

## Introduction to Cece Bell's Acceptance Video for *El Deafo*, Winner, Great Stone Face Award, 2016

Years ago, there was a discussion among the then members of the Great Stone Face Committee as to the appropriateness of considering graphic novels for inclusion on the list. I recall a member asking, "How can you possibly evaluate a book that uses pictures to tell its story on the basis of its writing? How can you compare the quality of this book to one that tells its story with words alone?"

I felt at the time, as I do now, that it's difficult... but possible. Yes, it's probably comparing apples to oranges, but sometimes that's what we're called upon to do. I believe that the quality of a graphic novel can be evaluated in the ability of the artist to imagine and depict a world in which a story is told by visual means, with all of the attention to continuity of character, setting, and style that visual storytelling demands. Quality can also be evaluated by the ability of the writer to weave dialogue and narrative seamlessly into the story in a way that enhances, rather than distracts from, that visual story.

Hundreds of New Hampshire children can tell you that when an artist and a writer get it right, the story they tell can be entertaining, compelling, and deeply moving. A book like that can make readers stop and think about, and be more sensitive to, the varied life experiences of the people around them. And isn't that what quality writing does?

Last year, we were fortunate to have just such a book come to the table for consideration—*El Deafo*, by Cece Bell. In this case, the artist and writer are one and the same person.

Through her visual and narrative storytelling, Cece shared her experience of growing up with a hearing impairment that profoundly affected her life in every way. With her engaging visual *and* narrative storytelling she drew us into her tale of the challenges, frustrations, heartbreak, and even humor that life as a child who is "different" can bring. Children all over New Hampshire responded to this memoir by voting it their favorite of the 20 books on the list for 2016.

Thank-you to Cece Bell for creating a book that touched so many New Hampshire children, and thank you to all of the children who participate in voting for their favorite Great Stone Face books every year.

Cece is unable to attend our conference to accept her award, but has recorded a "video acceptance" of the Great Stone Face Award for 2016.

Sarah Hydorn  
Co-chair, Great Stone Face Committee  
Amherst Town Library  
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