

## NCTE Award for Excellence in Poetry for Children Selection Committee

**Charge:** To recommend on a regular basis every two years a living American poet to the NCTE Executive Committee for the [NCTE Award for Excellence in Poetry for Children](#) in recognition of his or her aggregate work; to sustain the collection of poetry books of award winners, past and future, in the [University of Minnesota, Kerlan Collection](#); to recognize and foster excellence in children's poetry by encouraging its publication; and to explore ways to acquaint teachers and children with poetry through such means as publications, programs, and displays.

[Read more](#) about the NCTE Poetry Award winners.

### What major actions or projects have been completed by your group pursuant to your charge since July 1, 2010?

The NCTE Award for Excellence in Poetry for Children Selection Committee continued to review the poetry books of possible nominees for the next award—to be announced at the 2010 NCTE Convention and presented at the 2011 NCTE Convention—prior to its working committee meeting in November 2010. Initial conversations on the topic began at the Philadelphia convention, and continued through the poetry listserv throughout the summer, culminating in the consideration of three poets whose body of poetic work seemed to stand them in good stead as poets worthy of this honor. In Orlando, the committee met in a closed session, and selected J. Patrick Lewis as the sixteenth winner of the NCTE Award for Excellence in Poetry for Children. The 2011 recipient has written more than 65 children's books and is known for his versatility as a poet. His poems are often humorous, but also, often tackle serious subjects. Once the nomination was voted on and Lewis was declared the unanimous recipient, the committee members phoned him at home to share the news. Needless to say, he was absolutely thrilled. At the Books for Children Luncheon, Committee Chair provided a brief rationale for Lewis's selection in announcing the 2011 Award Winner. (The award will be given during this year's annual convention in Chicago.)

Poetry Committee members Rebecca Kai Dotlich, Elaine Maglioro, Mary Napoli, and Terrell Young, appointed in 2009, continued to serve out their three-year terms while members Jonda C. McNair and Barbara A. Ward continued to serve their second three-year terms on the committee.

Additionally, the current committee (Dotlich, Maglioro, McNair, Napoli, Ward, & Young) presented its favorite poetry books from 2009 as well as a handful of favorites from 2010 at a well-attended session in Orlando. Handouts featuring notable poetry titles were provided to those in attendance at this interactive session featuring slides of the poetry book covers and plenty of audience participation. The current committee (Dotlich, Maglioro, McNair, Napoli, Ward, Young) also agreed to continue the committee's tradition of reading and annotating 2010 poetry titles for an article highlighting the best poetry titles of 2010 for an article in *Language Arts*. The article, submitted in January, appeared in the July issue of the journal under the title of "Tasting Seasoned Words of Joy: Notable Poetry Published in 2010. Images of the book jackets and detailed descriptions of the poetry books that caught the committee's attention filled 9 pages of the journal. For those interested, check out *Language Arts*, 88(6), 459-467. The editors of *Language Arts* have provided an attractive venue for bringing attention to children's poetry, and the Poetry Committee is hopeful that they will remain interested in doing so. Poetry books featured included: *Amazing Faces* (edited by Lee Bennett Hopkins), *Another Jar of Tiny Stars: Poems by More NCTE-Award Winning Poets* (edited by Bernice E. Cullinan & Deborah Wooten), *The Carnival of the Animals* (written by Jack Prelutsky), *Dark Emperor and Other Poems of the Night* (written by Joyce Sidman), *In the Wild* (written by David Elliott), *Lots of Spots* (written by Lois Ehlert), *Mirror Mirror: A Book of Reversible Verse* (written by Marilyn Singer), *One Big Rain: Poems for Rainy Days* (written by Rita Gray), *Our Farm: Written by the Animals of Farm Sanctuary* (written by Maya Gottfried), *Poetrees* (written by Douglas Florian), *Sharing the Seasons* (edited by Lee Bennett Hopkins), *Skywriting: Poems to Fly* (written by J. Patrick Lewis), *Switching on the Moon: A Very First Book of Bedtime Poems* (selected by Jane Yolen and Andrew Fusek Peters), *Time You Let Me In: 25 Poets Under 25* (selected by Naomi Shihab Nye), *Ubiquitous: Celebrating Nature's Survivors* (written by Joyce Sidman), and *Volcano Wakes Up!* (written by Lisa Westberg Peters); novels in verse included *Borrowed Names* (written by Jeannine Atkins), *The Firefly Letters: A Suffragette's Journey to Cuba* (written by Margarita Engle), *Three Rivers Rising: A Novel of the Johnstown Flood* (written by Jaime Richards), and *Wicked Girls: A Novel of the Salem Witch Trials* (written by Stephanie Hemphill)

Judging from the titles alone, publishers continue to be interested in publishing a broad selection of poetry, some from established poets and some from novices. The committee took care to include some novels in verse on the

list this year by request of former committee members and the *Language Arts* editors to show the expanding nature of poetry today.

Two members of the Poetry Committee also submitted two separate proposals for the 2011 NCTE Convention to share the members' passion for poetry. One session is intended to celebrate the life and words of the 2011 Poetry Award winner J. Patrick Lewis and will feature a speech by Lewis as well as the committee members sharing snippets of their favorite Lewis poems. The second session pays tribute to all the recipients of the Poetry Award from its founding in 1982 with six of the poets planning to be on hand to read their poetry after personal anecdotes about each one is shared. The poets who are no longer living or who will not be in attendance will have their work read by committee members and audience members.

**What projects, initiatives, or studies are "in progress" at this time?**

Work is ongoing in the preparation of the sessions honoring the past recipients of the award and the 2011 recipient. The Poetry Committee has requested funds from the Elementary Committee to defray the costs of 1,000 poetry posters celebrating the award and its winner to be presented in Chicago. Committee members are rereading Lewis's books and rereading the poetry books of the previous winners to select poems to be shared at the session(s).

The committee chair continues to update a data base of publishers' contact information to request poetry books for the committee members' consideration as well as reviewing blogs devoted to poetry in order to stay informed about 2011 poetry books.

Individually, several members of the committee have led sessions devoted to poetry on the local, state, and national level at various conferences, attempting to bring even more attention to poetry. Several committee members have either blogged or written articles in state, local, and regional journals about poetry.

The sub-committee formed last year to spell out more specific guidelines for the selection of poetry books named to the Notables list is continuing to refine its guidelines.

The committee had hoped to reconnect with the curators of the Kerlan Collection to determine what poetry books are missing. As stated last year, there has been some discussion about creating a collection of tapes of the NCTE Excellence in Poetry winners reading some of their poems, to be added to that collection, but no work has been accomplished in this area. This is a project that needs to be moved to the forefront so that the committee can make it a priority.

**Strategic Governance: Over the past few years, the NCTE Executive Committee has established outcomes and priorities relating to these key topics in our field Documenting Professional Learning, Assessment, [Closing the Achievement Gap](#), [NCTE and International Involvement](#), [Reading Research](#), [21<sup>st</sup> Century Literacies](#), and [Attracting, Supporting, and Advancing Early Career Educators](#). Currently, they are working on performance assessment of teachers and student learning. Does your group have research findings or suggestions to contribute that are relevant to on-going work on these strategic governance topics?**

Make this organization seem essential to professional growth and somewhat cutting edge. Provide free books to members when they renew or join for two years or some sort of incentive.

*Barbara Ward, Chair*