

Recommended Literature by Grade Level, K–8, and Supplemental Literature

Annotations by Susan Hepler

About These Lists

Literature is the heart of our literacy programs. Whether you use a total literature program that relies exclusively on trade books or a basal textbook program that is supplemented with trade books, you will want to be familiar with exemplary children's literature. Inspiring literature can be used to read aloud, teach reading, promote rich literature conversations, and encourage a lifelong love of reading.

The following K–8 literature lists have been carefully composed to reflect a wide variety of outstanding literary and artistic literature—picture books, poetry, folktales, realistic fiction, historical fiction, science fiction, humor, and nonfiction. These lists are meant to be used as a reference and starting point for conversations about what literature will work best in your own school or district.

The literature lists are totally new, that is, with few exceptions, the titles are not repeats of previous lists in *Invitations* or the stand-alone *The Blue Pages* (1994). However, be sure to revisit our former lists that serve as a foundation for these lists. While we set our task as selecting the best from recently published literature, remember that “old favorites” such as *The Little Red Hen*, *Strega Nona*, *The Stories Julian Tells*, *Tuck Everlasting*, and *Hatchet*, are still strong teaching choices. However, because many children are widely read, it is also necessary to keep ahead of their reading so they don't endlessly read *Hatchet*, *Charlotte's Web*, or some other classic at one grade level and then again at a later grade level.

The supplemental lists include author/illustrator studies as skeleton organizers for your own preparation of other author studies. Many authors and most publishers now have Web pages where you can find additional information. Recognizing the important influence of reading on writing, we have also included an extensive section, “Books That Encourage Children to Write,” as part of the supplemental lists.

Grade-level literature lists are organized alphabetically by title. Each book annotation includes a brief summary, noteworthy characteristics about the literary and artistic quality, and possible suggestions for discussion and response. “Series” after an annota-

tion means that there are either sequels or other titles featuring the same characters. Key features of each grade-level list precede the list of books, and each list also includes suggested authors and illustrators for in-depth study.

So that books can be used for small-group guided reading and literature conversations, we recommend purchasing six to ten copies of each selected title. To make the literature affordable in multiple copies, we have chosen titles, most of which are available in paperback. The parentheses following the publishing information indicates the paperback publisher. An empty parentheses means that there was no paperback publisher when this book went to press. However, paperback books regularly go in and out of print, so you will want to periodically check availability. Also, to help you locate all recommended books on the lists easily, all literature is included in the index of *Conversations* by title, author and illustrator.

Balancing the Collection

We have made a big effort to include more nonfiction and culturally diverse titles than on previous lists. Much more quality nonfiction is now available, and at least 25 percent of all included titles are nonfiction. We selected these titles because of the relevance of the content, the way the narrative works, the organizational patterns of the text, and the way illustrations point readers to traditional nonfiction visual conventions such as graphs, sidebars, and glossaries. (See pages 441–443 for specific guidelines for choosing nonfiction.)

At least 40 percent of the all titles on the lists are “culturally diverse.” We believe that the books children read—and the books in our school and classroom libraries—must represent every ethnic group and culture. However, while the number of children's books published in the last ten years has doubled from the previous decade, less than 5 percent of new books being published are “culturally diverse.” So finding excellent literature to include is a challenge. Looking at current literature, the good news is that African Americans are now presented most frequently and with fewer stereotypes than any other

cultural group. However, while some strong Asian characters are portrayed, there is meager coverage of Latino culture and an appalling lack of literature related to Native American culture. Regarding the latter, the literature that exists is mostly folktales; there are few books on Native American history or their lives today (Galda 1998).

We prefer the term *culturally diverse* to the common term *multicultural*, which has taken on varying—and often confusing—meanings. By “culturally diverse” children’s literature, we mean quality texts and illustrations that accurately and respectfully portray the different people, cultures, and perspectives of our society. When students engage with the characters in these books, they have the potential for serious and thought-provoking discussion about such issues as bias, freedom, justice, and equality. Additionally, culturally diverse literature has the power to humanize us and increase our sensitivity, tolerance, and compassion for people and other cultures. (Take a careful look at the texts and illustrations in your classroom and school collections. Some old books may have to go.)

Using These Books in Your Reading Program

With the exception of the kindergarten list in which books are meant to be read *to* the child, all books in the grade level lists are meant to be read *by* and *with* children in the guided reading program. While the lists are organized by grade levels for your teaching convenience, many books work on multiple levels. For example, a book that works well for guided reading and literature conversations at one grade level could be a wonderful read aloud at a previous grade level or a terrific book for cementing reading strategies at a higher grade level.

Because developing readers need daily practice on easy books, we have included lots of information and recommendations in “Little Books for Developing Readers,” in a section placed between the kindergarten and grade one lists. You may also want to check the information and resources on leveling books on pages 18b–19b. There is also information and extensive recommendations for “Books in Series.” As well as being terrific for turning kids on to reading, a number of these series books are also appropriate for guided reading.

