Imagining Social Justice and Peace in a World Community: The Jane Addams Children's Book Award

by Susan C. Griffith

> We have learned as common knowledge that much of the insensibility and hardness of the world is due to the lack of imagination which prevents a realization of the experiences of other people. (Addams, 1902/2002, p. 8)

Fifty years ago, pacifist and activist members of the Jane Addams Peace Association, the educational affiliate of the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom, created the Jane Addams Children's Book Award. The award has been presented annually since then to the children's book of the preceding year that most effectively promotes the cause of peace, social justice and world community. The award seeks to bring to public attention children's books that invite young people to think imaginatively about questions of utmost importance: How can people of all races, cultures, nations and economic systems live together peaceably? How can we begin to think more creatively and humanely about injustice, past or present, real or fictionalized (Official Guidelines, 1994)? Fifty years later, books commended by the Jane Addams Children's Book Award form a body of work distinguished as literature, a body of children's literature that counters what Addams saw as a source of "insensibility and hardness" in the world-namely, "the lack of imagination which prevents a realization of the experiences of other people" (Addams, 2002, p. 8).

As a member of the 2004 Jane Addams Children's Book Award Committee, I delved into the work with a sense of honor and purpose, more than pleased to focus my efforts on a project that furthered the legacy of a woman I have long admired Here I share my experience with that project. The following discussion explores connections between Addams' own life and philosophy and the children's books that are honored in her name. I provide both relevant biographical information and draw on recent scholarship about Addams' work by philosopher Charlene Seigfried (1999, 2002) and historian Jean Bethke Elshtain (2002) to outline the thrust and shape of Addams philosophy. Then I concentrate on Addams Award Winners of the past ten years', looking at them in light of Addarns' most widely recognized accomplishments--the ones that she requested be noted as an epigraph on her grave marker:

Jane Addams
Of
Hull House
And
The Women's International League
For
Peace and Freedom,

Finally, I look closely at two of the 2004 Addams Award Winners and Honor Books to describe how their literary conception reflects the tenets that guided Addarns' thinking.

Jane Addams, Activist, Pacifist, Philosopher, Thinker

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[1]Twenty books have been distinguished as Addanis Award Winners since 1994. Two books per year, in two categories--. Picture Books and Books for Older Children-have been named. The process allows for Honor Books to be named as well but here the focus is on the award winners only.

Jane Addams was an inspired activist who struck at the roots of social injustice through astute, persistent, thoughtful action during the first decades of the twentieth century. Born to a prosperous, white, middle-class family in Cedarville, Illinois, Addams was a serious child whose childhood was marked first, by the death of her mother when she was two, then, by the death of her father just as she entered adulthood. Her father's death triggered a prolonged grief and depression that provoked years of soul searching. Dissatisfied with the prospects and parameters that society offered her as one of a small but growing number of middle class, college-educated, white women, she sought a way to loam from life and contribute to it that went beyond individual goals and family obligations.

While traveling in Europe after her father's death, she realized the devastating effects of urban poverty. In London, she also witnessed the efforts of the staff of a pioneering social enterprise-the settlement house. Addams observed the workers at the Toynbee Hall settlement house as they worked alongside the poor to better living conditions and to improve the quality of education. Returning to Chicago in 1889, she and her friend Ellen Gates Starr rented a "decaying mansion in the midst of a poor immigrant community" (Alonso, 2004, p. 4). Here they set up Hull House, one of the first settlement houses in the United States. Collectively working with other women like themselves, she and Starr lived at Hull House and worked with and for neighborhood people. In a recent portrait of Jane Addams, Harriet Hyman Alonso (2004) notes:

> Within four years of its inception, Hull House boasted an array of clubs and functions, a day nursery, gymnasium, dispensary, playground and a cooperative boarding house for single working women, known as the Jane Club. (p. 4)

People from all over the world revered Addams for the work of Hull House-work that continued for decades beyond her death in 1935. They admired the energy and tenacity she brought to battles with Chicago's municipal government and to those with the Illinois legislature as an advocate for reforms in child labor, sanitation, housing, and work conditions. Addams biographer Jean Bethke Elshtain (2002) notes that

