

Mock Ezra Jack Keats Award Toolkit



This Toolkit was created in collaboration with teachers from **Friends School of Baltimore** and by librarians and teachers in New York, NY and Stamford, CT.

Special thanks to the following individuals who were part of those institutions and were critical members of the creative team: John Scott, Andy Hanes, Mary Kelley, Frances Morrissey and Diana White from Friends, Chris Carter, Teacher, NYC Public Schools, and to Caroline Ward, Youth Literature Consultant.

Dear Friends,

The **Mock EJK Award Toolkit**, modeled on the actual EJK Award, is a guide for teachers and librarians who want to show their students that reading, discussing and thinking can be fun. The EJK Award celebrates outstanding authors and illustrators whose books, in the spirit of Keats, highlight the most diverse cross section of our world's population. This makes a Mock EJK a perfect way to enhance student's understanding of tolerance and equity.

A **Mock EJK Award** can be adapted for library users and groups of children from kindergarten through high school age. In this activity everyone comes together to read, discuss, and evaluate a selection of eligible books for the Award in order to make a group decision about what books most successfully meet the criteria you and your students have created for your award.

In this toolkit, we've gathered everything needed to guide your group through this Award process over the course of a typical school year.

What you'll find in this toolkit:

- ▶ **Background materials** about Ezra Jack Keats
- ▶ An outline of the **actual EJK Award** process
- ▶ **Lesson Plan objectives**
- ▶ A **timeline** based on a typical academic calendar
- ▶ Sample **criteria**
- ▶ Sample **voting** process
- ▶ Ideas for producing your remote **Award Ceremony**

This toolkit is based on a number of actual Mock EJK Award programs, but you should modify it to best serve your needs. We appreciate and look forward to hearing your thoughts and feedback.

Please send any thoughts to jmccarthy@ejkf.org.

Deborah Pope
Executive Director, EJK Foundation



Introduction



Pointers for Using Your Mock EJK Award Toolkit!

The process and timeline provided for your **Mock EJK Award** program follows that of the actual EJK Award.

- ▶ Initial prep can be done in the fall.
- ▶ The EJK Foundation will share a list of newly published books appropriate for your Mock EJK Award program as soon as they become available.
- ▶ From this list, you can select and purchase the books your group will consider for your Mock EJK Award Winner and Honors.
- ▶ The actual EJK Awards are announced in late February or early March.

Mock EJK Award Objectives For Children

- ▶ Sharpen critical reading skills, refine verbal communication and build visual literacy.
- ▶ Improve social interaction and strengthen a sense of community between children and their school or library.
- ▶ Increase cross curricular connections.
- ▶ Create opportunities for children to make personal connections between literature and real life.
- ▶ Encourage children to become familiar with people and places that may be new to them.
- ▶ Inspire children to become more aware of being agents for social and/or personal change.
- ▶ Provide an opportunity to discuss the importance of diversity and equity in literature and in life, which can help to:
 - ▶ Let children express their desire to see diversity in the books they read.
 - ▶ Increase their vocabulary related to diversity.
- ▶ Enhance younger children's ability to use math skills in the real world (involvement in the voting and tallying.)

The Mock EJK Award is appropriate for Children of All Ages

- ▶ Younger children
 - ▶ ...often depend on illustrations for the storyline, but can then be guided into in-depth discussions of a book's meaning.
 - ▶ ... might be better able to judge a smaller number of books than older kids.
 - ▶ ... can share thoughts in discussions with caregivers or an appointed "buddy".
- ▶ Older kids
 - ▶ ...can engage in more independent analytical discussion of image and text.
 - ▶ ...might serve as mentors to younger children.
 - ▶ ...can create their own online discussion groups to evaluate the books.



September-December Get Ready



This is a time to gather materials and build excitement with your students, school, as well as with your library.

Sign-up

Go to this link (<https://bit.ly/3Lqsh09>) to sign up.

You'll receive updates about the Mock EJK Awards as well as our suggested eligible booklist and useful information and tips. Plus we will connect you with others doing a Mock.

Select & Obtain Your Books

- ▶ Choose your books from the booklist provided.
- ▶ Decide how many books to include in your Mock EJK based on reading levels, time and budget.
- ▶ Find out if your institution or an auxiliary organization (i.e. a PTA) can fund the purchase of your books.
- ▶ Check with book publishers for permission to record read alouds for your group to access.

Document Your Mock EJK Award Process

- ▶ Designate someone to take photos or videos of the discussions, voting and ceremony.
- ▶ Remember to get signed releases from all parents / guardians, if you don't already have them, to use photos and videos.

