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THE CENTER FOR CHILDREN'S AND YOUNG ADULT LITERATURE: A PARTNERSHIP FOR LITERACY

By KENNETH WISE
LIBRARY BUSINESS MANAGER AND
DIRECTOR OF THE CENTER

"Children with books learn to read." Certainly. But children are not all the same, books are not all the same, and, more importantly, children learning to read are not all the same. Understanding these differences is at the core of the mission of the Center for Children's and Young Adult Literature, a public service partnership engaged in outreach to teachers, school and public librarians, day care workers, and students who work with children learning to read.

The Center, a partnership of the University of Tennessee Library, the College of Communications and Information Sciences, and the College of Education, Health and Human Sciences, was established in 1999 as part of a larger cooperative effort that included representatives from Webb School, Knoxville Catholic Schools, Oak Ridge City Schools, Knox County Schools, and the Knox County Public Library System. It is founded on the belief that literacy is essential in the lives of our young people, not only to facilitate their acquisition of reading ability, but also to help develop a love of literacy and an understanding and appreciation of its potential power in their lives.

The Center's focal point is its examination collection housed in the Reserve Room of the Hodges Library. This collection contains copies of recently published and soon-to-be-released books by the major publishers of children's and young adult literature. Titles are continuously added to the collection as they are released by the publishers for review and



Jack Gantos at an in school visit with students in Oak Ridge.

remain in the collection for a period of twelve months. The collection is open to the public as a resource for teachers, librarians, students, and parents engaged in building personal or institutional collections, preparing classroom instruction, completing scholarly research, or just simply browsing for pleasure.

In conjunction with the examination collection, the Center sponsors a variety of programs, lectures, and seminars on children's literature. The most notable of these are the major author and illustrator lecture programs offered each fall and spring semester. Recently the Center had the good fortune to host Richard Peck, one of the most celebrated authors of literature for young people. Peck is the 2001 Newbery Medal recipient for *A Year Down Under*, a companion book to *A Long Way From Chicago*, the recipient of a Newbery Honor and a National Book Award nomination.

In his lecture Peck made several references to his latest book for young people, *Fair Weather*, a humorous novel set during the 1893 World's Fair in Chicago. In many ways, Peck noted, the variety of technological innovations introduced at the 1893 World's Fair marked the end of the 19th century and the beginning of what later became known as the American Century. With reference to his book, Peck drew strong parallels between the 1893 fair and the September 11th terrorist attack, which happened only four weeks prior to his lecture and which is perhaps the defining incident that symbolically closed out the twentieth century.

Richard Peck and authors Jack Gantos, Suzanne Fisher Staples, Carolyn Coman, and illustrators Emily McCully, and Robert Sabuda have all made laudable contributions to the Center's growing tradition of superb lecture programs. But each of these has perhaps made a greater impact in the classroom, visiting young readers, answering questions, and encouraging them to develop the habit of reading regularly and reading seriously. While the Center's outreach is primarily to adults working with young readers, sponsorship of author visits to the schools reinforces, we believe, the efforts of the librarian and teacher in the classroom.



Newbery Honor winner Jack Gantos lecturing to students in a summer course.

Literature for children and young adults is a vital part of the curriculum at the University of Tennessee, particularly for programs in Information Sciences, Education, and Child and Family Studies. As a partnership, the Center for Children's and Young Adult Literature allows the academic community to engage the public community in both supporting the mission of the university and in pursuing a set of wide-ranging goals influencing the well-being of young readers, many of whom will be future students of the University of Tennessee.

The outreach efforts of the Center are made possible by the support of the two dozen or so publishers who donate review copies to the examination collection, the efforts of a hard-working board of directors, and the generosity of a few financial benefactors, particularly the alumnae of the University of Tennessee chapter of the Pi Beta Phi sorority. Through an endowment established specifically for support of the Center, members of the Pi Beta Phi sorority have made it possible for this partnership of the university community and greater Knoxville K-12 community to reap the benefits of immediate access to some of the most creative minds in children's literature.

News of upcoming events, lecture programs, seminars, and exhibits is generally disseminated through the Center's newsletter issued twice yearly, at the beginning of the fall and spring semesters. The newsletter features introductions to guest lecturers and highlights of recent events, as well as short news items about our sponsoring publishers, award-winning books, and summer courses that may be of interest to librarians and teachers. Please call the Hodges Library Business Office (865/ 974-2359) if you would like to be added to the mailing list for future newsletters.