Criteria for Evaluating Fiction Books

Setting (When and where did the story take place?)

- Should be clear and believable.
- Biography – should be authentic.

Point of view (Who tells the story?)

- Author may write as narrator and describe characters and setting.
- Narrator may make no comment and simply let characters’ actions speak for them.
- If told in first person, voice may be an impartial bystander or a principal character.

Characters (Who are they? How are they revealed? How do they change and grow?)

- Characters must be both believable and convincing.
- Characters should develop naturally and talk in ways consistent with their age, sex, background, ethnic group and education.

Plot (What happens in the story?)

- Plot is basically a series of actions that move the related sequence to a logical outcome.
- If there is no sequence, book may be a series of episodes.
- Plot needs an introduction to set the stage; a development involving conflict, opposition or a problem; and a climax of action or strong indication of resolution.

Theme (What is the main idea of the story?)

- May reflect developmental values.
- May have no specific theme but instead be just for fun; or highlight a person or period.

Style (How is the story written? What ideas are expressed?)

- Involves author’s choice of words, sentence patterns, and imagery used.
- As in theme there should be appropriateness and integrity.

Adapted from Sutherland, Zena and Arbuthnot, May Hill *Children and Books*. 5th ed. Glenview: Scott Foresman, 1977, pp. 21-28