Mock Geisel Workshop Part 1.

**Welcome**

Facilitated by

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Amy Served on the 2016 Geisel Award, Guessing Geisel, Search for Giant Squid

**Best practices**

(See Slide)

The Geisel Award was established in 2004. First Award was Henry and Mudge and the Great Grandpas

Now there are over 70 winning titles.

Recognize the complexity and problematic legacy of Dr. Seuss.

**Ice breaker – Favorite Geisel winner**

Charlie and Mouse

The Big Guy Took My Ball

See the Cat

You are Not Small

See the Cat

Hi! Fly Guy

We are in a book

Stop! Bot!

Flubby is not a good Pet

(for more titles see Chat notes)

**Award**

The award goes to the author and illustrator. Both author and illustrator must be U.S. citizens; the book must be published in U.S. and awarded in the year it was published. For beginning readers, Prek to 2nd grade. Can be any format. any genre. No shorter than 24 pages and no longer than 96 pages. The 24 page minimum is so you don’t have to look at Board Books; 96 pages is the length of anthologies – Amy has heard. If you have questions about Geisel, you can reach out to Amy Seto.

**Criteria**

Significant achievement, eminence, individually distributed, stimulation experience. Images may give clues or keys to the text. (See Amy’s blog post: Intriguing enough to motivate readers. Short chapters are optional. Word repetition to ensure knowledge and retention.) Other criteria include simple straightforward text, page turning dynamic. Criteria is on the ALSC website. The range in reading ability is quite large in this age range. *Waiting* by Kevin Henkes shows how throughout the book, word repetition is happening,. Kids are able to practice throughout the book. Illustrations demonstrate of building word repetition. *The Watermelon Seed* by Greg Pizzoli: Example of page-turning dynamic.

How much control does the author/illustrator has over the layout of the book depends on the editor and publisher. Sometimes it’s the publishing house. The editors aren’t always thinking about the size of the font.

Anna Nicolson asks: How many books have you read in the past year? (Book award committees)

The year Amy was on Geisel Amy ready 500 books and got 100 that were not eligible.

Alec – Caldecott pandemic year – 7 nominations each committee gets to nominate a book. You are supposed to read them all. The committee builds the list from the nominations. Alec doesn’t remember how many books he read.

Nomination list is confidential. Only the committee can see nominations of what they choose for honor and medal winners. The only thing the general public will know is what actually wins.

Question from an attendee: Have you noticed more titles than in year’s past?

Mary Scheiber: there are more for committees to look at and more potential for a book to get on a honor list. It is a genre that has exploded in recent years.

Amanda Foulk: she sees more new books more new series, more than would be eligible than in 2006. She sees and uptick in [better] quality books for this age group.

Danielle Jones: the success of the award might be driving the amount that is getting published.

Alec: he’s surprised that publisher might not taking into consideration the layout/font etc. of the book.

Amy: the pandemic has created a lot of kids being behind [academically]. Publishers are seeing the demand.

Jackie: Do you think the criteria might change? Thoughts on revising the criteria?

Amy says: it would be great for ALA to reexamine what they put out there. It is the major award for ER. It is the big one. We have this opportunity as a profession to help change the criteria. The research has been telling us for decades. You can help make your voice be heard on the topic by reaching out to an ALSC member, becoming a member, or reaching out to a board member at ALA.

Kathy Street: Discussion on rebranding the award? There has been a discussion. Discussions are happening. The reason the award is name after Dr. Seuss is because the estate gave money to start the award, but maybe there are no ties to funding to the family estate?

Katie was on the 2020 2021. It won’t be changed because of the funding.

Alec: beginning readers are often left out. Did you receive on the job training about beginning readers? It’s a question to all panel members.

Kath Street: she didn’t get any training but working in a school help create a “kind of training.”

Daneille: she did not get training in her system. She did take a class through ALA. A six-week class to get more familiar with the leveling system. Each publishing house has a different way of determining what level is what.

Alec volunteered with SMART. It’s a reading tutor program. He learned what motivates a child to read, rather than a child picking a book, the books were already chosen. It was a good learning experience about what motivates a child to read.

Core text about Early Readers – Amy suggests reading From Cover to Cover by KT Horning

Katie: Early Readers are seen a blip in time for the publishing house. Not a collection that sticks around.

