

# Criteria for Reviewing Children's Books

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*More than 5,000 juvenile books are published each year. For this reason school and children's librarians depend on reviews to assist them with their selection responsibilities. Through a review of professional literature, we identified 10 criteria that librarians, authors, editors, and publishers thought were important to include in a book review. Using content analysis, we applied the criteria to 152 reviews of 1996 Notable Books for Children in four journals commonly used by school and children's librarians. We found that although the journals include several of the criteria for quality book reviews, no single journal stood out as consistently providing all the criteria. The findings can be used by children's books reviewers, librarians with the responsibility of selecting reviewing journals and children's books, and researchers interested in further studies to help determine the criteria needed for quality book reviews.*

Children's librarians are faced with the important job of selecting quality books for their readers. However, with approximately 5,000 juvenile books published each year (*The Bowker Annual* 1997), it is impossible for a librarian to examine all of these books. Consequently, school and children's librarians rely on published book reviews as a selection tool when choosing books to purchase. Several current journals provide reviews of children's books. With tight budgets, libraries are not able to subscribe to all such journals, so it would be beneficial to know which journals provide the most useful reviews of children's books.

When writing a book review, novice reviewers might assume that they have the right to include or exclude anything they

wish. However, those familiar with the field are well aware that book reviews are a highly disciplined type of writing that requires the guidance of specific criteria.

One of the major purposes of a review is to serve as a selection instrument for librarians and educators who might be considering the purchase of the book. While it is noted that librarians can use a variety of methods to determine the books they acquire (for example, looking at publishers' catalogs, visiting bookstores and conference exhibits, or talking with publishers' representatives), reviews remain the basic way in which librarians build their collection and acquire knowledge about children's books (England and Fasick 1987). Of the 510 librarians responding to a *Library Journal* survey, 96% cited

reviews as essential tools for purchasing materials and 83% ranked them as their first choice (Fialkoff 1998). At a two-day conference devoted to the topic of evaluating children's books, Schomberg (1993) spoke of the importance of reviews to school librarians, pointing out that they are essential tools of collection building. Horning (1997, 178) comments about the selection process of school and public librarians:

While some decisions can be made quickly based on popular demand or professional wisdom, most selections are made with a great deal of care and deliberation based, in whole or in part, on reviews. The reviewer, then, owes it to her audience to use care and deliberation in preparing a review.

Because librarians rely heavily on book reviews, reviewers have a responsibility to include all the information that will help librarians make informed purchase decisions. The purposes of the current study were to identify the criteria that should be included in reviewing juvenile books and to determine which journals provide the most coverage of those criteria.

Several researchers have studied how journals differ in reviews of children's books (e.g., Weber 1979; Stewig 1980; Witucke 1980, 1982; Dodson 1983; Kennemer 1984; Burchette 1992; Bishop and Van Orden 1998). Length of reviews, promptness, total coverage, and content of the reviews were among the factors that were analyzed. Common criteria were not always examined, but the researchers generally concluded that no single journal adequately provided all the information that librarians need to make informed selection decisions. In the research literature, no study was found in which researchers had attempted to determine which reviewing criteria were the most essential. In her summary of the research studies that deal with the reviewing of children's books, Doll (1990, 150) indicated the importance of such a study in stating that: "[i]t is time to develop checklists for content analysis, study reviews of nonbook materials, design studies based

on hypothesis testing, and begin to build a common knowledge about reviews and reviewing journals." In a recent article, Bishop and Van Orden (1998) called for studies to be made on the quality of children's book reviews and the elements that constitute a good book review.

#### REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

A review of the related literature revealed that reviews of children's books found in journals are an essential tool in the book selection process. Researchers further demonstrated that while such reviews are widely used by school and public librarians, there is a lack of uniformity in the content of the reviews. We found no researchers who had attempted to determine the criteria that should be included in a quality book review. Given this lack in the literature, we turned to professional writing, concentrating on accessible periodicals and books devoted solely to the reviewing of books for children and young adults. Authors of children's literature textbooks, journal editors, library science educators, and library practitioners have written about the essential criteria for a book review. Several of these writers shared similar opinions about what should be included in a quality review. At other times, only one or two of the writers thought a particular criterion was imperative.

