

ALSC Member Profiles

Keary Bramwell



Keary Bramwell is School Librarian at Grace Lutheran School in River Forest, Illinois.

In celebration of the centennial of the Newbery Medal, the ALSC Membership Committee interviewed past Newbery Committee members about their experiences.

Jenna Friebel, Collection Management Librarian, Oak Park Public Library; 2020 Committee (Newbery Winner *New Kid* by Jerry Craft)

Favorite memory?

Calling the authors was so satisfying and emotional. All our honorees were excited and grateful, and I definitely cried more than once!

What was the most unexpected part of being on the committee?

Before serving on the Newbery Committee, I had already served on award committees for Geisel (2016) and Printz (2018), so I was familiar with the process. Still, there's nothing quite like that feeling of being in the room and making the big decisions. It's impossible to predict beforehand how the discussions will go and what will make it out on top.

What advice would you give to a new member of the committee?

Always be open to changing your mind! You'll have favorites and not-so-favorites, but it's so important to truly listen to and consider the thoughts of your fellow committee members. That said, when you are passionate about a book, have plenty of textual evidence to back you up on its merits or lack thereof.

What is your favorite Newbery title (other than your year) and why?

What an impossible question! I don't think I can choose a favorite, but one that was monumental in my childhood was *The Witches of Worm* by Zilpha Keatley Snyder, a 1973 Newbery Honor. I read it in middle school, so roughly twenty years ago when the book was already nearly thirty years old. And although I haven't reread it since, I still credit it with being the book that turned me into the horror fan I am today.

What snack got you through the long committee meetings?

I had my own personal bag of double-dipped chocolate covered peanuts, my favorite comfort snack.



Tad Andracki, Middle School Librarian, University of Chicago Laboratory Schools; 2018 Committee (Newbery Winner *Hello, Universe* by Erin Entrada Kelly)

Favorite memory?

We met in Denver for our deliberations in the middle of winter, so, naturally, it began to snow during one of our meetings. We had a large bank of windows in our meeting room, so while we were discussing, we got distracted by the gently falling flakes. During our next break, we frolicked a bit in the snow, including our committee member who was a lifelong Angeleno and had never seen snow before!



What was the most unexpected part of being on the committee?

How often my mind changed! The committee is a group of people with a wide variety of life experiences—but who are all there for a reason. The ways that someone would suggest an alternative reading on the language used in a book that completely opened up my perspective...or might point out a minor detail that proved to be a fatal flaw...it was so rewarding to be with such a rich body of knowledge. And it made me rethink everything I thought I knew going in.

What advice would you give to a new member of the committee?

Take good notes, and put your systems in place early on how to sustain your home, social life, and work. Newbery reading will eat it all if you let it, and you need to figure out how to make it all work before it becomes too much.

What is your favorite Newbery title (other than your year) and why?

This question isn't fair! But I'm a huge E.L. Konigsburg fan, and *The View from Saturday* had a major impact on my life when I first read it. There's something about the way Konigsburg sketches characters who are a little awkward, a little nerdy, a little queer, and a little selfish—but always have a good heart, even if they don't know how to express it—that really speaks to me (and so many, I think).

Edith Ching, Instructor, University of Maryland; 2007 Committee (Newbery Winner, *The Higher Power of Lucky* by Susan Patron)

What was the most unexpected part of being on the committee?

How much I learned from my fellow committee members and how their insights helped inform me about the books we were discussing.



What advice would you give to a new member of the committee?

When I received word I had been elected to the Newbery committee, I cried because I felt overwhelmed by the honor and then worried that I wasn't "good enough" for the job. I realized that anyone can be a productive member if they are willing to put in the work. So have confidence and be ready to set aside a lot of time.

What is your favorite Newbery title (other than your year) and why?

When You Reach Me by Rebecca Stead. My son is mentally ill, and one of the things I treasure about this book is that Stead shows a person who becomes mentally ill but was once a sweet loving son and friend. It is one of the many "truths" of this book. &

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