

Do kids really like Dora the Explorer? Selecting children's books in the face of mass media

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What are some of the Literary Quality criteria for evaluating children's fiction books?

- Evocative narration:
 - a “voice” that seems alive
 - language that “sparkles”
 - narrative techniques that complement the point of the story
 - Viorst, *The tenth good thing about Barney*; Stinson, *Red is best*; Carlson, *How to lose all your friends*
 - compare to *Dora's backpack*; *It takes two*
- Well-developed themes:
 - subtle and/or sensitive portrayal/treatment of a personal, social, or other issue
 - subtle and satisfying message or “moral”
 - effectively and suitably satirical, ironic, humorous, or nonsensical
 - Estes, *The hundred dresses*; Pilkey, *Captain Underpants*; Walsh, *Shabash*
 - compare to *Disney's Pocahontas*; *Thank you Angelica (Rugrats)*
- Effective plot:
 - realistic and/or plausible
 - maintained suspense
 - effective turning point/climax
 - satisfying dénouement and/or conclusion
 - Park, *Mick Harte was here*; Bourgeois, *Franklin in the dark*
 - compare to *Barbie.com Ballet Buddies*; *Scoop saves the day*
- Realistic characterization:
 - believable characters who seem real
 - characters that charm, evoke a reaction, and/or fascinate
 - sparkling and/or realistic dialogue
 - Gay, *Stella queen of the snow*; Park, *Junie B Jones*
 - compare to *Ernie Gets Lost (Sesame Street)*; *Thank you Angelica (Rugrats)*
- Effective read-aloud qualities:
 - Opportunities for participation by the audience, either in the text or potential: questions & answers, a refrain, guessing, riddles, noises, actions, deliberate errors, wry irony, crazy concepts that elicit audience reaction
 - Rhythm / rhyme
 - Repetition, e.g. cumulative
 - Grossman, *My little sister ate one hare*; Woods, *The napping house*
 - compare to Schlessinger, *Why do you love me*; *Dora's backpack*

What are some of the things that give a book Popular Appeal?

- Marketed through other media: TV, film, games, toys
 - Snicket, *A series of unfortunate events*
- Series – publisher’s series or reader’s series
 - Damziger, *Amber Brown*
- Familiar characters (often from one of the above)
 - *Barbie.com*
- Format that appears to be the opposite of “serious” literature, e.g. short, segmented, “snappy” text
 - Van Draanen, *Shredderman*
- Format that resembles a popular media, e.g. graphic novel, comics, TV/movie stills
 - Kinney, *Diary of a wimpy kid*; Wilson, *Perfect man*
- Obvious humour, crudeness, satire, irreverence
 - Pilkey, *Captain Underpants*
- A “kids know best” or “kids in charge” orientation
 - Wade, *And then it happened*
- Obvious connection to popular concerns, e.g. school, siblings, dating, etc.
 - *Franklin*; *Arthur*; *High School Musical*
- Depicted characters that kids identify with: modern, their age, contemporary language and slang, contemporary interests, “cool”
 - Scieszka, *The Time Warp Trio*
- Popular genres: fantasy, science fiction, adventure, mystery, horror/scary
 - Lawrence, *The Roman mysteries*
 - Zimmerman, *Trashy Town*
- ALL OF THE “LITERARY QUALITY” FACTORS!

What is the paramount criterion for choosing books?

- Not children’s *wants*, not even their *needs*, but their *response*