Through my journey through the course so far, I feel as though my eyes have been opened to how awards are chosen and how to select quality literature for my students and myself. It was interesting to learn about the selection process behind all of the various methods, how many books are recognized per year, and how much literary weight some awards have. I admit that previously, when I was shopping at Barnes and Nobel for quality books as I built my classroom library, I just had to have all of the award winners. Why? Because they must be great books if they got an award! However, as I have begun to uncover the background to each award and the debates that came with them, I have more information, more opinions, and more insight. There are many different facets that play a part in to what quality literature is. Experts have been working to make award rules and committees to ensure that "the right books" be chosen to be recognized (especially with the Caldecott and Newbery awards, which have been around for over seventy-five years). But, through learning this information, I feel as though there is not a way to guarantee that every book that is chosen is going to be well received by children or applicable to a wide audience.

First of all, I have learned that your background knowledge and interests play a huge role in what literature is deemed important for a certain individual. For example, I chose *Across the Wide and Lonesome Prairie* (from the Dear America series) as my "best book" because I was interested in its content and it pertained to something I already had prior knowledge on. At the time I became interested in this book, I remember my mother reading a book about The Oregon Trail and she was recounting the interesting facts she had learned to me. I felt connected to that information and chose to seek out a book to deepen my understanding and appreciation of the historical event. This book was not an award winner, but I chose it because I, myself, was interested in learning more about this topic. Another student in my class might not have chosen this book as a favorite because he or she was not driven to learn more about the information. This is one reason why I do not feel as though many of the awards affect children's choices of books. Children choose books on topics they want to learn more about, books that their friends are reading, or books that relate to them (not necessarily whether that book has a Newbery medal or not).

Secondly, I have learned that people are more likely to choose books as quality literature when they relate to them and find them meaningful. My group's discussion on *Charlotte's Web* and *Secret of the Andes* brought this idea to life. We all had several conversations about how we all thought that *Charlotte's Web* was a better quality book because it was applicable to our lives and it had stood the test of time (plus, we remember growing up with this book when we were kids!). This just goes to show that even though the committee clearly chose *Secret of the Andes* as the winner because of its poetic writing, difference in culture, and inner journey, *Charlotte's Web* is the text that is more widely received and is put as the favorite by most people. I think Amanda said it well when she mentioned, "*Secret's of the Andes* truly does explore a different culture and through a child with an unusual upbringing." I personally did not put myself in Cusi's shoes while reading this book. I appreciated the work of art as literature and definitely learned some things about Peru, but I did not find it meaningful to my own life. However, as I read *Charlotte's Web*, I was imagining myself as a child and how it would be if I

could really talk to animals and hear their conversations. I think the overall message also makes the distinction between how to relate to the two texts. A deep-rooted personal struggle with family or religious beliefs might relate more to an adult then a child. I think children want to hear stories about friendship because navigating relationships are something that is applicable to children (wish is what *Charlotte's Web* brings to them).

As we explored the multitude of different awards in Week Two, I realized how many of awards are given on the premise of minorities or historically oppressed groups of people. I learned about awards given to books regarding African American writing, Jewish experiences, or work that represents issues of social justice (just to name a few). I realized that many of the books that are chosen for awards for children's literature in general are about books that highlight a "minority". I think part of the reason these books are chosen to be awarded (aside from the fact that they are pieces of quality literature), is to recognize that this country is a melting pot. However, it brings about an important question: do the majority of children in our country see these as award-winning texts or are they just found important by children who can relate to them. For example, would students in my current classroom (a 100% Caucasian classroom, mostly revolving around the middle class) choose *Esperanza Rising* as a book they would like to read? On the other side of this debate, I absolutely think that it is vital for students to learn about, appreciate, and empathize with other students who are not like them. So I am not taking a stance that we need to create more homogenous selections, yet raising a question about how applicable these texts are to the majority of our youth.

In the same respect to the debate of "how relatable is this text", we return to the big debate between *Charlotte's Web* and *Secret of the Andes.* The more I found out about information on the Newbery, the more I believe it also highlights this very fact. While researching some more information about these two texts, I stumbled upon Anita Silvey's comment in the *School Library Journal* regarding a particular Newbery committee member. Apparently, the committee member said that she voted for Secret of the Andes instead of *Charlotte's Web* because she had not seen any good books about South America. Furthermore, the comment alludes to the fact that Secret of the Andes was a good book, but not necessarily the best book of the year (it was just different from the other selections). Additionally, looking over the most recent selections of the Newbery in particular, I notice more and more of the books are odd and unusual. They seem to reflect varying cultures and experiences, but do not have the "universal acceptable" factor that they once did. Texts like *Number of the Stars*, *Holes*, and *The Giver* are Newbery medal books that have seemed timeless and appreciated by children and adults alike. However, these books were awarded over ten years ago. So the question remains: why is the direction of the Newbery medal winners seeming more and more "out there"? Is it simply because of wanted to find something new and unique? Does this, in turn, create giving medals and awards to books that will be seldom read?

Many of the awards that we have been researching seem to draw similar genres and styles to their award winning texts. Many of my current first and second graders have been enthralled with more graphic novels, comic books, and *Captain Underpants* type books. I do not see many awards recognizing many books of this genre. The only award

that comes close is the Children's Choice Award. I think this brings up a pivotal point in choosing books to be recognized: do children really appreciate these texts? Obviously, children enjoy the books that are chosen by the Children's Choice Award (which I think is why they are more comical and on a variety of different genres). However, I cannot say that I usually witness a plethora of children picking up Caldecott medals. I have, though, seen many of my own students picking out books that are represented on the past few years' annual Children's Choice Award honor book lists.

These conclusions lead me to believe that many of these awards are more for the adults than for the children. Although committees of adults are getting together to discuss what books are of literary merit or whose illustrations are notable works of art, this does not mean that they are necessarily applicable to wide ranges of children. Moreover, I think that more adults are more influenced to pick up a book and share it with students if it has a medal on its cover. This is how I think award-winning books get infused into our children's repertoire of regular reading material. Children are more apt to choose books that they are interested in, that they feel a connection with (maybe the main character is the same age or going through the same situation), or that their peers are choosing. Rarely do children choose texts just based on the medal on the cover. So, why aren't more award committees considering the thoughts and knowledge of children? It seems as though if these awards are being developed for children, they ought to be the ones who have more say.

In closing, I think that a book should be considered a classic due to its ability to:
- stretch across multiple generations, yet still be relatable
- inspire children to keep reading
- reach a wide variety of children as the audience
- have a interesting plot, relatable characters, and a meaningful message
- have immense literary quality