Selecting High Quality Urban Children’s Literature to Engage Beginning Readers

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Choosing texts: Assessing text quality

Selecting High Quality Children’s Literature with Urban Settings and Themes

1. Overview of criteria
2. Practice reviews
3. Share strong and weak examples
4. Critique of images and availability
Brainstorm book titles or authors
(contemporary realistic fiction)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Picture Books</th>
<th>Short chapter/Single</th>
<th>Short chapter/Series</th>
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What prompted the project?
What’s so important about familiar texts?

- Emergent literacy skills/oral language and literacy
  - Concepts about print
  - Linguistic Awareness
  - Relating speech to print

- Familiar schema for story comprehension

- Maintaining interest and motivation

- Seeing self, family, community represented and valued

- Authors and illustrators like me
Development of the rating scale

- Guidelines for high quality children’s literature
  - Huck (1997)
  - Cullinan (1994)
  - Temple (1998)
  - Tomlinson (1996)

- Hefflin (2001)
- Boutte (2002)
- 10 Quick Ways to Avoid Racism and Sexism
Characteristics of high quality picture books with urban settings

**General characteristics**
Cover, character, plot, theme, language, illustrations

**Urban-specific characteristics**
- Accuracy of characters
- Familiar Context
- Familiar Language
- Authentic Urban Scenery
- Diversity of Characterization
- Diversity of Setting

(see handout for details)
Hot City

Barbara Joosse

Illustrated by
Accuracy of characters

but I don’t know exactly what they mean.
“What does ‘brave’ mean, Daddy?” I ask.
“It just means that you’re not afraid,” Daddy says.
When we sit down, I practice being brave.
Familiar Context
Familiar Language
Authentic Urban Scenery

BLACK CAT

By CHRISTOPHER MYER
crossing basketball courts and no-netted hoops
past the school,

Then they left.
Diversity of Characterization
Diversity of Setting

SOMETHING BEAUTIFUL
Sharon Dennis Wyeth
Illustrated by Chris K. Soentpiet
Book Exploration

• Take time to review a range of books
• Use general and urban characteristics of quality

1. Choose **one** excellent example to discuss

2. Choose **one** not-as-great example (for contrast)
Sharing Selections
Discussing race, class, and equity in children’s literature

• **Race – What do you notice?**
  
  Images of people of color, range of diversity in books with urban settings
  
  Presence of racial stereotype
  – What do Latino “cities” look like?
  – Where do we see Asian Americans?
  – Where are Native Americans, biracial characters, others?

• **Class – What do you notice?**
  
  White privilege in urban children’s literature
  – Where do white people in the city live?
  – What do white people do?

• **Equity – Where do you see these texts and stories?**
  
  – Exposure to familiar settings, authors, and illustrators in typical basal series
  – Availability of urban titles in big box stores and other outlets
  – Developmental gaps in availability of texts – e.g., short chapter books
Discussing race, class, and equity in children’s literature

• Race – What do you notice?
  
  Images of African Americans and other people of color

  Presence of racial stereotype
  – What do Latino “cities” look like?
  – Where do we see Asian Americans?
  – Where are Native Americans, biracial characters, others?

• Class – What do you notice?

  White privilege in urban children’s literature
  – Where do white people in the city live?
  – What do white people do?

• Equity – Where do you see these texts and stories?

  – Exposure to familiar settings, authors, and illustrators in basal series
  – Developmental gaps in availability of resources – short chapter books
Changes over time – e.g. *Time Warp Trio*
Thank you!

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