

## **General Consideration for Book Reviewing**

The Association of Children's Librarians of Northern California evaluates new books to identify titles appropriate for library purchase. All reviews are written by member-volunteers. Reviews should be concise and critical. Briefly, a review should identify: 1) What kind of book it is, 2) For what audience it seems to be written, 3) How it compares with similar titles, 4) How it is presented both in text and illustration, 5) How compelling authentic, relevant, or appealing it seems to be.

When feasible, try to use the author's writing style, or a few of his/her words or phrases to help convey the flavor of the book. However, do not paraphrase a plot or give detailed recapitulations of contents. Four or five sentences will suffice; not more than one should be devoted to plot.

Consider bias in every category and genre of material: are gender, ethnic, religious, or age groups treated fairly and with equal respect? How will readers perceive their treatment? Are particular groups either noticeably absent or present in either text or illustrations? Is opinion presented as fact?

Consult experts about accuracy and authenticity. Evaluate whether the age appeal and age appropriateness correspond. And remember, the experts on child appeal are the kids themselves; try out a review book on young friends.

Keep in mind that reviews will be used by both public and school librarians. Because the school library collection often has a focused grade level, try to be precise about a book's potential usefulness in the school curriculum, and the interest and reading competency (or grade level) of a majority of that book's potential readers.

All books should be reviewed promptly. If you know you will be unable to review for a period of time, let the Book Review Chair know immediately. If you have problems with a particular book, send it back to the Book Review Chair as soon as possible.

## **Particular Considerations**

### **PICTURE BOOKS**

The picture book in its best form is a union of text and illustration. Illustrations should extend and interpret the story. They supply what paragraphs of words do in a novel for older readers. Does the blend work? Will it work with children? Evaluate picture books on design, originality, artfulness, and appeal.

### **READERS (Easy or Beginning Readers)**

There are several components to a successful beginning reader book: sentences are simple and straightforward, with illustrations giving clues to the text, usually words are repeated, book design supports the beginning reader with a large font, adequate spacing, and an uncluttered background, and the book may or may not be broken into very short chapters. The book should motivate the emergent reader, and allow them to create a successful reading experience.

**FICTION (NOVELS)**

Good fiction should offer an appealing story, told smoothly, with freshness and originality. Consider plot, characterization, and style. Is the story absorbing, convincing, and carefully worked out to an honest conclusion? Is it entertaining? Will the reader meet real characters and watch them grow? Compare the novel in question with previous work by the same author, or with books by other authors on the same theme.

**FOLKLORE**

When reviewing folklore, consider these points:

1. As stories, how good are they?
2. How does the book compare with others of the same kind?
3. Are the stories available in other collections?
4. Is it a book for children, or a book for folklorists?
5. Does the style reflect an oral tradition, or is this a literary treatment?
6. Do the stories and telling style seem to represent the culture from which they came? Does the story convey a cultural authenticity, or reflect a bias imposed from outside? If you are unfamiliar with the culture depicted, consult a colleague or member of the community who is.
7. Are sources, parallels, or other additional information provided?

**POETRY**

Poetry should represent a new perspective with an economy of well chosen words. Again, it must speak to the child, not at or about him/her. Evaluate poetry on its uniqueness and its use of language. Check for variety of meter, rhyme scheme, and type. With an anthology, check the availability of the selections elsewhere.

**NON-FICTION**

Non-fiction should aim toward high standards of literary quality, be clearly written, accurate and current, appeal to its young audience, and be presented in a pleasing format with illustrations that clarify the text. Notice tables, maps, appendices, and picture credits, or lack of them.

Photographs or illustrations of people should reflect the appearance of people in a similar proportion to reality at the time and place. Some further considerations can be used for various types of non-fiction noted below:

- **History**  
Successful history should make past eras come alive for the reader. Check the author's accuracy and biases. Does the author attempt to present the "facts" from more than one point of view? Are bibliography, footnotes, and index included? If not, should they be?
- **Biography**  
Biography for children is frequently not documented. For this reason, it is particularly important to check the author's credentials. Does the author "know" the person and the field? And, does the subject of the biography come through as a human being, or as a colorless paragon? Is dialogue based on imagination, or on diaries, letters, etc.? Have the incidents included in a juvenile biography been wisely chosen to give a true portrayal of character and personality?

