

YALSA Board of Directors
ALA Annual Conference
June 25-30, 2020

Topic: Odyssey Group Recommendations - Part 2

Background: To evaluate current Odyssey eligibility criteria and determine effective ways of reducing the workload of committee members while ensuring that the committee continues to evaluate audio productions efficiently and critically. To advise the ALSC and YALSA Boards of Directors on recommendations for the 2020 awards cycle and continuing tasks for the 2021 cycle and beyond. These recommendations are brought forth by Rob Bittner, member of the joint ALSC/YALSA Odyssey Award working group with additional information provided by Todd Krueger, YALSA President.

Action Required: Discussion and Action

Overview:

In order to better inform the boards during discussions on these recommendations, we should note that while considering the possible revisions and updates to the manual, one particular issue came to the forefront in almost every interaction. Defining the term “audiobook” has previously seemed to assume an audio production based on an existing text that a library could in turn have in its collection. While we have suggested a possible change to language in order to cement this particular interpretation, we believe that great care should be taken in this definition due to the possible implications for the future, namely that original audio productions without a companion text would be ineligible. And while this would ensure future Odyssey committees are not overworked, we believe both the YALSA and ALSC boards need to come to a consensus on the definition with the knowledge that the future of audio productions may become less reliant on texts that are traditionally published. We highlight this specifically in Recommendation #5.

Addendum: The ALSC Board met on June 17 and with input from ALSC Executive Director Aimee Strittmatter and questions asked of Odyssey working group Rob Bittner, the ALSC Board sent the recommendations back to the working group for further clarification and changes.

Recommendations:

Recommendation #1:

Discuss the option of two winners

As the number of audiobooks produced each year continues to increase, the working group recommends that the Boards discuss the possibility, if feasible, of awarding two audiobooks in a year (similar to the Stonewall Award), one for children’s productions and the other for young adult. The working group would like this considered since the range of ages for the award is so broad and a picture book recording is very different from a novel recording, making the comparison for a single winner incredibly difficult.

This recommendation would allow future committees to better evaluate productions within their own categories, rather than attempting to compare short works based on picture books with works that span many hours of recording time. This would also help committees to resist the urge to balance the list based on age range representation rather than merit.

Recommendation #2:

Consideration of certificate(s) for narrator(s)

The award very rightly awards the producer(s) behind an audiobook production, however the narrators are often invited to be a part of the celebrations, and are also asked to read portions of the texts live at ALA Annual. The working group recommends that the Boards consider allowing future award presentations to include certificates or some similar token of appreciation to be presented to the narrators, particularly since they are the public face of each production. The primary award would still go to the producer.

Recommendation #3:

Administrative assistants

During her tenure as chair, Sharon Haupt had the opportunity to work with an administrative assistant as a pilot project. She noted that having an assistant was invaluable and allowed her to focus more on working with the committee on evaluation, rather than spending the bulk of her energy on small but important details such as filling out spreadsheets. The working group recommends that both Boards consider making it a regular occurrence each cycle to have an administrative assistant assigned to the committee (this could be virtual or in-person, as long as the individual would be available to attend, in person or virtually, the Annual and Midwinter of the year in which deliberations occur). Currently, YALSA allows chairs to use an administrative assistant if they would like one, but the process is more informal and relies on the chair to find and/or request an assistant.

Recommendation #4:

Update to submission criteria

The working group recommends that the website sections with suggestions around submission criteria be updated to include the following: “Audiobooks must be submitted by publishers within the quarter in which they are produced, in order to better ensure fair and thorough consideration by the entire committee.” This will hopefully discourage publishers from last minute submissions at the end of the award cycle. Sharon Haupt noted that they received over a hundred and fifty submissions just before the deadline (many of which were published early in the year, so early submission was possible), making it difficult for the committee to give full consideration of all submissions in time for the Midwinter deliberations.