> Nearly every major piece of social legislation or civic initiative having to do with the well-being of children from 1890 to the New Deal bears the Hull-House stamp in one way or another. (p. 122)

Addams was also an ardent pacifist. On the brink of World War I, in 1915, she, along with women peace advocates from many countries, founded the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom (WI PF). While her work at Hull House never ceased, her work toward international peace dominated the last twenty years of her life. During World War I, her criticism of the war and her efforts to bring its devastation to light were interpreted by the public as misguided at best. Most, however, considered them unpatriotic or traitorous. In spite of being censured for her views during this war, she later-in 1931-was honored as the first woman to receive the Nobel Peace Prize, an award she shared with Nicholas Murray Butler.

Eishtain's (2002) and Seigfried's (1999, 2002) analyses of Jane Addams' work reveal important characteristics 'of her philosophy, her writing, and her vision of democracy. Her philosophy is noteworthy for its basis in experience. Her writing is distinctive for its reliance on storytelling. Her vision of democracy is remarkable for its insistence on the inclusion of all people in both the process and outcome of responsible human action.

Addams, like her friend pragmatist

philosopher John Dewey, sought to find the origins of understanding life in the experience of living everyday life itself. She grounded her activism firmly in her own life experience and in her observations of the common daily experience of the working class and poor people who surrounded her. All of her ideas and theories grew from what she called perplexities, i.e. particular situations that engender clashes of beliefs, habits and interests endemic in diversified societies (Seigfried, 2002). Experience itself was not enough, however. Philosopher Seigfried (2002) points out what Addams held true: "Experiences cannot ... just be taken at face value or else they will lead us astray. Conclusions based upon them must be critically tested, revised, and retested (xi)"

Addams' contemplation and explication of her experiences yielded twelve books and over five hundred essays, speeches, editorials and columns (Elshtain, 2002). It is in this writing that she developed a cohesive sense of purpose and the philosophy that guided her actions. Her philosophy shares the hallmarks of pragmatist thinking - namely, linking theory and practice, facts and values, experience and experimentation (Seigfried, 1999, p. 217). Her analysis is distinctive, however, in that it draws nearly exclusively on the experience of women and children, especially those white middle-class women like herself and the women and children of diverse ethnic backgrounds who were her Chicago neighbors (Seigfried, 1999, p. 221).

Addams told and reflected upon the stories of life that surrounded her to explore and illustrate her understanding of the world Framed by incisive analysis, the stories she told are the fabric of her thinking. In terms of research today, Addams was a natural qualitative researcher, working from the ground up, focusing on telling incidents, representing them in vivid detail followed by critical analysis to build theory grounded in the real world. In Elshtain's words (2002), Addams was "attuned to narrative structure, the requirements of drama and the need to tether important ethical decisions to concrete and vivid events" (p. 17).

For example, Addams ponders the effects of forcing women to leave their children untended to work for long hours at low pay through this story:

> I cannot recall without indignation a recent experience. I was detained late one evening in an office building by a prolonged committee meeting of the Board of Education. As I came out at eleven o'clock, I met in the corridor of the fourteenth floor a woman whom I knew, on her knees scrubbing the marble tiling. As she straightened up to greet me, she seemed so wet from her feet up to her chin, that I hastily inquired the cause. Her reply was that she left home at five o'clock every night and had no opportunity for six hours to nurse her baby. Her mother's milk mingled with the very water with which she scrubbed the floors until she should return at midnight, heated and exhausted, to feed her screaming child with what remained within her breasts. (Addams, as cited in Elshtain, 2002, p. 106)

Addams explored the perplexities of linking individual and family life with the larger social life through pointed, reflective, vivid narratives like this story of the overworked mother. This kind of thinking through narrative propelled the development of her philosophy which demanded that private life be brought into the realm of what she called the social claim, that is, the public world of responsible human action.

