



Sibert MEDAL ACCEPTANCE SPEECHES

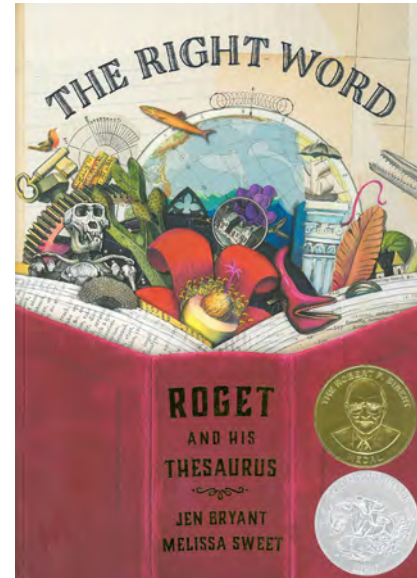
Sibert Medal Acceptance Remarks

by Jen Bryant

To Deb Taylor and her diligent committee members, we are so very grateful (obliged, indebted, thankful, blessing our lucky stars...) that you awarded the Robert F. Sibert Medal to *The Right Word*. We feel enormously privileged, humbled, and proud to be here today with you, and with the five fantastic honor recipients.

The words “painstaking” and “pleasure” describe the creative process behind this book. The thousand necessary decisions that make a good biography become far less burdensome when they are shared by a creative team like the one Melissa and I had at Eerdmans. Truly, three additional names should appear on the cover: art director Gayle Brown, editor Kathleen Merz, and publisher Anita Eerdmans, who wore every hat imaginable in its development.

Peter Mark Roget was a unique individual whose personal writings became one of the great democratizing forces in the English language. His roles as a student, doctor, inventor, and lecturer brought him in contact with the privileged, educated upper classes as well as the poor, marginalized, undereducated ones. When he realized that the word lists he'd collected for his own use might be of value to others, he was determined that it would be a vehicle of equality—a book that offered a range of proper, scientific, and formal options



for expression, but also colloquial, slang, and whimsically idiomatic ones. He wanted the user to have control, to enable him or her to choose just *the right word*, based on needs and situation.

When people ask: *How do you choose your topics?*, I confess that they often choose me—that there is some immediate emotional connection between me and my subject's personality and passions. Obviously, as writer and poet, I shared Peter's love of words, but it went much deeper than that. His innate curiosity, his childhood shyness, his delight in the natural world; his need to record the important events and individuals in his life; his anxiety about public speaking; his dependence upon routines, rituals, and a very understanding spouse, to ground



Jen Bryant (left) and Melissa Sweet (right) are the winners of the 2015 (Robert F.) Sibert Award for *The Right Word: Roget and His Thesaurus* (Eerdmans Books for Young Readers, an imprint of Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing), written by Bryant and illustrated by Sweet. Their acceptance remarks were delivered at the ALSC Book and Media Awards Program on Monday, June 29, 2015, during the American Library Association Annual Conference.

For more information about the Sibert Medal, visit <http://bit.ly/sibert-medal>.



Jen Bryant was born in Pennsylvania and grew up in Flemington, New Jersey. She has a BA from Gettysburg College, MA from Arcadia University, and an Honorary Doctorate from Gettysburg College. She has taught writing and Children's Literature at West Chester University and Bryn Mawr College. Jen writes picture books, novels, and poems for readers of all ages. Her biography *A Splash of Red: The Life and Art of Horace Pippin*, also illustrated by Melissa Sweet, won the ALA Schneider Family Book Award, the Orbis Pictus Award, and a Sibert Honor in 2014.

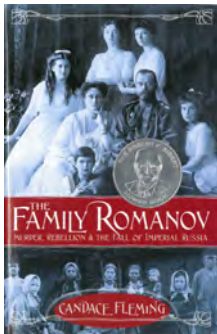
FUN FACT: Besides writing, Jen has been a waitress, bank teller, cross-country coach, high school teacher, member of a road crew, and picture framer, among other positions.



