2016 Notable Children's Books

Each year a committee of the Association for Library Service to Children (ALSC) identifies the best of the best in children's books. According to the Notables Criteria, "notable" is defined as: Worthy of note or notice, important, distinguished, outstanding. As applied to children's books, notable should be thought to include books of especially commendable quality, books that exhibit venturesome creativity, and books of fiction, information, poetry and pictures for all age levels (birth through age 14) that reflect and encourage children's interests in exemplary ways.

According to the ALSC Notable Children's Books Committee manual, these categories loosely represent the following: Younger Readers – Preschool-grade 2 (age 7), Middle Readers – Grades 3-5, ages 8-10; Older Readers – Grades 6-8, ages 11-14; All Ages – Has appeal and interest for children in all of the above age ranges.

When you see a word bubble ☐ before the title, it indicates a book we will be discussing at our presentation today.

Young Readers

This collection of humorous illustrations and clever word play introduces children to the wide variety of animal groups, such as a prickle of porcupines and a tower of giraffes.

Lewis Michaux Jr. takes readers through the National Memorial African Bookstore in Harlem. This one-of-a-kind store offered a place for African Americans to read, learn, and debate ideas for over 40 years.

Ballet Cat loves ballet more than anything. What happens when her best friend Sparkles doesn’t want to play ballet every day? Find out in an early reader that breezily dances along.

Three rowdy robots keep a young boy awake with their requests for more oil, tightened bolts, loosened fan belts, and more. Will a bedtime story finally lead to sleep?

Bagley’s gentle artwork and warm story sensitively portray Buckley’s way of coping with the absence of his father by making boats from found beach objects.

Whether they own chickens or not, young readers will use this handy guide to answer their basic questions about the familiar fowl.

Squirrel's nuts have been stolen! Never fear, a bulbous toad, Detective Gordon, and his new mouse assistant, Buffy, are on the case. A delightful mystery.

Underdog football player Mo Jackson may be the smallest kid on his team, but Coach Steve has a plan for him to save the day. (Geisel Medal Book)

In this story inspired by a real musician, a girl in Cuba longs to play the drums, and with perseverance, she breaks down the gender barrier, eventually becoming a famous drummer. (Belpére Illustrator Medal Book)

Emmanuel doesn't allow his malformed leg to deter him from riding a bike to crusade for disability rights in Ghana. His successes chronicled in this biography are inspirational.
This heartening tale is an incredible account of the friendship and love shared between a soldier and the real bear that inspired Winnie-the-Pooh. (Caldecott Medal Book)

In this wordless picture book, a gray, rainy day turns into an adventure when a boy makes a paper boat and plays outside in the rain.

Flop to the Top! By Eleanor Davis and Drew Weing. Illus. by the authors. TOON.
Wanda is shocked to learn that her dog, Wilbur—not Wanda—has become an instant celebrity when a selfie goes viral. Bright, bold cartoon art tells this story, emphasizing that friendship and family are more important than fame.

Fourteen poems of mammals, birds, insects, fish, and reptiles are presented in both English and Spanish. Embedded within the lively illustrations are additional words in both languages.

Little-known hero baker of the American Revolution Christopher Ludwick stars in this engaging picture book biography with a tasty twist.

Xiao Le’s grandmother passes away soon after he spends a rare day visiting her. His mother is sad, but Xiao Le helps her feel better, telling her what Grandma is doing in Heaven. (Batchelder Honor Book)

In this adaptation of Aesop’s fable, vivid, intricate watercolors bring to life hardworking ants as they prepare for the winter, while a playful grasshopper wishes they would join in his merrymaking instead.

A young Pedro Martinez, inspired by his brother Ramon, rises from humble beginnings in the Dominican Republic to become one of the best Major League Baseball players of our time.

The hippo, with its monstrous jaw and razor-sharp tusks, is the most dangerous animal in Africa. Filled with fascinating facts about the fierce, but sometimes playful, hippopotamus.

