

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

January 20, 2015

**Jenny Offill Wins 2015 Charlotte Zolotow Award**

Madison, WI -- *Sparky!*, written by Jenny Offill and illustrated by Chris Appelhans, is the winner of the eighteenth annual Charlotte Zolotow Award for outstanding writing in a picture book. The award is given by the Cooperative Children's Book Center (CCBC), a library of the School of Education at the University of Wisconsin-Madison, and will be presented in Madison this spring.

Jenny Offill's clever twist on the familiar "I Want a Pet" scenario gives an absurd premise masterfully understated treatment. The story begins with a girl's heavy lobbying for an animal companion, followed by a compromise from her mother: "You can have any pet you want as long as it doesn't need to be walked or bathed or fed." A little research in the school library results in a match. "My sloth arrived by Express Mail." The girl optimistically names him Sparky. "It was two days before I saw him awake." The marvelous humor is never overplayed as Offill skillfully maintains a measured, evenhanded tone and perfect pacing. The restrained narrative manages to be both outrageously funny and unexpectedly tender as the girl comes to appreciate Sparky for what he is, rather than what he is not. "I reached over and tagged him on the claw. 'You're it, Sparky,' I said. And for a long, long time, he was." The muted illustrations perfectly echo the story's tone.

*Sparky!* was edited by Anne Schwartz and published in the United States in 2014 by Schwartz & Wade Books, an imprint of Random House Children's Books.

The 2015 Zolotow Award committee named five Honor Books: *Beautiful Moon: A Child's Prayer*, written by Tonya Bolden, illustrated by Eric Velasquez, edited by Howard Reeves, and published by Abrams Books for Young Readers; *Chengdu Could Not, Would Not Fall Asleep*, written and illustrated by Barney Saltzberg, edited by Kevin Lewis, and published by Disney-Hyperion, an imprint of Disney

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Book Group; *Ivan: The Remarkable True Story of the Shopping Mall Gorilla*, written by Katherine Applegate, illustrated by G. Brian Karas, edited by Anne Hoppe, and published by Clarion Books/Houghton Mifflin Harcourt; *Tap Tap Boom Boom*, written by Elizabeth Bluemle, illustrated by G. Brian Karas, edited by Joan Powers, and published by Candlewick Press; and *Water Rolls, Water Rises = El agua rueda, el agua sube*, written by Pat Mora, Spanish translation by Adriana Domínguez and Pat Mora, illustrated by Meilo So, edited by Louise May, and published by Children's Book Press, an imprint of Lee & Low Books.

The 2015 Zolotow Award committee also cited nine titles as Highly Commended: *Beneath the Sun* written by Melissa Stewart and illustrated by Constance R. Bergum (Peachtree); *Edgar's Second Word* written by Audrey Vernick and illustrated by Priscilla Burris (Clarion Books/Houghton Mifflin Harcourt); *Go To Sleep, Little Farm* written by Mary Lyn Ray and illustrated by Christopher Silas Neal (Houghton Mifflin Harcourt); *Hooray for Hat!* written and illustrated by Brian Won (Houghton Mifflin Harcourt); *The Hula Hoopin' Queen* written by Thelma Lynne Godin and illustrated by Vanessa Brantley-Newton (Lee & Low Books); *If You Were a Dog* written by Jamie A. Swenson and illustrated by Chris Raschka (Farrar Straus Giroux, Macmillan Publishing Group); *One Big Pair of Underwear* written by Laura Gehl and illustrated by Tom Lichtenheld (Beach Lane Books, an imprint of Simon & Schuster); *Water Can Be...* written by Laura Purdie Salas and illustrated by Violeta Dabija (Millbrook Press, Lerner Publishing Group); and *What Forest Knows* written by George Ella Lyon and illustrated by August Hall (A Richard Jackson Book/Atheneum, an imprint of Simon & Schuster).

Established in 1998, the Charlotte Zolotow Award honors the work of Charlotte Zolotow, a distinguished children's book editor for 38 years with Harper Junior Books, and author of more than 70 picture books, including such classic works as *Mr. Rabbit and the Lovely Present*

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(Harper, 1962) and *William's Doll* (Harper, 1972). Ms. Zolotow attended the University of Wisconsin in Madison on a writing scholarship from 1933 to 1936, where she studied with Professor Helen C. White. Ms. Zolotow died in November, 2013, at the age of 98.

The award is given annually for outstanding writing in a picture book for children in the birth through seven age range and published in the United States in the preceding year. Members of the 2015 Zolotow Award committee were: Megan Schliesman, chair (Librarian, Cooperative Children's Book Center, Madison, Wisconsin); Barb Huntington (Library Consultant, Retired, Madison, Wisconsin); Kristine Klopp (Librarian, Boulder, Colorado); Karen Lench (Literacy Resource Teacher, Crestwood Elementary School, Madison, Wisconsin); and Ruth Sias (Children's Librarian, Madison Public Library, Madison, Wisconsin).

The Cooperative Children's Book Center is a noncirculating library for adults with a professional, career or academic interest in children's and young adult literature. The Friends of the CCBC, Inc., sponsors of the award event, is a nonprofit organization offering lectures, book sales and other benefits for members, in addition to supporting the work of the Cooperative Children's Book Center.

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