Interest in the topic was high during the late 1970s. Hearne (1978) noted that speed, brevity, and currency were considered the essence of good book reviewing. She stated that by nature, book reviews are "fast, judgmental, descriptive rather than analytical, and in the case of children's books, monopolized" (46).

Editors of ALA's *Top of the News* were so interested in the topic of book reviews, reviewing, and review media that they devoted the winter 1979 issue of their journal to the topic. For one of the articles, they solicited the opinions of ten experts regarding the qualities that make a good book review (What makes a good review? 1979). The people whose opinions were presented in the article came from a variety of backgrounds, including educators, librarians, editors, and authors.

Many of the experts in this article had particular criteria for a good review. Pollack (146) stated, "A good review is no more or less than an honest personal reaction to a book." Wells and Young both responded that it was important for book reviewers to comment on the appropriateness of any artwork to the text. Young also mentioned that a comparison to other similar works was essential. Heylman stated she thought a good review should contain a very brief description of the content, followed by a comparison with the author's other works, the intended reading level, judgment of literary quality, and information about any controversial issues. Broderick expressed the opinion that in addition to a summary of the content, a book review should comment on the attractiveness of the cover illustration, make suggestions for the use of the material, and tell who else should know about the existence of the book, including persons such as counselors or youth workers. Myers thought every review should contain a clear-cut commitment to recommendation or nonrecommendation.

Another expert, Starr, felt that good reviews would describe the scope and level of interest in the subject of the book and convey the style, depth, and flavor of the work. Rudin noted that she appreciated book reviews that tell specifically for whom the book is intended, the uses of the book, how the illustrations relate to the book, information about the jacket or cover of the book, and the author's opinion of the book. Abel listed the following as essentials of a quality book review: timeliness (within a year of the publication of the work), an emphasis on the tone of the book, an indication of the book's strengths and weaknesses, a definition of its audience, an assessment of its potential, and the author's opinion of the book (What makes a good review? 1979).

In the same *Top of the News* issue, other authors expressed their opinions regarding the quality of children's book reviews. Sullivan (1979) thought a quality book review should contain a brief summary of the content, mention of the expected readership, and an indication of the most effective elements of the book, as

well as the weaknesses. Campbell (1979) stated that the best reviews were brief (150–200 words) and contained an assessment of the literary quality of the book and comparison with the author's other works.

Gerhardt (1986, 70) stated that, "All good library reviewing . . . should have definite critical quality. It should not just tell what a novel is about, but it should give some valid indication of merit or demerit, of excellence or crudity in expression, of triviality or significance, of values that it holds for library use."

DeCoster (1988), although not dealing specifically with reviewing children's books but rather with the broader review of educational materials in general, thought that a book reviewer should cover the content, identify the target audience, evaluate the book's contribution to existing literature, and comment on its use for practitioners.

The interest in book reviewing continued into the 1990s. Hearne and Sutton (1993) present the proceedings of a two-day conference on reviewing children's books. The book is a watershed work on evaluating children's books and contains 10 essays dealing with reviews and their influence on collection development. Although none of the authors specifically outline the criteria that should be in a good review, they do discuss various important aspects of reviewing and evaluating books, including such topics as philosophies of reviewing, criteria for evaluating picture books, and problematic reviews.

Fialkoff (1992, 1994) believes reviews should be brief (125–175 words), describe the content of the book, indicate the usefulness of the book for different types of libraries, and compare the book to similar works. She also notes that reviews should contain an evaluation of the significance of the book, as well as the popular appeal; information about the book's style and level of treatment; and the reviewer's personal opinion of the book.