I Yam a Donkey! By Cece Bell. Illus. by the author. Clarion.
Correcting a donkey’s grammar and pronunciation comically leads to one yam’s demise.

A rabbit and mouse wait patiently for the seeds they planted to grow into delicious vegetables. When some birds want part of the harvest, everyone learns being kind is the most fruitful way to be.

CJ’s journey with his Nana is not just a simple bus ride; it is a multi-sensory experience through which he discovers that beautiful music, nature, and people surround him. (Newbery Medal Book & Caldecott Honor Book)

Homemade guardians Lenny and Lucy protect Peter and his dog from the dark, scary woods and help him find fun and friendship at his new home. Pops of color bring life to the charcoal illustrations.

Leo, a child ghost, leaves his home when its new occupants fear him. He soon meets Jane and discovers the wonder and joy of a true friend. Cut-paper collages capture Leo’s emotional journey.
Recalling the fight for the Voting Rights Act of 1965, a 100-year-old woman on the way to cast her ballot recounts the journey her family faced in gaining the right to vote.

When Mia discovers that her Abuela can’t speak English, she finds the perfect gift that helps them both with their language barrier. Vibrant illustrations and Spanish words blend together to create a warm family story. (Belpére Author & Illustrator Honor Book)

Addy and her family watch the moon follow them through the sky on a car ride home. Colorful cut-paper collage illustrations in luminescent tones illuminate the journey.

A dozen intriguing sea animals in the ocean explain their unique characteristics. Readers are invited to choose which is the most amazing.

In this small-format board book, three squares transform into a variety of vehicles, and with each page turn, shapes turn into objects in a fun visual twist.

Mr. Squirrel’s imagination runs wild when he mistakes a wheel of cheese for the moon. Gorgeous illustrations detail his efforts to get rid of the moon before anyone comes looking for it.

Aaron learns first hand from his grandfather (Tata), who cares for family, friends, and neighbors, the significance of healing with a tender touch of wisdom and medicinal herbs. (Belpére Illustrator Honor Book)

A Pig, a Fox, and a Box. By Jonathan Fenske. Illus. by the author. Penguin.
In three humorous stories, not-so-clever Fox comes out the worst for wear when he uses a box to play tricks on his friend Pig. (Geisel Honor Book)

Piper Green’s life is rich with family, friends, kittens, and magic. She meets her challenges head on and shows her spirit in everything she does.

Sink your teeth into a delicious collection of poetry for all seasons, complete with imaginative watercolor illustrations that bring the whimsy to life.

Princess Pinecone wants a proper warrior’s horse for her birthday. The round, short, flatulent one she gets instead is not what she had in mind, but she learns it can be a secret weapon.

Beautifully detailed, up-close photos of the natural world demonstrate the wonder of raindrops as they splatter, drip, roll, and more.

A girl and her friends laugh when a classmate blushes on the playground. When one student takes the teasing too far, the girl must make a critical decision.

Cinematic art and text illuminate exuberant Emily, whose loud hobbies interrupt Roger as he tries to peacefully read his book.

A little girl collects wildflowers while her distracted father pays little attention. In a wordless homage to the importance of small things, each flower becomes a gift, transforming the giver and the recipient.
What is a man to do when a skunk appears on his doorstep? Readers follow the man and skunk on a quirky, humorous adventure.

Meeting some odd characters along the way, Sadie travels by plane, train, and alligator to deliver an elephant to lonely Great Aunt Josephine.

When a blizzard comes to town, an unassuming garbage truck secretly trades his glasses for a powerful snowplow and becomes the heroic "Supertruck."  (Geisel Honor Book)

Elegant illustrations and poetic text tell the story of Anna Pavlova, an accomplished ballerina who shared the beauty and joy of dance with the entire world.

Other than Tapir and her little one, the jungle animals are all so noisy! When a hunter comes to the jungle, the other animals learn the value of quiet. Stylized illustrations convey the jungle sounds.

