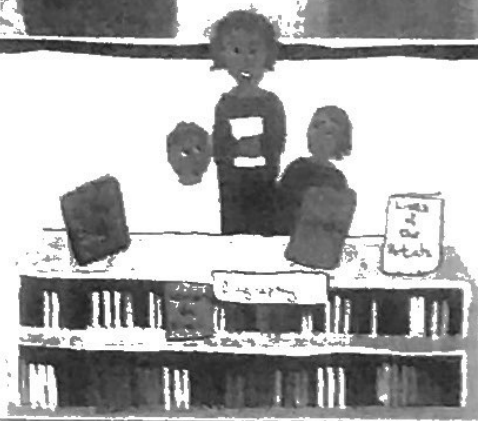




chapter

# 1

## Children's Books in Children's Hands

What Are Good Books for Children?

What Are Good Books for Each Child?

Issue to Consider: *Even Comic Books?!*

What Is Children's Literature?

Qualities of Children's Literature • Qualities of  
Outstanding Children's Literature

Children's Books and Childhood

Children in the Middle Ages

Ask the Critic: *Betsy Hearne*

Children in Puritan Times • Children in the  
Enlightenment • The "Golden Age of Children's  
Literature" • Contemporary Children's Books

The Genres of Children's Literature

Children's Books and English  
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Censorship: Which Books Will Make  
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Resources for Children's Books

A four-year-old child in her mother's lap hears Margaret Wise Brown's *Little Fur Family* and is filled with a secure feeling of being a special child, very much loved. In the coming months, the child picks up the book every now and then, and that same feeling of warmth and security comes over her each time she does.

In a first-grade classroom on the South Pacific island of Fiji, the teacher has created a hand-lettered enlarged version of Bill Martin, Jr.'s *Brown Bear, Brown Bear, What Do You See?* She reads it to her assembled class, pointing with a ruler to each word. Even before she has finished the first reading, children are anticipating what she is going to say next. The second time through, the children, supported by the patterned text and the illustrations, are reading along with her. There are no bears on Fiji, though, and soon the children are writing their own book based on Martin's pattern but featuring a mongoose, a mynah bird, an iguana, and other local animals. Martin's book has helped these children of Fiji learn to read and write.

Trip-trap, trip-trap, trip-trap, trip-trap.

"Who's that walking on my bridge?" roared the Troll.

"It is I, Little Billy Goat Gruff."

In a South Texas classroom, Jackie murmurs, "Oh, good," when Ms. Sloan sends her group to the library center, a favorite in the classroom. Some of her fellow students browse through the collection looking for particular books. Jackie says, "Let's do 'Three Billy Goats Gruff.'" Four other children agree and cut short their search. Now the five children—three goats, one troll, and a narrator—are acting out this folktale that is so well known to them from their teacher's reading it aloud. And of course one performance will not do. Everyone wants a chance to be the troll!

A teacher reads aloud from Gloria Anzaldúa's *Prietita and the Ghost Woman/Prietita y La Llorona*, a modern tale that features the "Weeping Woman," a ghostly character familiar among Hispanic children in Mexico and the American Southwest. "We tell about *la Llorona* down in the valley at my *abuela's* house," says Ana Margarita. "But she's not nice like this lady. She's the one who catches little kids if they go out at night, especially near the water." Then she politely provides the pronunciation of *Llorona*, "You pronounce the double L like a 'Y,'" she says—and goes on to explain some of the other Spanish words such as *curandera* and *remedio* that are given in the book. She has a look on her face that says, "Isn't it great to discuss a book about things from *my* side of town?!"

In a fourth-grade classroom in Atlanta, a teacher has just finished reading Carmen Deedy's *Fourteen Cows for America* (2009) with two-page spreads of lifelike illustrations of a Maasai community in East Africa.

"Look closely in the eye of the person in the picture," she says.

"Oh!" says a student. "It's a tiny reflection of a building. It's burning, and you can see the smoke!"

"So the young man can still see the attack on the twin towers. It's still in his eyes, even when he's so far away from it in Africa," says another student.

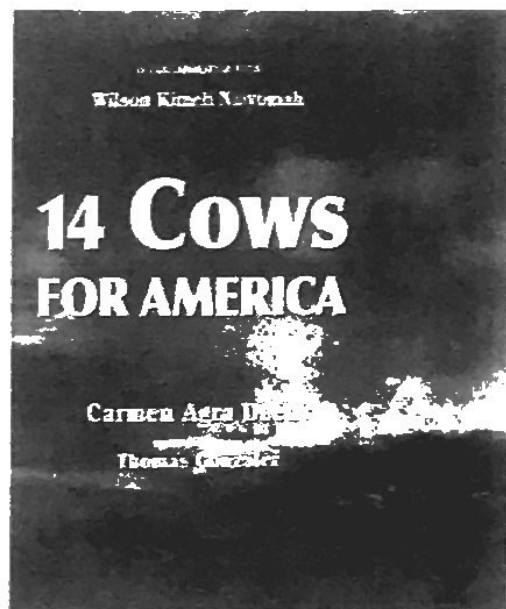
"Was that a true story?" asks another.

"Yes, it was. Let's turn the page." The next pages give an account of a young man from the Maasai tribe who was studying medicine in the United States when he happened to witness the attack on the World Trade Center in New York. When he returned to his village a year later, his people were so moved by his descriptions that they donated some of their most valuable possessions—fourteen cows—to America.

"But where are the cows?" a student asks. Later the class looks up the event on the Internet and finds newspaper accounts of the

#### ILLUSTRATION 1.1

Generous Maasai herdsmen from Kenya donated cows to America as a gesture of solace after September 11, 2001, in this true story. (Cover image from "14 Cows for America" by Carmen Agra Deedy & Wilson Kimeli Naiyomah, illustrated by Thomas Gonzalez. Illustration copyright © 2009 by Thomas Gonzalez. Printed with permission from the publisher.)



## TEACHING IDEA 1.1



### ASK THE CHILDREN!

Have a conversation with a group of children about children's books. Ask these questions in a conversational way:

1. How do you know a book is a children's book?
  2. What are three of your favorite children's books?
  3. What makes them good—that is, if you met someone who was going to write a book for children, what advice would you give her or him to make it a good book?
  4. How do you feel after you've read a really good book? What are you thinking about?
- Note carefully what the children say. Is there a difference in what children of different ages admire in books? How do their criteria for good children's books compare with those set out in this chapter?

**COMMON CORE STANDARD:  
Craft and Structure,  
STANDARD 5**

Maasai village's generous act, entries about the Maasai people, and an entry about Wilson Kimeli Naiyomah, the young man in the story.

