

The Classroom Canon: Textual Scholarship and the Importance of Modern Critical Editions

First published in 1960, Scott O'Dell's Newbery-winning novel *Island of the Blue Dolphins* quickly became a modern classic. Today, 8.5 million copies are in print in the U.S., and more than 30 editions have been published in other languages. Because Houghton Mifflin Harcourt retains the copyright, and because each of its three editions was produced during the computer age, one might expect few, if any, variants among editions. Yet that is far from the case. Errors entered the book's printing history when paperback rights were sold to Dell in 1971, and again when Houghton Mifflin produced its 30th and 50th anniversary editions. My study of *Island of the Blue Dolphins*' print history suggests that other longstanding classroom staples—books that, unlike Golden Age classics, we tend to think of as static and uniform—also contain significant variants, even if scholars rarely specify editions and printings in their writing. Using *Island of the Blue Dolphins* as a case study, this paper presents a three-pronged argument for textual scholarship on modern children's classics: 1) it reveals significant variants; 2) it sheds light on the collaborative process of children's book creation; and 3) it facilitates the entry of literary scholarship into K-12 classroom. Archival research on *Island of the Blue Dolphins* reveals the significant influence of early readers, agents and editors, and late-stage copyeditors on the book's market placement and on its reception history. Most vividly, O'Dell excised two chapters after his typescript was reviewed by *Betsy-Tacy* author Maud Lovelace; with their threat of rape, these chapters would have disqualified the text from categorization as children's literature. A copy-editor's query late in the production process, meanwhile, prompted a line in the author's note that clearly articulates the book's participation in a "Vanishing Indian" project. Such details, which help to contextualize the novel, can play an important role in both explaining the impulse to "ban books" and in offering an alternative. Even as scholarly editions *acknowledge* problematic elements of widely-taught children's fiction, they offer ways for the public, including children, to think productively about them, and thus about our collective past.