Teen Choice (Book)
Awards: The Red Maple and White Pine Program of the OLA

By Melanie Grant

Ontario Library Association executive members attended the Texas Library Association’s convention in 1993 to learn how they managed to stay engaged and relevant with young people in a large area, very similar geographically and demographically to Ontario, and were inspired by the Texas Bluebonnet Award, a children’s choice book award selected by kids in grades 3-6. Upon return to Ontario, after some study, the Silver Birch Award was founded in 1994. In 1998, the Forest of Reading program expanded to include the Red Maple award for young people in grades 7-8, and in 2002, the White Pine award for grades 9-12 (OLA, 2013).

Each year, book titles are put forward by authors and publishers. The goals of the Forest of Reading program, in addition to encouraging literacy, include promoting Canadian authors, so the nominated books must be written by a Canadian citizen or resident, and published within two years preceding the nomination deadline. Ten fiction books in the Red Maple and White Pine categories are selected for nomination by a committee of the OLA, and in alternating years, nonfiction books are included in those categories as well. Participating students must read at least five nominated books to be eligible to vote.

The Forest of Reading program has categories encompassing all age groups, levels of reading, and French and English-language books, and all awards are selected by the readers of the books. Although there are “trees” for adult readers, the focus is primarily on fostering reading among children and youth.

This is a selection of other teen choice book awards across Canada:

- Manitoba Young Readers Choice Awards (grades 5-8) http://www.myrca.ca/
- Snow Willow Award – Saskatchewan (grades 7-9) http://www.willowawards.ca/
- Stellar Book Award – BC (age 13-19) http://www.stellaraward.ca/2012/

The winners of the children’s and youth Forest of Reading categories are announced at the largest of the Festival of Trees celebrations, which occurs in Toronto in May. The Festival of Trees is the largest children’s and young adults’ literary festival in Canada, and it is focused on young people as attendees, with its events geared to the more than 8000 young people expected to attend; activities scheduled include workshops with nominated authors, a “tattoo tent” and a book trading tent. Other Ontario cities are invited to hold their own Festival of Trees, and in 2013, Parry Sound, Thunder Bay, and North Bay will be participating in the lead-up to the Toronto festival with their own literary events.
At the time of publication, the 2013 Red Maple and White Pine winners will have been announced, but discussing the merits of the winning selections would be a good topic of debate in a library youth group or book club. Here are the nominees for 2013:

**Red Maple Fiction:**

*Crush. Candy. Corpse* by Sylvia McNicoll  
*The Dragon Turn: The Boy Sherlock Holmes, His 5th Case* by Shane Peacock  
*End of Days* by Eric Walters  
*First Descent* by Pam Withers  
*Testify* by Valerie Sherrard  
*This Dark Endeavour* by Kenneth Oppel  
*The Tiffin* by Mahtab Narsimhan  
*The Town that Drowned* by Riel Nason  
*The Vampire Stalker* by Allison van Diepen  
*The Vindico* by Wesley King

**Red Maple Nonfiction:**

*Adventures of a Medical Man: Kids Illnesses and Injuries Explained* by Dr. Michael Evans, David Wichman, and Gareth Williams  
*Beyond Bullets: A Photo Journal of Afghanistan* by Rafal Gerszak with Dawn Hunter  
*Last Airlift: A Vietnamese Orphan’s Rescue from War* by Marsha Forchuk Skrypuch  
*Lizards in the Sky: Animals Where You Least Expect Them* by Claire Eamer  
*The Lowdown on Denim* by Tanya Lloyd Kyi and Clayton Hanmer  
*Real Justice: Fourteen and Sentenced to Death* by Bill Swan  
*Running to Extremes: Ray Zahab’s Amazing Ultramarathon Journey* by Steve Pitt with Ray Zahab  
*The Sea Wolves: Living Wild in the Great Bear Rainforest* by Ian McAllister and Nicholas Read  
*You Just Can’t Help It! Your Guide to the Wild and Wacky World of Human Behaviour* by Josh Szpirglas and Josh Holinaty

**White Pine Fiction:**

*All Good Children* by Catherine Austen  
*Dark Inside* by Jeyn Roberts  
*First Day on Earth* by Cecil Castelucci  
*Getting Over Garrett Delaney* by Abby McDonald  
*Karma* by Cathy Ostlere  
*The Opposite of Tidy* by Carrie Mac  
*The Taming* by Eric Walters and Teresa Toten  
*Way to Go* by Tom Ryan  
*The Way We Fall* by Megan Crewe  
*Witchlanders* by Lena Coakley

Past winners of the Red Maple and White Pine awards make for great additions to booklists, but have not been without controversy: in 2009, Red Maple-nominated *Book Nerd* by Susin Nielsen was challenged in Hamilton, Ontario, for its inclusion of foul language. The OLA stood behind Nielsen, and *Book Nerd* went on to win the 2010 Red Maple Award. To build a youth-approved booklist of excellent Canadian young adult literature, try these titles, the winners from the past five years of the Red Maple and White Pine awards:

**Red Maple Fiction:**

2012 *Half Brother* by Kenneth Oppel  
2011 *Not Suitable for Family Viewing* by Vicki Grant  
2010 *Word Nerd* by Susin Nielsen  
2009 *Out of the Cold* by Norah McClintock  
2008 *Safe as Houses* by Eric Walters

**Red Maple Nonfiction:**

2011 *Bite of the Mango* by Mariatu Kamara  
2009 *Royal Murder* by Elizabeth MacLeod
White Pine Fiction:

2012 *The Gathering* by Kelley Armstrong
2011 *The Monkeyface Chronicles* by Richard Scarsbook
2010 *Mostly Happy* by Pam Bustin
2009 *Little Brother* by Corey Doctorow
2008 *Keturah and Lord Death* by Martine Leavitt

White Pine Nonfiction:

2012 *The Book of Awesome* by Neil Pasricha

References:

Canadian Children’s Book Centre. (n.d.)
Canadian children’s awards index.
Retrieved from http://www.bookcentre.ca/awards/canadian_awards_index
