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"Picture Books Aren't Just for Little Kids"

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Picture Books are not just for little kids. Readers of all ages can benefit from reading picture books but that is not to say that all picture books are a match to all readers just because they can read them. It is important to consider audience's level of maturity and whether or not the material is appropriate for the group. Parents may consult their child's teacher for recommendations of picture books that will supplement curriculum learning.

Some educators have the misconception that the term "picture books" refers to a book with many pictures and few words and feel that picture books are appropriate for preschool and kindergarten students. They feel these are best suited for read aloud sessions or simple individual exploration. This is true for some picture books depending on the topic and illustrations. Even parents confuse picture books with baby board books.

In order to clarify this misconception, it is necessary to understand, "What exactly is a picture book?" Although, it is true that many picture books are written for a young audience, (3-6 year olds), there are many other picture books written for older audiences that present relevant on topics for students in upper elementary some for middle-school. Topics, such as The Underground Railroad, slavery, Native American legends, space, and stories told in poetic verse, Bats at the Beach for example, are written in the picture book format. The artwork in these picture books is exciting. It is intended for an older audience because the illustrations convey

the author's message. Two good examples of this type of illustration are, The Old African written by Julius Lester and illustrated by Jerry Pinkney, and Moses written by Carole Boston Weatherford and illustrated by Kadir Nelson. The illustrations in both of these picture books are profound and contribute greatly to the text.

Picture books are 32 pages in length. The main character is easily identified as is the age level of the audience for the story. The illustrations convey the message or the story's plot. They are engaging and lend themselves to helping the reader make predictions about the story's plot. In a picture book, the story is told with both words and pictures which appear equally on a double page spread. Many picture books are meant to be read aloud to an audience of 4 - 7 year olds but others can be equally enjoyed and read independently by children ages 8 and up. ((Lynch-Brown, Carol, Tomlinson, Carl M. (2008). Essentials of Children's Literature, 6th Edition. (Boston: Pearson Education Inc, p. 5.)

Depending on the content, picture books can transport the reader to another time in history or to another planet. In the picture book titled, Look to the Stars written by Buzz Aldrin and accompanied by the paintings of Wendell Minor, students learn about Nicholas Copernicus, Galileo, Johannes Kepler, and Isaac Newton. They are given an introduction into flight through the accomplishments of Orville and Wilbur Wright and Charles Lindbergh. They read about the accomplishments of Robert

Goddard "who successfully launched the first liquid-fueled rocket" and so much more. It is a beautifully illustrated resource on the history of space exploration. There are quotes from famous people noted at the bottom of each page. There is a timeline at the back of the book which begins with Copernican theory in 1543 and extends through to the year 2010. Students will be astounded by the artwork of Mr. Minor. It is a real "page turner!" Look to the Stars is a picture book that middle school students will find interesting. It is equally intriguing for a parent reading to a child who is particularly interested in space, or a teacher reading to her second through fifth grade class. Middle school students might find this not only a fascinating read but a good resource for a project about the history of space travel. This is one example of a picture book that can speak to a wide age range of readers.

During your next visit to the library, ask the children's librarian to recommend a picture book about a particular topic for your child. Students miss out when they begin reading chapter books and leave picture books behind. Picture books offer an opportunity to learn new vocabulary and delve deeply into a topic. In contrast, an information book of 60 pages or more might overwhelm the reader. Struggling readers may find chapter books daunting but they can find success reading a well-written, quality, picture book that covers a topic of their interest.

For example, a third grade student who is not a strong reader, might enjoy reading Blueberries for Sal by Robert McCloskey. It is a picture book and has plenty of challenging vocabulary words. The reading level, as identified by Scholastic's Book Wizard website, is approximately a 3.8 reading level which means for the third grade approximately the eighth month. It is a DRA level of 28 and an "M," Guided Reading Level. DRA and Guided Reading are levels that school's use to determine the reading difficulty of a text so they can match a student's reading ability to a given book.

Some parents might see the young child on the cover of Blueberries for Sal and think that it is a book more suited to a preschool child. It makes a nice read-aloud book to a preschool or Kindergarten age student, but can be just as appealing to a struggling third grade reader,

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"Picture Books" cont'd

who is frustrated by the seemingly endless number of pages in a chapter book. This story could be a good match for that student to read successfully on his/her own.

McCloskey writes and illustrates this charming story about a small child and her mother who go out to pick blueberries to can and store for winter. Before reading this story, the parent or teacher may want to discuss what "canning" is and how people do this to preserve food for later use. The story proceeds with a bear cub and his mother going out to the same Blueberry Hill, to eat blueberries and fatten up for winter when food becomes scarce. Here the author provides an opportunity for a teacher or parent to discuss bear eating and hibernation habits.

In a comical turn of events, the child and the bear cub in the story become separated from their mothers and a humorous switch takes place. The illustrations are magnificent and quality language is used throughout. Verbs like the, "hustled and hustling," are used," giving students an opportunity to decode words with the "ed and ing" endings.