John Cunningham's sixth-grade class has finished Louis Sachar's *Holes* (2000), about a juvenile detention camp. Now he is reading them parts of Adam Rapp's *The Buffalo Tree* (1997), a book about "juvies," young people who are incarcerated in a juvenile detention home. One student sighs, shakes her head, and remarks, "This is more like what it must really be like to be locked up in one of those places. I mean, I loved *Holes*, but that book seems kind of like a dream in comparison—not a good dream, but like nothing is quite real. But this, this—you can almost smell the anger, almost taste the blood in your mouth."

Good books—like good paintings, plays, movies, sculptures, and other creative works—merit appreciation in their own right. But good books serve children in some specific ways. Good children's books can evoke strong feelings and come to stand for childhood emotions, much in the way a security blanket does. Good books can give children reference points for understanding their own experiences, lessons that may last a lifetime. Good books may make children proud of and knowledgeable about their own culture and open windows onto other cultures. Good books may help children understand how others live, and how they face the same issues in their lives. Good books, and the sharing of them, cultivate children's capacity for empathy and compassion. Good books educate the imagination, as children stretch to visualize what it would be like to walk in the shoes of a character in a book.

All great things that have happened in the world, happened first of all in someone's imagination, and the aspect of the world of tomorrow depends largely on the extent of the power of imagination of those who are just now learning to read. That is why children must have books, and why there must be people . . . who really care what kind of books are put into the children's hands. (Astrid Lindgren, author of *Pippi Longstocking*, from her acceptance speech for the Hans Christian Andersen Award in 1958)

Good books may give children much of the motivation and even the concepts they need to learn to read and the models that show them how to write. Good books offer children delight, mystery, charm, an experience of awe, and companionship. Good books invite children to play with language. Good picture books cultivate

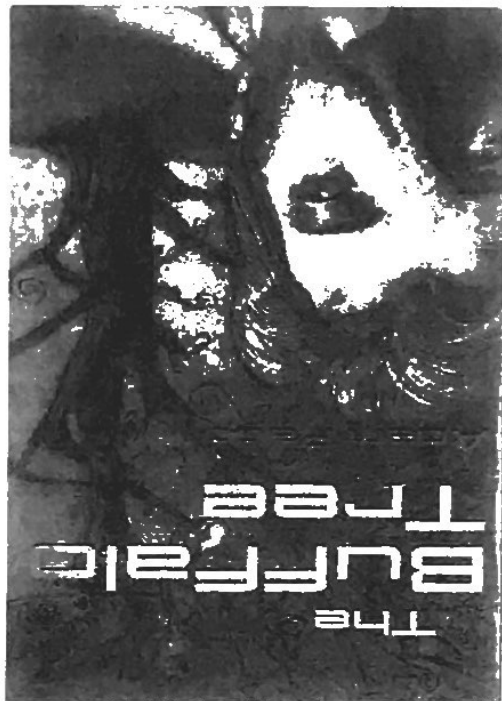


ILLUSTRATION 1.2 Adam Rapp's *The Buffalo Tree* is a book about "juvies," young people who are incarcerated in a juvenile detention home. (Used by permission of HarperCollins Publishers.)

children's visual literacy and their aesthetic sense. Good books nurture children's appreciation of the author's craft.

## What Are Good Books for Children?

For the student of children's literature, there is a lot to learn about. Let's identify some key questions here, and relate them to the upcoming chapters, where you will find answers.

### *What Are Good Books for Each Child?*

Answering that question will require that we develop some criteria for quality in children's books. And since the answer depends partly on the age and interests of the child, we should consider ways in which readers respond to literature and how they differ in their responses at different ages. These issues will be the focus of this chapter. Knowing what good books are for different children requires some intelligent way of talking about goodness and mediocrity in books—that is, we will need a

## ISSUE TO CONSIDER 1.1

### *Even Comic Books?*

Although children who are now in school think of Superman, Spiderman, Batman, and Catwoman as characters in action-packed movies, in previous

generations young people knew the real score: These were characters from comic books, those pulpy-paged illustrated thrillers from the days before television, that cost only 10 cents—and then 15, and then 25, and then . . . they all but disappeared. Comic books were either a staple of life or a threat to civilization, depending on whom you asked. In the 1950s, during the McCarthy Era when people suspected that the moral fiber of our country was under attack from many quarters, a set of Congressional hearings were held in which comic books were accused of promoting amorality, lawlessness, and perversion. In 1954, the major comic book publishers agreed to police themselves and adopted the Comics Code Authority, which insists, among other

things, that:

1. Crimes shall never be presented in such a way as to create sympathy for the criminal, to promote distrust of the forces of law and justice, or to inspire others with a desire to imitate criminals.

2. No comics shall explicitly present the unique details and methods of a crime.

3. Policemen, judges, government officials, and respected institutions shall never be presented in such a way as to create disrespect for established authority.

4. If crime is depicted it shall be as a sordid and unpleasant activity. (Comics Code Authority)

Source: *Comic: A History of Comic Books in America*, by Les Daniels, copyright 1971 by Les Daniels and Mad Peck Studios.

Many comic book publishers went out of business, and the rest quickly lost ground to the growing attraction of television—which, of course, some would argue has become an even greater threat to children's intellects and morals. Now comic books are back in a new form, called *graphic novels*. They are being produced with some sophistication—printed on glossy paper and costing more money. Many graphic novels are reprints of comic books, with several episodes strung together as one volume. Others are newly created as graphic novels. Notable among these are *manga*, graphic novels from Japan.

The American Library Association is taking graphic novels seriously, and they put out an annual list of the best graphic novels (see the home page at <<http://www.ala.org>>). Graphic novels are reviewed in *School Library Journal* and *Kirkus*. Some advocates of graphic novels are enthusiastic about their exciting multimedia formats. Others note their appeal to reluctant readers—especially children from 11 or 12 and up. (You can, after all, “read” them by only occasionally looking at the words.) Educators we talked to in an unsentimental survey weren't sure. When we asked to review the graphic novels in one middle school library recently, the librarian confided that it was not yet possible: The principal had taken them all into his office, and was still trying to decide if they should go on the shelves.

### *What do you think: Should they?*

serviceable set of terms to help us talk about literary features of children's books. Those will be the focus of Chapter 2.

Some of the most appealing books for children are illustrated books. Picture books are a unique art form, combining aspects of novels and movies. Appreciating the dynamics of picture books deserves its own focus, and that will be the topic of Chapter 3.

A huge contribution of children's literature is to help children understand themselves and appreciate people from other cultures. Multicultural books mostly written within North America will be the focus of Chapter 4. Because many good books are available to children from writers in other parts of the world, we will focus on international literature in Chapter 5.

