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# An In-Depth Analysis of Character Traits Depicted in Newberry Medal Books from the 1920s to the 2000s

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# **An In-Depth Analysis of the Character Traits Depicted in Newbery Medal Books from the 1920s Through the 2000s**



**Presented by:**

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# Welcome!



**Educational Background**  
**Teaching experience**



# Introduction, Purpose, Significance



## Content Analysis

Literature-based character education

Moral development of children

Newbery Medal Award



# Why teach character?



1. Classroom climate

2. Critical inquiry

3. History and literature

4. Home and community

O'Sullivan, 2004

# How to teach character with books?



**Phase 1**

**Phase 2**

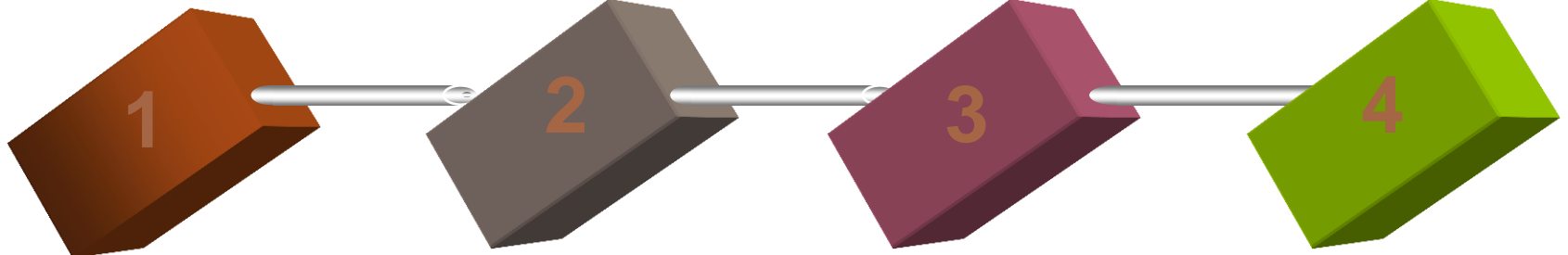
**Phase 3**

**Book  
selection**

**Active  
dialogue**

**Follow-up  
activities**

# Why choose Newbery books for character?



**Well-written books containing moral dilemmas**

**Books with enough depth – beyond literal level**

**Admirable but believable characters – about same age as reader**

**Wide range of cultures – boys and girls as lead characters**

# Newbery Medal Award Criteria



**“1. The Medal shall be awarded annually to the author of the most distinguished contribution to American literature for children published by an American publisher in the United States in English during the preceding year. There are no limitations as to the character of the book considered except that it be original work. Honor books may be named. These shall be books that are also truly distinguished.**

**2. The Award is restricted to authors who are citizens or residents of the United States.**

**3. The committee in its deliberations is to consider only the books eligible for the award, as specified in the terms”  
(ALSC, 2011)**



# Definitions of Criteria Terms



- **The website that has been referenced indicates that a contribution to American Literature indicates that committee members must consider all genres.**
- **The sentence stating that there are no limitations as to the character of the book is clarified in the very last sentence on the website: “Note: The committee should keep in mind that the award is for literary quality and quality presentation for children. The award is not for didactic content or popularity” (Association for Library, 2011 )**
- **The term didactic is synonymous with the term moralistic (An Encyclopedia Britannica, 2011)**

# Researchers, Educators, Parents



## Responsibility

**Align books with moral development**

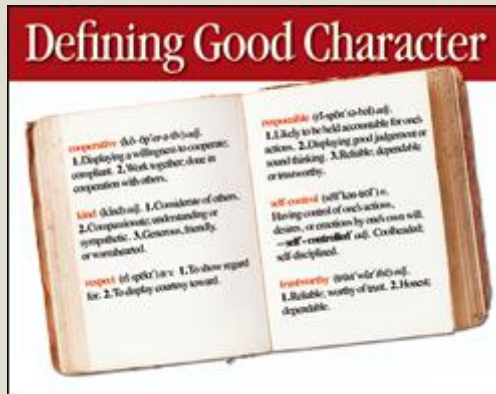
**Newbery criteria: definition of ‘child’**



