Irma Black Award Book Curriculum

Description, Goals, Intended Outcomes

The Irma S. and James H. Black Award is given annually to a book that exemplifies excellence in text and illustration together. The four finalists have been chosen by 3rd and 4th graders from a semifinalist list selected by a committee of educators. The winner receives a gold seal and the other three finalists become honor books with a silver seal.

Below are some guidelines to assist you through the process. None of the suggestions and sample questions are required, but are meant to give you an idea of how to structure the conversations. This year almost 10,000 children from all over the United States participated in this curriculum.

Please use this link to download the Irma Black Award Book Curriculum, and visit Irma Black Award: Book Discussion Guide for more on critical book discussion with children.

How Did We Get to These Four Finalists?

From the many children's books published each year, an adult group of writers, librarians and educators choose approximately 16 to 20 books that they consider the best candidates for the Award.

These books are then sent (in four sets) to the 3rd and 4th grade classrooms at the Bank Street School for Children. As part of their picture book evaluation curriculum, we ask these students to look critically at the art and words and whether these books would be relevant to younger children. Over the course of five weeks the children read and discuss all of the books before selecting four finalists.

Then What Happens?

The four finalist titles are placed in 1st and 2nd grade classrooms or libraries in schools. The children in these classrooms read, examine, discuss, and re-read the books over a six-week period, before they select the winning book.

How Do I Sign Up?

Just send an e-mail to Kristin Freda with your name, the school’s name and address, contact phone number and e-mail.
Procedures

Before implementing the Irma Black curriculum, spend time examining previous award winners and discussing the criterion for excellence with the student. Create a checklist to refer to when beginning the picture books study.

Registration will begin February 14, 2012. To see this years registration go to schoollibraryjournal.com and for curriculum guidance visit Irma Black Award: Book Discussion Guide.

Read aloud and discuss the four finalists with 1st and 2nd graders. Submit the children's votes at the Bank Street College secure website (a link will be sent via email after you register). The four finalist titles will be announced February 14, 2012.

Budget

Plan for $60.00 for the four picture books. Through the Bank Street Bookstore by calling 1-800-724-1486 or email books@bankstreet.edu. A complete set of the four titles can be pre-ordered and shipped when available for $60.00 (a $10 discount) plus $5.00 shipping ($65.00 total) by calling 1-800-724-1486. No tax will be charged for books shipped to schools and libraries. Just order the ISB 2012 Award books. A large school might want multiple sets. They will be available from major distributor, and other book stores.

Time Estimates

Plan at least five to ten minutes to read aloud each title. Plan to have five to ten minutes for discussion. This will include examining the pictures more closely or hearing the language of the text again. Best practice would be to hear the books again and again over four weeks and engage the children in reading response activities.

Examples of reader response activities:

Campaign posters, Creating advertising, a wiki discussion, graphing votes, mapping the stories, create original covers reflecting the themes and art. Creating art in the style or media of the award books. Small group discussions. Readers Theater from the text. 4th and 5th graders can read aloud the award books to younger buddy students. 4th, 5th and 6th graders can create their own picture books for reading aloud as an extension of the study. Create an opportunity for public speaking as students advocate for their favorites.
**Time Line**

1. Six week time frame from the beginning of March to the second week in April.
2. Note that you may have to account for Spring break somewhere in the middle.
3. Votes are due to the Bank Street College secure site on April 6, 2012
4. How do I get the silver and gold seals?

Registered participants may send a stamped, self-addressed envelope to:

Attn: Irma Black Award  
Bank Street College of Education Library  
610 West 112th Street  
New York, NY 10025

Additional stickers can be ordered for $0.50 a piece from the Bank Street Bookstore.

**Evidence of Outcomes, Possible Adaptations, Lessons Learned**

Benefits of Reading Aloud to Children

1. “In 1985, the National Academy of Education issued a report based on two years of analysis of more than ten thousand research projects conducted in the previous quarter of a century.
2. Below are two of the key findings:
   o "The single most important activity for building the knowledge required for the eventual success in reading is reading aloud to children."
   o "It is a practice that should continue throughout the grades."
   o Picture books as visual context to provide writing and reading skills
   o Picture books for visual literacy skills
     - To observe details
     - To infer and perceive
     - To identify symbols, shaper, and colors
     - To generalize information

**Possible Adaptation**

This curriculum can be adapted for any age group, older students can consider child development issues, have a more sophisticated discussion of artistic style and media, and create their own product using the discussion criterion.
Common Core State Standards addressed: Standards

Critical thinking skills

1. Knowledge: Can the children recall elements of the story?
2. Comprehension: Do they understand the story. The different styles of art and media?
3. Application: Can the children express their thoughts about the four titles?
4. Analysis: Are the children able to support their statements using content from the text or pictures? Are the students able to generalize about these titles and compare to other titles in their knowledge base?
5. Synthesis: Can they make connections about these titles to others? Can they compare content?
6. Evaluation: Do the children understand the criteria for excellence? Do the children understand what makes a "best book"? Do they have an opinion about which book is "the best" to them?

Skills taught: Objectives

Students will:

1. develop grade-appropriate listening skills as they listen to the four award finalists,
2. will be able to recognize elements of a picture book for discussion. Cover, end-papers, pages, and spine. Words and art as well as who creates the words and pictures,
3. will be able to evaluate the words and story of the four award finalists,
4. will be able to express their opinions verbally,
5. will be able to discern artistic style and medium such as cartoonish or realistic, and water color or collage,
6. will be able to synthesize information and form a conclusion.

Assessments:

1. The Irma Black Awards generated significant enthusiasm among third graders. Several features were responsible for this:
   o The child-generated focus
   o The competitive process
   o The high quality of book selection
2. The majority of children’s responses in all three formats – oral, written and in pairs orally – were analytic in nature, confirming Sipe’s research.
   o The children were active participants in the text, responding most frequently to plot, character, settings, illustrations, and humor.
3. The children also made many intertextual (text to text) and personal (text to self) responses during the read alouds.
4. The use of a common text created a deep sense of community and generated many communal responses.
For example, the whole class gasped together when they came to an illustration across two pages of a pig’s nostrils.

5. The excitement around the context created a common focus of listening actively to each read aloud.
   - A child’s vote was at stake with every book.

6. This process improves vocabulary and comprehension

7. This process increases writing quality when children were asked to write in response to each of the books?