Materials to Create & Display Art

Decide what kind of display materials you want to create to promote or "advertise" your program throughout the entire process. Involve your group in their creation to heighten their excitement about the process. Display materials can be used in the months *prior* to the actual Mock EJK Award Program as well as *during*.

- ▶ Check out this **Mock EJK Award Medal** created for your use. You're welcome to simply use the clip art file provided and substitute your school, library or group name. Use it to create a poster or other artwork. (<https://tinyurl.com/y8neqqjm>)
- ▶ Children can create collages and drawings or a poster featuring the Mock EJK Award Medal with the books being considered.
- ▶ Children can also create a poster of their favorite books and/or characters
- ▶ Brainstorm additional art projects with them.

Design Your Award Ceremony

- ▶ **Set the Date Early:** The actual EJK Awards are announced late February, early March so you may want to plan your ceremony to correspond with that time period or shortly thereafter.
- ▶ **Invite Speakers:** Use this opportunity to reach out, build and strengthen your school or library community. Put the date on their calendars early and keep in touch with them to build anticipation. Consider having the children extend the invitations. Invitees may include:
 - ▶ Your supervisor or principal to be a host or guest speaker.
 - ▶ Your colleagues and their groups, especially those who work with younger or older children.
- ▶ **Notify the Winners and Honors:** Let your students know that after their award ceremony you may write to the authors and illustrators to let them know they've won a Mock EJK Award! (Prepare them for the possibility of not hearing back from either).



The Mock EJK Award: Toolkit

January: Stock Up, Discuss Process, Read, Deliberate



It's time to review the program and process with your students. Let them know why you think it will be fun. Discussion points are provided for each of the following sections:

- ▶ Your Book Selection
- ▶ Your Criteria and How To Apply It
- ▶ Reading and Discussing Submitted Books
- ▶ Guided Reading Ideas
- ▶ Your Nominating and Voting Methodology
- ▶ How You Will Announce and Celebrate the Winners
- ▶ Final Planning for your Ceremony, Decoration Ideas, Day of details

Friends School of Baltimore (FSB) Criteria

- ▶ **Childhood:** Where did we see childhood in this book? How did the author address childhood in the text? The illustrations? What are the messages about childhood? How did you see yourself and your childhood in the book?
- ▶ **Family:** What's being celebrated about family? What are things that are similar/different from your family? What message about family does this book send?
- ▶ **Diversity:** The FSB leaves this topic very open to the children's interpretation. One student brought up biodiversity. Questions you might consider are -- What do you think diversity means and how is it a topic that is presented in the books you're reading? How do you see or define diversity?
- ▶ **Words and pictures go together:** Do the author and illustrator do this well? Can you identify pages in which this works really well? How are the two related? Are they telling a complementary story?
- ▶ **Excites your brain:** When you read the book can you not wait to get to the next page? How did it excite your brain?
- ▶ **Hugs your heart:** You may want to talk about the fact that your heart feels lots of different things and ask such questions as -- How does it hit your heart? How did it make you feel? Does it remind you of something special?
- ▶ **Makes you want to learn:** What does this book inspire you to find out more about? Does it excite you to read more books? If the children aren't readers yet you may ask -- What did you enjoy about this book? Might you like to read another like it?
- ▶ **Social and Personal Change:** Did the book help you learn more about your community, the people around you, yourself?

Your Book Selection

Discuss the huge variety of children's books published each year from fiction and nonfiction to fantasy and poetry.

- ▶ Talk about how the books being considered were chosen.
- ▶ Tell them how many books they will read.
- ▶ Let them know that they may be examining some of the same books as the actual EJK Award Committee, but manage expectations by letting them know that they may not select the same award and honor books.

Your Criteria & Ideas On How To Use It

- ▶ Feel free to use or adapt the **Friends School of Baltimore** criteria depending on your needs. We have provided you with a slide of the criteria to use in your virtual presentations. (<https://tinyurl.com/y83qxpz>)
- ▶ Review info about Ezra Jack Keats' life (See Page 5) and most importantly his work as a way facilitate a discussion about what "in the spirit of Keats" means.
- ▶ Let your group know the difference between the actual criteria (See Page 6) and the criteria they're using.
- ▶ Print out and display the criteria for easy reference.
- ▶ Describe how they will analyze, evaluate and compare the text and illustrations in each book, in comparison to the other books and in relation to the criteria.
- ▶ Show and evaluate past winners and honor books. This exercise can illustrate the difference between the two categories. It can also help build a connection between their decisions and those of the EJK Award judges.

The Mock EJK Award: Toolkit

January: continued



Background on Ezra Jack Keats & the EJK Award

Ezra Jack Keats (ejkf.org/ezras-bio) was an award-winning author and illustrator of books for children. Many of Ezra's stories are about a group of friends growing up in a city, like where Ezra grew up in Brooklyn, NY.

