

To: ALSC Board of Directors
From: Nina Lindsay
Re: ALSC Awards Program in Context of Strategic Plan

Introduction

At our ALSC Fall Executive Committee Meeting, we began a conversation to examine ALSC's Awards program within the context of our strategic plan, specifically looking at the implications for our organization of having awards named for individuals whose currently recognized place in the canon of children's literature is not universally consistent with ALSC's values, or our goal of Diversity & Inclusion. If ALSC is fully committed to "becom[ing] more diverse and inclusive, *acting to promote these values in all aspects of library service to children,*" we must be willing to unpack whether our most high profile and revenue-generating program is serving this goal. We now ask the Board to begin engaging membership in this critical, if challenging, discussion.

Background

We recognize recent steps ALSC has taken to include a section on Diversity and ALSC Media Evaluation within our award manuals, asserting our value of inclusivity and stating that "It is the responsibility of each ALSC media award and notables committee to reflect this value in their approach to their work." However, if our awards are to truly promote the values of inclusiveness, integrity and respect, and responsiveness that we profess to hold as an organization, and in order to honor book creators and serve all children as we intend, we must be willing to dig deeper, and the ALSC Executive committee began to do so this fall, considering the names of two of our prominent awards that have been called into question by members.

The Wilder Award

Laura Ingalls Wilder has long held a complex legacy, as her books reflect racist and anti-Native sentiments and are not universally embraced. The Wilder Award began in 1954 when the ALSC Board gave Wilder an award for lifetime achievement, and later established the ongoing award in her name.

Today, this award elevates a legacy that is not consistent with values of diversity and inclusion--something we did not fully understand as a profession when we created the award. While many of Wilder's books received Newbery honors, (and one may easily find other books within our award canon that don't live up completely to our current values), we recognize that the name of an award itself holds significant power. A member wrote to me: "the Wilder is a monument that says something about our profession's history, but every year it is given out it also says something about our present."

The ALSC Executive Committee noted that the name of the award is a currently potentially significant barrier to achieving our goals, and is within our power to change. The award is funded through a board designated unrestricted long-term investment project established with a \$25,000 transfer from ALSC's operating fund, and the medal image is trademarked by ALA. Any alteration to the medal image would need to be cleared with the Wilder estate, but in all other regards the award belongs to ALA.

The Geisel Award

This fall, the legacy of Theodore Seuss Geisel came under scrutiny in the media, as examined in the EdWeek article by Steven Sawchuck "[Is 'The Cat in the Hat' Racist?](#)" Grace Lin also commented on the controversy from her perspective as a Geisel Award author honoree in her blog article, "[Ok, Let's Talk about Dr. Seuss.](#)" As it was brought to our attention, the ALSC Executive Committee, at our fall meeting, noted the complexity of the debate surrounding Geisel. We also considered our legal agreements with the Geisel estate regarding the Geisel award, noting the need to consult with them further before considering any recommendations.

Proposal

The Executive Committee has no current recommendation regarding the Geisel Award and has not examined our awards beyond the two mentioned.

We do recognize the importance and urgency in addressing the question of the Wilder award, especially considering the anticipated movie adaption of "Little House on the Prairie".

In order to further move forward with a deliberate and open examination of our awards program, we suggest, at minimum, both of the following:

1. Establish a task force to explore the ALSC awards program within the context of our core values and the Diversity & Inclusion goal of our strategic plan, beginning with whether to rename the Wilder Award. The task force should deliver recommendations regarding the Wilder in time for any changes to the 2019 award, soliciting feedback from members and other stakeholders, and consulting with the EDI within ALSC Implementation Task Force, ALSC Fiscal Officer, ALA Awards Committee, and other critical stakeholders upfront. Additionally, the task force may be charged with additional direction formed from the Board's discussion.
2. Immediately update the "About the Laura Ingalls Wilder Award" webpage with more informed background on Wilder and her legacy, and a statement about ALSC's values and current actions in regard to the award. A proposed rewrite will be shared with the Board for discussion, and if the Board approves could be uploaded immediately, in time for the 2018 YMA announcements. A rewrite would additionally reaffirm the honor bestowed upon Wilder Award recipients, whose life work contributes essentially to ALSC's vision of engaging communities to build healthy, successful, futures for all children.

Recommended reading on Laura Ingalls Wilder's work

Kaye, Frances W. "Little Squatter on the Osage Diminished Reserve: Reading Laura Ingalls Wilder's Kansas Indians" (2000). Great Plains Quarterly. 23.

<https://digitalcommons.unl.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?referer=&httpsredir=1&article=1022&context=greatplainsquarterly>

Reese, Debbie. "Indigenizing children's literature" (2008). Journal of Language and Literacy Education [Online], 4(2), 59-72.

<http://jolle.coe.uga.edu/wp-content/uploads/2013/03/indigenizing.pdf>