In this autobiography, Trombone Shorty reminisces about his early life in the jazz music scene of his beloved hometown of New Orleans.  (Caldecott Honor Book)

Two mice embark on adventures on the water and in the air, by both day and night. Beginning readers will enjoy the simple text, the counting experience, and the colorful illustrations.

On their way to catch a bus, a mother wants to hurry; her child wants to wait. A surprise stops them both, just short of the bus.

In this gentle story of five animal figurines waiting together by the window, readers and characters meet new friends, observe the unhurried passage of the seasons, and anticipate what may come next.  (Caldecott & Geisel Honor Book)

Through simple, poetic phrases and engaging watercolor illustrations, a sister and brother experience the water cycle throughout the seasons.

Flip the pages to view the suspect line-ups and use the visual clues to determine the “who done it” on each page. A mystery designed for preschoolers.

When her parents decide to raise a baby wolf as their own, Dot the rabbit fears that he will eat them all up, until a surprising encounter with a bear brings them closer together.

Five-year-old Eddie, after a spirited quest through the shops in her French village, parleys a brioche, a clover, a button, and a postage stamp into the perfect birthday gift for her mother.  (Batchelder Award Book)

Enter the world of woodpeckers and enjoy a bird’s-eye view of their everyday life. A variety of woodpecker species fly through these beautifully illustrated pages.

Written and Drawn by Henrietta. By Liniers. Illus. by the author. Tr. by the author. TOON.  
Henrietta is writing and illustrating a story about a three-headed monster. Liniers’ thin-lined, expressive cartoons, complete with Henrietta’s crayon-thick scrawls, track her joyful creation of a scary and funny adventure.  (Batchelder Honor Book)
Middle Readers

From the shooting of Crispus Attucks to the inauguration of President Barack Obama, 28 moments in Black history are celebrated through poetry, prose, and vivid illustrations.

**Adam and Thomas.** By Aharon Appelfeld. Illus. by Philippe Dumas. Tr. by Jeffrey M. Green. Seven Stories/Triangle Square.
In the last months of World War II, two Jewish boys are taken from the Ghetto by their mothers to the forest of the Eastern Front and told to wait for their return. The boys forge a strong friendship, learning from one another and helping others escape through the woods. *(Batchelder Honor Book)*

**Adventures with Waffles.** By Maria Parr. Illus. by Kate Forrester. Tr. by Guy Puzey. Candlewick.
Whether sledding with chickens or boating with cows, there’s never a dull moment when neighbors Lena and Trille are together. The Norwegian village comes alive in this tale of family, friendship, and adventure.

Eighth-grader Apple, a Filipino American, faces bullying, parental conflicts, fickle friends, and a lack of self-confidence with the help of a Beatles cassette, new friends, and the determination to play the guitar.

**The Blackthorn Key.** By Kevin Sands. Aladdin.
In 1665 London, Christopher, an apothecary’s apprentice, and his best friend Tom attempt to uncover the truth behind a mysterious cult. They follow a trail of puzzles, codes, pranks, and danger toward a powerful secret.

**Echo.** By Pam Munoz Ryan. Scholastic.
This original fairytale intertwines with historical fiction to explore music and its power to save, heal, and set free. *(Newbery Honor Book)*

From an early age, poet E. E. Cummings loved words. Burgess’s text, enhanced by Di Giacomo’s collage illustrations, explores Cummings’ life from his childhood to his career as a poet.

**Fish in a Tree.** By Lynda Mullaly Hunt. Penguin/Nancy Paulsen.
With the help of an insightful teacher and quirky friends, Ally discovers how smart she really is in spite of being identified as dyslexic.

The story of Frederick Douglass’ inspirational life and quest for equal rights unfolds with dramatic illustrations and powerful language, including quotes from Douglass.

