

From the



Volunteer Reader's Manual



Help! How do I judge if it is a good book?

A good book is one that you and your students enjoy, and that is appropriate in every way – reading difficulty level, subject matter, and emotional level. Here are a few things your favorites may have in common:

1. A clearly defined theme.

Memorable stories tend to explore ideas that humans can relate to, such as underdog characters, sibling rivalry, or dreams thwarted and later achieved. Good stories move us to experience a range of emotions.

2. A good plot.

Especially for young listeners, the action in a good book will move fast enough to hold attention. Tension in the story will build to a climax, which is resolved. Readers and listeners should feel satisfied at the end of the story.

3. Engaging language.

You could call it style. A variety of interesting words, pleasing sounds and rhythm, and vivid word pictures will make a good plot worth listening to. We want children to see the scene in their heads. Good authors can do this with words.

4. Characters.

Characters are believable, even if they are fanciful. As readers, we empathize with characters. To some degree, we share their struggles and successes.

5. Illustrations.

Illustrations are an important part of the story. They help children to learn new ideas. They reinforce or augment what children imagine. They also introduce readers to different styles of art.

6. Right listening level.

Remember that children can understand and



Jessica Silber of Kanawha County reads at Elk Elementary Center.

benefit from listening to a book that is a grade level or two beyond what they can read proficiently themselves. Too far, and they cannot follow it. Too easy, and they may lose interest.

7. Relevant and popular topics.

Read what you love and, through interaction with the class, discover what members of the class love, such as basketball or fantasy. Children respond well to books about subjects that interest them. Some readers like to find books that explore topics children have studied. Children also benefit from reading or listening to multiple books on the same subject. Readers are not required to match books to school lessons, but when it happens in a natural, enjoyable Read Aloud way, it can be a thrill for students to recognize something they have learned about and to build on that knowledge.

