

# **The Official YALSA Awards Guidebook**

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Compiled and Edited by  
Tina Frolund

For the Young Adult Library Services  
Association

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## Foreword

In 1999 I was working for the Kansas City (MO) Public Library. I had been a professional librarian for just over three years at the time. That year the library's young adult specialist was a member of YALSA's (Young Adult Library Services Association) Best Books for Young Adults (BBYA) committee and was moderating several teen input sessions focused on BBYA nominations. It was at one of these sessions that I first heard teenagers' comments about Walter Dean Myer's *Monster* (HarperCollins, 1999). I had read the book but had not yet talked about it with any teenagers until that session. Early in the discussion it became very clear how deeply affected many of the teens had been by the book. I can still clearly recall the comments of one 14-year-old young man. When given the opportunity to share his thoughts, he did not jump out of his seat with excitement. He did not wave his hand in the air wildly to grab anyone's attention. He said, simply, "I read this, the whole thing. I really did. I stayed up all night to finish it. It was really good." He didn't say anything more. Several teenagers nodded their heads in agreement and understanding. His brief comments had captured exactly how they all felt.

Months later in January 2000 *Monster* was named YALSA's first Michael L. Printz Award winner. It has received much well-deserved critical acclaim over the years, has been the subject of many teen literature discussions, and, along with the 2000 Printz Honor books *Skellig* by David Almond (Delacorte Press), *Speak* by Laurie Halse Anderson (Farrar Straus Giroux), and *Hard Love* by Ellen Wittlinger (Simon & Schuster Books for Young Readers), helped to set the highest standards for YALSA's Printz Award in defining "literary excellence." But it is the straightforward, poignant comments delivered by that 14-year-old young man those many years ago that have always remained with me. His words remind me that YALSA's award books connect with teenagers in a unique and enduring way. These are complex and groundbreaking titles that are read by teenagers not once but again and again, providing something new each time. These are the books that cause young adults to offer that strongest of teen endorsements, "I read this, the whole thing. It was really good."

It is no easy task for the librarians serving on the various award selection committees to find these books, those titles that fulfill their committee charges and also connect with teenagers. YALSA award selection committees consist of a wide variety

of members representing many different communities. Some are from multibranch public library systems serving cities and large metropolitan areas. Others are from school libraries serving students in small, rural communities. Award committee members read hundreds of books and spend hours discussing titles. In order to complete their task these diverse members must come to a consensus about what book or handful of books best fits the criteria for their specific award.

Serving on one of YALSA's prestigious awards committees is a great privilege and a tremendous responsibility. The hard work of these committees and their members matters greatly. People from around the country and the world—librarians, teens, teachers, reporters, and many others—wait with great anticipation for YALSA's annual January announcement of the award-winning titles. Minutes after the announcements the impact of YALSA's work is clear. Booksellers and libraries see a quick reaction from the world with sales of award winners increasing almost immediately and library reserve lists for these titles growing lengthy overnight.

The excitement of the annual announcement, however, should not overshadow the insight that the history of YALSA's awards can provide about the growth and expansion of teen literature. For example, the winners of YALSA's longest-standing award, the Margaret A. Edwards Award (established in 1988), cover a great range of books and authors, from titles written for younger teens such as Richard Peck's 1990 title *Ghosts I Have Been* (Viking Press, 1977) to Francesca Lia Block's classic *Weetzie Bat* books for older readers honored in 2005. With two new awards, the Odyssey Award, first given in January 2008, and the William C. Morris YA Debut Award, approved by the YALSA Board of Directors and to debut in 2009, it is clear that YALSA continues to play a pivotal role in raising awareness about the expansion in literature and material for young adults. There is no doubt that YALSA's awards are key to spreading the word about the ever-growing range of teen literature.

YALSA's Margaret A. Edwards, Alex, and Michael L. Printz Awards provide a starting point for building knowledge of and appreciation for young adult literature. Written by nationally recognized authorities in providing library services to teenagers, this guidebook brings together essential information about these YALSA awards in one place, clearly making *The Official YALSA Awards Guidebook* a core purchase for libraries. I encourage teachers, librarians, parents, and even teens to use this book as either an introduction to these time-tested award lists or as a resource for expanding your perspective about the wide array of engaging books targeted specifically to teenagers. By learning more about YALSA's awards, every librarian working with teenagers, from generalists to teen specialists, can greatly improve the service they provide teenagers in their libraries. And, in the end, that is the greatest accomplishment of all.