Kelsey Lamme – Library Assistant, just graduated with MLIS. Question: the Picture Book and ER format are historically the considerations. Have Easy Reader graphic novel format been considered?

Alex: most ALSC awards leave it up to the committee to determine that graphic novel should ever win; it’s all about how you interpret the criteria.

Amy adds the Graphic Novel is an enticing format – with Geisel, it’s up to the committee to determine if they count as distinguished. It’s exciting to see all the different art forms come together.

Kelsey’s second question: Does repeating character winning the award (example Elephant and Piggie) equal bias, maybe?

Panel member responds: Only allowed to discuss the books eligible for that year.

Amanda Foulk: In 2016, there were 2 Elephant and Piggie books. Neither received on that year.

A lot of ER are going to be part of series.

Katie circles back to the science of reading; she volunteered at a first-grade class, one-on-one. Has been on the Gisel committee. She also reads to the dog with her dog. She made sure she always had decodable readers for the kids to read one-on-one with the dog. [She notices] It was different experience for the kids when they didn’t have the decodables than when they did. It [decodables] was so much more successful for the kiddo. Librarians have the expertise to help with education on that.

A decodable reader: decoding the words is the process. Might also be referred to phonics. It’s the process of looking at the letters on the page and making the sounds. C makes a sound, A makes a sound, etc. Decoding uses the skills kids they have at that point. It will be different for a kindergartener versus a second grader. There is an order kids learn sounds. Consonants short vowels, consonant vowel consonant. Then combining letters. Once you’ve mastered one skill, then you work on the next skills. Gradually adding those difficult vowel sounds.

Amanda: what makes the criteria so challenging--- and fun---is what’s decodable for someone starting the first grade is very different from what’s decodable for someone at the end of first grade. She is constantly surprised by what a publisher decides what words go in. (Example: sleigh.)

Even untrained, when you’ve spent enough time reading through Early Readers, you can spot things that don’t quite work for decodable.

**The Panel -**See the slide with their information.

**Amanda Foulk** – Sacramento Public Library, 2016 Geisel Committee.

**Jamie Kurumaji** – Fresno County Public Library, 2021 Geisel Committee.

**Mary Schreiber -**Cuyahoga County Public Library, 2012 Geisel Committee.

**Sarah Stippich -** Miquon School Library, PA., 2019 Geisel Committee.

First Question for the Panel: When did you first become aware of the Geisel Award?

**Mary Schreiber:** first heard about it when she was applying for the Morris seminar. It’s every other year through ALSC. It covers selection and awards overview. Practice the discussion. Once you learn about it, you can’t turn off that criterial lens.

**Sarah Stippich:** agrees with the Morris seminar. It’s really wonderful – apply for it! It was a huge way to learn how to read a book and talk about it critically. Feels like she’s always known about the Geisel. Not sure when she first became aware of it. She’s working more in depth with the kindergarteners and first graders. Hearing their teachers teach how to read. It’s fascinating. This experience has informed how she looks at books for beginning readers.

**Amanda Foulk**: [feels like] I’ve always been aware of it! But she was in graduate school when she first learned about any award winner other than Newbery. Was hooked. Fell in love with it. It [Geisel] was her dream committee. The Morris [seminar] helps with networking with the people that decides who is on the committee. Was a teacher before a librarian. That age group deserves the best! What they get from the curriculum is not always the best or most enticing to read. They deserve the great art.

**Jamie Kurumaji**: [maybe] grad school, but can’t remember. Foray into literature was with picture books. After serving a year with it was magical luckily selected for Geisel. Had been a children’s librarian for a few years. She knew the importance of Early Readers. It’s the magic for getting children into reading. It gave her a better understanding of those readers, being on the committee. It added to what she could do for the youth that came into the branches. She had more confidence recommending Early Readers.

Amy Seto: the Morris also changed her life!

Second Question for the Panel: “Subject matter must be intriguing.” How did you approach this specific criterion?

**Jamie Kurumaji**: It was interesting—her year was the year going into the pandemic. So many times her committee would have loved to have gotten more perspective from the patrons, but they didn’t have the chance to talk to kids. Coming into it as an adult, is one thing, but trying to view it as a child is another thing. Had to look at the title with a kids like viewpoint. Looked at the whole--cover to cover. Was the storyline something that kept us wanting to read. Was it relatable to the beginning readers. Was there surprises, and twists and turns?

