

Characteristics of High Quality Children's Literature

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Characteristics of Children's Literature

- **Plot:** Series of events in a story
 - Usually simple and brief
- **Characters:** People or animals who take part in the story
 - Characters are not generally fully developed due to the short nature of children's stories
- **Setting:** Time and place in which a story takes place
 - Illustrations typically establish setting

Characteristics of Children's Literature

- **Theme:** Central idea or belief in the story
- The theme is NOT the title of the story
- The theme IS the most important lesson from the story
 - Themes should be related to children's needs and understanding
 - Themes can help children manage new situations or problems
 - Frequent themes in Western children's literature are overcoming fears and the importance of friendship

Characteristics of Children's Literature

- **Style:** Way the author uses words (word choice, sentence structure, figurative language, repetitive language) to establish mood and meaning in the text
 - Words must be carefully selected
 - A rhythmic style of writing is oftentimes used
 - Single words or phrases are often repeated
 - Words are carefully selected to set mood and create vivid images
- **Humor**
 - Humor is important element in books enjoyed by children.
 - Word play and nonsense are used often
- Surprise endings are common

Selecting Age-Appropriate Children's Literature

- **Readability:** Estimate of the text's difficulty based on:
 - Vocabulary (common vs. uncommon words)
 - Sentence structure (short, simple sentences vs. long, complex sentences)
- **Conceptual difficulty:** Complexity of ideas in the book and how they are presented

Evaluating a Story: Literary Criticism

(Norton, 2011)

1. Is the plot well organized?
2. Did the main character overcome the problem, but not too easily?
3. Did the characters seem real?
4. Did I find out about more than one side of the characters – both strengths and weaknesses?
5. Did I feel that I was really in that time or place (setting)?
6. Was the theme worthwhile?

Evaluating a Story

		Literary Merit			
		Good		Poor	
Popular Merit	Liked	+	+	+	-
	Disliked	-	+	-	-

Evaluating a Story: Multicultural Criteria

(Norton, 2011)

1. Are characters portrayed as individuals, NOT representatives of a group?
2. Does the book transcend stereotypes?
3. Does the book portray physical diversity?
4. Is culture accurately portrayed?
5. Are nonwhite characters shown as equals of white characters?
6. Are the illustrations authentic and nonstereotypical?

Functions of Illustrations in Picture Books

- Establish the setting
- Reinforce the text
- Extend or develop the plot
- Provide interesting side-stories
- Establish the mood