Some other wonderful examples of well written picture books which contain interesting story plots and strong characters include, Beatrice's Goat. This story is written by Page McBrier, and illustrated by Lori Lohstoeter, is written at a third grade reading level, and published by Scholastic Inc. It is about a 9 year old Ugandan girl who receives a goat. This gift changes her life and the life of her family.

Another fine picture book is Lon Po Po; a Red-Riding Hood Story from China translated and illustrated by Ed Young. This Chinese version of Red Riding Hood is

written at a 2.6 reading level making it a great read-aloud or an independent read for second grade students or early third grade students. Mr. Young's illustrations are breathtaking and accompany the text perfectly. An observant eye will notice on the first page that the artwork is an outline of the wolf cleverly used to form the hillside. Students will be amazed

reading the first page. The book's plot is a conversation between each of the rain forest animals with a sleeping woodcutter who intends to cut the tree down after his nap. Each animal whispers into the man's ear and tries to explain how his life will be changed once this mammoth tree is chopped down. The story's setting is a Brazilian rain forest and the theme covers conservation of natural resources. At the end of the book, Lynne Cherry writes a letter to the reader, asking for the reader's help to preserve the earth's resources. It's a beautiful story that can be an introduction to many science discussions and projects for the right audience. In the home, it can be a catalyst for a discussion about how each family can do their part to conserve our planets resources.

There are many picture books of great quality in libraries and book stores. All we need to do is search for them. Remember to seek guidance from your local children's librarians and your child's teacher. They are a wealth of information. As with any book choice, it is important to consider the audience that will be reading the book. It is important to match the reader's maturity to the topic. One must take into consideration a student's prior knowledge of the subject before the book is

read. Lastly, it is important to think about the type of illustrations in the book with regards to the intended audience.

Authors Carol Lynch-Brown and Carl M. Tomlinson want us to remember that, "The best children's book offers readers enjoyment as well as memorable characters and situations and valuable insights into the human condition. These books have permanent value."

(Lynch-Brown, Carol, Tomlinson, Carl M. (2008). *Essentials of Children's Literature*, 6th Edition. (Boston: Pearson Education Inc, p. 5.)

Some Picture Book Favorites

- Alexander and the Wind-Up Mouse by Leo Lionni
- Bats at the Beach written and illustrated by Brian Lies
- Blueberries for Sal written and illustrated by Robert McCloskey
- Chameleon, Chameleon written by Joy Cowley and photographs by Nic Bishop
- Check out these picture books
- Coming on Home Soon written by Jacqueline Woodson and illustrated by E.B. Lewis
- Doctor DeSoto Goes to Africa Written by William Steig
- Henry the Sailor Cat written by Mary Calhoun and illustrated by Erick Ingraham
- If not from the prairie... written by Davic Bouchard and illustrated by Henry Ripplinger
- Look to the Stars by Buzz Aldrin and illustrated by Wendell Minor
- Mama Panya's Pancakes; A Village Tale From Kenya written by Mary And Rich Chamberlin and illustrated by Julia Cairns
- Moses by Carole Boston Weatherford and illustrated by Kadir Nelson
- Mufaro's Beautiful Daughters; An African Tale written by John Steptoe
- Nature Did it First written by Susan E. Goodman and photographs by Dorothy Handelman
- Night Boat to Freedom written by Margot Theis Raven and illustrated by E.B.Lewis
- Pink and Say Written and illustrated by Patricia Polacco
- Stellaluna written by Janell Canon
- Talkin About Bessie: The Story of Aviator Elizabeth Coleman written by Nikki Grimes and illustrated by Earl Lewis
- Thank You, Sarah. written by Laurie Halse Anderson and illustrated by Matt Faulkner
- The Legend of the Bluebonnet retold and illustrated by Tomie DePaola
- The Magic School Bus on the Ocean Floor by Joanna Cole and illustrated by Bruce Degen
- The Old African by Julius Lester and illustrated by Jerry Pinkney
- The Three Little Javelinas written by Susan Lowell and illustrated by Jim Harris
- The Three Little Pigs written and illustrated by David Wiesner
- The Tortoise and the JackRabbit (La Tortuga y la Liebre)written by Susan Lowell and illustrated by Jim Harris
- This Is Our Earth written by Laura Benson and illustrated by John Carozza

at how the artist uses the line of the artwork to convey the story theme.

The Great Kapok Tree: the tale of the Amazon rain forest, is written and illustrated by Lynne Cherry and approximately, a 4.4 reading level. In the front of the book, Cherry provides a map to give the reader a visual sense of where the rain forests of the world are located. Rain forest animals and their names border the map giving the reader background knowledge of the rain forest inhabitants. A section of the map illustrates the layers of the rain forest providing information before the reader begins

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