

Baseline Standards of Book Quality for Vendor Produced “RIF Catalogs”

Prohibited Items

Activity Books, Coloring Books, Sticker Books, and Workbooks are not approved by RIF.

Children’s Literature in the Elementary School

The RIF Literature Advisory Board recommends *Charlotte Huck’s Children’s Literature* by Barbara Kiefer for evaluating children’s literature for standards of quality. Children’s books comparing favorably to less than 50% of the guidelines outlined in the text will not be approved.

Reviews and Recommendations

RIF also looks to professional journals, review sources, literary awards, and recommended book lists for indicators of a book’s quality. Although awards, positive reviews, and placement on recommended book lists are not required for “RIF Approved” status, they will inform RIF’s decision.

Sources consulted for reviews and recommendations include, but are not limited to, award-winning children’s books and books gaining distinction by appearing on “best of year” lists, including the annual professional awards and distinctions of the following organizations and journals: ALA including the Mildred Batchelder Book Award, Pura Belpré Award, and Coretta Scott King Awards; the American Indian Library Association including the American Indian Youth Services Literature Award; ALSC including the Theodor Geisel Seuss Award; American Jewish Library Association; Américas Awards; CBC; CCB; CCBC and the Charlotte Zolotow Award; Horn Book; IBBY; IRA; MLA; Multicultural Review; NCTE; NCSS; NCTA; NCTM; NYPL/Ezra Jack Keats Foundation’s Ezra Jack Keats Award; Oyate; Reading Rainbow.

Reviews, recommendations, and awards are part of the review process but not a defining decision point for approving, or not approving, a particular book. For example, if a children’s fiction book features members of parallel culture groups, it will be reviewed against the criteria listed for children’s fiction and multicultural literature in *Charlotte Huck’s Children’s Literature*. Additionally, sources such as (but not limited to) Multicultural Review will be consulted.

Charlotte Huck's Children's Literature Evaluation Guidelines

The following guidelines are quoted or adapted from: *Charlotte Huck's Children's Literature, Ninth Edition* by Barbara Z. Kiefer. New York: McGraw Hill, 2007.

Note: Not every question relates to every book. Books are to be evaluated against applicable questions within applicable categories. For example, a nonfiction title that depicts or represents people from parallel cultures should be evaluated against the Nonfiction category and the Multicultural Literature category.

Picture Books

CONTENT

- How appropriate is the content of the book for its intended age level?
- Is this a book that will appeal to children, or is it really written for adults?
- When and where does it take place? How has the artist portrayed this?
- Are the characters well delineated and developed?
- Are race, gender, and other stereotypes avoided?
- What is the quality of the language of the text?
- How is the theme developed through text and illustrations?

ILLUSTRATIONS (medium and style)

- What medium has the illustrator chosen to use? Is it appropriate for the mood of the story?
- How has the illustrator used line, shape, and color to extend the meaning of the story?
- How would you describe the style of the illustrations? Is the style of the appropriate for the story?
- How has the illustrator varied the style and technique? What techniques seem to create rhythm and movement?
- How has the illustrator created balance in composition?

ILLUSTRATIONS (relationship to text)

- In what ways do the illustrations help create the meaning of the text?
- How are pictures made an integral part of the text?
- Do the illustrations extend the text in any way? Do they provide clues to the action of the story?
- Are the pictures accurate and consistent with the text?
- Where the setting calls for it, are the illustrations authentic in detail?

FORMAT

- Does the size of the book seem appropriate to the content?
- Does the jacket design express the theme of the book?
- Do the cover design and endpapers convey the spirit of the book?
- In what way does the title page anticipate the story to come?
- Is the type design well chosen for the theme and purpose of the book?

