



Literacy Links

February, 2007
Volume 3, Number 6

Monthly E-Newsletter of Maine Reading First

Spotlight on...

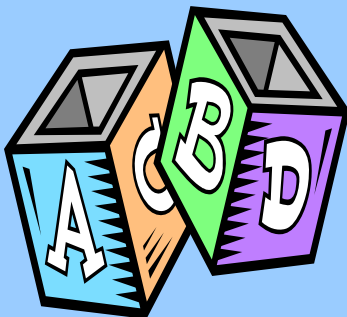
Selecting Quality Children's Books (part 2)

In the January, 2007 edition of *Literacy Links*, details pertaining to various awards for children's fiction and nonfiction were outlined as a first step in selecting high-quality children's books. In addition to seeking out award-winning books to stock a classroom or school library, there are further considerations which can guide the review and selection process. Below are lists of elements to consider when selecting quality fiction or nonfiction books. Each element includes guiding questions to focus a reviewer's thinking on that element:



"Education is not the filling of a pail, but the lighting of a fire."

W.B. Yeats



Fiction

Content

- Is the plot well-developed, appropriate, and appealing for the intended readers?
- Are the events in the story revealed in a logical sequence? Do the problem and solution within the story seem plausible?
- Are the characters convincing and reflective of real life?
- Are readers actually drawn into the setting of the book?
- Is the theme developmentally-appropriate and applicable for the intended readers?
- What impact will the theme have on readers?
- How are controversial issues handled?
- Are stereotypes avoided within the content and language of the book?

Illustrations

- How well do the illustrations capture and hold the reader's attention?
- Do the illustrations create, support, and extend the meaning of the story?
- How authentic are the details within the illustrations to support the plot, setting, characters, and theme?
- How well does the medium of the illustrations contribute to the mood of the story?

Style of Writing

- Is the style of writing appropriate for the intended readers?
- What is the quality of language in the writing (word choice, sentence structure, descriptive language, figurative language, dialogue, etc.)?
- What point of view is used in the story and how does this point of view influence readers' comprehension?

Format

- How enticing is the design of the front cover and/or dust jacket to the reader?
- How appropriate is the size of the book and font size for the intended audience?

Upcoming Events

March 14, 2007 ~
 “Informational Texts: Exciting and Engaging Ideas to Build Comprehension in Grades K-3” with Dr. Karen Burke (registration information for this conference is available on the Maine Reading First website at <http://www.maine.gov/education/rf/homepage.htm>)

April 25, 2007 ~
 1st Annual Nonfiction Institute, “Using Nonfiction in the Classroom”, with award-winning nonfiction author Penny Colman. Held at Jeff’s Catering in Brewer. Sponsored by the University of Maine College of Education and Human Development— Literacy Unit; Contact Amy Cates at 581-2438 for registration information.

Comparison with Other Books

- How well does this book compare with other books by the same author and/or illustrator?
- How well will the reader be able to connect this book to other books he/she has read?
- What type of contribution will this book make to the world of children’s literature?

(The above information was adapted from the work of Charlotte Huck, Susan Hepler, Janet Hickman, Bernice Cullinan, Wendy Kasten, Janice Kristo, and Amy McClure.)

Nonfiction

Content

- Is the content appropriate for the intended audience and presented in a manner which does not overwhelm readers?
- How broad or narrow is the scope of the content and what is the level of detail on the topic?

Visual Elements

- Does the overall design and layout of the book add to its appeal for readers?
- Are labels and captions used to identify illustrations and/or photographs? Is the language within these labels and captions easy to read and understand?
- How does the author’s use of diagrams, tables, charts, graphs, timelines, or maps enhance the visual appeal of the book and promote comprehension?

Accuracy of Content

- Does the author and/or illustrator have expertise in the field related to the content of the book?
- Does the author include mention of individuals and/or organizations who were consulted to gather information or review the content for accuracy?
- What is the copyright date of the book? Has the content been subject to change since the book was published?
- Does the author clearly state the difference between fact and opinion or are the lines between the two blurred?

