

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

Topic: Reimagining the Alex Awards Task Force report

Background: A task force was created to consider the Alex Awards due to their unique situation of being in a middle ground between existing as a selection list and as awards. They were also tasked with considering ways of promoting and making the Alex more visible, considering their singular existence as an award celebrating the best books published for adults that are suitable for a teen/young adult audience. Kali Olson, chair of the task force, brings forward this report on their progress to date.

Action Required: Information

Overview:

The Reimagining Alex Task Force met most recently on 6/11/20 to discuss possible changes to increase the visibility of the Alex Awards. The Alex is a much-loved award that flies under the radar and currently exists in a sort of no-man's-land between selection list and book award, and it's time the Alex got the attention and promotion it deserves.

Topics discussed:

- clarify criteria to take into consideration more than just "teen appeal," including an acknowledgment of the diversity and maturity of the teen reader, the staying power of winning titles, literary merit, etc.
- clarify the purpose of the vetted list--is it all nominated titles? specific recommended titles? a list of honor titles?
- redesign of the Alex medal to reflect more of Margaret Alexander Edwards' mission and character, such as the donkey-pulled cart she drove into underserved areas of Baltimore, the xylophone she played to attract the attention of neighborhood patrons, and the bull she was given upon retirement
- better promotion and availability of a seal (sticker) for award-winning books
- allowing the committee to call winning authors before the YMA announcements
- getting publisher access to eGalley via NetGalley or Edelweiss rather than requesting and waiting for the final published copy of each book to be sent to every committee member for review
- hold a hybrid Alex Award ceremony / celebration with some authors attending in person and some authors attending via video conference or video message
- allowing committee members to attend ALA Annual virtually with in-person attendance required only for Midwinter

YALSA Board of Directors – ALA Annual Conference 2020
Reimagining the Alex Awards
Item #33

- go into the Midwinter conference meeting with a list of 30-50 finalists, with the committee having held several virtual meetings between Annual and Midwinter
- ten winning books to reflect the vast depth and breadth of the field of nominees, which includes every genre and format of book for adult audiences (fiction, nonfiction, poetry, verse, graphic novels) by authors of every gender expression, sexual orientation, race, nationality, age, religion, etc.

[clarification: Having ten winners allows the committee to honor the depth and breadth of the field (as opposed to one winner like most other awards). The ten winning titles would remain as they are now--any ten books the committee chooses from the vast number of possible nominees. That field contains every genre and format of book for adult audiences (fiction, nonfiction, poetry, verse, graphic novels) by authors of every gender expression, sexual orientation, race, nationality, age, religion, etc., so choosing just one book to represent all of adult publication would be impossible!]

- up to twenty honor books to reflect the diversity of the field (replacing the "vetted list")

[clarification: The 20 honor titles are a way to change the current vetted list into something that matches an award rather than a selection list (like BFYA or GGNFT). This is in part based on the work the 2020 committee--they went into Midwinter with 35 finalists and chose their top ten winners from those. The remaining 25 books became their "vetted list." These 20 (or fewer) honor titles wouldn't need to be announced at the YMAS--that's a lot of books!--but would be another way to mark the diversity of the field since every genre, format, etc. of book published for the adult market is eligible. We prefer "honor" to "vetted" as committees in the past have been confused by the intention of the vetted list, and honor titles matches the format of other awards.]

Submitted by Kali Olson, chair of the Reimagining the Alex Award Task Force. Clarifications requested and received by Todd Krueger, YALSA President.