**Amanda Foulk**: also mentions the criteria. It is so fun to be on a committee, to have specific criteria is lovely. Sparks joy because mass appeal does not matter. Its so much different than the Newbery or Caldecott. It’s absolutely OK to put the books up for the award in front of the kids to see if they like it. Geisel cares if a kid wants to read a book.

**Sarah Stippich:** it was interesting to watch what the kids gravitated towards. They don’t have the same tastes as an adult. It was interesting to see what was confusing. There was a big difference between what she liked versus what they liked. Interesting to see what ones they [kids] were especially interested in. When you think about the books that are presented, it’s crucial that they are great and they [kids] want to pick up. It’s the first books they’re going to unlock and could be part of their decision if they are going to want to read more and more.

**Mary Schreiber -** Agrees with what everyone says. She watched how the different ages interacted with the books. It wasn’t what she expected. What her niece was interested in wasn’t what she thought she’d be interested in. These very simple stories attention span is beyond. Nonfiction finding that right thing for great that it’s part of the criteria not just what we think they should like to read.

Third Question for the panel: How does a book create a page-turning dynamic?

**Sarah Stippich:** page turn is interesting line breaks and pacing between words: IT Is Time it was captivating. There was something about the pacing and the draw with very few words. It is such a craft and such a skill. Looks for what is the artistic style; what is the line that makes your eye travel across the page from left to right and how does that work for a beginning reading book? It’s very different.

**Jamie Kurumaji**: Line breaks--agrees! She didn’t think of it with adult eyes until after the first discussion. Remembers *What About Worms*. Loved how the illustrations accompanied the flow of the text--well enough that made it the children want to keep going. The illustrations flowed along so that you wanted naturally to continue.

**Amanda Foulk**: Build on what Sarah and Jamie said. The pacing, does it move? Do we have any weird plots that it veers off into. Passionate about ellipses (doesn’t like)—it comes from and what does not create a page turner. Breaks a sentence over a page turn. Boo! If the sentence is a fragment, it’s hard for a reader, it’s hard to carry them through. Line break—it is so key! Especially for a kiddo who is first decoding. To take the “breath” at the end of the line before moving on to the next.

You can get really into the details of the momentum. In *You are Not Small,* the bear is literally gesturing to the next page. The predicable placement of the text on the page—very important.

**Mary Schreiber:** Asks herself, is the double -page spread leading the reading to turn the page? The audience knows more than the bear knows, added an extra element. It did encourage you to keep turning the pages. In *I Want My Hat Back*, you could see it in the kids faces [they know more than the characters], that’s what they were really drawn to.

Question 4: Some of the criteria are about the words and sentences themselves: “New words should be added slowly enough to make learning them a positive experience; Words should be repeated to ensure knowledge retention.; Sentences must be simple and straightforward…” Those criteria can seem so specific, yet so vague when looking at an individual title. What helps you evaluate these aspects of a title?

**Jamie Kurumaji**: had a guest speaker and KT Horning as her guest speaker! She really walk them through Talked about white space font repetition and all of the does the text building confidence do the illustrations enhance the story--so if a kiddo doesn’t quite know the word will they have good guess or help get them to the word. The pictures and words can’t tell a different story.

**Jamie Kurumaji**: Actual font sizing of the font and the text and the colors that were used. Take into consideration sometimes illustrations were too close to one another so you could read. Notice this in several books. Word building – repeat words to build on then more words added. *Where’s Baby* is a perfect example of how she was able to add new words a lovely pace. Clear. White background. Black font. Making it legible for all readers as they continue through the story.

**Sarah Stippich:** thinks about the decodable elements that kids need to learn and how they can be used creatively so it doesn’t feel like a phonics lesson. *Fox the Tiger* is an example. The double oos set the kids up for success the words are used so strategically to help them learn the word say the word.

Cynthia Rylant is really good at this. Helps a kid decode the word and sets the kiddo up to learn the next word with the same or similar sound and then adds and S at the end.

So important to write and illustrate something so that a kid can read and decode it.

**Amanda Foulk**: Yes, what you all said! Over arching--the book must be supportive of a beginner reader. Beginning preschool reader vs. the beginning second grade reader. This kiddo reads 15 words it was funny and it was good. New words tons of repetition, *Charlie and Mouse* evocative of F*rog and Toad.* Some might not be supportive of a kindergartener, but great for a second grader. More challenging. We’ve all seen what “done badly” can look like. White space support for the physically of what a new reader needs. Gentle introduction to new words. It’s harder in some ways to write these than for an older kiddo. Must ask: will this child be able to decode this word. It’s art and poetry!

