Library Media

*By Michael Klimas*

In the depths of winter come the numerous award announcements /shows honoring the year’s best motion pictures, stage productions, musical compositions and…books! For this *Strong Scoop* article I shall focus on, perhaps, the biggest three of young-adult literature: The National Book Award, The Newbery Award, and the Michael Printz Award

**The National Book Award:** Established in the 1930s, its mission is to *“celebrate the best of American literature, to expand its audience, and to enhance the cultural value of good writing in America.”* It hands out four book awards in fiction, non-fiction, poetry and young adult literature, respectively. The young-adult literature category was first awarded in 1996.

The 2014 winner is: *Brown Girl Dreaming* by Jacqueline Woodson. This is an auto-biographical memoir told in verse. It is a coming-of-age book aimed at the middle school audience. Through her poems Woodson recounts her youth—1960s and 70s America—and what it was like to grow up as an African-American girl as the Civil Rights Movement eradicated the Jim Crow laws of the American South. As the official citation states: Brown Girl Dreaming offers the reader “a sharp social commentary of a country’s struggle to live up to its ideals, an honest portrayal of the strength of family, and the delicate blossoming of a young writer.”

**The Newbery Award:** Established in 1921, it was the first children’s book award in the world, with a mission to annually honor "the most distinguished contribution to American literature for children." Awarded by the American Library Association (ALA) there is one medal winner and, given the year, one to four “Honor’-able Mentions.

The 2015 winner is: *Crossover* by Kwame Alexander. It is similar to Woodson’s *Brown Girl Dreaming* in that *Crossover* is a coming-of-age story, written for the middle grades, and, likewise, incorporates verse. It is a realistic-fiction novel dealing with twin brothers on the verge of adolescence, how basketball has been an integral, grounding part of their moral lives, and how their individuality beginning to emerge tests their fraternal bond. As Alexander stated in an interview: “ [I] tried to write the book to show boys – and girls – that poetry could be cool”.

**The Michael L. Printz Award:** Established in 2000, its mission is to annually recognize "best book written for teens, based entirely on its literary merit.” Awarded by the Young Adult Library Services Association (YALSA) there is one winner and up to four honorable mentions. Michael Printz was a high school librarian and a long time, active member and promoter of YALSA.

The 2015 winner is: *I’ll Give You the Sun* by Jandy Nelson. Again we see the similarities across much of young adult literature—the coming-of age story. Here we meet two fraternal twins: Noah and sister Jude at various moments during their during their teen years; moments told by each of them. Eighth graders and up would get the most from this challenging novel has to offer—in dealing with a tragedy that affects their relationship, their lives, forever, “it shows its protagonists moving from a black-and-white version of the world to one of infinite, sometimes uncomfortable, variegations.”

For more detailed literary analyses, here are the respective *New York Times* book reviews:

<http://www.nytimes.com/2014/08/24/books/review/jacqueline-woodsons-brown-girl-dreaming.html>

<http://www.nytimes.com/2014/05/11/books/review/the-crossover-by-kwame-alexander.html>

<http://www.nytimes.com/2014/11/09/books/review/ill-give-you-the-sun-by-jandy-nelson.html>

All of these award-winning titles have been ordered for the shelves of Strong Middle School’s Library. See you in the stacks! =)