Set against the backdrop of the first lunar landing, this free verse novel features Mimi Oliver, a half Japanese, half African American girl who learns about fitting in and standing up for what’s right.

**Funny Bones: Posada and His Day of the Dead Calaveras.** By Duncan Tonatiuh. Illus. by the author. Abrams.
In this book about artist José Guadalupe Posada, Tonatiuh juxtaposes his own artwork with Posada’s iconic Dia de Muertos illustrations and life, telling the story of a remarkable man and time in Mexican history. *(Sibert Medal Book & Belpre Illustrator Honor Book)*

**Fuzzy Mud.** By Louis Sachar. Random/Delacorte.
Taking a shortcut through the off-limits woods to avoid a bully, Tamaya and Marshall encounter fuzzy-looking mud that unleashes a medical and environmental disaster.

**George.** By Alex Gino. Scholastic.
George identifies as a girl; if only the rest of the world would too. With the help of best friend Kelly, George takes the first steps to becoming Melissa, her true self.

Sisters Delphine, Vonetta, and Fern travel to rural Alabama to visit Big Ma during the summer of 1969, where they find out about southern culture, animal rights, and the strength of their family, both past and present.
In a spunky graphic novel retelling of Sleeping Beauty, Harriet, a hamster princess, embarks on many wild adventures until the curse on her backfires and she needs to save her parents.

Lailah, a young girl who has been looking forward to fasting for Ramadan for her first time, suddenly feels shy because she is at a new school in a new country.

In his efforts to make a fresh start in middle school, Trent struggles to put a traumatic event behind him. Fallon, the class outcast, strives to help Trent let go of his guilt.

Learn about more than 250 species of monkeys from around the world through a series of warm illustrations and fascinating facts.

A war between Earth and aliens leads to the evacuation of children to Mars. When the grown-ups disappear, Alice, her friends, and a robot goldfish make a discovery that might just change everything.

Two seemingly unrelated plots—Billy Marvel’s wordless, illustrated story set in 1776; and Joseph Jervis’s prose story set in 1990—come together in a tale of mystery, adventure, friendship, and family.

Follow along as Ben Franklin applies the scientific method to a new mysterious phenomenon Dr. Mesmer has been spreading across France. A whimsical look at science and history.

Once Robert Battle’s leg braces were off, nothing could keep him from flying. With determination and love of dance, he became the artistic director of the renowned Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater.

My Two Blankets. By Irena Kobald. Illus. by Freya Blackwood. HMH.
While learning a new language in a new country, a young woman compares her native language to a warm, comfortable blanket. Soon she has two comfortable blankets—the old and the new language.

Hazel Wong and her best friend Daisy Wells form a secret detective agency at their boarding school. They open their first big case when their teacher, Miss Bell, turns up dead.

Steve is always anxious and his baby brother’s health issues take it to another level. When he is approached by the Wasp Queen, who claims she can solve his worries, he learns agreeing with the wasps comes with a dangerous price. Haunting and eerie.

George Moses Horton overcame slavery and illiteracy to become a remarkable poet. His love of words and success as a poet will inspire readers.

Kara and her American mother are different from everyone they know in their Chinese neighborhood. When a medical emergency forces them into the mire of Chinese bureaucracy, Kara’s future becomes desperate and unpredictable.

Astrid falls in love with roller derby and learns how to be tougher, stronger, and fearless. Jamieson perfectly captures the highs and lows of growing up in this dynamic graphic novel. (Newbery Honor Book)
Sex Is a Funny Word: A Book about Bodies, Feelings, and YOU. By Cory Silverberg. Illus. by Fiona Smyth. Seven Stories/Triangle Square.
This age-appropriate and inclusive resource, featuring cartoon-style illustrations, is aimed at young children and their caregivers. It invites conversations about sex, gender, and the human body.

In 1932 North Carolina, Stella feels the effects of a Klan cross burning, segregation, voter registration, and a major house fire in a story of change in a close-knit community.

