



Selecting Alphabet Books

Selecting alphabet books—or ABC books—is greatly dependent on their use. Is their use a component of early literacy instruction as children learn the alphabet such as alphabetical order, letter identification, letter names, shapes, and sounds (or pronunciation), lower- and uppercase recognition? Or for more sophisticated literacy skills such as collective nouns or similes and metaphors? For immigrant students new to learning English? Do you seek topic-specific titles for increasing vocabulary? Or used as prompts for writing or creative classroom projects? Each of these uses have unique considerations.

Criteria to Consider Literary Quality, in General

- *How well are each of the entries written?*
- *Does the book offer multiple uses? Can the book be used to teach various art styles, introduce an art, music, or writing lesson, teach alliteration, or introduce a geography study, for example?*
- *Are the represented concepts clear and not known by multiple names? (Is H for bunny, hare, or rabbit?)*
- *For the school library in general, is the topic one that will be of interest to many?*
- *If the text is in rhyme, do the rhymes flow well or are they forced requiring multiple readings?*
- *Look at Q, Z, and X: Does the item represented clearly begin with the corresponding letter?*

Illustrations, Object Representation

- *Will the cover art grab readers' immediate attention by topic and/or illustration?*
- *Are the illustrations clear, familiar, identifiable, and uncluttered (unless intended)?*
- *For early literacy skills does the illustrator make good use of white space?*
- *For very young readers does the book contain no abstract words?*
- *Is the pictured object relevant and of interest to children?*
- *Does the image detract from or enhance the intent of the text?*



Alphabet Books for Early Literacy Instruction

- *Is there a clear link between letters and objects represented?*
- *Are the objects easily identifiable for the intended audience?*
- *Do beginning letters clearly represent the initial letter sound of the object represented? (No blends, digraphs, diphthongs, or silent letters)*
- *Is the font familiar and easily recognizable?*
- *Are letters large and clear, standing on their own?*
- *Is there a single word (or very few) representing the identifiable object? Is the word a single syllable or sight word?*
- *Is there upper- and lower-case representation for each letter?*
- *Does the illustration clearly begin with the letter; does it also sound like it begins with this letter?*

Alphabet Books for Older Students or English Learners

- *Is the topic one that is sophisticated enough to hold older readers' interest?*
- *Does each entry provide stimulating and new information on the book's topic or theme?*
- *Will the book increase student vocabulary on the given topic?*
- *Does the text use sophisticated or complex language such as alliteration or wordplay to challenge readers' critical thinking?*
- *Do the illustrations provide challenging detail, style, or subject matter to stimulate critical thinking?*