Access Features

- Does the author include any of the following access features to help readers easily access the content: table of contents, introduction, headings and/or subheadings, sidebars and/or insets, glossary, index, sources for further information, or appendices?
- How useful and informative are the access features which are included?

Style of Writing and Organization of Content

- Is the writing clear and easy to understand for the reader?
- Has the author included a lead which captivates the reader and draws them into the text? Does the ending bring closure to the text and/or stimulate further thinking on the topic?
- How are specialized vocabulary words used within the writing? Are they introduced and defined within the text in a way that supports comprehension?
- Does the author incorporate narrative writing which overpowers the informational content?
- How does the author’s tone, voice, and point of view impact the content?
- How does the author organize the content and what impact does the organizational structure have on reader’s comprehension?

(The above information was adapted from the work of Janice Kristo, Rosemary Bamford, Nell Duke, Susan Bennett-Armistead, and Linda Hoyt.)

August 6-8, 2007 ~
Annual Seamless
Transitions
Conference;
University of Maine,
Orono
Organizers of this
conference are
excited to announce
that Dr. Susan
Bennett-Armistead,
University of Maine
Literacy Faculty
Member, will offer a
full-day institute on
preK Literacy on
August 9;
Contact Amy Cates
at 581-2438 for
more information.

**Save the Date for
Fall 2007 ~**
The New England
Reading Association
(NERA) Annual
Conference is coming
back to Maine next
year! The 2007
Annual Conference,
"Literacy Learning:
What Matters" will be
held at the Augusta
Civic Center on
September 27-28.
Janet Allen, Penny
Kittle, Don Leu, and
Doug Hartman will
be the keynote
presenters for the
two-day conference.

Beyond these considerations, a true test of the quality of children's books is the children themselves. Children tend to be mesmerized and intrigued by the best books!

The International Reading Association and Children's Book Council have joined together to publish "Children's Book Choices" annually each spring. This project began in 1974 and involves 10,000 children from various regions of the country who are asked to read and evaluate newly published books. Refer to the following website for a list of the winning choices:
http://www.reading.org/resources/tools/choices_childrens.html

Description of Instructional Idea...

Think Alouds

Proficient readers automatically utilize various comprehension strategies (monitoring, connecting, questioning, visualizing, summarizing) without conscious attention. Beginning readers do not have an intuitive sense of how to incorporate these strategies to build comprehension while they read. Think alouds are a powerful instructional technique which helps bridge this gap for beginning readers as they observe the thinking that occurs while a proficient reader reads a text. Think alouds are a logical extension of instructional read alouds (instructional read alouds were described in detail in the March, 2006 edition of *Literacy Links*). The primary purpose of a think aloud is to make the thinking and comprehending of a proficient reader visible for students. The language used in a think aloud is explicit as it clearly describes for students the thinking process which is going on 'behind the scene'.

When first using think alouds within an instructional read aloud, it is necessary to distinguish for students when reading from the text and when thinking is being shared. Otherwise, students can easily become confused on whether what is being said is written in the text or not. A simple method to help students make this distinction is holding the book up while reading aloud and laying the book down while sharing the thinking process. Another idea is to create large paper speech bubbles labeled with each specific comprehension strategy.

For more information on think alouds, check out Improving Comprehension with Think Aloud Strategies: Modeling What Good Readers Do by Jeff Wilhelm (Scholastic Theory and Practice Series, 2001).

Summary of Professional Literacy Text...

More Than Guided Reading: Finding the Right Instructional Mix, K-3

Cathy Mere shares her thoughts and offers details on her journey in reevaluating the emphasis on guided reading in her classroom. She proposes placing children at the center of literacy instruction and designing a more balanced reading workshop time to develop independence in readers. Mere does not dismiss the power of guided reading as an instructional technique, but recommends coupling it with other opportunities for students to self-select books and talk about their reading. This book will generate meaningful conversations as teachers consider a fresh perspective on guided reading.