Terrible Typhoid Mary: A True Story of the Deadliest Cook in America. By Susan Campbell Bartoletti. illus. HMH.
Known as a carrier of the deadly typhoid fever, Mary Mallon was also a victim of civil rights violations and overly harsh treatment. Her nuanced biography reveals the true complexity of her infamous case.

At the turn of the twentieth century, Czechoslovakian Robert Miller became a con artist. Calling himself Vic, he started with small schemes, working his way toward selling the Eiffel Tower.

Told primarily in letters, a series of humorous events kicks off when Sophie discovers chickens with astonishing abilities after her family inherits her great uncle’s farm.

Bradley’s powerful plot, remarkably drawn characters, and sparse language are outstanding components of this novel about courage, community, and conviction. (Newbery Honor Book)

Older Readers

- Cuckoo Song. By Frances Hardinge. Abrams/Amulet.
- Drowned City: Hurricane Katrina and New Orleans. By Don Brown. Illus. by the author. HMH.
- The Lightning Queen. By Laura Resau. Scholastic.
- Rhythm Ride: A Road Trip through the Motown Sound. By Andrea Davis Pinkney. illus. Roaring Brook.
- The Smoking Mirror. By David Bowles. IFWG.

All Ages

Spare rhythmic text and swirling abstract illustrations take readers of all ages into the bebop world of John “Dizzy” Gillespie and Charlie “Bird” Parker.

Written in free verse poems, this oversize counting book features striking detailed portraits filled with emotion, which showcase a variety of creatures.
After losing his family to war, the grieving Hiawatha is asked by the Peacemaker to help him unite the five warring Iroquois nations. Vivid oil paintings illustrate the fictional retelling of the true story.

Explore the New York City subway system with Pablo and Alicia as they get separated from their class while finding their way to the Empire State Building. Includes maps, archival photos, and historical notes.

In detailed, pen-and-ink illustrations, Myers relates the story of a boy and his pen, who, together, can build worlds, ride dinosaurs, and show love—all they have to do is let the worlds inside themselves out!

Bold, colorful photos, paired with kid-friendly poems about nature, connect readers to the outside world and show how easily poetic inspiration comes from our planet.

An only child trying to find her way to grandma’s house becomes lost in an unknown world, but imaginative companions help her find her way back. A stunning wordless graphic novel that explores isolation and resourcefulness.

Pastel tones plunge readers into a world of discovery as a shy boy overwhelmed by a crowded pool discovers worlds of imagination in the watery realm below.

Poems by legendary African American poet Langston Hughes celebrate water in many forms. His words are brought to life with brightly colored collage art by Ashley Bryan.

The inspirational singer and Civil Rights activist comes to life in 22 brief, first person, free verse poems that seamlessly incorporate Hamer’s own words. The biography takes her from a sharecropping child to a community leader. (Caldecott & Sibert Honor Book)

Members of the 2016 Notable Children's Books Committee are: Maralita (Micki) Freeny, College Park, Md., Chair; Allison Barney, Nashville (Tenn.) Public Library; Keary Bramwell, Mount Prospect (Ill.) Public Library; Paige Bentley-Flannery, Deschutes Public Library, Sisters, Ore.; Brenda Dales, Miami University, Oxford, Ohio; Kimberly Probert Grad, Brooklyn (NY) Public Library; Sharon Haupt, San Luis Coastal Unified School District, San Luis Obispo, Calif.; Danielle Jones, Multnomah County Library, Portland, Ore.; Joyce Laiosa, University at Albany (SUNY), Albany, NY; Gwen M. Taylor, Lewis Clark State College Library, Lewiston, Idaho; and Bina Williams, Bridgeport (Conn.) Public Library.

Thanks for joining us today at the 2016 Kutztown University Children’s Literature Conference! We’ll put our presentation and handout on the conference website in the near future.

Karen, Sue, and Roseanne