



Brian Floca received the 2014 (Randolph) Caldecott Medal for *Locomotive* (Atheneum/Simon & Schuster). His acceptance remarks were delivered at the Newbery Caldecott Banquet on Sunday, June 29, 2014, during the American Library Association Annual Conference.

For more information about the Caldecott Medal, visit <http://bit.ly/caldecott-medal>.



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I'd like to begin tonight with some numbers. Illustration and commercial art: 741.6. Public speaking and oratory: 808.51. I think you see what I'm getting at here. I don't want to question anyone's intentions, but when illustrators are asked to give banquet-hall speeches, someone is showing a real willingness to misshelve.

Twenty years ago I had the opportunity to illustrate a story by Avi, edited by Richard Jackson, titled *City of Light, City of Dark*. This was my first book; the book had a villain; the villain was, at least in his own mind, an artist; and the villain's artwork took the form of immense, garish neon signs. It makes me very happy, then, to be here with all of you tonight in Las Vegas, Nevada, neon as far as the eye can see, and to have been brought here by the artwork in a book dedicated to Avi and edited by Dick Jackson.

Locomotive is a book that took a long time to create. Some of you already know this, and some of you know it too well. The path this work took twisted and turned. Now an interesting parallel is that the path of the Union Pacific Railroad Company, as it headed west from Omaha, Nebraska, also, at least at first, twisted and turned. The difference is that the Union Pacific was under contract to the government, and they were being paid by the mile. That is not the arrangement I had with Atheneum/Simon & Schuster. So why the twists and why the turns?



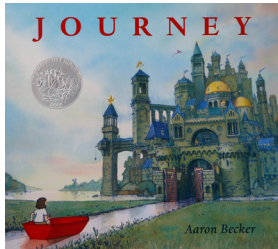
Locomotive was in many ways a book I had been waiting to make. Trains had been on and off my drafting table several times over the years. I had, after all, grown up in a town founded by a railroad company, been the proud operator of an HO-scale operation as a boy, and logged my fair share of miles on Amtrak as an adult. And yet for a long while the subject wasn't under my skin in the irrational, compelling way I need in order to work on a book in earnest. The essential, triggering moment for the book came only when I found myself on an early-morning train ride while abroad—away, importantly, from familiar sights and places. The train rolled first through darkness. Then the sun rose over a new landscape, lit a new countryside that arrived and disappeared out the window as quickly as I could take it in. That was

Author/illustrator Brian Floca was born and raised in Temple, Tex. He graduated from Brown University, Providence, R.I., and received his MFA from the School of Visual Arts. His books have received four Sibert Honors for nonfiction, an Orbis Pictus Award and Honor, a silver medal from the Society of Illustrators, and have twice been selected for *The New York Times'* annual 10 Best Illustrated Books list. He has illustrated works by Avi, including a graphic novel and the *Poppy* stories. Floca lives in Brooklyn, N.Y.

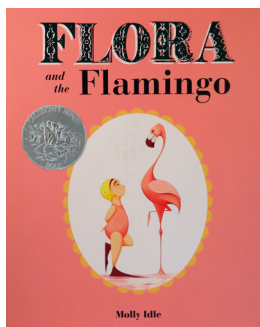
FUN FACT: Brian once had a part-time job answering phones at Harvard University.



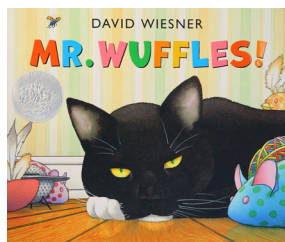
2014 CALDECOTT HONOR BOOKS



Journey.
Becker, Aaron.
Illus. by the author.
Candlewick



Flora and the Flamingo.
Idle, Molly.
Illus. by the author.
Chronicle



Mr. Wuffles!
Wiesner, David.
Illus. by the author.
Clarion

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it. There was the feeling of travel, the feeling of moving through unknown places. In this aspect of travel we are reminded of one of the great tensions of life: the tension between the desire to stay in one place, to stay true to who we are, and the desire to leave that place and to risk becoming someone new, to become who we might be. In my book *Lightship* a crew stays put, where they need to be. In *Moonshot* a crew leaves but returns to home and to safety. In *Locomotive* a family leaves and will stay away. They've left one life to make another. This may sound a little grand, and I don't kid myself that these are the things young readers see first in my books, if they see them at all. Many may not see past the noises and the gears and the smoke and the wrecks, and that's fine with me. I like all those things, too, I really do, and an interest in them drives my work as well. But it's the power of landscape and travel and change that gets me started, that tells me I will stay interested through the research and work to come.

Not that I truly understood how much research and work *Locomotive* would require when I began it. L. P. Hartley's novel *The Go-Between* opens famously, "The past is a foreign country: they do things differently there." I stepped rather innocently into that country when I decided that it might add another layer of interest to this voyage by train if I set it on the brand-new transcontinental railroad. I quickly realized that they did a *lot* of things differently in 1869. It was both challenge and pleasure to try to visit that foreign country, to work to find the right ways to frame and organize what I was learning there, the right ways to make a book that could acknowledge its complexity while staying focused enough for a young audience. It was a pleasure and a challenge to try to make an accurate book that could also be a beautiful book. And how much I learned in that making;

how different my impressions of 1869 are now than before I began. Many of my earlier ideas, I now realize, had come from the small black-and-white photographs we so often see of that period—still images, sober images, from a still and sober time, it might seem. But instead, what a swift-moving and brightly colored time it was. What a pleasure it was to spend my time learning that, trying to think of ways to pass that sense of discovery on to young readers in words and pictures, trying to ignite in that audience a sense of how alive and real history can feel.

The attempts to figure all of this out were made in books, photographs, visits to museums, conversations, on a drive across the West, even in the cabs of locomotives one hundred and fifty years old. Most of the actual making of this book was done in a studio in Brooklyn, New York. Like the number of the Union Pacific locomotive that pulled into Promontory Summit on May 10, 1869, the studio street address is 119. The Central Pacific engine that day in 1869, by the way, was the *Jupiter*. Next door to the studio? Jupiter Motorcycle Repair. You may make of this what you will, and in any case what I like best about the studio is not the address so much as the artists with whom I share it: Sophie Blackall, Edward Hemingway, John Bemelmans Marciano, Sergio Ruzzier, and John Rocco before he cut loose for the West Coast. Writing and illustrating for young people can be a funny way to make a living, and not always funny ha-ha. While making a children's book, the things one is asked to take seriously and the things one is asked to take lightly can stand in a sort of inverse relation to the priorities of the rest of the world. Will this be beautiful? Does that mistake look good, and should I leave it there? How did these people go to the bathroom? When making a children's book, not calen-



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dars and checkbooks but questions like these ought to be our highest concerns. For that reason and others this work we do both offers and asks a lot. And when deadlines are coming up, and when deadlines have passed and we are chasing them from the wrong direction, days in the studio can grow long. One evening last year Sergio put on his jacket and announced casually that he was headed to his “home away from home,” by which he meant his apartment. Our friendships, shared experiences, and the inspiration I take from the extraordinary work being made around me are ballast through all the ups and downs of this career.

Dick Jackson was not in that studio, yet he was with me every step of the way with this book. He is my first audience, and I can’t imagine a better one. I rely on Dick’s intelligence, taste, his sense of theater, his sense of play, his eye, his enthusiasm, and his generosity—the generosity he shows me as friend and bookmaker, and the generosity he lets me know we owe our audience. With Dick, whatever we’re talking about doing for a book, it is worth the trouble. And we are not bad at making trouble. Toward the end of July 2012, I received a full-size printout of *Locomotive*’s layout as it stood at the time. From these layouts I stitched together a book dummy, and I read it with a sinking sense of gloom. How crowded the second half of the book had become, even though we had already bumped the book’s length up from forty-eight to fifty-six pages. This was very late in the making of *Locomotive*, I should say, or so I thought. I figured at the time that I was about three months from finishing the book. Looking back on it all, I suppose I spent two years or more being a mere three months from finishing. In any case, that afternoon I sent Dick an e-mail telling him how the end of the book now felt to me. At five o’clock he called to say that he saw what I meant, and to stay tuned. Closer to nine o’clock,

the e-mails began to arrive, Dick letting me know he had run the bases at Atheneum, checked budgets and deadlines, and that we could expand the book by another eight pages. Now, you should know that Dick suggested cutting this paragraph about himself when this speech began running long, so he is not universally an expansionist. In the case of *Locomotive*, though, the extra room allowed cramped passages to open up again. It also made room to show a glimpse of the rail line’s construction at the beginning of the book—a scene I had always wanted to include, but a scene that, like others, had been on and off the cutting room floor. Neither of us had to ask if the extra pages were worth the extra work. Then again, that’s the other thing about working with Dick: the trouble we go to is also the fun we get to have. More pages? More work? It was one of the happiest days I had while making *Locomotive*.

