

And the winner is....

While the winners of the Newbery and Caldecott Awards for children's books are announced with much fanfare each year, children around the country are busy reading and choosing their own winners. Most states have some kind of book award program that school age children participate in.

The Massachusetts Children's Book Award (MCBA), established in 1975, is for fourth-, fifth- and sixth-graders. Out of a list of twenty-five books that have been published within the last five years and are available in paperback, students must read at least five in order to vote for their favorite. While each state determines its own specific criteria for the award, in most cases a list is drawn up and decided upon by educators and librarians (sometimes with the help of parents and/or publishers) from which the children read a certain number, then vote for their favorite. Some states have different categories for each grade from K-12, others have only one or two.

In spite of the different criteria from state to state, not only do some of the same authors appear on many of the different lists, but a number of specific books have been popular with kids throughout the country.

Here are some of the books and authors that have appeared more than once on the lists of several states over the last few years.

On the list of at least six states, and the 2011 winner in Massachusetts and Vermont is [*Eleven Birthdays*](#) by Wendy Mass. Amanda and Leo, born on the same day, had celebrated all of their first ten birthdays together. But a disagreement keeps them apart on their eleventh birthday. At least that's the way it seems until the next morning.

A winner in three states, Ohio (2008), New Hampshire (2008) and Massachusetts (2010), [*Rules*](#) by Cynthia Lord deals with 12 year-old Catherine's challenges of living with an autistic brother and her discoveries about friendship where she least expects to.

On four states' recent lists, [*Savvy*](#) by Ingrid Law, introduces us to almost-13 year-old Mibs, who is waiting to receive her special power - her savvy – on her birthday, when an unforeseen event changes everything and adventure ensues.

[*Swindle*](#) by Gordon Korman. After being tricked out of his most-prized baseball card, Griffin and his pals are involved in a number of escapades trying to get it back.

[*Cracker! The Best Dog in Vietnam*](#) by Cynthia Kadohata. A recent winner in both California and Ohio and on the list for Massachusetts this year, this is the story of a brave and clever dog and the soldier who becomes her companion on the battlefields of Vietnam.

Several authors have more than one book that show up on lists throughout the country. At least five different books by Andrew Clements have appeared on various lists, with [*Extra Credit*](#) finding a place recently on four states' lists. Clements often writes about different kinds of

school situations, and in this case the story focuses on some of the complications that develop when sixth-grader Abby's extra credit project involves a pen pal from Afghanistan.

Another popular author in many states is Carl Hiassen, whose three children's books have all appeared on a number of lists, with his most recent, [*Scat*](#), found on at least five lists recently.

Like his earlier kids' books [*Hoot*](#) and [*Flush*](#), *Scat* combines mystery, humor and an ecological message.

Mike Lupica writes sports fiction for both adults and children and three of his books can be found on recent lists, two of which, [*Miracle on 49th Street*](#) and [*Million-Dollar Throw*](#) concern two of New England's professional teams. But while the sports elements are an important part of the plots, the stories also feature kids who must deal with real-life issues and sometimes make difficult decisions.

Margaret Peterson Haddix is the author of several popular fantasy series and books from two of these series have appeared on several lists. [*Among the Hidden*](#) starts a series of stories about a future society in which families are allowed to have only two children. In this first book of the series we meet Luke, a family's third child who must remain in permanent hiding. Are there other kids like him? And how will he ever find out if he must stay hidden? [*Found*](#), a recent winner in Ohio and Missouri, is the first book in Haddix's *The Missing* series and deals with two boys who find themselves in a precarious situation after receiving anonymous letters informing them that they are "missing".

With so many books to choose from, it is often hard to know what to read, but the kids throughout the country seem to agree on some of the things that make for a good read and they have some great recommendations for all of us.

