

STBA PRESENTATION

Good morning and thank you for joining us for the 2013 Sydney Taylor Book Award Session. On behalf of the committee, I'd like to welcome you to annual celebration of excellence in Jewish Children's Literature. Are there any first time attendee's in the audience today? Please stand. Let's give them a warm welcome! You are in for a treat!

Before we begin, I'd like to thank the Association of Jewish Libraries Board and Council for their support of the STBA committee. Are there any Council and Board Members here? Thank you to Heidi Estrin, AJL President and Lisa Silverman SSC president. Thank you to Toby Rosner and Judy Weidman for the outstanding job they have done planning the conference. It's been amazing so far, right?

Thank you to the authors and illustrators in attendance for making the trip to be here. Your presence here makes this morning truly extraordinary. We are so appreciative of you taking time away from your families and your work to be here.

Finally, I would like to thank Jo Taylor Marshall, Sydney Taylor's daughter, for her enduring support of this committee. Without Jo, we would not be here today. According to *More Books by More People*, Jo was the impetus of the All-of-A-Kind Family. She is an only child and Sydney wanted to share her past with her. "When Jo was little . . . I would sit beside her bed at night and try to make up for the lack of a big family by telling her about my own. Jo loved the stories about how papa and mama worked and how the five little girls helped out. She was delighted with the tales of our good times together and the enjoyment of simple pleasures. She loved the stories so much that I decided to write them all down especially for her. The manuscript went into a big box and stayed there." Fortunately, for us all Sydney's husband Ralph submitted the manuscript to a contest sponsored by Follet. The rest is history. The Taylor Family has been supporting this award since 1978 and we thank them for their generosity. Unfortunately, Jo was unable to join us this year but I hope she will make the trip to our conference next year in Los Vegas.

We have a delightful morning planned for you. In our first session several members of the STBA committee will reveal the criteria we use to evaluate books submitted for the award. Of course, we will be sharing our favorite titles and why we chose to recognize them. We will also share some that did not exactly measure up to our standards or criteria, but still may be worthy of adding to your library collection.

At 10, we will have a short break and then things are going to get even more exciting. All four of our winners – Linda Glasser and Adam Gustavson, Louise Borden, and Deborah Heiligman -- are here today to talk about their gold medal winning books.

So let's get started!

I'd like to begin by introducing our outstanding committee.

Barbara Bietz, is our past chair, and is the author of the chapter book, [Like A Maccabee](#) a 2012 PJ Library selection. Barbara's website, Barbarabookblog.blogspot.com is dedicated to Jewish books for

children and features interviews with authors and illustrators. Barbara's non-fiction appears in numerous magazines. She contributes to the AJL Newsletter and Jewish Book World Magazine. Her monthly column appears in the award winning web site, FamiliesOnlineMagazine. She has been a member of the Society of Children's Book Writers and Illustrators since 1996. Barbara lives with her family in Oak Park, California.

Debbie Feder is [the Director of the LRC at Ida Crown Jewish Academy in Chicago](#). She has her Masters in Library and Information Science from Dominican University. She is the author of *Jelly Bean's Art Museum Adventure*.

Charna Gross A teacher since 1975, and a school librarian since 2000, Charna Gross, a Los Angeles native, is currently the school librarian at Sinai Akiba Academy. She has lived on three continents and speaks English, French and Spanish. She is a big techie geek.

Diane Rauchwerger is [librarian for Congregation Beth Am, Los Altos Hills, California](#) and has worked as a children's librarian for the Sunnyvale Public Library, Sunnyvale, California. She is the author of a series of children's picture books published by Kar-Ben Publishing, including her newest book *Dinosaur Goes to Israel*

Nancy Silverrod a librarian from the San Francisco Public library.

Joining us in spirit is Barbara Krasner, the dynamo behind the outstanding blog, *The Whole Megillah, The Writer's Resource for Jewish-themed Story: Fiction, Nonfiction, and Poetry*.

