school's PTO. A timeline of our work with the books is presented in Table 1.

**Table 1. A timeline for Jane Addams selection process.**

<p><b>January:</b> Introduce awards &amp; previous winners Read aloud new titles to evaluate for theme and merit</p> <p><b>February:</b> Book clubs reading contending chapter books Online research &amp; writing summaries</p> <p><b>March:</b> Write opinion pieces defending pick for awards Much in-person &amp; online discussion</p> <p><b>April:</b> Work to reach consensus and vote National winners announced!</p>
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In the classroom, we begin by introducing guiding questions and themes that Jane Addams books must contain, beginning with the books for younger readers (picture books). We read previous winners and honor books to build understanding of the themes and get a sense of the caliber of the winning books. Sample themes explored in the Jane Addams books are presented in Table 2.

From there we read aloud each contending book with lots of turning and talking to discern themes. We back up our determinations with evidence from the text. The children practice close reading by rereading with partners and recording questions for further research. Later, they will reread again as they prepare to write summaries, book reviews and eventually to develop opinion pieces defending their choice for the award. Every year one or more of the books will lead the children to social action; this year, letters to President Obama, a previous year, raising money for drilling for drinking water in Africa.

We continue reading aloud and re-reading the books for younger readers well into February. After a few weeks of exposure to the process with picture books though, we also begin book clubs with book for older readers (fiction and nonfiction with denser text, accessible to third through seventh grade readers). In the book club, children

**Table 2. Example themes in the Jane Addams Award books.**

<p>Solving problems courageously and non-violently</p> <p>Overcoming prejudice</p> <p>Breaking cycles of fear</p> <p>Approaching life with self-confidence and strength</p> <p>Understanding human needs with compassion</p> <p>Broadening outlook to appreciate a variety of cultures</p> <p>Accepting responsibility for the future of all peoples</p>
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read an assigned section and leave tracks of their thinking (take notes) that they bring back to share with their book club. They initially record their thinking in two columns: "I learned....(the text says) / I think....(because the text says)" From there we move to reading strategy jobs and eventually to being able to independently keep track of thinking. We focus on developing listening, questioning and adding on in book club conversation, with a special emphasis on building understanding through being open to multiple perspectives. The children write responses after book club conversations and before reading more. They research online, share links connected to the book and blog about their reading between meetings.

As March draws to a close, the children share their persuasive opinion pieces with each other and discuss the relative merits of their suggestions for the awards. Our consensus and voting time arrives and by mid-April. Then with our impressions of the books shared with the adult selection committee, we wait for their final decisions to be announced at the end of the month at Hull House Museum in Chicago.

**Table 3. The 2012 Jane Addams Book Award winners and honor books.**

<p>The 2012 Jane Addams Award-winning books are:          For Younger Readers: <i>Each Kindness</i> by Jacqueline Woodson.          For Older Readers: <i>We've Got a Job: The 1963 Birmingham Children's March</i>, by Cynthia Levinson.</p> <p>The 2012 Jane Addams Award honor books are:          For Younger Readers: <i>Dolores Huerta: A Hero to Migrant Workers</i>, by Sarah Warren and <i>We March</i>, by Shane W. Evans,          For Older Readers: <i>Marching to the Mountaintop: How Poverty, Labor Fights and Civil Rights Set the Stage for Martin Luther King Jr.'s Final Hours</i>, by Ann Bausum, and <i>Temple Grandin: How the Girl Who Loved Cows Embraced Autism and Changed the World</i> by Sy Montgomery.</p>
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The 2012 award winners and honor books are presented in Table 3.

An online database of the Jane Addams Book Award-winning and honor books since 2000 is available at [http://www.janeaddamspeace.org/\\_books/](http://www.janeaddamspeace.org/_books/). Each title is annotated giving teachers a summary and a sense of its applicability for their classroom. See Table 4 for a list the searchable categories and examples of titles found under each.

**The Jane Addams Book Awards and the Common Core**

Our classroom community has participated in this award process since 2004. Upon our introduction to the Common Core Standards, my teaching partner and I discovered that our work already meets (and can be further developed in the context of) the standards. By example, consider the following excerpts from the Common Core for English Language Arts for fifth grade in light of our children's literacy work with the awards process:

(a) **Quote accurately** from a text when explaining what the text says explicitly and when drawing inferences from the text.

