

# The Colorado Children's Book Award Program: Why All the Shouting?

Sheryl R. Crow

The clock is ticking down to the end of the school day, and, except for the occasional hum of classroom activities and the patter of a student's feet as he goes to the office on an errand, the halls at Penrose Elementary School are quiet. Suddenly, the air explodes into applause and students are cheering all over the building. A few seconds pass, followed by another round of raucous cheering, and another, and another, until the final cheer is the longest and loudest, with joyful screaming mixed in to bring the outbursts to a climax. Why are these children cheering and why are the teachers and administrators letting them? They have just heard the voice of the Library Technology Educator over the intercom, and these children are responding to the announcement of book titles. Virtually everyone in the entire school is cheering for the winners of the Colorado Children's Book Awards.

## OVERVIEW OF THE COLORADO CHILDREN'S BOOK AWARD PROGRAM

The Colorado Children's Book Award (CCBA) is sponsored by the Colorado Council of the International Reading Association (CCIRA) and was established by Dr. Bill Curtis in 1975. Its purpose is "to encourage children's active involvement with books and reading."<sup>1</sup> Books are nominated by children each year and must be published in the previous five years by a living author who is residing in the United States. Newbery and Caldecott winners are not eligible, but honor books are. The nomination list consists of twenty titles and is compiled by a committee of the CCIRA. Students must read, or have heard, at least three books on the list in order to vote. Votes must be sent in by March 1. A Picture Book Winner and a Junior Novel/Middle Grade Winner is announced in April.

## THEORETICAL FOUNDATION

Why use the Colorado Children's Book Award program with students to promote reading? First, it encourages children to read and respond to quality literature. Louise Rosenblatt, in her *transactional theory of reader response* encourages the surrounding of children with quality children's books and opportunities to respond to them.<sup>2</sup> By doing this, children will naturally

relate to the author's text with their own rich and varied experiences and develop personal ties, whether it be efferent or aesthetic (i.e., focused on acquiring information or on the reader's feelings).<sup>3</sup> This is the process that creates lifelong readers.

Second, students are empowered by the act of voting for their favorite book. After watching the excitement and elation that emanated from the 21<sup>st</sup> Texas Bluebonnet Award presentation, Julie Cummins states that "surely nothing can generate lifelong readers more easily than encouraging children to have a vote in a value system for books and reading."<sup>4</sup> Compare this reaction to the findings in recent studies of computer-based reading quiz programs such as *Accelerated Reader*. In one study, 1,500 seventh graders in Michigan were followed. Half had used the Accelerated Reader program and half had not. The study found that while students read more while using the program, after it was over they read no more than before. In fact, it was found in some programs that students actually read less.<sup>5</sup> Penrose Elementary School students' reaction to the CCBA program has been just the opposite: the books from the nomination lists continue to be popular for up to three years after their nomination year.

Third, studies show that the amount of time children spend reading directly correlates with improved reading achievement. In a 1988-89 study of forty-six sixth grade classrooms in thirteen states, no significant difference was found between the type of reading program used to teach reading and reading achievement, nor between number of volumes in the school library and reading achievement. However, "a significant difference between sixth-grade reading achievement and circulated volumes per student was evident."<sup>6</sup> Penrose Elementary School has also found that the number of books circulated from its school library correlates with reading achievement. In 2001-2002 and again in 2002-2003, the intermediate grade levels with higher circulation statistics also had higher CSAP (Colorado Student Assessment Program) scores. Similarly, the grade levels with lower circulation statistics had lower CSAP scores (see Appendix A). Statistics and scores will be compared in future years at Penrose to see if these trends continue. Studies support and conventional wisdom holds that

when children read more, they read better.

