

NEWS

Oakland children's librarian will help select Newbery Award book

By **LAURIE BOUCK**PUBLISHED: November 28, 2009 at 8:46 PM PST | UPDATED: August 15, 2016 at 4:49 PM PDT

Librarian Kathryn Shepler screamed when she learned she had been selected to the panel that will help select the recipient of what is arguably the nation's most prestigious award for children's literature.

The only problem was that she wasn't in the privacy of her own home.

"I think I actually shrieked in the hallways of O'Hare airport," Shepler recalled of the day in May when she learned she would help select the recipient of the 2010 John Newbery Medal.

She was traveling through the Chicago airport when she got the news.

"It's a tremendous honor to be even placed into nomination for the committee," Shepler said, "and to actually win a spot on the committee is just a wonderfully euphoric feeling."

Shepler, an Alameda resident who has been a children's librarian at Oakland's Aurora School for the past 10 years, will join 14 others nationwide on the Newbery panel. The medal recognizes the most distinguished children's book of the year. The award is given by the Association for Library Service to Children, a division of the American Library Association.

The Newbery Medal, established in the 1920s, is awarded to a book written for children up to age 14, based solely on the quality of the writing (the annual Caldecott Medal recognizes children's picture books). One book receives the Newbery Medal each year, and often several other books are recognized with Newbery Honor awards as well.

The 2009 Newbery Medal winner is "The Graveyard Book" by Neil Gaiman. The ALSC described the book as "a delicious mix of murder, fantasy, humor and human longing "... told in magical, haunting prose."

Each committee member nominates a number of books for the award, which the others read, discuss and ultimately vote upon during the course of the year. Because books of all genres are eligible for the award, Shepler hopes to read and nominate “a couple of genres that young people are enjoying reading,” such as history, fantasy, horror, science fiction and narrative nonfiction. She is looking forward to “perhaps pushing the envelope a little bit in the kinds of books that get taken under consideration.”

There’s been tremendous growth in children’s literature over the past 10 years, Shepler said.

“There is such a variety of books for kids in so many different genres, appealing to so many different interests,” she said. She has also seen an increase in multicultural books.

Shepler’s favorite classic children’s book is “Charlotte’s Web” by E.B. White, which she considers “a classic example of a perfectly constructed children’s book.” More recent favorites include Elizabeth Partridge’s “Marching for Freedom” about young people who marched for civil rights in Selma, Ala., in 1965, and Marilyn Nelson’s “Sweethearts of Rhythm: The Story of the Greatest All-Girl Swing Band in the World,” a book of poems about musicians of color.

Children, like adults, deserve access to literature that is “meaty and rich and demanding,” she said.

Shepler took an unusual path to the private Aurora School. Before joining the school, she spent almost two decades working as a vice president at Bank of America.

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She had always loved children’s literature, however, and helped set up a library at Aurora, where her children attended school. After she left the bank, the school offered her a position in the library.



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