The Snowy Day and Ezra's Books

The Snowy Day is a beloved children's book that won the Caldecott Award in 1963. You can go to the EJK Foundation website to see and listen to a wonderful animated Read Aloud version of the book. (ejkf.org/read-aloud-the-snowy-day) You can also access information on the other classic books by EJK, such as Whistle for Willie and Peter's Chair. (ejkf.org/all-ezras-books)

Why is the EJK Award Unique?

The EJK Award is given to outstanding authors and illustrators whose books, in the spirit of Keats, celebrate the diversity of our culture, and depict children from the widest spectrum of ethnic groups from around the world. It recognizes new talent, having identified early career authors and illustrators, many of whom have become today's most popular makers of children's books.

Who Produces the EJK Award?

The EJK Foundation and the de Grummond Children's Literature Collection at the University of Southern Mississippi, are proud to work together to produce the EJK Award, which has the most diverse group of winners and honors of any children's book award, as well as the most ethnically balanced group of book characters. (ejkf.org | degrummond.org)

When is the EJK Award Announced?

The EJK Award is announced each year in late February, early March.

When is the Award Given?

The award ceremony takes place every April, with over 500 teachers, librarians and literature scholars in attendance, during the Fay B. Kaigler Children's Book Festival in Hattiesburg, Mississippi. (usm.edu/childrens-book-festival)

Reading & Discussing Eligible Books

- ▶ Make a schedule to read, evaluate and vote on your award and honor books.
- ▶ Discuss the schedule as well as how and when the winners will be announced.
- ▶ If possible, give the children an opportunity to read the books on their own.

Guided Reading Ideas

- ▶ **Read Alouds:** Introduce books that they will be voting on, show covers or pages of each book, read the book(s) aloud and facilitate discussion including going over your selected criteria in-depth. (Refer to Page 4 criteria)
- ▶ **Enhanced Read Alouds:** If possible, project the pages onto a large screen for a read aloud to inspire children to see a book in a different way.
- ▶ **Quiet Reading Time:** Set time aside for younger children to read, reread and view the books. To facilitate this important time, place the books in a special basket or on a dedicated shelf.
- ▶ **Discussion Time:** Suggest at-home reads and discussions with families as learning opportunities if they have access to the eligible books or if you have a lending system in place.
- ▶ **Breakout Sessions & Buddy Systems:** Depending on your setting and the age of your group, you may be able to encourage breakout sessions for older children to ponder specific questions or books with peers. Younger children can have brief, yet meaningful discussions about a given book and guided question with an assigned "reading buddy" from a group of older children.



The Mock EJK Award: Toolkit

January & February



The Actual EJK Award

Criteria: The Award is given to a new writer and a new illustrator for a picture book that:

- ▶ Highlights the universal qualities of childhood and the strength of the family and community
- ▶ Reflects the multicultural nature of our world
- ▶ Has original text and original story (no folktales)
- ▶ Unifies illustrations and text
- ▶ Avoids stereotypes
- ▶ Highlights a child's freedom to be who they want to be or what they want to be
- ▶ Is respectful of the reader's intelligence, sensitivity, curiosity, and love of learning
- ▶ Demonstrates excellent command of the chosen medium
- ▶ Displays freshness and originality of language and literary expression

Eligibility: Authors or illustrators may have no more than three books published prior to the one submitted. Books must be published in North America in English or bilingually, including English. Self-published books are not eligible.

Selection Committee: The Committee is composed of nine people and includes illustrators, authors, librarians, early childhood educators, book reviewers, literary critics, and members of major professional organizations.

Timeline

February to December: Book Selection

- ▶ Hundreds of books are submitted by publishers and sent to each committee member.
- ▶ After reading every book, committee members choose five books to be considered for the Writer Award and five for the Illustrator Award

January/February: Deliberations and Final Plans

- ▶ The Committee deliberates for two and a half days
- ▶ The Committee chooses the Winners and Honors
- ▶ Publishers, Winners and Honors are notified

Late February/Early March: Winners and Honors Announced

- ▶ Writers and illustrators can tell all their friends!

Many EJK Award and Honor winners have gone on to write and illustrate many more books and win additional awards.

