

How to Find Books for Your Students . . . and for You

Increasing your knowledge of books for young people positively influences your ability to match students with books, but it can be overwhelming! There are thousands of books published for children and teens each year, and locating and evaluating books for students' independent reading and your instruction can require consulting multiple sources to find what you need. Consider the people and groups in your reading community, then investigate credible professional resources, reviewers, and publishers' information. Develop processes for evaluating books and recording your observations, so that you can build your collection intentionally over time.

Community Relationships

Community relationships might include

- colleagues,
- school librarian,
- students,
- families,
- public librarian, and
- bookstores.

The best way to discover books of interest to your students? Your community! Create an online spreadsheet for exchanging book recommendations with your school colleagues. Partner with your school librarian to locate books for instruction and read-alouds. Observe what books seem popular with your students this year. What topics or authors appeal to them? What books have gone viral in your classroom or school? Regularly invite students to exchange book recommendations through book talks, lists, and displays.

Outside of your school, talk with your local public librarians to borrow books and access library resources such as review publications and databases, award lists, and other book promotion and recommendation sites. Submit requests for specific titles, so that librarians can add them to the

collection as interest and budgeting permit. Support your local independent bookstores and chat with the staff about upcoming books and your students' needs and interests.

Expert Readers

Expert readers might include

- scholars,
- teachers and librarians,
- parenting communities, and
- online reading communities.

There is a large community of professional and amateur children's book reviewers and enthusiasts on the internet, including many teachers and librarians. Access to children's literature scholars and professional evaluators through online interactions and freely published resources like blogs offer an advanced education in book evaluation skills and how to use trade books in the classroom to anyone interested in learning more. Follow hashtags like Donalyn's #bookaday or #nerdybookclub to connect with more educators. When attending conferences or workshops, follow presenters and fellow attendees, as interested. Try out Goodreads, a social networking site for readers, which offers lists and groups for exchanging book recommendations and reviews.

A few of our go-to sources for book reviews as of the printing of this book:

American Indians in Children's Literature (<https://americanindiansinchildrensliterature.blogspot.com>): Run by Drs. Debbie Reese and Jean Mendoza, Native scholars of children's literature, AICL offers critical evaluations and reviews of books featuring Native children and stories.

Latinxs in Kid Lit (<https://latinosinkidlit.com>): Founded by Latinx educators and authors, this site offers reviews of children's and young adult literature featuring Latinx characters and creators, interviews with authors and illustrators, and frequent booklists and book talks.

Cotton Quilts (<https://edicottonquilt.com>): Run by former social studies teacher and school librarian and

now academic librarian Edith Campbell, this blog offers frequent lists and critical reviews of children's and young adult literature with an exclusive focus on books featuring BIPOC subjects and characters of color.

Nerdy Book Club (<https://nerdybookclub.wordpress.com>): Founded by Donalyn and her friend and collaborator Colby Sharp, the *Nerdy Book Club* blog provides reviews, lists, author and illustrator essays, teaching tips, and suggestions for engaging children with reading at school and home. It also offers a writing community for guest contributors.

Professional Resources

Professional resources might include

- book review publications,
- professional organizations, and
- newspapers and magazines.

Ask your school and public librarians about accessing online children's and young adult literature review publications. Many libraries subscribe to databases and periodicals. Professional review publications have consistent guidelines for reviewing books and reviewers have training and experience in evaluating books for both school use and pleasure reading. In addition to book review publications, many professional organizations for librarians and educators create lists of notable trade books for young readers. Check your state and regional associations in addition to the national groups listed here. Many periodicals such as newspapers and magazines regularly include professional book reviews, including titles for children.

Professional Children's and Young Adult Literature Review Publications

Booklist (www.booklistonline.com): Booklist Online is the web-based edition of *Booklist* magazine, published by the American Library Association. This website offers book reviews, expert opinion, thematic booklists, podcasts, and webinars for librarians and patrons. Starred reviews from Booklist are considered

an indicator of literary excellence by the children's and young adult literature and library fields.