Having considered those background issues, we will then look more closely at the books themselves: the kinds of books available (arranged by genre), the evolution of books over the years, and exemplary writers and illustrators of children's books. In the pages that follow, we will examine Poetry for Children (Chapter 6), Traditional Literature (Chapter 7), Modern Fantasy and Science Fiction (Chapter 8), Contemporary Realistic Fiction (Chapter 9), Historical Fiction (Chapter 10), and Informational Books and Biography (Chapter 11).

## What Is Children's Literature?

It is surprisingly hard to define a children's book. In his own apology for not offering a straight answer to the question, "What is a children's book?" Peter Hunt (1995) writes,

[T]he answer is that we all *know* what it is, but it is not very easy to *tell* what it is (or what it is not). . . . [I]t is everything from a Sixteenth Century chapbook to a twentieth century computer-based, interactive device. It is everything from the folk tale to the problem novel, from the picture book to the classroom poem, from the tract to the penny dreadful, from the classic to the comic. (p. ix)

Children's literature is the collection of books that are read to and by children. That collection is enormous: There are hundreds of thousands of English-language children's titles in print. Currently about 25,000 new titles are published every year in the English language alone (*Library and Book Trade Almanac*, 2010). And it is old: The tradition of publishing literature for English-speaking children dates back two and a half centuries, predating the founding of the American republic.

Children's literature spans the range from alphabet books and nursery rhyme collections for the very young through novels and informational books for adolescents (or young adults, as they are called in the book trade)—in other words, from birth to about age fifteen.

Today, most children's books are written expressly for children. But there are books written originally for adults that have become popular with children—from an earlier period, John Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress* and Daniel Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe* and, more recently, *Platero and I* (*Platero y yo*) by Juan Ramon Jimenez. Other works, such as Charles Perrault's "Sleeping Beauty in the Woods" and the anonymous *Arabian Nights*—were written for adults but have been adapted for children. And the oral tradition—myths, ballads, epics, and folktales—makes up a large body of material that was told to adults and children alike, including the well-known stories "Jack and the Beanstalk," "Rapunzel," "Brer Rabbit and the Briar Patch," "Cucarachita Martina and Ratoncito Perez," and "Anansi the Spider."

Today, children's books are published by the juvenile books branches of large publishing houses such as Random House and Houghton Mifflin, as well as by publishers that serve the children's market exclusively, such as Candlewick Press

and Peachtree Press. Many publishers offer books published under imprints, which might, like Atheneum, be the name of an originally independent publisher that has been taken over by a larger house or, like Richard Jackson Books, Margaret K. McElderry Books, and Walter Lorraine Books, reflect arrangements by which publishers allow their most successful editors to publish books under their own names.

We should note that many titles of children's books are produced by publishing companies that have particular religious orientations. Such books may sell copies that number in the millions; however, because they are not usually purchased for use in public schools, or reviewed in professional journals on children's literature such as *The Horn Book* or *School Library Journal*, they are not treated in this text.

### *Qualities of Children's Literature*

As teachers of college courses on children's literature, we sometimes catch ourselves smiling to see an adult student smuggling *Frog and Toad Are Friends* to class between a copy of *War and Peace* and a thick tome on organic chemistry. That image sometimes makes us stop to ask: What is the study of children's literature doing in a college curriculum? Just how significant is the quality of children's books? There are several ways to answer these questions.

First, although children's books might seem simple, their simplicity is achieved through hard work by talented writers. Many people try to produce books for children, but the percentage of manuscripts that are actually published is unbelievably small. In a recent year, one major publishing house received five thousand unsolicited manuscripts and published two of them.



### TEACHING IDEA 1.2

#### INTERTEXTUALITY!

"Intertextuality" is a term for the similarities between stories—the features like the problem situation (such as children being left at home alone), the plot structure (the hero as least-likely-to-succeed going on a quest and proving himself or herself a hero), the pattern of actions (such as one thing leading to another), the kinds of characters (such as a trickster spider), or even important details (such as a piece of clothing that identifies the true hero).

Read one of these collections of stories to children; then lead the class in completing a Venn diagram (two interlocking circles) about them.

#### For kindergarten through grade 3:

- *Hattie and the Fox*, by Mem Fox
- *The Little Red Hen*, retold and illustrated by Paul Galdone

It's not just the chicken heroes! It's also the pattern of the chicken-hero going to one character after another, and having them give the same lazy response that makes these stories similar.

#### For older students:

- *The Children's Homer*, by Padraic Colum
- *The Homecoming*, by Cynthia Voigt
- *Bud, Not Buddy*, by Christopher Paul Curtis
- *Parvana's Journey*, by Deborah Ellis

Here the pattern to observe is *the journey*. What sends each character or set of characters on their way? What discouragements and distractions do they face along the way? What faith sustains them? How do they grow and change as they travel? What turns out to be more important: the arrival or the journey?

COMMON CORE STANDARD:  
*Integration of Knowledge and  
Ideas, STANDARD 9*

Award-winning author Katherine Paterson (1983) compares writing a children's book to composing music. She suggests that a good children's book is like a score for a chamber quartet, rather than a work for a full symphony. The work for the chamber quartet is less elaborate, but if its melodies are pleasing and its harmonies apt, it will have no less quality than a full orchestral work. In the same way, a good children's book will have fewer layers of complexity than a good book for adults, but if it is created with great care, it can also have excellence.

Second, because much of our contemporary children's literature grew out of the folktales from oral traditions, children's books contain many timeless stories that know no age boundaries. In *The Anatomy of Criticism*, Northrop Frye (1957) wrote that all literature is one fabric, woven of many strands of plot, image, and theme that have been told over and over in stories around the world, throughout all time. The most essential stories—those that tell of virtue rewarded, of straying into danger and struggling to get back out, of learning to distinguish the things of lasting value, of finding one's true qualities and putting them to the service of others—are the materials out of which all literature is made. They are found in their purest form in myths and folktales from around the world, and in books for children.

Third, children's books are worthy of serious study because the education of children warrants society's best energies. Good books will help children by making them literate, giving them knowledge of the world and empathy for those with whom they share it, offering them stories and images to furnish their minds and nurture their imaginations, and kindling their appreciation for language used well. Given such worthy goals, such literature deserves attention and respect.

What makes a book a children's book? A children's book usually has these qualities:

- ① A child protagonist and an issue that concerns children. A children's book usually has a central character that is the age of the intended audience. Children identify more easily with one of their own. Even when the central character is not a child—as in "Cinderella," for example—children need to feel that the central issues of a story concern them in some way.
- ② A straightforward story line, with a linear and limited time sequence in a confined setting. Books for younger children usually focus on one or two main characters, cover short time sequences (they are usually—but not always—told straight through from problem to solution, without flashbacks), and most often are set in one place. When writing for older children, authors gradually take more license with time sequences and may interweave more than one plot strand, as Louis Sachar does in *Holes*.
- ③ Language that is concrete and vivid and not overly complex. The words in children's books—especially in picture books—primarily name actors and actions. Books without pictures need to have more verbal description to help children visualize characters and settings. They use dialogue to move the story along. And they give glimpses of the characters' motives. In all these cases, readers see more of what characters do than of what they say, and certainly more of both than of what they think.

