

## Mock SB&F Prize Election: Engaging Middle School Students with High Quality Science Trade Books

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*“Concepts are learned best when they are encountered in a variety of contexts and expressed in a variety of ways, for that ensures that there are more opportunities for them to become imbedded in a student’s knowledge system” (AAAS, 1990, p. 198)*

**P**K-12 science trade books are generally authored by adults, illustrated by adults, and reviewed by adults. With few exceptions, these books are awarded merit by adults without input from PK-12 students for which the books are written. The Junior Aventis Prize for Science Books (Royal Society), given for outstanding science writing for children, is one exception where children (up to 14 years old) from around the UK vote for award winners along with adult judges. In the US, the authors have found no such awards where children are involved in “official” award selection; however, “mock” award elections do exist for Newberry, Caldecott, and other Association of Library Service to Children (ALSC) awards. In mock elections, a finalist book list is read by each participant who then votes for the book s/he predicts will win the official award. While Mock Sieber (see ALSC website) elections for non-fiction books are held, the authors have found no mock elections for K-12 science trade books specifically. This article describes the development of a Mock *Science Books & Films* Prize for Excellence in Science Election for Middle School students.

Middle Grades Mock *SB&F* Prize Election Structure: Since 2005, the *SB&F* Prize for

Excellence in Science has been awarded annually in four categories (children’s, middle grades, young adult and hands-on) by an officially organized judging committee. Gerber & Brunsell (2008) developed a Mock *SB&F* Prize election to introduce undergraduate students in elementary and middle level (pre-service) teacher training programs to K-8 science trade book evaluation. The Pre-service Teacher Mock *SB&F* election (see website referenced below) served as a template for construction of the Middle Grades version described here.

*SB&F* finalist books are normally announced online in October of each year with award winners announced online in January of the coming year. This provided a three month time block for sixth grade students from three School District of La Crosse (WI) Middle Schools to read and evaluate the five 2009 *SB&F* Middle Grades finalist books. For our first election, prospective participants within the high performance learner program were selected based on high Wisconsin Knowledge Concepts Examination scores in both language arts and science subjects. A permission slip was sent to the guardians of each prospective student to opt into or out of election participation.

Concurrent elections were run in each of three middle schools. The School District of La Crosse provided funding for seven sets of the Middle Grades *SB&F* finalist books. A finalist book evaluation rubric, based on a highly modified version of *SB&F*’s judging criteria, was completed by each student for each of the five 2009 finalist books. Prior to using the evaluation rubric, students completed a trial evaluation using the 2008 *SB&F* Children’s Science Picture Book Prize winner. This trial was done to familiarize the students with the evaluation process and rubric use. After the five 2009 finalist books were read and evaluated, the students at each Middle School answered a series of questions on a “Mock *SB&F* Ballot” then discussed their choices. Each student then selected their choice for the finalist book most deserving of the Mock *SB&F* award (Table 1). The election was completed prior to the

“official” *SB&F* Prize online announcement. Following the election, one set of finalist books was placed in each of the middle school Library Media Centers with remaining books going into individual classrooms.

A variation of our mock election process could also be used with other disciplines. In each January/February *SB&F* journal issue, an annual trade books “Best List” includes outstanding books in multiple categories (i.e., technology, engineering, and mathematics). *SB&F* Best List books in the “Engineering” category, for example, could be substituted for the science finalist books. A Mock *SB&F* Engineering election could be held with participating students.

“Considerable evidence indicates that young children have much more opportunity in school to read and listen to stories than to experience informational text....Yet experts have long called for change in this situation...pointing out that not only do young children deal quite well with informational text, they are interested in it.” (Dreher and Voelker 2004, p. 260). The Middle Grades Mock *SB&F* Prize election promotes the critical analysis of science trade books by students, increases the use of high quality science non-fiction in the classroom, illustrates the connection between literature and science, and enhances a school’s science curriculum.

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**Table 1. 2009 Middle Grades Science Mock SB&F election results (n=30).**

School District of La Crosse (WI)–Middle Schools	Lincoln	Logan	Longfellow	Totals
Election Date	1/20/2009	1/6/2009	1/21/2009	
<b>TITLE:</b>				
<i>What’s Eating You? Parasites: The Inside Story</i>	5	7	1	13
<i>Cold Light: Creatures, Discoveries and Inventions that Glow</i>	5	1	2	8
<i>Life on Earth and Beyond: An Astrobiologist’s Quest</i>	1	0	7	8
<i>How We Know What We Know About Our Changing Climate</i>	1	0	0	1
<i>George Washington Carver</i>	0	0	0	0
<b>Total votes (6th grade students)</b>	<b>12</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>30</b>

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## REFERENCES:

**AAAS (American Association for the Advancement of Science). 1990. *Science for All Americans*. Oxford University Press.**

<http://www.project2061.org/publications/sfaa/online/sfaatoc.htm>

**ALCS (Association of Library Service to Children) awards**

<http://www.ala.org/ala/mgrps/divs/alsc/awardsgrants/bookmedia/index.cfm>

**Aventis Prizes for Science Books (Junior Version), Royal Society, UK.**

<http://royalsociety.org/bookspage.asp?id=6414>

<http://royalsociety.org/displaypagedoc.asp?id=29362> (page 4), and <http://royalsociety.org/bookspage.asp?id=6324>

**Dreher, M. J. and A. N. Voelker. 2004. In: *Crossing Borders In Literacy and Science Instruction*. E.W. Saul ed. International Reading Association.**

**Gerber, D. T. & E. Brunsell. 2008. Introducing Pre-service Teachers to High Quality K-8 Science Trade Books through a Mock SB&F Election. *SB&F* 44(5): 188**

<http://www.uwlax.edu/murphylibrary/departments/curriculum/stem/mocksb&f.html>

**Mock SB&F Prize election website**

<http://www.uwlax.edu/murphylibrary/departments/curriculum/stem/mocksb&f.html>

**SB&F Online**

<http://www.sbsonline.com/>

**Prize for Excellence in Science website** <http://www.sbsonline.com/prizes>

**Best Lists**

<http://www.sbsonline.com/bestlists.htm>

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