

Children's Poetry Award Committee

Names, affiliations, and geographic region for members:

Mary-Kate Sableski, Chair, University of Dayton, Dayton, OH
Willeena Booker, Hatboro-Horsham School District, Horsham, Pennsylvania
Ryan Colwell, Fairfield University, Fairfield, Connecticut
Deanna Day, Washington State University, Vancouver, WA
Rebecca Kai Dotlich, poet, Carmel, Indiana
Joseph Pizzo, Black River Middle School, Chester, New Jersey
Junko Sakoi, Tucson Unified School District, Tucson, Arizona

Actions, projects, initiatives, or studies in progress

A current project is reading, reviewing and rating the poetry books we have received from publishers. As chair, I have been communicating with publishers since late February/early March requesting them to submit their 2023 poetry titles for committee review. All books received are recorded on a Google Sheet in a Google folder accessible by the committee members. Once the books are read and rated the books, we select our top picks for the current list of Notable Poetry Books and Notable Verse Novels. We have had 62 books submitted as of this date and several more have been requested. October 15th is the deadline for accepting 2023 titles. We will use our committee session time on Thursday, Nov. 16 from 8:30 to 4:30 to discuss our final selections. Requesting books from publishers has proven somewhat challenging as the contact person from each publishing house changes frequently. It's difficult to keep the contact list up-to-date. Without a specific person to contact at the publishing house, requests for titles often go unfilled. We have a Google sheet with contacts of each person and try to keep it updated as individuals change. We are also planning our two Conference presentations - NCTE 2023 Excellence in Children's Poetry Notable Poetry and Verse Novels and Georgia Heard's Excellence Award Winner session – in Columbus. These sessions will have a PowerPoint presentation with handouts and poetry “warm-ups” that will provide teachers in the audience with ideas for using poetry in the classroom. Georgia Heard will speak during her session and engage the audience in poetry activities.

Accomplishments and timeline for future work

We wrote and submitted an article about the 2023 Notable list for *School Library Journal*. Our committee members prepared an article about the 2023 Notable books for Language Arts, and another article about Georgia Heard, the Excellence winner. We intend to select our Notables for 2024 by November 16th, and will proceed with articles about these books in 2024. Early in the year, we spent time contributing to a proposal to revise the Poetry Notables list from a list to an award, which went before Executive Board and is now being revised for resubmission.

Contributions to shaping the profession of teaching and/or the understanding of literacy in educational contexts:

Poetry is a genre that not all teachers are comfortable teaching or promoting in the classroom. The goal of our committee is to do just that—promote good poetry and provide teaching ideas through our conference presentations and journal publications. We have shared, and will continue to share, not only what we consider the best poetry available from the current publishing year and offer suggestions to teachers to make them more comfortable in reading and teaching poetry in the classroom. We want to encourage the writing of poetry on the part of students and the enjoyment of listening to and discussing poetic language. Because one of our goals is to seek out poetry from diverse languages and cultures, we hope to promote the multicultural and diverse language and setting that poetry offers. This speaks directly to the opening sentence of the NCTE Vision statement: “NCTE and its members will apply the power of language and literacy to actively pursue justice and equity for all students and the educators who serve them.” We are also striving to find and recommend notable poetry books for the youngest children in our age range—3 to 5 years old.

Further, our committee put significant time into the proposed revisions for transitioning the Notables list into Awards for poetry and verse novels. This work was significant and we feel it has the potential to shape the profession of teaching and the understanding of literacy by promoting poetry and elevating quality selections with a distinguished seal, and increased attention as a result.

Significant changes or trends in our field:

Committee members have noticed an increase in the number of verse novels written for young adults. Because our age range is 3–13 years old, we are unable to recognize these wonderful books. Perhaps NCTE could discuss a way to recognize poetry and verse novels for young adults in a formal way?

We strongly suggest the continued conversations around how to transition the Poetry Notables list from a list to an award, with special recognition for verse novels. Verse novels are an increasing and important genre, and there are not currently any awards recognizing them. Much work has already been done to advance this conversation through the Executive levels of NCTE. The committee feels it is time to act and to put this work into motion.

Trends to factor into medium to long-term NCTE planning:

The website and social media connections are critically important in today's classrooms and styles of teaching and communicating. Keeping these areas user-friendly, easily accessible, and easily navigated is essential.

Sessions selected at Annual Convention are critical in reflecting current trends and enough cannot be said about the importance of issues of diversity today. All of the NCTE communications, website articles, author presentations at annual conference, need to reflect this. This is definitely getting better, but a continued focus is necessary.

As Chairs are encouraged to select members for the committee who are diverse, K–12 teachers, or both, it is vital to consider the cost of participation on a committee. Teachers are often not supported with PD funds in the same way that university faculty are, and thus incur most of the costs of participation. Though they agree to this when joining the committee, these costs will deter a diverse representation from applying to be on any committee. Our committee understands the many considerations that go into costs to put on a convention, but attention to some aspect of how the costs incurred impact individual committee members would be beneficial.

Mary-Kate Sableski, Chair