Children’s Literature Reviews

2018 Charlotte Huck Award for Outstanding Fiction for Children

Erika Thulin Dawes, Maria V. Acevedo-Aquino, Bettie Parsons Barger, Desiree W. Cueto, Mary Lee Hahn, Joyce Herbeck, and Stacey Ross

This column showcases the winners of the 2018 NCTE Charlotte Huck Award for Outstanding Fiction for Children.

The Charlotte Huck Award for Outstanding Fiction recognizes literature for youth ages 5–12 that has the “potential to transform children’s lives by inviting compassion, imagination, and wonder” (http://www2.ncte.org/awards/ncte-childrens-book-awards/charlotte-huck-award/). Charlotte Huck, a former elementary school teacher who joined the faculty of education at The Ohio State University in 1955, believed that good literature should be at the heart and center of the elementary school curriculum. She established the first course in children’s literature at the university and went on to develop master’s and doctoral programs in children’s literature with a wide range of special topics. In 1961, she published the first edition of Children’s Literature in the Elementary School with her colleague, Doris Kuhn.

Now titled Charlotte Huck’s Children’s Literature, the book is in its 10th edition. Over the course of her career, Huck received numerous awards and honors, including membership in the Reading Hall of Fame. She served as President of NCTE and developed an annual children’s literature conference at Ohio State.

Charlotte Huck was convinced that if children found joy in books, they would want to learn to read and then read avidly. One of her goals was that children become lifelong readers. The Charlotte Huck Award for Outstanding Fiction was established in 2014 to honor her contribution to children and teachers and to further the belief that distinctive children’s literature has the potential to positively impact children’s lives.

Charlotte Huck Winner

After the Fall: How Humpty Dumpty Got Back Up Again
Written and illustrated by Dan Santat

You know Humpty Dumpty, right? But you only know half the story. Dan Santat, Caldecott-winning author of The Adventures of Beekle: The Unimaginary Friend, has created a stunning picturebook that tells the tale of what happens after the fall. Readers are introduced to Humpty Dumpty as an avid birdwatcher, sidelined by his storied accident. Patched together, but anxious and fearful, Humpty Dumpty laments his grounding, as he is unable to climb up to his bunk bed or even to reach his favorite cereals on the top shelves at the grocery story. Using color and perspective to great effect, Santat’s mixed-media illustrations soar. Touches of humor in the illustrations help to mitigate the heavy content. Humpty’s facial expressions are marvelous (he sticks out his tongue while concentrating on building paper airplanes). Perseverance leads to

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transformation, and Humpty’s journey to recovery prompts reflection on trauma and healing. The ending may make you and your students gasp aloud. A powerful new take on an old tale. (ETD)

perspectives of a story as well as the difficult process of making decisions that could compromise individual or collective belief systems. While the book takes place in various contexts, the school classroom is positioned as a space for inquiring about self and the world, facilitated by a young male activist teacher who encourages students to “[t]hink about something that affects you or your family or your community” (p. 70). (MVA)

Honor Books

The End of the Wild
Written by Nicole Helget

A wild range of things in Fern’s life seems to be coming to an end. The woods where her family goes foraging have been labeled as fracking sites. Meanwhile, Children’s Protective Services and the strong influences of her wealthy paternal grandfather have consistently threatened Fern’s family over the years. But every story has different perspectives. The fracking project might provide the financial stability that will allow Fern’s family to stay together, and even begin to heal the relationship with their grandfather. This powerful book creates a window into the realities of families and communities that juggle family well-being, financial challenges, and commitment to the environment and wildlife on a daily basis. The narrative highlights the imperative to explore and question the multiple

Forever, or a Long, Long Time
Written by Caela Carter

Flora and Julian have finally found a forever home. Yet, forever is hard to believe in when you have moved so many times and been with so many foster families. In this beautiful and emotional book, readers get lost in the thoughts of Flora, who, at eleven, has survived the trauma of nine years in the foster care system. Neither Flora nor Julian believes that they were born, as they have never seen any evidence of being babies. Instead,
they create theories of how they came into the world. Carter gives Flora a voice when hers so often gets stuck, allowing readers to see Flora’s deep pain and healing. As Flora and Julian learn of a new baby joining their forever family, they go in search of answers to questions about their past, the people who loved them, and evidence of their birth. Along the way, they discover what it means to be a family. Flora’s story emphasizes the importance of knowing who you were, and how that shapes who you are. We all are reminded of the power of love and family, forever. (BPB)

of a monochromatic, blue-tinted color scheme represents the “real” world, which provides the beginning backdrop for readers to experience the connection a young girl has for her beloved toy fox. While playing in the park, a real fox takes the toy and runs off through the forest. Distraught, the young girl and a friend follow the fox. During their pursuit, they lose sight of the fox but stumble upon arched shrubbery. As they pass through the archway, Graegin’s illustrations explode with color, revealing a magical, secret forest teeming with animal life, small cottages, and charming treehouses. Will the lost toy be found? Readers receive a delightful discovery on the final pages through the story’s clever illustrations and peritext. Themes of empathy, giving, and selflessness are sure to provoke reading and rereading on laps and in classrooms. (SR)