The Horn Book (www.hbook.com): Founded in 1924, the Horn Book remains a prestigious source for children's book reviews, expert opinion, and booklists. The Horn Book publishes the Newbery, Caldecott, and Legacy Award winners' acceptance speeches each year and cosponsors the annual Boston Globe/Horn Book Awards, given to outstanding children's and young adult literature. Starred reviews from the Horn Book are considered an indicator of literary excellence by the children's and young adult literature and library fields.

Publishers Weekly (www.publishersweekly.com): *Publishers Weekly* is the professional trade magazine for the United States publishing industry and features deal announcements, publishing industry news, book reviews, booklists, and expert opinion. While this publication may not have as much relevance for teachers and librarians, starred reviews from *Publishers Weekly* are considered an indicator of literary excellence by the children's and young adult literature and library fields.

School Library Journal (www.slj.com): *School Library Journal* is the professional trade magazine for school librarians in the United States. *SLJ* features news articles and commentary of interest to school librarians, webinars, professional development resources, interviews and expert opinion, booklists, reviews, and roundups of online resources. Starred reviews from *SLJ* are considered an indicator of literary excellence by the children's and young adult literature and library fields.

Professional Organizations' Awards and Lists

American Library Association: *ALA Book, Print, and Media Awards* (www.ala.org/awardsgrants/awards): The ALA awards honor a wide range of publication types and include annual or biannual awards familiar to many families and educators, such as the Newbery and Caldecott Medals, the Coretta Scott King Award, and the Printz Award.

International Literacy Association: *Children's and Young Adults' Book Awards* (www.literacyworldwide.org)

/about-us/awards-grants/ila-children's-and-young-adults'-book-awards): These annual awards celebrate newly published authors and illustrators who show exemplary talent in creating books for young readers. Titles include primary, elementary, and secondary titles.

National Council of Teachers of English: *Children's Book and Poetry Awards* (<https://ncte.org/awards/ncte-childrens-book-awards/>): NCTE selects notable children's fiction, nonfiction, and poetry titles each year. Titles are chosen for their exemplary potential as English language arts instructional resources and students' independent reading selections.

National Council for the Social Studies: *Notable Social Studies Trade Books for Young People* (www.socialstudies.org/notable-social-studies-trade-books): This annual list includes engaging, diverse books for teaching and learning about social studies topics. While the current award year's list is available only to NCSS members, archived lists are open to all.

National Science Teachers Association: *Outstanding Science Trade Books for Students K–12* (www.nsta.org/outstanding-science-trade-books-students-k-12): Created in partnership with the Cooperative Children's Book Council, this annual list highlights books for teaching and learning about science.

Creators

Creators in children's and young adult literature are

- publishers,
- authors, and
- illustrators.

Many children's authors and illustrators use social media and other online platforms like blogs to connect with educators, families, and young readers about their books and other children's and young adult books they recommend. When you discover books of interest to your students and you, research the creators' websites and social media presence. Creators frequently host giveaways or offer extra resources like reading guides,

video interviews, and enrichment activities to support readers. Subscribe to artists' and publishers' YouTube channels and newsletter mailings for updates on their upcoming books.

Here are a few creators' sites that we use regularly as of the printing of this book:

The Brown Bookshelf (<https://thebrownbookshelf.com>): The Brown Bookshelf was founded by several Black children's book authors and illustrators to highlight Black creators writing books for young people. Each February, the website hosts 28 Days Later, a Black History Month celebration of children's literature. Daily posts feature different authors, illustrators, and books. Discover books and more creators to follow!

Cynsations (<https://cynthialeitichsmith.com/cynsations/>): Muscogee author, editor, and teacher Cynthia Leitich Smith regularly interviews other creators and curates resources on her blog, including support for teachers and librarians who are using her books. As the curator of Heart Drum Books, a Native-focused imprint from HarperCollins, Smith collaborates with many other Native creators and showcases their work on this site.

We Need Diverse Books (<https://diversebooks.org>): WNDB, a nonprofit organization supporting diverse creators, seeks to dismantle the inequities in children's publishing and increase equitable representation of historically minoritized people in books for young readers. Its website includes abundant resources for families and educators. Although the website does not publish reviews, the WNDB social media accounts continuously share and promote books and artists.