When I tell people I chair the STBA committee people always want to know how do I find time to read that many books. This year, we had around 100 submissions from around the world. Nearly half are picture books. About 30 percent are submissions for middle grade readers and the remaining 20% are for teens. We review self-published titles, books from around 40 secular publishers, and from Jewish presses.

The second question that follows is how do you decide which is the winner. The answer is really quite simple: we are judging books with outstanding qualities of children's literature and most promote positive Jewish values. The EXCELLENCE IN JEWISH CHILDREN'S LITERATURE: A Guide For Book Selectors, Reviewers and Award Judges published by AJL has been indispensable to me as a book reviewer and as a member of this committee. Copies are available to all of you and you can also download it from my Facebook Page.

Barbara Beitz will elaborate on the qualities of outstanding children's literature. Then we are going to dive in and look at the positive Jewish values critical to our process.

Barbara:
5- Minutes

Thank you, Barbara. Now let's take a look at Excellence in Jewish Children's Literature.

Accuracy:

Accuracy, especially when dealing with nonfiction materials is essential in my work as the librarian at the Agnon School. I work diligently to ensure that all materials in my library reflect the highest levels of scholarship. It is important to me to make sure that I provide the best materials to my students and teachers, who need accurate materials to complete research projects and to satisfy their personal curiosity. It is important for children to see examples of high quality materials with back-matter that is extensive and correct. The following books are examples of author really took the time to do their homework.

Wooden Sword

I have a perhaps unnatural obsession with author's notes. Just ask my students, they'll tell you! I am thrilled when a book includes them and I always take the time to share them with children, even if it means keeping them in the library a few minutes longer. I tell my students that the author was kind enough to write them a note. Listening to what their inspiration was really humanizes authors to children and shows them how to look for inspiration in their own lives when writing for an assignment or for journaling. The best authors notes not only share what sparked an author's creativity to write the story, but also shares a little bit more about the time period or research he or she conducted. The author's note in Ann Redish Stampler's, honor winner for older readers does just that. She eloquently writes the history of the Afghani tale and even notes that she a European version of this story as a child. She shares the adventure of working on a tale from out side her own culture. Stampler writes she was impelled to learn the customs of the Afghani people, the clothes they wore, the role of women, what Jewish might eat for their Sabbath meal and which prayers a Muslim shalw would say after dark. She worked with experts of Jewish Afghani life and academics to make sure all the details were historically and culturally accurate and even had the manuscript vetted by a professor of Islam at Loyola Marymount University in Los Angeles. The result is an accurate and entertaining story about the intermingling go Jews and Muslims.

There's a lot you can do with this book. It can be the starting point to a discussion of faith. It can be read with any number of the outstanding Jewish folklore tales. Andrew Clements, is an incredibly popular and prolific writer of realistic fiction for middle grade readers. His novel extra credit explores the relationship between two children – one in rural Illinois and one in Afghanistan – might be an interesting pairing. You could also bundle it with an age appropriate book about Afghanistan. This particular series is very popular in my library.

His Name Was Raoul Wallenberg

I'm not going to say too much because we are lucky to have Louise Borden here to discuss the book and her research. There's a lot you can do with this book in your libraries and classrooms. The prose begs to be read aloud and it could be used on a unit on research skills because there are so many examples of primary sources.

There were two outstanding illustrated biographies last year about Irena Sendler: Irena's jar of secrets by Marcia Vaughn and Irena Sendler and the Children of the Warsaw Ghetto by Susan Goldman Rubin. For something more substantial, Crabtree press released a longer biography this year, Irena Sendler: Bringing Life to Children of the Holocaust. There are several DVD's about her life too.

Beyond Courage

Doreen is here and will be doing a session this afternoon from 4:00-5:00 in room 8A. Doreen worked on the book for 6 years and her level of scholarship shows. This book must be incorporated in any unit Holocaust unit.

For even more extensive look at Righteous Gentiles and Jewish REsistance, please refer to our own Rachel Kamin's outstanding piece in School Library Journal. You can find it online at <http://www.slj.com/2013/04/books-media/collection-development/focus-on-collection-development/the-holocaust-rescue-and-resistance-focus-on-april-2013/>.