Your Nominating and Voting Methodology

- ▶ **Voting Process:** Explain the nominating and voting process to your group and discuss how long they will have to make a decision. *A third grade class in Stamford encouraged each child to take notes on eligible books as they read them, which helped them focus when they began voting. The Friends School of Baltimore spread all of the books on a rug and allowed the children to take a book walk before voting.*
- ▶ **Final Submissions:** As the discussion of the books progresses and everyone agrees on which books to eliminate, remove those that are clearly no longer in the running. In Stamford they selected a dozen books to discuss and narrowed the finalists down to five. The Friends School narrowed their original list down to a dozen finalists.
- ▶ **Final Voting Schedule:** If you conduct voting several times throughout your process, you may schedule your group's final voting at the end of February.
- ▶ **Announcement of Winners:** Some like to wait to announce their winner and honor until the Award Ceremony.

Voting Options

Vote By Criteria: Create a ballot that shows each book cover and each of the criteria such as those listed in these materials. Each voter can select their chosen title for each of the criteria.

Vote By Overall Book: Create posters that have images of each book cover. Each child can vote using the No Ballot Method for the book they like the best.

No Ballot Method: Ballots aren't needed for this simple and commonly used method that is sometimes good for smaller children:

- ▶ Lay submitted books out on a table and put a basket next to each book.
- ▶ Ask children to walk around and place paper votes (5-10 post-its or colored pieces of paper) in the basket of those they like:
 - ▶ 3 votes = favorite ▶ 2 votes = 2nd choice ▶ 1 vote = 3rd choice
- ▶ Count the votes (Math project!)
- ▶ Select a pre-determined number of books that receive the most votes for winner and honor books.

Create and Use Ballots: Three are described here. Once decided, consider setting up privacy booths using tri-fold boards on desks.

- ▶ **Paper:** Check out the paper ballot that was used at Friends. They voted using star stamps, but children can also circle their choice. (<https://tinyurl.com/uo3y2dl>)
- ▶ **Laminate:** Laminate several copies of a ballot you or your group design and the children can vote using dry erase markers. This way you can use the same sheets repeatedly.
- ▶ **On-line:** Some schools have access to and use Seesaw or another electronic portfolio system. With this method, students can both cast ballots, and with the guidance of a leader (depending on which system you use) children can discuss and record the reasoning behind their votes.

The Mock EJK Award: Toolkit

February & March



Final Planning for your Ceremony

- ▶ Confirm Your Special Guests and Speakers: Make sure your program is complete.
- ▶ Create a Run of Show: This detailed timing of your day and ceremony can include a list of school, library or other officials attending, and how you will progress from speaker to speaker.

A sample schedule:

- * 9:45 - 10 am: Special guests arrive. Children enter and are seated.
 - * 10:10: Event Begins: Group leader welcomes everyone and gives introductory remarks about the process & results
 - * 10:13: Group leader introduces honored guest(s)
 - * 10:17: Honored guest(s) speak and name the award and honor books
 - * 10:22: Photos are taken
- ▶ Draft Remarks: Include a brief introduction of the award, your process, your criteria, how many great discussions and how much fun you had, and the announcement of your Honor Books and the winner of your Mock EJK Book Award!

Decoration Ideas

Collect and create any special items you might want on stage such as the books or items your group may have made which may include:

- ▶ A Mock EJK Award Poster of your winners and Honors using your Mock EJK medallion
- ▶ Materials created and used throughout the program
- ▶ A sign announcing the name of your group.

A Few Days Before Your Award Ceremony

- ▶ Review your Run of Show.
- ▶ Update and finalize all remarks. Send them to your confirmed speakers.
- ▶ Finish and display all artwork. Have the children make signs.
- ▶ Order or buy any snacks or drinks for a reception.

Day of your ceremony

- ▶ Designate special seats for any invited or special guests
- ▶ Have children greet presenters such as your host, award presenters, winning authors or illustrators, or others you feel are appropriate for VIP treatment
- ▶ Designate a group of children to set up the stage area, hang or display all creative projects you've undertaken, set up the snack table, and display a selection of the winning books and others they've read
- ▶ Make extra copies of the script for the podium just in case someone forgets to bring their talking points or remarks

**You've finished your Mock EJK Award.
Time to Celebrate!**



The Mock EJK Award: Toolkit

Collected Links for Easy Access



Mock EJK Award Sign Up Form : <https://bit.ly/3Lqsh09>
EJK Mock Medallion : <https://tinyurl.com/y8neqgjm>
Friends School of Baltimore criteria slides : <https://tinyurl.com/y83qxdgz>
Ezra Jack Keats' Bio : ejkf.org/ezras-bio
The Snowy Day Read Aloud : ejkf.org/read-aloud-the-snowy-day/
EJK Award Origin : ejkf.org/about-the-ejk-award
EJK Foundation Homepage : ejkf.org
De Grummond : degrummond.org
USM Kaigler : usm.edu/childrens-book-festival
Friends School of Baltimore Paper Ballot : <https://tinyurl.com/uo3y2dl>