Books for the Very Young Child

THE BEST BOOKS FOR BABIES AND TODDLERS

SHOULD:

- Relate to familiar life experiences
- Provide clear uncluttered illustrations with little or no distracting background
- Use clear, natural language
- Have predictable stories
- Provide some humor, especially so the child will feel superior
- Offer opportunities for participation and interaction
- Hold the child's attention

Children's Fiction

PLOT

- Does the book tell a good story?
- Will children enjoy it?
- Is there action? Does the story move?
- Is the plot original and fresh?
- Is it plausible and credible?
- Is there a basis of cause and effect in the happenings?
- Is there an identifiable climax?
- How do events build to a climax?
- Is the plot well constructed?

SETTING

- Where does the story take place?
- How does the author indicate the time?
- How does the setting affect the action, characters, or theme?
- Does the story transcend the setting and have universal implications?

THEME

- Does the story have a theme?
- Is the theme worth imparting to children?
- Does the theme emerge naturally from the story, or is it stated too obviously?
- Does the theme overpower the story?
- Does it avoid moralizing?
- How does the author use motifs or symbols to intensify meaning?

CHARACTERIZATION

- How does the author reveal characters?
- Are the characters convincing and credible?
- Do we see their strengths and their weaknesses?
- Does the author avoid stereotyping?
- Is the behavior of the characters consistent with their ages and background?
- Is there any character development or growth?
- Has the author shown the causes of character behavior development?

STYLE

- Is the style of writing appropriate to the subject?
- Is the style straightforward or figurative?
- Is the dialogue natural and suited to the characters?
- How did the author create a mood? Is the overall impression one of mystery? Gloom? Evil? Joy? Security?

POINT OF VIEW

- Is the point of view from which the story is told appropriate to the purpose of the book?
- Does the point of view change?
- Does the point of view limit the reader's horizon, or enlarge it?

- Why did the author choose this particular point of view?

ILLUSTRATIONS

- Do the illustrations enhance or extend the story?
- Are the pictures aesthetically satisfying?

BOOK DESIGN, FORMAT

- How well designed is the book?
- Is the format of the book related to the text?

[**Note:** See the text for additional guidelines related to poetry, realistic fiction, and historical fiction.]

Multicultural Literature: Literature that depicts members of parallel cultural groups.

DIVERSITY AND RANGE OR REPRESENTATION

In the portrayal of any cultural group, a collection of books should show a wide range of representation of that particular race or ethnic group.

AVOIDANCE OF STEREOTYPING

- Do illustrations portray the distinctive yet varied characteristics of a group or race so that readers know they are looking at a people of, for example, Sioux, Jamaican, or Vietnamese descent?
- Does the book avoid the portrayal of stereotypical articles?
- Does the book avoid implying that specific occupations, recreational pastimes, family organizational structure, or values are descriptive of any particular race or ethnic group?

[Note: refer to the text for specific examples of stereotyping]

LANGUAGE CONSIDERATIONS

- Are derogatory terms for particular racial groups avoided? If they are used, are they essential to a conflict or used in a historical context? Even then, it should be made clear that the use of these unacceptable terms casts aspersion on the speaker, not on the one spoken about or to.
- When an effort is made to represent the cadence and syntax of certain language

patterns, does the book avoid phonetically written spellings and stereotypical dialects that look like "broken English"? Some recent books about African Americans make a conscious effort to reproduce the cadence and syntax of certain language patterns without resorting to phonetically written spellings or stereotypical dialect.

- Books that incorporate the language of a minority group, such as Spanish, do not need to translate a word if context defines it. Children need to understand that all languages adequately serve their speakers and that no one language is better than another.

THE PERSPECTIVE OF THE BOOK

- Who solves the problems in stories? For example, does an African American or a person with a disability take the initiative in problem solving or are solutions provided by paternalistic adults?
- Are racial pride and positive self-image apparent in the story?
- Do the details of the story authentically portray the experience of the represented minority?

ACCURACY AND AUTHENTICITY

- Is the author qualified to write about this topic? Has the manuscript been checked by authorities in the field?