- **Science**

Many of the above concerns also apply to science books. Consider these additional points:

1. Readability. Is the language and technical information appropriate for the audience?
2. Accuracy. It is essential to compare books/authorities for authenticity of information.
3. Currency. In fields where knowledge is rapidly changing, will the book soon be obsolete?
4. Illustrations. Are drawings and photographs sharp, clear and detailed? Do they include captions?
5. Index and bibliography. A thorough, usable index is a must.

- **How-to-Books**

Craft, sewing, cooking and other how-to-do-it books should fulfill a few basic criteria. Are the directions clear and complete? Do the instructions include safety precautions (knives, stoves, etc.)? Do the projects encourage creativity, or are they cut-and-dried recipes? Is the finished project worth the effort?

- **Sports Books**

Just as sports are full of action, sports books should be compelling and exciting. Does the author create dramatic moments without resorting to clichés? Are statistics used judiciously without bombarding the reader? In how-to sports books, will the intended audience be able to attempt the skills described?

### GRAPHIC (Graphic Novel or Comic Book)

In a successful graphic novel, the words and pictures “work together in a kind of harmonious fusion that makes the whole greater than its parts,” (from First Second publishers). Often the artwork is in sequential panels, with text in speech balloons and in text boxes. The art and text work hand in hand, and the illustrations should flow from one panel to the next. We use this designation for both fiction & non-fiction in comic-book or graphic-novel format.

### PROFESSIONAL

Books for adults on children’s literature, library service to youth, and related subjects are the only adult books reviewed by ACL. If a book for professional development adds new information to our profession, explores children’s literature in a way that can inspire our assistance to children, or opens youth services librarians to new programming, techniques, and services, it can be of great use to our profession.

### Presenting Reviews

When you present your reviews at the ACL meeting, keep in mind that each member has the printout with the book's rating, grade, annotation, etc.

Hold up the book **and say the title and rating**, then give your brief annotation (not the whole review), focusing on your opinion. Usually the annotation is a sentence describing what the book is about, and a sentence evaluating the book. This takes about 30 seconds.

You might want to emphasize the following:

- Controversial subject matter and/or themes
- Outstanding quality
- Innovative or fresh approach
- Local author, illustrator, or publisher
- Well-known author or illustrator
- Local or California setting
- Current issue of great interest
- Only book on the particular subject
- Notable first book by new author or illustrator
- Content appealing to or reflective of the diversity of California's population.

If you cannot attend the monthly meeting, you can still review for *BayViews*. Please send your name and address to the current Book Review Chair. If you cannot attend a particular meeting, please send your books along with a colleague. Do not hang on to un-reviewed books, please make sure they get back in a timely manner, so that they can be re-assigned if necessary.

ACL members are encouraged to maintain the warm and sympathetic climate in which reviews are presented. It is important that new (and experienced) reviewers encounter a supportive atmosphere, which still allows for objective disagreement and critical debate. Lively discussions about new books are challenging and productive.

### Mechanics of the Review Form

**ONLINE FORM:** Please use the review form available on the ACL website at <http://www.bayviews.org/reviewformgoogle.html> . If a field is not applicable to your review, leave it blank. Standardization aids the bib checkers, typists and copy-editors. Please use the directions below as you complete the online form.

**DEADLINE:** All reviews are now submitted electronically, using our Google review form. All reviews must be submitted by 10:00 am of the Wednesday prior to the Friday review meeting.

**TITLE:** Use both title and subtitle, separated by a colon. Please note that the current online form does not permit italicizing titles here or within the text of the review; copy-editors will note when the professional typist needs to use italics.