Books in Series

Introduction

Because series books are important for turning many students on to reading, we have deliberately included a separate category for them. Many inexperienced readers have become “hooked” on series fiction and then, eventually, moved on to more sophisticated materials. Not only are series books wildly popular with students, they perform an important function in increasing students’ comprehension. As readers become more familiar with the common elements of each book in the series—characters, author’s style and tone, language, content, predictable format, and concept demands—they can focus more on meaning, and their confidence and competence grow. Then, it becomes our job to help readers expand their reading preferences to include the full range of rich literature in various genres.

As children, both Susan Hepler and I became avid readers through series books. We read every title in a series, proudly owned many of them, and often read favorites. Susan read “Biographies of Famous Americans.” We both read Nancy Drew books, a series that, along with Hardy Boy books, dates back to 1927. The rules in the series never varied: “No serious violence: a character could be knocked unconscious only once in every book. Each chapter must end with a cliffhanger.” And while characters have evolved “from fearless Nancy” in the first book to “Flirtatious Nancy” in the late 1980s, those rules have held (Smith 1998).

Books in a fiction series have “common elements of characters and/or setting,” “formulaic plots,” and “end with loose ends tied up, questions answered, and the satisfaction of a happy ending, at least for the protagonists.” Series books are designed to appeal as a total concept rather than on a book’s individual merits. In addition, because children choose these books and enjoy reading them, they provide “a valuable incentive for the reading practice that young readers need.” Not only does such reading improve fluency, it also provides social connections for communities of readers who enjoy, discuss, and interpret these books (Jenkins 1997).

The following series books have proven popular with readers over the years. Check the grade-level lists for other series books, as well, and be sure to include your students’ favorite series in your classroom library.

Most series books noted are fiction but we have included quality nonfiction series when we could find them. While not all books in a series are equally of high quality, useful in the classroom, or appealing, the series on this list provide consistent and reliable reader support. However, many of the series on this list feature excellent writing and some single titles would support guided reading. Just be sure to read individual titles before you purchase. Some series books appear only in paperback, not hardbound. Note that we have not included mass market series such as Nancy Drew, Babysitter's Club, Goosebumps, or sports series as these are books that kids will easily find and read on their own.

Easy Reader Format (Grades 1–2)

Most titles feature easy-reader format of three or four short chapters, six to ten lines of text, plenty of illustrations, and approximately thirty-two to forty pages long. Several series here are picture storybooks, as well.

Amelia Bedelia stories by Peggy Parrish, illustrated variously. HarperCollins. Classic misadventures of a maid who misunderstands.

Arthur series by Marc Brown. Little, Brown. Animals-as-humans, picture book (also see next list).

Clifford stories by Norman Bridwell. Scholastic. Large red dog and his neighborhood friends.

Eyewitness readers. Level 1 and 2. Dorling Kindersley. Nonfiction.

Frog and Toad series by Arnold Lobel. HarperCollins. Classic friendship stories.

Grandpa and Uncle Wainey series by James Stevenson. Greenwillow. Family tall tales.

Gus and Grandpa series by Claudia Mills, illustrated by Catherine Stock. Farrar Straus & Giroux. Boy and grandfather.

Henry and Mudge series by Cynthia Rylant, illustrated by Suçie Stevenson. Simon & Schuster. Boy and dog.

Lionel stories by Stephen Krensky. Dial. Boy at school and at home.

Little Bear stories by Else Homelund Minarik, illustrated by Maurice Sendak. HarperCollins. The series that started the genre.

Let's-Read-and-Find-Out science series. HarperCollins. Nonfiction on many topics.

Little Bill series by Bill Cosby, illustrated by Varnette P. Honeywood. Scholastic. Brothers in family dilemmas.

Mr. Putter and Tabby series by Cynthia Rylant, illustrated by Arthur Howard. Harcourt. Older man and friendly cat.

Mud Flat series by James Stevenson. Greenwillow. Humorous animal friendships.

Nate the Great by Marjorie Sharmat. Putnam. Boy detective in the neighborhood.

Oliver Pig; Amanda Pig series by Jean Van Leeuwen. Dial. Pig family life.

Pinky and Rex series by James Howe. Simon & Schuster. Girl-boy realistic friendship.

Poppleton series by Cynthia Rylant, illustrated by Mark Teague. Blue Sky/Scholastic. Pig and his friends.

Willy stories by Anthony Browne. Candlewick. Gorilla boy experiences dreams, bullies, etc.

Zelda and Ivy stories by Laura McGee Kvasnovky. Candlewick. Fox sisters humorous rivalry.

Easy Chapter Book Series (Grades 2–3)

These short novels feature more text than the previous category, usually more than sixty pages in length, illustrations every few pages, and stronger or more complex literary elements (plot, character, theme, language, etc.).

Adam Joshua series by Janice Lee Smith, illustrated by Dick Gackenback. HarperCollins. School life.

Arthur series by Marc Brown. Little, Brown. Animals-as-humans, chapter format.

Aunt Eater series by Doug Cushman. HarperCollins. Anteater detective stories.

Best Enemies series by Katherine Leverich. Morrow. Girl rivalry and friendships.

Cam Jansen series by David A. Adler. Viking. Girl detective, short chapters.