

The ALSC/Booklist/YALSA Odyssey Award for Excellence in Audiobook Production

Background Information

What

An award for the best audiobook produced for children and/or young adults.

Who

A committee made up of the following persons developed the rationale and requirements for this award:

Producers: Bruce Coville, Full Cast Audio; Tim Ditlow, Listening Library/Random House; Arnie Cardillo, Live Oak Media

Booklist Staff: Bill Ott, Editor & Publishers; Sue-Ellen Beauregard, Media Editor

ALSC Members: Mary Burkey, Chair Notable Children's Recordings; Ellen Fader, ALSC President

YALSA Members: Sharon Grover, Incoming Chair of Selected Audiobooks for Young Adults; Chair Pam Spencer Holley, YALSA President

Name Selection for Award

The story of the wanderings of Ulysses, as he returns to his kingdom of Ithaca after the Trojan War, are ascribed to the blind poet Homer who either wrote, or dictated, the epic poem called *The Odyssey*. Whether this odyssey of Ulysses was based on one specific event, or many different ones, is argued by researchers today, though they all seem to agree that the poems comprising *The Odyssey* were originally told and retold in the oral tradition, hence the name for this award. The Odyssey Award allows us to return to the ancient roots of storytelling, while living in our modern world.

Why

The youth divisions honor books and movies with awards, such as the Caldecott, Carnegie, Newbery and Printz, but there is no official ALA award for audiobooks, which constitute a fast growing areas of usage in libraries. Consider the following:

- Circulation for children's audiobooks rose 10.7 percent and the budget for these materials rose 4.8 percent (Audio Publisher Association, December 2004)
- The growth in circulation of audiobooks is outpacing overall library circulation. Book clubs are increasingly made up of hybrid listener-readers, and the market for children's audiobooks is booming! ("Loud, Proud, Unabridged: It Is Too Reading!"; *The New York Times*, May 26, 2005)

As a group of professionals who are committed to lifelong literacy, it's important that we recognize the role of audiobooks in the development of literacy. Consider the following:

- Research shows that one of the most important reasons for the increasing interest in audiobooks for young people are the correlations between listening to audiobooks and improvements in reading comprehension, fluency, language acquisition, vocabulary development and improved achievement. (“Not Just for Listening,” *Book Links*, May 2005)
- Fewer Americans are reading books than a decade ago, according to the National Endowment for the Arts, but almost a third more are listening to them on tapes, CDs and iPods. (“Loud, Proud, Unabridged: It Is Too Reading!,” *The New York Times*, May 26, 2005)
- According to Wendy Kasten, an education professor at Kent State University, “Listening to tapes with books in front of students is very, very good for building vocabulary.” (“To Curl Up with a Good Book, Listen Up,” *The Plain Dealer*, May 23, 2005)

Listening is an important skill to be both taught and learned. Children of this century live in a world where media is a dominant form of communication (25 million iPods sold last year), and imagination's greatest champion in this technological realm is the spoken word. Through the years our cultures have been nurtured and our customs passed on by storytellers—audiobooks carry on that tradition.

In addition, with all of the audiobooks available today, and with the increasing number being produced, we believe it is essential for ALSC and YALSA to provide the same level of support for this nonprint format that they have historically provided for print materials, by creating an annual award for the best audiobooks in the field. We believe that by doing so, ALSC and YALSA can not only assist their members to better serve their library patrons, but also raise the profile and standards of audiobooks by having those honored serve as models toward which all audio producers can aspire.

For all of us on this task force, we were pleased to be part of a unique collaboration among three units of ALA and three noted audiobook producers. The three ALA units will, if the ALA Awards Committee approves this award, continue to work together to ensure that this award is presented on a yearly basis.

The ALSC/Booklist/YALSA Odyssey Award for Excellence in Audiobook Production

Charge: To annually select the best audiobook produced for children and/or young adults, available in English in the United States during the preceding year and, if desired, to also select honor titles.

Committee Members:

The committee will consist of nine members: four members appointed by ALSC; four members appointed by YALSA; a chair, whose appointment alternates between ALSC and YALSA divisions; and a consultant from the staff of Booklist.

Members serve a one-year term beginning immediately after Midwinter and ending after Midwinter of the announcement year. All members are required to attend all Odyssey Committee meetings held during the selection process. In the event a member is unable to complete her/his term, the President of the appropriate division shall appoint a replacement from among the members of either ALSC's Notable Children's Recordings or YALSA's Audiobooks Selection Committee, with the replacement serving double-duty until end of that award cycle.

The chair is a voting member of the committee with all the rights and responsibilities of other members. In addition, the chair presides at all meetings of the committee and serves as a facilitator of both discussion and committee business. The chair has sole responsibility for any contact with publishers.

The Editor/Publisher of *Booklist* magazine will appoint a consultant to the Committee from among the magazine's Audiobooks staff. This consultant may participate fully in all book discussions but may not participate in voting.