### *Qualities of Outstanding Children's Literature*

What makes a good children's book? Qualities that make outstanding children's books apply to excellent literature for any age. If a book satisfies the following criteria, it is a good children's book:

- Good books expand awareness. Good books give children names for things in the world and for their own experiences. Good books take children inside other people's perspectives and let children "walk two moons" in their shoes. They broaden children's understanding of the world and their capacity for empathy.

- Good books provide an enjoyable read that doesn't overtly teach or moralize. Many children's books turn out to be about something—to have themes, in fact—and it is often possible to derive a lesson from them. But if a book seems too deliberately contrived in order to teach a lesson, children (and critics) will not tolerate it.
- Good books tell the truth. Outstanding children's books usually deal with significant truths about the human experience. Moreover, the characters in them are true to life, and the insights the books imply are accurate, perhaps even wise.
- Good books embody quality. The words are precisely chosen and often poetic in their sound and imagery; the plot is convincing, the characters believable, and the description telling.
- Good books have integrity. The genre, plot, language, characters, style, theme, and illustrations, if any, all come together to make a satisfying whole.
- Good books show originality. Excellent children's books introduce readers to unique characters or situations or show them the world from a unique viewpoint; they stretch the minds of readers, giving them new ways to think about the world and new possibilities to consider.

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## Children's Books and Childhood

The criteria for excellence just outlined have not always held true. That is because the life stage of childhood has evolved throughout history as adults changed their definition of *childhood* and their views of young people. Literature for children has changed, too, following the fortunes of childhood as a life stage. As Victor Watson writes, "Children's books reflect and are bound up in cultural changes; they are particularly susceptible to developing assumptions about the nature of childhood, adolescence, and education" (2001, p. vi).

### — *Children in the Middle Ages*

It has been said that until roughly five hundred years ago, childhood as we know it did not exist in the West (Aries, 1962). That is because up until the Renaissance, children's activities—the games they played and the stories they heard—were not separated from those of adults.

Children drank alcoholic beverages, smoked tobacco, and used coarse language. After the age of seven, most children were made to work in the kitchen, in the fields, or in shops. When the village storyteller could be persuaded to tell a tale, children and adults alike gathered around to hear it. In medieval England, games such as Red Rover could involve people of all ages in a village.

It is not surprising, then, that books were not written expressly for children in those times. The few children who could read had no choice but to turn to adult fare. The ballad "Robin Hood," for example, was known as far back as 1360 A.D., and three printed versions of the legend existed before 1534. Child readers, then as now, enjoyed and accepted the romantic concept of robbing the rich to help the poor. Other romantic stories circulating at the time were those about King Arthur and the Knights of the Round Table and about Bevis, a thirteenth-century hero who hacked his way out of dungeons and slew dragons.

— In 1476, William Caxton established the first printing press in England, and in 1477, he published one of the earliest books expressly for children. Called *A Booke of Curtesye*, it was filled with do's and don'ts for an audience of aristocratic boys preparing for social engagements and military careers.

## Ask the Critic . . . Betsy Hearne

Some critics, such as Northrop Frye and E. D. Hirsch, Jr., maintain that there are some stories that all Western children could benefit from being exposed to. Do you agree? Do you believe there are some core stories or works that all children should know, or do you see the issue another way?

The idea of canonizing stories that all Western children should know is understandably controversial. On the one hand, this would solve problems in defining curriculum, testing educational achievement, and establishing cultural frames of reference in a multicultural environment. Yet realizing such an idea raises as many questions as it answers. Literature is not a science with objective, quantifiable standards of measurement. Who will decide which stories belong in the canon? How do we incorporate individual differences (both adults' and children's) into the subjective task of assessing a story's importance? Is it possible to reconcile myriad conflicting values in a small selection or, conversely, reflect representative values in a large selection? In terms of use, a core of "approved" stories is bound to take precedence over other texts. What are the implications for publishing new texts? And how long do we wait before inducting a story? Some books and stories that are now considered classics met with a negative reaction when they were first published. This includes traditional fairy tales, picture books such as *Where the Wild Things Are*, and many examples of fiction across two centuries.

On the practical front, what are the effects of mandating stories to creative teachers, who may find such a prescription stifling? Sometimes it is more effective to study one story in depth, establishing a process and a set of principles that can then be applied broadly, than to cover a predetermined core, which can easily become an exercise in superficial exposure. Certainly, the identification of a canon of



*Betsy Hearne*

stories, those that have appealed to both critics and children over a long period of time, would require a balanced emphasis on the often warring factors of high quality and general appeal.

Proponents of a clearly defined—and, by implication, required—body of stories common to all children either believe that these questions are answerable or believe that the disadvantages of compromise are worth the advantages of commonality. My own experience of reviewing, teaching, and storytelling over several decades has persuaded me that adult consensus on these issues is rare, if not impossible, and that children and stories are a

quirky, unpredictable match depending on personality, peer group, family environment, and many other factors. Of course every child needs some stories. But selecting the same stories for "all Western children" involves the kind of generalized social and aesthetic assumptions that have plagued efforts to establish a literary canon in higher education. I would suggest that a buffet of stories, from which children and adults can choose together, is preferable to a set menu.

Betsy Hearne is a professor in the Graduate School of Library and Information Science at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, where she teaches children's literature and storytelling. She is the author of numerous articles and books, including *Choosing Books for Children: A Commonsense Guide*; the folktale anthology *Beauties and Beasts*; several novels for children (most recently *Listening for Leroy and Wishes, Kisses, and Pigs*); and a picture book, *Seven Brave Women*, which won the 1998 Jane Addams Children's Book Award. The former children's book editor of *Booklist* and of *The Bulletin of the Center for Children's Books*, she has reviewed books for thirty years and contributes regularly to the *New York Times Book Review*.

### *Children in Puritan Times*

By the seventeenth century, more works were being written for children, but most did not make for enjoyable reading. The Puritans, the stern religious exiles who established the English colonies in America, infused early American children's works with their certainty that the devil could enter young bodies. They even wrote poems exalting death at an early age—better to die innocent than grow up and be corrupted. Given the didactic and fiery messages of Puritan authors, it is not surprising that most of their works are no longer read. Here is an example of Puritan prose written in 1702 by one Thomas Parkhurst:

My dear Children, consider what comfort it will be unto you when you have come to dye, that when other children have been playing, you have been praying. The time will come, for ought you know very shortly, . . . when thou shalt be sick upon thy bed, and thou shalt be struggling for life, thy poor little body will be trembling, so that the very bed will shake under thee, thine eyestrings will break, and then thy heartstrings will break; . . . then, O then, the remembrance of thy holy life will give thee reassurance of the love of God.

Despite this bleak view, nonetheless, there were some bright moments. Books were generally instructional and religious in nature, but many writers did sugarcoat their instruction with rhymes, riddles, and good stories. Also, children continued to find adult fare to their liking. John Bunyan's Christian allegory, *Pilgrim's Progress*, was read for centuries. What made it palatable to children was its portrayal of a sense of family. Children are presumed to have skipped over the lengthy religious commentary to savor the happy family life. Indeed, the story of Christian can still hold the imagination of children who read the adapted, abridged, and illustrated versions.

Children of the fifteenth to eighteenth centuries also turned to hornbooks and chapbooks for their reading fare. In both England and America, peddlers traveled from town to town selling items such as pots, pans, needles, medicine, and hornbooks—which looked like paddles, averaged two and a half by five inches, were usually made of wood, and often were attached to a leather thong so that children could hang them around the neck or wrist. The lesson sheet or story was pasted onto the flat surface, and then covered with horn, a film of protective material similar to animal horn. Hornbooks were filled with lessons in religion, manners, the alphabet, and reading.

The same traveling salesmen who peddled hornbooks inspired the invention of chapbooks ("chap" is derived from the word "cheap"). Chapbooks were made of folded sheets of paper and were inexpensive to produce and light to carry. They contained popular stories of the day, such as "Jack, the Giant Killer," "The History of Sir Richard Whittington," and "Saint George and the Dragon," and also large numbers of cautionary tales, illustrating the do's and don'ts of childhood. Contemporary author Gail E. Haley has written and illustrated *Dream Peddler*, about a fictitious chapbook peddler who was proud of his profession because he gave children fairy tales and adventures to cultivate their dreams.

### *Children in the Enlightenment*

In 1693, John Locke published *Some Thoughts Concerning Education*, which influenced child-rearing practices on both sides of the Atlantic. The book's exhortation that "some easy pleasant book" be given to children was good for the circulation of children's books. Nonetheless, the books still promoted strict moralistic teachings, if in narrative form.

➤ At the dawn of the eighteenth century, more playful and pleasurable literature began to emerge. The verses of Isaac Watts were popular, and although to a contemporary ear they sound overly moralistic and didactic, for their time they

were less so than those of his predecessors. In 1743, Mary Cooper published *The Child's New Plaything, Being a Spelling Book Intended to Make the Learning to Read a Diversion*. An American edition of the book came out in 1750 with even more "diversions," reflecting a change in how stories for children were perceived. *The New England Primer*, which combined alphabet and catechism, was the most widely read book of the period, another indication of the instructive mindset of the eighteenth century.

During this period, children also continued to read books written for adults. Many of Daniel Defoe's works were popular with children. In fact, *The Life and Surprising Adventures of Robinson Crusoe of York, Marine*, with its fearless optimism and high adventure, proved popular with children for the better part of two centuries.<sup>4</sup> Jonathan Swift's *Gulliver's Travels*, published in 1726, is another book that was written for adults but adopted by children. Although the book is filled with heavy satire that reflects Swift's quarrels with the imperfections of humankind in general and Englishmen in particular, its language and plot are irresistible.

- Two and half centuries ago, an innovative entrepreneur named John Newbery (1713–1767) prepared the way for the blossoming of children's literature in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Newbery moved to London in 1744 and launched the first commercially successful company dedicated almost exclusively to publishing beautiful and pleasurable children's books. In his thirty-year career, Newbery published twenty titles for children in attractive, playful formats, including the accordion book, made of one long strip folded accordion-style to form "pages." He was the first to introduce illustrations by first-rate artists, and he published books in more permanent, attractive bindings than the popular, less expensive chapbooks.

In 1922, Frederick Melcher, the founder of *Publisher's Weekly*, made a donation to the American Library Association to establish an annual award for the most distinguished contribution to literature for children. Fittingly, the award was named after John Newbery. (A list of the award winners and the honor books over the past eight decades appears on our accompanying website.)

Newbery is believed also to have written some of the books he published, including *A Little Pretty Pocket-Book* and *The History of Little Goody Two-Shoes*. Read for the better part of a century in England and the United States, *Little Goody Two-Shoes* was the first best seller written for children (and one of the longest lasting). The book might not be familiar to you, but the phrase "goody two shoes" is still used to mean a person with overly refined behavior.

### *The "Golden Age of Children's Literature"*

As the example of *Little Goody Two-Shoes* illustrates, children's books up until the 1800s were often strongly didactic—if not downright preachy. But in the 1800s, books for children became more entertaining. In the 1800s, delightful works written expressly for children emerged that still rank among the most popular books of all time. During the long reign of Queen Victoria from 1837 to her death in 1901, England enjoyed a period of stability. Parents began to sentimentalize childhood, creating what has been called "the cult of childhood." Some of the very best writers created books for children. Books written in the nineteenth century that still circulate briskly include Clement Moore's *The Night Before Christmas* (published in 1823), Hans Christian Andersen's *The Ugly Duckling* and *The Little Mermaid* (translated into English in 1846), Lewis Carroll's *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* (published in 1865), Louisa May Alcott's *Little Women* (published in 1868), Mark Twain's *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer* (published in 1876), Randolph Caldecott's *The House That Jack Built* (1878), Carlo Collodi's *The Adventures of Pinocchio* (1881), Robert Louis Stevenson's *Treasure Island* (1883), Joel Chandler Harris' *Uncle Remus: His Songs and Sayings* (1883), and Rudyard Kipling's *The Jungle Book* (1894).



## TEACHING IDEA 1.3

### EXPLORING LITERATURE FROM THE GOLDEN AGE

Authors writing children's literature a century ago often used more elaborate language than contemporary children's book authors do. Such writing had its own virtue. Here is an experiment. For students in third grade and above, read a section from Kenneth Grahame's original *The Wind in the Willows*—the chapter "Dulce Domus" will do fine. Tell the children a little bit about the characters: Ratty is a "Hail fellow, well met" type who has invited his new friend Mole for an outing in the countryside, and now they are making their way home. Mole, of course, is naturally timid, and might have preferred to stay home in the first place. Ask the students to listen carefully and try to picture the scene in their minds. After you have finished reading, have them tell you what they envisioned. It may help to have them draw the scene first. Afterwards, ask if Grahame's writing "worked" for them.

COMMON CORE STANDARD:  
Craft and Structure,  
STANDARD 4

This "Golden Age" of children's literature continued up until the 1920s. The early 1900s saw the publication of L. Frank Baum's *The Wizard of Oz* (1900), Beatrix Potter's *The Tale of Peter Rabbit* (1902), James Barrie's *Peter Pan in Kensington Garden* (1906), Kenneth Grahame's *The Wind in the Willows* (1908), Frances Hodgson Burnett's *The Secret Garden* (1910), Hugh Lofting's *The Story of Doctor Dolittle* (1920), Margery Williams' *The Velveteen Rabbit* (1922), and A. A. Milne's *Winnie the Pooh* (1926).

Although the "Golden Age" as a sort of distant period of excellence in children's literature may have ended with Milne, many other much-beloved books, especially picture books, emerged in the decades that followed. Hardie Gramatky's *Little Toot* came out in 1931.\* Dr. Seuss (Theodor Geisel) published *And to Think That I Saw It on Mulberry Street* and J. R. R. Tolkien published *The Hobbit* in 1937. Virginia Lee Burton's *Mike Mulligan and His Steam Shovel* dates from 1939, the same year Ludwig Bemelmans' *Madeline* appeared. Robert McCloskey's *Make Way for Ducklings* and H. A. Rey's *Curious George* both came out in 1941. Eleanor Estes won the Newbery Award with *The Hundred Dresses* in 1944. C. S. Lewis' *The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe* was published in 1950, and E. B. White's *Charlotte's Web* followed two years later. All

of these books are so popular with contemporary children that it may be hard to believe they delighted their great-grandparents, too.

### Contemporary Children's Books



There is one obvious distinction between most of the books published for children through the 1950s and those that followed. Up until the early 1960s, in the United States, children's literature featured white children almost exclusively. Then in 1965, with the civil rights movement awakening mainstream Americans to the realization that their conception of "us" was largely limited to white, English-speaking children, Nancy Larrick wrote a path-breaking article for the *Saturday Review* in which she pointed out the paucity of nonwhite characters in books for children.\* Shortly afterward, the Council on Interracial Books for Children was established, with the goal of persuading writers and artists of color to produce works for children.\* In 1982, the American Library Association added to its Newbery and Caldecott Awards the Coretta Scott King Award, to celebrate books that honorably and accurately depict African American children (see Chapter 4).

These efforts opened the door to a wealth of talent. Not only has the representation of minority children in English-language children's literature increased substantially in the last thirty years, but the writers and artists of color who have broken into print are among the best we have. Children's books are written by, and feature, African Americans, Latinos, Asian Americans, and Native Americans, as well as children from families of limited means and those who otherwise depart from the older stereotype of white, middle-class, two-parent homes. Far more international literature is available for the American child reader—especially books from Latin America and Asia—and these books are written with greater sensitivity than in the past. Mostly gone are the stereotypical depictions of people from other continents; the norm is to have people from other cultures either write their own books or be portrayed as they would present themselves. Indeed, a whole subfield of multicultural

children's literature has emerged to help librarians, teachers, and parents take advantage of the multicultural works that are available. (Chapter 4 of this book is devoted to that subject.)

Even as the "Golden Age of Children's Literature" was in full flower, there were, as Prime Minister Benjamin Disraeli acknowledged, "Two Nations" in nineteenth century England. The children of the aristocrats and the growing middle class were delving with delight into these wonderful new children's books, while the children of the poor from the age of five were working 16-hour days in the mines and factories. Today in North America, children's books are not enjoyed by all children, either—at least not in their homes. Although children's literature in America has exploded with color and diversity, many American children rarely see a children's book or hear one read aloud at home (Hart & Risley, 1995; Heath, 1983).

## The Genres of Children's Literature

Genre in literature corresponds to the rules of play in a game: If you know the genre you are reading, you know what kinds of actions and realities to expect, and which ones are not allowed. But herein lies a problem: Rules (in games or in literature) are sometimes broken. The breaking of genre rules—or the blurring of genre lines—in literature results in what has been called *blended genres*, *mixed genres*, or *hybrid books*. While this is not a new phenomenon in literature, it seems to be occurring with increasing frequency.

One example of genre blending is the time travel book, in which a character is transported through time to another era or to a fantasy world. In Jane Yolen's *The Devil's Arithmetic* (2004), the story begins as a contemporary family gathers for a Passover Seder. Soon Hannah, the story's protagonist, is transported to a Polish village in 1940, where she is captured by the Nazis and taken to a death camp. In Susan Cooper's *King of Shadows*, the protagonist travels to contemporary England with an American drama troupe, only to find himself transported 400 years back in time to Shakespeare's London. Young readers also enjoy this type of blended genre, as evidenced by the popularity of series such as Jon Scieszka's *Time Warp Trio* series.

Magical realism is yet another example of genre blending. In magical realism the author creates a believable, realistic setting and then infuses elements into that setting that stretch the boundaries of believability. For example, in Polly Horvath's *The Pepins and Their Problems*, readers encounter a cow that produces lemonade. Cornelia Funke's *The Thief Lord* is largely a realistic story about two orphaned boys who run away to modern-day Venice and join a community of street children. Only at the end of story do magical elements come into play in this suspenseful adventure.

What is of particular note in contemporary children's literature is the way in which lines are being blurred across an increasingly wider range of genres. More and more contemporary authors are blurring the lines between poetry and other genres. In *Out of the Dust*, author Karen Hesse (1999) blends poetry and historical fiction, using free verse poetry to tell the story of the hardships faced by young Billie Jo in the midst of the Dust Bowl during the Great Depression. In *Dark Sons*, author Nikki Grimes (2005) further blurs genre boundaries as she uses free verse poetry to tell the story of two boys—modern day Sam and the Biblical Ishmael. In *Song of the Water Boatman and Other Pond Poems*,

ILLUSTRATION 1.3 Polly Horvath's *The Pepins and Their Problems* is written in a mix of genres. (Book cover of "The Pepins and Their Problems" by Polly Horvath, illustrated by Marilyn Hafner. Square Fish [an imprint of Macmillan. All rights reserved.], 2008. (ISBN:0312377517).)



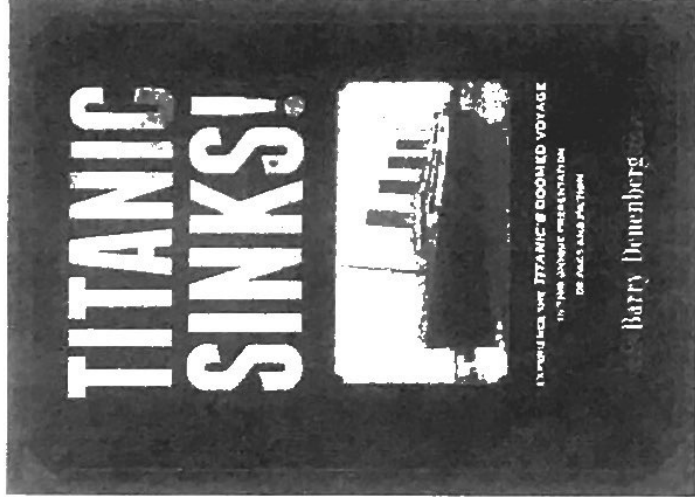


ILLUSTRATION 1.4 In *Titanic Sinks!* Barry Denenberg blurs the line between fact and fiction by creating a newspaper called the *Modern Times* that is used to convey information about the Titanic. ("Titanic Sinks!" by Barry Denenberg. Used by permission of Penguin Group (USA) Inc. All rights reserved.)