Horning (1997) believes that a quality book review should contain a description of the content, an evaluation of style and scope, an assessment of literary quality, and an indication of the potential audience.

According to Horning, it should also tell whether the illustrations support the text.

It would appear that there are a number of opinions expressed by authors, librarians, and journal editors about the criteria needed in a good book review. The authors examined here mentioned a total of 14 criteria for a quality book review, which are listed in table 1. In his assessment of the review process Weinrach (1988, 178-79) wrote, "The profession needs concrete criteria that will be imposed evenly and systematically across materials. In the absence of explicit criteria, reviewers have no alternative but to create and impose their own."

Evans (1995) discusses two types of professional reviews: those designed to promote and those designed to evaluate. Most of the criteria included in table 1, with perhaps the exception of the last, "Information Concerning the Attractiveness of the Jacket or Cover Design," would be in professional reviews that are designed to evaluate. Evans goes on to comment that evaluative reviews are extremely important to public and school librarians. Normally such reviews contain both descriptive and evaluative, and occasionally comparative, criteria. The crite-

ria mentioned in table 1 as being important to a good children's book would apply similarly to any book being purchased by a public or school librarian, regardless of the age level of the material. One exception might be criterion number 5, which might be emphasized more in the selection of children's books where illustrations are generally regarded as equally important as the text. Although criterion number 14, which relates to the controversial issues surrounding the subject of the book, might also be important for reviews of all kinds of materials, some might tend to think this would be more important to include in reviews of children's books.

### RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The current study was based on the following research questions:

1. What are the criteria that experts consider essential in a quality children's book review?
2. Which of the most commonly used journals for reviewing children's books contain the criteria that experts consider essential in a quality children's book review?

TABLE 1  
CRITERIA MENTIONED IN THE PROFESSIONAL LITERATURE

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1.	Description of the Content
2.	Definition of the Audience
3.	Information Regarding: Scope, Tone, Style, Point of View
4.	Comparison with Author's Other Works or Similar Works
5.	Appropriateness of the Art to the Text
6.	Reviewer's Personal Opinion
7.	Strengths and Weaknesses
8.	Uses of the Work
9.	Brevity
10.	Judgment of Literary Quality
11.	Currency of the Review
12.	Judgment Regarding Reader Appeal
13.	Information Concerning the Attractiveness of the Jacket or Cover Design
14.	Comments Relating to Controversial Issues Surrounding the Subject of the Book

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### METHOD

A content analysis of book reviews using the criteria stated by the panel of experts was undertaken. Five major steps were involved. In the first step, the experts were identified by reading the articles and textbooks written by people in children's literature or in the area of book reviewing. After reviewing the professional literature, we found a total of 16 persons who commented on the criteria for book reviews. We concluded that these could constitute a pool of "experts" who expressed their opinions on the criteria needed for a quality book review. Several of these persons were identified in "What makes a good review?" (1979). The opinions expressed by all 16 persons were selected as the content base for this study.

"Experts" were defined in this study as persons whose opinions about the reviewing of children's books had appeared in professional periodical literature and in books solely devoted to the book reviewing of children's books. The literature examined covered a fairly long period of time, from 1979 to 1997. The selected experts represented different professional areas and had different roles in relationship to children's book reviews. Two experts were children's book authors, four were librarians, seven wrote for or edited six different journals, two worked for pub-

lishing companies, and one was a public library consultant. Each professional group might have had a different viewpoint, but one that was also a valid perspective on what is important about a book and thus should be included in a good book review. No attempt was made to compare the credentials of these experts. In some instances it was difficult to assign one job title because some of the experts' jobs fit into more than one job category.