#### **PENROSE'S IMPLEMENTATION OF THE CCBA PROGRAM**

Penrose Elementary School enjoys wonderful support for the program and has experienced great success with it. The Penrose PTA has supported the program for three years by supplying the funds to purchase the nominated books in multiple copies. Three copies of the junior novels and five copies of the picture books are purchased each year, with copies added throughout the year as the need demands. The Library Technology Educator goes to each classroom in the fall to explain the program and booktalk each title appropriate to that class. A huge bulletin board with all the nominated books' jackets is prominently displayed, and bookmarks are made and passed out to every student. A website is set up so parents can access the program's goals and nomination list.<sup>7</sup> Administrators and staff are encouraged to read the books to the students and many use creative and exciting activities to promote them. One third grade teacher tied in the math standard on graphing by taking a vote on each book read in class, then graphing the results in different ways for each. Principal George Marin read Julie Dannenberg's *First Day Jitters*<sup>8</sup> in an August inservice to teachers, who quickly snatched up the five copies to read to their classes on the first day of school. Because of the quality of books on the list and the support and encouragement by the PTA and the staff, Penrose enjoyed 92% participation in student voting in 2001, 88% in 2002, and 90% in 2003. Many students read at least half of the titles on the list, with several reading all twenty. Students go on to read other books by the same authors of the nominated books, as well as other books in the same genres. In addition, a by-product of the program is that teachers keep updated on new children's literature. The popularity of the nominated books doesn't end with the voting, either. Right after the classroom, building, and teacher choices are announced, there is a surge in reserves for those books, then again after the state winners are announced. Circulation of these books remains high for years after their appearance on the nomination list.

#### **CONCLUSION**

By using student choice reading programs such as the Colorado Children's Book Award, it is hoped Penrose Elementary School will continue to improve reading achievement, empower student choice, and most importantly, build lifelong readers. These are worthy goals for any educational institution—goals worth shouting about!

#### **NOTES:**

<sup>1</sup>Colorado Council of the International Reading Association. *Colorado Children's Book Award*. <<http://www.ccira.org/ccba.html>>.

<sup>2</sup>Louise M. Rosenblatt. *The Reader, the Text, the Poem: The Transactional Theory of the Literary Work* (Carbondale, IL: Southern Illinois University Press, 1994).

<sup>3</sup>Marjorie Hancock. *A Celebration of Literature and Response* (Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 2000).

<sup>4</sup>Julie Cummins. "Kids, Parades, and Books." *School Library Journal*, May 2001, 9.

<sup>5</sup>Karin Chenoweth, "Keeping Score." *School Library Journal*, September 2001, 48-51.

<sup>6</sup>Pamela Farris and Marjorie Hancock. "The Role of Literature in Reading Achievement." *Clearing House*, November/December 1991, 114-118.

<sup>7</sup>Sheryl Crow. Colorado Springs School District Eleven. *CCBA Program*. March 4, 2003. <[http://www.ccssd11.k12.co.us/penrose/ccba\\_program.htm](http://www.ccssd11.k12.co.us/penrose/ccba_program.htm)>.

<sup>8</sup>Julie Dannenberg. *First Day Jitters* (Watertown, MA: Whispering Coyote/Charlesbridge, 2000).

#### **ADDITIONAL READINGS:**

Brown, David. *Children's Book Awards*. <<http://www.ucalgary.ca/~dkbrown/awards.html>> Accessed June 19, 2003.

Ley, Elaine, Connie Mitchell, and Roger Wachtel. "Who or What is Eliot Rosewater, and Why Should You Care?" *Indiana Media Journal*, September 1996, 3-7.