Now That You Have Discovered Some Potential Books . . .

Finding books of interest for your school community is only the first step. Once you've discovered some books, you'll need to prioritize book acquisitions based on your needs. Then evaluate potential books for use with students.

Select Books with Students in Mind

Throughout *The Joy of Reading*, we have explored topics like material selection (Chapter 2), leveling (Chapter 3), censorship (Chapter 2), and the need for equitable representation in the media shared with and promoted to students (Chapter 2). Please refer back to relevant sections as needed when selecting and evaluating books for your students.

Teachers and librarians often consider curriculum needs when choosing books to read and share with students. Books for whole-class and small-group reading experiences such as read-alouds and book clubs must necessarily incorporate themes and topics aligned with school subjects. Seek out texts for classroom use that are current and highly engaging to students. Beyond any academic criteria for choosing books, students' interest remains the most significant factor when selecting books. Student interest surveys, reading conferences, and conversations with families provide insight into students' personal tastes and interests. Ask yourself:

- What content will students learn this year? What books can support background knowledge building and inquiry?
- What topics interest students? What media do they enjoy? What other books have they enjoyed in the past? What would they like to read?
- What regional and local topics interest our community? What books reflect our communities' experiences and needs? What books can show our school families they are included at school?

Select Books That Are Accurate, Are Relevant, and Reflect Current Scholarship

The diversity of genres, formats, perspectives, and experiences available in books for young people is astounding. Never before have so many types of books existed and so many people shared their stories. It is impossible to evaluate every book yourself! Rely on expert opinion and evaluation tools for choosing books to ensure that students read high-quality, accurate texts that celebrate the world's people and foster reading enjoyment. Ask yourself:

- Do the books in my collection perpetuate biases and stereotypes or do they seek to dismantle them?
- Do the books in my collection include positive, inclusive, joyful portrayals of a wide range of people and experiences?

- How current is the collection, particularly the nonfiction?
- What are the systems, procedures, and resources employed for evaluating books?

Here are a few of our favorite resources when considering accuracy, relevancy, and currency in our collections, as of the printing of this book:

“Checklist: 8 Steps to Creating a Diverse Book Collection,” by Lee and Low Books (<https://blog.leeandlow.com/2014/05/22/checklist-8-steps-to-creating-a-diverse-book-collection/>)

“Guide to Selecting Anti-Bias Books,” by Louise Derman-Sparks (www.teachingforchange.org/selecting-anti-bias-books)

Using Graphic Novels in the Language Arts Classroom, by William Boerman-Cornell and Jung Kim (New York: Bloomsbury Academic, 2020)

Find Ways to Fund Your Collection

While we believe that schools should provide classroom resources for teachers and students, including classroom library materials, we know that most language arts teachers fund their classroom libraries through a mix of donations and personal funds. Here are a few strong resources we’ve found for procuring books and funds for book collections.

Book Grants

Book Love Foundation Grant (www.booklovefoundation.org): Founded by teacher and author Penny Kittle, the Book Love Foundation provides funding for classroom libraries. United States and Canada.

First Book (<https://firstbook.org>): First Book offers a professional network and low-cost or free resources for qualifying educators who serve impoverished children. The First Book Marketplace sells deeply discounted books and the Book Bank offers books and other materials for the cost of shipping. United States.

Snapdragon Book Foundation (<https://snapdragonbookfoundation.org>): Snapdragon Book grants provide funding for school library, classroom library, and book room collections. United States.

Book Distribution Programs

Dolly Parton's Imagination Library (<https://imaginationlibrary.com>): Entertainer Dolly Parton launched the Imagination Library program to provide free books to newborns and toddlers in the Tennessee county where she was born. Expanded to five countries, the program provides millions of books directly to registered families each month. United States, Canada, United Kingdom, the Republic of Ireland, and Australia.

Reading Is Fundamental (www.rif.org): RIF provides books, resources, activities, and professional development for educators, caregivers, and community volunteers to support the literacy development of children. The Books for Ownership grant program provides funding to build home libraries. United States.