The second step was to list all the criteria that the experts considered essential to a quality book review. The third step was to identify the criteria that were most frequently mentioned by the experts. Only criteria identified by three or more experts were included in the content analysis used to answer the second research question. Three or more of the experts mentioned 10 criteria. Those 10 criteria and their rankings as determined by the number of experts who mentioned them are listed in table 2. The criterion most frequently listed by experts as being essential for a quality book review was the description of content. Surprisingly, only 8 of the experts indicated that a description of content was essential, but it is possible that the others assumed that a review would contain such a description and therefore may have felt it was not necessary to mention this particular criterion. It is acknowledged that the criteria

TABLE 2  
LIST OF CRITERIA USED IN THE STUDY

Rank	Criterion	Frequency
1	Description of the Content	8
2	Definition of the Audience	7
3	Info Re: Scope, Tone, Style, Point of View	6
4	Comparison with Author's Other Works or Similar Works	5
5	Appropriateness of the Art to the Text	4
6	Reviewer's Personal Opinion	4
7	Strengths and Weaknesses	4
8	Uses of the Work	4
9	Brevity	3
10	Judgment of Literary Quality	3

considered essential to an excellent book review may vary because of the professional backgrounds of the experts.

The fourth step was the selection of review journals to be used in the study. The journals included here were four that had been frequently used in previous studies (Weber 1979; Stewig 1980; Witucke 1980, 1982; Dodson 1983; Kennemer 1984; Burchette 1992; Bishop and Van Orden 1998): *Booklist* (BL), *Bulletin of the Center for Children's Books* (BCCB), *The Horn Book Magazine* (HBM), and *School Library Journal* (SLJ).

In the fifth step, book reviews of the 1996 Notable Children's Books in the journals were analyzed. In some of the previous studies (Witucke 1980, 1982; Burchette 1992; Bishop and Van Orden 1998) researchers also analyzed the reviews of Notable Books for Children. We read the reviews of the 1996 Notable Books for Children that appeared in all four journals. Of the 74 titles chosen as 1996 Notable Books for Children, only 38 were reviewed by all four journals and were used in the current study (see table 3). The criteria that each review contained were tallied and totalled by journal. These totals are displayed in table 4.

One limitation of the study is the analysis of only the 1996 Notable Books. Also, both HBM and BCCB changed editors during the course of the study, which could affect the book reviewing policies and consequently the criteria included in reviews.

## FINDINGS

Table 5 provides the total and average numbers of the criteria by the four journals in the study. Although reviews in all four journals described the content of the book, very often different aspects of the book were highlighted in each journal. Some reviews contained a very detailed description of the content and more evaluative comments than did the other reviews.

One criterion that 7 experts agreed upon was that the review should contain a definition of the audience. Of the four journals studied, BL, BCCB, and SLJ con-

tain that information as a standard part of their bibliographic data. BL indicates the appropriate ages, while BCCB and SLJ indicate the grade levels for which the book will be appropriate. Additionally, sometimes the individual reviewers gave information about the target audience in the content of the audience, such as "good for reluctant readers," or "good for those who love to do puzzles."

Of the four journals only HBM failed to give a good indication of the target audience in the review itself. This journal gives broad descriptions of the audience, such as "younger" or "intermediate." The reviews are grouped together under those broad audience labels, with headings that say, "For Younger Readers: Ages 5 to 8," or "For Intermediate Readers: Ages 8 to 12." This might not be a helpful method for readers who look at an index to locate the page number of the book review they wish to examine and then go directly to that page, and miss the target audience information.

Six experts also thought a quality book review should contain information concerning the scope, tone, style, and point of view of the work. This criterion was present in the majority of the reviews. Interestingly, this information could be found in sentences that provided other criteria, such as uses of the book, strengths and weaknesses, appropriateness of the art to the text, and the reviewer's opinion. This information might make it possible for a reader to get a feel for the mood of the book.

Five experts thought comparisons with the author's work or with similar works was a necessary ingredient of a quality book review, although not many reviews included this information. Of the four journals, the reviews in SLJ included 17 comments on this topic, which was the most of any of the journals in the study.