She saw democracy as a way of life that was always a work-in-progress, forged from reflections on, and results of, the experiences of all. Democracy requires people who are "widely at home in the world" (Addams, 1902/2002, p. 96). Enlarging consciousness so that the social claim encompasses the claims of family and of individual goals was a guiding force in the ongoing work of democracy. She challenged educators to give children's own experiences a social value, to show them how to direct their own activities, and to teach them to adjust their activities to those of other people (Addams, 1902/2002, p. 81).

The spirit of lane Addams' civic work and her international work for peace lives in the Addams Children's Book Award winners of the past decade. Like Addams, the books focus on lives limited by injustice and misunderstanding in the world. All illuminate the resilience and tenacity of children whose spirits or circumstances are akin to those of the poor, working class, common people who shared their neighborhood with Addams and her colleagues. Each raises important questions about what it means to live honestly and thoughtfully in the world today.

Carrying On the Legacy

With an underlying vision of a socially just world, the Jane Addams Children's Book Award Winners explore the effects of racism, injustice, war and repression in the lives of children in the past and in the present. The stories these books tell are stories of people much like those Addams encountered in Chicago and around the world. The books bring to life the issues faced by Addams, her colleagues and their neighbors, including child labor, sanitation, housing, work conditions, hunger and the effects of war. Like most children's books, these twenty books focus almost exclusively on the experiences of children. They do so in five categories: historical documentaries of children's experiences, stories of individual lives, historical novels portraying racism in the United States, international stories chronicling the effects of war and repression and stories that underscore the importance of working for peace. (See Appendix for complete list of award winners.)

Books like Growing Up in Carl Country by Susan Campbell Bartoletti (1996) document the actual history of children. Drawing on written and photographic primary source material, the books in this grouping give a genuine sense of the way children experienced conditions or events of a specific historical era. In Bartoletti's book (1996), the work of children in the mines of Pennsylvania at the turn of the last century takes center stage.

Individual picture book biographies place the accomplishments of people who publicly fought injustice in light of their childhoods. 2004 Award Winner Harvesting Hope (Krull, 2003) traces the life of Cesar Chavez, from his secure childhood in Arizona, to his days as a migrant worker, forward to his life as union founder and organizer. This group also includes artistic autobiographies like George Littlechild's *This Land is My Land* (1993). In a series of deeply personal reflections on a collection of his own collages, Littlechild's art and words speak loudly and clearly of richness and limits of Native American life in the unjust world of contemporary society.

Ten works of fiction burrow into children's encounters with injustice, using children's eyes to create the viewpoints in each story. These include works of historical fiction set in the United States that explore the effects of racism, like *Esperanza Rising* (Ryan, 2000), a novel about a wealthy Mexican family who become migrant workers in California in the nineteen-thirties. Several works of contemporary international fiction explore the effects of war and repression in the

lives of children today: *Habibi* (Nye, 1997) set in the Middle East, *Parvana's Journey* (Ellis, 2002) set in Afghanistan, *The Other Side of Truth* (Naidoo, 2000) set in Nigeria and London and *The Composition* (Skarmeta, 2000), set in an unnamed South American country.

Three books can be categorized as books that illuminate the need to work for peace in the world. *Seven Brave Women* (Heame, 1997) and *Sub's Secrets* (Nye, 1994) focus on the peaceful lives of women and children. Each of these two books subtly yet purposefully juxtaposes the creative, life-affirming activities of women and girls with references to wars happening at the same time, showing by contrast and implication the deleterious effects of war.

The third book in this group, *Patrol: An American Soldier in Viet Nam* (Myers, 2002) is distinguished as an Addams Award Winner on two counts: its protagonist is not a child and its subject matter is combat itself. Myers' lyrical, haunting poem sears through a soldier's experience on patrol in Viet Nam to raise . the question, "Who is the enemy?" Framed and deepened by landscape collages by Ann Grifalconi, this picture book startles because it pushes parameter in both form and content,

Addams' notion that people need to be widely at home in the world underpins the spirit and purpose of the Jane Addams Children's Book Award, too. The award winners of this past ten years traverse the distance from the immediate life of the child's first ventures outside the family-as an immigrant going to school in *Painted Words/Spoken Memories: Marianthe's Story* (Aliki, 1998) or as a poor child reporting for work in a cannery in *Kids at Work Lewis Hine and the Crusade Against Child Labor* (Freedman 1994) -- to the experiences of children whose lives are engulfed by war and repression, for example France Temple's *Taste of Salt: A Story of Modern Haiti* (1992), the story of Djo, a boy who labors in sugar cane fields in the midst of physical abuse and political repression. As a body, the books seek to enlarge children's consciousness so that the social claim informs and extends their individual and family lives.