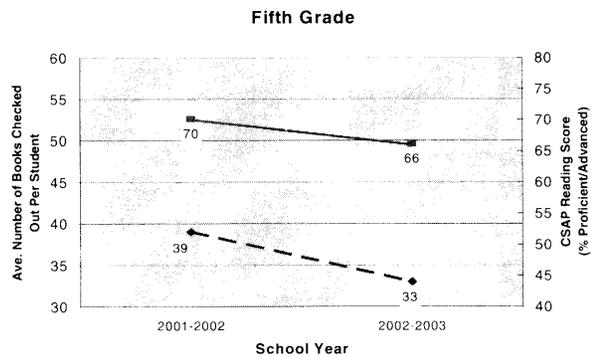
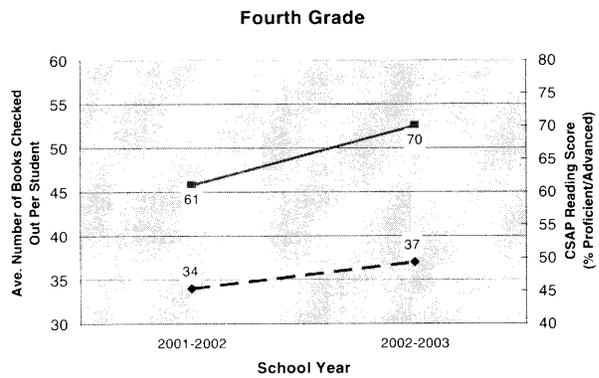
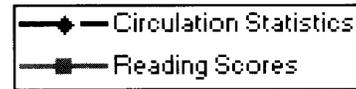
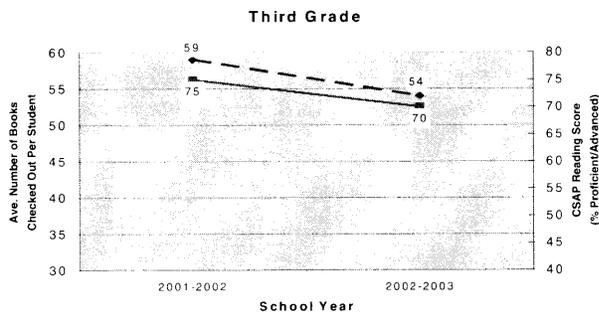
Smith, Cynthia. *Awards for Children's and YA Books by State (and National)*. <<http://www.cynthialeitichsmith.com/newreadingd.htm>> Accessed June 19, 2003.

*Tips for Implementing the Colorado Children's Book Award Program*

- Get financial support for purchasing books
- Purchase several copies of each nominated title, preferably in pre-bound covers
- Booktalk each appropriate title in every classroom
- Display book jackets on bulletin board in prominent place
- Display nominated books separately with sign or shelf marker
- Continue displaying past years' nomination books
- Create large bookmarks and pass them out to every student
- Create website with nomination titles and winners (see <[http://www.cssd11.k12.co.us/penrose/ccba\\_program.htm](http://www.cssd11.k12.co.us/penrose/ccba_program.htm)>)
- Print nomination list and program goals in the school newsletter
- Elicit ideas from creative teachers for activities to promote the books and share with the whole staff
- Have one separate set of the nomination books for teachers use
- Have the principal or other staff read a picture book from the list at a staff meeting
- Go to each classroom to take the official vote
- Announce winners over the intercom (be sure to wear earmuffs!)

**Appendix A**

**Penrose Elementary School (Colorado Springs) Third, Fourth, and Fifth Grade Circulation Statistics Compared with CSAP Reading Scores**



