



## Questions for Consideration in Selecting Picture Books

When looking specifically at picture books some of the same general criteria should be pondered as that for which you consider quality for fiction in general. But in addition to those general questions one would ask, consider these specific to evaluating picture book quality.

### 1. Audience: The Reader

- *For whom is this book written (e.g., age, gender, culture, theme, topic of interest)?*
- *Is the audience easily identified or recognized?*
- *Are there specifics within the text and/or pictures that limit or discourage readership outside the intended audience?*
- *Are there intended biases in the text meant to influence the audience of readers?*

### 2. Theme or Topic

- *Does the book's subject suggest an appropriate audience? Is that topic appropriate for the book's intended audience?*
- *Is it a topic that is of interest to wide readership?*
- *Is the book's subject matter relevant to the intended readers in your collection?*

### 3. Language

- *Is the language natural, not stilted?*
- *Does it match the style, tone, and mood of the story?*
- *For fiction, is the voice authentic to the setting and characters?*
- *Is the vocabulary appropriate for the intended age of the reader?*
- *Is jargon used? If so, are terms easily identified, understandable, and appropriate?*
- *Is the language free of stereotypes?*
- *If the author includes poetic or figurative language, does it capture an original image for the reader?*

### 4. Illustrations

- *Does the book's cover illustration draw the reader in?*
- *How well do the illustrations match the text?*



- *Are the pictures engaging, drawing the reader to the story and enhancing the text?*
- *Do the illustrations help set author's intended mood and tone?*
- *If human characters are illustrated, are they portrayed in a non-stereotypical way?*
- *Are characters diversely represented, free from tokenism?*

## 5. Theme, Symbolism, Mood, Other Literary Devices and Figurative Language

- *Can you site examples of literary devices and figurative language used appropriately to enrich and balance the story?*
- *How has the author presented his views on the book's subject?*
- *Do events, topics, themes, or symbols seem forced or natural within the book's content?*
- *Does the story carry a thought-provoking theme that provides the reader with "food for thought" post-read?*

## 6. Authorship

- *Is the author of this book, particularly for nonfiction, a subject matter expert in the book's content?*
- *In realistic fiction, does the author have the authority to write about cultures represented in the book?*

## 7. Characters (for fiction)

- *Are the characters engaging, well-rounded, interesting, memorable?*
- *What distinguishes them and makes the reader interested or care about them, particularly the main character?*
- *Do main or heroic characters provide positive role models for very young readers?*
- *Are characters in historical fiction true to their historic setting?*
- *For fantasy/science fiction especially, are the characters unique?*
- *For realistic fiction, are they believable and consistent, changing only as it revolves around the plot?*

## 8. Setting (for fiction):

- *Is the setting interesting? Can readers relate to or imagine the setting(s) in their mind?*
- *Does the tone of the illustrations match the setting and content?*
- *Do the plot and characters "match"?*
- *Does this setting enhance and enrich the story?*



- *Past, present, or future: do all elements authenticate the setting, in both illustrations and story structure?*
- *Do the author and illustrator create a lasting impression in the reader's mind of both time and place?*
- *For historical fiction, does the reader engage in the story's historical setting? Do the images add detail to historical settings?*
- *Does this setting, both words and images, enhance and enrich the story?*

## 9. Plot (for fiction):

- *Does the story draw the reader in immediately and make them want to interact with the story, read on? And then does the plot move on at an even pace and come to a recognizable climax?*
- *For realistic fiction, is the plot consistent and believable, enhanced by setting and character, both in illustrations and text?*
- *What drives the plot?*
- *Does the pace of the story enhance the book, overall?*
- *Research has found that most children want the following plot structures; are these represented in this book:*
  - Humor
  - Action
  - Believability
  - Relevancy
  - Surprise or predictable: satisfying ending
  - Clear resolution to conflict
  - Dialogue, no great lengthy descriptive passages

## 10. Overall Impact on the Reader

- *Does the book leave the reader with a marked impression, “food for thought”?*
- *Does the story have an emotional impact on the reader, laugh out loud, tearful, or thoughtful?*
- *Is the book free from blatant didacticism?*
- *Do the author and illustrator show respect for children as readers?*
- *Is there opportunity to extend the book's themes and spark imagination and conversation as Mo Willems noted on The Tonight Show, “I want my books to be sparks. I want them to be played . . . But I also want for the grown-ups . . . I want to give them a shame-ectomy . . . because here's your chance to be ridiculous, to yell, No! . . . I only put 49% of the book on the page. It is the grown-ups and the kids and the way they strive and create that makes these stories special. . . . Drawing is physicalized empathy.”? (Kimmel 2023)*

## Picture Books



There are other considerations that one might consider, ones that have great impact on the quality of the book, such as the **emotions** evoked through the storyline or the author's **tone**; these vary with every story. But whether the book moves the reader to action, to an emotional state, or to a fantastic epiphany; whether the story is set in a foreign place, a future setting, a magical imaginary realm or right next door; whether the characters jump off the page, or plunk gently on your heartstrings, there should be some element that addresses the humanity in us all.

Kimmel, Jimmie. "Mo Willems Teaches Jimmy How to Draw a Pigeon Using Only His First Name." The Tonight Show, April 4, 2023. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FxRc3Dc9GCA>