Individually, each intertwines and melds the individual, family and social claims, as Addams called them, more or less effectively. While the success of placing a particular story in a larger social context-or within the social claim-is not a specific criteria for the award, the issues of contextualization do arise in discussion. How should books for children with historical approaches connect the past with the present? How should books about individuals show the lives in light of the larger world? How, and when, should books make clear that individual and historical tragedies link directly to larger repression and violence present right now as we read this article?

Two books for older-children commended by the 2004 Jane Addams Children's Book Award meld the individual, family and social claims exceptionally well: one of the 2004 honor books, *GettingAway with Murder: The True Story of the Emmet Till Case* (Crowe, 2003) and the 2004 award winner, *Out of Bounds: Seven Stories of Hope and Conflict* (Naidoo, 2003). Each of these books also powerfully stretches the tragic history it illuminates so that readers can see its presence in the present and feel the urgency of placing their own lives within the larger social world.

Chris Crowe's thorough, unflinching chronicle of Emmet Till's life, his lynching and its repercussions, masterfully places this explosive, heart. rending tragedy historically and, more importantly, contemporarily. Throughout the book, Crowe carefully shows just how the Emmet Till case relates to past and future events in the struggle for African American civil rights in this country.

Through careful, respectful attention to the courage, resolve, actions and words of Emmet's mother, Mamie Till Bradley, Crowe shows deep connections between family and social claims. In the book's concluding paragraphs, Mrs. Bradley's words followed by Crowe's stunning economy of words unite individual, family and social claims past and present:

> In a newspaper interview a month after the conclusion of the trial in Sumner, she told reporters, `Two months ago I had a nice apartment in Chicago. I had a good job. I had a son. When something happened to the Negroes in the South, I said, `That's their business, not mine.' Now I know how wrong I was. The murder of my son has shown me that what happens to any of us, anywhere in the world, had better be the business of us all.'
> It is still the business of us all.
> (Crowe, 2003, p. 120-121)

Beverley Naidoo's short story collection *Out of Bounds: Seven Stories of Hope and Conflict* melds individual, family and social claims powerfully and poignantly. Naidoo's seven chronologically sequential short stories that take place in South Africa unravel the perplexities of life under apartheid from 1948, when the first story is set, through 2000, when children and naive readers might think apartheid's deadly ramifications would be over. Each story reveals its message through vivid details and telling incidents, just as Addams' stories and vignettes made their points. Each is a short, purposeful story of ordinary life constricted by larger social conditions, just as Addams' stories are. And, each, like Addams' stories, invite discussion and interpretation in order to understand the way in and the way out of the tangle of competing claims they convincingly represent.

Like Jane Addams' philosophy, the Jane Addams Children's Book Award Winners are grounded in the experience of women and children. Like the stories that are the fabric of her writing, they crystallize ordinary experiences of life with telling details, a sense of drama, and narrative structures that give immediacy to the stones as they unfold. Motivated by a vision of a socially just world, nearly all of the books from the past decade address issues of social justice by exploring the effects of racism, injustice, war and repression in the real and imagined lives of children in the past and in the present. Jane Addanns Children's Book Award Winners and Honor Books offer young readers the opportunity to stretch their imaginations beyond their individual and family lives. As a body and individually, they also seek to create children who are widely at home in the world and who understand the social value of their own experience.

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Stories of Individual Lives

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All About "Ms." -- An Interview with Alma Graham

by Dure Jo Gillikin, Retired Teacher Representative

In 1972, Alma Graham became the first lexicographer to put the courtesy title "Ms." into a dictionary. To find out how and why this term originated, how it was popularized, and how it should be used, I asked her the following set of questions.