Alec cheers about the poetry of it.

Question 5: Titles for beginning readers are more plentiful than in the past, but there’s still so much untapped potential. What’s one thing you’d like to see more of in titles for new readers?

**Jamie Kurumaji**: more diversity! Ty’s Travels: Zip! Zoom! highlighted a diverse family there’s more and more coming out in ER, but there is more work to be done. Acknowledges that It’s hard to write for this group.

**Mary Schreiber:** takes several years for a book to go through the process of getting published. I like to read was the first year thrilled there are so many more choices than just ten years ago. Lots of room for improvement but need more photographs of actual people – we don’t see that in beginning readers: pictures of lots of different people.

Decodable science of reading. Her colleague has the expertise to say which ones are decodable. Lots of educational base but not motivating kiddo to read. She’s hoping in the next five years we’ll see more of the principles put into practice of decoded readers.

**Amanda Foulk**: Agrees with Jaime. So many more diverse books but the starting point was so small. It’s getting better, but it could still be some much better.

ER has the same problem here it’s easy to just have animal characters and not queer diversity more specifically: Gay neighbors, queer families that are also funny and realistic.

**Sarah Stippich:** what everyone said. To add one, she’d love to see more nonfiction. More photography in these books--of people and of real things. Will we see an emergency of biographies? There are some but there could be more. King and Kayla--she loves reading those to kids and she’d love to see more mystery. And more scary books more variety of genre built in the ER.

**Amanda Foulk**: shout out Yasmin series. Because of the specificity of diversity. Reflects all different physical abilities. the family in Yasmin is very specific. They haven’t plugged in a character. Instead of brown washing, the characters have very specific qualities.

**Sarah Stippich:**  Would like to see authors from those lived experience writing those stories. Yasmin resonates because it’s written by those insiders.

**Mary Schreiber:** the big age spans we don’t see under 96 pages. Wants the short chapters she’d love to see those elements move into the FC books.

**Sarah Stippich:**  learning order and Japanese – fascinating thing to highlight not just English readers who are reading those books. (referencing the Gigi and Ojiji books)

**Amanda Foulk**: One wish: more Early Readers in other languages. It is so hard to find ERs in languages other than English!

Amy Seto: We do have that power. Ask the publishing houses “Where are your \_\_\_ ER?” and discuss the pros and cons about their selection. We can talk to publishing houses--you would be surprised about how few people [in the industry] are talking about ERs. Reach out! It all takes a social media post or a conversation with a rep.

End of official questions for panelists.

Alec/Amy: Register for the Part II. Thanks everyone for being here. We’d love to see you come back. Check out the ten titles. Asks for any final thoughts.

Alec: How do you compare a beginning chapter book to a level Early Reader? They’re very different.

**Mary Schreiber:** [It]goes back to if the GN could be a Caldecott? Could it be a Newbery? You have to look at how well each book meets the criteria for what it is. The few words might have a bigger impact than the one that has more text, but it’s perfectly put on the page and the illustration are perfectly put on the page. This guides the conversation: they are not the same thing but following the criteria helps.

**Sarah Stippich:** the intended audience--if you think it’s written for a second grader, how well is the text guiding that 2nd grader through the story. It’s important to test the books out on the kiddos. The books are so different from one to the next. Each author has a different take. Picture a child who would pick this book up and imagine the child. Does it meet them where they are? Also how well does it fit the criteria?

Amy Seto: we are comparing apples to oranges when we compare all awards. Newbery and Caldecott: lots of difference in word count, pictures, etc. The Geisel is the epitome of an underdog award.

**Amanda Foulk**: She’s all for a Geisel Part II---an award for the First Chapter group. She loves the award [Geisel] and is here for the quality of it. It would be nice to split into two one for those first readers and one “harder” for these readers. They deserve the best.

**Mary Schreiber:**  really on her mind need to think would need to read a lot of Middle Grade, but it’s supposed to be wider than

**Amanda Foulk**: shout out to the Newberry – everything 0-14!

**Mary Schreiber:** [Early Readers] it’s double the amount being publisher this year than in past years.

Goodbyes.