

Caldecott and Newbery Medal Wins Bring Instant Boost to Book Sales

by [Marlaina Cockcroft](#)

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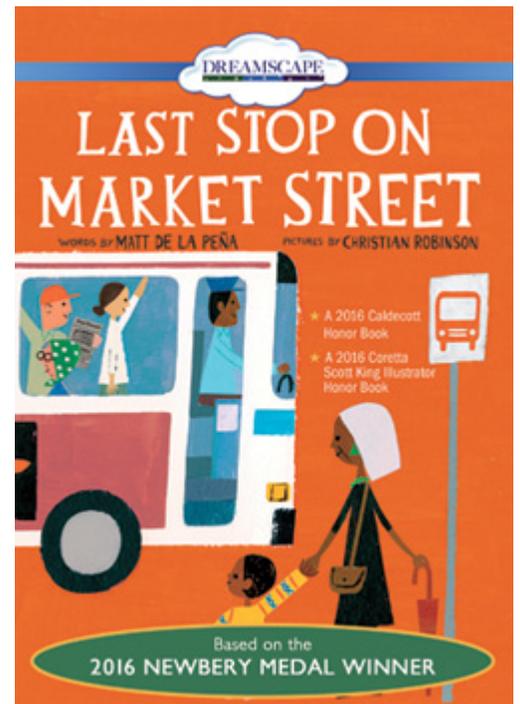
Like an Oscar win sparks bigger box office numbers and on-demand rentals, a Caldecott or Newbery Medal means an instant bump in book sales. As soon as the winners are announced on February 12, orders start pouring in to the publishers. "For our core book market, the demand is immediate and significant," says John Mendelson, senior vice president of sales at Candlewick. The [Youth Media Awards \(YMAAs\)](#), sponsored by the [American Library Association \(ALA\)](#), recognize outstanding work for children and teens. Of the more than a dozen awards, those administered by the [Association for Library Service to Children \(ALSC\)](#), including the [Caldecott](#) and [Newbery](#), are the most established and have the most clout. The Caldecott Medal, awarded to "to the artist of the most distinguished American picture book for children," and the Newbery Medal, given to "the author of the most distinguished contribution to American literature for children" are arguably the biggest honors given out during the annual ALA event. All eyes are on Denver this year, where the announcements will be made at the ALA Midwinter meeting. The applause will have barely died when the awards' effects kick in. The library and online markets and traditional book retailers respond first, Mendelson says, followed by nontraditional segments such as the mass market or specialty markets. The sales boost is felt most in the months immediately following the award announcement. *SLJ* asked The NPD Group | NPD BookScan to look at Newbery and Caldecott winners from 2017, as well as five and 10 years before. NPD's numbers don't suggest



that much has changed in the YMA's influence over the last decade. The Newbery and Caldecott still pack power. Analysis of the 12 weeks before the award announcement versus the 12 weeks after show a sales bump of 324 percent for 2017 Newbery winner *The Girl Who Drank the Moon* by Kelly Barnhill and 473 percent for 2017 Caldecott winner *Radiant Child* by Javaka Steptoe. The percentage jump, of course, depends on how well the book was selling before. Despite the boost, the prestigious awards don't necessarily push a book into bestseller territory. "While the awards helped these books be discovered, with the possible exceptions of *The Girl Who Drank the Moon* and *Flotsam*, none of these books would be considered major bestsellers compared to many of the titles appearing on the bestseller lists at the time of their publication," says Kristen McLean of NPD Group. "Having tracked children's books for many years, I think that the criteria that the ALA is using does not always translate consistently to the trade book market, but does underline a book's quality in such a way that it will always have a home in classrooms, libraries, and the more literary-minded bookstores who keep a well-stocked awards shelf," McLean says. The literary impact remains, but there seems to be more of a delay in the winning title getting to average consumers than there was 10 or 15 years ago, according to Lori Benton, vice president and group publisher for Scholastic Trade. "I don't feel like there's as big an awareness at a consumer level in the initial announcement," says Benton, who believes it's the effect of the *Today* show ending their annual interviews with the award-winning authors in 2010. "I think it just takes a little longer to trickle down." While there might be hope that social media would negate the *Today* effect, it's unlikely. ALA, for example, has about 170,000 followers on Twitter, 185,000 on Facebook, and 30,000 on Instagram. Prominent publisher Little, Brown (which has published the last three Caldecott Medal winners) has more than 500,000 Twitter and 73,000 Instagram followers, but if its books don't win, it's not likely to push out an award announcement. Unless someone's social media feeds are full of multiple authors, publishers, librarians, and book bloggers, news of the announcements could take a while to filter through. Major news outlets will do stories, but it is tough to come close to the impact of an interview in front of more than four million viewers. Still, the greater public and book purchasers (parents, in the case of these children's titles) will seek out the winning selections at some point and publishers and bookstores must prepare for the coming demand, starting with spreading the news as best they can. Candlewick, which has had such past winners as Caldecott winner *This Is Not My Hat* by Jon Klassen and Kate DiCamillo's Newbery Medal winners *The Tale of Despereaux* and *Flora & Ulysses*, uses email blasts and social media to announce a win. "I'd say simultaneously while we're contacting the customers, they're already submitting orders," Mendelson says. "Their initial orders often come in based on a formula that they've arrived at from previous years' demand, and then demand for those titles is evaluated on an ongoing basis." Elena Mesthos, buyer at Books of Wonder in New York, says her staff tries to predict and be proactive, making sure they have some possible winners on the shelves before. They will order



what they need based on the announcements. The morning after the YMAs are revealed, the store starts getting calls looking for the winning titles. *The Girl Who Drank the Moon* was a store favorite before the announcement, but the staff was successfully handselling it. Following the announcement, they no longer had to do the legwork. “After the award, of course, everybody’s coming in asking for it,” says Methos. *Radiant Child* was one book that Methos saw really benefit from the award. Before the announcement, Mesthos says, Books of Wonder sold between 10 and 12 copies. When it won, the book was out of stock at the publisher. As soon as the store got copies in, they sold close to 200, and have sold 100s more since. When the selection is shocking or controversial, curiosity can bring people to the bookstore. In 2016 when picture book *Last Stop on Market Street* by Matt de la Peña won the Newbery—unheard of for a picture book—the store sold many more copies and had customers coming in just to take a look. “There [were] a lot of people, even if they weren’t necessarily buying it, wanting to come in and read it and look at it, and see why it was chosen,” Mesthos says. While the numbers show the interest and sales wane over time, the award impact never completely disappears. “You have a guaranteed long-tail backlist title at that point,” Benton says. Those books are also available in stores for a longer time and get special attention or promotions, she says. Scholastic, whose previous winners include Caldecott winner *The Invention of Hugo Cabret* by Brian Selznick and Newbery winner *Out of the Dust* by Karen Hesse, sees a year-over-year increase on winning titles at Amazon and educational wholesalers. A win boosts sales for the author or illustrator’s previous titles as well, according to Benton. The moments after the awards are announced are busy for the publisher, from design and editorial to production and sales and marketing. When it comes to the Newbery and Caldecott, a win almost always lead to an immediate rush reprint, Mendelson says. The extra work is worth it, he says, and not just because of higher sales. The awards give a publisher the platform “to encourage kids to discover a book they might not otherwise have access to.”



As the excitement builds to the 2018 Youth Media Awards announcements on February 12, slj.com takes a look at the Caldecott and Newbery Medal books’ impact on [librarians](#), last year's [winning authors](#) and the children’s publishing industry.

Caldecott medal

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