**AUTHOR:** Author's name should be listed last name first, in this field. **Additional authors** should all be listed below in the **Additional creators** field.

**ILLUSTRATOR:** Illustrator's name should also be listed last name first in this field. If the illustrator is also the author, please type out the full name in both fields. **Additional illustrators** should all be listed below in the **Additional creators** field.

**SERIES:** Enter the series title in this field. For example: *Black Stars*. If you are reviewing two or more books from a series at once, please write one review; the rest of the books should all use a stock phrase, similar to the following format: "**SERIES REVIEW. Please see: African American Entrepreneurs by James Haskins for series review.**" Use the book that will appear first in *BayViews* as the main review, where the entire text of your review is included. We file first by author, then by title for all the reviews. **However,**

individual reviews of a numbered volume of a series should list the individual title in the Title field and the Series title in the Series field, which should also include the number if there is one, for example: Gideon Trilogy; Bk 1 and Series of unfortunate events; Bk 7.

**BOOK GROUP:** Please choose a category from the dropdown box that best describes where the book will be shelved in most libraries: Picture Book, Reader (meaning Easy or Early or Beginning Reader), Fiction, Folklore, Poetry, Nonfiction, Graphic (meaning Graphic Novel or Comic Book), Professional.

**GRADES:** Please determine the intended audience for this title. In the dropdown box on the form, you will see grade levels as simple numbers and the following abbreviations: B/T = Baby/Toddler, P = Preschool, K= Kindergarten, A=Adult. We do not use “YA” for young adult – instead give the grade range. Please fill out both fields; the “beginning of grade range” and “end or grade range”. For example, if you choose P and then K, it means Preschool through Kindergarten; if you choose 5 and then Adult, it means 5<sup>th</sup> Grade through Adult.

**RATING:** Make sure that your Rating is justified by the opinion stated explicitly in your review.

- **OUTSTANDING:** Outstanding in its presentation of the genre, including style, consistency, design, accuracy, and consideration of audience. Books receiving this rating will be considered for the annual Distinguished Books List.
- **ADDITIONAL:** Competent, but may be excelled in its field by other books. A useful addition to most library collections. Reviewers who wish to distinguish books at the high or low range of this broad category may use the terms *HIGH ADDITIONAL* or *LOW ADDITIONAL* to so designate.
- **UNSATISFACTORY:** Contains so many weaknesses in style, content, and/or book design that it is not recommended for general library purposes.

**PAGES:** Include page count. If unnumbered, count pages and list the number in brackets; [32]. If front or back matter is several pages or more in addition to the numbered pages, please include the additional number of pages in brackets, for example: 116 [+12].

**ADDITIONAL CREATORS:** Additional authors and/or illustrators should all be listed first name first, separated by commas. For up to three additional creators, list as in this example: Candace Fleming, Douglas Florian, & Nathan Hale. For more than three, put “et al” after the second name.

**TRANSLATOR:** In the translator field, please follow this format: “Translated from the German by Elizabeth D. Crawford.” (*See note below regarding publication dates.*)

**PUBLISHER:** Please identify the publisher by using the information found on the spine. Leave off "Books" "Press" "Company" "Inc" "Group" etc. If only the logo is present, use the info from the title page. If both imprint and parent company are present, please use the shortest version of each, with a slash between. For example, for "Arthur A. Levine Books, an imprint of Scholastic Press," use Levine/Scholastic.

**DATE:** Use the date on the item in your hand, listing month and year: MM/YYYY. This can be found online, along with the prices & ISBNs for all available formats. Mention the original date of publication of the work in the body of your review if it differs from the

edition you are reviewing, as in the case of a reprint or translation. (See note in “*Body of the Review*” section, below, for *Advance Reader Copies*.)

**PRICE/ISBN:** Complete price and ISBN info for all available bindings and prices, in any source that is convenient for you. (Sources: the book itself and the dust jacket, *B.I.P.* ([www.booksinprint.com](http://www.booksinprint.com)), [www.amazon.com](http://www.amazon.com), BWI TitleTales ([www.bwibooks.com](http://www.bwibooks.com)), Baker & Taylor ([www.btol.com](http://www.btol.com)), Library of Congress ([www.loc.gov](http://www.loc.gov)), *Booklist*, *SLJ*, or *PW*.)

**NOTE:** Please use 13-digit ISBN numbers only. If simultaneously published in multiple languages, also indicate this in the body of the review, in a similar manner. We ask for Trade, PLB (prebound or library binding), and Paper only. If simultaneously published in other formats (eBook, Audiobook) you may mention this in the body of the review if you choose.

**REVIEWER INFO:** Include your affiliation as well as your name. If not currently employed by a library, school or company, use “Independent.”

## BODY OF THE REVIEW

You must use the online Google form to submit all reviews.

**Be succinct.**

Long reviews increase our publishing costs (typist’s time, printing AND mailing!), and – more importantly – are less likely to be read by busy professionals.

When **referring to another work**, provide Title and Author, Publisher, and Year, in parentheses. For example: Thank you, Sarah (Anderson, S&S, 2002). If any of the information is the same as the title being reviewed, you may drop that piece of information. For example, in a review of *Knuffle Bunny* by Mo Willems, you would simply refer to *Don’t let the pigeon drive the bus* (2003), because it is by the same author and publisher. Please note that the current online form does not permit italicizing titles; copy-editors will note when the professional typist needs to use italics.

If you **refer by title to the book being reviewed**, no other info is needed.

When reviewing from an **advance-reader copy**, please note this as the closing line of your review, using the following phrase; “**Review based on an ARC.**” “Illustrations not seen by this reviewer,” may be added if appropriate. If your review is based on galleys of a picture book, consider what issues may arise in the final binding. If you have any concerns about the final illustrations, speak with the Book Review Chair about waiting for actual publication before submitting a review.

**Read your review aloud** to check for coherence and smoothness. **Check** your typing, spelling, punctuation, and grammar. Your review will be copy-edited, which means we will double-check it before printing, but you are responsible for clarity.

## ANNOTATION OF THE BOOK

Please describe the book in 50 words or fewer. Try to limit to 2 sentences, including both a CIP-like summary and your critique. These annotations are for internal use only, although annotations for books that are rated Outstanding or appear on the Distinguished Books List will be copy-edited and published for our members and for publishers.

## STYLE

Standard abbreviations:

Abbreviate “page” as: p. Abbreviate “pages” as: pp.

Abbreviate “black and white” as: b&w

Numerals:

Always spell out numerals at the head of a sentence. Within a sentence, spell out numbers zero through ten, use numerals for 11 and higher. (Seven-year-olds. 14-year-olds.) However, write out ordinals such as third, seventeenth or twenty-fourth. When writing about **decades**, no apostrophe is needed, unless you eliminate the century: Use either 1890s or ‘60s.

Quotes:

After close quotes, indicate (CIP) if you are quoting from the Cataloging in Publication info. If you are quoting from the text of the book, indicate the page number like this (p. 14).

Use punctuation inside quotation marks, with the exception of exclamation and question marks that apply to the whole sentence. Examples:

This really was “the end.”

Nina said, “Who took my post-it notes?”

Did you hear Nina say, “I bet Joy took my post-it notes!”?

If a quotation is cut, use ellipses ... within the quote to indicate this. If the cut is at the end of a sentence, use .... – the fourth dot is a period for the end of the sentence.

Quotes within quotes are done this way; “‘Girls never admit to nose-picking,’ I told Gus.”

