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## **Ways to Grow Good Kids Sprout from Children's Literature**

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COLLEGE STATION – Long before Jack cast some bean seeds and scaled the resulting stalk into the heavens, children's books have sprouted imagination while planting positive thoughts.

It's that principle that prompted two major children's gardening programs to honor books that tell value lessons in imaginative ways, according to Randy Seagraves, Junior Master Gardener national curriculum coordinator.

The first "Growing Good Kids - Excellence in Children's Literature Awards" were announced by Junior Master Gardener Program officials and the American Horticultural Society. Forty titles published over the last 100 years were given the distinction of "Classic" in this inaugural year, Seagraves noted.

"If you have ever read a book to a child, you have seen how freely a child can become immersed into a story," said Seagraves, who also is Texas Cooperative Extension associate in horticulture. "Kids love a good book. With an engaging story, a child can be profoundly touched or can feel connections to struggling characters born from an author's imagination. And books can shape how young people view and feel about the world around them."

The Growing Good Kids awards honor "engaging, inspiring works of garden and ecology-themed children's books," Seagraves said, "recognizing books with both a powerful story and moving illustrations."

"We are very pleased to have partnered with the Junior Master Gardeners to establish this children's garden book award," said David Ellis, the horticultural society's director of communication. "It is our hope that these award-winning books will inspire the next generation of gardeners to explore and enjoy the natural world."

For its first year, the award program has developed a "Classics" category with a list of children's fiction published prior to 2005. The list was compiled from recommendations of the National Children and Youth Garden Symposium Advisory Panel, the horticultural society and Junior Master Gardener specialists and coordinators across the United States. Teachers, youth leaders and kids throughout

the nation also had input, Seagraves noted.

In coming years, he explained, the literary awards will consider qualifying books published in the previous year and other categories such as non-fiction and books published for various ages of children.

Seagraves also pointed out that a new Junior Master Gardener-developed curriculum – Literature in the Garden – uses six of the Growing Good Kids Book awardees so teachers can "cultivate the connection between children's gardening experiences and great books.

"The curriculum inspires learning through outdoor activities, creative expression and open exploration," he said, "and helps those stories they read come alive because the kids likely have experienced similar things in their own gardening efforts."

The newly released curriculum combines "hands-on opportunities for exploring the natural world with novel activities that encourage leadership development, personal pride, responsibility and community involvement," Seagraves said.

For more information about Growing Good Kids and the book awards, see <http://www.jmgkids.us/bookawards> .

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