# Moral Crisis and Mandates



Drugs, pregnancies, crime  
Federal mandates  
Character education programs  
Research study



# Positive and Negative Character Traits



**Love versus selfishness**

**Joy versus sorrow**

**Peace versus worry**

**Patience versus impatience**

**Kindness versus cruelty**

**Goodness versus immorality**

**Faithfulness versus betrayal**

**Gentleness versus violence**

**Self-control versus recklessness**

# Methodology



- **Content analysis**
- **Quantitative measures**
- **Descriptive/survey/interview methodologies**
- **Investigator triangulation**
- **Methods triangulation**
- **Annotation**
- **Consensus meetings – reduce variance**
- **Researcher's role**

# Inter-Rater Consensus



**Positive Character Traits**

**Consensus .9913**

**Negative Character Traits**

**Consensus .9948**



# Results Pertaining to Research Question One



- **Does each Newbery Medal book depict more positive or negative character traits?**
- **Chi-square test of independence**
- **Books one, two, three, five, six, seven, eight, nine, 10, 11, 12, 13, 15, 16, 17, and 18 – negative**
- **Books four and 14 – no difference**
- **Conclusion: significant difference 16/18 books**

# Results Pertaining to Research Question Two



- **With what frequency are specific positive character traits and paired negative traits demonstrated within each Newbery Medal book from the 1920s through the 2000s?**
- **Chi-square test of independence**
- **Null hypothesis rejected 100 times/ accepted 52 times**
- **Statistically significant greater frequency paired negative character traits**



# Results Pertaining to Research Question Three



- **Have Newbery Medal books become increasingly positive or negative, with respect to character traits, over nine decades?**
- **Chi-square test of independence**
- **Statistically significant greater frequency of negative traits**
- **1934 and 1989**

# Results Pertaining to Research Question Four



- **To what extent has the frequency of positive character traits and paired negative character traits conveyed in Newbery Medal books changed over the course of nine decades?**
- **Chi-square test of independence**
- **Love, faithfulness, self-control.**
- **Sorrow, worry, impatience, cruelty, immorality, violence.**

# Results Pertaining to Research Question Five



- **What are the general emergent themes related to morality within and across Newbery Medal books from the 1920s through the 2000s?**
- **Focus-group interview style open-ended discussion**
- **Readers' responses converged**
- **Emergent moral themes**

# Discussion



**Literature-based character education**  
**Recommended categories**



# Children's Literature



- **Invincible Louisa: The Story of the Author of Little Women**
  - **Thimble Summer**
  - **...And Now Miguel**
  - **It's Like This, Cat**
  - **Dear Mr. Henshaw**
- **Joyful Noise: Poems for Two Voices**

# Adolescents' Literature



- **The Trumpeter of Krakow**
  - **Johnny Tremain**
  - **King of the Wind**
- **The Witch of Blackbird Pond**
  - **The Westing Game**
    - **Holes**
- **The Tale of Despereaux: Being the Story of a Mouse, Some Soup, and a Spool of Thread**

# Adolescents' Literature: Proceed with Caution



- **The Dark Frigate**
  - **The High King**
  - **The Slave Dancer**
    - **The Giver**
- **The Graveyard Book**

# Recommendations



**Reconsider the definition of the term ‘child’**

**ALA: Two annual Newbery Medal Awards**

**Character must count**





# Future Research



**Quantitative: Further examination**

**Qualitative: Interview ALA**



# Hands-On Activity



- **Review definitions of positive and negative character traits**
  - **Individual activity**
  - **Group consensus meeting**



# References



- **Association for Library Service to Children. (2011). Retrieved on November 3, 2011, from**
  - ✦ **<http://www.ala.org/alsc/awardsgrants/bookmedia/newberymedal/newberyterms/newberyterms>**
- **An Encyclopedia Britannica Company: Merriam - Webster. (2011). Retrieved on November 2, 2011, from**
  - ✦ **<http://www.merriam-webster.com/thesaurus/didactic>**

# Thank You!



**Enjoy the rest of the ALER Conference!**



## Educational Research