On the other hand, although only 4 experts felt that a reviewer should comment on the appropriateness of the art to the text, a large number of reviews contained that information. Twenty-five of the reviews in SLJ, 22 of the reviews in BL, 21 of the reviews in BCCB, and 19 of the reviews in HBM contained statements

TABLE 3  
TITLES REVIEWED BY JOURNALS

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- Adoff, Arnold. *Street Music: City Poems*. New York: HarperCollins, 1995.
- Avi. *Poppy*. New York: Orchard, 1995.
- Bradby, Marie. *More Than Anything Else*. New York: Orchard, 1995.
- Bruchac, Joseph. *A Boy Called Slow*. New York: Philomel, 1995.
- Colman, Penny. *Rosie the Riveter*. New York: Crown, 1995.
- Coman, Carolyn. *What Jamie Saw*. Arden, North Carolina: Front Street, 1995.
- Conly, Jane L. *Trout Summer*. New York: Holt, 1995.
- Cummings, Pat. *Talking with the Artist, Volume 2*. New York: Simon & Schuster, 1995.
- Curtis, Christopher P. *The Watsons Go to Birmingham*. New York: Delacorte, 1995.
- Cushman, Karen. *The Midwife's Apprentice*. Boston: Clarion, 1995.
- Engel, Dean. *Esra Jack Keats: A Biography*. New York: Silver Moon, 1995.
- Feelings, Tom. *Middle Passage*. New York: Dial, 1995.
- Fritz, Jean. *You Want Women to Vote, Lizzie Stanton?* New York: Putnam, 1995.
- Froehlich, Margaret W. *That Kookery!* San Diego: Browndeer/Harcourt, 1995.
- Giblin, James. *When Plague Strikes: The Black Death, Smallpox, Aids*. New York: HarperCollins, 1995.
- Gray, Luli. *Falcon's Egg*. Boston: Houghton, 1995.
- Griffith, Helen V. *Granddaddy's Stars*. New York: Greenwillow, 1995.
- Hamilton, Virginia. *Herstories: African American Folktales*. New York: Blue Sky/Scholastic, 1995.
- Han, Suzanne C. *The Rabbit's Escape*. New York: Holt, 1995.
- Hoestlandt, Jo. *Star of Fear, Star of Hope*. New York: Walker, 1995.
- Hughes, Shirley. *Rhymes for Annie Rose*. New York: Lothrop/Morrow, 1995.
- Johnson, Stephen. *Alphabet City*. New York: Viking, 1995.
- Macauley, David. *Shortcut*. Boston: Houghton, 1995.
- McKay, Hilary. *Dog Friday*. New York: Simon & Schuster, 1995.
- McMillan, Bruce. *Night of the Pufflings*. Boston: Houghton, 1995.
- Moore, Martha. *Under the Mermaid Angel*. New York: Delacorte, 1995.
- Murphy, Jim. *The Great Fire*. New York: Scholastic, 1995.
- Orlev, Uri. *The Lady with the Hat*. Boston: Houghton, 1995.
- Rathmann, Peggy. *Officer Buckle and Gloria*. New York: Putnam, 1995.
- Reef, Catherine. *Walt Whitman*. Boston: Clarion, 1995.
- San Souci, Robert. *Faithful Friend*. New York: Simon & Schuster, 1995.
- Scieszka, Jon. *Math Curse*. New York: Viking, 1995.
- Stevens, Janet. *Tops & Bottoms*. San Diego: Harcourt, 1995.
- Stevenson, James. *Sweet Corn*. New York: Greenwillow, 1995.
- Taylor, Mildred. *The Well: David's Story*. New York: Dial, 1995.
- Van Dijk, Lutz. *Damn Strong Love: The True Story of Willi G and Stefen K*. New York: Holt, 1995.
- Wynne-Jones, Tim. *The Book of Changes*. New York: Orchard, 1995.
- Zolotow, Charlotte. *When the Wind Stops*. New York: HarperCollins, 1995.
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relating the illustrations to the text. It is also important to mention that 11 of the 38 titles did not contain any art or illustrations. One might infer from the findings that information regarding illustrations is being included in a large percentage of the reviews of books that contain illustra-

tions, at least in those books that are considered notable. In the majority of the reviews where this type of information was included, criterion number 3 (comments relating to the scope, tone, style, and point of view) was also met. The reviewer often mentioned the mood set by