**Try to avoid...**

- ✓ Overused adjectives, such as: beautiful, wonderful, lovely, pretty, cute, etc.
- ✓ Weak adverbs. Instead, use strong verbs. For example use “elaborated” instead of “told more.”
- ✓ “!” Instead, use strong language.
- ✓ “This book” at the beginning of the review. Instead, use an opening that will grab your reader.
- ✓ “I” at the beginning of the review. Instead, try to phrase personal opinion as an evaluative comment. If absolutely necessary, use “this reviewer.”
- ✓ Vague terms. (How many is “lots”? Which country is “America”? Whose “Civil War”?)
- ✓ Run on sentences. Sentence fragments.

- ✓ Generalizations about readers attributed to their identity. (“This will appeal to boys....” “American youth prefer...” “Finally a story for Native American beginning readers...”)

## CONTENT

Try to keep plot to one sentence, with time and place setting as necessary.

Avoid personal attacks.

Avoid judgments that are based solely on personal taste. Can you rephrase your personal opinion as an evaluative comment or imagine other readers’ perspectives? Give an example from the text to substantiate your opinion. For example, “ugly illustrations” doesn't explain; try “unsuccessful,” “amateurish,” etc.

Include sufficient evaluative comments and examples to justify the rating and for librarians to make purchasing decisions.

Describe illustrations with regards to composition, media and style. (See K.T. Horning’s *From Cover to Cover: Evaluating and reviewing children’s books*, pages 95-113. for more information on this topic.)

Indicate your opinion on whether representations of racial, ethnic, religious, language, gender/sexuality, disability, or other identity characteristics are treated either with or without authenticity, realism, and respect. Do the demographics of the story reflect the reality of the setting, or (for fantasy) the reality of humanity?

## GRAMMAR AND USAGE GUIDELINES

Follow the grammar and usage conventions listed below. For topics not included here, such as commonly confused words, try: <http://writing-program.uchicago.edu/resources/grammar.htm>.

### **Subject/Verb Agreement**

Both must be singular or both must be plural. Wrong: One of my books are moldy.  
Right: One of my books is moldy. (One book is the subject).

### **Tense Agreement**

Make sure to stick to the same tense throughout the plot description. Present tense usually works best for all parts of the review.

### **Pronouns**

Pronouns as the subject in a clause. Try completing the full sentence:

Joy is not as tired as ~~me~~ *I*. (“Joy is not as tired as I am.”)

Pronouns as a compound subject. Try it by itself if you’re not sure.

Joy and ~~me~~ *I* went to the library. (“I went to the library.”)

~~Her~~ *She* and ~~me~~ *I* went there. (“She went” “I went”)

Pronouns as a compound indirect object. Try it by itself if you're not sure.

Joy went to the library with Mary and I *me*. ("Joy went with me.")

Joy went with ~~she~~ *her* and me. ("Joy went with her.")

Please see the ACL website at <http://www.bayviews.org/samplerreviews.html> for sample reviews.

**Sample Review:**

Sturm, James, Andrew Arnold, and Alexis Frederick-Frost. *Sleepless Knight* ‡ Graphic. First Second, 04/2015. [29]p. \$14.99 978-1-59643-651-0 OUTSTANDING GRADES K-3

A young knight with a trusty horse sets off on a camping trip, only to discover that the knight's favorite teddy bear has disappeared, and the help of forest animals must be enlisted to find the lost bear. This beginning graphic novel from the creators of *Adventures in Cartooning* (Sturm, 2009) features large, boldly colored illustrations, spare but engaging text, and hilarious facial expressions on the characters. The picture book trim size will attract readers who may not have tried graphic novels previously, and the simple yet action-packed story will demand repeated readings. The knight's appearance, deftly rendered as a stick figure with a helmet, is both gender- and ethnicity-neutral, so the universal feelings of loss, fear, and bravery will resonate with most children. This book will be a hit with graphic novel fans and those new to the format. Endpapers have instructions to draw the knight, horse, rabbit, and bear.

Melissa Morwood, Palo Alto City Lib

**Sample Annotation:**

A young knight and trusty horse set off on a camping trip, and discover that they need the help of forest animals to find the knight's lost teddy bear. Large boldly colored illustrations and an action-packed story ensure that this book will be welcomed by young readers.