Calendar

The Committee will observe the following calendar:

- October - Dec: Committee members and chair are appointed and the chair sends letters of welcome to committee members, which include a draft calendar and a copy of policies and procedures. The chair works with ALSC and YALSA staff to set initial meeting for the upcoming Midwinter as well as to determine method for best notifying publishers with an explanation of the award and a list of committee names and addresses. Appropriate award information for publishers and other interested parties will also be posted on the ALSC and YALSA websites.
- January - April: At Midwinter, the committee will have a voluntary organizational meeting to discuss criteria, set suggestion and nomination deadlines, and allow members to meet one another. Listening commences as audiobooks become available. Committee members suggest titles for award consideration to the committee as a whole. The chair compiles a monthly master list of suggested titles and distributes these updated lists to the committee.
- May: By May deadline, the chair will assemble and send to committee members a list of all suggested titles that will be discussed at the Annual meeting. Committee members will listen to all suggested titles in their entirety and maintain careful evaluative notes of the meritorious qualities of the work.
- Annual Conference: The committee meets in three closed sessions to discuss all titles suggested up to May deadline.
- June - October: Committee members continue to listen and each month, at an agreed upon time, suggest titles for award consideration. The chair will compile and distribute to committee members, monthly cumulative master lists of titles suggested since Annual.

Committee members will listen to all suggested titles in their entirety and maintain careful evaluative notes of the meritorious qualities of the work.

October:

October 1: Final date for producers to submit audiobooks for consideration.

October deadline: From the list of suggested titles, committee members nominate up to three titles for the voting ballot; members write annotations for each title. Chair compiles list of all nominated titles and sends list to members.

October deadline –December deadline: Committee members continue to listen and suggest titles for award consideration. The chair will compile and distribute master lists of newly suggested titles to committee members. Committee members will listen to all suggested titles in their entirety and maintain careful evaluative notes of the meritorious qualities of the work.

December - Jan:

December deadline: Committee members nominate three additional, and different, titles, with annotations, for the voting ballot. Chair compiles and sends a final annotated list of all nominated titles to members. Committee members will evaluate all nominated titles noting the qualities that match the award criteria.

Midwinter
Conference

Committee meets in three closed sessions to select a winner and honor titles (if any) from the list of nominated titles. Winning titles are announced at the Youth Media Awards Press Conference.

Eligibility

The ALSC/Booklist/YALSA Odyssey Award for Excellence in Audiobook Production shall be awarded annually to the best audiobook produced for children and/or young adults during the preceding year.

- All literary genres are eligible for consideration, including read-alongs.
- The Committee will consider and vote on titles published within their assigned calendar year, January 1 to October 31, in addition to those published between November 1 and December 31 of the previous year. A title may only be submitted once and cannot be reconsidered the next year.
- Audiobooks produced previously in another audio format are ineligible for consideration.
- The audiobook is intended for either young adults or children, who are defined as persons up to and including age eighteen; works for this entire age range are to be considered. Adult titles are ineligible.
- Audiobooks featuring single or full cast narration are eligible
- Audiobooks previously published in another country are eligible presuming they have also been distributed in the United States during the preceding year.
- “In English” means only audiobooks produced in English are considered, but this requirement does not limit the use of words or phrases in another language where appropriate in context.
- If no title is deemed sufficiently meritorious, no award will be given that year.
- The chair, with assistance from designated ALSC or YALSA staff, is responsible for verifying the eligibility of all nominated titles.
- The award will be presented to the publisher[s] of the winning and/or honor audiobooks.

Odyssey Award Criteria

Though literary merit is part of an excellent audiobook, it is not what creates the unified whole of the completely unique literary experience provided by an audiobook. For that experience, the following criteria are essential:

General Guidelines

This award recognizes excellence by a producer or director for accomplishment and/or innovation in the production of an audio program. The winning title must exemplify the highest standards of direction, narration, engineering, and technical achievement.

- Popularity is not the criterion for this award nor is the award based on the message or content of the book on which it is based.
- The committee must consider technical and aesthetic aspects, including the effective use of narration as well as music and sound effects when they are incorporated into the production. These elements must come together to create a unified whole.
- The audio must maintain and stimulate listeners' interest.

❖ Production Qualities

➤ Narration:

- Does the reader (or readers) have good voice quality, diction, and timing? Is the reader (or readers) believable and convincing?
- Does the reader (or readers) distinguish between characters by changing pitch, tone, and inflection? Are accents or dialects used and if so, are they handled authentically and consistently?
- Are all words, including proper nouns, locales, foreign terms, character names, and others pronounced correctly and consistently?
- Does the reader (or readers) avoid condescending vocal mannerisms and style and is the reading believable and convincing?
- Is the performance dynamic and does it reflect the expressive nature of the text?