Joyce Sidman (2005) combines poetry and nonfiction. Sidman uses a variety of poetic forms to celebrate the plants and creatures commonly found in ponds. Each poem is accompanied by a paragraph that provides scientific information about the featured creature or plant.

In Jason Chin's picture book, *Coral Reefs*, a young girl at the library begins reading a book about coral reefs and suddenly finds herself immersed in the ocean and surrounded by plants and animals of the sea. So a fantasy framework becomes the vehicle for conveying information about the ocean.<sup>4</sup> The line between fantasy and nonfiction are also blended in the popular *Magic School Bus* series by Joanna Cole.

While there has been some criticism of the blurring of genre boundaries in books such as these, we believe that children can readily distinguish between fact and fiction. Children know that school buses cannot really shrink down and carry the passengers into the human body! However, the blurring of boundaries can sometimes be cause for concern. In *Titanic Sinks!* Barry Denenberg (2011) blurs the line between fact and fiction by creating a newspaper called the *Modern Times*, which becomes the vehicle for conveying information about the Titanic. The author also infuses "journal entries" written by the editor of this fictitious newspaper throughout the book, which is made to appear to be a work of nonfiction by the inclusion of actual photographs from the era.<sup>5</sup> And while the cover of the book notes that the book is a blend of "fact and fiction," young readers may not have the sophistication to untangle this blending.

## Children's Books and English Language Learners

Two thirds of English language learners in American schools are born in the United States. But among those who were born elsewhere, as well as many who have grown up in relatively isolated communities in the United States, there are quite a few who may find books written for North American children to be puzzling or off-putting.

The genres of American children's books may be unfamiliar. In the countries outside North and South America, Europe, Australia and New Zealand, and Japan, realistic fiction is rarely found, so children from other parts of the world may be confused by books that *seem* true to life in every respect but actually are not true. Science fiction and fantasy genres may be unfamiliar, too. You may need to take the time to explain those genres to English language learners. Folktales, on the other hand, are common virtually everywhere.

The qualities of good children's books we described earlier in this chapter may not apply to stories that children from other parts of the world have heard or read. For example, books that are popular with children from Argentina, Mexico, and other Spanish-speaking countries may be startlingly unpredictable instead of linear, because their authors equate an unfettered imagination with creativity.

The moral orientation of American children's books may seem odd. Authors of mainstream children's literature in America downplay moral teaching, leaving room

for readers to derive their own truths, but children raised in traditional societies more often expect stories to have clear moral messages.

The initiative taking and individualism of characters in American children's books may run counter to the cultural norms in many traditional societies, where children are taught to be stringently obedient to adults. Children from such cultures may find it hard to identify with characters like Marry in Phyllis Reynolds Naylor's *Shiloh* (2010), Opal in Kate DiCamillo's *Because of Winn-Dixie* (2010), and Jennifer Holm's *Turtle in Paradise* (2010), each of whom is depicted with a strongly individualistic personality; in addition, each of these characters formulates and carries out plans that are daringly independent of adults.

## Censorship: Which Books Will Make It into Children's Hands?

All teachers make decisions about which books to put into children's hands. Of course, teachers choose books that they think will interest children and that will appeal to the children's level of understanding. Of course, they choose books that they think have some sort of merit. But at the same time teachers make some books available, they deny children access to others. When teachers deny children access to books because they think those books are too risqué or controversial or when other adults put pressure on teachers to deny access to certain books, then we are dealing with the issue of censorship.

Simply put, censorship means to deny someone access to books or ideas (Naylor, 1991).<sup>1</sup> The First Amendment of the Constitution of the United States states: "Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof; or abridging the freedom of speech, or of the press. . . ." This language suggests that individual freedom is at issue whenever teachers or other school officials deny children access to written materials. But many parents claim the right to expect teachers not to expose children to material on topics that the parents would rather handle more delicately at home or keep away from their children altogether. Teachers, for their part, may choose to introduce children to a book they know will stretch their minds and not to share books they consider trashy. Whose rights should prevail? And how should the issue of rights be squared with the requirements of responsible education?

Some topics seem to raise more pressures for censorship than others, and the controversial topics are not always the ones we might expect. In society at large, the areas in which the media feel the most pressure for censorship are sex and violence, especially in our entertainment. These topics seem to cause less controversy in schools, though (Traw, 1996), perhaps because there is something closer to a consensus among parents and teachers that books with more than trace amounts of sex and violence should not be circulated at school. It is true that there is the occasional book such as Judy Blume's *Forever* that describes sexual acts (and, sure enough, this book has suffered campaigns to get it off the shelves). But for the most part, in children's literature, sex is off limits, and few people want to argue about it. Other bodily functions seem to escape censorship, however. Taro Gomi's *Everyone Poops* and Shinta Cho's *The Gas We Pass* are sometimes found in school,

ILLUSTRATION 1.5 Books like the popular *Captain Underpants* series that deal with bodily functions are, surprisingly, seldom censored in schools. (Scholastic, Inc.)



## TOP SHELF 1.1

### TOUCHSTONE BOOKS FOR DIFFERENT AGES

#### Early Childhood Books

Cabrera, Jane (2005).

*If You're Happy and*

*You Know It Clap Your Hands.*

Dunrea, Olivier (2002).

*Gossie and Gertie.*

#### Preschool

Bang, Molly. (2004). *When*

*Sophie Gets Angry.*

Carle, Eric. (1981). *The Very Hungry Caterpillar.*

Ehlert, Lois. (1993). *Eating the Alphabet.*

Finch, Mary. (2001). *The*

*Three Billy Goats Gruff.*

Illustrated by Roberta Aronson.

Willem, Mo. (2004).

*Knuffle Bunny.*

#### Primary (books for learning to read)

DiCamillo, Kate. (2007).

*Mercy Watson: Princess in Disguise.* Illustrated by

Chris Van Dusen.

Rylant, Cynthia. (2006).

*Mr. Putter and Tabby*

*Make a Wish.* Illustrated by Arthur Howard.

Seeger, Laura Vaccaro.