Our partner in all this was senior designer Michael McCartney. Revision after revision crossed Michael’s desk, but Michael, too, is someone for whom trying to get it right is worth the trouble. Michael contributed, aided and abetted, improved, and sometimes knew where to draw the line. If you are glad the book does not take nineteenth-century typefaces further, into the realm of “synesthesia” and “circuses”—Michael’s words—he is the one to thank.

For a long stretch of making *Locomotive*, it felt as if the three of us might be making the book all on our own, operating our own skunkworks, as if the rest of Atheneum/Simon & Schuster had forgotten the book was even being made. Given where I was with my deadline, this did not strike me as impossible, and on some days the idea offered a sort of relief. When the book did begin to approach completion, I began to understand how many people there were at Atheneum working

on its behalf, making sure that *Locomotive* would be printed and published and publicized in a way that gave it every chance of being the book I hoped it might be. What a relief to recognize that the resounding quiet I heard had been all the while a show of trust, and what a privilege to work with a team like this. Thank you to everyone who is or has been at Atheneum who helped this book find its way here tonight.

I am also grateful to friends and loved ones who have stayed close and put up with the single-mindedness that this work can compel. There is a kind of danger to this business; the work can be so consuming, can lend so much to one’s identity, that one can give oneself too much over to it. I thank all those who have alternately encouraged and tolerated the work on such days, and even occasionally pulled me out of the tunnel.

In 1995, two years after our first book together, Avi and Dick and I reunited for the novel *Poppy*, which received a Boston Globe-Horn Book Award. At that ceremony, Avi gave gracious thanks, and also admitted to a suspicion. “The notion of best,” he said, “may apply to sports teams and foot races, but when it comes to literature, I confess to having serious doubts as to whether any piece of writing is ever best for any one child.” I remember well sitting in the audience in Manchester, New Hampshire, and thinking to myself, “Avi, you just won an award. Just be *happy* about it!”

I now have the privilege of understanding Avi’s remarks so much more fully. Molly Idle, Aaron Becker, and David Wiesner, it is an honor to be here with you and your books, to be here with Kate DiCamillo and all the Newbery Honor authors, an honor simply to be part of a field filled with so many remarkable people working to create stories worth reading, work-



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ing to create art worth looking at, and working to get books into the hands of readers.

The early morning call, the very-early-morning call that brought the good news brought with it surprise, happiness, the sweet and unseemly thrill of victory, and a tinge of survivor's guilt. Receiving the news was relatively easy, perhaps because I was still in the middle of a sleep cycle. Sharing it with my parents without choking up was the hard part. I was glad that morning that earlier in the month I had defied a tendency toward magical thinking and, with caveats and cautions attached, forwarded a blog post to my parents that paved the way just a little bit, a blog post that asked, among other things, whether a nonfiction book like

Locomotive had a shot at Caldecott recognition. My mother had replied simply, "What do they mean, *Locomotive* might pull a *Snowflake Bentley*?" I am grateful to my parents, to whom the idea of my making a career in the arts felt only slightly more foreign and nerve-wracking than it did to me when I began, but whose support has been one of the great constants of my life.

Finally, I would like to close by acknowledging that it is librarians and the attention you bring to books that creates a space in our country for the kind of bookmaking and publishing I have tried to describe, the kind that takes its time, that goes forward in a seemingly deeply impractical way, more concerned with trying to make the best book than any-

thing else. Your attention to our work gives such efforts a glimmer of plausibility, a thin veneer of the rational, a thread of this-just-might-work-out-after-all. You librarians know this already, but I want you to know that I know it, too, and that I'm grateful. The recognition you have granted my efforts will help me to keep making work, and for the rest of my career the memory of this recognition, and the memory of this evening, will inspire me to keep trying to make the work better. Thank you to Chair Marion Hanes Rutsch and to the members of the 2014 Caldecott Medal Committee. Thank you to you all. I look forward to seeing you in the hallway soon, and to shaking hands until we all collapse.

Again, thank you.

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Association for Library Service to Children

For more information about the Caldecott Medal, visit <http://bit.ly/caldecott-medal>.

* ALSC thanks Natasha J. Forrester, Multnomah County Library District, Portland, Ore., a member of the 2014 Caldecott Medal Committee from January 2013 through December 2013, who was unable to attend the Midwinter Meeting and vote on the final winners.