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2 May 1979

Zena B. Sutherland  
Editor  
Bulletin of the Center for Children's Books  
University of Chicago  
1100 E. 57th Street  
Chicago, IL 60637

Dear Ms. Sutherland:

Enclosed please find the last three pages of an article "Award-Winners Gilly, 'Turtle' and Ramona: the Newbery Award Winners from an Elementary Educator's Viewpoint" I have submitted for publication to SCHOOL LIBRARY JOURNAL.

Lillian Gerhardt suggested to me this week that you might like to see these last remarks I have made concerning your task force to study alternative ways of celebrating the Newbery and Caldecott Awards. These remarks are included in the section "We Need the Children", so I am taking the liberty of sending you the entire section as background.

Ms. Gerhardt has forwarded my article to TOP O' THE NEWS for consideration, and I am hopeful it will be published next fall. I would appreciate any reactions you might care to give me personally or to the editor of that publication concerning my suggestions to the N/C Committee.

Thank you for your attention.

Sincerely,



Lyn Lacy  
Media Generalist  
Wilder A Elementary  
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Thus, we professionals continue the arguments over "distinguished contribution" among ourselves, and clearly we need still more help. Award committees, literary criticism, book reviews, all have taken us as far as they can "for the present", as Ramona the Pest would have said. We wish we could hear what Ramona herself might now have to offer.

#### WE NEED THE CHILDREN

The mistake Melcher made in the beginning was in leaving his equivocal proposal, however well-intentioned, to be quarreled over solely by adult readers, writers and "librarians who make it their life work to service children's reading interests". The children themselves must be more actively involved in the choice of award winners in their own field of literature. Even Krumgold's "family book" implies the active presence of children at some point appreciating at least some of the story, if only being read aloud to them, and surely whatever titles are to be passed on to youngsters as worthwhile contributions should be chosen in some measure by those who are to read them.

Participation by the children requires more time for selection, time for the member librarians of the Children's Services Division, who send in the nominees to the N/C Committee, to read and discuss the possibilities with the children in schools and neighborhood libraries. The N/C Committee might once again follow the recent lead of the YASD as stated in the 1979 SLJ Report: "High on the (Midwinter Meeting's) agenda was the Board of Directors' hard look at YASD's list-generating mechanisms...Some of the proposed changes are purely practical: a new title nomination process that builds in pre-selection; alteration of eligibility dates from January to December of a given year to September of one year through August of the next."

Moving the eligibility date back four months for Newbery and Honor Book titles as well would give librarians a more realistic period in which to get additional input from the children they serve. Some even believe that moving back a full year for the consideration of titles is that much better. Some sort of practical re-scheduling would also certainly aid the Committee in its monumental selection task at the Midwinter Meeting.

The importance of children's opinions during this initial stage must not be minimized; librarians should be encouraged to reflect these opinions to the Committee even if they are in conflict with their own. Over the years, children have proven their ability to help us define a "distinguished contribution" by singling out the truly good stories with word-of-mouth enthusiasm for some older Honor Book titles that no million-dollar promotional campaign by adults could have ever achieved. Who can deny the well-deserved popularity of past Honor Books such as Charlotte's Web, The Cricket in Times Square, Little House in the Big Woods, Millions of Cats, Misty of Chincoteague? But these prestigious books are now much older certainly than any of the younger readers, and the children have regretfully few Newbery award-winners published during their own lifetimes that have achieved even the semblance of such popularity. They need now to have their say.

The children should be given still another opportunity to participate fully in the Newbery proceedings; a representative from their age group should be provided a seat on the Committee during its Midwinter deliberations. The last duty of each departing N/C Committee could be the selection of the next year's childrens' representative and alternates, chosen from written and tape-recorded applications sent in from a previously-selected, and rotated, region of the country (the Pacific Northwest states for 1980, the Upper New England states for 1981, etc.). The youngster chosen should have voting privileges, especially a tie-breaking vote, should perhaps be given the honor of

announcing the winners, and would need to have his or her expenses (but not necessarily those of a parent or chaperone) paid for by the ALSC.

This increased participation could be extended into the celebration held for the award winners. In this year's SLJ Report, Zena B. Sutherland and Mae Benne, members of the Board of Directors of ALSC, were said to have "called for a task force to outline methods of celebrating the Newbery/Caldecott Medal Awards other than the customary banquet. They emphasized its increasing cost to members and the prospect that another sort of event might attract an even wider audience than the annual 1000+ diners attracted to the Newbery and Caldecott winners' speeches."

A wider audience could certainly be reached by an invitation to thousands of children during the school day to watch a live PBS televised broadcast of the authors' speeches (written more with children as an audience in mind), complete, perhaps, with a telephone question-and-answer session offered locally by the broadcasting station. School libraries/media centers and classrooms across the nation could schedule low-cost lunchbox banquets, with the TV occupying the place of honor at the head table.

If back in 1978, the children had been given an additional four months to choose among all the titles possible for nomination, they would have still agreed whole-heartedly with the adults on the nomination of Ramona and Her Father.

If, however, a childrens' representative had been seated on the Committee, he or she could have been counted on to lobby long and hard to give Cleary the Newbery itself.

And if in 1978 such a televised event of the winners' speeches had been publicized, half-pints of milk everywhere would have been raised in a toast to our beloved heroine, now Ramona the Award-Winner, and as a fond salute to a truly distinguished contributor to literature for children, our own Beverly Cleary.