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Dear Sue:

In answer to your letter of May 18th about the Newbery-Caldecott dinner, I have very mixed feelings. I think it is nice to have a special, dignified, formal occasion, and the banquet certainly is that. In fact, a banquet can and should be, generally, the height of elegance and one of the most impressive ways to honor someone. The purpose of the Newbery-Caldecott banquet is obviously to honor the winners of the two most prestigious children's books awards that are given here or probably anywhere in the world. Certainly no other awards sell books in the way that the Newbery and the Caldecott do.

On the other hand, I do realize that the preparations for the banquet are enormously time-consuming. The banquet has become very expensive and certainly younger members oftentimes would probably not want to spend that much for dinner. And there may well be other ways of honoring a winner in impressive fashion.

There is always a possibility, of course, of having an event at, say, 4:00 or 4:30 in the afternoon with the author and illustrator giving the speeches that they would otherwise have given, followed by a cocktail hour. Or you might want to try a morning affair. Perhaps something that begins with coffee and tea and something else to eat at 10:00 and moves on to the awards at 10:30 and is over by 11:00 or 11:30 or certainly by noon. Or, if you didn't want to have it at the summer meeting, you might even consider giving the awards at midwinter. The medals would not yet be engraved, but they could be shown to the author and illustrator and mailed to them later when the engraving was done. This would mean that the two could not have an elaborate speech prepared, but perhaps they could write some kind of momento that the publishers could then publish, either a picture or a statement, and mail to a big mailing list. This could include people who were not there as well as people who were there. Or maybe you might want to eliminate speeches altogether. Most of the speeches try very hard to be erudite and fall flat on their face. There is no reason to suppose that just because an author can write a good book, that author can also write a good speech. Or maybe, instead of the award being given at any AIA function, it should be given in a different place in the country every year before a large audience of children. The Newbery could be given in one place and the Caldecott in another. This might be done during National Library Week, or it could even be done during Children's Book Week in the fall. However,

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if the Newbery-Caldecott banquet ceases to exist and something similar does not take its place at ALA, I suspect the number of children's librarians who come to ALA will be far smaller. I think that many people come to go to the dinner and if the dinner did not exist, those people would think twice about coming to ALA. At least, the dinner is a highlight and the thing they go back and talk about. And I think in your deliberations, you probably ought to keep this in mind. This is especially true for people who attend ALA infrequently. To most of us, the dinner has become a bore, but that's because we go every year. You need to talk to a lot of people who don't go to ALA every year to see what it means to them and what would bring them to the meetings. Maybe there should be a workshop pre-conference every year honoring the Newbery-Caldecott winners but taking up some aspect of children's literature. The awards could be given at the workshop.

If I have any more ideas, I will let you know.

Sincerely,



Jean Karl
Editor of Children's Books

JK:lm
✓cc: Zena Sutherland