TABLE 4  
CRITERIA BY JOURNAL

	<i>BCCB</i>	<i>Booklist</i>	<i>Horn Book</i>	<i>SLJ</i>
1 Description of Content	38	38	38	38
2 Definition of Audience	38	38	2	38
3 Scope, Tone, Style, and Point of View	31	27	29	33
4 Comparison with Author's Other Works or Similar Works	15	12	9	17
5 Appropriateness of Art to Text	21	22	19	25
6 Reviewer's Personal Opinion	30	31	30	36
7 Strengths and Weaknesses	8	15	1	7
8 Uses of the Work	6	3	5	9
9 Brevity	12	19	7	10
10 Judgment of Literary Quality	19	18	20	24
Total	218	223	160	237

the illustrations, and whether that mood was consistent with the text.

The majority of reviews in all four journals met criterion number 6, which is the reviewer's personal opinion. Clearly, those reading the reviews would like to know what a person actually thought of the book, rather than just factual information about it. *SLJ* met the criterion the most times, with 36 comments relating to this subject. Only 2 of its reviewers did not clearly indicate their opinion of the books they reviewed.

An indication of strengths and weaknesses was another criterion that 4 experts thought should be in a good book review. *BL* contained the criterion in 15 of the 38 reviews, the most of any of the journals surveyed. No consistency was revealed in what reviewers considered

strengths or weaknesses. In one case, a reviewer noted as a weakness that the book looked "babyish," while another reviewer pointed out factual inaccuracies as a weakness.

Another criterion mentioned by 4 experts was an indication of the uses of the book. This was done rarely in the reviews studied. *SLJ* had the most reviews that met this criterion, with 9 reviewers indicating the uses of books. When this criterion was included, the reviewer usually mentioned that the book is good for story time, reading aloud, or science projects or reports.

Three experts thought a good review should be brief, but only 2 defined brevity. One expert indicated 125 to 175 words per review as brief, and another stated that 150 to 200 words would be consid-

TABLE 5  
TOTALS AND AVERAGES OF CRITERIA

Journal	Total No. of Criteria Met by Journal	Average No. of Criteria Met per Review Article
<i>BCCB</i>	218	5.74
<i>Booklist</i>	223	5.87
<i>Horn Book</i>	160	4.21
<i>SLJ</i>	237	6.24



ered brief. For this study, brevity was defined as 150 to 175 words per review. Many reviews examined did not meet this criterion, but it might be asking too much to expect a review to meet 9 essential criteria in less than 175 words. However, *BL* contained brief reviews over half the time, and it ranked second in total overall criteria met, so perhaps it is possible to be brief and inclusive at the same time.

Judgment of the literary quality was the most difficult to identify. Very often it was difficult to tell whether the reviewer thought the book contained literary merit, or whether the book contained a number of things that the reviewer judged as strengths.

Because of the small size and uneven job background distribution of the experts, it is difficult to draw any valid conclusions as to how the background of the experts might have affected the results of this study. Mainly, the practicing librarians and journal editors noted the importance of criterion number 1, "Description of the Content" and criterion number 10, "Judgment of Literary Quality," both of which occurred frequently in the reviews. The journal editors and publishers were the only experts mentioning criterion number 6, "Reviewer's Personal Opinion," which also appeared frequently in the reviews. The other criteria were fairly well represented by all of the background groups and no further patterns could be observed.

#### DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS AND FURTHER RESEARCH

In the current study, *SLJ* contained the most criteria identified by the experts as essential for a quality book review. However, *SLJ*, *BL*, and *BCCB* were quite close in the total number of criteria met by each journal. Those totals were 237, 223, and 218, respectively. Thus, it is not possible to identify one journal that provides the best quality book review of juvenile books. Only *HBM* fell much shorter in meeting the criteria, with a total of 160 criteria for the 38 titles. It should be noted that *HBM* only reviews books it recommends; some readers might be content to know that the

book is being recommended without being told specifically why.

It is also helpful to look at table 4, which breaks down the criteria by journal and shows that some journals contain strengths in certain areas and weaknesses in others. For instance, *BL* is clearly superior when it comes to identifying strengths and weaknesses of the books examined here, but it is not as successful as the other journals when it comes to identifying the uses of a book. *SLJ* leads the other journals in giving the reviewer's personal opinion, but only slightly so. It is, however, clearly superior to the others in identifying uses of the work. *BCCB*, on the other hand, although meeting only 218 total criteria, fell in between *SLJ* and *BL* in the breakdown of each individual criterion.

These results support the findings of previous researchers (Weber 1979; Kennemer 1984; Witucke 1980, 1982; Meacham 1989; Burchette 1992; Bishop and Van Orden 1998) who were unable to identify one single journal as being adequate to provide the information needed by librarians to make informed selection decisions regarding children's books.

Four criteria mentioned by the experts did not qualify for this study because they were not identified at least three times: (1) currency of the review, (2) judgment of reader appeal, (3) information concerning the attractiveness of the jacket or cover design, and (4) comments relating to controversial issues surrounding the subject of the book. It would be worthwhile to do another study with more experts to see whether these criteria would also be considered essential. It would be interesting to determine whether the professional background of the experts makes a difference in whether these criteria are considered important. For instance, one might speculate that school librarians would be most interested in comments relating to controversial issues, while publishers might want to include information concerning the attractiveness of the jacket or cover design.

It would also be helpful for the experts to qualify their criteria whenever possible. For instance, if an expert thinks a

book review should be brief, a definition of brevity should be given.

All of the journals in this study indicate their recommended titles by some type of symbol (stars in *SLJ*, *BL*, and *HBM* and asterisks in *BCCB*). Most of the books in this study received recommendation symbols (stars or asterisks) in their reviews. The focus of the current study was on the content of the review. Recommendation symbols might indicate quality of the book, but not necessarily of the review. A study in which the effect of recommendation symbols on selection is examined, in addition to the content of the reviews, would be beneficial.

None of the journals in the study had selection policies that indicate the criteria that are applied in the book reviews. *SLJ* and *BCCB* publish annual policies that are descriptive in nature, but do not discuss individual criteria. *BL* does not include a policy statement, but does note in the table of contents that all the books reviewed in each issue are recommended to libraries. *HBM* states at the beginning of its review section that most of the books are recommended. Inclusion of selection policies that address the criteria for book reviews would be helpful to librarians so they can be aware of the basis upon which reviewing decisions are made.

Additional studies are needed to determine the criteria that are essential to a good book review. A survey that uses a large number of respondents from a variety of backgrounds (school and public librarians, library school educators, journal editors, authors of children's literature textbooks, authors of collection development textbooks, and authors and illustrators of children's books) as the sample would be helpful to establish a ranked checklist of criteria stratified by background category of the experts. Some analysis of the ranking of the criteria in relation to the backgrounds of the respondents would indicate whether there are differences in the criteria correlating with the backgrounds of the respondents. A Delphi study using experts in the field of book reviewing might be beneficial for the same purpose.

## CONCLUSION

Although the current study cannot stand alone in presenting final conclusions regarding the essentials of a quality book review or the journals providing such reviews, it can provide benefits to the profession. Reviewers of children's books can use the criteria identified here as a guide when writing book reviews. School and children's librarians can utilize our findings when making journal and book selections. It is hoped that other researchers will use the findings and recommendations of this exploratory study to investigate further the criteria that are needed to provide quality reviews of juvenile books and to identify the journals that provide those reviews.

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