Fortunately, this year we did not receive any books with any glaring inaccuracies. However, in years past there are always a couple of books with some mistakes or misleading information.

Age Appropriateness:

When I consider age appropriateness for books for children and teens I am thinking about if the book will connect with the readers based on their social and emotional development. As librarians, it is imperative that we do not make assumptions based on age or reading level but look at an individual child. I consider myself very fortunate that my role as a librarian at a small day school enables me to get to know my students and have a better sense of what is appropriate for them individually and as a group.

My first grade and kindergarten students adored this story of a shy Israeli boy who impresses all of his classmates when he can give commands to a visiting police dog in Hebrew. My students were connected to this book on many levels because of their age and school experiences. Like Tomer, my students are learning to read too and can relate to the fear he experiences reading aloud in front of classmates. Day school students can also relate to the challenge of learning an unfamiliar language because they are learning Hebrew. Each year, I have at least one student to have Israeli and Russian classmates, who like Tomer are not native English speakers.

This book begs to be pored with Caldecott winner, Officer Buckle and Gloria by Peggy Raganathan. Or another idea would be to pair it with a nonfiction titles, Aero and Officer Mike by Joan Plummer Russell.

Perfectly age appropriate for children going to camp for the first summer or contemplating overnight camp soon. There is just enough dramatic tension to keep readers hooked, but the predictable ending and accurate depiction of camp life will reassure campers who might have the "shpikes" that camp is an amazing experience.

I read this aloud to 2nd and 3rd graders at the end of the school year when we had some extra time. Sami, the protagonist, is a songwriter and the story is peppered with songs that contain a smattering of Yiddish she picked up in a class she took with her grandmother. My favorite is Farshtinkener, set to Yankee Doodle. You could challenge your students to their own songs by hosting a song writing contest.

Deborah's here so I will be brief, but I will say that I think this book is an exemplary example of YA literature at its finest. Rachel's voice is so authentic, that I expected her to pop into my library and ask to borrow a copy of The Hunger Games. At times, it can be raw but it captures many of the

challenges contemporary teens struggle with. Sex and drugs are part of the story, so it is recommended for a high school audience. Something cool you might want to share with your students, is the playlist Deborah posted online.

I had trouble with this book about the bizarre quest Isaac's older brother, Josh sends him to prepare for his bar mitzvah while his parents are out of town. On one hand, I adored it because from an adult perspective it is hilarious -- although I had to suspend disbelief that parents would abruptly leave town two weeks before their son's bar mitzvah for an extended visit to Italy. There is a terrific dynamic between the two brothers in the story. Unfortunately, it is a bit over the top and some of the language is crude and could be offensive to some readers. Children who are preparing for bnai mitzvah's may not be emotionally equipped or mature enough for some of the content. Isaac, the protagonist, sounded a bit too old and a bit too wise to be a 7th grader.

AUTHENTICITY

Diane

POSITIVE FOCUS AND JEWISH VALUES

Diane

SENSITIVITY

Charna

DEPTH OF JEWISH CONTENT:

Intro:

Wonder by RJ Palacio

Jewish: Aimee Not Jewish: Debbie

Kaytek the Wizard

Jewish: Aimee Not Jewish: Charna

Code Name Verity

Jewish: Debbie F Not Jewish: Diane

Curveball: The Year I Lost My Grip

Jewish: Diane Not Jewish:

Laundry Day by Maurice J. Manning

Jewish: Aimee Not Jewish:

Final shout out to a book you liked, but did not mention in the presentation.

Aimee: The Shcmutzy Family

Thank you for joining us this morning. After the break our authors will be doing their presentations. Please grab a quick cup of coffee and be back at 10:15. We have a jam-packed morning until lunch that you won't want to miss.

Break:

Thank you for joining us. Deborah, Louise, Adam, Linda. That was outstanding.

The fun does not end here, please make sure you attend the two afternoon sessions.