*Paula Brehm-Heeger*

## Preface

Young adult literature is now one of the fastest-growing segments in book publishing and is a highly regarded field of study in its own right. In addition to demographic influences, today's burgeoning interest in this literary segment has been greatly influenced by the Young Adult Library Services Association (YALSA) and its literary awards program. YALSA started bringing attention to young adult literature 20 years ago when it began establishing literary awards for young adult books. The first of these awards, The Margaret A. Edwards Award, given for a writer's lifetime contribution to young adult literature was first given in 1988 to S. E. Hinton. It was soon followed by the Alex Awards, for adult books with particular appeal to teens, in 1998. The third YALSA award was the popular Michael L. Printz Award for excellence in young adult literature, first given in 2000 to Walter Dean Myers. Through these awards, YALSA has educated the public about the growing field of YA literature and furthered twin missions of encouraging reading among young adults and educating the professionals who work with young adults.

YALSA now builds on this success by publishing the volume you are now holding in your hands, *The Official YALSA Awards Guidebook*. The Association's members and staff began compiling this guide in order to have a comprehensive, authoritative source of information about its major literary awards so readers, teachers, and librarians could find information about each award and advice about promoting reading of these stellar books in one easy-to-use source. The Association is proud to finally have an official historical summation of the awards, a checklist for collection development, a reader's advisory tool, and a book that interested browsers can use to explore YA literary history, trends, authors, and titles of note.

The timing for this book is propitious. The confluence of several events made it seem that YALSA and young adult literature have now achieved critical mass. Some 2008 marks:

- The fiftieth anniversary of YALSA
- The twentieth anniversary of the Edwards award
- The recent establishment of three new awards: the Odyssey Award for Excellence in Audiobook Production in 2008, a joint award given with

the Association for Library Service to Children and sponsored by Booklist; the William C. Morris Debut YA Award to honor a first-time author writing for teens in 2009; and the YALSA Award for Excellence in Non-fiction for Young Adults in 2010

- The inaugural Young Adult Literature Symposium sponsored by YALSA to be held biennially starting in November 2008

All of these events spoke to the need for a comprehensive volume summing up the YALSA awards to date.

The time was also right for asking the experts involved in the beginnings of the awards to contribute essays to remind the rest of us how it all started. The contributors to this volume comprise a who's who of YALSA luminaries and experts in both literature and services to young adults:

- YALSA Past President Michael Cart writes about the Printz Award.
- Betty Carter, a former YALSA board member who edited the first two volumes of *Best Books for Young Adults* and served on the inaugural Alex Awards committee, covers the Alex Awards.
- YALSA Past President Mary Arnold tells us about the Edwards Award.
- RoseMary Honnold, current editor of *Young Adult Library Services*, YALSA's official journal, shares her knowledge of programming for teens using the best literature available.
- YALSA Past President Pam Spencer Holley wrote the excellent annotations for each book listed.

This volume was also lucky enough to tap the expertise of two rising stars who will carry YALSA and the banner of YA lit into the future. Paula Brehm-Heeger, the 2007–2008 president of YALSA, wrote the foreword to this book. The chapter on the role award winners can play in effective collection development was written by Erin Downey Howerton, who served on the 2008 Edwards Award selection committee and currently edits YALSA's e-newsletter *YAttitudes*.

All of the people who contributed to this work encourage you to use this volume actively. Share it with teens who love to read and with teens who don't know what to read next. Share it with colleagues who want to know more about young adult literature. Make sure your library has a reference copy, but have a circulating copy as well. Use your personal copy as a reading log, mark it up with your own notes and reactions to each title—have a dialogue with this book, with your colleagues, and with the teens you serve. Young adult literature is a dynamic field, one that welcomes passion and participation—join the discussion!

*Tina Frolund*

## **Acknowledgments**

All acknowledgement, praise, and thanks must go to the contributors who truly wrote this book: Pam Spencer Holley, Betty Carter, Michael Cart, RoseMary Honnold, and Mary Arnold. Their knowledge, expertise, and generosity are the reason this volume could be created. Paula Brehm-Heeger and Erin Downey Howerton took time from active careers to contribute their expertise as well.

YALSA's Executive Director Beth Yoke was an early and enthusiastic supporter of this book, and Stephanie Kuenn, Communications Specialist at YALSA, has also been vital to the production of this book.