

Review Articles & Reviews/ Critiques et comptes rendus

SOME HELP IN CHOOSING

Choosing children's books, David Booth, Larry Swartz and Meguido Zola. Pembroke Publishers, 1987. 176 pp. \$12.95 paper. ISBN 0-921217-12-9.

How do parents or teachers who are not familiar with a wide range of children's books choose something suitable either for reading aloud to children or reading by the children themselves? This choice is important because often one felicitous volume will start a child on the road to becoming a life-long reader. *Choosing children's books* is aimed at helping adults select the right book for the right child at the right time.

This book contains an annotated listing of more than a thousand children's books from five countries – Canada, the United States, Great Britain, Australia and New Zealand – as well as publication information for each entry. The books selected are organized in four general categories: for pre-schoolers (0-5), primary children (5-8), middle readers (8-11) and young adolescents (11-14). Within each category the books are again arranged according to genres or interest themes. For example, ten theme groupings given for 8-11 year olds, include relationships, mystery, adventure, issues, sport, bibliography, fantasy, historical fiction, nature, and humour.

Teachers should find this annotated bibliography of immediate interest as they are constantly seeking a variety of motivating books for their classrooms. Today many of them organize their teaching around a theme, often chosen from a key children's book which they read aloud to the whole class. The children read other related books independently for enjoyment or for project work. Using this bibliography as a guide, teachers may choose the key book from the Read Aloud category and a set of related books from the author's theme selections.

Arrangement of the books into similar groupings at the various age levels helps teachers to cope with a wide variety of reading proficiencies within their classes. This help also extends to those who teach split grades.

Student teachers as well will find this affordable handbook useful; and glancing through it will remind seasoned veterans of books which had slipped to the back of their minds. For example, I made use of it to find books dealing with food for a grade three class. Although no such category appears, a few

minutes of skimming helped locate several books where food played a part: the instant that my eye fell on titles such as Tomie de Paolo's *Strega Nona*, I remembered that the action largely centered on food. Author Index also facilitates these searches. (A curious omission from the index is J.R.R. Tolkien's *The Hobbit*, which is among the annotated selections.)

The book is also aimed at parents. However, I feel that the majority will find the number of entries daunting; a shorter list and some illustrations would probably entice more parents to make use of this book.

Besides utility, another concern when reviewing a book like this is its use of current theory. Our knowledge about how children learn to read has increased dramatically in recent years: we know for instance that they gain increasing control over reading strategies not by being taught a hierarchy of skills, but simply by reading a variety of books. Across Canada, the Whole Language philosophy has put a fresh emphasis on literature-based curricula.

These current theoretical concerns are reflected in the introduction, the succinct overviews before each section, and the categorization of the books. For example, recent research has shown the need to expose very young children to books and all children to a variety of text structures: the authors advocate both of these practices. Cloth and board books that babies can manipulate in their playpens are dutifully listed. Informational books with artistic merit and factual accuracy also figure in this book, so that more children may be helped to have experience with expository prose, and there is a category of books suitable for reluctant and remedial readers.

I find the authors' emphasis on reading aloud to all children, including adolescents, a strong point of both overviews and selections. Adults reading orally for a young audience provide them with reading models and great enjoyment; this practice encourages the weaker readers and introduces the proficient to books that for the moment are too difficult to be tackled on their own. As the authors state:

The impact of adults who read and tell stories aloud will affect what young people choose to read as well as influence their feelings about what is read and about those who read. If careful choices are made, the teenagers can be exposed to books they might not choose or are unable to read on their own. (167)

What could be a final concern is adequacy and range of coverage: the authors discuss the dilemma of choosing among the "tens of thousands" of books available for young people. They make no claim to universality of sampling, and say that their selection is based on their own experience. The three of them are fans of children's literature, each owning large collections which they use in their work with both children and teachers. In my opinion, their selections cover a wide range of available children's books and are not noticeably biased.

I like the fact that popular books enjoyed by children, not just those recognised as good literature, are included. Books by major Canadian authors are there; the only ones missing are those with a more regional appeal -- but this is hardly a fair criticism of a book of this size. Genres and formats for each age level are adequately covered: picture books, poems, novels, information books, popular books, and classics.

The publishing information given for each main entry is up-to-date and sufficient to locate the book in a library or bookstore. However, an explanation of what is meant by the rubric "Other Books" at the end of many main entries would be helpful: a reader will not know whether these are other books by the same author or others related by their theme. I also noticed some inconsistency of style in the short descriptions of the books: at times they are short summaries of the story, but on other occasions they also include information about the genre.

The three authors are well suited to the task of suggesting suitable books for young readers. Each is known for tireless efforts to bring all children to literature and have it come alive for them. This book was written with a deep desire to help children become readers. It may be written for adult readers, but as the authors say: this is a book for children who need our advice, wisdom and support, and nurturing as they develop into independent readers who not only *can* read, but *do* read" (6). Hence, it will be a valuable addition to many a professional's library.

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FLAWED BUT SERVICEABLE

Childview: Evaluating and reviewing materials for children, Claire England and Adele M. Fasick. Littleton, Colorado: Libraries Unlimited, 1987. xviii, 207 pp. \$23.00 cloth. ISBN 0-87287-519-9.

In their guide to assessing classroom and library materials for children, England and Fasick raise important issues and offer some good advice. Their book, however, is flawed; it could have benefited from the attention of a competent editor.

Part 1 provides a context for the reviewer. It touches on such recurring concerns as literary quality, censorship, sexism, racism, and conflicting values and standards. The authors stress the importance of examining materials for children from the double perspective of the adult and of the child. With this emphasis in mind, they sketch current childhood development theories and briefly mention the needs of handicapped children. They also discuss reasons