- Are the facts accurate according to other sources?
 - Is the information up-to-date?
 - Are the significant facts included?
 - Are generalizations supported by facts?
 - Is there a clear distinction between fact and theory?
-

Nonfiction

ACCURACY AND AUTHENTICITY

- Is the author qualified to write about this topic? Has the manuscript been checked by authorities in the field?
- Are the facts accurate according to other sources?
- Is the information up-to-date?
- Are the significant facts included?
- Do text and illustrations reveal diversity and avoid stereotypes?
- Are generalizations supported by facts?
- Is there a clear distinction between fact and theory?
- Do text and illustrations omit anthropomorphism and teleological explanations?

CONTENT AND PERSPECTIVE

- For what purpose was the book designed?
- Is the book within the comprehension and interest range of its intended audience?
- Is the subject adequately covered? Are different viewpoints presented?
- Does the book lead to an understanding of the scientific method? Does it foster the spirit of inquiry?
- Does the book show interrelationships? If it is a science book, does it indicate related social issues?

STYLE

- Is information presented clearly and directly?
- Is the text appropriate for the intended audience?
- Does the style create the feeling of reader involvement?
- Is the language vivid and interesting?

ORGANIZATION

- Is the information structured clearly, with appropriate subheadings?
- Does the book have reference aids that are clear and easy to use, such as table of contents, index, bibliography, glossary, and appendix?

ILLUSTRATIONS AND FORMAT

- Do illustrations clarify and extend the text or speak plainly for themselves?
- Are size relationships made clear?
- Are media suitable to the purposes for which they are used?
- Are illustrations explained by captions or labels where needed?
- Does the total format contribute to the clarity and attractiveness of the book?

[Note: Consult the text for additional guidelines related to Juvenile Biographies.]

Book Evaluation Worksheet

Title	Author	Publisher	ISBN

Vendor(s)	Recommended Age Range	Reviewed by:	Date:
	___ 0-2 ___ 9-11 ___ 3-5 ___ 12-14 ___ 6-8 ___ 15-18		

Instructions: Evaluate book in each applicable category to determine if minimum expectations are met for the category. Insert an "X" in the appropriate box. Use the guidelines outlined in *Charlotte Huck's Children's Literature* by Barbara Z. Kiefer for evaluation criteria.

- **Exceeds:** Book compares favorably to over 70% of applicable evaluation questions for the category.
- **Meets:** Book compares favorably to 50-70% of applicable evaluation questions for the category.
- **Doesn't Meet:** Book compares favorably to less than 50% of applicable evaluation questions for the category.

Prohibited Items:	Not Acceptable
Workbook	X
Sticker Book	X
Coloring Book	X
Activity Book	X

Books for the Very Young Child	Doesn't Meet	Meets	Exceeds
Content	X		
Illustrations			
Language			

Reviews & Recommendations	Doesn't Meet	Meets	Exceeds
Positive reviews	X		
Placement on recommended book list(s)			

Children's Fiction	Doesn't Meet	Meets	Exceeds
Plot			
Setting			
Theme			
Characterization			
Style			
Point of view			
Illustrations			
Book design, format			

Charlotte Huck's Children's Literature Guidelines*

*Content in this section adapted from *Charlotte Huck's Children's Literature* by Barbara Z. Kiefer

Picture Books	Doesn't Meet	Meets	Exceeds
Content			
Illustrations, relationship to text			
Illustrations, medium and style			
Format			

Multicultural Literature	Doesn't Meet	Meets	Exceeds
Diversity and range of representation			
Avoidance of stereotyping			
Language considerations			
The perspective of the book			
Accuracy and authenticity			

Nonfiction	Doesn't Meet	Meets	Exceeds
Accuracy and authenticity			
Content and perspective			
Style			
Organization			
Illustrations and format			

Physical Construction	Doesn't Meet	Meets	Exceeds
Paper quality, durability			
Binding			

OVERALL EVALUATION	Not Acceptable	Acceptable	Strong

Additional Notes: