

Opening sentence:

“Run by a tiny pig-tailed librarian and her three assistant owls, the Midnight Library opens only at night, ready to serve a community of dogs, rabbits, sheep, and mice.”

Usually, the opening sentence gives a brief plot description, focusing most on how the plot begins and never divulges the ending. As K.T. Horning states (p. 175) you need to “grab your readers’ attention with the opening sentence.” Avoid beginning “This book is about...;” instead, go right into the plot description.

Follow up:

“Kohara successfully highlights the use of the library as a community space, as the tiny librarian points a rambunctious three-piece squirrel band to the activity room to “[play] their instruments as loud as they [like],” directs a sad Miss Wolf to the storytelling corner to cheer her up with a happy story, and cheerfully instructs a slow-reading tortoise to make a library card and check his book out at the end of the night.”

Clearly describe the book’s strength and weaknesses, which will allow you to recommend the book (or not) without having to use the words “Recommended.” You can use examples from the book to back up your opinion on a strength or weakness. For example, if you say the first person voice is authentic (or not), give a brief phrase that backs that up.

Book design:

“The thick-lined black ink linocut illustrations with gold backgrounds and accents of navy create a happy, retro feel while maintaining a sense of cozy, nighttime fun.”

Think of your reader as someone who hasn’t seen the book, and describe the book design and illustrations. For a picture book, try to determine the media used, or guess/conjecture if necessary: “the joyful illustrations *appear to be* watercolor with ink outlines,” and the style used (collage, cartoon, folk art, etc.). Often the media used is described in the book, on the verso of the title page. Nonfiction book design is also important to describe: maps, photos (color or b&w), back matter (index, source notes, bibliography, timeline, glossary).

Concluding sentence:

“It is hoped young readers will be inspired by the sense of adventure and possibility in the Midnight Library and will see parallels to their own community libraries. This charming picture book makes an obvious choice for evening storytime or as a one-on-one nighttime read-aloud.”

The conclusion often describes the audience for the book, how it could be used in a classroom or storytime, and again giving a clear indication as to the quality – something that substantiates the rating it was given.

Sample complete review:

Kohara, Kazuno. *The Midnight Library*. Kazuno Kohara, Illus. Pic. Bk. Roaring Brook, 2014. [28]p. \$16.99 978-1-59643-985-6. OUTSTANDING GRADES PRE-1

Run by a tiny pig-tailed librarian and her three assistant owls, the Midnight Library opens only at night, ready to serve a community of dogs, rabbits, sheep, and mice. Kohara successfully highlights the use of the library as a community space, as the tiny librarian points a rambunctious three-piece squirrel band to the activity room to “[play] their instruments as loud as they [like],” directs a sad Miss Wolf to the storytelling corner to cheer her up with a happy story, and cheerfully instructs a slow-reading tortoise to make a library card and check his book out at the end of the night. The thick-lined black ink linocut illustrations with gold backgrounds and accents of navy create a happy, retro feel while maintaining a sense of cozy, nighttime fun. It is hoped young readers will be inspired by the sense of adventure and possibility in the Midnight Library and will see parallels to their own community libraries. This charming picture book makes an obvious choice for evening storytime or as a one-on-one nighttime read-aloud.

Laura Gravander, Oakland PL

Horning, Kathleen T. *From Cover to Cover: Evaluating and Reviewing Children’s Books: Revised Edition*. Collins, 2010.