Who originated the term "Ms." as a courtesy title? When and why was it first used?

The eleventh edition of Merriqm Webster's Collegiate Dictionary gives the date of origin as 1949. I remember reading--perhaps in the first issue of *Ms. Magazine*--that "Ms." was first used in the 1940s by people who prepared mailing labels for magazines and advertisements. With many women working outside the home during World War II, taking over jobs traditionally done by men, a female householder's marital status couldn't simply be assumed. Since "Mr.," the abbreviation for "Master," didn't reveal marital status, the bulk mailers blended "Miss" and "Mrs.," the two abbreviations for "Mistress," into a shorter form parallel to Mr.: Ms. So it seems that the origin of Ms. was purely commercial. (I'd hoped to be able to research this further on a Google search; but all I turned up was multiple sclerosis and Mississippi.) Those who say that Ms. is an abbreviation of nothing are simply ignorant of etymology.

How successful is the use of Ms. now, and why? How is Ms. correctly used?

Given the widespread acceptance and use of Ms. now, it's funny to remember the resistance we encountered in the 1970s. A. M. Rosenthal--who exerted editorial power over *The New York Times* throughout the `70s and served as executive editor from 1977 to 1986--forbade the use of Ms. during his tenure. Israel Shenker managed to sneak it past him, though, when he was a *Times* columnist. In

the early '70s, when I was associate editor of the American Heritage Dictionary, Shenker interviewed me for a piece he was writing on trademarks. He quoted me as follows: "`I want to see the day when I can write Jell-O with a lower-case letter,' said Ms. Graham (who boasts that she was the first to put Ms. into a dictionary.) If Ms. Graham will be good enough to consult the Random House Dictionary, she will find the gelatinous answer to a maiden's prayers, jello in letters small but firm." Daring as Shenker was at the time, he couldn't resist getting my marital status in there with "maiden."

Ms. Magazine, first published in 1972, was instrumental in popularizing Ms. Ultimately, it was widely adopted because it filled a real need in the language. More and more, as women claimed careers of their own, many resisted being labeled according to whether or not they were married. Originally used only when marital status was unknown, Ms. came to be used when such status was considered irrelevant. Some mistakenly thought it was to be used if a woman was divorced, but the whole point of Ms. is that it says nothing about a woman's marital status. The biggest faux pas is using it before a man's name as a substitute for Mrs., as in Ms. Frank Mitchell. Ms. should always be followed by a woman's name: first and last or last name only, as in Ms. Jo Gillikin, Ms. Gillikin. Informally, it may be followed by a woman's first name only, as in Ms. Jo.

How did the title Ms. get into the dictionary? Israel Shenker said you boasted you were the first to put it in.

That's right. Actually, many people are involved in the decision to put a new word into a dictionary. There are the citation readers who scan publications for new words and new senses of existing words. Then come the editors who determine when a word has come into general circulation. Finally, a lexicographer has to define it based on the contexts in which it appears. *The American Heritage School Dictionary*, published in 1972, was the first dictionary to include the title Ms. Our usage editor, Bruce Bohle, came to me one day and said he thought the term was in sufficiently wide use to be entered. We discussed the fact that a standard pronunciation had not yet been agreed upon, so we covered that in a note. I defined *Ms.* as "An abbreviation used as a title of courtesy before a woman's last name or before her given name and last name, whether she is married or not." The note observed that "Ms. has yet to find an agreed pronunciation: (mis), (miz), and simply (em es) seem to be the possibilities." Of course, usage soon determined that it would be pronounced (miz). Our dictionary broke new ground in eliminating the sexist stereotypes that we found throughout the schoolbooks of the 1960s, a process I described in "The Making of a Nonsexist Dictionary," which appeared in Ms. Magazine in December 1973 and was reprinted in *ETC. A Review of General Semantics* in 1974.

That was very informative. Thank you.

Thank *you* for asking, Ms. Gillikin.