➤ Sound Quality

- Is the sound sharp and clear with no obvious humming, distortion, or electronic interference?
- Does the sound quality remain consistent throughout the recording?

➤ Background Music and Sound Effects

- If music and sound effects are used, do they enhance the text and support the vocal performance?
- Does the music represent the emotional and structural content of the text?

❖ Overall Rating

The sum of all the criteria should represent the highest achievement in audiobooks for children and/or young adults, including

- excellence in narration;

- excellence of audio interpretation of story, theme, or concept;
- excellence of execution in the aural techniques of the medium;
- excellence in the delineation through the audio medium of literary elements including plot, theme, characters, mood, setting, or information presented;
- excellence in the appropriateness of technique or treatment to the story, theme, or concept.

Confidentiality

As all nominated titles must be kept confidential, there will be no announcements of nominated titles. All committee meetings and discussions, including electronic discussions, are closed to YALSA and ALSC membership and the general public.

Nominations

Committee members suggest audiobook titles beginning in March, with suggestions due each month from March through the end of the time period. Three nominations from each committee member are due, at agreed-upon deadlines, in October and three different nominations in December. Following this procedure allows committee members to reflect on what their peers consider to be award-worthy titles and narrows the list, leading to more efficient and productive meetings.

Each suggestion must in writing on an official suggestion form [available from either the ALSC [ALSC@ala.org] or the YALSA Office [YALSA@ala.org] or online from either division's website [www.ala.org/alsc or www.ala.org/yalsa]. Each suggestion must include the following information: author, title, publisher, name of narrator/full cast info, price, ISBN, time of production, length, format and an annotation specifying those qualities that justify the title for consideration.

At the agreed-upon deadlines in October, and again in December, committee members submit three nominations each to the chair. Each committee sets these specific deadlines at its first midwinter meeting to accommodate the oddities of that year's calendar, the actual conference dates, and any conflicts that the chair may have that would prevent the compilation of suggestions and/or nominations.

Field Suggestions

Field suggestions are encouraged. To be eligible, they must be submitted on the official suggestion form. Committee members will be notified of all field suggestions, which are eligible to be considered for nomination by members. Only those titles that have been nominated will be discussed at Midwinter and Annual Conference meetings, though a committee member may request that a suggested title be moved to the discussion list and thus treated as a nominated title. Furthermore, all nominated titles must be discussed. Publishers, authors, or editors may not nominate their own titles.

Voting Procedures

Following discussion at Midwinter, balloting will begin. Members must be present to vote. Proxies will not be accepted.

Award Audiobook

- Paper ballots will be used and tallied either by the chair or her/his designee(s).
- Members are reminded that, at this point, they are voting for the winner, NOT for honor titles. A separate ballot will be conducted for honor titles.
- On the ballot each member votes for her/his top three choices. First choice receives five points; second choice receives three points, and third choice receives one point. To win, a title must receive five first-place votes and must also receive at least five more points than the second-place title. If no title meets these criteria on the first ballot, any title receiving no votes is removed from consideration and a period of discussion of remaining titles follows. A second ballot is then conducted. Balloting continues in this fashion until a winner is declared.
- Members are reminded that, at this point, they are voting for the winner, NOT for honor titles. A separate ballot can be conducted for honor titles.

Honor Audiobook(s)

- The results of the first ballot for the winning audiobook will be used for selection of the honor audiobooks with any title receiving no votes removed from consideration.
- The same voting procedure will be used to select the honor audiobooks.

Annotations and Press Release

The committee is responsible for writing a press release; annotations for the winning title and honor audiobooks, though already written, are rewritten by the committee to ensure consistency. The chair divides up the titles among committee members to complete this task; the Booklist consultant aids the chair by reviewing these annotations and assisting with the writing of the press release. Both the annotations and the press release will mention the specific audiobook criteria which led to each title's recognition. ALA PIO provides specific information about the press release, annotations and the press conference.

Immediately after the press conference, the chair, and/or the appropriate divisional staff, will see that the ALSC and YALSA audiobook selection committees receive information about the winning and honor book title(s) appropriate for their lists, specific bibliographic information and annotations, for automatic inclusion on the final lists of these committees.

Relationship with Publishers

Committee members are not to solicit publishers for copies of audiobooks, however they may accept any unsolicited ones that are offered or sent to them.

Committee members should not solicit publishers for favors, invitations, etc. If members receive these, however, they will use their own judgment in accepting. Publishers understand that such acceptance in no way influences members' actions or selections.

Evaluation of Award

At the end of the first three years, the award will be reevaluated by a task force, composed of a group representative of audiobook publishers, Booklist personnel, and members from ALSC and YALSA. Reevaluation is to include discussion of any changes needed in policies and procedures as well as determination of continuation of award, whether it's appropriate to still give only one award with honor titles, and to see if ALSC and YALSA wish to continue their collaboration.