**Table 4. Some searchable categories in the Jane Addams database and examples.**

Searchable category	Examples of titles
Social Justice Issue Addressed	Impacts of poverty: <i>Ninth Ward</i> by Jewell Parker Rhodes Voting Rights: <i>With Courage and Cloth: Winning the Fight for a Woman's Right to Vote</i> by Ann Bausum
National, Racial or Cultural Identities	Mexican American: <i>Poems to Dream Together = Poemas Para Sonar Juntos</i> By Francisco X. Alarcon Native American: <i>Sequoyah: The Cherokee Man Who Gave His People Writing</i> by James Rumford
Era in which events took place	1700's <i>The Escape of Oney Judge: Martha Washington's Slave Finds Freedom</i> by Emily Arnold McCully Mid 1900's <i>When My Name was Keoko</i> By Linda Sue Park
Specific people made real in the books	Sojourner Truth: <i>Sojourner Truth's Step-Stamp Stride</i> Andrea Davis Pinkney Mendez Family (Mendez vs. Board of Education: <i>Sylvia &amp; Aki</i> by Winifred Conkling
Age for whom the books is most appropriate	Ages 4 to 6: <i>One Thousand Tracings: Healing the Wounds of World War II</i> By Lita Judge Ages 12-15: <i>Ain't Nothing But a Man: My Quest to Find the Real John Henry</i> By Scott Reynolds Nelson and Marc Aronson
Jane Addams Selection Criteria	Understanding human needs with compassion: <i>Amber Was Brave, Essie Was Smart</i> by Vera B. Williams Overcoming prejudice: <i>Heart and Soul: The Story of America and African Americans</i> by Kadir Nelson

- (b) **Determine a theme** of a story, drama, or poem from details in the text, including how characters in a story or drama respond to challenges or how the speaker in a poem reflects upon a topic; **summarize** the text.
- (c) **Compare and contrast** stories in the **same genre** on their approaches to similar **themes** and topics.
- (d) **Write opinion** pieces on topics or texts, **supporting a point of view** with reasons and information.

Explore your own use of the exemplary books within the Jane Addams award collection. Children deserve honest, provocative literature that will lead them to questions and move them to helpful action. They need stories in which they will recognize themselves and their families. We, as teachers, have a responsibility to bring the best to our children in order to develop their deeper, critical thinking. The Common Core Standards can surely be met, and in a more meaningful way, as we remember and fulfill our larger job.

## References

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### About the Author

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## THE TOMÁS RIVERA BOOK AWARD AND A COGNATE DATABASE

by José A. Montelongo

Since 1996, the Tomás Rivera Mexican-American Children's Book Award has been given to authors and illustrators who "create literature that depicts the Mexican American experience," according to the award's website (Rivera Children's Book Award, 2014). The award is named after Tomás Rivera (1935-1984), a Chicano author, poet, and administrator who devoted his life to making education accessible to Mexican-Americans. The son of migrant farm workers, Dr. Rivera was a former high school teacher who became the chancellor of the University of California Riverside. The award was developed by the College of Education at Texas State University. The url for the Tomás Rivera Book Award website is: <http://riverabookaward.org/book-award-winners>.

There are several criteria for selecting the winner of the award. First, the book must be written for children and young adults from birth to sixteen years of age. The book should portray Mexican-Americans authentically through rich characterizations avoiding stereotypes. The book may be fiction or non-fiction, and the text and illustrations should be of the highest quality. A list of all of the winners (1996-2013) is presented in Table 1.

The picture books that have won the award are designated (PB) in Table

1. Several of the Tomás Rivera Award-winning picture books are biographical. *José! Born to Dance* (Reich, 2005) chronicles the early career of choreographer José Limón. *A Library for Juana: The World of Sor Juana* (Mora, 2002) tells about the early life of the seventeenth-century feminist nun Sor Juana de Inés, and *Diego Rivera: His World and Ours* (Tonatiuh, 2011) is a biography of the Mexican muralist. *Tomás and the Library Lady* (Mora, 1997) presents the relationship between a young Tomás Rivera and an inspirational librarian.

The *Farolitos of Christmas* (Amaya, 1995) tells the heart-warming story of a young girl, appropriately named Luz, who creates farolitos to light the way for the Christmas pilgrims as she awaits the return of her father from war. *My Very Own Room* (Pérez, 2008) relates the story of a young girl's need for privacy and the ways, in which, an entire family contributed to make it happen. *Los Gatos Black on Halloween* (Montes, 2006), *Just a Minute: A Trickster Tale and Counting Book* (Morales, 2003), *Chato's Kitchen* (Soto, 1997), and *What Can You Do With a Paleta?* (Tafolla, 2009) present interesting stories with engaging pictures. *The Three Pigs: Nacho, Tito, and Miguel* (Salinas, 1998) is a non-violent re-telling of the porcine classic.