**Little Fox in the Forest**  
Written and illustrated by Stephanie Graegin  

Stephanie Graegin’s wordless picturebook provides readers an invitation to step into a fantastical adventure. The illustrations, rendered digitally with pencil, watercolor, and ink, are thoughtfully crafted, beginning with clues for the reader beneath the cover and inside the end papers. Graegin’s use of a monochromatic, blue-tinted color scheme represents the “real” world, which provides the beginning backdrop for readers to experience the connection a young girl has for her beloved toy fox. While playing in the park, a real fox takes the toy and runs off through the forest. Distraught, the young girl and a friend follow the fox. During their pursuit, they lose sight of the fox but stumble upon arched shrubbery. As they pass through the archway, Graegin’s illustrations explode with color, revealing a magical, secret forest teeming with animal life, small cottages, and charming treehouses. Will the lost toy be found? Readers receive a delightful discovery on the final pages through the story’s clever illustrations and peritext. Themes of empathy, giving, and selflessness are sure to provoke reading and rereading on laps and in classrooms. (SR)

**Refugee**  
Written by Alan Gratz  

Alan Gratz has written a masterfully interwoven trio of stories about refugees from three different periods in history—Nazi Germany in the 1930s, Castro’s Cuba in 1994, and Aleppo, Syria in 2015. Events and individuals in each of the stories are based on historical fact, but the power of the book lies in the recurring topics, themes, and extended metaphors that bind the stories together and remind the reader that until we find ways to eliminate overly powerful dictatorial and/or terrorist leaders, we are doomed to repeat history. In each story, the
The Rooster Who Would Not Be Quiet!
Written by Carmen Agra Deedy
Illustrated by Eugene Yelchin

In a town that has outlawed singing of any kind, a cheerful rooster is determined to “Kee-kee-ree-KEE!” Even after being deprived of his fragrant mango tree, his family, his food, and sunlight, the rooster insists on his jubilant “Kee-kee-ree-KEE!”

He justifies his song: “I sing for those who dare not sing—or have forgotten how.” Carmen Agra Deedy, in an Author’s Note, explains that this book is in recognition of “those who resist being silenced, who will crow out their truth, without regard to consequence.” Eugene Yelchin’s colorful mixed-media paintings perfectly capture the positive, upbeat, and relentless perseverance of this brave little rooster. The body language and facial expressions match the rooster’s determination in spite of loss and deprivation. He serves as an example to all of us of the pursuit of freedom and truth at any cost. Although predominantly to be found in early elementary grades, this is a picturebook for all ages. Its message can be discussed and appreciated from preschool to graduate classes. (JH)

Recommended Books

All’s Faire in Middle School
Written and illustrated by Victoria Jamieson

Middle school is never easy to navigate, but when you’ve been homeschooled by parents who are Renaissance Faire actors, there’s a whole new level of awkward when it comes to making friends, knowing what to wear, and dealing with a strict

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science teacher. Luckily, being a knight-in-training gives Imogene the tools of chivalry, honesty, and bravery to use when she makes a series of mistakes that land her with a three-day suspension from school and a little brother who may never speak to her again. Chapter openers with the appearance of an illuminated manuscript frame Imogene’s story as a Renaissance hero’s journey, while pitch-perfect illustrations take the reader on Imogene’s emotional rollercoaster through the use of posture, facial expressions, and pacing using panel size and shape. Imogene’s parents are key to her eventual success. Besides supporting her decision to switch from homeschooling to public schooling, they are role models in choosing a way of life that makes them happy, even if it is not financially lucrative. (MLH)