(2007). *First the Egg.*

(continued)

and Dav Pilkey's *Captain Underpants* series, with titles such as *Captain Underpants and the Perilous Plot of Professor Poopyants*, is freely distributed during "Drop Everything and Read" time, even (especially!) in third grade.

The surprisingly difficult issue is religion. Religion seems to come up in two ways. We are familiar with the direct way, as exemplified by the state school board of Kansas's decision (later overturned) to require biology teachers to teach Creationism—the biblically based doctrine that God really did create man and woman in his own image—and not evolution—the theory that human beings descended from pre-human primates. The Louisiana Science Education Act allows but does not require teachers in that state to teach Creationism (and also to challenge the science behind claims that human activity has influenced climate change). Usually, religious censorship comes up in less direct ways, as groups of parents and other citizens campaign against books that they believe spread antireligious ideas. Especially vulnerable to censorship are books about magic and witches.

• The *Harry Potter* books and even Tomie dePaola's *Strega Nona* books have evoked campaigns for removal from school libraries by people who believe the descriptions of magic that permeate them are not harmless fun but suggestive of Satanism. Sometimes the criticisms miss the target entirely. For instance, the storyteller Joseph Bruchac described visiting a school district in South Dakota where a citizens' group had demanded that the school remove all books from the library having to do with Transcendentalism. (The parents apparently confused the nineteenth-century literary movement led by Ralph Waldo Emerson with a popular method of meditation.) But whether the groups bringing complaints about books have done their homework or not, schools and teachers need to be prepared to defend their choice of books.

Arguments over religion and alleged Satanism may deflect attention from another kind of passive censorship that is also serious: What are we leaving out? James Loewen filled a book with teachings that were either distorted in or missing altogether from the typical American school curriculum. He entitled his book *Lies My Teacher Told Me: Everything Your American History Textbook Got Wrong* (Loewen, 1996). If our children are going to sharpen their minds and forge better ways of living in the future, they will need access to materials that challenge the status quo. But teachers who have been beleaguered by parents upset about *Strega Nona* or *Harry Potter* might not be very daring when it comes to looking at the true story of Christopher Columbus, the struggle to improve working conditions in America, or even the constructive role religion has played in U.S. life. Because censorship removes from consideration materials that might stretch children's minds, the American Library Association (ALA) has issued statements opposing it. Here is why:

#### ✱ Why is censorship harmful?

Censorship is harmful because it results in the opposite of true education and learning. In the process of acquiring knowledge and searching for truth, students can learn to discriminate—to make decisions rationally and logically in light of the evidence. By suppressing all materials containing ideas or themes with which they do not agree, censors produce a sterile conformity and a lack of intellectual and emotional growth in students. (ALA web page, November 2, 2000)



What seems clear is that in some districts, at least, there is less of a consensus about what schools should teach and less trust on the part of the parents than there was before the drumbeat of critiques of U.S. schools that began in the 1980s. How should teachers conduct themselves in the face of the occasional demands for censorship of children's reading fare in the schools?

We recommend the following steps:

1. Stay aware of what is in your classroom library and the groups of books you assign, and know why they are there. You should be confident that the books

you are making available have literary merit, are enjoyable, raise interesting and important themes, and broaden children's awareness of people and places and events. You should be confident that they are not mean spirited, racist, or prurient.

2. Make sure that your school has responsible guidelines for choosing books. One source of such guidelines is the National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE). NCTE has a special section on their Web site devoted to the topic of censorship, including suggested guidelines for choosing materials for students to read <[www.ncte.org/censorship](http://www.ncte.org/censorship)>.
3. Be prepared to speak up for the contribution that good books make to children's education. Also be prepared to explain the benefit to individual children and to society as a whole when students learn to distinguish what is worthwhile from what is not worthwhile and to entertain ideas and points of view that are different from their own.
4. Realize that others may disagree with your choice of a certain book, for reasons they believe are right. Be prepared to recognize their concern for their child and to respect that concern.
5. Be aware that, should the choice of books in your classroom or school be criticized in ways that you believe are unfair or misguided, and should calm conversation not resolve the problem, there are resources that can help. One is the American Library Association (ALA), which has an Office for Intellectual Freedom <[www.ala.org](http://www.ala.org)>; the Office for Intellectual Freedom is also found on the ALA Web site. Another source of help is the National Council of Teachers of English <[www.ncte.org](http://www.ncte.org)>.

## Resources for Children's Books

Studying children's literature in college differs in many ways from studying other literature, especially in that the focus is turned as much or more toward contemporary books for children as it is toward great works of the past. That is because—with the explosion in the number of books published for children, improvements in the technology of color reproduction, and a growing diversity in the range of people children need to know and care about—many of the very best books for contemporary children have appeared in the past twenty years. And they continue to be published every year. Therefore, to be well read in children's books, you must read backwards and forwards: Read the best of the books already published, and read the best of those just coming out. For the best books already published, you can count on the Recommended Books section at the end of each chapter (especially those in Chapters 5–11). The most important books in the development of each genre are discussed in each chapter in the section on historical development. If you want a historical perspective on children's literature, you should read those books as well. But what of the new books? How can you find your way to those that are best?

Several journals review children's books and promote the best ones. These journals, which include *The Horn Book Magazine*, *School Library Journal*, *Booklist*, and *Bookbird* as well as the book review sections of several professional magazines such as *The Reading Teacher* and *Language Arts*, have slightly different emphases and target audiences. Journals published by other teachers' organizations such as the National Council for the Social Studies <[www.ncss.org](http://www.ncss.org)> and the National Science Teachers Association <[www.nsta.org](http://www.nsta.org)> also list children's books that are keyed to topics from those subject areas.

Shaw, Nancy. (1997). *Sheep in a Jeep*. Illustrated by Margot Apple.

Willem, Mo. (2007). *I Am Invited to a Party*.

Wood, Audrey. (1999). *Silly Sally*.

Primary (books for reading aloud)

Avi. (2008). *The End of the Beginning: Being the Adventure of a Small Snail (and an Even Smaller Ant)*.

Cronin, Doreen. (2000).

*Click, Clack, Moo: Cows That Type*. Illustrated by Betsy Lewin.

Henkes, Kevin. (1996). *Lilly's Purple Plastic Purse*.

Steig, William. (1990). *Doctor De Soto*.

Upper Elementary

Browne, Anthony. (2001). *Voices in the Park*.

Creech, Sharon. (2002). *Love that Dog*.

Sachar, Louis. (1998). *Holes*.

Wiles, Deborah. (2001). *Love, Ruby Lavender*.

Middle School

Avi. (1991). *Nothing But the Truth*.

Bartoletti, Susan Campbell. (2005). *Hitler Youth*.

Curtis, Christopher Paul. (1999). *Bud, Not Buddy*.

Walker, Sally M. (2005). *Secrets of a Civil War Submarine*.