## Colorado Children's Book Award Winners

- 1976 – Peet, Bill. *How Droofus the Dragon Lost his Head*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1975.
- 1977 – Peck, Richard. *A Day No Pigs Would Die*. New York: Random House, 1972.
- 1978 – Balian, Lorna. *The Sweet Touch*. Watertown, Wis.: Humbug Books, 1976.
- 1979 – Flora, James. *The Great Green Turkey Creek Monster*. New York: Margaret K. McElderry, 1976.
- 1980 – Barrett, Judith. *Cloudy with a Chance of Meatballs*. New York: Atheneum, 1978.
- 1981 – Calhoun, Mary. *Cross-country Cat*. New York: William Morrow, 1979.
- 1982 – Blume, Judy. *Superfudge*. New York: Dutton, 1980.
- 1983 – Marshall, Edward. *Space Case*. New York: Dia, 1980.
- 1984 – Mayer, Marianna. *The Unicorn and the Lake*. New York: Dial, 1983.
- 1985 – Allard, Harry. *Miss Nelson is Back*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1982.
- 1986 – Schwartz, Alvin. *In a Dark, Dark Room and Other Scary Stories*. New York: HarperCollins, 1984.
- 1987 – Wood, Audrey. *King Bidgood's in the Bathtub*. San Diego: Harcourt Brace, 1985.
- 1988 – Numeroff, Laura. *If You Give a Mouse a Cookie*. New York: HarperCollins, 1985.
- 1989 – Cole, Joanna. *The Magic School Bus at the Waterworks*. New York: Scholastic, 1986.
- 1990 – Lester, Helen. *Tacky the Penguin*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1988.
- 1991 – San Souci, Robert. *The Talking Eggs: A Folktale from the American South*. New York: Dial, 1989.
- 1992 – Picture Book: Kimmel, Eric. *Hershel and the Hanukkah Goblins*. New York: Holiday House, 1989.  
– Chapter book: Sachar, Louis. *Wayside School is Falling Down*. United States: Lothrop, 1989.
- 1993 – Picture Book: Robertus, Polly. *The Dog who had Kittens*. New York: Holiday House, 1991.  
– Chapter Book: Schwartz, Alvin. *Scary Stories 3: More Tales to Chill your Bones*. New York: HarperCollins, 1991.
- 1994 – Picture Book: Scieszka, Jon. *Stinky Cheese Man & Other Fairly Stupid Tales*. New York: Viking, 1993.  
– Chapter book: Gurney, James. *Dinotopia: A Land Apart from Time*. New York: HarperCollins, 1992.
- 1995 – Picture Book: Stevens, Janet. *Coyote Steals the Blanket: A Ute Tale*. New York: Holiday House, 1993.  
– Chapter Book: Coville, Bruce. *Jeremy Thatcher, Dragon Hatcher*. New York: Harcourt Brace, 1991.
- 1996 – Picture Book: Brown, Marc. *Arthur's Chicken Pox*. New York: Little Brown, 1994.  
– Chapter Book: Robinson, Barbara. *The Worst Best School Year Ever*. New York: HarperCollins, 1994.
- 1997 – Picture Book: Palatini, Margie. *Piggie Pie!* Boston: Clarion, 1995.  
– Chapter Book: Sachar, Louis. *Wayside School Gets a Little Stranger*. New York: William Morrow, 1995.
- 1998 – Picture Book: Schnetzler, Patti. *Ten Little Dinosaurs*. Denver: Accord Publishing, 1996.  
– Chapter Book: Naylor, Phyllis. *Shiloh Season*. New York: Atheneum, 1996.
- 1999 – Picture Book: Arnold, Ted. *Parts*. New York: Dial, 1997.  
– Chapter Book: Pilkey, Dav. *Adventures of Captain Underpants: An Epic Novel*. New York: Scholastic, 1997.
- 2000 – Picture Book: Parks, Barbara. *Psst! It's Me the Bogeyman*. New York: Atheneum, 1998.  
– Chapter Book: Naylor, Phyllis. *Saving Shiloh*. New York: Atheneum, 1997.
- 2001 – Picture Book: Lester, Helen. *Hooway for Wodney Wat*. New York: Houghton Mifflin, 1999.  
– Chapter Book: Howe, James. *Bunnicula Strikes Again!* New York: Atheneum, 1999.
- 2002 – Picture Book: Shannon, David. *David Goes to School*. New York: Blue Sky Press, 1999.  
– Chapter Book: Harness, Cheryl. *Ghosts of the White House*. New York: Simon & Schuster, 1998.
- 2003 – Picture Book: Scieszka, Jon. *Baloney, Henry P.* New York: Viking, 2001.  
– Chapter Book: Snicket, Lemony. *The Bad Beginning*. New York: HarperCollins, 1999.

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