

Orbis Pictus Award for Outstanding Nonfiction for Children

Charge: *To select the recipient of the annual Orbis Pictus Award® and up to five honor books, and to promote the use of children’s nonfiction books in the classroom.*

The Orbis Pictus Award® was established in 1989 to promote and recognize excellence in the writing of nonfiction for children. The name Orbis Pictus, commemorates the work of Johannes Amos Comenius, Orbis Pictus—The World in Pictures (1657), considered to be the first book actually planned for children. The award is presented at the Children’s Book Awards Luncheon at the NCTE Annual Convention.

For more information on the Orbis Pictus Award, please go to: <http://www2.ncte.org/awards/orbis-pictus-award-nonfiction-for-children/>.

Major activities: What major actions, projects, initiatives, or studies in your charge have been completed by your group since July 1, 2018? In each activity describe the more important features of the work, and connect your work to the NCTE Vision Statement, if applicable.

1. List names, affiliations, and geographic region for all committee members.

Denise Dávila, Chair, University of Texas at Austin
Seemi Aziz, University of Arizona, Tucson, AZ
Amina Chaudhri, North Eastern Illinois University. Chicago, IL
Suzanne Costner, Fairview Elementary School. Maryville, TN
Daryl Grabarek, School Library Journal. New York, NY
Sanjuana C. Rodriguez, Kennesaw State University, GA
Julie Waugh, Zaharis Elementary School. Mesa, AZ

2. What actions, projects, initiatives, or studies are “in progress” at this time?

December 2018: Denise Davila became the chair of the Orbis Pictus committee. Applications for membership on the 2020 Orbis Pictus Committee were collected by NCTE and shared with the committee chair.

January 2019: Invitations were issued to welcome two new member onto the committee in place of two out-going members. The new committee met to mentor new members, review the bylaws and procedures for the 2020 award, develop a group identity, answer questions, and discuss the Orbis Pictus evaluation criteria.

In consultation with NCTE President Frankie Sibberson and the 2019 chairs of the Orbis Pictus and Huck committees, Mary Ann Cappiello and Ericka Dawes, the criteria for the book awards was updated to permit submissions of books either first published or distributed in the United States during the 2019 calendar year.

January - February 2019: The Orbis Pictus and Huck committee chairs collaborated in communicating with children’s book publishers and soliciting submissions. For example, we sent out our introductions to publishers on the same day, using the same letter, with appropriate changes made to share information on each committee. We encouraged publishers to send books as soon as possible. The committee began receiving books in February.

March - August 2019: Every 4 - 6 weeks, the committee completed submission evaluation surveys and met via video conference to discuss, critique, and advance book submissions.

June 2019: With Patrick Owen of NCTE, the committee chair visited all of the book vendors at the American Library Association convention in Washington D.C. to solicit submissions for both the Huck and the Orbis Pictus awards.

August - November 2019: Every 3 weeks, the committee completed submission evaluation surveys and met via video conference to discuss, critique, and advance book submissions.

The committee shifted to meeting more frequently during this time frame to accommodate the abundance of books that are submitted fall in advance of the October 15 submission deadline.

3. What have you accomplished so far, and what is your timeline for future work?

As of this writing (September 2019), we have evaluated and discussed more than 250+ submissions. We anticipate that we will review and critique another 150 + submissions that are received on/before October 15.

Following the success of the 2018 Orbis Pictus committee, the 2019 committee is preparing a session for NCTE 2019 that focuses on teaching with the books across the varying types of non-fiction. Although the development of the session is an additional layer of work for the committee, we think this is an important next step in supporting teachers as they try to scaffold more nonfiction into the everyday lives of their elementary and middle school classrooms.

4. How has the work of your group contributed to NCTE's role in shaping the profession of teaching and/or the understanding of literacy in educational contexts?

The Orbis Pictus award is very important in the field of children's literature, especially as there is a growing understanding of the significance of quality nonfiction in the classroom. Teachers still need more professional development on how nonfiction books operate and the multiple roles that nonfiction can play in the classroom. We think our updated format for the Orbis Pictus Committee presentation at the 2019 conference will help support teachers' interests and objectives for using nonfiction literature in their classrooms.

Suggestions from your group: Your good ideas help direct future NCTE actions.

1. What significant changes or trends in our field point to action from the Council?

We agree with the 2019 committee that NCTE needs to be a leading voice in advocating for the diversification of texts that are explored in classroom K-12. Instead of looking at multiple texts concurrently, in various genres and modalities, many schools continue to repeat the same books year after year, and often a single text at a time. NCTE needs to be an even larger catalyst for self-examination within the field, and an advocate for change.

2. What trends need to factor into medium- to long-term NCTE planning?

A trend that needs to be factored into NCTE's medium- to long-term planning is supporting teachers to not only expand their repertoires of diverse and transformative works of children's literature but also to cultivate the capacity and skills to guide critical discussions that stem from the literature.

Denise Davila, Chair