More Than Guided Reading: Finding the Right Instructional Mix, K-3 by Cathy Mere was published in 2005 by Stenhouse Publishers. The ISBN is 1571103880.



"Some books are to be tasted, others to be swallowed, and some few to be chewed and digested: that is, some books are to be read only in parts, others to be read, but not curiously, and some few to be read wholly, and with diligence and attention."

Sir Francis Bacon



Children's Literature Title...

Baby Bear's Books

Written by Jane Yolen and illustrated by Melissa Sweet

Baby Bear loves to read books all day long and all over the place! Readers can't help but be entertained as they read about how much Baby Bear loves to read. Jane Yolen's fun and rhyming text is accompanied by bright and colorful illustrations by Maine illustrator Melissa Sweet.

Baby Bear's Books was published in 2006 by Harcourt, Inc. and the ISBN is 0152052909.

News from Maine Reading First...

- Maine Reading First is pleased to sponsor a day-long conference, "A Day with Dr. Karen Burke—Informational Texts: Exciting and Engaging Ideas to Build Comprehension in Grades K-3" on March 14, 2007 at the Waterville Elks Lodge. Registration information for this conference is available on the Maine Reading First website at <http://www.maine.gov/education/rf/homepage.htm>
- Maine Reading First is currently accepting requests from Districts interested in offering the Maine Reading First Statewide Course during the 2007-2008 school year. The Maine Reading First Statewide Course is offered as part of the federal Reading First Initiative. It provides educators with an overview of the scientifically-based reading research behind literacy development and instruction. There is a focus on research, instructional strategies, and assessments related to the five essential elements of reading: phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, comprehension, and vocabulary. The outline for this course is posted on the Maine Reading First website at <http://www.maine.gov/education/rf/homepage.htm> If you are interested in learning more about offering this professional development opportunity in your District or if you would like to submit a request to have the Maine Reading First course offered at a site in your District, please contact janet.trembly@maine.gov

Check it out...

DIBELS Interventions Electrified is a website developed by a technology resource teacher which includes links to over 50 web-based activities sorted to develop the skills assessed within the following DIBELS tasks—Letter Naming Fluency, Initial Sound Fluency, Phoneme Segmentation Fluency, and Nonsense Word Fluency. (The December, 2005/January, 2006 edition of *Literacy Links* includes a spotlight on DIBELS.) Check out these interactive activities at <http://www.k12.de.us/teacher/galgano/kdibel.htm>

Newsletter Archives

There are several earlier editions of *Literacy Links* available on the Maine Reading First website at <http://www.maine.gov/education/rf/homepage.htm>

Edition	Spotlight Topic
March, 2005	Maine Reading First
April, 2005	Maine Reading First Course

"The things I want to know are in books; my best friend is the man who'll get me a book I haven't read."

Abraham Lincoln



May, 2005	Reading Fluency
June, 2005	Vocabulary
September, 2005	Phonemic Awareness
October, 2005	Phonics
November, 2005	Comprehension
December, 2005/January, 2006	DIBELS
February, 2006	Literacy Centers
March, 2006	Interactive Read Aloud
April, 2006	Nonfiction
May, 2006	Word Walls
June, 2006	Classroom Design
September, 2006	Shared Reading
October, 2006	Automaticity
November, 2006	Using Assessment to Guide Instruction
December, 2006	Deepening Comprehension
January, 2007	Selecting Quality Children's Books (part 1)



For additional information about any of the items in this newsletter or to sign up to receive this e-newsletter, please email janet.trembly@maine.gov

Click here to view the Maine Reading First website
<http://www.maine.gov/education/rf/homepage.htm>

The professional development opportunities and materials are listed in *Literacy Links* for informational purposes only and are not necessarily endorsed by the Maine Department of Education's Maine Reading First Initiative.