

## **Nonfiction Books of Information**

Whatever the motivation for reading nonfiction, kids deserve to have books that are accurate, engaging, and well written.

Looking at:

### 1) AUTHOR – Authority and Responsibility

Who is the author? Known? Recognized as a reputable writer of information, or someone you are unfamiliar with.

Check the author bio at the back of the book or the back flap. Check for educational background. Doesn't have to have a degree in entomology to write about bugs, but it is something to look for. Check the acknowledgments – is there someone he/she consulted? Did this person check for accuracy? The acknowledgement also shows respect for young people.

### 2) INCLUSIVE LANGUAGE: boys and girls; all racial backgrounds

Of course, the subject matter can dictate that only one race or gender be represented, but you should look at the pictures and the subject and think about how everything is represented. Think in broader terms, not small terms.

### 3) ORGANIZATION

Enumeration: author describes the relevant parts of a subject in some sort of orderly fashion.

Chronological: obvious pattern for history or biography, but it can be used to illuminate other subjects as well.

Is there an alphabetical index that appears at the end of the book?

Before you read any nonfiction book, you should look at it critically to see how it is organized. In longer works, a table of contents often provides a clear picture of a book's organization. Whenever you set out to evaluate a book of information, you should always try to get a sense of the book's distinct parts and how they are related to each other – in other words, how it is organized.

### 4) ILLUSTRATIONS

Provide information by complementing, supporting, or extending the text.

How do they relate to the text?

Are they merely decorative or do they actually enhance the text?

Do they make the subject matter more appealing?

Are they up to date? Are captions clear and accurate?

Do the captions add supplementary information or repeat what's in the text?

## 5) DESIGN

Typography – is the type size appropriate for the intended audience?

White Space

Different styles or sizes of type used to get across different kinds of information?

Placement of illustrations

Do they generally appear next to the part of the text that discusses what they picture?

Or do you have to flip back and forth to match text with pictures?

Do they break up the flow of the text?

## 6) WRITING STYLE

Clear prose - simple declarative sentences. Still needs to be engaging as it is in fiction.

Passion from author for the subject matter transfers that enthusiasm to the reader.

Use of specific words – apparently, may, suggest signals a distinction between fact and informed opinion, and demonstrates the nature of true scholarship.

Is there a logical development of ideas rather than merely reciting facts and figures?

*Tone* and *appropriateness* for the subject matter.

## 7) DOCUMENTATION OF SOURCES

Are the sources up-to-date?

Are the cited articles from popular magazines (*Time*, *Newsweek*) or scholarly journals?

A critical look at sources may give you a picture of the depth of the writer's expertise.

“Suggested Further Reading” can be confusing. Are the titles age appropriate and will they be found in most libraries?

Adapted from: Horning, Kathleen T. *From Cover to Cover: Evaluating and Reviewing Children's Books*. New York: Collins, 2010.