2015 SIBERT HONOR BOOKS



Brown Girl Dreaming.
Woodson, Jacqueline.
Nancy Paulsen/Penguin



The Family Romanov: Murder, Rebellion & the Fall of Imperial Russia.
Fleming, Candace.
Schwartz & Wade/Random House
Children's Books



Josephine: The Dazzling Life of Josephine Baker.
Powell, Patricia Hruby.
Illus. by Christian Robinson.
Chronicle

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his intellectual wanderings; his fondness for people and his equally strong desire for solitude and personal space. These connected me to Roget and to the tattered Thesaurus that had stood for so long on my own writing desk. Here was a kindred spirit from the nineteenth century—an individual about whom, until a happy accident (which you can read about in my author's note) forced me to consider him, I had never given a second thought. The opportunity to make this

journey with my friend and brilliant illustrator Melissa Sweet is, as Peter would say, in ascending order: good, above par, leaning toward the favorable, better, mutually beneficial, excellent, crack-a-jack, unparalleled, superfine, gilt-edged, first-class, exquisite, transcendent, and finally—(my word now)—**perfect**.

Once again, to the Sibert Committee, and to everyone at ALSC/ALA, the right word is indeed: Thanks.

Sibert Medal Acceptance Remarks

by Melissa Sweet

Thank you, Deb Taylor and the Sibert Committee, for this distinguished award. I'm very honored to be here with my colleagues and their wonderful books.

The research for this book began when I went to Santa Barbara to see Roget's original word book in a private collection. It is a slip of a book, with delicate paper and Roget's sturdy penmanship. I couldn't believe this book still existed, let alone that I was holding it in my hands.

While I was there, an assistant asked me how I would create pictures from Roget's lists. I told him I had illustrated a picture book biography (also by Jen), about another writer, the poet William Carlos Williams. He said, "Yes, but you had the imagery of poems to inspire you." He was right. I had yet to figure this out.

Roget's Thesaurus describes a list as "connected items written...typically one below the other...a catalog, directory, record" and he writes, "to choose, to indulge one's fancy." That was all the permission I needed. My lists could be any letterform, colors, or onomatopoeia that struck my fancy, with the criteria that it also be a word from his *Thesaurus*.

For months, I jotted down words when I walked my dog, noticed the weather, recorded the shades of green in my backyard. I realized too, I *had* to somehow include Roget's original list of 1000 words—the basis for his *Thesaurus*. If I were a kid, I would want to know: of all the words in the world, which ones did he choose? There was no question in my mind that it had to be hand-lettered. A typeset list would look flat and static. It took the better part of

Melissa Sweet was born and raised in Wyckoff, New Jersey. She received an Associate's Degree from Endicott College in Massachusetts and studied art at the Kansas City Art Institute. She has illustrated nearly 100 children's books. Her art also has appeared in the *New York Times*, *Martha Stewart Living*, and *Madison Park Greetings*. Melissa wrote and illustrated *Balloons Over Broadway: The True Story of the Puppeteer of Macy's Parade*, which received numerous awards in 2012, including the Sibert Medal and Orbis Pictus Award.

FUN FACT: As a child, Melissa enjoyed paper dolls, paint by number kits, Colorforms, and Spirograph.



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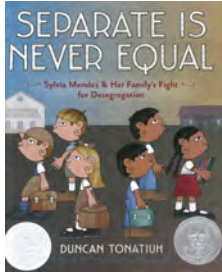


***Neighborhood Sharks:
Hunting with the Great Whites
of California's Farallon Islands.***

Roy, Katherine.

Illus. by the author.

Roaring Brook/David Macaulay Studio



***Separate Is Never Equal:
Sylvia Mendez & Her Family's
Fight for Desegregation.***

Tonatiuh, Duncan.

Illus. by the author.

Abrams

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two weeks to carefully write out this list in sepia ink—just as Roget had done. It was like a meditation, and I could not have enjoyed it more. In that time, I got to know Roget not only by his word choices, his “ideas,” but also by how he catalogued the world.

Thank you, everyone at Eerdmans, for your keen collaboration in crafting this book. And to Jen, it was a privilege and pleasure to work on this moving and lyrical text.

The poet Horace said that the purpose of art is to delight and inform. With this award, it is my hope that young readers will not only be delighted and informed, but most important, that they find the right word whenever they need it.

Thank you.



For more information about the Sibert Medal, visit <http://bit.ly/sibert-medal>.

2015 ROBERT F. SIBERT MEDAL COMMITTEE

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