Amina’s Voice
Written by Hena Khan

In *Amina’s Voice*, Khan brilliantly tackles Islamophobia and anti-Muslim sentiment through the lens of her twelve-year-old, Pakistani American, Muslim protagonist. Quiet and reflective, Amina prefers to stay out of the spotlight. However, when the mosque that she and her family attend is vandalized and burned, she must face her greatest fear—that her voice might once again betray her. On the night of the winter concert, Amina makes her solo debut, belting out the words to Sam Cooke’s famous 1964 song, “A Change Is Gonna Come.” Her decision to sing the anthem of the Civil Rights Movement evokes the historical struggle against discrimination in America. The words of this song continue to have relevance as Khan reminds us that we all have a voice to effect change. (DWC)

**Big Cat, Little Cat**
Written and illustrated by Elisha Cooper

With simplistic black-and-white illustrations, Elisha Cooper tenderly weaves a circle of life story: “There was a cat who lived alone. Until the day a new cat came.” Page turns reveal the daily, weekly, monthly life lessons Big Cat bestows
upon Little Cat. Splashes of yellow emphasize the love between the big white cat and the little black cat. One double-page spread with four vignettes shows the passing of time as the little black cat grows and grows, becoming larger than his friend, which marks a shift in the story. One day, the older cat leaves and doesn’t return. Shades of gray symbolize the sadness the loss of a loved one brings upon a family. Ending as it begins, Big Cat, Little Cat provides a loving story of purpose, friendship, life, death, and beginning anew. (SR)
Shelter
Written by Céline Claire
Illustrated by Qin Leng

How much is enough? At what point do we feel that we can share what we have with those less fortunate? Céline Claire explores these questions in a story of forest animals eagerly preparing for an approaching storm. When the weather deteriorates, the animals are safe and warm in their homes. Then two strangers appear out of the swirling fog, looking for help, but they are turned away by every family. Later in the story, however, when one of the families needs help, the two strangers welcome them with no hesitation. Qin Leng’s gently elegant pen-and-ink and watercolor illustrations find beauty in the fury of nature, but, most of all, in the generosity and hospitality displayed by the two strangers, who hold no grudges and are willing to share the little they have on a cold winter’s night. (JH)

Stef Soto, Taco Queen
Written by Jennifer Torres

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Stef does not have a real Tía Perla, but Tía Perla is part of her family—the family taco truck; “she” brings the family together almost every day and pays for pencils, books, uniforms, and paints. But caring for Tía Perla also means embarrassment and bullying caused by her distinctive presence and cilantro aroma. In the face of taunts from her seventh-grade classmates, Stef (aka Taco Queen) must decide whether or not she will work to save Tía Perla and take a stance alongside her father to fight for fair working conditions for the larger community of mobile food vendors and drivers, warmly referred to as compadres. Will she become the person “who knows how to tell people why they should care” (p. 100)? Jennifer Torres creates a story about speaking up and being heard, an opportunity to reflect upon one’s complex cultural identities and positionality in the world, and a call for individual and collective action. (MVA)

Wishtree  
Written by Katherine Applegate  

What wish would you leave on a wishtree? Friendship? Love? Change? Narrated by Red, a wise old oak tree that has lived for 216 rings, readers learn about his history, friends, inhabitants, and neighbors. This bold, brave tree breaks the cardinal rule that one should never speak in front of humans—to grant the wish of friendship. He stands tall, as a red oak should, even when faced with destruction, and reminds the whole community what it means to love and accept people. Applegate gives a voice to the mighty tree and a firm reminder to her readers of what can be accomplished when we listen to the wishes of others and work together. Her poetic language coupled with the beautiful black-and-white spot and occasional full-page illustrations by Charles Santoso evoke emotions and empathy from readers of all ages. (BPB)

Erika Thulin Dawes, Committee Chair and NCTE member since 1999, is a professor of Language and Literacy at Lesley University in Cambridge, Massachusetts. Maria V. Acevedo-Aquino, NCTE member since 2012, is an assistant professor of Early Childhood Education and Care at University of Massachusetts, Boston. Bettie Parsons Barger, NCTE member since 2005, is an assistant professor of Elementary and Literacy Education at Winthrop University in Rock Hill, South Carolina. Desiree W. Cueto, NCTE member since 2010, is an assistant professor of Literacy at Western Washington University in Bellingham, Washington. Mary Lee Hahn, NCTE member since 1990, is a fifth-grade teacher at Daniel Wright Elementary in Dublin, Ohio. Joyce Herbeck, NCTE member since 1990, is an associate professor of Reading and Language Arts at Montana State University in Bozeman, Montana. Stacey Ross, NCTE member since 2014, is a second-grade teacher at Casis Elementary, Austin Independent School District, in Austin, Texas.

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