Recommendation #5:

Audiobooks based on a printed source vs original audio productions

As the landscape of publishing continues to change, and with it the formats of books and their modes of production, we need to consider not only what is being produced, but what is considered eligible within the current (and forward-thinking) criteria. As a task force, we have considered, along with audiobook producers, two possibilities for consideration:

1. *Audiobooks based on a printed source available for institutional purchase*

Many audiobooks are currently produced in a way that relies on original source material that a narrator or ensemble cast reads aloud. The purpose of restricting future productions to this model is twofold. The first reason is that these audio productions can be used for simultaneous reading/listening, and the second reason is that the number of eligible productions would remain more manageable for the Odyssey committee moving forward.

2. *Original audio productions as well as those based on a printed source available for institutional purchase*

This option allows for audio productions that are based on original source material, while also allowing for original audio productions that are not based on a traditionally published text. While this does have the potential for more unique and creative submissions, there is the likelihood that the committee--unless it is split into two subcommittees that each work on a particular age grouping--would ultimately be unable to keep up with the number of submissions from publishers.

Recommendation #6:

Manual revisions and website updates

The working group has worked to update and revise the Odyssey manual to better reflect the current state of the audiobook market, and to reflect updated eligibility criteria that has been passed by both Boards in late 2019. The YALSA website currently reflects the change to criteria around availability for institutional lending, however the ALSC website does not yet reflect that change, and we feel that consistency is imperative as this award crosses between the two divisions.

The following changes are being recommended and can be seen in full in the attached document:

- Remove the phrase “typically a novel” from the audiobook definition on page 1.
- Remastered audiobooks are not eligible, but new productions of a particular book are
 - This will hopefully cut down on future submissions that are just remastered for a new type of media (cassette recording remastered for digital, for instance.)
- Change the word “foreign” to “non-English”
- [Depending on the final decision re: Recommendation #5] Include “A print source must be available to schools and libraries. The print source must be published simultaneously or prior to the audiobook production.”
 - This will hopefully reduce the number of audio productions that are not based on printed materials prior to their recording.
- Change the instance of “audio program” to “audiobook” [noted in the manual]
- Carry over the ALSC inclusivity guidelines and YALSA guide for evaluating authenticity as appendices.
 - There are currently no inclusivity guidelines in the manual, but there are in the majority of other ALSC manuals. This would ensure that the award is consistent with other manuals, and would also ensure that under both divisions’ administration, the guidelines would be spelled out directly.
- Change wording around liaisons so that each division provides a liaison during the time in which the award is being administered by them.
 - Currently the wording in the manual suggests that both divisions should provide a liaison every year, but this is not always followed, and if it is, it results in unnecessary additional lines of communication.
- Add performance-related terms to Appendix 2 for committee reference.
- All larger revisions/updates have been noted with highlighted text to let the Boards know what has been changed or suggested.
- It may be a benefit to incorporate a Table of Contents into the updated manual as well.

This working group is comprised of:

- Robert Bittner (YALSA Awards Oversight Committee)

- **Heather Booth (Booklist Consultant)**
- **Kim Dare (YALSA Awards Oversight Committee)**
- **Sharon Haupt (2020 Odyssey Committee, Chair)**
- **Carol Phillips (ALSC Priority Group Consultant)**
- **Janet Thompson (2020 Odyssey Committee, Administrative Assistant)**

Industry consultants:

- **Paul Gagne - Scholastic Audio Books; Weston Woods**
- **Melanie Donovan - Recorded Books**
- **Katherine Punia - Listening Library/Books on Tape/ Penguin Random House**
- **Rebecca Waugh - Listening Library/Books on Tape/Penguin Random House**
- **Jennifer Rubins - Listening Library/Books on Tape/Penguin Random House**

YALSA Board recommendation:

As the ALSC Board has sent these recommendations back to the joint ALSC/YALSA Odyssey Working Group for further review, adjustments, and changes, the YALSA Board sends along its suggestions and commendations on the work to this point, and awaits an updated version of the six recommendations.

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Odyssey Group Recommendations – Part 2
Item #18**